

The Art of Holding Grudges

I remember, as a child, trying to stay mad at one of my parents for something I considered unfair. I wasn't very good at it at first, but gradually I "improved." I also expanding my definition of what deserved my resentment to include not only what a person actually did or said, but what I was sure they meant by it, their presumed malicious intent. On a couple of occasions, I even determined to hold a grudge on behalf of someone else – for the wrong I believed had been done to them. The fact that I hadn't been there to see and hear what had actually happened didn't prevent me from judging. Now that's taking grudge-holding to the level of an art form, don't you think?

Of course the problem is that anger, resentment, and bitterness are not from God; they are instead powerful tools of the enemy. He is overjoyed when we allow these negative thoughts and emotions to take root in our hearts. He rubs his hands together in glee whenever we adopt a new grudge or dredge up old ones, keeping the bitterness alive. Why? Because he knows that these things not only poison our own souls; they will taint or destroy our relationships, including our relationship with God.

"...I say to you that everyone who continues to be angry with his brother or harbors malice against him shall be liable to and unable to escape the punishment imposed by the court: and whoever speaks contemptuously and insultingly of his brother shall be liable... So if, when you are offering your gift at the altar you there remember that your brother has any grievance against you, leave your gift at the altar and go; first make peace with your brother, and then come back and present your gift." (Matthew 5:22-24, Amp.)

We can't draw close to God while we harbor resentment in our hearts against another, especially against a fellow Christian (1 Corinthians 6:1-8, 1 John 4:20). We can't glorify the Lord with the same tongue we use to curse or slander one for whom Christ died (James 3:9-10). How much better to forgive! – even as God in Christ has forgiven each of us a thousand times more (Matthew 18:21-35). Then pray for that person as well as for yourself – to repent of any wrongdoing in the case, for a cleansing of the heart, for understanding and reconciliation to take place. Do it out of obedience to God. Do it to lighten your own burden. Do it to frustrate the enemy! Wouldn't that make a great New Year's resolution? Give up grudge holding and develop the art of forgiveness instead.

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