

## FORGIVENESS

In the act of forgiving someone who has offended you, the question one must ask himself is **not CAN** I forgive . . . but . . . **WILL** I forgive . . . "*Do I really **WANT** to forgive?*"

If the Christian would only realize the limitless strength and ability that he can be the recipient of . . . the incredible extra inner reservoir of power which God has placed within him . . . he would realize that he is more than a match for anything life can throw at him. When this power of the Holy Spirit is made operative . . . by an act of the Christian's **will** . . . phenomenal . . . even miraculous...accomplishments are achieved.

For a Christian to say, "*I `can't' rid myself of these deep inward feelings of bitterness that fester up - I `can't' get over the hurt - I `can't' forgive,*" is a lame excuse. He must be honest with himself and use language that expresses the reality of the situation. When he changes his "*can't's*" into "*won't's*" . . . and when he quits deceiving himself and stops avoiding the truth . . . he will then be able to fully forgive every offense ever committed against him!

NonChristians are the only ones who, in fact, may be victims of unforgiveness . . . trapped, and bound, like slaves in a fierce and endless struggle with bitterness . . . because . . . without Christ . . . and His power within . . . they **do** lack what it takes to change permanently . . . which is why they "*don't*" forgive . . . because they truly "*can't*" forgive without Christ's power to do so.

However, those who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, unlike their unsaved counterparts, "*don't*" forgive because they "*won't*" forgive. As soon as one is willing to realistically own up to the fact that God's Word tells him that he has a **responsibility** to forgive, he will stop playing the blame game at pity parties for himself and will, instead, confess that . . . because God has given him the power . . . and ability . . . to overcome his unforgiveness . . . his "*I `can't' forgive*" is, truly, "*I `won't' forgive.*"

In an endeavor to arrive at this very conviction one should read . . . and take . . . the following verses (along with the dozens more like them) very seriously:

Philippians 4:13, "*I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength.*"

2 Corinthians 12:9, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*"

Ephesians 3:14, 16, "*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father . . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.*"

2 Peter 1:4, "*He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature . . .*"

1 Corinthians 10:13, "*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*"

Malachi 2:15 gives an interesting observation when God's says, "*Ye that desire a spiritual seed...you want a spiritual ministry, therefore, take heed to your spirit.*"

If one has a *bitter spirit* he will not only never be able to produce forgiveness, gentleness, and righteousness in his own life, but he will also never be able to produce these virtues in the lives of those around him.

It is important that one understands exactly what forgiveness is **from God's point of view.**

### **What is Forgiveness from God's perspective?**

MY FORGIVING SOMEONE WITH GOD'S FORGIVENESS IS:  
MY DESIRING TO HELP THE PERSON WHO OFFENDED ME  
AS MUCH AFTER HE OFFENDED ME AS I DID BEFORE HE  
OFFENDED ME.

MY CLEARING HIS RECORD FOR HIS OFFENSE AGAINST  
ME AND, IN THE PROCESS OF DOING SO, MY  
TRANSFERRING THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY  
PUNISHMENT FOR HIS OFFENSE OVER TO GOD.

MY HAVING THE SAME OPENNESS TOWARD MY  
OFFENDER AFTER HE HAS OFFENDED ME AS I DID BEFORE  
HE OFFENDED ME!

1. It may be that God wants to use a person's offense against you as a way of getting your attention to show you where you need help . . . or . . . it maybe that you are even the cause of the offense and you need to realize your own need to change.
2. It may be that God is showing you how you might be able to "help others" in their need to change!

FORGIVENESS INVOLVES ONE'S USING HIS HURTS  
AS A MOTIVATION FOR REFLECTING CHRIST'S LOVE!

Remember that **FORGIVENESS IS NOT "PARDON!"**

There is a vast, distinct, difference between "*forgiveness*" and "*pardon*." If someone breaks the law, or commits a crime, we must forgive them, however, we do not have the power to "*pardon*" them!

**BITTERNESS PERSISTS WHEN:**

## 1. THERE IS "PERSONAL" GUILT

Proverbs 26:2 tells us that *an undeserved curse has no more effect upon you than a bird flitting through the air...which means that...if someone curses . . . or accuses . . . you because of some false accusation, this accusation has no more effect upon you "than a bird flying through the air" . . . however . . . if there is any truth in the accusation, then the curse "cuts deep like a knife."*

Because just a *little bit* of guilt...even if it be because one is assuming only 20% of the blame for a particular conflict . . . will still cause bitterness to become inflamed, it is very important that one takes care of his guilt . . . by clearing his conscience before God...before he goes to someone to ask forgiveness.

Because one cannot get rid of "*bitterness*" as long as he has "*guilt*" . . . because *bitterness* and *guilt* must "balance" in order for one to have emotional health!

Romans 2:1-3 says, "*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning your- self . . . (you pin-point the problem in your own life) . . . because you who pass judgment do the same thing. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?"*

## 2. THERE IS A REVENGEFUL SPIRIT

God said in Romans 12:19, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay saith the Lord.*" When God takes vengeance for an offense committed, He leaves the person with a clean wound that will bring healing to the person, however, when we attempt to take vengeance for an offense, we leave the person with a festering infection which brings the person . . . and ourselves . . . all sorts of problems. It is for this reason that God says, "*Leave vengeance to Me, I'll take care of the situation for you.*"

As long as the spirit of revenge controls a person, he will neither be able to forgive . . . nor to remove bitterness from his heart toward . . . his offender.

## 3. THERE IS A TEMPORAL VALUE SYSTEM

As long as one desires the "*things that last for time*" more than he desires the development of his attitudes and character . . . things which will last for eternity . . . he will be incapable of any real forgiveness!

One's inability to forgive is often the result of a temporal value system which governs his life because . . . when one is controlled by the world's . . . rather, than by God's . . . value system, when someone gyps him . . . steals something from him . . . or hurts his reputation . . . he becomes bitter . . . and unforgiving . . . over it!

One has learned a great lesson when he discovers that *God is NOT concerned about one's reputation until it is identified with Christ's reputation . . . which is why one of the*

*most beautiful things that one can do is to trade his reputation for Christ's reputation! And . . . when one's attitude is, "Lord, because it is Your reputation which is at stake, please vindicate Your name" . . . God will then always come to one's rescue!*

Colossians 3:1-3 states, "*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*"

God allows certain things to happen to us to let us see ourselves as we really are...to let us know that we have been "*setting our affections*" on a temporal value system.

God's Word gives some very clear precepts on

### **"HOW TO SET ONE'S MIND ON THINGS ABOVE."**

#### **4. ONE "TAKES UP AN OFFENSE"**

When someone says something like . . . "*Oh, he didn't hurt me, but do you know what he did to so-and-so? I can never forgive him for that!*" . . . he is, essentially, "**taking up an offense**" . . . which means that he becomes bitter toward the offender because he offended someone he loves.

God's Word promises us that *we will face no trial beyond what we can bear because God can be depended on not to allow us to suffer any temptation beyond our strength. He will see to it that every temptation has "a way out" so that we may be able to bear it.* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

And the "*way out*" which God gives to us, which enables us to endure any temptation, is the provision of His "*grace*" in our time of need.

God promises us, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness,*" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God provides His "***grace***" to each one of us to enable us to go through any temptation, or trial, that He allows to come into our lives. This being so, when one of His children is offended, God gives him His "***grace***" . . . extra ability . . . to respond correctly to the offense.

God will not only give the one offended the ability to see the **WHY**, and **PURPOSE**, of the offense, but He will also give one the ability to receive **BENEFIT** from the offense.

### ***"Taking up an offense"***

However, when someone **else** says, "*The offender did not hurt me, but he did so-and-so to my friend*" . . . and "***takes up his friend's offense***" . . . he (because he is intruding into a situation that God has not ordained for his personal spiritual growth...in terms of his need of appropriate God's promise of grace . . . His "*extra*" God-given ability . . . to forgive his offender" since he, in fact, has no offender because he was not the one offended) can, too easily, be motivated by a kind of *self righteous anger* that . . . (unlike God's righteous anger that hates the

"sin" . . . the offense

. . . but loves the "sinner" . . . the offender) desire to "get even" with his friend's offender . . . the heart- beat of his vengeance being to repay hurt with hurt which, of course, is diametrically opposed to the heartbeat of God's vengeance which is to . . . in the process of His "discipline" against the "sin" of the offender . . . bring healing to the offender . . . the "sinner."

### **Consequences of Bitterness**

#### **1. PHYSICALLY**

Bitterness writes itself on one's face . . . it tightens the muscle tone of facial expression . . . it etches its way into facial features . . . and . . . it hardens the jaw and neck. No, one can't hide his bitterness!

In his book, "*None of These Diseases*," Dr. S.I. Mc Millen, M.D. says, "*Ulcerative colitis, toxic goiters, high blood pressure are only a few of the scores of diseases caused by bitterness. Our resentments call forth certain hormones from the pituitary, adrenal, thyroid and other glands. Excesses of these hormones can cause diseases in any part of the body.*"

Because our system was never made to handle bitterness, or guilt, our refusal to forgive can result in **physical** fatigue, loss of sleep, and the above mentioned disorders!

Unforgiveness is like a dangerous poison that can bring a person to the point where he is in need of a medical, or a mental, hospital. Some doctors estimate that **75%** . . . (some doctors even estimate as high as **90%**) . . . of the patients in hospitals are there *because of emotional disorders* which are the result of bitterness, guilt, or one's lack of love!

### **WHAT ABOUT GERMS?**

Good question! Aren't most patients who are in hospitals there because of having been infected by germs...or having been exposed to viruses?

In answer to that question, one doctor writes, "***Bitterness breaks down one's inner resistance . . . one's ability to ward off germs. Many germs would not affect the person who is not carrying around bitterness or guilt!***"

In Numbers 5:11-13, we are told that, in the days of the Old Testament, when a wife, who had been accused of having an adulteress affair, denied the accusation, she was given a drink of special herbs to determine her guilt or innocence. If she was guilty, her chemical balance was upset by the drink and the so called "germ" it produced created a turmoil within her which produced death. However, if she was innocent, the mixture had no effect upon her.

To show the dangerous effect that bitterness can have on one, physically, listen to what one man writes: "*I have become a slave to my bitterness. I can't enjoy my work because he . . . (the person he was bitter toward) . . . controls my thoughts. My resentment produces many stress hormones in my body and I become fatigued after only a few hours of work. Work, which I formerly enjoyed, is now drudgery for me. I cannot escape the tyrannical grasp bitterness has on my mind. Thought of the one whom I hate will not permit me to enjoy my food.*"

Proverbs 15:17 states, "*Better is a dish of vegetables with love, than the best beef served with hatred.*"

## 2. PSYCHOLOGICALLY

Depression is one of the major psychological consequences of bitterness. There are other causes for depression, but when one is bitter toward someone the emotional energy that it takes to maintain that bitterness is almost guaranteed to result in depression.

Whenever one exerts his *emotional* energy, he becomes depressed in the same way that one becomes exhausted whenever he exerts his *physical* energy.

Because one cannot maintain bitterness without using up *emotional* energy, when that *emotional* energy is used up it puts a constant drain on one's system that not only causes depression, but also causes many other problems. Needless to say, there is a price one has to pay for his "*unforgiving spirit.*"

## 3. SPIRITUALLY

Since, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray, "*Father, forgive me my trespasses in the same way that I forgive those who trespass against me*" it can be assumed that, when one says, "*I will NOT forgive those who trespass against me,*" he is also praying that God not forgive him!

In Matthew 18:21-22, Peter asked Jesus, "*How often shall we forgive those who trespass against us...seven times?*" Jesus answered, "*Our forgiveness must be perpetual forgiveness... seventy times seven*" - (that's 490 times!) (In Luke's account of this same conversation, Jesus indicates that one should forgive **450 times a day!**) Jesus follows this statement that we should "*forgive those who trespass against us seventy times seven* with a parable of an unforgiving servant who refused to forgive another of a small, almost insignificant offense, after he himself had been generously forgiven of a large offense by his master. The master then ordered that the unforgiving servant be turned over to the tormentors till he paid all that he owed! (Matthew 18:23-35)

F.W. Boreham tells the story of visiting a man . . . who had spent the last years of his life as a very gruff hermit...on his death bed. There had been a great deal of speculation as to why this man had chosen to be a hermit . . . perhaps he was a fugitive from justice . . . or . . . had some terrible secret to hide. *All these speculations were wrong!* That night, as this man lay dying, Dr. Boreham discovered that the real explanation for why he chose to live the way he did was because he had harbored a resentment all his life!

He had been offended by someone when he was a young man and, in anger, he said, "*I'll remember it to my dying day.*" And remember it to his dying day is exactly what he did, and it ruined his entire life!

Gasping from the cot in his little shack, he said, "*I've gone over the incident in my mind every morning . . . I've thought about it every night...a hundred times a day, I've cursed the person who offended me.*" Then, in an indication of brokenness, he added, "*My curses have eaten out my soul. They've been like gall on my tongue and gravel in my teeth. My hatred has hurt nobody but myself. God knows it has turned my life into hell!*"

Rather too late, this man learned that resentment is a cruel tormentor!

What Christ is saying in this passage in Matthew 18 is, "*Can't you realize how great a debt I have forgiven you? I have forgiven you of an ETERNAL offense! Therefore, how unjust it is for you not to forgive someone of a small TEMPORAL offense!*"

One, who seeks to follow Jesus, must understand the concept of the following passages:

1 John 2:8-11, "*I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in Him... (Christ)...and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.*"

1 John 4:20-21, "*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.*"

These passages, while they are difficult to apply to our lives, certainly come close to where we live!

**FORGIVENESS IS NOT SOMETHING WE "DO", IT IS A RESULT OF WHO WE "ARE"**

**... IT IS A CONSEQUENCE OF A WHOLE NEW DIRECTION OF LIVING!**

In these passages in 1 John, as God speaks of one's "*emotional focus*," He is telling us that one **cannot** have the *emotional focus* of **hatred** toward a brother . . . or a sister . . . and an *emotional focus* of **love** toward God at the same time! And because one cannot love God and hate his brother at the same time, if he attempts to do so, he is "*only deceiving himself*."

It is only as one breaks the "*emotional focus of bitterness*," that he will then be able to develop an "*emotional focus of genuine love*" toward God and toward his fellow man.

When no "*emotional focus of bitterness*" exists, one is then free to establish an "*emotional focus toward Jesus Christ*" for the purpose of being like Him! In the process of doing this, it is **His actions** . . . the way He does . . . and would do . . . things that **become the standard of one's conduct**, and when he fails to measure up to this standard, he allows the Holy Spirit to, more and more, develop his attitudes into the attitudes which Jesus had (has)!

Isn't it ironic that, so often, when there is deep hatred, toward someone, the person who hates this individual **becomes like the person he hates**?

A son who says, "*I will never be like my father*," very often, because of the bitterness he has toward his father, **does** become just like his father! - Why does this happen?

Where there is real bitterness toward a person, certain spiritual and emotional, laws . . . that are beyond one's control . . . go into effect which is why, years later, the wife of that son, will probably say to him, "You are just like your father!"

Now, let's say that his father was a drunk, was unfaithful to his wife, and neglected his children while, on the other hand, the son never touched alcohol, is faithful to his wife, and spends a great deal of time with his children. **How, then, can anyone say that father and son are alike?**

The answer is that, while the **VISIBLE, OUTWARD, ACTIONS** may not be like his father . . . the one he is bitter toward . . . nonetheless, because the "**ROOT ATTITUDE**" is the same, the son turned out to be bitter, proud, selfish, and stubborn **just like his father!** . . . And this happens despite the fact that one's deep bitterness toward someone makes him say, "*I will never be like him,*" because . . . in the process of setting up a standard of comparison by which we begin to judge our actions and responses . . . as compared to those of the one we are bitter toward . . . our "*emotional focus*" begins to be built around the person we hate and **we become like the person who has our "emotional focus."**

The ultimate purpose of the first, and greatest, commandment is that one establish his "*emotional focus*" upon God. "Jesus replied: *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'* *This is the first and greatest commandment.*" (Matthew 22:37-38)

### **How do we give God our entire "emotional focus?"**

The answer is:

1. By forgiving everyone **even as** God forgives us!

Ephesians 4:32 tells us, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

2. By keeping our "*emotional focus*" upon Jesus Christ!

Hebrews 12:2 states, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

We are to **continually review** Christ's actions and attitudes!

3. By concentrating on God's Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to produce basic changes in us.

2 Corinthians 3:18 states, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever - increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit."

As was stated earlier, whenever one reacts to a person's offense with bitterness, he is



*measuring himself by that person's actions*, and God's Word tells us, "*Measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves by themselves, they are not wise.*" When one reacts to a person's offense with bitterness it causes this person to become his "*emotional focus*," which fosters an attitude of superiority and unforgiveness! On the other hand, when no bitterness exists and one is *free to establish an emotional focus on Jesus Christ . . . it . . .* because it has, as an end result, becoming like Jesus Christ... fosters, within one, an attitude of humility and forgiveness . . . and . . . instead of "*measuring oneself with oneself*" . . . he measures oneself with Christ. When he fails to measure up to **Christ's** standard, he allows the Holy Spirit to develop within him that which is lacking in Christ-likeness.

Just as in the process of "Photography" . . . (that is, producing images on sensitized surfaces by the chemical action of light) . . . a **bright** light is not necessary unless one desires a large portrait (in which case a bright light must be used in order for the photographer to see, and clear up, all of the imperfections of the portrait before the final portrait is shown), the larger one desires his Christlike "*message*" to become, the brighter must be God's light on him in order for him to be able to detect any flaws in his life! One's prayer should be, "Oh, God, let the light of Your Word shine into my life and make out of my life a living example of You!"

Ephesians 5:8-14 tells us, "*For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: `Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'*"

### **HOW TO FOCUS ON: "YOUR OWN WRONG ATTITUDE" AND NOT ON THE "ACTION OF THE OFFENDER:"**

#### **1. VIEW THE OFFENDER AS AN INSTRUMENT IN THE HAND OF GOD**

If one will allow God to, He will use the offense in one's life as a *mirror* to let him see his own wrong attitudes!

How can one *hate* the hand of God and *love* God at the same time? (1 John 4:20)

Because Joseph's brothers stripped him of the beautiful coat his father had given him, threw him into a pit, and then sold him as a slave to Egypt, he, as a result, could have been bitter toward them, however, instead, he discovered that God was directing his life **by their actions!** Genesis 50:20 tells us that, years later, he said to his brothers, "*You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good!*"

**God give us the kind of insight Joseph had so that we will be able to see Thy Hand behind the actions of whoever might offend us!**

If one responds to the *offense*, or the *offender*, apart from the realization that God can use the hurt inflicted upon him . . . by the offense . . . for his ultimate good, the result will be that his hurt will make him become bitter toward the offender . . . however . . . if he responds to the

offense with the realization that God will use his hurt for His ultimate good, his hurt, rather than making him become bitter toward the offender, will instead, enable him to be filled with **forgiveness** toward him!

In 2 Samuel 16:5-14, when King David is being driven out of Bahurim by Shimei . . . (a relative of Saul, the former king of Israel) . . . and being cursed and stoned by him . . . and, when he (David) is asked by one of his armed guards, "*Why do you let this dog curse you? Give me the word and I will take his head off,*" his answer to his armed guard was, "*Don't touch him because God has allowed him to curse me this day and the Lord will requite me good for his cursing.*"

### **GOD HONORED DAVID FOR THAT INSIGHT!**

*God allows offenses to come into our lives because He has something to say to us and this is the way He gets our attention!*

We should keep in mind that, when Jesus Christ was being crucified by those who hated Him . . . and was hanging, in agony, on the cross...He said, "*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*" . . . "**BUT YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING THROUGH THEM** . . . They are **YOUR INSTRUMENTS** carrying out Your ultimate will for My life on earth!"

It is not until one is able to view those who offend him as tools in God's hand . . . tools that He is using to work out His divine intention for him . . . that he will be able to turn His bitterness into full God's forgiveness!

If the book of Job teaches us anything, it teaches us that Satan cannot do anything to a child of God without God's permission . . . because . . . in essence, what God says to Satan is, "*You can only go so far, and no further.*"

Only when one accepts this concept of God's ultimate control over what happens to him . . . even his offenses . . . and only when one, willingly submits **to** God's control over these offenses . . . will one be able to receive God's ultimate benefit for him . . . which is to "*work all things (including his offenses) together for his (spiritual) good.*"

## **2. THANK GOD FOR "EACH" OFFENSE**

It is impossible to be free from all bitterness toward . . . and to fully forgive . . . the offender, until one can see that the offense has some real benefit in it for him personally. God's Word teaches us that there is no offense in the Christian's life which does not have benefit in it for him, **if he will respond to the offense in the right way!**

*GOD IS MORE INTERESTED IN ONE RESPONSE TO OFFENSE . . . THAN HE IS IN THE ACTUAL OFFENSE!*

Jesus teaches us that "*Offenses must come, but woe to the man through whom they come*" (Matthew 18:7). Interestingly, verse 6 states, "*If anyone causes one of these little ones . . . (a new Christian) . . . who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*"

Nothing is clearer in Scripture than the fact that *each one of us is responsible for his own responses to people . . . and circumstances . . . and . . . if his responses are right . . . there is no one who can ruin . . . or damage . . . God's purpose in his life - except he himself!*

**We, alone, can damage God's purpose for our lives  
by responding the wrong way to offenses!**

The reason that one is "*vaccinated*" when he leaves the United States can be seen as analogous to the reason that God allows certain offenses to take place in our lives:

If one were to leave the United States to enter another country, he, most likely, would be vaccinated against the possibility of some disease infecting him. He would be given a vaccine which would, actually, make him *contract* the very disease that he is being vaccinated against . . . however . . . the portion of the disease that he is given is such a *balanced* one that it makes his body **immune** to the disease, should he come in contact with it!

In much the same manner, God, Who knows our future clearly, allows certain offenses to happen to us in order to "*vaccinate*" us against . . . make us immune to . . . the temptations, and trials, that we, down the road, will come in contact with!

In order for one to *view an offense he has suffered as an instrument, for good, in God's Hand . . . and in order for one to be able to thank Him for each offense . . . one must be able to:*

### **3. DISCERN THE VALUE OF EACH OFFENSE**

**(A) USE THE OFFENSE AS A MIRROR TO REFLECT YOUR WRONG ATTITUDES!**

Offenses cannot "*create*" anger, bitterness, selfishness or pride within you, they can only "*reveal*" . . . or bring out . . . that these things are within you!

**(B) USE THE OFFENSE TO MOTIVATE YOU TO DEVELOP RIGHT ATTITUDES**

Because the offense looms so large in one's mind, he cannot see the magnitude of his offense against God . . . nor realize its impending consequence . . . when he responds incorrectly . . . or in an ungodly manner . . . **to** the offense.

(Remember Matthew 18:23-35?)

Because one's attention is so focused on the offense . . . which, in reality, is just a little fragment of the whole picture, in terms of God's purpose for his life . . . one fails to see the offense as **God** sees it...from **His** larger frame of reference . . . **His** priorities for one's life . . . **His** desire to develop **His** message through one's life.

### **4. ANTICIPATE SUFFERING**

One of the reasons that one becomes embittered by offenses is because that he has the mistaken notion that Christians will not . . . or should not . . . suffer . . . and yet . . . God's

Word teaches us that, "*All that live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,*" (2 Timothy 3:12) and, "*It is given unto us, not only to believe on Jesus, but to suffer for His sake.*" (Philippians 1:29)

It is when a Christian does not anticipate that he is guaranteed to know some form of suffering in his life that he can have a problem with bitterness.

**Visualize Jesus at the whipping post . . . visualize Him being beaten with a cat-of-nine-tails in a kind of whipping which was referred to as "*the half way death.*" And then, visualize Him as He is being crucified . . . visualize His back with the whelps . . . His skin torn open as blood oozes out.** Can you visualize that?

### *Who beat Jesus?*

God tells us that, "*He was wounded for 'OUR' transgressions.*"

Visualize His response on the cross as He prays, "*Father, forgive them . . .*"

1 Peter 2:24 tells us that, "*By His wounds we have been healed.*" It is because of Christ's righteous, loving, forgiving, response **that we are healed** . . . made whole!

What significance this statement holds in light of the whole context of 1 Peter, chapters 2 and 3!

Let's study this passage of 1 Peter 2 through to 1 Peter 4.

After Peter . . . in 1 Peter 2:12 . . . states, "*Live such good lives among the unbelievers that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us,*" he then gives us guidelines for what the Christian's attitude should be when he...in verses 13-25 . . . states, "*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.' When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him Who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*

After Peter . . . in chapter 2 . . . tells us about the kind of example that Christ left for us to follow, he . . . beginning with chapter 3 . . . begins to instruct us on how we can carry out

this example in our own lives. He first gives practical instruction . . . in 1 Peter 3:17 . . . to wives as he states, "*Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the Word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.*"

He then goes on to give practical instruction to husbands as he states, "*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*"

Finally . . . beginning with verse 8 . . . his "instructions" address everyone as he states, "*Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. 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 do evil.' Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.' But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*"

1 Peter, chapter 4, follows with the instruction, "*Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because He who has suffered in His body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*"

This passage teaches us that because Christ was willing to suffer to bring about healing to others, we, too . . . in our endeavor to follow His example . . . should be willing to suffer to bring about healing to others!

If, by your willingness to suffer injustices, God can bring about healing . . . spiritual healing . . . to others, are you willing to so suffer?

God never promised us that life would be "fair," however, He **did** promise us, "*that all things would work together for good...for us to be conformed to the likeness of God's Son, Jesus Christ.*" (Romans 8:28-29).

The next step one needs to take in order to be able to focus on his attitude toward the offense . . . rather than the offense itself . . . is that one:

### 5. **MUST DEDICATE HIS BODY TO GOD AS A LIVING SACRIFICE**

Because there is such a feeling of ownership when it comes to one's body . . . or one's life . . . one becomes very fearful when he is told to dedicate "*his body*" . . . "*his life*" . . . to God as a living sacrifice . . . However, one should rest in the knowledge that if he, in fact, dedicates his body . . . and life . . . to God, that God, in fact, will take care of **His** property and not allow anything to happen to it that will bring it permanent harm . . . because no one will be able to get at one's life to damage God's property, unless God has some special purpose in one's doing so . . . that will bring him some ultimate benefit . . . or "*good!*"

### **ONE'S FEARS ARE THE RESULT OF HIS NOT TOTALLY DEDICATING HIMSELF TO GOD!**

Romans 12:1-2 instructs us, "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.*"

### **WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD SOMEONE WHEN HE OFFENDS YOU?**

Do you react with anger, and bitterness, toward the person who has offended you, or do you go to that person and ask him to forgive you for your unChrist-like attitude?

If we are serious about being a disciple of Jesus Christ, we are to go to the person who has offended us and . . . if we indeed have a wrong attitude toward him . . . we should with . . . our wrong attitude in focus, rather than what they did to offend us . . . say to him, "*Because I have wronged you by my wrong attitude (Name the wrong attitude) will you forgive me?*" When one sincerely does this, God will then give him a new kind of love for the person who has offended him!

WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT OTHERS DO,  
HOWEVER,  
WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR ATTITUDES  
TOWARD WHAT OTHERS DO!

*Are we willing to suffer unjustly, and, rather than respond to the person who has offended us with anger and bitterness, respond with sincere godly love? If we are willing to do this, God will bring deep conviction upon the one who has offended us!*

In the Sermon-on-the-Mount, Jesus said, "*But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:44).

God help us to see that those who offend us are in need of healing, and God help us . .

. with the power of His grace . . . to be willing to suffer, if need be, to bring about their healing

. . . It was because Peter . . . in Acts 16:16-18 . . . upon seeing the need of the young girl who hacked him "*many days*" . . . was willing to co-operate with God, that God was able to meet the need in her life.

As you demonstrate God's forgiveness to someone who has offended you . . . and as he witnesses that your response to his offense is one of openness and love . . . you will be afforded a golden opportunity to display Christ's love in such a way that it will better enable him to comprehend just what kind of unconditional love God has toward him.

In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus also said, "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*"