

The Invisible Barrier

The title of this meditation is The Invisible Barrier. I want to begin by asking you to think about three questions.

- 1. In John 10:10 Jesus said that He had come so that we may have life and have it abundantly. Is it possible to be a Christian, to have trusted in Jesus as your Savior, and not be experiencing this abundant life that Jesus died to give us?**
- 2. Is it possible that some kind of invisible barrier could exist that surrounds us so that although we see others living lives overflowing with God's love, we find ourselves unable to break through into this life in grace?**
- 3. This is a delicate question. Is it possible that our heavenly Father sometimes withholds joy, celebration and forgiveness from His children?**

In Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus says "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

This verse states quite clearly that if we do not forgive others, we cut ourselves off from God's forgiveness.

In Luke 6:37-38 Jesus says "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

This verse instructs us not to judge or condemn, but to forgive. We are told that whatever we choose to give to others, forgiveness or judgment is what we will reap in our own lives. But not just to the degree we give it, but multiplied – pressed down, shaken together and running over. So if we choose to release forgiveness and mercy to others, we can expect that in our own lives. But if we judge them, holding on to bitterness and resentment, then that is what we can expect to receive as well.

So this invisible barrier that prevents many from living a fruitful, joyful Christian life is unforgiveness. While others are growing and maturing in God, some choose to live in this impenetrable bubble rather than forgive. There are people in this room this evening who find yourselves trapped in this bubble, living your Christian life without the joy and peace that is available to you. Some may stand in need of emotional or physical healing that is blocked due to unforgiveness in your heart.

The apostle Peter understood the challenge of forgiving others. In Matthew chapter 18 we read:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ “Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ “So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ “And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ “And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Let me share with you a few highlights:

- 1. Peter thought that extending forgiveness 7 times would be the maximum amount because 7 was the perfect number. Jesus, however, responds with $70 \times 7 = 490$ times. This isn't a legalistic answer. Rather, it is a dramatic reply to illustrate the necessity to continue to forgive no matter how often it is required.**
- 2. The king represents Christ. He issues compassion, release and forgiveness. The slave owed a debt he could have never repaid for he owed the equivalency of \$10 million dollars.**
- 3. The slave did not extend the same forgiveness he freely received. When he found a fellow slave who only owed him the equivalency of \$18.00 he demanded full and immediate payment.**
- 4. Jesus makes it very clear that our heavenly Father responds to unforgiveness by withholding forgiveness to us for our debts.**

So if the sinner repents, this verse clearly teaches that we are obligated to forgive him immediately upon request. But what about the situation where the sinner does not express any sorrow, let alone repentance?

The scripture addresses this as well. In Mark 11:25 we find:

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

The sinner is not even mentioned in this passage. We do not know if they are repentant, nor do we know if they have requested forgiveness. This passage clearly commands that we are to forgive anyone for any and all things they have done to us, whether they have ever asked us to forgive them, or have ever even acknowledged their sin.

We are called to follow the ultimate example of forgiveness that Jesus provided. As He hung on a cross, He looked out upon the unrepentant sinners who had crucified Him and said – “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Jesus simply forgave. As Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ, so must we.

Here are seven things that forgiveness is and is not:

- 1. It is not an action, but an attitude of the heart of God.**
- 2. It is not an occasion but is an established habit.**
- 3. Forgiveness is not natural to our flesh, but is supernatural and, therefore, natural to the Spirit of God that lives in us.**
- 4. It is a covenant promise – “By God’s grace I will not hold this against you any longer because as Christ has forgiven me, I forgive you.”**
- 5. It is not a “faith gift”. There is no such thing as a spiritual gift of forgiveness. We forgive out of obedience to God’s word and the conviction of His Spirit within is.**
- 6. It is not always something we want to do. If you don’t want to forgive someone, don’t pretend otherwise. Confess your heart condition and ask God to give you His desire to forgive them. He will, and then you must.**
- 7. It is not a feeling. If you wait until you feel like forgiving someone, you’ll probably never do it. We forgive out of our love for God and our desire to obey His word. Do it, and over time your feelings will follow your obedience.**

If I hold bitterness and resentment in my heart toward another, I am the one in bondage, not them. And when I forgive them, I am the one who is set free. Please hear this – your unforgiveness toward someone may be, in a sense, totally justified. The pain they have caused you is real. Why haven’t we forgiven them? Because we believe somewhere deep down in our hearts that they deserve our unforgiveness. And that may be true. But how much more has God, through Christ forgiven us when we deserved His unforgiveness? Choose to be merciful, Jesus said, as my Father in heaven is merciful.

In summary, I am suggesting that to enjoy the life God has planned for you and realize the potential you have to impact the world for His Kingdom, you must let go of any and all unforgiveness that exists in your heart.

Now stop thinking about someone you wish was here to hear this. God has you here. This is your weekend.

Chapel chas, will you please pass out the hearts.

The little slip of paper that you are being handed is called a forgiveness heart. Please keep this with you at all times. Do not write your name on it; instead, make a small mark that you would recognize on the front, in the event you lose it. Inside on the heart, I want you to write down the names of those people that you need to forgive. No one will see this but you. This is strictly between you and God. There are probably names already coming to mind for many of you.

Here are some possibilities:

- **your spouse or your ex-spouse**
- **your mother or father – your in-laws or your brothers or sisters**
- **your own children or maybe your step-children**
- **a friend, your neighbor, or maybe someone of another race**
- **your co-worker, supervisor, boss, manager or business partner**
- **a teacher, including Sunday school teachers**
- **a doctor, lawyer or some other professional**
- **your pastor (current or former), a deacon, an elder or your denomination**
- **God. You may be angry at God for something that happened that you blame Him for?**
- **or maybe your holding unforgiveness against someone not for what they did to you, but for something they did to someone you care deeply for.**

Perhaps you feel that the person that is the hardest to forgive is yourself. Two things we'd like for you to think about in regard to forgiving yourself. First, it is normal to feel the weight of guilt for sins in your past, even those you have

already repented for. Many, if not most, Christians have experienced it at some point. The second is to understand this: the concept of “self-forgiveness” for the believer is not scriptural. Think of it this way, when the bible speaks of the importance of extending forgiveness to others it is fulfilling the principle Jesus challenged the first disciples with when He told them “...freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Our forgiveness comes from God freely by His grace, then we are to extend this forgiveness to others. 1 John 1:9 says “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” There is nothing we need to do or can do to earn this forgiveness. We just have to admit our sin to God and we are forgiven. If you feel that you need to forgive yourself this simply means that you have not fully understood and embraced the grace and forgiveness that was yours the moment you confessed your sin to Father God. Our hearts may change but God never changes. That is why 1 John 3:20 says “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.” If you have confessed your sin to God on the authority of His word you are forgiven and you are free. Allow the truth of this to settle over you this evening. Then you will be able to extend grace to those you need to forgive.

We call unforgiveness an invisible barrier because often we do not recognize the power it has over our lives. It prevents us from giving and receiving love as God intends. It hampers our ability to enter into meaningful personal relationships because we always have our guard up, waiting to be hurt again. The truth is that people aren't perfect and they will hurt and disappoint us at times. But if we are able to understand the truth that we are completely and perfectly loved by our heavenly Father, and we find our purpose and identity as His child, then the hurts and disappointments that others have caused us can be overcome and we can walk in forgiveness. Grace works. Freely you have received, now freely give. Please keep these hearts with you through the day tomorrow and begin now to ask the Holy Spirit to prompt you with the names of those you need to forgive.