

Do you desire to taste heaven on earth? Do you have a desire to taste heaven in your heart, home, family, married life and society?

Start forgiving others as Christ forgave. If you prayerfully and sincerely read this book, it will surely benefit you greatly. If you learn to forgive as Christ forgave, neither man nor the devil can harm you. Even if they try to harm you, God will turn it into good. Please read this book and share it with others who have difficulty in forgiving.

FORGIVENESS

A Foretaste Of Heaven



"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

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This book has no copyright. In fact, we would like to see this message published in all languages so that every person on earth can experience and enjoy the foretaste of heaven.

For copies, contact :

THE PENTECOSTAL MISSION

Roja Street,
S.V.Nagar Post
Irumbuliyur, Chennai - 63
India.
Phone : (044) 2279 - 0079

45-A, 5th Street,
Padmanabha Nagar,
Adyar, Chennai - 20
India.
Phone : (044) 2491 - 3641

Printed by

Pentecost Press Trust,
45-A, 5th Street, Padmanabha Nagar,
Adyar, Chennai -20.

Introduction

Every day, hundreds of thousands are brutally assaulted, badly wounded and mangled. Billions and billions of dollars are spent on developing weapons of war, while perhaps less is spent on helping the starving masses. Man has invented weapons and huge weapons to kill a million people or more in a few months. And, as if not satisfied with this, he is trying to develop more sophisticated weapons. The whole earth is a battlefield with destruction and weapons. A new man is placing more and more bombs. It is estimated that at present at least forty million are being waged on this small planet. Every minute

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Introduction

Every day, hundreds of thousands are brutally assaulted, fatally wounded and murdered. Billions and billions of dollars are spent to develop weapons of war, while perhaps less is spent to keep alive the starving masses. Man has invented nuclear and laser weapons to kill a million people or more in a few seconds. And, as if not satisfied with this, he is trying to develop more sophisticated weapons. The whole earth is stockpiled with destructive weapons; now man is placing them in space also. It is estimated that at present at least forty wars are being waged on this small planet. Every minute a bomb goes off somewhere, killing or injuring some innocent folk. Millions of marriages are on the rocks, inflicting deep wounds on the members of the family. As a result, some are reduced to mental wrecks and some others have taken their own lives. This so-called civilized world seems to have turned uncivilized as never before. What is at the bottom of all this? Man has yet to learn to forgive his neighbour wholeheartedly.

'Forgiveness' is the most wonderful word in the Bible. Without it, heaven's doors are closed, and heaven will never be heaven and Christ's mission to this world has no meaning. When Jesus uttered on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," perhaps the angels could not understand it; yet it brought sinners to heaven. Yes, forgiveness is a supernatural word, in the sense that, it turns darkness into light, confusion into peace, fear into faith, sadness into gladness, despair into hope, hatred into love, sickness into

health, weakness into strength, a sinner into a saint and hell into heaven!

What is forgiveness? The Oxford dictionary defines the word 'forgive' as "remit, let". The divine definition is much more. It is erasing every resenting thought, attitude, every hurt feeling and restoring a better and purer love-relationship with the offender.

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Forgiving cheerfully does a person a world of good. "Never does a human soul become strong as when it dares to forgive an injury." We receive riches of grace by forgiving (Eph.1:7). Forgiveness is true wisdom and 'all wisdom' (Eph. 1:8). If so, being unforgiving is 'all foolishness'. Forgiveness is a precondition for healing (II Chron.7:14; Psa.103:3). In fact, Christlike forgiveness opens to us the treasures of God's richest blessings. Once we learn to forgive others as our Lord did, Christian life is indeed 'joy unspeakable and full of glory'. Forgiveness is the heart of the gospel and it is the heart of a true Christian life also. If we cannot forgive, we are but 'heartless' Christians! Forgiveness is the bridge to heaven. When someone says, "I cannot forgive you, I will not forgive you," he is virtually destroying the bridge on which he is standing, plunging himself into the ocean of *eternal sorrow* and torment.

God, in all ages, has raised and promoted forgiving people in every area of life. It is they who can be true leaders. They are a blessing to the whole world, like Joseph. There is a saying like this: "Ability may bring you to the top, but only character can keep you there." How true that is! Most politicians accuse others in order to come to power. And once

they come to power, they accuse others even more. What a disorientation and disarray this world is facing due to such corrupt political leaders! But forgiving people are great. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Am I not destroying mine enemies when I make them my friends?" "Lord make me an instrument of peace," prayed St. Francis of Assisi—"Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is confusion, peace; where there is darkness, light; where there is injury, pardon. Let me not seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love." For by giving we receive; by forgiving we are forgiven; by dying we are born to eternal life.

This book is written to show the Reader how blessed a thing forgiveness is, how it is a foretaste of heaven. The many dangers that lie in harbouring an unforgiving spirit are also exposed. We pray that every Reader will be blessed and be led into a life of heaven on earth.

70/10/16/16/16

To protect the privacy of the individual some of the names used in this book are not real.

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CHAPTER 1

CHRISTLIKE FORGIVENESS

Most children of God have the desire to become Christlike in character. But some give up this noble desire after a time of trying and struggling. If we realize that *there is an easy way to become like Christ*, we will never give up the longing to become like Him, but rather pursue it all the more with zeal and fervour.

One cannot grow in Christlikeness without first learning Christlike forgiveness. It would be like preparing for a college degree without first learning the ABC. So, the easy way to become like Christ is to first learn the very basic spiritual lesson—Christlike forgiveness. In other words, if we have not learned to forgive as Christ did, we may never learn to become like Christ.

How do we forgive as our Saviour did?

"But one of the soldiers pierced His [Christ's] side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (Jn.19:34 NKJV).

This is a text filled with deep spiritual truths on the subject of forgiveness. Obviously, the soldier pierced

the side of our Lord's body so deep that His heart was pierced and immediately blood and water gushed out of His heart. Just as the Roman soldier pierced the heart of Christ, sometimes, people may pierce our hearts; may not be with spears, but with the tongue. People may reject us, despise us, ridicule us, or speak all kinds of evil of us falsely, and this may break our hearts. But the important question is, how do we react to all this? How did our Lord react? "Immediately blood and water came out." The blood of Jesus signifies forgiveness. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph.1:7 NKJV). When people around us pierce our heart, forgiveness should come out of our heart. Water typifies many things, one of which is 'divine love'. Jesus spoke of living waters referring to the love of God shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Jn.7:38,39; Rom.5:5). When we are being "pierced", we must offer forgiveness and divine love to those who pierce us. Some try to forgive the offender after a few years but the verse says, "*immediately* blood and water came out". We must learn to forgive immediately and straightway offer agape or unconditional love. If someone throws a stone at an apple tree full of juicy fruits, the apple tree *immediately* (not after a few years) gives him a juicy apple in return, as if it were saying, "Thank you for pelting me with a stone." That is the very nature of our God. He Who created the apple tree has created us too. When someone throws a stone (ridicule, reproach, etc.) at us, if we fail to give a 'thank you' fruit in return (the firstfruit of the Spirit is love) *immediately*, it proves that we are not fruitful trees but barren ones! From where did the blood and water come out when the

soldier pierced Christ? From the *heart*. Sometimes, with our mouth we may say, "I forgive you and love you," but forgiveness and love should come out of our heart, and that makes all the difference, and that is Christlike forgiveness.

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

We know of many spiritual gifts but many are ignorant of this unique gift—the gift of forgiveness. Those who receive this blessed gift can become a blessing to millions, not only in this generation but in the generations to come, and all through eternity.

In the parable of Jesus on 'forgiveness' in Matthew Chapter 18, we see the king cancelling a debt of 10,000 talents. One talent of gold weighs about 100 lbs. If so, one talent may be worth a minimum of a million dollars. Then, 10,000 talents is like 10,000 million dollars! This amounts to gifting the debtor with the sum of \$10,000 million. Receiving forgiveness from God for the sins we have committed is like receiving a gift of \$10,000 million. In fact, the price Jesus paid on the cross for us is infinitely much more than that. How sad it is to see the servant who received \$10,000 million trying to kill the person who owed him just 100 pence (about one dollar)! Forgiving one who has wronged us is just like giving away one dollar!

Each of us, when we received forgiveness of sins at the time of salvation, has received \$10,000 million or more! If we have so much money, is it not easy to *immediately* give one dollar each to even a thousand people who ask for it? We do not have to work hard for

a month to earn enough money to do it, do we? This is the gift of forgiveness.

If, when someone spits on us, immediately we feel hurt (and that is natural), it shows that we do not have the gift of forgiveness. True, after feeling hurt, we may realize that we are the children of God and that we should be forgiving, and forgive the offender. However, that is not Christlike forgiveness. Having the gift of forgiveness or Christlike forgiveness is being able to forgive and love a person immediately after he has committed the worst possible sin against us. The secret is this: when we realize the greatness of the forgiveness Jesus has offered us, we will realize the smallness of the sins others have committed against us. In other words, when we are aware of the terrible sinful state from which the Lord saved us, we will see the offences of others as very, very small and we can easily forgive and love them. On the other hand, if we see the sins of others as great, we are minimising the forgiveness of Jesus towards us.

There are numerous blessings in the gift of forgiveness. Let us remember, when we are forgiven by the Lord, we receive riches of grace along with it—"In Whom we have redemption through His blood, *the forgiveness of sins*, according to the *riches of His grace*" (Eph.1:7).

Dear friend, Jesus wants to give you the gift of forgiveness, a gift that can transform your whole life and ministry. You will not feel hurt when people speak evil of you, reject you or persecute you; rather, you will love them even more. You will be a blessed man and your

life and ministry will be extraordinary. Open your heart today and receive this blessed gift.

Come to the foot of the cross *right now*. Can you see forgiveness and love (blood and water) flowing from His pierced heart? Will you dedicate yourself today to become an instrument in God's hands to reveal Christlike forgiveness?

THE BEAUTIES OF CHRISTLIKE FORGIVENESS

If we have not learned to forgive, our life will not be exciting. We will go to bed wishing we will not wake up the next morning. When we wake up, we do not want to get out of bed to face another miserable day. But once we learn to forgive as Christ forgave, it is altogether another story! Each day will be more exciting than the day before. We will realize from past experience, that we are going to be more useful to others, that more opportunities are awaiting us and that more offended, hurt and rejected people are going to experience the fragrance of true forgiveness through us.

Christlike forgiveness produces many beautiful qualities in us.

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another; and forgiving one another" (Col.3:12,13).

'Forbearing one another' refers to forgiving present offences and, 'forgiving one another', is forgiving past offences. In this context, we learn a blessed truth from St. Paul: "This one thing I do, forgetting those things

which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil.3:13,14). When we cannot forgive or forget the past (offences), we cannot reach forth unto "those things which are before" ie. unto joy, peace, the manifold grace of God, etc.

Bowels of mercies, ie., tender mercies or compassion: When someone spits on our face, pierces our heart, etc, if we have learned Christlike forgiveness, we will have compassion on the one who did it. Jesus had compassion on those who spat on His face and scourged Him. That compassion moved Him to pray, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." If we cannot forgive, we will feel irritated, hurt and angry. Our hurt feeling or irritation is a sure sign of our unforgiving spirit.

Kindness: This word in Greek signifies goodness or usefulness. Jesus was useful and a blessing even to His worst enemies. He created a brand new ear for Malchus who came to arrest Him. Joseph's brothers hated him, plotted to kill him, etc., but he became a great blessing to them and took care of them and their little ones. "You ...killed the Prince of Life [Jesus], Whom God...having raised up...sent...to bless you" (Acts 3:15,26). Jesus became a blessing to His murderers. Until we become a blessing to our enemies or 'murderers', we cannot claim to have learned Christlike forgiveness. Yes, forgiving like Christ is most exciting as it is the most blessed life.

Humbleness of mind: Many of us have not learnt what "humbleness of mind" is. If we are truly humble, rejections, persecutions, betrayals, storms or winds will not put us under pressure or cause us any problem; the

grace of God will compass us, as God gives grace to the humble. The story is told of an oak tree that often boasted to a little blade of grass growing nearby. "You little thing, you are so weak, frail and tiny. Look how tall and great I am!" The blade of grass would keep quiet; after all, he had nothing to boast about. One day, a great storm blew. The mighty oak started shaking. He tried his best to stand erect but soon fell to the ground with a great thud. When the storm subsided he saw the blade of grass standing on the ground, as fresh as ever. "O little grass, I was so great and tall but I could not withstand the mighty storm. How did you manage, being such a small fellow?" he asked. The grass smiled and said, "It is simple. When storms and winds blow on me, I just bow my head and they go over me without causing any problem!" O blessed humility! Till we learn to forgive, we will never learn true humility of mind. At the root of every unforgiving spirit is pride! If we feel hurt when someone is insulting us, it is our pride that is hurt. When we say that we are deeply hurt, it means we have deep pride. We may not admit it though, because of pride, of course!

Meekness: Meekness is the quality that helps us accept insults cheerfully and not strike back with hatred or anger. Dr. Williard Harris, a famous physician of Ohio State University, says that anger and fear affect the heart in two ways: the pulse rate increases and the breathing rate doubles. Acute heart attack has been associated with acute anger. Repeated bouts of anger over a long period of time can damage the heart. Meekness is the quality that works the other way around. It is indeed healthy

for our mind and body. Unforgiving people can *never* have a meek spirit.

Longsuffering: I Corinthians 13:4 says, "Love suffers long and is kind" (NKJV). Kind to whom? We can easily be kind to someone who is kind to us. But can we be kind to someone who has been afflicting us *for a long time*? 'Longsuffering' is 'being kind to someone who has been giving us suffering for a long time'.

Here is a touching story of a Chinese Christian woman named Nancy Huong. When she was born, her father promised his friend in the village that he would give her in marriage to his son, Victor Chong. One day she met with an accident which inflicted wounds on her lovely face. Although the wounds healed, the ugly scars remained. When she grew up, the boy married her, respecting the agreement made by his father. However, he hated her. Although two lovely children were born to the couple, the husband's hatred for the wife kept growing. He hardly spoke to her. But the wife, being a committed Christian, continued to love him and care for him without a word of complaint. Sometime later Victor was hospitalized with serious problems in both his eyes. Nancy took this opportunity to show her love and devotion for her husband. She had taken up some odd part-time jobs and had saved a little money. She gave all her savings to her husband. However, he had no word of thanks for her. On the contrary, one day, he instructed that she should no longer visit him at the hospital.

Victor lost both his eyes but someone donated an eye for him. When he came home from the hospital, Nancy served him food as usual and he ignored her as

usual. Suddenly the children shouted, "Mummy, you must tell it, you must tell it *now*." Puzzled, Victor turned to look at Nancy. He had a shock; Nancy had only one eye! He then realized the loving, but silent sacrifice she had made for him. This broke his hardened heart and changed him completely. For the first time Victor found Nancy most beautiful. What made the difference? Nancy's forgiving love had touched his heart. "Love suffers long and is kind." Nancy suffered long and continued to be kind to the one who caused her suffering. She was richly rewarded. If she had reacted otherwise, not only would the marriage have ended up in a divorce, but she would have also spent the rest of her life in the misery of hatred and bitterness. May this world which is filled with unforgiving people find light and life in Christlike forgiveness.

A person who has learned to forgive as Christ forgave can never be harmed by any man or the devil. Look at the life of Joseph. Although his brothers had hated him, conspired to kill him, put him in a pit and sold him as a slave, see what Joseph says: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20). Joseph did not say, "You *did* evil against me" but "you *thought* evil against me." What a blessed truth! No one can do any evil to the man who has learned to forgive as Christ did.

An angelic face while dying: Those who learn to forgive like Christ will have an angelic face while dying. Let us look at the beautiful story of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. "And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly

on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel"; "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" (Acts 6:15; 7:60).

It is easy to have an angelic smile when in a comfortable situation, or before an applauding crowd. But here, Stephen was before a hostile crowd, before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme court. They were all accusing him and he was about to be stoned to death. Besides, he was fully aware of his situation. To have sweet calmness as that of an angel at such a time, one needs a Christlike forgiving nature. Note that it was not his friends who observed his shining face, but his angry murderers!

How many saints die as gloriously and triumphantly as Stephen did? When a person is being stoned to death, his dying moments would naturally be agonizing. Yet, Stephen had such deep love and compassion for his murderers that he knelt down (a person in a kneeling posture is more exposed to stoning than the one who is lying down) and cried with a loud voice (doing both would have been very difficult just moments before dying) pleading forgiveness for them. His last prayer was for the blessing of his enemies! Stephen died on his knees and with an angelic face, praying for forgiveness for his enemies. God wonderfully answered his prayer and fairly soon, Saul of Tarsus, the worst enemy of Christians, was saved and became St. Paul.

In contrast, some children of God have a really frightening face and attitude at the point of death. Mary was a good believer in a particular assembly. She appeared to be one of the best members of the church

—very active, attending all the church meetings, bringing new souls to church, doing charitable work, etc. She even dedicated her son for the Lord's work and lived like a servant of God in every way. One day, she became very sick and was about to die. She entrusted her children into the hands of the Lord and prayed, "Lord, I am ready to come to You now." The Lord replied, "Coming to Me? You are going to *hell*!", "What! Lord, I am Your child. Am I going to *hell*?" Mary cried. "Yes, you are! You have not forgiven your sister!" came the reply. Mary was terribly frightened and her face changed. Fear of death gripped her spirit. She cried, "Lord, please don't let me die now. Please give me a chance. I will forgive her and speak to her." Then she sent for her sister. She asked forgiveness from her and kissed and hugged her. Then the Lord graciously healed her. Now she is a living testimony to the fact that at times when our healing delays, it may be due to an unforgiving spirit.

Dear child of God, do not make the foolish mistake of imagining that while harbouring a grudge or an unforgiving spirit, your good works will help you escape hell-fire. True, God spared Mary's life and she got a chance on her deathbed to forgive and escape death and hell-fire. But, do not think you too will get such a chance. A person who cannot forgive others will definitely have the terror of hell on his face. May God make us all like Stephen. Whether we live or die, may our hearts be filled with forgiving love and our faces shine with an angelic smile.

THE POWER OF FORGIVING LOVE

Unlike wishy-washy forgiveness, Christlike forgiveness is a miracle-working forgiveness! Those who learn to forgive like Christ will turn out to be a great blessing to millions. Verse 37 in St. John's Gospel, Chapter 19 says, "They shall look on Him Whom they pierced." That is, if we offer *immediate* forgiveness and heavenly love to people who pierce our hearts, one day the same people will approach us for favour or blessings in their need!

Tradition says that the name of the Roman soldier who pierced the heart of Jesus was Longinus. He had some defect in his eyes. As the blood flowed from the side of Jesus, some drops fell on his eyes and he was immediately healed. This brought conviction of sin upon him and he was saved. He became a great saint, he preached Christ boldly, and finally became a martyr for Him. This story is purely tradition; but whether it is true or not, the golden truth stands out—if we learn to offer forgiveness and love to our offenders, then certainly, one day, we will become a blessing to them.

The following is a true story that can stir us up to become a great blessing to those who appear to have done the worst damage to our life and family.

Karl and Edith Taylor lived in a small apartment in Waltham, Massachusetts. They loved each other dearly and lived happily for 23 years. In February 1950, the Government sent Karl to Okinawa. Postcards and gifts hardly reached Edith. She thought that her husband must be very busy, and did not have enough time to write. Then his assignment, which was supposed to have been only for a few months, kept extending mysteriously. In the meantime, Edith who was a deeply committed Christian worked hard and paid the advance to buy a small house.

However, after a short time, Edith learned that Karl had married a 19-year-old servant girl called Aiko, from Okinawa. Edith was 48 then. Although it was a shock to Edith, she took the whole matter to the Lord in prayer. Instead of getting filled with anger and hatred towards Karl, she was full of pity and compassion towards him; she saw him as a lonely man, as the man who had always leaned on her for help. She had compassion for Aiko too, a penniless, perhaps illiterate girl who desperately needed a life partner.

Karl wrote one day that he and Aiko were expecting a baby. Marie was born in 1951; then Helen in 1953. Edith sent little gifts for the children. After sometime she got a letter to say that Karl was in the hospital dying of lung cancer; he had hardly any money for the hospital bills. Edith sent some money. She also did all she could so that Karl could die in peace.

After Karl's death, Edith offered to educate Aiko's two girls in America, as all Karl's money had been spent on hospital bills. Aiko finally accepted the offer and sent the children to Edith. Edith worked hard to take care of the children and educate them. In a few years time she became very weak and sickly. She realized that she was getting old and that the girls needed help. She decided to bring Aiko from Japan. However, Aiko was still a Japanese citizen and the immigration quota had a long waiting list of many more years. But by this time, press agents got to hear of this wonderful story of forgiving love, and it got published in many newspapers. Many petitions were forwarded to the Congress. A special bill speeded through the Congress and in 1957, Aiko Taylor was permitted to enter the United States.

As Aiko came down the stairs from the plane at New York Airport, what do you think happened? Edith had every reason to give Aiko a cold reception. She could have thought, "This is the woman who destroyed my 23-year-old married life. She destroyed my husband, my family, my future, my happiness, my health, my wealth, etc., etc." Instead, Edith warmly hugged Aiko, and Aiko wept on Edith's shoulders! Aiko found in Edith a love and compassion which she had not got even from her late husband. No wonder then that Aiko, the one who "pierced" the heart of Edith looked up at the "one whom she pierced" and found great blessing and favour! Aiko, the heathen girl was transformed, as she found Christlike love and forgiveness in Edith.

This world is a sick world full of people with the sickness of an unforgiving spirit, hatred, anger, revenge,

bitterness, resentment, etc. God needs a group of people who can forgive instantly and love from the heart. There is no greater conquering power on this earth than the power of Christlike forgiveness. It can heal broken hearts, broken marriages, broken lives and broken families. Only forgiving people have a bright future and only they can offer others a better tomorrow.

When Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," He was in (a) the most humiliated state (b) the weakest moments of His physical life (c) the worst state of suffering (d) the most painful state, both physically and emotionally. But what was the outcome of that prayer? Today millions are being forgiven and released from the power of eternal death and destruction. By learning to forgive we also can help release millions from the power of divorce, disease, death, and destruction.

One meaning of the Greek word for "forgive" is "release". By forgiving, we release both ourselves and others. Those who cannot forgive others wholeheartedly can never enjoy *true freedom*. What is true freedom? True freedom is knowing the right thing and having the power to do it. Many people know that the right thing to do is to forgive, but they do not have the inner strength or power to do it. An alcoholic may know that the right thing to do is to give up drinking; a chain smoker may know that the right thing to do is to give up smoking before dying of lung cancer. But they may not have the power to give it up. Only Christ can give one this true freedom. "If the Son [the Lord Jesus Christ] therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (Jn.8:36).

Why don't we come *right now* to the Lord Jesus and receive inner strength to forgive and love our worst enemy?

The story is told of a man who got into a small boat late one evening and started rowing to reach the other side of the river. He rowed almost all night, but as it began to dawn, he realized the terrible mistake he had made. The boat was still in the place where he had begun because it was tethered to a tree on the shore. He had not untied the rope before starting to row. Unforgiving people are making the same foolish mistake. Forgiving others releases yourself and your boat (life); otherwise your boat (life) will never make any progress. It will never reach the other side of the river or heaven. Finally, at the end of your life you will realize that all your labour (rowing) had been in vain (and it will be too late then!). If you want to enjoy *true freedom*, learn to forgive and love your enemies.

In a communist country there was a Christian woman who had a little son. Every year the boy used to present his mother with a bouquet of flowers on her birthday. One day the communists got to know that the woman was witnessing to others about Christ. She was arrested and killed. When the mother's next birthday arrived, the boy decided to make a beautiful bouquet and lay it on the grave. On his way to the grave, suddenly, he remembered what his mother had said before she died as a martyr for Christ: "Son, we must love our enemies; that's what Jesus taught us." He had an excellent idea. He said to himself, "Mum is in heaven. She doesn't need these flowers anymore. I must give this bouquet

to the communist captain who killed her. Then mum in heaven will be happy seeing her son take her good advice, and Jesus will be very happy too." The boy turned and went straight to the captain's office and offered him the bouquet saying, "Sir, today is mum's birthday. I used to give her a bouquet on her birthday. But as mum was a Christian, last year, you killed her. I made this bouquet today and was going to lay it on her grave when I suddenly remembered that mum had said, 'Son, you must love your enemies; that's what Jesus taught us.' Then I realized that I must give this bouquet to you for that would make both mum and Jesus very happy. So sir, please accept this."

The captain was a hardened murderer of Christians, but the words of the little boy pierced his heart like a sword. He wept unashamedly, perhaps for the first time in his life. Instead of taking the bouquet, he took the boy in his arms and said, "Son, we communists were never taught to love our enemies. From today, the Jesus Who taught your mother to love her enemies, will be my God." The forgiving love that the boy expressed melted the heart of the communist captain. Not only did he commit his life to Christ in that very office but he was such a shining Christian that fairly soon he was arrested and sent to prison for the sake of Christ.

'Forgiving' is going the extra mile or the second mile. Once a Christian farmer faced a situation he could not tackle. Every night he went to his paddy field and with great strain manually watered it. But the neighbouring farmer, who was not a Christian, would get up early in the morning and redirect the water into his

own field, leaving the Christian farmer's field dry. The Christian did not argue over it, but forgave him. This continued for a number of days. The Christian then went to his pastor for counsel. The pastor advised him, "First water your neighbour's field and then water yours." The Christian did just that. This brought such a conviction and shame upon the neighbour that he stopped stealing the water. The Christian's forgiving love had a great impact on his life.

See the power of forgiving love. If we have a handful of Christians with this powerful weapon of Christlike forgiveness, without doubt this would be a far better place to live in.

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CHAPTER 3

THE FIVE ASPECTS OF FORGIVENESS

There are five areas in which we all need to experience forgiveness. We need to 1. receive forgiveness from God 2. ask forgiveness of others 3. forgive ourselves 4. forgive God 5. forgive others.

1. RECEIVING FORGIVENESS FROM GOD

Once a dear saint prayed, "Lord, please don't take me to heaven till I'm spotlessly clean." A certain young man heard that prayer. It opened his spiritual eyes and revolutionised his whole life and ministry. It is true that the blood of Jesus Christ can wash all our sins away. But unless we repent of our sins and confess them, His blood cannot wash us and make us spotless. Suppose you are working in a soap factory and getting free soap for personal use. If you still wear dirty clothes, it is not the fault of the soap; it does not mean that the soap has no power to make clothes clean. It is just that you did

not apply the soap. So it is with sinners and backsliders — they are in their filthy state, not because the blood of Jesus has no power, but because they did not apply the blood to themselves.

Some of those who often get irritated and angry, pick on others, take out their frustration on their children, wife, or husband, etc. have secret or unconfessed sins in their lives. If we do not experience this first step in Christian life, of *receiving forgiveness from God*, we may fail in the other four steps of forgiveness.

In this modern digital age, watching obscene programmes on television, video, Internet, etc. are not considered as great sins. The Word of God says, "For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon...all pleasant pictures" (Isa.2:12,16). Perhaps this is a reference to all the modern "pleasant pictures" on television, etc. A great saint is one who reckons his little sins as great sins, as they are committed against a great God. One man of God who was known to often preach on a "crystal-clear Christian life", lived and died as a great saint. Some children of God do not consider certain sins as serious till they are in their deathbed. And deathbed confessions are often shallow and self-centered. We must see our sins as God sees them. As our God is One Who sees everything, we must be serious with our invisible sins i.e., those in our thoughts, imaginations, desires, etc.

Mrs. Cowman, in her famous book "Streams in the Desert", shares a beautiful story. One fine morning a drop of water in one of the filthiest gutters, looked up and saw a shining dew drop on the top of a mountain.

The drop of water in the gutter prayed: "O Lord, look at the dew drop shining so brilliantly on the mountaintop, and look at myself, such a filthy, dirty, smelly water drop. Can I ever become like that dew drop, so pure and clean?" God answered the prayer! As sunlight fell on the gutter, gradually the water drop evaporated and went right up to the sky. Early next morning it came down upon the mountain as a dew drop!

Dear friend, perhaps you are like the filthy drop of water in the gutter. Your mind may be filled with all kinds of filthiness. Do not be discouraged. There is hope for you. If God can transform the drop of water in the gutter into a dew drop, He can do the same with your mind. He is able to save you from the "gutter(most) to the uttermost".

Let us take time on our knees to examine our hearts and ask the Lord for forgiveness for all our sins. Let us live each day realizing it could be the day of our rapture or of our departure. May the Lord help us have a crystal-clear Christian life.

2. ASKING FORGIVENESS FROM OTHERS

Even if we have not done anything against anyone, if we know that someone is hurt by us, we must ask forgiveness. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt.5:23,24). Note the words "if...thy brother hath aught against thee..." We

may not have anything against our brother; still, we must take the initiative and humble ourselves to bring about reconciliation.

The altar was placed in the outer court of the tabernacle. This proves that if we are not reconciled with our brethren, we cannot even go to the outer court. In this New Testament Period, we are called to the Holy of Holies. If so, how much more eager we must be to live in peace with others!

In this Grace Period, Christ is our Altar (Heb. 13:10). So, we lose our access to Christ, or lose the presence of God, if we do not get reconciled with others. Cain asked God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" If we are not our brother's keeper, we are our brother's killer, as Cain was.

An unforgiving spirit conceives hatred and begets the spirit of murder. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (1 Jn.3:15)—murdering whom? When we hate others, we kill the peace, the joy, the grace, and finally the eternal life we have received.

It is good to ask forgiveness as soon as we realize our mistake. Delayed obedience is disobedience. Very often, husband-wife relationships are strained because one or the other delays or refuses to ask forgiveness due to pride or stubbornness. In some cases, the husband may expect or demand forgiveness first from the wife or vice versa. The right spirit is to ask forgiveness from others, even if our mistake is only 1% and that of the other, 99%.

3. FORGIVING OURSELVES

Many children of God are living in a condemned state. Although God forgave their sins when they genuinely repented and confessed them, they find it hard to forgive themselves. In some cases, the devil condemns them, whispering, "How dare you think that a holy God can forgive such a great sin?" The devil is a liar and the father of lies. The Word of God says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom.8:1).

Once a young Christian committed a sin. Immediately afterward he felt convicted—not only did he repent and confess his sin, but he also set his life right in that matter right away. However, the devil kept condemning him. After many years of struggling with the feeling of condemnation, one day he approached an elderly sister in the church who often had visions of Christ, and said, "Sister, the next time you see Jesus, please ask Him what sin I committed when I was young." She agreed. So when Jesus appeared to her, she asked Him, "Lord, what sin did that person commit when he was young?" "I don't remember!" came the prompt reply.

How can the all-knowing God, Who even counts every hair on our head, forget our sins? we think, but that is what the Word of God says. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb.8:12). When we truly repent of our sins, *our God not only forgives, but also forgets!* This is amazingly true. When we reach the pearly gate of heaven, do you think the Lord will stand

there to say, "I remember all that you did. Anyway, since you have asked forgiveness, come inside"? No, never. Not only now, but all through eternity, we will be before Him as if we had never sinned! The blood of Christ forgives us and justifies us also.

Our Lord's name is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending (Rev.1:8). What does that mean? As He is Alpha, the Beginning, *He can go to our past or to the very beginning of our life* and His blood can wash our past and make it as if we had never sinned! It is true that we cannot go to our past, even to yesterday, but our God can. Let us therefore forgive ourselves because our God has forgiven our sins and forgotten them all.

"This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil.3:13,14).

4. FORGIVING GOD

Forgive God? What sin has God committed that we should forgive Him? Nothing at all! There is absolutely no sin in God. He is holy, holy, holy. Blessed be His holy name.

However, there are times when we human beings, in our human frailty, fail to understand the work of God. In our hearts, perhaps ignorantly, we question God. "Lord, why did You take away my child?", "I am the only one who seems to be going through such a hard trial. Why?", "Why is this happening to my marriage?", "Lord,

why did You allow this sickness in my child's life?", "Why did You allow my husband to do this to me?", "Why did You allow this problem in my work-place?", "I always have this financial problem. Why?" "What wrong have I done that You should punish me, my children, my family like this?" There may be literally hundreds of situations which we cannot understand. It may appear as if we are the only ones who go through such hard trials and all other Christians may appear to be well off.

Without our knowledge, as we keep questioning God, a grudge may develop in our hearts and our love towards God may grow cold. Gradually we find that prayer is no more sweet, but boring, and the Word of God may seem to be a dead book. Going to church will only be a formality and no sermon will be interesting. The grudge nursed in our hearts is growing, swallowing up all that is good, like a dragon in our hearts. *We must forgive God.* Our little mind cannot grasp all the wisdom of God; all the wonderful, but often mysterious works of God. It is true we do not understand many things that are happening in our life. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us" (Deut.29:29).

When we were children, we could not grasp some of the good deeds of our parents. For example, a baby, seeing the golden flames in the fireplace, may crawl over to take hold of it. But as soon as the mother sees it, she rushes to rescue the baby; in the process, she may even give the baby a gentle smack which may make him cry and be angry with the mother for not letting him catch that "beautiful thing". There are times

when we too are spiritual babes, not being able to understand the good hand of God working for us.

Once a young man got saved and became active in spiritual matters. Then, a young mother in his neighbourhood died, leaving behind a baby. The young Christian got very offended. "If God were a loving God, He would have taken the baby rather than the mother. How can the baby survive without its mother?" he thought. One night he had a dream. He saw an angel of God, dressed like an ordinary human being, walking in pouring rain on a dark night. The angel knocked at the door of a house and asked for help. An old couple opened the door. They had compassion on him, gave him a change of clothes, a hot meal and a bed to sleep in. Before going to bed, the old couple told the stranger that they were a few days away from their 50th wedding anniversary. Pointing to a silver plate in the show case, they told him that they were planning to eat from that plate, which was presented to them by their nephew. After the couple went to sleep, the angel took the silver plate and went away. It was still raining and very dark. The angel had to cross a river on a small wooden bridge. He knocked at the door of a house close to the bridge and asked for a lamp. The kind housekeeper sent his little son to help him over the bridge. Half-way across the bridge, the angel pushed the boy into the river and he died.

While seeing this dream, the young Christian thought, "What I thought was right. If God were a loving God, He wouldn't let His angel do all these cruel and wicked things to those who were very kind and

good." Then the angel spoke to the young Christian. "Whatever my heavenly Father commands me, I do implicitly and without questioning. I know that all His commandments are excellent and worthy to be obeyed. In the case of the old couple, their nephew, being the next of kin, had poisoned the silver plate so that when the couple ate out of it, they would die and all their property would go to him. If I had told the old couple what their nephew had done, it could have brought bitterness in their hearts towards their nephew and they could have died of a broken heart. So it was best to remove the silver plate, and save their lives spiritually and physically. In the case of the little boy who drowned in the river, it was not the will of the heavenly Father to give that couple a son. However, that godly couple had cried day and night. So God had compassion on them and gave them a son. But the boy was being pampered by the couple. If God takes him now in his innocent state, he can be safe in heaven. If any delay is made, he will be lost in the world and the parents will miss him through all eternity. Therefore the Lord did the best for both couples, although at that moment it was hidden from their sight." The young Christian realized his mistake and when he awoke, he asked forgiveness from God for doubting His love.

Dear friend, perhaps you too have many questions in your heart — why God allowed this or that. Let God be God. "Be still and know that I am God." "All things work together for good to them that love God." Please do **not** question God any more. When you go to heaven and see Jesus, He will surely tell you, "My child, all that

I did was for your good." Let not your grudge against God grow into a dragon and devour all the goodness of God. Forgive God!

5. FORGIVING OTHERS

Unfortunately, there seems to be an abysmal ignorance among children of God about this very important area of forgiveness. Quite a number of well-meaning Christians are deceived into thinking that they have forgiven others, while the truth is otherwise. If this blessed truth is properly grasped, Christian marriages, families and homes can virtually be heaven on earth! A happy marriage is the union of, not two perfect persons, as many imagine, but of two forgiving persons. Unforgiving people dig the pit of hell for themselves and for others.

If we have learned to forgive others wholeheartedly, we have laid a strong foundation in our Christian life, ministry, marriage, family, etc. May the dear Lord open our spiritual eyes to see the blessed truth of forgiving others from the heart, just as Christ forgave us. Then we will stand out in this world like fragrant roses among thorns. The fragrance will not die even after the rose falls to the ground. On the contrary, the ground too will become fragrant.

16:16-16:16-16.

CHAPTER 4

HAVE I REALLY FORGIVEN?

There are seven clear evidences of our having forgiven others from the depths of our heart. All these are beautifully portrayed in the life of Joseph in Genesis Chapter forty-five.

(1) Once we have forgiven someone, we will never mention to anyone, at any time, even to close friends, what that person did to us.

Joseph was hated by his brothers, put in a pit and sold as a slave. After many years, he became the governor of the Egyptian empire. His brothers were not aware of it. They came to Egypt to buy corn during the famine. Joseph recognized his brothers, but his brothers did not recognize him. Finally the time came for him to make himself known to them. Joseph asked all the Egyptians standing around him to go out (Gen.45:1). Why? He did not want any of them to know what his brothers had done to him. This is clear proof that Joseph had truly forgiven his brethren.

Further, when Joseph was in prison, there came a chance for him to explain to his cell-mate, the chief butler, how he came to be in the prison. Look at the beautiful way Joseph explained it: "For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon" (Gen.40:15). He could have told the butler how his brothers had hated him and sold him as a slave, how Potiphar's wife had falsely accused him, etc, but he did not. This shows that Joseph had already forgiven all of them. If he had explained all the ill-treatment he had received, to the butler, in all probability, he would have continued in his misery and died in the prison itself. Let us remember, we may never come out of our prison-like situations, unless we learn to forgive others.

Many Christians are under deep deception. They imagine that they have forgiven others, but they are actually in bondage to an unforgiving spirit. A person who realizes that he is ignorant of a thing, is teachable. But a person who thinks he knows everything, cannot be taught. This is the sad state of many Christians. They partake of the Holy Communion regularly and may say, "I have nothing against any one." But whenever they get a chance, they speak about what others have done to them; in the same breath they may also say, "I have forgiven them, but I am just telling you what type of people they are!"

How sad it is that some of God's people are practically agents of the devil, the accuser of the brethren. Many churches and families are facing divisions and confusion all because an important lesson in Christian life has been neglected—"Speak evil of no man." Remember, the

moment you speak to anyone about what others have done to you, the demon of an unforgiving spirit takes over your life to destroy your family, marriage, good conscience, peace, joy and every other good thing both in this life and in the life to come.

- (2) *Once we forgive someone, we will not want him to be tormented anymore by a guilty conscience. We will do all we can to help him forgive himself.*

Although Joseph had forgiven his brothers, obviously, they had not. If they had had any love for him, they would have searched for him but they did not. So when they saw him after about twenty years, they were 'terrified at his presence' (Gen.45:3 NIV).

When we fail to forgive and love those who have wronged us, the devil may fill our heart with all kinds of negative fears. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear". "Fear hath torment," says St. John (I Jn.4:18). Those who cannot forgive others will therefore have torment. Often, those who cannot forgive others have secret sins in their lives. So it can be seen that those who have secret sins, have tormenting fears.

All negative fears are from the devil, and you can be delivered from them right away. Once you have repented of any secret sins you may have committed, and forgiven those who have hurt you, you have every right to rebuke the demon of fear with all authority in the name of Jesus. "Resist the devil, and he will flee" (Jas.4:7). "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but...of love" (II Tim.1:7).

On the other hand, how did Joseph respond to his brothers' fear? "Don't be grieved that you sold me," he

said, "Don't condemn yourselves." This is the real spirit of forgiveness. If you have not really forgiven, you will say, "Yes, I've forgiven you, but you've got to learn a lesson. You're suffering today because of all you did to me." That is not Christ's spirit. If somebody has wronged us, we should wholeheartedly pray that no evil should befall him. And if any evil does come to him, we should cry out to God for his deliverance.

(3) *Once we have forgiven others, we want them to be closer to us than before.*

Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me" (Gen. 45:4 NIV). Although the unforgiving brothers stood away, Joseph wanted them close to him. He wanted not only his brothers, but even their children and grandchildren to be near him. "Thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast" (Gen. 45:10). This is one evidence of genuine forgiveness.

Some people say, "I have forgiven that person, but I keep my distance. If we come closer, more trouble may arise." This is a trick of the devil. If you have really forgiven someone, you will actually want that person to be closer to you than before. The other may try to keep away from you but your forgiving love should go after him to win him for Christ. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. What if Jesus had forgiven us and said, "I have forgiven you, but don't come near Me and I will not come near you either. Don't talk to Me; I will not talk to you either. Don't come to My house (heaven) and I will not come to your house either..."?

Such a forgiveness would be mockery and meaningless. When we were yet sinners, God loved us and came down from heaven so that we may be close to His heart. He came in search of us; we did not go after Him, but He came after us.

Our "safe distance" from others is a very dangerous unsafe distance. We may physically meet others, but our hearts can be a million miles away from them. We may not show it outwardly. Some have distanced themselves from their own parents, wives or husbands. If we die in such a state (God forbid!), what happens in eternity? That "(un)safe distance" that we kept between us and our offenders will become a great gulf fixed in eternity! See what father Abraham says to the rich man in hell: "And beside all this, between us and you there is a *great gulf* fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (Lk.16:26). Our character on earth will reflect our eternal state. What we read in the case of the rich man in hell is that the "great gulf [was] *fixed*"—it cannot be removed in eternity. Thank God, while we are on earth, if we have made such a great gulf between us and our brothers, it is not too late to remove it and we can remove it by the grace of God. But if we leave this world without removing the gulf, in eternity it will be fixed for ever, to our eternal doom and shame.

Beloved friend, please examine yourself and see whether you have distanced yourself from anyone. Do you realize, if you do not remove this *great gulf* now, it can be your eternal doom? Please forgive your offender; let your heart go after him in love and compassion till you

win him for Christ. *Break the great gulf today itself.* Even if he does not talk to you, go and talk to him. Even if he does not greet you, go and greet him warmly. Though he does not write to you or phone you, do write or phone him today. Go the extra mile and put the devil to shame.

When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (Prov.16:7). Are your ways really pleasing to God?

(4) *Forgiveness brings new life; an unforgiving spirit, death.*

"God did send me before you to preserve life...to save your lives by a great deliverance," said Joseph to his brothers (Gen.45:5,7). We received salvation or eternal life since Jesus forgave all our sins. Forgiveness, therefore, is connected with new life. When we do not in turn extend forgiveness to others, we forfeit the forgiveness we have received from the Lord and with it, life. The more we learn to forgive others, the more we receive life. Similarly, the more we refuse to forgive others, the more death works in us. 'Life' means joy, peace, satisfaction, fulfilment, etc. 'Death' means confusion, sorrow, dissatisfaction, pain, torment, etc.

People even commit suicide owing to an unforgiving spirit. It may appear as though they did it on an impulse, but in reality, the devil may have taken advantage of their unforgiving spirit. The reason why Ahithophel killed himself may appear trivial and foolish. But the root cause was that he had refused to forgive. Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba (II Sam.11:3; 23:34). Although God had forgiven David for the sin he

had committed with Bathsheba, obviously, Ahithophel had not. He deserted David to join Absalom. Finally, he committed suicide (II Sam.17:23). Like Ahithophel, if we refuse to forgive others, a suicidal spirit can attack us; we may hear a strange voice saying, "Kill yourself. Jump into the river etc, etc."

(5) *When we truly forgive we will have compassion for the offender.*

Although Joseph's brethren hated him, plotted to kill him, put him in a dry pit and sold him as a slave, all that Joseph had for them was love and compassion, a sign of true forgiveness. Joseph said to his brethren, "I will nourish thee...Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them" (Gen.45:11,15).

How do we know we have not forgiven others as Christ forgave us? The answer is that when we see our enemies, instead of having compassion on them, we feel irritated and angry. "And be ye kind one to another, *tenderhearted, forgiving* one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph.4:32). Only those who have learned to forgive can have a tender heart.

The story is told of a good Christian shoemaker. He trained a poor orphan boy in the shoe business. One day the boy left and opened a shoe shop just opposite his master's shop. That evening, in family prayer, the Christian prayed that God may bless his former trainee's business also, as he too had a family to look after. This is true forgiveness. Once we forgive our offender, we have a compassion for the offender. Till we feel such compassion, we have not really forgiven.

Although the enemies of Jesus spat upon Him, pierced Him and crucified Him, with compassion He prayed for them: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk.23:34). "The lord...was moved with compassion...and forgave him" (Matt.18:27).

Dear child of God, how much compassion do you have for your (worst) enemies? Remember, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Lk.6:38). Plainly speaking, if you cannot show compassion towards your worst enemies, one day, before the judgment seat of God, you may not be shown compassion and you may be found the (worst) enemy of Christ.

(6) True forgiveness helps us to be God-conscious.

What is God-consciousness? God-consciousness is being aware that whatever happened in the past, whatever is happening now, and whatever is going to happen in the future, are all from the hand of God and that they are therefore all for our good and for the good of others. A God-conscious person sees God in every situation, in every moment, in everything and everywhere. A God-conscious Christian always enjoys heaven on earth.

Only forgiving people can be God-conscious. Joseph is a classic example. He saw God's hand in every situation. See what Joseph says to his brethren: "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves...for God did send me...So now it was not you that sent me hither, but

God"; "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen.45:5,8; 50:20).

Life is easy and smooth when we can see God everywhere, in everything and in every situation. When we see God in everything, we can see the goodness of God in everything. But unforgiving people live in another world altogether. They often see evil in people and in situations. Some also become paranoiac (ie., anxious, apprehensive, distrustful, fearful, and suspicious of everyone and everything). Such people find fault with others and blame them for their problems and worries. They say, "Everything is going wrong with me and everybody is against me."

While self-conscious people see things going wrong, God-conscious people see everything going on well in the same situation. In other words, unforgiving people live in a negative world of problems and worries, but forgiving people always enjoy heaven.

Your happiness or unhappiness in life is the reflection of the state of your heart. Will you forgive everyone wholeheartedly right now, so that you can start a new life in a 'brand new world' of joy and peace? Yes, by faith you can fly away from a gloomy land to a glory land where your mourning will turn into dancing and your sadness into gladness!

(7) Once we forgive our enemies, we long to do our best for them.

This is the best sign of Christlike forgiveness. Our God showed His forgiveness and love towards us by

giving His best—His only begotten Son. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn.3:16). “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom.5:7,8).

Jesus showed His forgiveness and love towards us, the worst of sinners, by giving His best—His own life. There is no better sign of Christlike forgiveness. When we forgive, we want to do our best for our worst enemy! If we fail to do this, neither our forgiveness nor our Christian life will be perfect.

Look at the example of Joseph. Joseph asked his brothers to carry word to his father saying, “And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children’s children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: And there will I nourish thee” (Gen.45:10,11). The land of Goshen was the best land (Gen.47:6). Joseph gave his worst enemies (the ones who had tried to kill him and had sold him to Egypt as a slave) the very best he could give. Until our heart is filled with such a love for our enemies, we have not learnt Christlike forgiveness.

A few years ago, in Capitol Hill, Washington D.C., a certain Christian’s testimony was a great blessing to the whole world. News media widely published the story for the glory of God. The Christian had a teenaged son, who was killed by another teenaged boy. The killer had

to go to prison. However, the Christian visited the boy often and offered him forgiveness and love. This transformed the boy completely. When the boy was released from prison, the Christian adopted him as his son, and arranged for his higher education! This is Christlike forgiveness.

On January 8, 1956, in Ecuador, five American missionaries were martyred and thrown into the river Cuaray. One of the martyrs was Nate Saint. His children, Steve and Kathy, learned to forgive and love the murderers. They went to Ecuador and stayed there to continue to minister God’s love to the murderers. Finally, the killers Kimo and Dyui were saved in an amazing way. Soon they became pastors among the Auca Indians. By this time Steve and Kathy had grown and they chose to be baptised by Kimo and Dyui (the killer-turned-saints) in the very river where their father’s dead body had floated!

We urgently need ‘Josephs’ today. Only they can feed the famished world. Such saints are the only ones who can bring light and life to this dark, dying world. Dear Reader, why don’t you take up the place of Joseph? Many people may have let you down or persecuted you. There might have been ‘Potiphars’ or ‘Potiphar’s wives’ in your life. Will you forgive them now? Make the decision right now.

CHAPTER 5

THE HIGH COST OF BEING UNFORGIVING

If only we realize the high cost we have to pay for nursing an unforgiving spirit, we will never give room for it. It brings unnecessary and untold sufferings both to us and to others. The parable that Jesus spoke in Matthew 18:21-35 in this context, is very enlightening.

When Jesus told Peter to forgive his brother seventy times seven, He did not mean that the offender be forgiven 490 times and hated the 491st time. 'Seventy' signifies our whole life. "The days of our years are three-score years and ten (seventy years)" (Psa.90:10). 'Seven' stands for perfection. So it means that we must forgive others perfectly throughout our life.

We learn many things from this parable. The king represents Christ, and the servants, ourselves. The king forgave a debt of 10,000 talents. The price the Lord paid on the cross of Calvary to forgive us, is much more than

that. But although we are freed from our debt of sin, we are not free from our debt to forgive and love others.

The sins that others commit against us are like a debt of 100 pence or one dollar. Having received a great pardon of 10,000 million dollars from the King, if we do not pardon the one dollar of our fellowservant, what will the King do? "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him" (Matt.18:34). When the king saw that his servant did not cancel his fellowservant's debt of 100 pence, the forgiveness of the debt of 10,000 million dollars was forfeited. When we do not forgive, we immediately become (spiritually) bankrupt; it is as if we are getting into a debt of 10,000 million dollars again. If we do not forgive, we will be tormented. There are many in this condition; as they cannot forgive others, they are being tormented in their mind, soul and body. Some cannot even sleep. God's Word is very clear; if we refuse to forgive, the devil will take advantage of us and may play havoc in our life. "To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also: for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (II Cor.2:10,11). Sad to say, many, ignorant of the devil's devices, refuse to forgive others; thus the Evil One is given opportunity to take advantage of them.

Some complain, "The devil is always after me." If you keep a dry fish in your pocket, a cat, attracted by the smell, may come after you. Constantly rebuking the cat (devil) is not going to work. If you throw away the dry fish, however, you will see that the cat (devil) is no longer

interested in you. Find out that 'dry fish' (unforgiving spirit or some unconfessed hidden sin) in your life and give it up.

When we keep our life right with God, no demonic power has any right over us. We will not be afraid of the devil; the devil will be afraid of us. We will not be afraid of sickness; sickness will be afraid of us. We will not be afraid of death; death will be afraid of us. Jesus said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (Jn.14:30). Another translation says, "He (Satan) has no power over Me." The power of Satan is the power of sin. When we keep our life right with God, the power of Satan is broken and we are free.

By not forgiving others we are virtually selling ourselves to the devil. It is a historical fact that many accidents and sicknesses are the sad consequence of an unforgiving spirit. One couple, Sandy and Simpson, although being committed Christians, could not forgive each other even for little things. One day their two lovely teenaged children, Stephen and Stephanie met with an accident and died almost instantly. The couple realized their mistake and soon after, even before the funeral of their children, repented of their mistake and forgave one another.

Dear friend, do not wait to meet with a fatal accident or a serious sickness, before forgiving others. (Please note that all accidents and sicknesses are not the result of an unforgiving spirit). One thing, however, is certain—if you do not forgive, you will suffer. On the other hand, if you forgive wholeheartedly, you will be

crowned with God's tender mercies and lovingkindness. You will also be a source of joy and happiness to others.

As children of God, if we do not forgive others, our torment in hell will be worse than that of demons. Demons were never offered forgiveness for their sins. As soon as angels sinned they became demons and were sent to hell, the place of torture. Demons are very angry with us and will torment us because we were offered forgiveness and they were not.

BITTERNESS IS A POISONOUS ROOT

One man of God says, 'Bitterness (ie. an unforgiving spirit, hatred, anger, resentment, irritation, uneasiness, hurt feeling, etc) causes a continual drain (or strain) of your emotional energy' i.e., you become very weak emotionally. To make matters worse, the one against whom you are bitter begins to control your life —your thoughts, conversations, feelings and attitudes. In other words, you lose control of your own life and someone else controls you. That is, you become an emotional wreck or an emotional slave. You want to sleep, but your offender controls your thoughts and imaginations, delaying and disturbing your sleep. You are hungry, but as bitterness fills your heart, even delicious food is like poison and you cannot enjoy it at all.

An unforgiving spirit can sometimes morally, mentally, physically and spiritually kill you. "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are *poisoned* by bitterness and *bound* by

iniquity" (Acts 8:22,23 NKJV). Indeed, it is a frightening fact that when you allow bitterness into your heart, *you purposely take poison, one of the worst kinds of poison* that kills your peace, joy, health, spiritual grace and a host of other virtues. Also, bitterness binds your spirit, throwing you into the dungeon of spiritual darkness. Remember, when you are bitter with someone, you are bitter with God, Who is in charge of every situation in your life. God permitted that situation with a purpose which you fail to understand.

Bitterness makes you to fail of the grace of God. One saint defined GRACE as 'God's Riches At Christ's Expense'. "Be careful that no one fails to receive God's grace and begins to cause trouble among you. A person like that can ruin many of you" (Heb.12:15 NEW CENTURY VERSION). It is sad but very true, that bitterness can not only fail the grace of God in your life, but can also trouble first you and then others. Indeed, you can ruin many. The first sign is that, we simply withdraw our love from the person after a particular incident. We just cannot love that person as we did before. We find a strain in our relationship; we cannot meet, visit, talk or look as freely as we used to. His or her presence makes us uncomfortable although at one time we might have enjoyed his or her presence. Often our mind is preoccupied with resenting and unpleasant thoughts about the offender. If any of these signs are in us, whether we admit it or not, we are bound in the dungeon of an unforgiving spirit.

As we continue our hatred, eventually, we can lose our serenity, peace, sleep, appetite and concentration. Above all, our loss in the spiritual realm would be

irreparable. Often premature death and sickness are the effects of taking holy communion without forgiving i.e. "not discerning the Lord's body" (I Cor.11:29,30). The Lord's body was bruised and broken to forgive us. If we discern this, we too will be ready to make any sacrifice to forgive others. When we cannot forgive we create our own hell since forgiveness is a heavenly spirit coming from heaven and creating heaven (II Chron.6:27).

A BLIND MAN WALKING IN DARKNESS

When we fail to forgive someone, the next step is that we begin to hate that person in the heart. And what happens to us when we start hating? The following text in the Bible may frighten us but it is very true. "He who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (I Jn.2:11 NKJV).

If we hate anyone, like a blind man who walks in darkness, our life will be a life without destination or goal, a life without a meaningful purpose, a life of waste. In short, God's purpose for our life will never be fulfilled if we hate someone. Imagine a blind man walking in pitch darkness; he will never reach the destination and there is a great possibility of his endangering his life by ramming into a wall or falling into a pit.

According to the text, if we hate someone, we not only become blind, but also walk in darkness. If a blind man walks where there is light, at least someone with eyesight can guide him and lead him in the right way. But a blind man who walks in darkness cannot be helped by another person (even if he tries to).

Dear friend, are you a blind man walking in darkness? Do not waste your precious life any more. Learn to forgive your enemies and love them so that God's great purpose may be fulfilled in you. The greatest joy of sinners is in receiving forgiveness from the Lord. The greatest joy of Jesus is offering forgiveness. When we cannot forgive, we are losing the greatest joy of Jesus. Even angels cannot have this joy, but we can have it.

"You...killed the Prince of life, Whom God...raised up...[and] sent Him to bless you" (Acts 3:15,26). This is a blessed truth we all should know. When we become a blessing to those who kill us or persecute us, it proves that God has raised us up and given us a spiritual promotion. "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give...forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). O, what a unique privilege! When we forgive others as Christ did, *we become princes and saviours* for the glory of God.

GOD PRESERVING US FROM ALL EVIL IS CONDITIONAL

The Word of God says, "The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil" (Psa.121:7). "There shall no evil befall thee" (Psa.91:10). Why then do we sometimes see evil in our life?

For the answer, let us look at the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors...but deliver us from evil" (Matt.6:12,13). We are delivered from evil on condition that we forgive our debtors. In other words, although God has promised to preserve us from all evil, we have a part to play. If we are willing to forgive others, God is willing to preserve us from all evil. The more we harden our hearts and do not forgive, the more

evil will befall us. There are innumerable evils that can befall us if we stubbornly refuse to forgive others. Some diseases in the Bible are called "evil diseases" (Deut.7:15).

An interesting testimony appeared in the bulletin of the Bible Society of India, Sept-Dec 1999 issue. A lady was dying of cancer. The doctors gave her a maximum of six months to live. One day, she disclosed the doctor's verdict to her two boys aged 12 and 14. The older boy immediately brought his Bible and read out a verse he had learnt at a Christian camp he had recently attended. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mk.11:24). His mom was surprised. She, being a Christian, had not known that such a verse existed in the Bible. That night, before going to bed she took the Bible and once again read it. Urged to read on, she read the next verse also: "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." This convicted her of her unforgiving spirit towards her people. Outwardly, she would say, "Hello, nice to see you," but inwardly she would say, "If only I had a gun, I'd shoot you on the spot." She sincerely cried to the Lord and asked Him to help her forgive all of them. That night she was able to sleep like a child in the arms of its mother. The next morning she felt fine and went to see the doctor. To the doctors' surprise all the cancer was gone. This happened over eight years ago. Now she is hale and hearty, serving the Lord as a missionary to cancer patients. The amazing thing is that, she did not pray for healing but for grace to forgive others. When she was able to forgive others, she was healed of her "evil disease".

Dear child of God, perhaps you too are afflicted with an evil disease. Why don't you cry out to Jesus from the depths of your heart, to be able to forgive others wholeheartedly? You can receive healing instantly.

David sinned with Bathsheba and killed her husband to cover up his sin. God sent Nathan to David who told him that a rich man in his kingdom had killed a poor man's lamb. Then David got very angry and commanded the rich man to be put to death and fourfold compensation be made for the lamb (II Sam.12:5,6). Why? He himself was the 'rich man' who had killed Uriah, the 'innocent lamb'. When we cannot forgive others, it is a sure sign that *we have greater sins than others*. Here David's hypocrisy is exposed. He appeared to be a man who had great pity for others; on the contrary he had shown no pity to his extremely loyal servant, but had killed him and taken his wife. The frightening fact in this story is that the judgment that we pronounce on others, will come on us. David had commanded that four lambs be given for killing one lamb. In his life, for killing Uriah (one lamb), four of his children were killed. In the same chapter we see his child born to Bathsheba dying; in the next chapter his son Amnon was murdered; then Absalom and finally, Adonijah. May the Lord help us to learn that when we make harsh judgment on the sins of others, a worse judgment can come on us.

If you are harbouring hatred against anyone, remember the Word of God: Satan will stand at your right hand and your prayer will become sin. And whatever ministry you may be doing for Jesus will be

removed from you and be given to someone else. This truth is clearly revealed in Psalm 109:3, 6-8. "They compassed me about also with words of hatred...let Satan stand at his right hand... let his prayer become sin...let another take his office." This really opens our eyes to see how harmful hatred and an unforgiving spirit can be.

An unforgiving person's life is miserable; his death, most miserable. Some say that unforgiving people grind their teeth when dying. What a sad way to finish life on earth and go to (Outer) Darkness! On the other hand, a forgiving spirit is a sanctified spirit. Of the seven utterances of our Lord on the cross, the first and last ones begin with 'Father'. "Father, forgive them..." and "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Lk.23: 34,46). From this we learn that the spirits of those who refuse to forgive others may never be sanctified and they may die as backsliders or sinners.

One man of God says that all our troubles and trouble makers are like the grain of sand. If it gets into our eye, it causes irritation, red eye, infection, etc. On the other hand, if the same grain of sand gets into an oyster, the secretion from its body covers it and makes it smoother and smoother. Gradually, the irritable character of the sand will be transformed into a beautiful pearl. Similarly, in case there is a troublesome person in your life who, like a grain of sand, is always trying to irritate and trouble you, cover him with forgiving love and your trouble will be transformed into a treasure!

CHAPTER 6

TO BE ABLE TO FORGIVE...

You may be convinced that you must forgive others, but you may be finding it difficult to forgive someone from the heart. You may even realize that the devil has put a curse on you and your family because of this. Maybe you or someone in your family is suffering from sickness. Perhaps sickness is not leaving your family. You may find problem after problem in your work place or worshipping place. You may have prayed for a forgiving heart, but may not seem to receive it. What should you do?

BLESS THE OFFENDER

The story is told of a Christian lady who could not get over her hurt—her husband left her and it was hard to see him walking with another woman. She was upset and angry to the extent that it affected her appetite, concentration, sleep, etc. Finally she came to the point where she feared she would become a mental wreck. Her Pastor advised her to bless her husband every morning when she got up to pray. Although at first it appeared hard, it worked, and it worked miraculous results. First

it worked in her own life, gradually removing her anger, frustration, bitterness, etc., and filling her heart with forgiveness and compassion for her husband. Then her husband was transformed.

Dear friend, if you are hurt or let down by someone, if there is someone troubling you day after day why don't you try this? As soon as you get up in the morning, wholeheartedly pray and ask God to bless that person. This definitely works, as it is based on the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "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" (Matt.5:44).

THANK GOD

How did an unforgiving spirit first enter us? We failed to thank God for the offence God permitted in our life, and for the offender. We failed to realize that God had a purpose and plan behind it, to develop divine character in us. The Word of God says, "Give thanks whatever happens. That is what God wants for you in Christ Jesus. Do not hold back the work of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess.5:19 NCV). In other words, when we fail to thank God for the situation God permits, we hold back the work of the Holy Spirit in us and perhaps the evil spirit of anger, resentment, etc, will start working! When you thank God, you are in fact not thanking God for the offence, but for the divine purpose in allowing it (to bless you and your offender). Then you will see your offender as God's agent to work out God's character in you.

Richard Wurmbrand once narrated a beautiful story:

There was a girl who was brought up on stories of valiant missionaries who worked among savages to bring them to Christ and who were eaten by cannibals. Her prayer was, "God, help me to become such a missionary." It was her dream to sacrifice herself for the worst of men.

In time, the dream faded and by the age of 18 her prayer was, "God, give me a good Christian husband." Her prayer was answered, and she was married. For six weeks she was happy with her husband. Then came the Japanese attack on the Pearl Harbour, and the USA entered the war. Her husband was drafted into the army and was away from her for three years. When he finally returned home, he was no longer the same nice, loving husband.

One evening, he came home drunk. Without one good word for her, he fell asleep on the couch. She went to another room and prayed with tears, "God, change my husband." God's reply came: "Why should I change him and not you?" "But there is nothing to be changed in me. I have belonged to You since early childhood," she replied. God then said, "Between you and Me there is a misunderstanding. I have always been attentive to your prayers. I liked it when you offered yourself to be a missionary among cannibals. But cannibals are scarce nowadays and far away in Africa or on some lonely island. To ease your task, I brought a savage into your home. Be a missionary to him. Win him for the Kingdom."

She went back to the other room, looked at her "cannibal", and fell in love with him again. She decided her life's task would be to restore him as a child of God and a loving husband. It took her a very long time, but she succeeded. Now they are both in their ninties. He brings her a flower each day to show his gratitude.

God gratifies us with difficult tasks to ennoble us.

May the Lord help us to thank Him for the "cannibals" permitted in our life. Let us fall in love with them, so that God can bless us and bless them too. Let us not forget, 'forgiving love has the power to change the foulest sinner into the finest saint'.

CRY OUT TO GOD

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord...there is forgiveness with Thee" (Psa.130:1,4). To receive forgiveness, the Psalmist cried out of the depths of his heart. That is what you need to do to receive a forgiving heart also. A wishy-washy prayer will not be enough. Right from the very depths of your heart you must desperately cry and you should not rest until you receive a Christlike forgiving heart. Perhaps the following statement will be shocking to you, but it is very true. You love Jesus only as much as you love your worst enemy.

See what a beautiful forgiving heart the Psalmist received! "They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with

fasting...I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother" (Psa.35:12-14). The Psalmist had a great love and compassion for his worst enemies, even those who tried to destroy his soul and his spiritual life. When they were sick he fasted and prayed for them and cried and mourned as if he was mourning for his own mother! This is Christlike forgiveness. This is the foretaste of heaven.

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CHAPTER 7

CONFESSION OF SIN

Suffering from the guilt of sin is indeed the greatest suffering for man, and freedom from guilt and sin is indeed the greatest freedom for him. Unconfessed sins bring a feeling of guilt. You may also suffer from sudden fear, fear of death, frustration, lack of inner peace, frequent outbursts of anger and disturbed sleep.

Psalm 32 teaches us some important truths on the confession of sin. This was Martin Luther's favourite psalm. St. Augustine, who was a very wicked man before his salvation, wrote this psalm on the wall of his bedroom and often wept as he read it.

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (vs.1). Forgiven people are indeed blessed people. As long as you cover your sins, God will not cover them. However, when you repent and confess them, God cleanses you and forgives you forever.

"Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (vs.2).

'In whose spirit there is no guile,' means 'whose spirit has made full confession' (Moffat). The word 'confess' in Greek is *'homologeō'*, which means, 'speak the same thing'. Some people make a half-hearted confession or do not tell the whole truth. Some others confess without fully acknowledging their fault, at least partially blaming someone or something else, like Aaron did. He collected gold from the Israelites, 'fashioned it with a graving tool' and made a golden calf (Exo.32:4). But when Moses confronted him, this is the confession he made: "And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf" (vs.24). What a twisted confession! He made it as though his only fault had been putting the gold into the fire and as though the fire was to be blamed for making the calf. No surprise then that this wishy-washy confession almost earned Aaron the wrath of God (Deut.9:20,21). May this be a warning to all those who hide their sins and find various excuses for them.

"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long" (vs.3). The New Living Translation has it: 'When I refused to confess my sin, I was weak and miserable, and I groaned all day long.' When David withheld confession of his sin, he suffered terribly. The agony we go through because of guilt is compared to the unbearable pain we would physically endure if our bones were to disintegrate.

"For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (vs.4). The length of your suffering is the length of time

you keep your sins covered. Do not wait till the heavy hand of God falls on you. Seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near. Some people repent and bring their sins to light only after they suffer from some terrible sickness, accident, etc. However, all sicknesses and accidents are not the consequence of some unconfessed sins.

"I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (vs.5). David had comfort and relief when he had confessed his sins to Nathan the prophet.

The story is told of two servants in a rich man's house. One day, when the master was away, the junior servant happened to throw a stone. It hit one of the master's ducks and killed it. The servant was terribly afraid. "Don't worry, I won't tell the master," the senior servant assured him. So the junior one buried the duck. The next day the senior servant sat on an easy chair and commanded the junior to do his job also. When the junior declined, the senior whispered, "*duck!*" This frightened the junior servant and he did both persons' jobs that day. The next day too the senior servant did the same thing. This continued for a few days, and the junior servant began to realize that if he continued like this, he may die of exhaustion. One evening, he went to the master and confessed his fault with tears. The master had compassion on him and forgave him. The next morning, when the senior threatened him as usual, he retorted, "Duck or dick, I will do my job and you will do yours."

The lesson is clear. Once sin is brought to light and proper confession is made with true repentance, Christian life becomes very easy—the heaviness of sin and the guilt are gone. Sins that are not repented of will not be forgiven by the Lord. Like poison in our system they affect us spiritually and physically and work our eternal ruin.

“Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him” (vs.6). This is a great comfort and encouragement for all those who have cleansed themselves from all their sins and iniquities. When you live a transparent life, no flood of great waters (great trials or tribulations) can overcome you. Trials may be there but no trial can destroy a Christian who lives a crystal-clear life.

“Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble,” (vs.7). God is the true hiding place. “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Prov.18:10). When you sin and try to run away and hide from God, it is like trying to escape from the heat and falling into a furnace. But when we have confessed our sins there is great joy and singing in our heart.

“Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah” (vs.7) – ‘Selah’ means, ‘pause and think’. If there are songs of deliverance, there must be songs of bondage too. How many young people are bound by wrong types of music! They are bound and blind to spiritual truths. The so-called *Christian Rock* music is nothing but music from Satan in the guise of an angel. Once a

child of God named Martin suddenly got out of his bed at about 2 a.m. and started to choke his little daughter saying, “This is a snake; I must kill it.” The wife frantically called the Pastor. It took a few days for Martin to get deliverance. After deliverance, he confessed that all that night he had been listening to strange types of songs from an audio tape and had felt some strange spirit enter him.

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you” (vs.8,9 NKJV). If you walk with God, not hiding any sin, He will guide you with His eye, ie. He will guide you in love. If not, He will have to lead you just as a horse or a mule is led by its master—with ‘bit and bridle’. A donkey or horse can only understand the language of whips. Some of God’s children cannot be guided by love. Only sickness, trouble, tragedy, accidents, etc. will make them obey God.

WHY ARE SOME NOT FORGIVEN?

Some children of God do not realize that God gives everyone a time to repent, confess their sins and turn to God. This is called a grace period. David made use of the opportunities given to him and eventually became a man after the heart of God. Saul, on the other hand, rejected the opportunities given him to repent of his sins and turn to God. Finally, when he was in deep trouble near the end of his life, he desperately sought God’s guidance, but could not get it. “For this cause everyone who

is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found" (Psa.32:6 NKJV).

Some have a problem confessing their sin. "Why should I confess to man? I have confessed to God and that's enough," they say. Certain serious sins need to be confessed to a reliable and mature Christian minister. How can we know which sins need to be confessed to someone else? If we do not have a deep inner peace even after asking forgiveness from God, it shows that we need the help of a servant of God. Generally speaking, adultery, fornication, abortion, etc. need to be confessed to an elder of the church, if we really want to have a transparent heart. Although King David was a great king, when he sinned with Bathsheba, God sent a man of God (Nathan) and he had to confess to him. Moreover, after you are washed in the blood of the Lamb and become a child of God, if you fall into sin, you need the prayer and guidance of other saints. Sometimes the church needs to discipline an individual depending on the gravity of his sin. "Call for the elders of the church ...Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another" (Jas.5:14-16). Confession should be made not to just anyone but to the elders of the church, i.e. spiritually mature ministers who will be able to help and give proper counsel. "And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me" (Josh.7:19). "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov.28:13). These verses prove that confession of sins in the proper way is scriptural. It is better for the church to discipline

us than for "the heavy hand of God" to fall upon us. A true child of God who wants to live a transparent life will definitely value the confession of sins.

Once in North India a man called James joined a Pentecostal church and took water baptism. He did not receive the Holy Spirit but he was a good interpreter for the pastor. Soon, the pastor observed that very often he criticized the servants of God. He realised that the man needed deliverance from something and invited him one day to fast and pray with him. The pastor felt he needed to confess something, but James refused to make any confession. As they both continued praying, a demon entered James and started saying, "James belongs to me. As you Pentecostal people have been praying for him, I could not do anything; leave him alone, he is mine." With this James jumped up and ran away. A prayer meeting was going on in another place in an open area. He took a knife and threw it at the congregation. Miraculously the knife got stuck on a clothes line and did not harm anyone. Within a few days James was arrested by the police. About 20 years ago James had killed two people. He cleverly changed his name, and joined the Indian Army. After 12 years, he retired from the army and joined the Pentecostal church as the people there were very loving towards him. However, the police tracked him down. God had graciously given him a chance to repent and confess, but he refused and hardened his heart to his own ruin.

May the Lord grant us the grace to live a transparent life, free from an unforgiving spirit and free from all unconfessed and unforgiven sins.

Prayer:

"Our loving heavenly Father, through these pages, You have been teaching me the glory and beauty of Christlike forgiveness. Having learned these blessed truths, grant that my life will be an embodiment of forgiving love. Help me, Lord, never to give room to anger, irritation or any hurt feeling against anyone at any time. Please transform me in such a way, that even after I leave this world, the fragrance of Your forgiving love will so diffuse through my character that many will turn and follow You. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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