

When Trust Is A Sin by Pastor Marty

In the last newsletter—as well as many prior ones—I have discussed the necessity for Christians to follow the command of the Lord when it comes to forgiveness. This is vital to our own spiritual life and growth as well as our psychological and emotional wellbeing. One issue that often comes up in any discussion of forgiveness has to do with how we should relate to other people after we have forgiven them. This is especially significant for those who are struggling to forgive others because the offenses have involved abuse, betrayal, or harm. Forgiving someone can seem insurmountable when we believe it means trusting the other person and opening ourselves to repeated hurts. We hold onto offenses—or the memory of offenses—because we are trying to protect ourselves from again being harmed by the person (or persons) who sinned against us originally. This makes a great deal of sense when we take time to think about it logically: we were somehow vulnerable to others, they caused us physical or emotional harm, and forgiving them makes us vulnerable again. We automatically relate forgiveness to vulnerability because we equate it with again being naïve or innocent when it comes to how others will treat us. We think loving others automatically means we have to trust them when that is not the case.

We think loving others means we automatically must trust them when that is not true.

This is a radical statement, and it seems entirely contrary to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 where he says that love keeps no record of wrongs, bears all things, and believes all things. However, it actually is not a contradiction; it is a recognition that our English language requires more clarification in how we use or understand these terms. The problem is that we regularly equate keeping a record with remembering, bearing with permitting, and believing with trusting. These terms can be used similarly at times, but they are not always the same—especially in certain contexts. As described in several prior newsletters, the “loving” thing is not always the same as the “nice” thing or the “kind” thing; love often has to be stern and tough, and it often requires setting boundaries. Enabling someone to continue in a self-destructive habit, such as pornography or drug addiction, may temporarily make them happy, but it is certainly not the loving thing to do. Love requires limits and conditions that force the person to deal with their issues even if it causes them grief and pain in the short term. We are repeatedly told we must allow certain lifestyle preferences because it makes people happy, but we see those lifestyles directly leading to increasing rates of suicide, mental illness, child abuse, trauma, sin, and death. It is not loving to approve something that offers short-term happiness at a cost of long-term destruction.

It is not love to promote what offers momentary pleasure when it brings lifelong regret.

If love keeps no record of wrongs, which is true, then we must identify exactly what this means. Many people interpret this to mean relating to someone as if no prior offenses have been committed. It is often described in terms of justification: God views us just-as-if-we-had-never-sinned. However, it is not valid to equate the two, for there are clear conditions and contexts involved. When God washes us clean and throws our sins into the sea of forgetfulness, it is *after* we have repented and turned away from them. The grace and forgiveness described in this verse is based on a transformed life. Hebrews tells us that if we continue to sin after we know the truth, we separate ourselves from Jesus’ sacrifice and face impending judgment. Throughout the prophets, God often recited the past sins of the people once they returned to those sins. Paul’s statement about not keeping a record of wrongs is not about treating people as if they never sinned; it is about responding to people according to where they are in the present instead of holding resentment and treating them according to all their past sins. The book

of Proverbs, which is based in the fear of the Lord, commands us to recognize the lifestyle, behavior, and attitudes of others and act accordingly. Returning to the analogy of relating to an addict, if we act as if there is no addiction, it is the most unloving thing we can do to them. There is certainly a place for it after the person has become clean and shown consistent improvement; until then, we must watch them like a hawk. Keeping no record of wrongs is about treating people honestly and fairly, not naively.

Forgiveness means treating people honestly and fairly; it is not being foolish or naive.

Likewise, Paul stating that love bears all things does not mean repeatedly putting ourselves in a harmful, abusive, or foolish situation. Proverbs repeatedly tells us otherwise, commanding us to avoid the immoral, give no place to the foolish, and even run from the ungodly. Jesus does tell us to turn the other cheek, but the context reveals that it is about not taking revenge and seeking “an eye for an eye” in return; it is not about continually walking into destructive situations. He Himself said that we should be wise as serpents as well as innocent like doves. The same Paul who says we must bear all things also tells us we *must not* associate with a believer who acts worse than an unbeliever. In that case, doing the loving thing means disassociating from the person—at least for a time. The language here indeed is suggesting a person enduring difficulty or hardship at the hands of another. However, if we look at the other times it is used, they all refer to doing so when it is ultimately helping the other person. If we use the analogy of a physically abusive relationship, we recognize that keeping the status quo only enables abusers to continue sinning without taking responsibility for their actions—and that is certainly not loving. When Paul says we should bear all things, he is telling us not to give up on others prematurely or write them off when being in relationship become difficult. It requires discernment on our part to know if enduring is helping someone become a better person or is actually promoting sin to continue.

Enduring can help others become better people, but it can also foster a sinful lifestyle.

The most significant aspect of this discussion has to do with the idea of believing all things, for it is where trust comes into the equation. Again, this is where forgiveness can be the hardest because it seems to require us to become vulnerable to injury. There is both truth and error in this: on the one hand, relationships always open us up to injury in some way because the only way to remain safe from any disappointment, harm, or grief is to be, as the song says, an island; on the other hand, trust can be an entirely different creature than believing in someone. There are many disorders and dysfunctions in our society, and they make us habitually do the wrong thing. If people are drug addicts or mentally ill, we can believe the best about them while simultaneously recognizing that trusting them to not commit certain behaviors is only allowing them to harm themselves and others. Parents often believe the best about their children, but they still need to set firm boundaries for the sake of each child. The verse that says, “train up children in the way they should go, and when they grow up, they will not depart from it” is not a guarantee that children will never sin; it is a guideline that tells us that the more we set healthy boundaries for children when they are young, the better they will do in life when they get old. Paul is not telling us here that love means believing that every person will do the best thing in every situation; he is telling us that we should notice, bless, and affirm the good in others instead of focus on the bad.

Love means blessing and affirming the good in others instead of focusing on the bad.

This is a very different reading of these “love words” than many of us may have heard. With this being the case, it is reasonable to ask for something more than reason to support the premise that love does not automatically require trust. Thankfully, there are some biblical examples to not only support the argument but make it almost absolute. One instance is found if we go back to the book of Judges. The entire book is comprised of stories of men and women God raised up to deliver Israel after they

had come under bondage—usually by their own disobedience. Here, an Israelite man took a foreign woman as his wife. From the very beginning, we see Sampson acting foolish and doing things that God had told His people not to do; however, God uses Sampson even in his weaknesses and turns every situation into an opportunity for judgment against his enemies. Most notably, there is one part of the story that clearly shows that trusting was the wrong thing to do. Sampson was under a vow from birth that he must never cut his hair. To do so would take away his strength, the gift that God gave him to deliver His people. Sampson knew this, for he admits he would lose his strength if his hair is cut. Delilah three times asks Sampson to share the secret of his strength, and he finally tells her even though she has betrayed him each time. Trusting her this last time was willingly and knowingly forsaking his calling. Trusting someone who is not trustworthy is not only personally risky but can also put others at risk.

Trusting those who are not trustworthy can potentially even put others at risk of harm.

Another obvious instance of trust being wrong has to do with forsaking God's command. In the first book of Kings, a prophet of God speaks a word of judgment against a sinful king. God clearly used this man to powerfully speak against unrighteousness. God specifically told this prophet he was to go speak to the king and then *immediately* return home a different way than he had come. The prophet is very clear in explaining exactly what God had commanded him to do. However, an older prophet hears what happens and goes to great lengths to intercept him. When he does, he lies to the young man, telling him an angel of God appeared to him, instructing him to provide food and shelter for the night. This is a sad tale, for the young prophet believes the old man and has a meal with him. It does not tell us why the old man—who himself is a prophet and certainly knows how important it is to obey God's word—lies to him. It seems that he may have been testing the young man to see if he would hold firm to what God told him to do. Perhaps it was an opportunity for the young prophet to receive a blessing if he did not disobey. We do not know; what we do know is that once the young man eats the meal, the old prophet immediately pronounces a judgment on him for knowingly disobeying God's command to him. In this case, trusting the old prophet was a sin because it led to his forsaking God's command.

At times, trusting the wrong person can lead us to sin against God or against others.

These are just two instances where trust can be seen to be unwise and even sinful. We actually find many instances in the Bible where this is the case. When Joshua is leading Israel into the promised land, they make a covenant with the Gibeonites although God expressly forbid them from doing so; the rulers and the people *trusted* the men were telling the truth when they said they were from a distant land. Adam and Eve ate from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil although God had told them it was forbidden; they *trusted* the serpent was telling the truth. All through the book of Proverbs, the wisest man alive repeatedly tells the reader that the wicked, the sinner, and the fool should not be *trusted*, for it leads to sin and death. Jesus, the perfect physical manifestation of God—and therefore the perfect representative of what love really is—refused to rely upon human testimony to prove who He was; it says He would not *trust* Himself to any person because He knew all about human nature. If anyone can claim to perfectly love and believe the best about others, it has to be God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, that love does not automatically translate into trust. On the contrary, the parable of the talents, along with many other verses, tell us that God only trusts us a little bit until we show we are trustworthy stewards; He then gives us greater authority according to our responsibility. Trust is certainly a good thing, but it must be valued and cared for when it is given. If there is any single parable that best describes how trust should be treated, it is found in Matthew 7:6 where Jesus warns the people about casting their pearls before swine. Trust is a valuable commodity, so it must be prized.