

# Forgiveness Teaching

## The Consequences of Unforgiveness

There is a dimension of freedom that will never happen in our life until we choose to be a forgiving person. Matthew 18:34-35 says, "In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Torture—that is what is inflicted on the person who chooses not to forgive. It seems quite backwards, because our human instinct expects revenge for the wrong done to us. Strangely, to get back at the people who offend us, we will in effect drink poison, expecting the person who did us wrong to suffer the consequences.

Making the decision not to forgive tortures us and keeps us forever bound to the person who hurt us. Instead of releasing them and letting the offense go, we hang onto it. It is like being tied to a rotting corpse, and that dead body that we carry around causes a stench to impregnate every relationship and area of our life.

The tormentors or torturers in Matthew 18:34 are demon spirits. They have a legal right to torment you if you have unforgiveness. When we plant or water the seed of unforgiveness, bitterness will spring up. Bitterness has been defined as unfulfilled revenge. Bitterness is similar to cancer. We need to forgive others so Satan cannot take advantage of us (2 Corinthians 2:10-11 KJV).

When someone hurts you, the pain is real. The hurt is real. Unforgiveness can be likened to being in a prison or in chains. It is like having a chain attached to the offender's ankle and to yours. You are bound to each other. They can continue to hurt you for the rest of your life because every time the video of the offense replays in your mind, up comes the pain. That person hurts you over and over. You, in response, build a wall around your heart so you can protect yourself from being hurt again. But instead of that wall protecting you, it becomes your prison. You don't let anybody into that part of your heart, and the pain on the inside will never leave. Your wall becomes a prison where you get eaten up by the bitter rotting corpse of unforgiveness.

## What Forgiveness Is

1. **Forgiveness is a "letting go," a "disregard." It is "keeping it no longer."**
2. **Forgiveness is a command.** One of the biggest mistakes we could ever make is thinking forgiveness is an option. It is not an option; it is a commandment. Unforgiveness is a sin issue. If we want forgiveness for ourselves, we must forgive others (Matthew 7:12).
  - o Matthew 6:14-15 says: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

- Prolonged disobedience to this command causes bitterness to turn into a spreading poison.
  - Letting go of anger and resentment can bring peace, improve your health, and increase your happiness (Proverbs 14:30, Matthew 5:9).
  - Even more important, forgiving others is a key to receiving God's forgiveness for your own sins (Matthew 6:14-15).
  - Forgiving others is a prerequisite to our prayers being answered (Mark 11:22-25).
  - Harboring unforgiveness grieves the Holy Spirit.
    - "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 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, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:30-32).
3. **Forgiveness is an act of obedience to God's Word.** It is a choice—an act of your will. It's a decision to obey God. Forgiveness is not a feeling.
- You cannot wait until you feel like forgiving. Make the hard choice to forgive even if you don't feel like it. Once you choose to forgive, Satan will have lost his power over you in that area, and God can then begin the healing process of what you suffered.
  - When you make the decision to forgive, don't say, "Lord, please help me to forgive," because he is already helping you and will be with you all the way through the process. And don't say, "Lord, I want to forgive..." because that bypasses the hard choice we have to make. Say, "Lord, I choose to forgive..."
4. **Forgiveness is releasing the person to God.** It is "letting go" of the resentment, the bitterness, the ill-feelings, and the desire for revenge.
- "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord"" (Romans 12:19).
  - Let God deal with the person. Let him or her off your hook because as long as you refuse to forgive someone, you are still hooked to that person. You are still chained to your past, bound up in your bitterness. By forgiving, the other person is off your hook, but he or she is not off God's hook. You must trust that God will deal with the person justly and fairly, something you simply cannot do.
  - Some may say: "But you don't know how much this person hurt me!" You're right. We don't, but Jesus does, and he tells you to forgive. And don't you see? Until you let go of your anger and hatred, the person is still hurting you. You can't turn back the clock and change the past, but you can be free from it. You can stop the pain, but there is only one way to do it—forgive.
5. **Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin.** You are going to live with those consequences anyway whether you like it or not, so the only choice you have is whether you will do so in the bondage of bitterness or in the freedom of forgiveness. No one truly forgives without accepting and suffering the pain of another

person's sin. That can seem unfair and you may wonder where the justice is in it, but justice is found at the cross, which makes forgiveness legally and morally right.

- Jesus took the eternal consequences of sin upon himself. God “made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- Though we often suffer the temporary consequences of other people's sins, that is simply a harsh reality of life all of us have to face.

6. **Forgiveness is what will release us from the torment.** The pain and suffering that unforgiveness brings can all be healed, but only once we make the decision to forgive. The decision to forgive does not always bring immediate relief from the pain inflicted, but it starts the process so the healing can occur.

- Some say forgiveness is a process—it is not. Forgiveness is a decision that must be acted on. There are no sins that are stopped through a process. They are repented of. That means a decision is made to turn from it and walk in the opposite direction.
  - Murder is a sin. But we do not stop that sin through a process. It is an immediate decision not to do it again. The same applies to adultery, gossip, or anything else.
- It is true that the memory of the wrong done to you will come back, attempting to stir up unforgiveness and bitterness—after you made the decision to “let it go.”
  - That is Satan, trying to keep you trapped. Those lies must be fought against and renounced. You have to stand your ground and say to yourself: “I have forgiven. I made that decision to forgive. It is in the past. I choose to disregard it; I will keep it no longer.”

7. **Forgiveness is getting Satan's foot out of the door of your life.**

- "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" (Ephesians 4:26-27).
- "Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs" (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

8. **Forgiveness includes forgiving ourselves.** We have to understand we have absolutely no right to hold anyone in unforgiveness. God will not tolerate us doing so, and “anyone” includes ourselves. You must forgive yourself.

- Are you disgusted with your past decisions? —Forgive yourself.
- Are you ashamed of your past actions? —Forgive yourself.

9. **God has never done anything wrong, so we don't have to forgive him.**

- Sometimes, however, people harbor bitterness toward God because he didn't do what they wanted him to do. Maybe a child or spouse died. Maybe a job was

lost, which resulted in the loss of a home, a vehicle, or a life dream. Those feelings of anger or resentment can become a wall between us and him, so we must let them go. This is a deep theological issue, but when deep, deep tragedies take place, and we hold bitterness in our hearts toward God, we must come to the place where we say: God, I trust that you know more about your eternal affairs than I do. I have been hurt deeper than words can express. But I choose to believe you have my best interest at heart, and though I have been severely hurt, I choose to let it go. I choose to disregard it. I choose to keep the resentment no longer.

### **What Forgiveness Is Not**

1. **Forgiveness is not saying that what a person did or didn't do to you is OK.**
  - It was not OK. It will never be OK. It was wrong.
2. **Forgiveness is not condoning the wrong—you are simply letting it go.**
3. **Forgiveness is not pretending that the offense never happened.**
  - God forgave King David of serious sins, but he did not shield David from the consequences of his actions. God even had David's sins recorded so that they would be rehearsed for thousands of years (2 Samuel 12:9-13).
4. **Forgiveness is not allowing others to take advantage of you.** We must set healthy boundaries.
5. **When someone repeatedly violates us, we aren't called to continually endure it.** We can physically and emotionally set boundaries to protect ourselves. The key here is to keep our spirit right by forgiving the offense.
  - Suppose, for example, that you loan money to someone, but he wastes it and then cannot repay you as he had promised. He is very sorry and apologizes to you. You could choose to forgive him by not harboring resentment, not rehashing the matter with him continually, and perhaps even canceling the debt altogether. However, you might also choose not to loan him any more money (Psalm 37:21; Proverbs 14:15; 22:3; Galatians 6:7).
6. **Forgiveness is not about forgetting.** Often we hear the phrase forgive and forget. This can be misleading. To forgive and forget does not mean that a person who has been wronged develops sanctified amnesia. A person who has been abused will never forget that it happened. A person who has suffered from an adulterous spouse will always remember that experience. A parent who has had a child abducted will probably think about that crime every day of their life. Yet, it is possible for each of these people who have been sinned against to forgive and also to forget, as long as the biblical definition of forget is in view.
  - In the Bible, remembering and forgetting do not have to do with retention of information in the brain. When God says he forgives, and will remember their sin

no more (Jeremiah 31:34), he is saying that he chooses not to act on the basis of those sins. It is similar to the Bible verses that says “love keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Corinthians 13:5 NIV).

- The words forgive and forget are actually synonyms. Both words mean that the person who has forgiven will not continue to hold that sin against the wrongdoer or take their sins into account in future interactions. A person may remember that it happened, but they can choose not to act on it—that is biblical forgetting.

7. **Forgiveness is not about waiting for the offending party to ask to be forgiven.** Jesus did not wait for those who were crucifying him to apologize before he forgave them. Even while they mocked Him, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; For they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).