

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. Stumbling Blocks

- 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)
- God asks us to love those who offend us: Pr 10:12 AMP— Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers *and* overwhelms all transgressions [forgiving and overlooking another's faults].

II. Forgiveness

- 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
- We are called to forgive others because we've been forgiven: 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.

III. Misunderstandings About Forgiveness

a. Forgiveness ≠ Forgetting

- It is an amazing mystery that God, in His omniscience, chooses to *forget* our sins! 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 the past would eliminate important chapters of the story God is writing in us.
 - 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
 - God is able to redeem our memories—they are transformed and seen in the light of love and eternity every time we revisit them 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 a sense of peace and freedom because 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

- We all long for accountability and restitution for the wrongs we suffer: 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.
- There will come a 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 10:14 NIV-- But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you
 - Ps 96:13-- 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.

d. Forgiveness ≠ Peace at Any Price

- Forgiveness is costly. We must calculate the cost to us and then chose in faith to let it go.
- However, when we do this we are not saying that:
 - 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
- God asks us to show mercy and forgiveness to anyone who has harmed us so that we will overcome the offense: Rom 12:21—Over come evil with good!

IV. Reconciliation

- Reconciliation, defined:
 - Vertical--the restoration of the favor of God to sinners that repent and put their trust in the expiatory death of Christ (Strong’s)
 - Horizontal--adjustment of a difference, restoration to favor (Strong’s); when former enemies agree to an amicable truce (dictionary.com)
- God pursued us and desired relationship with us. He forgave our sins and invited us to restored relationship with Himself and others: 2 Cor 5:15-19 The Voice-- He died for us so that we will all live, not for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose from the dead. *Because of all that God has done, we now have a new perspective. We used to show regard for people based on worldly standards and interests. No longer. We used to think of (Jesus) the same way. No longer. Therefore, if anyone is united with (Christ), that person is a new creation. The old life is gone—and see—a new life has begun! All of this is a gift from our Creator God, who has pursued us and brought us into a restored and healthy relationship with Him through (Christ). And He has given us the same mission, the ministry of reconciliation, to bring others back to Him. It is central to our good news that God was Christ making things right between Himself and the world. This means He does not hold their sins against them. But it also means He charges us to proclaim the message that heals and restores our broken relationships with God and each other.*
- God extends kindness to reconcile and transform us: Rom 2:4 MSG-- God is kind, but he’s not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change.
- It takes the Lord’s wisdom to hate the sin and love the sinner so that transformation can come: Rom 12:9-- Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.
- Reconciliation leads us to new and different places in relationship: Lk 5:37-39--No one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. ³⁹ And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better.’”