

Overcoming The Problem Of Forgiveness **Genesis 50:15-21; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11**

Introduction:

1. Forgiveness is a problem in the Christian life because it is so hard to do. It is one of the most difficult things to do, yet one of the most needed.
2. In this lesson, we will examine two portions of Scripture:
 - 2 Corinthians 2:6-11 – In this passage, the apostle Paul is encouraging the church at Corinth to forgive a young man who had repented after committing the sin of fornication.
 - Genesis 50:15-21 – In this passage, Joseph forgives his eleven brothers who had plotted against him, sold him into slavery, and then lied to their father to cover up their sin.
3. Maybe you have unforgiveness against someone in your heart tonight. You're thinking, "I don't care what he says, I'm not ready to forgive." Maybe not, but at least listen with an open mind and allow this Bible study to work like a gentle rain, softening your heart towards biblical forgiveness.

Why is forgiveness such an important issue for the believer?

1. Because unforgiveness allows Satan to gain ground in our lives. 2 Corinthians 2:10-11
 - Satan is the epitome of an angry, bitter, unforgiving person. When we refuse to forgive, he takes advantage of this. He exploits it in our lives.
 - Verse 11 states that we are not "*ignorant of his devices.*" A device means "a purpose." His purpose is to bring bondage in our lives. When we refuse to forgive, we are handing him the rope and saying, "Tie me up. Bring me into bondage."
 - God deals in freedom and liberty. Satan deals with bondage. When we refuse to forgive, he uses this to produce bondage in our lives. Most of the ground Satan gains in our lives is due to unforgiveness.
2. Because unforgiveness can destroy the person that we refuse to forgive. 2 Corinthians 2:7-8
 - Paul is saying, "You are going to discourage and destroy that young man, and he is going to drown in sorrow because of **your** unforgiveness." There are people in this condition today.
 - It could be that they can't get over the fact that they hurt you and they are hungry for your forgiveness, comfort, and love.
 - When verse 7 mentions "*comfort,*" it means "to call near; invite; invoke." It is the idea of putting your arms around them and saying, "I know you didn't mean it, and even if you did, I forgive you."
 - **Illustration:** Joseph (Genesis 45:1-5, 14-15)
3. Because unforgiveness hinders the entire body of Christ. 2 Corinthians 2:9
 - The matter of unforgiveness was hindering the entire church. When we refuse to forgive, we don't just harm ourselves. The Bible likens the church to a body (1 Corinthians 12:27). Some members are an ear, or a mouth, a foot, a leg, an arm, etc.

- When you, as a member of the body, get angry and hold a grudge against another member, it hinders the whole body from working effectively.
- **Illustration:** Can you imagine if members of our body held grudges against each other?
- Paul said, “Comfort him and confirm your love toward him.” This is the way the body is supposed to work. If the head hurts, the legs carry the body to the store, the arm and hand grab the medicine, the eye reads the dosage, the fingers open the package, etc.
- When there is unforgiveness and grudges are being held, the body cannot function efficiently. Our unforgiveness hurts others. It hurts innocent bystanders.

Why is it so difficult to forgive when we have been wronged?

1. Because we want to see them suffer. 2 Corinthians 2:6; cf. Romans 12:19
 - Forgiveness is difficult for us because it pulls against our concept of justice. We want revenge for offenses suffered.
 - You have heard it said, “Revenge is sweet.” Don’t believe it! This is the philosophy of Satan. Do you remember our lesson on what bitterness produces?
 - Loss of joy, isolation, physical sickness, hindrance to our Christian walk, God’s displeasure, etc.
 - We want to see **them** suffer, but **we** are the ones that end up suffering. This is why we are commanded to leave vengeance with God (Romans 12:19). Vengeance is in God’s job description, not ours.
2. Because, if we forgive, we feel as if we are letting them off the hook.
 - It appears that Joseph struggled with this (Genesis 42-44). He did not immediately reveal himself and offer forgiveness to his brothers. He was harsh and rude with them, he sent them away, and he was using them to try to get to see Benjamin. He wasn’t quick to let them off the hook.
 - People protest, “Why should I forgive them and let them off the hook?” Forgiveness lets them off of **your** hook, but they are never off of God’s hook.
 - If you don’t let them off your hook, you are hooked to them and the past, and that just means continued pain for you.
 - **Illustration** – Use a rope and tie myself to another person. I can never get away from him. Everywhere I go, there he is. “I’m not letting him off the hook.” So what happens is, I stay hooked to him and the past and never get away from it.
 - Forgiveness unhooks me. This is why forgiveness is not just for **their** sake, but also for **your** sake. It sets **you** free!
3. Because of stubbornness. cf. Proverbs 13:10
 - This is another word for pride. We want to forgive, and know we should forgive, but pride won’t let us. We cannot humble ourselves, and we cannot bring ourselves to do it.

- This is sad because life is like water spilled on the ground. You cannot retrieve it and get it back. Every day that we hold bitterness and grudges, we can never go and get those days back. Many people are living with guilt. They were too prideful to forgive, and the object of their unforgiveness died, and it is too late.
 - Unforgiveness and grudges can destroy your quality of life.
4. So how do we forgive? Next week, we will examine five key principles from the life of Joseph that will help us to be victorious!