

Released: What you must remember in order to forget. – 2 Corinthians 7:8-12

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Forgiveness begins with a choice. But that choice opens the door to other issues that arise in the process. While forgiveness is necessary to become free from the prison of resentment and bitterness, it is also necessary to examine how misunderstood expressions of forgiveness can put us right back in the prison cell we were seeking to leave.

Forgiveness raises some sticky issues.

- When we choose to begin the process of forgiving, how does that inform and impact the process of restoring trust?
- Does providing forgiveness mean things go back to the way they were before?
- Do I have an unforgiving attitude if I can't say to the offender, "It's okay?"
- How far should I go to protect loved ones from the consequences of their offenses?
- Forgiving is hard enough, how in the world does God expect me to forget?

If we don't understand how to navigate these questions forgiveness can become a path to greater pain rather than freedom. Misunderstood forgiveness can cause us to forget that grace and truth are interdependent.

Clarity for this is found in 2 Corinthians, written by Paul to a church riddled with problems. During a visit to Corinth, someone, egged on by critics of Paul, publicly insulted him and questioned his legitimacy as a servant of Christ (13:3). While these baseless accusations hurt deeply enough, what hurt Paul the most was that the church sat by and did nothing to support him.

After this humiliating scene, he went to minister in another city, but wrote a very strong letter rebuking the church for not coming to his aid (7:8-12), demanding that the person who'd falsely accused him be held responsible, (2:5-11) and expressing deep sorrow over the church's lack of support (2:3; 7:12-13). We don't have this letter, or the Corinthian response to it. We have 2 Corinthians, which is Paul's response to the letter from Corinth - whew!

Paul navigates this deep pain toward people he loves, and the person at fault in ways that are at the same time tough and tender, corrective, protective, and redemptive; full of grace and truth. I think the passages clarify several commonly misunderstood issues related to forgiveness.

1. Forgiveness requires confronting the offense. - *Even if I caused you **sorrow** by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because **your sorrow led you to repentance.** – 2 Corinthians 7:8-9*

Confront, means to turn the face frontally. Not aggressive, but informative. Forgiveness prevents us from going on as if nothing ever happened. It happened, and this is what it did, and this is how it will be dealt with. You have to be specific.

- This process is designed to make people take accountability for their actions. – Simon Sinek

- State **exactly** how you feel.
 - The **specific action** they took to make you feel that way.
 - The potential impact.
- Accountability requires specificity.

2. Forgiveness does not immediately restore full trust. – Forgiveness is granted, trust is earned. There must be a track record consistent with the promise of change.

- The hard work of forgiveness on the part of the victim is one part of the path of restoration. The other is the work of the offender to understand the realities of that path. Some consequences are permanent, and some opportunities are no longer available. Other opportunities will require time and consistency before they are available once again.

Sometimes a spouse will break covenant, and the couple will choose to work things out. The one who violated the vows bears a great responsibility for a long time to restore trust and security by letting the other spouse know where they are, who they're with and what they're doing.

10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret – 2 Corinthians 7:10 - Sorrow – Lupeomai – inner grief, sorrow linked with metanoia- turn. The inner sorrow results in real change.

- “Repentance is not merely feeling sorry or being sorry. It is a turning in one’s attitude and actions, not merely a change of heart, but a change of life and lifestyle.” Ben Witherington

Salvation here is likely not only the theological sort (eternal life), since *swthria* can also mean "self-preservation" or "well-being." Sorrow that turns outward to redress the wrong done leads to personal wholeness. A process of saving the relationship by rebuilding of trust through verification.

- Two interdependent actions on the path to restoration are to **trust** and **verify**.

Another reason I wrote you (rather than visit) was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. – 2 Cor 2:9

The process of reconciliation depends on the attitude of the offender, the depth of the betrayal, and the pattern of offense. An unrepentant offender will resent your desire to confirm the genuineness of their efforts. The offender may resort to lines of manipulation such as, "I guess you can't find it in yourself to be forgiving," or, "Some Christian you are, I thought Christians believed in love and compassion." Such language reveals an unrepentant heart.

- Forgiveness and full trust are two different things. Don't assume that because you don't yet trust who hurt you that you haven't yet started to forgive them. And don't assume that time and effort required to restore trust is somehow an effort to withhold forgiveness from you.

3. Dishonesty and excuses forfeit forgiveness. – *worldly sorrow brings death – 2 Cor. 7:10*

Worldly sorrow is that which turns in on itself and feeds off its ever deepening self-pity. It brings death because it breeds self-destructive resentment and bitterness that eat away at the person. We think that we are harming others by holding these grudges and hates, but the deeper harm is to ourselves. This is a sorrow that will overwhelm and consume us in the end.

A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again. - Proverbs 19:19

- It is appropriate for people to experience the consequences of their wrong-doing. If you cover for them, they may never learn how their behavior hurts them, you, and others.
- There is redemptive correction in appropriate discipline.
- Even when God forgives our sins, he does not promise to remove all consequences created by our actions.
- There's a difference between letting them experience consequences and harboring ill will in our hearts toward them. Does it hurt you for them to hurt? If you take delight, you haven't forgiven.

PREVIEW: Forgiveness includes setting or re-setting healthy boundaries. *11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done – 2 Corinthians 7:11-12*

- Boundaries are the property lines, the limits, and the values by which we own, discern, and navigate life and relationships. What next week's sermon is all about.

4. Forgiving is one thing, forgetting is another. – *The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. 7 Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. – 2 Cor 2:6-8*

Paul tells the church to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love. This involved Paul doing the same. How would they "forget" what he'd done?

Forgetting is something that happens to us. Forgiving is something we do. – I forgot Serena's ultrasound.

- Forgiving is active – something we do. Forgetting is passive – something that happens to us. Our mandate is to actively forgive. The forgetting may come in time. How??

"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Jeremiah 31:35 - Does that mean God becomes unaware, or is it that "to remember" is used differently in scripture?

After the flood... "The Lord remembered Noah" – Genesis 8:1 God revisited Noah, he went back to Noah. He re-joined, re-remembered.

- Choosing not to re-member is choosing not "re-member", "re-visit", or "re-play" the hurt.

Corrie Ten Boom: Forgiveness to letting go of a bell rope. If you have ever seen a country church with a bell in the steeple, you will remember that to get the bell ringing you have to tug awhile. Once it has

begun to ring, you merely maintain the momentum. As long as you keep pulling, the bell keeps ringing. Forgiveness is letting go of the rope. It is just that simple. But when you do so, the bell keeps ringing. Momentum is still at work. However, if you keep your hands off the rope, the bell will begin to slow and eventually stop.

- The reason some of us can't get over the hurt is because we keep ringing the bell.
 - I call my friend to complain about something my husband said
 - I'm in conversation with my partner and bring up a past hurt, just to let her know I haven't forgotten.
 - I sit at my desk and I replay the recording in my head of how he hurt me, and I simmer.

Forgiveness is a choice, forgetting comes as I stop ringing the bell, the sound fades and the memory doesn't affect me anymore.

- "Forgiving does not erase the bitter past. A healed memory is not a deleted memory. Instead, forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future." — Lewis B. Smedes

The act of forgiveness is one of the hardest things you will ever do. The scriptures instruct us to forgive one another just as in Christ, God forgave you. The best word to describe this idea is the word grace. Unconditional, undeserved love available no matter who you are and what you've done, or what's been done to you. It doesn't mean there won't be consequences, and it doesn't mean that the memories of hurt will be erased. It does mean that in the eyes of God, you are forgiven.

Grace received frees us from the chains of shame and guilt.

Grace extended frees us from the chains of bitterness and hatred.

Either way grace really is amazing.

Questions to Ponder

- Why is it so important to confront an offense specifically? Talk through the three-step confrontation approach. Do you agree that accountability requires specificity? Why or why not?
- Talk about the issue of forgiveness and restoration. Are you able to receive forgiveness while also working to restore trust with someone you wronged? Are you able to extend forgiveness while allowing appropriate trust to be rebuilt?
- How do you explain Paul's sorrow for calling out the Corinthians, while also affirming his love for them in doing so? How does this reveal a healthy attitude toward those seeking restoration?
- How do you respond to the notion that restoration may not include the same opportunities one had before? Why is this a difficult reality for some Christians?
- Do you make excuses for another's wrongdoing? Do you expect those you've hurt to make excuses for you? How has today's message helped release you from the lie that forgiveness requires protection from consequences?
- What initial thoughts/questions do you have about boundaries?

- How would you explain what it means to “forgive and forget” after today’s message?
- What unforgiven hurts do you “re-member”, “re-visit”, or “re-play”? Are you ready to stop ringing the bell and let forgetfulness happen to you?