

Breaking The Chain Through Forgiveness

Forgiving

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My mother is a very kind and sweet woman. She has about a million characteristics that I love and I hope to emulate, and I hope that I somewhat emulate them now. But one of her best characteristics is how forgiving she is. Something that has always stuck with me is how quick she was to forgive other people when they had done her wrong.

My mother lived a difficult life through her childhood and up into her adult years, having a few unpleasant things happen along the way. But through all of this she never held a grudge against anyone. She would always forgive and forget. Through the years, she has given me a wealth of instruction and knowledge on how to be forgiving. So today I would like to instruct you of a few practical applications on how to forgive and talk about the dangers of not forgiving.

The first step is to try and forgive ASAP. That means "as soon as possible." Being able to forgive is necessary for us in our Christian walk. We already know, and all of us obviously already know this, but if we live a life lacking forgiveness, God will not forgive us of our own trespasses.

But I would argue it is just as important to forgive someone as quickly as possible. Whenever we are asked for forgiveness from someone, it is dangerous to leave it hanging around in your mind. We have all been there before, I am sure. Someone has done something to offend us, then they have come and apologized. But for whatever reason, we do not just instantly forgive them.

Now, I am not trying to say that we need to immediately void the feelings of offense as soon as someone apologizes. But what I am saying though is that we cannot dwell on those feelings of hurt or offense. We should make an active effort to forgive and be at peace with the offense as quickly as possible. If we allow ourselves to dwell on an offense after an apology, it can

become a gateway drug towards a grudge forming. Once a grudge forms, we may be outwardly showing that we have forgiven someone, but there is still resentment present. Trying to forgive as quickly as possible and working through those feelings of hurt stops this feeling of resentment from turning into something sinful.

I like to invoke the knowledge of the wise master, Yoda. "Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering and suffering leads to the dark side." I think there is a similar path of progression that lead take to sin if we refuse to forgive someone. It all starts with an unforgiving attitude that leads to a grudge, which leads to vengeance or an attempt at vengeance, which puts you right on the cusp of the dark side.

Grudge holding is something that can and will absolutely lead to sin if you allow it to continue to grow. If you hold a grudge, it is like an infected wound. It will grow in strength and it will grow in influence on you every day you allow it to remain unchecked. The only way to stop a grudge is a change of attitude and heart. Grudges are a result of an unforgiving attitude or an unforgiving attitude that was not properly medicated. If you want to stop a grudge from growing, you must change your attitude.

This attitude changes is the act of putting on humility. Putting on humility shows that you are putting the person that you are upset with over the grudge that you are holding against them. Wanting what is best for them and realizing that the responsibility to forgive is solely yours. Not only is it your responsibility, but more importantly, it is God's command.

The next stage towards the dark side is vengeance. The reason why vengeance is a result of grudge holding is because really all revenge is, is an outward display motivated by a grudge. Nobody seeks revenge if you have already forgiven somebody. You only seek revenge when you have allowed a grudge to grow to such an extent that it now controls your attitude and actions. And letting it grow to this extent is something that God tells us to completely avoid.

God knew this and told us this in Leviticus 19, verse 18. So let us go ahead and turn to there.

Leviticus 19:18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

In this verse, God gives us the problem and the solution. The first one is you shall not take vengeance. Is God saying we cannot engage in the act of vengeance? That is kind of self-explanatory.

But He takes it a step further by saying, "nor should you even bear a grudge," which is something that occurs in the mind and heart. In other words, God is saying you should not act on it or even have it in your mind. God ends this statement by telling us what we need to do to avoid sinning. He tells us, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." This requires you to lower yourself below your neighbor in humility, which takes godly character to love them regardless of the offense.

To bring this back fully around town, we need to forgive quickly and with love so that a grudge does not form, therefore breaking the progression which leads us to sin.

Brethren, forgiveness is paramount in our Christian walk. An unforgiving attitude can be one of the quickest paths to sin that we can take if we are not careful. I try to emulate the wise sage of Akron, Ohio, Sandy Ellis, when it comes to being forgiving and I hope that you all do as well.