

# *Forever Forgiven & Forgiving*

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*“Our Father... Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors...”  
Matt. 6:12*

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*In dedication to my wife, Patsy.*

*Psalm 48:14*

*“This God is our God forever and ever;  
He will be our Guide, even unto death”*

## FORGIVEN

Not far from New York, in a cemetery lone,  
Close guarding its grave, stands a simple headstone,  
And all the inscription is one word alone---  
FORGIVEN.

No sculptor's fine art hath embellish'd its form,  
But constantly there, through the calm and the storm,  
It beareth this word from a poor fallen worm—  
FORGIVEN.

It shows not the date of the silent one's birth,  
Reveals not his frailties, nor lies of his worth,  
But speaks out the tale from his few feet of earth—  
FORGIVEN.

The death is unmention'd, the name is untold,  
Beneath lies the body, corrupted and cold,  
Above rests his spirit, at home in the fold—  
FORGIVEN.

And when from the heavens the Lord shall descend,  
This stranger shall rise and a glorious end,  
Well-known and befriended to sing without end—  
FORGIVEN!

(Author unknown)

## **Forward: Practically Applied Forgiveness**

During our years of ministering the Word of God in the interior of Alaska I experienced one of the most phenomenal encounters involving forgiveness.

The Village of Gulkana is located where the Gulkana River crosses the Richardson Highway. The Chapel was pastored by Ben Neeley and Fred Ewan, Athabascan Indians.

The children in the village developed a dangerous game of running across the highway when a car entered the other end of the bridge. The adults were unaware that this was being practiced.

One afternoon, Fred Lappi was enroute to Glennallen to pick up High School students; tragedy struck! Ben's son endeavored to cross the highway and in seconds he was hurled to his death. A short time later Ben, returning from work, arrived on the scene to discover his son's death. It is important to remember that all of the people involved were close acquaintances.

On the day of the funeral I stood in the Gulkana Chapel, Fred Lappi, at my side. As the Service progressed, it was obvious that the Neeley's were going to share what God had laid on their hearts. We all waited, wondering what might take place. Mrs. Neeley shared first and displayed the epitome of Christ-like graciousness. It was now Ben's turn.

After addressing us all in his most gentle and Christ-like manner he said something close to this: "Brother Fred. You have a reputation for driving fast. However, there is nothing to show that you were speeding that day. I want you to know that I forgive you."

Fred and I, along with the entire village followed close to the casket as the body was taken for burial. We left only when the last shovel-full of dirt had been cast on the grave. As I walked away I realized that Ben and Fred and I were walking together. Brothers in Christ, the forgiven and the forgiver!

That is the way it is with us who are in Christ... the forgiven and the forgiver walking hand in hand.

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## Chapter 1: Perspectives on Forgiveness

Mark Twain said: "Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it." Perhaps that conveys just a drop of the meaning we find in Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

I have frequently thought of something I would like to do, but have never had sufficient nerve to literally follow through with my thoughts. It would seem appropriate to select a given Sunday in the church I was pasturing, preach a sermon on forgiveness, and pass out pieces of paper for people to write down all of the things that they want forgiven and those that they here and now forgive. Next, gather the entire congregation around a casket in the parking lot or some other place on the church property and after all of the papers have been placed in a casket, have a bon-fire or a burial service. Leave the past and pray through God's enablement, never to purposely recall them, and if recalled inadvertently, never to allow yourself to act negatively upon them. They have been forgiven!

Such action might see "way out" and unnecessary. Perhaps you are right and rationalization in my own mind has given way to never having done same. Sometimes though, I think that we might remember more vividly portrayed demonstrations of what we have experienced from God and what we have experienced from men. We would be far less prone to recall some "forgiven" item for the purpose of acting up it.

There are two aspects of FORGIVENESS that we might explore momentarily. Human forgiveness is an act of pardon or remission of something. It means that there is the cessation of demand for payment of a penalty. Freedom has been granted. It involves further, the ceasing to blame or feel resentment against or to remit as a debt. Naturally, the majority of people on the old earth have a desire to experience this type of action toward them from someone they offended. Sad to say, many of us are all too unforgiving toward each other. What we want for ourselves we fail to initiate toward our offenders.

The second aspect, divine forgiveness, is literally described as "sending off or away". It involves covering, expiation, cancelling. It includes appeasing, cleansing, disannulling or to pitch or purge away. Basically it involves separating sin from the sinner.

John Owens, in commenting on "But there is forgiveness with Thee, that thou mayest be feared." (Psalm 130:4) "Forgiveness is from a Hebrew word signifying to spare, to pardon, to be propitious, in opposition to a similar word meaning to cut off and destroy. Jerome, with the Septuagint, renders it "propitiation," which implies more than pardon. The word is constantly applied to sin, and expresses everything that concurs to its pardon or remission.

"It implies the mind and will of pardoning, or God's gracious readiness to forgive. 'Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive;' that is, benign and meek, or sparing and

propitious. It also regards the act of pardoning, or actual forgiveness itself. 'Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;' actually discharges thee of them. This is the word God uses in the covenant, in that great promise of grace and pardon, Jeremiah 31:34. It is warrantable for us, yea, necessary, to take the word in the utmost extent of its signification and use. It is a word of favor, and requires an interpretation tending towards the enlargement of it. We see it may be rendered propitiation, or grace; and also pardon; and may denote these three things: The gracious, tender, merciful heart and will of God, who is the God of pardons and forgiveness.

"A respect unto Jesus Christ, the only propitiation for sin, as He is expressly called, Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2, mediating between the gracious heart of God and the actual pardon of sinners: all forgiveness is founded on propitiation."

The heart that has been touched with forgiveness by the Almighty is not long on issuing words similar to those of David, found in the 4<sup>th</sup> Psalm. Verse 7 in particular bears repeating: "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their grain and their wine increased." Material possessions move into comparable obscurity when one considers what they have experienced in DIVINE FORGIVENESS.

One of the portrayals that we have concerning forgiveness is found in Leviticus 16. The basic content deals with the Day of Atonement. On that day, annually, the Jewish nation celebrated a Feast. Today it is called Yum Kippur. It celebrates a new beginning and is representative of the Jewish New Year.

On this day of "atonement", we find that in reality, a "covering" was being made for sin. That is the Old Testament idea of the word. However, when we reach the New Testament we have the thought of removing of sin. Someone has said: "In the Old Testament God covered the sins of His people, but when our Lord came, they were all uncovered and borne by Him on the tree."

Further, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies three times: 1) V13 with incense. 2) V14 with blood of a bullock for His own sins. 3) V15 with blood for of first goat for the sins of the people. When he came out of the Holy of Holies, he was to take the living goat, and placing both hands on the head, he is to confess all the iniquities, all the transgressions, all the sins, "and the goat shall bear upon it all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness." (Leviticus 16:22)

This performance annually may have become mere ritual; it may have seemed somewhat elaborate; it may have seemed un-necessary; however, it drummed home to the hearts and minds of the Israelites that God was covering their sin in the atonement; but it did not stop there, He was removing the sin from the sinner. Maybe, just maybe, I should reconsider that funeral service in the parking lot annually.

From the Garden of Eden, when Adam first replied to God and sensed the depth of his shame, man has experienced that same guilt complex concerning his sin. God kept

reassuring man of His method of dealing with this nagging guilt. Promise followed promise concerning the redeemer. Those promises eventuated in the person of Jesus Christ. When He came, He went to Calvary to affect God's dealing with sin. He was the propitiation for the sins of the world. Everything up to that point was covering...now came the removal and putting away. Hebrews 9:24-26: "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; now was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

Remembering the words of Ephesians 4:32 in conjunction with those of Mark Twain, let us reflect on forgiveness as we understand it...my sins have been removed, pitched away from me, if you please, and I am to forgive as He forgave me.

The sins of my past were dealt with (Colossians 1:14) when through an act of His grace, (Colossians 3:12-17) He touched my heart by His Holy Spirit, gave me the desire to beckon Him to become my substitute and Savior, and embraced His finished work on Calvary as the only acceptable method to forgiveness. To elaborate on what sin or which sins I might have committed is only fuel for the fires of people's imagination to belittle or lust upon. What I was I am no longer. He forgave me "in Christ Jesus".

The waters of many years may have "gone under the bridge" since that time. Though sins were removed from us, the flesh has been here all the time. Again, we would not begin to enumerate on failings and fallings. One can rejoice in the knowledge that on the authority of His Word, (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." Sin handled in this manner, a proper fashion, has His guarantee of forgiveness. While some may not have forgiven us, that remains between them and the Lord. Let us ever keep short accounts in regard to sin, ever rejoicing in His forgiveness.

Perhaps the most basic reason that we do not see the putridness or sinfulness of sin as we once did is that we have become "good little boys"; ungodly activity, "big" sins will be removed and we are now dealing with things that are not as obvious to us or to others. They are equally repulsive to the Almighty; it is just that man does not picture them as graphically. The 130<sup>th</sup> Psalm is excellent on this theme, the 4<sup>th</sup> verse in particular: "But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." It is important that one ask God to show him afresh the exceeding sinfulness of sin. A starting point would be to review the proceeding of Calvary and the cost of our sinfulness. Never forget from whence we were rescued.

In a system such as ours, the moral values and ethics have been undergoing constant change. What was once repulsive, even to the non-Christian, has become acceptable. Our minds have been sufficiently warped to rationalize the clear cut "thus saith the Lord"

position of the Holy Scriptures. The forces of a secularized and humanistic society have so enveloped our thinking that we do not even recognize the resulting changes.

The believer's identity was described by Peter as being "peculiar". The peculiarity was the method of our redemption...through the blood of Christ. (See also Ephesians 1:3-14) Because of that unique method of atoning for our sins and impartation of forgiveness, we have become a peculiar people. We stand in unique contrast to the world. Just as uniquely, we experience and should manifest the forgiving spirit that has been manifested to us.

Turning the other cheek is far more than a cliché utilized to rebuke someone who has offended us; it is a character manifestation imparted through and Holy Spirit and demonstrated toward others. If God could cease to demand a payment of a penalty, making that payment with the blood of His Son Jesus, certainly I can cease placing similar demands upon those who have sinned against me. I can extend the same freedom that He imparted to me.

If God has removed my indebtedness and has sent it off or away; (and He has) if He has made "covering" for my sin, casting them all away to the point where sin and the sinner are separated, (and He has) certainly my religion stands out from others in its uniqueness concerning forgiveness.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed my transgressions from us; they have been cast into the sea of His forgetfulness, never to be recalled." (Psalm 103:12)

*"Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you." -Ephesians 4:32*

## Chapter 2: Progeny and Forgiveness

There is little as distasteful in the ministry as having to deal with unforgiving attitudes among family members. Nothing cuts into the effectiveness of a congregation more detrimentally as the bitterness that develops out of “family feuds”.

From the earliest records, Cain and Abel, we observe the “cainableization” or cannibalistic attitudes that can be displayed among family members. While it is true that such things occur outside filial relationships, it seems to have a deeper and more lasting impact within family ties.

Among the lessons on the subject in the Word of God is that of the sons of Jacob. It provides illustration of how pronounced the problem can be accentuated. By the time we reach Jacob’s death in Genesis 50, he had almost every possible problem in the family line imaginable. Even at his death, the “boys” get together to connive a method of dealing with a potential problem, how Joseph might deal with them in light of Jacob’s death. It is to be remembered that they had gotten together on other occasions to concoct schemes that would allow venting of their bitterness toward Joseph. Fear strikes into their hearts...what if Joseph had only had his hand stayed against them because of their father? Perhaps it was this very idea that produced a “weeping” on the part of Joseph...to suspect him of never having really forgiven them.

Another illustration of the struggle to forgive within family relationships is the story of the prodigal in Luke 15. The father sees the value in the son who returns to the fold, the brother sees: 1) Years of wasted living. 2) The possibility of the remaining inheritance being split. 3) The little recognition given to him while “minding the store”.

In fairness to the story recorded concerning the death of Jacob and the “boys” actions, perhaps they were actually reporting what Jacob had said. After all, when you rehearse the prophetic pronouncements concerning his sons, you can see that he understood the makeup of his children. Then, with Joseph’s removal from the family at some of the most formative years of his life, Jacob was not quite so sure on how he might act.

Most of us have experienced situations in which someone has told us that they have forgiven us, yet we cannot envision that forgiveness has actually been activated in the heart. We see the outward display toward us, but we cannot fathom that in actuality, the person no longer harbors resentment or reactionary desires toward us. When a person has been so demonstrative of a “Christ like” attitude, we have a desire to bring him down in our thinking to make him at least equal, or perhaps a little less in our estimate of him. We feel more comfortable with that, although we admire the other greater.

In the interest of watching the manipulative procedures employed by the brothers, and reproduced by people today who have sinned against another, we see them cognizant of the “just desserts”. Rather than face Joseph directly, they send a messenger to see

what the heart of the brother might harbor as a result of their machinations against him. If there is possibility of retaliation, there are plans in the making, I assume, to hold another family menagerie and formulate plans to initiate action to alleviate the problem.

This man of intense wisdom obviates one of the enormous tragedies in the making. Joseph observes the suspicious attitudes being demonstrated and again responds with a “Christ like” handling of the situation. He turns the other cheek, but the manner in which he turns it is important to observe.

Many times we go to God with concern about the punishment we are to experience, rather than being repulsed by the enormity of the sin we have committed. One cannot help but be reminded of the first chapter of the First Epistle of John...“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (V8, 9) We desire to look into the looking glass for the purpose dressing for impressing, but certainly to observe blemishes that disclose we have fallen short of the mark.

“Joseph wept”! His action spoke louder than words. This is what brought the brothers to a place of falling on their faces before Joseph. That long ago prophetic dream is finding fulfillment again, “bending before Joseph”. Observe what lacerates the heart of Joseph...that they would think so little of him as to believe that he would vindictively lash out; that circumstances and people as over against character would guide him.

The misdirected display of love in the family has led to this. When one would think that a lesson should have been learned, we see some of the same problems in life of Jacob and his relationship to Benjamin. At the other extreme, we see the brothers handling that situation somewhat differently from their handling of Joseph.

The attitude of servitude always wends its way to the forefront in doing the will of God. Against the societal attitudes of our generation comes the display of Christ’s words: “And whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all”. (Mark 10:44 NASB) Joseph, as a type of Christ demonstrates this most beautifully. Jesus said: “My kingdom is not of this world.” Building for time does not permit a servant’s heart; building for eternity knows no extremes.

Josephs: 1) “Fear not”; 2) “For am I in the place of God?”; 3) “You thought evil, God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive”; all bespeak the manner and method in which we handle forgiveness of an offender. First, let us dispel any fear that people might have of us. Ours is to manifest the character of Christ. More family feuds have failed to be solved because of this particular problem than probably any other. Each person in the family believing that they should be fearful of what the other member will do to them if honest confession is made of heretofore unresolved sin, often results in sin remaining unresolved. The problem festers, the poison deepens, the gangrenous effect and potential heightens.

Second, let us negate in the minds of the offenders that we have taken over the responsibility of being God's self-appointed watchdog. I am not, "in the place of God." To illustrate the extreme to which one might go in demonstrating how opposed he is to vengeance, look closely at Joseph's display..."I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spoke kindly unto them." When a man is down he needs more than a kick. He needs the under girding of one determined to do things God's way; he needs to feel the strengthening hand reaching out to him. "Comfort...kind words" are beautiful demonstrations of how to go about helping the individual fraught with the heaviness of soul resulting from sin. Commit the individual and his sin to God. Do not presume to elevate yourself to the position where you become judge and jury. We seldom, if ever, see the whole picture. Our perspective is limited and usually tainted with our conclusions of unfounded or manufactured facts. Never presume to sit in the seat of the Almighty. God is working out the accomplishment of His will. A pattern is being woven, an intricately formed structure is being erected, the purpose of God is being accomplished. (Romans 8:28)

Third, God not being in the position of accountability to me, and viewing the panorama of His will from His vantage and position, it is imperative that I understand that initial observances may be in the reverse from what I picture them. God was allowing all of this for numerous reasons. One such reason for such a tragic experience as Joseph's was for the purpose of saving many people from death. In the process of complaining about our Egyptian journeys we forget the famines in the Promised Land. We fail to see how the circuitous route may indeed be the perfect route.

The road of providence seldom makes sense until we retrace our steps. It is only when we compared dates, times and events with history that the picture as perceived by God focuses. Sometimes, according to Hebrews 11, many of the great saints "died in faith...never having seen the promises." Some things will only make sense when we get to glory.

Some very practical lessons have been set before us in reviewing some family frictions that need to be oiled with the oil of forgiveness. Distill any prevalent fears with a spirit of meekness, the spirit of a heart broken before God. Weep with your brethren about the devils doggedness to create dissension among you. Refrain from accusations that prove your point and rehearse together how the events have been allowed of God to bring you to this moment. "Nourish" each other. "Comfort" each other. Broaden your scope to include the entire family so that everyone is included in the benefits of restoration.

The hurts in families torn by "prodigals" cannot be fully comprehended. Many a father, putting forth a bold face from day to day, may have dampened the pillowcase with tears from night to night. It appears sometimes that the only thing that keeps some old men alive is their desire to view the returning prodigal. What a father had worked so hard to earn and seen wasted in debauchery suddenly fails in significance. It cannot be taken to the grave. The good name is what is left behind. The family in harmony becomes an important, a major factor. When that proud and stubborn young man's head breaks

over the horizon it is visible to the father who has plowed the fields with one eye fixed on his anticipated hope...he will “come to himself”.

It seems that if nothing else will bring dissension in a family, just see how the family inheritance is treated. Everyone feels that there is a right way and a wrong way to “divvy” it up. Everyone feels that someone in the family is more deserving or undeserving. There is no unified agreement. The young man stays home, he works from daybreak till sunset to help his father; his consistency seems to go unnoticed. Then his prodigal brother arrives from afar and gets the “royal” treatment. Upsetting to say the least!

But the father has selected the attire with care; the robe is for the covering, the ring for unity, and the shoes for newness of life. The backslider has been missed from the family table; the circle that was broken is restored. Must I have the praise of men, including my father, to be “faithful”? Surely that is what God expects of stewards!

(1 Corinthians 4:2)

There is no more beautiful statement in the entire story of Luke 15 than that of the 31<sup>st</sup> verse...“Son, thou art ever with me, all that I have is thine”. The friction had developed because a brother had allowed the circumstances of the moment to outweigh the truths, the realities of eternity. While we sit and sulk about a one-time situation, we have lost sight of our own personal inheritance...“you are ever with me, all that I have is yours.” What we possess in Christ can never be taken away!

It is important that we review our standing and state periodically, lest the winds of change entice us to believe that there are other things we should have had from the father; to believe that we have not been treated fairly; to see the reveling rascal who has drained the family coffers as undeserving and ourselves as the deserving ones. These are the things that produce upsetting circumstances and ultimately sin, in the family camp. Learn to live above the circumstances and go in and “we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.” (V32)

Again, though you may not agree with what the father has done, do not let it interrupt the communion between you and your brother, between you and the father and more importantly, between you and God. This would be a delight to the devil.

These illustrations, but two from the Word of God, are excellent to prod us with the reality of a problem that must be dealt with on a priority basis. To leave such things undealt with means one is willing to allow sin and its rampant effects to stifle our progeny for years to come. Unconfessed sin and forgiveness are probably the most devastating things to affect our family fortresses.

*“Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32*

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## Chapter 3: Principles Concerning Forgiveness

Perhaps one of the most misinterpreted and certainly second to none in application by Christians today, is the passage found in Matthew 18. The gratification of the flesh, and all too often misunderstanding, coupled with observed methods practiced by other believers and a lack of concern to know exactly what Christ said relative to the issue, has brought about some devastating situations amongst believers today.

In fairness to the subject, let us observe that contextually two other illustrations flow into the conversation of Christ in addressing this subject. First there is the thought concerning children and their place in the kingdom. A very strong point is made about the offence that might be precipitated toward them. While we are ensnared in this era with the devil's trickery to think in terms of "great people", and we have followed the world's ideas of what constitutes "greatness in the kingdom", the problem was clearly there in Jesus day as the passage indicates), our Lord reminded us of the prescription for greatness...conversion and childlikeness.

The second illustration concerns the parable of the lost sheep. It is indeed strange how we forget where this passage is located in Scripture. It ties itself inseparably to FORGIVENESS. Also, it is "sheep" that is being dealt with, not goats. If I look back to Luke's Gospel, (Luke 15) I discover that the context there indicates Christ's concern for first, 1 in 100, next 1 in 10, and finally 1 in 2.

It is imperative that we see the value of the person who has sinned, lest we be caught up in the sin itself. Galatians 6:1 would illustrate the care necessarily exercised in such situations: "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

With these words of foundation, we can now search the verses that incorporate Jesus instruction on the process to be applied when a "brother" shall trespass against you.

The "brother" has overstepped the law. Whatever the violation has been, it appears to have been between you and him. Obviously, others were not involved. You are to go to him and tell him his fault. Many times we assume that the individual is cognizant of the "sin problem", whereas this may not necessarily be the case. Thus we have the responsibility of initiating communication on the subject with the brother. Already you can see how important it is to pray about something of this nature in advance that your heart and his might be prepared for the confrontation.

Now comes the almost impossible situation in a modern day setting..."alone". You have no right whatsoever to ask someone else to "pray with you about" this meeting, unless all names and details are excluded. We will see how important this is as we move through the text. You may have fears about this confrontation, and he may have raised hair when confronted. However, if it is being handled according to Scripture, both will

have the occasion in prayer. Both will be seeking to know the mind of Christ in the matter. The character of our concern will be evidenced by the manner in which we approach the whole subject. No, not even your pastor should be brought into the matter at this juncture.

In the fact that you are expecting your “brother” to be a good listener, make sure that you are equally attuned to hear him out. Perhaps his explanation of the matter might shed sufficient light that your heart will be broken with his over the sin committed and the reason behind the action. It is far from being unreasonable to suspect that he might long ago have dealt with the problem but had been hesitant in coming to you about it. Again, he may have been anticipating how he could broach the subject with you.

“If he hear thee” amplifies the goal or motivational factor behind your action or mine. I am to go with the object in mind of having him “hear me” and that this will put an end to the matter there and then. It is with the thought of “gaining your brother” that we open our mouths initially. It is with hope and anticipation that the positive response from the brother will cause immediate restoration between the two, and that an end will put to the matter. This being the case, the matter is dropped and should not be brought up again, and certainly not at the expense of showing how great it was when you two got together and he confessed his sin to you and reconciliation was wrought. This is sickening. Further, there is the importance that the matter should be dropped immediately. When sin has been dealt with between you, it is not a matter for others to be invited to share their opinions. The matter is a dead issue. Again, this is the goal that should be sought when the initiation of contact is established at the outset. The “offenses” are dealt with, and the value of your brother has been kept in proper perspective. Forgiveness to be experienced by both parties should be the goal of our action.

No matter how careful we are in approaching our brothers, sometimes we do not come across just right and friction is aroused, reaction sets in and the other believer is sensing that we are geared to being judgmental. Again, perhaps he believes that I feel spiritually superior. Maybe, he even does not want to deal with the problem because his spiritual interest has diminished to a point that is lower than freezing.

After every effort has been utilized personally, explain that it would be best if the matter were reserved for additional prayer. Again, avoid involving another person becoming involved. However, if arrogance surrounds the attitude of the “brother”, the next step is to one or two witnesses. In selecting those witnesses, be certain that the individual does not see himself in an unsettled position with everyone against him. Let one of those witnesses be someone that he looks up to and respects as a leader. To do less than this might only prejudice your presentation in his eyes and still leave the problem unresolved. These men should be selected so that they also have as their ultimate goal, “the restoration of the brother”.

In accordance with Scripture, (Deuteronomy 19:15; John 8:17) every word is to be established. Let us be certain that “good listening” surrounds the quality of the men involved. In clarifying the problem, “every word” must be examined. It is important that

we hear what people say and not what we want them to say. In the event you are ever called upon to be a witness, remember that your goal is to rectify first. If that is not possible, you may later have to testify. However, if confession is made and forgiveness sought, the matter is forever sealed, as in the previous instruction.

Having taken the steps necessary to resolve the problem between the brother and yourself, and the individual becoming adamant against all effort to effect such a situation, we now take an additional step. The witnesses have not gone with you or me in an attempt to sit and say, AMEN! Their responsibility according to the 17<sup>th</sup> verse is that they have been heard on the matter. His rejection of their counsel precludes this step of taking it “to the church”.

The Church undoubtedly has a Constitution and By-Laws. There are procedural steps relative to discipline, which a member consents to at the time of obtaining membership. Again, the sin that has remained quite personalized should remain personalized. If the individual refuses to take the admonition administered by the board responsible, after hearing all parties and witnesses, it moves to the assembly of believers. That is a last resort!!! It must be repeated that all effort is geared to restoring the brother.

A side thought on the issue concerning this man that should be treated “as a heathen and a tax collector”. Though he may be treated as one might treat an unsaved individual, the method should not become unsavory. The church has no further obligation, such as endeavoring to continue to put pressure on that individual, save the pressure of love. 1 John 5 would give clear indication of how one should be left to the Lord. If God sees fit to judge him here on this earth, that is His to do. If not, it will await the Judgment Seat of Christ. Public sin is dealt with in 1 and 11 Corinthians.

In a day when much is said about “binding” and “loosing”, it is important that we see what appropriate interpretation finds contextual basis. After all, this “binding and loosing” is “on earth” and “in heaven”. If sin is “forgiven”, it is “loosed” both here on earth and in heaven. What is dealt with here must not be dealt with in eternity. If sin is not forgiven here, because it has not been sought, it is bound into eternity.

One studies the Disciples or Lord’s Prayer and discovers this truth: “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” (Matthew 6:14, 15 NASB) Bound or loosed will carry its effect into eternity, there to never be addressed, or there to experience the Judgment of rewards withheld. Not forgiving a brother that has sinned or refusing to confess sin will both find an accounting in Heaven.

Another verse of Scripture that is constantly squeezed out of context is the 19<sup>th</sup>. We endeavor to appropriate this to prayer. In a sense it is, but it is two brothers finding an agreement relative to sin. Two brothers are experiencing the ministry of confrontation and dealing with sin. Together they seek the Lord and arise knowing full well that their request has been resolved for all eternity.

Now, about that 20<sup>th</sup> verse that says: “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” Is it to be remembered that when I kneel to pray, two or three of us make enough for God to be in the midst? It is merely the smallest demonstration of “the church”? Might it not be more accurate to say that it is the “two or three witnesses” on a matter? Three of us, you and me, and God as our witness, that we are righting a matter. He answers that request and the matter is settled as far as earth or the courts of heaven are concerned. This is the authority that is given to us to make things right. This is the confidence with which we might say: “Thy sins be forgiven thee”...God, with the two of us, present to seal the agreement concerning confessed sin.

Peter thought within himself that he now had a comprehension of the subject of forgiveness. The question was, just how far should he go with this thing of forgiveness. After all, a man committing the same sin seven times and experiencing forgiveness, that should suffice. Being a door-mat to lead a person to Christ is one thing, but having a brother stand there and dig his heels in...that seems to be going a little far.

There seems to be just a little bit of smugness on the part of Peter. Perhaps he had extended himself to this point once before or maybe even on several occasions. The sweet rebuke of our Lord is sufficiently clear and lucid that all can understand: “Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but to seventy times seven.” Forgiveness cannot be limited by a number! It should know no limit. If we are counting, we have not forgiven! “Loose” a brother as quickly as possible.

God the King is asking for an accounting...the illustration is found beginning at verse 23. Every man must give account of his stewardship. The servant is discovered to be short some ten thousand talents. This being the equivalent of thirty years of salary in that day, you can see the magnitude of the problem. After the King hears a plea for mercy, the wife and child are brought back from the auction block and the man is allowed another opportunity to make good. Try to understand the heart of the King that gives such an absconder to resume his position...that is love unequalled. However, it is the love our Lord has shown to us, the undeserving servants, in displaying His graciousness that we could never pay back.

A man has not understood forgiveness if his tactics follow the pattern that Jesus used in this parable. One who rushes out to his “debtors”, lays hands on him, and takes him by the throat and says pay me, has a poor memory. In addition, it is obvious that he has never sensed the depth of his own wrong or the extension of forgiveness that has been ministered to him. Paul’s words: “I am what I am by the grace of God” (1 Corinthians 15:10) should be regularly rehearsed in our thinking. What a magnanimous gesture on the part of a righteous God...FORGIVENESS.

Obviously he had been using his master’s resources to finance his way along and fill his pockets from others who did not have “credit” available to them. He utilizes others poverty and exploits opportunity. Technically he is no less than a loan shark. This manifests itself when the servant proceeds with the identical attitude by seeking

forgiveness, requesting patience and promising restitution. The attitude of “I want what is mine” irrespective of the plausibility of such a request and the inability to remember where he had been but a short time ago displays itself. Of what worth is it to cast a man into prison where there is no possibility of resource or recourse to him?

Sin has a way of disclosing itself. “Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” (Galatians 6:7 NASB) Ere long, the “fellow servants”, who have been observers to this point, get the ear of the king. They share “all”. The king, acting upon the word of the servant and his appeal that sounded genuine, has the right of repeal. Instead of compassion he now pronounces judgment.

When God extends the grace of forgiveness, He expects us to extend the grace of forgiveness. Failure to do so put us into the class of a “wicked” servant. It is the “flesh” that lashes out in reaction. It is the flesh that dominates when we see a fallen brother and our efforts are directed toward making him crawl. Brother is instructed to help brother.

The king delivered the “unjust servant” to the judges, the inquisitors or tormentors; you can see the vividness of men giving account for their deeds in the future. We are accountable for our failure to “unloose” when it is well within our ability to do so. Again and again we hear the words of 1 Corinthians 4:2 echoing in our hearts: “It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” For most occasions today, the “pity” has been lost. It is not that there COULD not be forgiveness; it was that there WOULD not be forgiveness. We must all pay our dues for the things done, for “each one of us will give an account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:12 NASB)

The concluding thoughts bring the entire subject into a refocused position. Am I waiting for my brother to come crawling to me? Am I waiting for the opportunity to condemn his actions? Am I acting on the pretense that I have forgiven, whereas the subject has remained a topic of discussion with one or two of my “busybody” friends? Is my action based upon “my heart” or head? Am I eager to see my brother experience the same FORGIVENESS that I have experienced? Do I have the mind of Christ in the matter? “FORGIVE us our debts, as we FORGIVE our debtors.”

*“Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32*

By, Rev. E. “Ted” Cowen, Copyright Commitment 2008

## Chapter 4: Burdensomeness for Forgiveness

Why do so many of us find relative ease in identifying with Psalm 51? I would suspect that the guilt level in people exceeds the external attire of "I am O.K. man!" In the quiet and secret moments there is inner searching and constant longing to deal with the weighty matters of sin that plague us. Whether the conscience, the devil himself, or the Holy Spirit has become the catalyst that causes this awareness to haunt us is subject to question; the fact is that some of us live with it in a greater degree of guilt than others and many of us do not acknowledge publicly of the problem. Such "burying" leads to blundering efforts to surmount the accompanying frustrations, that ultimately we go through life with increasing amounts of denial, discouragement, and depression.

David had entered into a sexual adventure with Bathsheba who had become pregnant. To cover his "tracks", he tried sending her husband to her from a stint in the army so that the pregnancy became explainable. When that did not work, he sent him to the front lines so that he might be killed. Now he has to live with that experience haunting him. Nathan, the prophet, exposes David. There is no choice left but to deal with the sin committed.

Endeavoring to deal with sin and the pursuing accessories that beset us, we need to realize that God and His graciousness is where we begin. Out of His bag of "lovingkindness" we need compassion from Him that will "blot out our transgressions". From day one, (Adam and Eve), we see man's flailing and failing effort to deal with his personal sin. The knowledge that God would be visiting them and that they were naked caused them to try to cover that nakedness. God immediately provided a covering that originated from a blood sacrifice. It would symbolize throughout Scripture, that the blood sacrifice, that of Jesus Christ, would be the only legitimate method of dealing with sin.

Always graphic is the vocabulary selected to reveal the tantalizing and tormenting conscience and consciousness of sin. That is precisely why he speaks to God of washing him "thoroughly". He wants nothing left that would impinge upon his relationship to the Father...God. He wants complete cleansing; nothing is to remain of his previous action and activity. The longing of a man who is described as a "man after my own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) by God, is that this sin that "is ever before me" would somehow be blotted from his memory. It is not to be! W. Graham Scroggie notes: "Sin is regarded in three ways: as a blotted record, which must be expunged; as a polluted robe, which must be washed; and as a fatal disease, from which he must be cleansed."

Now the Psalmist zeroes in on the real crux of this nightmarish experience that is a constant contaminant of his thinking--"Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight," (V4) The more closely he endeavors to walk with God, the more horrific this whole scene becomes. He secures a deeper understanding of God's holiness and grasps the reality that sin is against God. While it might affect him and others, the real offense is against the Almighty. Because we are brought up under

a set of morals, we need illumination of this basic truth...Sin is against God. This will be most obvious when God gives the final word on the matter. He will be just and the justifier.

Another vista of focalization by the author is the inner man. What causes a man to sin? He has been "conceived" in sin, he was "brought forth in iniquity". But, because God desires "truth in the innermost being" (V6), while we understand why we sin, there is no justification for sin. I must still be held accountable for indulging in sinful activities. My predilection to sin is not justification for having violated God's standards. Here he refers to the "hyssop" that was used to sprinkle the blood in the ritual utilized to declare a leper clean. In so doing he lowers himself to the most abhorrent of diseases, leprosy, but also presents that picture to which we referred at the beginning of this chapter, the blood of Christ that alone cleanses sin.

As the oppressive burden of sin crushes upon us there is a realization that is instilled within us...when washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, in faith, we are whiter than snow. This appropriation results in a remarkable change in my concept of how God sees me and how I should see me. I now hear "joy and gladness"; the "broken bones" rejoice; the idea of God hiding his face from my sins and my iniquities being blotted out allows me to see this matter of oppressive sin taking on another perspective. I refuse to let the scars of the past interfere with what God can and will do with a person He has declared "justified". Justification is more than just God seeing me as though I had never sinned, "it is the judicial act of God whereby He justly declares and treats as righteous the one who believes in Jesus Christ." (Scofield) *God sees me; God acts toward me and treats me as righteous. Forgiveness is at the heart of that action and that is how I should act toward another whom I have forgiven.*

To acquire this balance, a person need recognize what the Psalmist recognizes...my problem is the inner man. It is out of the "heart" that our actions materialize. James, in his Epistle points out that the tongue spews out vocabulary abhorrent to God. One minute it is praising God and the next it is cursing. He also notes, like the Psalmist, that this filth comes from the corrupt heart. His desire is for an "upright" heart so that his actions are commensurate with the heart of God. His "spirit" should emulate the Holy Spirit's presence.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit had not come to indwell men as in the promise of Jesus, "I will send the Comforter" (John 14:16-18). There, He came upon men and would leave men. Reading through John 14-17 we see how He now resides within believers only and cannot be "taken" from us. Once the Holy Spirit enters an individual's life, at the new birth, he gives us a "new heart" and this enables us to live a new life under His control. When a person's actions are brought under control of the Holy Spirit, ere long, others are affected. The unlikely, "transgressors" and "sinners", recognize the positive effect that the "new heart" has on this individual. Likewise, they become converts and follow the Lord. Here is a reminder of the far-reaching effects of a man understanding the magnitude and the magnificence of what he has procured and have become his in Christ Jesus. There is more to come in the succeeding verses!

David had ordered the death of Uriah in the process of trying to cover the sin committed with Bathsheba. The method was to place him in the front lines where there would be the likelihood of his being killed. Nathan, the prophet, shows absolutely no tolerance for David's action and discloses David to be guilty of Uriah's blood. In a very real sense, every man alive has blood on his hands. When Jesus Christ hung on Calvary, it was our sin that nailed Him there. Like Pilate in (Matthew 27:24,) we claim innocence. We assign it to others! However, the truth is that before God we are guilty. It was because of the innocent blood of the just ONE that we all stand guilty and are under the condemnation of death. It is that condemnation that presses on the conscience of the Psalmist. It is from that guilt of the Son of God that man wants forgiveness. It is from the shedding of that same blood that there is the possibility of "salvation". "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow." (Hall/Grape) When the weight of my sin has been lifted, my tongue will gladly sing of His righteousness.

Singing usually comes from a lightened heart. In the day and hour in which we live, what we hear and see may appear to contradict what I am saying. However, joyous and melodious songs fill the lips and the mouth of a person who wants to Praise God. He looks back and recalls from where he has come; he sees where he is and where he is going; he sees how it was accomplished; now he has only praise for God alone—He did it all and we become the recipients through Christ. It was not sacrifices on our part, nor was it burnt offerings of effort by us; it was humbleness of heart, contriteness, brokenness of spirit that acknowledged that our salvation and the lifting of our burdens are solely on the merit of His GRACE!

While an examination of the Old Testament will reveal that much of God's dealing with Israel focused on a Promised Land and occupation of that land, it was not without a deep spiritual attachment.

The building of "the walls of Jerusalem" and God having "done good to Zion" would mean that the central place of worship was established; accordingly, when the people were worshipping there

in right relationship to God, the offerings that would be offered would be accepted. In verse 16 they were not acceptable; here in verse 19 they are acceptable. The motivation is a key factor. There it was obligatory, but here they are pouring out their thanks from hearts that recognize what God has wrought.

The songwriter put it so beautifully: "Burdens are lifted at Calvary". From the weightiness, the crushing guilt of a sinful action comes the acknowledgement: "Calvary covers it all!" Herein we rejoice! There is no need to remain in the doldrums of disgust, disappointment, depression; Rejoice! God has cared for it all in the most intricate of detail. Revel in your redemption!!! When the devil throws a wrench into the works, remind him...It is forever cared for, "washed in the blood of the Lamb".

*"Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;*

*just as Christ god forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32*

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## Chapter 5: Forgiving / Forgetting

Every assembly of believers has problems of one type or another. The biggest “problem” is how we handle the problems that beset us. The Church at Corinth had fourteen basic problems. One of those problems involved a man who took freedoms to commit incest. He had taken his father’s wife to himself. The specifics involved are spelled out for us in 1 Corinthians 5; thankfully, it is not a blow-by-blow detailed account, but sufficient information to know the general context of the situation.

Paul was appalled by this conduct; he noted that it was not even acceptable among the “Gentiles”. He was referring to those who were not believers. The church was accepting what the world outside of Jesus Christ would not and could not accept! It was and still remains a repulsive aroma to the nostrils of the Almighty. As then, so now, this, along with the other problems at Corinth, is seemingly devoid of attention and correction in our local assemblies even though they are abhorrent to the Lord Himself.

How this fiasco developed, the arrogance that was being displayed by the church and its leadership in not dealing with the “brother”, can be traced back to the leaven that was developed in 1 Corinthians 4. Such a domino effect is always discernible if we are sufficiently honest to seek it out. The church should have been “mourning”, whereas, they were gloating. The answer was not to close the doors and take down the “shingle”; the answer was correction! This man should have been removed.

In endeavoring to follow Paul’s instruction to them, the church stood up to her responsibility, they ousted this man from their fellowship. It was not an easy decision or action. It was necessary. You can imagine the opinions voiced when people expressed themselves in regard to what was taking place; especially by relatives and those who considered themselves intellectually superior, which was another of those problems at Corinth. It must have had every indication of chaos.

Out of that scenario there was reaction. The brother was “dumped” and no effort was made to see him restored to the fellowship of the assembly of believers. Part of Paul’s admonition was adhered to while the other part of it was allocated to the trash bin...an all too frequent method of dealing with a sin problem in our churches. The key element, “that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” had faded into obscurity. Throughout these two Epistles to Corinth we see the Apostle admonishing the brethren to endeavor to utilize every effort to have people restored. That is a goal that involves FORGIVENESS.

As we read the opening verses of 2 Corinthians 2, the word “sorrow” occurs a number of times. There is no joy in finding sin in the church. There is no joy in finding that sin in the church has not been dealt with in a Biblical, Christ like fashion. Paul felt deeply about his return to Corinth; he did not want it to be a sorrowful experience for him or for the assembly of believers there. He says that he had written out of “much affliction and anguish of heart”. Sin has to be dealt with out of a broken heart, or it has not been dealt

with at all. Throughout the process of dealing with despicable sin, we hear him saying: “but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.”

When a member of a local assembly sins in a private fashion, it should be dealt with in a private fashion. Matthew 18 makes that quite clear. However, when this man sinned at Corinth and committed incest, it became an open matter to the entire group of believers. In that case our text makes it clear that it had to be dealt with openly by “all of you”. Paul makes it clear that while it might affect him as a member of the Body of Christ, the responsibility of dealing with this brother remained theirs. He is going to keep his conversation on the subject quite limited. I must admit that as guarded as I have been, there have been times when I was sucked into discussions and asked to offer opinions that were not my responsibility. It is hard for preachers, loaded with messianic complexes, to leave matters with the local assemblies. However, that is the method he endorses.

After the problem developed and the brothers at Corinth had dealt with it, removing the offender from the assembly, their action caused this man to re-establish a right relationship with God. However, they so ostracized this man that when he desired to be restored to their fellowship, they allowed the scars of the past to justify their continued treatment as though he was still involved in his sin. This cannot be justified before God. Paul warns them that such practices will possibly eventuate in this man being taken advantage of by Satan. The brother needs to have comfort and forgiveness. When these are absent, you can be sure that a person will quite possibly be “overwhelmed by excessive sorrow”. The man was punished, he repented, God forgave him, and we have a responsibility equal to that action. He has suffered enough and there is no justification to continue to treat him like he was still committing that sin.

The continued action that follows is to revolve around this thought: “reaffirm your love for him”. It is one thing to talk about loving someone, but this is putting on shoe leather. It is letting our talk walk. It is personalizing our profession. It is displaying our doctrine. Paul tells them that this is now a test of their obedience. If we are unwilling to act in accordance with the dictates of Scripture, than we need to see if in fact we are “in the faith”.

Another principle that we must apply when we recall a brother’s past life of sin is recognize that if it was cared for by others, the individual does not have an accountability to go further. Paul says that if they forgave the man, likewise, he forgives him. He tags that with: “if I had anything to forgive”. This man does not need to make a confession to everyone and his brother under Christendom. We have an obligation to forgive the brother who committed sin because we recognize the authority of those involved who dealt with the problem. The phrase: “But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ.” (11 Corinthians 2:10 NASB)

In view of what we have discussed, what happens when I recall a person’s sin? After all, I cannot forget. Only God, in His perfection, has that ability to cast our sins into “the sea

of forgetfulness” and “remember them no more”. This was the problem at Corinth, right? We must act toward that person as though the sin had never been committed. This is the key that had been missing in the Church at Corinth. They acted on what they remembered about the man and his sin. They forgot that Satan uses such circumstances as part of his schemes to thwart the progress of the church. The Apostle said that: “we are not ignorant of his schemes”. How should I act toward that brother in Christ? Quite simply: Remember where you were in sin and what Jesus forgave you. That knowledge should be sufficient to cause any of us to apply those principles identically to any given situation of similarity.

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;” (2 Corinthians 2:14, 15 NASB)

*“Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32*

## Chapter 6: The “Much” of Forgiveness

He stood, sharing the story of his life as a prominent businessman and then the moment of his born-again experience. Tears flowed freely down his cheeks. Because this was the fourth or fifth time I had heard it, I found myself questioning the genuineness of those tears, even though I did not want to be negative about them. Over the years I have watched many people like that brother and I have come to accept the depth of their emotions as they reflect back on the grace of God toward them.

In the Gospel of Luke, the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter, the 36<sup>th</sup> Verse, we find the beginning of a story that shows a woman with almost incomprehensible gratitude toward the Lord Jesus. Christ had been invited to dine with a Pharisee, an invitation that He accepted. That in itself was unusual! Here is one who would normally be exposing the Pharisees and their hypocrisy. Now he “reclines” at the table within this home.

One has to question how this woman became aware of Jesus being in the home of this Pharisee. This is a religious leader and this “immoral” woman takes the liberty of entering the home of this Pharisee, carrying with her an alabaster vial of perfume. One immediately wonders about the relationship between these two? No immediate criticism is vented on the Pharisee, yet it was frequently addressed when Jesus reached out to people of questionable character. (V34) It shows how frequently we are predisposed to conclusions, legitimate or illegitimate.

Tears in such abundance that a person’s feet could be washed undoubtedly caught the attention of everyone; it would still catch the attention of people. It was an experience that Jesus said would be spoken of throughout the world. (Mark 14) It has been! A woman using, no less, her hair to wipe the feet of the Savior is another unusual situation. Finally, she anoints them with perfume from the alabaster vial. There is no question about its worth, it was expensive.

This whole story is filled with incongruity. From the character of the woman applying perfume to unwashed feet, kissing those feet, to Jesus accepting this action, defies common logic; but it happened! We might call her the Podiatrist of Podiatrists.

While the questions may be rampant as to what the people observing this event might be thinking, there is no room to wonder what Simon, the Pharisee, was thinking; it is recorded in the 39<sup>th</sup> Verse...If Jesus were a prophet He would know the low estate of this woman. What Simon missed was that it was because Jesus knew who the woman was, and because the woman knew who she was, was indeed the very fact that brought about her salvation.

It is not unusual for people to question who Jesus is. It happened here, John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He was the Messiah simply because Jesus did so many things contrary to the way John envisioned Him. Thomas sat under His ministry for three years and struggled to accept His resurrection even though he had been taught concerning it.

This is the situation to which Jesus addressed the Parable of The Two Debtors. It could have turned into an explosive situation because it was Simon who was challenged in his own home. Instead we hear the question: "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" (V49) A more perfect setting could not have been manufactured for what happens; a natural challenge emerges relative to our understanding of what God has done in Jesus Christ and the emotional transition that accompanies this newfound life.

The opening words: "Simon, I have something to say to you" is arresting. Jesus is going to personalize this subject of forgiveness and the comprehension of what is wrought through Christ. He specifies "Simon". Jesus deals with men one on one. It is more than saying in a sweeping motion, "You". It is the Lord of Glory, signaling His concern for a single individual. As one meanders through the Scriptures, you are keenly aware of this oft-repeated idea...Nicodemus, "you must be born again". The woman of Samaria, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that says to you..." A Nobleman, "Go; your son lives." At the pool of Bethesda, "Do you wish to get well?" To the man born blind, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." Jesus singled out individuals then and He continues to do so today by the ministering work of the Holy Spirit. It is the manner in which the church has been built. Each of us gets that personalized touch when we hear Him say: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 NASB)

God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit has something to say to each of us personally. In fact, He has much to say to us in and through His Word, the Bible. It does not take long to learn how much when we begin to peruse the Scriptures. He makes it come alive, to us, PERSONALLY. We hear our response as that of Simon in the 40<sup>th</sup> Verse, "Say it, Teacher."

Whether this Pharisee had a sense of superiority toward Jesus, or he had become so enamored that he forgot common courtesy is subject to debate. However, he became the object lesson for us today. Two people having contrasting debts, one ten times as much as the other, are forgiven by the moneylender. Graciousness exudes from this man who recognizes that "they are unable to repay".

Both men are in debt. Both are forgiven. Both are appreciative. Simon, when asked, concludes that the one with the greater debt is probably more appreciative than the one with the smaller debt. Consider these men for a moment. They have borrowed to the hilt, up to their "eyeballs". They have no recourse. Then it is that the "moneylender" steps in and displays his graciousness. It is a beautiful picture of Ephesians 2:8,9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." The "riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19) is applied to our debt of obligation to God and we experience forgiveness from that liability. The Lord is filled with compassion and therefore it did not take more grace or less grace to deal with each person, before us is the magnitude of

their appreciation in respect to the size of their obligation. The greater we feel the burden of that obligation; the more expressive becomes our emotions.

Why me? Why you? Oft repeated phrases that reveal our amazement that God should demonstrate His grace to such an undeserving sinner such as I. He has wiped the slate clean with His shed blood.

“Do you see this woman?” Comparison or contrast always serves to present an example. A man or woman transformed by the grace of God is a graphic display of appreciation. Long before the words: “Your sins have been forgiven”, this woman has appropriately recognized Jesus for whom He is. She needs no dissertation on the subject; His obviousness is before all, but she is the one who acts upon that recognition. Every person who recognizes Christ, who He really is, will become an object of display pertaining to the effectiveness of God’s grace. That person comes away transformed! Have you seen a man or woman transformed by the grace of God?

Common courtesy had not been extended to Jesus, but this woman reaches beyond such expectations. She is in another’s house and displays the perfunctory things that another should have performed. However, she displays them in a far superior demonstration. She does not open the door of her home; she opens the door of her heart. She is simply unable to contain herself, she just pours out love toward the man that she recognizes as her Messiah. It is demonstrated in abundance; it seems to come without let up or end.

Simon had not visualized himself in his sin or his need of this Savior, Jesus. This woman did! Immediately Jesus responds to her love and we hear Him say: “her sins, which are many, have been forgiven.” A more magnanimous action cannot be found in Scripture. “She loved much.” Her love of other “things” has been replaced with a love of Jesus, the Messiah. That is the way to forgiveness... fall in love with Jesus.

The Savior’s response is forthright: “Your sins have been forgiven.” He longs to share those words with any man or woman who will invite Him to enter and control their lives. Many are those who say: “I wish I knew my sins were forgiven. I hope they are, but I have no assurance or guarantee to that effect.” There are multiplied verses in Scripture that assure us that confessed sin is forgiven, unconditionally! We need only believe Him. 1 John 1:9 NASB says: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God’s promises are “Yea!” And “Amen!”

Picture one-self reclining at that table with Jesus. What thoughts might be traversing the brain about now? Would you be asking questions similar to that group, would you be saying: “Who is this man who even forgives sin?” Need we be reminded that this was the “sin bearer” of which Peter spoke in his Epistle. He is the one alone who has the right, the authority, to speak such words. As stated previously, He longs to speak them to you.

The woman of this encounter hears the words that her soul has longed to hear: “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” While those ‘reclining’ were tossing facts around in their heads, this woman was resting in who Jesus was and that He had forgiven her sin. The whole event becomes almost humorous, if it were not for the weightiness of the subject matter. Those who were considered the more learned are learning from a woman of the world. They are perplexed and she is at peace. The oppressiveness of sin is removed and that knowledge creates a woman that now loves much. Gratitude is the attitude of understanding forgiveness.

*“Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32*

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## Chapter 7: Forgiveness and Fellowship

As a teenager the young man was developing the traits of bitterness and vindictiveness. He found himself reacting rather than responding. While he did not like what he saw, it was a method of survival. God intervened into that hollow life form and through divinely ordered circumstances he was born-again. Immediately, one of his mentors, recognizing the existence of these problems, suggested that he memorize Luke 6:35: "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." That verse became a bridge over a fissured life and has helped immeasurably for more than fifty years.

Learning the art of forgiving another, be they Christian or non-Christian, is Scriptural. It is a "law" that is mandated throughout the Word of God and unless applied brings more grief to the one refusing to forgive than to the offended. It can be said that unapplied, it makes the offended an offender of God and man.

One of the most popular portions of Scripture known to man is the "Lord's Prayer". Jesus disciples had been made aware of John the Baptizer having taught his disciples prayers of one type or another. They, sensing their inadequacy or inability wanted to learn how to be identifiable disciples of Christ. Jesus presented them with: "Our Father, who is in Heaven, Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." Immediately He adds: "For if you forgive others for the transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:2-4 NASB)

Naturally, one must ask why those 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Verses were tagged to the end of the prayer. After all, Christ had said that we were to forgive just as we also have experienced forgiveness. Obviously, that statement needed emphasis and it needs our focus.

The prayer that Jesus taught His disciples was not one to necessarily be repeated word for word in a repetitious manner. We are warned about that in the 7<sup>th</sup> Verse of Matthew 6. In the words preceding the prayer itself, we are told that we are to pray "in this manner" or "in this way". Incorporated into this prayer are these particular thoughts.

Prayer should be to A Heavenly Person. Prayer should involve a relationship, "Father", to that One to whom we are praying. People are either children of God or "of your father, the devil". (John 8:44) To become a child of God, one must, in faith, believe or receive Jesus Christ as the substitute for his sin. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but

of God.” (John 1:12, 13 NASB) Our Father is in heaven! It is from there that He rules and reigns. It is to there that the believer is destined. (John 14) It is in view of this position that He occupies we should direct ALL prayer to Him and Him alone.

Prayer to God is directed to Him from a most humbled position. We have the privilege of access to the Divine One on the basis of our son-ship. We acknowledge His name as a name above all names. We do in that moment what every man will ultimately do: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:10, 11 NASB) God tells us through the writer of Hebrews that we are to come boldly to the Throne of Grace. Every act of prayer should originate from a humble heart.

Praying has as its goal a holy purpose. No matter what might surface in our thinking as deserving of prayer, the will of God should be ultimate in the manner it is answered. While the Christian, in positional truth, already occupies a place in Heaven, practically, we live on this earth. Much of this prayer is directed to living by directions out of heaven; to so personifying Jesus Christ that we face life’s difficulties saturated with the desire to do all things, whether it be daily bread, debts and debtors or deliverance, everything framing the Lord Jesus.

Finally in the prayer we have everything directed in praise to our Father. The kingdom is His, power is His, glory is His, and eternity is His! The ultimate of all praying is to end with the Father being, as He will ultimately be, ALL IN ALL!

Out of this prayer we see Christ focusing on men forgiving men. After all, we cannot expect forgiveness if we do not forgive. It appears that all of this praying has a contingency drawn from the middle of the prayer: “If you forgive....If you do not forgive”. Much of what is addressed, as praying may be reaching no farther than the last ear that can hear it. Transgressions must be forgiven in order for us to experience the forgiveness of the Lord. Failure to forgive sin will hinder a person’s prayer. It impedes communication with God. While a prayer may be impressive to those listening, under an unforgiving spirit God will not forgive until we practice forgiving. Another verse that stands out on this subject is 1 John 1:9, addressed to believers: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

The church, the Bride of Christ, has become unresponsive to the dictates of God’s Word, the Bible, on this all-important subject. Is it possible that we no longer believe injunctions from our Lord, such as: “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven”? (Matthew 18:18) While these things do not have to do with the imputed righteousness of Christ that cared for our sins for eternity, they do have to do with our rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Failure to deal with sin here means an accounting there. Rewards will be affected.

One might look at the literalness of this passage and even argue about the portion considered an appendage. We have outlined how in principle, it is appropriate for this hour of the Church. I hear the words of Dr. J. Edwin Orr: "Search me, O God, and know my heart today; Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray: See if there be some wicked way in me: Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free."

With these thoughts from Scripture as a basis, let us pursue the subject a little further. There are much too many interrupters in our lives, between God, and ourselves that also interrupt our communication with our brothers in Christ. We see sin more as a violation of trust involving others of humanity than we see it as an affront to God. While sin affects others, it is against God that a person sins.

A sound illustration of this principle exists in 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 where the brethren are gathered around the Table of the Lord for the purpose of breaking bread and sharing the cup in remembrance of the Lord's death. The focus was to be on remembering Him. In the process of doing this, there was to be heart searching to see if participation was in an "unworthy manner". The old King James Version said "unworthily". The whole idea behind this is that one is "worthy" because of the imputed righteousness that Jesus gives to them, but the fact that they are knowingly harboring un-judged sin in their lives, they are taking in an unworthy, or unworthily manner.

It is impossible to convey the ideas portrayed in the Lord's Supper properly unless self-examination is conducted and sinful actions are dealt with completely. It would be hypocrisy, pharisaical. Participation in such a sacred trust as "in remembrance of Him" and all the while allowing sin, like a magnet, to remain attached is equal to being "guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord". One would have to forget the forgiveness they have experienced in Christ or purposely refuse to practice a Scriptural injunction. In either case, it is abhorrent to God! It is equal to having stood at Calvary and participating with the crowd in the crucifixion of Jesus. Hear again the words of Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." There is marked contrast with the verse that precedes it: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice". John speaks in his Epistle of true love for the Lord leaving behind those things of carnality. To retain such things in our daily life-style, we cannot possibly have the type of fellowship with God or our fellow men that pleases the Lord.

People running from church to church with the development of each problem; self-appointed prophets starting a new church on every street corner and preaching a "new revelation" each Sunday are illustrations of unforgiving spirits. There are many others. With these things, God is not pleased. Believers are not dealing with their sin and as a result, an underlying problem, equal to the shifting plates that produce earthquakes.

It would behoove us, as believers, to obey the dictates of Holy Writ and learn again the importance of forgiveness.

*“Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ god forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32*

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## Chapter 8: The Magnitude of Forgiveness

Little in history equals that moment when Jesus, hanging on Calvary, said: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34 NASB) God incarnate, pleading with the Father to show forgiveness to ignorant, sinful men who were crucifying Him. I am prone to believe that had He not made that prayer at that moment, perhaps the Almighty would have poured out His judgment, destroying all of humanity. That prayer of intercession could well be the hinge that allows for subsequent events to find their fulfillment in the plan of God.

In studying the events that surround Calvary, we see empathy on the part of our Savior who understood the abounding naiveté of people who had perpetrated and those involved in the act of crucifixion. Is it not a vivid picture of people who, even today, turn their backs on the Savior and in what appears to be a carefree fashion object to His rule over their lives? His tolerant attitude will not continue indefinitely. He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world! In mercy He has extended that judgment at the behest of His Son. Though we do not know the exact moment of that judgment we can see the "beginnings" falling into place.

One reads that: "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." (Galatians 3:13) That is a quote from Deuteronomy 21:23. Jesus had become the most despicable object of humanity possible at the hands of the most despicable people of history, yet He prayed to the Father for their forgiveness. As gory and gruesome as that moment is envisioned, a beam of light penetrates its blackness and we hear: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." While hanging between two criminals, while watching men fight over His garments, while listening to the jeers and sneers attacking the validity of His Saviorhood, while being mocked by the soldiers, while being abandoned by His disciples and observing the agony of His mother, still He plead the forgiveness of that abusive and deranged mob. He saw something that others could not grasp! He saw the sacrifice for sin being actualized.

Two thousand years have passed since that moment in time; with the remoteness of Calvary so far removed, few are those who catch a glimpse of the magnanimousness of that occasion. We live in an era when sin is glossed over and called everything but sin, when God is placated as something or someone that is accommodating to our desires. The Biblical perspective of HIM is obscured by our intellectualism and sophisticated approach that negates in our thinking accountability to the Almighty. Very little thought is given to the righteousness of our God. We approach things as acceptable or unacceptable lifestyles. We have become so enamored with political correctness, without a standard of truth and righteousness that we are sneering and jeering like that crowd around the cross.

Think back, at the outset of His ministry Jesus taught the Beatitudes. (Matthew 5:1-12) He then spoke to those that had listened to Him and told them to become salt and light in a sin darkened world and followed that, clarifying their responsibility in relationships

with others. As He hung upon Calvary's cross, we see these things consummated in fulfillment by the Savior Himself. He was practicing what He preached. He was personifying everything that Christianity stands for! His message, unchanged, was at that moment undergoing its ultimate test and He was the living reality of that proclamation. Remember, all of this was for undeserving people like you and me. It is almost beyond comprehension.

Comprehending the cross of Calvary is what brings about a transformed life; it was on that cross that we view the righteousness of God and the sinfulness of man. Jesus was perfect; He was on that cross because the righteousness of God demanded a perfect sacrifice for the sin of mankind; Jesus Christ was that perfect sacrifice, offering Himself as a substitute for us. The gruesomeness of our sin could never be magnified more than in the events leading up to and including that moment. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." (1 Peter 3:18 NASB)

Isaiah gives us a picture of the Holiness of God in the sixth chapter. He saw "the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple." Seraphim stood above Him...they called out to each other: "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." With such a revelation, Isaiah is humbled; He says: "Woe is me, for I am ruined; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." It is exactly that feeling that should fill our minds and hearts as we view Him, our representative on Calvary.

Because of the triteness with which we view the sins listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9,10...fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, swindlers...it is obvious that we need a fresh vision of the crucified Savior and see sin as sin. We are told positively that such: "will not inherit the kingdom of God." Such things may be viewed as the sins of "commission". As we grow in the grace of our wonderful Lord, we begin to be aware of the sins of "omission". This can be illustrated in verses like 1 Samuel 12:23..."Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you." Whence shall we get such a vision? By reading and studying the Word of God intently.

A man may get a fresh grasp of the extreme sinfulness of sin by reading Romans 1-3, or he may note the absence of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-26 which follows on another list of sins in verses 19-21. Such things are repulsive to our Holy God. When seeing them as such, we will become repentant and relish forgiveness, which He extends to us in and through Christ.

There are other things that Jesus said while hanging on the cross of Calvary. Each of those sayings reveals the character of the sinless Son of God. They also embody the heart of Christ for a sinful world. "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) "Woman, behold your son! Behold your mother!" (John 19:26, 27) "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken

Me?" (Matthew 27:46) "I thirst." (John 19:28) "It is finished!" (John 19:30) "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." (Luke 23:46)

Seven times we hear our Blessed Savior, while exposed to the vilest that man had to offer and bearing humanity's sin on that cross, turning the other cheek and pleading to them and for them. This is truly the magnanimousness of love and forgiveness. It might be found at no other person and at no other place than Calvary. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16, 17)

Reflection takes us back to the shuddering earth, the blackened sky and the maddened crowd. There was the noise, the gambling, the cursing, the blood and then, quietness from the Throne of God. Yet, there were those words: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

About the sin practiced and mentioned in Romans 1-3. It has continued to repeat itself through the centuries. There is no let up by those who have abandoned God. However, in the midst of all of this we find a statement in 2:4 that illustrates the answer to that prayer of Jesus: "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" The vileness of men in those chapters lead us into the fourth chapter that tells us the way out..."Abraham believed God and it was credited to Him as righteousness....God credits righteousness apart from works."

No less than 10 times in that chapter we see God "credit" His righteousness to a sinful man when the individual exercises faith in the person and work of Jesus.

Thus we see His kindness, His tolerance, His patience being extended to man that he might repent. That prayer has and is being answered.

The Psalmist says it so beautifully: "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord...there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His Word do I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchmen for the morning; indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning...for with the Lord there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption." (Psalm 130 NASB)

*"Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you." -Ephesians 4:32*

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## Chapter 9: The Healing Aspect of Forgiveness

Thought must be given to James 5:13 and the context if we are to deal with a prevalent problem, sickness, in the Church today. Many of our sicknesses are the normal for these bodies, which have been under the curse since Eden, but others are a direct result of sin being practiced by believers. While there are those who refer to sickness of all types being cared for and people's lives being "saved", the truth is that they are extended. Ultimately, every person will reach the grave. The average will be 70 years. Juggle the methods by which we determine the average lifespan all we choose, but God has spoken to this effect and it will remain fixed. (Psalm 90:10)

James' Epistle is considered a General Epistle. It is presented to a "general" audience as over against a specific church. Prayer is spoken of throughout this Epistle; it is seen as a vital function of all believers, no matter the situation in life. One cannot help but be reminded of our Savior's words in Luke 19:46..."It is written, 'and My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a robbers' den." Few are the churches today that are citadels of PRAYER. We are known for good music, good Bible teaching, good fellowship, good ministries, good preachers, (few pastors) and the list goes on, but few there be that are known for PRAYER.

Our context indicates that some sickness has come as a result of sin on the part of the individual. It is personal sin. Some sickness is because of original sin. It is part of the result of what took place in Eden and the subsequent punishment, leading to inherited sin or the sin nature in every man. We are on our way to the grave and the road does not prove to be a physically enjoyable one. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned". (Romans 5:12)

Passages like Psalm 32:3: "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long." Psalm 38:3 "There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin." 1 Corinthians 11:30 "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." (NASB) are indicative of personal sins leading to sickness.

Personal prayer is the first action that is to be employed by any person suffering. In that experience he must learn to turn it into Praise. Learning to re-focus on the Lord is the beginning of all healing. The "poor me" syndrome should be dealt with first. I must endeavor to determine if it is a "normal" type of sickness, or if it is sin related. If it is sin related, I must deal with it immediately before the Lord, before an individual or individuals, and if others beyond that small group, before a larger group. In other words, cover all the bases. The relief of having done so will be the beginning of praise being uttered from your mouth or mine.

The Sacred Scriptures give indication that all sickness is not healed; those who say differently are in direct conflict with what the Scripture teaches. To illustrate this, may

we refer to 11 Corinthians 12:8-10..."Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecution, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." (NASB) Further Scriptures may be explored, Philippians 2:12-30, 11 Timothy 4:20, 1 Timothy 5:23.

Every believer is enabled to deal with the frequent frailties of the body through the grace of God. We approach our weakness, knowing full well, that there is before us a day when this body will experience redemption. Everything that has to do with suffering and sickness will be removed and we will have a "new body". While we continue in these weaknesses down here we have the guarantee of the Holy Spirit's empowerment, His help. "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body....In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness." (Romans 8:23-26 NASB)

After having determined, to the best of our ability, the source of our sickness and have not reached the place of Praise because it still is ponderable to our thinking, the procedure of recourse is set before us in James 5. We are to "call for the elders of the church". It is not a mass meeting, it is not a "healer" or "evangelist", it is the "elders". It is obvious that the sick individual has a solid relationship to the fellowship of believers and that he has confidence in brothers that are responsible for the administration, spiritual in particular, of the Church. The sick person initiates the contact!

The next action of the "elders" is to pray over him. Obviously there are reasons for this. Again, together the elders and the individual are to endeavor to seek the mind and heart of the individual. Their endeavor is to determine the source of the sickness. They are to determine if this sickness is sin related. If it is, they are to be confrontational and then only are they to be involved in prayer with and for the situation.

In a situation of this magnitude another action is spoken of: "anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord". Why? This may be approached as totally spiritual or medicinal. Many would interpret the Greek of this passage as indicating the equivalent of the person receiving two aspirin. Oil was used as a medicinal treatment and you might say: "rubbing him down with oil". From a spiritual approach I prefer to see it as the individual submitting to the Holy Spirit, who is represented by oil. It would be similar to baptism in this respect...this action depicts what has transpired in the individual's life and their renewed dedication to the leadership and obedience to the Holy Spirit.

The Lordship of Christ is tied inseparably to this prayer.

Reflecting on the prayer of the elders is essential. They have pursued every possibility as to the origin of this sickness, they have heard the brother's confession, they have anointed him with oil as indication of their agreement as to his sincerity, they agree in

faith, that God has allowed this sickness because of sin and therefore in presenting their request to God, they believe that this person will be healed.

When this follows the established, Biblical, method, it can be concluded that God will “restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.” (V15) The inter-relationship between the elders and brother is essential for this activity to be conducted properly.

After articulating this practice, James indicates that this is not relegated to one individual, but is inclusive of the entire brotherhood of believers. That is the practice enjoined upon believers in the 16<sup>th</sup> Verse. This is not a general type of confession to a mass group of individuals; it is very personalized...one on one. The context indicates that it is confessing to the one against you have sinned. “Effective” praying is only accomplished when sin is confessed and forsaken; brothers are restored to fellowship with others. “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” (James 5:16 NASB) One cannot help but see how forgiveness on the part of God is necessary before one enters the closet of prayer for healing. With such a mighty entrustment as is enjoined upon the elders, you can see that they want to be certain that everything is in order, that they and the sick person are both in right relationship spiritually before prayer is lifted to the Almighty. They must also sense that what they are requesting of the Lord is in “faith”. The divine order is mandated. If everything is done accordingly, the individual will be healed.

Most of what I have observed in meetings or on TV does not meet the criteria. Partial or temporary healing does not meet the criteria. The excuse that the person needing healing does not have the “faith” does not meet the criteria. Admittedly, there are times when God has worked healing in people’s lives, even with their acts of ignorance; there cannot be justification for circumventing the Word of God.

*“Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32*

## Chapter 10: Promissory Note

At the outset of these thoughts on Forgiveness, I mentioned that the word incorporates: "It means that there is a cessation of demand for payment of a penalty." Because we have constantly referred back to Ephesians 4:32 and occasionally coupled that with Colossians 3:13, we need catch the idea of the cancelled promissory note and relish its significance.

The Church at Colosse was invaded by the Gnostics of that day. These "boys" were endeavoring to supplement the Gospel with a mixture of Judaism (2:16) and Oriental mystic speculation. (2:18) The all-pervading features were: "(1) An exclusive spirit. The word means one who claims pre-eminent knowledge, with, in this case, a process and oaths of initiation. (2) Speculative tenets on creation, evil, emanations, angels. Creation was not by the Supreme God, since He could have nothing to do with matter which is inherently evil, but by one or more of the angelic emanations from Him. Those emanations or angels are to be worshipped. (3) Ethical practice. Either a rigid asceticism, because of matter being the abode of evil, or unrestrained licentiousness, on the principle of not condescending to care at all about a thing so inherently evil as matter." (Nicholson)

When one begins to supplement the Gospel, ere long every conceivable heresy possible will be found co-habiting. God's Word, the Holy Bible, needs no additions or subtractions. The Apostle made that quite clear in 11 Timothy 3:16:

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (NASB) He prefaced those verses with an admonition to Timothy that these were the "sacred writings" that he had learned from childhood. The Scriptures are final in God's message to man and they are that by which we are measured. Peter said in his Epistle, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Peter 1:20,21) More important than the spoken word was the WRITTEN WORD!

Paul, even though he had never been to Colosse, wrote to them to deal with the prevalent heresy and assist them in comprehending what it was to be "IN" Christ and have Christ dwelling "IN" them. Their position was secure because of their "faith in Christ Jesus"; they had postured themselves in "the love which you have for all the saints; they had procured a hope that was "laid up for them in heaven". (V's 4,5 of Colossians 1) The Gnostics were endeavoring to move them away from the Person in whom they dwelt and who dwelt in them.

In Chapter 2 as Paul elucidates on this subject he uses the words "in Him" and "with Him" again and again. He was "circumcised" and in Him I was "circumcised". He was "buried", I was buried with Him; He was "raised" and I was raised with Him. I was

“dead” and He made me “alive together with Him!” When He did that, He in that moment, forgave all my transgressions. (V13)

He “canceled out the certificate of debt” which was an obligation to be paid because sin leaves us indebted to God. There was no way in which a person could pay that debt to the Almighty. That is clear from Romans 5. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation....For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many...For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ....so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men...even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.” (V’s 8-19 NASB)

In the Roman culture of that day, Promissory notes were popular. When the note was “paid in full”, it was frequently nailed to the doorpost of the individuals home. This piercing with the nail and public display of the notes obligation having been met was for all to behold.

A number of things took place simultaneously at the moment that Christ hung on Calvary’s cross, paying the debt of sin for all of humanity. Naturally, the Promissory note was satisfied. God’s seal was displayed in the nail pierced hands and feet and at that moment we hear the Savior saying: “It is finished.”(John 19:30) That is why we read passages like Romans 8:1 with excitement: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

The King James Version says: “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us,” (V14) Here is a picture of ones own handwriting and signature attached being blotted out. If you are old enough you will recall that they used to have “ink eraser”. It could remove our mistakes and allow us to correct them.

The work of Christ was and is significant in that it blots out our sin, our transgressions, our trespasses and imputes His righteousness. Let us revel in the knowledge that Jesus Christ: “His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.” (1 Peter 2:24,25)

Jesus was the document being nailed to the tree. He was the display piece that bore His own handwriting: He went there voluntarily, by choice to pay the debt of sin. He attested to God’s satisfaction when He said: “Into Thy hands I commend my spirit”. All of the accusations, “the certificates of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (V14)

As a result of the work of Christ that forgave us our sin and imparted us His righteousness, God has placed us IN HIM. Therefore, He sees us in the righteousness of Jesus. As positionally so placed, we are reminded in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Colossians that there is a battle being waged through the old nature to distract and destroy our fellowship in and with Christ. There is “immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed” which make for idolatry. (V5) They used to live in these things, but they have been dealt with in finality; other factors would interrupt our fellowship in Christ...”anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive speech from your mouth”. (V8)

While those Gnostic heresies were abounding within the intellectually elite, the truth of the Gospel, the Promissory Note has been satisfied at Calvary. The price was paid, forever settled in Heaven. God has written across the man or woman who trusts Christ as Lord and Savior, FORGIVEN...forever forgiven! To such ones He says: Forgive as I have forgiven you.” To our position He challenges us to practice our own experience.

Illustrating the afore-mentioned concept, we journey to Matthew 18. The slave is brought to account before his master. Unable to meet the demands of repayment, he is forgiven. However, when he endeavors to make himself look good and not be satisfied with the act of grace extended to him, he is vengeful toward his fellow servants. When the master hears of his actions he is called to account and this time there is no mercy. Every believer is to remind himself constantly of that Promissory note that has been nailed to the cross of Calvary. That vivid picture, imbedded in our minds and hearts will make us forgiven people forgiving other people.

*“Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32*

## Chapter 11: Unforgivable

A high percentage of people have experienced the frustration of wondering whether they have committed a particular sin for which God is unable to forgive them. At times it is the gravity of the sin committed that fosters the question. At other times it may stem from the feeling of personal unworthiness. In either case it engenders frustration that can possibly eventuate in negative connotations toward God.

I had heard of people reaching a point of desperation in this matter, but it was a fellow student in college that brought home the ugliness of despondency that resulted in his abandonment of the study of God's Word. No matter what portions of Scripture were presented to this man, he would toss them aside in preference to what he felt. He is not alone in such an opinion. Any person can pursue a similar course of direction that does not accept the authority of Scripture as the final word in the matter of our relationship to God and eternity. Beliefs at variance with Scripture need to be dispensed into the garbage can with the trash that it generates. When God says it, believe it! The matter is settled.

The usual portion of Scripture that people refer to as indicating they have committed the unpardonable sin is Matthew 12:30 thru 32. The passage mandates examination of the context. Whether you conclude it possible or impossible to commit today will depend on your exegesis of the surrounding verses. A group accompanied Jesus to observe the many miracles He had been performing. They failed to understand what the temple was all about and He shared with them that: "a greater than the temple is here." (V6) Concerning the Sabbath, "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (V8) So ingrained were they with their ideas that when He healed a man on the Sabbath He reminded them: "How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!" (V12)

We are told that immediately, the Pharisees went out to conspire and devise a plan for His destruction. While they were doing this, He continued to heal "all" who came to Him. In that particular moment we are projected, through Matthew's quote from Isaiah, "And in His name the Gentiles will hope." A distinction emerges, introducing a leadership within the Pharisees that was rejecting Him and a people who would embrace Him. The events that follow give perfect illustration of this truth.

As He healed a "demon-possessed man who was blind and mute", the crowds were overjoyed and yet somewhat consternated as to who Jesus was. The Pharisees, responding to this activity and their predilection to reject Him, began thinking: "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons." In that moment, He reads their minds and says: "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house." (Matthew 12:25-29)

While Kingdom truth has been presented to this point, and Kingdom truth will be presented until 16:21, when we will see Christ being presented as the Son of Abraham; there is an interjection of transitional and culminating truth presented here that will bring into focus the ministering work of the Holy Spirit of God. All three persons of the Godhead must necessarily be acknowledged and would be acknowledged by the Gentiles as over against what was being demonstrated by this group of Pharisees. In that hour they might not be willing to acknowledge who Christ was, but of necessity the interrelationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit must be acknowledged.

It is important that we remember that Christ was differentiating between the spirits of which they were thinking and the Holy Spirit, from and of God, that had rested on Him and confirmed: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased...This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him."

This blasphemous activity on the part of the Pharisees, internalized or verbalized, makes it obvious that they were, even then reaching a point where they were beyond forgiveness. Once the Holy Spirit, the promised one of Acts 1:8 had manifested Himself on the church, and now took up residence within the church there would be no forgiveness apart from an acknowledgement of HIM. They might misunderstand and thereby conclude that He was not the Messiah, but the ministering work of the Holy Spirit which solidified who He was and clarified the fulfillment of the law and introduced the dispensation of GRACE could not and cannot be denied without the accompanying judgment of eternity, unpardoned sin.

God began a work in the Gentiles by calling out a people for His Name...the Church! This introduction of that ministry that would shortly follow this message of Jesus in Matthew 12 bears the imprint of what we now enjoy in God the Holy Spirit. For instance: 1) A man comes to Jesus because he is drawn to that point. (John 6:44) "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise Him up on the last day." 2) The individual is born into the family of God by the work of the Spirit of God. (John 3:5,6) "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," (3) Such an one is "sealed" by the Spirit of God. (Ephesians 1:13) "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." (4) The Holy Spirit is the Comforter promised in John 14. "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."

(V's 16-20) Prior to His departure from this earth, Christ said much about the ministry of the Holy Spirit which is elaborated on in John 14-17. Naturally, other passages contain many great truths on His ministry. A rejection of His ministry within the triune Godhead

is blasphemous and would therefore be unforgivable, “in this age and in the age to come”. (V32)

It is understandable how the people of the hour in which Jesus lived upon this earth could find reservation concerning His Messianic claims; following His resurrection and ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit there is an accountability in another dimension: “for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.” (John 16:7-11 NASB) He, the Holy Spirit, in stark contrast to the spirits of which he was being accused in Matthew 12, confirms, solidifies the ministry of the Godhead in regard to the church being called out from both Jew and Gentile.

In this portion of transitional truth that should enable the listener to understand the person of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each manifesting himself jointly and yet individually unto mankind, we have a beautiful presentation of the Trinity. The emphasis in the Old Testament is the Father; the emphasis in the incarnation is the Son; the emphasis on the Holy Spirit is in the church age. While they might reject the Son while he was upon the earth and find salvation later, through the impartation of the Holy Spirit upon their lives, if there is a rejection of the Holy Spirit’s ministry unto the grave, there is no redemption. An excellent illustration of this is in the conversion of Saul in Acts chapter 9. This man certainly rejected the Son of God initially, but when the Holy Spirit chose to confront him on the Damascus road, he was forced to recant, to repent; to choose between acceptance of His ministry or rejection of His ministry and never be forgiven.

Any person, who has experienced the new birth, would not commit the unpardonable sin. The solidifying ministry of the Holy Spirit which unites me with the Father, with Jesus and with Himself is thorough; how simple and profound it is to realize that while a child may not always please his parent, there is nothing that can un-born him from that relationship. Fellowship may be broken, but relationship is permanent.

Out of our “born” relationship we experience constant refreshing with thoughts and ideas that emerge from the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit of God witnesses to our hearts. (Romans 8:16; Hebrews10:15) He gives us the assurance that we need when confronted by the devil. He not only draws us to Himself in our initial act of salvation, but daily He draws us to Himself. We are not left to make it on our own. As mentioned previously, John 14 through 17 makes Him more real and His ministry to us more realistic.

As an unbeliever, one who has never embraced the Triune God, you must face the reality that in so doing, you are condemning yourself to eternal judgment.

As a believer, rest, relax, experience refreshing in and through this third Person of the Trinity who “will never leave you or forsake you”, any more than Jesus Himself.

*“Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you.” -Ephesians 4:32*

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## Chapter 12: Forgiveness Postlude

The church service had concluded and the organist proceeded with the customary postlude. It seemed an appropriate song after such a moving message; however, between the noise and rush to exit the sanctuary, I was fairly convinced that the majority of the congregation was not listening to what was being played. If the organist had played, "It was a hot time in the old town tonight", few would have noticed.

Consciously or unconsciously, having read what we have shared on the subject of forgiveness, we are faced with the decision of what to do about it. It is the question that should be asked by each individual at the conclusion of a church service; having experienced forgiveness from God in and through Jesus Christ, am I ready to meet God's instruction on the subject?

Forgiveness originated in the heart of God toward us; so compelling is its realization that it is virtually impossible for a Christian not to become obedient in forgiving others. As we view Acts 24:16 we can see how the Apostle Paul comprehended this message. "In view of this, I also do my best always a blameless conscience both before God and before men." His desire was to bring every thought and action into subservience to Jesus Christ. What I see in Christ should be seen in me... that is genuine reflection.

And what would prepare my heart to follow in obedience to God's instruction? It takes prayer. It takes feasting on the Word of God. It takes a clear perception of God's love to us in Christ. It takes an understanding of the value of another before our Lord. It takes a comprehension of our value before God; walking in right relationship to Him.

Honest reflection on Psalm 103 should bring any person on their knees. Absorbing the phenomenal truth of the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse will break a man's heart and will... "Who forgives (pardons) all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases." You meander through the Psalm and arrive at the 18<sup>th</sup> verse: "To those who keep His covenant and remember His precepts to do the." What I know about forgiveness commands my unqualified obedience to the Lord... forgiving others.

Hopefully the postlude to these thoughts will become your postlude and not just mine. Endeavor to place into perspective the verse of Scripture that has concluded each chapter. As should be the case of each Church service, spend time on reflecting what God has called to your attention. Yield to the Holy Spirit's direction.

Forever Forgiven? Forgive!

*"Be kind and compassionate to each other; forgiving each other;  
just as Christ God forgave you." -Ephesians 4:32*

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## She Kissed His Feet

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While some were plotting Jesus, the Christ, to destroy  
A woman came in faith His healing to employ.

He sat reclining at the table At Simons' house that day  
This man, a Pharisee; she "immoral", as they say.

Bringing of her earnings An alabaster vial of perfume  
She anointed Jesus, The aroma filled the room

Weeping, tears freely flowed She washed and kissed His feet  
Using her hair for drying she perfumed them; complete!

Such love! Actions said it all she to the Son was driven  
She heard His words... "Your sins have been forgiven".

Criticism flowed freely from those present that day  
They never heard the words that He to her would say.

They, with hearts unbroken accused, "if you knew who"  
She, a contrite sinner embraced what He could do.

"Do you see this woman?" Jesus asked of Simon there  
"She expressed it all by the shedding of her tear".

She saw her sins as many by that sin her life was driven  
He spoke...In tenderness... "Your sins have been forgiven."

And who loves more than one who knows release?  
Who heard the voice of Jesus "Your faith has saved you; go in peace".

Others, soon forgotten but not this life unfurled  
As He said 'twould be she is spoken of throughout the world.

## Forever Forgiven

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He hung between two thieves  
The Christ of Calvary  
Undeserving as He was  
They nailed Him to a tree

The mob railed on that day  
“Crucify Him, Crucify Him”  
What they failed to know  
This One, was dying for their sin.

Above the noise, the din  
Words were heard, adieu  
“Father forgive them  
They know not what they do.”

Such love, mercy, grace,  
Displayed in condescension  
God incarnate, Christ the Son  
Beyond all human comprehension.

To you, to me, He speaks  
Tis’ displayed upon His brow  
“I want your love returned  
Why not give it?...Do it now!”

“Father forgive them  
They know not what they do.”  
Parting words from the Savior  
Saving words...“My life anew!”

I heard His plea to God  
For this sinner and my need  
Forgiven! What a word!  
Eternally FORGIVEN He decreed!