

FORGIVENESS
Text: Psalm 130

INTRO: For some time I have wanted to put the subject of forgiveness into one message. That is our topic this morning.

It is a while ago we heard the heartrending story of a young lady who had been abused physically in her family. There are millions of stories like this in the world, most have never been heard. There are many young ladies and women and there are boys and men, who have horrific stories to tell but we will never hear them. There are various reasons why many do not tell their stories. The "Me too" stories that have been coming out are the tip of the iceberg. Then there are many, many other stories where horrible wrongs are committed against people. And Psalm 103:3 says there is forgiveness with God.

All over the world, if the Lord waits long with returning, there will yet be millions of sad stories that we will never hear. And if some of those come into contact with Christianity they will run into the teaching that they must forgive unconditionally, regardless of whether the one who did the wrong repented or not. Some will fall for modern psychological techniques used by Christians like imagining a picture of Jesus in a peaceful scene telling them what to do. And some will find some relief, not because what they were told was right, but because what they did was called forgiveness. But the facts are it was not real forgiveness. Biblical forgiveness is a very important subject and it is one of the most misunderstood.

Years ago when the Daily Bread still put out good material a man by name of Gary Inrig, who was a pastor in Calgary, Alberta when we lived close to there, wrote a booklet for the Daily Bread on forgiveness. It was called, "What is True Forgiveness?" Pastor Inrig's first statement was, "Forgiveness is one of the most misunderstood subjects in the Bible."

Modern psychology has infiltrated the Church. Ephratha Ministries has an article on the internet titled, "Christian Counseling, Is It Biblical." They write:

Most of the counseling movement uses psychology, but there are others here locally that use the Inner Healing method and the Listening Prayer Therapy. John Regier claims that he used to preach and pray with people, but it didn't work. So he prayed and asked God to show him why it didn't work, and asked how he could help people. He says that one day God began to reveal to him the truth. And all the materials he puts out (I have his workbook, his Twelve Locked Hearts, and a great big, thick Counselor's Manual) came from this revelation.

What he doesn't tell you is that he went through seminary, and in seminary (at least some of them), they teach you psychology. Neither does he tell you that the ideas he is presenting are not just his ideas. Ed Smith and Art Zeilstra have similar ideas, and they come from Agnes Sanford and others. They try to say that it is all divine revelation.

Later they say:

In the next paragraphs, when you see "praying" in quotation marks you need to think "Listening Prayer Therapy." The way this happens is that the counselor will pray a short specific prayer, such as "God, will you please show me why I am struggling in this area?" The counselee will pray through the same words, word for word. Everybody has his eyes closed. When they are at the end of the prayer they are silent. The mind is empty or focused ... the counselee is waiting for the first thought or picture to come. As soon as it comes—they have already given themselves to the counselor as the specialist/professional—they tell the counselor exactly what that thought is. That is exactly like what is called contemplative prayer, or centering prayer. This is demonic, rooted in mysticism, with a mix of eastern religions, end quote.

One of the greatest subjects there is, is true forgiveness. It is one of the most wonderful things to experience. But for most, true repentance is so humbling and therefore so difficult that most will justify themselves with anything else they can find. But when real repentance happens, it reaps the most blessed fruit. I can recount numerous occasions when, in order to clear my troubled conscience, I had to go confess to another person some sin such as lying or cheating. All over our land and all through our churches are people who have unconfessed sin in

their lives, and the one reason it is still there is the pain of repentance.

Today we are in need of revival, but it does not come because repentance is so humbling. Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. True repentance and forgiveness will bring great joy. So we want to consider this subject of repentance.

I. DEFINITION

It is important to begin with a definition of forgiveness. If we are wrong on the definition, we will be wrong on our conclusion and on the actions required. The Hebrew OT word for forgiveness is *nasa*. The idea is to bear, carry or take away. The Greek NT word is *aphiemi*. Vine's says it means to send forth or away. When it comes to sin, the concept of forgiveness is to bear, carry, take away sin or to send sin forth or away.

I cannot take time here to deal with the feasts of Israel and the Day of Atonement. But the Day of Atonement teaches how forgiveness takes place and that it requires repentance for forgiveness to take place. Anyone interested can check our messages on sermonaudio.com/mecl. Here we learn that forgiveness required two goats, not just one.

II. POSITIONS

Now there are two positions taken by Christians on the forgiveness of sins. Many teach that as soon as you are sinned against you must forgive. You must forgive unconditionally whether repentance takes place or not. I read of a preacher who forgave sins before they even took place. That is a huge injustice to God Almighty!

A. Unconditional Forgiveness

1. Definition

So we begin then with a definition of the position of unconditional forgiveness. This view basically says that forgiveness should be extended to our

fellow man whether repentance takes place or not. This is the most common view in Christianity today. It is not only the view of most Christians, it is the view of the NAM. The only way to peace, they say, is to forgive. If you don't, you will become bitter.

In a little longer form, here is how I would define unconditional forgiveness: *When I am wronged, I must forgive on the spot; no conditions need to be met, simply forgive. To fail to forgive is to harbor an unforgiving spirit and will lead to bitterness.*

Let me just briefly insert what I believe an unforgiving spirit is. It is when someone has truly repented, but one refuses to forgive. That is an unforgiving spirit.

Back to unconditional forgiveness, here is the view: if I do not forgive immediately when I have been wronged, I am doing wrong. Jesus, when He hung on the cross forgave those who crucified Him and they had not repented and we are to forgive like Christ forgave. Stephen, when he was stoned, forgave those who stoned him though they had not repented. This is the biblical thing to do. We too, we are told, must forgive unconditionally like Jesus and Stephen did.

4. Scriptures used for this view

What Scriptures are used for this view? We will look later at the Scriptures that are used to support this view.

B. Conditional Forgiveness

1. Definition

The other view of forgiveness is conditional forgiveness. This view says: *Forgiveness is the bearing away or sending away of sin based on the sincere repentance of the offender.* This view says that

until the one who committed the sin repents true forgiveness cannot be granted.

2. Explanation of this view

So, let me take some time to explain this view by quoting from two writers that support this view. Vine's Dictionary says this of forgiveness: "Human forgiveness is to be strictly analogous to divine 'forgiveness,' e.g. Matt. 6:12. If certain conditions are fulfilled, there is no limitation to Christ's law of 'forgiveness,' Matt. 18:21, 22. The conditions are repentance and confession, Matt. 18:15-17; Luke 17:3."

So Vines has said, and I believe, correctly so, that repentance and confession by the wrongdoer are required before forgiveness can be extended. So let us look at both repentance and confession.

a. Repentance

So we ask first, what is repentance? The Biblical word is *metanoia*, which means a change of mind. I must change my mind about what I did and acknowledge that I have sinned. Unless I come to a change of mind, my sin remains and I must give account for it some day. The main message of both John the Baptist and Jesus can be summarized by the one word, repent! (Matt. 3:2 and 4:17). Without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins!

b. Confession

Second, sin must be confessed! If I have sinned against God, I must confess to Him. If I have sinned against man, I must confess to the one I have sinned against. Only repentance and confession makes us clean from sin!

Now to confess means to say the same thing. What that means is we must say the same thing as we have done. When John the Baptist began to preach and

people repented Matthew 3:6 says that when John baptized them they confessed their sins.

First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Until we have confessed our sins to the one against whom they have been committed, those sins cannot be forgiven.

Let me give an example. Let us say I have lied to someone and my conscience is at work in me. In order to be truly forgiven I must go to the person I lied to and keep nothing back when I confess to him the lie I told. Let us say I said something bad to my wife. I cannot clean that up by taking her out to supper. I must go and confess what I said and admit I was wrong in doing so. Confession is one of the hardest of all things.

3. Scriptures used for this view

So what Scriptures are used to support conditional forgiveness? Well, throughout the Bible repentance has always been the first step. On the day of atonement in the OT the sins were first confessed, and then they were sent away.

Jesus spoke of this in Luke 17. Verses 1-5 say this:

- 1 *Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!"*
- 2 *"It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."*
- 3 *"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."*
- 4 *"And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."*

5 *And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."*

The teaching here is very clear. It is repentance first, and then forgiveness. So it is my conclusion, and that of numerous others, that forgiveness is conditioned on repentance.

Now when we have been sinned against by a very huge sin unconditional forgiveness becomes a burden almost beyond human capacity. The Lord taught that when a person sinned against you seven times in a day, and they repented each time, they were to be forgiven. The disciples found forgiveness after repentance, if it happened seven times in a day, almost beyond their faith. So they said, "Lord, increase our faith." If they found that hard, what would they say to the modern understanding that forgiveness is to be extended every time even if there is no repentance?

III. DEFENCE OF CONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS

A. Arguments Explained

So let me give some defence for the view that forgiveness is conditional. It is argued by some that in unconditional forgiveness, the one sinned against forgives, but the offender is not forgiven because he has not repented. So if the one who sinned is not forgiven, how can the offended person have forgiven him or her? The sin has not been sent away. If it had been sent away, the one who committed the sin would be free. There is something very wrong here.

In conditional repentance, the one who sinned has repented. Now the one sinned against is obligated to forgive and when he does, the one who committed the sin is free. True repentance does miracles in relationships.

Some like McLintock and Strong say that human forgiveness is not expected to be like that of God. They write, "It is a mistaken idea that in the matter of forgiveness we are strictly to imitate God the Father, and not forgive

those who trespass against us until they repent and ask our pardon."

But Scripture says that we should forgive like Christ forgave. Colossians 3:13 says "even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." And how does Christ forgive? He forgives when repentance has taken place! It is NEVER otherwise!

When unconditional repentance is exercised, the one who sinned is not yet forgiven. But when forgiveness is extended upon repentance, then the sin is truly forgiven. True repentance and forgiveness provides everything needed to restore the relationship. So, conditional forgiveness says that before forgiveness can be extended, repentance must take place. Without repentance, there can be no true forgiveness. This holds true for both divine and human forgiveness.

Here is a discussion I have had with numerous people. I ask this person that has unconditionally forgiven, "Did you say you forgave the one who wronged you but they have not yet repented?" And the answer is, "Yes, I did." And then I ask, "Is that person now forgiven?" And the answer, usually after some probing, is, "No. Not really. But I have forgiven on my part." So I say, "You forgave this person but they are not really forgiven?" And they say, "Yes. I guess that is it." So I ask, how can you have forgiven them if they are not forgiven?" And the answer is, "Well, I forgave on my part." That is unconditional forgiveness. That is what I call one goat forgiveness.

Now I would not say that there may not be some benefits to unconditional forgiveness. Let me explain. The one who claims he or she has unconditionally forgiven may have cleared him or herself from carrying bad thoughts about the person or bitterness by telling themselves they have forgiven them. This may keep them from becoming bitter. But the facts are that forgiveness has not taken place. The facts are the guilty person still has the sin. This may keep a person from becoming bitter or harboring bad thoughts towards the

other person, but it is not forgiveness, it is something else.

B. Scriptures Explained

1. Mark 11:25

Let me now explain some Scriptures used in defence of unconditional forgiveness. Turn to Mark 11:25. This is the most used Scripture to show that forgiveness must be extended unconditionally. It says, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." If one were to take this verse alone, the natural conclusion would be that of unconditional forgiveness.

It is an established biblical principle that one's interpretation of one verse must not contradict the clear teaching of other verses. To establish a doctrine one must use all Scriptures that bear on the subject. And you have two passages that give an apparent contradiction, which is what we have between Mark 11:25 and Luke 17:1-3 and others, you must then take the general tenor of the rest of Scripture on the subject. An established principle of Bible interpretation is that the unclear must give way to the clear. It is very clear from all the rest of Scripture that forgiveness can only truly be experienced when repentance has first taken place.

That is true with God and it is true with man. Ephesians 4:32 says, "And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." There is no question that Christ does not forgive until repentance has taken place, and here we are told to forgive like He forgave. When someone has wronged me and I say I have forgiven when the person has not yet repented, what is very clear is that the other person is not yet forgiven.

What is the teaching then according to this view? Take the case of the young lady I mentioned earlier. She has been violated and now she lives with this horror in her life. And she comes to her pastor and says, "What am I to do?" And he says, "You must forgive your father."

And now the battle sets in, in this young lady. Maybe she can even finally get herself to do this. And yet for many, they live with guilt because they cannot forgive so that the thing no longer torments them in their minds. They live with guilt because they cannot forgive like others claim they can or claim that you should be able to if you forgive like Christ did. And how many put on an act? Or how many live in defeat but they do not dare to say so because they then appear to be unspiritual?

There are those, who through the techniques of modern psychology teach people to have a picture of Jesus in their minds and that they are talking to Him and asking Him what He would do and so on. Most of this so called Christian psychology is based on the teachings of very ungodly men of modern times such as Sigmund Freud and B.F. Skinner and others.

I believe in Mark 11:25 Jesus is referring to a person who was wronged another and the wrongdoer repented but this person would not forgive. That is an unforgiving spirit. Now he is standing before the Lord to pray and the Lord says, "Don't bother talking to Me until you have taken care of this very serious matter of unforgiveness." The verse reads like this: "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." So verse 26 says, "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

2. Luke 23:34

Another Scripture often used to teach unconditional forgiveness is Luke 23:34. It says:

32 *There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death.*

33 *And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.*

34 *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.*

Most people believe that Jesus forgave those who had Him crucified. But look at the verse very carefully and notice that it does not say that He forgave them. It does not say, "Father, I forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus asked God to forgive them. And on what ground did He ask that they be forgiven? He said, because they know not what they do!

When He said they do not know what they are doing, of whom was He speaking? Let me ask, did the Jews know what they were doing when they turned Jesus over to Pilate? Yes they did! Did Pilate know what he was doing when He condemned Jesus to death when He knew Jesus was innocent? Yes he did! Who did not know what they were doing? The soldiers who have just crucified Him. They were just doing their job. They crucified a lot of people. Crucifying men condemned by Rome was simply their job.

But these soldiers did not know that here they were crucifying an innocent man. Nor did they know that He was the Christ. Did God forgive these soldiers on the ground that Jesus asked for this? We do not know. It does not say. But what we do know and what is very clear is that Jesus did not say, "Father I forgive them, for they know not what they do." He asked God to forgive them on the ground of their innocence.

3. Acts 7:59-60

We go now to Acts 7:59-60. It is also said that Stephen forgave those who stoned him before they repented. Let me read these verses;

59 *And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."*

60 *Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Notice carefully that he did not say, "I forgive you." He requested that God would not lay this sin to their charge. Do you think God did not lay this sin to their account? Again, we are not told. Adolf Eichmann, who said he had his feet dangling over six million Jews was apprehended and put on trial before a non-Christian tribunal. He said, "How can you blame me for this. I only did what Hitler told me to do." And do you know what this unbelieving tribunal said? "You still did it. You are guilty. You must hang."

4. Revelation 6:9-11

We go next to Romans 6. Now let me ask a question: Let us say you have been severely sinned against. What do you want? Well, you want justice. It is called vengeance. And we immediately think, "Oh, vengeance is wrong!" No, vengeance is not wrong but God says, "Vengeance is mine says the Lord, I will repay." If God takes vengeance then vengeance cannot be wrong. The NT word for vengeance is *ekdikēsis*, which means 'out of justice.' When we are sinned against we want justice. God does too. But God says we are not to seek to bring about our own justice. He will do that. Romans 12:19 says, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.'"

If a Christian was killed by unbelievers and he went to heaven, do you think he would say, "Lord that is OK. I forgive them?" Well, look at Revelation 6:9-10. It says:

9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Let me give you the case here. This happens in the tribulation. Many Christians are killed for their faith. And when they get to heaven, after people have killed them they say, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Now consider this. They are already in heaven and they want vengeance or justice!

Consider further that God does not say, "Away with such non Christian thinking. You are in heaven now and you must not think like that. You are perfect now and you cannot sin here, so never say things like that again in my heaven!" Do you realize what God said? Here is what verse 11 says:

11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Do you know what He is saying? Wait just a little longer and I will take vengeance on them. And for those who do not repent during the tribulation, read in the book of revelation how God takes vengeance on them. They suffer horribly, even before they die. And after they die they go to hell. The book of Revelation says so.

Vengeance is not wrong but it is wrong for man to take revenge.
If man leaves it, God will do it in the end.

IV. DEALING WITH SIN

Intro: So just what is wrong with unconditional forgiveness?

Well, first it is not forgiveness. Second and worse, those who forgive unconditionally fail to deal with sin the way the Bible says it should be dealt with.

A. Sinned Against By An Unbeliever

So, what is the believer to do when he or she is sinned against if unconditional forgiveness is not what the Bible teaches? First, it is important to distinguish between being sinned against by a believer or an unbeliever. Sometimes we confuse Scriptures that tell us how to deal with sin when we are sinned against by an unbeliever with being sinned against by anyone. We go to Matthew 5. We'll read verses 43-48:

43 *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*

44 *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,*

45 *"that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

46 *"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*

47 *"And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?*

48 *"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

We notice first that it deals with two classes of people, one's enemy and one's brethren. The Lord here teaches us what to do when an unbeliever sins against us. And here is what it says to do: Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for

those who spitefully use you and persecute you. By the way, note it never says to forgive them.

Romans 12:17-21, on the same topic, says:

17 *Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.*

18 *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

19 *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*

20 *Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."*

21 *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

So here we have very clear instructions on how to deal with unbelievers when they sin against us.

B. Sinned Against By A Believer

But what if we are sinned against by a believer? Once again we have clear instruction. We go to Matthew 18:

1. When church discipline is an option

Matthew 18:15-17. It says:

15 *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*

16 *"But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'*

17 *"And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

Notice first that the Lord did not say, "If your brother sins against you forgive him." We would most assuredly gather that if unconditional forgiveness was true

that is what it would say. It would also not be necessary then to pursue the matter further.

I have been a pastor for many years and have never seen this Scripture obeyed. One man, one time came to me with such a case, and when we searched into the case, we found him guilty of wrongdoing in the very same matter he was accusing another of.

Furthermore, very, very few churches deal with serious sins, never mind an issue like this. And it is to be noticed that in the end, if the sinning person does not repent, he is not to be forgiven, but is to be excommunicated. This is very clear.

But certain sins are not against an individual believer. They are against the church body. These are sins like fornication, adultery etc... Turn to 1 Corinthians 5. Here Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth and instructed them what to do with a man who claimed to be a Christian but he was living in big sin. Paul instructed them to excommunicate the man without any further discussion. You see, when sin is against one Christian by another then it is a three step process. First the one sinned goes to the one who sinned against him or her. If repentance does not follow, he is to take one more. If repentance still does not follow, then the one who sinned is to be excommunicated.

The situation in 1 Corinthians 5 is different and it is a very serious sin. In this case Paul instructs them to immediately excommunicate the one living in sin. There is no three step process. Then in verses 9-12 Paul says this:

9 *I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.*

10 *Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*

11 *But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.*

12 *For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?*

Here the instruction is for any Christian who knows another person who claims to be a Christian and is living in sin, to not keep company with such a person. Notice that it does not say to forgive this person. If unconditional forgiveness were true, surely it would say that here. Now in this passage he is not talking about unbelievers, but believers who are living in sin. And he instructs them to avoid such people and not mix with them. That is what I recommend in cases where a church does not deal with sinning members.

Again, Romans 16:17 says, "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them." Again, this passage says nothing about forgiveness. Why not? Because forgiveness is to be extended only after repentance. The clear instruction here is to avoid such people.

Then in 2 Thessalonians 3 Paul dealt with those who were lazy and refused to work and were busybodies. And he writes this in verses 6-15:

6 *But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.*

7 *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;*

8 *nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,*

9 *not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.*

10 *For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*

11 *For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*

12 *Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*

13 *But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.*

14 *And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.*

15 *Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

Now once more we notice first that forgiveness is not unconditional in this passage. And I recommend that when church discipline is not an option that a person avoid a Christian like that until the matter is taken care of.

Now all three of these passages are very, very seldom obeyed; both by churches and individual believers and the teaching of unconditional forgiveness aids disobedience to these passages.

2. When church discipline is not an option

Now, there may be times when church discipline is not an option though one is sinned against by believers. Many cases could be cited, such as they are in another church and that church does not deal with sin. In such cases I recommend to follow what Romans 12:17-21 teaches regarding when one has been wronged by an unbeliever. It says:

17 *Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.*

18 *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

19 *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*

20 *Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."*

21 *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

In cases where sin cannot be dealt with, I recommend to practice verse 19. It says to give place to wrath. These words are difficult but I understand them to say, "Make room for God's wrath." The instruction is not to take vengeance into your own hands, but make room for God's wrath. Why? Because vengeance belongs to God, and He promises He will repay.

So if one is dealing with a believer and the sin cannot be dealt with, I recommend to hand the matter into God's hands and thus make room for His wrath. Entrust the situation to God. Never let bitterness grow. If one fully trusts God, one will not become bitter. And if one prays for this person, pray that God will bring them to repentance before it is too late. Hand the person over to God. And then, don't act as if nothing is wrong. That is hypocrisy. If the person seeks to be friendly, hoping you will act as if all is well, that person is doing it to cover sin in that way. Do not let them cover sin. Just nicely say, "We have a matter to take care of before we can be friends."

In no case, when repentance does not take place, is forgiveness instructed. Why not? Because it can't be done. It is injustice. You might say you have forgiven but you haven't. You might have been able in some such way to put it behind you, but the person is not forgiven unless he repents. What could be more clear?

C. Dealing With Smaller Issues

There is one more matter worth mentioning. There are many things we need to learn to forbear. To forbear is to put up with, bear with, endure etc... Forbearance, in my understanding of Scripture gives us another principle for dealing with the vast majority of petty infractions. To forbear is to hold up or hold back. Vine's dictionary says it signifies to 'bear with' or to 'endure'. There are many things we can bear with one another. Colossians says, 'forbearing one another, forgiving one another'. When do you forbear and when do you forgive? When a matter breaks our fellowship with another, I think is a good rule to tell us when what needs to be done. It is important to understand that forbearance and forgiveness are two very different words with two very different meanings. So, there are times to forbear and there are times to confront sin with a rebuke.

Paul says in Ephesians 4:2:

4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Colossians 3:13 says:

3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

There are many things we need to forbear among ourselves. No matter who we are, others will have to endure things from us they do not like.

V. THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS

And so, finally, let us look very briefly at the process of forgiveness in relationships. Forgiveness requires that there is first some kind of relationship between two or more people. And then one party sins against the other and this causes a separation in the relationship. To restore the relationship, the one sinned against must be propitiated or satisfied and this requires repentance on

the part of the wrongdoer. Without such repentance a continued relationship is hypocrisy. If and when true repentance occurs, forgiveness is in order. To not forgive when true repentance has taken place is to carry an unforgiving spirit. When repentance and forgiveness have taken place, then reconciliation can and should take place and the relationship is restored to wholeness.

CONCL: And because I have taken so much time, let me conclude by saying with Gary Inrig, forgiveness is one of the most misunderstood subjects in the Bible. For those who wish to grasp this subject, whether one agrees with the position taken here or not, it would be well to go through this several times and honestly, objectively think through the whole subject.