

# Gospel and Forgiveness

## Outline:

Introduction — the two options available when others hurt you

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2. The second option and its consequence of resurrected life
3. Holding the wrongdoer accountable
4. Gospel and Forgiveness of God

## Introduction — the two options available when others hurt you

Consider this situation. Your friend takes your expensive mobile phone. But drops it, and it breaks. Maybe it was a pure accident, or he was irresponsible and careless. But what can you do? There are essentially two options.

- i. The first is to demand that he pay for the damages.
- ii. The second is refusing to let him pay anything. You bear the cost yourself.

Notice that in either option, someone must pay for the damage because the cost does not go away and vanish by saying sorry. In this illustration, forgiveness means the second option—you pay the price for his misdeed.

Now, most of the wrong done to us we cannot measure in terms of money. Someone may have robbed you of some happiness, reputation, opportunity or promotion. Or someone may have insulted, beat, abandoned you when you were young and vulnerable, interfered with your marriage, etc. You cannot put a price tag on such things, but we know it was unjust. When people seriously do wrong and badly hurt us, that sense of gross injustice does not go away when the other person says, 'I'm sorry.' Because someone has to pay, there are only two options.

**1. The first option** is to make the wrong doer suffer for the damage they caused you. How do you do that? There are several ways:

- i. You can stop talking to them. You can ignore them in a meeting.
- ii. You can hurt them by calling them vicious names
- iii. You can spoil their reputation. You can slander them.
- iv. You can curse them. You can kill them. Kill their loved ones.
- v. Children lead terrible lives and blame their parents for neglecting them.
- vi. People lead terrible lives and blame God for abandoning them

If those wrongdoers suffer, you may feel satisfaction—like a payback for the suffering they caused you.

**But there are some serious consequences with this first option:**

- You may become more complicated and colder or become an angry person.
- You may wallow in self-pity and live a poor me life.
- You may develop attitudes against a complete set of people typical of the wrongdoer who hurt you. (e.g. if the wrongdoer were a rich/opposite sex/another race/person of authority — then you would have an attitude against rich folk/opposite sex/that race/ people of authority).
- You may hurt or blame others (parents, spouses, God). If unable and unwilling to take responsibility, you will be dysfunctional and manipulative).

**Besides all the above, you become an agent of spreading evil.**

- The wrongdoer and his friends and family often feel they ought to respond to your payback in kind.
- Cycles of reaction and retaliation can go on for generations.
- Complete sets of people retaliate — causing communal riots, racial hostility, etc.
- People did evil to you. Yes, but when you try to get payment through revenge, the evil does not disappear. Instead, it spreads, and it extends most tragically of all into you and your character.

In all cases, **the consequences of the first option are a life of defeat — defeated by anger, resentment and hatred; it will adversely affect your mental and physical health.** You have allowed the wrongdoer to affect you still.

**2. The second option. You forgive. You bear the cost yourself — but eventually, you get the freedom to live a resurrected life of victory.**

Forgiveness means refusing to make them pay for what they did — no revenge. And you pay the cost of the damage done to you. How?

Every time you refrain/restrain yourself from lashing out at someone when you want to do so with all your heart, you suffer pure agony. You not only sustained the original loss of happiness, reputation and opportunity, but now you suffer again by letting go of the opportunity to inflict pain on them. (in our example, you pay for the mobile phone twice). You absorb the payback, taking the cost entirely on yourself instead of taking it out of the other person. It hurts terribly. It is dying to your desire to take justice into your own hands.

And nobody likes death. Yes, but without death, there is no resurrection. Either live a defeated life of bitterness and anger with **option 1** or take option 2 of forgiveness—which is dying to your desire for revenge. But this option can free you to live a victorious, resurrected life. You don't have to envy others who appear to have excellent opportunities you did not have, a pleasant youth you never had, or a marriage you didn't have — all because of wrongdoers that came into your life. You don't have to envy all this because you can live a victorious and resurrected life.

Many people refuse to forgive and keep resentment in their hearts, so they reject the resurrected life. They live with hurt all their lives. And living like that shows in their character defects — and it affects their mental and physical health and their family.

**The way out of this defeated life into resurrection life:**

As a pastor, I have counselled many people about forgiveness, and here's what I found. Anger slowly subsides when they refuse to take revenge on the wrongdoer by refusing actual acts of revenge but also by refusing to entertain revenge, even in their thoughts. Because you are starving the fire of resentment and anger from any fuel, you're not allowing it to go on burning. So, your resentment level becomes lower and lower, and resurrection life grows more and more. There is life in forgiveness. We grant forgiveness at first

by an act of will, by choice, even though we don't feel like forgiving. But eventually, the force of revenge will die away gradually. Finally, you get freedom; you get resurrection life. Again, I repeat, forgiveness is an act of will, of choice, and as we will see later, God's grace is available for it. So, I say, **"Choose life"** (Deuteronomy 30:19) — it will bless you and your family.

*Deuteronomy 30:19 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now **choose life** so that you and your children may live.*

**Testimony of a young woman:** Many years ago, I was counselling a 20-year-old girl whose father was an army officer. She felt he was overly strict and uncaring, etc. She was hurt and angry, and her life wasn't going anywhere. I spoke to her at length and then heard the Holy Spirit prompt me to tell her two words — **"Choose life"**. She looked at me and said, "OK, pastor". At that moment, the Holy Spirit's power fell upon her, and she fell to the ground. The anger came out in loud moans, followed by gushing joyful tongues from her innermost being. She would have let her father defeat her forever if she didn't agree to choose life. By choosing to forgive her father, she had victory over injustice. She had life.

**3. Holding the wrongdoer accountable:** When I counsel forgiveness to those whom others have badly harmed, they often ask this question, 'Shouldn't we hold the wrongdoers accountable?' I respond, "Yes, but only if you truly forgive them".

There are many good reasons that we should want to confront wrongdoers.

- Wrongdoers have inflicted damage; as in the mobile phone example, it costs something to get a new one.
- We should confront wrongdoers — to wake them up to their actual character, so they can move towards repairing their relationships.
- We should confront wrongdoers to constrain them at least and protect others from being harmed by them in future.

**But the essential thing when confronting the wrongdoer is to be careful of your heart to see if any anger or vengeance is lingering there.** You may say, "I just want to hold them accountable", but your real motivation may be to see them hurt. Suppose you are not confronting them for their or society's sake but for your own sake to pay back. In that case, the chance of the wrongdoer ever coming to repentance is virtually nil. In such a case, you will overreach, seeking not justice but revenge, not their change but their pain. Your demands will be excessive, and your attitude will be abusive. They will rightly see the confrontation as intended to cause hurt. A cycle of retaliation will begin.

Only if you completely forgive the wrongdoer inside your heart will your confrontation be free from vengeance. Instead, you can relate with them with wisdom and grace. Only when you have lost the need to see the wrongdoer hurt will you have any chance of bringing about change, reconciliation and healing — in your and the wrongdoer's heart. Therefore, submit to the costly suffering of forgiveness, causing death to your pain, if you want to gain any resurrection.

**Forgiveness doesn't mean you can trust the wrongdoers and allow them to manipulate you continuously.** You don't have to trust the wrongdoer, even after completely forgiving him. Instead, it is the wrongdoer's responsibility to earn your trust. Therefore, drawing boundaries is necessary to awaken wrongdoers to respond to earning your trust. We draw boundaries for their sake.

**Our Testimony:** When my wife Melanie and I were new Christians, we zealously served a charismatic and anointed pastor whom God mightily used in ministry. But through a series of unfortunate misunderstandings, he hurt us deeply, and we were utterly devastated. Other Christians came to hear about it, and it was the talk of the town. Then, to our horror, we realised that the poison of vipers was on the tip of our tongues to lash out and spoil his reputation. But we also realised that this would not honour God. And by God's grace, we kept quiet to ourselves, blessing him, speaking well of him, and acknowledging

our immaturity when people asked us about the problem. It was like suffering twice when he hurt us, to begin with, and suffering again when we forgave and blessed him, even saying we were immature. It took several months for the fire of our resentment to extinguish. But the minister was godly. He acknowledged the path that we chose. When we eventually met him, he publicly honoured us. Above all, God publicly honoured us before other city church leaders.

#### 4. Gospel and Forgiveness of God

*Rom 5:8, 10 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...<sup>10</sup>For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

Why did Jesus have to die? Couldn't God forgive us?' It is what many ask. But now we realise that no one "just forgives", especially if the evil is grave. Forgiveness means bearing the cost instead of making the wrongdoer do it, so you can reach out in love to seek the wrongdoer's renewal and change. Everyone who forgives great evil, experiences agony and goes through death— but also experiences resurrection freedom. But it is what God did for us. God determined to forgive us rather than punish us for all the ways we have wronged Him and wronged one another, that He went to the cross in the person of Jesus Christ and died there. On the cross, we see God doing publicly and universally what every human being must do locally to forgive someone. **But God did it on an infinitely greater scale. We would have broken billions of His laws in our lives, and He paid for the damages Himself.**

Human forgiveness works this way because God created us in His image. That is why it should not surprise us if we sense that the only way to triumph over evil is through the suffering of forgiveness. **God's passion to defeat evil justly and love His people (whom He created in His image) is infinitely greater than ours.** So, He went to the cross Himself.

- God's passion for defeating evil **in a just manner** drove Him to the cross to pay the damages for our breaking His laws. At the foot of the cross, I see the litter of the immense number of His laws that I broke, and He paid for it all. And I am humbled to see it. I feel like Paul, who said in 1 Tim 1:15 *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners— of whom I am the worst.*
- God's passion for loving us meant He went **gladly** to the cross because He loves us. His love is the only one that matters in your life, and He loves you immensely. Jesus says, *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love (John 15:9).* That should affirm and secure us in His love.

Forgiveness is always a form of costly suffering. We saw human forgiveness and its costs, and it's the same with God's forgiveness but on a cosmic scale. However, God's forgiveness is the ultimate basis and resource for us. Understanding God's love in Jesus Christ, who gave His life on the cross, enables Christians to live a sacrificial life in the face of intense persecution. They are even able to forgive their persecutors.

Jesus' death, burial and resurrection were for our freedom:

*Romans 6:3-4 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

Jesus broke the power of sin in everyone's lives on the cross because He loved us, even though we didn't deserve His love.

When He rose again, He rose to freedom and victory **for everyone who believes.** As believers, we undergo **baptism to identify by faith** with His death, burial and resurrection. The sacrament of Baptism is similar to our marriage choice to live a life of covenant love with our spouse. We cannot live out these choices by our effort but only by the resurrection power of our risen Lord. But for this, we continually look to the **cross to humble and affirm us simultaneously. Humble us because we have grievously sinned. Affirm us because God**

**infinitely loves us, and** it motivates us to live the cross life by God's grace.

There is so much hurt even in the church because **the gospel hasn't penetrated our hearts**. And so, we don't see the resurrected life in the church as much as we should. But when it does, we will see Revival. Let it begin with you. Become an agent of Revival and let it spread throughout the world. It will happen because God promised in *Num 14:21 (KJV)*, *But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD*.