

The Importance of Forgiveness

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Matthew 6:12 (NKJV) “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

Matthew 6:14–15 (NKJV) “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

One of the greatest struggles that a Christian will face in this life is the issue of offense and forgiveness. We live in a fallen world. Everyone says and does things that hurt others. Do you have someone in your life with whom you struggle to forgive?

It is quite common to be offended. We cannot exist in a bubble. Relationships are vitally important and yet relationships will be tested by offenses. Jesus said: *“It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!”*¹ It is not a question of “if” we will be offended, but “when” we will be offended.

Offense is a natural reaction to injustice—whether it be real or perceived. Offense is the devil's bait to lure us into his trap. It is also the trap stick that shuts us in an emotional prison. The Greek word for “offense” is *skandalon* which refers to the movable trigger or stick in a trap. Offense triggers the devil's trap. Regarding this, Paul said to Timothy: *“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, ²⁶ and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”*²

Offense embitters our heart and takes us captive to become an instrument of the devil to do his will. The word “devil” means “slanderer”. Those who are offended become his means to speak evil of and slander others.

Offense builds walls between us and others. Proverbs 18:19 (NKJV) says, *“A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.”* When we are offended we distance ourselves from those with whom we are offended. Offense stirs up our pride. When offended we exalt ourselves into the seat of the prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner.

Offense is a test that reveals what is hidden in our heart. Offense exposes an area of our life that is in turmoil because it is not under the submission of the Prince of Peace. Psalm 119:165 (KJV) *“Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”*

When we are offended we must choose to forgive for our own sake. Unforgiveness hurts us more than the one with whom we are offended. Unforgiveness derails the work of God for our life. People who refuse to forgive will end up shipwrecked on the rocks of offense.

Many feel they cannot forgive because it seems they are condoning the wrong that another person has done. This is a misunderstanding. Forgiveness is NOT condoning sin or injustice. On the cross, Jesus forgave those who were involved in His crucifixion. Jesus was not condoning the injustice done to Him. He was there to save them.

¹ Luke 17:1 (NKJV)

² 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (NKJV)

Forgiveness has several meanings. Forgiveness means to choose reconciliation; to allow mercy to triumph over judgment; to cancel debt; to release from obligation; to pardon iniquity; and to cease rehearsing and nursing a past offense.

Does forgiveness sound too difficult? In one sense it is impossible without the grace of God. Thus, heartfelt forgiveness is not natural but supernatural. Alexander Pope, in his "Essay on Criticism", said: "To err is human; to forgive is divine." William A. Ward once said: "We are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive." John Stott once said: "The symbol of the religion of Jesus is the cross, not the scales."

Some have the idea that forgiveness is a sign of weakness. Nothing could be further from the truth! Forgiveness is a sign of strength rather than weakness. Benjamin Franklin said: "Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; Revenging one makes you but even with him; Forgiving it sets you above him." Yolanda Hadid: "I believe forgiveness is the best form of love in any relationship. It takes a strong person to say they're sorry and an even stronger person to forgive." An unknown author once said, "The glory of Christianity is to conquer by forgiveness".

Those who refuse to forgive are trapped in the past which cannot be reversed. Forgiveness, on the other hand, changes the future. Bernard Meltzer: "When you forgive, you in no way change the past—but you sure do change the future."

Those who refuse to forgive are committed to their own destruction. Unforgiveness holds us under the power of the tormentors. (Matthew 18:34) Unforgiveness eats away at the soul like cancer eats away at flesh. Saint Augustine put it this way: "Resentment is like taking poison and hoping the other person dies." How foolish!

Unforgiveness locks a person in the prison of the past. Choosing to forgive sets them free. An unknown author once said: "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and to discover the prisoner was you!"

Since we are commanded to forgive, and because it is in our best interest to forgive, what must we do? Here are some important things to remember. First, remember that God has forgiven you. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18:21-35 makes this quite clear. Second, consider the example of Jesus Christ. He forgave His enemies while He was still hanging on the cross. (Luke 23:24) Third, forgive others as God has forgiven you and to the degree in which you want God to forgive you. Has not God forgiven us of things for which we do not deserve to be forgiven? We are to forgive others by the same measure that God has forgiven us: "*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*"³ Sadly, we often ask for mercy for ourselves and justice against others! If we refuse to forgive others, then we can expect the same from God. Fourth, commit all injustice to God. We live in an evil world among fallen people. Life is not fair, but God is just. (1 Peter 2:19-23) Fifth, choose to let go of the offense. Release the debt of what you believe others owe you. Sixth, ask and allow God to heal the wound in your soul caused by offense. You will know that your healing is complete when the pain is gone.

Forgiveness is a key to receiving from God. Forgiveness positions us to experience God's peace and healing. Isn't it time to come out of the prison of the past? Isn't it time to let go of offense and release the debt? Anybody can hold a grudge. It requires God's love to let it go. Forgive and begin to live again!

³ Ephesians 4:32 (NKJV)