

Freedom from Unforgiveness

The Hidden Faces of Unforgiveness & How to Forgive

- I. INTRO... Last week, we talked about the danger of unforgiveness and how it opens you up to spiritual torment and affliction...
 - A. King Saul was Israel's first king. He was chosen by God, anointed by the prophet Samuel, and given the privilege of leading God's people.
 - B. But Saul had a fatal flaw—deep insecurity and pride (often linked as in your pride you are shocked by your own failings)
 - C. When a young man named David came along—faithful, humble, and victorious—Saul's heart began to turn.
 - D. At first, Saul loved David. David played music to calm Saul's tormented spirit. He became a trusted soldier. But then, the women of Israel sang a song:
 - 1. "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1Sam 18:7).
 - E. Jealousy crept in. Saul didn't deal with it. He didn't confess it. He nursed it. He let it fester. And what began as jealousy turned into bitterness—a rot in his soul that made Saul suspicious, paranoid, and tormented.
 - F. From bitterness came anger—the kind that simmers and then explodes. Saul tried to pin David to the wall with a spear multiple times.
 - 1. He sent men to hunt David down like a criminal.
 - G. David hadn't done anything wrong—he was loyal, respectful, and even spared Saul's life when he had the chance to kill him.
 - H. But it didn't matter. Saul's heart was poisoned.
 - I. Eventually, Saul lost everything. His anointing. His peace. His family. His throne. Even his sanity. What destroyed him? It wasn't an invading army. It wasn't political rebellion. **It was unforgiveness.**
 - J. Bitterness opened the door. Anger gave it a place to grow. Rage and clamor and slander followed. And the man who once had God's favor became a mad king, ruined by his refusal to deal with his pain and surrender his pride.
 - K. Now, let me ask you...
 - 1. Where has jealousy crept into your life?
 - 2. Where has bitterness gone unchecked?
 - 3. In which relationships has anger become your default reaction?
 - 4. Who are you quietly punishing in your heart?
 - L. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you..." (Ephesians 4:31)
 - 1. Let's walk together—and find the freedom Saul never did.
- II. *Ephesians 4:31–32, [31] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. [32] Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (ESV)*
 - A. Each of these words falls under the umbrella of unforgiveness

1. Most people would reject unforgiveness in its ugliest form, but we forget that unforgiveness is a spectrum
2. If we are honest with ourselves, we might find we harbor much more unforgiveness than we previously thought; I know that I did

B. Bitterness

1. Bitterness is resentment solidified—a sourness in the soul that settles
2. It may not explode outwardly, but it corrodes inwardly.
3. We've all experienced bitterness, but it doesn't always overflow
4. It often emerges as sarcasm, passive aggression, cynicism, or avoidance.
 - a) Ex: slamming dishes around b/c nobody unloaded the dishwasher
 - b) Ex: "Hey honey, I am going to be late again;" "Of course you are"
5. Resentment is the seed of unforgiveness
 - a) When your mind begins to dwell on the frustration

6. Bitterness is how you rehearse the pain without ever resolving it.

C. Wrath

1. Often translated "rage," this is a boiling over of emotion—a burst of fury.
2. While bitterness is slow-burning, wrath is the explosion.
3. Wrath is a sign that forgiveness has not occurred; the pain is close to the surface and easily triggered.
4. We often ask for forgiveness after we pop, but do we stop to think that unforgiveness is what caused it? (ex: nobody listens to me...)

5. Wrath says, "I've had enough—now you'll feel what I've felt."

D. Anger

1. Not all anger is wrong... It's what you do with your anger
2. Anger is a response to a perceived wrong (good or bad)
3. Righteous anger..., Jesus in the temple (not all anger is wrong)
4. It's the internal smoldering that underlies wrath (or action)
5. It colors how we interpret others' actions and makes reconciliation feel impossible.

6. Anger says, "You have wronged me..."

E. Clamor

1. This is a loud protest, yelling, outcry—often a public display of anger
2. It's the verbal chaos that tries to win the courtroom of public opinion.
3. Clamor is a way of self-justifying our pain by enlisting others to feel it too.

4. Clamor says, "Let me tell you what they did to me! Then you can be mad at them too."

F. Slander (blasphēmia) // "from Satan"

1. This is speech designed to damage: character assassination, gossip, defamation.
2. It's more calculated than clamor. It's how unforgiveness takes aim.
3. Even "harmless" venting can become slander when it's aimed to punish or discredit.

4. Slander says, "They hurt me—now I'll hurt them with my words."

G. Malice

1. Malice is the heart posture of ill will. It is the desire to see someone else suffer.
 2. Even if we never act on it, this is the root of revenge, the opposite of love.
 3. Malice keeps a file cabinet of wrongs and imagines scenarios where justice is served our way.
- 4. Malice says, "They deserve to pay, and I hope that they do."**
- H. The Subtle Revenge Cycle → Each of these can be seen as forms of revenge—subtle, socially acceptable, even spiritual-sounding at times:
1. Bitterness is emotional revenge: "I'll never let go of what you did."
 2. Wrath is volcanic revenge: "You'll feel my pain."
 3. Anger is relational revenge: "You're cut off."
 4. Clamor is reputation revenge: "I'll make sure others know."
 5. Slander is character revenge: "I'll shape how they see you."
 6. Malice is mental revenge: "I hope something bad happens to you."
- I. Even if we never physically retaliate, these behaviors are relationally aggressive and contradict the forgiveness and mercy we've received in Christ.
1. What do you do if you suffer from these things, church?
- III. Ephesians 4:32 follows immediately and gives the antidote: *"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*
- A. Kindness
1. Definition: Useful, gracious, benevolent in action—not merely "nice," but actively good.
 2. It is acting for someone else's benefit—even if they don't deserve it.
 3. This word is used in *Romans 2:4: "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance."*
 4. Counter to: Malice and slander → Instead of wishing them harm or speaking evil, you do good to them.
- 5. Kindness says, "I will seek your good even if you hurt me."**
- B. Tenderhearted
1. Definition: Compassionate; literally "well-compassioned," or having strong inward affection.
 2. In the ancient world, the bowels (or inward parts) were the seat of emotions. This word describes deep, gut-level empathy.
 3. It means feeling the pain of others, not coldly dismissing it.
 4. Counter to: Bitterness and wrath
 5. Bitterness shuts down empathy. Tenderheartedness reawakens it.
- 6. Tenderheartedness says, "I see your brokenness and hurt—even if it hurt me." It says, "Forgive them, they know not what they do."**
- C. Forgiving One Another
1. Definition: Graciously giving pardon, canceling a debt. The root is charis—grace.
 2. It's the choice to absorb the cost of the offense without repayment.
 3. This is not an emotional reflex—it's an intentional act of grace rooted in the gospel.

4. Counter to: Anger and revenge
5. Instead of replaying the offense, you release it.

6. Forgiveness says, "You owe me nothing. Jesus paid it all."

D. As God in Christ Forgave You

1. This is the gospel motivator and model.
2. "As" here means both because God forgave you, and in the same way God forgave you.
3. How did God forgive you?
 - a) Completely (Col. 2:13)
 - b) Freely (Rom. 3:24)
 - c) While you were still sinning (Rom. 5:8)
 - d) At great personal cost (the cross)

4. This phrase reminds us: You are not being asked to give what you haven't received.

E. The Movement of the Passage

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|---------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Unforgiveness | → | Forgiveness |
| 2. Bitterness | → | Kindness |
| 3. Wrath | → | Tenderheartedness |
| 4. Anger | → | Forgiving One Another |
| 5. Clamor & Slander | → | Speaking with grace (Eph. 4:29) |
| 6. Malice | → | Loving as Christ loves (Eph. 5:1–2) |

F. Ephesians 4:32 Is an invitation to be like Jesus

1. It's not just about being nice—it's about imitating the heart of the cross:
 - a) He didn't wait for you to say sorry.
 - b) He didn't treat you according to what you deserved.
 - c) He moved toward you in love, even when you were His enemy.
2. "Forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you" is a call to live the gospel with others.
3. Forgiveness is the decisive rejection of every weapon listed in verse 31. It disarms the subtle revenge strategies of the flesh and hands justice over to God. It says: "I won't keep making you pay. Jesus paid for both of us."

IV. Practical Concerns

A. Why Don't We Forgive?

1. Let's be honest: if the Bible is clear, why do we resist?
 - a) We think we can't → It feels impossible.
 - b) We think we don't need to → We feel justified.
 - c) We don't want to → The grudge feels safer.
 - d) We don't think we are → "I've moved on..."
 - e) We have strings attached → "I'll forgive once they..."
 - f) We're afraid → Anger feels like protection.
 - g) Spiritual block → Sometimes we need deliverance, not just willpower.

B. Misconceptions:

1. What Forgiveness Is and Isn't

- a) Forgiveness is NOT:
 - b) Forgetting
 - c) Excusing sin
 - d) Trusting blindly again
 - e) A feeling
 - f) Requiring an apology
 - 2. Forgiveness IS:
 - a) A deliberate choice
 - b) Absorbing the cost
 - c) Letting God handle justice
 - d) Choosing not to hold the sin over them
 - e) Choosing freedom for you
- (1) You forgive to heal. Not the other way around.

C. The Forgiveness Process

1. This is not about "trying harder" but partnering with the Holy Spirit.
2. Ask God who you need to forgive.
 - a) Let names and memories surface. Don't filter.
3. Use this sentence: "I forgive [Name] for [Action] because it made me feel [Emotion]." → Examples:
 - a) "I forgive my dad for leaving because it made me feel abandoned."
 - b) "I forgive my friend for the betrayal because it made me feel worthless."
4. Don't say: "God, help me forgive." Say: "I choose to forgive..."
5. Let the Holy Spirit surface deeper memories.
 - a) Don't rush.
6. Keep forgiving until the bitterness breaks. (7 x 70)
 - a) Forgive yourself. Release shame.
 - b) Release resentment toward God.
 - c) Acknowledge disappointment, surrender expectations.
7. Pray a blessing over those who hurt you.
 - a) Matthew 5:44: Pray for your enemies.

V. Conclusion → Close the Door

- A. Ephesians 4:27 warns not to give the enemy a foothold.
 1. Unforgiveness is a foothold.
 2. When we forgive, we slam the door shut.
 3. Unforgiveness binds. Forgiveness frees.
- B. Today is a day for freedom. Don't wait until you feel like it. Decide.
 1. "I won't keep making you pay. Jesus paid for both of us."
- C. Let's pray. Let's forgive. Let's close the door.