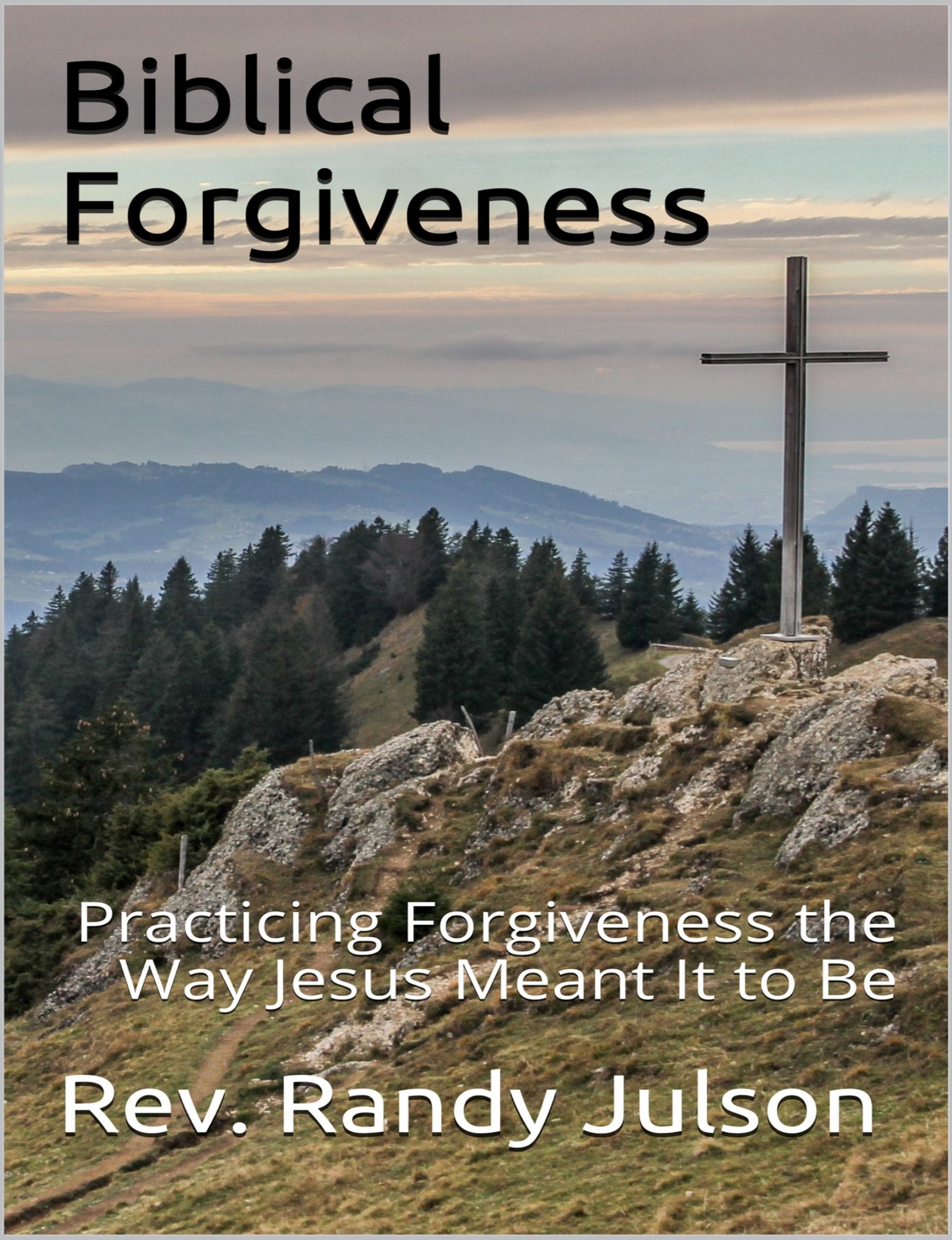

Biblical
Forgiveness
Practicing Forgiveness the
Way Jesus Meant It to Be
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Chapter 1

The Great Deception

Isaiah 14:12-15 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! 13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. 15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

The original sin is often referred to as the time that Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden; however, this passage in Isaiah brings up the very first sin recorded in the Scriptures. We don't know when this rebellion against God took place, but it obviously must have been some time before Adam and Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden.

Some specific issues led up to this rebellion against God. Probably the most significant was pride. Somehow Lucifer, who was one of the most magnificent creatures that God had created, started to think that he was not only equal to, but that he was powerful enough to force God off from his throne and become the ruler of the universe. I feel that the whole thought process that brought this to pass was the result of self-deception in the mind of Lucifer himself. To think that a creature that God had made would be powerful enough to remove the one who made him is entirely absurd. Not only that, but he had a line of thinking that convinced a third of the angels of heaven that what he was proposing was indeed plausible. It didn't matter, however, how many others that Lucifer convinced—the whole effort was doomed to fail for at least two reasons. First, no one can fight against God and win. He alone is the creator. He alone is the Almighty One. He is the only One who is worthy of worship and praise. Secondly, the whole idea of what Lucifer was trying to do was based on a false premise. It was not true. Truth is so powerful that lies will never conquer it. On a temporary basis, lies can cover over the truth, and they can seem to prosper, but in the end,

truth will rise up to be victorious. We live in a world that is full of deception, and I feel that there is more deception regarding the subject of religion than there is in any other area of life. There is a simple reason for that. If Satan can create deception and cause confusion concerning our relationship with God, which is the most important thing in a person's life (whether the individual understands that or not), Satan has control over that individual and their eternal destiny.

Much of what makes us who we are takes root in us while we are quite young. Robert Fulghum published a book in 1986 titled *All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten*. It does deal with several things that become a part of us from when we are little. However, the formation of who we are starts much earlier than that. I have heard of mothers reading or singing to their babies even before their child is born! From a biblical standpoint, we know the story of Moses, how he was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter and nursed by his own mother, Jochebed. She knew that she only had him for a short time, likely just a very few years. In that short time, she passed along to Moses principles that stayed with him his entire life.

I have often thought about the many decisions we need to make as we pass from the late teen years of life until maybe we get to the age of 25. It is during those years when we are still yet very vulnerable—because of a lack of experience—that we often make decisions that are not based on the best of judgments. Yet it is precisely in those years that we are laying a foundation for the remainder of our life. It is a time of development physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Some of the major decisions we make during that time are regarding our career (and related to that is where we will live); our spouse and how large of a family we will have; the principles (or lack thereof) that we will live by; and our religious persuasion, as well as a host of other decisions. Who we are today is an accumulation of all of the knowledge and experiences of life that we have gone through up until this point. Once these decisions are made, it is not as though they cannot be revisited or even wholly overturned, but the older we get, the more difficult it is for various reasons to change course. It is innate within us that we don't like to be wrong, and if we are, we tend to smooth over the extent of our error. For example, men are stereotypically known for not wanting to ask for directions. In today's world of GPS, it is not as much of an issue, but even technology can be wrong on occasion. I have found

myself taking the wrong entrance ramp on a freeway and going the opposite direction than I had intended. No matter how humbling it may have been, it only made sense for me to turn around so that I could get to the destination that I desired.

The consequences of decisions that we make and actions that we do can be much more significant than what we may recognize initially. Consider the responsibility that an individual takes upon themselves in merely driving an automobile. A single action or inattentiveness can result in an accident that could cause injury and pain or even death not only for yourself but your loved ones who are in the vehicle with you, not to mention others on the road as well. A personal story that highlights this very point happened to me in May of 1975. I was a young, inexperienced 20-year-old, engaged to my wife (to whom I am now married 43 years). Her parents planned a fishing trip into Canada over an extended Memorial Day weekend, and they graciously invited me along. They allowed their daughter and I the use of a 12-foot aluminum boat with a tiny three horsepower motor. The place where we did most of the fishing was on the opposite side of the lake (about a 45-minute journey with the small engine) from where we had camped. Usually, her parents would tow the smaller boat behind their larger boat, but this particular time we left by ourselves. Everything seemed to go fine, and the air was crisp, but it was a beautiful and sunny day. We anchored the boat in a small bay area off to the side of where a stream entered into the lake and we did some fishing.

Meanwhile, my fiancée's parents showed up to fish in the same general area but on the other side of where the stream came into the lake. During the time that we had been fishing, a stiff wind began to blow from the far side of the lake. With her parents now in the vicinity, we wanted to be near them. I started up the little motor and proceeded directly toward where they were anchored. The problem was that with the stream bringing its water into the lake, and the stiff breeze blowing against it, the area we were traveling into was quite turbulent. Before we knew it, we were in more trouble than what we had bargained for, and it was too late to turn around. Our little boat bobbed up and down with the motor actually coming out of the water at times, and it had very little power to push us through the rough area. I was concerned that we would capsize, which would have been disastrous for many reasons. First, I don't know how to swim and actually

have a fear of being in deep water, second, I wasn't wearing a life jacket, and third, with it being so early in the spring (and in Canada), the water was extremely cold, and the likelihood of rescue would have been slim. It was only God’s grace that kept us both from perishing in those cold waters. Unfortunately, situations like these don’t always turn out as well as mine did, and we hear about them in the evening news, but it shows how significant just a seemingly small decision can be.

Shifting our thoughts to the spiritual side of things, as Christians, the foundation for our beliefs come from the Word of God. The Scriptures are God's revelation of Himself to us. It shows us who He is, His character, His loving-kindness, His mercy and grace, but also gives us principles that are an extension of what makes Him who He is as well as his justice, judgment, and anger. If we don't have a balance of all of these things, we don't have a very accurate picture of what God is like. Too many people like to focus on the positive aspects of God's character such as the love of God, and the grace and goodness of God but put out of their minds other facets such as the justice and anger of God that are just as real as the positive parts. Not all churches have the same respect for the authority of the Word of God, and in a world of confusing church cultures, we need to determine how much influence we are going to allow the Scriptures to have in our lives.

I grew up in what was known as the American Lutheran Church. After we married, my wife and I attended the United Church of Christ where she had grown up. During that part of my life, the Lord was not as important to me as He should have been, and we were pretty much living the secular life (not terrible sinners, but not seeking the Lord either). The Lord did get my attention through a TV evangelist named Jack Van Impe. I became interested in his view of the end-times and started reading the Bible more. This sparked a desire within me to become more involved in church, so from time to time I would visit with the pastor, and I soon started to teach Sunday School. As I became more familiar with what the church teachings actually were, I found out that they didn't believe that the Bible was necessarily true. They felt there were "stories" in the Scriptures that should not be taken literally. Although I had grown up in a liberal church, this was very different from even what I had believed. I always had respect for and felt that the Word of God was true. This threw me into a spiritual crisis (though I didn't realize the implications at the time). As I was considering

all of these teachings which were new to me, I came across a small book called *"Difficulties in the Bible"* by R.A. Torrey. Though I do not accept every explanation he offers in the book, it did help me to make a crucial determination: I believe the Bible (the original Scriptures given to us by God) to in fact be the true Word of God. I determined that we can stand on it and hold it to be divinely inspired (inerrant), given to us by God as a means of revealing Himself to us. I had no idea at the time, but this marked a significant turning point in my life as I was no longer going to accept anyone else's explanation as to why we could not trust the Scriptures. I had no idea where this would lead me, but I slowly began to open up my thinking in trying to find a church that believed that the Bible was the authentic Word of God as well.

The question of what is truth, and what will be the guiding principles in our life, is a fundamental and personal question that each one of us needs to answer for ourselves. What kind of foundation are we going to build our lives upon? Are we going to believe the Bible or are we going to accept the secular view that the Scriptures may be okay in teaching some good things to help us in life but cannot be trusted as truly being "God-breathed"? This is the core of what a person builds their life upon and should not be taken lightly. Your answer to this question could (and very likely will) be a determining factor in your eternal destiny.

Jesus, in praying for his disciples in John 17:17 said this: *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."* If Jesus said that God's word is truth, I am determined to hold onto that for the rest of my life. I may not always fully understand the full implications of it, but no matter what, I have decided that I want to adjust my thinking to be in line with what the Scriptures teach. In John 8:31-32, Jesus also stated:

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

It is a fact that we will only be a disciple of Jesus, we will only know the truth, and the truth will only make us free if we continue in His Word. It is imperative that we honestly and wholeheartedly study and apply the Word

of God to our lives in a manner that is consistent with how God desires for us to understand it (not the way that we would like it to be).

There are people today that are absolutely convinced that it is God's will for them to kill and harm as many people that they can that do not agree with their religious persuasion, even to the point of sacrificing their own life to accomplish that purpose. They believe that God will welcome them and reward them for the pain and destruction that they inflict upon others. These are people that are entirely convinced that what they believe is right. They are very sincere, but they are sincerely wrong because their belief is not rooted and grounded in the truth of the Scriptures. Likewise, many religions around the world are mostly the result of the imaginations of individuals who have convinced themselves that their ideas are correct, again in contrast to what the Word of God tells us. Closer to home, there are literally thousands of sects or denominations in what is considered "Christianity" today—even among those that are regarded as being “evangelical” or “Bible believing” churches. Some of them have minor differences, and they feel comfortable worshiping together and, in some cases, have even merged organizations together. There are people in other religious groups, however, who see things very differently, so much so that if what one “Christian” group believes is true, then it follows that what other “Christian” groups believe cannot be true—and this is among so-called "Bible-believing" churches.

This creates questions and confusion in the minds of many people. The problem is not with the Word of God. The Scriptures are dependable, reliable and worthy for us to put our trust in. The problems come with what mankind does with it—how they study and apply the Scriptures. Some people are swayed by their own desires and agenda that promote doctrines that are not consistent with what the Word teaches, similar to how the Scribes, Pharisees, Rabbis, and teachers interpreted the Scriptures during Jesus' day. They resisted Jesus' teachings because it threatened their place and position—it was going to cost them something. In a similar sense, there are people today who resist the truth of the Word of God because it requires them to be willing to change their lifestyle. They can't live the way they have been living and at the same time be obedient to what the Scriptures teach.

Other people can best be described as sheep. They follow particular religious teachings and have very little interest or desire to search it out for themselves. They are depending upon their spiritual leader to tell them what they need to know, but unfortunately for many reasons, they are not being told the whole truth. These could be people who blindly don't know any better because they accept what they have been told and feel they have no reason to question it. They continue to live in ignorance thinking that all is well, when in reality it is not, even to the point of having eternal consequences.

Finally, there are some who just don't want to know. In these last days, this is becoming a larger and larger segment of society. They have chosen to ignore the Word of God for a variety of reasons. They may have come to believe that the Bible is not relevant today. They have heard conflicting teachings from some religious groups that make them feel that it is not reliable. The modern-day educational system has worked diligently to convince them that God is not necessary and that all things can be explained through evolutionary theory. To them, the Bible is a relic from the past that has no part in today's society.

So, why start out a book on forgiveness by bringing up this discussion on deception? Basically, because I want to challenge you to think. We should not blindly (I emphasize the word blindly) follow the teaching of any spiritual leader, for it could be possible that they may not have the fullness of truth either. I am not saying that they are intentionally deceiving people, but it may be that they don’t know any better. They may be repeating what they have been taught and that they have been convinced is true for whatever reason. Like Lucifer, many people have become a victim of the Great Deception—self-deception—the greatest deception that there is. The thing that is so difficult about deception is that when you are in the clutches of it, you don’t know that you are being deceived. I feel that only those that are dishonest—whether they are dishonest with themselves, or dishonest with others—don’t want the truth. There are many others, however, who merely have been deceived into thinking that what they have is truth, but in reality, is not. Deception is a house of cards that will come crashing down over anyone who is taken in by it. The greater the deception is, the more significant the consequences. I know people that at one time embraced and believed the truth but for whatever reason decided to turn away from it.

They will still need to face it because we will all someday stand before the God of truth.

I encourage you to seek the truth no matter what. Whatever it may cost you it will be well worth it, and I'm not primarily referring to financial cost. If we do not find and follow the truth as laid out in the Word of God, we will find ourselves in a lost and hopeless condition. The responsibility to seek after truth and treasure it rests solely upon our ourselves as individuals, for each one of us must give an account of our own life before the Eternal Judge. God has given the opportunity to each one of us to find it, it is up to us to take action. The remainder of this chapter provides the background into the methods that I feel are important to make sure that what we have is the proper understanding of the Word of God that the Lord Himself desires for us to know.

Rules for the Road

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

This book is not intended to be an exhaustive resource on all aspects of the Christian faith; however, there are some established principles of Bible interpretation that are well accepted across the spectrum of most established denominations. We will briefly touch on some of the more pertinent ones here. The first principle is that we need to be sure that we are looking at the context of what the Bible writers intended. We cannot expect to understand the Scriptures the way that God intended if we pull verses out of context and impose an interpretation that should not be there. This also applies in the context of the entire Bible itself.

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

We need to keep in mind that there are different “divisions” of Scripture that are intended to bring various aspects of how God has shown Himself to us. For example, we shouldn’t look into the book of Revelation specifically

to find the information we need to live a good, productive, mature Christian life—although there are things in it that we can draw from for our daily walk, it wasn't intended for that purpose. It was given for us to have insight into the end times and the coming judgment. We need to understand, therefore, that if we don’t recognize the proper purpose for which the individual books of the Bible were written, we can come away with an inaccurate interpretation and/or application to our daily life.

With that in mind, it is easy to recognize the natural divisions in the Bible. The first significant division, of course, being the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament starts with the creation of the world, the failure of mankind and God calling a people to serve Him. He makes a covenant with them and wants them to be a witness of His power and might. The Prophets were sent to rebuke His people who had become rebellious, and to prepare the world for the coming Messiah who would free mankind from their own failures.

The New Testament brings to us the Incarnate God who came in the flesh of Jesus Christ. It presents His ministry to the world and His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. He leaves His work in the hands of twelve chosen men who establish the Church by proclaiming the Gospel—a new covenant—and displaying the power of God to the world. Once we get beyond those two major divisions, we can also see that each "Testament" has different groupings as well. The main classifications of the Old Testament are:

(5) Books of the Law: Genesis through Deuteronomy

(12) Books of History: Joshua through Esther

(5) Books of Poetry / Wisdom: Job through Song of Solomon

(5) Major Prophets: Isaiah through Daniel

(12) Minor Prophets: Hosea through Malachi

Likewise, the New Testament can also be divided up as well.:

(4) Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They primarily present the life, death, resurrection, and ministry of Jesus Christ. An interesting side note is that from a legal standpoint, until the resurrection of Jesus, the Gospels are actually under the rules and precepts of the Old Testament Law; the Church has not been established yet.

Book of Acts: Luke, the writer, gives us the history of the beginning of the Church on the Day of Pentecost as well as highlighting the ministries of mainly Peter and Paul. Acts is the only New Testament book that records the word for word preaching of the Gospel to the lost. As such it is the only book that gives us specific examples of how people became a part of the Church (were saved) in response to the preaching of the Word of God.

(13) Pauline Epistles: Paul wrote these letters to churches or individuals who had previously applied the Gospel into their lives (they had already become Christians). Although they do talk about the salvation experience, the Epistles were not written to the lost in teaching them how to be saved (because they were addressed to those who had already responded to the Gospel message). As such, there are no specific examples of anyone becoming a Christian in any of the Epistles. The Epistles mainly give guidance on how to live and grow in the Christian life, as well as addressing problems that came up in the early Church. The Epistles do talk about salvation, but as more of an explanation of what they have in Christ and how the Christian should love and appreciate their relationship in Him. With that said, nothing in either the Gospels or the Epistles contradicts any of the teachings of the book of Acts. Instead, it reinforces and supports the teaching of the apostles to the infant Church.

(8) General Epistles: Similar to the Pauline Epistles, these were letters written by various inspired writers to other churches or individuals who also had previously been saved. Again, these were not intended to be used to preach the Gospel message to the lost but to give instructions for godly living and encouragement to those who had come to know and follow Jesus.

Prophecy: The Book of Revelation contains many symbolic images that point toward the end of the age, the second coming of Jesus Christ and the final judgment of mankind. Prophecy is not limited to the book of Revelation either. There are numerous other passages in the New Testament (Gospels and the Epistles) that refer to the end times as well.

In reviewing these divisions in the Bible, we can easily see that if we do not correctly *"rightly divide the word of truth,"* we can find ourselves with a wrong theological understanding. For example, if you want to know the details of how the world began, you need to go to Genesis. This does not

mean that the creation of the world is not mentioned in the rest of the Bible, neither does it mean that the rest of the Bible contradicts the book of Genesis, but rather Genesis contains the detailed information regarding the creation, and the remainder of the Bible confirms and reinforces what Genesis teaches.

Likewise, if we want to know what God expects for us to be saved, we need to study the Book of Acts which gives us the specific detailed Gospel message that was preached to the lost. The Gospels and the Epistles are definitely very important, but they are intended to serve a different purpose. The Gospels give us tremendous insight into the heart of God, and although it is still "under the law" it is a transition time from the rules and regiments of "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" mentality that had captured the minds of the Jewish leaders. The Gospels open to us the grace and love and mercy of a God who desires the best for us. Though the Gospels discuss and lay down principles for the salvation experience, and there are even situations where Jesus declared certain people to be saved, no one in the Gospels was saved under the same conditions that we today, living in the church age experience. They were legally still living under the Old Testament Law (the Church had not been formed yet because the Holy Ghost had not been poured out until the Day of Pentecost).

This leads me to the second "rule for the road." Truth will never contradict itself. When applied to the Scriptures, it means that no part of the Bible will go against what another part of the Bible teaches. Many people claim that it does have errors, but the problem is not with the Bible; instead it is in their understanding of it. If our beliefs are in line with what God wants us to know, then there will be no contradictions whatsoever. Period. If we feel that there are contradictions, then we ought to step back and consider where we might be wrong rather than excuse our inconsistencies or try to sweep them under the rug.

The third “rule for the road” involves the importance of having a corroboration of the Scriptures to verify that our understanding is correct. This is a principle even established under the Old Testament law:

Deuteronomy 19:15 One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the

mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

The context of this verse is saying that for a person to be proven guilty of a crime, there needs to be at least two or three witnesses to verify that the accusations are correct. In trying to ascertain the truth regarding a specific situation, leaders were to look for witnesses that agreed in their testimony. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus upheld this principle in how we should deal with a disagreement with one another:

Matthew 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

I feel that we can apply this principle to overall biblical interpretation as well. We should be very cautious in using just one verse (or passage) as a basis for our doctrinal positions. We should look for multiple passages that shed light upon and reinforce the teaching that we are embracing. If we cannot find other Scriptures to support it, maybe we should consider other possibilities as to how God wants us to think. There are some prevalent teachings in the Church today that are based on just one verse of Scripture, and people minimize the importance of how their incorrect interpretation brings contradictions into the rest of the Word of God.

There are other principles of Bible interpretation that I certainly agree with, but these three are essential and vital in understanding the Word of God the way that He desires us to understand it. In addition to these being sound, logical principles, they also undergird the judicial system in our country today. When a court of law is looking to find out whose version of the story is right, they call in as many witnesses as they can find and look for inconsistencies in their testimony. If all is correct, they will all line up; if not, then the whole premise of the point in consideration is thrown into question. The remainder of this book will rest upon these principles that have been established.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of

them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Now let's add something else to consider—what if what we thought was right was not true at all? Would we want to know? An honest question could very well be, am I (the author) the one who is being deceived? It certainly could be the case and that I don't know it. But I am doing my best to hold on to the words of Jesus: *"If ye continue in my word, ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* With everything that I have within me, I am trying to study, obey, practice and teach what I feel the Word of God honestly presents. But if what we thought was true ended up being a lie, would we want to know it? The obvious answer is that yes, we certainly would want to. However, when it is a matter that we hold near and dear to our heart, our emotions, pride, and our ego can get in the way, and it is easy to try to justify a position that a reasonable, rational person would come to a very different conclusion about. I earnestly urge every one of us to take a long hard look at what we believe about God, the Scriptures, the Church, our salvation experience, godly living and, in this particular case, about forgiveness as well. I'm not trying to say that everything people believe is wrong, just that we need to make sure that what we hold to be true is in line with what God wants us to think. We only get one chance at making heaven our home; there is no reincarnation or second life. It is not what you or I or what anyone else thinks that is important—it is what God thinks that really matters, for He is the Judge of all mankind.

There are many things in this book that you may have never heard of before this. I encourage you not to dismiss them just because they are different. I challenge you to honestly and sincerely look into the Scriptures, using the principles that I have laid out to determine if what I am presenting is the truth. As I said before, we must all stand before the God of truth and reconcile how we lived our lives with how His Word teaches us to live. I am not the Judge and I don't want to be. I only want to be a transmitter of the truth that I feel God has given not only to me, but to all mankind. I don't

want to be a victim of the Great Deception—deceiving myself into thinking I have truth when I am in actuality promoting a lie.

Chapter 2

Background

Ok, why another book about forgiveness? It's pretty much a cut and dried topic. Practically every preacher that I have heard, every book that I have read, every blog, every Internet post, everyone agrees—you have to forgive, and that's it. It doesn't matter whether those that did the wrong are sorry for what they did or whether they ask for forgiveness or not, you are obligated to forgive them unilaterally whether you have any contact with the individual or not. People that teach this do use some Scriptures, but is this the whole story? Is that really the total picture of what the Bible says? I think that there are some significant areas that for the most part have been overlooked.

Usually with most teachers, the emphasis is on overcoming the hurt, dealing with the pain and heartache, and bringing ourselves to the point so that we can get on with our lives. I am not going to minimize that at all because that is very important, but I also feel that a large part of the forgiveness process must also involve repentance, restitution as much as can be done, and if possible, working to restore the relationship between those who have been at odds. In trying to teach this in the past, I have been very much misunderstood by people thinking that I am promoting the thought that it is all right for a person to stubbornly withhold forgiveness from another person, or that it is okay for a person to not be willing to forgive. That is not true. It is not that I am suggesting that a person does not “have to” forgive, but rather that until the offender fulfills the biblical qualifications for forgiveness to take place, which includes genuine repentance, I feel that true forgiveness cannot happen.

I am not in any way suggesting that people harbor feelings of hatred, malice, vengeance or take on an attitude where they refuse to offer forgiveness either. There are many, many situations where people have been told that they have to forgive others, but they often feel pressured in fear that if they do not forgive, then God will not forgive them either. I am not saying that people are purposefully misleading themselves, but that in spite of their good intentions, and not having the entirety of the biblical teaching on forgiveness, they often still struggle with their feelings of hurt, mistrust,

and having a proper relationship with the one who had wronged them after they had supposedly forgiven them.

One of the questions in the minds of people regarding traditional forgiveness teachings is "How do I know that I have truly forgiven this person who has hurt me?" This can be a lingering question especially when the root problems that caused the offense have not been addressed. In these situations, the relationship is still strained, there has not been reconciliation, and there can still be some difficult feelings that honestly need to be dealt with. The reverse question to that is "How do I know that I have been forgiven?" The latter question is more likely to be asked regarding a person's relationship with the Lord than interpersonal relationships, but it is a valid question that needs to be answered as well. People can feel the guilt of having done things that are displeasing to the other person (or the Lord), and yet the real issues have never been brought out into the open. Consequently, there is an uneasiness, lack of trust and separation because there has not been healing in their relationship.

Again, I want to emphasize this and please don't get me wrong. In no way am I condoning an attitude where someone refuses to forgive or withholds forgiveness (what I call a spirit or attitude of unforgiveness). Nor do I support any feelings of vengeance or bitterness or malice or any other destructive intention. These things are all wrong and will lead to the ruin of anyone who harbors these thoughts.

I realize that since I am presenting something different than what others have taught, the proof lies directly upon myself to show that what I am suggesting is biblical. I feel that through the Scriptures, we can discern what God wants us to know about this vital subject.

A Better Way

Paul teaches the church in Corinth about the proper use of the gifts of the Spirit in I Corinthians chapters 12 and 14. Sandwiched between these two chapters, is what is considered the "love" chapter in the Bible. He prefaces it at the end of I Corinthians 12 with this statement:

"and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way."

In that light, my desire here is not to tear down others, but hopefully to show that when we see the subject of forgiveness from God's perspective, we will realize that it encompasses a much broader view than just dealing with our personal feelings and hurts that happen through the process of life. As with Paul, who reminded his Corinthian brothers and sisters that to use the spiritual gifts properly they needed to balance them with God's attribute of love, likewise, when dealing with the subject of forgiveness, we need to try to see things through the eyes of the eternal love of God, not as a legalistic action that we do to soothe our conscience. Through this infinite love of God, Jesus taught us in Matthew 5:43-44 that we even need to love our enemies:

Matthew 5:43-44 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Having love for an enemy can be quite different than having love for a family member. With family members, there is affection, closeness, and desire to be with and/or spend time with them. Loving an enemy has more to do with our response to how they have treated us. Unless there is a change in their heart, we will not experience a closeness with them; after all, they are our enemy. In spite of the hurt and pain that they desire to inflict us with, we are to overcome this so that our love response toward them is to do things that would be in our enemy’s best interests. It is important to understand that they may not necessarily be things that they would see as being a blessing to them. This can at times require us to do as Dr. James Dobson has taught, using a "tough love" approach where we do things that may not be pleasant; however, they are things that may be necessary to help them to grow personally, spiritually and/or emotionally. Similarly, Jesus taught us the "Great Commandment" of the Scriptures as well:

Matthew 22:36-40 Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is

the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

One of the striking differences between conduct in the Old Testament and in the New Testament Church is that in the Old Testament, a person was more or less judged by their actions, not by their motives. In the New Testament Church, our attitudes and motivations are as important (and in some cases may be more so) than what we do. People in the Old Testament often got caught up in keeping the rules (laws) but not recognizing or understanding the importance of the principles behind them—having proper thoughts and attitudes. My primary desire and intent for this book is that we express through our actions and our attitudes the great "agape'" love of God, in particular regarding the relationship with those that have hurt us. Hopefully, that is how this subject will be received by the reader.

I don't feel that I am blinded by an ideal world perfectionism, where we expect every situation to turn out exactly as we want, and we all live "happily ever after." I realize that everyone is an individual, not everyone has a Christian ethic, you can't force people to like you, others may not do what you want them to, nor can you require them to do "what is right." People in general, have accumulated a lot of bad experiences that have caused them emotional, spiritual and maybe even physical pain. These hurts often affect their thinking and how they respond, in spite of our trying to exhibit the love of Christ to them. The only thing that we can do, and all that we are responsible for, is how we act and/or react to events that often cause interpersonal relationship difficulties.

My Story

I grew up in a family that "liked to fight." I know it was not something that they enjoyed doing, but it indeed was a part of our family history. I don't mean the traditional rivalry between siblings either; it seemed that my parents always had someone that they were at odds with. If they weren't fighting between themselves, it was either my grandparents (on either side), some of their brothers or sisters, me or my siblings, or anyone that happened to be the focus at the time. As is typically the case, this did trickle down among my siblings; therefore, over the years there has been considerable conflict between many of my brothers and sisters as well.

Even so, I don't feel that I had a terrible childhood. There are many precious and good memories that I cherish, and I can't say that I was terribly scarred emotionally because of the relationship difficulties, though it definitely has affected me. There were times that I had become distressed and agitated. There were times that I would think and plan ways of getting even with those that I felt had done wrong to me; however, the hurts did eventually heal, and I can't say I have any ill feelings toward anything that happened in my childhood. As time continues to pass, relationships between my siblings seem to be getting better as well of which I am thankful.

Personally, I am generally an easy-going and laid-back individual. I am usually a quiet and soft-spoken person. In many ways, I am an introvert, and that has gotten me into trouble because people don’t know how to “read” me and quite often have misinterpreted either my actions or inaction. On the other hand, especially when I was younger, there have been times that I have been known to be brash and abrupt and jumped to conclusions that simply ended up not being the case. Even so, because of my family background, I don't like to fight, and in fact am very poor in trying to win a verbal argument.

Some things do stir my resolve, however. One of them is when I feel some principles need to be stood for. It is in those times that I can become a bulldog of sorts, and it has been some of those times that have gotten me into trouble where I have gone beyond the place where I should have. As I have matured and learned these principles of forgiveness, I feel that some of the rough edges have worn away, and I handle things very differently than when I was younger. I have learned not to burn bridges unnecessarily, for you never know through the course of life when you may need to cross that river again. I try to make a determined effort not to let my emotions rule in a situation, and I try to do what I can to work things out, even hoping to make it a "win-win" for everybody, but unfortunately, that is not always the case. There have been times that in a discussion an individual has become upset with me and they "showed me the door," but I purposefully stayed there, not wanting to leave until we could work through the disagreement respectfully. Hopefully, this gives a little insight as to where I am coming from, and the spirit in which I am trying to present this.

As is the case with most everybody, I have had my share of challenging and sometimes bizarre situations in my adulthood that have tested and caused

me to look at, and seriously examine the issue of forgiveness. Sad to say, the people that have hurt me the most have not been people in the secular world, nor my extended family, but those who are generally looked up to as leaders in the Church. I have also seen through the grace of God how in the face of what seems to be an utterly irreconcilable situation, God can bring people back together again in a relationship that is as good and maybe even better than it was before. It takes a Christian effort by all those involved to see relationships healed through the love of God.

What I am presenting does require a greater responsibility on the part of the Christian believer, in that there are instructions in the Scripture that teach us we are to do what we can to bring about peace, unity and ultimately reconciliation with those around us. I do not feel that I have all the answers either, but looking at it from what I think is God's perspective, this gives us insight in how to handle those who have hurt and offended us.

My attempt in this book is to go through many of the Scriptures regarding forgiveness that the Bible presents, as well as additional verses regarding interpersonal relationships. Hopefully, we will come away with the real and proper understanding that God wants us to have. The focus of this book is not intended to cover all of the minor, everyday occurrences in our dealings with people that rub us the wrong way; instead, I desire to deal with situations that may be serious and/or ongoing. God does have means and methods in handling conflicts in a Christian manner that are laid out in the Word of God, and it is to our advantage to apply them in our lives.

Chapter 3

Forgiveness

Let's get into the meat of it with a dictionary definition:

“Forgive - To cease to feel resentment against (an offender): Pardon (one's enemies). To give up resentment of or claim to requital for (an insult). To grant relief from payment of (a debt)" *(Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 484).*

This is a definition that I can mostly agree with, but even the scope of what this dictionary definition is saying can be an enormous hurdle to those who have been hurt, especially when it comes to a situation where the person who does the offense refuses to acknowledge their wrongdoing. Under the surface, there are connotations of the results of forgiveness, but it does not adequately express the entirety of the biblical teaching either.

First of all, let's compare how we handle forgiveness with the dictionary definition. Do you cease to feel resentment against those that have hurt you? Do you genuinely pardon them? One of the aspects of a pardon is to "release a person from the liability of an offense, or to remit the penalty of an offense" *(Dictionary.com).* When a Governor or President issues a pardon to an individual, it is as though the offending action was never committed. There is no longer any record of it that is held against the individual. The last portion of the dictionary definition is to "grant relief from the payment of a debt." To me, this means that whatever is owed to us is canceled. It's gone. It is as though whatever it was has been completely taken care of, fully paid for. When someone has violated us through some kind of offence, there definitely is a debt that is owed to us. It may not be in financial terms but in matters of trust, security, peace or other areas of our lives. This debt is not a trivial thing.

Romans 12:17-21 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. 18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. 20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him

drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. 21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Nestled within this passage that addresses how to deal with people that you are at odds with is verse 18:

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

We all face minor things that happen to us (probably on a daily basis) that we may consider as being injustices. People can be selfish, inconsiderate or just plain rude. In a general sense, regarding these minor offenses, we need to develop a bit of a "tough exterior" where we take these things as being a part of life. From the perspective of the other person, we have no idea the strain or stress of what they may be going through. It could very well have been unintentional, and they never knew the difficulties that it placed on others. So, from this context, we just need to "let things go," move on and chalk it up to just plain being a part of life.

Other times it is not possible to "live peaceably with all men" nor should a person just "let things go." There are times that a person needs to stand their ground. Sometimes because of principle, sometimes because of how the other person's actions are hurting other people, and other times for the sake and the good of the person who is causing the problem. How does a person deal with interpersonal conflicts in a Christian way? What we are told is that we need to forgive them unilaterally and unconditionally, but have you forgiven them, really? How do you know that you have forgiven them?

The Romans 12 passage deals with the attitude of the one who has been wronged. It is not our place to be the other person’s judge, jury, and executioner. Don't try to get even—it is the Lord who is the judge, and He is the one who will make things right in the end. The passage also goes further in that if we see that they are in a place of having a need, and if we have a Christ-like attitude, we should be willing to help them in their time of distress. If they don't respond to our kindness, then they are adding additional judgment upon themselves. The spirit of this verse gets back to the heart of the "agape'" love of God that as Christians we are challenged to develop in our own lives.

On the other hand, this passage does not excuse their wrongdoing either. This is not indicating that we ought to just move on and forget the injustices that they have done to us with no other considerations. We do not have to become doormats that other people walk all over and take advantage of. We do, however, need to respond to their wrongdoing in a Christian way and leave the final judgment up to the Lord.

Finally, this passage says we are to deal with injustices properly and not let them cause a bitter spirit within us. Instead, we should counter their behavior with a proper Christian response (overcoming evil with good) which we will get to later. It is not wrong to be angry with someone for the inappropriate things that they have done. We don't have to stick our heads in the sand or sweep everything under the rug and pretend that what has happened is not hurtful or unimportant. But we do need to learn how to respond to these difficult times in a godly, Christian way that is pleasing to the Lord.

This may be a strange, (but I feel appropriate) example illustrating what typical forgiveness teachings present. Suppose you were in the habit of leaving the keys in your automobile while it was parked in your driveway. Your neighbor, being your neighbor, knew this. One day when you are not looking, he comes over to your home, gets into your car and drives it to his place (literally stealing your vehicle). Later, seeing your car in his driveway, you naturally go over to ask what's going on (with your car in his yard). He replies, "It's not your car, it's my car—it’s in my driveway, and I have the key."

Based on traditional forgiveness teachings you are to forgive him whether he asks for forgiveness or not, so what do you do? Do you call the police or do you forgive him? He has taken something that belongs to you. (Think about the relationship and emotional analogy.) Suppose that he begrudgingly gives your car back to you, but he makes you feel like you are the one who is in the wrong. What does that do to your relationship? Do you trust him? Do you continue to leave your keys in the car? I know this is thoroughly absurd, but in essence, this is what we are told to do regarding forgiveness toward other people.

Traditional forgiveness teachings often come across that the one who has been wronged (the offended) is the focus regarding forgiveness. In fact (as

we are told), unless we unilaterally forgive the offender, then we are the one that is in the wrong. We have been targeted, mandating that we bear the responsibility and unilaterally forgive the offender even if there is no remorse or attempt at "righting the wrong" by the person who caused the problem in the first place. Don't get uptight; I am not ignoring the Scriptures that in no uncertain terms talk about the necessity of being willing to forgive, but there is more to it than requiring the offended individual to bear the entire burden without any conditions on the person who committed the wrongdoing.

You say that you have forgiven someone who has hurt you. My question to you is this: How is your relationship with the one who offended you? If there has not been at least some measure of reconciliation—now don't get uptight—I question if the offender has truly been forgiven. This should not be because you are unwilling to forgive, but because the offender has not fulfilled the necessary requirements that God expects so that forgiveness can happen. Unless the one who committed the trespass comes to the position of admitting their wrongdoing, repents and desires to make things right, looking at it from a biblical perspective, I don't even think it is theologically possible to forgive. This certainly is different, isn't it?

I want to remind the reader that although there are valid issues that need to be dealt with, we are not looking to apply this in a legalistic way. I am wanting to practice forgiveness as the Lord would have us to, from the standpoint of the agape love of God. Unless their misbehavior is taken care of in a biblical way, authentic forgiveness does not happen. This is true whether it is between individuals or between God and man. Stay with me as we get into some Scriptures:

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Colossians 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.

These verses say that we need to forgive one another "even as God has forgiven us." I totally and completely agree with this, but this passage has been taken out of context to infer that since God has forgiven our debt of sins which are much weightier than any of the offenses that we incur from one another (this part is absolutely correct), we, therefore, need to forgive everyone else regardless of what they have done. I also agree with that statement but with a qualifier, and that qualifier is this: We are to forgive as God has forgiven us. When we examine the process whereby God forgives us, we find that He does not forgive us unilaterally. Nowhere in the Scriptures do I see that God grants blanket forgiveness to all of humanity. He does not forgive anyone without some qualifications being applied to it. One of those conditions is that we must repent:

Luke 13:1-5 There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Jesus was very adamant here that for us to be saved (to have our sins forgiven), we need to repent. Not only did He put it in no uncertain terms, but He also repeated himself to reinforce the point. There are several Scriptures where the Gospel writers tell us that Jesus preached the need for repentance (see Matt. 4:17, 9:13; Mark 1:15, 2:17; Luke 5:32, 15:7), as well as other passages that document the clear connection between repentance, forgiveness and salvation (Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38, 5:31, 11:18, 20:21, 26:20; II Cor. 7:10, Heb. 6:6; II Pet. 3:9).

We see through this that God will not forgive anyone unilaterally (that is without any remorse, interaction or response from the transgressor). Yet we are taught that we are obligated to release anyone and everyone that has hurt us, regardless of whether that person ever comes to us or ever has any sense of regret or remorse regarding the wrong that they have done to us.

We are told that it is categorically improper to not unilaterally forgive every single person that has hurt us and that for us to not do so endangers our salvation because unless we forgive others, God will not forgive us. That is what we are told.

There is a measure of truth in those statements, but that is not the whole story. To teach this as we are often told is not using the entirety of the Scriptures. There are untold billions of people on this earth that have not received God's forgiveness because they have not fulfilled the requirements that God has put in place for them to be forgiven. It is not that He does not want to forgive them, but these people refuse to do what is necessary to receive His forgiveness.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

What happens when someone commits a sin against God, which at the same time the very same action is also an offense against an individual? Think again about the previous illustration regarding the neighbor stealing the car. The act of theft is a sin against God. It is also a violation against the other individual. God will not forgive them unless they recognize their sins and repent. Based on traditional forgiveness teachings, the person whose car was stolen from is supposed to forgive (cancel the debt), even if the thief is unrepentant and unwilling to make things right, yet it is a principle that God won’t forgive them unless they repent.

My question is this: If God will not (or maybe from a theological sense cannot) forgive anyone unilaterally (without repentance), how could God require us to forgive one another unilaterally? Would that mean that God expects us to be more forgiving than He is? I don’t think so. Maybe the real answer is that God does not require us to forgive unilaterally. Rather the Scriptures used to support such teaching have been taken out of context. Here is what the Bible actually instructs us about the need to forgive one another:

Luke 17:3-4 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 4 And if he

trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

First off, notice that if someone does wrong to you, you are to confront them (we will get into more detail in a later chapter), but Jesus doesn't say that we need to forgive them unilaterally. Also, notice that the requirement for us to forgive is closely tied to the necessity that the person who has done the wrong needs to repent of what they did to us. The difficulty on the part of the one who has been wronged is the fact that no matter how many times the offender comes to us with a repentant heart, we are obligated to grant them forgiveness.

A valid question is, how can we know that repentance has actually taken place? Obviously, Jesus is not advocating that all we have to do is to say the words "I repent" without there being a repentant heart. Repentance is more than just saying "I'm sorry," although that often is, and should be part of it. It can be easy to mouth the words and not really mean it. Sometimes people make a "generic" apology just to help their conscience feel better, but they do not really accept that they have done anything wrong. Scripture gives us some guidelines to help us understand what real repentance is. The context of this passage is regarding our relationship with God, but the principles of repentance also apply interpersonally as well.

2 Corinthians 7:10-11 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. 11 For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

From a contextual standpoint, this was written to the Church in Corinth which had all kinds of moral problems. Paul had previously written to them addressing these sins. In response to Paul's rebuttal, they repented and corrected their failures. The following comes from *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* on this passage:

"There is a great difference between this sorrow of a godly sort and the sorrow of the world. The happy fruits of true repentance are mentioned. Where the heart is changed, the life and actions will be

changed. It wrought indignation at sin, at themselves, at the tempter and his instruments. It wrought a fear of watchfulness and a cautious fear of sin. It wrought desire to be reconciled with God. It wrought zeal for duty, and against sin. It wrought revenge against sin and their own folly, by endeavors to make satisfaction for injuries done thereby. Deep humility before God, hatred of all sin, with faith in Christ, a new heart and a new life, make repentance unto salvation."

These are some of the indications of sincere repentance that we can look for when a person comes to us asking for forgiveness. It generally is not too difficult to tell. A person that is repentant has an earnest desire to make things right, not make excuses for their behavior, and they are willing to accept the consequences for their actions. When a person has a genuinely repentant heart, it is not hard to offer them forgiveness for you know that they are sincerely sorry for what they had done, and they have a desire to change the behavior that caused the problem in the first place. It is not always necessary that they go through a line by line list of all their offenses either. What we are looking for is that they have a changed heart and desire to do things differently than they had in the past.

For comparison, I look at how I personally handle things when I come to the Lord with a repentant attitude for my sins. I am genuinely sorry for the things that I have done wrong, I ask that He cleanse me, and I ask Him to help me because I do not want to do those things again.

In practice, this requires us to make a judgmental decision as to whether the other person has sincerely repented. (I can hear the groans already—we are not supposed to judge!) Too often, that passage is taken out of context as well:

Luke 6:37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

Jesus is not advocating that we never come to any conclusions regarding other people, for in the Gospel of John, he tells us this:

John 7:24 Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

Life requires that we need to make decisions and judgments as to not only what we do, but how we are going to interact with one another. If we are on a big city street in the wrong part of town, our view of people (and consequently what we do) will be very different than if we are in a small

rural community based on what we know and have experienced in the past. Jesus specifically said not to judge by appearance, but to judge righteous judgments.

Godly and righteous judgments come by knowing all the information regarding a particular matter, and not being swayed by personal opinions. That is the desire and intent of our judicial court system—to bring out all the evidence in a case so the jury can make an intelligent and informed decision. In the strictest of sense, only God has all the information available, for He not only sees our actions but He also knows the thoughts and the intents of our heart. Even though we have limitations, we still need to make judgments based on the limited information that we have. Think about a parent who finds two of their children fighting about something. One child says one thing, the other has a different story. The parent is in the position that they need to make a judgment, not fully knowing all the exact details of what happened. They have no choice but to do the best they can, based on the information that they have available.

So it is with our interpersonal relationships. We necessarily need to make judgments based on incomplete information. Unlike God, we don't know the thoughts and intents of other people’s hearts, and consequently too often we come to our own conclusions that fit in with the narrative that we have formed in our own mind. What we need to be willing to do is to gather as much information as we can and also be willing to accept new information as it becomes available to us, even if it goes against our preconceived ideas. In this process we should try to give the benefit of the doubt as much as possible—in other words, we need to offer the other person grace.

Personally, each one of us has needed and benefitted from the grace that God generously gives to us, and we need to extend grace to others as well. This does not excuse what they did or minimize the pain that it causes, but each one of us has sinned in our relationship with God, and it is God's grace and mercy that allows us to come back to Him. In spite of what has been done to us, we need to be willing to offer compassion, not judgment, to those that have hurt us.

There was a situation where, based on the information that I knew, I felt someone had purposefully and intentionally tried to undermine my leadership position. I related my suspicions to them, and we did talk about

it. They assured me that what I had felt was definitely not the case. My response to them was that based on what they said, my suppositions were not correct, so I needed to accept that what they were saying was true. I was not in the place of being able to judge their thoughts and motives. If what they told me was not the truth, then that would be something they need to straighten out with the Lord. For my part, I dropped the suspicion that I had made.

There was another time that I had unknowingly offended a couple by something that I had said. This went on for many weeks until, in frustration, they finally brought it to my attention. I did not realize that they were offended, and I certainly had no intention to do so. After hearing their side of the story and because of how they reacted, I felt terrible. I apologized several times during the meeting for the statements they had misinterpreted and for the negative feelings that they had harbored toward me as a result, even though I had no idea that they had thought that way. My point here is that I had no intention of hurting them, but when I found out there was a problem, I readily apologized, wanting them to know how sorry I felt for the misunderstanding.

Hebrews 12:16-17 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. 17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

It is possible for people to put on an outward show of repentance, but not fully do so. This could be a case of false repentance, which if a person does not correct, they have the Great Judge that they will need to face.

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

I feel that this is more appropriately applied to interpersonal offenses than it is regarding sins against the Lord. As a pastor, I had no desire to have people come to me to confess all of the ungodly deeds that they had done. It is not necessary, nor is it good for people to describe the depths of their iniquity for the whole church to be exposed to their ungodliness.

On the other hand, sometimes when people apologize, it becomes a "generic" apology, and they do not really accept what they did was wrong. When it is not clear what the apology is for, it is not conducive in bringing closure to the disagreement or offense. In these types of situations, it can be good to specifically admit to what was done wrong, especially if it is something that has been a reoccurring stumbling block. This brings in the "pray for one another" part, that the person may gain the victory over this weakness. Doing this opens up communication between Christian brothers and sisters and allows for a healing of the relationship.

It is essential to understand that, among other things, the Lord often uses interpersonal relationship conflicts as a tool in working to make us more into the image of Christ. The broader concern is, do we handle these things with integrity? Or do we deal with them through the natural instincts of our fleshly nature? When it comes to these types of conflicts, emotions can be very high, and the consequences can be high as well, but the Lord is much more concerned with the spiritual aspects of life than He is the physical. He is Lord of all; He can do anything. He can change the whole situation at any time, but there also are times that He is not afraid to let us struggle for the purpose of teaching and training us to be more like Him.

I feel I need to remind the reader once again that the core principle that should guide us is the agape love of God. When there are people in our lives that have not been forgiven, it is not that we are withholding it because we are trying to inflict punishment upon them. This is actually "tough love" in action. If we brush off the offense and say that we have forgiven them without the person coming to repentance, then how are they going to be forgiven by the Lord? It may be that we are condoning their failures, handicapping them from facing their faults, and likewise short-circuiting their need to change their behavior. We are not seeking vengeance, retribution or malice, but desiring that they would make things right. Usually, offenses are not just between individuals, but they affect their relationship with God as well. The principle here is that the offender has a responsibility to make things right. In a similar sense, a good parent does not allow a child to misbehave and simply say "that’s okay." It is not that we have the same relationship position with the offender (as parent-child), but bad behavior needs to be corrected, not excused, whether it is between God and man or between individuals.

Speaking of the parent-child relationship, children are naturally possessive, have little patience, and want their own way. A common conflict between toddlers is that one child can physically take a toy (or another item) away from another child who had been playing with it (it could be a sibling or a friend). If a good parent sees this happening, they should (and often do) intervene in the situation, telling the child that took the toy away from the other to give it back (restitution), and tell them to say that they are sorry (reinforcing the need for repentance—whether the child is actually sorry or not is another story). We generally don't focus on the child who had the toy taken away from, except to make sure that they are treated properly, and that their rights are not infringed upon. Somehow, when we grow up, we are told that we have to do things differently, but we do have a good Heavenly Father who expects his "children" to behave appropriately toward one another as well.

Here is another passage regarding forgiveness:

Matthew 18:15-18 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. 18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

I am not going into this in detail here, because I will cover it more fully in a later chapter. Compare this passage with most forgiveness teachings where we are told that we simply need to forgive! We are told that it doesn't matter what they have done, it doesn't matter whether they ask for forgiveness or not, and it doesn't matter whether they are sorry for it or not—we just need to forgive! If that were true, why would Jesus go into the specific details of how to bring about reconciliation? If that were true, why not just forget about it and move on? If that were true, why the statement that:

"if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."?

Where is the “forgive or else we can’t be forgiven” in that? There seems to be a contradiction here between most forgiveness teachings and what the Word of God teaches. Let me assure you that the Bible is not wrong. The Lord wants His people to live in harmony and unity. It won't happen by ignoring the "elephant in the room" and sweeping everything "under the rug." Offenses and difficulties need to be addressed, and they need to be worked through so that reconciliation can take place. Jesus continues in the next passage showing the importance that we need to be willing to forgive one another:

Matthew 18:23-35 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. 24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. 27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. 28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. 29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. 32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: 33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? 34 And his lord was

wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

This parable is held up as an example of how we need to forgive no matter what. Notice however, that both the first servant and the second servant acknowledged that they had a debt that they owed (repentance), they both had a desire to repay it (restitution), but neither one was in a place financially where they could ever satisfy it (just like our inability to "pay off" the price of the sins we have committed). The problem was that even though the Lord freely forgave the first servant (remember he was repentant and wanted to pay his obligation), that same man did not offer the same type of grace to the second servant (who was also repentant and wanted to do right) that owed him a much lesser debt. That unwillingness to forgive when someone wants to make things right is what caused the first servant to be handed over to the tormentors for punishment.

I do not find any verses anywhere in the Bible that commands us to forgive anyone unilaterally without any interaction or response or remorse from the one who has done us wrong. (I'll get to the passage about what Jesus said on the cross later.) Furthermore, it is not wrong to have an individual in your life that has not received your forgiveness either (as long as you have a willingness to forgive them and work things out). If God were to require that of us, then it would be at odds with God's relationship with the bulk of humanity who refuse to turn to Him and thereby have not received forgiveness from God either.

In Luke 15:11-32, Jesus gives us the parable of what is commonly known as the prodigal son. I urge you to read it for yourself, but I will relate the story instead of reprinting it here.

The younger son causes an offense between himself and his father, as well as his elder brother, by asking for his portion of his inheritance even before his parents had died. The father willingly complies with the request and divides everything he has between both of his sons. This would have caused considerable hardship for both the father and the elder son for it probably would have required liquidation of assets (of some sort). Then the younger son takes off, leaving all the family responsibilities with the father and

remaining brother. The younger son goes off into a far country and starts to "live it up." He enjoys the pleasures of life until the money is gone, then there is a famine in the land causing additional hardship.

In need of something to eat, he takes a job with a farmer who sends him out to feed the pigs, which would be a detestable thing for a Jew. His desperation was so great that he wanted to eat the pig’s food, then he remembered that even the servants in his father's house had plenty to eat. The Bible says that finally "he came to himself." In his sad state, he decided that it was time to change his ways, go back to his father, apologize, and ask if he could just be considered a servant.

The father sees him coming from a distance, and with compassion, acceptance, and affection runs out to meet him. The son begins his apology, but his father calls his servants to take care of the son’s needs and to prepare a party. After working in the fields all day, the elder son comes home and hears the commotion of the "homecoming party" for the younger son. He asks what's going on, and the servants tell him about his younger brother’s return. This frustrated him because he felt that he had been slighted. The father talks to him, reassuring the elder son that everything he had still belonged to him, yet it was proper to rejoice for the “lost” son was home again.

In this story, we see the abundant mercy of the father (which is symbolic of God's love and forgiveness toward us). We also notice that the father never showed an unforgiving attitude toward the younger son. For sure, he didn't agree with the son's actions, but there was little he could do to stop him. It is also apparent that the loss of his son bothered the father, for as soon as he saw the boy, he ran out to meet him (that is grace). The father did not wait to see what the son was going to do.

The younger son, showing his repentant attitude, offered his apology and was not expecting anything except for a chance to be a hired servant. The father's forgiveness is apparent, accepting the son back home and throwing him a party. The elder son had a problem with all of this. He had been faithful, he had done his part, he had worked for the family day after day, and now that this “playboy” came home, what was going to happen now? The father reassured the elder son that he was not losing anything, but even so, it was appropriate to rejoice in the return of his brother. It does seem as

though the elder son needed to work through some forgiveness issues of his own. The primary emphasis of this story, however, is the love and willingness of the father to forgive, but it is important to note that the forgiveness was not effective until the prodigal repented and returned to make things right.

Repentance is the key that unlocks the door to true forgiveness. With interpersonal relationships, things are not as clearly defined as it is in our relationship with the Lord. God never does wrong. When there are problems in our relationship with Him, it is not God’s fault—it is our failure. We are always the one who needs to repent, change our ways and make things right.

On the other hand, our relationships with others are far more dynamic. It is not always one person who is clearly in the wrong and the other person who is right. Sometimes it could be just a simple misunderstanding. One person may initiate a wrong, but often we mishandle our response to that first offense as well. We can't read one another's heart or motives (we often think we can). Only the Lord knows the thoughts and intents of the heart, and we often come to conclusions regarding the other person that are not correct. Nevertheless, there needs to be a desire on the part of both individuals to work things out, which unfortunately does not happen as often as it should, even between those who consider themselves Christians.

I have had some people tell me, "I don't want to go through the rest of my life with this person owing me this debt of offense that they may never admit to." My feeling is that I don't have a problem with that. It is not that I hold feelings of resentment, bitterness, malice or vengeance at all toward them; it is simply the recognition that this other person has done wrong, and that in real terms, because of what they did, they have incurred a debt in their relationship with me. We were not the one that caused the offense. It is not improper, nor is it our fault for there to be certain individuals that "owe you a debt" because of their actions. God has people that "owe him a debt of sin," and the responsibility for that debt belongs upon the offender. As long as we keep a right attitude, and maintain a proper relationship with the Lord (having a willingness to forgive if things can be worked out), it should not cause emotional or spiritual stress in our life.

I know that I am being redundant, but people have claimed that I am advocating a refusal to forgive others, which I am not. As I have written previously, there are untold billions of people in this world that have not received God's forgiveness, not because God doesn't want to forgive them, but because they have not fulfilled the necessary conditions in order to be forgiven. Likewise, it is not improper to have people in your life that have not received forgiveness either. It is not because you don't want to forgive them, but because they have not fulfilled the biblical requirements so that forgiveness can take place. We cannot control, nor are we responsible for what other people do, but we are responsible for how we react to them and whether we respond in a Christian manner. My comfort is in knowing that God is a Righteous Judge—nothing escapes his understanding. I have faith that in the end, He will make things right, whether things are ever straightened out during this life or not. As long as I walk with Him, as it says in Romans 8:28:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Injustices happen, bad things take place, and life is not always fair, but just as in Joseph of the Old Testament's life, God can work the miraculous so that even though evil is planned against us, God can work it out for good.

What about people that have hurt us and there is no possible way for us to be able to reconcile? You probably have people in your life that are no longer living that you had relationship problems with (as I have as well). They passed away, and reconciliation was never made—what do you do? Since they are no longer living, there is not much that a person can do at this point. For our own peace of mind, we need to work through the pain and hurt and come to a place where we overcome the spirit (or attitude) of unforgiveness, meaning that if we had the opportunity, we would do what we could to work things out. You can't change what happened. You can't change the other person's actions or reactions. All you can do is leave them in the hands of God and move on with your life, knowing that you have peace in your heart because you are not holding bitterness, nor do you have an unforgiving spirit. The Lord is the one that keeps the scales of justice. If the person who has wronged you has passed into eternity without making things right with God, they will need to face the consequences.

The Fruit of Forgiveness

With traditional forgiveness teachings, many people have this uneasy feeling about whether they have genuinely forgiven someone or not. They have done their best to bury the hatchet so to speak, put things behind themselves and move forward, yet their relationship with the offender is not good. There are still disappointments that need to be dealt with. You don't know if the perpetrator is going to try to do the same thing to you over and over again. There is a loss of respect and trust in the other person because the real issues have not been resolved.

So, the question is, how do we know that forgiveness has actually taken place? For insight into this matter, we can look again at the example of the relationship that God has with mankind. As previously discussed, it is evident that God does not unilaterally forgive anyone. When we come to God acceptably, however, He freely and fully forgives, and consequently, some wonderful benefits flow to us. Many of these things correlate in our relationship with other people as well.

First, when God forgives us, there is the understanding and relief that our sins have been taken care of. We are no longer under the guilt and condemnation that we had felt because we have repented of our sins and committed our lives to serve the Lord in godliness, righteousness, and truth. In our relationships with one another, when true forgiveness takes place, we also feel a tremendous amount of relief and release from the tension in our relationship. We are not on edge with one another anymore because we have honestly and openly dealt with the issues at hand.

Secondly, since there is no longer guilt and animosity between God and us, we are then free to cultivate a personal relationship with Him. This process is known as reconciliation. The word "reconcile" comes from old Latin that means to be "brought back together again." Since the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, there has been a distance between humanity and divinity. The failure of Adam and Eve brought the sin nature into the lives of every one of their descendants (that means you and me).

Consequently, this sin nature has caused people since then to fail to walk in the holiness that God demands. Because of His principles of righteousness and justice, God could not just "look the other way" when it came to the sins of people. There was a price that needed to be paid, and God robed

himself in the flesh as Emmanuel "God with us," lived the perfect, sinless human life—something that we could not do. He gave His life, a life that should not have experienced death because he was perfect in every way. The blood of Jesus satisfied the demands of a righteous God. When we repent (acknowledge that we have done wrong), God opens his arms in welcoming his prodigal son or daughter home again. This transformation is so dramatic that the Scriptures refer to it as an “adoption” into the family of God, and that we take on a “new birth."

Likewise, when there is an earnest desire by both parties in a personal dispute to work things out, there can be reconciliation between individuals, and their friendship can be as good or even better than it was before. I have personally experienced this.

Another man and I were working together in what turned out to be a very complicated situation. The circumstances were difficult for both of us for different reasons. Although we were working together, he was my superior. I could understand some of the difficulties that he was facing, but it seemed to me that he was not disclosing certain things from people that should have been notified. In hindsight, I readily acknowledge that I didn't handle things properly. I should have been more open myself and discussed my concerns with him; however, since he was my superior, I felt apprehensive and felt that I could not do that. I am not using that as an excuse, for I readily admit that I was wrong in that I didn't communicate more than I did.

Making a long story short, I was responsible for this man losing his job. We separated, being at odds with each other with no contact whatsoever. Eight years later, my son passed away from leukemia. Shortly after, even though I was definitely the one who was more in the wrong regarding our dispute, this man called to express his sincere sympathy. To this day, I am very grateful for that phone call, for it started the process of reconciliation between us. Over time we were able to talk things through and work things out. I can't say that we discussed all the details of what happened nor did it seem necessary, but today I consider him a good friend, and I feel free to contact him whenever I have a question, concern or anytime that I would like to. This is an example of the power of reconciliation that God desires us to have with those whom we have had disagreements with.

Let's look at some of the dynamics regarding true forgiveness. These things can apply whether it is between God and us, or if there is a problem between individuals:

1. Because the person who did the offense repented and sincerely felt sorry for the wrong, the debt is canceled entirely. Since the one who committed the error desires to change their behavior, this debt cancellation is not difficult. There can be a fresh start because there is a new baseline of trust that the relationship is built upon.
2. When God forgives, he also forgets. He casts our sins into the depths of the sea. For us, there is no need to "keep score" or bring up the offense again in an accusing way. History cannot be changed, but there is no need or desire to hold the transgression over the other person's head. There may be consequences that need to be dealt with, in many cases what has been done cannot be undone, but neither is there any need for animosity between individuals.
3. Because the wrongdoing is corrected, there begins a rebuilding of faith in one another. Since these things have been cleared out of the way, the relationship between the two affected parties can be restored. This can take time, but the foundation that good relationships are built upon has been laid down again.

There are some qualifiers here that need to be addressed. In our relationship with the Lord, everything is laid open and bare before Him. He knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. He knows if we are truly sincere or not. He cannot be fooled. He knows if we have fully repented of our wrongdoing. When we have truly repented, forgiveness flows freely, and restoration is immediate and complete.

When it comes to human relationships, we don't know what is going on in the other person's mind. We don't know what their real motives are. Forgiveness can be immediate, but the rebuilding of trust takes time. There needs to be a new track record of faithful actions to build confidence in a person's sincerity. The more significant the offense, the more time it may take to restore trust. There are some situations where the wrongs may be so severe, that for the wellbeing of the one who was hurt, there needs to be a total separation of the relationship. I am thinking of situations where there has been gross abuse or physical attack. This does not mean that

forgiveness has not been granted or received, it is just that the danger of the possibility of it happening again is too much to bear for the person who suffered the injustice.

Marriage, in general, can be used as an example to illustrate this point. God created marriage to be a blessing to His people. He intends it to be a beautiful relationship between a man and a woman to be enjoyed in many different dimensions for a lifetime. Due to the fallen state of mankind, not all weddings experience the living “happily ever after" part. There are going to be times of stress, misunderstandings, and disagreements. Many marriages are good, but few, if any, are perfect. Some have many times of tension but could still be considered an okay relationship. Some married people put up with each other because the alternative of being separated is worse than the disagreements that they have. Others for various reasons just can't seem to bear it and opt for a divorce. That is not the Lord's will, but it is reality.

So it is in our relationships with others as well. We are not going to be best buddies with everyone, and that's alright. We all have different personalities, interests, and priorities. Offenses break the trust relationship between two individuals just as sin breaks the trust relationship that we have with the Lord. When trust is broken, it is a sad thing, and sometimes faith in the other person can be difficult to rebuild. Not that it can't be, but it takes time with a renewed history of faithfulness in action.

Another indicator as to how well the relationship is restored can be the depth of remorse and regret (repentance) by the one who caused the offense. If the person shows a deep sense of grief in recognizing their error, it is easier to look past the offense and move on. On the other hand, if they only offer a shallow, generic apology, it may be more difficult to sense that they recognize their error, with the concern being that they may be more likely to do something similar again. The problem is, we don't know the heart or the true state of anyone's repentance.

This restoration of relationships cannot be accomplished very well by a person just saying that they forgive someone without involving the other individual. That is why Jesus gave us the instructions in Matthew 18, where if you have an offense against a brother, we are to go to them and try to

work it out. This keeps bringing us back to the “agape” love that the Lord wants us to have for one another. Proverbs 27:6 says *"faithful are the wounds of a friend* ." There are people that we have casual associations with every day that do questionable things, yet our relationship with them is so shallow and limited that we really are not in a place to say anything to correct them. With those that are closest to us, things should be different. When there is a matter that can cause strain in our relationship, we should have the internal strength to bring it to their attention, not in a critical tearing down or abusive kind of way, but as a matter of love in helping them to grow in their personal character. Surely, God puts people in our lives and uses them to help us in our Christian growth as well.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

I remembered a preacher years ago (Rev. John Grant) say that if you are madly in love with someone, they can do no wrong, but if you are at odds with someone, they can do no right. There is a lot of truth in that statement. If we greatly adore someone, it seems like everything they do is terrific and we easily overlook their weaknesses, but when we are not getting along with someone, we tend to highlight all of the little things they do that irritate us. We are called to live in peace, not in anger or strife, vengeance or maliciousness. A problem we have so often is the fact that we are emotional creatures. When we face something that goes against us, as a matter of protecting ourselves, we tend to react emotionally other than the way that Lord would have us to respond. The real issue may not be forgiveness per se, but that we also express the kind of love that God has toward others in our life.

Chapter 4

Biblical Examples of Forgiveness Withheld

(at least for a time)

There are several examples in the Scriptures where forgiveness is not granted to others, at least for a while, until the conditions for forgiveness are satisfied.

Joseph

The story of Old Testament Joseph, the son of Jacob is often, and rightly so, used as an example of Christlike forgiveness toward those who have done wrong to another. On the outset, I think it is significant to notice that forgiveness did not materialize until he tested his brothers, and they had shown that there had been a change in their lives. In the meantime, God was also dealing with his brothers, bringing Joseph to their remembrance and convicting their conscience because of what they had done to him.

The Bible is silent about how Joseph initially handled the rejection and betrayal by his brothers—being stripped of his coat, put in a pit, and finally sold to the Midianites. It must have been very, very difficult. He had trusted his brothers. He meant no harm to them, yet they hated him to the point where they just wanted to get rid of him, and they lied to their father about what had happened. There is no record at all of bitterness or desire for vengeance on the part of Joseph. He did not seem to hold an unforgiving attitude, and Joseph did not allow his troubles to keep him down for long. In spite of the circumstances, he decided to make the best of things and get on with life. God took notice of how Joseph responded to the injustices and consequently, God was able to bless him.

While serving Potiphar, Joseph again is wrongly targeted. Potiphar's wife has romantic desires toward Joseph, but in his integrity, Joseph refuses. She becomes angry and falsely accuses Joseph of the very things that she was doing to him (which is quite often the case when people wrongly attack others). Again, there is no hint of bitterness, even after he rose to power, but on the other hand, there is no record that Joseph ever had anything to do with Potiphar again either. Because of these accusations by Potiphar's wife,

Joseph is put into prison, which by itself shows the hand of God upon him in that Potiphar didn't have him instantly killed as he could have.

While in prison, Joseph again displays an excellent attitude and with God's blessings upon him, he takes charge of all the other prisoners. Joseph is now maybe 28 years old, and it has been about 11 years since his brothers betrayed him. God provides an opportunity whereby it seems that Joseph could finally be released from prison. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, becomes angry with his butler and his baker, and both are sent to the same prison where Joseph is kept. While there, they both have dreams, and God gives Joseph the interpretation. The baker is killed, and the butler is restored to serve the king just as Joseph foretold. For whatever reason, the butler forgets about Joseph, and Joseph is left in prison for another three years (but Joseph has no idea if he will ever get out). Can you imagine the disappointment that Joseph must have had? How he must have questioned whether doing the right thing was the right thing to do, yet he keeps his integrity.

Finally, God intervenes, giving Pharaoh some dreams that could not be understood. The butler then remembers how Joseph interpreted his dreams, and that what he had said came to pass, so Joseph is called before Pharaoh in the hope that Joseph can explain the king's dreams. God gives Joseph the understanding, and because of his wisdom, Pharaoh makes Joseph the second in command of the whole country of Egypt.

As the dreams foretold, there were seven years of plenty when crops were stored for the seven years of famine that would follow. The drought not only hits Egypt but also the land of Canaan where Joseph's family lives. Jacob sends his sons (except for Benjamin the youngest) to Egypt to buy food. Joseph is now about 40 years old, and it has been about 23 years since last seeing his brothers. When they come to buy grain, Joseph recognizes them, yet he doesn't reveal himself to them; instead, he accuses them of being spies.

We don't know his mindset, but seeing them again must certainly have brought up many memories of what he had gone through. One thing is for sure: Joseph did not deal with them out of a spirit of unforgiveness or vengeance. He had the power that he could have had them killed if he had wanted to, but that was not his motive. Joseph, however, did put them in a

place where they had to face their past, and he tested their hearts to see if their attitudes had changed.

Though he spoke roughly to his brothers, and he wasn't afraid to inconvenience them, he did deal with them out of a spirit of love and compassion by giving them the money back that was paid in buying their provisions. Nevertheless, he wanted to make sure that his brothers would have a reason to come back to him, so he accused them of being spies and had Simeon bound in front of them, who was to be kept in prison until his brethren returned. After they got back to Canaan, the brothers told their father Jacob what happened, and that the Governor of the land (Joseph) required that they bring Benjamin back to prove that they were not spies. Being protective of his son, Jacob adamantly refused until they ran out of food again and he had no choice but to send Benjamin with them to get more provisions.

This time, when Joseph saw Benjamin, he had his brothers taken to his own house. Since they had no idea what was going to happen to them, they were very afraid, but the steward of the house comforted them and treated them well. When Joseph arrived, he asked his brothers about their father, and being overcome by emotion, Joseph went into another room and wept. After pulling himself together again, the servants had them sit down in order of their age which was surprising to them. As a test of the older brothers' hearts, when food was served, Benjamin was given five times as much as the rest, which didn't seem to create an issue. The generous way they were treated made Joseph's brothers at ease. They had a good time, but surely Joseph was observing how they handled all of this.

After dinner, Joseph laid a trap for them. He had the steward load their animals down with food and put their money back into their sack as well, but he also had the steward put Joseph's silver cup in Benjamin's sack without any of them knowing this. Shortly after his brothers had left, Joseph sent his steward after them accusing them of stealing. The cup was of course found in Benjamin's sack, and they all returned to face Joseph.

Judah became the spokesman since he was the one who had guaranteed his father that Benjamin would indeed be brought home again. Judah willingly offered all of them to become servants to Joseph, but Joseph ruled that only Benjamin (the one who had supposedly taken the silver cup) would be a

servant and that the rest could go home. He said this to test them to see if they had really changed. Judah explained that if they went back without Benjamin, their father's heart would be broken and that Jacob would die. Judah also told Joseph that he had personally pledged to bring Benjamin back, offering to take Benjamin's place.

In the emotion of the moment, Joseph couldn't take it anymore and revealed who he was to his brothers. His brothers didn't know what to say, but Joseph understood that it was part of a grand plan by God to preserve their family through the famine. They had a wonderful reunion, and their relationships were restored again. Joseph sent his brothers back with wagon loads of provisions, as well as instructions to bring the whole family back to Egypt because there was yet to be five more years of famine. Jacob lived in Egypt for about another 20 years before he died. After Jacob died, his brothers became concerned that Joseph had only been kind to them for their father's sake, but Joseph reassured them that even though they meant him harm, God's hand was in it working everything for good.

The whole point here is that until the mindset that Joseph's brothers had previously displayed was corrected, forgiveness was not granted. After Joseph had tested them and found that their attitudes had changed, there then could be reconciliation and restoration of their relationship. When their relationship was restored, we can be assured that forgiveness had undoubtedly taken place.

King David

Another revered and highly respected Old Testament character was the man who became known as King David. God himself gave him the label as “the man after God's own heart." How did he handle offenses?

Looking at his relationship with King Saul (before he became king himself), a person could come to the conclusion that David was very forgiving. However, it seems that his tenderness toward Saul was very much due to his respect for the anointing of God upon Saul, the leader that God had chosen. To a secondary degree, it was probably because of his friendship with Saul's son Jonathan.

Another situation that could be looked upon as showing David’s forgiving attitude was the relationship with his son Absalom. Absalom stirred up

rebellion in the kingdom and would have killed David if he had gained the opportunity, but Absalom ended up being the one who lost his life. David lamented over Absalom's death, but I feel it was more the father/son relationship that stirred him rather than merciful forgiveness.

Looking at some of David's other relationships, however, things do not seem to fare as well. In I Samuel 25, there is the story of Nabal. He was a sheep farmer that David and his band of men treated very kindly. David sent a party of men to Nabal asking for some compensation for how David had protected Nabal's flock from other raiders. Nabal mistreated the men and refused to give them anything. When David heard it, he didn't just turn aside and forget about it. He got his men together with the intention of attacking and killing everyone in Nabal's household because of the way Nabal had despised them. If not for Abigail, Nabal's wife, certainly there would have been a great slaughter. In this situation, God took care of the matter by killing Nabal himself.

In II Samuel 20, after the revolt of Absalom, another man Sheba the son of Bichri tried to start another rebellion. This time David did not take it as well, immediately calling for the death of Sheba.

In I Kings 2:5-9, David is giving his last instructions to his son Solomon. He explicitly mentions Joab (who was the chief of David's army), recounting the bad things that Joab had done, and expressed that he wanted his son Solomon to carry out judgments against Joab. At the same time, he also mentions Shimei who had cursed him when he was fleeing from Absalom, again desiring Shimei to be held accountable for his actions against David.

There are other incidents that we could look at as well, but this is sufficient to show that there were times that David did not exercise grace, mercy or forgiveness either. Some could say, "That was the Old Testament" and "That was under the law," which is true, but there are ample passages in the New Testament that indicate forgiveness was not always granted until the personal situation was worked out.

New Testament

In the New Testament, there were some people that Paul did not forgive either—at least not immediately. The first situation is John Mark, who had

gone with them during their first missionary journey, but for whatever reason John Mark left them somewhere along the way and went home. This evidently did not sit well with Paul who, when John Mark wished to go with them on another evangelistic trip, Paul refused to allow him to do so. The disagreement regarding John Mark was so significant that the ministry team of Paul and Barnabas was separated, each of them going their own ways:

Acts 15:36-40 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. 37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. 38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. 39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; 40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

We don't know how long this time of disagreement lasted, but we do know that at some point they worked things out, and there was reconciliation. In Paul's last letter to Timothy he makes this remark:

2 Timothy 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

At this later time in Paul’s life, he commends John Mark for his work in the ministry. The point is, there definitely was a time that Paul would not let what John Mark had done to just pass, and that Paul did not forgive him until John Mark had shown that he had changed. It was then that they were able to reconcile. Just a few verses later in the book of 2 Timothy, Paul mentions another man who had not been forgiven either:

2 Timothy 4:14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:

There was a good reason why Alexander had not been forgiven. He had resisted the work of God, the will of God, and the word of God. But that

was not all; evidently Alexander had hurt Paul personally for Paul specifically says he *"did me much evil."* Remember this was Paul's last letter that he had written before he was to be martyred. He seemed to know that his time on earth was short, yet he kept Alexander accountable for his actions, and Paul was not afraid of meeting the Lord with someone in his life that he had not forgiven. On the other hand, he was not bitter against Alexander either. He was not wanting to exercise his own vengeance; instead, he left the final judgment in the Lord's hands.

Here is another New Testament example, Paul is writing to the church in Philippi:

Philippians 4:2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

I have read that Bible scholars say there was an ongoing rift between these two women Euodias and Syntyche. Paul is urging them to work things out and get along. He doesn't tell them that they ought to just "forgive and forget" and move on. Paul is wanting them to reconcile so that the work of the Lord would not be hindered.

Other instances could be brought up as well, but the few that I have highlighted show that just saying that you have forgiven someone is not the "end all" desire in the mind of God. God wants us to rebuild and restore relationships with one another and live together in harmony in the Church of God.

Psalms 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Chapter 5

The Spirit of Unforgiveness

This chapter deals with what I feel is the essence of what many traditional forgiveness teachings actually present. Much of their focus is overcoming the pain and hurt and being willing to offer forgiveness to those who have injured you. When I hear or read other people's writings on forgiveness and the way that they present it, I see it as they are talking about the need to overcome what I call the "spirit of unforgiveness," or you may consider it an "attitude of unforgiveness." This is bringing ourselves to a place in overcoming our carnal nature, our emotions, the hurt and even our mindset in being able to offer to the offender, whoever it is and no matter what it is that they have done, the opportunity for forgiveness. There definitely can be a difference between having someone in your life that has not been forgiven and being a person that has an unforgiving spirit. As discussed previously, that is the essence of the relationship between Almighty God and the bulk of humanity. God never has an unforgiving spirit:

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

He took on the form of flesh and died a death on the cross that we deserved rather than Him. Not only that, God gives us His grace, reaching into our lives that we might one day turn to Him, repent and have our sins forgiven so that we would have the opportunity for eternal life as well. There is nothing that anybody has ever done that is so evil that God cannot and would not forgive, yet forgiveness does not come automatically.

Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent:

As presented earlier, repentance is one of the necessary ingredients that we need to have if we want God to forgive us. If we come to the Lord in a manner that is acceptable to Him, we can certainly have the assurance that our sins have been taken care of. This could be an application of the statement that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. He loves mankind, but unless people repent, He will not forgive them. Actually, it is also possible

(though not the will of God) even for saints to be in a place where they have not been forgiven:

I John 1:9-10 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

By rightly dividing and correctly understanding the Word of God, we can see that this is a promise given to saints in the Church, not to sinners that do not know God. The book of First John was a general Epistle, meaning it was written to people who were already saved. This passage is a promise of forgiveness for those of us who know the Lord, and in order for us to be able to receive that forgiveness, we must first confess our sins (repent again and acknowledge that we have done wrong). If we do so, then God is willing to forgive us, His saints.

Using the inverse, if we do not confess our failures (which we have all have done wrong since we started walking with the Lord), it rightly could be said that we have sins that have not been forgiven either, even though we have previously obeyed the Gospel. Repentance is not only for those in the world, but it is also for God's saints in His Church as well. Since it is a principle that repentance is a necessary part of forgiveness, it could be said that the only sins God will not forgive are those that have not been repented of.

My definition of having an unforgiving spirit (or attitude) is this: "Refusing to grant someone forgiveness under any circumstances." A statement like "I will never forgive them" shows an unforgiving attitude. People with unforgiving spirits usually carry a grudge and desire vengeance and retribution against the other. They want to bring about their own justice by taking the matter into their own hands. According to the *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, a grudge is a "strong feeling of anger and dislike for a person whom you feel has mistreated you, especially one that lasts for a long time." When you have a grudge, you want to get even, hoping to exact vengeance against the other, yet the Bible tells us:

Romans 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will

repay, saith the Lord.

There is NEVER ANY reason for anyone to have an unforgiving attitude or spirit toward anyone else where he or she refuses to be willing to offer forgiveness. Neither is it EVER appropriate for us to hold grudges, desire vengeance or seek malice against another person. Allowing these things in your life will eat you up and destroy you. It will cause bitterness, which is a downward path toward your own destruction. It is understandable in the heat of the disagreement or offense that a person needs to take some time to deal with their own emotions of anger and resentment because of the things they have suffered. But the Bible does give us the warning *"be ye angry and sin not"* (Ephesians 4:26), so even though emotions are high, we do need to be careful to temper our actions in a way that we do not lose our integrity.

It is not our place to try to "pay someone back" or want to get even. God has reserved that for Himself, and if we try to do that, we are putting ourselves in God's place. An unforgiving spirit or attitude is an outright refusal to forgive someone under any circumstances. I believe that overcoming this attitude is what Jesus was talking about when He instructed us about forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer, as well as many other times that he taught on forgiveness:

Matthew 6:14-15 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Mark 11:25-26 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Matthew:37-38 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

In Matthew 18, Jesus takes up the topic of forgiveness in response to Peter's question:

Matthew 18:21-22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? 22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

According to this passage, we must be willing to forgive up to 490 times in one day. Actually, the intent is that we must be willing to forgive as many times as is necessary. In the Gospel of Luke Chapter 17, Jesus addresses this same subject similarly, but this time He gives us some additional information. Remember how I mentioned earlier that the Bible does not try to fully cover a topic every time that it is brought up? We need to compare Scripture with Scripture and rightly divide the word of God to understand it the way that the Lord intended. Notice what Jesus says in this passage:

Luke 17:3-4 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

Here Jesus tells us that the unlimited times that we need to offer forgiveness for an offense is contingent upon their repentance. The most challenging part of the verse is that if he offends us seven times in a day (or 490 times as stated in Matthew 18), and he comes to us in sincere repentance, we still need to offer him forgiveness. Most religious teachers will say that while Jesus was on the cross, he forgave those who crucified him without them being repentant, but is that really the case?

Luke 23:33-34 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. 34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

What actually happened here is that as a man, Jesus prayed for them, but Jesus did not say that they were forgiven. I would like to believe that in

time, some may have found forgiveness, but others probably did not. It would all depend on whether they were willing to obey the Gospel as Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. Yet Jesus' prayer demonstrated that He loved them and that He did not have an unforgiving attitude no matter how badly they had treated Him. This exemplifies His teachings that we are to love our enemies and pray for them that despitefully use us. A similar situation took place at the stoning of Stephen:

Acts 7:59-60 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

This certainly displayed Stephen's Christian character and love toward his persecutors by praying for them, but again whether they were forgiven or not would depend on if they turned to the Lord and obeyed the Gospel the way that Saul (later known as Paul) did.

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. 6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. 7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. 9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. 10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; 11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

In this passage, Paul is following up on his correction to the Church in Corinth (I Corinthians 5:1) where they had allowed a man to be a part of the assembly that was having sexual relations with his father's wife. After being confronted, evidently the man repented and changed his ways. In verse ten Paul says that if they forgave it, he did so also as a representative of Christ. This was not an offense that was committed against Paul personally; it was

an ungodly thing that had been allowed in the Church of God, and as an apostle, he had the responsibility to address it. The forgiveness Paul offered was based on the repentance that was reported to him. He wanted the Church to know that forgiveness was granted by the Lord and that they needed to forgive the man as well, welcoming him back into the assembly, lest Satan use this as a means of causing someone to fall away.

I feel that trying to forgive someone who is unrepentant is like drawing pictures on the water—it is impossible. Even though the motions (actions) are made outwardly, the inward man (of the one who committed the offence) is not changed, and any supposed benefits are quickly lost because the offender may continue to repeat the wrongs (whatever they are) over, and over and over again. In fact, excusing bad behavior may be doing the offender a disservice. If they sense that everything is okay without them having to change their ways, it may cause them to feel that they don't need to repent to the Lord either. Is it possible to forgive unilaterally (solely on our part) without any contact whatsoever with the one who caused the offense? It doesn't seem to me that it would be achievable. If it were, God would do it for the Scripture says:

"God is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance."

He predicates repentance as a necessity before forgiveness can happen. If God doesn't forgive unilaterally, it seems to me that it probably is not even possible, for there is no one that is as forgiving as God is. If God required us to forgive unilaterally, how could He send people to hell without violating His own principle? People often use the passages such as Matthew 6:15 and Mark 11:26 to prove that it is imperative that we forgive people unilaterally, and if we don't, God will not forgive us either:

Mark 11:26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

If that is the case, that we have to fully forgive someone (even though they have not repented) before we can be forgiven, how long does a person have to forgive them? I know people that had been at odds for years until they finally got to the place where they supposedly forgave the other person. What about Paul's disagreement with Barnabas and John Mark? Was his

salvation in jeopardy during the time of their dispute? What about his comments regarding Alexander the coppersmith? There is no record of Paul offering any manner of forgiveness toward Alexander before he was martyred.

How about this unusual but real situation? A person is shot by another with a gun. It is a mortal wound. They do not die instantly; however, they only have a few minutes to live. If they hope to be forgiven, do they need to forgive the one that shot them? Based on the way most people teach using the passages in Matthew and Mark, it is imperative that they do. God is the judge, and there are other things that God uses as criteria as well, but how does this line up with traditional teachings on forgiveness?

I know of a situation of two men that were working together and for this illustration, let’s call them Stan and Rick. One day Stan verbally "blew up" at Rick, accusing Rick’s wife of being unforgiving because it seemingly took her a few moments to affirm her forgiveness toward another person. Rick tried to offer explanations as to why Stan had the wrong impression and why his wife hesitated, but Stan would not accept any of it. Stan then brought up several instances that had occurred over a number of years previously where there had been disagreements or misunderstandings between the two of them. From Stan’s perspective, all of these misunderstandings had built upon each other and culminated with their present dispute.

Up to this point, Rick had felt that all of the prior difficulties had been straightened out and taken care of, but evidently, Stan still hadn't fully forgiven them. It seems that Stan was quite hypocritical in that he demanded a forgiveness affirmation within a few seconds from Rick’s wife, but he personally had held unforgiving feelings for years.

In closing out this chapter, I want to say again that it is always, 100% wrong to refuse to be willing to offer forgiveness to anyone, no matter what they have done to us. To have that mindset will cause a person to develop bitterness and hatred toward the other party. It will eat them up inside and ultimately will bring the judgment of God upon them because of their unwillingness to offer grace to their fellow man.

I have often been misunderstood by people saying that I am promoting unforgiveness, but that is not the case. I just realize that forgiveness is more

involved than merely expressing the words "I forgive them." It requires repentance by those who have done wrong (many times this involves both individuals in a disagreement). Ideally, it results in reconciliation and restoration of the relationship, just as is the case in our relationship with God. What I am saying is that the person who has been offended should not have a desire to withhold forgiveness, but until the conditions for forgiveness can be met, forgiveness isn't going to happen because I feel, theologically, it can't happen. In the meantime, you desire to reach out to the offender in love, (just as God in His grace reaches out to us) hoping and praying that they would realize their error and eventually make things right.

On the other hand, we are not responsible for other people's actions, attitudes or intentions. We cannot force anyone to repent or do what is right. Ultimately it is something that is between the other person and the Lord. If they do repent unto the Lord, the fruit of that repentance should lead them back to the one that they had wronged to correct their error as well.

Chapter 6

Presumption, Deception, Pride, Jealousy, and Fear

I am not a psychologist, but I wanted to devote a chapter discussing some of the main things that I feel cause problems in interpersonal relationships. They seem to either come out of insecurities that we have or a lack of character development into the image of Christ. The Lord allows us to go through trials and difficulties for many reasons, but high on His list of priorities is that He wants us to develop our character, of which we are all quite deficient. Interpersonal relationship difficulties shine a spotlight on what kind of person we truly are. I have said before that you don't fully know what a person is like until you cross paths with them. It is during those times of stress that a person's true colors shine through—either for good or, quite often, to display our weaknesses.

Presumption

Psalms 19:13-14 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

I have always liked Psalm 19:14, but until now hadn’t recognized the connection between “the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart" of verse 14, and verse 13 that talks about "presumptuous sins." When we have wrong presumptions regarding a situation, it very easily affects the "words of our mouth and the meditation of our hearts." In and of themselves, presumptions are not bad, for presumptions are a necessary and integral part of everyday life. They give us a baseline on which to operate and plan for the future. We "presume" that we are going to be able to take our next breath, we "presume" that we are going to wake up tomorrow

morning, and the next morning and the following day. Certainly, there are no assurances, but you do have to make plans—day by day, week by week, and on into the later years of life. Nevertheless, we can't take the time that we have for granted either:

James 4:13-15 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

Presumptions are necessarily a part of life that we need to manage. The problem we run into is when we make presumptions about other people—specifically their actions and their motives—without having sufficient information to make a proper judgment. Some people are more outgoing and talkative than others. Those that are more reserved can be more difficult to "read" than those that are talkative. Because of the lack of "signals" from the quiet individual, people make assumptions based on what they see on the outside. Those assumptions may not be in line with how the quiet person feels or is motivated; however, that is the impression that comes across. Consequently, if you don't know where people are coming from, it's hard to understand what their actions mean, thus a lack of communication can also lead to presumption. You don't know what they are thinking, or why they do what they do, therefore in your mind you make a determination of their motives and intents. Let's look at a Bible story that illustrates this:

II Samuel 10:1-7 And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. 2 Then said David, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father shewed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father. And David's

servants came into the land of the children of Ammon. 3 And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honor thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it? 4 Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away. When they told it unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return. 6 And when the children of Ammon saw that they stank before David, the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Bethrehob, and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand footmen, and of king Maacah a thousand men, and of Ishtob twelve thousand men.

This is a sad and unfortunate story. David only meant well toward Hanun, but Hanun saw it as a trick, something sneaky, and as a way for David to attack him. The result was that this mindset by Hanun started a war costing the lives of thousands of men who died needlessly—all because of an incorrect presumption.

Unfortunately, these kinds of things happen regarding relationships all too often. Things are not always how they seem to be, and the way that we look at circumstances has a tremendous influence on how we think. Thus, it can make a difference in how we handle situations, and as a result, how things end up. As I said, we can't entirely get away from our perceptions, and the way that we "see" things is not necessarily wrong, but the conclusions we come to can affect our future. If you have a certain feeling about something based on past experiences, it can change your whole outlook on things.

They say that if a cat jumps on a hot stove, it won’t jump on a hot stove again, but it will not jump on a cold stove either.

We should try to do what we can to be objective and look at the facts of a situation. We need to be willing to accept new information that can shed light on what the truth really is. The sin that is so easy for us to fall into is that we determine something is a specific way, and we don't want to see it differently. This brings me back to what I wrote regarding deception; we need to be extra careful that we are not deceiving ourselves regarding our presumptions. How many times in our lives have we positively known that the way we see things just has to be right, only to find out later that what we had believed to be true…was not?

In these Last Days, we are dealing with spirits and ungodly forces that are out to attack, and deceive, and destroy every one of us spiritually. Similar to the lies that Lucifer told the fallen angels, these demonic spirits will feed us lies that are very convincing, and unless we know the mind of God, we will be tricked into accepting something that is just not true. We need to be careful about how we let our perceptions affect our judgments.

Because we are made in the image of God, He has given us the ability, the power and the responsibility to draw our own conclusions about things. The older I get, the more I realize how little I truly know. When it comes to passing judgments on people and situations, we need to be very cautious, be open to other possibilities, and try to consider what is going on from another point of view. How we see things is very important. Wrong presumptions have started an untold number of wars through the ages. Not just between nations, but between individuals as well. If only we could somehow see things through God's eyes and recognize the way things actually are, it would help us in our relationships with others.

We need to be careful how we look at people, how we look at situations, how we react and even the way that we see ourselves. At times we all come across people that seem irritable and grumpy. We often take them at face

value as an unhappy, miserable person, but we don’t know what they are facing in their lives. Maybe they are going through a divorce? Perhaps they got a bad report from their doctor? What if they just got let go from their job? Maybe their son or daughter is having trouble with drugs, or alcohol, or is in jail? We just don't know what people are dealing with, so we need to be careful how we look at them.

It is easy for us to draw conclusions for ourselves, but it is not for us to judge another person's motives of why they do what they do. We don't know their heart—only they and God do. That doesn't excuse people to treat us like dirt, especially if they claim to be a Christian, because people are still responsible for their actions. There are also times that we do need to protect ourselves, but neither are we their judge. The Bible does say we are to return good for evil. Do we see things the way God sees them? Or do we look at them with carnal eyes of flesh? Do we see people as having an eternal soul that can be lost? Even if we are dealing with a Christian brother or sister who seems to not be treating us right? I know of several preachers and pastors who have backslid because of how others mistreated them in the Church.

We can’t change other people, what they do or how they treat us. But we do need to watch out for the perspective that we have, how we look at them, and how we handle the situation. We should always strive to have a Christian response—the way that Jesus would have us to treat them. Do we write them off as being so lost that there is no hope? Can we understand that God's grace can work in them as well as it does in us? Will we offer them grace as well? If it were not for God's grace to us, we would all be lost. Our perspective. It can be a blessing, or it can be a curse, to us and to those around us.

Deception

Proverbs 21:2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

I know that I started this book out talking about deception, but I wanted to touch on it again. In the first chapter, it was in more of a general sense, wanting us to open our thought processes up to be able to receive what the Scriptures had to tell us. Here, I want to bring it more down to a personal level.

One of the reasons the world we are living in is so full of deception is because it is in the clutches of Lucifer the great deceiver—the father of lies. He makes his lies sound so right, they are so believable that people accept them as truth. Some devote their entire lives to propagate the lies that they believe to be true. It is not a matter of sincerity. Countless people are very devoted to their beliefs, but the sad fact is that they are sincerely wrong.

This concerns each one of us in that no matter how sincere we may be, it is not a guarantee that we have the truth. These untruths can influence numerous areas in our lives and can affect our relationships with others. I lived twenty-five years of my life not understanding the Gospel, thinking that I was saved and not realizing that I needed more. Even since that time, there have been areas in my life that I have later found that I had been deceived about and, at times, paid for it dearly. Thankfully God's grace and mercy have been with me to help me see the error of my ways, come to repentance and rearrange my priorities. That is how easy it is to deceive ourselves.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? 10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

This battle against deception is very much tied in with the other areas discussed in this chapter: presumption, pride, jealousy, and fear. All these other things can become a "feedback loop" that reinforces the incorrect thoughts that we put into our minds. This deception will often lead us to do things contrary to the principles of the Word of God. In fact, that may be

one of the great warning signs that we are being deceived, if we are honest enough with ourselves to see it. This reinforces the importance of studying and obeying the Scriptures, having a sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit of God, and, in prayer, asking Him to help us to walk in truth.

Psalms 37:23-24 The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.

Pride, Jealousy, and Fear

I am going to lump these three together, for in some ways they are quite connected. The first one is pride, a mindset where someone either thinks that they are better than how they are being treated, or they don't want others to look at them in a bad light.

Proverbs 13:10 Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.

Proverbs 28:25 He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.

According to these passages, pride is the number one thing that causes problems between people. Pride is one of those things that we will probably battle as long as we live, but it more easily affects those that are younger (I know that has been my experience). The older I get, the more that I realize that I am not self-sufficient and that I need the Lord's wisdom and guidance. Pride can cause us to be unwilling to admit we are wrong, especially to one another. Our ego resists our need to repent of our sins and make things right again with our Christian brother or sister. It is sincerely humbling when we find ourselves in a place needing to do that. Unfortunately, many people cannot bring themselves to that place. They can repent before God all right but find it difficult to make things right with those that they have offended.

There is also jealousy. In the Scriptures, there are both good and bad types of jealousy. It talks about God being a jealous God—that is in the sense that

He will not allow our allegiance to be divided between Himself and other priorities that we have. He must be first and foremost in our lives, even above our family and friends. In another sense, Paul told the church in II Corinthians that he was jealous over them with a godly jealousy. Paul's earnest desire was that they would serve the Lord with all of their heart, but that is not the sense of jealousy that I am referring to either.

The wrong, sinful type of jealousy is a worldly, selfish emotion. This is where people see something that others have, and they want it, or they feel that they deserve it for some reason. Jealousy is a cruel emotion (Song of Solomon 8:6) that is a cousin to covetousness. It is an emotion that, once it gets a hold of a person, will cause them to do all kinds of things that they shouldn't, and normally wouldn't. Any hint of jealousy will automatically cause problems between individuals because the nature of jealousy causes a person to be very self-centered and primarily concerned about their own needs. The focus of people's resentment can be seen in many areas, not just regarding money. Fame, popularity, talents, influence, position—you fill in the blank. It all really comes out of a spirit of selfishness, control, and intimidation.

2 Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

1 Timothy 6:6-8 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

Closely connected to jealousy is insecurity and consequently fear. If a person is jealous, they are also nervous and protective. People can feel vulnerable, and sometimes they attack others because they feel threatened

for whatever reason. To them, it is a matter of self-preservation and unfortunately others receive the ramifications of it.

These are all emotions or attitudes that we ought to be on guard against, both in ourselves and in those that we may be having a disagreement with. When we sense them in ourselves, we ought to step back a bit and see how our actions and our attitudes are contrary to the principles of the love of Christ. If we see them in those that have hurt us, it can give us insight into how to pray for them, and provide us with wisdom and caution in how to handle the situation.

Chapter 7

How a Christian Should Handle Offenses

I want to remind us again that as Christians, the proper motivation for everything is that we should operate out of an attitude and spirit of love for one another. That has been the intent and desire of this entire book. It is much easier said than done, but that should be our goal.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

The Greek word for charity here is the word for “agape” love, the highest form of love. This “agape” love seeks to cover over faults and weaknesses in others. Those that are closest to us are those that we know the most, and the ones that know the most about us. We see each other’s flaws and learn to put up with all kinds of things that could otherwise easily irritate us just because we love them. On the other hand, when we discover that there are certain things that we do that bother them, we try our best to keep from doing them, again because of our love for them.

In this light as Christians, what are we to do when someone does wrong to us (or at least we think that they do)? What is the proper response? There is a world of difference (at least there should be) in how a Christian reacts to disagreements and offenses and how people in the world handle them. The unconverted do their best to "win the argument," "come out on top," or "get even." Every one of us has a natural defense mechanism that kicks in to protect ourselves, because we don't want to get hurt. When someone seems to be attacking or challenging us for whatever reason, it is easy for our human emotions to take over. Even Christians can be quick to say or do hurtful things when they feel backed into a corner, feel they have few options or are feeling hurt themselves. But how should someone who desires to model the love of Christ handle difficult things like this?

In I Corinthians 6, Paul rebukes the people in Corinth for taking their brethren to a secular court of law for solving their grievances with one another. A court of law should not be the first course that a Christian takes without first following the biblical process for resolution of the conflict. It should be noted that exceptions can and should be made if there is the threat of bodily harm or there is criminal behavior. If it is some kind of an abusive

situation, you need to take necessary steps to protect yourself or anyone else who is vulnerable. Get help from a friend, relative, the police, pastor or someone else that you can trust. You need to do whatever you need to do to be safe.

This book is not intended to cover the appropriate actions in those kinds of situations. I am concerned more with the aftermath: How do you deal with the fallout emotionally and spiritually with someone who has hurt or offended you? How do we handle them in a way that is pleasing to the Lord? This is good advice for everyone, but for the non-Christian, it can be especially difficult. We need the help and strength and grace and love of God to respond in a way that the Lord would desire. How we face these types of situations reveals the integrity and character of the person within—both ourselves and the one that we are having a disagreement with.

The first thing we need to do is get a handle on our emotions. It is only natural that our first reaction would tend to be carnal and fleshly. We instinctively want to protect ourselves. This can be difficult, but if possible, it is good to step back from the conflict and examine things in mind of what is the big picture. I have learned (after mishandling many things) not to take most of these attacks personally. I try to look at things from the perspective of the other person and possibly come up with ways to work through the differences, looking to find options where, if possible, a reasonable solution can be worked out for both.

Unfortunately, it doesn’t always work that way. After we get through the initial shock and immediate reaction that arises from a conflict, we need to overcome the spirit of unforgiveness, which is not an easy thing to do. Depending on the depth of the offense, this can take some time, but if we lean on the Lord, He will help us through this. Once we have overcome the spirit of unforgiveness, we can then move on to honestly deal with this in a Christ-like attitude.

Galatians 5:19-25 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you

in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

This passage contrasts the lifestyle of those who live in "the world" and those who desire to live a life devoted to the Lord. The works of the flesh are the natural tendencies of the carnal man. Too often when we are under pressure, and if we are not careful, we can end up with the characteristics of verses 19-21. The Lord wants us, even when we face a conflict with someone, to respond with the attributes consistent with the Fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Despite all the churning around of emotions on the inside, it should be our goal to respond with these virtues.

It is painfully evident that we are not going to see eye to eye with everyone. Sometimes we have to agree to disagree, and it is not wrong to be different. God has made each one of us unique, but even in the midst of our differences, we need to be Christians and treat others properly and with respect. I have often thought when you are done with dealing with the issue at hand, would you be comfortable inviting the other person to church? Or in the process, did you lose your testimony?

Going back to verse 24, it says:

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

In a figurative sense, this spiritual crucifixion is precisely what we need when we find ourselves at odds with someone else. This crucifixion is not easy, nor is it pretty. When we crucify the flesh, we need to come to grips with the feelings that flow through us because of the offense—the anger, strife, even malice and vengeance. As I said, our initial reaction is for self-preservation and protecting ourselves. When we begin to see the one who is causing the problems as someone who is not only needing our own forgiveness but the Lord's mercy as well, we see the other person's spiritual

condition and their need for restoration. This is taking on and seeing their true state through the love of Christ.

When we get into a conflict or misunderstanding, it can escalate very quickly, emotions get intense, and we sometimes react in ways that we shouldn't. Very often both sides end up being wrong. Usually, there is a certain amount of blame that we all need to accept. Even though we try to paint it otherwise, we are generally not the "totally innocent one" that we think we are. It is well to remember the words of wisdom from Proverbs 15:1:

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Responding with a humble spirit and a desire of Christian love can go a long way in working things out. Jesus also gives us a process to air our grievances if someone has offended us. I have referenced this before, but want to get into this with more detail:

Matthew 18:15-18 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. 18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

This is relatively straightforward and simple but is something that is rarely carried through. This is not meant to be a method where you try to use it to win an argument or prove your point. Instead, it is intended to be a means where two parties who have a disagreement can come to a place where they can work out their differences, do what is right, and reconcile again as brothers (or sisters) in the Lord. I do find it interesting that these teachings are in the Gospels, given to us directly from Jesus himself. He didn’t wait to have the apostles teach on it in the Epistles after the Church was formed as

He did with many other subjects. He even uses the word “church” (KJV) before the Church was even born yet. I think it shows how important this is to the Lord, that we do what we can to work things out and get along with our brother or sister.

This is the process that Jesus outlined:

Step 1. You go to them privately, and explain your position and why you are upset, doing so with a spirit and desire of working things out and making amends. Jesus said, *"if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."* If this is successful, the issue is taken care of, and your relationship can be restored.

Step 2. If the first time doesn’t go so well, go back to them a second time. This time take along one or two others, preferably those who are generally well respected. They may even be people that are close to the situation and understand what happened, doing this again with humbleness and a desire of wanting to work things out.

Step 3. If they still aren't reasonable, Jesus said to tell it unto the Church. This is somewhat vague as to what is meant by the Church, but I would certainly think that it would not mean telling everybody in the congregation (that could be tale-bearing) but instead go to the church leadership—the elders of the assembly. The leaders would then exercise discretion in bringing a judgment as to how to resolve the situation that should be just and fair to both parties.

Step 4. This is a very major and serious thing. If the one who is found to be in the wrong refuses to abide by the judgment of the Church, then Scripture tells us that he should be put out (what is often called excommunication or disfellowshipping) and no longer considered a brother or sister, but instead looked at as a sinner who needs repentance. If this is done correctly, this judgment by the Church seems to have legal weight with the Lord for it says:

18 Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

This makes it not just a grievance between two different people, but it becomes an offense that carries over to their spiritual condition with eternal

consequences. If the one who did the wrong does not make it right, it says to treat him as a non-Christian, *"a heathen man and a publican."* That's pretty strong, and that's coming from Jesus Himself, the one who came to *"seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)* I think it reflects how important it is that we get things right about this.

For the one who has been wronged, it absolutely requires the love of God to be able to work things through to bring the offender to repentance. We were the ones who were hurt, we were the ones that were attacked, we suffered because of what they did, yet, it's not our place to be vindictive against them. In our hearts, we should want to lend them a hand of mercy and compassion to see them restored into the family of God. Don't have a self-righteous attitude like I heard one person say: "When they come to me crawling on their knees." That is not a Christian attitude at all. Instead, we need a spirit of love—the love of God. This is not wishy-washy love but true love in action.

I was at odds with another person, and I asked if we could meet to talk things over, which he agreed to. When we did get together, almost right away in a stern voice, he said, "You know this is unbiblical." I looked at him puzzled, and asked, "Why"? He said according to Matthew 18, we are supposed to have someone else here, too. I said, "I don't want this to be legalistic I just want to work things out." He did settle down, and we did talk some things over, but we never did get down to the real issue. I have tried over and over again to get down to the real problem with him since then, but he has evidently gotten to the point where he just ignores me.

Matthew 18 is meant to be a process whereby disagreements can be worked out, not a rigid method where you must abide by the "letter of the law." For the person who suffered the wrong, the degree that you pursue this depends upon the seriousness of the offense. Many conflicts only need to go to the first step. The issue(s) may or may not have been resolved; however, the concern has been brought to the attention of the other person, and the "ball" is left in their "court." If they are a person of integrity, they will make an attempt at correcting the problem. If they are not, they may make excuses or shift the blame onto someone else.

From our own personal standpoint, if the situation has not been resolved and it is not something of major significance, it may be better just to drop it. This does not mean that they are forgiven, or that the relationship between you is restored; it is just a recognition that the other person is not ready to do what they ought to do. Pray for them and be open to reconciliation in the future, but it may not be beneficial to push the matter if they are not ready. At least you did your Christian best to bring it to their attention and tried to work things out.

I have heard people claim, “I’ve tried Matthew 18, it just doesn’t work.” My feeling is that the reason it doesn't work is that there hasn't been the "crucifixion of the flesh" that I was talking about earlier. People may have gotten together like they are in a boxing match, trying to win an argument, rather than having a desire and spirit of reconciliation. Just because mankind fails in carrying out the plan that God has for us doesn’t mean that God’s plan is wrong—it just means we aren’t doing it correctly.

Thinking this through, I have wondered: What does God do when people sin by committing all kinds of offenses against Him? And how can we apply that in our dealings with those who have hurt us?

1. God loves them no matter what. In our situation, we don't need to, nor is it alright to excuse their actions, but we ought to love their soul. They need restoration to God as well as reconciliation with us.
2. Keep the door open and try to work things out. Even though with God all things are possible, God still has established limitations for Himself in His dealings with mankind. When He came to this earth in human flesh, He limited himself and experienced life as a human being even though He was still God in the Spirit. God does everything within His principles to get us to repent, but He will not force us to. He has given us a free will to choose and do as we please. Likewise, the person on the other end of our disagreement has the freedom to do however they wish as well, and it just may not be a godly reaction, even though they profess to be Christians
3. If we cannot work it out, continue to pray that God would convict them and help them to see their errors. Leave the door open for

> reconciliation and restoration. If an opportunity arises, again do what you can to see this resolved without compromising the principles of righteousness. It can take time, even years, before things get worked out, and sometimes, despite a person’s best efforts, they never do. If we have done the best that we feel we can, we can be assured that the Lord is pleased with our efforts. Others may not understand or recognize the things you have done, but they are not the judge.

Have I been perfect in the way that I have dealt with those who have wronged me? No, but I have tried to do what I can to work things out. I have often taken the initiative to apologize. There are times that I probably have been too zealous in trying to work things out when the other person was not ready for it. My desire is that if I have done wrong to contribute to any situation, I would be willing to make it right.

An unknown writer said, "Apologies are out of order if we have neither the desire nor the intention to change." What I am talking about here restores the responsibility of an offense to where it belongs: the one who did the injustice. I feel that the process of forgiveness is more important for the one being forgiven than the one doing the forgiving, for the one in the wrong is usually transgressing the laws of God as well, which if not repented of may involve eternal consequences.

By following this process of reconciliation, both parties should have a release in their spirit knowing that the issue in question has been resolved, and their relationship has been restored. If the offender refuses to make things right, it's not the victim's fault, for they have tried to do their best to straighten things out. Their conscience is clear before man as well as God. Obviously, there would continue to be an uneasiness between the two parties, but it is not because the one that was hurt desires it to be that way. The offender will continue to bear the weight of the transgression, as they should, because they have refused to repent of their misconduct.

If we do feel that someone has offended us, it is our responsibility to take the initiative to bring the offense to his or her attention. It could be that it was unintentional or that their understanding of the situation is very different from ours. They may not even realize that they had hurt you. Therefore, if we don't have enough courage to bring it to their attention,

then we have no basis whatsoever to hold any hard feelings against them, for we have not given them an opportunity to correct the matter.

A word about talebearing and backbiting. We are often told that it is wrong to speak negatively of anybody and that what happened to us is a "dirty little secret" that should not be repeated and never told to others. Generally speaking, if the disagreement is resolved and forgiveness truly is granted, that should be the case because that is inherently a part of the forgiveness process. If the issues have not been cleared up, however, and the offender is not repentant, there are times that what happened should not be kept to yourself.

The Scriptures do speak negatively about talebearing and backbiting. Perhaps some definitions are in order. According to the online *Oxford Living Dictionary*, a talebearer is “a person who maliciously gossips or reveals secrets.” To backbite is to “talk maliciously about someone who is not present.” It seems the key in both of these definitions is the word "maliciously." If the purpose and intent of sharing information are solely to cause pain, heartache or exact vengeance against another, then it definitely is wrong.

On the other hand, the Bible is full of illustrations of people that sinned and did things that they shouldn’t have. These actions were not covered up; instead, they were recorded and given to us as examples and warnings for us not to repeat their mistakes. (I Corinthians 10:9-12).

Likewise, some situations warrant circumstances where information could and should be shared with others. If there is a possibility the offender could do similar things to other people, it may be essential to explain pertinent information as to what happened for another person’s protection. Extreme examples could be if the offender is a thief, abuser, or sexual predator. Usually these things should also be reported to civil authorities and dealt with accordingly; however, the secular justice system does not always operate efficiently. There are times that people are convicted of things that they did not commit; it is also possible that the guilty are not held accountable for their actions.

We saw a friend recently that has a relationship with a couple that we had difficulties with a few years prior. Our friend was telling us how this couple was treating him, and we felt it was important to explain how the other

couple had mistreated us as well. For his protection, we advised our friend not to allow the other couple to take advantage of him.

Another situation could be if the offender circulates misinformation regarding the conflict. It could be important to defend yourself by exposing the truth. There is a caution that goes along with this though: Many times the base issue is an underlying spiritual conflict. This conflict needs to be fought by spiritual means, relying on the Lord to fight the battle. Spiritual sensitivity is required so that we handle the situation correctly and do as the Lord would desire.

A third scenario could be for the sake of the one who is opposing you (loving your enemy). The individual needs to come to full repentance, and exposing the sin brings the offending action(s) to light (i.e., other people find out what they have done). Hopefully this leads to the spiritual restoration of the individual. Care must be taken to ensure that the motive behind revealing information is pure and proper. It is so easy to get caught up in our feelings and emotions, ultimately handling the situation in a way that is not pleasing to the Lord.

If We Have Offended Someone

Looking at things from the reverse side, what are we to do if we feel that someone may have an offense against us? It may have been something that we had not intended to do, or it could also be the result of an incorrect assumption on the part of the other person. The Bible is clear in this matter as well. If we feel that there is an issue, it is our responsibility as Christians to go to them to try to work things out, even if you don't know what the problem may be.

Matthew 5:21-24 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. 23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24

Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

We have all been in situations where we get this feeling that somebody may be upset or that they have something against us for some reason. You feel awkward and hesitant; perhaps like you're walking on eggshells. Sometimes it's a matter of pride: "Why should I go to them, I didn't do anything!" The Lord wants His children to dwell together in unity. He wants us to do what we can to work things out if at all possible. When we find ourselves in these kinds of situations and if it happens to be that there is no problem between you and the other person, then by going to them everything should be cleared up. Any tension between you should be relieved. If there is a problem, then you can hopefully work things out.

There was one man who had been a friend of mine. We had known each other for years, but for some reason, there came a rift between us. I didn't know of anything that I had done, but he seemed upset with me. Finally (after waiting too long of a time) I called and asked if everything was all right between us. He brought up an issue that I wasn't aware of, feeling that I had slighted him, which I had no intention to do. We talked it through, and I can say with confidence that the problem between us has been resolved.

One time, I felt that I should send an email to eight different men (ministers), asking them if there was any kind of a problem between us. I suspected that at least some of them had negative feelings toward me because of how I had wrongly handled some things in the past. I hoped that we could clear things up, work things out if there was a problem, and if necessary, I would do what I could to make things right. I specifically asked them to get back to me one way or the other. Only four of them responded. None of those four indicated that they held anything against me; in fact, some wondered why I even asked. There were two that had sent email messages back that I felt we still had some unfinished business that needed to be taken care of. With a couple of email exchanges and a phone call, things were worked out where I feel there was at least a measure of reconciliation that took place. Sadly, the other four of them did not take the time to reply, and I still wonder if I have somehow offended them. My peace of mind is that I did try. I have nothing against them, and if they feel that there is a problem, the responsibility is now on their shoulders.

Reconciliation and restoration are the will of God. He longs for restoration between Him and us, as well as between each other as part of the Bride of Christ. I think that the importance of it is highlighted by the fact that Jesus covers both types of situations: if we have something against someone else or if we think that someone is offended with us. Either way, the Lord wants us to do what we can to work things out, and do our best to *"live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12:18)* The most difficult thing may be getting past our own carnality and pride.

Ephesians 4:1-3 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Chapter 8

Forgiving Ourselves

Matthew 6:14-15 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

We have covered many aspects of forgiveness, but one area that is not discussed in many forgiveness books is forgiving ourselves. In some ways, offering and receiving forgiveness for ourselves can be the most challenging thing to do. Many years ago, I was talking with a man about homosexuals. I explained how it is possible for them to come to repentance and receive forgiveness from God. This was a quite a few years ago. I don't know if he feels the same now, but back then he said, "I'm sorry, but I can't accept that. With what they have done, I can't believe that they can be forgiven." He was dead set against homosexuality, and he felt that those sins were so shameful that they could not be forgiven. You generally don't get that reaction anymore today, but in our minds, we do rate some sins as being worse than others. However, James says:

James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

Essentially, if we tell a little white lie, we are also guilty of homosexuality, murder, adultery, robbery, or any other part of God's moral law that you can think of. We are all guilty. It's not pretty, but that's the way God sees sin. Though there are degrees of consequences in the lives of people, sin is sin. The effects of one sin are not the same as others. The harm caused by someone shoplifting is definitely not as severe as what a madman with a gun can do in lives of others, but it does not change the fact that right is right and wrong is wrong. Sin has its consequences.

The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. This is not just talking about ending a life, which assuredly does apply, but is more of a reference to eternal death in punishment. It doesn’t matter what sin it is, the end result is the same. We cannot make excuses for it in our life or in anyone else’s. It doesn’t matter what a person's place or position in society is. We can't do like I have sometimes done with a little bit of dirt that is left on the garage

floor: take the broom and scatter it all over so you can’t see it anymore to get rid of it. We need the blood of Jesus applied to our lives to cleanse our souls. If our sins are not taken care of properly, when we stand before Him, we will be held accountable. But thank God that He has made a way for us. We don’t have to carry a load of shame, but we can be forgiven, and we can have that assurance of forgiveness. It is not just because we say that we "believe," but the Word of God declares it to be true because we have obeyed the Scriptures and applied them to our lives.

God really does love us, and His mercy and forgiveness toward us are incredible. Understanding this part of God's goodness can be especially hard for new believers in the Church—recognizing and knowing that God has fully cleansed us. We have so many regrets and memories of things we have done that can haunt us. Satan is there to continually remind us of all the bad things we have done as well. He will tempt us with thoughts from the past, tell us we are no good, we are not worthy—and the truth is we're not! But no sin is too inexcusable for God to forgive. It doesn't matter what we have done in the past.

I Corinthians 6:9-11 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Every one of us falls into one or more of these categories. We were like that! But we’ve been given a new life, a new hope, a new beginning because of His great love and His grace that has been extended to "whosoever will." We once lived a life of sin. I'm not pretending that we are now 100% perfect, but in spite of how many times we mess up, we no longer desire to live in our old carnal ways of ungodliness. We were living a disgusting life compared to His holiness, yet He loved us and died for us anyway that we might be saved from an eternity in torment.

God's forgiveness reaches to everyone, no matter what we or what anybody else may have done. It is free to us, but it took a price. The only physical life that God ever had was sacrificed and given that we might have an opportunity to be forgiven and be with Him for all of eternity. With this great gift, there are also some responsibilities. One of them is that we need to be willing to offer forgiveness to others. We must understand that no matter what it is, we cannot keep an unforgiving attitude against anyone. The awesome forgiveness that God has given to us is so much broader than any wrong done to us by anyone else.

In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom wrote how her father and family worked in the anti-Nazi underground movement helping Jewish families escape persecution by getting them out of the country. Her father was arrested and later died in a German hospital. She and her sister were taken to a concentration camp where they were treated terribly and forced to do hard labor. When they got sick and couldn't keep up their quota, they were beaten. They were abused mentally, physically and sexually. Many times they were naked and exposed to the elements—the winter cold and the summer heat. They watched one after another die by torture, abuse, and the gas chamber. She even watched her own sister die.

While being beaten Corrie prayed for those who mistreated her. One day she was surprisingly released and later found out that it was a mistake made by a file clerk. A week later, all of the women her age were taken to the gas chamber. From that time on, she dedicated her life to helping those scarred by the war, telling them about the love of Jesus. She traveled around the world spreading her message of forgiveness. Going from church to church and town to town, she talked about her experiences in the concentration camp, the forgiveness of God, His love, grace, and the importance of forgiving others. One day she faced someone who was totally unexpected. These are her own words as written in her book *The Hiding Place:*

“It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, a former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanched face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. ‘How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein.’ He said. ‘To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!’ His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

“Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I prayed, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

“As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so, I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

Sometimes it is hard to understand God’s great forgiveness to us, but when we read the story of Corrie Ten Boom, we can somewhat relate to how hard it must have been to forgive the prison guard. However, there is one other situation that may even be more difficult to forgive, and that is we need to extend God’s grace and forgiveness to ourselves as well.

Nobody knows us as we know ourselves, not even our spouse or closest friend knows our secret thoughts and motives. Often, we criticize ourselves the most, we demand more of ourselves than of anyone else, and we know every little flaw in us. Yet in others, we only see the outward actions, and those actions can be deceiving because we can’t see the heart. We look back on things and situations in our past with regret, wishing we had made some different choices. We get into the “if only” syndrome—if only I had done it differently. Yes, there are consequences we face because we were not living right, but if we were perfect, we wouldn’t need a Savior.

Many times, the Lord has protected me from some of the dumb things I have done, but other times He allows us to suffer the results of our decisions. There are some things that an apology and an "I'm sorry" can't undo. It does not mean it cannot be forgiven, but neither is it something that can be fixed, and you can't go back and do it over. There are some things that we have to live with what happened for the rest of our life. That is a simple fact. It is not that other people won't forgive, but what has happened has happened. It cannot be changed, and we can have a hard time forgiving ourselves.

There is a small group of people reading this that can fully relate to what I am presenting. You have different situations, different stories, different consequences but are feeling the same shame, regrets and guilt, wishing that

you just could have, would have done things differently. The person that we look at in the mirror can genuinely be the most difficult one to forgive.

Think about the Apostle Peter at the trial of Jesus. He was outside the Sanhedrin courtroom, and the pressure was on. Jesus was in a staged trial, facing death. If others recognized Peter, he could be arrested and suffer as well, and under the pressure of the moment, Peter denied Him. Not once, or twice, but three times. He lied—said he didn't know Him and he even cursed! Peter messed up really bad. Just earlier that evening he told Jesus that he was ready to die for him, now fear for his own life pushed him into saying things that weren't right. Imagine the depth of despair he went into. "I failed my Lord. At the time he needed me most, I failed Him." Jesus had even warned Peter this would happen. Think of the guilt he must have felt. If Peter would have said something, just maybe Jesus could have been released—but he didn't.

When Peter realized what he had done, the Bible says he went out and wept bitterly. Oh, for the sorrow, for the regret. If he could only do it over again, but he couldn't, and none of us can change the mistakes that we have made either. The Lord did not leave Peter in the depths of despair. After his resurrection, Jesus specifically called for Peter and reassured Peter of His love for him. On the Day of Pentecost forty days later, Peter was the one who stood and proclaimed the Gospel on the birthday of the Church. He continued to be a respected leader for the rest of his life.

Here's a story of another man, Judas Iscariot, the one who set Jesus up to be arrested for just a little bit of money. He probably didn't expect this to go as far as it did. He certainly had not intended for Jesus to be condemned to death, but after he realized the result of what he had done, He could no longer live with himself. His thoughts tormented him. Satan drove him to the place where he felt he had no hope. The feelings he had at that time was not the truth, and the thoughts that were going through his mind were not of God. Jesus had tried to help him; He tried to reach to him. At the Last Supper and again in the Garden at the moment of betrayal, Jesus even called Judas His friend.

I believe that even Judas could have been forgiven if he could have gotten past that point in time, past the remorse, past the guilt, and forgiven himself. If Judas could have been able to come to the place to ask the Lord, I know

that Jesus would have forgiven him. Jesus died for him as well as He did for us, but instead, the Bible tells us that *"Judas went and hanged himself,"* cutting off all opportunity for God to help him. By ending his life, Judas sealed his fate forever.

One last example: The apostle Paul was also troubled by feelings of guilt and regret. He was devoted to the cause of God according to the Jewish traditions that he grew up with. Like many people today, Paul didn't understand who Jesus was and is. He didn't recognize that Jesus was the Messiah. Saul persecuted those who were in the Church, sending innocent people off to jail, having them stoned or doing whatever could be done to stop what in his mind was heresy. Years later, after his conversion, it seems that he was still dealing with feelings of regret and remorse. Paul wrote that he considered himself the least of the apostles, not even worthy to be called an apostle, because of his persecution of the Church. In another place, he called himself the chief of sinners, the worst one around because he was responsible for putting to death those that believed in the One he later came to know as his Savior.

What was the difference between these men? It lies in how they responded to the grace of God in their lives. It was how they allowed God's love to reach to them. Recognizing that God had forgiven them and that they also needed to release themselves. The desperate spirit that tormented Judas can haunt us as well. Just as in Judas' case, those feelings are not of God—it is the condemning voice of the enemy of our soul. He tells us that we are no good. He will beat us down until we have such a poor view of ourselves that we won't be able to do anything, and we can't even respond to God's love and mercy. It is a tactic of Satan to throw us into despair and keep us from living for God.

We must allow ourselves to understand the fact that we are human. We are not God. It’s a great day in our lives when we resign the position of being God. I remember one day that I decided to do precisely that! I really did! We will not be perfect in this life. We make mistakes, and we mess up from time to time. I'm an older man, and once in a while I still spill milk at the table. Christ died for us. He died to cleanse us from our sins, both before and after we come to God. When God saved us, He knew our weaknesses.

He didn't choose us because of our goodness or that we were worthy. He wanted us because He loved us.

Paul recognized that it's when we are weak, then we are strong. When our limitations bring us to the end of ourselves, and we realize it, then God's grace can come and fill in the weak spots. Paul knew that it is by the *"Grace of God that I am what I am."*

Psalms 103:13-17 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. 14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. 15 As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. 16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. 17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

Like I said before, we are our own worst critics. We know our weaknesses. We see every time we fail. We remember the promises that we have made to God. We know all the "should have beens" or the "used to be's." We remember the times that we have been stirred by the Spirit and determined we were going to do better, yet we fail, time after time, again and again. But God remembers what we are. We can't do it in our own strength. That's why we need the power of God in our lives every day, and God's forgiveness is able to take care of any sin that anyone could have done. If God wants us to forgive our brother and sister 70x7 in one day, should we not forgive ourselves? If Corrie Ten Boom could forgive a man who had done such terrible things to her and her sister, we need to offer ourselves forgiveness as well. We are probably the most difficult one that we need to forgive, yet our eternal destiny requires that we provide the grace and mercy to ourselves that we also need to extend to others.

Chapter 9

Forgiving God

Yup, you read that right: Forgiving God. No, I'm not referring to the fact that God is a forgiving God, which He is, but there can be times in our lives when we have to come to grips with being able to forgive God. To understand what I am trying to say, we need to realize that offenses do not always happen when someone actually does something wrong to someone else. Sometimes people get offended when one person comes to a false conclusion regarding what they think about the other person. It's not because of anything that the other person did but because of their presumption about it. Offenses are not always the fault of the one that we get upset with. It may be because of the wrong thinking that we have on our part.

Sometimes that is the way it is between God and us. We get in our mind that God just has to do this or that to solve whatever the problem is that we are facing, but for His own reasons, He doesn't. When He doesn't do what we feel that He should do, there are times that we can get offended at God, even though it is really not His fault. The biggest problem is that we only tend to see things from our point of view, and we have no idea why God does or doesn't do what we feel that He should. There are lots of people who have walked away from the Church because they had a beef with God and couldn't get over it.

Isaiah 55:8-11 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, & it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

There is no doubt that God is a loving, gracious and merciful God. He wants good things for us. He wants us to be blessed and has promised His people marvelous and awesome things. He loves us more than we can love our own spouse, children, or grandchildren, and yet we all go through times when we struggle, and it seems like God is far, far away. Before I get into this, I want to say again that we are never going to fully understand why God does or doesn't do what He does. This passage in Isaiah tells us that "*my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* We are never going to figure God out totally, but I do feel there are some things that God does want us to understand. Some of this can be explained in that God allows us to go through things to learn and grow in Him. Sometimes He does it to discipline us for our own good, but that does not explain everything.

Referring back to the love that we have for one another, if someone we care about is in a situation where they really need something, because of our love them, we will naturally and willingly do everything that we can to help them to the best of our ability. God, being all powerful and all knowing, is able to take care of any need that we have. All He has to do is speak the word! Yet He is often silent, or it seems like He doesn’t care when we are going through difficulties. We struggle because we know that He can fix it, but He doesn't. It can seem like the love and care that we have for our family is more than the love and care which we get from God, yet that definitely is not the case. The only answer that I have is that even though He loves us tremendously, other principles hold God back from helping us. There are precepts that He has put in place, and laws that He cannot and will not transgress.

Proverbs 4:5-7 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. 6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. 7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

There are three words in the Bible that have a close relationship but are distinctly different: Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding. Knowledge

can easily be considered as being information, facts. Knowledge itself is what they call amoral, meaning it is neither bad nor good, but it can be used for either purpose. Understanding can be looked at as taking the available information and processing it into a useable form. It can provide us with principles, guidelines or rules to live by. Wisdom is knowing how to correctly apply the knowledge and understanding we have into a particular situation. People that have wisdom know the right things that should be done and the proper time to do them. On the other hand, there are plenty of people that have all kinds of knowledge, but without understanding the principles of the Scriptures, they are continually doing the wrong things. They don't have wisdom.

Putting all this together, I think that part of our problem is that we may have too much of an elevated view of ourselves, feeling that we personally top the list of things that God is most concerned about. I started wondering, what would God's top priorities be? If you were God, responsible for everything in the whole universe, what would be on the top of your to-do list? This is definitely not exhaustive, but this is what I would consider to be His top priorities:

1. At the top of His list has to be His sovereign will. He has plans and purposes, both general and specific, for the time we are living in and all of eternity, as well as this world, and the entire universe. We may very well not even know about most of this grand plan. We understand some through the Word of God, but how we expect end time events to play out can be pretty fuzzy. One thing we can be sure of, above all, is that He will see to it that His sovereign will is something that will be accomplished. There is nobody that will get in the way to cause His purposes to fail.

2. Another big priority with God is that He will stand behind His word. His word is an extension of Himself; therefore, it cannot fail. One problem that we have is that we don't always understand how specific promises in His word apply to us personally. We get in our mind that God has to do things this way and that way, but He doesn’t, and He doesn’t have to ask our permission either!

3. In a broad, general sense, He has covenanted Himself with Israel as well as the Church. The Book of Revelation shows us that He is not done with His people Israel, and He will continue to work with them until the end of this age. He has also espoused himself to the Church as a husband to a bride. His bride is predestined to be His for all of eternity, and she is promised many tremendous blessings. We only get to share in those blessings if we truly become a part of His family. No matter what else happens, He will be faithful to these covenants.

4. In addition to, and separate from, the covenants with Israel and the Church, He has also covenanted Himself with certain individuals in this world. In the Old Testament, we know of a few covenants that He made with specific people for specific reasons. Noah, Abraham, and David are some from the Old Testament. In the Church Age, He willingly covenants with all who become a part of His bride. He is always faithful to us, but we are not always faithful to our covenant with Him. There are times that people do turn their back on their promises to Him and leave the Church. God won't stop them if that's what they want. Having this special relationship with Him does not mean that we can expect a "free ride" in this life, only getting good things, blessings and prosperity. He loves us with pure "agape love." That means He gives us those things that are for our good, not just what we want for our enjoyment or pleasure. Because of this, He is not concerned about circumstances and situations but uses them to help mold and make us into His image. There are also times that God uses people as examples for others to look to, sometimes for good, such as Job, Moses and King David in the Old Testament, and other times it is to see the bad, such as Korah. Achan and Solomon. In the New Testament, we look to Paul (as well as all of the other apostles) positively, and in a negative sense Judas and Ananias and Sapphira. I think that even today He also uses people as examples for others to see (both good and bad). We all know modern day people of faith that we look to, and we also recognize those that have failed and see what has happened to them.

5. When God created this world, He specifically gave man dominion over it, and in a sense, the affairs of this world, He has submitted Himself under the authority that He gave to man and usually does not intervene without being asked. Likewise, Adam and Eve transferred a portion of that authority to Satan when they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Mankind has suffered the consequences of this ever since, even to the hurt of individual people including His saints. In many ways, evil is allowed to triumph. God could stop it, but He doesn't. He often leaves things in the hands of man, whether it is for good or evil. Many examples could be used, but it certainly includes the persecution of early Christians, as well as the oppression of His people in the centuries since the Day of Pentecost. I think about many events throughout history, things that were entirely in the will of God, and where God could have changed things to help his people, but he didn't.

When the Pilgrims came to America, they were people that were living for God with all that they knew. Unfortunately, they arrived at the worst possible time of the year landing at Plymouth Rock in December. Couldn't God have delayed their departure at least until Spring? Yes, He could have. Or why did they have to land at Plymouth Rock? All that God needed to do was to give one or two people the thought of "Why don't we sail south a few hundred miles?" The winter weather conditions wouldn't have been as severe. Instead, half them died the first winter.

What about the Civil War? Again, it definitely was the will of God for America to finally abolish the practice of slavery. Two of the South's most significant leaders, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, came from Virginia. They weren't all that much behind slavery, but when Virginia voted to go with the South, they felt loyalty to their home state, so they opted to go with the Confederacy. Without those two men, the South would have been much weaker, and the war probably wouldn't have been anywhere near as bad. Hundreds of thousands of lives suffered and died as a result.

In more recent times, think about the evils of the Nazis in WWII. Millions of God’s chosen Jewish people went to concentration camps to be needlessly slaughtered. God could have stopped it all by allowing the

assassination plot against Hitler to be successful or by striking Hitler with an incurable disease.

This does not mean that He does not love His people. There are also many stories of God working miracles in the midst of these terrible things, but it seems that God usually leaves the affairs of man in the hands of men. I feel it is because of the principle of giving dominion of this world to mankind. He has established His principles and will not go against them unless, like I said, He is petitioned.

This shows the importance of prayer. Prayers of His people have literally changed the course of history. Consider the prayers of Moses on behalf of the nation of Israel when God was ready to wipe them out. Out of Hannah's prayers came Samuel, the judge, prophet, and priest, who was the man who anointed Saul and David as Kings over Israel. When Sennacherib threatened Jerusalem, Hezekiah spread the letter out before the Lord and pleaded for deliverance. God answered in a mighty way, sending his angel to destroy the Assyrians. We don’t have to look only in the Bible. There are countless stories of how God has intervened in the lives of contemporary people, doing what was literally impossible—things that only God could do. God has done tremendous things because of the prayers of His people.

6. His blessings flow to those who apply the principles of the Word into their lives. This is not necessarily dependent on whether they actually are a part of His family. On the other hand, difficulties and heartaches fall on those who fail to apply His principles to their life. This is also true whether a person is a part of His church or not. We need to be careful in not casting judgment on others though. This does not necessarily mean that those who go through hard times are necessarily reaping the results of failing to live by the principles in the Word. The whole ninth chapter of the Gospel of John is the story of a man who was born blind. The conventional thinking was that this specifically happened because someone had sinned. The disciples even asked Jesus: Who is at fault, this guy or his parents, in that he was born blind? Jesus said that neither one was the case but that God had a purpose in it. It is not for us to point the finger and judge people because of the trials that they face. Many godly people who have been in the center of

the will of God needed to face struggles and difficulties, and we just don't know why. God has His reasons.

As mentioned earlier, we know that there are times that God does supernaturally intervene in the lives of people today. God is not just a God of the Bible, a God of the past. He paid the price for our healing at the whipping post, just as He paid the price for our sins on the cross. No miracle is too hard for Him to do. He is able to heal, deliver, provide, and do whatever it takes to care for His people. If the hairs of our head are numbered, and He sees every sparrow that falls, He certainly knows everything about us and the struggles we face.

But sometimes, for His own reasons, He does not do what He is able to do, and He remains silent. Not everybody is healed, at least in this life, and until the rapture, there will come a time when we all have to die from something. Jesus didn't heal everybody when he was on the earth either. There was still a lame man at the gate Beautiful in Acts chapter three. The Bible says that his friends had carried him there every day. Jesus had to have walked past him many times. The day that Peter and John saw him, however, was the day for his miracle.

Here are some of the reasons that God does get involved in the affairs of people. Again, this is no way intended to be comprehensive.

1. To accomplish His purposes (His sovereign will). There are all kinds of examples in the Scriptures where He performed the miraculous to ensure that His will was fulfilled. Look at the lives of Abraham, Moses, Mary the Mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

2. To bring glory to Himself. The story of the resurrection of Lazarus comes to mind. When Lazarus was yet sick, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus knowing that Jesus could heal him, yet Jesus was not in any hurry. He specifically waited until after Lazarus had died before returning to his friends' home and then performing the miracle. (John 11:4-14)

3. Again, as an example, either good or bad for others to see. Miriam was struck with leprosy because she murmured against Moses.

Ananias and Saphira were also struck dead because of their deception, as an example to the church.

4. Because of His compassion. There were different times the Bible tells us that Jesus either healed or helped people with their problems because he was moved with compassion. (Matt. 14:14, Mark 8:2, Luke 7:13).

What are some things that can encourage God to intervene in a situation?

1. Faith. Time after time in the Bible there are examples of people receiving their needs met because of their faith. Many times, God works through principles of faith, not just because of the necessity. The woman with the issue of blood had dealt with her problem her entire life. She spent everything she had on the doctors of her time, but when she acted upon her faith, that's when her healing became fact. Faith is not just a passive "believing," but it often requires action. Look at the miracles that Jesus performed. Usually, if not always, there was an "act of faith" or a "response of faith" that Jesus required before the miracle took place. (Luke 8:43-48).

2. Diligence. There is the parable of the woman and the unjust judge. The reason she received her answer was that she was persistent and kept asking time after time after time. Finally, the unjust judge gave her what she wanted because of her determination. (Luke 8:1-8).

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

3. Zeal or Intensity

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. 12 Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. 13 And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

This is not an “oh well, whatever” type of thing. Nor is it an “on again, off again” thing that you squeeze in whenever it is convenient. It is “when ye shall search for me with all your heart," that’s when we get God’s attention.

On the other side of the coin, what are some things that keep God from getting involved in a situation?

1. Unbelief. Just as God works through and honors faith, unbelief keeps God from doing what He is fully able to do

Matthew 13:57-58 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house. 58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

He was in his hometown. They knew Jesus as the neighbor kid, not as the Messiah. Because of their preconceived ideas, they missed out on what Jesus could have done. We don’t know how many were not healed that day because of their fear and doubt, but it was a point that God wanted to bring out in that it was mentioned in the Scriptures.

2. Not asking, or asking for selfish reasons.

James 4:2-3 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. 3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

What if Moses would have kept silent when God was ready to wipe out Israel in the wilderness because they worshipped a golden calf? But he didn't, and because of it, Israel was spared from destruction. I'm not

saying they didn't suffer some consequences, but they were not destroyed because Moses interceded for them.

3. Relationship Difficulties

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

1 Peter 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

The Lord wants us to know that He is not pleased if we are not treating one another properly, and we experience consequences if we don't do right.

4. Sin in your life

Isaiah 59:1-2 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

Imagine someone doing all kinds of bad things to you, maybe even slapping you in the face, then asking you to do them a favor. How well is that going to go over? In a spiritual sense, that's what we sometimes do to God, and we wonder why He doesn't answer our prayers. It's not that we get good enough so that God will do what we want, but it could be considered simple common courtesy.

Again, I'm not saying that I have a handle on all of this, but above all God knows us. He knows where we are, He knows what we are facing, and there is nothing too hard for God to take care of. Realizing that, and having confidence in that, shows a great measure of faith. It is loving and trusting God regardless of whether He does what He is capable of doing in our lives

or not. The Hebrew children who faced Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace knew that God was able, but their faith in God was not predicated by whether God delivered them. They decided that they were going to serve God regardless of the outcome. (Daniel 3:12-30).

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Overcoming times in our lives when we don't understand what God is doing requires us to keep our faith in God, focusing on His character, His love, His mercy, and His grace. We need to understand who He is—the God of all the universe—and that the way He deals with us is a lot more involved than just meeting our present needs.

We should also realize that He is a just and righteous God. We may not experience the miracles here in this life, but our faith in Him says that in the end, God will make all things right. That is faith! One time when I was struggling with understanding how faith worked in my life, I felt this impression in my mind and feel it was the Lord speaking to me, *"Do you trust me?"* Regardless of whether we understand what is going on or not, whether we get the things that we feel we need or not, whether we feel like we are being treated fairly or not, can we still trust Him?

Job had an answer to that. He had no idea what was going on behind the scenes. He didn't suffer because of iniquity. He lost most everything he had: his finances, his children, his health. He had "friends," but probably would have better off without them. All he had left was a wife that told him to "curse God and die" (a lot of help that was). He called on God, but God didn't answer, at least not until later. In the meantime, he said in *Job 13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*

I have often heard references to the bumper sticker "God is my Co-Pilot." Usually, the comment is, "If God is your co-pilot, you need to switch seats!" But neither statements are really biblical truth. God is not a "Co-Pilot" who will take over when we need Him to, neither is He going to take the place of being the "Pilot" of your life. He absolutely refuses to take on that role. God has given each of us a free will to do as we desire, even to

our own hurt if that is our choice. If He were the pilot that takes control of our life, that would make us robots where would have no choice in how we live. God doesn't want robots: He wants people that love Him and want to serve Him voluntarily.

The place and position that God wants to be in our lives is not "Pilot" or "Co-Pilot." Rather He wants to be our "Navigator." The navigator understands the lay of the land. He knows the route, and he knows the best way to get from one place to the next. The navigator is not in control, but he gives directions that, if the Pilot is wise, he will follow so that they make it to the desired place. What we need to do is be sensitive to recognize and understand the voice of God so that we can be obedient to the Navigator in our lives. By doing so, we not only avoid a lot of pitfalls but also keep from "crashing and burning" because we became disappointed in life and offended at God, feeling like God didn't do what He should have done for us.

Chapter 10

Receiving God's Forgiveness

This is the most significant and most important area regarding forgiveness. In due respect, it should be an entire book by itself, but I am going to condense it into one chapter. The question is, how can we receive God's forgiveness? Another way of saying it, the commonly used expression, is "What does He require for us to be saved?" The core issue is the fact that no matter how good we are, we have all done wrong and we all need to have our sins forgiven.

This topic causes a lot of controversies. It has been the reason for church divisions and splits going back to before Martin Luther and the reformation times. Like most of the rest of this book, what I am presenting is not commonly taught in most churches. What I am going to offer is not a "fringe" teaching by any means; there are many millions of people, thousands of churches and several church organizations that hold to this same message. Please don’t dismiss this as being unimportant, but compare what I am presenting with the Word of God, for our eternal destiny is at stake. Some people get defensive, thinking that I am looking down upon them if they don’t believe the same as I do or feeling that what someone else thinks changes their eternal destiny. I do not desire in any way to be offensive. All that I can do is tell you what the Word of God teaches.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

I don't feel that I have to "prove that I am right." I just want to be right. What I mean is that if all that I am doing is trying to get others to believe the way that I think, then what I am presenting means nothing. However, if what I am offering is biblical truth, then I have a sure foundation behind what I believe because then this is not just me—it is the Word of God that we will all need to give an account for someday. Truth is truth, no matter who says it or whether anyone believes it or not.

Today, you can go to different churches and get entirely different answers to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" And the fact is that they can't all be right, for what some churches teach totally opposes what other churches present. There are some different "camps" that the answer to this question falls into (with some variation of course). I won't go into all of them in detail, but there are the tenets of the Catholic/mainstream denominal church traditions, the Evangelical church beliefs, and the Apostolic church teaching.

All Christian Church dogmas point in some degree to the Bible; at least they use some verses to try to support their position. The question we need to ask, however, is this: Is what they present entirely in line with what the Scriptures require? It is possible to pull verses out of context to prove whatever you want to believe. Some pretty weird teachings claim to have Bible verses as their basis. Even those who support homosexuality try to use the Bible to prove their point. You see, it doesn't matter what I think or what you think or what your pastor thinks or what any megachurch pastor or televangelist thinks or what the Pope thinks. No matter what anybody thinks, it is not going to change what God requires of us. Even if everybody in the whole world could agree on one single teaching regarding salvation, it wouldn't have any influence at all on what God demands.

I would say that the majority of people go through life assuming that they are ready for Heaven. They figure that they are generally a good person (at least not as bad as some people). They go to church at least once in a while (if more often it's an extra bonus), they give to United Way or some other good cause, and in general, try to be kind to people, so why wouldn't God let them into heaven? At the very least, they are not a mass murderer or a bank robber or a sex offender. Besides, the church that they go to doesn't tell them differently, so everything has to be okay, no need to get into this "fanatical Jesus stuff"! But is that a good way to think? Let's look at what Jesus said:

Matthew 7:13-14 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

In this passage, Jesus has two groups: the few that find life and the many that go to destruction. The Greek word that Jesus used for many can also be translated “mostly or largely." The Greek word He used for few can be translated "puny." Jesus said that most people are going to destruction, but few (a puny number) will find life. Very different than the way most people think when they assume that practically everyone except the worst of people is going to heaven. Here is another Scripture that challenges what most people think. Again, this is Jesus talking:

Matthew 7:21 Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Just because we call him Lord or Savior doesn't mean we are going to get a pass. Jesus said that only those that do the will of God would make it to heaven. It is essential to know what the will of God is and make certain that we do it. The only sure way of finding out what is the will of God is through the Scriptures. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His desires for mankind. If we want to be saved, we need to obey the Bible, not just go according to what anyone else’s opinion may be. That brings me back to some of the more popular methods of "how to be saved" that are taught today. I don't want to offend anybody, and I am not going to run down other preachers or other churches, but I do want to compare their teachings with what the Bible says.

The most predominant teachings offered today include “all you have to do is believe” and you can’t do any more than that. Another is "just say the sinner's prayer." A similar salvation teaching is to "accept Jesus as your personal Savior." Most, if not all, of the evangelical church community

teach a variation or combination of these three things. Again, I'm not here to attack, and I'm not going to question their sincerity, but I do want to ask these questions: Are these teachings rooted in the Bible? Is this what God truly requires of us? Isn't what God expects of us the most important thing?

The first one is "all you have to do is believe." Often, they use the phrase, "by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone," and they use the verses:

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

I agree wholeheartedly with this passage in the context of the entire Bible, but not pulled out and used independently from the rest of Scripture as it often is. The following is an "all you need to do is believe" teaching taken from the *Bible.org* website. At face value, I don't disagree with anything that he says, except that he feels this is the "plan of salvation." There is nothing unique in this; this is typical thinking from their perspective:

"To be saved, you must know something about God. He is righteous, holy, just, and loving. You must also know that you have sinned against God and stand guilty and condemned before Him. You must know that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who took on human flesh, born of the Virgin Mary. He lived a perfect life and died on the cross as the substitute for sinners, paying on their behalf the penalty that God demands. But God raised Him from the dead and He ascended into heaven. He will return bodily to judge the living and the dead, but also to save all that have trusted in Him. These are basic facts, revealed in the Bible, that you must know to be saved."

In addition to all of those things, they say that you also need to do this:

"But, also, you must give *assent* to these facts, or agree that they are true. A student could know all of these facts well enough to pass an exam, but not affirm that they are true. Saving faith includes intellectually assenting to the truth of the gospel."

So, not only do we need to know those things, but we need to accept and agree that they are correct. They then go on to explain some other things that we "need to do."

“Saving faith is personally trusting Jesus Christ, committing your eternal destiny to what He did for you on the cross. Just as you entrust your life totally to the pilot when you get on board a plane, so you entrust your eternal destiny totally to Jesus and His death as your substitute on the cross. You trust God’s promise that He will justify the one who has faith in Jesus. And, implicit in “getting on board” with Christ is that you can’t keep one foot on the “terminal” of sin, and the other on board with Christ. You must commit yourself to follow Him as your Lord.”

On top of that, they say that a person also needs to "commit to following Him as our Lord," to whatever degree that entails. I am not ridiculing him, and I do accept the fact that these things are necessary for our salvation. That's not the point. This man is coming from the position that you don't have to (or can't) do anything to be saved, and then goes on to list the many things that a person must do. Conversely, if you don't do those things, then it is implied that you are not saved.

When you get down to it, the simple fact of "believing" even as they proclaim it to be, is a "work." As they teach, it is not something that we do as a physical act, but it is something that we do consciously and mentally. We make a definite decision that we are going to accept that what they tell us is true, and apply it to our life. Even in the most basic of their requirements regarding salvation, we still have to do something otherwise everyone in the whole world would be saved. The question then is not whether or not we have to "do something" to be saved, but rather "how much is required of us" to make it to heaven?

So, what about the Scripture in Ephesians 2:9? *"Not of works, lest any man should boast."* We need to personally accept that the Scriptures are true and what it says needs to be taken seriously. There are no contradictions or inconsistencies in the Bible, but again, we need to take this verse in context with the whole of Scripture, not just pluck it out to use as we want. Ephesians 2:9 puts out a basic statement *"not of works,"* but what does that mean? As we have seen, even the basic requirements of the most stringent believers of "no works" require that we do something. The general assumption is that Ephesians 2:9 is referring to all works, but I feel

I have some biblical standing to suggest otherwise. You see, there are several different types of works that the New Testament refers to:

Acts 9:36 says that Tabitha was full of "good works"

Romans 9:32 talks about "works of the law"

Romans 13:12 refers to "works of darkness"

Galatians 5:19 lists the "works of the flesh"

Titus 3:5 says that we are not saved by “works of righteousness"

Hebrews 9:14 talks about "dead works"

These represent some of the uses of the word works in the Scriptures (KJV) and showing that we can use none of these kinds of works to earn salvation. Now there are some other clues as to what sort of works Paul was referring to here in Ephesians. In Galatians, he discusses this same subject as well, and he explicitly tells us what types of works he is talking about:

Galatians 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Paul is saying that none of us are justified by keeping the commandments, for if we have ever broken even one of them, we are destined for condemnation. On the other hand, other references in the Bible show the need to apply our faith by putting it into action. The book of James brings out one example:

James 2:14-26 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to

the body; what doth it profit? 17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. 25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Based on this passage, it is safe to say that unless we have "works of faith," then the faith we claim to have is, in fact, worthless and even "dead." James is even adamant:

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

By this, we can conclude that Paul was not referring to "all works" in Ephesians 2:9, since James says that we are justified by our works. If a person still insists on the "all works" interpretation, then what about these verses?

Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent:

Luke 13:2-5 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent,

ye shall all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Biblically, repentance is a necessary part of the salvation process. Anyone who preaches salvation without repentance is not presenting the whole Word of God. Repentance is not just a mental exercise. It is committing yourself to turn away from the world and turn unto God doing our best to live a life that is pleasing to Him. Repentance is not a one-time event either; it is something that we are to live out every minute of every day.

On the other hand, neither can we think that we can be saved just because we have repented and live a good, wholesome, godly life. Even if we were to live a perfect life from the time that we first repented (which none of us can possibly do), there is no way that we could be saved, for we still need to deal with our past sins. Only the blood of Jesus can cover our sins, and we need to find out biblically how to get the blood of Jesus applied to our lives. How about this passage that also shows we need to do something to be saved?

Mark 16:15-16 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth <u>and is baptized</u> shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

I know the argument; some say that the last part of the verse only mentions those that believe not, not those that are baptized not. Faith has to be a part of the baptismal process. If a person is getting baptized just to get baptized, they are merely getting wet, and if a person doesn't believe the importance of baptism, why would they even agree to do it? Those that teach this categorically dismiss baptism as a requirement because as they say, it is a

"work," but what if it is not something we do because we are trying to earn our salvation? What if, instead, we are doing it as an act of faith, by believing, applying and obeying what the Bible tells us to do? Here is another favorite verse of the "believe only" crowd:

Acts 16:23-33 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. 25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. 26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. 29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

Many religious leaders focus on verse 31 where Paul talks to them about believing, but they ignore the results of the Jailor’s faith in verse 33 where it tells us that they were baptized that same hour of the night. When a person truly has faith, their faith will cause them to act upon what they believe. Paul is not indicating that all a person has to do to be saved is to believe. To teach this goes against Paul’s other admonitions regarding salvation, such as the need for repentance (Acts 17:30, Hebrews 6:1),

baptism (Acts 19:2,6, 22:16, Hebrews 6:2), receiving the Holy Ghost (Acts 19:3-5, Romans 8:9, Hebrews 6:2), and the importance of godly living (Romans 6:15-23, Hebrews 12:14). It would also contradict what Jesus said to Nicodemus (John 3:3-5), as well as his other teachings in Matthew 7:21-27, John 8:31-32, Luke 13:1-5, and Mark 16:15-18, among others that show the necessity of putting our faith into action.

1 Peter 3:20-21 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. 21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

The above passage connects Noah's deliverance, with water baptism, saying that baptism "doth also now save us." Doesn't that sound pretty important and definitive?

Another relevant question regarding baptism is this: What is the purpose for it biblically? Since most evangelicals reject that baptism is a part of the requirements for salvation, they come up with other explanations as to what baptism is for. The most common that I have heard is that baptism is an outward show (or declaration) of what has already taken place in the heart. They say that it has nothing to do with our position of salvation in God, but is merely a public confession of our faith in Christ.

The reason that they teach this is because they go back to the “no works at all” interpretation of Ephesians 2:8. If what they are saying is the proper biblical view, let's go back to the Bible to find the verses that support such teaching. Is that what the Bible teaches? … I’m waiting…I’m waiting…I'm still waiting … I don't know of any passage that says that baptism is just a public declaration of our faith, nor any Bible verses that even implies that. On the other hand, the Bible does very specifically tell us what the real purpose of baptism is, going back to Acts 2:38:

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Peter said that EVERYONE is to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for (the purpose of) the REMISSION if sins. He didn't say that baptism is a public display of our faith, but instead we are told it is specifically for the remission of sins. Remission means removal. When we are baptized in the name of Jesus, our sins are not only forgiven, they are also entirely removed from us. God casts them into the sea of forgetfulness. There is no longer any record of them in our account against us.

Proponents of "no works" theology will say that the word "for" in Acts 2:38 can also mean "because of." They say that baptism is done because our sins have already been forgiven, not for the "purpose of" getting our sins forgiven. When translating from Greek to English, words can very properly have dual or alternate meanings, and grammatically such could be the case here. However, if a person takes the evangelical view that Acts 2:38 should be interpreted as "because of," then where else in the Bible does it specifically tell us the purpose for baptism? They don't have any passages to support their view, but here are some other verses that support what the Bible teaches as well:

Luke 24:46-47 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Here, Jesus was talking to His disciples after His resurrection. This is also known as one of the "Great Commission" Scriptures. Jesus said the very purpose for Him to be crucified, and to rise from the dead was "*that repentance and remission of sins* (the reason for baptism) *should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."*

Doesn’t that sound very similar to Peter’s words in Acts 2:38? Or how about this one:

Luke 1:76-77 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; 77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

Zacharias, John the Baptist's father, gave this prophecy regarding the work that his son would be called to do. He would prepare the way of the Messiah, and people would find the knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins. This passage does not explicitly say baptism, but other than pointing people to Christ, wasn't repentance and baptism the central message of John’s ministry?

Acts 10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Peter is preaching to Cornelius and his family about Jesus. He said that through the name of Jesus, those that believe on him would receive remission of sins. Again, this does not specifically mention baptism except it does refer to the "remission of sins," and that the "remission of sins" comes through the name of Jesus. Didn't Peter previously say that baptism was to be in the name of Jesus? Look also at what happens next with Cornelius. The Holy Ghost fell on them (indicating a measure of belief and that they had received the Spirit of God in their life), yet Peter still commanded them to be baptized. It wasn't an option that they could do later, thus showing how vital Peter felt that it was.

Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Here, in Acts 22, Ananias is telling Paul that he needs to be baptized, and connects his baptism with *"washing away thy sins,"* which would be

another way of saying that they were removed from him or it was for the "remission of sins."

As can be seen, there are many Scriptures that shed light on and support the view that the purpose of baptism is in fact, for the “remission of sins” just like the Bible says, while the contrary argument (as far as I know) does not have any biblical support.

What about grace, then? The modern-day teaching is that grace is this mystical thing where God swoops into our life and does everything for us. It is referred to as being God's unmerited favor, which it is, for without God's grace we would have no hope at all for salvation. In fact, without God's grace, this world probably would not even be here. He probably would have wiped it out when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. Yes, it was the grace of God that brought Jesus into the world to die for our sins, but the active grace in the life of believers today is not the supernatural "God does everything for us" idea that people often teach. There are different facets of the grace of God in the lives of Christians given to them for different purposes. This verse talks about the grace of God regarding salvation:

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world

The grace of God that brings salvation is a teacher and requires something of us, telling us that we need to:

deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

The grace of God is not a mystical thing that God "zaps" us with but is an ongoing influence in our lives to give us not only the ability to be pleasing to God but also the desire even to want to do it:

Philippians 2:12-13 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 <u>For it is God</u> which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

It is the grace of God that brings conviction to our hearts, to realize that we are lost, sinners headed for damnation. It is by the grace of God that we even have any desire at all for spiritual things. It is the grace of God that allows us to be able to understand what He requires of us. It is the grace of God that gives us the power to do what we need to do to escape His wrath. The grace of God brings us to a place where we are willing to obey the Scriptures by repenting of our sins and being baptized according to the way the New Testament Church did it. **<u>That</u>** is the active grace of God in our lives. Nowhere in the Bible are the words “by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone," and nowhere in the New Testament are there any examples of anyone being saved using the “no works” methods that are often presented today.

What about saying the sinner's prayer? There has been an evolution of thought (I use the word evolution on purpose) that has brought about the use of what is regarded as the "sinner's prayer." It is not in the Bible, and it was not a practice of the early Church, but for the most part, it was something that was invented by 20th-century preachers for the purpose of quick evangelism. If you question this, it is not difficult to find information supporting these facts on the Internet.

I have no problem with the sinner’s prayer as a prayer. Generally, it is a prayer of repentance and making a commitment to God, which is fine, but to tell people that it alone brings salvation into their lives is not true. Again, there is no record of it in the Bible, and there are no examples of anyone in the New Testament Church praying the sinner’s prayer as their salvation experience.

Finally, what about “accepting Jesus as your personal Savior”? That too is a development of 20th century evangelists, probably even later than the start of the use of the sinner’s prayer. Again, I can agree with the concept—committing yourself to Him and making Him the most important thing in your life, but it is not a biblical way to find salvation. They may use Scriptures like this:

John 1:10-13 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

They often say that you need to “receive Christ as your personal Savior.” When looking at the context of this passage in John, it was not meant to be detailed teaching on how to be saved. These are simply some general statements regarding the purpose and work of Jesus Christ. Greater detail is given later on in other passages as to how salvation is applied to our lives. Once again, the words “accept Jesus as your personal Savior” (or similar) are not in the Bible, and there is no record at all of anyone in the early Church doing that as a means of salvation.

Romans 10:12-13 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. 13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

This is a favorite verse that some people use to show that all we need to do is to *"call upon the name of the Lord."* If we only take this at face value, what about the requirements of being born again, believing, repentance and baptism? Admittedly, believing is a part of it, for if a person calls on the name of the Lord, there must be some reason or basis for calling upon Him. I don't have space here to explain this fully, but "calling

on the name of the Lord" is truthfully referring to water baptism. When people in the New Testament were baptized, some verses specifically say that they *"called on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:16). If all we need to do is verbally "call upon the Lord," then what about the group of people that Jesus talked about in Matthew:

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

These were not just ordinary people. These were people that had a strong faith and had done great things through the name of the Lord—even miracles—yet their lives did not fall in line with the will of God for them. They lived their life the way they wanted to and disregarded what the Scriptures said about godly living. Consequently, Jesus said that He didn't even know them. What a sad place to be. I think we can safely say that "calling on the name of the Lord" is more than just a verbal exercise; it is a life-changing commitment. Here is another popular passage that some people use talking about being "born again":

John 3:3-5 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

It is fashionable today to say you are a "born-again" Christian. Again, I have no problems with this verse, but it has suffered a great deal of misuse because of the improper interpretation of it. Jesus said there are two things you have to do to enter the kingdom of heaven. We must be "born of water and born of the Spirit." Most everyone agrees born of the Spirit is receiving the Spirit of God into our lives. I agree with that, and we will discuss how we know that we have received the Spirit of God a little later. But what does being born “of the water” mean?

Some people say that being born of the water refers to the water sack around a baby when they are naturally born. Okay, that's a theory, and in a natural sense it could sound reasonable, but how about proving that with Scriptures? I have never heard a single Bible passage used to support that line of thinking. So then that theory is only based on natural reasoning, not the Word of God. The Bible consistently teaches that being born of the water refers to water baptism in the name of Jesus. We have already discussed Mark 16:15-16, and I Peter 3:20-21 here are some other passages that discuss the importance and the work that baptism does in our lives:

Romans 6:3-5 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Biblically, the only way that we put on Christ is through water baptism.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and

ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

This statement was in response to the question of the crowd on the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. The Holy Ghost came upon and filled all those who were there that morning in the Upper Room. It caused quite a commotion because a crowd of people gathered together to find out what was going on. Peter (to whom Jesus had previously given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven) preached to them the first sermon in the Church age. He explained to them that what they were seeing was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the indwelling Spirit of God. Peter preached Jesus to them--that Jesus was the Messiah and that they had taken and killed him, but he rose again three days later. He finishes his sermon with this:

Acts 2:36-37 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. 37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

Realize what was happening here. These were Jews who as a people had been waiting for centuries for their Savior and Messiah. They didn't recognize Him as such and had rejected and crucified the One that was sent to save them. So, they asked the question: Now that we did this, what hope do we have? Peter gives them the New Testament salvation message in Acts 2:38.

1. Repentance
2. Baptism in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins
3. Then the promise that they also would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost just like the people in the Upper Room had experienced.

I have used several passages of Scripture to show the point that water baptism is an essential part of the New Testament salvation experience. I

have not contradicted anything in the Scripture. I may have crossed some personal theology, but I can't help that. I urge the reader to find a church that will help you to be obedient to what the Bible clearly says. The next area that I want to cover that is referred to by Peter is how are we to be baptized?

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

These are the words that most churches recite when they baptize people. Again, it is the Word of God, and we cannot ignore it, but the problem is that not once did the Apostles or the early Church use these specific words when they baptized anyone. There are no examples to be found in the Bible. We previously referred to Acts 2:38 – Peter said very explicitly that **everyone** is to be baptized in the **name of Jesus Christ** (not in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost). Remember, there are no contradictions in the Scriptures, so we need to discern why there is a difference here.

This may seem like a silly question, but what does everyone mean? All—no exceptions. The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) was just days after Jesus gave the commandment in Matthew 28:19. Did Peter make a mistake? NO! If he did, why didn't the other apostles speak up? The other eleven were right there with Peter as well. Let's use Scripture to interpret Scripture, not use our own thinking. We referred to this already, but in Acts chapter 10, Peter is preaching to Cornelius and his family:

Acts 10:43-48 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name **(he was talking about Jesus)** *whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. 44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came*

with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Here, Peter commands them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. It doesn't mention Jesus' name, but rather the name of the Lord. What is the Lord's name? Let's not just draw our own conclusions, let's use Scripture to find out. Paul discovered who the Lord was on the road to Damascus. He was knocked down off his horse, blinded, and the Lord spoke to Him. Paul's question was:

Acts 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest:

Since Jesus said he was the Lord, it could be reasonable to say that Cornelius and family were baptized in the name of Jesus, as was the case in every specific example of anyone baptized in the New Testament Church. Why did Jesus say "be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost" in Matthew then? Do we have a contradiction in the Scriptures here? Or could it be that somehow, Jesus **is the name** that corresponds to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost that Jesus referred to in Matthew 28? Are there any passages that could support that thought? Obviously, Jesus is the name of the Son, everyone agrees with that, but how could Jesus be the name of the Father? Jesus himself said:

John 5:43 I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.

If Jesus came in his Father's name, a question connected to that could reasonably be, how did Jesus get his name? An angel appeared to Joseph (Mary's espoused husband) and told him in Matthew 1:21:

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

God named His Son Jesus for a specific reason, and Hebrews 1:4 also tells us why. It says that he got His name by inheritance just like we typically get our names: from our fathers. My last name is Julson because my Dad's name was Julson. His dad's name was Julson, and my son's name is Julson. It is passed down by inheritance from the father. God revealed His Old Testament name to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15. Some say it as Jehovah. It may be more proper to say Yahweh. The name Jesus literally means Yahweh has become my salvation. The Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah 12:2 reinforces this:

Isaiah 12:2 Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.

Almighty God came to this earth through the flesh of His Son, the man Jesus Christ, to become the means of salvation for all of mankind. So just as Jesus said in John 5:43, He came in his Father's name.

Then what about the Holy Ghost? How can we say Jesus is the name of the Holy Ghost?

John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

Jesus said the Father would send the Holy Ghost in His name.

Romans 8:9-10 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. 10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Here it calls the Holy Ghost the Spirit of Christ. This makes sense, for Scripture says that God is a Spirit, and the Bible says there is only one Spirit (I Cor. 12:7-11, Eph 4:4-6), and that Spirit is holy. According to I Timothy 3:16, Jesus is the Almighty God manifested in the flesh. Therefore, the Spirit of Christ would be the same Spirit that was in Jesus, which is the

same Spirit we receive when we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. The words Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, and Spirit of Christ are all synonymous terms:

John 14:17-18 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. 18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

Jesus is talking to his disciples about the Holy Ghost, which they were going to receive sometime in the future (the Day of Pentecost). Jesus said that this Spirit dwelleth with them. Who was with them? Jesus. Who was going to be in them? The Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Christ. Then He said he would come to them, not physically, but in a spiritual form. It is the same Spirit of God, so it is not surprising that we could and should call His name Jesus.

Isaiah 9:6 is a very familiar passage of Scripture, usually read during Christmas time. It is a prophecy about the coming Messiah:

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: (this is talking about Jesus) *the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor,*

Counselor is a word that some translations use for the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26, 15:26) - then Isaiah goes on:

The mighty God, - there is only one God

The everlasting Father- connecting the term Father with Jesus

The Prince of Peace - refers to the work of the Son of God

In this prophetic passage, we have the usage of all three titles—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—referring to the One who was to become the Son of God. The only conclusion we can come to from a biblical standpoint is that the Apostles understood the name of Jesus to be the one name associated with all three titles that Jesus referred to in Matthew 28.

Matthew 28:19 is an example of where churches have taken one verse of Scripture and made an entire doctrine out of it. There is not a single

instance of anyone in the Bible being baptized using the words “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” There are at least five different specific instances of people that were baptized in Jesus' name, (Acts 2:38, Acts 8:16, Acts 10:48, Acts 19:5, Acts 22:16) and there are also other Scriptures that imply baptism was done in Jesus' name as well. Another important point is that the words Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not names, but they are titles associated with the One Almighty God that we worship. I am a husband, father, son, and grandpa, but when I write a check, I don't sign it by any of those titles. The bank would not accept it as being a legal signature. They want my name on it to make it valid. Every four years we potentially could have a different President. When they sign a law into effect, they don't sign it “President," they put their name on the line.

Some have said, "I would rather take Jesus' words than Peter's words." It wasn't just Peter who baptized in Jesus' name; all the apostles were there. If you were to take that position, you are saying that the Word of God is not true or inspired by God, because you are saying that Jesus is right, and Peter and the other apostles are wrong. Also, remember this, that Jesus taught his disciples how to baptize. He gave them practical, hands-on instruction:

John 4:1-2 When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, 2 (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)

It doesn't say how they baptized, but Jesus was watching them, making sure that they did it correctly. During that time in Jewish history, baptism was an initiation rite for those who were followers of that teacher. It seems logical that the disciples would have baptized the same way then (in Jesus’ name) as they baptized later after the founding of the Church. Why would they change the baptismal formula after Jesus ascended? Some say what's the difference, it all means the same, but the Bible is adamant about this as well:

Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

The word "Father" doesn't do it, "Son" doesn't do it, "Holy Ghost" doesn't do it—we must use the name of Jesus. Acts chapter 19 shows how vital Paul felt that it was. He came across some disciples that had not been baptized correctly, and he specifically rebaptized them in the name of Jesus:

Acts 19:1-6 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, 2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. 3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

There are many examples in the Book of Acts showing how people were baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38, Acts 8:12, 16, Acts 10:48, and Acts 19:5, as well as support from Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27). In addition to this, I encourage the reader to do an Internet search of Church history to verify that from the start, the early Church always baptized in the name of Jesus (not titles Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) until things started to be changed in the second and third centuries (after the apostles died). Paul even warned about wolves that would come and teach different things after his departure (Acts 20:29-31).

Being baptized is not something that is reserved for young people or small children either. As long as a person has breath, they can be a candidate for water baptism. My wife and I, as well as my mom, were visiting with my 92-year old grandmother in the summer of 1995. While we were there, we began talking about the Lord, and I felt impressed to ask my grandmother if

she would like to be baptized in the name of Jesus. I knew that she was familiar with it because she had a brother-in-law who had been a part of the Apostolic Church for many years, and I am sure that he would have discussed it with her. To my surprise, she replied, "Yes, she would." The home care worker helped my grandmother get ready, and we baptized her in the bathtub of her home. About nine months later, she passed away. A few years later, I was talking to my mom on the phone, and she asked me if I could baptize her as well. I made arrangements with the pastor of a church in Eau Claire, and I baptized her in the name of Jesus in obedience to what the Scriptures teach.

Much more could be said, but there is one other topic that I need to cover, and that is this: How do we know that we have in fact received the gift of the Holy Ghost? It is crucial that we are sure that we have the "real deal."

John 7:37-39 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. 38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. 39 (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

It is accurate to say that when we believe as the Scriptures say, we will receive the Holy Ghost. However, many people make the presumption that when we profess a "belief," you will automatically have the Spirit of God within you. The problem is that what many people consider as “believing” is different than *"believing on him as the scriptures hath said."* The Lord knows when our faith is genuine and when it is not. When our believing is genuine, God will bless us with the experience of receiving the Holy Ghost just as was experienced, not only on the Day of Pentecost but also throughout the book of Acts.

Romans 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his

Paul is writing here to the believers in the Church at Rome. He seems to raise the question of whether the Spirit of God was in them or not. Unless we have the Holy Spirit in our lives, we cannot have the assurance of being saved, as pointed out by Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:3-5.

So how can we know if we have indeed received the Holy Ghost or not? I grew up in a denominal church. It was assumed, and based on what I was told, I felt that I had the Holy Ghost probably since confirmation. However, as I said earlier, it is not important what you or I think. The essential questions are what does the Bible say and what does God think? For we will be judged by the Word of God, not by anyone else's opinion. In light of that, does the Bible give us any information as to how we can know that we have received the Spirit of God?

Acts 2:1-4 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

On the Day of Pentecost in Acts Chapter two, when the Holy Ghost came to permanently dwell in the hearts of men for the first time, they heard a sound from heaven as of a "rushing mighty wind," and they saw cloven tongues "like as of fire" that sat upon each of them. These physical manifestations were a special sign given for that specific instance, and they don't happen today, but there is a symbolic importance to these manifestations. The Bible does not say it was a wind that they heard, but that it was a "sound as of a rushing, mighty wind." The Greek word used for wind in Acts 2:2 can also mean "a respiration, breeze, breath." The Greek word for spirit (which is a slightly different word than the one for wind in Acts 2:2) can also mean a "current of air, a breeze, wind or breath."

A few weeks earlier, after the resurrection, Jesus breathed on them and said, *"Receive ye the Holy Ghost."* They did not receive the Spirit at that time, for it was not "poured out" until the Day of Pentecost. However, Jesus was preparing them for the time when the Spirit would come and live in them. The Spirit that came on them on the Day of Pentecost was the breath of God. That day was the beginning of God figuratively breathing out and sending His Spirit to reside in the lives of mankind. This is conjecture, but I feel that is why they heard the sound as of a *"rushing mighty wind."* It was the coming forth of the Spirit into their lives.

There also appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, that sat upon each of them. Many people think that they actually saw a fire, but it doesn't say that they did. The Bible says that they saw cloven tongues *"like as of fire."* Cloven means it has two parts. Usually, this is referenced to the type of hoof on an animal. A cow has a cloven hoof; it is split into two parts. A horse does not; it has a single hoof that goes all the way around the foot. On the Day of Pentecost, they saw cloven tongues (not fire, but the tongues were like as of fire), which means the tongues that they saw were divided into two parts. This is symbolic of when a person receives the Holy Ghost. We then have two tongues or two languages—our original tongue and our new miraculous heavenly language (speaking in tongues).

It also said that the cloven tongues sat on each of them, indicating that every person who receives the Spirit will speak in an unknown tongue. If this were not true, God could have shown this to be so at the initial outpouring. The Scripture may then have said, "Tongues sat upon some of them," but it didn't. It said that the cloven tongues sat on each of them. The tongues were described being *"like as of fire."* Many times, when a person receives the Spirit of God, and they let their tongue loose by faith, it often will flicker back and forth very rapidly, like the flames do in a campfire. They were cloven tongues *"like as of fire."*

Peter also told the crowd that day:

Acts 2:39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The promise was for them (the Jews that were there that day and for their children) and all that are afar off (anyone throughout the world and over centuries of time), also even as many as the Lord our God shall call. If God is speaking to your heart about living for Him, God is calling you into a closer relationship to Him. We can know we have His Spirit within us, for we will speak in tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance just like they did on the Day of Pentecost. Not only that, but it was a pattern throughout the early New Testament Church.

Some people wonder, “what does it mean to speak in tongues?” It is speaking a language that you have never learned in a natural sense. We don't teach people how to speak in tongues; this comes supernaturally from God Himself. It is our lips, our voice, and our breath, but God bypasses our minds, and by faith we speak words we don't understand. It truly is a miracle from God, for we *"speak in tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance."*

On the day of Pentecost, there were people in Jerusalem from many different nations and those who received the Spirit of God began speaking the languages of these native countries telling of the wonderful works of God. The people that heard them were amazed because they realized these people were only Galileans—people who typically wouldn't know how to speak many of the different languages represented there that day. I have heard some say that on the Day of Pentecost they only spoke in tongues to preach the Gospel that day, but that isn’t true, for Peter stood up and preached the Gospel to all of them (probably in the universal Greek language of that day).

There are many stories of missionaries that preach the gospel in foreign countries that tell of times when the native people receive the Holy Ghost, and they begin to speak in tongues just like they did in the Bible. Sometimes when these people receive the Holy Ghost, they start speaking English, which to them is an unknown tongue. The missionary can clearly hear them speak things in English that bring praise and glory to God. Later, after the service, when the missionary tries to talk to them in English, they

have no idea what the minister is trying to say—it was a miraculous move of God speaking through them in an unknown tongue as the Spirit gave them the words to say. For more biblical support, here is the story of what happened in Samaria:

Acts 8:5-8 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

There was joy in that city. They believed what Philip preached to them, and miracles were happening, which is a sign that God was working among them. Many were even baptized in Jesus' name. Some today feel that as soon as you profess belief in Christ, the Spirit of God automatically dwells in the believer, but according to vs.14, the people in Samaria still hadn't received the Spirit of God yet:

Acts 8:14-19 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. 18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

This tells us two different things. First, that receiving the Holy Ghost was not something that happened "automatically," and secondly, there was a definite experience that they were looking for. It must have taken some time for Peter and James to get there (Jerusalem is about 40 miles from Samaria), and it wasn't until Peter and John prayed for them, and laid hands on them, that they finally received this experience. It doesn't say they spoke in tongues, but it must have been something definite and supernatural because Simon wanted to buy the power to give people the Holy Ghost

Here's a passage detailing the story of some disciples of John the Baptist that we had referenced earlier when discussing baptism:

Acts 19:1-6 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, 2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost 3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

These were people who were sincere and believed to the best of their ability. They had even been baptized by John the Baptist, the one who had baptized Jesus, but Paul was precise about their need to be baptized in Jesus' name. After they had been baptized the proper way, then Paul prayed (laid his hands upon them), and they received the Holy Ghost and spoke in tongues.

Acts 10 is a story of a man named Cornelius who was a Gentile. At that point, Gentiles were not a part of the Church, but God was working to change that because he died for everyone, not just some people. He sent an angel to both Cornelius and Peter to have Peter go to Cornelius’ house to

preach the word of God to them. As Peter was telling them about Jesus, the Spirit of God fell on them. The Bible says that those that were with Peter were astonished because they heard them speak in tongues; therefore, they knew they had received the Spirit of God:

Acts 10:44-46 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.

These examples in the Bible show that when they received the Spirit of God, it was a typical experience for them *to "speak in tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance."* For those who may not accept that, I ask what biblical evidence do you have in how to know that a person has received the Holy Ghost? I do not know of any other consistent evidence from the Bible that is to be found. Some people have been offended when I suggested that maybe God had a more excellent experience for them. I don't understand why anyone who loves the Lord would feel hurt at the possibility of having a closer relationship with Him.

It is not that we are seeking after tongues. What we are suggesting is that God maybe has more for you. It is not a matter of pride on our part either. We don't think we are any better than anyone else because we speak in tongues; it's just that we want to share this experience that God has promised to all believers. Really, if God has a blessing for us that we have not previously experienced, wouldn't it be to our benefit to seek God until we receive it?

An objection to this that is often brought up is the passage in I Corinthians 12:

1 Corinthians 12:28-30 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers

of miracles? 30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

I don't have the room to fully discuss this here, but Paul is referring to the operation of the gifts of the Spirit in the Church, not as an indication whether a person has the Holy Ghost or not. The word for "gift" in I Corinthians is the Greek word "Charisma", which can mean a spiritual endowment or miraculous faculty. The Greek word for "gift" in Acts 2:38 is "Dorea" which simply means a gratuity or gift. The gift that we have been given in Acts 2:38 is universal, the gifts of the Spirit as described in I Corinthians are given to certain individuals for God's purposes in the Church:

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. 8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; 9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; 10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: 11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

As a part of the Church, God does not use everyone in the operation of the gifts of the Spirit, however as we have seen in the biblical record, when a person receives the gift of the Holy Ghost, there is a universal manifestation that takes place to assure us that we do have the Spirit of God within us. Again, I challenge anyone to present any other consistent scriptural evidence that lets us know whether we do have the Spirit of God in us or not. I will finish this chapter with just a few more verses:

John 8:31-32 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And

ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

We can only claim the right to be His disciple if we continue in His word. By continuing in His word, we then will know the truth, and the truth shall make us free.

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

There are so many traditions of man that have filled the religious world today. Many people hold very dearly and very sincerely to the traditions that they have grown up with, but sincerity and determination do not mean that it is true. We need to follow Christ (who is the Word of God that became human flesh), not the teachings of man. Paul was so adamant about the message he preached that he said in Galatians 1:8-9:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

It doesn't matter if even an angel were to come to preach a different message. If we don't hold to and teach what Paul preached, we are in big trouble. He was so adamant about it that he repeated himself. Jesus, through John the revelator gives us this warning:

Revelation 22:18-19 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

It is not my desire to see anyone lost or to make it difficult for people to be saved, after all I am not the judge. When we all stand before the Great Judge, every one of us will need to give an account for ourselves according to the Word of God, not by the teachings of any Church or any preacher or anything that anyone else says or thinks. Hopefully, I have given you something to think about.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. 2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Chapter 11

The Bride of Christ

There are many different analogies in the Bible regarding the Church. It is referred to as the body of Christ; we are members in particular. It is known as the family of God; we are sons and daughters of the Almighty. It is called the household and the temple of God. As Christians, we are also looked at as athletes, ambassadors, and soldiers. Each one of these metaphors highlights different aspects of our relationship to Christ. This is not specifically about forgiveness, but in this final chapter, I want to talk about what I think is one of the greatest and most intimate of relationships—that of the Church being the bride of Christ.

Ephesians 5:22-33 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Before we get into the details as to the how the Church fits into this role as the Bride of Christ, we need to review what it takes to become a part of His family. In a nutshell, it is laid out for us at the end of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost—the birthday of the Church. The details and scriptural support for this are in the previous chapter. Peter gives them the hope of the Gospel in Acts 2:38:

Repent—turn from sin and commit to walking with Jesus. Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Then they were promised to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The Bible also tells us that the Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We connect the plan of salvation to that Gospel message:

Repentance relates to the death (spiritually) of our fleshly, ungodly, carnal nature. Baptism is the burial of our old man and the remission of our sins. Receiving the Holy Ghost as beginning a new life of the Spirit of God and a type of resurrection in living our new life to Him.

I don't want to diminish that in any way, but I would like to dig deeper than just the generalities of the analogy of the Church as the Bride of Christ and compare how the Gospel relates to different aspects of the marriage relationship.

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: <u>but I speak concerning Christ and the church.</u>

I would like to compare our act of repentance to a couple's engagement period. When we repent, we turn away from sin and commit to living for Jesus and serve Him alone—we need to leave the lifestyle of how we used to live. When a man proposes to his hopeful bride to be, he has already determined to be wholly committed to this lady and forsaking all others. Years ago, it was the time that they needed to rip out all the cards in their Rolodex of all the other potential gals that they had their eyes on. Today, you would probably have to go through your contact list and delete all their phone numbers or go to Facebook and unfriend all of the girls you had previously gone out with. But it is the same principle as repentance. You are turning away from the rest of the world, and committing yourself to one

person and one alone. You can't be engaged to marry one person and still continue to date others as well. It is a time to make a choice. You have to make a decision: Either commit yourself to One (who is Jesus) or continue to keep your options open. Jesus said that no one can serve two masters:

Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

You can't have both. Make sense so far?

Now, I would like to compare the wedding day to the act of water baptism. Both are a ceremony. Both have specific things that they are determined to accomplish. Both are important and necessary. Both have specific wording that we look for. Today marriage vows are often tailored by the couple, but as a minister, I still look for words of commitment of one to another. In baptism, it is vital that we call upon the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Both baptism and the marriage ceremony are a public display of our pledge to one another. Marriages, as well as baptisms, can be done in private, but there is still a physical action showing our commitment, and there are witnesses that attest to the fact that it happened. Both are putting away the old and consecrating ourselves into a new life. In both cases, we are entering into a covenant relationship…**till death us do part.**

Hebrews 10:38-39 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

The third aspect of our salvation experience is being filled with the gift of the Holy Ghost. I want to be careful here. This could be misunderstood and taken wrongly. I liken receiving the Holy Ghost to the consummation of the marriage relationship. The world has taken the physical relationship

between men and women and cheapened it into just physical pleasure. The Lord has intended from the beginning for it not only to be a physical act but that it is representative of the total union of a man and woman. Not just in a natural sense, but also emotionally, as well as a union of our priorities, principles, and goals. That's one of the reasons why the Bible tells us that we need to be careful whom we choose for a spouse—a Christian should not marry an unbeliever. They cannot have a total union because the most important thing in their lives (the Lord and the world) are poles apart.

When we repent, and when we decide that we want to become engaged, it is something we do mentally—it is a conscious decision that we make. When we are baptized, and when we are married, we put the decision we made into physical action—we walk down the aisle, we go down into the waters of baptism. Receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost represents the intimate relationship we have with the Lord. We open ourselves up in a spiritual sense, and the Spirit of God comes to live within us and be a part of us.

John 14:17-18 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. 18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

Romans 8:10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

John 14:20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

There is a spiritual union where the God of all creation invests himself in us, comes within us and becomes a part of us spiritually. This is not in the same sense as a demonic possession type of thing, nor does it make us little gods. Rather this is as the intimacy of the marriage relationship.

There is one other aspect of salvation that is not explicitly mentioned in Acts. 2:38, but it is implied in conjunction with repentance. That is, we need to live faithfully with the one we have committed ourselves to. When people are married, they don't go flirting with people of the opposite sex (or today, with anyone for that matter). You don't do things that are

questionable or would reflect negatively on either yourself or your marriage relationship.

Spiritually, we shouldn’t be flirting with things of ungodliness or things of the world either. What I am talking about is how we need to walk in holiness and purity of heart before the Lord. Holiness is often looked at as being how we present ourselves regarding the outward appearance, but the principles of holiness go much, much deeper than that.

Some people conform to what may be expected of them regarding outward appearance or actions, but they don’t understand the core reasons as to why we do what we do. Consequently, they may be just "following the rules" for whatever reason. It could be peer pressure, it could be not wanting to "rock the boat," or it could just be out of obedience to leadership. Whatever the case, it is a pretty weak foundation for living in holiness, and it leads to a legalistic approach in serving God. When the pressures of this world or temptation comes, it is common for people that do not have the sure foundation to cave in. When I am talking about holiness here, I'm not specifically referring to the external. I am referring to the desire to walk with the Lord, love the Lord and be pleasing to Him. The passion that we had when we first came to Him, our first love.

When we repented, we "cut the strings" that were tying us to the world. We turned our back on things of sin and committed to serving the Lord. The central desire of holiness is the determination to live faithfully to the Lord that we have committed ourselves to, in a way similar to our marriage commitment. Just as in the natural sense, we are surrounded by temptations that would destroy our marriage; likewise, we are also bombarded by a whole host of enticements that would desire for us to turn away from our walk with the Lord. Should we give in to those temptations, where we turn our back on the Lord and go back into the world, this could be seen in a theological sense as spiritual fornication or spiritual adultery.

1 Corinthians 6:15-20 Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. 16 What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is

one spirit. 18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. 19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Clearly, this is speaking of the physical act of adultery, but parallels could very quickly be drawn in a spiritual sense. When we willingly give in to the temptations of the world that pull us back into the net of sin, we are crossing a line in our minds, our will, and our spirit that we are turning away from the commitment we made to serve Jesus.

They keep all kinds of statistics regarding marriage and the family. One of those statistics is that there is a certain percentage of married people who at one time or another have a major disagreement and don't understand why the other person is doing what they are doing. That percentage is 100% (just kidding, but it is true). Raymond Hull, a Canadian writer, puts it this way: "All marriages are happy. It's the living together afterward that causes all the trouble."

When you say "I do" that is generally not the beginning of the "happily ever after" part. Sometimes it is better described as the start of a boxing match. I remember a friend of my dad used to call his wife the "War Department" (he was kidding—I think). There are a lot of adjustments people make when they cross the threshold of the marriage relationship. The first year of marriage is often challenging for people in making those changes.

Sometimes, especially when the couple is not fully serving the Lord, the individuals can have a hard time making those adjustments, and the love that they felt for one another grows cold. This can lead to disappointment and separation from one another and eventually to resentment and bitterness. Often, this is when the prospect of divorce enters into the picture. In our society, divorce used to be looked at as something of a shame, failure and a lack of being able to work things out. Today, it is just accepted as something that happens when people don't find themselves "compatible"

with one another, or when they "fall out of love" with one another. But that was never the intent that the Lord had for them:

Matthew 19:4-9 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? 6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? 8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

In God's eyes, there is only one permissible reason for divorce—when the other person has been unfaithful to their marriage commitment. Now, this doesn't mean that when one person has been untrustworthy that they ***have*** to get a divorce; it just gives the innocent party a permissible way to move on with their lives. There are many times that when someone has been unfaithful, the person repents and the two of them are able to work things out and continue with their relationship, but it takes time and a tremendous amount of effort in building trust again. When we make this connection in our relationship with the Lord, we understand that He is never unfaithful to us. We often don't know why He does or doesn't do the things that He does, but He invariably has our best interests at heart.

Unfortunately, we don't always understand that. Just as it is in the natural, sometimes our spiritual "marriage covenant" gets strained. Just as in the natural, we can go through difficult times with our spiritual marriage relationship, and we have our spiritual "bouts" with our "Heavenly Groom." Because of our limited understanding, we don't agree, and we don't know why the Lord doesn't do what we expect Him to. The "why" question can be tough because we don't always get an answer. This can cause tension, disagreement, misunderstanding, and disappointment. During these times, it

gets easier to look over the fence and think that the "grass is greener on the other side."

It is during these spiritually low times that we are more liable to let down our guard and allow ourselves to dabble again in the things of the world. If we are not careful, we can cross that line that is similar to the line that is drawn in our natural marriage relationship. It is a matter of, will we continue to be faithful to our spiritual spouse even during the hard times? Or will we “cash in our chips” for the unsavory promise that the devil makes to us that things will be better if we take a different route? There will always be those who will choose that way. They feel that there is a better way than the "straight and narrow" with Jesus, so they commit spiritual fornication/adultery and decide to go back into the world again.

But the Lord doesn’t give up on us that easy. Even though we have been unfaithful and often are a disappointment to Him, He keeps holding His hand out to us in the hope that we will come to our senses, repent and seek reconciliation again (just like the prodigal son story). Even though the Lord has the legal right, He usually does not exercise the course of a divorce. Sometimes He does, when a person goes so far that they have become a reprobate and there is no hope for return. This is not a place for mankind to judge, but for the Judge who knows the thoughts and intents of the heart

For the most part, the Lord in His love and mercy keeps reaching to us until there is a point of no return, and then the other means whereby a marriage is dissolved takes effect—death. If we find ourselves in this position where we pass from this life and have not made a recommitment of our marriage covenant with the Lord, we can fully expect it to be over and judgment to be served.

But there can be other situations where we find ourselves at odds with the Lord. Not because we are “looking for a way out” but simply because we don’t understand His ways. We become disappointed because our expectations don’t line up with how the Lord does things. In a similar vein, just because we have a disagreement with our husband or wife, it doesn’t mean that we are ready to head out the door. I’m not saying that things are happy and great and wonderful, but because we have made a commitment, we are not going to throw it away simply because we don't see eye to eye all the time. So, we keep working at it, trying to find a way to work things

out and make amends, but sometimes it can take a while. We know that even though we are having struggles as a couple, the answer is not to give up but to work things out rather than head for the divorce lawyer. We keep our commitment, we keep our integrity, and we keep loving our spouse (it's not just a feeling). Finally, the time comes that our understanding is enlightened, we each see things at least a little bit from their perspective, and things work out.

So it is in our relationship with the Lord. It is true; things may not be “peachy keen” at times. There may be things that are bothering us, but we have no intention of going back into the world either. And just because we may find ourselves in one of these situations, it doesn’t mean that we are lost. The Lord is not ready to turn His back on us just because we are not “red hot” on fire in our walk with Him all the time. It’s not His preferred relationship, but He is loving, kind and reaching for us to work things out again. He is not going to divorce us (so to speak) and throw us out in the trash just because things don’t happen to be going well between us all the time.

When I understood this, it was refreshing and a relief to me. We are not redeemed based on our performance or what we do. We are saved based on our relationship—in spite of who we are, and what we have done. It is not because of our goodness, but because of His grace. As long as our hearts are set on serving Him, even though it may be difficult at the time, we are still a part of the bride of Christ.

The unconditional love that the Lord has for us often is illustrated to us through the cross. However, there are many real-life, modern-day examples of sacrificial love that we can look to as well. One of them is in the life of David Roever, and his wife, Brenda. His story is well known, but I will briefly summarize it here, as gathered from the website *Hubpages.com:*

In July 1969, eight months into his tour of duty in Vietnam while serving as a Brown Water Black Beret with the U. S. Navy, Dave Roever was severely burned beyond recognition when a white phosphorus grenade that he was poised to throw exploded in his hand. He was thought to be dead. The ordeal left him hospitalized for fourteen months, where he underwent numerous major surgeries. His survival and life are miraculous. This is how

Dave describes the day his wife first saw him after the incident. He had been transported to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas:

"My wife Brenda, still a teenager, walked into my room; a girl I had respected while we dated. She was a virgin when I married her, and so was I. Our relationship was built on respect, not the back seat of a car. Two kids had waited for each other because they respected and honored God and themselves. Now, that respect would come back, not to haunt me, but to help me. The day Brenda stepped into that room it was truth or consequences. She walked up and read the chart on my bed to confirm I was her husband. She read the tag on my arm to be certain the right man was in the right bed. Then convinced it was me, she bent down, kissed my face, looked me in my good eye, and stated, 'I want you to know that I love you. Welcome home, Davey.'" *Hubpages.com*

Revelation 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

I leave you with one final thought from *America's Christian Newspaper*, November 2018 edition:

"The nearer we are to God, the higher our standard of holiness will become, and the deeper we will recognize what uncleanness, corruption, and unrighteousness are."

May the Lord bless you in your journey to live for and serve Jesus, the one and only King of Kings and Lord of Lords!