

Chapter 3

FORGIVENESS

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

Colossians 3:13 (NKJ)

In the last chapter, you learned about the damaging affects of living in the Judgment Cycle. When you choose to judge people, they feel rejected. When you choose to remember that Jesus died for them, you can accept them in spite of their faults.

This chapter will illustrate that you can experience freedom through forgiving others. Do you have feelings of anger, resentment, or hatred toward someone who has hurt you? Do those feelings torment you? Learning how to truly forgive will set you free.

Q1. How would you describe forgiveness?

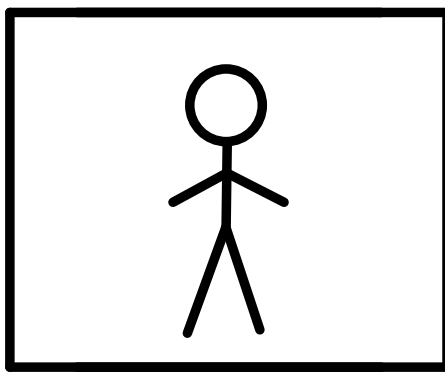
Forgiveness is **not** simply trying to forget. It is not just letting time pass after an offense happens. It is not disregarding the wrong another person has done against you or even pretending that an offense did not matter. This is not true forgiveness and you will not experience freedom.

Prison of Unforgiveness

The hurts you have experienced from others could be one-time offenses or repeated wrongs done to you. The person who has offended you may or may not know that you were hurt. Regardless of how the offense happened or who did it, if you don't forgive, you will never be truly free. Your offender was in the wrong but you are the one who ends up in bondage.

This bondage is illustrated as the **prison of unforgiveness**.

Prison of Unforgiveness

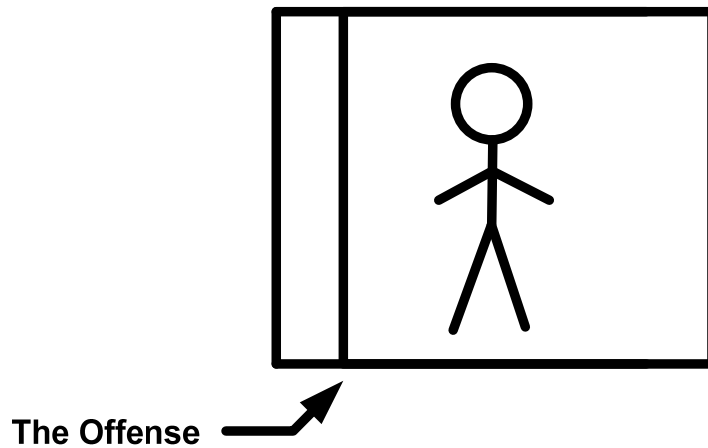


- Q2.** Is there someone who has offended you that you have not forgiven?
Who is it?

Bar #1 – The Offense

This prison of unforgiveness has four bars. The first bar of the prison is **the offense**. This is the wrong the person did to you.

Prison of Unforgiveness

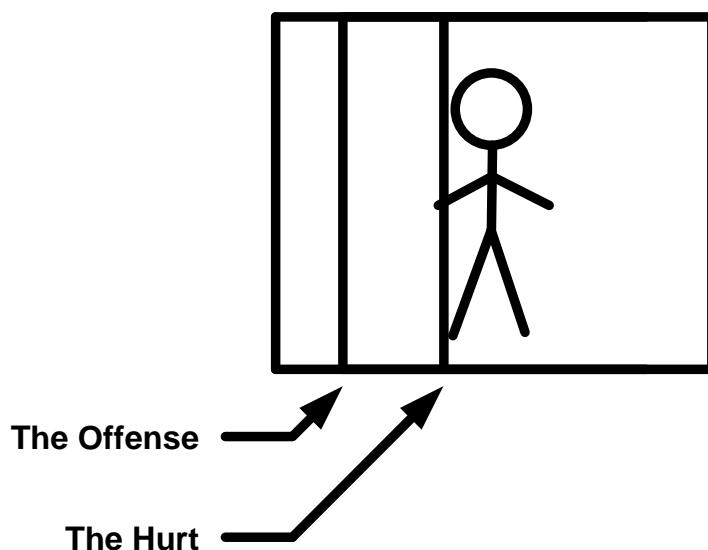


Q3. What was the *offense* the person committed?

Bar # 2 – The Hurt

The second bar of the prison is **the hurt**. This is how you felt emotionally as a result of the offense. You may have felt betrayed, embarrassed, rejected, belittled, unimportant, depressed, angry or devastated.

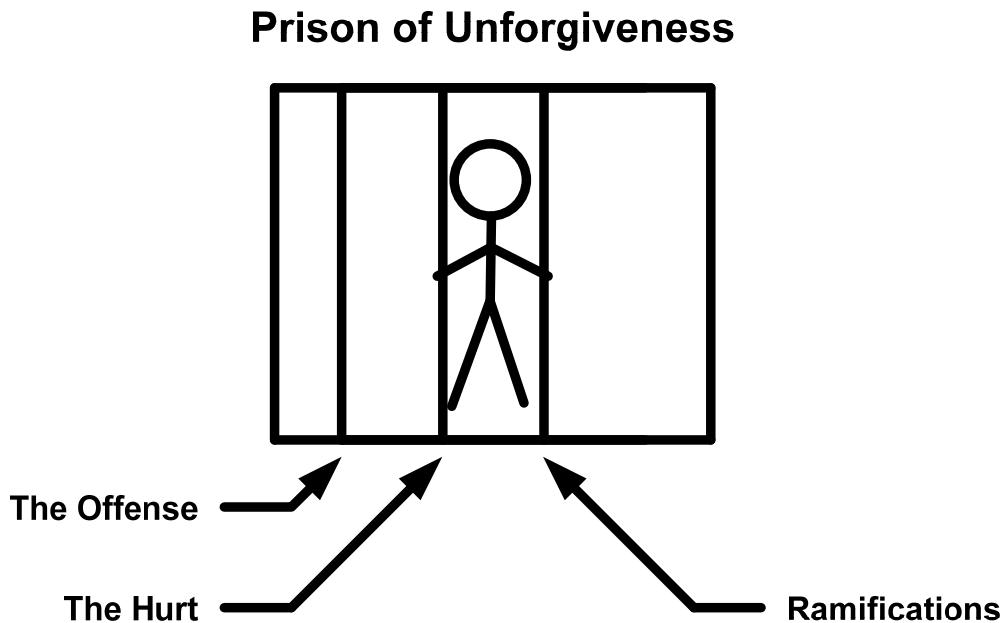
Prison of Unforgiveness



- Q4.** How did you *feel* about the offense from the previous question? What were your emotions?

Bar #3 – The Ramifications

The third bar to the prison is **the ramifications** of the offense. This is how the offense affected your life afterwards.



The offense is like a rock thrown into a pond; the hurt and ramifications are the ripples into the other areas of your life. Ramifications of an offense may affect your relationship with God, your mind, your health, your relationships, your finances, your marriage, and your children.

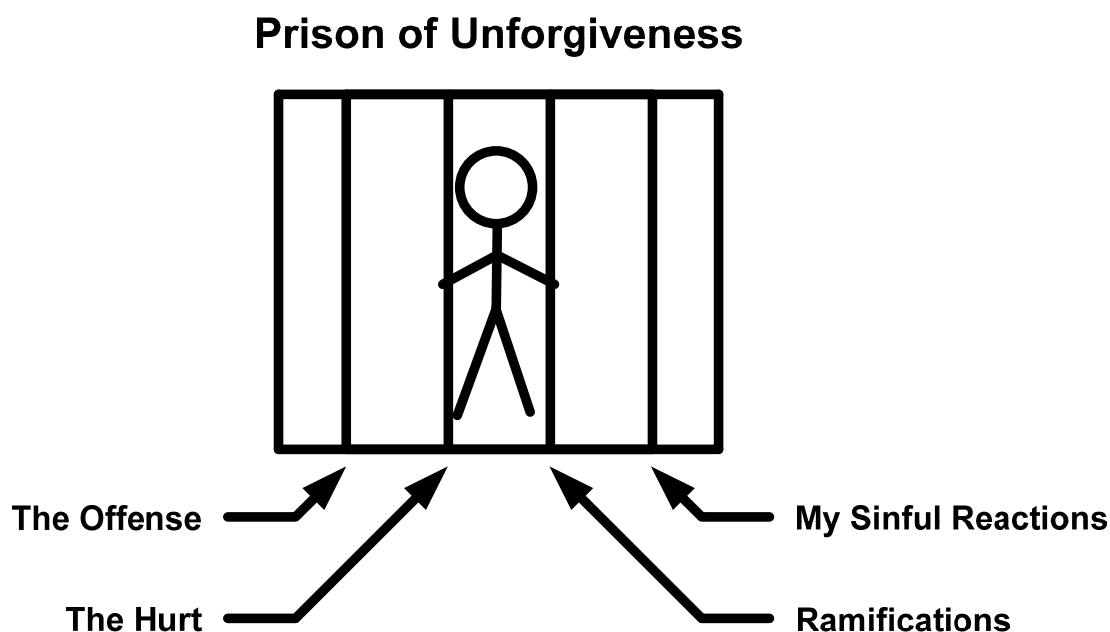
For example: If someone stole from you that would be the *offense*. The *hurt* may be feelings of being cheated and betrayed. The *ramifications* may include not having enough money to pay your bills and having to take a second job. The fact that you have to work a second job takes time away from your family and causes problems in your marriage. All these ramifications happened because someone stole from you.

Q5. What are the *ramifications* of the offense you previously listed?

The ripples from the offense continue to grow larger over time.

Bar #4 – My Sinful Reactions

The fourth bar of the prison is your **sinful reactions**. These are the wrong choices *you* made as a result of the offense.



You were wronged but did you react in a sinful manner? This would include gossip, slander, rejecting, and judging your offender. It could also include wrong choices you made long after the offense.

For example, perhaps you were sexually abused as a child. The abuse was the sin of your offender, but you may have gone on to make sinful choices yourself. These sinful reactions might have included sexual promiscuity, not trusting anyone, or substance abuse.

Q6. What were your sinful reactions as a result of the offense?

You may have built your Prison of Unforgiveness to protect yourself, but the bars keep you bound to your offender. How do you forgive an offense when you know someone must pay?

Jesus' Payment for All Sin

God does not forgive sin by pretending that it did not happen or ignoring it. He sent His only Son to pay for sin. God made the forgiveness of sin possible through the blood of Jesus. God requires the shedding of blood for **any** sin or offense to be forgiven.

"...Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins." **Hebrews 9:22** (NLT)

Jesus became the complete payment for sin. His blood was shed only once, but was powerful enough to cover every sin throughout all the ages.

*"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away **the sin of the world!**'"* **John 1:29** (NKJ)

- Q7.** Does the blood of Jesus take away your sins? Explain.
- Q8.** Is the blood of Jesus powerful enough to cover the sins of the person who offended you?

*"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him **the iniquity of us all.**"* **Isaiah 53:6** (NKJ)

God accepted Christ's blood as payment for **all** sins.

If all offenses were paid for by what Jesus did on the cross, His blood is potent enough to cover your offender's sin against **you**. Your offender may still need to receive God's forgiveness or be legally responsible for what was done, but as far as you are concerned he or she is no longer guilty when you forgive.

Jesus tells a parable about a king who forgave a servant of a great debt. Later that servant wouldn't forgive the small debt of a friend.

*“Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ Then the angry king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny. ‘That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart.’” **Matthew 18:32–35** (NLT)*

- Q9.** What is the reason the master gave for expecting the servant to forgive?

Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant makes the point that God’s children are commanded to forgive, because God has forgiven them.

True forgiveness is choosing to accept the blood of Jesus as the full payment for what your offender did. Choosing to forgive is an act of your will; forgiveness is not based on your feelings.

- Q10.** What is keeping you from forgiving your offender?

The Bible gives the account of Joseph in Genesis 37. He was wronged and offended by his brothers. They threw him into a pit and sold him into slavery. Joseph experienced tremendous hurt because of his brothers, but he forgave them. When he was eventually reunited with them, he treated them kindly and said,

*“...As far as I am concerned, God turned into **good** what you meant for evil.” **Genesis 50:20** (NLT)*

- Q11.** Can God turn what has happened to you into good?

"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."

Romans 8:28 (NLT)

You may be trying to protect yourself or get revenge by choosing not to forgive. Nevertheless as you have seen, *you* become the one in bondage, not your offender. *You* become the person in the wrong when you do not forgive someone who has offended you.

"...Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

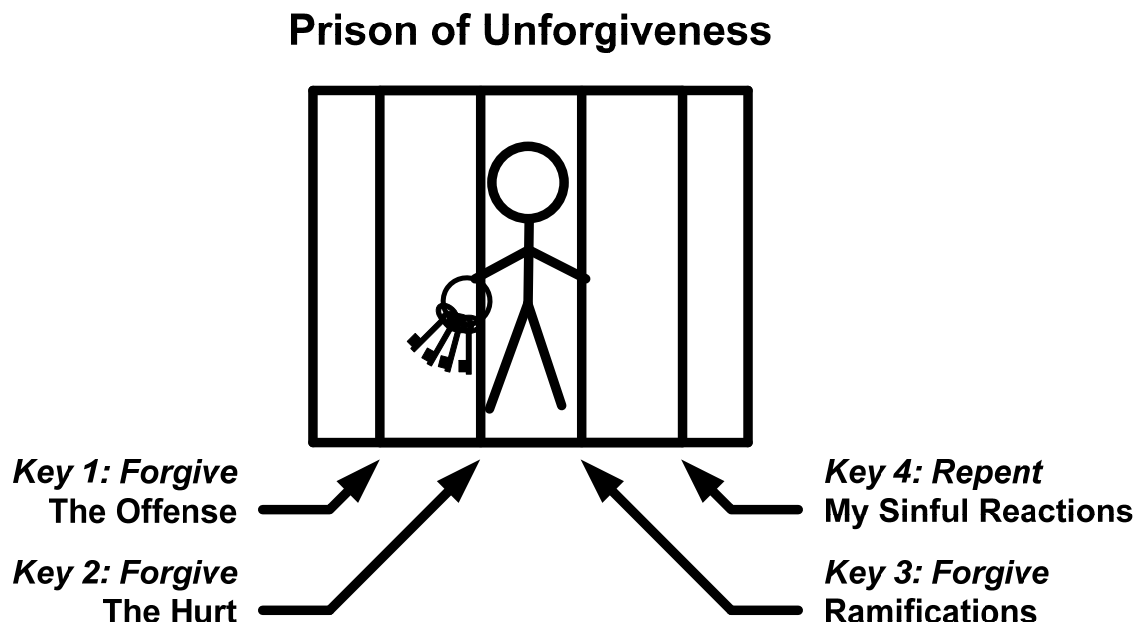
Ephesians 4:32 (NLT)

Q12. What does this verse say about forgiveness?

God wants to heal your hurts and set you free from bondage.

Keys to Forgiveness

Notice that the keys to unlock the Prison of Unforgiveness are *in* your hand. There are four keys.



Key 1 – Forgive the Offense

You choose to forgive the person for the wrong that he or she did to you. Remember, you are accepting the blood of Jesus as full payment for what the offender did. You are choosing to no longer hold them guilty for the offense. You might pray something like this, “Heavenly Father, I *choose* to forgive (name the person who offended you) for what he/she did to me (be specific and name the offense) I believe the blood of Jesus covers their sin.”

Key 2 – Forgive the Hurt

After you forgive the offense, take the time to forgive all the hurt feelings you have experienced. “I *choose* to forgive him/her for the feelings that I experienced because of the offense.” (Be specific and list the emotions you experienced.)

Key 3 – Forgive the Ramifications

You choose to forgive the offender for how the offense affected all other areas of your life. “I choose to forgive him/her for all the ramifications (list them) caused by the offense.”

Key 4 – Repent of Your Sinful Reactions

You repent of your own sinful reactions. “Lord, I acknowledge that I have sinned too. I confess my sinful reactions (be specific). Thank You that the blood of Jesus covers my sins and that I am forgiven.”

Q13. Are you ready to be free from the Prison of Unforgiveness?

Take time to make the following lists.

1. List the offense.

2. List the hurt.

3. List the ramifications.

4. List your sinful reactions.

Now pray and use the **four keys** to forgive your offender.

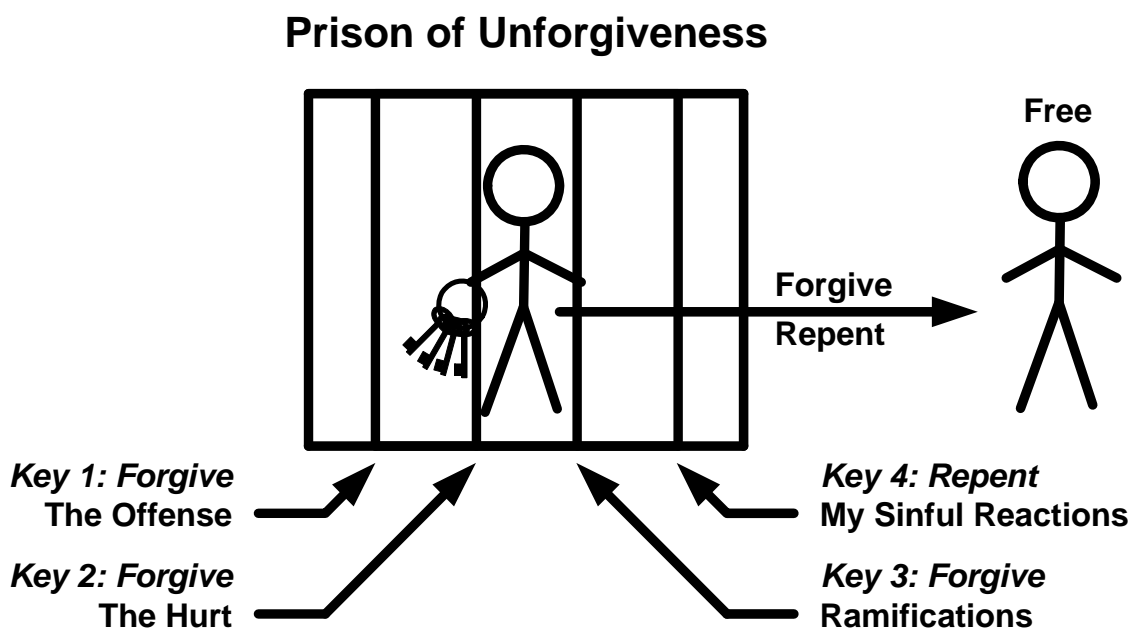
Make a Habit of Forgiving

You may need to go through this process many times if you are in a relationship where there is regular hurt or offenses. Peter came to Jesus and asked,

“...‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’” **Matthew 18:21–22** (NKJ)

Freedom

After you have chosen to forgive, you are **free** from the prison of unforgiveness.



*"God [Jesus] has purchased our freedom with his blood
and has forgiven all our sins." Colossians 1:14 (NLT)*

Christ's blood frees you from the punishment for your sins. Christ's blood is also the basis for forgiving others, which frees you from the Prison of Unforgiveness.

Lastly, as you used the fourth key (Key 4: Repent of your sinful reactions), you may have seen ways that you have hurt others.

Q14. Have you been someone else's offender? Who is it and what did you do?

*“So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be **reconciled** to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.”*

Matthew 5:23–24 (NLT)

Seeking Forgiveness

Part of being *reconciled* to others, is seeking forgiveness when you have wronged them. Even if their wrong seems bigger, you need to take responsibility for your unkind words and actions.

Seeking forgiveness is:

- seeing how you have hurt another person by your *words* or *actions*. The other person has been offended by what you did not by what you were thinking. Your sinful *thoughts* about that person are between you and God. Repent of those to Him.
- going to or calling that person. Be sure you have completed the process of forgiving that person before you go.
- saying, “**I was wrong** for what I did (state your offense). Would you please forgive me?”
- doing everything that you can to make restitution. For example: if you stole something, pay it back. It might mean being willing to rebuild trust and show yourself as reliable.
- responding quickly.

“Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible.” **Romans 12:18** (NLT)

Prison of Unforgiveness

Diagram

Notes