

SELF-INFLICTED CANCER

There may be no word in our English language that strikes more fear in us than the C-word – CANCER. It conjures up impressions of people we know who have endured, and often succumbed to, this debilitating disease caused by out-of-control cells growing in us. Cancer is terrifying and our desire is to avoid it at all costs; however, the physical disease is not what I have in mind here. The cancer to which I am referring is just as deadly, perhaps more so, because it affects more than the sick person. The cancer of which I speak is one that *we inflict on ourselves!* This cancer is not a disease but a sin – *unforgiveness*.

The effects of this self-inflicted cancer eat us alive, gnaw at our very souls. They keep us from being unproductive in our service to Christ and make us miserable. But the effects don't stop with us. They spill over to others in our lives – especially our families. The bitterness that develops in us is reflected on those we love and associate with. Unforgiveness has ruined many families and friendships. Our unforgiveness deeply wounds those we love who may not have any connection to the situation that hurt us.

God's Word, the *Bible*, often causes me to reflect on various character traits and how they are manifest in my life. These generally involve *choice* on my part. I choose to love others. I choose to hate some. I choose to bless others – or not. I choose how I will react to various events. Often, I am initially led to these choices by my feelings. This is where life gets dangerous. My feelings can – and usually do – color the way I interpret the circumstances. I do not always see things as they really are. I get the context wrong. One part of the context I often miss is how the situation and my reaction to it square with God's Word.

Likely, each of us has been hurt in some way by someone else. The hurt may be minor, but it is real. Or it may cause us significant pain. Regardless, our natural tendency is to hold a grudge. We refuse to get beyond the hurt and we *refuse to forgive* the person who wronged us. My observation is that often the hurt is more perceived than real. We let our feelings color the way we interpret the situation. We go on separated from the other person by the grudge we are holding.

God addresses this in His Word. He calls us to quit it! To REPENT! To forgive!

Don't believe me? Check out the scriptures copied at the end of this article.

FORGIVENESS SCRIPTURES

NOTE: All scriptures are from the NIV.

In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.”

The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. *Numbers 14:19-20*

. . . if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. *Matthew 6:14-15*

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” *Matthew 18:21-35*

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. *Matthew 26:28*

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” *Mark 11:25*

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. *Luke 6:37*

. . . “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.” *Luke 17:3-4*

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. *Acts 10:43*

‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ *Acts 26:16-18*

If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. *2 Corinthians 2:5-8*

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace⁸ that he lavished on us. . . *Ephesians 1:7-8*

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. *Colossians 3:13*

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. *1 John 1:9*

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. *Ephesians 4:31*
