

Foreword:

Bitterness

Bitterness is an unprofitable servant. It is like the clouds that promise water to a drought-stricken land but pass over leaving the environment it overshadowed parched and desolate with the inhabitants sick of heart because of hope deferred. Bitterness is Amnon's friend that gives advice that leads to sin, rejection, and destruction.

Bitterness is inebriated with the strong drink of pride. It promises sweet delicacies but once consumed it is full of gall. Bitterness gives rousing, articulate discourses on the glorious victories in Absalom's wars of rebellion but refuses to give aid as you hang by the hairs of your head and die a gruesome death. Many have been troubled in their hearts and have become defiled in body, soul, and spirit because of the root of bitterness that has sprung up unnoticed and unrecognized in the luxuriant gardens of hope, grace and blessing until the weed of bitterness has caused such extensive destruction that the garden is damaged beyond repair and cannot be restored to its original beauty though it be sought carefully with tears.

Bitterness is an adder full of poison and should be beheaded ere it stick its ugly head out of the pit of Hell. We must not be lured by its sireneic song of destruction. We dare not be seduced by this strange woman of bitterness, whose mouth is smoother than oil, whose lips drop as the honeycomb, but her end is as wormwood, her feet go down to death and her steps take hold on Hell. Attend unto wisdom! Bow thine ear to understanding!

Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: Lest thou give thy honor to others, and thy years unto the cruel: And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!?

Dr. Bill McSpadden

What Forgiveness Is Not

By Dr. Bill McSpadden

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Numbers 14:11-20

¹¹And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

¹²I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

¹³And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;)

¹⁴And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

¹⁵Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,

¹⁶Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

¹⁷And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,

¹⁸The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

¹⁹Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

20 And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

I would like to discuss with you the subject, **“What Forgiveness Is Not.”** Many people have a hard time forgiving, and the reason is that they do not understand what forgiving is not. To me Numbers 14:18 is one of the most interesting verses in the Bible. Look at what it says:

“The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*.”

This verse seems to be a contradictory statement; God is forgiving and merciful, but He is not going to clear the guilty. These two statements do not seem to match, but there is a great spiritual truth here.

Many times people have a hard time forgiving. By the way, if you live any amount of time on this earth, somebody is going to wrong you; somebody is going to hurt you. I dare say there is not a person alive who has not been hurt and wronged by somebody sometime in life. I'll dare say there is not one alive who has not had someone sin against him. Christians have this idea that if they live right, nothing wrong will ever happen to them. I have news for you; the longer you live, the more hurt you are going to have.

Pastors take a lot of hurt. You know what you ought to do for your pastor? You ought to write a note every so

often and let him know what a blessing he is to you and your family. You ought to! Write your pastor a note once in a while. Find out what his favorite candy bar is and keep him supplied with one. Slide the candy under his office door and write him a little note telling him how much you appreciate his sacrifice and work.

Occasionally a pastor has to preach a strong message to straighten things out in the church. He knows somebody is going to be mad and upset over it. He doesn't want to preach the message, but he has to preach it. When your pastor preaches a hard message and tells it like it is, write him a note and say, "Pastor, that was the best sermon I have ever heard you preach. Keep preaching like that." A church member can greatly encourage a pastor.

As a teenager, I thought everybody loved preachers. I grew up in a home where my mom and dad loved their pastor. There was no question about it. We supported our pastor and stood by him. We loved our pastor, so I thought everybody loved his pastor. I found out differently when I became a pastor. Everybody doesn't like me. Can you imagine someone not liking a cute little guy like me? I'm saying that everyone has been wronged and hurt.

If you are going to be what God wants you to be, you are going to have to learn to forgive the way God forgives. Many people have a hard time forgiving because they do not think it is fair to forgive. Many people have a hard time forgiving because they get forgiveness mixed up with things that are not forgiveness. Some struggle with

forgiving because they feel forgiving is unfair. Some think forgiveness lets the offender off free with no retribution and offers the wronged nothing except the possibility of more hurt, more wrong, and more suffering. People do not want to forgive those who have hurt them because it seems the offender is getting away with wrong. Many people think forgiveness is not fair. Some would say, "Am I to forgive a person who hurt me, did me wrong, and sinned against me? Am I supposed to say it is okay? Am I supposed to forgive and nothing happens to the offender? I have to suffer, and he gets off free?" There is something in us that says, "That does not seem right, nor does it seem fair!" People struggle with forgiving because of this seeming injustice. How can you forgive someone who has robbed you or cheated you out of money? How can you forgive a father who left you as a child and left you and your mother to struggle in life, just barely making it? How can you forgive that? You say, "I can't forgive. You don't know what he has done to us; you don't know the pain he has caused us, yet you want me to forgive him?" It doesn't seem fair does it? How can you forgive an abusive parent? A child may say, "You don't know what my father has done to me; you don't know what my mother has done. You don't understand! How can you ask me to forgive them? It doesn't seem fair!"

Many people struggle with forgiveness because forgiving doesn't seem just. Misunderstanding what forgiveness is and what it is not is the reason forgiving someone doesn't seem just. It doesn't seem just only because we misunderstand what forgiveness is and what it is not. I

think that after reading this booklet you will understand what forgiveness is **not**, and you will understand what forgiveness is, so you can obey God and forgive like you are supposed to.

FIRST OF ALL, FORGIVENESS IS NOT REUNION.

Some people say, “I couldn’t forgive because I cannot go back to a bad situation. I am not going to go back and live under those circumstances. I am not going to be a friend with that person again. I am not going back to that abusive situation.”

What you are thinking is, “If I forgive, I have to be reunited with the person who has wronged me by going back to the same relationship and getting hurt again. But, forgiveness is not reunion.

Do you think God knows what forgiveness is and is not? If anybody would know, God would know: God knows what forgiveness is. When He asks us to forgive, He knows what He is asking. God knows what forgiveness is and forgiveness is not reunion.

Numbers 14:20 says, *“And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word.”*

God forgave the Israelites. At first, He was going to destroy the Israelites because He was weary of their sin and murmuring! Moses said, “O God, You cannot do that! Please forgive! You are merciful and forgiving.” God agreed to pardon the Israelites. God forgave. After

God forgave the Israelites, we see the Israelites deciding to try to enter the Promised Land. God forgave the Israelites, and they then said, “We are going to obey now. We are going to do what You said now, God. We are going into the Land of Promise.”

Numbers 14:40, “And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, ‘Lo, we be here, and we will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised for we have sinned.’”

Notice Numbers 14:42, *“Go not up, for the Lord is not among you.”*

Wait! I thought God forgave them? In Numbers 14:20, God said He pardoned them. In Numbers 14:42, God said He wasn't with them. Forgiveness is not reunion. We ought not think that if we forgive, we must go back to the same relationship. God forgave, but He wasn't with the Israelites. God said, “I'll pardon you, but I am not with you.” That is why, many times, when people try to make things right with God, they go to the altar and confess their sins and get forgiveness, but they still don't feel close to God for a while. Because you are forgiven doesn't mean God is with you. You went to an altar in a service and confessed your sin and asked for forgiveness which you received, but you still do not have sweet fellowship with God. You are forgiven, yet God is not necessarily with you. It takes time to rebuild your relationship with God. Someone said, “I asked the pastor to forgive me, but he doesn't treat me like he used to.” Don't expect him to. He can forgive you and still not be

reunited with you. Forgiveness is not reunion. You can forgive and not be reunited.

Reunion can only begin after restitution is made for the crime done.

For example, I have a very nice ink pen. If Brother Smith steals my ink pen, then comes to me, and says, “Brother McSpadden, I am sorry I stole your ink pen. I want you to forgive me.” I will forgive him, but I am not going out to eat lunch with him until I get my ink pen back. Why? Because I am afraid he will steal my other ink pen. I can forgive even if he never returns my ink pen. If he never returns the pen to me, I will still forgive him, but I am not going to be his buddy. Forgiveness does not mean I have to be reunited. I can forgive without being reunited, but Brother Smith and I cannot be reunited until restitution is made. Until the person who has wronged me makes restitution, we cannot be reunited. I can forgive him, but until restitution is made, I do not have to be reunited in friendship with Brother Smith. Forgiveness does not mean I have to be reunited.

It only takes one person to forgive; it takes two to be reunited. Forgiveness happens inside the wounded person; reunion happens in a relationship between two people. You can forgive a person who never says he is sorry. Let me emphasize, you can forgive someone who never says, “Sorry,” but you can never be reunited until he truly repents. You can forgive without being reunited. God said, “I will forgive these Israelites. I will pardon them.” However, when they started to go into the land,

Moses said, “Don’t go, God is not among you. You are not reunited with God.” I can forgive even if I don’t trust the person who wronged me. Reunion can only happen when I can trust the person who wronged me once not to wrong me again. Forgiveness is not reunion. Forgiveness has no strings attached; reunion has many strings attached. Do you mean I can forgive somebody and not have a close relationship with that person? Yes! God had forgiven the Israelites, but God was not reunited with them.

I talked with a lady who had an abusive husband. She asked, “Pastor, what should I do?” I said, “Forgive him.” She said, “I can’t go back to him.” I responded, “I did not say go back to him. I said, “Forgive him. The first step is to forgive him.” You don’t have to be reunited to forgive, but you need to forgive and obey God. Forgiveness is not reunion. You can forgive and not be reunited. God forgave the Israelites, but they were not reunited. If God doesn’t know what forgiveness is then no one does, right? God said, “I will pardon; I will forgive, but I am not among you. Restitution needs to be made. You Israelites must make some things right before we can be close again.”

SECONDLY, FORGIVENESS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE WRONG THAT WAS DONE IS TOLERATED.

Many people have the idea that if we forgive somebody, we have to tolerate the wrong and live with it all the time. Forgiveness does not mean that we must tolerate

the wrong that was done. Where did we get the idea that if we forgive, we have to be reunited and tolerate wrong doing? We don't have to learn to live with sin. God didn't! God pardoned the Israelites, but He did not tolerate their disobedience.

In Numbers 14:20, He said, *“I have pardoned them.”* Numbers 14: 26-30, *“And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.”*

God was saying, “I forgive you, but I will not tolerate your rebellious behavior.” Somehow, we have the idea that if we forgive, we must tolerate the misbehavior of others and sin that has been done against us. When God forgives, He does not tolerate the wrong. Forgiving does not mean we have to live our lives under unbearable circumstances. Many people think they can't forgive because they would have to live under unbearable circumstances tolerating wrongdoing, hurt, and suffering.

Forgiving does not mean we tolerate sin. One Sunday I stood to preach and on the front row there was a rough bunch of teenage guys. They were straight out of the world with long hair, earrings, rock t-shirts, etc. We have those kinds of people come to our church, and we try to win them to Christ. Everyone is welcome in our church as long as they behave. These teen boys were sitting on the front row. At the beginning of the service, they were misbehaving, so I stood up to make announcements, and I said, "Now, fellas, it's time to be quiet. We are having a church service. Straighten up, listen and behave yourself. I am sure you are not used to being in church, but you must be quiet." We went on with the service, but they became rowdy. As I began to preach, they started making noise, mocking, and making obscene gestures. I did not tolerate it. I said, "Hey, you guys, sit up! Listen to me! Be quiet! We are having church here. Sit up and be quiet." One guy cursed and said, "I don't have to be quiet." I said, "Get out now, every one of you get out of the building! Leave now, all of you get!" They were acting tough, and the deacons and my men wanted to physically throw them out. I told the men, "Don't kill 'em, guys, just get them out of the building and send them away." Later that week, those teenagers came by my office, and the leader of the group said, "Pastor, I came to apologize for the way my friends and I behaved in church last Sunday. I am sorry. Can you forgive us?" I said, "Yes, you are forgiven." He asked if he and his friends could come back on Sunday. I said, "Sure, as long as you behave yourselves, you are welcome to come back."

They came back the next Sunday, and they started the same trouble. Again, I looked at them and said, “Alright, guys, I’ve talked to you. I said you could come if you behaved and now, you’re not behaving. This is your last chance.” They kept acting up, so I said, “Get out!” One guy said, “I thought you forgave us!” I said, “I forgave you, but I am not going to tolerate your rebellious behavior. Now get out.” I forgave those teen boys, but I am not going to let some rebellious teenage boys ruin the church service for everyone else. I cannot allow their behavior to keep some other person from getting saved. I don’t want someone to go to hell because of some rebels. Many people think if they forgive, they must tolerate sin, but they do not have to.

Many people have the unbiblical idea that if they forgive, they have to tolerate the wrong. God didn’t. God pardoned; then He said, “Moses, how long am I going to put up with this disobedience? I will not tolerate this any longer. I am done with this rebellion. These Israelites will die in the wilderness. I am done with them!” Wait, a minute, I thought God forgave them? He did, but forgiveness does not mean He will tolerate their sin.

For example, a battered wife does not have to tolerate abuse. A lady came to me with a big black eye, all beat up. I said, “What happened to you?” She said, “You know my husband is an alcoholic. He came home the other night drunk, and he beat me. He is threatening the kids. What am I going to do?” I said, “Well, your parents don’t live too far away. Why don’t you go live with your parents for a while?” She said, “Really?” I said, “Yes,

you don't have to tolerate this physical abuse. You do not have to live in this abusive situation. You do not have to put your kids in a dangerous situation. You don't have to live under those circumstances. Go live with your parents and stay with them for a while. Tell your husband that as soon as he will go see the pastor and try to straighten his life out, then we will talk about your going back to him." You told that woman to leave her husband? Yes, I did. I did not tell her to divorce him; I told her she did not have to live under those abusive circumstances. Forgiveness does not mean she had to tolerate sin and abuse. A wife does not have to live with an abusive husband. By the way, after she was gone about a week, he called her and said, "When are you going to come home?" She said, "As soon as you go see the pastor." I received a phone call from him, and he said, "Can I talk with you?" I told him to come to my office. He came. He is working on the alcohol addiction, and he and his wife are back together now.

A woman does not have to tolerate a husband who beats her. She needs to forgive him but does not have to tolerate his sin. When I forgive, it doesn't mean I have to tolerate the wrong that was done. A child who was molested does not have to live with abuse. Should he forgive? Yes. Does he have to continue to live with that abuse and molestation? No.

A man came to my office and said, "I need to talk to you." I said, "Yes, sir, what can I do for you?" He replied, "Well, I have been molesting my children." (Now there is nothing to me that is lower than a wicked man who

would molest his own children.) He said, "I have been molesting my children," and I said, "You have?" He replied, "Yes." I asked him how long, and he said, "Several years." He asked, "Can you help me?" I said, "Yes, sir, I can. Stay right here, please. I will be right back in a minute." I went into another office and called the police. They put him in prison. You say, "Why, I thought you should try to restore him!" I'm for restoring the fallen, but his children should not live in fear night after night. The children should not have to live with their father molesting them. Should they forgive him? Yes. Should they live with the abuse? No! Forgiveness does not mean to tolerate sin. Forgiveness does not mean to tolerate abuse. An employer does not have to tolerate an employee who steals from him. A spouse does not have to tolerate immorality on his/her partner's part. A parent does not have to tolerate a rebellious teenager's behavior. Forgiveness does not mean we tolerate the wrong that has been done. Forgiveness does not mean we tolerate sin. Forgiveness does not mean we have to be reunited. God said in Numbers 14, "I will pardon My people, and I will forgive them." When the Israelites started to go to the Promised Land Moses said, "Don't go, God's not with you!" God was not reunited with them. Later on, God said, "I pardoned them, but I will not tolerate their rebellion. I will not tolerate their sin."

THIRDLY, FORGIVENESS DOES NOT MEAN ONE SURRENDERS HIS RIGHT TO JUSTICE.

Numbers 14:18, *“The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty....”*

God said, “I will forgive them, but I am not giving up justice to do it.” God will not clear the guilty. Those who commit crimes must pay for their crimes. Many people think that when they forgive that they are giving up justice, which does not seem right. We feel that if we forgive, the person who wronged us gets off free, and all we get is suffering. What happened to justice? Please understand that God does not require you to give up justice to forgive somebody. God doesn’t require you to give up your right to justice. God didn’t give up His right to justice when He forgave the Israelites.

Numbers 14:18, *“The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty....”*

God forgave the Israelites, but He punished them for their sin. He did not give up justice. A murderer can be forgiven, but he still must pay for his crime.

Many years ago, there was a woman in Texas who killed several people and had been given the death penalty. She was to be executed for her crime. While she was in prison, she trusted Christ and was born again. There was a big debate over her situation. Now that she is a Christian, should she be forgiven and not die for her crime? A well-known Baptist pastor rallied a bunch of Christian leaders and petitioned then Governor Bush to

give a stay of execution. The preacher said, “She’s saved now; she is forgiven. She shouldn’t have to die for her crime.” That is wrong! That is not what the Bible teaches. The governor allowed the execution to proceed, and the woman died for her crime. It’s a shame that the governor had more sense about Biblical justice and forgiveness than a Baptist pastor. She killed five people; she must pay for her crime. She got saved; she is forgiven; and when she paid for her crime, she entered Heaven and began walking on streets paved with gold. She is forgiven, but she must pay for the crime. When you forgive, you do not give up justice.

Former President Clinton asked for forgiveness for the crimes committed while he was in office. Should we forgive him? Yes, we should, but anyone else that perjured themselves and obstructed justice would be sitting in jail right now. He should pay for the crime he committed. Forgive him? Yes, every one of us should forgive him. Should he be set free and not have to pay for his crime? No, justice should still be served.

We have this idea that if we forgive, we give up justice. God doesn’t require that at all. God doesn’t require it of Himself, and He doesn’t require it of you.

Numbers 14:18, *“The Lord is longsuffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty....”*

Justice still must be served. A thief may be forgiven, but he should not be given his job back.

My mother, before she retired, worked at a place called TP Laboratories, which is a company that makes dental supplies. In order to go to work, she had to travel on a toll way. She had a cup in a cup holder in her van in which she kept extra change to pay tolls at the toll booth. She never knew exactly how much change was in the cup. At the laboratory one day, her boss noticed a woman leaving the shop area and going across the parking lot and opening my mother's van door. She reached in, took some money, closed the door, and walked back to the building. A few minutes later the same woman returned eating some potato chips. The boss watched this and thought that maybe my mother had given her permission. This action continued for several days. The boss thought, "This is not right. There is something suspicious about this." So, for the next several days he videotaped her leaving the building, going to my mom's van, taking money out of the van, going back into the building and returning with a snack to eat. After five days of videotaping, he called her and my mother into his office. He said, "Maxine, did you give this lady permission to get money out of your van to buy some food?" My mom said, "I didn't know anything about it." The lady said, "Maxine, I didn't do that!" She looked at the boss and said, "I don't know who told you that, but I did not take money out of Maxine's van." (She did not know she was on candid camera.) The boss asked her, "You never went out to Maxine's van and took money to buy food, and eat it?" The lady replied, "Oh, no, Maxine, I would never do that to you." He said, "Are you sure you would never do that?" He went over and punched a button on the VCR.

There on TV was the lady taking the money from the van. She started crying, “Oh, Maxine, I am sorry! I lied to you! I stole the money. I am sorry, Maxine. Can you forgive me?” My mom said, “Sure, you are forgiven.” The boss said, “You’re fired.” That woman immediately said, “You can’t fire me; Maxine forgave me.” (That is what most people think forgiveness is.) She said, “You can’t fire me for this; Maxine forgave me.” The boss said, “Maxine forgave you, and I fired you.” He was right to do so. She could get forgiveness, but she should still pay for her crime. You do not give up justice to forgive somebody.

Forgiveness is not being reunited. Some feel, they cannot forgive because they cannot be reunited with the person who sinned against them. God says that you can forgive and not tolerate the sin. Some say, “I cannot forgive because it is not just. It is not right that they hurt me, did wrong, sinned, and got away with it. If I forgive I suffer, and nothing happens to them.” God doesn’t demand that of you. You can forgive and not give up justice.

Forgiveness does not mean I give up justice. The Bible says in Micah 6:8, “*...and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*”

We should forgive the sin; that is mercy. Punish the crime; that is justice. God says we are to have mercy and justice. We are supposed to forgive but still the offender should pay for the crime he has committed. Should we forgive the sin? Yes. Should a murderer who gets saved in prison be forgiven? Yes, but he should still pay for the

crime. Should a critic who causes strife and division in a church be forgiven? Yes. Should he have the privilege of fellowship? No. The Bible says in Romans 16:17, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*”

God is pretty plain about this. Should you forgive the offender? Yes. Should you go out to eat with them? No! God said to avoid them. God said to stay away from them. Forgive? Yes. Forfeit justice? No. Forgiveness does not mean I give up my right to justice. “Alright, Preacher, if forgiveness is not reunion; if forgiveness does not mean I tolerate the sin; if forgiveness does not mean I give up justice; then what is forgiveness?” Let me explain it to you.

Forgiveness is realizing that the person who wronged me is human.

All of us are capable of committing any crime or any sin. That person who committed the sin against you is human like you are. I am not saying I am to give up my justice; I am not saying I am to tolerate sin; I am not saying I am to be reunited, but I am saying I have to realize that he is flesh and blood, just like me. It could have been me that committed the crime. The Bible says in Psalm 103:14, “*For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*”

Forgiveness is surrendering my desire for vengeance.

Forgiveness is when I surrender my desire for vengeance.

Romans 12:19, *“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”*

Vengeance is my own pleasure in seeing someone who hurt me hurt. Vengeance is when I say, “I can’t wait to see the person who hurt me suffer. I am going to laugh the day you hurt as badly as you hurt me! I can’t wait to get you back!” That is vengeance. Vengeance is when I have pleasure in seeing someone else that hurt me, hurt. Vengeance is when someone hurts me and I find pleasure in seeing him suffer.”

Forgiveness is when I give up my desire for vengeance and leave it in God’s hands. Justice is secured when someone pays a fair penalty for wronging another. Vengeance is personal satisfaction in seeing that person hurt.

I can have justice without enjoying it. When I forgive, I give up my desire for vengeance, but I do not give up my right to justice. When someone sins against me, he should have to pay for it, but I am not going to enjoy seeing him pay for it. Forgiveness surrenders the desire for vengeance, but forgiveness never surrenders the claims of justice. **Vengeance is personal satisfaction. Justice is moral accounting.** Let me give you an example that will help you to better understand justice.

At the time of this writing my children are all grown and adults. I have five children, and I love my children dearly. When my children were young and living at home, from time to time my they did wrong, and they needed to be disciplined. One day, my son Caleb did something that was wrong, and I said, "Son, go to your room." He and I went up to his room, and we talked about it. I said, "Son, I do not want to discipline you. I do not enjoy disciplining you." I cried as I told Caleb, "I love you, but you must be punished for the wrong you did. I am going to have to discipline you so that next time you will do right." I disciplined my son, but there was no joy. Justice is when I disciplined my son, but there was no pleasure. I did not give up justice, yet I forgave him. I disciplined him, but I had no pleasure in it whatsoever. God says that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God forgave and though He knows the wicked must be punished, He has no pleasure in it. When I give up vengeance, I do not give up justice. I give up my joy in seeing someone who hurt me get punished. When the Bible says, "Pray for those who spitefully use you," it does not mean to pray, "Kill him, God. Let him have it." That is not what God had in mind when He said to pray for them. God wants you and I to give up our desire for vengeance and forgive the one who wronged us. Justice must still be given. Offenders must pay for their crime, but I give up my pleasure in seeing them pay for their crime.

There is a man in this world who has done much harm to me and my family. He has slandered me. Because of this man, our house has been vandalized; our pets have been

killed. I have had death threats against me. I have had much harm because of him. No restitution has been made. Do I have to tolerate it? No, I do not have to tolerate it. Have I given up justice? No, I have not given up justice. Not long ago he went through some terrible, terrible things. What did I do? I prayed for him. I had no pleasure in seeing him hurt even though he has done me much hurt. Forgiveness is when I give up my desire for vengeance, but I do not give up justice.

Thirdly, forgiveness is setting a prisoner free and discovering the prisoner I set free is me.

Forgiveness is setting a prisoner free and that prisoner is me. Forgiveness is so that I don't have to live in the prison of bitterness. You see when I give up vengeance, I do not have to live with wrath. I give up vengeance so I do not have to live my life full of bitterness, hatred, and wrath because those things will destroy me. When I give up the vengeance, I set myself free so that I can sleep at night. I can live with a clear conscience with both man and God. I can love people. I can serve the Lord because I have given up bitterness; I have given up wrath; I have given up hatred. Why? Because that was all a part of vengeance. I forgive primarily for me, not for the benefit of the person who wronged me. Did you know that God forgave for Himself first, not for us first? Jesus died for God primarily and for us secondarily. We reap the benefits, but Jesus died for God so that God's justice could be satisfied and God could give up vengeance. God has no pleasure in seeing the wicked suffer in Hell; God has no pleasure in seeing people hurt. Jesus died for God

so that justice could be satisfied and God could give up vengeance. God says, “I will forgive you and I give up my desire for vengeance, but the offender is going to have to pay for his crime.

When I forgive, I am forgiving so that I can set myself free. Now the person who gets forgiven gets the benefits of forgiveness, but it is primarily for me so that I don't have to live with hatred, bitterness, anger, wrath, and vengeance.

Conclusion:

I want you to think right now! Who has sinned against you? Everybody can think of someone who has hurt him. You have a legitimate claim concerning someone who has sinned against you. He wronged you, but you have heard that you are supposed to forgive. Do you keep thinking, “How can I forgive? I can't go back to that same situation. I can't be reunited. I can't forgive! How can I tolerate what he did? How can God expect me to tolerate that?” Have you had a hard time forgiving because you thought you had to give up justice? Have you had a hard time forgiving that father who left you when you were a young child? Have you had a hard time forgiving that person at school who has stabbed you in the back? Have you had a hard time forgiving that person who called himself a friend but turned into an enemy? Have you had a hard time with forgiveness because you thought you had to give up justice? You do not have to be reunited. You do not have to tolerate the sin. You do not have to give up justice. When you forgive, say, “That person is human, and I could have done what he did. I

am going to give up my desire for vengeance, and I am going to set myself free so that I can continue to live for God and love people and be happy and be at peace and not live in the prison of bitterness, hatred, and wrath.”

Right now, won't you kneel before God and forgive those who have wronged you and leave the vengeance to God?



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