

## SO FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU

### I. Romans 12:9-21

**A. Romans 12:9-21 (ESV) are what we'll call *be-attitudinal* words:** **9** *Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.* **10** *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.* **11** *Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.* **12** *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.* **13** *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.* **14** *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.* **15** *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* **16** *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.* **17** *Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.* **18** *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* **19** *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* **20** *To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."* **21** *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

**B. Last Sunday we talked about reconciliation. Today a little more. Reconciliation is when two or more people, in a state of enmity, are brought into, or back into, friendship. Forgiveness is when we cancel the debt of another who's wronged us--who's trespassed against us. Forgiveness can be rendered singularly. Reconciliation takes two or more who're willing to forgo a feud for friendship; quit their war to achieve peace. Raise your hand if you think that's easy!**

**C. Let's review V18 of our opening text: "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*" Two words say it all: "***If possible.***" When I scan my eyes across this room, I know many of us through the years have found ourselves in situations where reconciliation was not possible because no matter what we said or did, the other person(s) weren't having any of it. In fact our gestures to make peace seem to feed the other party's intent to make war. What do you do when your absolute best intentions to genuinely express love and restore friendship are rebuffed? What if you've kept the "*as far as it depends on you*" part but are still rejected? See above: "*Be constant in prayer.*"**

**D. Besides praying and committing all this to God, we have to make sure our own hearts are clear and our motives pure. We ask God to show the other person or party the same mercy He's shown us. They may not deserve it but neither did we when God lavished it upon us. It's called *grace*. We also pray for wisdom, asking God to show us how to apply His Word, what to say and what not to say, what to do and what not to do. We make sure we don't compromise God's will, His Word, or ways in order to appease or placate the other party. Grieving God's Spirit in order to make peace makes us turncoats. Finally, we ask God to change our hearts & minds where need be. Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV) can be our prayer: **23** *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.* **24** *See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*"**

**E. For most of us, being in a given state of enmity, especially with someone we deeply love, represents the hardest and most heart-wrenching ordeal we'll ever face. I'm personally convinced it's more painful than the loss of a loved one to death. We cling to Romans 8:28. But the "*all things*" part of a broken relationship, especially if we won't see**

the resulting "good" this side of Jordan, is close at times to being intolerable, an unbearable thorn. May God's grace prove ever sufficient!

**F. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (ESV) is all about vertical reconciliation; between God and us: 16** *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer. 17* **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18** *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself (turned us from enemies into friends) and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19* **that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20** *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. (Our declarative appeal as ambassadors is: God, through the sacrifice of His Son, has made a way for all who will embrace Him, to be turned from enemies into friends. And not only friends, but sons & daughters!) We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (And here's why:) 21* **For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (Our sin upon Him; His righteousness upon us; our enmity removed; friendship and full adoption bestowed. The Bread & Cup remind us!)**

**G. Do you wonder if anyone understands the depth of pain when your attempts to reconcile with someone you love are rejected? God knows full well! When your gestures are rebuffed and someone digs in their heels to maintain their opposition it's one thing; when God gives His one and only Son to take away our sin, suffer horribly to reconcile us to Himself, only to be rejected, can anything in the universe or throughout time eternal be more egregious? Do you know anyone who stubbornly refuses to be made right with God? Maybe they deny His existence altogether. Maybe they acknowledge His existence but refuse Him still. Maybe they just seethe with anger towards Him because they believe He's let them down. Our sins have been punished and forgiven; everlasting life has been offered; former enemies are offered friendship and sonship. Rejecting that is truly the tragedy of all tragedies!**

**H. But I pray you have not rejected Him! That you have received Him who loved you enough to die for you! That by His stripes you've been healed! Romans 5:10-11 (NLT) puts it like this: 10** *For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of His Son while we were still His enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of His Son. 11* **So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. (And that is reconciliation! The Bread & Cup remind us.)**

**\* Pray & Officiate Communion...**

**\* The Prentiss Brothers**

Pastor Steve - Pulpit Edition

At the outset of the Civil War two brothers, Clifton and William Prentiss, from outside Baltimore, Maryland, went off to war--one for the North, the other for the South. Clifton became a Union Major for the 6th Maryland. Younger brother William a regular in the Confederate Army. Just days before the war's end and following a long siege of Petersburg, Virginia, Union General Grant ordered a full scale assault on the breastworks of Petersburg. Leading the charge for the 6th Maryland was Major Clifton Prentiss. But as he crossed into the Rebel works, he was shot in

the chest. Meanwhile, brother William, defending those very trenches, was stuck above the knee by an artillery shell. When Yankee soldiers came upon the wounded Rebel to give him some water, he asked whether or not they'd heard of the Maryland 6th. They immediately replied that they were from that very regiment. Then he asked if they knew of a Captain Clifton Prentiss. They said he is indeed our Major and he lies wounded yonder over there. The Yankees then carried the wounded William by stretcher and laid him beside his brother. At first reluctant, Clifton just glared at his Rebel brother. But then William smiled at his brother, stretched out his hand, and merely said, "Clifton." The animosity suddenly drained away. They joined hands on that blood-soaked ground. Sadly in the days and weeks to come, both brothers would die from their wounds. But they did not die as enemies. The Prentiss brothers were reconciled!

**\* It would take a blood-soaked cross raised upon blood-soaked ground to reconcile us to God. Can anything good come from the crucifixion of God the Son? Yes! Our redemption. Our reconciliation. Our adoption as sons & daughters!**

**Colossians 1:19-22 (NLT) will usher us all home this morning: 19** *For God in all His fullness was pleased to live in Christ, 20 and through Him God reconciled everything to Himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. 21 This includes you who were once far away from God. You were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions. 22 Yet now He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result, He has brought you into His own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault.*

## **Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff**

### **Romans 12:9-21 (ESV)**

**9** Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. **10** Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. **11** Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. **12** Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. **13** Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. **14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. **17** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. **18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. **19** Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." **20** To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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**10** For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of His Son while we were still His enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of His Son. **11** So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.

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### **Bonus Rations for Further Nourishment**

**We Cannot Cling to Bitterness and God - Vaneetha Rendall Risner - Desiring God**  
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-cannot-cling-to-bitterness-and-god>

**Common Questions Christians Ask About Forgiveness - Erik Raymond**  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/common-questions-christians-ask-forgiveness/>

**10 Things Forgiveness Isn't - Mark Driscoll**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPxDs2bByYc>

**The Prentiss Brothers: A True Story of [Battlefield] Reconciliation - Rebekah Colburn**  
<https://www.rebekahcolburn.com/blog/the-prentiss-brothers-a-true-story-of-division-and-reconciliation>

**I Searched for the Key to Discipleship - Melissa Edgington**  
<https://yourmomhasablog.com/2021/09/28/i-searched-for-the-key-to-discipleship/>

**What is Evil and Where Did it Come From? - R.C. Sproul (Full Sermon)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzc7KuMj6o>

### **Proverbs 26:20 (ESV)**

**20** For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.

### **Proverbs 25:21-22 (NLT)**

**21** If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat. If they are thirsty, give them water to drink. **22** You will heap burning coals of shame on their heads, and the LORD will reward you.

### **Luke 6:27-36 (ESV) - Jesus' Sermon on the Plain**

**27** But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. **29** To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. **30** Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. **31** And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. **32** If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. **35** But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. **36** Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

### **Matthew 5:38-48 (ESV) - Jesus' Sermon on the Mount**

**38** You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' **39** But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. **40** And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. **41** And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. **42** Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. **43** You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' **44** But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. **46** For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **48** You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

### **Hebrews 2:17-18 (AMP)**

**17** Therefore, it was essential that He had to be made like His brothers (mankind) in every respect, so that He might [by experience] become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things related to God, to make atonement (propitiation) for the people's sins

[thereby wiping away the sin, satisfying divine justice, and providing a way of reconciliation between God and mankind]. **18** Because He Himself [in His humanity] has suffered in being tempted, He is able to help and provide immediate assistance to those who are being tempted and exposed to suffering.

**Quote by Martin Luther**

"Christ took our sins and the sins of the whole world as well as the Father's wrath on His shoulders, and He has drowned them both in Himself so that we are thereby reconciled to God and become completely righteous."

**Quote by Martyn Lloyd Jones**

"The very God whom we have offended has Himself provided the way whereby the offense has been dealt with. His anger, His wrath against sin and the sinner, has been satisfied, appeased and He therefore can now thus reconcile man unto Himself."

**Quote by Horatius Bonar**

"Had it not been for this [Christ's] dying, grace and guilt could not have looked each other in the face; God and the sinner could not have come nigh; righteousness would have forbidden reconciliation; and righteousness, we know, is as divine and real a thing as love. Without this exception, it would not have been right for God to receive the sinner nor safe for the sinner to come. But now, mercy and truth have met together; now grace is righteousness, and righteousness is grace. This satisfies the sinner's conscience, by showing him righteous love for the unrighteous and unlovable. It tells him, too, that the reconciliation brought about in this way shall never be disturbed, either in this life or that which is to come. It is righteous reconciliation, and will stand every test, as well as last throughout eternity. The peace of conscience thus secured will be trial-proof, sickness-proof, deathbed-proof, judgment-proof."

**Quote by Jerry Bridges**

"God did not wait for a change of heart on our part. He made the first move. Indeed, He did more than that. He did all was necessary to secure our reconciliation, including our change of heart. Even though He is the One offended by our sin, He is the One who makes amends to Himself through the death of Christ."

**Quote by John MacArthur**

"The glorious good news of the gospel is that the sin-devastated relationship between lost sinners and the holy God can be restored. That at first glance seems impossible. God's perfect, infinite, righteous justice demands the punishment of all who violate His law. Standing before the bar of His justice are helpless, guilty sinners, unable either to satisfy God or to change their condition. But through God's plan of reconciliation all the hostility, animosity, and alienation separating the Holy One and sinners vanishes, and those who were once His enemies become His friends. The high calling and noble privilege of preaching this message of reconciliation is the most important duty in the world, since it deals with eternal destinations."

### **Quote by Sinclair Ferguson**

“When Paul preached “the cross” he preached a message which explained that this instrument of rejection had been used by God as His instrument of reconciliation. Man’s means of bringing death to Jesus was God’s means to bring life to the world. Man’s symbol of rejecting Christ was God’s symbol of forgiveness for man. This is why Paul boasted about the cross!”

### **Quote by Charles Spurgeon**

“Our love ought to follow the love of God in one point, namely, in always seeking to produce reconciliation. It was to this end that God sent His Son.”

### **Quote by R. Kent Hughes**

“The Cross is the ultimate evidence that there is no length the love of God will refuse to go in effecting reconciliation.”

### **Quote by Dave Hunt**

“In Christ alone, and His payment of the penalty for our sins upon the Cross, we find reconciliation to God and ultimate meaning and purpose.”

### **We Cannot Cling to Bitterness and God**

by Vaneetha Rendall Risner / Desiring God

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-cannot-cling-to-bitterness-and-god>

Forgiveness. Even the word can make us bristle. Past wounds instinctively spring to mind, making forgiveness feel impossible (or at least unnatural). What feels natural is dwelling on the horrible things that others have done to us, rehearsing their wrongs and plotting our retaliation, if only in our imagination.

I know. I have nursed my anger as I have lingered over the ways people have hurt me. A close friend who ended our long-standing relationship over a misunderstanding. A woman whom I mentored for years who slandered me to others. My husband who unexpectedly left me for someone else. The doctor whose careless mistake ended my son’s life.

I remember sitting in a counselor’s office, talking about a deep betrayal. When the counselor mentioned forgiveness, I was furious. It felt like he was suggesting I offer that person a “get out of jail free” card, which was unthinkable after all I had suffered. Just hearing the word made me angry. Why should I forgive? Especially when the person didn’t even seem sorry.

But as my counselor unpacked the biblical principles of forgiveness, I couldn’t ignore his words. I realized I had not fully understood what forgiveness was — and what it was not.

### **What Forgiveness Is and Is Not**

There are many definitions of forgiveness, but a simple one is to surrender the right to hurt others in response to the way they've hurt us. Forgiveness means refusing to retaliate or hold bitterness against people for the ways they have wounded us. It is a unilateral act — not conditional on the person being repentant or even willing to acknowledge what they've done.

Forgiveness is not saying that sin doesn't matter. It is not approving of what the other person has done, minimizing the offense, or denying we've been wronged. Forgiveness is acknowledging that the other person has sinned against us and may never be able to make it right. The apostle Paul writes, *"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you"* ([Ephesians 4:32](#)). If God in Christ forgave us, then forgiving someone cannot mean diminishing the wrong they've done. God could never do that with sin and remain just.

Forgiveness doesn't always mean reconciliation or restoration. And it does not require restoring trust or inviting the people who hurt us back into a relationship. Forgiveness is unconditional, but meaningful reconciliation and restoration are conditional (in the gospel and in human relationships) on the offender's genuine repentance, humble willingness to accept the consequences of his actions, and a desire by both parties to work on the relationship.

Forgiving people also doesn't mean they won't experience consequences for their sin. When we forgive them, however, we leave those consequences to God, who says, *"Vengeance is mine, I will repay"* ([Romans 12:19](#)). This doesn't mean we may not pursue legal action, if warranted, against someone who has hurt us. In certain circumstances, that may be vital for the rehabilitation of the offender or for protecting other potential victims.

Forgiveness is costly. In the Bible, it involves shedding blood ([Hebrews 9:22](#)). Sacrifice. Death. Honestly, the first step of forgiveness still often feels like death. I want to cling to my right to be angry and often resent being asked to give that up. It all seems so unfair. My flesh still demands some type of retribution.

My resistance shows me I need God's help to understand forgiveness and to truly forgive.

### **Where Do We Begin?**

I have often had to say, Lord, I don't want to forgive now, but could You make me willing to forgive? You have forgiven all my sins and I know anything I forgive others is small by comparison ([Matthew 18:21–35](#)). But I cannot do this without You. Please help me.

Often, I have to repeat this prayer until God changes my heart. When He does, He usually helps me see the wounds of the person who has hurt me — wounds that do not diminish, justify, or excuse the offense, but that do soften my attitude toward the person.

Once I am engaged in wanting to forgive, I begin the process of forgiveness by naming what has happened and all the negative repercussions from the person's actions and words. I include everything. What I've lost. What's been hard. How it's made me feel. I want to know what I'm letting go of before I forgive so I can move forward, knowing I have counted the cost.

For most offenses, forgiveness is both an initial decision to let go of bitterness as well as a long, ongoing process. When offenses come to mind and painful memories resurface, I must intentionally stop rehearsing them and ask the Lord to help me release those thoughts and practice forgiveness.

### **Why Forgiveness Is Vital to Joy**

For years I didn't realize the importance of forgiveness and somehow assumed it was optional; now I see it as a command. "*As the Lord has forgiven you,*" [Colossians 3:13](#) says, "*so you also must forgive.*"

So to truly forgive those who have wronged us, we must first receive God's forgiveness, acknowledging our need before Him, which empowers us to forgive others. Christian forgiveness is vertical before it is horizontal. Throughout Scripture, our Lord intertwines His forgiveness of us with our forgiveness of others ([Matthew 6:14–15](#)). And like all of His commands, it is always for our good.

Forgiving those who have hurt us sets us free. It keeps bitterness from taking root, bitterness that would defile us and everyone around us ([Ephesians 4:31](#)). When we cling to resentment, we unknowingly give our offender ongoing power over our hearts, which keeps us enslaved to our anger. This prison we have created pulls us away from our Lord because we cannot hold on to bitterness and hold on to God.

Correspondingly, forgiving those who have wronged us releases the hold of bitterness on us. God, who has forgiven our enormous debt, gives us the power to forgive others. It is His power, not ours. This is the miracle of Christian forgiveness: when we forgive, Christ does something profound in us and for us. Those wounds inflicted by others firmly graft us into Christ, the vine, and His life flows all the more powerfully through us. The process unleashes God's power in our lives in an unparalleled way, making forgiveness one of the most life-changing steps we ever take.

### **Forgiveness, Freedom, and Peace**

Joy and sorrow often coexist, but joy and bitterness cannot. Bitterness and unforgiveness rob our lives of vitality, peace, and the refreshing joy of God's presence.

We see the power of forgiveness and grace in the lives of Joseph ([Genesis 50:15–21](#)) and Job ([Job 42:7–10](#)), who both forgave those who wronged them. And we see the hold of unforgiveness and rage on others like Joash, who murdered the priest who

disagreed with him ([2 Chronicles 24:20–22](#)), and even on Jonah, who was angry at God's compassion ([Jonah 4:1–3](#)). Being able to forgive not only changes our present; it changes our future. When we forgive, we can begin walking in freedom and joy.

I don't know where you are in your journey of forgiveness. Perhaps the wound for you is still fresh, and you need time to process all that's happened. Maybe you've been holding on to bitterness for a long time, and God is asking you to let go. If that's you, I encourage you to pray. To trust God. To forgive your offender. You won't regret it.

And after you have forgiven, after you've been released from the prison of bitterness, you may be amazed at how quickly God begins to flood your life with the joy and peace you lost.

- [Vaneetha Rendall Risner](#) is the author of [Walking Through Fire: A Memoir of Loss and Redemption](#). Vaneetha and husband Joel live in Raleigh, NC, where she writes [at her website](#), encouraging readers to turn to Christ in their pain.