

LOVE, MERCY, FORGIVENESS AND CHASTISEMENT : PART 1

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Human Pride, The Unrepentant Sinner, Wicked Heart, Fall Of The Proud, Humbly Confess Our Faults And Errors, A Root Of Bitterness, Forgiving The Unrepentant, The True Test Of Our Christian Love: Loving Our Enemies And Unrepentant Sinners, Defining Word "Offend" In The Scriptures, Endtime Apostasy, Trespass Sin And Missing The Mark, The Four Key Steps Of Forgiveness, Definition Of Genuine Repentance, Faith Backed By Actual Works, Hardened Criminals And The Revolving Door, Confessing Our Sins To One Another, True Love Is Blind And Covers A Multitude Of Sins, Mutual Reconciliation, Failure Of Modern-Day Relationships, Mercy, Reciprocal Forgiveness

Perhaps some of the hardest words to say in the English language are "I am sorry; I was wrong; please forgive me." Even though we know full well that we have said or done something wrong which has terribly hurt or offended another human being, our pride is so strong, that oft times not only will we stubbornly refuse to humbly seek forgiveness, but we will not even be willing to admit that we are guilty of the crime of which we have been accused. That old pride of ours just bursts out of our chest like an over-inflated balloon which repels anyone who tries to draw close to us in order to show us the error of our ways. Oh, our hearts can be so evil and so wicked! The Prophet Jeremiah knew all about this; and that is why he said in one place:

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

Jeremiah 17:9, KJV

In the New Testament, we are told that Jesus Christ knew exactly what was in the heart of man. On one occasion, after He had apparently done some miracles in Jerusalem, the Apostle John relates the following incident concerning our Lord:

"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."

John 2:23-25, KJV

Exactly what is in the heart of man? Jesus answered this question quite directly in the Gospel of Matthew when He told Peter and the rest of the Disciples the following:

". . . Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man."

Matthew 15:16-20, KJV

What some people don't realize is that the longer they cling to their pride, and stubbornly refuse to admit the error of their ways, and humbly seek forgiveness from those whom they have hurt or offended, the harder they will also fall when it comes time for the Lord to deal with them; and He most certainly will in His perfect time. This thought is clearly brought out in the following verse from the Book of Proverbs:

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

Proverbs 16:18, KJV

It is much better for us if we humble ourselves, tuck our pride back down in our shirt, confess our faults, and seek forgiveness, than to have to face the consequences for continuing to yield ourselves to the rebellion of our own proud, stubborn hearts. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God . . . For our God is a consuming fire."

Hebrews 10:31, 12:29, KJV

Recently, a dear sister in the Lord asked me for some advice concerning a serious problem she was having with another

member of her family. According to her story, some time ago, this person had committed an evil act of violence against her. Just as I described above, even though it was widely known that this person had hurt her in this way, he had never sought for her forgiveness; and in fact, he refused to acknowledge that he had even committed the crime. While this sister had thought that she had forgiven this person, a later incident revealed to her that perhaps she really hadn't; and that maybe a root of bitterness had taken hold in her heart. The Apostle Paul spoke of the danger of such things in his Epistle to the Hebrews when he wrote the following:

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;"
Hebrews 12:14-15, KJV

That word "bitterness" is derived from the Koine Greek word "pikria", which is pronounced pik-ree'-ah. Thayer's Greek English Lexicon provides the following definitions for this word:

----- Begin Quote -----

- 1) bitter gall
 - 1a) extreme wickedness
 - 1b) a bitter root, and so producing a bitter fruit
 - 1c) metaph. bitterness, bitter hatred

----- End Of Quote -----

Once bitterness against another person takes root in one's heart, it can be extremely difficult to rid oneself of it. It is just like an ugly weed growing in the middle of a beautiful flower garden. We might use a machete or perhaps a lawn mower to chop it off at ground level, thus giving the false impression that we have rid ourselves of it. But unless we totally remove the root, with time, that same old ugly weed will grow right back again to defile the beautiful landscape we have so carefully and patiently created. What is even worse, is that each time we cut off the top of that weed, the roots continue to grow and strengthen themselves below ground level.

In fact, depending upon its type, that weed might even spread

its hidden roots and produce similar weeds which will do even more damage to our once-beautiful flowerbed. Obviously, that flowerbed represents our own life, and those people who we immediately affect in it. This we will indeed do, whether we realize it or not. While trying to resolve a problem in the Christian Church at Rome regarding those Disciples who ate meat, and those who didn't, the Apostle Paul made the following comment:

"For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself."

Romans 14:7, KJV

Thus, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Hebrews, if we are not careful, we can defile others with the negative thoughts that we have towards that person who harmed or offended us; just like that stubborn weed which secretly spreads its roots underground.

This same dear sister then asked me a question concerning forgiveness. She was wondering how a Christian should respond in a situation -- such as the above -- where the evildoer has not only refused to seek forgiveness, but will not even confess to the crime. Under such circumstances, are we still supposed to forgive them? This is indeed a rather difficult situation which most of us have encountered at least once during our lifetime. The truth is that it is so much easier to forgive someone when they humbly approach us seeking forgiveness. But in real life, this simply isn't always the case, as we have seen. It is at this time in our lives that we are truly tested by such verses as the following:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 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; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good,

and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Matthew 5:38-48, KJV

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

Matthew 18:21-22, KJV

As Jesus makes very clear, it is so easy to love people who reciprocate our love with their own love. It is an equal give and take situation. However, this is not when the true Christian character is tested. It is when the other person does not respond to our love as we would hope, that we are put on the spot with the Lord. In the case of a person who has intentionally hurt us either physically or emotionally, and who shows absolutely no signs of repentance, this is when our Christian love and patience is stretched to the limit.

To fully understand this issue of offenses and forgiveness, it is important that you realize that in the Scriptures, the word "offense" does not always carry the same meaning. This is an issue which I explain in detail in the series "The Urantia Book: A Dangerous New Age Doctrine". In that series I discuss how the followers of the Urantia Book -- which I refer to as the Unbelief Book -- are leading people astray through their false doctrines. I then mention the fact that, unless they repent, those deluded people are going to face dire consequences in the day that they have to appear before the Lord. To support this thought, I quote the following verse:

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Matthew 18:6, KJV

In the previous verse, the word "offend" is derived from the Koine Greek word "skandalizo". It is in fact from this word that we derive our English words "scandal" and "scandalize".

While this Greek word is translated as "offend" in the New Testament, Thayer's Greek English Lexicon actually defines "skandalizo" as "putting a stumbling block or impediment in the way, upon which another may trip and fall". Thus, in the previous verse, Jesus is actually warning those people who, by whatever means, lead His lambs away from the truth of the Scriptures and faith in Christ. As you can see, this lexicon definition is substantially different from the meaning with which most people have become familiar. Furthermore, the act of tripping or falling away from the truth is also directly related to what the Apostle Paul stated concerning the tragic conditions which would exist prior to Christ's Return. Please note what Paul wrote in the following verse:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;"

2 Thessalonians 2:3, KJV

Those two words "falling away" are derived from the Koine Greek word "apostasia", which is defined as "a falling away, defection or apostasy". There are many reasons regarding why so many people are falling away -- or stumbling -- from the true faith and doctrines of the Bible. However, this topic is amply discussed in other articles; so I will not dwell upon it here. Jesus then continued to warn against those people who would offend His little ones by saying the following:

"Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

Matthew 18:7, KJV

Thus again we can see that these "offences" -- or stumbling blocks, from "skandalon" -- are the lies, deceptions and false doctrines which are causing so many people to be led astray from their faith in the saving Grace of God through the atoning Blood of Jesus Christ. Of course, as we should already know, in our modern day, this isn't the only meaning of the word "offend". In the Gospel of Luke, we find another account of these very same teachings from our Lord. Notice, that after speaking of offenses, Jesus continues His warning by discussing trespasses and forgiveness:

"Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged

about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."

Luke 17:1-4, KJV

In the previous four verses, the word "trespass" is derived from the Koine Greek word "hamartano", which is correctly pronounced as ham-ar-tan'-o. Of the forty-three times that it is used in the New Testament, this same word is translated thirty-eight times as "sin". Thayer's Greek English Lexicon offers a variety of definitions for this word. Consider the following:

----- Begin Quote -----

- 1) to be without a share in
- 2) to miss the mark
- 3) to err, be mistaken
- 4) to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honour, to do or go wrong
- 5) to wander from the law of God, violate God's law, sin

----- End Of Quote -----

As can be seen, the main thought seems to be to err, to be mistaken, to miss the mark, or to do or to go wrong. In the previous verses, we see that it is understood to mean to do these things against another person; and more specifically, to do them against a brother in the faith. If we closely examine Jesus's actual teachings in these verses from Luke, we see that He is describing a process which involves four key steps. These steps are the following:

1. the offense
2. the rebuke
3. the repentance
4. the forgiveness

If we were to behave ourselves like the rigid Scribes and the Pharisees of old, then technically-speaking, we cannot go directly to step four from step one. We must first go through steps two and three. In other words, if a person, -- meaning a brother or a sister in the faith -- offends you,

you are to rebuke him. If he humbly receives your rebuke and repents of his sin, then you are obligated to forgive him.

At this point, it might be good to explain exactly what is meant in the Bible by the word "repent". As I more thoroughly explain in the four-part series "What It Means to Repent", in the world today, when we hear this word, we usually think of the act of being sorry for something we have said or done. However, as you will now see, the true meaning of the word is much deeper than that. Consider the following verses that are found in the New Testament:

"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 4:17, KJV

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Luke 13:3, KJV

"And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Mark 1:15, KJV

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:"

Acts 17:30, KJV

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

Revelation 3:19, KJV

Over and over again we see this warning to repent, repent, repent. But exactly what does it mean? According to Thayer's Greek English Lexicon, the word "repent" is derived from the Koine Greek word "metanoeo". Pronounced met-an-o-eh'-o, the lexicon provides the following definitions for this word:

----- Begin Quote -----

- 1) to change one's mind, i.e. to repent
- 2) to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins

----- End Of Quote -----

Notice that "repent" does not simply mean to say you are

sorry for something. It means to change your mind, and to wholeheartedly amend your ways. Exactly what does amend mean? In this case, it means to change something, just as when a new clause is added, or amended, to the United States Constitution. By adding a new clause to a particular Article or Section, lawmakers are in effect changing or expanding upon the meaning of the Constitution. In similar fashion, true repentance also involves a serious change in one's life.

Words are cheap. People say "I am sorry" to each other all the time; but how much do they really mean it? If we are truly sorry for something which we have said or done, then we are going to have a complete change of mind and heart about it as well. If this repentance is real, then it will be manifested by a genuine change in our lives. In other words, our actions will support our words. This thought is confirmed in the Scriptures by the following verses where we see a direct relationship between repentance and the works which follow it:

"But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

Acts 26:20, KJV

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

Revelation 2:5, KJV

"Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds."

Revelation 2:22, KJV

Thus, just as Jesus and the Apostle James both said, we must prove what we believe. That is, we must demonstrate our faith, by our actual fruits, which are the works that we perform. Otherwise, we are just like the hypocritical Scribes and the Pharisees who said one thing, yet did another. Consider these verses:

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Matthew 7:20, KJV

"All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."

Matthew 23:3, KJV

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

James 2:17-26, KJV

Thus, it should be clearly evident to you, that saying that one is sorry for some particular deed is not always a true indication of repentance; particularly when we are dealing with people of the world who don't even know the Lord. They will insist that they are sorry regarding some offense that they have committed, yet their lives will never manifest any kind of real, long-term change. Such is often the case with hardened criminals. In some instances, these evil people are continually going through the revolving door of their local prison. They spend more time locked up in a jail cell, than they do being free on the street. Why? Because the time that they spend in prison does nothing to bring about real change in their lives. Some of them are simply abiding their time, until they can go out on the street and commit more evil.

But let's focus our discussion on a more personal level. What is one supposed to do when a certain individual, due to their pride and the hardness of their own heart, shows absolutely no intentions of repenting? What if said person is not even honest enough with himself to acknowledge the sin? This is precisely the problem which this dear sister had to face. At times like these, we can thank the Lord for the wonderful

truths that are found in His Word; because they never steer us wrong. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said the following:

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Matthew 6:14-15, KJV

If we were not aware of the previous verses I have shared from the Gospel of Luke, the above verses from Matthew would seem to offer a definitive answer to this problem. However, because we are already aware of the previous verses, we must now ask ourselves if Jesus might be saying that we should forgive the offender AFTER they have repented and sought for forgiveness. The only other alternative is that is He saying that we should forgive said person regardless of whether or not they repent and seek forgiveness. As I thought on this problem, I recalled another article where I also speak about forgiveness. In this article, entitled "To Pray or Not to Pray, That Is the Question", I mention the fact that, in his Epistle, the Apostle James makes it rather clear that we are to confess our sins to each other, and to forgive each other. Consider this verse:

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

James 5:16, KJV

As can be seen, confession is sometimes a two-way street. In other words, we are to forgive those who have offended us, as well as ask for forgiveness of those whom we have likewise offended. This takes humility of the kind which only God can give. It also requires a special love which God alone is able to give us when we are truly yielded to Him. With His Love, we will be able to forgive anyone, despite the true desires of our evil heart. There is an old saying which states that love is blind. This idea actually originates in the Bible, and means that if we truly love someone, we will be able to overlook their faults and shortcomings, just as God overlooks our sins and shortcomings when we plead our cause through the Blood of Jesus Christ. Consider the following verses:

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Ephesians 4:32, KJV

"And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."

1 Peter 4:8, KJV

So again, it is only this mutual reconciliation which brings about true spiritual healing of the soul; and it is love -- God's Love -- which is the healing ointment. Of course, such healing also requires humble, honest communication between the various parties concerned.

Sadly, this is something which is severely lacking in many modern-day relationships. Instead of opening our hearts to each other in humility so that we can try to resolve our differences, we prefer instead to put up a defensive wall of silence around ourselves. Due to our self-righteous pride, we choose rather to keep things guarded in our hearts, where we use them as timely weapons to inflict further damage on the person who has offended us. We allow the root of bitterness to grow. One wrong word, or one wrong action from them, and we quickly remind them of their faults and their past sins against us. We become cruel, merciless, legalistic tyrants, just like the Scribes and the Pharisees of old who constantly criticized Jesus for His many acts of love, which seemed to contradict their cold hard law. But notice what Jesus said concerning this attitude:

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

Matthew 5:7, KJV

"But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Matthew 9:13, KJV

To reiterate, it is only when we join our hearts in true humility, engage in an honest confession of sin, and show each other mercy, that we can destroy any remaining root of bitterness which may still be poisoning and destroying our relationship. Only in this way can personal relationships truly be healed. Furthermore, it is only then, after having made amends with the person we have offended, that the Lord tells us that He will also hear us and forgive us as well. Consider these verses:

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought 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."

Matthew 5:23-24, KJV

"And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us . . ."

Luke 11:4, KJV

So again, Jesus is clearly saying that before we can expect God to forgive us for our sins, we must first be reconciled with those people by whom we have been offended, or against whom we have likewise done wrong. Thus it seems that Divine Forgiveness is to some degree determined by our willingness to forgive others; and, of course, by our acceptance of Jesus' loving Atonement on the Cross for the sins of all mankind. If we forgive each other from our hearts, God will then forgive us through the Blood of Jesus Christ. Consider what the Apostle John tells us in his first Epistle:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9, KJV

Please go to part two for the continuation of this series.

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LOVE, MERCY, FORGIVENESS AND CHASTISEMENT : PART 2

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A Message Designed For Believers, God's High Standard, Love Is Supposed To Be A Principal Sign Of Our Christian Faith, When Secular Laws And God's Laws Collide, Backsliding And Christian Counseling, Jesus' Own Advice Regarding Christian Reconciliation, Building A Strong Scriptural Foundation One

Verse At A Time, Our Christian Responsibility Is To Forgive,
Life-Changing Power Of Prayer, Pray For Christian Brethren,
Forgive And Forget: Easier Said Than Done, Forgiveness Is A
Healing Balm, God Will Forget Our Transgressions Against Him,
Remember And Forget In The Scriptures, Our Record Is Purged
By The Blood Of Jesus Christ, God's Record Books, Though Your
Sins Be As Scarlet, Washed In The Blood Of The Lamb Of God

At this point, it is important that you realize that all of
of the verses that I have shared with you thus far regarding
the act of forgiveness, were spoken and/or written by Jesus
Christ and His Apostles. Equally important is the fact that
these words were directed at the Christian body of Believers.
In other words, there is no indication that they were spoken
to the unbelieving heathen of the world. Remember the verse
which I shared with you earlier where Jesus said "But whoso
shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me."
Thus, it seems that this counsel is primarily directed at
Christians who already know the Lord. This is because the
Lord apparently holds His own children to a higher standard
than He does the children of the world. You may recall that
Jesus also said the following to His Disciples:

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye
have love one to another."

John 13:35, KJV

In his first Epistle, the Apostle John also emphasized the
importance of Christian love; even going so far as to say
that those who do not love, do not even truly know God. In
fact, he tells us that they are the children of the devil.
Consider the following verses:

"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children
of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of
God, neither he that loveth not his brother . . . We know
that we have passed from death unto life, because we love
the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in
death."

1 John 3:10, 14, KJV

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love . . .
If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a
liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen,
how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

1 John 4:8, 20, KJV

Thus we see that Christian love is meant to be the principal sign of our faith. It is supposed to be what sets us apart from other religions of the world. Notice also that John's words are again directed at the Christian body, and not at outsiders. Of course, this is not to suggest that all of this wise counsel would not be good for the children of the world as well, as it most certainly would be. However, I am stressing this difference for a specific reason. As I point out in other articles, the Word of God advises us that we are not to concern ourselves with the affairs of this world. They have their own laws and their own ways of doing things, and they are not always in agreement with God's Laws. This is particularly evident in our modern day where there exists a growing body of man-made laws which contradict God's Laws in the most vile ways. I will leave it to you to decipher what I mean by that.

As we can see by the example of this dear sister in the Lord, the problem occurs when our interaction with the unbelieving people of the world results in our being threatened or harmed in some way, whether that harm, or threat of harm, is mental, emotional or physical. When such incidents occur, what are we supposed to do? How should we deal with them? If this were a matter which involved a Christian brother or sister straying from the teachings of the Gospel, the answer would be quite simple. Notice what James also tells us in the same chapter we looked at earlier:

"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

James 5:19-20, KJV

What James is basically saying is that when problems arise within the body of Christ, such as when a brother or sister backslides from the faith, Christian counseling is required, in order to restore the wayward brethren. In the previous verses, the verb "convert" is derived from the Koine Greek word "epistrepho", which means to cause to return, or to bring back. This is an internal matter and has nothing to do with the children of the world. It is strictly a matter of faith. Therefore, it should be handled by, and resolved by, those who are likewise of our same Christian faith. The counsel of James was derived directly from the Lord's own

words which can be found in the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Notice carefully the procedure that Jesus outlines for us:

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

Matthew 18:15-17, KJV

The previous verses greatly expand upon the verses that we looked at earlier; and this is exactly what we are striving for in our understanding of God's Word. As some of you will already know, my personal approach to Bible study has long been to carefully compare Scripture with Scripture. By slowly building upon our Scriptural foundation one verse at a time, we can arrive at the truth, and at the same time, expand our understanding of what is being said. Only in this way can we guard ourselves from falling into error. Even then, due to our human nature, there is still no guarantee that we will have a perfect understanding of God's Word. Notice again the various steps which Jesus advises us to follow as we seek to be reconciled with our brethren:

1. the offense occurs
2. the private rebuke
3. the offender refuses correction
4. the private rebuke with several witnesses
5. the offender still refuses correction
6. the open rebuke before the whole congregation
7. the offender continues to refuse correction
8. the offender is treated as a heathen and publican

As you may notice, this is essentially the very same pattern that we saw earlier with the following procedure:

1. the offense occurs
2. the rebuke is given
3. repentance occurs
4. forgiveness is granted

The primary difference is that in the second set of verses from the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, the offender does not

repent despite three serious attempts to help him to see the error of his ways. Thus we are shown exactly what to do in such cases. So then; if we take into consideration all of the verses that I have presented thus far, we can summarize what they teach with the following:

As followers of Jesus Christ, it is our responsibility and duty to forgive those people who harm us or who perform any evil act against us in any way. In fact, as we learned at the beginning of this same series, Jesus advises us to pray for those people who despitefully use us. Of the three times that this word "despitefully" is used in the New Testament, twice it is derived from the Koine Greek word "epereazo". Pronounced ep-ay-reh-ad'-zo, Thayer's Greek English Lexicon defines this word as follows:

----- Begin Quote -----

- 1) to insult
- 2) to treat abusively, use despitefully
- 3) to revile
- 4) in a forensic sense, to accuse falsely
- 5) to threaten

----- End Of Quote -----

Thus, regardless of how much we may have been despitefully used, or abused, by a particular person, we should never underestimate the power of prayer to bring about repentance and positive, lasting change in their life. As the Apostle James tells us "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much". Later on in this series, we'll be taking a look at some specific examples of lives which were changed in the past. So prayer is indeed powerful. The Lord and His Apostles spoke and wrote quite extensively concerning the positive fruit which can result when we earnestly seek His face in prayer. Consider some of the following examples:

"And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

Matthew 21:22, KJV

"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

James 1:6-8, KJV

"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

1 John 5:14-15, KJV

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Romans 8:26, KJV

Concerning the topic of specifically praying for our brothers and sisters in the Lord, we also find a number of interesting verses in the Epistles, such as the following:

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;"

Ephesians 6:18, KJV

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;"

Colossians 1:9, KJV

"Pray without ceasing . . . Brethren, pray for us . . . Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:"

1 Thessalonians 5:17, 25, 2 Thessalonians 3:1, KJV

"Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly."

Hebrews 13:18, KJV

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

James 5:16, KJV

I am happy to report that as a result of the supplications of some of the Lord's special Prayer Warriors, who have devoted years to praying for certain hard-hearted individuals, lives

have indeed been changed. In fact, such is the case regarding the dear sister who inspired this series. Some time ago, she informed me that the person who caused her harm in the past, is now seeking professional, as well as spiritual help. With time, he will hopefully come to full repentance, make a full confession, and finally make amends with this sister.

In thinking about our discussion concerning forgiveness and repentance, I am reminded of a popular worldly saying which says "Forgive and forget". While we have already seen that we are obligated by God's Word to forgive those people who offend us, to my personal knowledge, the idea of forgetting has absolutely no Scriptural basis. Let's be honest about this. Sometimes we are hurt so deeply emotionally, mentally or physically, that we remain severely scarred for the rest of our lives. This is certainly the case with such crimes as rape, incest, child molestation, assault and battery, etc.

While it is easy for certain people to nonchalantly suggest that we should "Forgive and forget", it is more than likely that they have never been in the shoes of those people who have actually been the victims of such horrible crimes, and thus have to deal with it for the rest of their lives. A clear case in point is my own dear sister. Sadly, a number of years ago, she became the victim of a gang rape. To this day, because of the violent act which was committed against her person, she has had to remain on medication in order to maintain some degree of mental stability and normalcy in her life. To ask her to simply forget the incident is ludicrous to say the least. This horrible crime has left an indelible mark on her life.

While the Lord expects us to forgive those people who offend us or who harm us in some way, given the gravity of some of these situations, I personally do not believe that He'll hold it against us if we find it difficult to forget the incidents or the perpetrators themselves. I also discuss this topic in the article "Forgiving and Forgetting: It Can Be So Hard!".

To try to force ourselves to forget such negative experiences in our lives is nearly a human impossibility. To even attempt doing this may very well result in a person going completely insane. While a lot of people resort to drugs or alcohol in order to forget the incident, or the pain that is associated with it, they are not really forgetting it. They are simply masking it over temporarily by dulling their senses and their state of awareness.

In some cases, the Lord is merciful to us. Thus, with the passage of time, we are sometimes able to forget the wrong which has been done against us, if it hasn't been too severe. It is not that we consciously try to force the memory out of our minds through the work of the flesh. It is just that the passage of time sometimes acts as a kind of soothing balm which eventually heals the hurt, and helps us to forget the pain.

Whether or not my sister ever actually forgave those people who committed such an evil act against her, I honestly do not know. It is really between her and the Lord. However, at the same time, her failure to do this could result in a root of bitterness springing up in her heart as we saw earlier in this series. Thus we can see that forgiveness, no matter how difficult it is to impart, not only helps the person who is being forgiven, but like a healing balm, it likewise helps to heal the person against whom the crime has been committed.

While it is indeed difficult for us humans to forget the evil acts which have been perpetrated against us, the Bible informs us in certain places that the Lord will "forget" our iniquities. For example, consider the following verses:

"And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Jeremiah 31:34, KJV

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

Hebrews 8:12, KJV

"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

Hebrews 10:17, KJV

I suspect that it may be a misunderstanding of the previous verses which has given rise to the popular phrase "Forgive and forget", as we discussed earlier. If we closely examine the Hebrew word from which the word "remember" is derived, we discover that when the Lord says He will remember our sins no more, it does not mean that He will actually forget them. Rather, I believe it means that He simply won't bring them to mind, or hold them against us any longer. In the Old

Testament, the word "remember" is derived from the Hebrew word "zakar". Pronounced zaw-kar', it means to remember, to call to mind, to mention, or to record. Following is the complete definition, as found in the Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon:

----- Begin Quote -----

- 1) to remember, recall, call to mind
 - 1a) (Qal) to remember, recall
 - 1b) (Niphal) to be brought to remembrance, be remembered, be thought of, be brought to mind
 - 1c) (Hiphil)
 - 1c1) to cause to remember, remind
 - 1c2) to cause to be remembered, keep in remembrance
 - 1c3) to mention
 - 1c4) to record
 - 1c5) to make a memorial, make remembrance

----- End Of Quote -----

In the New Testament, the word "remember" is derived from the Koine Greek word "mnaomai". Pronounced mnah'-om-ahee, this word carries the same meaning as its Hebrew counterpart, as we see by the following definition which is taken from Thayer's Greek English Lexicon:

----- Begin Quote -----

- 1) to remind
 - 1a) to be recalled or to return to one's mind, to remind one's self of, to remember
 - 1b) to be recalled to mind, to be remembered, had in remembrance
 - 1c) to remember a thing
 - 1d) be mindful of

----- End Of Quote -----

On the other hand, in the Old Testament, the word "forget" is derived from the Hebrew word "shakach" -- which is pronounced shaw-kakh' -- or "shakeach", which is pronounced shaw-kay'-akh. Again, following are the definitions which are provided by the Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew Aramaic English Lexicon:

----- Begin Quote -----

- 1) to forget, ignore, wither
 - 1a) (Qal)
 - 1a1) to forget
 - 1a2) to cease to care
 - 1b) (Niphal) to be forgotten
 - 1c) (Piel) to cause to forget
 - 1d) (Hiphil) to make or cause to forget
 - 1e) (Hithpael) to be forgotten

----- End Of Quote -----

In the New Testament, the word "forget" is only used on two occasions. In both instances, it is found in Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews. This word is derived from the Koine Greek word "epilanthanomai". Pronounced ep-ee-lan-than'-om-ahee, Thayer's Greek English Lexicon defines it as follows:

----- Begin Quote -----

- 1) to forget
- 2) neglecting, no longer caring for
- 3) forgotten, given over to oblivion, i.e. uncared for

----- End Of Quote -----

Thus, based on the previous definitions, we can determine that to not remember something, or to forget something, do not necessarily mean the same thing in the Scriptures. The Lord does not really forget our sins, He simply chooses to ignore them once we have accepted His Mercy, and have been washed clean through the Sacrifice of His dear Son, Jesus. The Scriptures tell us that the Lord blots out our sins. He removes them from our record; which is precisely one of the meanings of that Hebrew word "zakar", which we looked at a moment ago.

This is precisely what is sometimes done in a court of law. On certain occasions, a statement made by the witness is stricken from the record. In other instances, due to the process of appeals, sometimes a person is later vindicated of a false accusation which has been brought against him. As a result, the crime is also removed, or purged, from his court record. Because of our faith in the atoning Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and because of the Special Arrangement that God has made with His Son, as I explain in the series "Is Jesus the Only Begotten Son of God?", God also grants us a

clean record. He wipes the slate clean. God doesn't really forget our sins per se, but we are declared "clean" in His carefully-kept Record Books. Consider the following verses:

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Isaiah 1:18, KJV

"Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities."

Psalms 51:9, KJV

"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."

Revelation 3:5, KJV

"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."

Revelation 20:12, KJV

Allow me to share with you a small, personal revelation that I received. In Isaiah 1:18, the Lord tells us that our sins are "as scarlet" and "red like crimson". Thus, we might say that before we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, our sins are marked in bright red letters in the "Great Books" which are found in the Celestial Courts of Heaven. The American Heritage Desktop Dictionary defines scarlet as a bright red or red-orange color, and crimson as a vivid purplish red color. In other words, our sins are very apparent to the Lord. They stare God in the face from the pages of His Book. They show Him without a shadow of a doubt that we are all guilty! Therefore, we are worthy of death; because as the Apostle Paul tells us:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 6:23, KJV

However, as that verse also informs us, once we repent of our sins and accept the Salvation which comes through Jesus

Christ alone, what happens? Quite simply, as the previous verses tell us, our transgressions -- or sins -- become as white as snow. They become as white as the wool of a newborn lamb. Imagine, if you will, what would happen if you were to take a pen containing white ink, and write on a white piece of paper. The words would not only be very difficult to see, they would basically be invisible. So it is with the Lord. Those bright red sins of ours which are written in His Great Books, become "invisible" to His eyes, and He remembers them no more!

Let me give you another simple example which is rather easy to understand. Imagine that you take that same white sheet of paper, and then you use a red crayon to write the word "GUILTY" on it in big letters. Now, let us suppose that you suddenly have a change of mind, feel embarrassed, and decide that you do not want anyone to see what you have written on that piece of paper. Short of destroying that piece of paper, or throwing it away, what would be the quickest way to hide what you've written before someone else walks into the room? Quite simply, you would take that same red crayon, and begin to draw all over that word "GUILTY", until it can no longer be read by anyone. You have colored red on top of red.

That, my friends, is basically what happens to our sins when we come to Jesus Christ and receive Atonement as a result of His Sacrifice on the Cross. Jesus' red blood covers our red sins so that God the Father no longer sees them. As I stated earlier, we are washed clean. We are in fact washed in the Blood of the Lamb, as we can determine by the following set of verses:

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

1 John 1:7, KJV

"And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,"

Revelation 1:5, KJV

"And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Revelation 7:14, KJV

"And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."

Hebrews 9:22, KJV

"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate . . . Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Hebrews 13:12, 20-21, KJV

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;"

Romans 3:25, KJV

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

Ephesians 2:13, KJV

"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

1 John 2:2, KJV

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

1 John 4:10, KJV

Please go to part three for the continuation of this series.

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LOVE, MERCY, FORGIVENESS AND CHASTISEMENT : PART 3

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Fate Of Unrepentant Sinners, Are You A Stranger And Foreigner To God?, Members Of His Royal Household Through Jesus Christ, Treated Like A Publican, Are Christians Obligated To Pray For Unrepentant Nonbelievers?, God Refuses To Hear Prayers Of The Wicked, Free Will And Personal Choice, Our Primary Duty Is To Pray For Our Own, Unforgivable Sin And Blasphemy Against The Holy Ghost, God's Spirit Of Truth, God Is Not A Liar, Spirit Of Antichrist, Satan Is A Blasphemer And The Father Of Lies, Blasphemy Of The Beast, Are We Obligated To Forgive When The Offender Doesn't Demonstrate True Repentance?, Civil Capital Punishment System, God's Holy Laws, Standing Before Judgment Seat Of Christ, Sin Unto Death And Fornication In The Church At Corinth, Committing The Unrepentant Sinner Unto The Lord

Continuing our discussion from part two, as I stated earlier, being the sinful humans that we are, we tend to hold grudges and store negative incidents in our hearts, so that we can use them later in a moment of anger to attack a person who did us wrong in the past. Not so with the Lord. He keeps His word. If He declares that we are forgiven, then we are truly forgiven. We don't need to worry about it anymore. On the other hand, if a person has not come to accept Jesus Christ, and he has not truly repented of his sins, then he has not been forgiven, and his Heavenly Court Record is not clean! His sins are still written in bright red letters which stare God in the face. As a result, someday, when the Lord opens His Great Books, that person is going to be awfully sorry. Here is why. Please note that the words in brackets were added by me for the sake of clarification:

"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [the beast], whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Revelation 13:8, KJV

"The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and

yet is."

Revelation 17:8, KJV

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works . . . And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Revelation 20:12, 15, KJV

"And there shall in no wise enter into it [the Heavenly City] any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Revelation 21:27, KJV

"And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Revelation 22:19, KJV

Thus again, we can plainly see that while God the Father does indeed forgive those who humbly approach Him through His dear Son, He does not forgive or forget the sins of those people who willfully and stubbornly continue to rebel against Him until it is too late. As we discovered in part two, a central variable in the "forgiveness equation" is that an offender must first recognize his sins and seek forgiveness from the person whom he has offended, and then from the Lord Himself as well. If such an offender refuses to seek forgiveness, or if he is so hard-hearted that he will not even admit to the crime, what does Jesus advise us to do? The Lord tells us to treat him as a heathen and a publican. Let me share that set of verses with you again to refresh your memory:

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

Matthew 18:15-17, KJV

Exactly what does the Lord mean by this? The answer becomes clear when we examine the original word in our Greek lexicon. The word "heathen", as it is used in the previous verses from Matthew chapter eighteen, finds its origin in the Koine Greek word "ethnikos". Pronounced eth-nee-kos', Thayer's Greek English Lexicon defines it as follows:

----- Begin Quote -----

- 1) adapted to the genius or customs of a people, peculiar to a people, national
- 2) suited to the manners or language of foreigners, strange, foreign
- 3) in the NT savouring of the nature of pagans, alien to the worship of the true God, heathenish
 - 3a) of the pagan, the Gentile

----- End Of Quote -----

As can be seen, Jesus is simply saying that such a person who refuses correction, and who refuses to submit himself to the Spirit of God, should be viewed and treated as a stranger or a foreigner. In other words, that person is no better than an unbelieving pagan; and in the eyes of the Jews, all heathen were considered unclean, including the Romans who dominated Israel at that time. In contrast to Jesus' remarks, it is for this very same reason that the Apostle Paul informs us that once we come to Christ, and are washed clean by His Blood, we are no longer considered strangers and foreigners. Rather, we have become Royal Members of the Household of God. Consider the following inspiring verses:

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ . . . Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;"
Ephesians 2:11-13, 19-20, KJV

In those same verses from Matthew chapter eighteen, Jesus

also said that such unrepentant brethren should be treated as publicans. His Jewish followers perfectly understood what Jesus meant by this. Why is that? Well, you see, "publican" -- which is derived from the Koine Greek word "telones" -- was just another word for one of the most detestable classes of people in ancient Israel. That is, the tax collectors. No one wanted to have anything to do with the tax collectors. Well, except other rich people, of course. But as far as the common people were concerned, the publicans were the scum of the Earth; and Jesus said that unrepentant brethren should be treated in the very same manner as the tax collectors. In other words, with utter disdain.

Taking into consideration the stern advice that was offered by Jesus concerning those people who resist the conviction of God's Spirit to repent, we must wonder if we are even supposed to pray for such unrepentant people. While it is entirely up to you to determine how you should react in such a situation, and whether or not you should actually pray for such hard-hearted people, allow me to remind you of something that Jesus said in the Gospel of John:

"I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine."

John 17:9, KJV

The previous verse seems to indicate that we are under no obligation to pray for the unbelieving, rebellious people of the world who have knowingly rejected the Salvation that God offers them through the Sacrifice of His Son. Jesus gave us an example which we are to follow. In fact, it may surprise you to know, that there are instances in the Bible where the Jews of Israel had become so wicked, and so rebellious, that the Lord told the Prophet Jeremiah to not even pray for them, because He would not hear such prayers. This shocking truth is made evident by the following set of verses:

"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

Isaiah 59:2, KJV

"Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee."

Jeremiah 7:16, KJV

"Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble."

Jeremiah 11:14, KJV

"Thus saith the LORD unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good."

Jeremiah 14:10-11, KJV

"We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned. Thou hast covered with anger, and persecuted us: thou hast slain, thou hast not pitied. Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through."

Lamentations 3:42-44, KJV

"Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."

John 9:31, KJV

Yet to add a degree of balance to what I just stated, let us not forget some of the verses I shared with you in part one of this series. You may recall that in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus also said the following:

"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; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Matthew 18:44-45, KJV

So now you have seen both sides of the coin. I will leave it up to you to determine how you should personally act in each situation. To pray or not to pray. It is entirely up to you.

But returning to the unrepentant, incorrigible sinner who has refused to even recognize or admit his sin or offense, the sad truth of the matter is that once they have heard the Good News of Salvation through Christ, and made their choice to reject it, then that is it. They have consciously chosen to remain heathen and foreigners in God's sight by their own free will. As I point out in articles such as "Free Will and

Personal Choice", "All Are Given a Chance, But ...", and "Is the Message of Salvation Meant for All Men?", it seems that God usually doesn't try to override our free will under most circumstances. We are all free moral agents, and He allows us to live with the consequences of our decisions and actions. As the Apostle Paul wrote concerning one particular issue he had to deal with regarding the brethren:

". . . Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."
Romans 14:5, KJV

On the other hand, as we saw earlier, rebellious brethren are still our brethren as long as they maintain faith in Christ; even if they are in a backslidden state. Not only that, but the Apostles John, James and Paul did write that we should pray for them, in the hope that they will repent of their sins, and return to the faith. We may have to give them the shock treatment by giving them the cold shoulder for a time as Jesus advised us to do, but we can still be praying for them at the same time. Thus, it would seem that our primary responsibility is to pray for our own. That is, for our worldwide family of brothers and sisters in the Lord. Perhaps this is why in his first Epistle, the Apostle John states the following:

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it."
1 John 5:16, KJV

You will notice that in the previous verse, John refers to "a sin unto death". While John doesn't specify exactly what the "sin unto death" is, as I point out in other articles, according to Jesus' own words that are found in the Gospel of Matthew, there is only one unforgivable sin which is worthy of Eternal Death -- that is, the Second Death -- and that sin is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, as we see by the following group of verses:

"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him,

neither in this world, neither in the world to come."

Matthew 12:30-32, KJV

Exactly what does "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost" mean? This is in fact an issue which has been debated by Bible scholars for many years now. While I have never claimed to be a great theologian, my personal understanding is that to blaspheme against the Holy Ghost means to deny the ultimate reality which has been revealed to humanity by the Spirit of Truth. Based on Jesus' words in the Gospel of John, it is my personal belief that the Spirit of Truth -- that is, the Holy Ghost -- is an extension of God the Father Himself. Consider these verses:

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

John 4:23-24, KJV

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

John 14:16-17, KJV

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:"

John 15:26, KJV

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."

John 16:13, KJV

So I believe that to blaspheme against the Holy Ghost is to deny the truth of those verses. If God is a Spirit, and more specifically, if the Spirit of Truth is an extension of His own being -- please notice that Jesus clearly says that the Spirit of Truth "proceedeth from the Father" -- then to call God a liar when He tells us throughout His Word, over and over again, that Jesus Christ is His only-begotten Son who died for the sins of the world, is to blaspheme against the

Holy Ghost. Of course, we know that God is not a liar. This is made quite plain by verses such as the following:

"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"
Numbers 23:19, KJV

"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."
Romans 3:4, KJV

"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;"
Titus 1:2, KJV

"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."
1 John 1:10, KJV

"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son."
1 John 2:22, KJV

"And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."
1 John 4:3, KJV

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."
1 John 5:10, KJV

"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."
2 John 1:7, KJV

What the previous verses also plainly tell us is that anyone who denies God's message to the world regarding the nature and mission of His Son is in fact the real liar, as well as an antichrist, and is guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Not only that, but we also know that Jesus called the

Devil the real Father of Lies in the Gospel of John, as we see here:

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

John 8:44, KJV

Satan is the one who inspires people to rebel against God, to deny the message concerning God's Son, and to blaspheme against Him. Furthermore, the prophecies of Daniel, Second Thessalonians and Revelation all describe a devil-filled man who blasphemes against God day and night, even going so far as to declare that he himself is "God". Consider these verses:

"And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."

Daniel 7:25, KJV

"And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done."

Daniel 11:36, KJV

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, KJV

"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven."

Revelation 13:5-6, KJV

"And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the

mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon."

Revelation 16:13-14, 16, KJV

It is my view that the previous verses perfectly describe what blasphemy against the Holy Ghost really is. But to reiterate, it is calling God a liar, denying the Message of Salvation through Christ which He has given us, and in the severest of cases, it is declaring oneself "God" in God's stead. It is blaspheming against the Spirit of Truth which proceeds from the Father, by denying everything that said Spirit says.

Returning to the topic of forgiveness, while the Bible makes it rather clear that we are supposed to forgive and pray for our Christian brethren when they fall into error, or when they are in rebellion against the Lord, is this rule meant to be applied in every situation? When we are told that we won't be forgiven unless we forgive those who have offended us in some way, is it possible that Jesus was saying that we should forgive them IF they seek forgiveness from us first? If they are so proud and stubborn, and so yielded to Satan that they aren't willing to do this, are we still obligated to forgive them; or should we treat them as heathen, and simply commit them to the Lord's judgments?

While this may seem like an unnecessary question to some of you, please don't forget that in the previous Scriptures that we examined, the offender was required to approach the offended, and ask for forgiveness. Yes, out of Christian love we could just forgive them regardless of whether or not they ever come to us. But is this what we are supposed to do?

Allow me to give you a simple example. Consider a criminal who is taken to court. If despite overwhelming evidence which points to his guilt, the criminal refuses to admit to his crime, or to show any kind of remorse for his act, what will be the normal inclination of the judge and jury? Will they simply forgive him and acquit him of the charges which have been brought against him? Are they going to give him a light sentence? Of course not! In all likelihood, they will

probably be inclined to give him a very harsh sentence. If the crime merits death, he may even face the electric chair, lethal injection, the firing squad, the gallows, beheading, or whatever happens to be the form of capital punishment in that particular country.

While this may be difficult to understand for some people, God also has a system of Laws. Those people who break His Laws must also face judgment sooner or later. This is why the Apostle Paul wrote the following in his various Epistles:

"But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

Romans 14:10, KJV

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

2 Corinthians 5:10, KJV

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"

Hebrews 9:27, KJV

As with the case of capital punishment, depending upon the severity of the sin, a person who defies God's Laws may also merit death, just as we saw earlier in John's first Epistle where he mentioned a "sin unto death". In other words, while some Christians may be shocked to hear this, God may choose to destroy the flesh in order to save a person's spirit. This is exactly the kind of situation that we see the Apostle Paul confronting in the fifth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthian brethren. Paul is dealing with a serious case of fornication within the church there. It seems that a certain man has apparently engaged in sexual intercourse with his "father's wife". Whether or not this woman is actually the man's mother, Paul does not say. Consider these verses:

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him

that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"

1 Corinthians 5:1-6, KJV

By examining the specific words that Paul utilizes in those verses, we can easily determine exactly how grave the problem was in Corinth. In the opening sentence alone, Paul tells us that the fornication was "reported commonly". In other words, it seems that everyone knew about it. Even worse, Paul tells us that the brethren there had even outdone the wickedness of the Gentiles. He says "fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles". To Paul's dismay, rather than being in a state of humble repentance regarding the sin which has been committed among them, Paul tells us that the Christians there are "puffed up". What does that mean?

As it turns out, this phrase is derived from the Koine Greek word "phusioo", which means to bear one's self loftily, or to be proud. In other words, those brethren were in such a state of rebellion against the Lord, that they were actually proud of their sin. That is how backslidden they were. Is it any wonder then that Paul mentioned delivering "such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"? Paul concludes the verses by warning the brethren that they had better nip the problem in the bud, or else it will quickly spread. That is why he writes "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump".

Thus we see that there are times when we must simply commit our brethren into the Lord's hands, so that He can deal with them. If iron sharpening iron does not bring about positive results, then we are left with no other recourse. Consider the following verse:

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

Proverbs 27:17, KJV

In other words, if all of our prayers and counseling do not break through a person's wall of pride, then we must simply say, "Okay Lord; we have done all that we can. Now it is up to you to deal with him directly and knock some sense into

him." As I explain in other articles, such as "Beholding the Evil and the Good", while at times God can be a very stern Father, nevertheless, He is likewise a very loving one; much more so than our natural parents could ever be. Consider the following verses that are found in Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews:

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."

Hebrews 12:4-13, KJV

Please go to part four for the conclusion of this series.

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LOVE, MERCY, FORGIVENESS AND CHASTISEMENT : PART 4

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Divine Love And Chastisement, Examples Of The Apostle Paul And King David, Destruction Of Jerusalem By Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, The Prophet Jeremiah's Trust In God's Mercy, The Apostle Peter Recognizes God's Mercy And Longsuffering, Judgment Delayed Does Not Equate To Judgment Postponed, Some Extreme Cases And God's Wrath, Noah And The Genesis Flood, Bible Verses Regarding The Fiery Destruction Of The Wicked, Similarities Between Jeremiah Verses And Book Of Revelation, Cup Of God's Indignation And The Wrath Of God, Definition Of "Plead" In The Bible, As It Was In The Days Of Noah, Sudden Destruction Of The Wicked, The Example Of Sodom And Gomorrah, Destruction By Celestial Fire, Rampant Homosexuality In Our Modern Day, Apostle Peter's Description Of Fiery Destruction Of The Earth And The Heavens, The Apostle Paul's Description Of Sudden Destruction Of The Wicked, As A Thief In The Night, Importance Of Discerning The Signs Of The Times, Scoffers And Reprobates, Timothy: Personal Chastisement From The Lord, The Danger Of Harming The Lord's Children, The Apple Of His Eye, 1 Corinthians 13: The Love Chapter, Desperate Need For Love, God Is Our Center Of Gravity, Love Is Both The Royal Law And The Golden Rule, Closing Remarks, BBB Suggested Reading List

Continuing our discussion from part three, surely, if anyone understood the loving chastisement of the Lord, it was the Apostle Paul. Despite his blatant crimes against the Lord's children through manifold persecutions, the Lord saw fit to deal with Paul -- then known as Saul of Tarsus -- and his stubborn pride, as he traveled on the road to Damascus. He dealt with Paul as with a wayward son, and did not cast him off forever. In fact, as many Christians know, Paul went on to become the Apostle to the Gentiles, and was in large part responsible for converting many people in the nations of the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. I discuss Paul's life in more detail in articles such as part one of "A Biblical Cafeteria, or the Whole Course?".

In similar fashion, because the Lord was willing to forgive him for his gross sins, such as planning the murder of one of his own men -- Uriah the Hittite -- and then committing adultery with Uriah's wife, King David also recognized the Lord's love and mercy in the midst of His chastisements. As you may know, David wrote a beautiful Psalm of repentance. That is, Psalm 51, as well as the following verses that are

found in Psalm 103:

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

Psalm 103:8-14, KJV

In other articles such as "The Children of God and Politics" and the series "The Fruits of Disobedience", I explain that the invasion and destruction of Jerusalem by the forces of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in approximately 587 BC, was a severe chastisement from the Lord which resulted from the many sins and rebellion of the ancient Israelites. At that time, the Jews were heavily engaged in the worship of false gods; even going so far as to sacrifice their own children to the fires of the false god Molech. Following the third siege and invasion by Nebuchadnezzar's armies, the situation became so desperate that the women were forced to eat their own children according to the Prophet Jeremiah. Despite this fact, Jeremiah -- who had faithfully warned the leadership of Israel for forty years of impending doom -- never doubted the mercy of the Lord. Consider what he wrote in the Book of Lamentations:

"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

Lamentations 3:22-23, KJV

"The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD . . . For the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men . . . Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD."

Lamentations 3:24-26, 31-33, 40, KJV

Turning again to the New Testament, the Apostle Peter was likewise fully aware of the Lord's longsuffering and mercy towards His wayward children. Despite the fact that Peter denied the Lord three times in his moment of weakness, he also found mercy in the sight of the Almighty. As I explain in the article "Peter: Faith Tried in the Fire", Peter went on to become a pillar in the Early Church. Consider what he wrote in his second Epistle:

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

2 Peter 3:9, KJV

It can be clearly seen then, that despite the waywardness of His children, the Lord is not one to easily give up on them. He gives all of us the benefit of the doubt and is extremely merciful and longsuffering towards us. However, at the same time, being the righteous God that He is, as we have already seen, the Scriptures also inform us that the time eventually arrives when He must stop talking, and allow His wrath to be felt upon those proud, foolish people who stubbornly rebel against Him; whether it is His own disobedient children, or else the unbelieving world at large. As I point out in the three-part series "Don't Ever Underestimate Our Spiritual Enemy", while some ungodly people may scoff at us Christians, and view us as having one screw loose, one thing we all need to understand is that judgment delayed does NOT necessarily equate to judgment postponed. Stated another way, delayed chastisement from the Lord does NOT mean no chastisement from the Lord.

While Divine Chastisement may be a bitter pill to swallow at the time, through His loving corrections, the Lord will plead with us to return to Him. In some cases, the situation has gone to such an extreme, that the Lord has had no choice but to totally destroy the source of the evil. As I explain in series such as "Nephilim: The Giants of Genesis", God's Word tells us that this is precisely what happened during the days of the Patriarch Noah, when the Lord finally sent the Flood. The world had become so corrupt and so evil, that God had to destroy His entire Creation. Thus, all life perished, save for Noah and his immediate family. Consider the following verses:

"And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the

earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."

Genesis 6:5-8, KJV

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

Hebrews 11:7, KJV

". . . when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water."

1 Peter 3:20, KJV

Of course, in retrospect, from reading the Holy Scriptures, we come to understand that the Genesis Flood was merely the first of many chastisements which God would be forced to mete out against the wicked, rebellious people of our world. In some of the prophetic Books of the Bible, we discover a number of very interesting chapters and verses which clearly describe how the Lord pours out His fiery wrath upon the nations. For example, in the Book of Isaiah, we find the following verses:

"For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many."

Isaiah 66:15-16, KJV

In the twenty-fifth chapter of the Book of Jeremiah, we also find an angry Lord pouring out the cup of the wine of His indignation upon the nations. Consider the following verses:

"For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them . . . Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus

saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you . . . Therefore prophesy thou against them all these words, and say unto them, The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the LORD."

Jeremiah 25:15-16, 27, 30-31, KJV

The descriptive language that is used in the previous verses that are found in the Book of Jeremiah is rather similar to what we likewise find in the Book of Revelation. Consider the following verses which describe the great and final Battle of Armageddon, during which event the Lord pours out the cup of His indignation:

"And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb . . . And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs."

Revelation 14:9-10, 19-20, KJV

Regarding Jeremiah's prophecy, for the sake of clarification, allow me to point out that while in our modern day, the word "plead" is understood to refer to the act of begging with someone in order to achieve some specific goal or purpose, in the previous verses, it has an entirely different meaning. It actually means to execute judgment, or to punish. This word "plead" is derived from the Hebrew word "shaphat". Pronounced shaw-fat', it has the following definitions according to the Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew Aramaic English Lexicon:

----- Begin Quote -----

1) to judge, govern, vindicate, punish

1a) (Qal)

1a1) to act as law-giver or judge or governor (of God, man)

1a1a) to rule, govern, judge

1a2) to decide controversy (of God, man)

1a3) to execute judgment

1a3a) discriminating (of man)

1a3b) vindicating

1a3c) condemning and punishing

1a3d) at theophanic advent for final judgment

1b) (Niphal)

1b1) to enter into controversy, plead, have controversy together

1b2) to be judged

1c) (Poel) judge, opponent-at-law (participle, KJV)

----- End Of Quote -----

It is also interesting to note that in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus makes a clear reference to the evil days of Noah. The reason why Jesus does this, is not only to demonstrate how the spiritual condition of the world prior to His return is very similar to that of thousands of years earlier when Noah was alive, but also to emphasize the fact that God's judgments fall very quickly upon the world when they are least expected. To further emphasize this point, Jesus also uses the example of the sudden destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Consider what the Lord said in both of these Gospels:

"But as the days of Noe [were], so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

Matthew 24:37-39, KJV

"And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of

Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

Luke 17:26-30, KJV

As I also mention in the three-part series "Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: A Warning to Modern Society", taking into consideration the similarities between the main sin of the perverted inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the rampant homosexuality which has gripped the world today, we should all recognize the significance of the Lord using the example of these two cities in His Olivet Discourse. It is also noteworthy that these ancient towns were destroyed by fire and brimstone, just as the ancient Prophet Isaiah also describes destruction as being by fire. In fact, if you have read my five-part series called "Destruction of Planet Earth: The Wrath of God Revealed", you will know that the Apostle Peter paints the very same picture in his vivid description of the destruction of both the heavens and the Earth, as we see by the following group of verses:

"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

2 Peter 3:7-13, KJV

In his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul also warns of the suddenness with which the destruction of the ungodly occurs, as we can determine by these verses:

"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, KJV

If there is one very important point which I hope you have grasped from all of the previous verses, it is this: When God's divine judgment, chastisement and destruction finally occurs, it usually arrives very quickly. As we have seen by a preponderance of verses, our Father is very loving, very merciful and very patient with the rebellious people of our planet Earth. He gives us more than enough time to repent of our wickedness and rebellion against Him. But eventually, He says that enough is enough, and then the hammer of judgment strikes the anvil.

Now, while I have stated that God's judgments arrive very quickly, what I mean to say is that they arrive quickly, and without warning, for certain people, but not necessarily for everyone. The truth of the matter is that certain people are caught off-guard, and are so unprepared for it, as a result of not having properly discerned the signs of the times. Is this not precisely what the Lord warned about in the Gospels? Consider the following verses:

"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed."

Matthew 16:1-4, KJV

Such reprobate people have become so spiritually blind due to their own pride, that they not only cannot see what is happening around them, and cannot discern God's warnings to them to repent, but they even go so far as to scoff at the Lord's servants, and to mock His messengers, as the Apostle Peter writes in the following verses:

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days

scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

2 Peter 3:3-4, KJV

As I stated a minute ago, while Jesus and Paul described the Day of the Lord arriving "as a thief in the night", please understand that this was stated in regards to the unbelieving children of the world who would not be watching for the signs of the times. For a more detailed examination of this topic, I encourage you to read my series "As a Thief in the Night? Not For Me!".

Similar to all of the previous writers, the Apostle Paul also warned that the destruction of the wicked would come by means of fiery judgments from the Lord. Perhaps you will recall the following verses which I shared with you at the beginning of this same series:

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God . . . For our God is a consuming fire."

Hebrews 10:31, 12:29, KJV

While the previous Scriptures describe Divine Chastisement on a national or global scale, the same basic principles apply to individuals as well. In fact, as we learned earlier at the end of part three, this is precisely what the verses I shared with you from the twelfth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews are describing. If you go back and re-read them, you will see that what is written is directed to "My son." So it is being written to an individual. Exactly who is the person to whom Paul was writing? My personal guess is that it may have been to Timothy, who eventually became the bishop of the Church at Ephesus. Please notice that at the very end of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find the following four verses:

"And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words. Know ye that [our] brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you. Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you. Grace [be] with you all. Amen. [Written to the Hebrews from Italy, by Timothy.]

Hebrews 13:22-25, KJV

So, as I explain in other articles, due to his poor eyesight,

Paul apparently dictated some of his Epistles to other people who wrote them for him. In this particular case, Timothy was the chosen scribe. But notice also that Paul writes "brother Timothy is set at liberty." In other words, just as Paul was forced to appear before Emperor Nero several times, and was placed under house arrest, it appears that Timothy was also arrested at some point while he was in Italy with Paul. Thus, my personal inclination is to believe that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul may actually be writing about Timothy's personal trial, in that he was arrested and suffered some kind of affliction as a result of it. The fact that Paul describes it as "the chastening of the Lord", could mean that Timothy got off track in some way, and so the Lord had to deal with him about it. But let me stress that this is just my personal speculation. You don't have to accept it if you don't want to.

But concerning personal chastisement, if someone commits any form of violence against one of the Lord's children, rest assured that sooner or later, the Lord is going to deal with him about it, unless he truly repents. We only need to look at the example of the Apostle Paul traveling on the road to Damascus, to determine that this is indeed so. Even if the Lord's children forgive such persons, unless they personally acknowledge their sins before the Lord, and before us, it does not appear that they are going to escape judgment. When the children of the world purposely harm the children of the Lord, the Scriptures inform us that it is just like poking their finger in God's very own eye. Consider the following verses:

". . . Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."
Psalm 105:15, KJV

"Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings,"
Psalm 17:8, KJV

"For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."
Zechariah 2:8, KJV

In the previous verses, the word "apple" is derived from two Hebrew words, both of which actually refer to the pupil of one's eye. These words are "babah", pronounced baw-baw', and "iyshown", which is pronounced ee-shone'. If you would like to learn more about persecution against the Lord's children,

please consider reading articles such as "Civil Disobedience and Christian Persecution".

To conclude this series on a positive note, I feel that it is appropriate to share the following short chapter with you which clearly reveals the only real and lasting solution to any form of conflict, whether that conflict is on a personal level with another individual, or on a global scale. I hope that you will enjoy the wise advice which is offered to us by the Apostle Paul. Lord help us all to strive more to live by these wonderful words:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

1 Corinthians 13:1-13, KJV

What a wonderful chapter! Truly, charity -- or love -- is the healing balm which the world so desperately needs at this current time. Yet sadly, it is the very thing in which many people are lacking the most. Why is this? It's because people are abandoning God -- who is love -- in droves, as they turn to materialism, self-pursuit, and other sinful comforts of the flesh for personal, instant gratification, satisfaction

and happiness. The Apostle John was fully aware of this tragedy even in his own day two thousand years ago. Thus he wrote the following lines:

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."
1 John 4:8, KJV

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."
1 John 2:15-17, KJV

Without God -- who is the Divine Author of love -- as the center of gravity in each of our lives, we have nothing else to hold us together. As I explain in my 1997 article called "Selfishness: A Prophesied Sign of Our Times?", in place of God, we have inserted self. Sadly, it seems that nowadays, everything that we do is geared towards pleasing self. This is not God's way, it is our own way. It is the wrong way. It is in fact the Devil's way. After all, he is the false god of this present world. As Jesus prophesied so many centuries ago:

"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."
Matthew 24:12, KJV

Thank the Lord that even though we may not know each other face-to-face, and even though we may possibly be separated by hundreds or even thousands of miles, we Christians can be bonded together by His Love, and by His Word. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians:

"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."
Colossians 3:14, KJV

As I point out in my 1998 article entitled "The Royal Law: Thou Shalt Love!", as well as in a few other articles, not only is love the bond of perfectness, but the Apostle James tells us that it is in fact the Royal Law. It is the Golden Rule and the Greatest Commandment; precisely as the Lord Himself taught us in the following group of verses:

"If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:"

James 2:8, KJV

"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Matthew 22:35-40, KJV

With these thoughts I am going to bring this series to its conclusion. I trust that it has been a blessing, as well as an inspiration, in your life. Love today! It is the only thing that will truly last. Remember too that love, mercy and forgiveness can mend a life, as well as heal a broken relationship!

If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would really appreciate if you would take the time to click on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were also mentioned in this series, or which contain topics that are related to this series, and which are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server.

A Biblical Cafeteria, or the Whole Course?

All Are Given a Chance, But ...

As a Thief in the Night? Not For Me!

Beholding the Evil and the Good

Civil Disobedience and Christian Persecution

Destruction of Planet Earth: The Wrath of God Revealed

Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: A Warning to Modern Society

Don't Ever Underestimate Our Spiritual Enemy

Forgiving and Forgetting: It Can Be So Hard!

Free Will and Personal Choice

Is Jesus the Only Begotten Son of God?

Is the Message of Salvation Meant for All Men?

Nephilim: The Giants of Genesis

Peter: Faith Tried in the Fire
Selfishness: A Prophesied Sign of Our Times?
The Children of God and Politics
The Fruits of Disobedience
The Royal Law: Thou Shalt Love
The Urantia Book: A Dangerous New Age Doctrine
To Pray or Not to Pray, That Is the Question
What It Means to Repent

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