

FORGIVENESS #7

PSALM 130:3 "If You, Jehovah, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? **4** But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared."

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."

In an ancient confessional statement of the Christian Church, imprecisely called the Apostles Creed, these words are found, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." I believe in the forgiveness of sins. For individuals who have little concern about the Holiness and the Justice of God, who have little concern about their accountability to God and the coming day of the judgment of God, in which even thoughts and words will come within the orbit of God's judgment, forgiveness is no big deal. However, for those who take seriously what the Bible teaches and what their own consciences affirm concerning their accountability to God and His judgment, for such people, the verses in **Psalm 130:3-4** are wonderful and blessed good news. **3** "If You, Jehovah, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? **4** But there is **forgiveness** with You, that You may be feared."

"If You [the Infinitely Holy, Inflexibly Just God], if You should mark [that is, record so as to bring into judgment every sin] if You should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But [blessed but] there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared."

According to the teaching of Scripture, those who embrace the forgiveness provided by God for hell-deserving sinners, the person who embraces the forgiveness provided in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, is gathered into a community of people called the church, concerning which we can say as one of their fundamental aspects of their identity they are a forgiven group of sinners who become a forgiving group of sinners. Because forgiveness is so central to the message of the Bible, we've been considering the biblical teaching on forgiveness with particular emphasis upon that forgiveness which we extend one to another.

In the last study, we began to consider vital, practical, pastoral perspectives concerning forgiveness. The first was this: The common practice of apologizing and the biblical pattern of seeking forgiveness are not identical and interchangeable things. The common practice of

apologizing was described and illustrated, then three things in the common practice of apologizing were identified. These three things make it fall short of the biblical concept of confessing, seeking, and receiving forgiveness of sin. Then we analyzed what an apology may be, from the best thing it can be to the worst thing that it often is. We analyzed err of when we use it as a substitute for the flesh-withering, grace-exalting, biblical pattern of owning our sin as sin and seeking the forgiveness of another for that sin.

END REVIEW

In this study we will address the second of the practical pastoral perspectives regarding forgiveness.

PRACTICAL PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES REGARDING FORGIVENESS – #2

The conferral of gospel forgiveness and the restoration of damaged trust are separate and distinct issues.

In the conferral of gospel forgiveness, someone comes to me and says, "My brother, I sinned against you in this or that issue, will you forgive me?" And I say to my brother or sister, in the presence of God, I make this commitment, "Yes, I do forgive you. (i) I extend the promise that I will not willfully allow this thing ever again to come to mind. When it does I'll push the delete button of the mind and of the soul. (ii) I will not raise the issue with you ever again. (iii) I will not speak of it to others, and (iv) I will not allow it to remain a barrier in our relationship. I forgive you." That's the pledge and the promise that I am making. The **conferral of gospel forgiveness** and **the restoration of damaged trust** are not one and the same things. They are **separate** and **distinct** issues.

As with so many other aspects of the biblical teaching of forgiveness, there is much fuzzy thinking that results in unbiblical action. People carry around guilt that they should not carry because though they have been enabled by God to confer freely and joyfully gospel forgiveness, they've not been able to bring themselves immediately to restore trust, and yet some people tell them they ought to do it. They are wrongfully told that if they've really forgiven, then the relationship ought to be as though the sin never existed, and so they carry false guilt. Then there are others who emotionally manipulate people. They say, "Well if you've forgiven me, why don't you trust me in this area? I thought forgiveness meant the issue was buried." There is much fuzzy thinking that results in unbiblical action. Remember the great pattern

of sanctification. Paul lays it out in **Romans 12:2**, there is to be the constant **renewing of the mind** that we may prove, that is, work out in our experience, the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. Sooner or later, every child of God who seeks to be obedient to all that the Bible teaches about forgiveness, both divine forgiveness and human forgiveness, will have to come to grips with this matter, and recognize, * **that the conferral of gospel forgiveness, and the restoration of damaged trust, are separate and distinct issues**, and that the principles that are operative in the one are not the same as the biblical principles operative in the other.

Perhaps the best way to bring the distinction into sharp focus is to consider this fictional or contrived study. We are trying to bring into sharp focus gospel forgiveness conferred and damaged trust restored.

Think of John and Mary, a couple who have been married for 20 years. They were both converted in their college years and began to court in those years, and as they saw emerging qualities of godly manhood and womanhood and seeking proper counsel from parents, and pastors and wise mature people, they came to the conviction that they could marry in faith and glorify God in that marriage, and so they were married. They are members of a biblically ordered church and they have three children.

During the 20 years of their marriage neither one has given the other a whisper of a reason to question the others fidelity to the marriage vows. They have 20+ years of **earned trust in the bank of their relationship**. They began to put some trust in that bank in the period of their courtship. Mary noticed that once John made known his heart was toward her, his eyes were toward her, his speech was toward her, he wasn't playing the field with his eyeballs. He showed every manifestation of a man who understood that if there's going to be one woman in my home, in my bed, and in my heart, there's got to be one woman in my eyes, and he manifested that so there was an element of trust already in the bank when Mary said I do. John saw in Mary elements of a chaste, godly demeanor that persuaded him before he married her that when she would say, 'forsaking all others, I will cleave to you only,' he had reason to believe she would mean that. So there was some trust in the bank when they got married and for 20 years they've been putting it in a nickel and dime a day and they've got this bank full of mutual trust.

Never has there been anything to cause either one to question the fidelity of the other.

Tragically, John falls in an area of sinful uncleanness and infidelity. [Don't fall for the world's language, "They had an affair." No, he or she committed adultery and violated the sacred covenant of marriage vows they took before God, their spouse, and in front of witnesses.] He confesses his sins and begs Mary to forgive him. After the initial shock and all the rest, she turns to John and says to him, "Dear, I'm a forgiven sinner. I can do nothing other than extend to you, by the grace of God, gospel forgiveness. It won't be easy, but I'm a forgiven sinner, God has forgiven me an infinite mountain of sin. I must forgive you. I freely forgive you." And she's able to go over and put her arms around him and confirm her free, full, immediate, gospel forgiveness. John says, "Sweetheart, I don't know how you can do that, but I am so thankful." and he embraces her, and says, "I receive your forgiveness." And by the grace of God, this man, who is basically a solid good man, not a chronic problem, is restored by the Lord working through the love of his wife; to the man he was and truly is. In fact he becomes a much better man as a result of the restoring power of the gospel.

The question is this, with that conferral of gospel forgiveness, is Mary immediately to confer upon John all the trust of the 20 years? No. He's not only sinned against Mary –and that sin can have gospel forgiveness applied to it then and there– he has opened up the bank of trust and all the coins that went in a nickel and dime at a time for 20+ years have all been scattered on the floor. Mary is not under obligation to go gather them all up and stick them back in the bank and say, 'John, we're right back to where we were before.' John must now begin **to earn** her trust again. The onus is on him **to earn it**, not on her **to confer it**. He must earn back the trust that's been damaged by his sin. Mary is not under obligation to give it all back to him with her forgiveness.

The Differences Between Forgiveness Conferred, And Damaged Trust Restored

What is the fundamental differences between **FORGIVENESS CONFERRED**, and **DAMAGED TRUST RESTORED**. Here we come to an analysis of the difference between the two things and then we're going to illustrate the biblical substance of that difference. There are two fundamental differences.

The two main characteristics of gospel forgiveness conferred are these:

(i) GOSPEL FORGIVENESS IS FREE, UNDESERVED, AND A MATTER OF GRACE.

Remember one of the major words for forgiveness has grace as the root word. The undeserved mercy and kindness of God to those who deserve just the opposite. Forgiveness is free, undeserved. It is a matter of grace and that's the word used in **Ephesians 4:32**. "Forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you." So when Mary says to her covenant-breaking and adulterous husband, "I forgive you," this is an act of and dispensing of grace.

Secondly:

(ii) GOSPEL FORGIVENESS IS IMMEDIATELY, FULLY, AND IRREVERSIBLY CONFERRED.

When Mary says, "I forgive you," it is no half promise, it is no conditional promise. "I forgive you halfway and if you keep your nose clean for the next year then I'll forgive another quarter." No. When she says, "I forgive you," she is saying with regard to his adulterous behavior, it is a matter, my husband, that (i) I will not allow, volitionally, knowingly, to remain on the screen of my mind, when it comes up I'm pushing the delete button. (ii) I will not bring it up to you. (iii) I will not speak of it to others. (iv) I will not allow it to be a permanent fracture in our relationship. I'm committed to work towards the restoration of the damage that it has brought to the relationship.

Those are the two characteristics of gospel forgiveness. It is **free, undeserved, and a matter of grace**, AND it's **immediately, fully and irreversibly conferred**.

Now by contrast:

The two characteristics of trust in general, and certainly of damaged trust restored, are these:

Unlike forgiveness, which is **free, undeserved**, and a matter of grace,

(i) TRUST IS EARNED, DESERVED AND A MATTER OF MERIT.

Where do we find that in our Bible? How do we demonstrate from the Bible that trust brings us into the realm, not of grace that is undeserved and free, but in the realm of earned merit that is **deserved**.

In Genesis 39 Joseph is sold by his brothers into Egypt and is put in the service of this man Potiphar.

Genesis 39: 1 "And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hand of the Ishmaelite's, that had brought him down thither. **2** And Jehovah was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. **3** And his master saw that Jehovah was with him, and that Jehovah made all that he did to prosper in his hand. **4** And Joseph found favor in his sight, and he ministered unto him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. **5** And it came to pass from the time that he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that Jehovah blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of Jehovah was upon all that he had, in the house and in the field. **6** And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not aught that was with him, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was comely, and well-favored."

What do we see in these verses? We see Joseph earning the trust of his master, by the blessing of God upon Joseph's life and performance. His master, seeing this, entrusts more and more to him. **The trust is earned**; it is not gratuitously conferred. "Hey Joseph, you're a handsome man so I'm going to set you over everything in my house and hope you'll cut it with your good looks." No. The talking about him being a nice-looking guy comes at the end of all the indications that he earned his trust.

Matthew 25:21. When our Lord Jesus gives the parable of the stewardship of God giving talents to His servants, **Matthew 25:21** "His lord said unto him [the servant who took his five talents and brought five more] Well done, good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things; enter into the joy of your Lord."

'My servant, you have earned my trust in the little, I will now entrust you with much. You've earned it.' **Trust is a matter of earned confidence**.

Luke 16:10 - 12. 10 "He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much: and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much. **11** If therefore, you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? **12** And if

you've have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"

Our Lord is saying, 'If you want to be entrusted with more, then prove yourself worthy. Earn the trust of those who track your behavior.'

This principle of trust being earned and deserved and a matter of merit can also be seen in **Acts 16: 1-2**. **1** "And Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra: and behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewess that believed; but his father was a Greek. **2** The same was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. **3** Him would Paul have to go forth with him;"

When Paul came into these areas looking for further companions for his missionary journeys, what did he look for? He looked for people who had earned the trust of those who knew them best. There in these two areas these people knew Timothy, knew him well, and as Paul put his ear to their report they said this man is trustworthy. He found no negative input from those who knew him best. He had earned trust. His trust was not gratuitously conferred by an Apostle. 'Oh here's a nice little half Jew half Greek boy, he'll be good when we minister to Jews, he'll have some insight there and if he ministers to the Greeks he'll have some credibility there.' No. "Well reported of by the brethren." Trust was earned. He was entrusted with the position of being a companion of Paul by earning it.

1 Timothy 3. Those who are to be deacons, what must be true of them?

1 Timothy 3:10 "And let these also first be proved [put to the test] then let them serve as deacons, if they be blameless." Would they be given the responsibility of office-bearing capacity and service in the church? They must earn the right to be trusted. They must prove themselves to be blameless, then let them serve.

2 Timothy 2:2 "And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful [trustworthy] men, who shall be able to teach others also."

The very word, trustworthy, means worthy of trust. We are not worthy of mercy. We are not worthy of forgiveness, but we are either worthy or unworthy of trust. It brings us into a totally different orbit of ethical and moral issues. Unlike FORGIVENESS, which is FREE,

UNDESERVED, and is a matter of GRACE, IMMEDIATELY, FULLY, and IRREVERSIBLY CONFERRED,

TRUST IS EARNED, DESERVED AND A MATTER OF MERIT.

It is far more difficult to restore trust when it has been damaged, than to earn trust in the first place. Trust is earned. Trust is a matter of merit.

Unlike forgiveness, which is free, undeserved, and a matter of grace, (i) **TRUST IS EARNED, DESERVED AND A MATTER OF MERIT.**

Now the second characteristic of trust: characteristics of trust

Unlike forgiveness, which is immediately, fully, and irreversibly conferred,

(ii) TRUST IS DELAYED, IT IS INCREMENTAL, AND IT IS REVERSIBLE.

Do you see the contrast? Trust is delayed. You don't just pluck a whole bunch of trust overnight. It is delayed. It is incremental. It is earned by bits and pieces, and it is reversible. From no trust to trust, from fractured trust to restored trust – you see this pattern again in Joseph's life.

If these things are true then there must be something in the Bible that makes it plain and we see this in Joseph's life and in John Mark's life.

Joseph earned trust. We considered Genesis 9:1 – 6, but then his trust is damaged, not by what he did, but by what another person [Potiphar's wife] said about him. Potiphar believed his wife. In verses seven through the end of chapter 39, there is trust removed. Here was trust conferred in the first six verses. Now trust is removed, not for anything Joseph did, but what his master perceived that he did. So what happens? While Joseph is in prison, he regains trust in the prison context. **Genesis 39:21 – 23**. **20** "And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. **21** But Jehovah was with Joseph, and showed kindness unto him, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. **22** And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. **23** The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand, because Jehovah was with him; and that which he did, Jehovah made it prosper."

He had the Midas touch in prison. Everything Joseph did as an obedient prisoner, the hand of God was upon it. Pretty soon he rises above all the other prisoners and the keeper of the prison recognizes it and gives him responsibility. He sees the blessing of God upon it and he gives him more, until, basically, the keeper is on a holiday and Joseph takes over in the prison. What happened? He earned trust in that new setting and with that earned trust came responsibility and privilege. But then that trust is further increased in prison. When you read chapter 40, when he interprets the dreams of his fellow prisoners, he gains confidence with his fellow prisoners. When you come to chapter 41, you find Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dream and trust is not only restored, but granted at new and exponentially greater levels.

Genesis 41:37 - 45. 37 "And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. 38 And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the spirit of God is? 39 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God has showed you all of this, there is none so discreet and wise as you: 40 you shall be over my house, and according unto your word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than you. 41 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. 42 And Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; 43 and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without you shall no man lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt. 45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-phera priest of On. And Joseph went out over the land of Egypt."

And there you have the record of how Joseph's conduct was such that he earns back trust. No doubt Pharaoh had heard about the Potiphar issue, "How did that man get in prison? Well, he got imprisoned because..." And there may have been some questions at first, but whatever questions there were in the mind of Pharaoh, from the Potiphar wife issue, Joseph's conduct regained the trust and the confidence to the point where he's given a sphere of influence and responsibility far beyond that which he previously had.

You also see this in a case of John Mark. John Mark is a beautiful case study in trust recognized and earned, then trust betrayed and then regained. Who was this John Mark? He appears in Acts 12:12. He was a member of the church in Jerusalem. His mother Mary was an influential woman in the church. Peter gets released from prison and he comes to the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark.

Acts 12:12 "And when Peter had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together and were praying."

John was his Hebrew name. Mark was his Roman name. So he had two names. He appears here, obviously someone deeply embedded in the life of the church at Jerusalem. The next time we see him, is in Acts 12:25 Barnabas and Saul come to Jerusalem and we read in **Acts 12:25** "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministration, taking with them John whose surname was Mark."

They've come to Jerusalem with an offering, they're going to go back to Antioch which is the base of their missionary operations, and in their interaction with the church at Jerusalem, like Timothy, apparently they hear reports about Mark. Barnabas was his uncle, so he knew something in terms of the family understanding of one another -he had some measure of earned trust- and with that, they take John Mark with them. What does he do? The next time we find him is in chapter 13. The Spirit of God says to Paul and to Barnabas that they are to be separated unto the work to which God has called them, and we read in **Acts 13:5** "And when they were at Salamis, they proclaimed the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John as their attendant."

What did he do? We are not sure, but he certainly was not on the level of Barnabas as the equal, almost companion with Paul. At first it's Barnabas who seems to be the leader of the missionary team and from there on it's Paul who was the leader. John Mark is their attendant. Sort of an apprenticeship. He's earned trust. He's earning more trust as they see him working in the ministry, but then we read in **Acts 13:13** "Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia: [on the southern central shore of what is

now the land of Turkey] and John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem."

A difficult journey lay before them. It may have been a difficult passage across that bit of water that they had to cross. Who knows? But all we know from this passage is that John made a decision to leave them and go back to his home church. We are not told precisely why he did it. We find in Acts 15, John Mark comes back into the picture after a Council in Jerusalem is discussing the whole issue whether it is necessary to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law to be saved. The issue was resolved under apostolic guidance in the church at Jerusalem with men from the church at Antioch. **Acts 15:36** "After some days Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us return now and visit the brethren in every city wherein we proclaimed the Word of the Lord, and see how they fare. **37** And Barnabas was minded to take with them John also, who was called Mark. **38** But Paul thought not good to take with them him who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. **39** And there arose a sharp contention, so that they parted asunder one from the other, and Barnabas took Mark with him, and sailed away unto Cyprus; **40** but Paul choose Silas, and went forth, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. **41** And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Now the issue is beginning to be clear. Paul says, 'No, we are going out again to face all the difficulties, all of the uncertainties of missionary endeavor, with all of its physical liabilities, and all of its dangers in travel. This is the young man who had earned a measure of trust so much so that we took him with us the first time. We made him our attendant, and while we are pressing forward into a new endeavor of gospel enterprise, he quit and he went back to mama and he returned to Jerusalem.' When Barnabas says, 'Let's take him along with us again,' Paul says, 'No, this is the man who was like the man described in the proverb. Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble, is like a broken tooth, and like a foot out of joint. We were ready to bite down on a new gospel enterprise and we had a busted tooth name John Mark. We were about to run in a new area of gospel endeavor and our ankle was out of joint, and the ankle's name was John Mark. No sir. Not until he re-earns trust and there is sufficient evidence that what happened when he left us was not the unveiling of a fundamental character weakness.' Sometimes a person's character is not really known until they're thrown into the fire of difficulty, then the real person

emerges. Paul says, 'Wait a minute. The real John Mark may not have been the guy who was at the prayer meeting when Peter got loose from prison. The real John Mark may not be the fella who was looked upon with respect and confidence in mom's house and in his home church and in his comfortable surroundings. The real John Mark may be a quitter who turned heel and left us. Let time pass until we find out who is the real John Mark.' Barnabas says, 'No, I want to take him.' Was Barnabas influenced by the bloodlines, by his desire to please Mary? We don't know, but you look at the passage and it's clear there arose a sharp contention. **38** But Paul thought not good to take with them him who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. **39** And there arose a sharp contention, so that they parted asunder one from the other, and Barnabas took Mark with him, and sailed away unto Cyprus; **40** but Paul choose Silas, and went forth, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. **41** And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."

There is no indication that the church validated Barnabas's choice of Mark and his endeavor. They sailed away. But when Paul chooses Silas it is clear, the church that had sent Paul and Barnabas when the Spirit of God said separate them, that church, under the guidance of the Spirit, recognized and validated Paul's reservations about Mark. Now did that mean in Paul's eyes, he was saying to strike this guy off forever? No, because he shows up again in little places in the New Testament. The next time you read about him, Paul's in prison at Rome, and lo and behold, guess who is there? **Philemon 1:23** "Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, salutes you; **24** and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow-workers."

Something happened, there was a change or an affirmation that what happened wasn't the real John Mark. Identified with Paul at Rome and in the epistle sent at the same time, the epistle to Colossians he appears again. **Colossians 4:10** "Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner salutes you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (touching whom you received commandments; if he come unto you, receive him)" This is probably a reference to the Philemon passage, because Philemon was a member of the church at Colossae and so he's just underscoring it again, 'Whatever you may have heard about him you receive him.' He's the real thing, and so much the real thing that the last time we hear about him is in **2 Timothy 4:11** "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark,

and bring him with you; for he is useful to me for ministering." John Mark had once again earned Paul's trust. Trust, initially earned, trust damaged, but now trust restored. When trust is betrayed, that bank is emptied, and you don't scoop up all the coinage and force it back in.

From these passages we've seen that gospel forgiveness freely given and damaged trust restored are two different things.

The onus is on the person who damaged trust to do all that's within their power to repair the damaged trust over time, by bits and pieces. The onus is on the other person not to act as though the many years of fidelity never existed and to be a shrew, and treat him as though he had been a common adulterer for 20 years and had not manifested 20 years of fidelity. She's got a responsibility to be reasonable in putting back the coins into the bank of trust.

4 Vital Applications

The first practical pastoral application is that understanding this principle will help to guard us from unbiblical sentimentalism in dealing with sins which have damaged trust.

Let's consider a not-so-uncommon situation: Someone who is in spiritual leadership and has the trust of a congregation grievously sins. They manifest deep and thorough repentance. What often comes next is the wash of sentimentalism: "Well, the brother is really repentant and forgiven. The issue is dealt with and behind us. Why should he step down from ministry? Why should he step down from his office?"

He should step down because he has betrayed trust, and that trust cannot simply be conferred by a wave of the hand. It is not being pharisaic for a congregation to say, "No, we have no question about the man's repentance, but as far as having trust for spiritual leadership, it will be some time, if ever, that it can be regained." It's a sloppy sentimentalism that refuses to make this distinction. [Peter, David kept their offices]

The second practical pastoral application is that understanding this principle will help to guard us from being emotionally manipulated by those whom we have forgiven, but whose sin has damaged trust.

Sometimes people say, "Well, I've confessed my sin and you said you forgive me, why can't we go back to square one in our relationship?" No. Trust has been damaged and work must be done to restore it. Don't let people

emotionally manipulate you. You can look someone straight in the eye and say, "As best I know before God, I've made that four pronged commitment of true forgiveness, but you've shattered my trust in you, and it's going to be a long while before I'll be able to trust you in that area. Now, I am willing to have you regain my trust, but the onus is on you to regain it. It's not on me. I didn't betray the trust, you did."

You children, think of this when you are tempted to be dishonest with your parents who've come to trust you, believing that when you open your mouth you speak the truth. Do you think it is worth it, whatever you think you're going to gain by a lie, when the lie is discovered and trust is shattered? Don't go whining to mom and dad and say, "I confessed my lie, why don't you trust me?" Because they trusted you and you betrayed that trust.

Thirdly, understanding this principle will help to guard us from an unbiblical, pharisaic rigidity in dealing with those who have damaged trust.

Taking the posture, 'Well, you've destroy trust, you never can regain it.' was not Paul's attitude. He tracked John Mark and when he saw a pattern that indicated that whatever happened when he left us in that missionary journey, that was not THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTER of John Mark. That was a blip of human weakness on the screen. And John Mark so filled up the screen with the other indications of his true character, that Paul can say, "Bring John Mark with you, he's profitable. He's the real thing." That's a wonderful thing, but you have to have a heart that is ready to recognize the trust regained, re-earned, and reconstituted.

Fourthly, understanding this principle will help to guard us in the midst of temptation from sins which would damage earned trust.

This has been a great means of dealing with certain sins in my own life –to look at the sin and say, "What would this sin do, in damaging trust?" Look it straight in the eye, and say, "No, trust is too dear and precious a commodity, earned a nickel and a dime at a time over the long haul. Am I prepared to throw it all away for some temporal, sensuous, personal pleasure?" God help us to think through this issue

Wrestling with these kinds of principles should make us all appreciate afresh, the wonder and the glory of gospel forgiveness offered to sinners in Jesus Christ. He justifies the ungodly –and, without him, we are all

ungodly. We've got no earned trust before God. He doesn't ask us to bring any. He says, 'Come in all your untrustworthiness. Come in all your foul, wretched, stinking, rotten, sinful self and I'll receive you. I'll receive you because of my Trustworthy Son. I gave to My Son the trust of the salvation of all of His people. He committed Himself in pursuit of that trust to live a perfect life in our human condition under the demands of the law. He committed Himself to take our place in receiving all of the wrath of God for our law breaking, our trust breaking. In Jesus Christ we have the Perfectly Trustworthy One.' The Father could speak from heaven and say, this is My Son, My Beloved One, in Whom I am well pleased.

To those who are unconverted and outside of Jesus Christ, when you think of forgiveness, never move far from this center point, in Jesus Christ, God offers you full, free, unqualified irreversible forgiveness, for the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

May God help us to understand the difference between Gospel forgiveness freely conferred and damaged trust incrementally restored by the grace of God.

