



The Fear of Forgiveness

by Rose Colón

“Forgive my husband?” my counselee exclaimed, “He doesn’t deserve to be forgiven!”

Truly, this woman had been sinned against over and over again by her husband. In fact, he had been visiting prostitutes, viewing pornography, going to strip clubs and massage parlors the entire time they were married.

When she came to Pure Life Ministries for help, I will never forget her face as she walked into my office. Beaten down and hardened by all the years of sin, she had no joy, no hope, and no light in her eyes.

As she shared her story with me, my heart broke. I couldn’t hold back the tears hearing what this woman had suffered through for many years. She was at the end of her rope and desperately looking for help, not for her marriage but for herself. She knew she was in a terrible place spiritually but felt trapped, like there was no way out. I can recall her desperation as she asked, “What do I need to do to get my joy back?”

As we began that first counseling session, she had acknowledged she had allowed a stronghold of bitterness to take control of her spirit. She was full of resentment and had a deep seated hatred towards her spouse for stomping on her heart the way he had over the past 20 years. In fact, prior to her husband enrolling in our Residential Program, he had been out of their home for 3 years at her request.

“Where do we go from here?” I thought. I began to probe. One question did cause a spark, “Do you believe you have truly forgiven your husband?”

Her outburst was certain and revealing, “He doesn’t deserve to be forgiven!”

This issue of forgiveness brings many wives and many marriages to a major crossroads. A wife that has been on the receiving end of her husband’s sexual sin is afraid of taking this step. To forgive means to release and to release means to act as if it never happened, to become vulnerable again to someone who has hurt her over and over again.

To make matters worse, many of the husbands who come through our residential counseling program demand forgiveness and mercy from their wives without appreciating all the hurt, pain and rejection their wives has had to endure while they were

indulging in their sin. Little do these men know, this attitude reveals a lack of brokenness in their hearts for their sin, and makes it even more difficult for their wives.

My response to my counselee was immediate, “Do any of us deserve to be forgiven, especially when we see what Jesus has done for us at the Cross?” Her head fell. I knew the Holy Spirit was at work.

The fact is, Jesus was willing to be “vulnerable” for you and for me “when we were enemies (Romans 5:10),” willing to die a horrible death on the Cross. It was on the Cross that Jesus gave us a perfect picture of true agape love, a love that “suffers long and is kind,” a love that “does not seek its own,” a love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things,” a love that “never fails” (1Corinthian 13:4-8).

He asks us to love in this same way, to be willing to lay down at the foot of the Cross all of our hurts, pain, disappointments, rejections, griefs and sorrows - knowing that the One we are laying them down to has experienced all that we have faced. He asks us to surrender the fears that keep us from loving in this way.

I remember this wife was quiet for about ten minutes as she pondered what Jesus had done for her. I prayed silently, “Lord help her” as I didn’t know what else to do. After some time she lifted her head and said, “I know that I have been forgiven much by my Savior.”

Little did I know, in her time of silence, God was showing her the tremendous debt she owed Him and how He had wiped it all away in an instant. She knew she didn’t deserve such mercy from such a loving Savior that had done no wrong. It was at that moment she had made a decision, “I will release this debt my husband owes me even though he doesn’t deserve it. I know in my heart, it is the right thing to do.” I sat there silently, praising the Lord for doing in her heart what only He could do.

From that moment on, I could see, little by little, the light of God shining through her eyes. Her countenance began to change each time she visited her husband in our Residential Program. It was as if she literally went from darkness into light. A genuine joy radiated from her smile each time she came to visit her spouse. My heart was blessed to see God at work in her life and in her marriage.

She had allowed herself to become a prisoner to fear of forgiveness, fear of letting her husband get off scot-free, fear of being hurt again. It had stolen her joy. It had stolen her peace. Yes, she had been sinned against, but the only way out of her prison of fear was to forgive, to give out what Christ had so freely given her.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

At the end of her husband’s program, God had done such a work in her heart, that she allowed her husband to move back home. I knew His work was real based on the fruit I

was seeing in her life. It is clear to me today that it all began with her decision to surrender to forgiveness.

Beloved, we don't realize what we forfeit in the Lord when we remain captive to unforgiveness. Many times we hold onto things because we believe a spouse, a parent, a children or a friend doesn't deserve to be forgiven. What I have seen in the years of counseling at PLM is that laying this down by surrendering to forgiveness opens up the way to true joy, peace and happiness.

I encourage anyone struggling in this area to meditate over Isaiah 53, Psalm 22 and Psalm 103. Ponder Matthew 18:22-35, The Parable of the Unjust Servant. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart to the reality of what Christ did for you on the Cross. Seek Him for the grace to walk in that same mercy toward the one who sinned against you. I believe you will find again the "joy of your salvation."

"For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" (Hebrews 12:3).

Rose Colón is the Director of Women's Counseling at Pure Life Ministries, a position she has held since 1996. Rose has a Masters of Ministry in Biblical Counseling from Master's Graduate School of Divinity in Evansville, IN and holds certification from the International Association of Biblical Counselors (IABC) in Denver, CO.

2010 www.purelifeministries.org. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to use, copy, distribute, or retransmit information or materials on this page, so long as proper acknowledgment is given to Pure Life Ministries as the source of the materials, and no modifications are made to such material.