

Got Baggage? – The Trouble with Carrying a Grudge – Matthew 6:14-15

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:5-15

Introduction

I'm sure you've all heard the expression, "I don't get mad; I get even"

It's a common expression and it reveals a very common attitude – often even within Christian circles

Perhaps some of you have even used it a time or two

I don't get mad; I get even tells us that payback is the order of the day and no one can be allowed to get away with even the slightest offense

One need only look at the news to see how many people are having characters impugned and careers ruined by people who are bent on revenge or getting even

Amazon even sells a book with the title, "Don't Get Mad, Get Even – The Big Book of Revenge" for those who need help with finding ways to get even

For those who've suffered any kind of injury – even if only their pride was wounded – getting even is the name of the game

Because every wound needs to be answered regardless of whether it was even intentional or even whether it was real and not just imagined – as so many wounds we carry are just products of our own minds

To do anything less is seen as a sign of weakness and no self-respecting person would ever want to be thought of as a doormat

Am I right?

But getting even requires keeping score – a running record of whenever someone hurts you or disrespects you or deals you any kind of slight

Because unless we respond at the time of each offense we have to be sure to record every wrong so we can deal with them later

And when we live by the credo of getting even; the baggage we carry around with us can really begin to add up

Of course, we start small [**onebag.jpg**] and maybe carrying one grudge doesn't seem to slow us down much

But before long one leads to more and we find that as the baggage accumulates we begin to feel it [**morebags.jpg**]

And the longer we live our propensity to get even means being saddled with lots of baggage [**lotsofbags.jpg**]

Roughly three years ago I preached a sermon titled: "Hurt in the Church" and we looked at how hurt is inevitable even in the local church because the church is made up, not of perfect people but forgiven sinners

In that message we took a look at how we should deal with the wounds that we inflict on one another from time to time

Sadly, though, there are those who prefer to handle hurts the way the world does rather than the way God shows us in his Word

This is nothing new though and we actually find several instances of grudges in God's Word although they typically are being held by unbelievers

King David sought God's intervention against his enemies who he said in **Psalms 55:3** bore a grudge against him in anger

In **Mark 6:19** we read that Herodias harbored a grudge against John the Baptist because he dared to criticize her marriage to Herod

And we know that Herodias eventually acted on her grudge as she manipulated the events that led to John's execution

Then in **Luke 11:53** we see that the scribes and the Pharisees had a grudge against Jesus

And, as unseemly as it is, we have believers today who not only carry grudges against one another but actually nurse those grudges lest they forget and let an offense slide

One wag online made the comment that it's interesting that we spend so much time and energy nursing grudges because they aren't ever going to get better

This morning I want us to consider how to answer three questions:

First, what is a grudge?

Second, what does carrying or nursing a grudge indicate about the person carrying it?

Third, what impact do grudges have on the person with a grudge?

As we begin we will first consider just **what a grudge is**

I. What a Grudge Is

I like words and I like knowing and using the best word to express an idea

So, as you might expect, I like looking words up in the dictionary to see not just their meanings but their origins and how they have been used by skilled communicators in the past

Recently, I was introduced to a resource that I have really enjoyed – the 1913 edition of Webster’s Dictionary online

Unlike most modern dictionaries the 1913 Webster’s really digs into words to expose their nuance and Webster included some great examples of usage – and many of those examples are from Scripture – how times have changed

If you look up “grudge” in the 1913 Websters you discover some pretty amazing things

The first thing I discovered was that the word “grudge” comes from an old English word meaning **to murmur or grumble**

And it struck me just how true that is of grudges and how we rarely carry our grudges quietly or keep them to ourselves

Rather, we make sure that at least a select group of confidants knows about our grudge so they can harbor ill will toward our target too

Webster goes on to define a grudge as: “Sullen malice or malevolence; cherished malice, enmity, or dislike; ill will; an old cause of hatred or quarrel”

And for an example Webster included that “Esau had conceived a mortal grudge and enmity against his brother Jacob”

A more modern version of Webster’s defines a grudge as “a strong, continued feeling of hostility or ill will against someone over a real or imagined grievance”

From those definitions we see that the key words that describe a grudge are **hostility** and **ill will**

And that that these feelings are **strong** and **continued** or as the older version of Webster’s puts it, **cherished**

To cherish something means “to hold dear; to embrace with interest; to indulge; to encourage; to foster; to promote”

That’s where the idea of nursing a grudge comes from – those who carry a grudge choose not to let go of their hurt but encourage it, foster it, and promote it

Most grudges simmer and fester relatively quietly and most grudge bearers don’t act in any overt way to get even lest they be seen as the aggressor and any retaliation is typically more along the lines of the passive-aggressive type

But not a Brookfield, WI man who kept a list of grievances against people who he thought had done him wrong over a 10-year time period

He found himself in legal jeopardy when one day back in the fall of 2003 he went to the homes of some of his alleged persecutors and vandalized their properties as payback

He spray painted obscenities all over the house of a 75-year old man he blamed for getting him fired from a grocery store job

He destroyed the landscaping of another person who had intervened in a fight he was engaged in with a woman in a parking lot

And he dumped paint stripper all over the cars parked at and near the home of a woman he thought had once cut him off in traffic

I don’t know what the outcome of his case was in the end but I think we can safely say the man was guilty of carrying grudges

Acting on a grudge with that kind of fervor is thankfully rare and that’s what makes his case remarkable

Most of us wouldn’t actually seek to harm those we have a grudge against but we wouldn’t necessarily weep if some misfortune were to befall them either

And that says great deal about us so let's look next at what a grudge indicates about the one who carries it

II. What a Grudge Indicates

The first thing carrying a grudge reveals is that **the person doesn't love God**

Look with me at **John 14:15** where Jesus tells his disciples: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

According to Jesus, love for a sovereign is clearly demonstrated by obedience to that sovereign

So if we believe that God is our Father and that God has a right to expect to be obeyed as a demonstration of our love for him; to disobey indicates a lack of love – would you agree?

Turn in your Bibles with me to **Leviticus 19:18** (page 98) and follow along as I read to you what God says about carrying grudges –

*"You shall not take vengeance **or bear a grudge** against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."*

It's pretty obvious that this command forbids grudges among God's people

Certainly that's true when the grudge is against a fellow believer but we also need to remember the teaching of Jesus in the account of the Good Samaritan where he showed us that our neighbor is whoever we come into contact with

So that means that God forbids us to carry grudges at all and the person who does shows what they think of God

Then I want you to notice how God ended that command in Leviticus because it's significant in what it reveals

God ends the command with the statement, *"I am the Lord"*

By doing so, God reminds us that he is God and in **Romans 12:19** the apostle Paul quotes **Deuteronomy 32:35** where God states unequivocally that he alone, as God, has the right to deal with wrongs –

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."

When we carry a grudge, **we put ourselves in God's place** as we set ourselves up as judge and jury and claim the right to determine that another person's trespass doesn't deserve to be forgiven

When we carry a grudge we also **reveal our lack of spiritual maturity**

Just look at the fruit of the Spirit which show the level of spiritual maturity in the life of a believer

We find the fruit in **Galatians 5:22-23** (page 975) – "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"

Which of those do you see that are made evident by carrying a grudge?

They're all the exact opposite of the attitude that harbors a grudge and their presence precludes grudge carrying

But if you look at verse 20 (**Galatians 5:20**) you will find the works of the flesh that are all a part of harboring a grudge –

"Enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy"

Those are all precursors and excuses for grudges

So bearing a grudge really does serve to reveal very quickly where a person falls on the spiritual maturity spectrum

Grudges also show that **we have an opinion of ourselves that is too lofty**

Scripture admonishes us to consider others better than ourselves but carrying a grudge shows that we are the kind of person who thinks others owe us something

We want the other person to pay a price for hurting us that shows they have suffered as much as we have because we deserve to be compensated – but that rarely happens so the grudge lives on

Carrying a grudge also reveals another aspect of how we feel about our fellow man as it shows **we are unloving and unforgiving**

Consider the list of commands we find in **Ephesians 4:31-32** (page 978) –

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

When we carry a grudge we reveal the bitterness we have against another

And when we share our grudge through grumbling and murmuring we slander the other person by dragging their reputation down in the eyes of those we grumble to

And the presence of a grudge is evidence that we refuse to forgive them

So, carrying a grudge results in violating all the clear commands from these two verses

No matter how we try to justify it, a grudge, at its core, is really just hatred hung onto

And God's Word forbids us from hanging onto our anger or our hatred

Look just a few verses back at **Ephesians 4:26-27** –

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

This is really at its core a New Testament restatement of the command we saw earlier in Leviticus

Paul acknowledges that people and the things they do are going to make us angry from time to time

We are not told to never experience the emotion of anger

But saying "do not let the sun go down on your anger" is just another way of saying don't store up offenses; don't carry grudges

Grudges are not benign things

We can't carry them without revealing our hearts and we can't carry them without being affected by them

III. How a Grudge Impacts

A grudge will also have a debilitating influence on the person who carries it

Kathy and I have been watching old episodes of the television series, House, which is a show about the diagnosis of puzzling diseases

Early on in each diagnosis the team of doctors on the show will typically visit the patient's home and workplace to look for possible toxins that might explain their symptoms because exposure, especially prolonged exposure, to poisons is harmful

And a grudge is nothing but a kind of spiritual poison that will cause harm to the person carrying it

It's been said that carrying a grudge is like sipping rat poison and watching to see the rat die

When we carry grudges they begin to poison our spirits and they weigh us down making us ineffective

And they only rarely negatively affect the other person

The comedian Buddy Hackett is quoted as saying: "I've had a few arguments with people, but I never carry a grudge. You know why? While you're carrying a grudge, they're out dancing."

And the effect of carrying a grudge and seeing no effect on our target only serves to further entrench the grudge

It's a downward spiral that only serves to destroy the one who allows it to continue

It's like conspiring to commit murder while simultaneously but unknowingly committing suicide

And when individual believers are affected; the church is affected

Notice in [Ephesians 4:27](#) which we just read what Paul says is the result of hanging onto anger or carrying a grudge

He says we are to not do that so that we "*give no opportunity to the devil*"

The English translation here reveals the figurative meaning of what Paul is saying but the actual Greek word used indicates a place or an area

So, in a literal sense, Paul is saying that harboring ill feelings toward each other cedes ground to the devil and gives him a place in the church from which to launch an attack

So by carrying a grudge we not only show how little we think of God and his commands and how little we think of our fellow man while elevating ourselves above our station and setting ourselves up as judge and jury in God's place –

When we carry a grudge we actually put ourselves on the side of Satan by giving him a place within the church

If you've ever split wood you know how useful an opening can be for destroying the unity of a log

By looking for a crack and starting a wedge into that flaw even the strongest log can be easily split

The same is true for giant boulders as a person need only drill a small hole into the rock and then tap a wedge into it

It's not necessary in either case to take big, hard swings because once that toehold has been established multiple little taps will eventually result in a split

And Paul tells us that anger, malicious thoughts, grudges, and the like serve as the devil's footholds that he can use to destroy the unity of a church

Far too often local churches that are infected with grudges see their people continue to meet together giving the façade of unity where division actually exists – and it creates an uneasy tension that is just waiting to be released

And where that kind of tension exists, the closeness that is necessary for generating and maintaining enthusiasm for the ministry is pushed out

The work of the church is harmed and sometimes it can lead to physical division as the church splits and one faction leaves the church to go elsewhere or perhaps nowhere at all – all for the sake of a grudge

We can't be so naïve to believe that if we give the devil such a tool that he won't use it –

So for the sake of the church we need to get rid of all grudges we might be carrying

Lastly, and most importantly, carrying a grudge negatively affects our relationship with God

Look with me again at [Matthew 6:14-15](#) –

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

We see a similar teaching in [Mark 11:25-26](#) where Jesus told his disciples –

“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

We need to understand that neither of these passages is teaching that our eternal destiny is based on whether or not we forgive other people

Scripture is clear that reconciliation with God and eternal life is only through accepting the shed blood of Jesus Christ

That's not in dispute – entrance to heaven is not on the basis of our actions

No one is going to be allowed into heaven because they always forgave others and no one will be denied heaven simply because they refused to forgive someone

What Jesus is referring to in each of these instances is the ongoing cleansing from sin and restoration to fellowship with God that we all need each and every day

When someone sins against us we know all too well how damaging that is to our relationship with them

The same thing is true, and even more so, concerning our relationship with God so just like with our human to human relationships we need to regularly seek and receive forgiveness in order for the damaged relationship to be restored

When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples in the upper room he alluded to this fact

In [John 13:10](#) he told his disciples *“The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet but is completely clean.”*

If you have trusted in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and accepted God's gracious gift of salvation you have had the overall cleansing but as long as you wear this “earth suit” of flesh you are going to get dirty feet that need to be addressed

And that is what Jesus is taking about when he says the Father won't forgive your trespasses if you refuse to forgive others their trespasses against you

If you pray what we know as the Lord's Prayer you are actually asking God to forgive your sins precisely on that basis

Look again at [Matthew 6:12](#) – *...forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors*

If there are those we have not forgiven; if there are grudges that we are carrying against anyone, then we have no right to expect God to forgive us our sins and restore our relationship with him

Conclusion

Grudges and thoughts of revenge are the way of the world but they should never be present in the church

God is grieved when his children don't get along but Satan delights in disharmony

He loves it when we deny God and disobey his commands

He loves it when we put ourselves in the place of God and condemn one another

He loves it when we demand our due even if it means tearing down another believer

He loves it when we destroy ourselves by carrying the poison of a grudge around

But he loves it even more when our testimony is damaged

We call ourselves Christians which means we say we are like Christ – that we are “little Christs”

And while we know we aren't perfect and that we are a work in progress what we show to the world is what they think Jesus is like

When an unbeliever reads in the Bible that Christians are to continually bear with one another and that when we wound each other we are to continually forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven

Then how we forgive tells them what we really believe about the kind of forgiveness God offers to them

As we close I want us to recognize some very basic truths when it comes to grudges:

1. God has the right to our love and obedience
2. God is right to withhold forgiveness and closeness and even blessing from those who deny him his due
3. None of us is so perfect that we have any right to hold a grudge against anyone else
4. Settling accounts is God's province and it isn't our place to make sure the books are balanced
5. The unity of the church is important to God so it should be important to us

Next week we will continue with this mini-series as we look at the subject of forgiveness

But for now, if you recognize that you are carrying a grudge against someone – let me encourage you to deal with it quickly

Confess your heart attitude before God and, if your grudge has been made public to anyone, go to everyone who knows of it and repent

We are going to sing our final song here in a moment and then partake of the Lord's Table

One of the requirements for access to the Lord's Table is to be at peace with your spiritual brothers and sisters so that we can attend to the elements in unity

In light of today's message I encourage you to attend to whatever work you need to do before partaking of the elements

Let's pray