

Games People Play, Part Two

Sorry – The Power of Forgiveness

Matthew 6:14-15 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

A survey by Barna Research Group conducted a few years ago illustrates the depth of misunderstanding that surrounds the subject of forgiveness. How would you respond to the following questions? Rate each statement as an **ACCURATE** or an **INACCURATE** description of forgiveness.

- You cannot honestly forgive someone unless that person shows some remorse for what they did. **(62% agreed)**
- If you really forgive someone, you would want that person to be released from the consequences of their actions. **(60% agreed)**
- If you genuinely forgive someone, you should rebuild your relationship with that person. **(73% agreed)**
- If you have really forgiven someone, you should be able to forget what they have done to you. **(66% agreed)**

The biblical perspective is that each of these statements is WRONG!

Only 4% of respondents gave the biblical response to all the questions.

The problem with each of these statements is that they make forgiveness about “THEM” when forgiveness is really all about what happens in “ME.”

Have you ever heard of a spiritual advisor 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. And yet, that’s exactly what people choose to do to themselves – to hang on to an offense until it adversely affects them.

VIDEO CLIP #1 – JOSEPH SOLD BY HIS BROTHERS

WHY I CAN’T FORGIVE

1. Forgiveness denies the seriousness of sin.

- Many people believe that by forgiving, we are denying the severity of an offense – like saying that what our offender did wrong doesn’t really matter. But even those same people would probably agree that some offenses are so petty we should overlook them.
- **Proverbs 17:14 (NLT)** Beginning a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.
- **Proverbs 19:11 (NLT)** People with good sense restrain their anger; they earn esteem by overlooking wrongs.

- Solomon is telling us that a wise person is one who doesn’t make a federal case out of every injury they experience in life. This is not to say that even small slights aren’t painful (ever get a paper cut?).
- **But what about major offenses?** They shouldn’t be overlooked, should they? Is it even possible to treat every offense the same?
- Some people believe that when God forgives our sin, He overlooks our sin, but that is not what the Bible teaches!
- **Nahum 1:3a (NLT)** The Lord is slow to get angry, but his power is great, and he never lets the guilty go unpunished.
- God’s mercy cannot override His holiness! He does not casually declare that sinners are righteous and offenses are inconsequential. Our sin demanded payment ... and that took the agony of Calvary! If a perfect God finds it impossible to “overlook” sin against Him, how could He expect us to “overlook” the hurts inflicted on us by others?
- If forgiveness is going to simply gloss over the wrongs that have been done to me, then I shouldn’t have to forgive! **Or should I?**

2. Forgiveness lets people off the hook too easily.

- One of the most basic 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 even more deeply.
- **Matthew 18:21 (NLT)** Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?”
- How many times are you willing to forgive a person for committing the SAME SERIOUS OFFENSE against you? Suddenly, Peter seems quite generous! He believed (**like YOU!**) that there surely must be SOME LIMIT to forgiveness to prevent abuse toward us.
- If forgiveness is just going to carelessly let people off the hook to sin again, then I shouldn’t have to forgive! **Or should I?**

3. Forgiveness places too much responsibility on the victim.

- Quite a convincing argument could be made for the fact that asking victims to “let go of their pain” and deny their desire for justice 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!
- But 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 5:38-39 (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.

- 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!
- If forgiveness is going to place such a heavy burden on my shoulders, then I shouldn't have to forgive! **Or should I?**

4. Forgiveness is unfair.

- Gradually, as we have considered these legitimate objections to forgiveness, we have uncovered the bottom-line argument on which they are based. **FORGIVENESS IS UNFAIR!**
- All of us are created in the image of God, and regardless of how badly that image has been marred by sin, we still retain a sense of innate fairness. When we see a wrong committed, we instinctively know that it's unjust for that wrong to go unpunished!
- Isn't there is something fundamentally unfair in letting our offender go free without any consequences? And if forgiveness is essentially unfair, then I shouldn't have to forgive! **Or should I?**

DEFINING FORGIVENESS

All of these rational objections arise from a basic misunderstanding of the concept of forgiveness. Before we define the word biblically, let's state what forgiveness is NOT:

- It is not denying the reality of your pain.
- It is not letting your offender off the hook.
- It is not blaming you, the victim.
- It is not unfair. **(God can't do anything unfair!)**

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

If forgiveness is "none of the above," then what is it? **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.

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 our objections and offers us some compelling reasons to unilaterally forgive:

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

Genesis 4:24 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

To let the impact of His statement settle in the minds of His listeners, Jesus relates a dramatic and unforgettable story to drive His point home:

Matthew 18:23-27 (NLT) ²³ "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. ²⁴ In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. ²⁵ He couldn't pay, so the king ordered that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. ²⁶ But the man fell down before the king and begged him, 'Oh, sir, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' ²⁷ 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.

We've talked about some logical reasons WHY I CAN'T FORGIVE. But, now that I understand better what forgiveness is, there are some equally strong reasons why I should make a CHOICE TO RELEASE my offender.

THERE ARE 4 STRONG REASONS WHY I SHOULD FORGIVE:

1. **Forgiveness is often the only way to settle a debt.**
 - Realistically, what alternative to forgiveness did the king have? He didn't have to release the slave, but 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 REALIZE THAT 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. Understandably, they want vengeance. **But the truth is that very few sinners have the resources to pay for their offenses!**
- What satisfactory payment could someone 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! He understood that **forgiveness is sometimes the only way to break the endless cycle of hurt and unfairness.**

2. Forgiveness frees us to get on with our life.

- THE KING WAS ALSO SMART ENOUGH TO REALIZE THAT HE HAD TOO MANY RESPONSIBILITIES TO ALLOW HIMSELF TO BE DISTRACTED BY ONE SLAVE'S OBLIGATION.
- 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!

3. 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 suddenly, an evil thought entered his mind ...
- **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.**
- **WITH EVERY OFFENSE COMES A CHOICE!** We can hold on to it and become bitter, or we can release it and become better.
- James Garfield had been president of the United States less than four months when he was shot in the back on July 2, 1881. While the president remained conscious, the doctor probed the wound, unsuccessfully trying to detect the bullet. Over the course of the summer, teams of doctors tried to locate it. The president clung to life through July and August, but in September he died – not from the gunshot wound but from infection. The repeated probing of the wound, which the doctor thought would help, ultimately killed him.
- Continually reliving the hurts we've experienced infects not only our life, but the lives of those around us. One of the strongest arguments for forgiveness is the consequences of unforgiveness!

4. Forgiveness is the obligation of the forgiven.

- The Bible teaches that there is an inseparable link between receiving and granting forgiveness. Jesus' parable teaches us that our personal sin against God has produced an obligation we could never hope to repay. **BUT THE KING FORGAVE US!**
- But Jesus' parable also has stern words for us in our relationships with those who wrong us. We may have every RIGHT to "collect the debt they owe," but we have a higher OBLIGATION to release them from that debt, considering that we have been forgiven so much.
- **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 someone has inflicted on you is real, it is also negligible compared to the wrong you have committed against God.

Forgiveness isn't a one-time action, but a continual choice. **FORGIVENESS IS SURRENDERING THE RIGHT TO HURT YOU FOR HURTING ME.**

VIDEO CLIP #2 – JOSEPH FORGIVING HIS BROTHERS

Joseph knew what it was to spend time in a physical prison, so he was determined not to spend time in an emotional one! He chose to release his brothers permanently, knowing that in the process he was also releasing himself! He never wanted to go back to either jail again!

Ephesians 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.