

I. INTRODUCTION:

I was recently severely hurt and wounded by two close family members who I would never have expected being capable of causing such deliberate harm to me. Although I had observed they're questionable actions to others, I naively or perhaps hopefully presumed the family bond would preclude any detrimental action. I discovered that there is a wounding that only those with whom you are intimate and vulnerable with, can inflict. It was a difficult experience. As I digested their actions the Spirit started bringing things to light. Looking back, it became more clear the deliberate nature of their action, made all the more painful as my mother had complained of their intent for a number of years before she passed and the matter came fully forward. As I started digesting what had happened, I felt feelings of betrayal, having been deeply hurt, even disenfranchised from my own family. I wondered how can someone who professes to love you perpetrate such actions? I am a strong person and a strong disciple of Jesus and I am not entirely naïve... but perhaps more so than I thought. It would never occur to me to deliberately mistreat or defraud another, but here two of the closest people to me seemingly did exactly that... made worse because they refuse to engage with me and discuss my feelings and my complaint. I have felt anger, even outrage... especially when I confronted them and they not only justified their position as completely legitimate, they refused to discuss the matter and wanted to pretend that nothing had happened at all. As a year passed and of course even more evidence came to mind. Now five years later, we have not spoken much except for impersonal emails. Unfortunately, the only reasonable conclusion of the persistent refusal to meet with me is duplicity... which is also what the evidence suggests.

So I started trying to figure out my options. I have some attorney friends who have assured me I had a strong case and could definitely resolve the matter in civil court. The more I sought God on the matter, the clearer He made it that the legal approach would be the worst approach to take. While a legal approach may give me the satisfaction of proving my case publically, it would most likely permanently destroy any chance of reconciliation. Another approach suggested by a well meaning friend advising I "forgive and forget" seemed ridiculous. Initially I couldn't even imagine forgiveness on my part... after all I'm the one who was wronged and they should be asking for my forgiveness! Yikes! I'm a pastor... how can I feel this way? Yeah, I know I'm still human, but what does God expect of me? My initial tendency would be to write them off and have nothing more to do with them... but that can't be right, can it God? As time has passed and I've prayed through and over-analyzed the matter I discovered that part of my problem is that I don't want to forgive them for the wrong they have done and are continuing to do. I not only want them to do what is right, but I expect them to because that is what I would have done in their position.

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I know I am bound by Grace as well as by reason, and I needed to find some way to make peace in my own mind and heart before I could reasonably engage in any real resolution of the matter. So, to help me process and work through my dilemma, I engaged in the following short study on forgiveness.

II. DISCUSSION:

The Greek word translated as Forgiveness is *Aphesis*. It means to “release from bondage or imprisonment” and “forgiveness or pardon of sin/wrong doing (letting them go as if the wrongdoing had never been committed), it is remission of the penalty.” The root of Aphasis is *Aphiemi*, and in a relational context it means “to send away” as with a husband divorcing his wife. In a legal context it also means “to yield up, to allow to expire,” and “to depart from one and leave him to himself so that all mutual claims are abandoned.” There is obviously several ways to look at the word we use as “forgive.” Additionally, I recently heard a story about a woman who felt compelled by the Spirit to forgive her son’s murderer. She said, “Forgiveness is not merely about what someone has done to me... it really is about me.” She goes on to observe that “Un-forgiveness is a cancer... it eats at you and will destroy you if you let it; forgiveness is the cure.” She teaches forcefully that this aspect of forgiveness is “all about me... it is something I have control of.” This is of course, an internal response to an outward experience. Forgiveness is a process with the necessary first step of choosing to let the wrong go in the hope for reconciliation that is necessarily relationally and mutually interactive... it involves the stake-holders to agreeing to a reasonable and mutual resolution. A healthy example of this process in its most extreme case may be seen in this short video – https://www.facebook.com/TwinLakesChurch/posts/10153677323848406?comment_id=10153678432353406&reply_comment_id=10153678729953406&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R7%22%7D

There is another side of the problem known all too well to counselors of repeated abuse suffered by the hand of one that should care for you. This is not accidental or an outcome of bad choices. This is deliberate action that can be physical, psychological, or spiritual. Such abuse over time can create layers upon layers of woundedness that are not easily resolved. An approach often suggested is for such wounded individuals to put some distance between themselves and the toxic individual perpetrating the matter. There are some people you just really need to get away from to create some breathing space, and such may be a form of relational divorce.

Yet another side of the problem involves forgiveness in the community of Grace which runs at a different course than the dominant community or culture in which we live. What sets Christians apart is the tension in which we live between mercy and justice; and between the

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present fallen condition of creation and the not-yet perfection of creation we await at the Parousia. “Justification” is the theological term that explains the act where God makes peace with humanity through the atonement of Jesus. “Sanctification” is the life long process where God is remaking the individual believer from the inside out into a reflection of Jesus. Reconciliation with God is the fruit the Spirit is bearing in my heart and life that makes me hope for eternity.

In assessing this problem, the matter of sin/forgiveness runs twofold: 1) vertically between God and the individual, and 2) and horizontally between individuals. Christian disciples have the expectation of a genuine change of heart and action... this results from sanctification which is the life-long process of Jesus’ nature and character being developed within. However we know that words alone no matter how well intentioned that are not paired with tangible evidence of changed thinking and behavior ring empty... and rightly so.

Thinking theologically about it, the Biblical standard for forgiveness includes 5 components. These components are a process, and it begins and ends with my relationship with God and it has direct application as to how human relationships heal:

1. Conviction – Is a gift of the Spirit that lets me know I’ve done wrong and that I am found lacking in God’s sight. It’s a personal realization that I’ve messed up.
2. Remorse – Is my initial reaction in agreement with the conviction the Spirit has brought that I am wrong and in need of His help.
3. Repentance – is my conviction that I need and want to do things differently. Going forward I intend to mend my faulty behavior.
4. Restoration [or Restitution] – is my desire for making amends with the person I’ve harmed by my wrong doing in some real and tangible fashion.
5. Reconciliation – Is the gift of the Spirit that restores relational intimacy. This resolution brings me back into the relationship as if it never happened.

Contrary to popular thought, Biblical forgiveness is not easy and it is not free... if it were easy or free, Christ wouldn’t need to suffer and die. Forgiveness is a necessarily weighty and selfless act of love. It is the act of purposeful submitting to God’s will, a deliberate choice for redemption that helps define humanity at its best, and exhibits God’s children in contrast to the world. The spiritual act of forgiveness necessarily involves confession which is an inherently healthy spiritual discipline as it requires us to examine ourselves both for wrongs we have inflicted which wounds us and our intimacy with God, as well as wrongs and wounds we have suffered from others which wounds us and our intimacy with others. In truth, both forms of wrongs and woundings need the powerful healing of forgiveness.

There are 2 theological perspectives that bear directly on forgiveness:

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1. **Imago Dei** – humanity has been made in the image of God... but we are living out our life in a Fallen state that has damaged our ability to function as God intended. Most theologians agree that there is something remaining however sin-damaged of the God-Breathed image of God in whom we are made. How much we perceive and to what extent we can respond is well beyond the purpose of this short article. Suffice it to say, something positive and vital remains.
2. **Imago Christi** – Christians living out their life as a reflection of our Lord... having Jesus' nature formed within as He becomes more manifest in my life, and as my life is increasingly conformed to Him and transformed by Him. This is the life long process of sanctification that Christian discipleship seeks to encourage. God's end goal is for each of us to be an individual reflection of Jesus.

Both Imago Dei and Imago Christi are involved in the problem and resolution of forgiveness. While we often contemplate God and His attributes, what we don't always think through is about God's Character... His Nature is perfectly balanced. Meaning His attributes of justice, mercy, anger, grace, holiness, kindness, etc... all these attributes are perfectly expressed in perfect balance all of the time, and each expressed without conflict or contradiction. This is a picture of how a perfectly integrated character and nature are expressed. This is something only God can do because He is God... this is who He is in His Perfection. Humanity on the other hand, expresses these attributes imperfectly, inconsistently, and unbalanced. This is who we are as fallen creatures living in a fallen world that desperately longs for being perfected. The result is a conundrum in how we process forgiveness. We know the desperate need we have to receive forgiveness for what we have failed to do properly resulting in hurting others. We also know the need we have to hear from those who have wronged us express that they are genuinely sorry in seeking our forgiveness. There is something about someone who knows they have wronged you asking for forgiveness that can bring relational healing and wholeness. The flip side of the coin is the person who should be asking forgiveness that refuses to acknowledge their wrong. The latter brings anger and resentment, and relational dissonance and distance are the result.

Both Imago Dei and Imago Christi play out in the problem of forgiveness in light of a fallen world where pain and suffering and wrong persist. The latent attributes of creation in Imago Dei allow me to experience some of God's attributes but in a limited sense. Mercy, love and justice are competing with each other rather than being balanced in perfect expression. The desire to live out my life as Imago Christi leads to more frustration as I do so in a limited fashion, and those we expect to live at a higher level will more consistently disappoint us. The result of any form of these wrongs is always an offense against God, as well as an offense

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against others. We also know these wrongs have a relational impact which is at the heart of the problem.

This living in a fallen world with incomplete and inconsistent Godly attributes presents a sizable challenge to a life of faith. On one hand, God says every person who perpetrates wrong will be held accountable. On the other hand, He says we won't be forgiven unless we forgive, and by the standard we judge we shall be judged.

The Bible provides insight in how to live in this conundrum... that God brings us conviction and grace through the atonement of Christ and the ongoing sanctifying work of the Spirit. However, although the Grace is at hand we need to appropriate it by faith, and to respond to God's Grace with extending personal "remorse, repentance, and restoration" as appropriate. The whole forgiveness process enables reconciliation, which is the heart of God's plan.

A. CONVICTION:

Jn 16:7-11 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I [Jesus] am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in Me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned [convicted and rightly judged].

Conviction is a gift from God. It is the process where our conscience is illuminated by the judgment of the Spirit where we agree that our act or actions have been found wanting and that we have missed the proper standard of behavior expected. All believers are indwelt with the Spirit who diligently and methodically moves us to become more clearly an Image of Christ for the world to observe. This process [sanctification]... it is the process where Jesus' nature and character are developed within the disciple, making each a more recognizable child of the Kingdom of God. Humanity has been given the responsibility to choose our course of action in what we call 'free will'. Through our proper choices we cooperate with the work of the Spirit or alternatively we ignore it and frustrate the Spirit's work in us. The gift of grace in the disciple moves us from carelessness and self-centeredness to a genuine desire to know and please God and treat others as more important (or at least as important) as ourselves. To accomplish personal character development, the Spirit brings conviction which moves us to remorse and then to repentance. It moves further to restoration, and finally to reconciliation. Here is a description of how I see this process playing out.

B. HUMANITIES BIG THREE RESPONSES TO CONVICTION:

1. REMORSE – is the response of a person when they come to the realization that they have done wrong and have fallen short of God's standard. The result of which is having offended

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God and often involves having harmed or wounded another. When recognized through the Spirit's conviction, the response expected is for us to understand what we have done in failing to do the things we should have done, and we feel genuine sorrow [remorse] for the harm our wrong action caused. One of our problems is that we don't understand how offensive sin is to God. The key to remorse is recognizing the depth of our own debt that God has already paid the price for.

Luke 7:40-50 – Recognizing our Sin-Debt:

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

In this story, the Pharisee identified as Simon is clueless to the fact that he needs forgiveness. Instead, he stands justified in himself as a 1) child of Abraham, 2) a Jewish leader, and 3) a follower of the Law. The sinful woman on the other hand, has no such delusions about herself. She knows she has fallen short and that Jesus has intervened for her and saved her. The woman of the story is elsewhere in Scripture identified as Mary Magdalene who Jesus healed of demonic spiritual oppression/possession. She was a prostitute and instead of accusing her as she probably expected, Jesus did not condemn her and forgave her conditionally... "Leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). She knew her need for help, and felt the comfort of Jesus healing her. She had no delusions of herself... she knew the depths of her own depravity and the joy of being freed, accepted, and forgiven. The "sin no more" provision of Grace is what keeps us dependent upon Jesus. This story provides a model for forgiveness with God as well as with each other.

Being human in a fallen world, we often make the unintentional or intentional mistake that wounds or grieves another. When left undealt with, these woundings received and inflicted fester and poison our hearts and relationships. Forgiveness is the medicine for a sick heart. As soon as we are convicted and recognize the harm we have done, we should respond with remorse. This acknowledgment is agreeing with God that I have failed to live and act appropriately. Remorse demonstrates that we not only know the standard of conduct that we are expected to live by, but that we also are responsive when we fail to live it. Remorse is

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the result of the gift of the Spirit that we call “conviction,” and remorse should always lead next to repentance.

2. REPENTANCE – is the response that follows remorse that demonstrates our decision to do things differently in the future. The wise person routinely takes stock of their life and actions, and assesses what they have done right and where they have fallen short. The indwelling Spirit reinforces our personal analysis, and seeks to move us ever onward toward restoration and then reconciliation... which is God’s ultimate goal for us. Humanity was made for relational intimacy... 1st with God and 2nd with each other. Humanity necessarily lives in community, we were not created to live apart from a community in which I am known, loved, and supported. The results of our actions also have impacts on the communities in which we reside as well as the people with whom we interact. The motivation of God is always that we would be reconciled 1st to Him, and 2nd to one another. This is the will of God.

Mathew 18:21-22; Luke 17:4 – How many Times do we Repent and Forgive?

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says [honestly and earnestly], ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

This teaching is really interesting... but what does it mean? How do I act accordingly? Recognizing God’s desire for relational reconciliation and for the Sanctification of every believer is the key. The process of sanctification moves the person who performed the wrong (even repeatedly) to understand their failure which leads to genuine remorse, and as a result they come to the decision to do things differently [repentance]. Because of the importance of this process, the church instituted the sacrament of confession. Confession is not merely a legalistic recital of wrongs committed, and it is not a simple seeking of absolution which in itself is helpful. Instead it is an appeal to God for personal transformation and renewal. This is a really Holy thing that Christians need desperately.

^{Jas 5:16} Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

^{1Jn 1:9} If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Confession is an act of repentance in voicing before God and before a trusted witness the wrong they committed, taking personal responsibility for it, and seeking forgiveness 1st from God, and 2nd from the person they have wronged. Confession puts the penitent in the right vertical position with God so they can pursue the right horizontal position with others. Having confessed, the onus of the horizontal position is now upon the person who was wronged to accept by faith that the request for forgiveness is genuine. This of course means that the person committing the wrong should demonstrate a changed heart with changed

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behavior in tangible ways. Merely offering words of remorse without attendant demonstration in action is false.

However, some people who have wronged another may refuse to acknowledge their wrong doing and not seek forgiveness and restoration. The person wronged cannot force the wrong doer to change; as change requires a willful individual response to grace. As grace is offered to all of humanity, it must be accepted and applied by faith by each individual. People can refuse the movement of the Spirit to conviction, and they can also refuse the movement to confession. Those who have been wronged may long to hear the confession of the wrong doer, but in absence of that God does not expect the person wronged to continue in pain and has provided the unilateral side of vertical absolution, when the horizontal side is not available. In certain situations, the errors or sins may be purged over time as God progresses with His process of sanctification in the individual, and as our obedience is demonstrated as we cooperate with God in desiring and pursuing the sanctifying transformation. All transformation is ultimately the work of the Spirit, but we have a part to play in cooperating with what He is doing.

The desire to change and act differently is a key factor of remorse and repentance. If we know we are wrong and ignore the conviction of the Spirit, our hearts become calloused or “seared” ... meaning we become desensitized to our wrong doing and less concerned about the wrongs or their effects on those we have wronged. This is a great problem... and continued neglect of the Spirit’s leading necessarily leads to not just continued wrong action, but escalating wrong actions.

Being human and living in a fallen world means we will fail, and that we can expect others also will fail. None the less the desire for attaining the standard of Christ (Imago Christi) moves us toward sanctification (becoming perfected) as God progressively transforms us from the inside out. Sanctification is a lifelong process... we will not attain it on our time table, but God promises the process will be completed – Phil 1:6. Our job is to cooperate with the Spirit in the work of Sanctification He is doing.

The other side of the “how many times question” asks how can we truly forgive, and do we really need to forget? Jesus answer to how many times would seemingly be once... as He is speaking to an “ongoing, perfect tense action.” This means that each time they ask sincerely for forgiveness, we erase it and not hold it over them based upon the example of what God has done for us. This sort of repeated process effectively means that we never get to a second time because forgiveness is a complete ongoing matter. It should be understood that there are issues here – the sincerity of those asking our forgiveness, and our own ability to allow God to heal the experience. This is a side of Grace that is interactive. Some woundings go deeper than others and may take an extended time to fully heal. Some people ask forgiveness, but their behavior does not change or even improve... instead they do the same things over and over. Again, we need to recognize the problem then deliberately and purposefully cooperate with what God is doing and inviting us into.

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3. RESTORATION/RESTITUTION – is the fruit of conviction, remorse and repentance where the true penitent seeks to make recompense for the harm their actions may have caused. Feeling sorry is not usually enough... are you merely sorry you were caught? Or perhaps that you were unable to get away with the wrong you performed or even planned? How we respond in restoration/restitution says much to the honesty of our remorse.

Nu 5:7 and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged.

Ps 32:5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"— and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Repentance necessarily leads to a different way of thinking and acting as the process of Sanctification continues. It results in the desire to try to make things right... this is the nature of restoration/restitution, and it is the bridge toward relational reconciliation.

Luke 19:1-10 – Jesus and Zacchaeus:

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

In this story, Zacchaeus' restorative action demonstrated a changed heart... this is not mere lip service, but life change being proved out. So dramatic is this action that Jesus states "today salvation has come to this house." This is not merely a changed mind, or even a changed heart... this evidences a changed life, and that is what Jesus is celebrating.

It is a necessary truth that the human responses of remorse, repentance, and restoration are sandwiched between God's action of conviction and reconciliation. Restitution is an Old Testament theme – as noted in the Zondervan Dictionary of the Bible:

The references in Numbers 5:7-8 to restitution represent the Hebrew *sub*, which means "to turn back or return." One who wronged another had to confess his sin and return to the other full monetary value, plus twenty percent. Other references to restitution, in Ex 22 and Lev 22, are from *Salam*, "to be made complete or sound." The idea is one of restoring a violated relationship by a compensatory payment. Restitution is one of the most significant concepts in OT criminal law. The person who steals or misappropriates another's property is directly

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responsible to his victim. OT law directed the criminal to repay double. His own property or labor is demanded as recompense for the harm he did to his neighbor. This principle is very different from that embedded in our criminal law. In our system of justice a criminal is responsible to society, not to his victim. Society places the criminal in jail as a punishment rather than having him or her make restitution. The OT system is undoubtedly superior, both in its concern for the victim and in its holding the criminal responsible for his or her acts.

The requirement of “an eye for an eye” reflects a rigid sort of Old Testament Law, the idea being I’m responsible to compensate in my own flesh what I deprived from another. This was obviously a powerful incentive not to wrong another, but there was also a financial transactional provision that could be struck to compensate the person wronged. The main focus of the Bible is on individual responsibility for our actions to individual people we have wronged. The focus was less on making payment or corrective restitution [as in jail terms] as payment to society in our modern times, and more about making payment to the individuals that we’re hurt. Restitution to individuals harmed is not the main purview of criminal law, which seeks to determine guilt or innocence. However, restitution may be pursued in civil law in modern courts.

Financial restitution as required in the OT was the value of the wrong plus 20%. Zacchaeus went well beyond what was required by stating he would repay 400% of the value... this is a tangible picture of New Testament transformational grace. The New Testament Law of Grace is far superior to the OT Law, but it is built upon the OT foundation. Both OT and NT acknowledge that there are degrees of wrong doing, and requisite responsive degrees of restoration/restitution. This does not alleviate serial wrongdoers from the legal and penal consequences of their wrongs to another or to society. Again the intention is relational reconciliation 1st with God, and then with one another.

In developing the thought of restitution, one of my favorite Christian writers Oswald Chambers explains his view on explicating Matt 18:15-19:

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree [in conformance with Scripture] about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

Chambers makes the argument that it is necessary that we need to confront the one who has sinned against you personally and/or to others in the community. We have a brotherly and sisterly responsibility to go to one who has committed wrongdoing, and we should seek to

move them by loving reproof to correct their way. The goal of reproof is always to encourage the process that begins with conviction and ends with reconciliation. Chambers goes on to argue that if they refuse to acknowledge their wrong doing, or fail to show any remorse or repentance, that you can do little about resolving their problem about their need for forgiveness. At this point, he says you need to turn them over to the church and ultimately to God to deal with their refusal. The thought being that the indwelling Spirit will not allow a true disciple of Christ to live the continued life of sin, and that sooner or later as in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) where the wayward son came to his senses and returned to his father expecting only treatment as a slave, but instead he was reconciled as a son. This is at the heart of God in bringing conviction in grace and resulting is reconciliation.

The conviction/remorse/repentance process runs contrary to our modern sentiments that we should and can forgive anyone regardless of their own acknowledgment. Most Christians would argue that forgiveness is independent of remorse and repentance. I would agree that you can resolve in your own mind not to hold the wrong you have suffered against the perpetrator, and thus not be poisoned by your own bitterness. This is a form of unilateral forgiveness, but this is something less than the bilateral forgiveness that leads to reconciliation. For reconciliation to occur, the whole process seemingly would have to play out from conviction, to remorse, to repentance, to restitution, to reconciliation. On one hand, God's holiness and justice expects a proper response from the wrong doer. On the other hand, Grace is a much greater and stronger tonic than we give it credit for.

I would additionally argue that we have an intercessor and advocate in Jesus and the Spirit, and knowing that Jesus paid the price in full to secure my forgiveness with the Father, we still have the requirement to accept and apply the Grace God has provided. I would further argue that there are consequences for any wrong doing, whether the wrong suffered is intentional or unintentional. Deliberate wrongs and resultant woundings fall into one category and have a stronger penalty, and the justice of God will ultimately resolve these. Accidental wrongs and resultant woundings fall into another lesser category.

There are other aspects of forgiveness that comes into play, including 1) our individual experience of the sufficiency and greatness of God, 2) our personal spiritual & emotional health, 3) our personal strength of faith, 4) the degree of the wrong, and 5) the depth of the wounding. Because we do not live in a one size fits all world, we accept the reality that God does not force everyone through the same exact and rigid methodology... God tailors His response to the individual. God does not expect from anyone what they are incapable of doing, but He will transform us through the inworking of grace so that the outworking of the Spirit produces a result we could not have otherwise imagined. Such was the story of the Prodigal son.

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The last aspect of forgiveness is that it plays out two ways – on the vertical axis [between God and the individual], and on the horizontal axis [between individuals within their community]. This has an appropriate application to our interrelationships. For the person who was wronged and deeply wounded, grappling with the consequences can be very difficult and grace seemingly illusive. God has done the work in securing Grace for us that we could never have purchased, but we have a role both in accepting it by faith and cooperating with the Spirit in completing the work of Grace as it is applied in my inner-life. God ultimately is the final arbiter and the final healer, but the strength of faith and the degree of wounding certainly come into play. Here sensitivity in the Spirit in selfless dependence on God is key to promote healing and reconciliation.

C. RECONCILIATION:

So how does this all flesh out in light of God’s plan of completing His work of grace in me? How do I succeed in dragging along my sinful fleshly desires and expectations and selflessly submit to God? I think if we’re honest, most of the time we don’t want to be a living sacrifice, we don’t want to yield to God’s leadership and purpose because it makes no sense to my NATURAL way of thinking. This is obviously evidence that as Christians we are a work in progress... we are not yet arrived, but we are not lost in sin. The ‘sinner saved by grace’ by sanctification is becoming the ‘saint who sometimes sins’ of Spiritually mature Christians. I realize that I am both... but I sincerely desire to be moving more toward the latter.

The ‘Way’ of Christ is like walking a narrow path that threads through the extremes of Law on one side and grace on the other. If we go too far toward law we end up in legalism, where hope and peace and love are crushed out by the demands of obedience and judgment. On the other side is grace, and if we go too far on that side we end up in the abuse of the freedom we have in Christ. As Paul said in Romans:

Ro 6:1-2 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

There is a tension between the Truth of the Word and the Spirit of Grace, much as there is tension between the extreme of life in the “now, but not yet” of eschatology... we now have spiritual renewal, but we await the promised material renewal at the Parousia of Christ... at His second coming.

Ro 8:18-23 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we

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ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

The plan of God is reconciliation of both the physical and spiritual realities... that Christ may be all and in all. The Spiritual and material worlds will be reconciled to God and for God, with the domains of Heaven and earth merged into the new Creation. This is a mystery to ponder, as we struggle to live faithfully on a broken world longing for redemption. In Isaiah's Prophecy, Messiah is described some 800 years before Jesus came to earth:

Isa 42:1-4 "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth."

Yeah... I know that this is Jesus the Prophet Isaiah is speaking about, but He [Jesus] is the example for which we reach and stretch ourselves to become. He is the Image we seek to reflect – Imago Christi. Sometimes I wonder if it is even reasonable to desire this? And yes... it is... because the Spirit says it is. How in the world am I going to accomplish this? Obviously, I can't... only God can bring it about (Phil 1:6), but He is faithful and true and will not fail. Yikes! I have so far to go.

RO 12:1-2 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

A 'living and holy sacrifice' – are you kidding me? I can't keep my flesh crucified on the cross let alone my spirit still upon God's Altar. But when I ponder what it is I really want... it is to be God's own. What is the longing of my heart? What do I hear the Spirit whispering to me? It is not despair, but rather hope.

Does being this sort of a person demand that in becoming the Lord's own ambassador that I become the world's doormat? NO! Emphatically NOT. God wants us to be strong and to stand against the world in faith... to know and love what is good, true, and honorable; and resist all that isn't:

EPH 6:10-20 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE

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PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The image here is of a warrior prepared for battle and standing their ground in full confidence, not a wimp capitulating in fear. God does not expect me to be passive because Jesus was not passive. Indeed, Adam’s great sin in the Garden was his passivity. We need to know what is True, Holy, and Good – then submit to how God works that out in our life. Consider this passage of the “Woman at the Well” in Johns Gospel:

JN 4:23-24 “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

In explicating this passage in John’s Gospel, Zondervan’s Expository Encyclopedia provides this insight on the meaning of the encounter with the woman at the well:

“To Jesus, true worship is that of the spirit, which means that the worshiper must deal honestly and openly with God. She [the Samaritan woman at the well], on the contrary, had been furtive and unwilling to open her heart to God. "God is spirit" carries one of the four noun descriptions of God found in the NT (the other three are "God is light" [1Jn 1:5]; "God is love" [1Jn 4:8, 16]; and "God is a consuming fire" [Heb 12:29]). Jesus was endeavoring to convey to the woman that God cannot be confined to one place nor conceived of as a material being. Only "the Word become flesh" (cf. 1:14) could represent God adequately. Worshiping in ‘Truth’ means that the Reality of God is the motivating principle of life... God is both Spirit and Real, and faith must connect at both planes.

Worshiping in Spirit speaks to the eternal relational side of humanity that was imbued with the Breath of God at Creation. We are not merely animals incapable of discipline and self-control. We can know God, love Him, purposefully submit to Him, and incrementally to be transformed into a reflection of Him. We also know that as Christians we have a “direct-connect” to God through the indwelling Spirit. God wants to be known and desires to be revealed to us and through us. Worshiping in Truth speaks to the reality that we are created in the image of God, and the revelation of Truth is a reality we grasp in our minds which then takes root in our hearts.

Remember that the life of the Christian flows through Jesus words:

- ❖ The Great Commandment – love God and others.
- ❖ The Great Commission – evangelism and discipleship.

Final thoughts regarding what Imago Dei and Imago Christi have to do with love and peace.

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The heart of God is love:

¹Jn 4:8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

¹Jn 4:16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

To live in Christ is to live life in His peace:

^{Jn 14:27} Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

¹Pe 3:8-9 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Living in love and peace makes little sense to the worldly ones who seek only their own benefit over doing what is right, noble, and true. Lying, cheating, defrauding, and all manner of selfish misconduct is often approved as prudent by the world that believes the ends justify the means, but this is reprehensible to God. In Christian behavior it is not just what we do, but also how we do it. Life in the community of love is different than life in the world, and is not merely a Pavlovian response to my desire amid opportunity. It is shameful that in many ways the church has accepted the world's standard of conduct. The community of faith has instead a higher calling to be a counter culture... a beacon of light in a world of darkness. It is not always easy, and we often suffer wrongly as a result, but it is through acting consistently in a just and ethical manner that we demonstrate our faith to the world.

^{Lk 8:19-21} Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

III.CONCLUSION:

There is obviously much more that can be said about forgiveness... the purpose of this short study was not to solve the whole problem, but to gain some insight of what God really wants from His disciples living in community. The Christian community is not perfect, and often it is not pretty because it is filled with broken people who are under reclamation by God in becoming hopeful saints. This study has been helpful for me to frame God's expectations of my response before Him.

In the end, we can only get as close to another as they will allow us to become. Intimacy with God (the vertical axis) is unilateral... God invites us to get as close as we want. It is not God

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who puts up a barrier to intimacy; rather it is our choices that determines the extent of intimacy. Intimacy with other people (the horizontal axis) is bilateral... one can only get as close as another will allow you. Some people may refuse the relational reconciliation process, and we cannot compel them to do what we believe is right. We have a responsibility to do what we know is right, and invite others to join in the process.

Intimacy has its risks and rewards, and one person's expectation is rarely entirely consistent with another's. That is why we need to dialogue with humility, submission and grace. In our Christian community we should practice confession whenever God brings wrongs to mind to keep the relational pathway clear. Sometimes you have to let people go and allow them to do the wrong you would prefer they wouldn't in hope that at some point God will realign them... such as the Prodigal son. God does promise that all wrongs will one day be remedied, and that all tears will be dried, and that all wounds will be healed... but He doesn't promise that it will happen in our timetable or even in this world or in our own lifetime.

We walk in faith holding to the ideal God has set in our hearts. It is our responsibility to walk in integrity as ambassadors of Grace in a fallen world that desperately needs redemption. The actions we take can sometimes make a huge difference, though we may never know it this side of Heaven.

In thinking through this study and practicum, I asked a couple of my best friends who know me well and the circumstances of my particular struggle which led to this study... in which I have a response to make but first wanted to check my emotions in light of Scripture. I asked them to read my thoughts and check for blind spots. One friend responded as follows:

This is beautiful. It represents the best of theology: confession.

What you describe is the most expensive thing I have found in the kingdom. It costs dearly. Look at Joseph sobbing so that the entire court heard; his entire adult life focused on a decision he had available to him when everything passed into his hands...including the future of mankind if you think about Judah standing in front of Joseph trembling. Christ's will for his entire life was bent toward the last bit on the cross where he could utter "Forgive them..." It literally cost him everything.

I'll say it again, this #&%@ ain't cheap. I've had one of these ongoing pains in my life for years and I've just been called to lay myself and my anger and my completely justified indignation down *and* emotionally and physically prostrate myself before the throne on this person's behalf. I am neither Joseph nor Christ but I did ask one of them to come with me.

When the scope of our hurt and need is really broad, only Jesus can bridge us to forgiveness. I love you. Via con Dios.

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In summation, it is wise to regularly practice confession as a spiritual exercise. It is also wise to regularly check yourself and have trusted spiritually mature friends check your thinking for blind spots and afford the opportunity for encouragement and growth for both. The following practicum may be useful in the regular practice of confession.

IV. EPILOGUE:

It has been more than 5 ½ years since the events I experienced led me into the study documented above. I have struggled with this, prayed over it, asking God to convict us all... starting with me. To break our hearts, starting with me... but so far mine seems to be the only one broken. I've reached out, made contact with no real development. I've awakened many nights and wrestled with it, I've carried out mock conversations of what might be said if/when we finally have an encounter... and no, there has been no attempt on their part to engage me, let alone seek any dialogue with me. I have been convicted for my initial angry response which was wrong on my part. Though what I said was true, I had no right to respond in anger, and it only obscured what had happened and made me appear the problem rather than the victim. I feel remorse, repentance, and the desire for restoration and reconciliation... I miss interacting with the people I remember and loved, and the relationship we used to have. However, I don't care much for the people they've become and unfortunately there is little more I can do. I've forgiven myself, and have to let it go.

Relational change is a two way street, when someone is unwilling or unable to interact, you just have to let it go... and pray more. In coaching parlance – “I'm stuck.” So, how do I become unstuck? I'll continue to pray and hope. To gain insight, I've taken the following steps toward resolution:

1. I've spoken with my wife, pastors, friends, counselors... I realize I just need to let this go. I can't fix it, they don't want to talk about it, and it's become a toxic situation. Let it go.
2. I've found some good counsel from a book titled Leadership and Self-Deception. It's a really good book! Sort of the relational equivalent of the 12 Step Process.
3. In reading a recent article by relational columnist Offra Gerstein, she makes clear the need for apology as a means of encouraging forgiveness. She makes mention of a book by Dr Hamilton Beazley entitled No Regrets. This book discusses the need for an apology to set the stage for the opportunity of forgiveness. The book lists 4 parts for a “true apology” which contains:
 - a. A full acknowledgment and personal accountability for the offense.
 - b. An expression of genuine sorrow for having committed the offense.
 - c. A constructive effort to repair the damage caused in a tangible way.
 - d. An assurance that the offense will not be repeated.

Such relational repair is never easy. Apologies are necessarily uncomfortable. Trust once broken is hard to restore, hence the need for the apology and forgiveness cycle as a process toward restoration and reconciliation. The desired end result of the process is restoring relational intimacy, and working toward trust and respect.

4. I've found that time hasn't necessarily healed the wound, but it has dulled the pain. Pretending it didn't happen is not a constructive option. Hurts need to be healed, and ignoring them only allows them to fester.
5. Pastoral Advice – seek a competent pastor/counselor to help you work through these issues:
 - a. Realize that you can only get as close to a person as they will let you. Some people are so relationally insecure or damaged that they are unwilling or possibly unable to be vulnerably connected with others. Many have learned coping mechanisms to appear healthy, which further confuses the matter. We all have our own flavor of brokenness or even dysfunction and our own severity of it as well. A quick test can aid in understanding the ease in which we are able to trust and relationally connect with others – see Authentic Discipleship web site and the following article <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/3-leadership-dev/Family%20Atmosphere%20Survey%20-%202015%20Questions.pdf>
 - b. We all need people who “breathe life” into us. Life can be draining, and some people suck life out of us. Depending on our personal fortitude, spiritual vitality, and relational bandwidth... we need to balance incoming and outgoing life resources.
 - c. Some people are merely difficult and draining, others are toxic and damaging. It is not our job to fix anyone, it is the Spirit's work to heal and restore. We can be a friend and accompany others on their journey. However, when relationships go toxic, we need to refer or defer to professional pastoral and counselor help. In these circumstances we need to realize that there comes a time and it is OK to prayerfully and mercifully let toxic people go. Continuing to endure such people who refuse to be open to reasonable change and relational development is not healthy. When someone refuses counseling and constructive effort to restore relational health, it may be wise to separate yourself from the people at the heart of the problem. In some circumstances, a divorce of some sort may well be in order. It is not wise to continue to struggle and suffer through the abuse of another, and if you have children involved it is not fair to drag them through it as well. This is not God's perfect plan, but it may be a reasonable resolution to living with broken people in a broken reality. Whatever the solution, a lot of prayer and counseling ought to be added into the mix.

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- d. Some measure of distance can provide greater clarity and perspective. We don't always see as clearly or understand as wisely as we think we do. Pray for the Spirit to illuminate the matter so you can properly pray into it. Know that the Spirit is already making intercession on your behalf – Romans 8:26.
6. Finally – Brennan Manning, an American author, priest, and spiritual director said:
“Forgiveness is daunting; the ungraced human will does not have the capacity for it. Only reckless confidence in a source greater than ourselves can empower us to forgive the wounds inflicted by others.”

V. PRACTICUM:

Now that we have reviewed some of these elements, let us purpose to spiritually appropriate God's involvement in it. Set aside a time to confess and renew with the Spirit. Spend preparation time in prayer and worship. It is also good to do this on different occasions both with a trusted friend as well as alone before God.

1. With regard to my relationship with God – ask Him to bring to mind any wrongs I have committed against Him. Don't dwell on the guilt associated with it, just allow the Spirit to bring thoughts into your mind. If the thought is not immediately clear, ask God to clarify it. God is not a God of confusion, so seek clarity and order. The thoughts God brings to your mind need to be addressed. Don't justify yourself, confess before God... knowing He is faithful and true and desires to grant you forgiveness... on His terms. Don't add your own conditions to what God is asking of you. As God brings it to mind, confess it and release it.
2. With regard to my relationship with other people, there are two aspects:
 - Ask God to bring to mind wrongs you have committed against others, confess it and release it to God. Seek God's wisdom about what action may be appropriate on your part... do I need to call someone or meet with them? Is writing a note a better approach? Is there reparation that needs to be attended to? Or do I just need to pray and allow God to work in the matter and prepare the way for a future but as yet unknown action? In deciding your proper response, consider that any action you want to take needs to be restorative. If it will not promote greater love and relational intimacy, it probably doesn't require any action other than prayer alone. But in many cases, you may need to confess to the person you have wronged and seek their forgiveness... and restitution may be necessary. If done with true spiritual intentions, this may be a significant experience for you both. Complete brutal honesty is usually not healthy. Most people don't need or want to know the inner workings of our depraved mind. Especially if it won't bring about a healthy and loving response.

- **Ask God to bring to mind wrongs that others have committed against you. Some of these may actually be preventing you from living out the grace infused life God desires for His children. Is your heart holding on to some old hurt? Is the hurt festering and needing to be cleansed? Often such hurts are the source of anger that wells up out of proportion of another wrong inflicted. Identify these things, and commit them to God. Release them to Him, and trust Him to resolve them. When we dwell on such things they prevent us from living the life God called us into. In some cases, you may need to go to the person who wronged you and gracefully confront them. They may not know they hurt you, give them a chance to make things right. If they are unwilling or unable to respond, you may need to commit them and the problem to God. Pray for them, ask for resolution, and give them space and or distance for God to operate.**
- 3. You may want to journal what God tells you, and what you sense you need to do. It may help to have a trusted brother or sister in the faith to stand with you in prayer and accountability... to keep you focused on what is really going on. Trusted friends who are spiritually mature and who know you well, can see past the blind spots we often can't. I'm certain that as Joseph was sitting in prison for all those years in slavery in Egypt due to the betrayal of his brothers, that he wasn't often (if ever) praying for their well being. He probably thought of all sorts of retribution. Joseph probably didn't know what he was going to do until he had to do something, then God's preparation brought out the best possible response. Joseph's older brother Judah begged that Joseph keep him in prison and let his youngest brother Benjamin go. This demonstrated a changed heart for Judah, and likely began the healing process in Jacob's broken family. In your contemplation, imagine what it is that you should seek from God... what is the best possible response that He would have me do? Pray and collaborate with trusted friends before you act regardless of what you have decided to do.**
- 4. Get into the habit of asking God to reveal His heart to you, and to open your eyes to the situations around you. You may be surprised how your awareness and sensitivity will grow as you watch and wait for God.**