

Forgiveness

We need to forgive one another of anything and everything that has occurred in the past so we can establish a true bond of love in every one of our relationships. This is especially crucial in our immediate family, for Satan is making an all-out effort to destroy the family unit with money problems, drugs, and divorce. Love is the divine force that will surround our family and friendships with an invisible hedge that is able to withstand every attack of the destroyer.

The enemy hits Christians hardest in the emotional realm, using pressure to stretch their emotions to the breaking point until their resistance is completely gone. He skillfully sets up a person to take a deceptive avenue that appears to be the answer, such as divorce, or in the case of a teenager, drugs may appear to be the way out.

One of the enemy's favorite strategies is to attack our finances. He knows that when financial stresses become severe, we are tempted to worry and fret rather than adopt a systematic approach of taking God's principles as a guide. If we yield to that temptation, we can become very cantankerous, making life miserable for everyone around us rather than representing the love of God to them.

The reason we are often defeated in this type of situation is that we are fighting the devil in the wrong arena. He has pulled us into the emotional realm, where he rules as lord and master. Satan is prince over negative emotions, especially in the areas of depression, despair, torment, and fear. He is also highly skilled in the areas of strife and unforgiveness.

You see, the enemy is out to kill everything of eternal value in our lives, including relationships—and he is good at it. He seeks to plant seeds of unforgiveness in our minds—seeds that might start out small but can progress into deep roots of bitterness and hatred. When we allow these destructive seeds to fester within us, we literally raise the level of Satan's activity and authority in our lives, giving him access into the lives of those we love, if they allow it.

But, remember, the devil has absolutely no light in him. If we face him on his territory, he will defeat us. However, if we pull him into the arena of love and forgiveness, he cannot operate there. He cannot handle love; therefore, he cannot handle us when we walk in the love of God.

We are children of a living God whose ear is attentive to our cry and who loves to answer prayer. Therefore, the key factor to answered prayer in our lives is an intimate relationship with the Father. This is the primary reason why it is so important that we keep our lives free of strife and unforgiveness, making every effort to forgive everyone of any offense committed against us. We must keep open the line of communication between ourselves and the Father.

During a time of seeking God several years ago, I heard the Lord speak these words strongly to my heart: "Do not hurt anyone." Since then, it has become increasingly clear to me that the way we treat other people is a top priority with God.

So let's take a close look at this divine force of forgiveness. It is actually an extension of the most powerful force of all—the agape love of God. We'll never find anything that makes the benefits of answered prayer more readily available than do the forces of love and forgiveness.

As we walk in the love of God on a daily basis, we will have the assurance that God is with us. Every night we'll be able to lay our heads down and close our eyes, knowing that our intimate

fellowship with the Father remains unbroken. This is what Psalm 127:2 is talking about when it says, *It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.*

The more I think about unforgiveness, the easier it is to see why Christians so often fall into this trap that the devil sets up for them. Of all the areas in which Christians can be deceived, this area of unforgiveness seems to be the most common point of deception. In fact, most religious people—who wouldn't dream of missing a tithe check—will allow themselves to walk in hurtful strife and turmoil because they have actually deceived themselves into believing they are getting by with it.

Too often we don't take into account the time it takes for the seeds of unforgiveness to take root and grow in our lives. But this one thing I know for sure—those seeds WILL grow and bear a crop. They always do! This is why James 1:26 says: *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

That phrase "seem to be religious" means that a person may confess the Word as well as anyone in the church; he may pray over his dinner; he may raise his hands during the worship service and sing, "Oh, how I love Jesus," but if that same person bridles not his tongue, his religion is vain. He has deceived himself into believing that he can use his tongue to hurt others and get away with it. As James 3:5 says: *Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!*

All of this leads me to a conclusion about which I am becoming more and more convinced: When we fight with everything in us to forgive our brethren of all their trespasses—even though we may have been cheated, lied to, and schemed against undeservedly; even though we may be completely innocent—we are actually fighting to keep our line of communication to God completely open and free of all debris. By ridding ourselves of every hint of unforgiveness that has resulted from these kinds of offenses, we withstand one of Satan's most ingenious schemes of deception.

You see, the enemy's primary goal is to deceive us into closing our own prayer line to God, wherein we lose out on the benefits of answered prayer. It stands to reason, therefore, that our PRIMARY goal should be to keep that prayer line open at all costs. Evidently, Jesus understood how important this is, for He made a point of stressing that when we stand praying, we are to forgive (Mark 11:25).

Even though every believer will agree that strife and unforgiveness are wrong, Satan is so sly and deceptive that he will often convince a person that—in his particular case—things are different. (After all, deception isn't deception if a person knows he is being deceived!) The person will fume on the inside, thinking, *I have been wronged. Who do these people think they are that they can walk all over me? I have rights. No one lies about me and gets away with it!* He doesn't understand that the devil's ultimate desire is not just to make him angry with his brother. The enemy is really after his relationship with God!

Satan wants to close the door to our answered prayer. He wants free access to our lives. He wants to pull us down into the same pit where he lives.

The reason the enemy is so successful in the area of unforgiveness is because it is a subtle form of SELF-EXALTATION, or PRIDE. When someone who is full of strife is attacking us in some way, it is easy to yield to the temptation to hold an offense against that person. But when

we do that, we fail to walk in love, and at that moment, self enters in to become our primary concern. The harder we fight, the more self gets exalted and the more we become full of strife—until, finally, the devil has us right where he wants us!

After watching person after person fall into this snare, I have come to realize something: Although the devil's strategy is to get people to that place of deception where he can use them to stir up strife and trouble, this is not an overnight process. The enemy uses a systematic method of "breakdown" against Christians—a method proven successful against even the more gentle personalities.

Most Christians want to be reasonably sure that everything is all right between them and God. But the nature of the flesh is to try to get by with as much as it can. Because of this, many people make the mistake of "testing the waters" instead of just resisting with everything in them to keep from walking in strife and unforgiveness. What do I mean by "testing the waters"? They try to convince themselves that they are not so bad by pointing out a few choice faults that the "wicked" person attacking them possesses, thus making their own faults look slight in comparison. Then these same people wait to see if there are any consequences to their negative words about the other person.

Nothing appears to happen right away. In fact, to all appearances, these people seem to be getting by with their bitter words. This is where self-deception enters in, for it isn't as if these Christians don't know they are doing wrong. They would do well to heed Galatians 6:7, which says: *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

Do you think Satan is stupid enough to charge into our situation blowing a trumpet, announcing our demise as he drags us into terror? Of course not! He knows that if he gives us enough rope, we will eventually hang ourselves! He wants to deceive us into thinking that we are getting by with unforgiveness. He wants us to compromise our morals a little at a time until there is nothing left with which to resist him.

The things people do to us may not be our fault. It may appear that we have every right to defend ourselves. Nevertheless; we must always remember that when we fight with everything in us to forgive someone, we are really fighting to keep our line of communication to God open.

When we fight with people and compromise the principles of forgiveness, it destroys something down on the inside of our character. It is almost unnoticeable at first. But the power to resist sin is drained away one temptation at a time until, finally, the devil accomplishes his prime objective: an inroad for destruction into our lives, into our families, and into our businesses.

This is why Jesus said what He did about forgiveness in Matthew 18:21-35. His parable tells us that He forgave us and set us free from much more than a multi-million-dollar debt when we were yet lost and undone as servants to sin.

“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

“Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

“And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

“But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

“The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

“Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

“But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

“And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

“And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

“So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

“Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

“Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

“And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

“So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, IF YE FROM YOUR HEARTS FOR GIVE NOT EVERY ONE HIS BROTHER THEIR TRESPASSES.” (Matthew 18: 21-35).

In reality, it is not God who turns us over to the tormentors. We turn ourselves over when we refuse to walk in love and forgiveness. Jesus canceled the debt that would have sent the entire human race to hell. That is all the reason we should ever need to forgive others.

As far as the devil is concerned, unforgiveness is an effective tool because it is a violation of grace. In other words, we are violating the very principles by which we were "born again." We received the unmerited, unearned favor of God when it was freely bestowed on us through salvation. Therefore, even though we may think the person who wronged us doesn't deserve our forgiveness, Jesus is telling us, "I forgave you of everything, so why can't you forgive your brother?"

As we head into the latter half of this year, I am praying that we will diligently search our hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us any breaches in our family relationships or friendships that need to be reinforced by the love of God. Whether or not we were the ones who caused division, we can be the initiators of healing by smoothing the salve of love and forgiveness on every wound. After all, what good will our pride be to us when the enemy gains access through the avenue of unforgiveness to tear down the hedge of protection God has put up around our lives? We must attend to these matters now in order to make our defense against the enemy secure in the coming days.

If we really want God's best, we must humble ourselves to receive His best, drawing close to Him and letting Him fill our lives with His love. Our prayers for our loved ones' deliverance will be heard as we refuse to allow unforgiveness to clog the prayer line to the Father.

This is why we must obey Jesus' command in Luke 6:28 to pray for those who "despitefully use us." If we can't find the words, all we have to do is ask our Father for help. It may take some time in prayer before the love of God starts flowing in our hearts, but we were never promised it would be easy. Our flesh is a worthy foe; therefore, we must make a wholehearted effort to enter into the Spirit and thereby overcome the flesh nature.

Sometimes the hurt doesn't want to go away. But eventually it will, if we will truly put Jesus first. He will make our hurts HIS hurts, filling them with the oil of joy as His healing touch takes away the pain. But it is only as we realize our own inability and dependency on Him that we can gain access to all that He is to us and all that He has for us—including the ability to forgive.

Love isn't some kind of plastic attitude that we have toward someone. Love isn't a matter of quoting First Corinthians 13—the Love Chapter—and then saying, "I have to act this way toward you." Yes, First Corinthians 13:4-8 describes how divine love expresses itself, but just because a person has disciplined his flesh to act in the way those verses describe doesn't mean he has the love of God in his heart.

When the love of God completely takes over in our lives, it drives out selfishness, insecurity, fear, and worry. Love feels no need to protect itself. Therefore, when the love of God fills and dominates our hearts, it causes us to prefer our brother above ourselves and to be patient, kind, and longsuffering. To be filled with the love of God is to know that because God is for us, nothing can stand against us.

It is possible that as you have read this letter, the Holy Spirit has quickened the memory of someone to your heart. Perhaps He is leading you to begin to pray for him or her, make a telephone call, write a letter, or visit that person in order to show God's love and make a wrong situation right. If so, I encourage you to obey that inward leading of the Holy Spirit. Be sensitive to His voice so you can take advantage of every opportunity to strengthen the bonds of love in your relationships.

May the healing love and forgiveness of our Father envelop you more and more everyday and mightily reinforce you for the challenging times to come!

Your co-laborer,
Dave Roberson