

Breaking Cycles of Unforgiveness, Moving Toward Peace

Next week, on June 28, we remember two anniversary dates that are linked together in a cycle of bloodshed and unforgiveness.

On June 28, 1914, 109 years ago, a young Serbian terrorist assassinated the archduke and crown prince of the great Austro-Hungarian Empire. This act led Austria-Hungary to avenge itself by declaring war on Serbia. The Russians entered the blood feud to protect their fellow Slavs, the Serbians. The Germans came to the support of Austria-Hungary, France and England came to the aid of Russia, and Europe erupted into the massive slaughter we now call World War I. All because of a cycle of unforgiveness.

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Five years and millions of deaths later, the war was officially brought to a close on June 28, 1919, in the Treaty of Versailles. Once again, unforgiveness carried the day as the victorious Allies imposed draconian conditions on the defeated Germans. The resulting hardship and resentment created an opportunity for Adolph Hitler and his Nazi party to take over Germany and then drive Europe into a second horrendous conflict that became World War II. Then, for another 50 years, the Russians extracted their revenge by turning the Eastern European nations into subservient police states. World War I, called the “War to end all wars,” ended with the peace treaty of Versailles, which a critic called “The peace to end all peace.”

It was up to the Americans to break the cycle of unforgiveness after World War II. With the Marshall Plan in Europe and the

humane occupation of Japan, the Americans turned their German and Japanese enemies into friends. America also forgave its Cold War enemies in China, Vietnam, Russia and Eastern Europe, leading the world into a time of prosperity and relative peace, and making way for the unprecedented worldwide Christian revival.

The American ability to forgive goes back to our history as a Christian nation. The Lord commands us to forgive our enemies, and the experience after World War II showed how the biblical command to love our enemies produces the godly fruit of peace and revival. Forgiveness is perhaps the most powerful spiritual weapon to change the atmosphere and bring God's answers into a situation.

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Now we face another challenge as our Cold War adversary Russia has revived its grievances and is waging a pitiless war in Ukraine. Even as we seek to blunt the Russian aggression, we must look forward to a righteous and peaceful solution. But we must also know there is no true peace without forgiveness.

Let us pray we will remember that we are called to bless and not curse, and that we can use the spiritual weapon of forgiveness to end destructive cycles of unforgiveness.

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