

FORGIVENESS: THE BEST OPTION

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No doubt the Scriptures teach forgiveness. “And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, *forgiving* one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors...For if ye *forgive* men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:12, 14-15). “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I *forgive* him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21-22). “And when ye stand praying, *forgive*, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25). “Forbearing one another, and *forgiving* one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:13).

It is often hard to do what the Scriptures teach, but when you examine the options, you know that God’s solution to mistreatment is the best. What are the options? There are only three.

1. **DENY IT.** Try to act as if it did not happen. Try to forget by suppressing it. Not only is this potentially dangerous psychologically, but it is just about impossible.

2. **GO FOR REVENGE.** The Scriptures warn “Recompense to no man evil for evil...” (Romans 12:7).

Revenge is self-defeating. Revenge is not nearly as sweet as people have thought it to be.

3. **FORGIVE.** Our Lord knows what is best for us when He tells us to forgive. Jesus told the story of a man who was forgiven of a multimillion dollar debt, but turned around and refused to forgive the debt of one who owed him a relatively small amount of money (Matthew 18:21-35). He used the story to show how immoral it is for us to take mountains of mercy from Him and then to turn around and withhold a few shovels of that mercy from those who ask us.

The message is clear. As we have received immeasurable forgiveness from God, we are to allow what we have received to overflow into the lives of those who have wronged us. Forgiveness is not only scriptural and practical; it is the best option.

How can I forgive? It is not an easy thing to do. Three suggestions are given as follows:

1. Revise your thinking about the person who has wronged you.
2. When you think differently, you will feel differently.
3. Give up your right to get even.

PRAYER

“Father, help us to forgive. Let us do so from the embrace of Your love, and from the gentle grip of Your inexpressible grace. Amen”

WOT

EDITORIAL

BRETHREN FALL AWAY, BUT GOD IS FAITHFUL

God, in His infinite wisdom and foresight, surrounded us with a spiritual family to help us on our journey toward heaven (1 Timothy 3:15). It would be nearly impossible for us to remain faithful to the Lord without the encouragement and support of a loving church family. God put us in the midst of those who can sympathize with our struggles, who can admonish us to leave behind our sins, who can lend us strength to fight the temptations around us, and who can rejoice in our victories. Truly, the wisdom of God is seen in the church: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10). How many brethren have been on the verge of giving up on the Lord, only to be encouraged by the good examples and kind words of loving brethren? How many brethren have wandered away from the Father's house, only to find their way home because of the efforts of their concerned brothers and sisters? How many brethren felt they were all alone in the battles they were facing, only to have an arm around their shoulder or a hug or a gentle word from those of their brethren who had faced similar circumstances? No child of God could put a value on being a part of the family of God! Brethren who serve as marvelous examples of godly living and who continually encourage those around them by word and deed are an asset to the church of our Lord. One of the great blessings of being a part of the body of Christ is the ability to lean upon and to count on the faithful.

Sadly, at times we fail our brethren, and they fail us. As frail humans, "all have sinned" [past tense] and "come short of the glory of God" [present tense] (Romans 3:23). We will fall from time to time. Some will fall into momentary lapses of sin. Others will fall away for a while, only to "come to themselves" (Luke 15:17). Still others will fall away and be unfaithful for long periods of time. Perhaps through persistent efforts of caring brethren and untold multitudes of prayers, some of these may be won back to the Lord. It can be rather disconcerting and spiritually disastrous when those that we esteem, admire, and seek to emulate in the faith fall into sin and out of service to the Lord. While we should have confidence in our brethren, especially those who are

faithful and active in the work of the Lord, we must be careful that we not place so much trust in them that we fall when they fall. We will have to deal with brethren who fall away; even the most trusted and faithful may slip and fall. Consider Demas. At one time, he was a faithful companion and co-laborer of the apostle Paul. Paul mentions him as a faithful worker along with Luke and Mark (Philemon 24). He also sends his greetings to the church at Colosse (Colossians 4:14). Though he was a great asset to the work of the church at one time, he fell away, and his life was no longer worthy of commendation or imitation. As Paul neared the end of his earthly sojourn, he made mention of Demas, though now in a very negative light: "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). No doubt this was a blow to Paul and to all other faithful brethren who had been built up and encouraged by the work of Demas. However, Paul did not allow this to discourage him from living for the Lord. As a matter of fact, Paul had been betrayed by other brethren, but he took confidence in knowing that the Lord was still with him:

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (2 Timothy 4:16-18).

How should we react when our brethren fail us and fall away from the Lord? We must remember that they have frailties and weaknesses just as we do. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3:12). We should pray fervently for those who have gone astray: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fer-

vent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). We must also do everything we can to help restore the erring to the way of right: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). Take note also of a great lesson concerning our attitude toward the erring from the verse just cited—we must never think that we cannot fall to the same temptations that caused these to become unfaithful. It must ever be remembered that we are striving to get to heaven, and to help all that we can along the way to get there as well. Those of our brethren who have turned aside from faithful service are in grave danger.:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered unto them (2 Peter 2:20-21).

It is our responsibility to lovingly admonish and warn them of the error of their way:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

We would do well to remember that even when brethren fall away, God is faithful. Though our brethren may disappoint us, discourage us, or even desert us, we have the assurance of our Lord that we will not be alone: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). Time and again we are reminded in Scripture of the faithfulness of God. He is called “the faithful God” (Deuteronomy 7:9). Leaning upon His faithfulness is the answer to so many problems not only in our own individual lives, but also in the collective life of the congregation where we labor and worship. “**God is faithful**, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son

Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). In times when we may be tempted to give in to the allurements of sin, we must remember,

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but **God is faithful**, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In times when we do give in to temptation and our hearts and lives are not what they need to be, we would do well to remember that, “If we confess our sins, **he is faithful** and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Our trust and our confidence must be whole-heartedly in Him, for He indeed is faithful to keep all His promises (2 Peter 3:9). “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is” (Jeremiah 17:7). Knowing that God will be with us so long as we strive to serve Him should keep us motivated to press on toward heaven, no matter what may befall others. Let us heed the words of the Hebrews writer, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for **he is faithful** that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Hebrews 10:23-24).

WOT

WEBSITE UPDATE

The website for the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is currently undergoing a complete overhaul. We are in the process of making our website more user friendly, as well as adding many tools and other things to benefit those who use it. We hope to catalog all issues of *The Words of Truth* on our new site. Our domain name has also changed. **The new website for the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is www.sixthavenuechurch.org.** Effective immediately, the old web address is no longer valid. If you have links on your website to our site, please take note of this change, and update your links. May God be glorified through all efforts to disseminate the Gospel.

ONE TIME MISTAKE OR PATTERN OF SIN?

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Perhaps the most notable event in the life of King David was the sin of adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite. 2 Samuel 11 vividly chronicles this tragic story. A man, who had already been introduced in Scripture as a giant-killer and would later be described as a man after God's own heart, is identified as an adulterer and a murderer.

In order to justify the description of David in the Bible, many teach the events of 2 Samuel 11 as they are an aberration in David's life. While it must be pointed out that David was a man that did what God said, the way God said to do it, most of the time, it is not fair to the Divine record to title David's sin with Bathsheba "just a mistake."

God Had Already Given Warning

Long before Israel rejected God as their king and desired that an earthly king rule over them, God predicted through the pen of Moses that this would happen (Duet. 17:14-15). In view of that request, God warned that their new king avoid three things: horses, personal wealth and many wives (Duet. 17:16-17). Furthermore, God gave explicit instructions to ensure that the king would hear these warnings: *"And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law... he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them"* (Duet. 17:18-19). David was at least aware of these warnings. If he had given them their due attention, perhaps the course of his life would have been different.

Earlier Signs Of A Problem

The Bible reveals that David's failure to heed the warning of God relative to women started long before the events of 2 Samuel 11. In fact, consider what inspiration reveals in 2 Samuel 5:12-13 – *"And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake. And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem..."* It would appear as if the power of being king and the success of David's reign had caused his heart to be lifted up (see 2 Samuel 5:12). Once that happened, David either ignored or forgot the warnings relative to women. This would seem to be a

pattern for David. Thus, when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then killed her husband, he was merely taking steps further into this sin. It does not appear that David made a one-time mistake, but that he struggled with this area of life for a long period of time.

Present-Day Applications

There are at least two lessons we can learn from the consideration of these points. First, Satan always knows when to attack, and he is aware of sin's progressive nature. More than likely, David would not have even considered ordering a man's death in order to cover his sin of adultery any earlier than the moment that he did. David's decision in 2 Samuel 5 (to gather many wives unto himself) started him down this path. After years of practicing adultery and avoiding the warnings of God, David was more susceptible to going out of his way to cover up his sin.

Second, we need to be very careful when we minimize sin as merely a one-time mistake. There are occasions when we do sin without having a pattern of such behavior. However, many times we attempt to excuse sin by applying the term "mistake" to it. Often times when it comes to the usage of profane language, the sins of a sexual nature and other sins, people will say, "Oh, I just made a mistake." While that might be true for some, many fall into the same category as David. Many times, by the time our sin is revealed, we are deeply entrenched in such activity. May we realize that God does not view a pattern of sin as a one-time mistake, but rather as that which violates His law.

WOT

FREE BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

If you would like to study the Bible in the privacy of your own home and at your own pace, enroll in a free Bible correspondence course. All materials are free of charge, and you are under no obligation to continue the study. Brother Hap Johnson will be glad to get you started in study of God's word today. Request your free study by writing to the church office at the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ, 1501 Sixth Avenue, Jasper, Alabama, 35501. You may also call us at (205) 384-6446.

DAVID: SWEET IMPRECATOR OF ISRAEL

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The description of David which precedes his last words reads, "David the son of Jesse said, and the man *who was* raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel" (II Samuel 23:1). What a beautiful characterization of the second king of Israel and the producer of most of the Psalms; what a beautiful description of the one whose heart was like Lord's (I Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22; c.f., I Kings 15:3-5). This "sweet psalmist of Israel" was not perfect, but he was very admirable.

How do we, seeing this David described as sweet, reconcile his being capable of praying concerning his enemies things such as "Destroy thou them . . . let them fall" or "[let them] be ashamed and sore vexed" or "let them be silent in the grave" or "Destroy . . . and divide their tongues"? Would this not be a grievous attitude on the part of David? Considering these statements in their fuller versions, one understands a little about what attitude backed these imprecations (imprecation being "The act of calling down a curse that invokes evil" [WordWeb, ver. 4.5a]) of David as well as other psalmists, including the writer of the harsh Psalm 137:7-9 which reads, "Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase *it*, rase *it*, *even* to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy *shall he be*, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy *shall he be*, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." Here they are:

"Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee" (Psalm 5:10).

"Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return *and* be ashamed suddenly" (Psalm 6:10).

"Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause" (Psalm 25:3).

"Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their en-

deavours: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert" (Psalm 28:4).

"Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, *and* let them be silent in the grave" (Psalm 31:17).

"Destroy, O Lord, *and* divide their tongues: for I have seen violence and strife in the city" (Psalm 55:9).

Can you see the attitude behind these imprecatory Psalms? Even though they may not seem such on the surface (and even though many have misunderstood them), the psalmists' imprecations are righteous ones for the following reasons:

First, they call upon God to be the One who exercises vengeance (Psalm 94:1; 58:10; 149:6-7; Deuteronomy 32:35,43; c.f. Romans 12:19). Second, they recognize God as being a God of judgment (Psalm 149:9) and justice (Psalm 7:9; Psa_82:3) as the psalmist wrote, "Justice and judgment *are* the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face" (Psalm 89:14). Third, they represent vindication for the righteous (Psalm 58:11). Fourth, they exemplify the old principle of retaliation (Psalm 137:8-9; c.f., Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21).

When we read these Psalms, let us consider not the harsh language, but the righteous indignation behind the psalmists' words.

WOT

THE EARTHLY CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

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I have been preaching full time for a little over twelve years; no doubt that seems like a long time to some, and a very short time for others. In my twelve years of preaching, however, I have noticed some things while standing behind the pulpit. One of the most eye-opening things I realized almost right away is the strange phenomenon that many people, both young and old, believe that a preacher is struck blind each time he steps behind the pulpit. Why else would people do some of the things they do during the preaching unless they believed the preacher was blind and could not see their actions? I have seen people pass notes, carry on conversations, play with babies, sleep, clip and clean their fingernails, and the list could go on. One of my favorite preachers even told of a time when the song leader took off his shoes and socks and clipped his toenails! Yep, people must think we're blind. Either that, or those people do not have respect for the preaching of the Word of God.

Every passage of the Bible read from the pulpit should have our undivided attention, but perhaps none more than the following:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Genesis 3:1-6).

If people would even begin to grasp the conse-

quences to the world because of the actions committed that day, they would never dream of letting their minds drift from its magnitude. The eternal consequences of living a life lost in sin, then dying in that condition are obvious if one spends any time in Scripture. The Bible describes the ultimate end of those who die in sin. They will abide in outer darkness (Matt. 8:12); there will be unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12); hell is a place prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41); and is a place "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44). However, sin will not only ruin our souls in death, but also it will ruin our lives on this earth. Think for a moment of the devastating effects of sin in this world.

Imagine a little boy throwing a ball up into the air to himself in his front yard just before dark. He was supposed to have a playmate to catch his throws and toss them back to the little boy. Right before his dad left for work, he promised his son that as soon as he returned from work, they would play catch. Instead of going home as he promised, however, the man made his nearly daily stop at the bar, and there he is perched while his son waits. The boy knows he should not have expected his dad to keep his word, but he just doesn't know enough to give up hope. What is the cause of this scene played out all over the world? Sin.

Think of a little girl in her bedroom, even this very night, who will get sick in the night. She will do what nearly every child does when sick; she will call out for her mom. The only problem is, her mother will not be there to comfort her. Mom sought greener pastures in the form of another man and chose to leave her husband, house and children, giving it all up for a man worthless enough to be willing to break up a home for his own pleasure. The dad will go to his daughter when she cries out, but it just will not be the same. No one can replace a mom. Why will this daughter go without the comfort for which she yearns? Sin.

Contemplate all of our senior citizens who do not get the quality care they need in some nursing homes and hospitals because of the huge shortage of healthcare providers. What does this have to do with

sin? Since 1973, some 47 million women have chosen to end their pregnancies by abortion (<http://www.abortionno.org/Resources/fastfacts.html>). We could talk about this ungodly practice, but the point I want to make is this: Think of the nurses, doctors, preachers, leaders, etc. this country has eliminated by abortion. Would one of the 47 million babies have found the cure for cancer? Would they have been the one to bring peace in parts of the world that have not known peace? How many would have possessed the care and compassion to take care of the elderly in our nursing homes? The world will never know. Why? Sin affects everything.

More and more scenarios could be told, but surely we get the point. Sin not only devastates souls for eternity, but it ruins the lives—sometimes it ends the lives—of so many in this world. It is not my intent to sensationalize sin, but rather, to try to paint an accurate picture of its consequences. Actually, it is not possible even to begin to describe the awfulness of sin.

God wants you to be happy here on earth and for eternity (John 10:10); sin robs you of that happiness. The next time you hear your preacher talk about sin, put your fingernail clippers down, ignore the baby in front of you, and listen to what the Bible says. It just might save you a lot of heartache, and if you put the truth into practice, it will save your soul.

WOT

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

We hope that each of our readers have enjoyed the Thanksgiving holidays. As we reflect on God's goodness toward us, let us shower upon others the blessings that God has given us. We hope that each of you will have a very safe and enjoyable holiday season with friends and family. May we ever be thankful for all that God has done and continues to do for us (James 1:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

WHAT WILL THE CHILDREN LEARN?

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

Our children learn from what they see,
And what they hear from others.
A seeking mind, with soil so rich,
The seed that's sown discovers.
The words we say are plainly stamped
On the pages of their book.
The mind can read, the eyes can see.
They're learning as they look.

If we think twice before we speak,
We can help to fill the space,
So they may choose good words from thoughts
As they put each word in place.
Through the fields of knowledge searching,
They will take in what they find.
Will the seed that grows to harvest
Be what's needed for the mind?

Is our language what it should be
In the presence of a child?
Day by day from us they're learning
More than just to frown or smile.
Will the future generations
Learn enough of what it takes
For their book of information,
Or be lost by our mistakes?

Once they're molded by the potter,
Going back would be in vain.
A masterpiece that could have been
We can never mold again.
The shining mirror from within
Could be broken in the frame;
No trusted view to look into
For the vision of life's aim.

Will distinctive class and fashion
With character be their style?
Will the training that we're giving
Be enough to lead a child?

ASK A BIBLE QUESTION

QUESTION: Is it okay to play the Lottery and Bingo as long as the revenue goes to fund our schools, resurfacing our roads or charity organizations?

ANSWER: No, it is not okay to play the Lottery or gambling Bingo for any reason! Promoters of the Education Lottery and Charity Gambling Bingo paint a deceiving picture of fast and profitable recovery for our schools, roads and charities through the avenue of "gambling." Sin never profits anything or anyone! Playing the Lottery and Charity Bingo (i.e. gambling) are sins, a violation of God's Law because it stands for one to gain at the loss of others. Gambling is a parasite on our economy that promotes evil and leaves destruction in its wake (Rom. 3:16). Honest income is derived from hard work (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 2 Thess. 3:10). The gambler profits solely from another's loss, thus evading his responsibility to provide for himself and his family. The gambler gets something for nothing. A gambler's essential motive is covetousness (1 Tim. 6:10), and that motive breeds other evils such as greed, broken homes, theft, organized crime, murder, drunkenness and suicide. Nothing good can come from gambling and the legalizing thereof, just as nothing good has come from the legalization of alcohol. The promise of the "Saving Lottery" is just an echo of those that said the same about the legal sale of alcohol. They said alcohol would save our schools. It has not! Sin, no matter what name you call it (gambling, alcohol, etc.) is always wrong! Please, let's not use our children's education or smooth roads to justify the filthiness of sin and the evil desires of those that serve Satan. Read James 1:13-21. Dedicated Christians are opposed to gambling in any form, degree, place or time (Acts 5:29).

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