



How Satan Gains Access to Work in our Lives

Part 12: An Unforgiving Heart

In this issue we will examine how the lack of forgiveness provides a foothold for Satan in one's life. The grievousness of this sin must not be underestimated as it is integrally related to our respect for the very blood of Jesus, which represents His excruciating, but perfect, payment for every man's sin. Though all may not avail themselves of it, He offers it to all, even the vilest of sinners (Rom. 5:8). When we maintain hate and a desire for revenge in our hearts towards anyone for whom Christ died, we are not walking in God's spirit of grace (Heb. 12:15). How can we who have been forgiven a lifetime of sin through the precious blood of Jesus deny forgiveness to another whose particular sin just happens to affect our lives (Matt. 18:21-35)?

When we do this, not only do we show grave disrespect for Jesus' shed blood that paid for our own sins, but Scripture clearly states that we mar our relationship with God, stepping out of fellowship with Him and into the darkness, where we lose the guiding light of the Holy Spirit (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 3:5:6; Mat. 6:15; 1 John 2:9, 11). In this darkened state Satan is able to take advantage of us, activating our flesh and leading us into self-seeking acts of hostility, strife, and even murder. Within a local church this foothold gained through a lack of forgiveness can destroy the unity of the Spirit within the entire body (2 Cor. 2:10-11; Gal. 5:19-20; 1 John 3:15).

A lack of forgiveness also keeps us emotionally tied to the offender and the wound of his offense constantly open. The longer we hold hate and bitterness in our hearts, the more destructive these poisonous attitudes become, adversely affecting many aspects of our lives, including our health and relationships (Heb. 12:15).

God never intended that we serve as judges and avengers of those who wrong us. This is His role (Rom 12:19). When we step into it, we bring many negative effects on ourselves. When we relinquish this position to Him, we not only give our offenders over to a much higher judicial authority (Gen. 18:25; Col. 3:25; Heb. 10:31) but we are also released from the many ill effects of an unforgiving heart. This is God's way for us to experience emotional health in spite of being grievously wronged. What a gift! This is His loving intent behind all of His instructions to us to forgive (Mark 11:25; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). Forgiveness is always intended to work for our benefit!

While forgiveness relinquishes all projections of ill will towards our offenders, it does not necessarily mean reconciling or resuming the relationship as if the offense never occurred. God extends His forgiveness to the whole world (John 3:16), but only when man does his part in repenting from his sin and accepting God's forgiveness can he be reconciled with God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Reconciliation requires the proper attitudes and actions of both parties. Forgiveness, on the other hand, can be granted and its benefits achieved regardless of the attitude of the offender.

Forgiveness also does not necessarily preclude confronting the person concerning his wrong, but this must always be done with care and be free from any spirit of hate or revenge (Lev. 19:17-18; Gal. 6:1). Taking an individual before an ungodly court for our benefit alone is not in line with forgiveness. God would rather that we bear the wrong than do this (1 Cor. 6:1-8). When our offender is a fellow believer, God lays out a procedure through which we may progressively confront him: first privately, then before two or three witnesses, and then before the church if

necessary. If he still does not repent, we are instructed to treat him as an outsider, unable to partake of the fellowship and ordinances of the Church (Matt. 18:15-17). If and when genuine grief and repentance occurs, however, this discipline should be lifted and replaced with loving comfort (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

Walking in God's spirit of grace *always* requires us to be guided by love, even toward those who have wronged us. We are to do good to them and respond to their genuine needs, endeavoring to overcome their evil acts with our good deeds (Ex. 23:4; Luke 6:27, 35; Rom. 12:20-21). This brings favor from God (1 Peter 2:20).