

Overcoming Sin (Part 11)

Unforgiving

Colossians 3:12-13

I. Introduction: 1, 2

1. 3 There is a sin present in the lives of some Christians that angers God, grieves their brethren, robs their peace of mind, stifles the cause of Christ, and causes men to lose their eternal souls—the sin of refusing to forgive others.
2. Some brethren have a real problem forgiving others when they've been sinned against: "I'll forgive, but I won't forget!" "I don't get mad, I get even!"
3. They prefer to nurse a grudge, soothe their wounded pride, and cling to memories of past offenses than let these things go, mend broken friendships, receive a penitent brother, and restore severed fellowship.
4. Such brethren are the very antithesis of the character of the true Christian: **Col. 3:12-13**: *"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 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."*

II. Discussion:

I. 4 We Are Commanded to Forgive One Another:

- A. Forgiving others is not optional: **Eph. 4:32**: *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."* Obviously, to refuse to obey the Lord's direct command is a sin.
- B. It is also important to forgive others for another reason: Jesus tells us that God's willingness to forgive us depends on our willingness to forgive others:
Matt. 6:14-15: *"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."*
Mark 11:25-26: *"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."*
- C. On one occasion, Peter questioned the Lord regarding the number of times he had to extend forgiveness to his brother (**Matt. 18:21**: *"Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?'"*).
 - (1) I'm sure Peter thought he was being generous: *"Up to seven times?"*
 - (2) Why? The rabbis in this day and time taught a man was to forgive three times, but never four.
- D. The Lord replied to Peter: **Matt 18:22**: *"I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."*
 - (1) When Jesus responded *"seventy times seven"* He was teaching a disciple's willingness to forgive must be limitless.
 - (2) Peter was looking for the bare minimum, but Jesus said we must be willing to forgive others as often as we want God to forgive us. What if God would only forgive me *"Up to seven times?"*!
- E. Jesus went on to teach a parable as a means of explaining this truth to Peter (**Matt. 18:22-35**). The parable's points are easy to follow:
 - (1) The first servant was forgiven a debt which he could never repay, not in a thousand lifetimes. The same is true of us and our debt of sin which God forgives.

“The servant asks for patience, but the king gives him compassion (9.36). He doesn’t restructure the debt, put the servant on a payment plan or give him a chance to raise the money. Instead, he does exceedingly abundantly above all the servant asked or hoped by forgiving the debt...” (Chumbley, p. 333)

- (2) The servant who had received such grace and mercy, then refuses to forgive his fellow servant of a relatively minor debt. That shows our hard-heartedness in refusing to forgive the relatively minor trespasses of our brethren.
- (3) By failing to extend even a small bit of mercy, when an immeasurable amount of mercy had been extended to him, the first servant is subject to the wrath of his master, and justly so.

“Note that withholding forgiveness and acting legalistically is defined by Jesus as wickedness. ‘The lord did not call him ‘wicked servant’ when he owed him the ‘ten thousand talents,’ but he did call him a ‘wicked servant’ for such harsh and cruel treatment toward his fellow servant’ (Boles, 382).” (Chumbley, p. 335)

F. As he rebuked the unforgiving servant, the master asked, “*Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?*” (v. 33)

- (1) Peter was looking for the minimum number of times he had to forgive.
- (2) Jesus teaches our willingness to forgive others must be comparable to God’s willingness to forgive us (**Eph. 4:32**: “*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*”)
- (3) The Bible teaches God’s mercy and willingness to forgive are great:

Psa. 103:8-14:

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.
9 He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.
10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
12 As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
13 As a father pities his children,
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.
14 For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.

1 Jn. 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

2. **5** When Our Brother Repents:

A. Jesus taught forgiveness when our erring brother repents: **Lk. 17:3-4**: “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”

- (1) To repent means to turn or to change.
- (2) There can be no forgiveness from God without repentance (Lk. 13:3; **Acts 8:22**: “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.”; **Acts 17:30**: “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.”).

- B. When our brother sins against us, Jesus gives us a very specific procedure we are to follow (**Matt. 18:15-17**).
- (1) First, we are to approach him privately and try to work the matter out just between us.
 - (2) If he will not listen to us, we are to take one or two more brethren with us and try to work it out with witnesses.
 - (3) If he will not listen to them, we are to tell the church, and if he will not hear them he is to be disciplined.
 - (4) However, if our brother repents, we are to forgive him. Our attitude during the entire process is: **Gal. 6:1**: *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”*
- C. It can be a great challenge to respond to our brother’s repentance in a proper manner.
- (1) This brother has wronged us and caused us pain, but now he has made things right.
 - (2) If we are not careful, our pride will find a way to keep us from reconciling with our brother.
 - (3) We will insist he feel more pain and show more sorrow; we will claim we need more restitution, more proof of sincerity, more time to heal, etc.
 - (4) However, the Bible does not tell us we have a right to withhold forgiveness until we feel like forgiving; we are to forgive when our brother repents.
- D. In **2 Corinthians 2:6-11** Paul gave the follow-up instructions regarding the man who had his father’s wife (1 Cor. 5; e.g., **1 Cor. 5:5**: *“deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”*).
- (1) The Corinthians administered the proper discipline, and it worked! The man repented (v. 6).
 - (2) Now that the brother had repented, Paul instructs them to forgive him, comfort him, and reaffirm their love for him (vv. 7-8).
 - (3) Other Bible passages say nothing about a probationary period in which a penitent brother is to prove himself to the members; he is to be forgiven, accepted back into fellowship, and the matter is to be considered closed once he repents.
- E. Responding to an erring brother’s repentance provides a test for our faith; will we be “obedient in all things” (v. 9) and receive him, or will we give in to pride and try to find a reason to refuse forgiveness?
- (1) Refusing to forgive gives Satan an advantage (v. 11: *“lest Satan should take advantage of us”*).
 - (2) The devil will use the opportunity to fill our heart with bitterness and fill our brother’s heart with despair; in the end souls will be lost because of our stubbornness to grant forgiveness.
 - (3) Remember: **Matt. 5:7**: *“Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.”*; **James 2:13**: *“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*

3. **6** When There Is No Repentance

- A. God’s desire when there are problems between brethren is reconciliation (Matt. 18:15-17).
- (1) The goal is that the relationship be restored to a state of peace and harmony.
 - (2) But, this isn’t possible unless the offender shows sincere repentance and the offended offers forgiveness from the heart (two-way street).
 - (3) So where there is no repentance, there can be no reconciliation.
- B. However, this does not mean the offended brother is best served by carrying a load of anger and resentment regarding the offense when repentance does not take place.

- (1) “Actually, we must have a willingness to forgive even if our enemy does not repent, if he does not repent, our willingness to forgive will not profit him but it will certainly profit us” (Butler, p. 384).
- (2) While the sin cannot be forgiven and the relationship cannot be restored without repentance, the offended brother needs to learn to let go of his resentment against the brother who has done him wrong, because pent up emotion will slowly and surely poison his heart and life.

C. Hanging on the cross, Jesus prayed, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*” (Lk. 23:34)

- (1) The people, as individual sinners, didn’t receive forgiveness until they repented regarding their involvement in the Lord’s death, but the Lord Himself let the matter go.
- (2) He died without anger, animosity or resentment in His heart regarding the terrible treatment He received from their hands.
- (3) We must follow the Lord’s example and learn to let go of offenses we’ve suffered (**1 Pet. 2:21-23**: “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*”).

4. **7 How to Overcome the Sin of Unforgiveness**: Those who struggle with an unforgiving spirit need to recognize this sin in their heart and strive to overcome it. Here are some suggestions if we have a problem with forgiving others.

A. **** Take heed to ourselves:**

- (1) What’s our natural first reaction when someone hurts you? We usually want to get back with vengeance or isolate ourselves to protect ourselves.
- (2) Both reactions are natural, but neither one is scriptural; thus, as the Lord said, let us “*Take heed to yourselves.*” (Lk. 17:3).
 - (a) Don’t allow our emotions to override our reason.
 - (b) Remember that Satan is going to use this situation to tempt us to sin (**2 Cor. 2:11**: “*lest Satan should take advantage of us*”).
 - (c) So it is critical when one sins against us that we don’t respond by sinning in return.
 - (d) We have to put our hurt feelings and bruised egos aside and fulfill our scriptural obligations.

B. **8 Do away with limits to our forgiveness:**

- (1) Many people place limits upon their willingness to forgive others; but Jesus taught our willingness to forgive others must be without limits (**Lk. 17:4**: “*And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.*”; **Matt. 18:21-22**: “*Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ 22 Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’*”).
- (2) When Jesus told Peter he must be willing to forgive “seventy times seven,” He was not saying Peter was to keep a ledger and withhold forgiveness for the 491st offense.
 - (a) He was exaggerating Peter’s original number (7) to teach our willingness to forgive must be without restrictions.
 - (b) How often must we forgive our brother? We must forgive him as often as he is willing to repent. Why? **Eph. 4:32**: “*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,*

even as God in Christ forgave you.” **James 2:13:** “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

C. 9 Value reconciliation and renewed fellowship over defending our injured pride:

- (1) There are some things more important than our feelings (**Psa. 133:1:** “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”)
 - (a) Sin destroys the unity shared between brethren, so repentance and forgiveness are necessary in order to restore this unity.
 - (b) With regard to restoring unity, withholding forgiveness is just as much an obstacle as refusing to repent (two-way street).
- (2) Christians are to be known by their love for one another (**Jn. 13:35:** “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”).
 - (a) When we fight, bite and devour one another we show others our personal feelings are more important to us than the cause of Christ (Gal. 5:15).
 - (b) We show ourselves to be no different than people of the world!
- (3) It should grieve Christians to see their brethren withhold forgiveness (**Matt. 18:31:** “So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.”).
- (4) The only way we can walk “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27) is if we reconcile our differences, stand fast in one spirit, and strive together (not against one another) for the faith of the gospel.

D. 10 Remember we stand in need of forgiveness:

- (1) Jesus taught us to pray, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” (Matt. 6:12)
- (2) His teachings clearly link the forgiveness of our sins with our willingness to forgive others (**Matt. 6:14-15:** “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.”; **Mk. 11:25-26:** “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”).
 - (a) In the parable of the unforgiving servant, the wicked servant refused to forgive a fellow servant after receiving forgiveness from an enormous debt by his master (Matt. 18:21-35); and paid a high price! **Matt. 18:34-35:** “And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”
 - (b) If God can forgive us when He has done nothing against us, upon what grounds can we, as imperfect sinners, withhold forgiveness from a brother who repents?
 - (c) It is as simple as this: If we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven!

E. 11 Remember that sins committed against us do not compare to the sins we have committed against God:

- (1) The great contrast in debts emphasizes the fact there’s no comparison between the sins we’ve committed against a holy and righteous God and the wrongs we have personally suffered from our fellow man (10,000 talents [\$13,125,000,002] vs. 100 denarii [\$9,615]—Matt. 18:24, 28).
“If one talent equaled ten thousand denarii, as some suggest, the debt would be equivalent to a hundred million working days [approx.. 273,973 years] for the day laborers mentioned in 20:2’ (Garland, 194).” (Chumbley, p. 332)

- (2) If God is ready and willing to forgive us of a debt we have no hope of repaying, how can we withhold cancellation of a minor debt against us?!
- (3) “How much do we owe the Lord? Some people do not feel that they owe Him anything. They breathe God’s air, devour His sunshine and rainfall, yet never give Him a passing glance or one ounce in return. Other people acknowledge that they owe the Lord something, while others confess that they owe the Lord much. But this parable smacks at our vanity and self-reliance and says to each of us, ‘You owe the Lord much more than you can ever pay’” (Lightfoot, p. 61)

F. 12 Remember that receiving mercy obligates us to show mercy:

- (1) In the parable, the master said, *“Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?”* (Matt. 18:33)
 - (a) If God has forgiven us, He expects us to be willing to forgive our fellow man.
 - (b) There is no way we can pay back the debt of our sins against God, so the way God wants us to “repay” His mercy is to cancel out the debt of sins others have committed against us.
- (2) Paul taught Christians to forgive one another on the basis of Christ forgiving 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.”*).

G. 13 Remember God’s blessings are given with the same measure we use upon others:

- (1) The scriptures set forth this truth: **Matt. 7:2**: *“For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”*; **Lk. 6:38**: *“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”*).
 - (a) We cannot afford God to be stingy with His mercy and forgiveness toward us.
 - (b) If we have condemned others without mercy and pity, God will do the same thing to us (**Matt. 18:33-35**: *“Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 ‘So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.’*).
- (2) When we stand before the Lord in judgment, we will not care about the wrongs committed against us.
 - (a) We will not have the opportunity to justify our resentment and refusal to forgive those who’ve hurt us.
 - (b) We will fall on our faces before the holy God and beg for His mercy and forgiveness.
 - (c) The only way we can expect any mercy then is if we have shown mercy in our lives (**Jas. 2:13**: *“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*).

H. 14 Love others as we love ourselves:

- (1) We’ve mentioned it many times in this series of lessons, but what is the second greatest commandment? **Matt. 22:39**: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*
- (2) Few things are more difficult than being denied forgiveness.
 - (a) When we’ve sinned against another, felt genuine remorse, repented, and sought to make things right, we don’t want a door slammed in our face!
 - (b) If we would not want to be treated this way, we should not treat others like this (Matt. 7:12).

III. Conclusion: 15

1. “The world’s worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart. If we refuse to forgive others, then we are only imprisoning ourselves and causing our own torment. Some of the most miserable people I have met in my ministry have been people who would not forgive others. They lived only to imagine ways to punish these people who had wronged them. But they were really only punishing themselves” (Wiersbe, p. 67).
2. Some of the most miserable Christians are men and women who refuse to forgive and let things go.
**“The one thing God will not forgive is an unforgiving heart’ (Morgan, 235). We should, therefore, tear up the ‘balance sheets that are used to keep mental tabs on the slights of others lest they come back to haunt us in the judgment (7.1-5).’ (Garland, 195-96).” (Chumbley, p. 335)
3. ** If you have a problem with it, make a conscious effort to overcome it.

Adapted from *Overcoming Sin*, by Heath Rogers, 2013, One Stone Press, Bowling Green, KY (pp. 89-94).

References:

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