

# The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation

## Lesson 15. To Be Born Again You Must Forgive Others (De-Hellenizing Mental Muck)

*Please prayerfully take your time going through each section of this lesson and consider both the information and the questions. Your heartfelt responsiveness and determination matter to our Lord, so don't try to complete an entire lesson at once. Also, you'll reap greater benefit if you go through each lesson with others close to you.*

### Section 1

#### To Be Forgiven You Must Forgive!

*“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

***But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”***  
(Matthew 6:14,15).

Our Lord Jesus couldn't have said it more plainly: To be forgiven by your Father, you must forgive! He allows *no exceptions* for why you shouldn't forgive *anyone*, no matter who they are or what they've done to you. Your *repentance* and your *readiness to forgive others* are inseparable:

That grief and sorrow you experience when the Holy Spirit first convicts you that you've sinned against a holy God and His righteous commands produce a *deep heart gratefulness* for the sacrifice Jesus endured on the cross out of *love for you*. He did for you what you couldn't do for yourself: He sacrificed Himself to pay the debt for your sins that you could never pay (1John 2:2). Your ardent appreciation for what Jesus suffered so that you could be accepted by our Father is what compels *you* to genuinely forgive other people from your heart.

If your repentance was shallow, not fully realizing the *depth of your sinfulness* and your *absolute need* to be forgiven by our Father, you'll find it that much harder to forgive others. But just know that our Father will not allow an unforgiving person to become His child. Why not?

Because in light of the *incomparable sacrifice of His own Son on your behalf* He can't forgive you in your unforgiving state (see Matthew 18:21-35). From the Biblical understanding of the earliest followers of Jesus, unforgiveness is **presumptuous**.

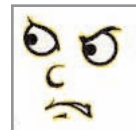
What an unthinkable blind and arrogant view someone has of him/herself who would *refuse* to forgive another person! Being *too proud to forgive* presumes that our Father is obligated to forgive you. You're in dangerous territory here, because you've made yourself the target of His opposition: *“God opposes the proud [the unforgiving] but gives grace to the humble [the forgiving]”* (James 4:6). If Father is opposing you because you won't forgive, then you're *not His child*.

#### Symptoms of Unforgiveness

Presumption	<b><i>If you've borne unforgiveness for a long time, the symptoms became entwined like tangled fishing line in your soul. Having one symptom then leads to developing another.</i></b>
Pouting	
Resentment	
Bitterness	
Begrudging	
Vengeful	
Chronic Grumbling	
Anger	
Hatred	

There's no place in Christ for the hate that underlies unforgiveness:

*“We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: **Whoever loves God must also love his brother**”* (1John 4:19-21).



**An Important Point To Remember:**

**Unforgiveness is THE most common reason that keeps people, even those who consider themselves “Christian,” from becoming the Father’s child.**

An unforgiving person is like a bride on the day of her wedding who tells her groom, “Honey, I’m a prostitute and I’m going to continue to give myself to any man who wants me. Will you still marry me?” The groom’s revulsion is the same as our heavenly Father’s when it comes to accepting someone who *refuses to forgive*.

Yet unforgiveness remains entrenched throughout Christendom because the need to repent has been downplayed or eliminated. For many years we conducted seminars in congregations throughout the U.S. and Canada. As we shared our Father’s stipulations for being born again, roughly 95% of the participants acknowledged they had unforgiveness toward someone. And these same folk then realized there was *no indication* in their own lives that the Holy Spirit had actually taken up His dwelling in them.

During a lunch break at a seminar in Oklahoma the worship leader (call him Tom) asked to talk with me (Mike). Tom confessed that since he began to lead in worship his marriage had been filled with tension. I suggested that God might be using the tension in his marriage to warn him about something not right in his life. I then cited 1Peter 3:12, “*For the eyes of the Lord are on the **righteous** and His ears are **attentive to their prayer**, but the face of the Lord is against those who **continue sinning**.*”

I asked Tom, “If the Lord won’t accept the *prayers* of the unrepentant, does He accept *their worship*?” Tom was convicted that He wouldn’t accept either, and he asked for my counsel. The next morning Tom began the Sunday service with a call to

repentance instead of an opening song. “When you’ve repented of your sins and you’re clean with God, stand up and look up at Him with a smile. When everyone is standing, then I know we can worship Him.” Thirty minutes later, after many tears of repentance were shed, Tom and the whole gathered body began to worship with clean heart and hands.

This event and others like it have happened in other congregations we’ve been part of. Again, *repentance* and *readiness to forgive others* go hand-in-hand.

**If you could survey a faith community that’s apathetic toward repentance, you’d find it filled with unforgiving people.**

- Stop and reflect for a moment. Are there any people who come to mind who inspire negative emotions in you? Write their names down. Now humble yourself before the Spirit of Christ and forgive them from your heart. Don’t depend on *feelings* to forgive; rather, forgive because *our Lord commands it*. Only His Spirit can heal your wounds, and when you forgive out of obedience, then He can heal you.
- Is your own faith community strong on insisting on repentance as a condition for prayer and worship? Has there ever been a call for congregational repentance?



## Unforgiveness Is Proudful Rebellion Against Your Heavenly Father

*“But I tell you that anyone who nurses anger against his brother **will be subject to judgment**; that whoever calls his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing!’ will be brought before the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be **in danger of the fire of hell!**” (Matthew 5:22).*

Clinging to unforgiveness not only leads you toward hell; the bitterness which permeates your unforgiveness *defiles your other relationships*. Since Satan knows that an unforgiving person can’t

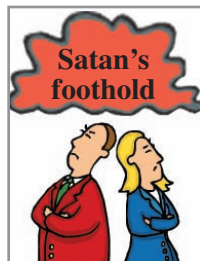
**Hurt feelings partnered with unforgiveness are a deadly pit.**



be forgiven by the Father, his number one scheme is this: **Make sure people are hurt and offended by others**. You might say that an unforgiving person is a tool of the devil, like a *relational hacksaw*. Paul certainly understood the danger of ongoing anger when he warned people to deal with their negative feelings quickly:

*“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are **still angry**, and **do not give the devil a foothold**” (Ephesians 4:26, 27).*

If you’re unforgiving, you’re going to be used by Satan because you’ve *given him a foothold* in your soul from which to operate. You’ve established a barricade that prevents you from both experiencing the love of Jesus and extending that love to others. As a result your unforgiveness contaminates your other relationships and stirs up trouble among them.



*“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Hebrews 12:15).*

Many years ago a local 4-H’er offered us his ewe for our farm/retreat center. She was a good-looking sheep and we gratefully added her to our flock. Not too long after, though, we noticed she was limping. Close inspection revealed the shepherd’s bane: foot rot. A highly contagious affliction, foot rot destroys the hoof tissue, crippling the sheep and hindering her ability to graze. To our dismay she’d infected our entire flock. How many hours we spent dipping resistant hooves into copper sulfate and cutting away rotted tissue!

The lesson we learned has spiritual implications: No matter how wonderful (or spiritual) a person looks on the outside, if the infection of unforgiveness and bitterness are present you can be sure that others will be contaminated by it. The root of unforgiveness and bitterness will spread to others like a pernicious weed—or unchecked foot rot!

The *“grace of God”* is always fully sufficient for every need in our lives *if* we yield to His will and forgive as He calls us to. Rejecting His grace in the area of forgiving others violates His command to *be holy* (set apart for His use — see Hebrews 12:14) and is proof that *you don’t appreciate* the preciousness of Jesus’ shed blood on your behalf. You’re throwing our Father’s grace back in His face, and He will do whatever’s necessary for you to humble yourself and forgive whomever you need to:

*“In anger his master turned him over to the jailers **to be tortured**, until he should pay back all he owed. **This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart**” (Matthew 18:34,35).*

### Symptoms of Unforgiveness Can Be Progressive

- ▼ **Presumption:** prideful view of yourself
- ▼ **Pouting:** visible sulking behavior
- ▼ **Resentment:** bad feelings and ill will toward someone
- ▼ **Bitterness:** bearing a relentless hostile attitude
- ▼ **Begrudging:** ongoing seething malice
- ▼ **Vengeful:** desire to retaliate
- ▼ **Chronic Grumbling:** nonstop murmuring, complaining
- ▼ **Anger:** uncontrollable temper or rage
- ▼ **Hatred:** intense animosity, hoping for harm to occur

- Satan is the force behind unforgiveness, using it to gain a secure position in Christian lives. Does he have foothold in you? Do others who know you well recognize that your unforgiveness is working against God in your life?
- Medical research has found that some types of cancer are related to bitterness. And perhaps other maladies are used or allowed by our Father as “torturers” until a person forgives. Are you or someone close to you being tormented because of unforgiveness?

## Section 2

### Do You Pout When You’re Corrected?

Because of the **presumptuous** attitude created by the **power of self-will**, people young and old don’t like to be corrected. The first reaction of most to correction is **pouting**, you know, that hangdog, pursed lips look. Many in Christendom who’ve been corrected by someone in the past are often trapped by the hurt feelings they continue to experi-

#### Pouting: Displaying the Power of Self-will



ence when they remember the incident and person who corrected them. This is true even when the correction was given lovingly and the one who was corrected benefitted from it. Their *pride* was hurt.

If your pouting was uncorrected and it’s *still* part of your inner attitude years afterward, then you have **resentment** in your heart. And the ongoing



torment of resentment always ripens into **bitterness**.

A bitter person who defiles others doesn’t always show their hostility on the surface. Most bitter people seethe silently with a **begrudging** attitude. You can discern their seething malice because they lack the Christ-like emotional support others need. And be aware too that begrudgers are the least likely to initiate physical affection toward others.



**Bitter**

**Begrudging**



You’ll know that your uncorrected pouting has turned to resentment, bitterness, and begrudging when you find yourself unable to recall *any* blessing from or appreciation for the person who confronted or corrected you. All you recount when you share the incident with others is your emotional pain from that moment. In our Father’s sight, your ill feelings show you’re still holding a grudge—an obstacle to the love He calls you to. By keeping a record in your mind of a perceived wrong, your words are clanging noise, and anything you do as a “Christian” gains you nothing in His sight (1Corinthians 13:1-3,5).

When your mind seethes with a grudge, you’re unable to respond to the Spirit because you can’t hear Him over the resentment! And that means you can’t respond to Jesus as LORD of what

you say and do and feel. Instead, your **power of self-will** is in charge, keeping you from extending Christ-like love and forgiveness.

- Were you in the past, and are you now, given to pouting when someone corrects you?
- Inside yourself are you fearful of being corrected? Do you respond with a pout?
- It's difficult for someone who's trapped by the hidden, seething pit of begrudging others to perceive it. Ask those who know you well if they see it in you so you can finally forgive.

### Are You Vengeful?

*“Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:17,18).*

Our Lord knits together a defined interpersonal responsibility in the above passage which adds up to *loving others as yourself*. A *rebuke* involves reproofing a person, telling them an area in which they were at fault. If this is done sincerely and for the neighbor's benefit, then the words come from a clean heart motive with no hate intended. But a timely word of rebuke which is left unsaid might well encourage him to continue in sin, and bring the consequences of his sin on you as well.

A man was to neither take vengeance nor bear a grudge against his neighbor. Rather he was to literally *watch out for his neighbor* and never bear malice in his heart toward anyone. Thus God's relational injunction was to *love others as yourself*—in other words, to take ownership of that relationship and be your brother's keeper (Genesis 4:9).

*“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).*



Revenge flows out of a begrudging attitude in which you want to hurt someone because they *hurt you*. You want them to experience the depth of pain you've gone through either directly at their hands or because of something they did that resulted in you being hurt. Many of our Father's commands in both Testaments have a bearing on how He wants us to treat each other. But if you've been hurt and have refused to forgive from your heart, you won't understand our Father's sovereignty in the matter—and that will leave you susceptible to taking vengeance.

Most Christians would never consider themselves vengeful. But all too often they enact their vengeance through gossip and slander.

**GOSSIP:** Sharing detrimental information about someone with people who aren't part of the problem or the solution.



**SLANDER:** Telling only part of the truth with the intent to hurt someone or make yourself look like the victim. (For further discussion of this, see our July 2000 Newsletter: *Lashon Hara—BadMouthing*)

It's with their *mouth* that most Christians take vengeance on those they refuse to forgive. Is it any wonder we're warned to be alert to what we say?

*“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).*

*“The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (James 3:6).*



Angry

All too many in Christendom use their tongues to gossip and slander, and ultimately become **angry** and/or **chronic grumblers**. Their words, actions and attitudes further defile relationships, and it often takes loving courage for others to be around them.



Chronic grumbler

- > To hold unforgiveness is to *place yourself on par* with your heavenly Father.
- > Refusal to forgive *discredits our Father's sovereignty* over the events in your life and the people who hurt you.
- > Unforgiveness *creates spiritual blindness* that evidences your distrust in Jesus as Lord.
- > Holding on to unforgiveness *keeps you from receiving our Father's Covenant* of forgiveness in His Son's blood.

**An unforgiving person is an unloving person.  
An unloving person is an unforgiving person.  
For these, the narrow gate is closed!**



- Are you currently holding a grudge? If so, against whom? What did that person do to prompt your ill feelings? What do you need to do to free yourself from that prison?

- Do you habitually gossip or slander against any particular person or people? Ask those who know you well for their input.
- Are you an angry person and/or a chronic grumbler? Again, ask those who know you well for their input.

**Unforgiveness: A Life of Sinful Omission**

*“Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins” (James 4:17).*

When you've lived a long time without forgiving someone, it's a strong indicator that you haven't looked at the sins you've committed against our Father by what you didn't do for other people. The most common omission in Christendom is the failure to provide the *agape* love and affectionate support others around you need. Many display more affection for their pets than they do for the people who should experience the love of Jesus through them.

Because of unforgiveness you resist doing the good you should do as a follower of Jesus. You withhold affectionate love for others by what you don't do on their behalf. You're imprisoned by your past and current *sins of omission*, all of which you need to identify and repent of. It's then that Jesus replaces your unforgiveness with the light of His love, even the love to confront others as He would because you don't have a log in your own eye anymore.

**Section 3**

**First Forgive, Then Get Healed**

Forgiveness begins when you realize how truly Sovereign our Father is over everything that happens to you. He has purposes for your emotional wounding that you'll never understand *if* you hold on to unforgiveness. It's *after* you forgive from your heart that He'll show you why certain events happened and His purpose in using them to bring you to His Son, Jesus, in a covenant relationship of love, and/or to further develop His character in you.

**Our Father knows that if you're obedient to forgive from your heart, the indwelling Spirit can heal your emotions. The memory isn't erased, but the *sting* of the memory is. Then when you recount the event to others, you'll have the grace of your Father's understanding of it that encourages them about His love and faithfulness.**

If anyone had just cause to repay evil for evil, our Lord Jesus did. Yet His heart overflowed with such love and awareness of His Father's will that He could readily forgive His torturers even unto death: "*Father, forgive them*" (Luke 23:34).

Nothing less is required of all who belong to Him: "*Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law*" (Romans 13:10). That kind of love is *supernatural*; it has to come from the power and the healing that the Spirit of our Lord does inside your soul.

Early followers of Jesus in Rome were especially susceptible to persecution. It would have been all too easy for them to respond to mistreatment with thoughts and deeds of vengeance. Yet Paul knew that the name of His beloved Lord would be brought down if they repaid evil for evil. Instead he recalled Jesus' words to love and bless their persecutors:

*"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"* (Matthew 5:44)



*"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody"* (Romans 12:14,17).

For the goal set before you, consider the glorious work of His Spirit in you and through you which our Lord Jesus promises you *if* you become born again by embracing his Father's stipulations for becoming His child:

*"Whoever puts his trust in Me, as the Scripture said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who trusted in Him were later to receive"*  
(John 7:38,39).

Lesson 14 on trust affirms that our Lord baptizes the born again with the Holy Spirit. That person becomes a vessel through whom "*streams of living water*" flow onto others. But out of an unforgiving person "*streams of bitter water*" emerge, misrepresenting our Lord to the world. So your decision to forgive others initially opens the way for the Spirit to take up His residence in you. Then it is *He* Who heals your heart and emotions since you can *never heal yourself*.

Only by clearly understanding how mandatory forgiveness is could martyrs throughout history have responded with grace toward their persecutors. Those who suffer for their trust in Jesus *have already forgiven* their tormentors. It all begins with the loving words of Jesus, repeated by Stephen, "*Father, forgive them.*"

- Concerning your past emotional hurts, how confident are you about your Father's sovereignty? None? A little? A great deal? Total?
- Would those who know you well describe your Christian life as flowing with "*streams of living water,*" revealing the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in you?
- How often have you sincerely prayed for those who've hurt your feelings? Will you?

### **Turn Your Forgiveness Into Blessing**

*"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity"*  
(Colossians 3:13,14).

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, **forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you**” (Ephesians 4:32).

“Above all, love each other deeply, because **love covers over a multitude of sins**” (1Peter 4:8).

If you want to quit living with unforgiveness, here are some steps to take.


1. STOP grumbling to others about your hurt feelings. Your one-sided railing involves them in the sins of slander and gossip, making you a tool of Satan and defiling your listeners. It’s time for you to trust our Lord’s command and forgive from your heart. Your action is one of obedience, not a feelings response.

2. We’re stressing forgiving others *from your heart*. That doesn’t mean you should go to someone who offended you and bluntly proclaim, “I forgive you!” That’s **presumption!** That person may not even be aware that he or she has done anything wrong that requires your forgiveness. Someday he or she may ask for forgiveness, and you can respond at that time that you have *already forgiven* him/her. But even if your offender never asks, by grace *you* have been forgiven, and by grace your Lord is calling *you* to forgive too.

3. After you have forgiven an offender, use each time that person comes to mind as a reminder to *pray God’s blessing* on him or her. We call this a “prayer target” and it keeps Satan from using past memories to incite resentment, bitterness, and begrudging all over again.

You’ll see in the diagram below that forgiving another person only gets you out of the *negative territory of unforgiveness* and back to 0. But if you stay at 0 you will always be susceptible to further unforgiveness and its agitating symptoms, usually directed toward the original person who offended you or toward someone who reminds you of him or her.


4. You need to be single-minded and purpose to get as far as possible into the *positive territory of blessing* on the diagram. 100 is great! You do this by praying for your Father to bless that person in any way which will draw him or her closer to encountering Jesus as their Lord and living for Him! Pray that He would lead that person to repentance *through His kindness* (Romans 2:4), not through His judgment. As the one who hurt you comes to mind, your Father wants you to bless him or her. If you do, then the Spirit of your Lord within you will heal your heart (see Exodus 23:4,5; Romans 12:20).



## Turning Unforgiveness to Blessing

### Comparison of the Hebraic and Nicolaitan Approaches

[From Lesson 31 of *Discussing How to Restore the Early Church*]



**Hebraic:** The Bible mandates that you forgive from your heart *without exception*. To belong to Jesus *is* to forgive. Forgiveness gets you out of *negative* territory on the chart to ‘0’. But the emotional healing accomplished by Jesus occurs as you enter *positive* territory through prayer for and good deeds toward the one who has hurt you. The further a forgiving person goes into positive territory, the less likely he or she will succumb to unforgiveness.

Unforgiveness					Forgiveness					Blessing										
-100	-90	-80	-70	-60	-50	-40	-30	-20	-10	0	+10	+20	+30	+40	+50	+60	+70	+80	+90	+100
seething bitterness, hatred, begrudging, resentment										prayer for, compassion, acts of love and kindness										

**Nicolaitanism:** Forgiveness is optional, and bitterness is seldom confronted. Past circumstances such as “*abuse*” and “*dysfunctional family*” are cited as grounds for not forgiving. The unforgiving arrogantly believe their offender has to ask forgiveness first. Few even get back to ‘0’. Those who do reach 0 often return to negative territory: unforgiveness.



***“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift”***  
 (Matthew 5:23,24).

Now that you know how to get into “positive territory” in your soul, we want to end this lesson with one more personal responsibility for you: to ask forgiveness from others *you* have offended.

This is so important to your spiritual well-being! It’s all too easy for your sin nature to rile up and tempt you to blame the person you offended or make excuses for yourself. But look where that got the first two humans. Adam could have asked God for forgiveness for his sin but he blamed Eve. Eve could have asked forgiveness but she blamed the serpent. Because they refused to ask forgiveness, they found themselves cursed by God and evicted from the Garden of Eden.



Our Father hasn’t changed His standards. If you know that a particular person hasn’t forgiven you, you are commanded by our Lord to ask their forgiveness. You’ll find that asking forgiveness is much easier if you have a repentant attitude and already willingly forgive others yourself.

It’s important that you ask their forgiveness in person if possible. If that’s impossible, then communicate with them by phone. A letter or especially an e-mail lacks the potential for the emotional healing they may need, so do this only as a last resort. And don’t text them a quickie just to get the task done. They’ll see your insincerity right away!

- Pray right now for the Holy Spirit to reveal to you anyone you’ve offended. Is He bringing any specific people to mind? Write their names down.
- Then take action to make contact. **Don’t presume** they should forgive you. Always take the humble attitude of the prodigal son, whose heart and words recognized that *“I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am unworthy...”* (Luke 15:18,19). Don’t say “I apologize” or “I’m sorry”; both phrases are presumptuous and superficial, because the person you’ve offended is sorry that you hurt them! It’s important that you start with something like, “Would you please forgive me for...” And be sure to ask those who care about you to pray and hold you accountable to follow through. Even if the person you hurt doesn’t choose to forgive you, you have obeyed your Lord’s command and opened a relational door which he or she may later decide to walk through.
- And please, don’t participate in communion until you’ve done this! (See 1Corinthians 11:27-32.)

