



How do you react when you are wronged?

Do you feel sorry for yourself? Perhaps you become angry? Maybe you don't blow up but you become critical and judgmental of the one who offended you? Do you develop a complaining spirit? Perhaps your personality is to bottle it all up inside? Do you replay the offense over and over thereby ensuring that you develop a bitter spirit?

When you repeatedly drive a tractor down the same path during rainy season it won't be long until the tyres have created deep ruts in the ground. No matter how you might try to steer back to the top of the path your tyres will quickly slip back into the deep ruts. Eventually you don't need to hold the steering wheel on the tractor, the ruts are so deep that the tyres will stay in them with no help from you! That is exactly what we do when we replay an offense over and over in our mind. We fund ourselves in the rut of bitterness!

King Louis XII of France said, "Nothing smells so sweet as the dead body of your enemy." And He was right! I have taken pleasure in that smell... and if you would be truthful, you have too!

My father experienced a mental breakdown when I was a young child. At times my dad was psychotic, on at least three occasions he tried to commit suicide. Etched deep into my childhood memory are times of physical and emotional abuse. On at least one occasion I feared for my life at the hands of my father. From the time I was eight until I was eighteen I grew increasingly angry and bitter towards my dad. On the third suicide attempt, paramedics did an emergency tracheotomy and saved his life... I remember being angry that they had been able to save him. I was angry, I was filled with bitterness toward my father for his sins against me.

When I was eighteen God mercifully worked in my life through the Scripture that I want to share with you today. It was not something that happened in an instant of time, but God mercifully helped me understand truth, and through that truth I was able to forgive my Dad for his sins against me. I found freedom through forgiveness... the same freedom that I pray you will find in your situation.

Finding Freedom Through Forgiveness. Mt. 18:21-35

Bitterness is the poison you swallow hoping the other person dies.

Think about that for a moment! The person you hope will die seemingly lives happily on oblivious to your anguish. Your joy, mental focus and many other aspects of life are being consumed by the anger, bitterness and resentment over their sins against you.

Three NT Greek words are translated “Forgive” in our English Bible:

- 1 To let go - to give up rights to what is owed as debt
- 2 To set free - remove the chains, release
- 3 To pardon - to withhold the penalty. To grant forgiveness.

To forgive is to give up the right of retaliation!

In our text Peter is asking a burning question (21).

According to the Pharisees, Jewish tradition required forgiveness for an offense 3 times but no more. Peter knew that Jesus always went beyond the Pharisees so he was being generous to suggest forgiveness 7 times.

Jesus gives the answer in verse 22.

He said not seven times but seventy times seven. A quick calculation bring the total to 490 times! But Jesus is not suggesting that we keep count, this was his way of pointing Peter to the fact that forgiveness is unlimited! God expects us to forgive every time, all the time.

Jesus then gives the disciples a lesson about forgiveness (23-35).

The whole point of this lesson is that “God eternally and unconditionally forgives those who repent of so immense a debt against him that it is unconscionable for believers to refuse to grant forgiveness to each other for sins that remain trivial in comparison.” [Cf. T. Deidun, “The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Mt. 18:23–35),” *BTB 6 (1976): 219, on the change of heart demanded by the love of God made manifest in Jesus. Sourced from Logos Bible Software.*]

The Kingdom of Heaven speaks only of those who are true citizens of the kingdom through saving faith in Jesus Christ. The King refers to God the Father and the servants are mankind.

There are four big ideas in this text that you must personalize if you are to find freedom through forgiveness:

THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD IS UNLIMITED (23-27)

Accounts will be settled with every man (23).

We all owe a debt we could never pay (24)

This servant embezzled what belonged to the King and consumed it on himself until nothing was left.

- 1 Talent = 6,000 days wages
- 10,000 Talents = 60,000,000 days wages = 164,000 years of work
- At a rate of \$50 per day = \$3 Billion

We are that servant! We have a debt that we can never pay!

We have received knowledge of God

Ro 1: 18-21: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

We have been given life.

Acts 17:25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

We have also been given the opportunity to give God what is due Him, but instead we squander God's property in sin. You see the inescapable reality is that all sin is against God!

Col. 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

Rom. 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Justice demands payment in full! (25)

Justice demands that we lose everything! For this servant the law demanded that a thief make restitution and if he was unable to do so all of his property would be seized and sold to restore the debt. If that still was not enough, the thief and his family could be sold as slaves, or cast into "debtors prison" until the debt was cleared.

Ex. 22:3 If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

Justice demands that we are punished for our sins throughout eternity in the Lake of Fire.

Rev. 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Rev 21:8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

We have been forgiven a great debt. (26-27)

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The servant when confronted with his crime repents and pleads with the king to be given a chance to make restitution (26). He humbled himself before the king, overwhelmed with the enormity of his wrongdoing. The servant repents and acknowledges his need to repay.

Note the response of the King (27)!

He is moved with compassion and forgave the servant of all the debt! This is a great truth for you and me! There is no debt of sin so great that God cannot or will not forgive!

We see the same response when the prodigal son returns home the Father embraces and restores him to his place in the family! (Lk. 15:20)

The King released the servant. He set him free from the penalty of his sin. He freely forgave! No conditions and no hesitations, it was an act of pure grace!

You might be wondering, how can God do that? How can a just God cancel the penalty of my sin and yours and set us free? The answer is that God can forgive because of the cross.

Rom. 6:10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

2 Co. 6:10 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

God's forgiveness coordinates with his justice. God's forgiveness is based upon the payment of the penalty of sin by a substitute - Jesus Christ! God is free to forgive anyone and everyone who comes to Him through Christ!

FORGIVENESS IS A CHOICE (28-30)

This servant rushed from the presence of the king the recipient of overwhelming grace and forgiveness. He seeks out his fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii. A denarii was equal to 1 day's wage. So this fellow servant owed him the equivalent of 100 days wages. At \$50 per day this was equivalent to \$5,000. Now \$5000 seems like a lot of money to me, and it would be a significant debt if I was owed that money by a friend; but it is nothing compared to \$3 billion dollars!

Attitude of the servant (28-29)

Anger - "laid his hands on him"(28). Strong emotion of irritation or agitation that occurs when a need or expectation is not met.

Bitterness - "took him by the throat" (28). Feeling of anger & resentment caused by perceived unfairness in suffering or by adverse circumstances.

Resentment - "pay me what you owe" (28). Bitter indignation of having been treated unfairly.

Revenge - "threw him into prison" (30). Returning injury or insult.

Rom. 12:17-21 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Choice of the servant (29-30)

This fellow-servant begged the man, using the very same words he had used with the king (29). But “he would not” listen to the plea. This speaks of a continued and persistent refusal (30)!

Forgiveness is costly. To forgive someone it means you agree to live with the consequences of the other person’s sins. You pay the price of the evil you forgive.

By the way, you are going to live with those consequences regardless! Your only choice is whether you will do so in the bitterness of un-forgiveness or in the freedom of forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT AN ISSUE BETWEEN YOU AND THE OFFENDER BUT BETWEEN YOU AND GOD. (31-33)

The reaction of the other servants (31)

They were grieved! They went to the Master to complain about how their friend had responded to the one who owed him the debt. The lesson for us is this: We should go to the Master in prayer for those who are in bondage to the sin of un-forgiveness!

The reaction of the Master

He will call us to account for our unforgiving attitude (32-33)

Our forgiveness of one another is based on God’s forgiveness of us (33). We are called to forgive the offender because of Christ's forgiveness of us!

Col 3:13 Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

When a person hurts you, they continue to hurt you until you forgive. You don’t forgive someone for their sake, you do it for God’s sake, because He commands us to forgive.

Because God commands us to forgive, we can! God's commands are His enablings.

Remember Peter who saw Jesus walking on the water and requested to be allowed to get out of the boat and walk to Jesus. Jesus commanded Peter, "Come." Peter stepped out and walked on the water! I wouldn't advise stepping out a boat and trying to walk on water on your next voyage, you will likely drown! God's commands enable us to obey them! Because God commands us to forgive, when we "step out of the boat" we will walk on top of bitterness, anger, resentment and bitterness.

FORGIVENESS SETS US FREE (34)

From the torture

Forgiveness sets us free from the torture of the stress, hardship, pressures that come to the one who is holding to an unforgiving spirit.

Jas 2:13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Forgiveness also sets us free from the schemes of Satan.

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2 Cor. 2:10-11 Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, 11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Un-forgiveness is a device of Satanic control. If he can control our mind, he can influence our actions.

Un-forgiveness is the root of bitterness. When bitterness has fully matured it brings forth destruction and death!

Heb 12:15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

Eph. 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Bitterness is extremely harmful to you - it is a poison. Remember what we said earlier, Bitterness is the poison you swallow while hoping the other person dies. The bitterness in my Dad's life over being abandoned by his mother as a little boy eventually led to his own breakdown.

Bitterness also destroys what is good and beautiful around you. Bitterness always affects others! My Dad lost his relationship with his own family, he lost his ministry, his peace, and his joy.

From the debt.

Forgiveness is a debt we owe our master!

As we wrap up this lesson remember - Forgiveness is not forgetting, it is a deliberate choice not to bring up the past.

Heb. 10:17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Psa. 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

How do you forgive from the heart? (35)

- 1 Acknowledge the hurt and the hate.
- 2 Decide that you will bear the burdens of their offenses by not using the information against them.
- 3 Don't wait to forgive until you feel like forgiving - you will never get there. Feelings take time to heal after the choice to forgive is made and Satan has lost his place (Eph 4:26-27) Freedom is gained, not a feeling.

Forgiveness is dealing with your pain and leaving the other person to God. Pray: "Lord, I forgive (name) for (specify).

Forgiveness sets me FREE!

I am indebted to thoughts by Neil Anderson, Bondage Breaker