

Loving while Hurting

The Christian life can be hard. This is not just about the persecutions, trials, and sufferings we face in the world, but internally, we have fellow believers who, like us, are still trying to become more like Christ, and so they can hurt us. Sometimes, they do this without finding any fault in their actions and may not apologize. They would go on with their lives not realizing how much they hurt us, or even if they realize, they would probably think we deserved it. They may lash out in anger and see no reason to make recompense if they feel justified for their actions.

Most Christians know what it feels like to be hurt by a fellow believer. The problem is, we may not address it in the way we should. And if we are being honest, our response may not be intentionally sinful. In fact, it could be our defence mechanism against being hurt again. We may not lash out at the person, but they certainly lose our respect; We may not be as friendly as we once were, or we would not trust them as before; We may not give them a cold shoulder, but they are certainly not getting as much as a smile or laugh from us; We may even get to the point where rather than address them harshly, we would not speak to them again; not because we are angry, malicious, unforgiving or prideful, but because it would hurt too much to act like everything is okay when we are actually hurting inside. Indeed, we too can find ourselves responding to the hurt the way the natural self would, rather than in the Spirit of Christ.

It is definitely not easy to be forgiving and loving as Christ is; He died for us before we even knew or loved Him. We are commanded to “not repay evil with evil, but to overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:17&21, AMPC), as Christ did. God wants us to think of the wellbeing of our brethren before our own. It is not easy for a wounded person to think of someone else’s pain while theirs screams at them for attention. One of the safety precautions on airplanes is to take care of oneself first before helping others; It is predictably so that the first response of our human nature is to see to our own wellbeing before someone else’s.

I am not writing this to chide or rebuke, but rather to encourage. No one is alone in this race – the fight against the flesh – which is a struggle to be more like Christ in every single area of our lives, even in the minutest details – because in the eyes of God, everything matters. The things we would excuse as our inherent personality (that we cannot help how we feel or react) may be the very thing that God wants to work out of us and work something better in us, to make us look more like Christ. This is never easy. The journeys we take as part of our sanctification are more often unexpected and difficult. God may see the things we never saw as problems, or things to be worked out, as stumbling blocks to our transformation into the image of his Son, and so begins the journey of shaping us into what He desires. I am reminded of the hymn that says “Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me”. To so many of us, they are

just words. We may even understand what they mean, but not until we are actually in that process can we truly understand how painful and difficult it can be.

Again, this is not to discourage us from aiming to grow more in Christ, it is rather an extended hand, saying “it is going to be okay, you are not alone, many have gone on before and have succeeded, and so will we”. By our own strength, we can never get to a point where we can be hurt time and time again and choose not to retaliate. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to strengthen and empower us to act like Christ when we are faced with tough situations, especially from our Christian brethren. It is the Holy Spirit that helps us see that we too are imperfect, that we hurt others even as we are hurt. And as we are constantly striving to be better, they also are doing the same. It is when we understand this that we can then show love even when we are hurting. In the end, it makes us feel better and gives us peace of mind when we follow God’s instructions. I believe we will be able to show genuine love and forgiveness towards those that hurt us because, like Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13, NIV).

