

Inspirational Thought—10-25-2024—Duff Gorle

The local Christian church is a community of those who are forgiven and forgiving—or it is nothing. This seems abundantly clear from the most cursory reading of the New Testament.

Before we can forgive, there must be an appreciation of what has been given for us. God forgives our sins and overlooks our failings. God accepts us despite our constant confusion and never-ending perversity. He invites us into the fellowship of his church and re-creates us in Christ Jesus.

Jesus calls for unlimited forgiveness—a forgiveness that passes all understanding. The only way the church can do this is by “passing on” its appreciation of all that God has given for us.

I’ve heard people in the church wonder out loud: “If I have to forgive and accept others does that mean I have to ignore their behavior or abandon my own ethical convictions?”

Should we condone evil when we see it? Clearly that is not what Jesus did! He loved his enemies and devoted his life to saving them from their evil ways by word, deed and example. Yet even in his darkest hour, as he hung on the cross, his prayer was “*Father forgive them...*” (Luke 23:24).

Jesus lived and died in order to “forgive the sin, and rescue the sinner.”

C. S. Lewis has written, “For a long time I used to think this a silly...distinction: how could you hate what a man did and not hate the man? But years later it occurred to me that there was one man to whom I had been doing this all my life—namely myself. However much I might dislike my own cowardice, deceit, or greed, I went on loving myself. There had never been the slightest difficulty about it. In fact, the very reason why I hated the things was that I love the man. Just because I loved myself, I was sorry to find that I was the sort of man who did those things” (*Mere Christianity*, 104).

The Gospel proclaims not only the unconditional forgiveness of our sins but the absolute demand that we live as though God’s acceptance of us makes a difference in our conduct toward others. We are expected to love as God loves. We are called to accept and affirm others without reducing by one ounce the hatred we feel for selfishness and insensitivity.

Forgiveness of others is the ultimate expression of love, of one’s own sense of security, of the presence of God within one’s own life. In the words of Paul Tillich: “We can live only because our guilt is forgiven and thus eternally forgotten. And we can love only because we forgive and are forgiven” (*The Eternal Now*, 32).

A heart full of grudges, judgment, cynicism, hurt and despair is a heart devoid of God. God has forgiven you! God accepts you! Be glad.