

FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

Ephesians 4:30-32 (KJV) And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Many times in Christian circles, we pay “lip-service” to the idea of forgiveness without dealing honestly with some of the objections people raise. We are prone to tell only one side of the story, extolling the benefits of forgiveness without mentioning how hard it can sometimes be to truly forgive those who have wronged us.

Have you ever heard a sermon preached against forgiveness? Have you ever heard of a spiritual advisor counseling a victim by saying, “What happened to you is so awful that you would be a fool to forgive – it’s alright to hang on to those feelings of bitterness and hurt for the rest of your life”? No pastor would ever advise someone to do that, for their own good. And yet, that’s exactly what most people choose to do to themselves – to hang on to an offense until it adversely affects them.

The real issue is not that I CAN’T forgive, it’s that I think I SHOULDN’T HAVE TO forgive! After all, if I am the victim, why should I have to do something that is uncomfortable for me? Why should my offender be allowed to get off scot-free? Is there ever a legitimate reason not to forgive? The biblical answer is **NO!**

Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT) If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Forgiveness lets THEM off the hook too easily!

One of the major hindrances to forgiveness is the fear of further abuse. We have a legitimate concern that forgiving our offender will give him permission to hurt us again, maybe even more deeply. Such a legitimate fear probably prompted this question from Peter to Jesus ...

Matthew 18:21 (NLT) Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?”

Before coming down too hard on Peter, ask yourself: “How many times am I willing to forgive a person for committing the SAME SERIOUS OFFENSE against me?” Peter simply believed (**as do YOU!**) that there surely must be SOME LIMIT to prevent ourselves from being taken advantage of!

Forgiveness places too much responsibility on ME!

Quite a convincing argument could be made for the fact that asking victims to “let go of their pain” is placing too much responsibility on the OFFENDED instead of the OFFENDER, blaming the VICTIM instead of the VICTIMIZER.

It seems similar to coming across the mangled body of a hit-and-run victim, and telling them to take care of their own injuries while you go tell the driver of the car not to worry about it! Isn’t it unrealistic to place the forgiveness burden on the victim of the wrong? Is it logical to expect them to be able to let go of serious hurts? Aren’t we asking them to do the impossible?

The word of God gives us the distinct impression that He doesn’t exempt us from tasks just because they’re unfair or difficult ...

Matthew 5:38-41 (CEV) You know that you have been taught, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I tell you not to try to get even with a person who has done something to you. When someone slaps your right cheek, turn and let that person slap your other cheek. If someone sues you for your shirt, give up your coat as well. If a soldier forces you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two miles.

Is it reasonable for God to expect this of us? It doesn’t seem right that a victim would have to struggle for years to get victory over something they didn’t cause or deserve, while their offender just goes on with life as though nothing happened! **Forgiveness seems unfair!**

Our objections arise from a basic misunderstanding of forgiveness. But forgiveness not about denying your pain. It is not about letting your offender off the hook. It is not about blaming you, the victim. And, most importantly, forgiveness is not unfair ... **because God can’t do anything unfair!**

Romans 9:14 (AMP) What shall we conclude then? Is there injustice upon God’s part? Certainly not!

The Greek word translated “forgive” carries the idea of a release from some type of obligation, most commonly a financial obligation. That’s how Jesus most often illustrated the concept of forgiveness.

Luke 7:41-42 (NLT) Then Jesus told him this story: “A man loaned money to two people—five hundred pieces of silver to one and fifty pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?”

- The moneylender chose to RELEASE both of the debtors from their very real obligations – the money owed was not a figment of his imagination!

- He had a legal right to be repaid – he was the innocent party.
- The borrowers had a legal obligation to pay.
- There was a deficit between their debt (obligation to pay) and their resources (ability to pay).
- The rule of accounting said that the books had to be balanced! The greatest misunderstanding about forgiveness is that it is simply overlooking someone else's transgression. The truth of the matter is that **SOMEONE ALWAYS HAS TO PAY, BECAUSE AN OFFENSE ALWAYS CREATES AN OBLIGATION THAT MUST BE SATISFIED.**

This is the essence of forgiveness! When we forgive ...

- We acknowledge that a wrong has occurred.
- We recognize that there is an obligation for repayment.
- We CHOOSE to release our offender from that obligation and to cover the loss OURSELVES.

Most of us have no trouble with the first two, because we are expert record keepers! The stumbling block for us is the third ingredient of forgiveness! Jesus' answer to Peter's question about forgiveness anticipated such objections and offers us some compelling reasons to unilaterally forgive:

Matthew 18:22 (CEV) Jesus answered: Not just seven times, but seventy-seven times!

Perhaps after a brief pause to let the impact of His statement settle in the minds of His listeners, Jesus relates an even more dramatic and unforgettable story to drive His point home:

Matthew 18:23-27 (NLT) "For this reason, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so the king ordered that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. But the man fell down before the king and begged him, 'Oh, sir, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' Then the king was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

Although the servant has absolutely no way to make even the smallest dent in such a huge debt, he begs for just a little more time to try. What a pitiful sight, to see him groveling before the king – and what a beautiful thing the king did, because he felt compassion for the man. This is a perfect illustration of forgiveness ...

- The servant owed a very real debt to the king.
- The king had every right to expect repayment of the debt.
- But the king voluntarily released the servant from his obligation and covered the loss himself.

FORGIVENESS IS OFTEN THE ONLY WAY TO SETTLE A DEBT.

Realistically, what alternative to forgiveness did the king have? Would the slave's imprisonment have resulted in even one dollar returning to the king? Was there any advantage to be gained by demanding that the slave remain behind bars for the rest of his life? **The king was smart enough to know he was holding a debt that was uncollectible!**

Many people struggle with offering forgiveness because they are unaware that they are holding a worthless debt. They mistakenly believe that there's some payment they can extract from their offender that will compensate for their loss. Understandably, they want vengeance. **But the truth is that very few sinners have the resources to pay!**

What satisfactory payment could someone ever give you to compensate for a child killed by a drunk driver? A reputation slandered by a false rumor? A marriage destroyed by infidelity? A childhood innocence stolen by an immoral relative?

Suddenly Jesus' seemingly outlandish solution of "turning the other cheek" appears more reasonable! **Forgiveness is sometimes the only way to break the endless cycle of hurt and unfairness.**

FORGIVENESS FREES US TO GET ON WITH OUR LIFE.

The king was smart enough to know he had too many responsibilities to allow himself to be distracted by one slave's obligation. Sometimes the only sensible option is to cut our losses rather than risk needless preoccupation with a hopeless situation. Why should the king spend every waking moment checking with the royal bookkeeper and neglect the rest of his kingdom duties?

Each one of us will have many situations arise in life where we are much more concerned about someone's obligation to us than they are! But if we hold on to the offense, we in effect become an **emotional hostage** to our offender. One of the best reasons for forgiving someone is not what it does for them, but what it does for you! Letting go of a rattlesnake might help the snake, but it benefits you as well!

Hebrews 12:1b (NLT) Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us.

Forgiveness is an antidote to needless suffering. Can you imagine the relief the servant must have felt as he left the palace, knowing that his million-dollar-debt had been forgiven? But then he had an evil thought ...

Matthew 18:28-35 (NLT) ²⁸ “But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. ²⁹ His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. ³⁰ But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and jailed until the debt could be paid in full. ³¹ “When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him what had happened. ³² Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ Then the angry king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny. ³⁵ “That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart.”

Did you notice the “zinger” that Jesus adds at the end of this story? That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive! The laws of God decree that those who refuse to forgive enter their own private torture chamber, sentencing themselves to a lifetime of needless pain.

THE BIBLE’S TERM FOR UNFORGIVENESS IS “BITTERNESS.”

The Greek word translated “bitter” comes from a word meaning “sharp” or “pointed.” Just as there are certain tastes and smells that are “sharp” to the senses, all of us can recall offenses committed against us that may have occurred years ago but still hurt us when we turn them over in our mind. Don’t risk poisoning your life by holding on to a grievance!

Hebrews 12:15 (AMP) Exercise foresight and be on the watch to look [after one another] ... in order that no root of resentment (rancor, bitterness, or hatred) shoots forth and causes trouble and bitter torment, and the many become contaminated and defiled by it.

WITH EVERY OFFENSE COMES A CHOICE! We can hold on to it and become bitter, or we can release it and become better. Continually reliving our hurts infects not only our life, but the lives of those around us. The strongest argument for forgiveness is the consequences of unforgiveness!

FORGIVENESS IS THE OBLIGATION OF THE FORGIVEN!

It must be astonishing to God sometimes that those who have been forgiven so much would refuse to forgive so little. While the pain that someone has inflicted on you is REAL, it is also NEGLIGIBLE compared to the wrong you committed against God. That is the ultimate reason why you should forgive!

FORGIVENESS IS SURRENDERING THE RIGHT TO HURT YOU FOR HURTING ME.

FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER ... FOR THEIR SAKE, FOR YOUR SAKE, AND FOR HIS SAKE!