

Learning to Walk in God's Love

Part 3: Walk in Love, not Unforgiveness

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Full Text (for reading on your own)

A True Standard for Walking in Love

As believers, we all know that we are supposed to walk in love. So why study what we already know? It feels obvious, right? So, we may think “why study ‘walking in love’”? The reason we feel this way is because we look at the rest of the body of Christ as our standard. We think that as long as we are walking in as much love as the rest of the body of Christ generally is then we are “good” at walking in love. But, Paul said it is not wise to compare ourselves amongst ourselves. The body of Christ is not our standard. The Word of God is our standard. Oftentimes, the body is not really living up to the Word so we need to abandon the body as our standard and go to the Word.

Ok, so we all know we are supposed to walk in love. But here’s my question: are we doing it? If you look at the body of Christ as a whole are we fulfilling the commandment to love everyone like Jesus loves us? By and large the body of Christ is (sad to say) failing miserably at walking in love with others. While there are probably millions of Christians who are truly walking in the love of Christ for others, that still leaves the vast majority of believers (90% or more) that are doing a miserable job loving others. We don’t look any different than the world; we are not loving people any different than the world loves them.

Consider this: when you walk into a restaurant, is it immediately very obvious to you who is a Christian and who is not a Christian? It should be! If you walked into a place and there were several people in there and one of them was Jesus, do you think you would notice a difference between Him and the rest of the folks? We would think “who is that guy!?” We would want to meet Him. We would be drawn to Him. We would think “who is that Guy; I’ve got to know Him!” That’s how attractive the love of God is!

The Problem: A Lack of Understanding

Believers know that we are supposed to walk in love, but that alone is not causing us (on the whole) to love like Jesus loves. In other words, knowing that we are supposed to is not working to bring out the love of God in our lives. Why? The problem is a lack of understanding. I say that because over the years, God has revealed things to me over the years that have freed me up enormously to love others! I have not “arrived” in terms of loving others, but I have definitely left! I am radically more able to love others now than before God revealed these truths to me. It is my hope that by sharing these truths with you, it will liberate you to be able to love other people.

We may think that the love walk is hard. But I can honestly say that when you start believing correctly that the love walk is really, really easy. You will actually find that not walking in love is infinitely times harder than not walking in love.

Consider which would be an easier role to play: (1) to be the judge of someone who has just committed a heinous crime or (2) to not have to be the person who judges them? Is it easier to have someone else judge them or you? Which one seems easier!?! When we're not walking in love, it is the same as making a choice to be the judge! We go around judging people, and the fact of the matter is, once we realize that it's not your job to go around judging people, a delightful freedom comes on you! When you don't have deal with the judgment, you are left with only one thing: love them!

That is an example of how correct thinking (about just one concept related to the love walk) can really set you free and liberate you to love others more successfully and more easily. But we cannot just hear this message once, we have to hear it over and over! Develop a habit of listening to the teaching of the Word over and over so that it changes your life!

Why to Walk in Love: Our Father wants us to

There are benefits and rewards to walking in love - motivations to walking in love! You may think "that's not right ... I shouldn't be looking for motivation to walk walk in love." But the New Testament makes it so clear that it is of God to be motivated by reward! Jesus said that if we are faithful with little He will make us ruler over much - that's a reward! He told us to not pray in the streets so that other people will praise us, because, if so, that's are reward. But if we want real reward, Jesus told us, we should go pray in the secret place and our Father who sees in secret will reward us openly. Reward is of God. It's OK. Don't worry about being motivated by rewards!

So what are some rewards to walking in love? Why walk in love? Number 1: because your Father wants you to! I keep this in the forefront of my mind when I am in front of a very unlovely person. I think to myself "I know what my Father wants me to do right now; He wants me to love them. He wants me to show them His love." It is exciting to me to realize that it will be really pleasing right now to my Father if I love them. It blesses me to think I will please my Daddy if I love them right now. Think about God's mindset: "God so love the world ..." He didn't "so love the Christians" - He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

It says in Romans 5:8 that God demonstrated His own love in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. So, when you see someone who is walking in a very unGodly way - or even overtly cursing God - it is natural to think that God is definitely not happy with that person! Therefore, either consciously or sub-consciously, we think we align ourselves with God by also being unhappy with them! We feel like we are standing up for righteousness by "also" not liking this person by either the look on my face or what I say or the attitude we have.

I want you to know, by the Word of God, we are actually deceived! That is not how God is feeling towards them. The Bible teaches that God had anger and wrath towards sin - and He took all

of that wrath for all of our sins for all of the world for all time ... and He already poured that wrath out on His Son! And the Bible says, therefore, we have all been reconciled to the Father. What does that mean? It means we have all been "made friendly" to the Father again. There is a wrath of God that is reserved - for the Day of Wrath. There is a period of Grace, right now, for all the world. The whole world has already been forgiven of all of their sins. While we are all reconciled, for salvation to take place, you actually have to exercise faith in Christ's sacrifice. And there is a period of time now for which man can exercise faith in Christ. And when God returns, those who never placed faith in Christ will be judged. And at that point, they will not be judged for their sins (those were already judged in Christ), but they will be judged for the rejection of His Son. If you believe in His Son, you have Life, and those who do not believe do not have Life.

We think we are aligning ourselves with God by having judgment towards the world, but we are not. If we actually want to get in alignment with God, we love them! Now does that mean that we say nothing about evil in the earth? No, not at all! There are many other scriptures that teach us we are to stand up for righteousness. When the world says it's OK to abort (murder) babies ... it's OK to live in sexual sin ... it's OK to ... We say "I'm sorry; it's not. There is a law giver, there is a moral judge and He says 'no.' I love you and I cannot agree with you. It's not what the Bible teaches. God says that is wrong." We don't get mean or ugly. We speak the truth IN LOVE. But, what are we doing in love? We're speaking the truth! We don't abandon truth for the cause of love ... because the truth will set them free! We love them by speaking the truth.

Why to Walk in Love: To Experience the Fullness of God

Walking in love is how we experience His fullness. It is the ONLY way we are actually ever going to experience the fullness of God. Apart from walking in love, it is impossible. Jn. 15:9-12 says "*As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*" If you obey God's commandment - to love one another as I have loved you - your joy will be FULL!

Do you know what it means to have your joy full? It means you don't have any room for more! If you feel like you could take on ANY more joy, than you are not full! Jesus was talking about our joy being FULL - to the point that there is not any room for more! This is possible! This is real! There was a period of time where my joy was so full that I had to ask the Father to turn it down! Listen - I literally did not want any more! I physically could not contain it; I had to ask Him to turn it down. Jesus' words in Jn. 15 are not just theory or words on a page. Jesus was saying there is a place that you can go where your joy will be FULL! In Reality! How do you get there? Walk in love!

Ephesians 3:17-19 says "*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the*

fullness of God.” You have to be rooted and grounded in love - not in knowledge or anything else - to be able to comprehend the love of Christ. When you are rooted in love, coming from a place of love, towards others, it enables you to comprehend God’s love towards you! God’s love passes knowledge. And this is the process of loving and knowing His Love that causes us to be filled with all the fullness of God! Sounds like John 15! Walk in love and your joy will be full! Walk in love and you will be filled with the fullness of God. If you are in the fullness of God, you are in His Presence, and in His Presence is fullness of joy!

Why should we walk in love!?! We will experience joy and the fullness of God! How does that work exactly? Imagine you are in front of someone who is being very nasty. Immediately your flesh wants to respond with similar nastiness. God says “don’t do that! Overcome evil with good!” We may think “I don’t feel anything good towards this person” and God says “I can’t recall a single scripture where I was talking about your feelings.” This is about Agape Love. God’s love. Agape Love is a decision of the heart. God made a decision to love us. He doesn’t love us because we are lovely. It has nothing to do with us! This is freeing to understand - God’s love for us was never based on us! It’s the true definition of Agape Love. He loves us regardless of what we do because His choice isn’t based in us! Our choice should never be based in them! Our choice is based in Him.

This is Christianity 101. Every part of Christianity is about whether we are going to be moved by our feelings or by the Word of God. That is our choice at all times. When I fail in my Christian walk, I always fail for the same reason - I was moved by my feelings instead of the Word. When I am successful is when I make a decision to be moved by the Word irregardless of my feelings. My feelings may be in alignment with it, but they may not be in alignment with it. I just have decided along time ago that I don’t care - it has nothing to do with my feelings. “But do you hear what that person just said to me?” But what does that have to do with wha the Word says? You are basing it on your feelings again! The Word says to love them - even though they are getting ugly!

The whole reason our feelings even get involved is because we are way too alive! God says we are to die to self! Just die already! Would you just die already! But it is all about what they said to “ME!” It may have been R.W. Schambach who said “you will never be greatly used by God until you get your ‘I’ punched out.” Reckon yourselves dead! They can say all they want and do all they want! What does a dead person do if you kick them or spit on them or throw insults at them? NOTHING - because they are dead! And that’s how we should be! It is really easy. When the God of the universe loves me, why should I care what you think? I don’t mean that to sound insulting - but really, why should I care what you think when the God of the Universe loves me? Now I’m free to just love you because I happen to know a secret - He loves you too! So I am going to just love you with Him Regardless of what you do, God and I - we are going to love you in the hopes that you will respond to that love and give your life to Him in the hopes that you will experience the same. And then you can be with us and the three of us can go around loving people!

So, if there is a person being nasty towards you and you do not feel anything towards that person that is lovely, you can choose to love them. “Hey man, I am really sorry, did I just do something that

offended you - I really didn't mean to offend you. I truly didn't." When we make that decision to love them we will experience God's love. When we get in agreement with God to love that person, God gets involved and He will begin to love that person through you. And what happens when God starts loving that person through you? You experience it too! When you decided to love them, you feel God's compassion go out of you towards them because you made a decision to love. Now God responds and you experience God's love for them even while they are being ugly towards you ... and through this dichotomous experience you personally begin to comprehend "wow, that's God's love. That's how it works!" We love and as a result we experience God's love. When you love someone as an act of faith, you will feel the love of God come up in your heart. The worse the situation is, the richer the soil for God's love to be on display! When you act in love you begin to learn and experience the Love of God.

It is Our Father's Will that we would Forgive

The greatest hinderance to loving people is unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is always triggered by offense. Just being aware of that truth becomes power in your hands! When someone does something and you feel offended by it, it is not unforgiveness yet. Being offended is one thing, but you can take that offense and say "that didn't feel good and I didn't like that, but I know that God loves them and I am not going to even go there. God loves them and already paid for that sin. What am I going to do - be in opposition to God's mercy in their life by harboring unforgiveness towards them?" In other words, you can get offended and not sin! OR you can take the offense and say "how dare you talk to me like that! Who do you think you are!?" You take the offense and you pass judgment on that person. When we do that - when we pass judgement and say that they were wrong - we just entered into unforgiveness.

Am I saying that you should never say something to anyone who says something wrong to you - NOT AT ALL! This isn't a message of becoming a doormat. It's just that we do everything in love. You can tell someone that you love them but what they just said was not true about you or about someone else. We can tell people that they are wrong - we can clarify and bring out the truth ... no problem! We just mess up when we decide to become offended, judge them, and get angry with them. That's when we left God's way and took on the enemy's.

Let me give you two reasons why to never harbor unforgiveness. Number 1: because Our Father doesn't want us to harbor unforgiveness. Does that motivate you? It really should! If it doesn't strike you as a great motivation yet, it is because we are not aware of how much He loves us! When we are aware of how much He loves us, it becomes our pleasure to be pleasing to Him because He is so good! Just meditate about Jesus on the Cross for you - and the outrageous, horrifically graphic nature of the punishment He took for you. You know, a while back I had heard a lot of preachers say "Jesus would have died for JUST you." One day I asked God "is that really true? Would you have died for just me?" I was OK if it were not true - His sacrifice for mankind is amazing enough! But then I heard Him say: "I had you on on My mind when I was on the Cross."

He would say the exact same thing as you! Remember, that was God on the Cross. He has the mental capacity to be thinking about every single individual that every was or would be. He had no sin in Him so He had the full capacity of His mind. And He literally thinking about every single person individually while He was getting His back ripped off of Him by whips. He was thinking of you as the nails first pierced His hands on the Cross. Think about God's goodness!

Now consider that if you love this person who is being nasty to you, you are going to be pleasing to God! What a great reason! Ephesians 4:32 says: *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."* Peter once asked Jesus (in Mt. 18:21-22) how often he should forgive a brother who sinned against him - "up to seven times?" Jesus replied "up to 70 times 7!" That would be hard to even do! It is our Father's will that we would forgive!

Warning: Unforgiveness is Poison!

Unforgiveness is a toxic poison in the heart. It will literally cause you to physically decay. It will cause you to mentally bog down. It is emotionally destructive. It is literally a poison! It is toxic. That is why we should never harbor unforgiveness!

Most people, unfortunately, are harboring unforgiveness. Try this. get before God in prayer - quiet. Get alone with Him and say "Father I ask you to show me right now ... do I have unforgiveness in my heart towards anybody?" Then just get quiet and listen. The majority of us will get reminded of some people that we need to release in our hearts from unforgiveness.

The reason I know this is because I was radically saved and after that all I did was ready the Bible day and night for two solid weeks to try and figure out who this God was Who had so powerfully saved me. And then, when I was only two weeks old in the Lord, the Spirit of God spoke to me so clearly and said "you have unforgiveness in your heart. It's not of Me. Get it out." He didn't say anything else. He didn't have to. I knew exactly who He was talking about.

ALL unforgiveness in the heart is demonic in nature.

Unforgiveness is NOT of God. That means it came from the Kingdom of darkness! Here is where people get tripped up - they think there is 3 realms from which to operate. They think there is the power of darkness, the kingdom of God, and then there's "my world." It's a total deception! We think "I know I have a little envy going on right now ... I know it's not of God, but it's not demonic it's just me." It's "my world!" You can't find that in the bible; there are not three worlds, there are only two! There's the power of darkness and the Kingdom of Light! So you and I are always operating in one or other. There is not gray.

We may think we're just envious about how spiritual they are, or how nice their house is, or how pretty or handsome their spouse is, but that envy is not from God! By the way, do you know why the grass is greener on the other side? It's only because you can't see the poop from here. Sometimes it may be because they did more work on their grass, but most of the time it is not as green as you think it is ... you just can't see the poop from here. But that envy is not just "your world."

Look at James 3:13-18 *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* True wisdom is always meek! Yes, some people can speak something that is right and even seemingly “wise” but if it is not done in meekness (but instead in pride) GOD does not call that wisdom! God says if you are going to be wise, don’t influence with arrogance and pride. God is far more circumspect than picking out one thing and saying “it was a wise statement” without noticing the other facets of the exchange. Wisdom can be worldly or heavenly. Wisdom from God is always in humility. The very definition of God’s wisdom (v. 18) is humility, meekness, willing to yield, etc.

But there is a wisdom from that does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. And what causes that sort of wisdom? Envy and self-seeking! Envy is demonic, just like unforgiveness. That’s not to say that every time we initially operate in pride, jealousy, envy, or anger that it is immediately a direct work of the enemy, but it is an indirect work of the enemy because it is coming out of the flesh which is influenced by sin. So, we are operating out of sin and it will prime the pump for demonic influence. Perhaps you have been angry before and you kind of have it under control ... until you actually say something to that person ... and then suddenly you explode with an inferno of anger. Why did that anger engulf you so quickly? Because as soon as you spoke it out you made yourself an instrument of unrighteousness to sin (Rom. 6:13, 16) We are an instrument - and we will either be used by the power of darkness or the kingdom of light. We have the choice! There are only two worlds we can serve: God’s or the enemy’s. *“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love”* (Col. 1:13)

Every time we harbor unforgiveness in our hearts, it is demonic and nature, and we need to get it out! Unforgiveness is you and I drinking poison - hoping that they will die. So, let’s find a better way to deal with it!

How do we Walk in Love and Constant Forgiveness towards Everyone

1. Possessing correct theology (or in other words, thinking like God thinks). So how does God think? First of all, He is loving everyone all the time! Secondly, God has forgiven (paid for) everyone’s sin debt. God is not angry towards any one. He has appointed a Day for Wrath, but today is not that day. We are in a dispensation of Grace. For now, even the judge of all the earth isn’t judging them right now, so what are we doing?!? What are we doing judging people when the judge of the earth isn’t judging them! Courts are closed for now!

2. We must have faith in our God-likeness. We act out of our belief system. James says he will show his faith by his works. Our actions are based on our beliefs. If you don’t believe that the Spirit

of God dwells on the inside of you and wants to love this person and that you are actually capable of loving them with the love of God that is inside of us, we won't do it! We have to have faith in our God likeness - your God likeness! "*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*" (1 Cor. 3:16) We may not feel right towards a person acting nasty, but if we believe that the Holy Spirit is in us and act accordingly, just watch what will happen! We've got to believe in the God likeness we have!

3. We often have a hard time forgiving someone because we mix the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation. They are actually completely separate issues all together. God does not say "be reconciled to everyone." NO. He says "forgive everyone." If for example, Bob steals from me, I can please God by forgiving Bob and keep myself from submitting to toxic, demonic unforgiveness. Yet some people pet that unforgiveness and nurture their growing hate towards another ... the root of murder! But if Bob stole from you, you have to make a decision: foster unforgiveness or forgive him? Personally I don't want that toxic, demonic garbage inside of me so I am going to forgive him! But, if Bob comes back to me to see if I still want to be friends and play some basketball, I am going to ask him "do you have that thing you stole from me?" I have already forgiven Bob, but reconciliation is not possible unless he is willing to repent and restore that which he stole from me. Reconciliation takes both of you, but forgiveness only takes one! I can be fully ready to reconcile to Bob, but Bob now needs to make a decision to be reconciled to me which means he needs to give me the stolen item back. Or, if he lost that item and has no ability to get another pencil, ask your forgiveness, show true repentance, wish he had never done it, and promise that he will never do it again. Then we would be good ... reconciled as friends because he decided to reach out to me and I am reaching out to him. Reconciliation takes both parties. Apart from that, we are NOT required to be reconciled. "With everything that is within YOU, be at peace with all men." He doesn't say "be at peace with all men" because we cannot control what the other person does! Reconciliation is different. If someone REALLY wrongs you, it may take a month or two or three in prayer to finally forgive them! Luke 6:28 tells us how to do this "*bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.*" When you start to pray for that person, it is an act of love, and you will start to know God's love for them. You will know you have forgiven them when you don't have any problem seeing them in person. That's the fruit of forgiveness. BUT you don't have to like them as a person. You can know their character is not right. You can choose to not do business with them again. You can forgive and love them, but also not be friends with them. Forgiveness is about releasing them from their sin debt to you; it's about releasing them to God. And use wisdom. If they have shown you that they are unreliable, don't rely on them. If they have shown you that they are a thief, don't give them money! Be smart. Don't co-mingle forgiveness with reconciliation. You can forgive and love them from a distance.

4. We also struggle with unforgiveness because we think that if we forgive them, we are letting them off of the hook which violates our principles of right and wrong. Here's why our forgiveness does not violate a standard of right and wrong: **(1)** You and I are not the judge of the earth. We need to get that straightened out. When we hold unforgiveness towards someone, we have literally stepped

into God's seat of judgment. There is ONE law giver and only He can judge. Romans 14:4 says "*Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.*" Yet here we are knocking that servant of God down! We didn't make them or create them. He's the judge and He will take care of it! **(2)** Your Father asks you to give to them what He already gave to you in a much bigger way. In Mt. 18 Jesus tells us of a debtor that was forgiven a huge debt which he could not pay only to turn around and strangle one of his debtors for a much smaller amount of money. When should never hold unforgiveness towards others for such petty things compared to what God has forgiven us of! Imagine if you forgave someone a \$100,000 debt to you and you then heard they had later ruthlessly tried to extract \$50 someone owed them. Is that a good thing? Can you see why we really can let someone go if we just reflect on what the Father has done for us. God is saying "I forgave you of a massive debt. I am asking you to do the same for them." **(3)** God is actually going to balance all the books at the end perfectly! We may be concerned that God will let them off the hook. But, do you want Him to keep you on the hook?!? We want God's love but we don't really want Him to give that same love to them. But keep a few things in mind: if they don't repent, they are already suffering in this life. We are supposed to bless (speak well of) those who curse you. When people speak evil of you, speak well of them. Pray for them. Do it as an act of faith. As God begins to move on them, one of the first things God is going to deal with is that thing they did to you ... because He loves them and wants to set them free from that poison that is in their heart. God doesn't just let things go because He loves us too much. We can release them to the only lawgiver that there is and no that He is perfect in His ways!

Remember This

Remember this as you are in front of a difficult person: Jesus died for the person you are struggling with because He loves them that much!

Remember this as well: when you are in Heaven, are you actually going to wish that person was in Hell? For 99% of the cases this will really help you! Think about how you will think about this person once you are in Heaven!

Those two thoughts will give you power to love people! Why? Because it is correct theology - you are thinking like God thinks - and it will empower you to love people!

Text Summary (for reading as a group)

As believers, we all know that we are supposed to walk in love. So, we may think “why study ‘walking in love’”? The reason we feel this way is because we look at the rest of the body of Christ as our standard. We think that as long as we are walking in as much love as the rest of the body of Christ generally is then we are “good” at walking in love. But, the body of Christ is not our standard. The Word of God is our standard. If you look at the body of Christ as a whole are we fulfilling the commandment to love everyone like Jesus loves us? While there are probably millions of Christians who are truly walking in the love of Christ for others, that still leaves the vast majority of believers (90% or more) that are doing a miserable job loving others. We don’t look any different than the world; we are not loving people any different than the world loves them. For instance, when you walk into a restaurant, is it immediately very obvious to you who is a Christian and who is not a Christian? By contrast, if you walked into a place and there were several people in there and one of them was Jesus, do you think you would notice a difference between Him and the rest of the folks? Absolutely! We would think “who is that Guy; I’ve got to know Him!” That’s how attractive the love of God is!

We know that we are supposed to walk in love, but knowing that we are supposed to is not working to bring out the love of God in our lives. Why? The problem is a lack of understanding. We may think that the love walk is hard. But when you start believing correctly the love walk is really, really easy. In fact, you will actually find that not walking in love is infinitely times harder than not walking in love.

In fact, there are benefits and rewards to walking in love - motivations to walking in love! You may think “that’s not right ... I shouldn’t be looking for motivation to walk walk in love.” But the New Testament makes it so clear that we should not worry about being motivated by rewards! The first reason to walk in love is because your Father wants you to! When you are in front of a very unlovely person it is exciting to realize that it will be really pleasing right now to Our Father if you choose to love them. Think about God’s mindset: “God so loved the world ...” He didn’t “so love the Christians” - He “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” It says in Romans 5:8 that God demonstrated His own love in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. So, when you see someone who is walking in a very unGodly way - or even overtly cursing God - it is natural to think that God is definitely not happy with that person, but the Bible teaches that God had anger and wrath towards sin - and He took all of that wrath for all of our sins for all of the world for all time ... and He already poured that wrath out on His Son! And the Bible says, therefore, we have All been reconciled to the Father. What does that mean? It means we have all been “made friendly” to the Father again. There is a wrath of God that is reserved - for the Day of Wrath. There is a period of time now for which man can exercise faith in Christ. And when God returns, those who never placed faith in Christ will be judged. We think we are aligning ourselves with God by having judgment towards the world, but we are not. If we actually want to get in alignment with God, we love them! Now does that mean that we say nothing about evil in the earth? No, not at all! There are many

other scriptures that teach us we are to stand up for righteousness. We don't get mean or ugly. We speak the truth IN LOVE. But, what are we doing in love? We're speaking the truth!

The second benefit to walking in love is that it is how we experience God's fullness. Jn. 15:9-12 says that if you obey God's commandment - to love one another as I have loved you - your joy will be FULL! Do you know what it means to have your joy full? It means you don't have any room for more! Jesus' words in Jn. 15 are not just theory or words on a page. Jesus was saying there is a place that you can go where your joy will be FULL! Ephesians 3:17-19 says when you are rooted in love, coming from a place of love, towards others, it enables you to comprehend God's love towards you!

Loving people is not about feelings. Imagine you are in front of someone who is being very nasty. Immediately your flesh wants to respond with similar nastiness. God says "don't do that! Overcome evil with good!" We may think "I don't feel anything good towards this person" and God says "I can't recall a single scripture where I was talking about your feelings." This is Christianity 101. Every part of Christianity is about whether we are going to be moved by our feelings or by the Word of God. That is our choice at all times. When I fail in my Christian walk, I always fail for the same reason - I was moved by my feelings instead of the Word. When I am successful is when I make a decision to be moved by the Word regardless of my feelings. My feelings may be in alignment with it, but they may not be in alignment with it. The Word says to love them - even though they are getting ugly!

The whole reason our feelings even get involved is because we are still way too alive! God says we are to die to self! Someone has said "you will never be greatly used by God until you get your 'I' punched out." What does a dead person do if you kick them or spit on them or throw insults at them? NOTHING - because they are dead! When the God of the universe loves me, why should I care what you think? I don't mean that to sound insulting - but now I'm free to just love you because I happen to know a secret - He loves you too! So, if there is a person being nasty towards you and you do not feel anything towards that person that is lovely, you can choose to love them. When we make that decision to love them we will experience God's love. When you love someone as an act of faith, you will feel the love of God come up in your heart. The worse the situation is, the richer the soil for God's love to be on display! When you act in love you begin to learn and experience the Love of God.

The greatest hinderance to loving people is unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is always triggered by offense. When someone does something and you feel offended by it, it is not unforgiveness yet. Being offended is one thing, but you can take that offense and forgive them. In other words, you can get offended and not sin ... OR you can take the offense and say "how dare you talk to me like that!" You take the offense and we pass judgement - we just entered into unforgiveness. Am I saying that you should never say something to anyone who says something wrong to you - NOT AT ALL! This isn't a message of becoming a doormat. It's just that we do everything in love. We can tell people that they are wrong - we can clarify and bring out the truth ... no problem! We just mess up when we decide to become offended, judge them, and get angry with them. That's when we left God's way and took on the enemy's.

Our Father doesn't want us to harbor unforgiveness. If it doesn't strike you as a great motivation yet, it is because we are not aware of how much He loves us! Jesus says "I had you on on My mind when I was on the Cross." Now consider that if you love this person who is being nasty to you, you are going to be pleasing to God! What a great reason! Ephesians 4:32 says: *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."* Peter once asked Jesus (in Mt. 18:21-22) how often he should forgive a brother who sinned against him - "up to seven times?" Jesus replied "up to 70 times 7!" It is our Father's will that we would forgive!

We also need to know that unforgiveness is a toxic poison in the heart. It will literally cause you to physically decay. It will cause you to mentally bog down. It is emotionally destructive. Most people, unfortunately, are harboring unforgiveness. Try this. get before God in prayer - quiet. Get alone with Him and say "Father I ask you to show me right now ... do I have unforgiveness in my heart towards anybody?" Then just get quiet and listen. The majority of us will get reminded of some people that we need to release in our hearts from unforgiveness. We need to realize that ***ALL unforgiveness in the heart is demonic in nature.*** Unforgiveness is NOT of God. That means it came from the Kingdom of darkness! Every time we harbor unforgiveness in our hearts, it is demonic and nature, and we need to get it out! Unforgiveness is you and I drinking poison - hoping that they will die. So, let's find a better way to deal with it!

So, how do we walk in love and constant forgiveness towards everyone?

1. By possessing correct theology (or in other words, thinking like God thinks). God is loving everyone all the time, has forgiven (paid for) everyone's sin debt, and is not angry towards any one. He has appointed a Day for Wrath, but today is not that day. We are in a dispensation of Grace. For now, even the judge of all the earth isn't judging them right now, so what are we doing? Love people!

2. We must have faith in our God-likeness. If you don't believe that the Spirit of God dwells on the inside of you and wants to love this person and that you are actually capable of loving them with the love of God that is inside of us, we won't do it! We may not feel right towards a person acting nasty, but if we believe that the Holy Spirit is in us and act accordingly, just watch what will happen!

3. We often have a hard time forgiving someone because we mix the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation, but God does not say "be reconciled to everyone." NO. He says "forgive everyone." Reconciliation takes both parties, forgiveness only requires you. "With everything that is within YOU, be at peace with all men." If someone REALLY wrongs you, it may take a month or two or three in prayer to finally forgive them! Pray for them! You will know you have forgiven them when you don't have any problem seeing them in person. That's a fruit of forgiveness. BUT you don't have to like them as a person. You can know their character is not right. You can choose to not do business with them again. You can forgive and love them, but also not be friends with them. Forgiveness is about releasing them from their sin debt to you; it's about releasing them to God. And use wisdom. If they have shown you that they are unreliable, don't rely on them. If they have shown you that they

are a their, don't give them money! Be smart. Don't co-mingle forgiveness with reconciliation. You can forgive and love them from a distance.

4. We also struggle with unforgiveness because we think that if we forgive them, we are letting them off of the hook which violates our principles of right and wrong. Here's why our forgiveness does not violate a standard of right and wrong: **(1)** You and I are not the judge of the earth. **(2)** Your Father asks you to give to them what He already gave to you in a much bigger way. God is saying "I forgave you of a massive debt. I am asking you to do the same for them." **(3)** God is actually going to balance all the books at the end perfectly! We can release them to the only lawgiver that there is and no that He is perfect in His ways!

Remember this as you are in front of a difficult person: Jesus died for the person and when you are in Heaven, are you actually going to wish that person was in Hell? Those two thoughts will give you power to love people! Why? Because it is correct theology - you are thinking like God thinks - and it will empower you to love people!

Points to Ponder . . .

- How does proper believing help us love people as Christ loves us?
- What are some of the benefits or motivations to walking in love?
- How does unforgiveness start in our hearts?
- What are some of the benefits or motivations to steering clear of unforgiveness?
- How can we continually stay in love ... and out of unforgiveness?