

CONQUERING BITTERNESS WITH FORGIVENESS

“See to it that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it, many be defiled.” — Heb. 12:15

It is quite common for a Pastor to have one of his sheep attacked by wolves. Their wounds are real and painful. Binding them up and helping them practically is not the real challenge. The real challenge is helping them with the damage to their heart caused by the BITTERNESS that the wrongs and hurts have produced.

Hurtful things and offenses naturally produce anger, discouragement, depression, and thought of revenge. They often gain control of their mind, rob them of their peace and joy, fill them with fear, and make them bitter about what people have done to them and what God has allowed.

Bitterness often so consumes their thoughts and feelings and decision making that they cease being givers and helpers to others and they become energy takers, not energy givers. The key to successfully escaping this bitterness is by learning and applying what God has said regarding FORGIVENESS.

In this study we shall consider God’s instructions to **CONQUERING BITTERNESS WITH FORGIVENESS**. We want to understand these truths – not only for our own sake, but also, so that we can help others who have suffered hurts and wrongs in life.

First, let’s clarify some biblical insights about **forgiveness**:

1. **Biblical forgiveness is the giving of mercy and grace to a person who has wronged or hurt you or yours.** It is the opposite of seeking justice or revenge.

Recently a young man was exhorted to forgive some folks who had hurt him deeply. “But what they did was wrong! They need to be rebuked! They need to apologize!” He was consumed with anger. But biblical MERCY is to **NOT give an offender what they deserve**, nor is it seeking justice because of what they did.

But our instructions go beyond even being merciful. We are also to be gracious to them, blessing them and **giving them what they do not deserve**. That is GRACE.

The young man was told that he needed to forgive those that had hurt him and to ask the Lord how he could bless them. “Where is that found in the Bible”, he demanded. “Well, it is the message of the entire Bible”, he was told. “Here is the clear instructions of our Lord to us from Luke 6:27:

“I say to you who hear, love your enemies, pray for those who mistreat you, bless those who curse you.”

“I can’t do that”, was his response. Well, the Bible agrees with that. In our own strength we can’t, but we can do all the things that God wants us to do – even this – by His enabling power. (Phil. 4:13) This young Christian was faced with either being a light shining in a dark place, or of continuing to feed his root of bitterness.

2. Biblical forgiveness is defined by God’s forgiveness of us.

“...forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” — Col. 3:13

When the Lord forgave you - paying a debt He did not owe, because you had a debt you could not pay – He sent your sins away from His own presence “*as far as the east is from the west*”. (Ps. 103:12) That is a very long way! The Greek word for forgiveness means “to cancel, to remove, to send away”.

God is able to make us to stand before the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy – because He is a Being of love/acceptance/and forgiveness. Because He has FORGIVEN US from His heart. We are to do to others who have hurt us, who are sinning sinners, what He has done for us.

This is not hard – it is impossible in our own strength. But, “*we can do all things through Him who strengthens us.*” (Phil. 4:13) God makes all grace (the desire and power to do God’s will) abound to us, so that, always having all sufficiency, we may have an abundance for every good deed.” (2 Cor. 9:8) There is grace to forgive as we have been forgiven.

3. True forgiveness is only possible for a Christian, and only for a Christian yielded to and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

- Forgiveness is the EVIDENCE that I have accepted God’s forgiveness of me.
- Forgiveness is the EVIDENCE that my heart has been changed by the new birth.
- Forgiveness is the EVIDENCE that the Holy Spirit is at work in me, both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
- The ABSENCE of forgiveness is the EVIDENCE, either of not being yielded to the leading of the Holy Spirit, or of not been born again.

Now, let us note: some truths and insights about **bitterness**.

1. Bitterness toward God, because of what He has allowed to happen to us, **CAN** dominate the life of a Christian.

Bitterness begins to control our thoughts, and then our emotions, and then what we say and do. This is why we are told to “See to it that...no root of bitterness...causes trouble.” When a memory of a past hurt comes to mind, as they do, we must learn to “take it captive” (2 Cor. 10:5) right away. Stop and begin to talk to God. Thank Him for allowing it (James 1:12) and then “Romans 8:28” and “Luke 6:27” it.

2. **Bitterness damages our relationship with the Holy Spirit** and can quench His power in our lives to do the will of God in all areas of life.

This is a serious consequence. When we refuse to forgive an offender, we are willfully disobeying the Lord. This grieves the Holy Spirit and has the effect of damaging our relationship with God. (Mt. 6:14-15)

3. **Bitterness, with its resentments and anger, spills over and affects ALL of our relationships.** (“...and by it (bitterness) many are defiled.” Heb. 12:15)

An angry Christian is focused on something that has happened to him. He is not focused on others. He is not able to give his heart and attention to meeting the needs of others. The wives and children of angry, bitter men are often full of fear. Turning bitterness to forgiveness avoids and changes these things.

4. Finally note that, full and complete forgiveness goes beyond only dismissing the offender’s offense or debt. It adds to this, **blessing and investing in the offender.**

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way.

And if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, in order to receive back the same amount.....

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

And do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."
— Luke 6:27-39

God's forgiveness of us did not stop in the neutral position, only to the forgiveness of our sins. No, He added blessings beyond imaging to it!

*"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in **order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**"*
— Eph 2:4-7

5. A forgiving Spirit and full forgiveness of the offender DOES NOT, in itself, restore the relationship with the offender.

The first benefit of forgiving an offender is that it frees me from the bondage of bitterness in my soul. But it takes a sincere response and genuine repentance **on the part of the offender** to completely restore the relationship.

A relationship involves 2 people. A relationship damaged by sin cannot be completely restored unless the sinner is truly repentant. This is true of our relationship with God and it is true of our relationship with others.

We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) by unconfessed sin. If we do we have damaged our relationship. But... if we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us. He has never left us nor forsaken us, and promises to completely restore our fellowship, but until WE deal with what we have done, He cannot trust and use us as He would like.

In our relationships trust leaves on horseback...it comes back on foot. But we are to do our part, be the initiator by forgiving the offense, and like the father of the prodigal son, be waiting and looking anxiously and longingly for a repentant sinner to be coming home to us.

UNIT STUDY SESSION #1

In preparation for the group study of this principle of conquering bitterness in our life by forgiving our offenders, read and study the above scriptures and summary and the complete the following self examination.

Evaluating My Life As A Christian Regarding A Root Of Bitterness In Me

1. Do you struggle with bitter thoughts that control you for a time? _____
2. Are there people who have wronged you that you have never forgiven? _____
3. Have you experienced the joy of blessing and investing in an offender? _____
4. How would you grade yourself in this area? ___A___B___C___D___F___
5. What commitments regarding this area of living for Christ are you willing to make? _____

Discussion Questions For Study Session #1

1. Do you have questions or comments on the summary of this biblical principle of living for Christ that you have before we consider these other questions?
2. Is it true that if I do not forgive an offense that, to some extent, and perhaps significantly, my mind and life will be controlled by it?
3. Does bitterness get worse as it “lingers” in my soul? What is the evidence of this?
4. What are the precise steps of forgiving an offender?
5. Can you give us an illustration from your own life of facing offenses and what you did?
6. What counsel and insights on the practical “hows” would you offer to someone who needs to pursue this?

UNIT STUDY SESSION #2:

Preparation For Session #2: Application Project

In preparation for the second study section please consider doing the following:

1. Memorize Heb. 12:15
2. Choose one of the following projects, depending on your history with this principle.

- If you have never made a list of those you need to forgive to gain freedom from the control of bitter thoughts and feelings – **make an initial list.**

Then, make your way through the list, 1) thanking God for His forgiveness of you, 2) forgiving them of their wrongs and offenses toward you, and 3) blessing them in some way. (Asking God to bless them, and/or doing something for them.)

- If you have forgiven others in the past, but still struggle...purpose to invest in them whenever they, or what they have done comes to mind. Take these negative thoughts captive by using them to stop and ask God to bless these folks who have hurt you and yours. Ask Him to give them the opposite of what they deserve. Ask Him to bless them, perhaps with salvation, perhaps in their family, perhaps like He has blessed you. Tell Satan that whenever He brings a negative remembrance of their offenses, you will respond in this way.
- If you are generally free of bitterness consider how to counsel another person who struggles with it and write out on one page how you would encourage them. What would you tell them to do, with past offenses and going forward when new offenses come. What has worked for you and why.

Discussion Questions

1. How many of you have been able to memorize Heb. 12:15? Is this verse a suggestion, or a command?
2. How many chose project #1 and would like to share how it is going?
#2?
#3?

Prayer Together