

## **FORGIVENESS #11**

**Matthew 18:15** *"And if your brother sin against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone: **if** he **hear you**, you have gained your brother. **16** But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. **17** And if he refuse to **hear them**, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse **to hear the church** also, let him be unto you as the Gentile and the publican."*

**Luke 17:3** *"Take heed to yourselves: if your brother sin, rebuke him; and, **if** he repent, forgive him. **4** And if he sin against you seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to you, saying, I repent; you shall forgive him."*

**2 Corinthians 2:4** *"For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that you should be made sorry, but that you might know the love that I have more abundantly unto you. **5** But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow, not to me, but in part (that I press not too heavily) to you all. **6** Sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the many; **7** so that contrariwise you should rather **forgive** him and comfort him, lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow. **8** Wherefore, I beseech you to confirm your love toward him. **9** For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether you are obedient in all things. **10** But to whom you forgive anything, I forgive also: for what I also have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, for your sakes have I forgiven it in the presence of Christ; **11** that no advantage may be gained over us by Satan: for we are not ignorant of his devices."*

Consider a make-believe Christian family who sit under a solid biblical ministry, and these two distinct series of interactions between family members. They give every evidence of being true, earnest, Christians.

The first interaction is between John, age ten, and his sister Mary, age eight. The second interaction will take place between Jack, the husband, and Susan, the wife. Now, although the example situations I am about to use have the boy and the husband as the offenders, the object lesson is no less applicable to young girls and wives.

Scene number one is with John and his sister Mary: on the first day of their vacation they go down to the lake on a beautiful sunny day, and as they begin to enter into the edge of the water, John knows from previous

experience that Mary, though she loves the water, has a horrible fear of being submerged over her head. They haven't been playing too long before John cannot resist his desire to tease his sister so he tackles her, drags her down under (not for long) and she comes up spitting and sputtering and she says to him, "John, you know I hate to get my head underwater! Why did you do that?" And he says to her, "O Mary, I'm so sorry, I feel so bad that I did that, I really wronged you. Can you forgive me?" She says, "Well, I guess I can."

So they go on playing and 10 minutes later, he does it again. She comes up sputtering and this time with her voice a little more intense, says "John why did you do that to me again?" He says, "Mary, I just couldn't resist, but I'm really sorry. I feel so bad. Mary, can you forgive me?" She says, "Well, I guess I can. But don't do it anymore." He says, "I promise I won't do it anymore."

A half-hour later –same thing. This time she comes up and has a little more heat in the way she addresses John and says to him, "If you do that again I'm going to go tell Dad, and you know what dad said, if you do this to me there will be no more time at the lake all day." So John again says, "O Mary I'm so sorry. I really feel so bad that I gave in to this thing again, can you forgive me?"

Mary says, "I don't know if I'm going to forgive you..." John says, "Ah but don't you remember last week when pastor preached from Luke 17 that if your brother sin against you, and seven times in a day comes and says I repent, you're to forgive him. Mary, you believe what Jesus said don't you? You've got to forgive me Mary."

She says, "Well John, that is what the preacher preached and that is what it says but" – John interrupts and says, "but Mary you've got to do what Jesus said." Mary says, "Okay John, one more time, if you do it again I'm going to dad. No words about 'you're sorry' or 'you repent'."

Sure enough, a half hour later he does it again.

The question is: should Mary go to dad or should she forgive him?

How many believe that you ought to tell Mary to obey Luke 17 and continue to forgive Johnny? How many of you believe she ought to?

How many believe she ought not to forgive him?

The "ought not's" have it.

Scene number 2 unfolds between Jack and Susan.

Susan was reared in a very stable, wise, godly Christian home. Temperamentally she was put together to be one of these people that she could be sitting in the midst of an earthquake and she'd be asking, well, where do we put that vase when the earthquake stops, and put it back in its place. She was very unflappable. Furthermore, she was converted very early, and she was reared in a home where her parents taught her, what it was in the language of Proverbs, to rule her spirit. So she has never been one who just rides the crest of her emotional intensities when they would seek to take her over. She had learned from childhood and added to that training was the grace of God from her early years. Out of gratitude to the One Who has granted her so great a salvation, she uses the Word of God as her standard from her Lord, from which she sets goals and boundaries as to her attitudes, emotions, actions, and behavior.

Jack, temperamentally, he was put together in a different way. He was like a whole pack of firecrackers from his mother's womb. That's the way God put him together. Furthermore, he was reared in a home where he was never taught the discipline of his emotions. He was allowed to have temper tantrums. He was allowed to blow his cork, so that in the developing of his personality, there were no restraints or walls around his emotional intensity. His father was not a good example of a man who regulated his emotions by any standard, let alone the Word of God. John was known to have a trigger temper –a hothead, short fused. But God wonderfully saved him when he was in college at age 20 and when he was converted, God dethroned sin in his life, and there was a marked change. However, his besetting sin has been dealing with that short fuse and trigger temper and he has sought to mortify it, to bring all the biblical principles to bear upon it, that he might manifest the fruit of the Spirit which is gentleness, and not the works of the flesh, which are anger and wrath.

That's the situation and lo and behold, after two days of beautiful weather, the skies opened up and it rained day and night. Everything was soaked. The tent is leaking. The wood is wet. The clothes are musty. This has added to the frustration because the kids are now filled with tent fever. There was very little to do that could be done outside in this particular setting.

So it's 7:30 in the morning and Jack is really looking forward to at least a nice breakfast in the midst of this washed out tent week that was supposed to be such a wonderful week of vacation. And lo and behold, Mary Burns the bacon. It's burnt so bad you wouldn't give it to the dog, and that triggers Jack, and he shoots out some sharp words, "Don't you even know how to cook bacon?" But no sooner are the sharp words out of his mouth, and his heart smote him, and he goes to Mary, and says, "O Mary, I am so sorry. I'm grieved that I spoke those words. I've sinned with my mouth and with my hot temper again. Mary, can you please forgive me?" Mary turns and says, "Jack of course I forgive you. I'm a forgiven sinner. In my devotions this morning I've gone afresh to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, I forgive you dear."

So the issue is forgotten, until 9 o'clock, and then 9 o'clock the kids get fussing over what they're going to do that day, and Jack blows his cork and says, "Can't you kids ever get along? You're always fighting." And again no sooner are the angry words out but that he has that sense –"I've blown it again." Without anyone having to say something to him, he goes and gathers the kids together and says, "Daddy has done it again. He has sinned with his lips. He has sinned with his spirit, and though you kids should not have been fussing, that was no way for a godly Christian father to deal with it. I've asked God to forgive me children, will you forgive me?" And they give him a hug and say, "Sure daddy we forgive you."

Then there's another incident a couple hours later and the same pattern of repentance is repeated. So before supper that night, he gathers the whole family together, and he says to his dear wife, "Sweetheart, several times today I've blown my cork" and then he says to each of his children, "Daddy is so ashamed of himself, it seems that this day has been nothing but a day in which I've manifested this horrible remaining sin of my short fuse and my sharp words. I feel so unclean and dirty, but what can I do but ask God's forgiveness, which I've done. My dear wife can you forgive me another time? And you my precious children, can you find it in your hearts to forgive me?"

My question is this, should his wife and children forgive him?

How many think they should?

How many think they shouldn't?

So the should's have it.

You have acknowledged that you have both the right and the responsibility to make a moral judgment as to whether or not a person who is seeking forgiveness is manifesting sincere and genuine repentance. The reason you say "no forgiveness" to Johnny (the brother) is because there was no evidence of real repentance in Johnny. The reason you instinctively said Jack (the dad) should be forgiven –in spite of the fact that he fell as many times in his area of weakness as Johnny did in his sin against his sister– was that he expressed in each of those times true, sincere repentance for his sins.

Having recognized in your own consciousness that there is a difference between sincere and insincere repentance, and, that we have the capacity, albeit not being omniscient or all-knowing, in ordinary circumstances to discern the difference, I want to set before you in this study a demonstration of the truth of the Word of God that can be expressed this way:

**The person sinned against has both the right and the responsibility to assess the genuineness and sincerity of the professed repentance of the one who has sinned, before extending forgiveness.**

**Consider a demonstration of this truth from holy scripture under three headings:**

- (i) The explicit Scriptural basis for this truth.
- (ii) A classic Scriptural example of this truth.
- (iii) Some necessary practical observations and guidelines in the outworking of this truth.

**(i) The explicit scriptural basis for this truth, that the person sinned against has both the right and the responsibility to assess the genuineness and sincerity of the professed repentance of the one who has sinned, before extending forgiveness.**

Our Lord says in **Matthew 18:15** "*And if your brother sin against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone: if he hears you, you have gained your brother.*"

In this passage, one brother has sinned against another. It's a clear sin. It's not some suspicion that could not be demonstrated to two or three witnesses, let alone,

carry the conscience of a whole congregation to excommunicate a person. It's a clear sin that can be demonstrated and carry the conscience of two or three, and if necessary, of a whole congregation. Brother B has sinned against brother A. Brother A, with a disposition of forgiveness already pressing at the inside of the door of his heart, longing to confer forgiveness upon brother B, goes with the disposition of forgiveness percolating in his heart –not a disposition to nail the person, not a disposition to get at the person, but a disposition to gain the person– to win the person back. This sin has erected a barrier and brother A wants that barrier dismantled. He knows that it can only be dismantled in God's way, by the sin being owned, repented of, and forgiveness being extended.

This is the only way the barrier is removed. So he goes with a disposition of forgiveness, a disposition of longing that the barrier be removed –that there might be restored communion. So, what does he do? He goes to show him his fault. That's a very weak translation of the Greek word. The simple word for rebuke or reprove is not used, but the word used here means to convict, to show the offender his sin in such a way that he is condemned in the theater of his own conscience for what he's done. That means that Brother A thinks long and hard and prayerfully considers how he can set the case before brother B in such a way that he will be persuaded. That he has indeed sinned against Brother A.

A wise reprover, Solomon, says, *upon an obedient ear, is like a fine earring of gold*, and so Brother A goes with a gracious, gospel-suffused disposition in his heart. [**Proverbs 25:12 & Proverbs 15:12**] By the way, if you don't have a gracious, gospel-suffused disposition, then don't go. You need to repent of ill will, of bitterness, of irritation; you sort out your own heart, until it is filled with the spirit of gospel forgiveness before you go to Brother B. You go skillfully, prayerfully in the language of Galatians 6, in the spirit of gentleness. **Galatians 6:1** "*Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself, lest you also be tempted.*" Why? Because you want to gain your brother back. You want to win him, and you seek to show him his fault. To bring him into the theater of his own conscience and the reality of what he's done in such a way that he cannot escape the conviction: "I have sinned against brother A."

**Matthew 18:15** "And if your brother sin against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone; if, he hears you, you have gained your brother."

What does that mean, "If he hears you?" If the person stands there with folded arms and says, "Okay lay it on me. You think I sinned against you? Okay come on, let's hear it." So Brother A, lovingly, tenderly, gently, wisely lays out the case, seeking to bring Brother B to feel and own the reality of his guilt and his sin. When he is finished, Brother B says, "You got any more to say? [attitude]" and brother A says, "No" so Brother B says, "I hear you." Is that with the Lord is talking about? If he hears you, you have gained your brother. Do you think that's what it means? "I hear you." No. That's no way to restore communion that's been fractured by one brother sinning against another.

Is it Brother B saying, "Okay, I hear you. I see I was wrong. Okay, I'm sorry. Now let's put it behind us and get on." That's a common phrase used today, "put it behind you and get on with life." Most of the time it means you brought it up to me, I haven't dealt with it, answered your question, or owned my offense, but since it was in the past and I don't want to deal it, I'll shut you down and shut you out by saying, "That's behind us let's move on." What's behind us hasn't been addressed or dealt with. So the person uses an evasive tactic and keep it that way. "That's in the past, we've got to move on." "Yes, I hear you. I see that wasn't the best way to do things. Okay, I admit I was wrong. I'm sorry. So let's forget it and let's get on with life." Is that "hearing"?

Everything in you says no, it can't mean just that. That's no way to restore communion that's been fractured by one brother sinning against another.

#### **WHAT IS "HEARING"? HEARING YOU IS:**

**FIRST**, coming to the internal persuasion of conscience in the presence of God that, indeed, I have sinned, not only against God, but I have sinned against brother A. The text says, "If your brother sin against you. "Hearing" is brother B saying, "That's what I did. I sinned against you and the barrier was raised by my sin."

**Hearing is, first of all, owning the sin as sin.**

**SECONDLY**, it is acknowledging that sin and its consequences with a measure of grief and sorrow.

That's why instinctively you know that when someone says in a blasé way, "Okay I hear you, nobody's perfect." When somebody says, "Nobody's perfect," in that way, that's the pillow of a hypocrite. Those words are the greatest grief to the true child of God. When brother B sees his sin as sin that raised up a barrier between him and brother A, he will not only own it as sin, but:

**Secondly, he will own it with a measure of grief and sorrow**, and:

**Thirdly, he will earnestly and sincerely, with appropriate words, measured by the nature of the sin, ask forgiveness** of brother A.

If a wife has spoken a words of sharpness and disrespect to her husband, and her conscience smites her, obviously, the manner of her expressing grief and sorrow and earnestly and sincerely asking for forgiveness will be entirely different from a woman who's been unfaithful and committed adultery against her husband. But in terms of the nature, the magnitude, and the degree that the sin has caused a barrier or a fracture in human relationships, there will be **an earnest and sincere entreaty for forgiveness, from the sinning brother to the one against whom he has sinned.**

These three things are bound up in the words "if he hears you".

Listen to **LENSKI**, the respected Lutheran commentator, on this very passage.

"If he hear you" is a condition of expectancy. Jesus looks for such an outcome. "Hear" is to be understood in this pregnant sense, that is, hear, so as to yield to the conviction, and thus to confession, and in sorrow, to ask for pardon."

The Lord says, if this man does not hear you, does not **(i) own the fact that he has sinned against you**, does not **manifest that this has indeed gotten into his conscience and (ii) owned it with a measure of grief and sorrow and (iii) earnestly and sincerely ask for forgiveness**, then when the two or three witnesses are taken, what is he to do with them? He is to **"hear them"**.

**Matthew 18:16** "But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more, that at the mouth of two

**witnesses or three** every word may be established. **17** And if he refuse to **hear them...**"

**17** And if he refuse to **hear them...**"

If the pressure of two or three witnesses does not bring him to that threefold concoction of what it means to hear, then the issue is to be brought to the church. If he refuse to hear the church, then he is to be treated as a Gentile and Publican, because he is showing the disposition of an impenitent sinner. No true disciple is in a pattern of an impenitent sinner. Any man or woman may fall into the worst, the grossest of sins, but the pattern of impenitence, in the face of repeated light and correction, is not the mark of a true child of God.

So this text is an explicit Scriptural basis for this truth: that **the person sinned against, has both the right and the responsibility to assess the genuineness and sincerity of the professed repentance of the one who has sinned, before extending forgiveness.** "If your brother sin against you show him his fault... **"IF HE HEAR YOU."** Who makes that judgment? The one who's been sinned against. They make the judgment of whether or not the person heard them. The Lord expects the offended brother to make a judgment. He expects the offended brother along with the two or three witnesses to make a judgment. Has he heard us? Has he not? He expects the church to make a judgment as to whether he has heard the church or has he not. That judgment lies with the offended. Do you see that in the passage? That means the offended has both the right and the responsibility to assess the professed repentance.

Perhaps some are already thinking, "Yes, but what about..." Hold the "Yes, but what about..." Let the weight of the text sink down into your soul before you come up with the "Yes but..." We'll address that.

The next text is **Luke 17:3** "*Take heed to yourselves: if your brother sin, rebuke him...*" Is that sin in general, or is it sin against you? Verse four clearly indicates it is sin against you. **4** "*And if he sin against you seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to you, saying, I repent; you shall forgive him.*" So this is personal offense.

**Luke 17:3** "*Take heed to yourselves: if your brother sin against you rebuke him...*" Now does that mean you go get a baseball bat and put a lump on his head? No. Rebuke him with grace, with a disposition that wants to

see the sin dealt with, that wants to see the barrier that sin has erected taken away. All of that is assumed in this passage. After it says in verse 3 "*if your brother sin rebuke him*" the end of verse 3 says, "*and **if he repent, forgive him.***" The offended has no warrant from Jesus to extend forgiveness to the offender until he judges that the offender has repented. **If** [that's a conditional clause] "***If** he repent forgive him.*" Suppose he doesn't repent? Then you don't forgive him. Well how do you know if he's repenting? The Lord expects us to exercise discernment and discretion. If there is no repentance you don't forgive him.

What is this thing called repentance? without which the offender has no right to expect forgiveness and the offended has no warrant to extend or confer forgiveness? Whatever it is, **IT INVOLVES WORDS.** The offender is required to verbalize repentance.

**4** "*And if he sin against you seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to you, saying, I repent; you shall forgive him.*"

"...saying, I repent." It involves words, but **IT INVOLVES MORE THAN MERE WORDS.**

That's why you made the right judgment in the difference between the children where the boy was picking upon his sister, and the husband and wife where the husband was having difficulty with his temper. You instinctively made the distinction. At the deepest levels of your spiritual, emotional, and intellectual constitution, you knew that's right, and it lines up with the Bible. Repentance involves more than words. You knew with all the words and all the earnestness from brother to sister saying, 'I really didn't mean it. I'm sorry,' was all a lot of hot air. He fully intended to drag her under as many times as he could until dad took him and spans him for his cruelty and his abuse of power. Instead of using his hands to treat his sister right and do good and protect her he did just the opposite. You may want to haul him out of the lake and have him sit there for three hours for what he did. Considering that kind of torment, knowing she had a serious fear of having her head go underwater, and for him to take advantage of the situation, I would create a strong aversion to that kind of cruelty and abuse of power via the rod, so that whatever he did in the future, he'd know, I can't go there.

Brother was saying forgive me, but his demeanor and his actions showed that he was not repenting, so Mary had no obligation to confer forgiveness on him.

However, in the case of the husband and wife, it is obvious that he was a true believer, struggling with a besetting sin, and there was a whole concoction of circumstances that were all pressing him at his weakest point while camping. The words used by the father were an expression of true repentance.

While we recognize that only God can read the hearts, we are given the Holy Spirit and discernment. We must seek to exercise that from a disposition of graciousness. We'll address that under our third heading.

To validate with two or three witnesses, that this is not some odd position, consider this quote from the commentary of the Gospel of Matthew by **BROADUS**, a recognized and trusted guide in the Scriptures. Commenting on the book of Matthew, Chapter 6:

"If forgive means merely to bear no malice, to abstain from revenge, leaving that to God, then in that sense we ought to forgive every wrongdoer, even though impenitent and still our enemy, but this is not the scriptural usage of the word forgive, and in the full sense of the term, it is not our duty, and not even proper, to forgive one who has wronged us, until he confesses the wrong and this, with such unquestioned sincerity and genuine change of feeling and purpose, as to show him worthy, of being restored to our confidence and regard."

Broadus is saying we have no duty whatsoever, and it's not even proper to forgive one who has wronged us until he confesses the wrong, and this, with such unquestioned sincerity and genuine change of feeling and of purpose. He goes on to say,

"Here again the example of our Heavenly Father illustrates the command to us, while He sends His rain and sunshine on the evil and the good, He does not forgive men, restoring them to His confidence and affection, until they sincerely, and thoroughly repent. In judging as to the sincerity and trustworthiness of those who professed repentance, our Lord inculcates great patience and charitable judgment."

Here is what WILLIAM TAYLOR had to say in his commentary on the parable of the unmerciful servant:

"That which is forgiven, is a trespass, and while there is to be in our hearts the disposition to forgive it, we must seek to bring our brother to the admission that it was a trespass, and to the expression of his sorrow for its commission. Forgiveness, can be exercised only, where the wrong is acknowledged and repented of. The noble minded prisoner, who had done no wrong, would not accept a pardon because that would've been an admission of his guilt."

Taylor is saying, here is a man who was innocent and is in prison. Someone offers him a pardon, and he says, no, a pardon is letting loose the guilty. I'm innocent. I am not guilty. I refuse your pardon. He continues:

"The same thing holds true with the one who's done wrong. The acceptance of forgiveness implies an acknowledgment of guilt, and if forgiveness in the right sense of the word is to be given by us, or accepted by the man who has trespass against us, we must first bring him to a true perception and acknowledgment of guilt, to do nothing about it, is not to forgive, and is neither just to ourselves nor kind to the wrongdoer."

That's what's called in our day **UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS**, and Taylor says it's neither just nor kind. If he repent forgive him.

These are **(i) The two explicit scriptural basis for this truth: The person sinned against has both the right and the responsibility to assess the genuineness and sincerity of the professed repentance of the one who has sinned, before extending forgiveness.** Now let's consider:

**(ii) A classic scriptural example of the truth, that the person sinned against has both the right and responsibility to assess the genuineness and sincerity of the professed repentance of the one who was sinned, before conferring forgiveness.**

2 Corinthians 2: Just a word about the background of these verses. You remember in first Corinthians, Paul had to address many sins and irregularities among the Corinthian's. One of the most serious of those sins was the fact that a church member was living in an incestuous relationship with his stepmother. Paul deals with it in explicit, plain, blunt language in 1 Corinthians 5, and instead of being humbled by this, apparently, the Corinthians had imbibed some kind of a notion of unconditional love. They were bragging about it, they were puffed up, they were proud; they were saying, we are broad enough to have a fellow like this among us.

(Sounds a bit like, “We don’t judge . . .”) Paul said it was a form of sin and fornication not even named among the heathen. Paul wrote very strongly to them and said, ‘Look, the next time you gather together, my spirit is with you, the Spirit of Christ is with you. Hand this one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Put him out of your assembly.’ It had a gracious purpose that his spirit may be saved contingent upon repentance. What happened? The response of the Corinthians to that letter (not only in that incident, but many others) was so encouraging, that when Titus, who was sent to Corinth to check things out, comes back to Paul (and you read about this in 2 Corinthians 7:6-8), he brings such a glowing report of what the Corinthians had done in response to that letter, that Paul’s heart is overflowing with joy and gratitude for what had happened. Among the things that gave him gladness was that they had dealt with this wicked man. They had dealt with him by excommunicating him, engaging in a solemn act of church discipline, and Paul reported that the discipline had done its work, not only in cleansing the church, but in humbling and bringing this man to repentance! So now Paul writes to them and says, ‘This is what you’re to do, now that the man has evidently repented.’ That’s the background.

In 2 Corinthians 2:4 the first thing Paul says, in reference to this whole situation is, he affirms that his disposition and his motive in writing as he did about that situation was love.

**2 Corinthians 2:4** *“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that you should be made sorry, but that you might know the love that I have more abundantly unto you.”* What is it that helps or seeks to bring people to own their sin in the gravity and the magnitude of it? It’s love. When we believe that sin is destructive, love will seek to bring people to see their sin for the soul destructive, ugly reality that it is. It’s not hatred. This touchy-feely unprincipled generation says, ‘If you try to go after sin, plainly and faithfully, then you’re not loving.’ Paul said, ‘It was the proof of my love. I wrote out of anguish with many tears, not to make you sorry, but that you might know the love that I have more abundantly to you.’ **2:4** *“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that you should be made sorry, but that you might know the love that I have more abundantly unto you.”* **5** *“But if any has caused*

*sorrow, he has caused sorrow, not to me, but in part (that I press not too heavily) to you all.”* He says, ‘Yes, I was grieved by what happened, but you people bore the greater grief. It was a member in your assembly. The testimony of your assembly was at stake. The honor of Christ among you was at stake.’ Now he says, **6** *“Sufficient to such a one [this incestuous man, put out of the church, who has by God’s grace repented, turn from his sin, sufficient to such a one] is this punishment which was inflicted by the many;*” corporate church discipline is called here “punishment by the many.” So what are they to do, now that it has worked its wholesome work? **7** *“so that contrariwise you should rather FORGIVE HIM...”* Do you mean that they suspended forgiveness until he undeniably manifested repentance? Exactly! ‘Now,’ Paul says, ‘that there is manifest, genuine repentance, you should forgive him.’ **7** *“and comfort him, lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow. **8** Wherefore I beseech you to confirm your love toward him.”*

See the things they are to do to him now? Now they are to forgive him, comfort him, confirm their love to him, and now notice what else Paul says, **9** *“For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether you are obedient in all things. **10** But to whom you forgive anything, I forgive also: for what I also have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, for your sakes have I forgiven it in the presence of Christ;”*

So Paul says, ‘Now that you who are closer to the situation see true repentance, and Titus has come back and told me all the indications of it, I now direct you, forgive him, comfort him, confirm your love to him. And now as I joined you, in putting him out of the church, I join you in smothering him with forgiveness, but it was all predicated on the man’s repentance.’

If he sins, rebuke him, if he repents, forgive him. This is a classic example of this principle, woven into the very texture of the church life under apostolic direction.

To have done these things before the man manifested genuine and sincere repentance would have been to trifle with this man’s soul. To go and smother him with love while he was still impenitent would have not mirrored his true relationship to God and to His grace. On the other hand, to have failed to forgive him, and comfort him, and confirm his love to him, and to have the Apostolic assurance of the Apostles forgiveness, now that he was repentant, would have left him

vulnerable to **discouragement** to **despondency**, and to the **machinations** of the devil. That's why Paul closes the passage by saying, **11** *"that no advantage may be gained over us by Satan: for we are not ignorant of his devices."*

If the brother sin, rebuke him, if he repent, forgive him. There it is –a classic example of it in the New Testament church life.

The truth has been proven by the explicit scriptural basis in Matthew 18:15 and Luke 17:3 – 4.

We've looked at this classic scriptural example of this truth, we now come in the third place to:

**(iii) Consider some necessary practical observations and guidelines in the outworking of this truth.**

**a) FIRST IS A WORD OF OBSERVATION**

**– If we do not grasp and implement this truth in dealing with offenses, we do no good to the offending person nor to our fractured relationship because it is sin.**

If we do not grasp and implement this truth, that we have both the right and responsibility as the offended party to assess the genuineness of the professed repentance of the offender before conferring forgiveness, if we do not grasp that truth and implement it, we do no good to the offending person, nor to our fractured relationship. The idea of "forget it and move on?" No, the sinning brother is still covering his sin and he will not prosper according to **Proverbs 28:13**. *"He that covers his sin shall not prosper."*

If she has truly sinned against you and not repented, she cannot prosper with that sin if it is not dealt with biblically. It's not love to say "let's forget it and move on." That does no good to their soul. The offender loves themselves so much that they're fearful of the consequences of faithful encounter. That's what keeps us back from owning our sin and repenting. But we do the offended no good and we love ourselves more than we love them. Also, we do our fractured relationship no good. If the offender says, "Well let's just forget it on and move on," and you say, "Okay let's forget it and move on," it doesn't remove the barrier. It's still there. When she looks at you, she sees the barrier because she knows it's not been removed biblically. And you look at her and it's the same thing. You may say with your lips,

"We've forgotten it and moved on," but you know you haven't forgotten it.

There are couples that have walls that should have been dismantled by gospel bulldozers years ago, but because they had this stupid notion that we'll just forget it and move on, all of the walls are still there, and they cannot connect and develop deep emotional intimacy because the walls were not removed biblically. Sins and offenses must be confronted, owned, confessed to the offended, and forgiven. <sup>(2)</sup>

The Bible says confront it, remove it biblically, and then forget the things that are behind, press on to the things that are ahead. Time has no power to rectify sin or the barriers created by sin. Time has no power. Only the blood of Christ. Only the dynamics of biblical resolution of conflict and sins –confession and forgiveness. Only those things can remove the barriers.

So much for a word of observation. Now we come to the "but, what if"...

**b) A word of caution regarding the abuse of this truth.**

If I, as the offended one, have both the right and the responsibility to assess the sincerity and genuineness of the professed repentance of the one who has offended me before I extend forgiveness, can't that be abused? Oh yes. What a legalistic, pharisaic, unloving heart will seek to do with this truth is to make the offender get down on the ground and eat dirt. "You're not repentant enough! I only saw three teaspoons of tears. I want six. Until you give me six, I'm not going to forgive you." "I don't think you sound repentant enough." "I don't think you sound, sincere enough."

Consider these three verses that will keep you cured of the abuse of this truth. You take a good swig of this truth made up of the three versus and you won't abuse this truth and grind into the dust your offending brother or sister who comes to you, really wanting to own their sin.

Consider the first ingredient that goes into our gospel drink:

**(i) THE GOLDEN RULE**

**Matthew 7:12** *"All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, even so do you also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets."*



When God has dealt with your own heart, you know before God you've been broken over your sin, and before your brother or sister even comes to you, you've gone to them and said, "God has dealt with me. I've come to make the issue right." You may not be one who cries easily. You may not be one who's got the ability to let yourself go emotionally in the presence of others to the point where your voice would crack and there'd be a tremble in your voice; and what might be more obvious, external, accompaniments of a spirit of repentance, but before God you know you're not playing games and you say, "John, I really see my sin. I have owned it before God, will you, for Christ's sake, forgive me?"

*"Whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, even so do you also unto them."*

Do you like to have your repentance rejected when it is sincere simply because you cannot bring all of the circumstances that might make it more obvious? Do you? Do you like to have someone look down their pharisaic nose and say, "You're not repentant enough!"? Then in God's Name, don't you do that with your brothers or sisters in Christ. *"Whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, even so do you also unto them."*

That's the first thing that goes into the potent potion of gospel drink. The second one is:

### **(ii) THE LAW OF EQUAL RETURNS**

**Matthew 7:2** *"For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete [or measure], it shall be measured unto you."*

You've got this tiny little scoop that's called your willingness to forgive. You give this tiny little scoop, and God says, "That's what you're going to get, not only from other people, but from Me." With what measure you measure, it shall be measured unto you. When our Lord says in Matthew 7:2, in that context, he repeats in Luke 6:38 in a different context. **Luke 6:38** *"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your heart. For with what measure you mete [or measure], it shall be measured to you again."* When a brother or a sister comes and there are clear evidences of repentance, though not all the ones you might like, or all the ones others may have manifested, God says, smother them with your forgiveness, and then when

you go to your brethren, you'll get what you gave. *"Good measure, pressed down and running over shall men give into your heart."* So if you are tempted to take this truth and abuse it, you take a good swig of this potent gospel potion that has in it the *golden rule*, the *law of equal treatment*, and thirdly:

### **(iii) THE THREAT OF JUDGMENT WITHOUT MERCY.**

**James 2:11** *"For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if you do not commit adultery, but kill, you are become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak you, and so do, as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to him who has showed no mercy: mercy glories against judgment."*

You take a good swig of this potion before you deal with a brother or sister who is seeking your forgiveness. Remember, if you show judgment without mercy, you will be judged without mercy.

**Matthew 5:7, 2 Samuel 22:6, Psalm 18:25**

**Mr. Hebert** commenting on this passage:

"It is certain that in future judgment, there will be no mercy for him who has shown no mercy in dealing with other men. The word showed is in the aorist tense which sums up this man's life as seen in the Day of Judgment. His earthly life has been unmarked by the practice of mercy when dealing with others. He is thereby taking himself out of that merciful judgment of God's hands that our Lord promised to the merciful in the Beatitudes. *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."* Mercy is the outward manifestation of pity and compassion in kindly action toward the misery of another. What misery is there, like the misery of conviction that I want to deal with my sin biblically, and I come to a brother or sister and say, "I own my sin will you forgive me?" And they show me no mercy. If you're such a person, you be prepared to meet God without mercy. The merciful person, James says, he can glory against judgment. "Mercy, glories against judgment."

What a wonderful statement. What does that mean?

**Mr. Hebert** again comments,

"The practice of mercy towards others is THE EVIDENCE that God's grace has produced a transformation in us. Having himself received mercy, he will be able to stand in the judgment that otherwise would overwhelm him. The merciless man reveals he has never apprehended God's mercy to himself. But

the man who, by a merciful character, proves his having a vital faith in God's mercy, is, through Christ, safe and can face the coming judgment with a blissful sense of safety.

If you're tempted to be tightfisted, pharisaic, narrow hearted, take a good swig of this potent gospel potion made up of the *Golden rule*, the *law of equal returns*, and *the threat of judgment without mercy*, and I think with a good dose of that in your spiritual belly you'll be able to say to a brother or sister who manifests in the judgment of charity any degree of true repentance and grief and sorrow for their sins, "I cheerfully, freely, lovingly, forgive you for Christ sake."

We've given (a) a word of observation, (b) a word of caution, now (c) a quick word of exhortation:

### **(c) A WORD OF THAT EXORTATION TO PARENTS AND CHURCH MEMBERS.**

This truth needs to be applied to our families and to our church life. It needs to be applied individually, corporately, and in our families. Parents, don't be conned by your clever children who are little histrionics. Histrionic is of, and pertaining to, the acting stage. Some of you have children that could make it in Hollywood. They are devious little actors and actresses. Some of them may not be so little, but usually the histrionic ones show it very early . . . and can they act. You see some kids at a very young age who know how to put on all the sighs and sobs... Don't be conned. Parents should cry to God for discernment, to be able to pick up the nuances of what true repentance is in your children, lest on the one hand, you discourage them by not accepting their expressions of repentance, or you harden them into thinking they can con the world because they can con you.

You say, "Man, that's a razor's edge." Yes it is, and that's why you need the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom. You need to **SOAK YOUR SOUL** in your Bible. Don't have little pat rules for your children. They're all different. The way they respond to being confronted is different in every case. We need to cry to God for the help of his Spirit, and that is true, likewise, in church life. Remember the Corinthian situation. God gave discernment to the Corinthians and to the Apostle to know when it was time to shower on the forgiveness and when it was time to hold back on the forgiveness. There is no volume that can give us all of the particulars. We are shut up to God and to the ministry

of the Holy Spirit and to being tethered to our Bibles – prayer and assimilation of Scripture.

### **IN CLOSING**

How can anyone give a message on forgiveness and sin and not hold up the wonder of God's forgiveness in Christ. Behind all of the biblical doctrine of forgiveness that we extend to one another is the marvelous reality that the God of heaven, Who has a controversy with every one of us by nature (He's angry with the wicked every day) and yet He Who has righteous anger against sinners is the God Who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He comes to us in the gospel with the most reasonable of terms, and He says, 'In My beloved Son, I have provided a forgiveness suited to the vilest of sinners.'

In the section that people are so often troubled about, the unpardonable sin, they glance over what is one of the most marvelous statements of God's forgiveness. "**All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven the sons of men.**" In Christ is a sufficient atonement for the vilest of sin and for the vilest of sinners. God comes on the most reasonable terms and He says to the sinner, 'Own the sin that put My Son to death. Own the sin that caused His bloody sweat drops in Gethsemane. Own the sin that cause the heavens to be shrouded in blackness. Own the sin that caused Him to cry, *My God My God, why have you forsaken Me*. Own the sin that will drag you to hell if you die with that sin still charged to your account. Turn from the life of self-will and self-centeredness which has only brought you frustration and misery and cast yourself upon the One Who said, *My yoke is easy, My burden is light, come unto Me and I will give you rest.*' What reasonable terms to have God's forgiveness! Own the thing that will damn you. Turn from the course of life that can only bring you frustration now, and terrible, horrific suffering forever, and throw yourself upon a gracious Savior. Look upward and outward to God's glorious forgiveness in Christ, and may you lay hold of Him in Whom that forgiveness is to be found.

**(1) Deuteronomy 19:15** “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sins: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall a matter be established.”

**2 Corinthians 12:19** “You think all this time that we are excusing ourselves unto you. In the sight of God speak we in Christ. But all things, beloved, are for your edifying. **20** For I fear, lest by any means, when I come, I should find you not such as I would, and should myself be found of you such as you would not; lest by any means there should be strife, jealousy, wraths, factions, backbiting’s, whisperings, swellings, tumults; **21** lest again when I come my God should humble me before you, and I should mourn for many of them that have sinned heretofore, and repented not of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they committed. **13:1** This is the third time I am coming to you. At the mouth of two witnesses or three shall every word established. **2** I have said beforehand, and I do say beforehand, as when I was present the second time, so now, being absent, to them that have sinned heretofore, and to all the rest, that, if I come again, I will not spare;”

**(2)** If one of the spouses refuses to see the difficulty or the sinful thought pattern that leads to this unresolved area of disagreement so that this spouse is basically not listening and will not allow this distorted area of thinking that they bring up to be sorted out, this dynamic in marriages may call for a “counselor”. What is the council of this “counselor”? Who is this “counselor”? It is just a fair, honest, seasoned person who knows the Bible and can point out the wrong thinking to the person who will not listen. It’s dealing with the person’s lack of repentance and clarity of thought. Satan will pipeline feelings and thoughts so we don’t get the help we need.

Satanic interference coupled with a person’s pride creates a barrier. Real hearing and listening is blocked and so the relationship is log jammed. The other spouse has to agree to “move on” in the sense that this wrong reasoning cannot be brought up. This hinders a true and deep relationship. The spouse who is closer to reality wants to help the other spouse out of the ditch they are in. However, the spouse in the ditch is convinced they are not in a ditch –“Nope, not me”– and then both spouses end up in the ditch. A “counselor” is brought in to help the ditch dweller see that the other person wants them to grow, but they can’t grow unless they see the err of their ways.

So the “counselor” is not really this “expert” who we bow down to. Wise counsel can be given by a person who has a sound theology, has life’s experience coupled with large doses of humility, kindness and love to see people restored. They are the kind of people who have been in these situations themselves and who have themselves fallen into the ditch and have been helped out.