

THE EFFECTS OF AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT

Just a short update about our literature project for the Philippines before we open God's word. As you know we order booklets and tracts about every two months and send them to Robin to dole out as he sees best and we've just about depleted our funds in the Robin column. This last order with shipping cost was about \$600 and we hope and pray there'll be souls in heaven as a result of efforts put forth. So please keep this project in your prayers and if you can see your way clear to give a little over the next two months so we'll have enough for next time, it would be much appreciated, and a special thanks to those of you who have been doing this on a regular basis, and may you be rewarded for your loving sacrifice.

As we come to the throne of grace this morning I know many of you have burdens for loved ones or for direction in your life as to what God would have you to do in your situation, and I also know some of you have chronic pain of some kind you have to deal with on a daily basis, and I want to bring all these cares and concerns to the Lord this morning, because He is the only One who can bring relief, and healing, and stability in your life and the lives of those you want to see as citizens in God's kingdom. So let's take a few moments to do that before we open God's holy book.

Recently I started reading the unpublished letters and manuscripts of Ellen White that were released by the White Estate in 2015 as the 100th year anniversary of her death. That's what the White Estate claims anyway. However, there's a group called "SDANONYMOUS", which is made up of several individuals from various places around the world, and they admit to hacking into the White Estate's unpublished letters and manuscripts somehow a few years ago and informed them that if they didn't release them, they would do it themselves by putting them on the Internet for all the world to see, and so they allege that it forced the hand of the White Estate when they had no intention of making them available.

Now if this is true, I assume that what the White Estate wanted to do is let this information dribble out, like they've been doing over the years by putting this information out in devotionals or books so they could keep a money flow coming in, or perhaps there was something in those letters and manuscripts denominational leaders didn't want people to have access to, but whatever the case, they're out there and available to anyone who wants to read them.

Portions of these letters and manuscripts have been selected and put out in various forms over the years, but usually they've been published in compilations, which means you're not getting the full context. So for that reason it's good to be able to read the whole thing. These Unpublished letters and Manuscripts start in 1847 and continue right on through to her

death in 1915 and there's a lot of stuff that most people have never read. And so, by reading them you get a little different perspective of what Ellen White had to put up with and how she herself advanced in her knowledge and writing style over the years. Anyway, it's interesting reading and I'm glad they've been released, whether voluntarily or under duress.

As I was reading a particular letter one morning, I read something I thought might be of help to those of you who might have a problem with not letting go of your past sins and mistakes once they've been confessed and forgiven. You know, sometimes it's easier to forgive others than it is to forgive yourself, but God doesn't want us to continue to carry a burden like that once it has been dealt with. When we ask God for forgiveness we know He forgives, don't we? That's the promise of **1 John 1:9**, but we still think about these past mistakes sometimes and allow them to harass our mind, and when we do that, they can affect us negatively in a spiritual sense, and it can also affect our relationship with others, especially those we may have wronged or have wronged us. God definitely wants us to learn from these things so we don't repeat them, but He also wants us to let them go so they don't stunt our spiritual growth or make it difficult for us to be the kind of witness He wants us to be.

Even the apostle Peter had this problem and he was absolutely tortured by it. In ***Story of Redemption, page 316*** it says, "Peter, as a Jew and a foreigner (**while he was in Rome**), was condemned to be scourged and crucified. In prospect of this fearful death, the apostle remembered his great sin in denying Jesus in the hour of trial, and his only thought was that he was unworthy of so great an honor as to die in the same manner as did his Master. Peter had sincerely repented of that sin, and had been forgiven by Christ, as is shown by the high commission given him to feed the sheep and lambs of the flock. But he could never forgive himself. Not even the thought of the agonies of the last terrible scene could lessen the bitterness of his sorrow and repentance. As a last favor he entreated his executioners that he might be nailed to the cross with his head downward. The request was granted, and in this manner died the great apostle Peter."

Now we can understand why Peter felt the way he did, can't we? But his life could have been made much more pleasant, without sacrificing principle, had he been able to forgive himself. Forgiving ourselves doesn't mean that what we may have done is no big deal or that we can repeat the same mistake over and over again because we've been forgiven, but we don't have to let it cause us continued bitterness and sorrow like Peter experienced. God wants us to learn from our mistakes and then move on.

I want you to notice what the Bible says in **Micah 7:18, 19**, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, (**or wickedness**) and passeth by the transgression (**which means to**

be rebellious) and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever, because **(why?)** because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue **(or conquer)** our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins **(or their habitual sinfulness)** into the depths of the sea.”

And you know friends, once that has happened, we have no right to purchase a fishing license and pull them back up and dwell upon them or throw them back in the face of someone we’ve already forgiven. This is especially true when it comes to the marriage relation. I know of a situation, and it’s not unusual, where a wife was unfaithful to her husband and after it was dealt with and forgiven, or so it seemed, later on when anything minor by comparison came up in their relationship, the husband would always bring her unfaithfulness up to her again and again. Rather than do that, it would have been better had he divorced her, which was no surprise when it eventually happened, than to go fishing every time some little disagreement took place. Once forgiveness has been granted, we are to leave it at the bottom of the sea, because that’s what God does with our iniquity, transgression, and sin.

Go also to **Psalm 103:8-12**, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide **(or rebuke)**: neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins **(like we deserve)**; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”

It’s no coincidence that three types of sins are mentioned in these verses. God wants us to know that whatever we have done, there is mercy and forgiveness and power to overcome. We don’t have to guess about whether or not there is mercy enough for us, because this is something God has plenty of. There is indeed a limit, or a line that can be crossed; a person can commit the unpardonable sin, but I can assure you that if you are listening today to these Scriptures and have a desire to be forgiven, you haven’t yet crossed that line. So take heart, the Holy Spirit has not yet been totally withdrawn from the earth, and you can still find peace with God.

Now let me ask, how far is the east from the west? You may not know this, but the earth rotates on its axis in an easterly direction. In other words, east to west is continuous, unending, and infinite. It’s also significant that on the Day of Atonement the high priest offered up sacrifices on the altar, which began on the east side of the tabernacle and he worked his way to the west as he entered the Holy and Most Holy places. Then at the end of the service as the sins were placed upon the head of the scape goat, which carried away the sins of Israel, it was released in an easterly direction into the wilderness, because that

was the only way out of the sanctuary, which symbolized Israel's sins being removed as far as the east is from the west and remembered no more.

There's something else interesting in **Leviticus 16:14** if you'd like to turn there with me. Here it says, "And he (**Aaron the high priest on the Day of Atonement**) shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat (**in which direction**) eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger (**how many times?**) seven times", which signifies completeness or perfection.

Now what does this mean to us? It means that the blood shed on Calvary by Jesus, which was represented by this sanctuary service, is a perfect and complete sacrifice that is available for sins permanent removal, or as far as the east is from the west! Is it any wonder that the sanctuary doctrine is the central pillar of our faith? There is a lot of important and comforting truth there, if we just take the time to search it out.

Go also to **Isaiah 38:17**. Isaiah says, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness (**in other words, rather than peace he had great bitterness, but what did God do?**): but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins (**where**) behind thy back."

This is another one of those word pictures God gives us to enable us to grasp the reality of His total and complete forgiveness. God is conveying the truth here, that once forgiveness is granted, our sins are no longer before Him. In other words, He no longer looks at them; He no longer thinks about them; He no longer sees us as being guilty of them, because He sees us as He sees His Son, innocent! We are covered. That's what justification by faith is all about, and that's what the third angel's message is all about. In **Psalms 32:1** David says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Covered by the blood; whiter than snow. This is the most beautiful truth there is for those who are willing to confess and forsake their sins.

I remember as if it were yesterday, when I understood and experienced this wonderful truth for the first time; that I could stand before God as if I had never sinned. How can anything be more wonderful to know than that? especially if one has been a great sinner. Remember what Jesus said to Simon when he was asked about the one who would love Him most? It was the one who had been forgiven the most, wasn't it? Mary was a great sinner, it's true, but there was no one who loved Jesus more fervently than she did. It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him whenever He was around. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil that was worth a whole year's wages. It was Mary who bathed His feet with her tears. It was Mary who stood beside the cross, and followed the lifeless body to the sepulcher. It was Mary who was first at the tomb after His resurrection. And It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour when all the rest of the disciples were

hiding out in the upper room for fear of the Jews. Can you identify with any of this? I hope you can, at least to some degree, because it's an experience we all need to have before we can set foot in the earth made new.

Now back to those letters and manuscripts. If you've done much reading about James White, you know that he had problems from time to time with his brethren. For one reason or another, he was not very well liked, probably because he and Ellen's work was to rebuke sin, and who likes to be rebuked? Also as leaders in the Advent movement there was probably some jealousy on the part of those who were always picking at the way he did things, and who thought they could do a better job.

Well, whatever the case, in *Manuscript 3, 1865* Ellen wrote a testimony about her own husband that I think may be of help to us, because most of us have probably had some of the same feelings as James did.

Ellen writes, "I was shown in vision December 25 the case of my husband. I saw that God had accepted his humiliation and the afflicting of his soul before Him, and that He had accepted his confessions of his lack of consecration to God and his repentance for the errors and mistakes in his past course, which have caused him such sorrow and despondency of mind during his protracted illness. Said the angel, 'Pardon is written.'"

Do you suppose it was a blessing for James to know he was forgiven after his wife told him what the angel said? "Pardon is written." To know you've been forgiven by someone who will never mention your errors and mistakes again is a very comforting thing to know, especially when it involves things of eternal consequence.

I don't know what James's protracted illness was at the time, but one thing you'll notice as you read the letters and manuscripts is that both James and Ellen seemed to be sick more than they were well. I remember reading something years ago when Ellen was in vision and she was afraid of self-exaltation because of her prophetic gift, and the Lord told her He would cause sickness to come upon her that would check any such feelings, and I think this may be the reason why both her and James suffered with various ills much their lives.

She continues, "I was shown that his greatest wrong in the past has been an unforgiving spirit toward his brethren who have injured his influence in the cause of God, greatly increased his care and labor to counteract their influence, and have brought upon him extreme sufferings of mind by their wrong course. **(Notice, she said, "an unforgiving spirit toward his brethren" was "his greatest wrong in the past" and that that was the cause of much of his mental suffering)** He has not in every case been as pitiful and compassionate to the erring as our heavenly Father has been toward His erring, sinning, repenting children."

As you read this testimony it's clear that James was wronged by his brethren, but that did not excuse the fact that he had an unforgiving spirit toward them. Just like James, we need to come to the point in our character development of being "as pitiful and compassionate to the erring as our heavenly Father has been" toward us. And that reminds me of what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:48**, that we are to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect. You may have wondered, "how in the world can that be? If I could become as perfect as God, why would I need Him?"

In *Testimonies for the Church, volume 4, page 454* we're given a clue about what it means to be as perfect as our Father in heaven. We're told that "we may be as perfect in our sphere as God is in His sphere." What does that mean? Our sphere is our blood family, our church family, and those we come in contact with from day to day. In other words, we are to be "as pitiful and compassionate to the erring" in our sphere as God is to those in His sphere, which is the whole world for Him, and that's where the comparison ends between us and the Father. This is where James failed, and it's where we fail when we have an unforgiving spirit, and it not only reacts negatively upon others, but upon ourselves as well.

Ellen goes on, "Those who have by their wrong course caused him (**James**) the greatest labor and sufferings of mind he could, and did, forgive when they heartily came up to the point and frankly acknowledged their wrongs and asked for forgiveness, and he could fellowship them as brethren. (**Now listen carefully to these next two sentences**) Although the wrong was healed in the sight of God, yet in his own mind he sometimes probed that wound by dwelling upon and referring to the past. By thus doing, he suffered the wound to fester and make him unhappy and dissatisfied, and a murmuring spirit came in against his brethren."

That's what happens when we begin probing old wounds. They begin to fester and make us unhappy and dissatisfied with life and we start murmuring about things that should have stayed where? at the bottom of the sea.

Ellen continues, "The question would arise in his mind why the Lord suffered his brethren to take the course they had and cause him so many unnecessary trials when his burdens were so many. In this way he lived over his past experience, and in his mind revived his past trials, which should have passed into oblivion and he not embitter his life with such saddening, unprofitable remembrance."

Do you see what it does when we revive our past trials with those who have wronged us? It embitters our life to bring to remembrance those things that "should have passed into oblivion." When we come to God and confess our sins, they pass into oblivion, or total

forgetfulness, and that's what needs to happen when those in our sphere acknowledge what they've done to wrong us.

The testimony continues, "He (**James**) has not always realized the pity and love that should be exercised towards those who have been so unfortunate as to fall under the temptations of Satan. Such ones were the real sufferers and the losers, instead of himself, as long as he should remain steadfast at his post doing the will and work of his heavenly Father. When these souls begin to see their errors they have a hard battle to resist the temptations of the devil and work their way from the darkness to the light by humble confessions. They have Satan to contend with, their own proud spirit to overcome. Such need help from those who are in the light, that they may be brought from their beclouded, blinded, discouraging condition where they can begin to hope and obtain strength to bruise Satan under their feet."

It's a difficult thing to make confession to someone we have wronged, isn't it? Our fallen nature does not want to admit that we were wrong, but it does become easier when we have to make confession to someone who is humble and walking in the light, because we know they are more likely to treat us as our Father in heaven would treat us. You see, those who have wronged us are the real losers, because they have fallen "under the temptations of Satan" and need someone to help them work their way back to the light, and if we are bringing to remembrance things of the past that should have been removed from our minds as far as the east is from the west, there's no way for us to be the help we need to be to lead them out of darkness to Jesus, who is the light.

The testimony goes on, "I saw that in the past it has had an unhappy influence upon the mind of my husband to dwell upon the unhappy trials of the past. These unpleasant recollections unfitted him for the peace of God to dwell in his heart, which peace would lead him in everything to give thanks to God." Everything? Even those times when we have been wronged by those we thought were our brethren? Yes, in everything!

Do you need the peace of God in your heart today? Then don't "dwell upon the unhappy trials of the past", because they will steal the peace of God from your soul. In **John 14:27**, just before Jesus went back to heaven He said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Why did Jesus have peace? It was because He did not dwell upon the sins of those who had wronged Him, even if they made no confession. And those who did confess the wrongs they had done to Him, He cast behind His back; He left them at the bottom of the sea; He removed them as far as the east is from the west.

Ellen writes, "I saw that the Lord had suffered the mind of my husband to be desponding because of his errors and mistakes. He had permitted him to despair nearly of the forgiveness of God, not because his sins were of such magnitude that God had given him up to darkness of mind, but **(why?)** to give him an experience that he might know how painful it was to be in a state of uncertainty and doubt, and how agonizing to be in uncertainty in regard to the forgiveness of God and being accepted of Him."

You know, sometimes God allows His children to become desponding because of their errors and mistakes and to nearly despair of God's forgiveness in order to give them an experience that they might be able to help others. Isn't it the person that has had, and has overcome the same kind of past experience that someone else is experiencing at the present, usually the best person to offer help? The best person to help an alcoholic is someone who has recovered from his or her addiction, and when you think about it, isn't sin an addiction? It's akin to being in slavery. Sin is a bad habit that only God can break, but he works through Christians that have experienced victory over the addiction of sin that can help others do the same.

Ellen goes on, "Said the angel, 'God will have His afflicted servant more clearly understand, 'For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'"

When someone has sinned against us and they make confession to us, if we don't allow that sin to go into oblivion, have we really forgiven them? No! We must forgive others from the heart as our heavenly Father has forgiven us, it's very plain. That's why Jesus said, "if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Ellen's testimony continues, "I saw that if God should be as exacting and should deal with us as we often deal with one another, we might all be thrown into a state of hopeless despair. I was shown that God permitted this affliction to teach my husband and myself much that we should not otherwise have learned in as short a time."

Well, I hope we've learned something from the experience that both James and Ellen had to experience about the kind of forgiveness that's required if we would have the peace of God in this life and eternal life and immortality to come, because that's how important it is to have a forgiving spirit.

I'd like to close with a quote from a periodical titled "***Bible Training School***" written **August 1, 1912**. During this training school Sister White writes the following advice to her students, "Some of you seem to be earnestly seeking forgiveness of sins, for freedom in God. Do you deserve the pardon that you are seeking?—No, you do not; nevertheless, God is willing to grant it freely. And dare you withhold from your brethren the forgiveness and affection of

which you do not think them worthy? Would you have God deal thus with you? Deal with your brethren as you wish God to deal with you. If we expect our prayers for forgiveness to be heard, we must offer them in a forgiving spirit. We must forgive others in the same manner, and to the same extent, that we ourselves hope to be forgiven. The hard-heartedness that professed Christians manifest toward one another is not Christlike, but savors of the satanic. We must every one of us open our hearts wide to the love of Jesus, and encourage pity and affection for our brethren.

“It was ‘while we were yet sinners,’ that ‘Christ died for us.’ In view of His unmerited love and mercy toward us, how can we cherish malice, or even one feeling of unkindness toward our brethren, the purchase of His blood? Let us put away all suspicion and hatred, and all feelings of bitterness, even toward our worst enemies, those who seek to do us harm.” Close quote.

This is not easy an thing, but it can happen if the old man of sin is crucified with Christ, that’s the only way. It’s a fact that an unforgiving spirit will keep us out of heaven, and unless we overcome in this area, the joyful experiences awaiting us in the earth made new will not come to pass. A forgiving spirit is basic to true Christianity, and I hope what we’ve discussed this morning has touched a responsive chord in your heart and that you will plead with God to rid yourself of this soul destroying and Satanic characteristic that plagues nearly the whole world, and unfortunately many professed Christians today. May it not get the best of us is my prayer for all of us today.