

RED LETTER CHALLENGE: FORGIVING

In the name of Jesus:

Welcome back to the Red Letter Challenge. We are on Day 13 of our 40-day challenge to put Jesus' words into practice. We are looking at the 5 main principles that Jesus calls, commands, and asks His followers to put into practice. Those five principles are:

Being / Forgiving / Serving / Giving / Going

Last week we spent a week of being. This week we spend a week of forgiveness. And to illustrate forgiveness I'd like to consider and think about your couch at your house.

We all know what couches are. Many of us have couches in our living rooms, family rooms, and sometimes we have them in storage. Typically we have very clean couches that also look very nice. They look good on the outside. We sit on them a lot. And we even have guests over to sit on these couches. But have you ever taken a moment to flip the cushions over to see what's underneath. Because you need to prepare yourself physically, spiritually, emotionally for what's underneath. You might find cookie crumbs or change. You really don't know what you might find under your couch cushions. And yet you and

I sit on them. Oblivious to what is underneath us. You would never know what is underneath the cushion unless you flipped the cushions.

Many of us live lives that are like the couches we sit on. We try to make ourselves look good, we think that we are well put together. We come to church on Sundays, we look great on Facebook or other pictures that we take of ourselves. If someone were to look at us from the outside, it would seem that all is well. There is nothing wrong going on in our lives. In fact, I have had people tell me that one of the reasons that they don't come to church is because they feel as if everyone else in church has their act together, and they don't so they don't come to church because they just don't feel like that they measure up when they compare themselves with others.

But we know differently, don't we? In many ways we are much like a couch. If you dig deep down, there is something inside each and every one of us that is messy. And a lot of us, we push this stuff down in the cracks and we tend to forget that it's there or we come up with coping mechanisms so that we can live with the garbage and the junk that's underneath us. We just suppress it. There is a lot in our lives we aren't happy with or are proud of. The sad part is that there are some people who are intimidated because they feel like they are the only one

who has a lot of stuff going on in the inside. They think everyone else has their act together. But they don't. We are all in the same boat. Each of us has things in our lives we aren't proud of and wish we could change. It is that way for everyone. Deep down underneath the cushions of our lives there is a mess. We are hurting, in pain, we feel guilt, even shame.

But God doesn't want us to live that way. That is why He sent Jesus. Jesus did not die on a cross, suffer a brutal death, and then rise from the dead so that you could live the rest of your life as a slave to the mess of what is inside of you. God sent His son to die on a cross for you so that you could know freedom and you could be free from your past and you could be free in the present and you could go into the future with a sense of freedom.

God wants to take away all the garbage, the crud, the junk, the past, and remove it this morning. He wants you to know that He has cleaned underneath the cushions. He has vacuumed up all of the debris and has thrown it all away. He has given you a good scrubbing on the inside. He did it when you were baptized. Just listen to what the Bible says: ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the

flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

God has sent His Son to cleanse you from all sin, and give to replace your sinfulness with Christ's holiness. For if anyone is baptized in Christ that person is a new creation. Christ lives in and through you, imparting to you His forgiveness, His love, His righteousness, so that you can show and share His love and forgiveness with others. Most people know John 3:16. **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** But do you know the very next verse?

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. He came to justify each and every one of us. He came to cleanse each and every sinner.

That doesn't make the Devil happy. He is a powerful enemy.

When we follow after Christ and when we live in this world for Jesus the Devil will try to upset the apple cart. He will shout accusations at you. He will throw his rocks at you and remind you of what you did, what you said, what you didn't do. And he will remind you, remind you, and remind you. He will tell you that you are no good, you are used goods, you are washed up, and God could never love a person like you. Nobody could love you.

Whenever that happens, and it will, just do what Martin Luther would do and tell the Devil to go back to hell where he belongs. The lies of the devil are no match for the truth and the power of the Gospel. Jesus came to forgive you and give His life as a payment for sinners for all time everywhere. I love what Martin Luther would say when the devil would torment him at night in his bed when he was trying to go to sleep. Luther would say something like this to the devil: "Yes I know that I am a sinner, what of it? I have a greater Savior, Jesus, who lived died and rose for me. So if you have a problem with me and my sins, bring it up to Jesus, take it up with Him." And with that, Luther would roll over and go to sleep in peace.

Dear friend, you have Someone in your corner who is more powerful than the Devil, Jesus Christ, Son of God, your Savior.

Whenever Satan accuses you Jesus says not guilty. He frees you from the accusations of the Devil so that you can go and live your life freely, in love for God and love for others. And how do you show love to and for others? By doing as Jesus does, by forgiving them the sins that they have committed against you. The Bible puts it this way: **My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. So now live your life by being kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.**

Amen