

Pastor Says Forgive and Your Pain Will Go Away

This article is from the “Edifying the Body” section of the Church of God Big Sandy’s website, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Jan. 1, 2022. (The article, which was posted at thejournal.org on Dec. 20, 2011, was written about a helpful sermon given in our congregation by Huntsville, Texas, pastor Albert Foy.) This article is reprinted in memory of Mr. Foy, who died last Saturday.

By Dixon Cartwright

BIG SANDY, Texas—Albert Foy remembers a night in 1959, when he was 12, when his dad “whipped” him for his failure to respond fast enough to a fatherly directive.

The “spanking, whipping, beating, whatever you want to call it,” hurt young Albert not only physically but emotionally.

Afterwards he found himself gazing out a window of the four-room house “that my dad had paid cash for” that was home for his parents and his 10 brothers and sisters. He was staring at the moon and stars with “tears running down my eyes.”

“My dad was the type of man who wanted us to be respectful and good citizens and always to obey,” Mr. Foy, now in his 60s, said.

He was speaking before members of the Church of God Big Sandy at a service on Nov. 12, 2011.

A 1969 graduate of Ambassador College, Pasadena, Mr. Foy was up from Huntsville, Texas, where he pastors the Huntsville Church of God.

His sermon’s title was “Freedom, Freedom, Freedom.” He spoke of liberation from pain and suffering caused by hating and holding grudges.

Taking control

On that night in 1959, while looking up at the heavens, the preadolescent Albert decided he “had to get control of my mind” and “had to make a decision.”

He decided that he could make “this pain go away.”

Mr. Foy’s sermon was not about the pros and cons of corporal punishment. It was about what forgiveness can do.

Sometimes God won’t forgive?

Mr. Foy was disturbed the first time he noticed a passage in the Bible that says God will not forgive people unless they forgive other people.

He had long since forgiven his father, but that verse, Mark 11:26, startled him.

Even though the Bible advises people to forgive others even if the offending parties do not ask for forgiveness, God seems to hold Christians to a higher standard than He holds Himself to when it comes to forgiveness.

Almighty God, according to that Bible passage, will forgive people only when they forgive their fellow trespassers. Yet Jesus set an example of forgiving unrepentant sinners—in this case His murderers—in the direst of circumstances, as shown in Luke 23:34:

“Father, forgive these people, because they don’t know what they are doing.”

“If we don’t forgive, we’re not going to be in the Kingdom of God,” Mr. Foy continued, based on his view of Mark 11.

For that reason, if for no other, it’s important to be a forgiving person, he said.

(This writer suspects that the verse in Luke 23 reflects the mind of God more accurately than the verse in Mark 11. Surely God holds Himself to the same high standard He expects of us.)

Another reason

But there is another good reason to forgive, and that was what the sermon was about.

Forgiving, Mr. Foy said, relieves pain. If one lives in a state of unforgiving, one constantly feels pain. As a 12-year-old, Mr. Foy could realize this and forgave his dad on the spot. The boy’s pain vanished.

Mr. Foy clearly remembers the offending incident. It’s one he will never forget. But he can remember and still forgive. He can remember without the pain.

Lust can lead to murder

The sermon included the appropriate Old Testament example (in 2 Samuel 13) of King David’s son Amnon and Amnon’s half sister Tamar. Amnon lusted after Tamar. He raped her. Amnon’s brother Absalom could not forgive him for molesting their sister. So Absalom murdered Amnon.

“The brother didn’t forgive,” Mr. Foy said, “so two years later” the rapist Amnon died at the command of his brother Absalom. Amnon was a rapist, but now Absalom was a murderer.

“If you hate, you will murder, as this tells us,” Mr. Foy said. “There was anger, there was hurt, there was pain that needed to be taken away.” Because Absalom “couldn’t let the pain go, he couldn’t forgive, so what did he do?”

As spiritually aware human beings grow in maturity, Mr. Foy said, they “need to realize there is a lot of healing that needs to go on within our families, among our children, among our friends: healing, putting away the hurt, putting away the pain, putting away the shame.”

Exegesis, Eisegesis, Jesus

Mr. Foy cited Jesus' example in Luke 23 of His forgiving even the people who were about to execute Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (verse 34).

Mr. Foy mentioned exegesis (critical and supposedly objective interpretation of Bible texts) and eisegesis (reading preconceived ideas into Bible texts) in Christians' efforts to understand the mind of God.

"But the most important gesis is Jesus," he said. "Jesus Christ's doctrines and teachings—if you follow them you're going to be okay."

A conversation about forgiveness should include a discussion of people who feel they are "victims," Mr. Foy believes.

Bad things happen

"I'm not special just because I'm black," he said. "Yeah, a lot of bad things happen to black people. But a lot of bad things happen to white people, and Jewish people, all people. So what?"

No matter our ethnic roots, "we need to get rid of the pain, and that's the miracle that God can perform when we forgive," he said.

"Are we better than Jesus? That's the question. We can say, well, I didn't deserve this. So did Jesus deserve it?"

Wiping away

True freedom is "freedom from pain and the wiping away of the pain and the hurt of sin, of abuse, of misuse," Mr. Foy concluded.

"We cannot [afford to] maintain the pain. You can remember the incident. Freedom—when you know you have pain, whether rightfully or wrongfully inflicted—is letting pain go, washing the pain away.

"But we have a part in that. We have to control our own minds, and God will take care of the rest."

Mr. Foy's parting advice:

- "Give no offense."
- "Get no offense."
- "Forgive and be forgiven."

Contact information

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