

FIND IT HARD TO FORGIVE?

Galatians 5:19-25; 6:7-8

Introduction: "Forgive him? Are you kidding? After what he has done to me? I can never forgive him." Does that sound familiar? There is a great tragedy when we cannot forgive one another or even our own selves. People who do not forgive are in a bondage that stifles their ability to love and accept those who deserve their love most. It cripples marriages and is passed on from generation to generation (family feuds) and finally it chokes out the abundant life Jesus promised.

Just what is forgiveness? It is the act of setting someone free from an obligation to you that is the result of a wrong done against you. For instance, a debt is forgiven when you free your debtor of his/her obligation to pay back what is owed you. Forgiveness involves injury, a debt resulting from that injury and it is a cancellation of that debt.

Most people with an unforgiving spirit do not know that UNFORGIVENESS is the root of most of their problems. They can't stand to be around certain people, they want to strike out when certain things are discussed, they feel uncomfortable around certain personality types and they lose their temper over little things. There is a constant struggle with guilt over past sins and they can't get over hating people they ought to love.

We don't like it when we read or see where organizations or countries take hostages, we are outraged, yet when one refuses to forgive another, a hostage is taken by the one unforgiving. Usually those holding hostage will want something in return for the hostage, a condition, like a ransom. When a person refuses to forgive he/she is saying the same thing. Instead of holding a person hostage, they withhold love, acceptance, respect, service, kindness, patience, etc. and say, "until I feel you have repaid me for the wrong done to me, you will never have my acceptance or cooperation." People who refuse to forgive, refuse to allow that debt to be paid and cancelled.

I. THE REAL LOSER

1. The person who refuses to forgive is always the real loser more so than whom the grudge is held against. (In one Southern major city a racial group rioted but burned and looted their own neighborhoods a few years ago.)
 - To refuse to forgive is disobedience to the Lord and is walking by the flesh rather than by the Spirit and no Christian can be unforgiving and live the abundant life.
2. If you have been really hurt or wronged, what did you feel like doing?
 - Was it wanting to do something kind for that person who hurt you?
 - Was it to retaliate? Was it letting loose some well chosen words?
 - Was it giving in and accepting the situation or did you want to fight for your "rights?"
3. Paul tells us how a Christian is to live in *Galatians 5:22-25*. All the things Paul lists are the very ones that an unforgiving spirit holds hostage.

- Do you want to love the one who hurt you? Is there joy and peace? Is there patience and kindness?
 - Paul then lists what the flesh is like in *Galatians 5:19-21*. An unforgiving person cannot walk in the Spirit and therefore must walk in the flesh.
 - Paul lists the consequences of walking in the flesh in *Galatians 6:7-8*. Corruption is the consequence during the earthly life and decisions are made in the flesh which ruins and wrecks that person's life.
3. Those who do not forgive are losers every time. By withholding patience, kindness, gentleness, self control and the rest, that person is held hostage by his/her own unforgiveness.

II. A CONSUMING CORRUPTION

1. Unforgiveness spills over into many other areas.
 - The ability to get along with others.
 - Unable to work out differences.
 - They excuse their problem as part of their personality and expect people to "work" around them.
 - They have a "take me or leave me, but don't try to change me" attitude.
 - All the while hurting everyone around them, even those they do really love.

III. THE REJECTION CONNECTION

1. Whenever that person is wronged in some way, rejection occurs. "I'll never trust again."
2. One always feels "put down" when hurt by others and resentment turns into feelings of being rejected, unwanted or needed.
3. Almost without exception, one with an unforgiving spirit, any hurt is interpreted as rejection and not being wanted.
 - That rejection feeling turns into unforgiveness and then into bitterness and a sense of emptiness which often drives a person into lifestyles not of the Christian life.

IV. THE WAITING GAME

1. The unforgiving spirit almost always WAITS for the other person to make restitution in which a great deal of time can go by during which non-Christian patterns of behavior and incorrect attitudes develop.
2. By refusing to forgive and choosing to wait for restitution, one's lifestyle is changed to hinge on the decision of those who hurt them in the first place.
 - This attitude causes the unforgiver to become a hostage to him/herself.
 - Release comes only when that other person apologizes and makes the first move.
 - The unforgiver's life and the lives of his/her loved ones are affected.

3. Sadly and unfortunately much of the waiting has been useless. The one who has done the hurt doesn't even know that he/she has hurt anyone.
 - Often when one doesn't take the steps to reconcile a hurt, that person just doesn't know that he/she has hurt anyone. They are simply unknowing.

CONCLUSION:

1. It's a FACT! The person who refuses to forgive always loses. No matter how wrong the other person may have been. REFUSING TO FORGIVE means living a flesh-controlled life and the abundant life of Christ is impossible.
2. Refusing to forgive is like reaching down and grabbing a rattlesnake by it's tail...you are going to be bitten and the poison of unforgiveness will work it's way all through your life.
3. All of us have been hurt by others at one time or other and it will happen again many more times in our lifetime. We can harbor the hurt, we can keep on resenting the hurt. We can let the bitterness keep growing. We can think of ways to "get back" and be hurt as badly as we were can't we.
4. If we do not forgive then we are losers! Whose life is unhappy? The one who did the hurting? Whose life have we made unhappy by our unforgiving attitude?
5. To not forgive is to be disobedient to the Lord, out of fellowship with others, miserable around certain people with hate and bitterness welling up inside. Why does one want to stay that way? Jesus tells us to forgive, to go on as if it had never happened. Do not dwell on that hurt, AFTER ALL, ALL OF US HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN OF MUCH MORE.