

Focused Discipleship

Forgiveness - Part 2 How to Forgive Biblically

Key Words: Keepers, Senders

One reason people find it hard to forgive is because of the depth of the hurt they have experienced and their deep desire for revenge for past hurts. // Feelings of the need to get revenge can be the back door to bring about forgiveness.

What do you think is the relationship between revenge and forgiveness?

Can you have one without the other? If so, how?

Why do you think the concept of revenge is so deeply imbedded in the mind of man?

REVENGE IS BIBLICAL

- I. **(It may be a surprise to you that) A deep desire for revenge is a legitimate, biblical principle. // We are often taught against taking our own revenge, so we forget the principle of revenge is biblical.**
 - A. **It is important to agree in principle with an offended person who is desiring revenge or demanding payment (justice) for an offense that revenge is biblical.**
 1. **Genuine forgiveness, forgiving from the heart, does require an acknowledgement of payment for an offense. // It is a bill that is owed the offended. God makes a direct connection between revenge (payment) and forgiveness.**
 - a. **Hebrews 9:22b, "... without shedding of blood (payment for sin) there is no forgiveness."**

- 1) This is the only logical reason to forgive because justice must be served and satisfied.
 - a) I John 1:9, If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
 - b) “Just,” He runs our sin through the cross.

- b. Leviticus 17:11, “For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.”

2. In fact, Jesus emphasized the need for payment for an offense at the Last Supper.
 - a. “For this is my blood of the new covenant (contract), which is shed (payment) for many for the remission (forgiveness) of sins” (Matt. 26:28).
 - b. The blood of Christ is the effective part of the atonement (covering) for our sin.
 - c. The blood of Christ sets aside all other plans for pardon (forgiveness) of sin.

3. Martyrs during the tribulation, now in heaven cry out for revenge and they are not shamed for it.
 - a. Rev. 6:9 -11, “When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. ¹⁰And they cried with a loud voice, saying ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ ¹¹Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.” God is in control.
 - b. The martyrs were not verbally reprimanded for desiring revenge. Instead, they were given white robes and told to rest and be patient.

4. The Apostle Paul knew the validity of revenge for a hurt, but he also knew who was responsible to give it.

- a. 2 Tim. 4:14, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works.” (CF Acts 19:33)
 - b. Alexander was openly opposing Paul’s message.
5. In fact, every known culture has revenge laws in their society.
6. God does not argue with you that punishment (hurt) is due the offender. // In fact, God is the one who instilled a sense for the need for justice in us all in the first place.
- a. But it is in God’s circle of responsibility to punish. // (You Can Work It Out, p. 107ff).
 - 1) Rom. 12:19 “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine (responsibility), I will repay (inflict pain), says the Lord.”
 - 2) I Thess. 4:6b, “...The Lord is the avenger in all these things...”
 - a) God is as angry for what was done to you as you are, if not more. Why?
 - (1) Because God is inside of you.
 - (2) Col. 1:27, “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
 - (3) Rom. 8:9, 10, “You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.”
 - b) God knows how to get revenge (CF Deut. 28:15-58).
 - c) God can punish forever (Rev. 20:11-15).

How would you explain the reality of revenge?

- b. The universal desire for revenge for an offense is written by God in the hearts of all men.
 - 1) The law of God is written in their hearts (Rom. 1:19).
 - 2) One New Guinea tribe had seven of the Ten Commandments in their culture which had no Judeo-Christian influence.

LOGIC BEHIND REVENGE

II. The logic behind the need for personal revenge is, “If I let him off the hook (by forgiveness), he gets off scot-free.” No payment is made by him for his offense. “If I don’t do it, it will not happen.”

A. Technically, the offender was never on the offended one’s hook in the first place.

1. Thinking a person is on your hook (or is being controlled or punished by your lack of forgiveness) is an illusion of the mind. The opposite is true.
2. Withholding forgiveness can be a subtle form of taking revenge.
 - a. Bitterness is unfulfilled revenge.
3. If you have been hurt and are bitter, you are hooked (bitterly bonded) emotionally to the offender. They have hooked you and controlled you instead.
 - a. They now control your thinking and quality of life.
 - b. But remaining bitter to punish them, it is like us drinking poison hoping to harm the offender.
 - c. One could be using anger to protect oneself from getting hurt again.

B. Anger can lead to depression.

1. Dr. Paul Meier states our brains run on serotonin like a car runs on gas. We will run out of gas mentally and emotionally. When we become bitter our brain dumps serotonin into the blood stream and it is broken down into by-products that are lost in the urine. When this occurs, we suffer from the classic symptoms of depression, insomnia, decreased energy, decreased concentration, despair, headaches and thoughts of suicide (Meier, p. 170).

C. Remember, the act of forgiveness is not for the benefit of the offender. The primary benefit of forgiveness is for the emotional and spiritual healing of the offended. Your act of forgiveness may not change the offender.

1. The benefit of forgiveness from the heart. It can improve cardiovascular function, diminish chronic pain, relieve depression and boost quality of life among the weary. It can lower blood pressure and depressive symptoms and once you reach middle age, it produces better overall mental and physical health than those who do not forgive.

D. When someone feels the need to take his own revenge, in his anger he has probably removed God out of his thinking.

Why do we push God out of our mind when we are angry or deeply hurt?

FEELINGS ARE ACKNOWLEDGED

III. Forgiveness is not giving up your need to have your hurt feelings acknowledged or understood.

A. False logic: “I can’t forgive him because I want him to feel the deep pain I have endured.”

1. The logic is “I can’t forgive unless they feel my pain.”
2. This unintentionally gives others control of your freedom.
3. This is a subtle form of revenge.

B. Problem with that logic is: Most offenders can’t or will not fully understand your emotional pain.

1. Realize Jesus is the only one who has been as deeply hurt as you and He can identify completely with your feelings.
 - a. Heb. 4:15, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.”
2. Jesus not only understands but absorbs your pain.
 - a. Acts 9:4,5, “Then he (Saul) fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting....”

1) Notice, He did not say persecuting “the church” but said, “Me.”

C. By releasing the offender from the obligation to feel your hurt, you then free yourself emotionally and mentally from their control (you are off their hook).

UNFORGIVERS ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE

IV. Many who cannot forgive and desire revenge already may know a lot of biblical truth (theology) but still can't forgive. They know:

A. God Himself has already paid the sin bill through the death of His Son. All sin was laid on Christ. // How?

1. 2 Cor. 5:21, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

B. The offender's sins were nailed on the cross.

1. Col. 2:13, 14, “When Christ died for our sins, He canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

C. God's payment for sin was big enough that it included all the offenses of all people everywhere for all time.

1. 1 John 2:2, “And He Himself is the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”
2. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

D. Taking your own revenge is, in a sense, double payment and double payment is not justice (Lynch, I Should Forgive, But... p. 59).

E. (Therefore) Forgiveness only makes sense because of Christ's death on the cross. Apart from His payment for sin, forgiveness is illogical because it leaves justice unsatisfied.

1. All sin was laid on Christ.

- a. 2 Cor. 5:21, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."
- b. Jesus even asked His Father to take this cup (death) from Him and come up with another plan for an atonement.
 - 1) Mark 14:35, "...Abba Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup from Me, nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."
- 2. Christ rising from the dead is proof God was satisfied with our Lord's sacrificial payment.
 - a. Rom. 4:25, "He was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."

F. Those who cannot forgive and who call for revenge may even be able to describe how much Jesus suffered on the cross. They know the facts.

- 1. His back was flayed open with a cat-o'-nine-tails (a long rod with long leather strips with glass, or sharp rocks attached to the end).
Luke 22:63; I Peter 2:24
- 2. His face was smashed to point of non-recognition.
Matthew 26:67; 27:30
- 3. Verbal curses and insults were hurled at Him.
Luke 22:64-65; 23:35-37; Matthew 27:39, CF, II Peter 2:23
- 4. Thorny branches were drug across His head.
John 19:2
- 5. They spit in His face.
Matthew 26:67
- 6. They embarrassed (shamed) Him in front of His friends and family.
John 19:25-26
- 7. They drove metal spikes into his hands and feet.
John 20:26
- 8. They isolated Him from His friends and family.
Matthew 27:27

FORGIVENESS CLEARLY DEFINED

V. Understand a clear biblical definition of forgiveness. (It is directly associated with revenge.)

A. One of the roadblocks of one still feeling the need for revenge is they may not understand what genuine forgiveness is. // Revenge is at the heart of genuine forgiveness.

B. Understand that the Greek word, “forgive” literally means “to send away,” not release, let go or turn loose.

1. The primary word for forgiveness is made up to two Greek words: “away” and “to send” or “to send away” (*apohiemi*; *apo* = from; *hiemi* = to send).
 - a. The basic meaning of *apohiemi* is to send away (Detzler, p.69).
 - b. Historically it was used to indicate the sending away of an object or a person. Later it came to include the release of someone from an obligation of marriage or debt. Later it included the release from punishment for some wrongdoing. In the New Testament, the word is used 142 times. All but 13 are used in the four gospels (Detzler. p. 168).
 - c. Some have suggested that in order to forgive you just have to “let go.” There is one small problem with this simple act. If you just let it go, you can pick it right back up again. The Bible does not equate “release” with “forgiveness.”
 - d. The N.T. verb (*apoluo*) “to loose from (*apo*, “from,” *luo*, “to loose”) to release” is translated “forgive” (“you shall be forgiven, Luke 6:37, KJV, RV “release,” “you shall be released”), the reference being to setting a person free as a legal act. The verb does not mean “to forgive” (Vine. p. 251).
 - e. To tell someone just to “let it go” is not an accurate picture of the literal meaning of forgiveness. Letting go can be a form of denial. “Just forget it.” “Don’t let it bother you.” If you just let it go, you can pick it back up.
2. The Old Testament priest illustrated the relationship between the word forgive (send away) and release (let go). On the Day of Atonement, the priest would select two goats. One would be sacrificed and his blood would be sprinkled on the alter. Then the priest would put his hands on the second goat, the scapegoat, and confess the sin of the people as a sign of transferring the people’s sin onto the goat. Then the priest “shall

send it away” (forgive) into the desert, “he shall release the goat in the wilderness” (Lev. 16:7-10).

- a. Today we send our confessed sin (and other’s) over to the Lord Jesus and “He has taken it out of the way, (while) having nailed it to the cross” with Him (Col. 2:14).
3. The process of forgiveness can be compared to mailing a letter (with a list of sins) that is placed in an envelope and is “sent away” (addressed) to the Lord Jesus. Once it is mailed (sent to Jesus), it cannot be retrieved.
4. The key question then is where do you send sin now? // Non-Christians have no place to send theirs or others’ sin. For Christians, it was sent over to the Lord Jesus first, then, let go, and nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14).

If non-believers have no place to send their sin, what do you think they picture in their minds or actually think happened to their sin or another person’s offense?

C. Forgiveness is the process of sending the person who hurt you and his sin over to the Lord Jesus, then, release him into His custody. // Why?

1. Jesus is the only One who placed all the sin of the whole world on Himself on the cross and paid the penalty for that sin.
 - a. 1 Peter 2:24, “And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you were healed.” By our words we are prepared to help others.
 - 1) “Were” healed is an aorist verb which is past tense. This is falsely used to state that by Christ’s wounds we are healed of all our physical difficulties. That is false doctrine and gives believers false hope.
 - b. 1 John 2:2, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”
2. God is the righteous judge who will receive your offender and will administer the appropriate revenge on to the offender.
 - a. He is a righteous judge.

- 1) 1 Peter 2:23, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."
- b. He wants us to step aside so He can administer justice whether it is punishment or pardon.
 - 1) Rom. 12:19, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."
 - 2) Notice God is just as angry at your offender as you are (i.e., God's wrath).
 - c. He will repay the offender for his actions.
 - 1) 2 Tim. 4:14, "Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done."
3. The choice is to be known as a "keeper" (non-forgiver) of offenses in the prison of your own heart or a "sender" (forgiver) of offenses to God for punishment.

KEEPER

VI. What is a 'keeper' (non-forgiver)?

A. A *keeper* is a person who chooses to keep the one who hurt them in the prison of their heart and not forgive. They lock the person in their heart which results in the offended one having a locked-up heart.

1. Dr. Theodore Rubin states, "Repressed anger also often functions as a block to other feelings, so that a person who is angry and doesn't know it, very often cannot feel love or feel or express warmth" (Rubin, p. 29).

Results of a Locked Heart

B. A person with a locked (bitter) heart cannot express love to others because they themselves are frozen hard like a stone emotionally in pain.

1. The door to the heart through which love could be given or received is locked shut by anger.

- a. The Apostle Paul connects a husband's bitterness to his inability to love his wife.
- b. Col. 3:19, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh [bitter] with them."
- 2. Even Jesus pictured Himself at the door of a believer's heart knocking and verbally requesting entrance to have a fellowship relationship.
 - a. Rev. 3:20, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

C. The *keeper* is also not able to receive love from others. // because the lock on the door of his heart is on the inside.

- 1. The bitter heart is stuck emotionally and cannot function relationally.
- 2. The *keeper's* locked up anger prevents love from getting through to them. As a result, they don't feel loved.
 - a. They will minimize others' expressions of love for them.

D. A *keeper* lives in spiritual darkness and fools himself in believing the lie that he is living in the light of truth.

- 1. 1 John 2: 9, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness."

E. The *keeper* assumes God's responsibility of "collecting" the debt the offending person owes them for inflicting the hurt.

- 1. The keeper is deceived into believing the lie that their bitterness is going to repay the offender for his "hurtful" actions.
- 2. They are deceived into believing that it is possible for the offender to pay them back for all the hurt they have caused. For some offenses, the offender could not repay the offense in a thousand lifetimes.

F. The *keeper* can still function in life but it takes much more energy to do it. They can act like they are walking in the light, but in reality they are stumbling in darkness.

1. **Skit:** Handcuff two people together. One person represents the offended one and the other the offender. Then ask the offended person to walk around the room. Because the offender is handcuffed to him, he must follow. Then point out to the offended one, that you only told him to walk around the room, yet the offender had to follow. The offended person will only be free when he sends his prisoner over to the Lord Jesus and releases him to Jesus.
2. **ill.** In an old prison movie, two older guards were watching a long-term prisoner being released. One guard turned to the other and said, “They come, they go. We come and we stay. I wonder who the real prisoners are?”

What other reasons do people have for being “keepers” instead of “senders?”

What do you think has to take place before they would agree to be *senders*?

What else could God do to make you willing to be a *sender*?

SENDER

VII. What is a sender (forgiver) (power of choice)?

A. He understands the concept that the hurt he experienced must be punished (revenge, Rom 12:19).

1. In most societies, legal revenge (punishment) is carried out in jail or prison. That is the location and environment for “punishment” for a crime. Since Jesus is responsible to take revenge (punish) all evil doers, picture in your mind He has a “jail. We call it the “Jesus jail.”
2. It is as if you were a sheriff of a very small town and you had no deputies. If you catch a criminal, you have to take care of him in your small jail and be responsible 24/7. You can’t go anywhere or do anything without taking him. Then you get a letter from the county prison offering to take over complete charge of your criminal. When you transfer your prisoner, you have to bring the conviction papers, too. Both must be transferred. It’s your choice. Keep your offender in the prison of your heart or send him to the “Jesus Jail” with his conviction papers (offenses).

B. A *sender* gives himself permission to feel the anger from the hurt, identifies the specific hurts and the one who hurt him.

C. Then he (in prayer) sends both the offense and the offender over to the Lord Jesus Christ and puts them in His “jail.”

1. Picture in your mind standing before the Lord Jesus with the offender(s) standing next to you. Confess aloud to the Lord their sin, then send them over to the Lord Jesus and put them in His jail.

What would be the advantage of picturing the process of forgiveness in your mind over just doing it?

Do you think both processes are equally effective? Why or why not?

D. The *sender* can trust God to be responsible to deal with the offender as He sees fit because he knows that God is a righteous judge.

1. Jesus trusted His Father to judge and punish others.
 - a. 1 Peter 2:23, “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”
2. Paul trusted the Father to punish Alexander, the coppersmith.
 - a. 2 Tim 4:14, “Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done” (because I’ve sent him to the Lord).
3. Transferring an offender to God leaves the offender’s future in God’s hands.
 - a. Good News: God knows how to punish an offender in time or in eternity.
 - b. Yet, God will grant him grace and mercy if he repents just like He did with you.
 - 1) Grace: Eph. 2:8,9
 - 2) Mercy: Rom. 12:1
 - 3) Pardon: Matt. 6:12
 - 4) Kindness: Rom. 2:4

E. Identify the basic parts of a sender's prayer of forgiveness.

Four Part Prayer

(Picture standing with Christ)

1. Confess the offender's sin.
2. Acknowledge God's role in revenge.
3. Ask for grace, mercy and pardon for them.
4. Send them over to Jesus and release them.

Prayer of Forgiveness

Dear Lord Jesus,

As I stand before You, I also allow (offender) to stand next to me. I want to tell you, Lord, in their hearing what they did to me (describe in detail to Jesus). I do realize it is Your responsibility to punish them, but only because of Your death on the cross, I ask You to grant them grace, mercy and even pardon. I now send them and their sin over to you Lord Jesus and I'm going to leave them with You and I'm going to say, "Good-bye." I now choose to walk away from them in freedom while trusting You, Lord, to deal with them in righteousness. Amen.

VIII. Practical Issues

A. Realize forgiveness does not always result in a restoration of relationship.

1. Steven: Acts 7:60, "Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

2. Jesus: Luke 23; 34, “then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” And they divided His garments and cast lots.”
 3. 2 Tim. 4:14, 15, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. ¹⁵ You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.”
 4. You do not need to now be their close friend. Trust must be rebuilt. You may have to causally associate with an offender (Mom, Dad, former spouse) but you are not obligated to fellowship with them if they continue to live in denial (darkness) and fail to acknowledge their responsibility and make it right.
 - a. I John 1:5-10
 5. God realizes that there may be a need to break off association or fellowship with offenders.
 - a. I Cor. 5:9-13
 6. There may be a need to protect yourself or your family.
 7. (But) The offended one feeling the need to inflict harm or injury in return for a wrong can be the first step in the process to forgive. // You have been hurt and someone needs to pay. The question now is: How can that payment be made to satisfy the need for revenge (justice) and who should pay it? This is the first key in the process of forgiveness.
 8. Forgiving an offender does not mean you can release them from the consequences of their offense.
 - a. King David was forgiven by God but experienced many losses because of his sin (2 Sam. 12:10-14).
- B. The *sender* knows he may lose something in time (on earth) but he will win in eternity by his Christlike response. The offender may win in time but will lose forever.**
1. If the offender is a Christian, he will lose his rewards forever.
 - a. 2 Cor 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

- b. One adult daughter deeply hurt by her pastor father, now deceased, said to a friend, to remind her that now her dad will know what he did to her.
2. If the offender is a non-Christian, he will experience a much deeper pain and agony forever in hell.
 - a. Rev 20:12-15, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.¹³The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.¹⁵If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

C. God will richly reward the sender (forgiver) forever for his godly response.

1. 2 Tim 4:7-8, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”
2. Heb. 12:2, “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

D. Marriage Forgiveness Project

1. In marriage, it is important to serve meals on clean plates each day. All plates are washed after use. Each mate needs to serve each other a clean plate of forgiveness with all that day's offenses washed off.

E. Keys for Success

1. Realize revenge is biblical.
2. Choose to let God punish.
3. Remember, Jesus has been punished for their sin.
4. Forgive for your benefit.
5. Choose to be a sender, not a keeper.

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