

# Forgiveness and Freedom

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The dictionary defines “**forgiveness**” as 1) give up the wish to punish, not have hard feelings at or toward someone, and 2) give up all claim to; not demand payment for. 3) restore the relationship to its previous state.

**“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.....If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:32,36).**

**“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).**

**“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:29-30)**

“Forgive him? Are you kidding? After what he has done to me? I can never forgive him!”

“Forgive me? How could God forgive me? You don’t know what I have done.”

“How could I have done such an awful thing? I can never forgive myself.”

These are the confessions I hear every day as a pastor. Confessions from people who have grown up in churches, grown up with godly parents, **and yet** grown up without ever fully understanding God’s forgiveness and its intended effect on every level of their lives.

The tragedy of all this is the *bondage* people find themselves in when they do not grasp the immensity of God’s

forgiveness. Allow me to enumerate **four different types of bondage’s** that they find themselves in **as a result of not understanding God’s forgiveness.**

1) It is a bondage that stifles their ability to love and accept those they know in their hearts most deserve their love.

2) It is a bondage that cripples marriages from their outset.

3) It is a bondage that is often passed from generation to generation.

4) It is a bondage that chokes out the abundant life Christ promised to those who would believe.

That is why I felt compelled to share this message on forgiveness. Only by truly understanding God’s forgiveness and making it a part of their lives will people be delivered from this bondage. Only then will they be able to live the Christian life to its fullest.

## What is forgiveness?

Forgiveness is “the act of setting someone free from an obligation to you that is a result of a wrong done against you.” For example, a debt is forgiven when you free your debtor of his obligation to pay back what he owes you.

**Forgiveness then involves three elements:**

1) **injury,**

2) **a debt resulting from the injury,**

3) **and, a cancellation of the debt.**

All three elements are essential if forgiveness is to take place. **Before we**

**look in more detail at this process, however, we need to trace the sequence of events that lead to bondage when this process is abandoned.** This is important because I believe most people who suffer from an unforgiving spirit do not know that unforgiveness is the root of their problem.

All they know is that they just "can't stand" to be around certain people.

1) They find themselves wanting to strike out at people when certain subjects are discussed.

2) They feel uncomfortable around certain personality types.

3) They lose their temper over little things.

4) They constantly struggle with guilt over sins committed in the past.

5) They can't get away from the ambivalence of hating the ones they know they should love the most.

Such feelings and behavior patterns often indicate that people have not come to grips with forgiveness by God and the implications of that forgiveness.

## **TAKING HOSTAGES**

We are all painfully aware of what it means for somebody to be taken **hostage**. We are outraged when the news of such an atrocity reaches us. **And yet when we refuse to forgive others (or ourselves, for that matter), there is a sense in which we hold them hostage.** Let me explain.

When a person is taken hostage on the international scene, the abductors usually want something. It may be:

- 1) **money**
- 2) **weapons, or**
- 3) **the release of prisoners.**

The message they send, in essence is, **"If you give us what we want, we will give you back what we have taken."** There is always

some type of condition, a ransom of some sort.

When individuals refuse to forgive others for a wrong done to them, they are saying the same thing. **But instead of holding people hostage until they get their demands,**

**they withhold:**

- 1) **love,**
- 2) **acceptance,**
- 3) **respect,**
- 4) **service,**
- 5) **kindness,**
- 6) **patience,**
- 7) **or whatever the others value.**

The message they send is this: **"Until I feel you have repaid me for the wrong done to me, you will not have my acceptance."** If we go back to our definition, we can see that the element missing from this scenario is **cancellation of the debt. Persons who refuse to forgive refuse to cancel the debt.**

## **THE REAL LOSER**

A person who has an unforgiving spirit is always the real loser, **much more so than the one against whom the grudge is held.** This is easy to see when we take a closer look at the things most people withhold from those they feel have wronged them. **Unforgiveness, by its very nature, prevents individuals from following through on many of the specifics of the Christian life and practically necessitates that they walk by the flesh rather than by the Spirit.**

Think about your own experience for a moment. Think back to the last time someone really hurt you or wronged you or took something that belonged to you, whether it was a possession or an opportunity.

**Let me ask some questions for you to ponder?**

1) Immediately following the incident, did you feel like running out and doing something kind for the person, **or did you feel like retaliating?**

2) Did you consider responding in gentleness, **or did you think about letting loose with some well-chosen words?**

3) Did you feel like giving in and accepting the situation, **or did you feel like fighting for your "rights"?**

If you were honest, you probably identified **more with the latter option in each case.** These are the normal responses to being hurt or taken advantaged of. **But think of these responses in light of what Paul says, and you will begin to understand why an improper response to injury automatically impairs a person's walk with God.**

**"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.....If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23,25).**

In a broad sense Paul's list here includes all the things we naturally want to hold hostage from the people who have hurt us. We rarely want to give our **LOVE** to individuals who have hurt us. We certainly have **NO JOY** or **PEACE** when others have injured us in some way. We **ARE NOT** generally **PATIENT** with or **KIND** to people who have wronged us. We could go right down the list.

Paul accurately describes the responses of the unforgiving person: **"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are...enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying.....and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things**

**shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).**

**First reason:**

**An unforgiving spirit prevents a person from being able to walk consistently in the Spirit.** The only choice is to walk according to the flesh. The consequences of such a life are devastating, and Paul discusses what will happen:

**“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7-8).**

The corruption Paul mentions has nothing to do with hell. He is talking about the consequences on this earth. If a person--believer or nonbeliever--makes decisions according to the impulses and desires of the flesh, the result will always be corruption---a wrecked and ruined life. Those persons who have not come to grips with the concept of forgiveness have by the very nature of unforgiveness set themselves up to walk according to the flesh. When that happens, they are losers every time. By withholding patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, and the rest, the individual is held hostage by the flesh and, thus, is the ultimate loser.

### **A CONSUMING CORRUPTION**

**Second reason:**

**The destructive nature of an unforgiving spirit is such that it is not limited to one relationship. Resentment and other negative feelings spill over into other relationships. This is the second reason a person with an unforgiving spirit loses out in life.**

Unfortunately, people are rarely aware when hostility from one relationship affects their ability to get along with others. So they try and try--- unsuccessfully--- to work out

their differences with others, never recognizing the real source of the problem. Once they tire of trying to change, they excuse their sensitivity as part of their personality and expect people to “work around” them, emotionally speaking. They develop a **“take-me-or-leave-me-but-don’t-try-to-change-me attitude,”** and in the process they hurt the people they love the most.

I see this spill over most often in marital relationships. When a husband and a wife come in for marriage counseling. I begin by asking their relationships with their parents. Almost without fail, one of them feels some bitterness or resentment toward a parent (or parents). Sometimes both of them have these feelings. Oftentimes the root of their marriage problems is found in some hostility they have been hauling around, sometimes since childhood.

**In almost every case, the counselees have a legitimate complaint; they have really been wronged by their parents. But their inability or unwillingness to forgive ends up hurting them, not their parents!**

### **THE REJECTION CONNECTION**

**Third reason:**

The third reason a person with an unforgiving spirit loses out in life is closely tied to the other reasons we’ve just discussed. When a person is wronged in some way, whether in **marriage, business, friendship, or some other relationship, rejection occurs.** The classic case would be when a guy breaks up with his girl friend because he has found another girl. **In her struggle with rejection the girl swears she will never trust another male.**

It is easy to see where hurt resulted from rejection. But if we plug this concept into other sets of circumstances, we can see it holds true in every case where forgiveness

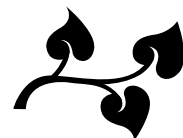
is needed. The following incident comes from the life of another pastor who related this story. This incident which set him and his son at odds for years, illustrates how an unforgiving spirit has feelings of rejection at its roots.

When his son was about fourteen, he discovered he had some musical talents. He began spending a great deal of time playing the piano, primarily by ear. That meant a great deal of pounding chords with very little melody. To the father it sounded all the same.

One day on his way upstairs the father stuck his head in the living room and said, “Son, is that all you know?” To his uninformed ear, it sounded as if he had been playing the same song for hours! The son immediately stopped playing. And he never played for his father again. The son would wait until his mother and father would leave the house, and then he would spend hours practicing and practicing. The father began hearing from others what a fine pianist his son was, but he never heard another sound from the piano in the living room.

Some years later--when his son was in his twenties-- their conversation turned toward his music. The son gave him his version of what happened in the living room that afternoon, and he confessed that he had resented his father from that day on. Why? It really was not a big deal to the father. He did not mean anything serious by what he said. But to his son, as a teenager, what he had communicated was this: “That he (father) did not accept him or his music.” Many times young people interpret what their parents say to them to mean: “I do not accept you or your music.”

*(Continued in next edition)*





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