

FORGIVENESS #6

Ephesians 4:32 *...and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.*

In this study, we will begin to consider:

I.) Vital Pastoral And Practical Perspectives Concerning Forgiveness

We will consider the first of three pastoral and practical perspectives on forgiveness in this study. The first vital pastoral and practical perspective is:

A.) The common practice of apologizing and the biblical pattern of seeking forgiveness are not identical or interchangeable.

What is the common or general practice of apologizing?

Apologize – to acknowledge and express regret for a fault or a wrong.

That's apologizing.

It looks and sounds something like this: A prominent political figure is publicly exposed and proven guilty of a serious moral or ethical deviation or laps. No longer can there be evasion or denial because the evidence is so overwhelming. What does this person do? They will appear in one venue or another and say something like this, "I stand before you today, to acknowledge that I made a terrible mistake. That I exercised poor judgment in what I did. Furthermore I want you to know that I am terribly sorry for what I did. For the hurt that it caused my wife, my family, and you, the people who put me in office, I sincerely apologize." That's what the common practice of apologizing looks like. The individual acknowledges and expresses regret for a fault or a wrong.

Or you have a brother and sister who were going at it like cat and dog, and you finally sort out who started the fight and all the rest and you say, "Now Johnny, you should not have hit your sister. I want you to say I'm sorry to Susie." With a look that would kill Susie, Johnny says, "Sorry." Okay Johnny, now it's all taken care of. Susie do you accept John's apology? "Yes." That's what passes for apologizing.

Tragically absent in the common practice of apologizing –whether it be an apology from a prominent politician or children interacting with one another– are three things:

First, the naming of the fault as sin. What should be said is, 'When I engaged in that wrong behavior I

sinned against Almighty God and the person I offended." In our example, there is no naming of the issue as sin.

Secondly, there is no seeking of forgiveness for the sin. In "I apologize" and "I am sorry" you don't hear the words, "and for what I have done, I sincerely ask your forgiveness."

Thirdly, there is no gracious conferral and the trustful reception of forgiveness on the part of the offended party. There is no opportunity given to say, 'You have acknowledged sin, you have asked forgiveness, I freely, cheerfully, and joyfully extend that forgiveness.'

It is these three things that constitute the heart of the issues in the biblical pattern of seeking and receiving forgiveness. Why? Because those three things are essential to true **repentance** and **faith**. Forgive as God forgives you, in Christ.

Consider these three things in more detail.

FIRST, there must be the owning of sin, as sin, against another, whether God or man.

For example, in Luke 15 when our Lord is describing the prodigal's return does it say, "When he came to himself he said I will arise and go to my father and say to my father, I made a terrible mistake in leaving home dad." No. "Dad, I feel so bad about my mistake in leaving home and blowing all the inheritance." No. **Luke 15:17** *"But when he came to himself he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have **sinned** against **heaven**, and in **your sight**."* 'I have sinned!' Son, where did you sin? 'I sinned against the God of heaven and against my father.'

In Psalm 51 David said, **4** *"Against You, You only, have I **sinned**, and done that which is evil in Your sight; that You may be justified when You speak, and be clear when You judge. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; And in **sin** did my mother conceive me. 6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."*

David's forgiveness, as we saw two studies ago, came when he said in the presence of the prophet Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. Nathan then said to David, *The Lord has put away your sin.* In **Psalm 32:1** David says, *"Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."* When did it get covered?

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When was it forgiven? In **32:5** **I acknowledge my sin unto You and my iniquity did I not hide, I said I will confess my transgression unto the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.** Sin, iniquity, transgression, iniquity, sin. Hey David, we got the message, your not calling what you did a weakness or a mistake, but you're owning it to be an ethical and moral aberration before the eyes of God and His law. It is sin. It is transgression.

Likewise when our Lord says in **Luke 17:3 – 4** *"if your brother sin against you, rebuke him, if he repent, forgive him."* What is essential to that repentance? It's the man saying, "I have sinned. You have come to me, you have rebuked me for my sin, I own my sin, will you forgive me?" And we could multiply passage after passage in reading through a number of the Old Testament classic passages such as Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, Daniel 9, 2nd Chronicles 6, passage after passage where bound up in the whole complex of divine forgiveness is the owning of sin.

SECONDLY there must be the seeking of forgiveness from the offended party, whether it's from God or man.

How did Jesus teach us to pray? Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sinned against us. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. It is not only the acknowledgment of sin, but the seeking of the forgiveness, from the offended party. Asking the offended party to make the commitment of forgiveness. Do you remember what it is? It's that commitment, couched in a promise from the offending party when they say, I do forgive, what they're saying is, I will not willfully allow this ever to come to my mind again. I will never raise it with you. I will not raise it with others, and I will not allow it to be a barrier to the restoration of our relationship. That's what forgiveness is. The commitment of will, couched in a promise. We come as the offending party, to God or to one another, seeking forgiveness. That's why David prayed in Psalm 51:9 specifically, it was not enough that the opening verses are this unashamed, profuse acknowledgment of what he did as sin, now he says, **Psalm 51:9** *"Hide Your Face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities."* That's the language of forgiveness. 'Hide Your Face and no longer look upon it, blot it out so in Your Mind, oh God, it no longer exists and is no longer a barrier between my communion with You, and Yours with me.'

There is an interesting complex of circumstances in that whole incident of Joseph with his brothers. Joseph's brothers have sold him into slavery and in that mysterious providence of God the brothers are brought

down to Egypt, Joseph discloses himself, and, obviously, Joseph is a beautiful example of one who has the disposition of forgiveness beating at the door of his heart. He's not out to get vengeance upon his brothers. Their father dies and we read in **Genesis 50:15** *"and when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, it may be that Joseph will hate us and will fully requite us all the evil which we did unto him."* Why were they fearful after all the kindness Joseph has shown to them, all of the ways that he evidenced to them, that he had no vengeance in his heart, why were they still fearful that he might get them now that their father was dead? Because forgiveness had not been sought, nor conferred. Joseph had manifested that he loved his enemies, was doing good to his enemies, that he had no desire to take vengeance in his own hands [the things that we considered in the previous message] but that was not forgiveness, and they knew that, and that's why they were scared now that their father was dead that Joseph may get them. So what did they say? **Genesis 50:16** *"And they sent a message unto Joseph, saying, your father did command before he died, saying, 17 So shall you say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray you now, the transgression of your brethren, and their sin, for that they did unto you evil. And now, we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him."*

Their father understood what we are now learning. He told his sons to go in humility to their brother and say to him, "forgive I pray transgression, sins, and evil," and now, no longer quoting their father, *"and now we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father. And Joseph wept when they spoke unto him. 18 And his brethren went down and fell down before his face and said behold, we are your servants. 19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? [I have not pushed God from His throne and usurped His place to take vengeance upon you. No. If any vengeance was to come upon you that is God's business.]*

20 *And as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. 21 Now therefore fear you not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."*

And never again did they have any fear, that Joseph would bring their sin up against them. Why? They acknowledge their sin, they sought and received forgiveness, and the issue was finally buried. Forever buried.

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Apology bypasses the owning and naming of the issues as sin, whereas in the complex of divine forgiveness, there must be the owning of sin against another, God or man. There must be the seeking of forgiveness from the offending party, and:

THIRDLY, there must be a gracious conferral, and a believing reception of forgiveness.

Luke 17 'If your brother sin against you, rebuke him, if he repents . . .' How do you know if he repents? Does God give you special glasses so that you can look inside his heart, and see that he's owned his sin, that he's grieved for his sin, that he wants forgiveness? Does God want you to be some kind of a mind reader? No. If he repent, that is, if he expresses in words, that's why the Lord can go on to say, if he come to you.

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."*

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, [noticed the next word] saying [he's using his mouth and with his mouth he's saying 'I repent. I own the sin for which you've reprov'd me. I see my sin, I know it's something I need to have forgiven, not only from God, but from you, the human, offended party. Will you forgive me?' And what are we to do? We are to forgive.] "You shall forgive him." [You shall make the promise and commitment of forgiveness. You will say, 'I forgive,' that is, 'I will never willfully, allow this issue to pop up on the screen of my mind and let it remain, but I will push the delete button. I won't allow it to remain. I will not raise the issue with you. I will not raise it with others. And I will not allow it to be a barrier, to the restoration of our relationship.'*

These three things are critical, in biblical conferring, and seeking forgiveness. **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."*

When we confess our sins, we have that forgiveness. When we take the promise of God's Word, we believe it and embrace it in our hearts; we come to God confessing our sin and God comes to us in the Word and promises in such passages as **1 John 1:9**, and we say, "Oh God, I do believe what you have said in Your Word." Remembering what **Proverbs 28:13** says, *"He that covers his transgressions shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy."*

We can say, *"Lord this is Your promise, You are worthy to be trusted. I have confessed my sin to You, and I now take Your Word of promise that forgiveness has been conferred."*

What is apologizing as it is commonly practiced, especially among God's children? We've looked at what apology is in the dictionary definition. We've looked at how apologies look in the world at large. We've looked at the **three deficiencies** of apologies in the light of these three elements that are crucial, in the divinely revealed complex of receiving forgiveness, but:

What is apologizing as is commonly practiced, especially amongst God's children?

The response to that question will be given by stating four things, and in so doing we will state them moving from the best to the worst. I don't take the position like some Christian authors that apologies are an unbiblical, un-Christian thing. That Christians who use apologies need to be rebuked. No. In my judgment, this is what apologies amongst the people of God really are, from the best to the worst.

The best thing apologizing is, as is commonly practiced, especially among God's children is:

#1 An apology may be a sincere, but an imprecise and poorly expressed attempt at confessing sin and seeking forgiveness.

What is an apology? It is the admission of a fault with some measure of grief – that's what apologizing is. "I'm terribly sorry for what I did to you." That's an apology.

The best thing an apology can be.

ILLUSTRATION - here's a boy who was a pattern of honesty in his relationship to his mom and dad. He's generally compliant and obedient with his teachers, his parents, and there is a special social event with his peers and he wants to go to that in the worst way. But he's been told, "Now son, you cannot go to that event unless you have completed the homework that's due on Monday." This event takes place on a Friday evening of that week. "Work comes before play, and that's how we rear you. No homework, no social activity." His mother asks him, "Son, did you do your homework?" And he says, "Yes, it's all done", but he's lying. Off he goes to the social event. He didn't enjoy the social event too much. His conscience is screaming at him. By the time he gets home his soul is so troubled, he burst through the door and throws his arms around his mother and says, "Mom, I'm so sorry. I lied. I told you the homework was done, and it wasn't done." Now what

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should the mother do? Should she push him off by the shoulders and say, "Well that's no confession, all you're doing is telling me you're sorry. I don't care how you feel, let's have a real confession. No. She puts her arm on his shoulder, and she says, "Son, mom is so thankful, that you have a tender conscience, and it's obvious you're sorry, I don't think you're simply turning on your tears, but now let me ask you a question son. What are you sorry about?"

"I'm sorry because I sinned." "Who did you sin against son?"

"I sinned against God. He said you shall not bear false witness."

"Have you asked God's forgiveness?" "No, not yet mom."

"Well let's stop and do that right now." She puts her arm around her son, and she encourages him, and he says, "Oh God forgive me for lying, I broke Your commandment. I shouldn't have lied. In the blood of Jesus, wash me and cleanse me of lying." After he's done praying, mom says, "Now son, who else did you sin against?" "Mom, I sinned against you and dad. I lied." "Let me ask you son, do you think mom stands ready and anxious to give you forgiveness?" "Oh I know you do mom; you always have." "Then what am I waiting for son?" "I'm not sure mom." "I'll tell you what I'm waiting for son. I'm waiting for you to say, Mom, I sinned against you, will you forgive me?" "Mom that's what I meant when I said I'm sorry." "I know son, but I want you to say what God says is a vital part of confessing sin. I want to train your conscience biblically. Mom's heart stands ready in spirit and principle, already with forgiveness, but I want to hear from your lips, will you forgive me." And he says, "O mom, will you forgive me?" She puts her arms around him and says, "Son, I've been forgiven so much even this day, how can I do anything other than forgive you. Let's pray and thank God that there's forgiveness with God, that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin."

What did she do? She took her son's apology, that was a sincere, but imperfect and poorly expressed attempt at confession of sin and, seeking forgiveness, she wisely and gently guided her son into a more biblical expression of repentance and seeking and receiving forgiveness.

I am confident, that there are many of you, because you've been brought up in a context where you weren't instructed in these things, but the language of apology sort of hung in the air. That's the way you deal with

your sins with one another as husbands and wives. I'm not just playing with words. Words convey thought and thought is either accurate or inaccurate. So if you've been in the habit of apologizing, may I urge you to consider whether or not your apologies, though sincere, have been imprecise and poorly expressed attempts at confession and seeking forgiveness, and do what God says we are to do in our relationships to one another so that the issues can be resolved biblically.

The second best thing apologizing is, as is commonly practiced, especially among God's children is:

#2 An apology may be a vital, and even necessary, but preliminary element in confessing sin and seeking forgiveness of one another.

An indispensable part of an apology as we know it, is the word "sorry". Sometimes, people don't even say, "I'm sorry." It's a verbal contraction to say, sorry. When the person says, "Sorry." It is a verbal contraction for, "I am sorry," or "I am sorry for" this or for that. Nonetheless, the words "I am sorry" as an expression of grief for what I've done is an integral part of an apology. True grief for sin is an integral part of repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:8 and following, Paul writes to the Corinthians about the things he had to deal with in a rather strident way. He says, beginning in **2 Corinthians 7:8**, *"For though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret it: though I did regret it (for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though but for a season), 9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that you were made SORRY unto REPENTANCE; for you were made sorry after a godly sort, that you might suffer loss by us in nothing. 10 For, godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation..."*

Godly sorrow is the precursor and the handmaid of true repentance, so that when someone makes an apology, when they come to you and say, "You know, I'm really sorry for what I did", that apology may be a vital and necessary, but only preliminary element, in the confession of sin and the seeking of forgiveness.

Let's take the abstract and make it concrete by way of an example. Here's a man who speaks sharply to his wife. This is not to pick on husbands. This example could very easily have the roles reversed. For a couple of minutes, his tongue became a temporary sword and a bludgeon, and with it he pierced his wife and he clubbed her. Because he's a true Christian man, and the Holy Spirit dwells in him, he cannot be comfortable for very long when he's used his tongue as a sword and a

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bludgeon. If you can use your tongue that way **and be comfortable**, give up any thought that you are a child of God. I didn't say give up any thought that you are a child of God **if you use it that way**. I said give up if you can **be comfortable** when you've used it that way. This man is a real Christian, but he struggles with a hot temper, and there may have been circumstances that made his fuse very short. His wife may have provoked him at one of his weak points and maybe she sinned by doing it. She knows what buttons not to push, but she pushed, and he went over the line and spoke harshly, negatively. It isn't long before his heart smites him and he has a deep sense of grief because he knows from past experience, when he does that, how it pains his wife. In a sense, it would be easier for her to take if he had used a belt across her shoulders, than to use his tongue to cut her with words that will rumble around in her head and echo in the chambers of her spirit. [For this case study we are using the male as the verbally abusive one, but the female can be equally as abusive with her tongue and it hurts no less just because he's a male. It is no less damaging internally, because he's a male] He is deeply ashamed and deeply grieved and he says, "Oh God I've done it again. This horrible tongue of mine, wretched man that I am, the good that I would I do not, and the evil that I would not that I do. Oh God forgive me for using this instrument that ought to be an instrument of health and healing and grace to my wife. Forgive me for using it as a sword and a club." And he no sooner asks God for His forgiveness, then he goes to his wife and puts his arms around her and says, "Sweetheart, please, please, believe me when I tell you, I am so **sorry**, I am deeply **grieved** at the pain and the sorrow that I've caused you." And he is so taken up, with a sense of shame and grief, that's where his words stop.

Now what should she do? Should she push him away and say, "Don't hug me. You haven't really confessed sin. All you've done is tell me how you feel. I'm sick and tired of it." No. While his arms are still around her, she should look up into his eyes and say, "Sweetheart, I'm so thankful you have a tender conscience. Yes, you did deeply hurt me and wound me with your words, but I see that you're genuinely grieved, truly filled with sorrow. Sweetheart, what do you want me to do?" And he says, "What do you mean, what do I want you to do?" "Well you've told me, that you feel grief, and it's evident that you are sorry and I believe you, but what do you want me to do? You've told me how you feel and you let me know that you've entered into my pain and grief, in terms of what you did, but what do you want me to

do?" The husband says, "I want you to forgive me." The wife can say, "That's what I've been waiting to hear, because I love to forgive, because I'm a forgiven woman, I'm delighted to forgive you." And she knows when she says I forgive, she's doing four things.

- (i) She is pledging not consciously to bring it to mind.
- (ii) She's pledging not to bring it up to him again.
- (iii) She is pledging not to bring it up with others.
- (iv) She's pledging that the crack that it made in their emotional and marital closeness, will no longer be a hindrance to a restored emotional, marital intimacy.

What has she done? She recognizes that his apology was indeed a vital and even necessary, preliminary element in confession of sin and seeking of forgiveness. He came to the first two steps and **she lovingly nurtured** him along to steps three and four.

This is what you do. Instead of becoming a rotten, pharisaical legalist who takes what you've heard about forgiveness and use it as a club **when people express the disposition of forgiveness** and they don't do it quite kosher –no, that's contrary to love that believes all things, that hopes all things, that takes no account of evil, and if a husband (or wife) is coming with tears and head hung down and the language of grief is there, my dear Christian, shame on you if you throw in their face that they haven't come and said the right words about forgiveness. You see, you can come and use the right words and not really be seeking forgiveness. You just stride into the room, and say, "Oh well, I know if I don't say I'm sorry and if I don't ask forgiveness that's not right." So you say, "Dear, I shouldn't have said what I said, will you forgive me?" No grief. No real concern for what it did to the other person. Most of all, it breeches God's law. Just mouth the words, "sorry," "forgive me." You can take that kind of forgiveness and throw it back in the person's face and say, "Why should I forgive you? You're not penitent. There is no evidence of godly sorrow that works repentance. When your heart's broken enough to make it evident to me, that there's genuine sorrow, then we'll talk. Don't play games with me." *You see you can have the right words and miss the reality. You can have the wrong words, but have the reality. Ultimately what were looking for is **reality** clothed in the right words. But there's something wrong with your soul if you can mouth the words and there is no reality. ⁽¹⁾

#3 An apology may be an appropriate and sincere expression of sorrow for a non-sinful act or word that has caused inconvenience or grief to another.

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An apology, or saying "I'm sorry, I feel bad concerning this thing that was done or said," may be an appropriate and sincere expression of sorrow for a non-sinful act or word that has caused inconvenience or grief to another.

ILLUSTRATION – My wife and I have been invited to your house for a meal and we know that ordinarily it would take 20 minutes from our driveway to yours. You said the meal will be on the table at 6:30 and if you want to come a little early that would be great, come any time from 6 o'clock on. On the way there, a massive accident has occurred, traffic is stopped in both directions, and we forgot to bring our cell phone. So we wait it out. At 7 o'clock we're still not there and you're frustrated. You call our house and all you get is our answering machine. You've prepared the most wonderful meal and it's the kind of meat that if you leave it 15 minutes in the oven too long it is ruined. Finally, we come through the door at 7:30 and what should we do? Surely I need to apologize and say, "I am so sorry, I'm sure this has been a frustrating time, but let me tell you what happened." Now, have we sinned? Do I need to say and will you forgive me for being sovereignly placed in a traffic jam? What have I done that needs forgiveness? Nothing. But if I'm sensitive to my brother and my sister who fixed the meal, do I not need to let them know that I feel the frustration they have felt? Yes.

We've seen the things that apologies can be, that we ought not to go around beating people on the head about if they make them. But now, fourthly, let's consider:

#4 An apology may be and often is used as an un-biblical and carnal substitute for the pride-withering, grace-exalting experience of biblically seeking and receiving forgiveness. [Remember what an apology is: An apology is acknowledging and expressing regret for a fault or a wrong –it is unilateral.]

It is this, that men like Dr. J Adams are addressing when they write, "Whereas the Bible calls for forgiveness, the world settles for apologizing. There is not so much as a single reference to apologizing in the Bible. It is a totally unscriptural concept. It is the world's substitute for forgiving."

Typically Jay Adams has "right angles" and we've seen that there are some rounded angles with apologies. We are trying to have the love that believes all things, hopes all things, puts the best construction upon what someone is saying or doing; however, it is indisputable,

that in many cases, an apology may be, and often is, an un-biblical and carnal substitute for the pride-withering and grace-exalting experience of biblically seeking and receiving forgiveness.

From the time our first parents sinned and human nature was polluted, we all have a built-in, deep-seeded aversion to two things:

- (a) facing and owning our sin and,
- (b) casting ourselves upon God's grace alone for the forgiveness of sin.

The human heart has a deep-seated aversion to those two realities. Owning sin, and having owned it, casting ourselves solely upon the mercy and forgiveness of God for dealing with that sin. Like Adam, we try to hide our sin, excuse our sin, and blame shift. Like the Pharisee, we attempt to do something to cover our sin. Left to themselves, the last place a sinner will go is the only place they can go, and that's to Jesus Christ who was crucified on behalf of sinners. And at the root of both of those horrible strands of depravity –unwillingness to own sin, unwillingness to cast ourselves upon the mercy and grace of God for the forgiveness of sin– it has a common root, and do you know what that common root is? Pride –the sin that made the devil, the devil. I will ascend to the hill of the most high. I will be like God. Pride lies as the common root of both our unwillingness to own sin as sin and to go to the only place where sin can be righteously dealt with.

What happens? Let's go back and take a couple of our case histories. Here's a man that's used his tongue like a sword and a bludgeon with his wife. [We're not talking about a husband who is acting in his Biblical role within the relationship as the seat of reason. We are not talking about a man rightfully using his God-given authority. We're not talking about a husband who is trying to discuss things about the wife's behavior or countenance that are a hindrance to her growth and, thus, their marriage relationship; or he's trying to persuade her to see the reality of a certain situation. We are not talking about a husband who is trying to move the relationship closer to the norms of Scripture and, by provocation of her resistance and defiance, amps up his voice to keep her on topic. We are talking about abusive speech.]

Let's go back and take a couple of our case histories. Here's a man that's used his tongue like a sword and a bludgeon with his wife and this is a sinful pattern. In his pride he does not want to come and say, "Dear, this was the outflow of my own remaining corruption and

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sin." No, he wants to come and say, "Now dear, you've got to understand, things were this way at the office today, and things were that, and things were the other." Anything other than saying, "I have sinned". And the reason we do this is because our sin places us **IN MORAL INDEBTEDNESS TO ANOTHER**. Remember the words of Jesus? He said, "*When you pray, pray after this manner, Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Your Name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*"

My sin against God places me **in moral indebtedness to God**. My sin against you places me **in debt to you**, and I don't like to own my debt. I always want to think everybody owes me something. I don't want to go and say I robbed you of something that was your due. A husband, when he has spoken that way to his wife has robbed her of her due. Her due as a Christian woman is that her husband will love and nourish her, and cherish her as Christ nurtures and cherishes His church –and His church is no prize! It's us with all of our remaining sin*. With all of our quirks and foibles and weaknesses, lack of gratitude, self-centeredness, self-absorption, and blots and blemishes. We want to do anything other than say, "I sinned." Pride.

Furthermore, we do not want to say, "Will you forgive me" because we know that the moment the person says, "I forgive you" we are **IN THE REALM OF GRACE** and we don't deserve forgiveness. We'd rather do our penance. We all have tendencies of the "do penance" mentality and disposition. We can pay off our debt by something we do. We can somehow add to Christ's work. The moment we deal with offenses in a biblical way we are brought into **IMMEDIATE CONTACT WITH the law** that **condemns** the act, and with **the gospel** [grace/salvation] that is the only **remedy** to the act. And you see, it's when we live in **CONSTANT CONTACT WITH the law** and **the gospel** that we live as consistent Christians. What better place to have **the law** and **the gospel** continually percolating through our spiritual veins than in our offences one with another.

Thus, the terminology. The apology is often a substitute for the **pride**-withering, **grace**-exalting experience of seeking and conferring forgiveness. The moment you've offended me and you come saying, "Look, I sinned, will you forgive me?" Do you see what that immediately does with me? It puts me, with my back to the wall, **in the realm of grace**! If I am a Christian, I have to say to myself, "Who am I? I am a forgiven

sinner. Almighty God says if I do not forgive every man from the heart, neither will my Father forgive me."

Matthew 18:35. "*So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.*"

How can I withhold forgiveness. I am a forgiven sinner. **Every time someone asks** me for forgiveness, it **reminds me** that I am a forgiven sinner. It reminds me of **the dynamics of grace**, of the **mercy** and **kindness** of God, it presses me afresh into the mold of **the gospel**. Every time I own my offenses and when they are sin, I call them sin, it's a reminder that **God's law** is an inviolable, changeless perfect standard of right and wrong, and I have violated that law in my relationship to you. Therefore, I come saying, "I sinned, will you forgive me?"

When you come to someone and say, "I apologize. I'm sorry for what I did. Will you accept my apology?" is that different from coming and saying, "Look, I sinned, will you forgive me?" Think for a minute. When I come and say, "I'm sorry." **I'm telling you how I feel**. When I say, "Will you accept my apology?" **I'm asking if you'll do something** that's fundamentally passive. Will you accept, will you receive? So **I'm telling you how I feel** and **I'm asking you if you will receive something**.

When I come and say, "I've sinned" I'm not telling you primarily **how I feel**, I'm telling you **what I've done**. I'm owning my actions. When I say, "Will you forgive me?" **I'm asking you to do something**. 'I've done something wrong, will you do something right with a reference to me? Will you forgive me?' I have now knocked the ball of my sin into your court, and I am asking you to knock it back to me with the pledge and the volitional commitment to forgive me. The onus is now on you. If you say, "No I won't forgive you" then **you** own the responsibility for restoring our relationship. Now, I have an offense against you, and I have every right to go and take one or two brethren and come to you and say, **"Look, Ed, did I not confess my sin against you?"**

"Yes you did."

"Didn't I ask your forgiveness?"

"Yes you did, but I'm not going to forgive you."

Then my two brothers say, "Wait a minute, do you know what the Scripture says?" and they open up the Scriptures and press on this man, "If you will not forgive, your heavenly Father will not forgive you. You are to forgive even as God in Christ forgave you." They

Forgiveness #6

take him to the parable of the unjust servant in Matthew 18, and say, "You say you're forgiven and now you've got your brother by the throat and all he owes you is a few pennies and God has forgiven you your millions. How can you claim to be a child of God?"

But he still says, "No, I'm not going to forgive him."

The issue is then brought to the church, and the man can be excommunicated. Why? Because he is not acting like a Christian. Because the Christian community is a community of forgiven sinners who have become forgiving sinners. It blows away all the smoke and the indefiniteness of an apology. You come to someone and say, "I'm sorry. I feel bad for what I did, will you accept my apology?" The one to whom you are apologizing says, "O Yea, everything is all right."

However, that's not a resolution of the issues –or a restoration of the relationship. But when you come and say, "I've sinned, this is my sin, I'm grieved, God has forgiven me, will you forgive me?" And the person says as the Scripture tells us to do, "I freely forgive you for Christ sake." Now the breach has been dealt with and you've gained your brother or sister, and once again, there is face-to-face communion.

I'm exhorting you Christian men, to go home today, and where you have practiced and allowed varying degrees of apology to substitute for real biblical confession and seeking and conferring of forgiveness, to sweetly, lovingly, acknowledge to your family, and say, "Look, I was just ignorant, God's enlightened me, but I am determined as the head of this home that this is going to be a home, where offenses between the members of this household are going to be resolved biblically. No more, "I'm sorry," but instead, "I sinned." No more, "Will you accept my apology?" but, "Will you forgive me."

Some of you need to sit down with your wives and say this is why issues don't really get resolved. We think issues are resolved and a week later someone starts with the "You always..." The minute a partner says to his husband or wife, "You always..." you haven't forgiven. You haven't restored the relationship through Biblical forgiveness. The four promises are lacking because we haven't asked for forgiveness on one side and haven't conferred it on the other.

When we come to the Matthew 18 passage, this is why Jesus said forgive 70×7. Why? If you've truly forgiven and the offense is repeated, it becomes the first time. You don't keep the numbers. If I'm forgiven, and its dealt with Biblically, and you come again about a

repeat on the same issue, this is the first time again. If it's dealt with, then this is the first time again. So you don't keep numbers. Some of you husbands and wives have not resolved this issue. Unresolved grievances. What about you husbands? Some of you need to say, "Enough of this dawdling about some of the most elementary biblical issues and take hold today, by the grace of God. Some of you need to have a sanctified "having it out" with your wives by saying, "No more of this dawdling, flesh-sparing mumbling that I'm sorry." Be determined to own your own sin and deal with it biblically. No sulking, no grudge-keeping. God help you to see this stuff rooted out of your heart, and the sweetness of gospel grace in a husband-wife relationship, parent-child, sibling-to-sibling. May God grant that we shall see it in abundance in the days to come.

(1) A benefit of repentance is that it brings about change and growth. It may be painful and slow, but if you do just enough to save face because you know you are wrong and you did someone wrong, so you just mouth the right words, that's nothing but religious hypocrisy. Generally, there is a warp in our soul that causes us to think that correction and making things right is rejection, or it's admitting that you are the cause of all problems. If you cause a disruption, admit it and make it right. The idea is that there is enough growth and conformity to the likeness of Christ, that over time, we overcome in that specific area so it is no longer an issue. One of the barriers to a great relationship is removed. "If we confess our sin... He will cleanse..." We need to CHANGE AND GROW, not cover up, and stay in a rut for 5, 10, 15, 20 years. You wonder why your Christian life shows no signs of growth? Why it's so stagnant? Why your marriage is so basic when it could be glorious? Change and grow, or, to put it in biblical language, **Luke 17:32** "Remember Lot's wife. **33** Whosoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

Why don't you easily share the glory of a relationship with Christ with others? It is probably right here. We need to confess and be cleansed and along with this benefit of repentance is the idea that you don't want to do the thing you repented of anymore. You want to make gains, negatively [stop it, put sin to death] and positively [put on the Lord Jesus Christ, be more like Him in the positive graces]. Lose your life and you gain it. You don't want to come under false accusation, but you do want to work on areas of your life that you know, and your spouse knows, need work, so you can grow together. If one spouse is lukewarm and the other is hot, the lukewarm spouse can hide behind all the excuses in the world about not submitting if it is the wife and not having enough time if it is the husband. The bottom line is we need to love our time with God more than time with the world. But, but, but... Lose your life and gain it, gain your life and loose it. To live with a person who is not growing and changing in the true Christian sense of the word as described above (negatively and positively), is to cause the relationship to constantly be in a state of tension and concession making.

God's given you your spouse to help you grow. Pride stands in the way. Repentance is the light on the path to growth. I've used this analogy before, but it bears revisiting. We all get caught up in fixing the house, interior, exterior, room after room. What about the house of your marriage. If you are not as concerned about the condition of the rooms in your marriage, at least as much as your concerned about your obsession with your house projects, what are you really building?