

If You Do Not Forgive...

Forgiveness part 3 Matthew 6:14-15 11-21-10

Most of us have a kind of love/hate relationship with forgiveness and mercy. When you are on the receiving end, you think it is the highest of all virtues. But when you are the offended party, suddenly forgiveness no longer seems quite so wonderful. It can seem like a gross violation of justice. This message and the next will help you understand what God requires of you when someone hurts you, and how to move your heart from unwillingness to forgive to eagerness to forgive.

Excerpt 1:

A man once said to Charles Wesley, "I never forgive," to which Wesley replied, "Then, sir, I hope you never sin."

Excerpt 2:

Love is patient. The readers of 2 Peter wondered why Christ was waiting SO long to come back and judge the wicked. And the answer is it does not seem long to Jesus because of His patient love. Waiting 1000 years for them to repent seemed to God like one day because of his love. Some of you expected your spouse to change after three months of marriage. Now it is fifteen years, and you are still waiting. If you love like God loves you, you can say, "For me, waiting fifteen years for her to repent is like waiting one day." Love is patient.

Excerpt 3:

It is amazing to me how willing I am sometimes to sacrifice what could be a perfectly happy day because I want to take offense at some little thing Tracy does. Maybe she got upset at me once for doing something, and now she just did the exact same thing. And at the moment I realize that I have a choice. Right now she is happy, I am happy, the relationship is fine, and if I decide to just laugh it off we can both spend the rest of the day in a good mood. But instead I decide, "No, I'm going to dwell on what she did wrong." And so I dwell on it. And I am the type whose pride goes more in the direction of self-pity than anger, so at first she does not even know. But I dwell on it until I become grumpy. I do not say anything to her, because that would be too petty. At least that is what I tell myself. In reality it is because to talk to her about it and resolve it on the spot would be an act of kindness, and I do not feel like showing kindness. So now I am in a little bit of a grumpy mood. Nothing extreme. Hardly noticeable – but it is noticeable. And the next thing you know, within a few hours, for some reason she is not in the greatest mood. And so now we are both in a grumpy mood, which means we are both really noticing every little offense, which feeds our grumpiness. (And do not be surprised at this point if I rebuke her for being so grumpy.) So now we get to have a whole day – or maybe two or three, where we are not happy. For what? All because I decided to wallow in self-pity over some insignificant offense that I could have easily overlooked.

What insanity that is! When Tracy does something to inconvenience me it is a fork in the road. The path to the right is a path of joy and happiness in the home for the next few days. The path to the left is a path of grumpiness and unhappiness. But to take the path on the right I have to lift up my foot and step over a log that Tracy left in my path, which is a piece of cake for humility, but if my pride decides to wallow in self-pity then I will be unwilling to step over that log and down I go on the path of unhappiness.

Introduction.....	2
The condition for being forgiven	2
<i>Because your sin is not over</i>	<i>5</i>
Pride.....	6
Realize your need for forgiveness	6
<i>You cannot be restored to a God who has forgiven that person when you won't.....</i>	<i>6</i>
The condition for forgiving others.....	7
<i>A function of love.....</i>	<i>8</i>

Bearing with one another	8
1. Do not be easily offended.....	9
2. Be Slow to Anger When You Are Offended	10
Don't give up on them.....	11
Conclusion	11

SUMMARY.....	11
---------------------	-----------

Q&A QUESTIONS	11
--------------------------------	-----------

Matthew 6:5-15 And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **7** And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. **9** "This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **10** your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **11** Give us today our daily bread. **12** Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' **14** For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** but if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Introduction

Most of us have a kind of love/hate relationship with forgiveness and mercy. When you are on the receiving end, you think it is the highest of all virtues. You commit some horrible sin and the person has mercy on you and gives full, immediate, heartfelt forgiveness – we love that. But when you are the offended party, suddenly forgiveness no longer seems quite so wonderful. It can seem like a gross violation of justice.

The condition for being forgiven

In Matthew 6:9 Jesus said, **This, then, is how you should pray...** and He went on to give us an outline for prayer. It is an outline for all prayer and all Christian living, and yet it is only five short sentences. And in one of those sentences Jesus drops a bomb. He throws in an extra phrase that is a shock.

Matthew 6:12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors

Forgive me like I forgive others? Have you ever prayed that (other than when you were reciting the Lord’s Prayer)? Is there anyone here who routinely prays, “Lord, please forgive me the way I forgive others”? That is a scary prayer. For many people that prayer would be signing their own death warrant. Most of us would probably be more inclined to pray, “Whatever You do, God, *don’t* forgive me the way I forgive others. Don’t let Your forgiveness of me be *anything like* the way I forgive others.”

Condition, not comparison

Why did Jesus teach us to pray that? Does it mean the forgiveness we receive from God limited to the way we forgive? My forgiveness, even at its best, is imperfect. So am I doomed to always receive imperfect forgiveness from God? No. I don't think this means God will forgive us exactly the same way we forgive others. He does not say, "To the extent that you forgive you will be forgiven." The point isn't *comparison*, but *condition*. It is not that God will use your forgiveness as the standard for how He forgives, but that your willingness to offer your imperfect forgiveness is the condition for receiving God's perfect forgiveness. God's forgiveness is conditional. And I know that statement makes a lot of people choke, because the idea that God's love is totally unconditional is repeated these days like a mantra (even though the word "unconditional" never appears in the Bible). What does appear in the Bible is a whole lot of conditions. Every time you see the word "if" you are looking at a condition. You cannot get a more conditional statement than

Matthew 6:14 if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Salvation by works?

One the reasons people react against that is because it sounds to some like salvation by works. It sounds like you have to earn your forgiveness by forgiving others. Is that what Jesus meant?

Whatever He meant, it is important. This is the only phrase in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus comments on. And Jesus repeated this same principle on numerous other occasions.

Mark 11:25 when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your sins.

Luke 11:4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

Luke 6:37 Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Here Jesus devotes an entire parable to this principle. And that parable clears up the question of salvation by works. Jesus tells the story of a man who is forgiven, but then is un-forgiven (or de-forgiven) once he refuses to forgive. But it is not a salvation by works system, because the forgiveness is not earned or deserved in any way. The man owes the king an unpayable debt, and he begs for mercy.

Matthew 18:27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

That is grace, not works. We receive forgiveness from God totally by grace alone. You can never deserve forgiveness, because the whole reason a person needs forgiveness is because he deserves punishment. So it is nonsense to speak of deserving forgiveness. It is a contradiction in terms. If you have to do anything to deserve forgiveness then it is not forgiveness; it is justice. If you have to pay the debt then the debt is not forgiven.

But if it is by grace alone, how is it that this guy loses it? There is no question this guy had forgiveness and then lost it. Why did Jesus tell a story about a guy losing his forgiveness? A lot of times people will say he must have never truly had it in the first place. He thought he was forgiven, but he never truly was.

The problem with that is if this servant was never truly forgiven in the first place then the master's logic falls apart. His whole point is that the reason the servant should have had mercy on his fellow servant is because of the fact that his own debt had been forgiven. If he was never actually

forgiven, that reasoning would not stand. It does not say the man thought he was forgiven; it says he was forgiven.

Matthew 18:27 The servant's master took pity on him, forgave the debt and let him go.

That is not the servant saying that – Jesus is saying that. There is no question the guy was genuinely forgiven.

Another approach has been to say, “Maybe he was still forgiven at the end. Maybe he forfeited temporal forgiveness, but not eternal forgiveness.” But the problem there is that the debt that is reinstated at the end is the very same debt that had been forgiven at the beginning.

Matthew 18:32 Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ... 34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

The debt that he was on the hook for at the end is the exact same debt that was forgiven at the beginning. You have to do some real interpretive gymnastics to make the forgiveness at the end a fundamentally different kind of forgiveness than the forgiveness at the beginning. It is the same debt.

Another approach is to say, “It’s just a parable. You can’t apply every detail of a parable. Some details are just the scenery of the story and don’t have any interpretive significance.” And that is true. So is the part about re-instating the debt and turning the guy over to the torturers just an incidental, meaningless part of the story with no direct application? Listen to what Jesus says at the end:

Matthew 18:34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

That part about having the debt reinstated and being turned over to the torturers is the one part Jesus goes out of His way to say is a direct application.

I do not see any way around this parable. It is a story about a guy who is truly forgiven, and then that forgiveness is cancelled and the debt reinstated when that guy refuses to forgive his fellow servant.

I do not know how anyone could have an unforgiving heart and then read that parable without being absolutely petrified. And if you come up with some ingenious, creative way of interpreting this parable to make it mean something other than the straightforward sense – ask yourself, “Do I really want to risk ending up in verse 35 on the strength of that interpretation?” The New Testament could not be more clear – if you refuse to forgive others God will not forgive you.

Does that apply to temporal, family forgiveness? Yes – remember, that is the context of the Lord’s Prayer. We saw two weeks ago that the forgiveness mentioned in the Lord’s Prayer is temporal, family forgiveness. A disobedient child getting back on good terms with his Father. Whenever we are unforgiving and hold grudges as Christians we distance ourselves from God to a degree. But the parable in Matthew 18 is clear that our eternal forgiveness is at stake as well. If you just have a hard, unrepentant, unforgiving heart and you are determined to hold a grudge without any intention of ever forgiving the person who hurt you – do not expect to go to heaven when you die. A man once said to Charles Wesley, “I never forgive,” to which Wesley replied, “Then, sir, I hope you never sin.” If you refuse to forgive then you had better be a perfect individual, because God will not forgive your sin.

Condition, not cause

And if that strikes you as salvation by works, it is important to understand the difference between a condition and a cause. If you won some drawing and they said, “We will come to your house and

replace all your carpet with brand new carpet, and all you have to do to get the new carpet is unlock your front door and let the carpet guys in,” the condition is you have to open your door, but opening your door is not the cause. The cause is the carpet worker – and whoever is paying the bill. Opening your door does not make you deserve the new carpet, it does not pay for the new carpet in any way – it is just the condition for receiving it.

That is the difference between a condition and a cause. Fulfilling the condition does not make you deserved the gift – it just makes you able to receive it. And it is the same with forgiveness. When we forgive one another that does not make us deserve God’s forgiveness. It is simply the condition that enables us to receive God’s forgiveness.

Why it is impossible to receive forgiveness while refusing to forgive

God’s forgiveness is impossible to receive while we are holding a grudge. And the reason it is impossible has to do with the meaning of forgiveness. Let me just quickly refresh your memory on the definition of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the restoration of the broken relationship. A person sins against you, and that puts a strain on your relationship. You are angry or hurt or upset at them, they are hurting you, and there is friction and strife between you and them. Then they stop sinning against you and realize the wrongness of what they have done, and they feel really bad for having hurt you. And finally the time comes when you do not want that kind of situation anymore. You do not want your relationship with them to be governed by that sin and their sorrow and sadness anymore. You are ready to just put it in the past so the relationship can get back on a good, happy footing.

2 Corinthians 2:7 you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

Forgiveness is that point where you no longer want the other person to be broken and crushed with sorrow. And so you drop it. You choose to replace your hard feelings with mercy.

Micah 7:18 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives ... You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

And when you replace the hard feelings with mercy you close the books on the matter. Forgiveness is a decision to no longer hold it against the person.

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him

So if you put all that together here is what you get for a definition: Forgiveness is setting aside a grievance, and extending love, comfort, kindness, and compassion, putting the matter completely to rest and opening up the door to full reconciliation to the person who sinned against you.

Because your sin is not over

And when you understand that definition it becomes clear why you cannot receive forgiveness while refusing to forgive others. Forgiveness is the restoration of a broken relationship. If you are going to repair something that is broken you have to first wait for it to finish being broken. You cannot repair a car while someone is still in the process of taking a sledgehammer to it. And you cannot repair a relationship while someone is still in the process of smashing it to pieces. When we refuse to forgive a brother or sister, we are still in the process of taking a sledgehammer to our relationship with God. And the process of repairing that damage cannot even begin until after we stop the activity that is doing the damage.

Before He is willing to forgive God requires confession, sorrow, and repentance.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins

We have to admit to our wrongdoing. And when we admit it we cannot laugh it off – there must be contrition and sorrow.

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

2 Corinthians 7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation

And that shows us the third requirement – repentance.

Acts 2:38 Repent and be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins.”

God will forgive you after you confess, and then your sorrow leads to repentance and a turning away from that sin back to God. And that involves realizing your sin and realizing your guilt and indebtedness to God. But when you are focused on how you have been wronged and someone is indebted to you, you are not focused on your own unworthiness. Repentance is a posture of humility; unforgiveness is a posture of pride. When you have your hands around the neck of someone who sinned against you, that is not a posture of repentance toward God.

Pride

When we refuse to forgive it is because deep down we do not think we need forgiveness. We think we are better than the other person. That person has hurt you and done something terrible to you – something far worse than anything you would ever do. And so you think, “Sure, I need forgiveness for my small sins. But I don’t commit huge sins like that against anybody.” Usually when you cannot find it in your heart to forgive someone, it is because you think you are above that person. Just because a person has committed a sin that you would never dream of committing, that does not make you any better than that person. Whatever sins people commit against you are nothing compared to how much you have sinned against God. If that person is repentant, what makes you any better than him? You are both repentant sinners – that is the best you can hope for in this life.

Realize your need for forgiveness

If you realize that your attitude toward someone is starting to slide into a mode of thinking you are better than them, remind yourself that in Colossians 3:13 we are all commanded to forgive **one another**. That “one-another” means God requires all of us to forgive you – which means you need forgiving. Sometimes we develop sort of a martyr complex when we forgive. We think we are being so big, and so gracious, and so self-sacrificial ... because we are overlooking some offense, and in the meantime many people around us are overlooking dozens of faults in us. There are no doubt several people right now overlooking and covering over and bearing with faults of yours that you do not even realize.

But when we refuse to forgive we are acting like we do not need forgiveness ourselves. There is no way you can refuse to forgive someone else while at the same time having a sense that you need to be forgiven. Refusal to forgive others means you are completely unaware of your own need to be forgiven. And it is like God is saying, “OK. If you don’t think you need forgiveness, fine – you won’t get it.” If you will not forgive someone else then you must not think you need forgiveness for your sins, which means you are not really repentant, which means you will not get forgiveness for your sins.

You cannot be restored to a God who has forgiven that person when you won’t

And beyond that, when we ask God for forgiveness we are asking to be restored to closeness and intimacy with Him. But that is impossible when you refuse to forgive a repentant sinner, because God *has* forgiven that repentant sinner. We can never be right with God while we are unwilling to reconcile a broken relationship with someone God deeply loves. You cannot hate my wife and pretend everything is fine between you and me. You cannot come up to me and say, “Hey, we’re cool, right?” while you are at that very moment mistreating my children. If you hate them then you most certainly are not “cool” with me. And just as you like it when your children love each other and are living in peace and joy and harmony in your home, and you do not like it when your children are mad at each other – it is the same way in the household of God. You are never right with the Father while withholding forgiveness from one of His children.

Jesus has already made that point crystal clear earlier in the Sermon on the Mount. In chapter 5 He said if you are angry with your brother you are guilty of murder. And you cannot ask to be forgiven for murder while you are still continuing to be a murderer, because forgiveness comes only after the sin is over. But as long as you have an angry heart the sin is still ongoing.

The condition for forgiving others

They must repent

So, the condition for receiving forgiveness from God is repentance, and if you refuse to forgive a brother then you are not repentant. But that brings up another question. If God requires repentance, should we require it? What if someone sins against us but they do not confess their sin, they do not feel bad, or they do not acknowledge what they have done? Or they do not take it seriously? What do you do if they are not repentant?

Luke 17:3 If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him.

If God expected us to forgive everyone automatically whether they repent or not, why would He keeps saying, “If he repents, forgive him”? God will not forgive unless a person confesses his sin, is contrite and broken over it, and repents, and He does not require a higher standard for us than for Himself. So do you need to forgive an unrepentant person? No.

Prior to repentance: Patience

But before some of you start singing the Hallelujah Chorus, you need to know this does not give you permission to hold a grudge. You do not have to forgive, but does that mean it is OK to be angry and bitter and upset? Is it OK to punish the person or teach them a lesson or be vengeful or cold or cool or unfriendly toward them? No – none of that is OK. God does not forgive unrepentant sinners, but He is patient with them and He requires that we also be patient. People ask all the time, “How do I forgive when the person is unrepentant?” And the answer is, “That’s the wrong question to ask. Forgiveness isn’t what is called for – patience is.” Patience is what you have while the sin is ongoing; forgiveness is for after the sin is over. Forgiveness closes the books and puts the whole thing in the past, and that is impossible to do while the sin is still ongoing. You cannot put it in the past if it is still happening. And when a person sins, that sin is still ongoing until he repents. If I lose my temper and yell at you for two minutes on a Tuesday morning, and then come and confess my sin and repent on Saturday, then my sin against you lasted four days, not two minutes. The sin continues from the time you commit it until the time you repent. And you cannot forgive a sin that is currently ongoing.

But you can do what God does and have patience. Listen to what Romans 2 says to unrepentant sinners:

Romans 2:4 do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

Right now God has not forgiven sinful, unrepentant humanity, but He is being patient with them.

Romans 9:22 What if God ... bore with great patience the objects of his wrath?

1 Peter 3:20 God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is ...patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ... 15 our Lord's patience means salvation

Is it OK to be angry and vengeful if the person does not repent? No. You cannot forgive yet, but you can (and must) be patient. Patience is the way God brings sinners to repentance and it should be our method as well.

The Greek word for patience is *makrothumia* (longsuffering, willingness to suffer a long time, an ability to outlast pain). It is a willingness to endure something at the hands of another person for a long time without getting angry, retaliating, or punishing that person. Being a patient person does not mean things do not bother you. Patience is the willingness to suffer the things that do bother you for a long time.

A function of love

This is a crucial component of love. In Paul's beautiful description of love in the love chapter (1 Cor.13) the very first item in the list is, **Love is patient**. The more you love someone the more inclined you are to cut them some slack. That is why God has been so patient with mankind for thousands of years. It does not seem like thousands of years to Him because of His love. The readers of 2 Peter wondered why Christ was waiting SO long to come back and judge the wicked. And the answer is it does not seem long to Jesus because of His patient love.

2 Peter 3:7-9 ... the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

People want to rip verse 8 out of context and apply it to the days of creation. But Peter is not talking about the creation; he is talking about God's patience with sinners. His delay of judgment does not seem long to Him because of His patience. Some of you expected your spouse to change after three months of marriage. Now it is fifteen years, and you are still waiting. If you love like God loves you, you can say, "For me, waiting fifteen years for her to repent is like waiting one day." Love is patient.

Bearing with one another

Another word for this is "bearing with."

Colossians 3:12 clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bearing with each other and forgiving whatever grievances you may have against one another.

What does it look like to have compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience? There are two parts – **bearing with** and **forgiving**. **Bearing with** is what you do while the sin is ongoing, **forgiving** is what you do after it is over. **Bearing with** is what you do while it is still an open matter, **forgiving** is what you do when it is time to close the matter (once they repent). The word translated **bearing with** means “to put up with.” When someone sins against you and does not repent, you do not retaliate, you do not teach them a lesson, you do not become harsh or cold or unfriendly toward them. You continue to show compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Do you pretend nothing happened? No. Do you act like nothing is wrong? No. But do you have the same closeness and intimacy in your relationship as before? No. There will be sorrow, and there will be a need to discuss the sin and bring it up in conversation, and call them to repentance. You may need to rebuke the person and exhort the person and warn the person about the consequences of persisting in sin. You do not do any of that after forgiveness. But while you are being patient you do do those things. But you do it all with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

There is a small blue flower in East Africa that grows along walking paths, and when it is stepped on the tiny blossoms are crushed, releasing a sweet perfume into the air. They call it “the forgiveness flower.” Here is the explanation I read: “This forgiveness flower does not wait until we ask forgiveness for crushing it. It does not release its fragrance in measured doses or hold us to a reciprocal arrangement. It does not ask for an apology; it merely lives up to its name and forgives-freely, fully, richly.” The flower “forgives” you for stepping on it even though you are unrepentant. That is a nice story, but the flower is misnamed. It should be called the patience flower. Forgiveness is a reciprocal arrangement and it does require an apology. But patience is sweet and fragrant even at the very moment it is being crushed underfoot.

Overcoming impatience

If you are impatient with people there are two angles from which to attack that problem.

1. Do not be easily offended

Being thin-skinned is a symptom of selfishness and pride. If you find yourself easily hurt, easily offended, easily irritated, routinely upset at people; you know you are becoming self-absorbed and prideful. Pride elevates self-importance. You start thinking your comfort is the supreme priority so everything that disrupts your comfort or makes you feel bad in some way makes you angry. You get angry at people who make honest mistakes, kids who make messes, adults who make messes, people who cut in front of you in traffic, phone solicitors, barking dogs, crying babies, lost car keys, people who do not show enough interest in you, etc. None of those things should make you angry. They should not require forgiveness because they should not even be noticed. They are so unimportant and incidental that they have no business taking up any of our thoughts – and they certainly have no business controlling our emotions. If you are walking down the hallway after the service and someone bumps you – brushes up against your shoulder a little bit – you do not pull them aside into the prayer room and rebuke them and show them verses from Scripture about being careful and considerate and require them to be crushed with sorrow and then forgive them. You do not even notice it. They say, “Oops, excuse me,” and that is the last you ever think of it. It does not require forgiveness or patience, because it is a non-issue to you.

But the more self-focused we become the more those little things bother us. Once you start worrying about whether people are loving you properly – that turns your focus inward and I guarantee you will be offended and hurt *constantly* everywhere you go. If you struggle with this type of anger, the solution is not to learn how to forgive so much as it is for you to repent of your pride. Shift the focus of your thoughts off of yourself and on to God. Stop worrying about whether people are loving you and focus on loving them. Pride is a very easy thing to measure. All you have to do is ask, “How much of an offence does it take to disrupt my relationship with this person?” If you are irritated by

every little thing, your pride is off the charts. The more you learn humility the more things slide off like water off a duck's back. And life becomes so much more pleasant.

When someone hurts us, most of us are tempted to go one of two directions – anger or self-pity. Those are the two sides of the same coin of pride. Depending on our personalities we might tend more toward one than the other, but they both sprout from the same root of pride.

For some people, anger is the first response. As soon as they are hurt, insulted, mistreated, abused, belittled, neglected, whatever; the first response is anger. Their heart is like a pile of kindling soaked with gasoline. And whenever someone hurts them – the sparks from that friction instantly start a fire. And for those people it does not seem like a choice. The fire of anger seems like an involuntary reaction that they cannot prevent. They do what they can to put out the fire once it starts, but it does not seem possible to keep it from igniting. Pride has turned their heart into gas-soaked kindling, and so they are volatile.

For other people it is not anger, but self-pity. Every time someone hurts you it is just one more proof in the books: “See – I’m so mistreated and so misunderstood and it’s all so unfair. Woe is me. I am so abused, I have to put up with so much, this is so horrible...” And that ends up leading to bitterness and resentment toward the person.

Some Christians realize that selfish anger is sinful, and they do not want to appear sinful, so they try to camouflage their pride with self-pity. Some people even try to make it look like humility. They are the ones who, whenever they are hurt, start putting themselves down. “Oh, I guess I’m just worthless. Nobody appreciates me; I guess my gifts just aren’t needed around here” – and they take their ball and go home.

It is amazing to me how willing I am sometimes to sacrifice what could be a perfectly happy day because I want to take offense at some little thing Tracy does. Maybe she got upset at me once for doing something, and now she just did the exact same thing. And at the moment I realize that I have a choice. Right now she is happy, I am happy, the relationship is fine, and if I decide to just laugh it off we can both spend the rest of the day in a good mood. But instead I decide, “No, I’m going to dwell on what she did wrong.” And so I dwell on it. And I am the type whose pride goes more in the direction of self-pity than anger, so at first she does not even know. But I dwell on it until I become grumpy. I do not say anything to her, because that would be too petty. At least that is what I tell myself. In reality it is because to talk to her about it and resolve it on the spot would be an act of kindness, and I do not feel like showing kindness. So now I am in a little bit of a grumpy mood. Nothing extreme. Hardly noticeable – but it is noticeable. And the next thing you know, within a few hours, for some reason *she* is not in the greatest mood. And so now we are both in a grumpy mood, which means we are both really noticing every little offense, which feeds our grumpiness. (And do not be surprised at this point if I rebuke her for being so grumpy.) So now we get to have a whole day – or maybe two or three, where we are not happy. For what? All because I decided to wallow in self-pity over some insignificant offense that I could have easily overlooked.

What insanity that is! When Tracy does something to inconvenience me it is a fork in the road. The path to the right is a path of joy and happiness in the home for the next few days. The path to the left is a path of grumpiness and unhappiness. But to take the path on the right I have to lift up my foot and step over a log that Tracy left in my path. Which is a piece of cake for humility, but if my pride decides to wallow in self-pity then I will be unwilling to step over that log and down I go on the path of unhappiness.

2. Be Slow to Anger When You Are Offended

So step one in overcoming impatience is to pursue humility and stop focusing on self so that you are not so easily irritated at the small stuff. But what about the more serious offenses that do need attention? That is where patience comes in. Patience does not ignore sin. It does not tolerate sin. It does not sweep sin under the rug. But it does strive to rescue the person from sin. We get angry or drop into self-pity when our focus is on self. But patience is concerned for the other person. When a person

commits a sin, that person is in trouble. The farther they go down that road of unrepentance the more damage they will do to themselves, and love will have compassion on someone like that. Love will want to rescue them from destroying themselves. And so love will rebuke them, correct them, admonish them, warn them, carry out church discipline – whatever it takes to rescue them. And while that process is going on, patience will hold back the flesh from anger or bitterness toward the person.

Patience springs from compassion. Just think of how much trouble the person is in with God. Think of all the terrible consequences the person is going to have to face. Think of how their closeness to God is going to be destroyed. Remember the times you have been self-deceived and continued in some sin. Think of what a terrible position that is to be in, and how hard it is to get out of, and how much God loves that person, and open the doors of compassion in your heart for that person. If you are trying to change them to make your life more pleasant, that is selfish, but if you have true compassion you will try to change them for their sake (and for God's).

Don't give up on them

And that will keep you from developing bitterness toward the person. If bitterness begins to build, eventually you get to the point where the relationship strained to the breaking point and you give up on the person. You let them slide into your bottomless doghouse. That is my word for when someone becomes so offensive in your eyes that you will always be down on that person. It does not matter what they do – even if they repent or stop this bad behavior – they are just always going to be in the doghouse with you. When that happens it means you have given up on the person. You have stopped trying to love them. But Christ-like love perseveres. It does not give up. After you repent it forgives, and before you repent it is patient with you.

Conclusion

So hopefully that clears up the question of why it is not possible to receive forgiveness from God while refusing to forgive others – and the difference between patience and forgiveness. But that still leaves us with a lot of other questions. How do you bring a person to become willing to repent? Or what if they feel they have repented, but you do not think their repentance is adequate? Or what if it is adequate, but you just cannot seem to bring yourself to forgive? Does forgiveness mean removing the consequences of sin? Do you ever have to forgive yourself? Come back next week.

Benediction: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Summary

God requires us to forgive in order to forgive us. This is not a works system because it is a condition, not a cause. But unforgiveness makes it impossible to receive forgiveness because it is unrepentance and it is the continuation of that which is breaking the relationship with God (and a relationship cannot be repaired while it is in the process of being broken). Others must repent before we forgive them for the same reason. But that does not mean it is OK to be angry prior to repentance. Patience is called for. If you are impatient, learn humility.

Q&A Questions

These are the questions answered on the recording:

- 1) How do you know when you have truly forgiven someone?
- 2) What if you hear that the person who hurt you is repentant, but hasn't said anything to you?
- 3) How is repentance defined?

- 4) What about passages of Scripture that call for forgiveness and don't mention repentance?
- 5) If there is a sin you committed in the past and didn't repent, but now you don't even remember it, does God still hold it against you?
- 6) If you sin against a person and confess the sin to God but not the person, are you still at odds with God?
- 7) What about when an unbeliever sins against you—someone who is not likely to ever repent?
- 8) What about when repentance is inadequate?
- 9) How much unforgiveness do you have to have in your heart before you lose your forgiveness in God's sight?
- 10) How aggressive should you be in trying to reconcile with someone who is sinning toward you?