

Anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other.
2 Corinthians 5:17-18 MSG

I. OFFENSES

- Offense—to put a stumbling block or impediment in the way upon which another may trip and fall; to entice to sin; to be displeased or indignant; to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust; to cause one to judge unfavorably or unjustly of another (Strong's)
- Pr 17:9 NIV-- Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends
- "Regular Offenders" are the people in your life whose differences, actions and attitudes are often irritating and trip you up.
- Make a list of anyone the HS brings to mind when you pray: "*Please show me those people with whom I am offended now or on a regular basis.*"

II. SPIRIT OF SEPARATION (SOS)—giving ground to Satan by shutting God out of certain areas of our lives; building walls that bar access to parts of us

- Prov 18:1 NAS—He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom
- Characteristics of SOS:
 - Pushing God or another person away from you
 - Putting conditions on how or where you'll connect with the other person
 - Defending your viewpoint, way, agenda, attitude
 - Difficulty seeing the other person's viewpoint
 - Unwilling to "own" any part of the problem
 - Refusing to deal in honest, healthy, or mature ways
 - Missing the opportunity for personal growth in holiness
- Mt 12:25—Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.
- Prayerfully consider your "Regular Offenders" list. Ask the Lord to show you which of these have progressed so that there's now a Spirit of Separation in the relationship. Record anyone He brings to mind (including those not on your previous list):

III. FORGIVENESS

- Col 3:13 MSG—Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you.
- Forgiveness, defined—to cancel a debt in order to provide opportunity for repentance and restoration of the broken relationship (Dan Allender)

- Unforgiveness, defined—not disposed to forgive or show mercy; unrelenting; not allowing for mistakes, carelessness, or weakness
- Jesus paid the ultimate price so that we could be forgiven, redeemed and in right relationship with Him. In like manner, He asks us to extend forgiveness to others: Eph 4:31-32--Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.
- We often fail to notice offense, separation and unforgiveness so we need to ask the Lord to show us, "*Who do I need to forgive?*" List anyone He brings to mind below:

IV. FORGIVENESS TRUTHS

- Before calculating the cost and choosing to forgive, it may help you to see some common misconceptions about the true nature of forgiveness (and what it is NOT):
- a) Forgiveness ≠ Forgetting
- It is an amazing mystery that God, in His omniscience, chooses to FORGET our sins! However, He is not asking us to do that: Jer 31:34 GNT— I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. I, the Lord, have spoken.
 - It is not in our best interest to completely forget the pain of our past. Here's why:
 - We are not defined by our past, but it is part of who we are.
 - Forgetting our past would eliminate very important chapters of the story God is writing with our lives.
 - Erasure of our past = seeking to relate with the Ideal vs. Real Self
 - Denial of our history renders us blind to the baggage yet to be addressed
 - We have the benefit of God redeeming our memories—they are transformed and seen in the light of love and eternity every time we revisit it with God. (Secular science supports this with evidence of the neuroplasticity of the brain and memory.)
- b) Forgiveness ≠ The End of Pain
- Forgiveness is a process. Often the initial act of forgiveness does bring with it feelings of peace and freedom. Nonetheless, a spiritual transaction has occurred.
 - We don't want to deny or shut down any subsequent painful emotions because:
 - Though we forgive the sinner, we are to continue to righteously hate the sin: Heb 1:9 NIV-- You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.
 - God may have more healing for you emotionally: Ps 32:5 AMP— I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord [continually unfolding the past till all is told]—then You [instantly] forgave me the guilt *and* iniquity of my sin. *Selah* [pause, and calmly think of that]
- c) Forgiveness ≠ No Desire for Vengeance
- Rom 12:19 NLT—Never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord.
 - We look forward to the day when God's righteousness and glory overcome the evil we've endured. Take comfort in the fact that God will make all things right:

- Ps 9:4 NIV-- For you have upheld my right and my cause, sitting enthroned as the righteous judge.
- Ps 10:14-- You, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.
- Ps 96:13-- Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.
- Ps 140:12 NIV-- I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy.

d) Forgiveness ≠ Peace at Any Price

- We extend forgiveness by calculating the cost of the debt done to us and by faith we choose to let it go. It is important to understand what that does not mean:
 - What happened was okay
 - We are supposed to sugar-coat, denying the full extent of the harm
 - The other person is not accountable for their behavior
 - We are required to return to unhealthy ways of relating as if nothing happened
 - "Turn the other cheek" = subject ourselves to more evil
- Prov 25:21-22 TV-- If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink, for your *kind treatment will be like* heaping hot coals on his head, *it may cause a change in heart*, and the Eternal will repay you.
- Insights:

V. FORGIVENESS BY FAITH

- For now, choose one (maybe 2) relationships where you are ready to forgive by faith.
- Use these suggested steps to guide your prayer to forgive:
 - a) Lord, thank you for forgiving me completely and unconditionally.
 - b) In obedience to Your command to forgive others as You have forgiven me, I choose to forgive [name of person] for [list their specific words, attitudes, or actions that have been hurtful]:

 - c) As I calculate what this person has cost me [name the costs and long term effects], I want to release them from anything I think they owe me:

 - d) Please forgive me for harboring [confess specific judgments, thoughts, emotions or other sinful responses] toward this person:

 - e) I choose to release him/her into Your hand. By faith, I receive the cleansing, healing and freedom that You have promised to those who forgive.
 - f) Fill me now, I pray, with your love and mercy as I move forward in this relationship.
 - g) Use the back of this page to process further or to repeat the forgiveness steps.

