

“Mending Fences ~ No Loitering” [3.2.08]

Video ~ Montana Snowmobiling
Nothing stings like stupidity

Today I’m living proof that, sometimes, pain can be avoided; that’s what we are going to talk about today.

Let’s pray [Father, give us fresh eyes & ears to see & hear your word differently]

Charles Spurgeon, a well known preacher from the past...

- Once received a letter from a hostile parishioner
 - There was a return address on the envelope, BUT...
 - When he open it, all there was inside the letter was one single word: “FOOL.”
 - Spurgeon wrote back to this person: “I’ve often got a letter where the person writes a message & forgets to sign their name. This is the 1st time they’ve signed their name & forgot the message.”
- Pastoral advice: the next time you find yourself in a conflict with someone; handle it in a way that is [civil & respectful]!
- Book of Proverbs instructs...
 - “A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.” [15: 1]
 - “Avoiding a fight is a mark of honor; only fools insist on quarreling.” [20: 3]
 - “Don’t befriend angry people or associate w/hot tempered people, or you will learn to be like them & endanger your soul.” [22: 24 – 25]

Last couple of weeks we’ve talked about the dangers of falling into the trap of offense.

We’ve learned if you are living & breathing; it’s impossible to avoid falling into the trap of offense!

But whether you stay attached inside the trap of offense is purely optional!

[Insert] Truck driver & motorcycle gang ☺

No matter how hard you try ~ even the best of people will occasionally find themselves deadlocked in the trap of offense!

The Bible indicates that there are @ least 2 distinct paths you can take after you have suffered a painful offense.

1st path is culturally conditioned & the 2nd path is biblically conditioned!

- I. 1st path is culturally conditioned
 - A. It’s the way of unforgiveness & revenge = it comes most naturally!
 - B. You will recognize this natural tendency when...
 - a loved one dishonors the family & deeply disappoints you; You will recognize it when...
 - a team mate cuts you in the back; You will recognize it when...

- someone tries to deliberately hurt your reputation; You will recognize it when...
- a competitor tries to undermine your business;

Our natural tendency is normally to fight back ~ to preserve our dignity; to inflict equal if not more pain to our perpetrators.

In the end after the conflict is left unresolved; you are left empty & hurting on the inside ~ no hope of healing in sight.

Let's see what Jesus has to say about our natural tendencies that are strongly culturally conditioned:

C. (R) Matthew 6: 12, 14 – 15 or p. 737 in pew Bible

Don't miss this simple bible principle that is easily overlooked; you don't give ~ you don't get!

Jesus explains, the way we forgive - - release - - and restore another person is the way we in turn will be forgiven.

You don't give forgiveness ~ You don't get forgiveness ☹

D. (R) Matthew 18: 23 – 27

- A closer look @ this parable reveals; that this parable applies to being offended.
 - When an offense occurs = a debt is owed!
 - You've heard it said, "He'll pay for this!"
According to this parable, forgiveness is like the cancellation of a debt!
- [Bottom-line] Jesus is saying ~ whatever else is involved in being a Christian & there is a great deal involved; forgiveness must be a part of what it means to live as an AUTHENTIC Christ-follower!

Bible says; You don't give ~ You don't get! Forgiveness is not optional!

Here's what God expects from us in the area of forgiveness:

II. God's expectations = FORGIVENESS

A. Forgiving starts with a look in the mirror!

- (R) Colossians 3: 13 or p. 904 in pew Bible
 - Anyone who has difficulty forgiving has forgotten the great debt for which they were forgiven. Realizing that Jesus delivered you from eternal death & torment ~ you will be more apt to release others unconditionally.

B. Forgiving is never easy!

- Listen & reflect on Jesus = (R) Luke 23: 33 – 34

C. Forgiving doesn't mean...

- Pretending the offense never happened.
- Blinding trusting again
- Removing all consequences

Proverbs 14: 15 says,

“Only simpletons believe everything they're told! The prudent carefully consider their steps. The wise are cautious & avoid danger.”

D. Forgiving simply means...

- Refusing to seek revenge ~ (learned this principle from Jesus!)
 - (R) I Peter 2: 21 – 25 or p. 935 in pew Bible

E. Revenge happens...

- When we refuse to forgive another person...
 - We set ourselves up as judges - - refusing to forgive until the debt in our mind is paid in full - - we are the only ones who can determine the acceptable compensation.
- Position was acceptable under the O.T. covenant...
 - If you trespassed against me ~ I had legal rights to bring the same back on you. Permission was granted to collect debts, repaying evil for evil!
 - Leviticus 24: 19 - 20 explains, “Anyone who injures another person must be dealt with according to the injury inflicted; a fracture for a fracture, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Whatever anyone does to injure another person must be paid back in kind.”
- Jesus initiated a new and healthier system in the N.T.
 - (R) Matthew 5: 38 – 42 or p. 737 in pew Bible
 - In other words we no longer have to be the Judge & Jury - - we have a Righteous Judge who promises...

“I will take revenge; I will pay them back says the Lord.” [Rom 12: 19]

We will never escape the trap until we allow God to do His part;
Injustice never goes unnoticed by God!!

Be encouraged = II Chronicles 16: 9, “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”

Don't be disheartened ~ God has a better path for us to take after an offense has occurred;

- III. 2nd path is biblically condition!
- A. It's the way of forgiveness & reconciliation!

In the end, after the conflict is resolved (as far as you are responsible) you are left with a clear conscience!

- B. God's goal for each of us = Acts 24: 16! "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."

In my last remaining moments, I will attempt to give you a concrete plan on how to biblically escape the TRAP of OFFENSE!

- IV. How to Escape ~ what the path looks like?

- A. 1st Step out of this trap ~ Recognize you are hurt!

- Often pride does not want us to admit we are hurt & offended ☹
- Key Indicator...
 - Meyer's or Marsh Rule
 - When grocery shopping you happen to notice someone out of the corner of your eye and you quickly cut down another aisle hoping to avoid meeting them ~ it's a good chance you've been hurt or wounded.
- Healthy step is simply to admit that you have been offended; the devil has an old trick he likes to play on us, "...it's a little game of pretend this didn't happen."
 - Denial is not biblical!
 - If you say that it didn't really matter ~ then there is not need for forgiveness

- B. 2nd Step out of this trap ~ Be proactive /take the initiative

- PURPOSE of the "No Loitering" SIGN
 - God expects us to take the necessary steps to resolve conflict in our lives; there's no standing around waiting on someone else to make the 1st move!
- If you have offended someone = Ask for their forgiveness!
- If you have been offended = Practice Matthew 18: 15!

"If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense."

- Gentle precaution:
Do not go to a brother or sister who has offended you until you have decided to forgive this person from your heart ~ no matter how they respond.

We need to get rid of any feelings of animosity toward them before approaching them with their offense. If not, we will probably do further damage [no healing] ☹

Remember goal is...Reconciliation not condemnation!

Sadly, some people get caught in the TRAP of OFFENSE get hurt & never recover.

Bible says, "If you don't give forgiveness - - You don't get forgiveness!"

This is why I can forgive...

Nothing that I have to forgive someone else for can even faintly - - remotely compare with what I have been forgiven

Escape is Possible ~ Take that 1st step!

