

LESSON 134 • MAY 14

“Let me perceive forgiveness as it is.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: To practice true forgiveness, that you may free your brother, free yourself from the chains you’ve wrapped around you, and lay down footsteps to light the way for those who follow you.

Longer: Two times, for fifteen minutes.

This exercise requires some explanation. First, “Would I condemn myself for doing this?” does not mean “If I did this, would I condemn myself?” Rather, it means “Do I really *want* to condemn myself for doing this (because if I condemn him I *will* condemn myself)?” This sort of “would you?” is found throughout the Course. For instance, “Would you know the Will of God for you?” (T-8.V.5:1), which means “Do you *want* to know the Will of God for you?”

- Ask the Holy Spirit, Who understands the meaning of forgiveness, “*Let me perceive forgiveness as it is.*”
- Then choose a brother to forgive, under His direction.
- Now catalogue this person’s “sins,” one by one (but keep from dwelling on any one of them). With each one, ask yourself, “*Would I condemn myself for doing this?*”—because when you condemn this brother for this specific “sin,” you hold yourself to the same standard. You search your mind for a similar “sin” in you, and then condemn yourself for it, just as you condemned him. To really make this meaning go in, you may want to do an expanded version of the question. Say, “*Do I want to condemn myself for [name the ‘sin’ you see in him; e.g., being overly judgmental of others]? I will not lay this chain upon myself. I will not condemn him for doing this.*” As you name his particular sin, make it general enough that it covers something you tend to do.
- If you practice well, you will feel a burden lifting from you, perhaps even from your chest, as if chains are being lifted from your chest. Spend the remainder of the practice period feeling liberated from the chains you tried to lay on your brother, but laid instead on yourself.

Frequent reminders: In everything you do.

Remember, “*No one is crucified alone, and yet no one can enter Heaven by himself.*” This means, when you crucify your brother, you crucify yourself as well. And when you set him free, you open the gates of Heaven to both of you.

Response to temptation: Whenever you are tempted to attack yourself by condemning another.

Say, “*Let me perceive forgiveness as it is. Would I accuse myself of doing this? I will not lay this chain upon myself.*” This is obviously a miniature version of the longer practice period.

Commentary

This lesson contains a very focused discussion about what it means to “forgive.” It deserves not only careful practice as a Workbook lesson, but careful study, as a separate exercise when you have more time. Several of these longer Workbook lessons fall into that category.

The main teaching of this lesson is that forgiveness, to be true, must be fully justified. It applies only to what is false. Sin, if real, *cannot* be forgiven (5:3–4). True forgiveness sees the

nothingness of sins. “It looks on them with quiet eyes, and merely says to them, ‘My brother, what you think is not the truth’” (7:5).

The lesson itself explains that main idea very well. I want to focus instead on the *results* of forgiveness: the relief it brings to us. Forgiveness is “a deep relief to those who offer it” (6:1). It wakens us from our own dreams. Even if you don’t understand all the Course theory behind forgiveness, when you forgive, when you let go of your grievances against someone, you can experience the lifting of a tremendous burden from your own heart. You may not understand why that happens, but you can know that it is true. As the lesson puts it: “You will begin to sense a lifting up, a lightening of weight across your chest, a deep and certain feeling of relief” (16:3).

Forgiving is a very happy feeling. Why is that? Because, without realizing it, when we condemn someone else for their sins we are secretly condemning ourselves. By condemning another, I am saying, “Sin is real and deserves to be punished.” If I subscribe to that principle, then I must also believe that when I sin, I too deserve to be punished. My form of “sin” may not be the one I condemn in my brother; indeed, I may be accusing him, or her, of something I think I would never do, and I imagine that because I am free from that particular fault, somehow my condemnation of another will purchase my salvation. But I have supported the principle that sin is real and deserves punishment. Inevitably I know, deep within me, that I, too, have “sinned” in some way. And if I have, I have nothing to hope for but punishment. What I apply to my brother applies to me as well.

When we are tempted to condemn someone, the lesson advises us to ask ourselves, “Would I accuse myself of doing this?” (9:3) or “Would I condemn myself for doing this?” (15:3). The words “would I” are meant in the sense of “do I want to?” The question is not “If I did what this person has done, would I judge myself for it?” Because, if I am judging the other for it, I definitely *would* judge myself if I did the same thing. We usually reserve our sternest judgment for things we think we would never do, precisely because we *would* condemn ourselves for doing them. When we read this question, for instance, and think of a child molester, if we understand the question incorrectly we may answer, “I certainly would condemn myself if I did that!”

What the question is really asking is, “Do I want to make sin real and insist it must be punished? Because if I do, I am condemning myself to punishment also.” We are laying chains of imprisonment on ourselves when we lay them on anyone (17:5; 16:4).

This is why releasing my brother from his chains brings relief to *me*. I am liberating myself from the principle that “sin is real and must be punished” when I liberate this other. And what a relief it is! The one who forgives, and offers escape to this other, now sees that escape is possible for himself as well:

He does not have to fight to save himself. He does not have to kill the dragons which he thought pursued him. Nor need he erect the heavy walls of stone and iron doors he thought would make him safe. He can remove the ponderous and useless armor made to chain his mind to fear and misery. His step is light, and as he lifts his foot to stride ahead a star is left behind, to point the way to those who follow him.
(12:1–5)

Forgiveness is a deep relief.