

FORGIVENESS #12

Our Lord Jesus Christ speaking says, **Matthew 5:21** *"You have heard that it was said to them of old time, You shall not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire. 23 If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has aught or something against you, 24 leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him in the way; lest perhaps the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. 26 Verily I say unto you, you shall by no means come out thence, till you have paid the last farthing."*

I want you to imagine with me what it would be like to walk into a town and spend one week in that town. For one week, every single dweller in that town would own every single sin they have committed against any fellow dweller of that town, owning their offense, seeking forgiveness, and making restitution where necessary. Where every person whose forgiveness is sought, they freely and cheerfully confer that forgiveness. For one week, no citizen has the barrier of an unresolved tension with any other fellow citizen. What do you think it would be like? That would be a little bit of heaven on earth, among men, for one week. One of the glorious things of the life of heaven will be not only that the people of God will see the face of their God and their Savior and have no sin to cloud His countenance or to dampen their love for Him, but where no dweller in heaven will have the slightest "against" with any other dweller of that blessed place. This town, for that week would indeed be a little bit of heaven on earth.

Just such a town or city is exactly what the church of Christ is to be like here and now, before it is taken to heaven. In a world of those who won't own their sin, humble themselves and seek forgiveness, either from God or man, in a world full of those who will not forgive, but instead nurse in their hearts the ravenous beasts of revenge, retaliation, and resentment, the church is to be a community of light and salt, demonstrating that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ

not only blows the roof off man's alienation between himself and his God, but where it flattens the walls that keep human beings from dwelling together in open-faced heart of communion one with another. One of the glories of the gospel is that when men and women are transformed by the saving work of the Lord Jesus there is placed within their hearts, as forgiven sinners, a disposition of forgiveness, so as we have seen, the church can rightly be described as a company of forgiven sinners who have been constituted a company of forgiving sinners. This is so essential to the identity of the church that Jesus says repeatedly, anyone who does not have the disposition of forgiveness has never been forgiven. Jesus said, if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses. At the conclusion of that parable of the unjust servant, who, having been forgiven his millions, grabbed his fellow servant by the throat for his nickels and dimes and would not forgive him, God says through our Lord Jesus, 'Deliver him to the tormentors till he shall pay all of his debt.' So shall My heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not everyone from the heart.

Because this whole matter of forgiveness, especially the horizontal or human, mutual forgiveness is such a crucial issue. We come now to the 12th message in this series on the subject of forgiveness with our emphasis primarily focused upon mutual, or horizontal, forgiveness.

Having laid a solid biblical foundation for a theology of forgiveness, having addressed some of the major erroneous ideas and practices with respect to mutual forgiveness, we come now to 3 concluding messages entitled, **Some concluding biblical council, concerning mutual forgiveness.** In these final three messages we will consider council that will be helpful at the most elementary level, as you and I, as the people of God, seek to be what our Lord says we are to be. Namely, a company of forgiven sinners who are marked as being a company of forgiving sinners.

In this life, even the most mature and most godly Christian will, throughout their life, be in the positions of both the offender and the offended. In other words, at one time we will be the one who has sinned against another, while at another time, we will be the one who has been sinned against. Our Lord assumes that this will be the condition of His people until the consummation. This is why in His model prayer, when He says "after this manner pray," one of the pivotal

petitions is, "and **forgive us** our debts, **as we have forgiven** our debtors." As we saw in the study of that passage, the only petition upon which our Lord enlarges is that petition. He enlarges it with enough words that take up half of the word number of the entire prayer, "for if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive yours." You and I, until we die and join the company of just men made perfect, or if we are alive at the return of the Lord when we get both perfection of body and soul in one instant, we will constantly be both the offended and the offender. Therefore, it is crucial that we know how precisely to conduct ourselves when we are on the one hand the offender and, on the other hand, when we are the offended. The apostle Paul assumed that in the most mature churches all of the Saints of God will be both offenders and offended. This is why, in setting out the lifestyle of those who are in Christ in Ephesians 4, Paul says to all believers, "forgiving one another even as God, in Christ, forgave you."

He assumes that in this church that will internalize all the glorious truths of the book of Ephesians, they will still be a church in which they will offend and be offended. They will need to seek forgiveness and they will need to extend forgiveness.

This biblical counsel will be set out under three major headings in three messages. **#1 WORDS OF COUNSEL FOR US WHEN WE ARE THE OFFENDER.** When we've done wrong to another. Then **#2 WORDS OF COUNSEL FOR US WHEN WE ARE THE OFFENDED.** When someone has wronged us. And then **#3 WORDS OF COUNSEL FOR US WHETHER WE ARE THE OFFENDER OR THE OFFENDED.** We begin in this study:

#1 WORDS OF COUNSEL FOR US, WHEN WE ARE THE OFFENDER, that is, when we are the ones who have sinned against another.

All sin is ultimately, fundamentally, and truly against God. Think of David. He committed the sin of adultery and murder by proxy. These were his sins at the horizontal level, and yet David had the nerve to pray in the language of **Psalm 51**, "*Against You God, and You only have I sinned and done that which is evil in Your sight.*" All sin, of any kind, is ultimately, fundamentally, and truly sin against God. With the emphasis upon horizontal sin and horizontal forgiveness, let us never forget that fundamental issue. Our sin is against God, against the Almighty, Infinitely Holy, Just, Transcendent, Sovereign Lord of the universe.

Our sin is against God. We must deal with sin that way, and before going to one another we must have heart dealings with our God concerning our sins. However, the Bible makes it clear that many of our sins are also sins against our fellow brothers and sisters, against our husbands, against our wives, children, work associates, etc.

In this study we will focus on what graces are needed if we are to deal biblically with our offenses against others. We are the offenders. What graces do we need, if we are to deal biblically with our offenses?

Concentrate your thinking upon this fundamental question: What graces do you need? What graces do we need if you and I are going to establish a pattern of dealing biblically when we are the offenders?

WHAT GRACES DO WE NEED IF WE ARE GOING TO ESTABLISH A PATTERN OF DEALING BIBLICALLY WHEN WE ARE THE OFFENDERS?

We will consider the answer to this question under three headings:

(i) We must pray for the grace of humility and a passion for likeness to Jesus that will make us approachable, willing, and eager to be shown our sins against one another.

You have sinned against your brother or your sister. As a husband or wife you spoke sharp words to your spouse that you know were sinful. You can rationalize with "but's" and "if's", but at the end of the day you know you spoke in a way that was sinful. You know that if your spouse is thinking biblically they are thinking of **Matthew 18:15** "*If your brother sins against you go...*" Seek to convict them of their fault between you and him alone. You know they have every right and a moral obligation to come to you and say, "Honey, those words were not words of kindness and gentleness, they were not words that reflected the Spirit of God upon your lips, but your own native natural person of what you were in Adam." You know you stand to be rebuked. "*If your brother sin against you rebuke him.*" **Luke 17:3.**

Your spouse, the person you've offended, has a heart suffused with a genuine Christ-imparted love for you. [Sad to say it is a rarity and it should be a normality in the local assembly. In a marriage it is something we must grow in. Check the following disposition out.] **They have not** reacted fighting fire with fire, **they've been** grieved, and in spite of being grieved and hurt by your sharp words, **they love** you, **they don't** want to

see you continue in that sin that is going to grieve the Holy Spirit and that is going to, some degree, cut off the your living communion with the Lord Jesus; furthermore **their heart is** bathed in a Christ-like disposition of longing to extend forgiveness and repair the fractured relationship. The only way this happens, is if you're both are committed to Spirit-filled, self-medicating on the Word –a soul steeped in the Word and communion with Christ.

One spouse has sinned with their words against the other spouse. The offended spouse has in their heart Christ-like love for this offending spouse. The offended spouse has a Christ-imparted disposition of longing to forgive. Now, let me ask you something: Will the offended spouse's ability to do what they are supposed to do –which is, go, convince the offending spouse of their fault between the both of them alone; in the language of Luke 17, "go and rebuke him or her" with a view that if they repent, forgive them– will it make any difference, in terms of how readily, how quickly, how cheerfully they go, if the offender has the reputation for being like a loaded gun, hair trigger temper, proud, defensive, or unwilling to see themselves and their sins for what they are? Will it make any difference, in terms of how readily, how quickly, how cheerfully they go, if the offender is known to be one who welcomes their coming to them, with such a disposition of God-given humility and a passion to be like Jesus, that anyone who can point out their sins is their friend and they love them? Does it make any difference in how quickly, how confidently, how cheerfully, the offended spouse is going to go to the offending spouse in terms of their earned reputation for responding in obedience, to Matthew 18 and Luke 17?

What kind of climate have you created between your spouse and yourself? What kind of climate have you created between you and your children? Between you and your fellow church members? Have you earned the reputation for walking in such humility that your disposition is that of the Psalmist, "*Let the righteous smite me, it shall be accounted as oil upon my head.*" **Psalm 141:5**. Or have you earned the reputation that the righteous who approach you are met with self-justification, retaliation, finger-pointing, equivocation? What reputation have you earned?

Robert Burns wrote the words, "Would some power the gift would give us, to see ourselves as others see us."

God has given you that power and it's your spouse. Next to God, no one should know you better than your husband or your wife. Would you dare to go home and look your spouse straight in the eye, and say, "With Judgment Day honesty, dear, I want you to answer me – and don't spare me– is my overall pattern of response to having you point out my offenses one of humility and such a passion to be like Jesus, that when you point out my faults, you're my dearest friend? Or am I bristly, proud, self-justifying?" Dare to go home and look your spouse in the eye and ask them to do it. That's the power God has given you to see yourself as others see you. Start in the domestic sphere. Since you and I are going to be offenders until we die, we need the grace of humility and such a passion for likeness to Jesus that it's easy for people to come to me and tell me where I've offended them.

If you won't go and ask your spouse, why not? Could it be that you're pretty sure what the answer is going to be and, in your pride, you don't want to face it? You say I'm not proud, I'm just hypersensitive. Do you know what hypersensitivity is? It's pride. I've got an image of myself and I don't want it marred by what you think of me. Your criticism exposes me and makes me know that you see me in some other way than I see myself. Hypersensitivity is pride that needs to be put to death.

If you and I are going to be God's counterculture in a world of dog-eat-dog and hatred and bitterness and resentment and vengeful attitudes, then we need tons of the grace of humility and a passion for likeness to Christ that will make us approachable and willing to be shown our sins against one another. But then here is the second thing we must ask God for:

(ii) As offenders, we must pray for a tender conscience with respect to our sins against one another and maintain a willingness to initiate the actions that lead to forgiveness and reconciliation.

We have examined the teaching of Matthew 18:15 and Luke 17: 3-4. In both of those passages the offended takes the initiative to come to the offender. One person has been sinned against. That person needs to go and convict the one who sinned and convict them of their fault. The rebuke must be with love, with a yearning to forgive, not to beat them over the head. The initiative lies with the offended, but that's not the whole story.

In Matthew 5:23-24, it is the offender who's commanded to take the initiative to go to the offended,

in order to own their sin, to ask and obtained forgiveness, leading to a healing of the breach or repairing of the fracture caused by sin. Let's consider:

(a) THE CONTEXT OF THIS DIRECTIVE.

The context is Jesus is giving the first of five directives, beginning with the words, "*You have heard that it was said, but I say unto you.*" In each of those passages, Jesus is correcting the truncated, twisted meaning placed upon a specific precept of God by the official teachers in Israel. They took the diamond of God's law, encrusted it in mud, and people thought the mud was the diamond. Jesus said, 'You have heard that it was said, the mud is this, but the diamond is this . . .' So He breaks off the mud and says, 'Here's the full intention of God's pure, holy, law.'

The first one is the commandment, you shall not kill. They had so interpreted it, that all that commandment meant to them was, you must not plunge the knife in a man's heart. You must not pick up the gun and shoot them in the head. If you don't actually take the life of another, then, you're keeping this commandment, but Jesus is telling them, no. That commandment not only forbids the actual taking the life of another, He shows that command forbids not only the ultimate physical, external, expression of ill will to another, but anything, that would lead to it, or be expressive of it. So He says, **Matthew 5:21** "*You have heard that it was said to them of old time, You shall not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; [When there is sinful anger, it is that anger which, if nursed and not checked, results in murder. So the commandment touches the spring as well as the fountain] and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.*" Raca is a term of great derision that has the spirit of murder, e.g., "I could wish you were dead." "If my words could kill," "Here's my dagger" – raca – fool – "You ought to be put out of your misery." He said that's the spirit of murder. This command touches that.

Notice when he comes to verse 23 He says, "*If therefore.*" He hasn't changed the subject, He wants us to see that command, "*You shall not kill,*" not only forbids the ultimate act of taking the life of another, the grosser forms of an inward disposition of anger, of ill will, a derisive, mean spirit towards another expressed in words, but it goes even further. He's now going to teach us that if there is anything that is causing a

barrier between me and another, that thing, if not mortified, could be nursed until it too, could be expressed in taking the life of another. So He says, **Matt 5:23** "*If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught [something] against thee, 24 leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*"

We've looked at the context of the directive now what is:

(b) THE CONTENT OF THIS DIRECTIVE.

Consider the content under two simple headings:

i) THE SITUATION ENVISIONED

ii) THEN THE SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES GIVEN. Here is:

A man has come to the temple and he obviously is someone who is not a mere formalist, one who has his body and hands in the Temple, but his heart and his mind are down fishing at the lake. This man's not like that. He's come to the temple to have dealings with God. He's bringing a gift. He's bringing something that is an expression of his gratitude for the mercy and kindness of God in covenant love to him. He's a true Israelite in his heart, and as he draws near to the Temple, and especially to the altar, the very altar on which the priest would place his gift where sacrifices would be burned. It was the altar of sacrifice, and as he thinks of the sacrifice that is placed on that altar and the wonder of God's grace in taking the life of the innocent that the guilty might be spared. His mind is filled with the thought of God's goodness and mercy and forgiving grace, as he has a heightened, intensified awareness of heart dealings with God. Suddenly, his conscience is sensitized and he thinks, oops, a brother or sister has reason to have something against me. Maybe I spoke a harsh word to them, maybe I wasn't completely honest in a business dealing with them. Whatever it was, in the context of having more intimate heightened communion with God, the conscience is sensitized, and he realizes, here is someone who would have every reason to come to me [Matthew 18:15, Luke 17]. There is a legitimate issue. He has something against me. It's not a mere thought or something spun out of their own head. There is a substantive issue against me. What did Jesus say the person is to do?

ii) THEN THE SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES GIVEN.

Look at the five verbs of action (and note that not one of them is prayer.)

5:24 *"leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

Five verbal constructions – leave, go, be reconciled, come, and offer.

What's the principle to be gained from these five verbal constructions? **The principle is that the people of God who are concerned about heart worship are to maintain a sensitive conscience with respect to their sins against one another and be willing to initiate the actions that lead to forgiveness and reconciliation.** That's what our Lord is saying. That's the responsibility of each one of us who at one time or another are going to be the offenders. This man with his gift before the altar is the offender. His conscience is sensitive. Why he hadn't thought of that before, we don't know. Maybe it was an inadvertent oversight. Maybe he willfully pushed it to one side. "It's no big deal," "Who should worry about that thing," "Everyone does this," "Everyone does that." Maybe the person who he offended came to him or tried to open the situation up and he just gave one of these "I'll get back to you on that." But in seeking to have dealings with God, his conscience is sensitized, and he says, "No, I can't have dealings with God until I set that thing right." So he goes and he sets it right. Then, with a clean conscience and with the confidence that he's right with his fellow man, he comes and he offers his gift unto his God. Now that's a responsibility that Jesus lays upon you and me when we are the offenders. Your conscience can get activated. You go to spend time in the Word and what comes to mind? That word I spoke to my husband had an edge on it that was not Christ like. It was a manifestation of my own remaining sin. God alone knows the times I've had to leave a certain activity, find my husband (or wife) wherever they are in the house and say, "Sweetheart, I sinned against you, you didn't deserve to have me speak with that edge of sharpness, will you forgive me? And they learned to say, "Well of course I freely forgive you." Then I can go back to what I was doing and offer my gift. It has to become a way of life.

You go to pray and you can't pray until that sin is acknowledged. This is not theory. This has got to become a way of life. Is it so with you? Can your wife or husband attest that this is a way of life in your home? If not, why not? The words of Jesus are plain, "*If you come to offer your gift, there remember, leave your gift, go, be reconciled, come and offer.*" You don't need to know a

word of Greek to understand those five verbal directives.

The issue is either: we have **an insensitive conscience** that thinks it can have dealings with God while there are unresolved issues with one another, or we are **too proud**. What does God think of your confession of sin in the secret place when you're not willing to humble yourself and confess your sins to those made in His image? James reasons from one to the other. He says *how can you bless God and curse men made in His image?* How can you be confessing to God, and not be willing to confess to those made in His image? That's why John is bold to say, *that if a man says he loves God, and doesn't love his brother, he's a liar. He has no true religion.* How much sham, play-religion exists in the world?

But we are to be a community, **starting in the home**, where –as forgiven sinners having been broken and humbled before the God of the universe– it's no big deal to be broken and humbled before one another. I think the easiest thing is to own my faults. The hard thing is not to do it again. The hard thing is not to own my faults. The hard thing is not to repeat the offense. Why is there not more of it among us? Why? Let your conscience answer . . . why not?

If the fact of the matter is that we are offenders until we're taken home to glory, then:

(i) We must **cry to God** for the spirit of humility and for that passion to be like Christ that is strong enough to make us open and **willing to receive** those who point out our sins against us. Secondly:

(ii) We must **pray for** that grace to experience the sensitivity of conscience regarding our sins against one another and **a willingness to initiate** the actions that will result in forgiveness and reconciliation. And now a third word of counsel to us offenders; thirdly:

(iii) We must **pray for** the grace to experience genuine repentance and for the wisdom to express that repentance and seek forgiveness in such a way that **makes it easy for** the person whom we've offended to forgive us.

Remember the truth we established from the Bible last study? **The offended party has both the right and the responsibility to assess the genuineness and sincerity of the professed repentance of the offending party before conferring forgiveness.** Bound up in those two texts, "*If your brother sins against you tell him his fault between you and him alone,*

if he hears you..." you must make the judgment, has he really heard me? Has he owned the sin? Is there evidence of repentance for that sin? Is there evidence of sincerity and seeking forgiveness? *"If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, if he repent, forgive him."* The offended has a right and a responsibility to assess – is he repenting? We looked at the example in 2nd Corinthians 2 of Paul in the Corinthian church with regard to that incestuous man who had been disciplined and subsequently repented and how these principles are patent in that passage in 2 Corinthians 2.

That being so, consider this situation: I'm the offender, I realize I have a well-instructed brother whom I've offended, and my heart is broken. I've asked God's forgiveness and now I want to go and seek his forgiveness. What must I ask God? I must pray for the grace to experience genuine repentance for that sin and the wisdom to express that repentance and seek his (the offended) forgiveness in such a way as to make it easy for him to forgive.

On what basis are we to receive this counsel? The whole thing could rest on **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."*

Let's go back to husband and wife again. Perhaps there are some single people among us and you think this doesn't relate to you, but it's the easiest way to demonstrate the principle. The husband has spoken sharp words to his wife, or the wife has been pouting about something she has no business pouting about. [He's fighting a carnal irritation and she's just given into sinful manipulation.] She's just trying to manipulate with her lower lip. To the husband, as in times past, the lower lip out has meant an erosion of the principle to stand on the truth of a matter, so she's trying to manipulate with her lower lip.

Of course no man here ever gives into carnal irritation and no woman here ever gives in to refusing to be instructed and or to be manipulative. This is totally theoretical. ;-)

There's been an offense. In making that thing right, is it easier for the husband to extend forgiveness if the wife comes and says, "Dear, I've done it again. I've done it again. That old pattern of my lower lip trying to be manipulative with it. I'm crying to God to help me, but dear, forgive me. I've bucked you on an issue I had no right to buck you on. You've explained this thing to me time and time again. It was reasonable and you dealt

with me like a reasonable person and I went back to my old pattern. [46:44] Can you find in your heart to forgive me?" If a man won't say, "Sweetheart, you are forgiven," then there is something drastically wrong with him. But suppose she just comes and says in a curt, short manner, "Honey, I know I shouldn't have bucked you on that. Forgive me." It's a little bit hard for me to say, I forgive you. Where's the evidence that she's really repented and owns the reality of her sin? If she comes in this cavalier way, he's got every right to say, "Well wait a minute, let's just wait a minute here. Do you realize what you are doing?"

"What do you mean do I realize what I was doing? I told you I know what I was doing; I stuck out my lower lip so forgive me." Now she gets real snippy *and angry and the anger further distorts reality*. And he gets all the more concerned and suspicious.

Of course this never happens among us and it's all theoretical right? We know things of like this happen, and what we are saying is, since we are going to be the offenders, we need to cry to God to work in us a genuine repentance and the wisdom to express that repentance, to seek forgiveness from the offended one in such a way that will make it easy for them to say, "That looks like real repentance, real grief, real sorrow, real seeking of forgiveness. I have to be a bum not to extend forgiveness when someone comes to me like that."

Where do we go if the offender is not sincere or the offended lacks a forgiving spirit? When there is no resolution. We are obligated to God to be renewing our mind. Renewing . . . continual renewal and, therefore, continually growing and maturing. Gain your life and lose it. Lose your life and gain it. Attempt to gain your life and you will continue to be encased in a self-absorbed, altered state of reality –the state of those who refuse to exercise in their Christian life the principles of forgiveness we've been discussing. Lose your life and be free to be conformed to Christ's likeness and be what we were meant to be. The frightening thing is that if you gain your life, you end up in hell. Where there is no growth, there is no love to be like Christ and there is no eternal life. If there is no genuine dynamic of change in our life through obedience and conformity to the Word, then we must not have ourselves in the right spiritual state that allows the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Word in us, or, there are so many worldly distractions that the Word can't penetrate. God will not bless minimal time with

Him and a maximum time in everything else. The continual grieving of the Holy Spirit is a problem. God resists the proud. He gives grace to the humble. God has ordained certain means for our growth. The bilateral interaction of asking for forgiveness and forgiving is a primary means for growth in the Christian's life. The doctrine of forgiveness is not an option for the Christian. Are you bucking it? God isn't interested in sacrifice or martyrism, He wants obedience.

We don't have to rest our case on **Matthew 7:12** alone, "As you would that others do to you." I want others to make it easy. I want to forgive. There is no greater joy than to forgive, but I have no right to extend forgiveness unless they are hearing me, unless they are repenting, according to the Bible. I have no right to confer forgiveness if there is no repentance.

I have the responsibility and I've got to be willing –if there isn't evidence, in the way it's expressed, of real repentance– to press the issue, remembering all the qualifications that were given last week. You may think, "Well, that can be abused." Yes, it can be. Three parallel lines of biblical evidence were given to keep us from abusing it, but turn to one Old Testament passage and one New Testament passage to see this illustrated.

Hosea 14. Remember the horrible sin of Israel is symbolically set forth in the prophet's wife being unfaithful, and yet he loves her still, going to enter back into a marriage covenant with her, and we read these words in **Hosea 14:1** "O Israel, return unto Jehovah your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity. **2** Take with you words, and return unto Jehovah: [Is that it? All you need to know is God is merciful; He's ready to forgive. Go with words and return unto Jehovah? No. God coaches Israel. God gives verbal coaching.] *Take with you words... SAY unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and accept that which is good: so will we render as bullocks the offering of our lips. **3** Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, you are our gods; for in You the fatherless find mercy."*

Do you see what the prophet is doing? In the Name of Jehovah, he is telling Israel, the kinds of words, that will be expressive of true repentance, and he says, "take with you **WORDS... AND SAY** unto Him."

Then we have God's beautiful response and the following blessing upon His people in verses 4-9. **14:4** "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him. **5** I will be as the

*dew unto Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. **6** His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon."*

We find a similar example in the well-known parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The great purpose of this parable is to show that God, in Christ, welcomes sinners, but in so doing we must remember that this was a repentant sinner, though the word repentance is not used in the parable of the prodigal, it's used in the two previous parables which are organically united to it; but he's obviously a penitent son. Repentance is demonstrated by the son to the father.

Look at the language in **Luke 15:18 - 21. 18** "I will arise and go to my father, [notice] and will SAY unto him"

He thought out the language that would express his repentance and his return. "I will SAY unto him, father, I sinned against heaven, and in your sight: **19** I am no more worthy to be called your son: make me as one of your hired servants. **20** And he arose, and came to his father. But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. **21** And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight: I am no more worthy to be called your son." What did he do? He used the words that he had conceived in his mind while yet in the far country. He didn't just come home and blabber. He thought, "What words will express the true disposition of my heart? What words will be a bridge from where I am to where my father is to persuade him that I am a different young man."

This is all we're saying, that as we will continually be the offenders, we need to pray for the grace both to experience true repentance for our sins against one another that will flavor the whole tone and attitude with which we come. It won't be like the little petulant child who's being forced to confess their sins to their brother or sister, "I was wrong forgive me," in a grudging way and tone. No. We will cry to God that they will be a touching of the deepest springs of our hearts, and then pray for wisdom to express that internal disposition of repentance and seek forgiveness in such a way that will make it easy for the offended brother or sister to forgive us. Make it easy for them to forgive.

Did you ever think of that? If you haven't, I hope you will, because you're going to be the offender, and there will be offended ones to whom you must come; and since they must make an evaluation, of whether what

you expressed is indeed a reflection of hearing them, a reflection of true repentance, make it easy by the disposition with which you come and the words by which you clothe the acknowledgment of your sin and of seeking repentance.

There is a group called Peacemaker Ministries. It's a parachurch ministry that specializes in trying to help people resolve conflicts. Individuals, groups, organizations, etc. etc. In one of their pamphlets, they have as one of the foundation stones in their approach to this matter of conflict resolution between brothers and sisters called, "The 7 A's of True Confession." Seven things beginning with A, and here they are:

#1 – ADDRESS everyone involved. Everyone who's been affected by your sin, be prepared to address them. If you've offended one, address the one. If you've offended the whole family, if you blew your cork in front of your kids as well as your spouse, gather the kids with your spouse. Address everyone involved.

#2 – AVOID "if," "but," and "maybe." Don't excuse your wrong. "Well dear, kids, mom blew her cork but..." No buts. "Mommy blew her cork but if..." Then there's the blame shifting. No. Mommy sinned by not controlling her spirit, and Solomon says, *"A man who doesn't control his spirit is like a city with his walls broken down."* Mommy's walls were down, and she has no excuse. She asks you to forgive her, and to pray for her that she will have more self-control.

Address everyone involved. Avoid, "if," "but," and "maybe."

#3 – ADMIT specifically both attitudes and actions. I came home with a sour spirit, and the sour spirit was manifest in such and such, say to your spouse, I was insensitive because I was so set on reading this book, that I didn't catch any of your signals that you wanted an hour with me. Admit specifically.

#4 – ACKNOWLEDGE the hurt. Stop long enough to think what you're sin did to someone. In one of the books the author was telling of an incident where in a semi-public setting, a social group, he said something that was very demeaning and shameful to his wife. She was deeply hurt and he picked up the signals, as any married couple should pick up those signals, and she just had an opportunity to give him a little specimen of how deeply she was hurt. He gave kind of a cavalier, quick acknowledgment of his fault, and asked for forgiveness. She responded, "Honey, I'm having trouble forgiving you. You simply don't know how deeply you

offended me and hurt me." He said at that point he stopped doing what he was doing, and listened to his wife and when she was done, and he realized how deeply he had hurt her, how extensive was his wound. His confession was much broader and much more extensive and her forgiveness was final and complete.

#5 – ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES. Consequences include owning up to your sin. Sometimes with children they know the things they do has a condition on it – If you do this, then you lose this privilege. They know if they own up, the privilege is gone. You've got to be prepared –in any true, thorough, honest dealing with one another– to accept the consequences.

#6 – ALTER your behavior. In addition to altering your behavior, that in your confession, it is necessary to express your determination to alter your behavior. I'm not going to wait till I can alter my behavior to make it right, so I need to express my intent to change.

#7 – ASK for forgiveness. When you've done these things, ask for forgiveness.

This is not necessarily an endorsement of these seven things, but you can see these are not some strange ideas on forgiveness we've gone over.

This is a group of Christians who are wrestling with this issue, as they see churches, Christian organizations, and men and women, apparently just encased in irreconcilable relationships, and as they seek to go in with their Bibles and have these things dealt with. These are the principles that they had discovered.

So I set before you these three words of counsel, when you are the offender:

#1 - We must pray for the grace of humility and the passion for likeness to Jesus that will make you approachable willing and eager to be shown your sin. In other words, when someone approaches you, let them know that they are approaching a pet bunny and not an angry grizzly bear. If you're going to pet a bunny or a bear, which one are you going to go pet? Pray that God will give you a pet bunny disposition of humility and willingness to have your sins shown to you when you offend another.

2 – You must pray for a tender conscience with respect to your sins against others and maintain a willingness to initiate the acts leading to forgiveness and reconciliation.

#3 –You must pray for the grace to experience genuine repentance and the wisdom to express that repentance and seek forgiveness in such a way that makes it easy for the brother or sister to forgive you.

APPLICATION

What have you been thinking as we attempted to open up the Word of God and give you counsels as to what you must pray for when you are the offender? Have you been thinking, “This stuff is ridiculous. Who takes sin that seriously? I mean come on.”

If you've seen your sin in the light of God's burning holiness, if you've seen your sin in the light of Golgotha, and the Incarnate God, impaled, His face contused, His body ripped open, the heavens shrouded in blackness, His soul plunged into the horrors of forsakenness by God, God forsaking God, the air split with His cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me." If you see your sin in the light of Golgotha you'll never sit through a teaching like this and say it is ridiculous. **JESUS DIED TO HAVE A PEOPLE WHO TAKE SERIOUSLY THE SIN FOR WHICH HE DIED.**

The true child of God, whose mind is persuaded, says, “Yes, I see. There is nothing unreasonable in these things. I must seek to incorporate them into my life, my marriage. The minute you do that, then **YOU'RE GOING TO BE DRIVEN BACK** to another **FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE**: Jesus said, “Without Me, you can do nothing.” Nothing. Don't set out to cultivate these three graces from the storehouse of what you can natively bring to them, because you'll end up frustrated and cynical. But the Jesus Who said, “Without Me you can do nothing” led His servant Paul to say, “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me.” The Lord Jesus Christ can give you and give me these graces until they become part and parcel of who we are. These three principles need to be rehearsed and practiced. How will you do that?

Can you think what a climate it is in a dog-eat-dog world full of hate, dishonesty, bitterness, and ill will, to come among a people or a family who operate in this way?

ILLUSTRATION – There's a brother, Brother Smith, who came to worship and he remembered, during the Sunday school that “I really have something against Brother Jones. I ought to go to him, so I'm going to seek him out between Sunday school and church.” He thought of Matthew 5, “*if your brother have ought against you.*” Then the two happen to be coming toward

one another down the hall and Brother Jones' and brother Smith's eyes meet and they come to each other and brother Jones says, “I've been looking for you.” and Brother Smith says, “I've been looking for you. Why, why are you looking for me?”

“Because God has laid on my heart, brother, you did something against me,” said brother Jones.

Brother Smith responded, “I was coming to you because I know I have done something against you.”

This is the way it should work, each one seeking to obey the biblical principle. They ought to meet one another, each one with a heart overflowing with the grace of God in Christ. It's wonderful to have a climate where the barriers are down because we're dealing biblically with our offenses one against another.