

FORGIVENESS # 4

Consider these two brief and parallel portions of the Word of God.

Ephesians 4:31 *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.*

Colossians 3:12 *Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; 13 forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do you: 14 and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.*

Here is an example of some of the erroneous views on forgiveness that are floating out there. 'You must learn to forgive yourself.' 'You must learn to forgive your dead relatives who wronged you.' 'You must even be willing to forgive God.' As hard as it may seem for some of you to believe it, these exhortations are only a sampling of some of the current counsel being given with respect to the duty and the privilege of Christian forgiveness. In the books that set forth that counsel, you will find such words as I have used. 'You must learn to forgive yourself,' though I challenge you to find one phrase in the Bible that says, 'you must forgive yourself.' You will find plenty in the Bible that says you must appropriate, to yourself, God's forgiveness of you, but you will not find one phrase in the Bible that tells you that you have a duty to forgive yourself. Furthermore, counsel is given to people to learn to forgive their dead relatives. To sit down in a room, imagine their now deceased relatives sitting in front of them, and to go through a ritual of extending forgiveness to the dead relatives. In one case, a woman –who was bitter because her son was a short little guy and her husband had a rather low profile job– was counseled to forgive God for making her son short and for giving her husband a job that, in her mind, was less than honorable. This is counsel given in books, printed by Christian publishing agencies, and sold in Christian bookstores. The books containing such counsel are written, bought, read, and taken seriously as an indication of the great need that people feel, and of the great confusion that exists, with respect to the subject of forgiveness. Because of these two realities,

we come to the fourth study in a series entitled forgiveness.

REVIEW

In message #1 the central place of forgiveness in Biblical Revelation was set forth. We saw the central place of forgiveness in the character and nature of God Himself, in the substance and proclamation of the gospel, and in the initial and ongoing experience of the people of God. The summary of that initial message was that the God of forgiveness has proclaimed a message of forgiveness which gathers to Himself a forgiven and forgiving people, called the church. The God of forgiveness, in Christ, proclaims a message of forgiveness which gathers unto God a forgiven and forgiving people.

In message #2, a biblical definition and description of forgiveness was presented. The family of words used in the Old and New Testaments were considered. The vivid word pictures of forgiveness were also laid out. Such things as God putting sin behind His back, burying it in the depths of the sea, remembering it no more, blotting it out like a thick cloud etc., and we came to this conclusion: **DIVINE FORGIVENESS** is a gracious act of a Holy and a Just God, by which He removes from a sinner the guilt and legal liabilities of their sin, thereby clearing the way to a restored relationship between Himself and the forgiven sinner.

Then we considered what human forgiveness was: **HUMAN FORGIVENESS** is a gracious God-like act of one sinner to another sinner, by which the offended party makes a commitment not to remember the sin of the offending party, thereby clearing the way for a restored relationship between both parties.

In this review let's park here for a minute and remember what is happening in the Christian relationship when someone comes to you and says, "Will you forgive me?" A husband comes to his wife and says, "Dear, will you forgive me for the sharp way in which I responded to you three minutes ago . . . or the way I reacted to . . .", and the wife says, "Dear, I forgive you." What is she doing? She is making a **FOUR-PRONGED PROMISE**. She is saying **FIRST** of all, I will not volitionally or consent to think about this issue again. Now granted, the thing that needed to be forgiven may have gone into the hard drive of the soul and at times may pop up on the screen of the mind, or it may come into the screen like junk mail –you haven't asked for it, you haven't sought for it, but

there it is. The Christian knows that when it's there, you push the delete button. That's the promise of forgiveness. I'll work the delete button as often as I need to. Once it's there on the screen of the soul, I will not gaze upon it and I will not bring it to remembrance. No, if it's there, I've made a commitment that I will not consent to think about this thing again.

SECONDLY, I will not bring up the issue with you and certainly not hold it against you in a future thing that's very similar to the offense. "You always... Do you remember when...?" No. Forgiveness is saying, "There is nothing to bring up." That's forgiveness. There is a commitment not to remember it. If it pops into the mind, push the delete button and not bring it up with the person who has been forgiven.

The **THIRD** prong of true forgiveness is not to bring it up to others.

FOURTHLY, not to allow the forgiven matter to be a hindrance in working toward a restored relationship.

That's what forgiveness is. When you say, "I forgive you," that's the promise you are making. You are making a four-pronged promise, from the heart, with serious intention before God to keep that promise. That's the essence of forgiveness in interpersonal relationships.

In message #3, we sought to establish from the Scriptures, that Divine forgiveness is the foundation, the motive, and the pattern, for human forgiveness. In the two passages we looked at already, God has set before us this great truth, that we are to forgive one another, **even as God, in Christ**, has forgiven us. Divine forgiveness is the foundation, the motive, and the pattern, of human forgiveness.

END REVIEW

In this study we want to focus our attention upon another very basic issue with respect to the biblical doctrine of forgiveness, and the issue is this:

What are the essential conditions, without which, forgiveness is neither conferred by God, nor received by sinners?

Almighty God, in Jesus Christ, and in His saving work has made a perfect provision for the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, this Gracious, Merciful God sincerely offers this forgiveness to sinners in the proclamation of the gospel. God, in Christ has made

provision for sinners to be forgiven. The blood of Jesus Christ has the capacity to cleanse from all sin. God comes to us in the gospel and offers this forgiveness to sinners as that gospel is proclaimed. However, although forgiveness has been provided in Christ and is offered to sinners, it is not automatically conferred upon sinners. It must be conferred and received with certain conditions. The question is:

What are the essential conditions, without which, divine forgiveness is neither conferred by God, nor received by sinners?

More specifically, what are the conditions, without which, forgiveness is neither conferred by God nor received by the sinner, either in initial conversion or continually in the Christian life? Before we answer this question, consider this:

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT:

This is a question that you and I ought to be deeply concerned about and that for two reasons:

(A) The question and its biblical answers are of crucial importance for the well-being of your own, never-dying existence.

Notice, I didn't say never dying soul, because it's not just your soul that's never dying, it's your existence as a soul-body entity. You will be somewhere, body and soul, forever. Neither your soul or body are to be annihilated and, therefore, according to the Scriptures, the most horrible possibility of human existence is to die in an unforgiven condition. Jesus said in John 8:24 these most sobering words. **24** *"I say therefore unto you, that you shall die in your sins: for except you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins."* Jesus said there are people, who when they die, their sins – rather than being blotted out, rather than being put behind His back, rather than being buried in the depths of the sea– their sins will go with them into death, unto resurrection, and on to eternity in everlasting punishment.

Therefore, we better be passionately concerned, with this question: On what conditions will God confer forgiveness to me or to you? What are the conditions by which I can receive that forgiveness?

(B) The question and its biblical answers that are of crucial importance for understanding: Under what conditions we are to confer forgiveness upon

others and under what conditions they are to receive it from us?

Until we are clear in our minds with respect to the conditions under which God confers and we receive forgiveness, how can we be clear about what it means when God says, we are to forgive, even as He forgives. If we are unclear in our thinking with respect to the conditions upon which God confers forgiveness and we receive forgiveness, how can we forgive one another, **even as God forgives**? Much of the confusion with people who write the nonsense that was quoted in the opening statements of this study is rooted right here. They have never dug into their Bibles and wrestled with this question:

Upon what conditions does almighty God confer forgiveness, and on what conditions does the sinner receive forgiveness?

Consider these two qualifying statements as we come to grips with the answer to this question.

(i) THESE ARE NOT MERITORIOUS CONDITIONS. In other words, these are not conditions of the soul with which we come to God and say, 'Here are my good works, will you take record of them? Here's my little coins of the conditions I've met, on this basis, God, extend forgiveness to me.' No. God's forgiveness is not earned by these conditions. Christ has met all the requirements for a Holy God to extend forgiveness to the likes of you and me. When He cried from the cross, it is finished, or it stands accomplished, it doesn't wait for any conditions on our part to complete the virtue of His saving work. These conditions are not meritorious conditions. Furthermore:

(ii) THESE CONDITIONS ARE NOT EVEN SELF-GENERATED CONDITIONS. They are not created by unaided human will. God clearly calls them in many places of the Scriptures His "gifts" and the result of HIS OWN ALMIGHTY ACTING upon the soul. Yet they are conditions and they are **ACTIONS** of the soul which **YOU AND I** engage in.

We are led to understand this from the second chapter of the Book of Ephesians, that even their **faith was the gift of God**, but they weren't saved apart from faith. By grace are you saved **through** faith and though he says that 'not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,' **God did not believe for them. They believed. They repented.** They had forgiveness conferred by God and they received it in the joyful embrace of faith in the

promises of God. GOD INITIATES - MAN RESPONDS - GOD BLESSES

Not meritorious, not self-generated, but they are conditions, without which, it would be immoral for God to confer forgiveness. The moral character of God demands that though He has provided a totally, gracious, gratuitous provision for forgiveness in Christ, and though He freely offers it to us in the gospel, were God to confer it without these conditions being met, it would be immoral. God's moral constitution demands these conditions.

WHAT ARE THESE ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS?

God in Christ has provided a full and adequate salvation for the vilest of sinners. In the gospel He comes and He presents that forgiveness to you. He urges you to embrace it. But on what terms? You must **repent** and **believe**.

REPENTANCE AND FAITH ARE THE ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS.

A quick survey of the Book of Acts will demonstrate that when the Apostles preached the gospel authorized by their Savior, they preached that forgiveness was provided, was available, was sincerely and freely offered, but the terms were repentance and faith. Before our survey of the Book of Acts, consider this passage from Luke.

Luke 24:45. At some point in the post-resurrection ministry of our Lord, we're not sure exactly when, Jesus gave these instructions to the Apostles: **Luke 24:45** *"Then opened He their mind, that they might understand the scriptures; 46 and He said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; 47 and that repentance unto remission [or forgiveness] of sins should be preached in His Name, unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."*

Based upon His work as the Savior, His death and resurrection which form the basis of God being able to offer forgiveness throughout the nation's, what were they to preach with respect to the conditions, upon which, that forgiveness would be conferred and received? It's clear,

Luke 24:47 *"and that repentance unto remission [or forgiveness] of sins should be preached in His Name..."* That is, preached in the light of the full revelation of God's mercy and kindness in the Person and work of

Jesus Christ. That's what it means to preach **IN HIS NAME**. That is, not only in His authority, but in the light of all of the mighty saving acts of God in Jesus Christ.

When the gospel was preached and Christ was set forth before the people what was to be their response? Simply to nod their head and assent to the fact that He died? No.

There was this demand of repentance –this change of mind, resulting in a change of will, issuing in a change of life.

It is repentance unto remission of sins.

Were the apostles obedient to the Lord so far as their preaching repentance and remission of sins? Consider this passage from the Book of Acts and we'll see if they were obedient.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came with such power in the midst of Peter's preaching that he gets interrupted before he can finish. Peter had just charged those who were listening to him with murdering Jesus. **Acts 2:36** *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* In the middle of the sermon, those to whom Peter is preaching are pricked in the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, *"brethren, what shall we do?"* The sermon wasn't completed because we read in verse 40, *"with many other words he testified and exhorted them saying..."*

Acts 2:36 *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. 37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? 38 And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ unto the remission [or forgiveness] of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Peter admonishes them, 'Would you have remission of your sins? Would you have remission of the very sins of which I charged you? You are murderers of the Lord of Glory. You by wicked hands have crucified Him and slain Him. You've been guilty of murdering God's Messiah,' and upon hearing this they cry out, 'What shall we do? How do we get the Blood off our hands? How do we get out from under the frown of Almighty God, the Judge of the universe?' Peter says repent, and

implicit in that is to commit yourself to Jesus Christ and that you are willing to be identified with Him in a confessional faith. That's the significance of baptism here. There is no virtue in the waters of baptism. It is simply an expression of that attachment to Christ that is so real –that you are ready to be identified and aligned with Him in the presence of the very ones who, with you, murdered the Son of God. *"Repent ... unto the remission [or forgiveness] of your sins;"*

Acts 3:19 in a similar circumstance where Peter is explaining to the people by whose power this man who was just healed of his lameness, and in talking of Jesus, Peter says to them **Acts 3:13** *"The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus; Whom you delivered up, and denied before the face of Pilate, when he had determined to release Him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, 15 and killed the Prince of Life; Whom God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses... 19 Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out..."*

Do you want your sins blotted out? This is one of the vivid word images of forgiveness. God says, 'I have blotted out as a thick cloud your sins.' Would you have Almighty God blot out your sins? Repent and turn again or have a deep change of mind about who Jesus is, about who you are and where you stand before the court of heaven. Have a deep and thorough change of mind that results in a change of will, of a change of direction, of a change of purpose. Repent and turn, that your sins may be blotted out. The conditions are clear.

In Acts 8:22 Peter is preaching to an individual who, though he made a profession of faith, shows that his heart was not really changed. Peter is preaching to this man, Simon, and what does Peter say to him? **Acts 8:22** *"Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of your heart shall be forgiven you."*

'Would you have forgiveness Simon? You must repent. You must turn from these horribly carnal thoughts about buying the gift and power of the Holy Spirit. You're a covetous mercenary and your profession of faith is not a true profession of faith. Oh yes, you've professed. You've been baptized, but your actions show there has been no repentance and, thus, no

remission.' **Repent** ...if perhaps the thought of your heart should be forgiven you."

In the early chapters of Acts the emphasis falls predominantly upon **repentance**, but notice in the later chapters it falls predominantly upon **faith**. In Acts 10 we have the record of Peter preaching in the household of Cornelius. **Acts 10:43** *"To Him bear all the prophets witness, that through His Name every one that **believes** on His shall receive **remission of sins**."*

Would you receive and appropriate to yourself remission? You must believe upon Him Who is the great central theme of the prophets. This Jesus of Nazareth Whom I preach to you, Who was approved of God by mighty signs and wonders, this is the Jesus Whom I set before you, and forgiveness in His Name, and you must **believe** if you are to receive that forgiveness.

In Acts 13 we have the record of Paul preaching at Antioch and we find a similar emphasis in **Acts 13:38** *"Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this Man is proclaimed [in the Gospel] unto you **remission** [or forgiveness] **of sins**; 39 and by Him every one that **believes** is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses."* Forgiveness is preached through Him in the gospel, but **not unconditional forgiveness**. It is bestowed upon everyone that **believes** in Him.

In Paul's summary statement of his ministry at Ephesus, we see the two things beautifully brought together in Acts 20:21. **Acts 20:17** *"And from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus, and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, You yourselves know from the first day that I set foot in Asia after what manner I was with you all the time, 19 serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind and with tears and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews; 20 how I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks **repentance** toward God, and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ."*

In answer to the question, **what are the conditions** without which Divine forgiveness is neither conferred by God, nor received by man, Scripture is abundantly clear: **repentance** and **faith**.

The Shorter Catechism definition of repentance is this:

WHAT IS REPENTANCE ONTO LIFE? "Repentance onto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it, unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience."

That's repentance. It is a true sense of sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. As repentance is preached in Christ's name, in the full light of His saving mercy, sinners are called to stack arms when they see Jesus hanging on a cross. They're told to turn from sin that will not only take them to hell, but the same sin that brought hell to Golgotha in the Person of the Redeemer. That's repentance.

The Shorter Catechism also answers, **WHAT IS SAVING FAITH?** "Saving faith is a transference of reliance upon ourselves and all human resources, to reliance upon Christ alone for salvation, in all the glory of His Person and the perfection of His work as He is so freely and fully offered to us in the gospel." [Page 111 RA&A.]

Saving faith is not tipping your hat to a few propositions. It's transference of reliance upon ourselves and all human resources to reliance upon a Person. It's one person (the sinner), to another Person (Jesus). What Jesus? In all the glory of His Person as the God Man. In all the perfection of His work as our Prophet, Priest and King, as He is so fully and freely offered to us in the gospel. ⁽¹⁾

If you ever get God's forgiveness and you are a stranger to that repentance and that faith, God's going to have to come down from heaven and rewrite the Bible. God has made it abundantly clear, He never confers, nor does the sinner receive forgiveness, apart from repentance and faith.

Are you persuaded of that?

When Paul wrote **Ephesians 4:32** *"be kind, tenderhearted, **forgiving** one another, **even as God, in Christ forgave** you"*, he's writing to people who knew the experience of receiving God's **conditional forgiveness**. They knew what it was to be pricked in their hearts and to see themselves as sinners, to hear the good news that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that in Jesus a full pardon was offered to the vilest of sinners, that through His servants God was entreating them to be reconciled to Himself. They knew what it was to turn from their sins [read the

account of it in Acts 19]; to abominate their former way of life, to turn from it and all of its manifestations, and to give themselves up to Jesus Christ, as He was offered in the gospel. So when they read, 'you are to forgive, even as God in Christ forgave you,' they knew that their forgiveness was received, not unconditionally, but conditioned upon repentance and faith. They were led to understand from the second chapter of the Book of Ephesians, that even their faith was the gift of God, but they weren't saved apart from faith. By grace are you saved through faith, and though he says, 'that not of yourselves it is the gift of God,' God did not believe for them. They believed. They repented. They had forgiveness conferred by God, they received it, in the joyful embrace of faith in the promises of God.

Any of the people at Ephesus that were willfully blinded or ignorant of their sin –too in love with their sins to forsake them, too proud to cast themselves upon Christ– they were not forgiven, even though God was ready to forgive. In Christ, full provision for forgiveness is made. In the gospel, forgiveness is freely offered, but if sinners will not own their sin, turn from their sin, cast themselves upon Christ in the flesh-withering exercise of saving faith, they will not know God's forgiveness.

What is true for the unconverted sinner, and the initial experience of the converted sinner receiving saving grace, is true for the pardoned sinner, in the ongoing experience of grace. The forgiveness we receive from God as the Judge of the universe is a once for all irreversible forgiveness that is part of our justification. Even the sins we've not yet committed are to be pardoned, but now there is a difference. When we are made His children and brought into His family, we now relate to God not as the Judge in the courtroom, but the Father in the living room. The Father has taught us that we are to keep short accounts with Him. That if we sin, His ongoing, Fatherly forgiveness is not conferred unconditionally. It's conferred upon the condition of ongoing repentance and ongoing faith. **1 John 1:9** "If we CONFESS our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What if we won't confess our sins? **Proverbs 28:13** "He that covers his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesses and forsakes them, shall obtain mercy." As His children, if we refuse to meet the conditions of ongoing repentance and faith, we grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, we elicit the

frown of our Heavenly Father, and our intimate, face-to-face communion with Him is disrupted. Yet, we are not made condemned sinners back in the courtroom on the way to hell – no.

The forgiveness of God The Judge, in conjunction with our justification, is this ~~category of the courtroom~~ where, once for all, irreversible forgiveness is extended. In the ~~category of the living room~~ of God The Father is the ongoing forgiveness of our loving Father to maintain the open-faced communion and unhindered relationship between the children and their Father.

Jesus said when you pray say, our Father Who art in heaven, forgive us our debts. It's asking the Father, for forgiveness. What happens if a son or a daughter get stubborn and won't seek forgiveness?

To answer that question we will use David as a case study. Remember what David did? He committed adultery, and then, to cover up his adultery, he committed murder. When you put the chronology together it looks like he went for a space of approximately a whole year in that unrepentant state. The baby is born and there is a period where David is in a very bad spiritual condition. Then God sends the prophet Nathan to him and the prophet comes to David. 2 Samuel 12. Here is the man after God's own heart, a writer of so many of the Psalms that speak of intimate, warm, passionate relationship with God. David could say, "My soul thirsts for You." "My flesh longs for You." "O God You are my God, earnestly will I seek You."

Psalm 63. A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

Psalm 63:1 "O God, You are my God; earnestly will I seek You: My soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You in a dry and weary land, where no water is."

Psalm 143. A prayer for deliverance and guidance.

Psalm 143:6 "I spread forth my hands unto You: my soul thirsts after You, as a weary land."

Here is a man who knew the sweetness of face-to-face communion with God. Now he has sinned and he doesn't experience that communion (as we will see when we look at a second passage) and now month after month has passed and there is the hiding of God's face. There is the trauma in David's own soul. When you read Psalm 51, Psalm 6, Psalm 32, you'd say

David would have been labeled as a psychotic. He has depression. He would've been on Prozac or something else. Day and night making his couch to swim with tears until he says, 'My moisture has turned into the drought of summer. I cried myself dry.' He was a mess. No sweet Psalms of intimate communion with God were penned in that period. Now God, who loves His child and is determined to bring him back into communion with Himself, sends the prophet Nathan. Nathan comes to David, gives his little parable, and David gets all emotionally upset and totally forgets that he fits the picture of the man who had all kinds of sheep and the other man only had this one little lamb who he loved. **2 Samuel 12:7** Nathan said to David, *"You, are the man."* David's heart is smitten and Nathan continues to drive home how culpable David was in sinning against light and privilege. **12:13** *"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against Jehovah."* I have sinned against the Lord. What are Nathan's next words? *"And Nathan said unto David, Jehovah also has put away your sin; you shall not die."* Here's the picture: When David sinned –the sins of adultery and murder and his backsliding over these many months–the heart of God is yearning, as his Heavenly Father, to forgive him. God is longing to forgive him and longing to have restored communion with him. The door of God's heart had the spirit of forgiveness dammed up behind it until the door was bulging with the pressure of God's heart, willing to forgive his erring, sinful son. But God does not forgive him until David repents and owns his sin. The moment he says, 'I have sinned,' the door burst open and the free forgiveness of God came down, cascading over his miserably backslidden child. 'I have put away your sin.' All the locks were on David side of the door. There was no lock on God's side of the door.

Do you get excited about that? That's the God Who is our Father Who yearns to forgive His erring child, but He had to hear him say, 'I sinned.' There was **no unconditional forgiveness** for His child, and there is none for you or for me as His children. If we are to forgive even as God forgives, and God's forgiveness initially and continually is conditional forgiveness, what does that mean about our sinning against one another and our conferring and receiving forgiveness for one another? All this loose talk about unconditional forgiveness goes out the window. We must think biblically and theologically, stay close to the Scriptures, and consider closely reasoned

arguments if we want to be a forgiven people. Why? Because otherwise we will be open to being deceived about so crucial an issue as to what are the conditions for the reception of Divine forgiveness. To be deceived in this area is to enter eternity in an unforgiven state.

Psalms 32 gives an expanded commentary by David, on his understanding of this reality. He says in **Psalm 32:1** *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."* **2** *Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."* [David how did you get there? Did God come along and just throw over you this marvelous unconditional forgiveness and take you from your depressed, backslidden, sad state to joy and peace? He said, 'No way.'] **3** *When I kept silence* [when my lips would not open and say I've sinned] *my bones wasted away through my groaning all the daylong.* **4** *For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was changed as with the drought of summer.* **5** *I acknowledged my sin unto You, and mine iniquity did I not hide: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."*

That's David's commentary on 2 Samuel 12. 'I kept silence, I wouldn't own up, I wouldn't say the words, I've sinned, but the moment I did, God, You put away my sin. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.'

Now having answered the question, what are the conditions, without which forgiveness is neither conferred by God, nor received by the sinner, initially in conversion and continually in the Christian life, consider in the second place:

The practical relevance of this foundational issue with respect to human forgiveness.

Going back to Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13, we are to forgive, as God, in Christ, forgave us. Is there any place in the Bible, where God confers forgiveness unconditionally? That is, where anyone is promised forgiveness, apart from the conditions of repentance and faith? Someone may say, 'Oh yes, Jesus' prayer from the cross.' That was not a conferral of forgiveness nor an expression of absolution. It was a prayer. Jesus gave expressions of absolution in the Gospels, Matthew 9:2. *"Son, your sins are forgiven you."* Luke 7:48. John 8:11 *"Woman neither do I condemn you go sin no more."* This is a prayer, it is not a pronouncement of absolution. If it were, Jesus is asking the Father to forgive a whole bunch of His

murderers and these foul soldiers who are strangers to repentance and faith and He would be asking God to give a salvation that is nowhere promised in the Bible. Jesus prayer on the cross is not to be used as a blanket justification of unconditional forgiveness. Jesus does not forgive unbelieving, impenitent sinners. He doesn't forgive before repentance and faith. Where does God confer unconditional forgiveness in the Bible? Much of the talk in literature about unconditional forgiveness is either blatantly unbiblical at worst, or is a well-intentioned, but careless confusion of issues at best.

Recall all the words we looked at for forgiveness. The same word used for divorce, separation, picking up and carrying away, is used for forgiveness. Where does God divorce a sinner from his sin, pick it up, carry it away, and lift it in order to remove it, apart from repentance and faith? NOWHERE.

We must always * **interpret the unclear or obscure verse in the light of the clear verse.** We must always ** **interpret the condensed in the light of the expanded.**

If God states something in a condensed way, and He's saying the same thing elsewhere in an expanded way, the expanded way is to regulate our understanding of the condensed way, or the verbal shorthand used to condense the expanded version found elsewhere.

What is made clear in one verse is to regulate our understanding of what is not clear in another.

Consider two passages in the New Testament which explicitly deal with how we are to deal with our offenses, one with another, and whether they are to be conditional or unconditional.

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."*

Matthew 18:21 *"Then came Peter and said to Him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times? **22** Jesus said unto him, I say not unto you, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven."*

Let's rewrite this according to the unconditional forgiveness theology. **Matthew 18:15** "If your brother sin against you, go, [tell him the good news, that you have unconditionally forgiven him, and there is now no barrier to your relationship.]"

Someone has sinned against me and I go to that person I say, 'Brother so-and-so, you know you sinned against me, I know you sinned against me, but I unconditionally forgive you, so the issue is dropped.'

Is that what I'm supposed to do? No. That's not what Jesus said. That is not what Peter understood either. Peter understood there was an exchange of forgiveness in these directions, and that's why he came at the end of this paragraph and said, 'how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? [assumption being that in seeking to gain him, I went to him and showed him his sin, he has admitted to sinning against me, he has asked my forgiveness, and I forgive him] up to seven times Lord?' Our Lord says 'No Peter, you set the bar way too low. The disposition of forgiveness, keeps no scorecard. *The disposition of forgiveness does not negate the need for confession and the conferral of forgiveness. Go, and tell him his fault, and if he's going to be bold and sin against you 70×7, you wear out your shoe leather and you go to him 70×7; and with a disposition of readiness to forgive him when he owns his fault and you've gained your brother.' In the spirit of love and gentleness, with a disposition of readiness to forgive, with a desire for reconciliation, with an overwhelming sense of the wonder of God's forgiveness –that's how I am to go.

Here's how some people treat the passage, 'If your brother sins against you go, show him his fault.' [in a nasty tone] 'Brother, I'm here because Jesus said I'm to come to you, and you've done me wrong.' Is that what the Lord's talking about? No. The purpose you are going is to gain him. You're grieved that your brother's sin against you has put a barrier in your relationship. It's a grief to you because you are bound in love as brothers, as sisters. So you go to your brother and you say,

'Mike, you have no question that I love you do you?'

No.

'I have no question you love me. We've enjoyed years of fellowship together haven't we?'

Yes.

'I think you feel that if anything were to disrupt that fellowship, you'd be grieved wouldn't you?'

Yes.

'So would I. Now my dear brother, there is an issue that has a real potential for disrupting that fellowship,

and I desperately want to see it removed. Will you hear me out as I address it?

That's going and showing his fault. You'd have to be a pretty off individual not to melt before that, and say,

'My dear brother, I, with you, do not want any barrier in our fellowship. What have I done?' Then you point it out and he says, 'I never even realized... My brother, can you forgive me?'

'Can I forgive you? That's what I came for. Forgiveness was bowing the door of my heart, and all you needed to do was tip the latch. There is no lock on my heart. You tip the latch and say, will you forgive me? And I confer the forgiveness, and we embrace, and I've gained my brother.'

[59:34] That's what Jesus is talking about. He's not talking about somebody copping an attitude and coming in saying in an irritated way, 'I'm offended, and Jesus said I'm to go to you.' That's so contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, it has nothing to do with what Jesus is saying here.

Consider the second passage in the New Testament which explicitly instructs how we are to deal with our offenses, one with another, and whether they are to be conditional or unconditional.

Luke 17:3 *"Take heed to yourselves: if your brother sin, [and we know that it's not just sinning generally, but sinning against the individual, because look at verse 4, if he sins against **you**, seven times. So here the more expanded description helps us to fill in the blanks] 3 "Take heed to yourselves: if your brother sin [against you] **rebuke him**; and **if he repent, forgive him**. 4 And if he sin against you seven times in the day, and seven times turns again to you, saying, **I repent**: you shall **forgive him**."*

The unconditional forgiveness theory would say, if your brother sin against you, go, and tell him. 'Brother you sinned against me, but I unconditionally forgive you, so the issue is buried.' That is not what the Lord said. You are not doing a person well to allow them to go in a course of sin without pointing out their sin. If they're a true believer they will want to pursue the holiness without which no man will see the Lord. [1:01:03] Hebrews 12:14. You are his friend if you help him to see the sins he is not aware of.

You are to help him to repent of sins he is aware of –as with David, Nathan was his friend. Nathan didn't come

and say, 'David, I've got good news. God's unconditionally forgiven you.' No. You are not a friend to your brother if you don't help him to see his sin, because you're not helping him to press on in holiness. You're not helping him to maintain a good conscience. If your brother sin against you, you rebuke him. How do you do it? Do you say in a sharp way, 'Brother, you have sinned against me, I'm here to rebuke you, in the name of the Lord?' If that's the way you deal with people and you can't figure out why you don't get anywhere in dealing with people that way, you are going in a spirit that is contrary to the gospel. *Your demeanor is to reflect the fact that you are a forgiven sinner. I come as a forgiven sinner. I come with the God of heaven, having put my sins behind His back, when He could've left me joined to my sins and sent me to hell.

A forgiven sinner will be in the language of Paul, kind and tenderhearted. As Paul expands with five qualifiers in Colossians, the disposition percolates with gospel tenderness.

Ephesians 4:31 *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 and be ye **kind** one to another, **tenderhearted**, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.*

Colossians 3:12 *Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of **compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering**; 13 **forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: 14 and above all these things **put on love**, which is the bond of perfectness.***

I've gone to God this morning with my sins. How can I come to help you see your sins with anything other than a humble, gentle, Gospel-percolated spirit? But I come nonetheless, and I say, 'My brother, are you aware that in this particular area you've done something that has put a barrier between us. I believe you've wronged me.' The person then asks, "What did I do?" Or they may say, 'Yeah, and I believe you deserved it.'

'Well my brother, I may have deserved it, and if I did something to provoke you, tell me my sin so that I may confess it to you.' There are times when you go to reprove a brother about their sins and you end up being shown your own sin, and you show that you've come with the disposition that welcomes it, and you

say, 'My brother, forgive me. I didn't realize that I provoked you. That was **my** sin when I provoked you. My insensitivity. Will you forgive me?'

'Of course brother, and can you forgive me?' and then they're falling over one another to extend forgiveness, and there's no hesitation on your part to extend forgiveness, and it's just wonderful!

In each of these passages it's assumed that the offended one confronts with a settled disposition to grant forgiveness. The inside door has no bolts and no locks. The pressure of a forgiving spirit is exerted upon that door and it's just waiting for the latch to be nudged. In some cases there may be many locks on the outside of that door that the brother has put there, that you cannot justly confer forgiveness until he owns his sin and repents of it. And in a real sense there is an element that's very much like faith. Not only must the offender repent of his sin, but when I say to him, "I do forgive you," and I make the promise that I will not willfully let that thing come up on the screen of my mind and look at it; that I will not speak of it to him again; I will not speak of it to others; I will not allow it to be a barrier; there's got to be an element of trust that I mean what I say, when I say, 'I forgive you.'

What's a church like that breathes the atmosphere of this kind of gospel-reconciling climate? Jesus assumes that His church is going to be a bunch of sinners who will offend one another and sin against one another. Peter and Paul assume that there will be a lot of little things that don't demand confrontation and a blanket of love will cover the issues, or forbearance will bear with the issues. Not every single issue is one that demands confrontation, explicit expressions of repentance, and conferral of forgiveness. But, where there is a gospel-reconciling climate, do you see we have nothing to fear about discovering in one another our sins and our offenses. We see them as a marvelous opportunity for the gospel to exert its power and to display its glory. We then reflect the God Who is constantly disposed to forgive. **Psalm 86:5** "You Lord are good, ready to forgive." That should be us! Always ready to forgive. We should earn the reputation of chomping at the bit to forgive people, and when that becomes so, what did Jesus teach us to pray in the Lords prayer? *"Forgive us our debts, as, we forgive."* You talk about reversing things. Paul says you forgive as God forgives, now Jesus says, when you pray, you

tell God to forgive like you forgive. *"Forgive us our debts, even as, we forgive our debtors."*

Do you want God to deal with you the way you deal with others? Can you say, 'God deal with me, the way I deal with others.'? Can you say that? Do you see what the implication is? When God's people take so seriously the directive of Ephesians 4 that they are forgiving one another, even as God forgives, it becomes the pattern and climate of their life, that they dare to say, 'our Father, forgive us, the way we forgive one another,' and know that God is not going to zap them. **James 2:12** *"So speak ye, and so do, as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to him that has showed no mercy: mercy glories against judgment."* You say, 'Won't people take advantage of that?' So what. They'll answer to God for it. I want to be able to say, 'God, I'm dealing graciously with others, deal with me the same way.'

We've seen God's forgiveness is not unconditional. Our forgiveness of issues that need confrontation is not to be unconditional.

(1) Faith, after all, is not belief of propositions of truth respecting the Savior, however an essential ingredient of faith such belief is. Faith is trust in a Person, the Person of Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the lost. It is entrustment of ourselves to him. It is not simply believing Him: it is believing in Him and on Him. To ask people a bunch of questions in an effort to supposedly lead them to Christ, for instance, do you believe you're a sinner, do you believe Jesus died for you, do you believe He rose from dead the third day, is getting people to nod to propositions about Christ, but not getting them to believe in Him, or on Him or into Him. **John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have eternal life. **17** For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him. **18** He that believes on Him is not judged: he that believes not has been judged already, because he has not believed on the Name of the only begotten Son of God.

vo-li-tion *n.* 1. The act of making a conscious choice or decision