

A March 2005 article by Tod Bolsinger, an Assistant Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, quoted a nationwide poll that asked the following question:

“What Word or phrase would you most like to hear uttered to you, sincerely?” No surprise, the number one answer was – “I love you.” The number three answer, believe it or not, was “Supper is ready.” The number two answer was– “You are forgiven.”

The second most common answer is very telling as to the state of relationships across the country in that there are unreconciled differences that one of the parties was desiring to resolve and to receive forgiveness.

## Unforgiveness - A Scheme of Satan

Lewis Seifert

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### 2 Corinthians 2:1-11

“For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. <sup>2</sup> For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? <sup>3</sup> And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. <sup>4</sup> For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

<sup>5</sup> Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. <sup>6</sup> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup> so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup> So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. <sup>9</sup> For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. <sup>10</sup> Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup> so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs (schemes).”

Context of this passage – 2 Corinthians was written after 1 Corinthians and following a “painful visit” by Paul to the church at Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1) This was followed by a severe letter to the church (2 Cor. 2:3, 4) That letter called upon the church to take action against a wrongdoer who caused pain to Paul and some in the church and rebuked the church for not standing with and not supporting Paul and his apostolic authority in this action of church discipline. Paul’s severe letter proved to be effective in that the Corinthians did take strong disciplinary action against the offender. Paul’s concern now was that Satan might gain the advantage if the offender were, after repenting, be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (2:7).

This passage in 2 Corinthians gives insight into how Satan can use unforgiveness to overwhelm the offender with excessive sorrow. The word overwhelm is also used of an animal who ‘devours’ their prey and waves or water which ‘swallow up’ objects and people. In other words, Paul is afraid that the offender, if not forgiven, may be drown in his sorrow.

When dealing with unforgiveness, a person is very susceptible to the schemes and lies of the enemy. For the offending person, the person's very faith can be brought into question by thoughts from the scheming enemy. The enemy wants to keep people in the grip of unforgiveness.

### The Scheme or Device of the Enemy – against the individual

As revealed in the Scripture, one of the most important weapons in overcoming unforgiveness is to focus your attention on how much God has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:13b states –“...forgiving one another as the Lord has forgiven you.”

Let's take a moment to review a few truths in the Gospel showing how the Lord has forgiven me: (Credit to the book A Gospel Primer)

- God is unimaginably awesome in all His perfection, absolutely righteous, holy and just in all His ways.
- He has been unbelievably good and merciful to me as the Creator and Sustainer of my life.
- All that I am and all that I have I owe to Him and to His goodness.
- Instead of giving thanks to Him, I have actually sought to exalt myself above Him.
- Going my own way and living according to my own wisdom, I have broken countless times the letter or the spirit of God's commandments.
- Apart from Christ, I am utterly deserving of and destined for eternal punishment.
- However, what I could not do, God did – sending His own Son into the world, living a life in perfect obedience to God and dying on the cross for my sins, thereby showing me unfathomable love.
- Jesus was willing to lay down His life for me. No one could ever love me more or better than Jesus
- God raised Jesus from the dead thereby announcing that His death was completely sufficient to atone for every sin I have or ever will commit throughout my lifetime.
- Christ now reigns from on high, granting salvation and forgiveness to all who call on him by faith.
- Now when my time came and I placed my faith in Jesus, God instantly granted me a great salvation.
- He forgave me all of my sins, past, present and future.
- God now has only love, compassion and deepest affection for me, this love is without any admixture of wrath whatsoever.
- God always looks upon me and treats me with gracious favor, always working all things together for my good and His glory.

“...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:12

So at the core of the Gospel is the forgiveness of sin through the completed sacrifice of Christ on the cross. True Biblical forgiveness is not possible apart from personally experiencing and embracing the forgiveness of God offered through the Gospel. For those of you who may not yet be Christians, I urge

you to allow God's grace to give you the faith to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and receive His forgiveness for all your sins. That forgiveness can then be the foundation for your asking forgiveness from others you have wronged and granting forgiveness to others who have wronged you.

In the case of this situation in the church at Corinth there would be the temptation in the mind of the offender to think "If the church members will not forgive me, then God must not be willing to forgive me either" This is a corruption of the Gospel which proclaims that God gives total forgiveness to those He grants faith unto repentance and salvation. This is the design of Satan that Paul is urging the church to fight and avoid through the act of forgiveness

2 Corinthians 2:10 – "In the presence of Christ" – As Christ looked on as a witness, Paul grounds the Christian obligation to forgive others on the Christian experience of God's forgiveness in Christ.

As Christians, therefore, we cannot overlook the direct relationship between God's forgiveness and our forgiveness of others.

**"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."**—  
C.S. Lewis

God has given us the grace and Biblical guidance we need to imitate Him by forgiving others as he has forgiven us. Long before forgiveness is requested by the offender and granted by the offended (transactional), it is from the heart, based on God's forgiveness of us and a heart transformed by His grace. One of the lies of the enemy is "I understand that God forgives, but that's because He is God. I just cannot do that." The truth is God's grace is totally sufficient to give us the heart and power to forgive. Unforgiveness is a scheme of the enemy to bring bitterness, resentment and disunity.

**What is Forgiveness?** (Credit Ken Sande, Tim Keller, John Piper, David Jeremiah)

**Forgiveness means to absorb the cost of the debt yourself. You pay the price yourself, and you refuse to exact the price out of the person in any way. Forgiveness is to free the person from penalty for a sin by paying the price yourself. Forgiveness is undeserved and cannot be earned.**

**Colossians 2:13-15**

**<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God <sup>b</sup>made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by <sup>c</sup>canceling <sup>d</sup>the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities <sup>e</sup> and <sup>e</sup>put them to open shame, by <sup>f</sup>triumphing over them in him. <sup>3</sup>**

The picture (from The Seifert Spiritual Imagination Commentary) presented in this passage is one of God, at the very instance of our salvation, raised us from our spiritual death. Then Jesus, our Savior, laid before God the Judge the record of our many, many past and future trespasses and sins. God then took His stamps of mercy and grace, dipped them in the blood of His Son shed on the cross and stamped them, each and every one, as "Cancelled, Cancelled, Cancelled, Forgiven, Forgiven, Forgiven!" Then God took those cancelled and forgiven trespasses and it is as if he handed them to Jesus who then nailed them to His cross. Then Christ, the Mighty Warrior, with eyes like flames of fire and His mouth as a sharp sword turned to the Accuser of the Brethren, our enemy Satan, and said "All these trespasses have been cancelled and forgiven by the blood I shed on this cross. If you

think you are going to take these down and use them to condemn my Beloved, you are going to have to go through me!"

'It is finished!' "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!"

"There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose ALL their guilty stains!"

- **Forgiveness is not a feeling (emotion). It is an act of the will.** Forgiveness involves a decision not to think or talk about what someone has done. And God calls us to make this decision regardless of our feelings. But the decision is not void of emotion. The decision to forgive can be made during a time of bitterness and hostility, but the decision can also begin producing feelings of kindness and friendship.

This decision will most likely need to be repeated and will take time. Unlike God's decision toward us to forgive in an instant, for us it will be a process but should not be reversed. This decision is a key weapon against the enemy's scheme of unforgiveness.

It is also important to realize that asking for forgiveness is more than apologizing or saying you are sorry. There needs to be identification by the offending party of the sin committed and the asking for forgiveness – "I was wrong, please forgive me for .....". This then requires a response from the offended party "I forgive you." This acknowledgment helps brings closure to the situation, exposes the enemy's plan of bitterness and unforgiveness and begins the reconciliation process.

**If you kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. Psalm 130:3-4**

- **Forgiveness is not a passive fading from memory with the passage of time.** Forgiveness is an active process. When God says that "**He remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25)**, He is not saying that he cannot remember our sins. It is not like God's omniscience has diminished. Rather He is promising that He will not remember them. He chooses not to mention, recount or think about our sins ever again. They are cancelled forever.

For you, as the one offended, to forgive others in this way, the choice will require a lot of effort and is not possible apart from the grace of God. But it will bring a mighty blow to the enemy's scheme of unforgiveness and freedom for believers.

If you, as the offending person, hear accusing words regarding your sins after repenting and experiencing God's forgiveness, those are words from the enemy, Satan, and not from God. Remember from the Gospel how God now views us and what He has chosen to do with our sins.

The offending person needs to be constantly reminded of the gospel and not keep bringing your sins up to yourself. It means to not dwell on it in the heart, and not to re-play the "videotapes" of the wrong in your imagination, in order to keep the sense of loss and hurt fresh and real to you. It means, instead, that you dwell on the truths of mercy, grace and forgiveness purchased on your behalf through the gospel.

Although forgiveness from God is instantaneous upon confession and repentance (1 John 1:9), the speed and degree of restoration with those individuals offended entails the re-creation of trust, and that takes time, depending on the nature and severity of the offenses involved. Part of real repentance usually means asking: "what could I do that would make you trust me?" and being willing to accept the answer.

### **Example from Marriage:**

Marriage and family are relationships that require purposeful communication and deliberate resolution of conflicts. I Peter 3:7 instructs husbands to "live with your wife in an understanding way". The reason for this instruction in Scripture is that husbands many times do not work to understand the feelings, concerns and fears that may be deeply held by their wives. This approach of non-resolution can lead to bitterness and unforgiveness. It can shut down meaningful communication and can lead to distrust between the spouses.

"What's wrong?" "Nothing." (Interpretation - I do not think you are understanding any of the words coming out of my mouth")

On one of our anniversaries, I made plans to return to the site of our honeymoon for a few days. That trip was a 10 hour car ride - one way. And at that time there were no cell phones and no text messaging to interrupt the conversation. The total of 20 hours alone in the car led to many deep, honest discussions about the state of our marriage communication. At one point I even asked the question "If you had to do it all again, would you still marry me?" (Note to men – be careful what you ask. You may not be ready for the answer.) Although the answer was "Yes", there was much sharing about my lack of effort to understand her concerns and to gently walk with her through issues that mattered to her. It took time, with much confession and forgiveness, but trust has been rebuilt in our marriage and Susan now feels I sincerely care for her.

Totally the Grace of God.

- **Forgiveness is not excusing (That's ok.)** Forgiving is the opposite of excusing. Forgiveness says "We both know what you did was wrong and without excuse. But since God has forgiven me, I forgive you." Because forgiveness deals honestly with sin, it brings a freedom that no amount of excusing could ever hope to provide. The cross did not excuse our sins. The cross dealt with our sins in justice and mercy, once and forever. That grants us freedom from the lies of the enemy.  
**If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother – Matthew 18:15**
- **Forgiveness is costly.** Forgiveness requires you absorb certain effects of another person's sins and release the person from liability to punishment. This is precisely what Jesus accomplished at Calvary.

...and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. - Matthew 6:12

It is important we maintain a posture of forgiveness. We may think “Well, they never asked for forgiveness.” Well, what if they never do? Does that mean they are not worthy of our forgiveness? Our posture should be to forgive, even if they are not asking. If we do not maintain this posture of forgiveness, there will be unresolved hurts. This posture should be pursued, even if there is no face to face airing of grievances.

It is necessary, however, to acknowledge that when they don’t ask and we still forgive, it may not reconcile the relationship. Everything won’t “just be alright” but it does free our heart from the scheme and bondage of unforgiveness. And if that repentance ever comes, we will be ready and free to receive it.

### The Scheme or Device of the Enemy – Against the Church

In our study of Ephesians, there were exposed several ways in which the enemy uses relationships in the family and church to stir up strife, division and unforgiveness.

#### Ephesians 4:25-32

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. <sup>26</sup> be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil. <sup>28</sup> Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. <sup>29</sup> let no corrupting (rotten) talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Three times in these seven verses in Ephesians Chapter 4, there are references made to the spiritual implications of our thoughts and actions in the context of personal relationships. One reference, and give no opportunity to the devil, reveals that there is actually spiritual warfare that occurs when there is unresolved anger, conflict and unforgiveness (be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.) Here, Scripture reveals that behind the actions of human beings, invisible personalities are present and active. In the context of these verses, relational disunity, if left unresolved, can even lead to grieving the Holy Spirit of God. This truth is the “Why this is important” in the middle of the “What disunity looks like”

The impact of the enemy’s devices on the entire congregation would be:

- **Causes disunity, discord** – As the Body of Christ walks in unity, the whole Body matures. This allows the church to represent Christ as the head and the body is built up in love. This allows the Gospel to be brought to life before an unbelieving world.

**“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**  
**John 13:35**

- **Defrauds the congregation of one of its members and their gifting permanently.** If forgiveness is not extended, the offending member may seek encouragement elsewhere, even outside the church. This would be as though a part of the Body were to be amputated by the enemy and unable to receive nourishment from the Head and the rest of the Body. Eventually this member will die and the whole Body will suffer as a result of not having that gift.

**If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. – I**  
**Corinthians 12:26**

- **Undermines the faith, devotion and good order of the church** – As with any unresolved conflict, bitterness and disunity grow. Gossip and slander begin to replace encouraging speech. As a result, when the church comes together, the worship is not focused on the glory of the reigning Christ. Revivals can be quenched and the move of the Spirit hindered.

**Matthew 5:23-24 states - “If you are presenting your offering at the altar,” – you’re coming to worship, coming to worship the Lord – “and you there remember that your brother has something against you,” – there is some unresolved issue – “leave your offering before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, then come and present your offering.”**

Story of Susan and serving in children’s ministry:

Early in our marriage, Susan and I attended a traditional Protestant church. The church had many beautiful, Godly people that we grew to love dearly. At the time, Susan was 19 years old and had only been a Christian for two years. Susan volunteered to serve in children’s ministry and was excited to spend quality time sharing Bible stories with the children.

Soon after she started serving, the parents pulled almost all the children out of the class Susan was teaching without explaining their actions. One of the fathers was then sent to tell Susan that they did not want her to teach their children because, in their words, her appearance was not appropriate. There was no further explanation of what that meant and no women came forward to help Susan understand how she could correct the situation. Needless to say, Susan was devastated.

Instead of becoming bitter as a new believer, Susan reached out to one of the mothers in the church and asked for help on how to grow as a Christian woman. In other words, Susan did not give place to the

scheme of the enemy trying to sow bitterness and unforgiveness in her heart and in the actions of others. Instead, she chose to work toward unity and forgiveness, even though the other women never asked for forgiveness or saw their actions as wrong. Over a few years, she became friends with this woman and used her as a mentor in growing in the Christian faith. In fact, one of the teen age children of this woman became very disillusioned with the faith and began to walk away from God. The woman ask Susan and I to reach out to the wayward youth and be a help in answering questions about the faith. Ironically, the mother felt the youth could better relate to us than to older people in the church.

### The Spiritual Battle against Unforgiveness

Unforgiveness is a scheme of the enemy that must be actively fought with spiritual weapons. Through forgiveness, we are remitting, or loosing, the offender's sins by declaring and confirming to him the reality of divine forgiveness. (Matt 16:19 "whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed<sup>4</sup> in heaven.")

### Our weapons:

- The Gospel – Remember God's Forgiveness toward you. Parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35)– We take God's forgiveness for granted when we stubbornly withhold our forgiveness from others
- God's Grace – God's strength. Continually ask for and rely on God's strength. True forgiveness is impossible apart from a heart changed by His grace. Before the forgiveness is sought through repentance and granted by grace (transactional), it must start in the power of God's grace and from a posture of forgiveness in our heart based on the truth we have also been forgiven of much.
- Our thoughts – replace negative thoughts about the offender with promise of forgiveness and fond memories
- Our deeds – "Don't waste time bothering whether you love your neighbor, act as if you did" C.S. Lewis.

Actions can change your feelings and can communicate the reality of your forgiveness and your commitment to reconciliation.

As previously stated, granting Forgiveness means to release from liability to suffer punishment or penalty. The debt is canceled.

Replace hostility and separation with peace and friendship. This is what Christ did for us on the cross.

Forgiveness means that, in your heart, your relationship will be at least as good as it was before the offense occurred.

- **Our words** – Speak Scripture to yourself. Fill your mind with the Gospel, Grace and forgiveness of God. Declare that unforgiveness has been defeated at the cross. Speak well of the person who offended you. Praise and encourage in his presence and with others.  
Do not underestimate the power of words spoken from Scripture spoken in faith and their ability to change your thoughts and actions.

**Application-** Humble yourself and ask God for grace to forgive. Declare in words, thoughts and deeds the Gospel. The spirits of unforgiveness, guilt and shame have been defeated at the cross – “Father forgive them”. Declare the victory of the gospel and stand firm in that declared truth. Do not give place to the enemy “It is finished!!”

“Unforgiveness is like taking poison but expecting someone else to die” – Unknown  
(possibly Nelson Mandela)

Testimony of Debbie Robertson:

July 10, 1994 ~it was a normal Sunday afternoon, we had just gotten home from Metro Life Church

...My mother was murdered by a homeless drug addicted man name Jerry Dale Bobbitt. He came in to the flower shop and locked himself in... tied her up with her apron and stabbed her 16 times with her design scissors, leaving them in her chest.

I was on my way to a Bible study, my daughter Ashlie was worried because my mom wasn't answering the shop phone. I called a neighboring business and had them check on her. The doors were locked... her car was out front... He told me that a flower arrangement was tipped over in the show room. I said call 911... I am on my way.

Police arrived... they investigated, it seemed to take forever for them to come back outside... They all avoided me...no one wanted to be the bearer of bad news... I stepped up in front of the next officer on his way out of the door and insisted he tell me! Was mom inside? Yes, he nodded... “Is she alive?” ..... “No, I’m sorry”

I fell to my knees, I cried and sobbed. She was my best friend, my life cheerleader... the one who hugged me, encouraged me, and was there through thick and thin with me. She is gone! How? Why? God, Where are you? Is this your plan? Can you be glorified through such a senseless act? If so... How?

While my life seemed like a bad dream that I never wake up from The killer walks the streets as if all is normal... 10 days later, he murders again. Now the city of Orlando has a serial murderer on the loose. We quickly become friends with this family, knowing what they are going through, we offer condolences, prayers, conversations, hugs and investigative Information.

Fast forward a year later... The suspect has been found, he is held in the Orlando Jail awaiting what we thought would be a trial. A plea is offered and he accepts in exchange for life in prison,

not ever eligible for parole. He WILL die behind bars.... this never brings a loved one back, but knowing he can't hurt anymore brings relief.

We are friends with Chaplain McGahey who tells us that Jerry has requested to be in the Christian section and has accepted the Lord as his personal savior. Now he gets saved? He gets to enjoy heaven someday? With my mother?

Lord... I know that in your precious Word, the Bible... we are asked to forgive. I am not capable of this. Can you help me?

This became my heart cry for months. Lord... If you are requiring this of me, please help me because I know that in my own strength, I am weak.

In the months ahead, I pour out this prayer asking God to help me to forgive the man who murdered my precious mother... He begins to peel the layers of my heart exposing my need for His grace and mercy and also forgiveness.

Victims impact day arrives~ We all pile into the courtroom to finally see face to face this person who committed this horrible crime. It begins with a public apology (hand written) and read by a deputy. Afterwards, first up to speak to Jerry Bobbitt is the Hawkins family who lost their loved one at the hands of this brutal murderer. (He stabbed her over 40 times with scissors) Mr. Hawkins (husband of the victim) lunges at the murderer, the judge orders his attorney to switch seats with him. He proceeded to tell him that he hates him, he hopes he suffers and rots in jail and Hell. Jerry nods and receives the lashing he is expecting. Now it is my turn... I walk by the same person Mr. Hawkins lunged at and I see his hands... these are the hands that killed my mother, that took her away from me. I have a twinge of compassion for his hands, for him. I quickly question myself and move up to the jury seat where I will address him. You could hear a pin drop.

"Jerry," I tell him, "You didn't know my mother, she helped people much like yourself. You took her from us, my father died when I was a teenager, my mother was my best friend. She was special. She loved the Lord too. I heard that you accepted the Lord while in jail... If that is true that the same mercy is available to you that is also available to her and me. The Lord forgave me of much. He asks us to forgive others. Although I did not think this was possible, I cried out and asked God to help me to forgive you. He answered my prayer. I want you to know that I forgive you for killing my mother." Now you can hear sniffles and sobs throughout the courtroom.

Jerry did not expect this, he was humbled and broken. He sobbed and said "I'm sorry and thank you" over and over again. There was not a dry eye in the room, including the judge and deputies lining the room. The Power of God filled the room. I felt like at that moment, it all finally made sense. This is how God would be glorified. What the enemy meant for destruction was turned around and God is using it to change me and many others through this. The media chases me down the hallway on my way out and asks silly questions like, "Didn't you love your mother? How could you forgive the man who brutally snuffed out her life?" I responded by saying, "Some things don't make sense. This is why God gets the credit. It doesn't make sense to me either but I serve a mighty God who promised that when I ask Him for a good thing, He will do exceedingly and abundantly more than I can ask or imagine!"

Oh, and back to the compassion for his hands, God spoke to my heart and said, ***you didn't ask for compassion, you simply asked for the ability to forgive. I gave you an extra measure and this is only a crumb compared to how much compassion I have for my children!***

Lewis:

There are many questions you probably have about the “Why’s and How could” of this horrific event. But these are mysteries too great for us to comprehend and we must leave them to mind of God alone. But these things we do know-

In the amazing grace of God, not only could Debbie Roberson forgive her mother’s killer and have no bitterness and resentment in her heart toward him, but in eternity, if the story of Jerry Bobbitt’s confession of salvation is accurate, Debbie’s mother and her killer are worshipping together before the throne of Jesus. The scheme of the enemy in this situation has been totally destroyed! Praise be to the great God of our amazing salvation!!

Speak the words in faith with the power of God’s grace that others are longing to hear –  
“You are forgiven.”