

Love Doesn't Keep a Record of Wrongs

By Wendy Wood



Love does not keep a record of wrongs. Other translations say “Love does not keep score”, “Love takes no account of evil”, “Love is not resentful”, or “Love does not take into account wrongs suffered”. The Greek is a combination of two words *logizomai*, which is an accounting term and means “to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over, or to weigh”. The other word *kakos* means “of a bad nature, troublesome or injurious”. Taken together, these words paint the picture of keeping a tally of the bad, injurious things that have happened to you. But, love does not keep this tally or score. **Love forgives.** At the heart of this facet of love is the idea that a loving person doesn't dwell on the sins of other people or rehearse wrongs that have happened. A loving person forgives quickly, consistently, and avoids bitterness.

Colossians 3:13 and Ephesians 4:32 command us to “forgive as the Lord has forgiven you” and “forgive as God has forgiven you in Christ Jesus”. We are given many word

pictures of God's forgiveness. Psalm 103:12 tells us God removes our sins "as far as the east is from the west" which is a distance incalculable since the directions go on forever in opposite directions. Micah 7:19 uses the picture of God casting our sins into the depths of the oceans where they presumably could never be uncovered or dredged up. Isaiah 43:25 simply says, "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." God is so gracious and forgiving that He chooses to remove our sins from our record (keeping no record of wrongs) and chooses to not even remember them. That is a picture of love!

When we are sinned against and experience a hurt, we have two choices. We can choose to forgive or we can choose to not forgive and allow bitterness to take root and begin to grow. Our response to being hurt, like all other responses, comes from our heart. We reveal what we treasure in our hearts most when we are hurt and suffering. It is easier to forgive if the offender admits he was wrong and asks for forgiveness. That doesn't remove the hurt or even make up for the hurt, but most of us feel better if the wrongdoer admits it. When a sinner repents, we can be honest that the hurt was real, there was a cost to the sin that must be absorbed by the hurt person, and it is a choice to not hold the sinner accountable for his sin. Some sins are easier to forgive in this way than others. A one time harsh word is easier to forgive and not keep a record of than being on the receiving end of an angry, abusive parent for 18 years or married to an oppressive spouse for 20 or more years. There is so much more to forgiveness in these long term situations that I will not address that here. Please seek biblical counsel for long term abusive situations and allow a counselor to guide you through forgiveness. Forgiveness is an event, meaning it needs to happen as a decisive point where forgiveness is granted, but is also an ongoing event, meaning that when a memory or thought of the sin comes back the forgiver must choose to forgive again and again. Luke 17:4 is clear, when someone repents, a believer in Christ must forgive. When forgiveness is asked for and granted, this completes the reconciliation process and the relationship is restored. The promise to forgive contains three parts. First, forgiveness is the promise to not dwell on or think about the offense anymore. Second, forgiveness is the promise to not talk to other people about the offense. Third, forgiveness promises to not bring up the offense to the offender, unless the same type of sin comes up again and this offense is used as an example of the greater pattern and is helpful in bringing the sinner back to repentance.

This facet of love clearly states that the loving response to being sinned against is forgiveness. So what if the person who sinned against you does not admit wrong and does not ask for forgiveness? True reconciliation requires repentance and forgiveness.

Scripture tells us to forgive as God forgives us. We must repent to be reconciled to God. We must turn from our sin and place our hope and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. Reconciliation is dependent on this transaction of asking for forgiveness and the offended person offering forgiveness. This is how we are reconciled to God. However, sadly, many times the offender does not repent and does not even admit wrongdoing. How do we then forgive? Romans 12:9-21 gives clear direction.

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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.” 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.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Working our way from the end of this passage backwards, forgiveness in the hurt person’s heart starts with trusting God and God’s justice. We are called to leave vengeance to God. God is a just God. He does not ignore sin. God hates sin and must punish it because He is holy. Holiness cannot overlook evil. Sin is either paid for through Christ’s blood shed on the cross or will be paid for by the sinner in eternal separation from God. If the person who sinned against you is a believer, Christ has paid the price for that sin. God has wiped that sin away because His wrath was satisfied by Christ making payment for the sin. When we realize God has already forgiven a believer’s sin, who are we to not forgive? Is your justice more right than God’s? Are your standards better than God’s? Is Christ’s sacrifice enough for this sin? To be unforgiving reveals your heart in this matter. Can you trust God to deal with this sin? God is all-knowing, all-wise, all-good, all-just, and only He can discern the motives and intentions of the heart perfectly.

So, if the one who sinned against you is unwilling to repent, we are called to trust God with the hurt and forgive by continuing to love that person well. The relationship is not reconciled fully as it would be if transactional repentance and forgiveness had happened. Yet, we are called to forgive in our hearts, trusting God that He has purpose in the hurt and we are called to love even our enemies. We’ve been describing what

love looks like for many pages, and will keep on going. All these aspects of love apply, even to someone who has wronged you and not repented. Romans 12 tells us that by loving them "you will heap burning coals on his head". This has a few different interpretations by Bible scholars. Matthew Henry offers both takes on this. First, it could mean "melt him into repentance and friendship, and mollify his spirit towards thee". By being kind, patient, loving, providing for your enemy, you might be an agent God uses to bring this person to repentance. The love could open his eyes to his sin and he would repent as he sees what Christ has done in your heart. Or, Matthew Henry says "It will aggravate his condemnation, and make his malice against thee the more inexcusable." After seeing Christ's love in action through a loving person, this person will be without excuse and further bring judgment on themselves.

As you continue to look at Romans 12 we see that forgiveness is extended by meeting the sinner's needs and responding with honor even in the face of bad treatment. It means seeking to make peace which might be gently pointing out the sin and calling the sinner to repent. Just because you seek peace doesn't mean it will happen, but love is willing to try. Romans 12 tells us to be patient in the affliction and to pray, both for our hearts to forgive and for the sinner. While a fully reconciled relationship requires the transaction of repentance and forgiveness, the offended party is still called to forgive and continue to love the sinner. (Again, there are some so abusive and power oriented relationships that sometimes the injured party must love from afar, so please seek biblical counsel if necessary.)

Bitterness is the opposite of forgiveness. I said at the beginning of this section, there are two choices: to forgive or not to forgive and allow bitterness to take root.

Bitterness is the result of not forgiving in your heart. Bitterness is what Romans 12 would call, "being overcome by evil." Being bitter is letting the other person's sin overcome you.

In his booklet "Bitterness: The Root that Pollutes", Lou Priolo says don't allow your offender's sin to overcome you.

You may not retreat.

You may not surrender.

You may not give up.

You may not throw in the towel.

You may not wimp out.

You may not allow his evil to prevail against you.

You may not allow his sin against you to provoke you to sin.¹⁷

So how do you know if you are bitter? Lou Priolo again shows us some possible actions that reveal a bitter heart.

*Thoughts of resentment toward your offender.

*Telling yourself things like “He’ll never change” or “I just can’t put up with the person any longer.”

*Unnecessarily limiting the scope of your communication because of unsuccessful attempts to resolve conflicts with him in the past.

*Allowing anger to keep you from confronting him biblically.

*Allowing yourself to become sinfully angry, anxious, or depressed about the ways in which he has hurt you.

*Allowing your ‘hurt feelings’ to keep you from fulfilling your biblical responsibilities - especially toward the person at whom you are bitter.

*Resorting to sinful, retaliatory actions such as:

- Abusive speech
- Gossip
- Name-calling
- Pouting
- Quarreling
- Slander
- Sulking
- Temper tantrums
- Threats
- Withdrawal

If you have any one of these, you are allowing sin to overcome you and are allowing bitterness to take root in your heart.¹⁸ Which of these do you see in your life? How have you allowed someone else’s sin to overcome you?

Bitterness affects relationships in many ways. When you dwell on someone’s sin, you

¹⁷ Bitterness: The Root That Pollutes, by Lou Priolo

¹⁸ Bitterness: The Root That Pollutes by Lou Priolo

are hardening your heart and that always impacts your thoughts, words, and interactions with others, and not just the person who offended you. As bitterness grows within you, you start to distrust others and are quicker to anger, especially in areas related to how you have been sinned against. It becomes easy to assume the worst of others' intentions and be guarded rather than reaching out in love. A bitter person is usually impatient. A bitter person is quick to find faults with others. A bitter person may use sinful speech in sarcasm or condescending words. A bitter person may withdraw and avoid contact with people. Bitter people tend to lack joy because bitterness (focusing on how you have been hurt) brings you down. Bitter people often have trouble submitting to authority because they assume others are trying to prevent them from good things. Bitterness separates you from God because you are not thankful for your salvation in Christ as manifested by not forgiving as you have been forgiven. Bitterness separates you from God because you are not embracing His sovereignty over man and you are not surrendering to how God uses suffering in your life.

Stop and do an inventory of your relationships. Which of these evidences of bitterness apply to you? What sins have been done to you that you are holding onto?

Bitterness begins in your thoughts. When you dwell on past offenses you allow the root of bitterness to take hold. So the first step in your journey out of bitterness is to repent of your sinful thoughts. This is recognizing that your thoughts about past sins is sinful. You are now sinning in response to what has happened to you. This is sin against God. You are judging God's wisdom and goodness in what suffering He has allowed in your life. After confessing your sin and asking for forgiveness, you must turn away from this type of thinking and replace it with loving thoughts. So, you must decisively choose forgive now. And then, when the temptation to think about past offenses comes up, you must again ask God to help you forgive and take thoughts captive. It is a choice to think about things that are true, right, honorable, lovely, pure, admirable, and things worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8).

So what does that look like when you are thinking about how you have been treated unfairly or when you have been hurt by someone?

True thoughts - God is sovereign. What man means for evil, God means for good (Genesis 50:20). God has purpose in all our suffering (Romans 5:1-5). Jesus, who was perfect, paid for your sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). Are you concerned about fairness? Things that are true conform to reality. God defines reality as the Creator. How he tells us to think and live are ultimate truths.

Right thoughts - You have been forgiven by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7). You are called to forgive others because you have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:31). The one

who sinned might see Christ in you and repent to God (Romans 12:20). God is righteous. Things that conform to God's will are righteous.

Lovely thoughts - The way Christ had compassion and patience is beautiful and lovely. The way Christ chose to be humble and take on human form, the form of a servant, and was obedient to death is lovely (Philippians 2). When you become like Christ, you are lovely (1 Peter 3:3-4). Lovely is the beauty of God's character on display.

Pure thoughts - Patient, kind, contented, selfless, humble, forgiving thoughts are pure (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). The idea of something being pure means it doesn't have impurities in it. It is 100% what it should be. Psalm 86:11 is a prayer to God to "unite my heart to fear Your Name". Pure thoughts are focused on God and His way.

Admirable thoughts - What do you admire? Admiration is given to those who are regarded well and thought highly of. Christ is our example to follow (John 13:15). When Jesus washed His disciples feet, He said we would be blessed if we followed His example (John 13:17). Admirable thoughts consider how you can serve others well.

Changing your thoughts is the first step.

Second, do good. What will you do to continue to show love to the people around you, even those who have sinned against you?

Application:

1. What aspects of "love keeps no record of wrongs" stood out to you?
2. What past hurts do you dwell on? Make a list of offenses that still replay in your thinking.
3. Repent. Confess that these thoughts are sin. Agree with God that you are judging Him in allowing these hurts to have happened. Commit to trust God's plan for your suffering and surrender to His plan for your life. Ask God to help you forgive. Commit to take those thoughts captive.
4. What thinking do you need to change? Be specific. Look at the list of offenses you listed out. For each one, write out what Philippians 4:8 thinking will look like.
5. What loving actions do you need to put on? Look back at the ways that bitterness shows itself. Do you need to re-engage in a relationship? Do you need to speak encouraging words rather than sarcasm? As you read back through the descriptions, ask God to reveal to you how you have harbored bitterness in your heart.