

Forgiveness

Prepared by Leanna Bolden

March 2013

Introductory Comments:

I've counseled many women over the past 10 years, and one of the biggest issues I've come across is that of unforgiveness. So many women have been terribly wounded, and unforgiveness grows a deep root. Whether the wounding was from a loss of trust due to unfaithfulness, adultery, divorce, abandonment, excessive criticism, or sexual, physical, or verbal abuse, the hurt runs deep and can leave marked scars. If this resonates with you, please know that you are not alone, and it is completely understandable that you may not be willing to forgive. But also know this: the Lord offers you a better way, and it is the way *out of* unforgiveness and *into love*. I hope you read the following with an open mind and heart, willing to give Jesus a chance to heal.

Additional Note:

This is not intended to be a thorough study on the topic of forgiveness, but it is a basic overview that has been prayerfully prepared for anyone who is interested in learning more about it. It is also written with the assumption that the person interested in putting these principles into practice is a Christian who lives a life submitted to the authority of Christ and the Scriptures, or is willing to begin doing so.

Forgiveness Overview:

When someone is stuck in unforgiveness, he or she is keeping a record of wrongs against another. This is not love.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-6

If we are followers of Jesus Christ, we are to choose love. When we choose to love, we are choosing to obey the Lord—and we obey Him because we love Him.

“If you love Me (Jesus), keep My commandments.” John 14:15

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” John 15:10

So, we choose love and forgiveness out of obedience- not feeling- and we do so because we love Jesus. Yes, we are called to love others, but our choice to forgive is superseded by our choice to love Jesus above our feelings of frustration, hurt, or anger towards another. While God does desire our reconciliation with others, forgiving them is, first and foremost, about our relationship with the Lord and our love towards *Him*. As we walk in love towards God, He then teaches us how to love others.

“For the wages of sin is death...” Romans 6:23a

Unforgiveness is disobedience, which is sin. Therefore, unforgiveness produces death: death of relationship, of peace, of love, of reconciliation, etc.

“But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” Romans 6:22

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” Romans 8:2

As one surrendered to Christ, you are no longer a slave to sin (i.e. unforgiveness). We are free from the law of sin and death, and therefore free to say NO to sin (unforgiveness) and free to say YES to holiness (love and forgiveness). Before we chose to live a life submitted to Christ, we were slaves to sin (unforgiveness), but now we are freed from that slavery, and have the power to choose life (forgiveness). You are free to now forgive!

**“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.”
Matthew 6:14-15**

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.” Mark 11:25

God’s love is unconditional. He loves you no matter what. But clearly in Scripture, we see that His forgiveness is conditional. He will not forgive us for our sins if we stand in unforgiveness towards someone. ‘If you have ANYTHING against ANYONE, forgive him...that your Father in heaven may also forgive you.’ Do you want God’s forgiveness? Then forgive others.

Will you obey? Do it because you love Jesus more.

“But, they don’t deserve my forgiveness.” Nope, they sure don’t. You don’t deserve God’s glorious forgiveness either. Yet He grants it. We don’t forgive others because they deserve it- we do so because we love and serve a holy God who deserves our obedience. Please read the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35. Unforgiveness is a *dangerous* path to walk...

“But, I’ve been too wounded.” Yes, wounding has occurred, and that needs to be addressed, nurtured, and healed in Christ. But forgiveness is completely separate; and in fact, once genuine forgiveness is granted, it is then when the healing begins.

It may also be that holding onto unforgiveness is only causing further hurt. As with any sin, unforgiveness hurts self, others, and the heart of God our Father. Why let another person’s wrong doing lead to your bitterness, anger, rage, and resentment? Your unforgiveness does not ‘pay’ that person back. They’re off having a wonderful time, not thinking about it, and all the while you’re sitting there stewing and brewing and probably getting physical ailments because of it--- a wound on top of a wound. Let go!

“But, if I forgive them, it’s like I’m saying what they did was okay.” Forgiveness does not mean we condone the behavior. It does not mean I have to like the person. It does not mean I agree with what they’ve done, and it does not mean I have to stay friends, business partners, etc. with them. It means I release them into the hands of our holy Lord for HIM, not me, to deal with them.

Forgiveness is not permission to sin, nor is it to say sin is acceptable. Rather, it is a releasing of your hold of them, into the hands of the Lord. When we withhold forgiveness, we are guilty of standing before the Lord saying, ‘I am god here. I will take this into my own hands and make sure they pay,’ when instead, ‘Vengeance is Mine, says the Lord.’ (Deuteronomy 32:35)

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I (Jesus) have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10

Throughout Scripture, it seems apparent that an unwillingness to forgive is a trap of the enemy, because unforgiveness separates us from God and from people. The enemy is all about separating/turning us against God and others; God is all about loving Him and others. The enemy’s goal is to turn us against God, others and self; God’s goal is to reconcile us to Him, others, and ourselves—to be at peace with Him, others, and self.

**“...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life...”
Deuteronomy 30:19b-20a**

So the question is posed today: will you choose unforgiveness, siding with the enemy who comes to steal, kill, and destroy? Or will you choose forgiveness, siding with the Lord, the One who created you (Psalm 139) and has good plans for you? (Jeremiah 29:11-12) I pray you choose life.

A Prayer of Forgiveness:

If you are ready to step into freedom and choose forgiveness, feel free to pray now—

“Heavenly Father, thank You for opening my eyes to the truth in Your Word. I admit that I’ve withheld forgiveness towards _____ and ask You to forgive me for that. I choose now by the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive _____ for _____. I’m choosing this because I love You, Jesus. You died on the cross to save me from my sins, and You rose from the dead to give me eternal life. The debt I owe for my sins has been paid in full—who am I to withhold forgiveness towards others when I have so undeservedly received such grace and mercy? I humble myself now before You and thank You for being patient with me. I also ask You to free me from the consequences of unforgiveness, like resentment, bitterness, self-pity, anger, and rage. I have participated with these sins and ask You to forgive me of that as well. Thank You that as I confess my sins to You, You are faithful and just to forgive me and purify me from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) Please teach me how to renew my mind now through the Word of God—I do not want to replay past incidents or conversations that would stir up temptation to walk in unforgiveness again! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.”

Please choose Scriptures to memorize, and carry them with you—the Word is our ‘prescription,’ and is how God renews our minds, replacing old lies with Truth. May the Lord bless you!