

301 Life on Life
Class Seven // June 13, 2021
From Bitterness to Forgiveness

I. Overview

A. One common topic in life on life relationships is that of **Forgiveness**.

1. Some people we talk with know it is an issue and mention it. They tell you, *"I just can't forgive my ex-wife or my son-in-law or the people from my former church."*
2. Others struggle with depression, anger, fear or feeling stuck spiritually, but as you hear their story, they are really struggling with an underlying issue of unforgiveness.
3. In other situations, a person may say they are having a hard time feeling forgiven by God, while others say, *"I'm having a hard time forgiving myself."*
4. For reasons we'll cover, thinking that we need to forgive ourselves reflects an inadequate understanding of forgiveness.
5. So whether people are aware or aren't aware they have a forgiveness issue, this topic is common enough in life on life relationships that we all need to think biblically through how to receive and practice forgiveness ourselves and how to help others do so.

B. Start by **defining forgiveness**.

1. John Morrison: **Forgiveness** is the withdrawal of personal judgment against another for an offense committed by the other. It is based not upon the offender undoing the offense or making promises with regard to the offense, but on mercy granted by the one offended.
2. Wikipedia: **Forgiveness** is the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, lets go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, with an increased ability to wish the offender well.
3. Ken Sande (author of The Peacemaker) says: *Through **forgiveness**, God tears down the walls that our sins have built and He opens the way for a renewed relationship.*

C. **Forgiveness is not the same as a restored relationship.**

That requires repentance on the part of the offender and agreement on the part of the offended. Forgiveness is the cancelation of a *"demand of satisfaction"* by the offended.

1. Two examples are Jesus on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and Stephen in Acts 8, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
2. In both cases, a relationship was not restored, but each one withheld their own right to judge against those who murdered them, and they even asked that the Father withhold His judgment against them for what they had done.

D. Forgiveness is important **because it is the central point of the gospel**. The gospel, properly understood, is **good news** about **bad news**. If there was no bad news, there would be no need for good news. That is, if there were no sin against a holy God resulting in our judgment, there would be no need for Jesus to take all our sins upon that tree and be raised from the dead to put an end to the Father's enmity against us. That is what a person believes when they believe the gospel.

E. But forgiveness as a personal issue is also important because that is a **main way the gospel shows up in our lives**. Though God gave every believer in Christ His forgiveness so we could be with Him when we die, even more it was so we would become like Him. As 2 Cor. 5:21 says, *"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* And perhaps the number one way to **be like Jesus is to practice Forgiveness**.

II. **What do the Scriptures say about forgiveness?** Several of you take turns reading out loud these familiar passages. We will see how central forgiveness is to our life with God and with each other.

- A. *Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*
- B. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*
- C. *And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High. For you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give people knowledge of salvation by forgiveness of their sins.*
- D. *The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*
- E. *This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*
- F. *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*
- G. *"Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."*
- H. *All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*
- I. *In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.*
- J. *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another.*
- K. *I write to you, dear children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name.*

III. **Four principles we must personalize for ourselves before we can pass them on.**

- A. If you do personalize them, and if you see them as coming from the Lord, you will be able to use the Scriptures and your life and help others take steps toward freedom.
 - 1. To grant forgiveness to others, we need to **recall our forgiveness** from the Lord.
 - 2. Withholding forgiveness **inhibits fellowship with Christ** and **opens a door to Satan**.
 - 3. Unforgiveness is always **held in place by self-righteousness**.
 - 4. Our ability to forgive grows as we **know Christ better and become more grateful**.
- B. **To grant forgiveness, we need to recall our forgiveness from the Lord.** Colossians 2:13-14: *When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. We have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins, by his blood.*
 - 1. This is always the place to begin when we think of forgiving. Forgiveness starts with God. He did it first. Notice when we examine the passage:
 - a. Although we were sinners (*dead in our transgressions*);
 - b. Everything we did wrong (*our transgressions*) was nailed to the cross with Jesus;
 - c. When Jesus' blood was shed, God canceled the debt our sin created;
 - d. The ones Paul is talking to have received redemption – the forgiveness of sins;
 - e. It involves the Lord paying the price for our sins instead of us;
 - f. All we contributed was our transgressions which added up to a "certificate of debt" requiring blood be shed, since the Bible says, *"Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness."*
 - 2. In Matthew 18, Jesus tells a story of a working man who owed his master 10,000 talents of gold – maybe \$15 billion. Needless to say, he could never have paid it off. (*That was meant to represent my sin and your sin and your friend's sin.*) The man told his boss, "I'll pay you back" – as if he could. He was not in touch with the size of his debt and his limited

resources. That is like us... *"I won't do that anymore, Lord."* Each one of us was that working man who owed a debt he couldn't pay. And in the story, the master – representing God – forgave the debt. He absorbed the loss for his worker. That is like God absorbing the loss our sin caused Him by sending Jesus to die.

3. The place all of us need to start when it comes to forgiving those who have hurt us is to remember what God did for us in Christ.

C. **Withholding forgiveness limits our fellowship with Christ and opens the door for Satan.** We have several passages that teach these principles.

1. First, Jesus says in Matthew 6:14-15, *"If you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your transgressions."*
2. At the end of the account in Matthew 18, He says, *"Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way I had mercy on you? And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."*
3. In these two passages, Jesus says the ability to experience the Father's forgiveness is dependent upon our forgiving those who trespass against us. The Bible is not teaching that we lose our salvation or that we never were forgiven in the first place. It is telling us that we will not experience the grace of God and His fellowship if we withhold forgiveness.
4. Perhaps the best example of that comes in Ephesians 4:25-27 which says, *"Speak the truth, each one of you, with his neighbor.... And be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and thereby give the devil a foothold."*
5. This idea of anger remaining in place giving the devil a foothold brings to mind 2 Corinthians 2:11 where Paul says to the church that they need to forgive the erring brother who has repented. He says, *"But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes."*
6. One of Satan's main schemes is taking advantage of believing people who do not forgive. When forgiven people do not forgive, God has given Satan permission to have a foothold in their lives. The reason God does this is because the believer who doesn't forgive is testifying to the invisible world that our forgiveness by God is not a big deal. It is announcing that *"although our paltry offenses against God were forgiven,"* the offenses we have incurred at the hands of our fellow traveler on earth is much too great to forgive. This amounts to a rejection of the gospel by a *recipient of the gospel*. It is almost like a spiritual law, an agreement between God and Satan, that anyone who comes under the blood of Christ will follow the example of his Savior, which strikes a blow to Satan. *(For the theology that how we live strikes a blow against Satan, see Job 1, for example.)* And when by unforgiveness, we testify that the gospel is inadequate to provide us enough spiritual ammunition to forgive, we announce that the gospel is not powerful after all.

D. **Third, unforgiveness is always held into place by self-righteousness.**

1. It works like this. The power to forgive comes from Christ. We forgive because we were unrighteous and yet were forgiven. We remember Romans 5:8, *While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* This showed that Jesus did not wait until we were obedient, faithful people before He went to the cross for us. He went to the cross for us when we were at our worst. **That is why Paul wrote in Romans 4:5, *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.***

2. So what basis does a person have for not forgiving? Generally, the idea is, “I never would have done this to him.” “This is no way to pay me back for what I have been.” People have an easier time forgiving someone for what they, too, have been guilty of. You can understand that kind of offense. But the hardest time to forgive someone is when they did something to you that you’d never have done.
3. What that means is, “I didn’t deserve this. I deserve better treatment.” Well, if we think we deserve better treatment, it means that though we believe that we are a sinner and needed God’s forgiveness, we didn’t believe our sin ever justified this particular treatment.
4. And by the way, the offense we received may not have been deserved by us. Just think of Job. Even God says he was righteous. But Job’s eventual sin in the book of Job was that he believed God owed him an explanation for all that had happened. That was a form of self-righteousness – I deserve an explanation. Similar to the one who doesn’t forgive. I deserve better treatment than he/she gave me.
5. We also see this in Hebrews 12:14-15. There we read, *Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.*
6. Here we see that bitterness is the result of our coming short of utilizing God’s grace and failing to pursue peace with all men through granting forgiveness. If we do not pursue peace with all people and we fail to appropriate God’s grace by forgiving, the passage says “we will not see the Lord” at work. Instead, we will become bitter and it will defile many.
7. But how does bitterness defile many? Each of us have been in rough circumstances that we did not cause, and been hurt in ways that we did not bring on ourselves. Few people escape the reality of being adversely affected by the fall beyond the effects of our own sin. But too often, those ways we have been ignored, mistreated, and abused have become for us the one justification for holding onto our offense.
8. Unfortunately, though, to hold onto an offense because we really did not deserve it is to say, “I have not deserved this behavior, and will therefore judge it.” That is saying, “I have some righteousness of my own on which I stand.” That flies right in the face of Galatians 6:14 that says, “May I never boast in anything but the cross of Christ my Lord.” In other words, may I not ever think there is something about me that is good *other than* Christ. From such a position and attitude, we can’t judge others.

E. Our ability to forgive grows the more we know Christ and the more we practice gratitude.

1. Our ability to enjoy forgiveness as a recipient and grantor is directly related to how much we appreciate how much we have been forgiven and how much we have been loved.
2. Listen to Colossians 3:12-17:
*So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. **Col. 3:12-17***
3. Notice the connection between forgiveness and being thankful for the grace of God in our lives. Colossians 3:12 says we are “chosen of God, holy and beloved” – which refers to the

fact that God had mercy on us and set us apart in His love. It is because we were chosen by God when we didn't deserve it, that we were set apart by Him for His purposes, that we are loved by Him, that we should put on a "heart of compassion with kindness, gentleness and patience. We are to bear with one another and forgive each other."

4. The kindness and compassion and gentleness we would need in order to forgive someone is directly related to the way that we remember His love for us. He says in Ephesians 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

IV. Forgiveness is an Offer for the Gospel to Continue

- A. **SUMMARY OF OUR FORGIVENESS:** When we forgive, we are like our Lord. When we forgive, we remove any impediments to another person from having a relationship with us. Restored relationship may require recognition on their part (See Luke 17) and willingness on our part, even if in a guarded way. But forgiveness invites the person to deal directly with God, it invites us to do good to them (Romans 12:20, 21), and it allows people to see their sin and the forgiveness available in Christ. It argues against taking our own vengeance. If the people do not repent and if God considers it to require vengeance, He will repay (Romans 12:19). We need only trust Him and remove our judgment against them.
- B. **To put flesh on this, discuss as a group your response to one of these case studies.**
 1. *Terry is 41. She grew up fast in a home with a lot of unresolved conflict. She went to church with her family in her early years. After being sexually abused by an older cousin from age 10-12, and pressured into sexual stuff when she was 15 at a friend's church retreat, Terry grew hard. She dated a fair amount, had a number of sexual partners, was married and quickly divorced. At 26, she had a daughter by a man she was dating who didn't want to get married. Now her daughter is repeating some of her same behaviors. Terry would like to find help for her daughter and she was recommended to you by a mutual friend. Where is forgiveness a stumbling block for her, and what help might she need?*
 2. *Marc is 50. He grew up in a Christian home, went to Christian school, attended Bible College for three years, thinking he would be a missionary. His serious girlfriend broke up with him his junior year, the year his dad died. He left school and took a job and helped his mom for three years until she remarried. He took classes on-line and finished his degree at age 30. Along the way, he was married. They had four kids under 6 at the same time. As he talks with you, he says his goal is to get his 15 year old son – his youngest – under control. He talks back, doesn't take his school seriously, is lazy and complains a lot. Marc is fed up with him and says he stays angry at him. Where could forgiveness be an issue for him and how could he be helped?*

Appendix: Forgiveness Through the Cross

These can help the person you help understand God's perspective on offense and forgiveness.

- A. Principles of Forgiveness – It is not overlooking an offense, it is dealing with an offense.
1. All true forgiveness is rooted not in ignoring, but in righteousness and justice.
 - a. Genesis 3:21
 - b. Exodus 12:7-13
 - c. Leviticus 17:11
 - d. Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24
 - e. John 6:53-56
 - f. Acts 20:28
 - g. Romans 3:25
 - h. Romans 5:9
 - i. Ephesians 1:7
 - j. Ephesians 2:13
 - k. Colossians 1:20
 - l. Colossians 2:14
 - m. Hebrews 9:13-14
 - n. Hebrews 9:22
 - o. Revelation 19:13
 2. It is always rooted in being sinned against & God most sinned against (Psalm 51:4)
 3. It is rooted in God's heart and character - mercy triumphs over justice (James 2:13)
 4. It showed up at the beginning of recorded history when God promised a deliverer (Gen. 3:15) and before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5, 3:11)
 5. Forgiveness costs the one who gives it (Hebrews 9:22; See also Luke 9:23-24)
 6. We are always **derivative** forgivers – never original. Forgiveness never starts with us. It is an extension to another what has been extended to us. (Mark 11:25)
 7. Available to everyone but not experienced by everyone (Luke 23:34)
- B. Model of Forgiveness is seen in 2 Corinthians 5:21
- C. Practice of Forgiveness
1. Matthew 6:12, 14-15 (We ask God to forgive us but He won't if we won't)
 2. Matthew 18:21-35 (Our forgiveness from God is like the man forgiven billions; our not forgiving others is like the same man not forgiving a few thousand)
 3. Luke 17:1-4 ("If he asks, forgive")
 4. Romans 12:14, 17-21 (Return blessing & leave room for God's vengeance)
- D. Costs of Forgiveness
1. Releasing our right to judge (Romans 12:19)
 2. Being willing to let them go free (Jonah 3:10-4:3)
 3. Letting go of the offense (An application of Galatians 2:20)
 4. Trusting God to deal with it if they haven't repented (Romans 12:20)

Homework for the Person Struggling With Bitterness

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with every form of malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. Eph. 4:30-5:1

Record all the observations about this passage you can make in this space:

Explain the passage – sound interpretation:

How could this be applied to a bitter counselee:

Action Point for Me:

Pursue peace with all men and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.
Hebrews 12:15

Observations:

Interpretation:

Applications:

Action Point for Me:

But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. James 3:14-15

Observations:

Interpretation:

Applications:

Action Point for Me:

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45

Observations:

Interpretation:

Applications:

Action Point for Me:

Case Study

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Ge 4:3-8

What was Cain's loss? (Remember that bitterness always requires a loss)

What were some of the emotions that Cain may have experienced in connection with that loss? (Realize some emotions are obvious and some are less so.)

Which emotion did God focus in on and why?

What losses have you incurred?

What emotions might you have experienced in the aftermath of that loss?

Which ones might God want you to focus on and why?

What sinful behaviors have you possibly been guilty of in the aftermath of your loss?