

# Forgiveness and Reconciliation

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Since the demise of the Worldwide Church of God, many have been offended and hurt since that time. And many personal relationships have been damaged by that event and the events that have come down to this day. And, frankly, what has happened here recently in the Church, in the recent past, based on that there is no more important subject than the one that we're going to talk about today because, we are, after all, God's people and we're seeking the Kingdom of God together. All of God's people, wherever they are on the earth, if they have God's spirit, we're all in this together and we're all seeking God's Kingdom together.

So what we want to do, by way of introduction, is to look at two key Scriptures that relate to this subject that we're going to talk about today. And this is a subject of what should happen when we sin or when we are sinned against and what should happen when we offend or when we have been offended.

Let's turn to Matthew chapter 18—and keep your finger here—and then we're going to go to Luke 17 and, just on the surface, quickly compare these two Scriptures. And then get into it into a little more detail as we go through in the sermon.

Matthew 18, we're going to read verses 20 and 21. Very straightforward Scripture! When you just take this out of its context and just read it, it's very straightforward.

**Matthew 18:21.** Then came Peter to [Christ], and said, Lord, how [often] shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? (KJV)

Very plain, open straightforward question!

**Matthew 18:21b.** till seven times? [He says.] 22) Jesus [said] unto him, I say not unto [you], Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. (KJV)

Now keep what you just read there in your mind and turn over to Luke 17 and we're going to read verses 3 and 4 because they address the same subject. Luke 17 verses 3 and 4, Christ is saying:

**Luke 17:3.** Take heed to yourselves: If [your] brother trespass against [you], rebuke him; and if he [repents], forgive him.  
4) And if he trespass against [you] seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to [you], saying, I repent; [you shall] forgive him. (KJV)

So we have Matthew 18 that says that you should forgive your Brother when they trespass against you. And then we have Luke 17 that says, "if he repents," then you forgive. And on the surface, they appear to contradict each other.

And, frankly, in years past, some Brethren have used Luke 17 to demand penance on the part of somebody who sins against them. And I've heard one woman say—this was a few years ago—"If he doesn't come on his knees to me," and then went on to describe what would happen, making a condition for repentance and using Luke 17 as justification.

Now both of these verses—we need to understand—Matthew 18, Luke 17 occurred in the latter part of Christ's ministry. And, therefore, they contain a deeper spiritual meaning than what He taught in the early part of His ministry. Because remember in the early part of His ministry, He's training His disciples from scratch. And over the years, as He taught them, He began to teach them deeper and deeper meanings—the weightier matters of the Law, so to speak.

So what we want to do today is look at these two Scriptures and other related Scriptures which have created, frankly, misunderstandings and misperceptions among God's people regarding the subject of *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. There's no greater subject that we can talk about right now where we are in the Church of God is *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. That is the title of the sermon.

Okay, let's go back to Matthew 18. We read verses 21 and 22, but we're going to read them now in a little more detail. And what we're going to see is that Matthew 18 and Luke 17 perfectly sink up and say the same thing. But you have to take the context to make that happen and to have that understanding.

Matthew 18 verse 21:

**Matthew 18:21.** Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how [often] (KJV)

This is the subject of this particular verse.

**Matthew 18:21b.** how [often] shall (KJV)

Now notice this:

**Matthew 18:21 continued.** my brother (KJV)

This means somebody in the Church! This isn't a neighbor. This isn't a co-worker at work. This is your Brother in the Church, or it could be Sister.

**Matthew 18: 21b.** how [often] shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? [Until] seven times? (KJV)

Now why did he bring up seven times? Let me explain. In The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume VIII, page 405, it says the following:

Rabbinical writings of the day comment that a brother might be forgiven a repeated sin three times. But on the fourth, there was to be no forgiveness.

This was the Rabbis interpreting the Law, adding to it or taking away from it.

They go on to say:

Peter, thinking himself big-hearted, volunteers seven times.

So he's going beyond the Rabbis of four to seven. And we could say, maybe sucking up a little bit to Christ. "I'm ready to forgive seven times. My Rabbis only say I need to do it three times." And so he's trying to do that. And then Christ said unto him, "Unh uh. I'm not saying seven times, I'm saying seventy times seven." In essence, He's saying, "Infinity." He's saying an unlimited number of times.

Now let's look at the context because one of the rules of Bible study is you can't pull Scriptures out of context.

Now look back at verses 11 through 14; those talk about leaving the ninety and nine and going after a lost sheep. And we're going to come back to that later. We'll go to Luke's account because it's a little more clear, but the context: Christ talked about leaving the ninety and nine and going after a lost sheep.

Then in verses 15 through 20 are the very familiar Scriptures of how to go to a Brother if they sin against you. Matthew 18, look at verse 15:

**Matthew 18:15.** Moreover if [your] brother shall trespass against [you], go and tell him his fault between [you] and him alone: (KJV)

We've been there before. We've talked about that. But notice what it says:

**Matthew 18:15b.** if he shall hear [you], [you have] gained [your] brother. (KJV)

That's *reconciliation!* If they hear, you've gained a Brother.

"But if he doesn't hear you," verse 16, "then you take two witnesses. And then if he doesn't hear the two witnesses," in verse 17, "you take it to the Church." And then at the end of verse 17:

**Matthew 18:17b:** if he [neglects] to hear the church, [then he should be unto you] as a heathen man and a publican. (KJV)

We will explain what that means as we go on.

Then in verses 23 through 34—this is after what we read in Matthew 18 verse 21 and 22, but we're looking at the context surrounding the verse—is the Parable of the King's Servant. Remember? He owed the king a lot of money and the king

forgave him that money after the servant beseeched him. And then what did the servant do? The servant wouldn't forgive a man who owed him a tiny amount of money relative to what he owed the king. And the message there is that if we want to be forgiven, we better forgive others. So that's the context surrounding Matthew 18.

And then in verse 35 is the last verse of the chapter, but summarizes the thought. It says:

**Matthew 18:35.** So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if [you] [Notice this!] from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (KJV)

So this tells us that in our hearts we should always be ready to forgive. We should always be ready to forgive as God is always ready to forgive us, as we're going to see.

So the entire context of Matthew 18 deals with the process of forgiveness and seeking reconciliation and reminds us that if we want to be forgiven, we better have a forgiving attitude to those who offend us or who sin against us.

Now let's go to Luke 17. We read that earlier, verses 3 and 4. So we see here that in Matthew 18 people are supposed to go to your Brother and in Luke 17, we see the same thing. Luke 17 verses 3 and 4, let's read it again.

**Luke 17:3.** Take heed to yourselves: [again] if [your] brother (KJV)

Same thing as in Matthew 18! It's a Brother not a neighbor, not a co-worker.

**Luke 17:3b.** trespass against [you], [He says,] rebuke him; (KJV)

Now the Greek means to admonish him.

**Luke 17:3 continued.** and if he [repents], forgive him. 4) And if he [trespasses] against [you] seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to [you], (KJV)

Now this is key! He says, "turn again to you." That means this is talking about a face-to-face confrontation between two people. "He turns again to you." This is something regarding forgiveness face-to-face.

**Luke 17:4b.** saying, I repent; [you shall] forgive him. (KJV)

So let's understand what Luke 17 is telling us. It's talking about forgiveness face-to-face, where you look somebody in the eye and one says, "I am sorry," and the other says, "I forgive." Hopefully, they'll do that.

And if one repents unto us, if somebody comes up to you, calls you on the phone, comes to your home, and says, "I have sinned against you. I did this and I am so sorry," if we hold a grudge, if we have a burr under our saddle and we

are angry, you can't forgive them immediately. And that is something that we should not do because we must have already forgiven them in our hearts, what Matthew 18 talked about, we must have already forgiven them in our hearts to be able to forgive them publicly when they come and apologize or repent. Because if you haven't already forgiven them in your heart, when they come to you and confess, if you hold a grudge, if you haven't forgiven them, then you won't say to them—won't be able to say to them—"I forgive you," and reconcile. We have to rid ourselves of our grudges and resentment and bitterness over a sin. And that means we apply Matthew 18 which says, "You have to forgive them in your hearts."

If the person repents to us and we forgive without limit, then reconciliation is possible between two people in God's Church. It is possible.

Now, somebody could say, "Well, okay, but what about Luke 23 and verse 34?" We're in the same book. You can turn there briefly if you want to. This is the account of Christ on the cross. And remember He had these two reprobates on either side of Him. And what did He say? He said, "Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them." Well, they hadn't repented. But Luke 17 says, "If he repents, forgive him." But these two criminals on either side of Christ had not repented. And so, what's going on there?

Well, the key is this: Did they understand what they were doing? Because remember Christ was on the cross and He said, "Father, forgive them." What was the rest of the phrase? "For they don't know what they're doing."

Now Matthew 18 and Luke 17, remember it says, "Your Brother." Now your Brother has God's holy spirit. Your Brother should know what he or she is doing. So the key then is one who has God's spirit should know better.

And those crucifying Christ were not converted and, therefore, they didn't know better. And Christ forgave them of that instance because they didn't know better. He forgave those that were parting His garments. He forgave those that nailed Him to the cross. He forgave those that scourged Him or jammed the crown of thorns on His head because it wasn't their time; they didn't know; they didn't understand.

But in Matthew 18 and Luke 17, it's very clear we're talking about Brother-to-Brother, Sister-to-Sister relationships in God's Church where both parties have God's Spirit.

Now, as I said, in the context of Matthew 18, there was the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Now let's go there but not in Matthew 18. We're going to go to Luke 15 because it's a bit more revealing. Now this is not a parallel Scripture to Matthew 18. It's not a parallel account. This occurred at a different time and a different place, but it addresses the same subject. But it is a little more revealing than the account in Matthew. Luke 15, we're going to read verses 4 through 7. And this is where a great deal of misunderstanding occurs in God's Church. So, let's look at this and then we'll dissect it. Christ says:

**Luke 15:4.** What man of you, having an hundred sheep, [and] he [loses] one of them, [does] not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, (KJV)

Now the Greek for the word *lost* means to be rendered useless. And so if a sheep is not part of the flock and is out away from the flock and is lost somehow, that sheep is useless as far as wool, as far as being available for food or breeding or whatever.

And obviously, somebody who is lost is useless to God in doing God's will. He says, "So you go after that which is lost:"

**Luke 15:4b.** until he [finds] it?

5) And when [he's] found *it*, he [lays] *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6) And when he [comes] home, he [calls] together *his* friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. (KJV)

Alright, now Christ explains what He means in verse 7. This is very critical.

**Luke 15:7.** I say unto you, that likewise (KJV)

And the word *likewise* in the Greek means in this manner, in a similar manner.

**Luke 15:7.** I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that [repents], more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. (KJV)

So, let's understand what Christ is trying to get across to us. The first thing we want to understand is that sheep are herd-oriented. Sheep want to be with the flock. Sheep do not run away from the flock. They just don't.

They're not like cats. Cats just go their own way. And you've heard of the term "herding cats"? You can't herd cats because they don't go together. They don't stay together. They just go to the four winds.

Sheep are exactly the opposite. Boy, they don't go off from the herd. They want to stay together at all costs. And if lost, once a sheep sees the flock—it could be lost and it's searching around—but once it sees the flock, it doesn't run away the flock. It goes right to the flock. It wants to be part of the herd!

Now that analogy should be true and is true for God's people. We want to be together. If we're of a right mind, if we have God's holy spirit, we want to associate with like-minded people.

Now in verse 7, Christ likens being lost to sinning because look what He says. "Likewise joy shall be in heaven over a sinner who repents." He's referring, drawing a connection and an analogy between the one who is lost, the sheep that was lost, to a sinner that is similarly lost.

And when we sin, guess what happens? We lose our way, don't we? When we sin, we lose our way. And when we sin, we stray from the flock. We stray from the body of Christ. When we sin, we become worldly; we become carnal; and we start straying away from the flock. Why do we stray? Very simple Biblical principle—sin separates. Sin separates us from God and sin separates us from God's people.

Look at Isaiah 59 and verse 2. I know you know this Scripture, but it is very applicable to leaving the ninety and nine and going after the one. Christ is saying, "The one who leaves is sinning." And in Isaiah 59 and verse 2, guess what we're told?

**Isaiah 59:2.** But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear. (KJV)

So therefore, when we sin, we get in a pattern of sin, a habit of sin, we don't repent, it begins to separate us from God Almighty, but it also begins to separate us from the Church, from those who follow Him. Meaning: it separates us from the flock because we no longer are likeminded—the sinner, I mean, to the rest of the flock.

So the lost sheep that was found obviously had repented because in verse 7, Christ said, "Likewise joy shall be in heaven over a sinner who repents," referring to the lost sheep. So the lost sheep repents and then comes back to the flock. Now notice what follows because what follows is a further explanation of what we read about leaving the ninety and nine and going after the one. Let's look at verse 11 of Luke 15. Now we have the Parable of the Lost Son, or some people say The Prodigal Son. Luke 15 verse 11, this is all a part of the same context, all part of the same subject of *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. Luke 15 verse 11:

**Luke 15:11.** And he said, A certain man had two sons:  
12) And the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that [fall] *to me*. And he divided unto them *his* living. (KJV)

So he asked for his inheritance in advance. Not when his father died or when his father retired or was too old to manage the business.

Verse 13:

**Luke 15:13.** And not many days after the younger son gathered all together [his inheritance], and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. (KJV)

We'll see in a minute what that riotous living was.

**Luke 15:14.** And when he had spent all, (KJV)

He blew it all! Didn't take him long to go through that. And it is amazing how people who can get a substantial sum of money instead of investing it wisely or saving it they can blow it in a manner or days, weeks, or months. So verse 14:

**Luke 15:14.** And when he had spent [it] all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15) And he went and [he] joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him to his fields to feed [pigs].

16) And he would [gladly] have filled his belly with the husks that the [pigs ate]: [but] no man gave him [those husks]. (KJV)

He had to give them to the pigs. And he wasn't allowed to even eat them for himself. That's how desperate this young man became.

Verse 17, this is the key!

**Luke 15:17.** And when he came to himself, (KJV)

Now today we would use the phrase, "And when he woke up," or "When he came to his senses."

**Luke 15:17.** And when he came to himself, he said, (KJV)

You can just see the light bulb going on in the kid's head!

**Luke 15:17b.** How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough [to eat] and to spare, and [I'm perishing] with hunger! (KJV)

All of a sudden the realization hit him. And, as we're going to see, it comes through pain most often. He was in a lot of pain. His stomach was hurting.

Verse 18, so to solve this problem, the light bulb came on and he says:

**Luke 15:18.** I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before [you], (KJV)

This is repentance. He went not only to God, but he went to the person he sinned against and repented. He said that was his plan. He hadn't done it yet. He said:

**Luke 15:19.** And am no more worthy to be called [your] son: [and] make me one of [your] hired servants. (KJV)

He was willing to be a servant and to give up the status that he had before if his dad would just take him back and employ him in the family business, but not as a son.

Verse 20:

**Luke 15:20.** And he arose, and came to his father. (KJV)



Now guess what? He's coming back to the flock! He's coming back to the herd because he has repented and he has a different mind now. His mind is like his father's.

**Luke 15:20b.** But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, (KJV)

His father saw what? Was the son running away? No. The son was coming back. He wasn't leaving and running away; he was coming back! And so because of that his father:

**Luke 15:20 continued.** had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. (KJV)

You see the father didn't have to debate about it. "Well, should I forgive him? Should I not forgive him? He's done all these things." His father, as we're going to see, has already forgiven him. Otherwise, he wouldn't have run to him and hugged him and kissed him.

Verse 21, the son repeated what he had planned to do.

**Luke 15:21.** [He] said, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in [your] sight, and [I'm not] worthy to be called [your] son. (KJV)

In other words, he was ready to be a servant. Guess what? That's humility! He wasn't demanding anything. "I want to be taken back. I'll come back if you restore me to my former position." No, he didn't ask for that. He said, "I'll just be a servant. Just take me back, please." That's humility.

Verse 22:

**Luke 15:22.** But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet: (KJV)

He was barefoot! He walked that whole way barefoot because he had nothing.

Verse 23:

**Luke 15:23.** And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; and let us eat, and be merry: (KJV)

Now that goes back to verse 7—"Great joy in heaven over a sinner that repents." This is a direct analogy on a physical level. Both verse 7 and it was repeated again in verse 10.

He says:

**Luke 15:24.** For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, (KJV)

Directly referring to the lost sheep!

**Luke 15:24b.** and is found. And they began to be merry. (KJV)

Now we have a problem! Verse 25:

**Luke 15:25.** Now his elder son [who] was in the field: he came and drew [near] to the house, he heard [the] music and dancing.

26) And he called one of the servants, and asked [what's going on here]. (KJV)

And in verse 17:

**Luke 15:27.** And he said unto him [the servant said], [Your] brother is come; and [your] father [has] killed the fatted calf, because he [has] received him safe and sound. (KJV)

Now the brother, instead of rejoicing that his own brother was coming back, "he was angry" in verse 28. "He wouldn't even go in the house. His father heard about it; he came out; he entreated him."

**Luke 15:29.** And he [answered] to *his* father, [Look], these many years I [have served you], (KJV)

He said, "I haven't given you a minute's trouble! I haven't sinned against you."

**Luke 15:29b.** [I haven't] transgressed at any time [your] commandment: and [he says,] [you've] never [given] me a [party like this!] (KJV)

And so, he was offended, the son. Verse 30:

**Luke 15:30.** But as soon as this [your] son [has] come, which [has] devoured [your] living with harlots, (KJV)

An obviously, where the son went, back then they didn't have jets and trains. He didn't go that far away—to the nearest big city probably. And over time, it took him—I'm sure months, maybe a year or two—to blow through the money that word came back to the family of what this lost son was doing. And so the brother knew what his son was doing. And he was blowing money on harlots—wine, women, and song! And he says:

**Luke 15:30b.** [you've] killed for him the fatted calf [for him!] (KJV)

And so it's obvious that the brother had not forgiven his brother and held a grudge. You know just kind of the way the Corinthians did. Remember 1 Corinthians? Paul wrote the letter saying, "You gotta get this guy out of the Church." And they finally woke up and kicked him out of the Church. And then he had to write another letter, 2 Corinthians, saying, "Look, this guy's repented. Have mercy! Bring him back. Don't hold a grudge." That's exactly what was happening here.

Verse 31:

**Luke 15:31.** And he said unto him, Son, (KJV)

This is from the father's viewpoint now. And there's messages here. He says:

**Luke 15:31b.** [You're] ever with me, [You've never left me. You've always been with me,] and [everything] that I have is [yours]. (KJV)

As the family business grew and developed when the other son left, everything grew and grew and grew, and the father's saying, "Look, everything I've got is yours." He wasn't going to reward his son who left and give him another inheritance. He just said, "Look, just remember everything I've got now is yours." The faithful son received a greater reward than the lost son. Understand that.

Verse 32:

**Luke 15:32.** [The father said, Look,] It was [proper] that we should make merry, [that we should be happy,] and be glad: for this [your] brother was dead, (KJV)

Meaning if he had kept going the way he was going, he would have died.

**Luke 15:32b.** [And he says]; and was lost, (KJV)

Just like the lost sheep. But he says, "Now he is found." This directly relates to leavening the ninety-nine and going off to the one.

So, let's understand. What is Christ trying to teach us here? The son was lost. The one that left with the inheritance and blew his money, he was lost—we just read in verse 32—due to sin—which we read in verse 7. Remember Christ told us that and likened the one, the lost sheep to sin.

Let's understand another thing. The son's mind, who left, was closed to see himself and to see his sins. When he left, went out the door, went to this city and started blowing his money, there is now way he would hear his father or there's no way he would come to his senses as long as the money was still there, the wine was still there, the women were still there, and "his friends" were still there.

Now when the money went away, guess what happened? The women went away. The wine went away. And his "friends" went away. Let's understand that.

And there's a message there for our youth—just as an aside. Your friends and your potential mate should care about who you are, not what you have. And if you're selecting friends or you're selecting a mate, they should care about who you are, not the material possessions you have. That's just an aside.

But obviously this young man's friends cared about what he had. They cared nothing about him and they deserted him as soon as the money ran out, as soon as the party was over.

And then, guess what happened? Hunger came. And hunger is pain. And in most cases, I find out that we only learn by pain. And so, this young son now had an empty belly. He had wasted himself with lack of sleep, wine, women, and all of that. And now all of a sudden he was slopping pigs and he was hungry. And so, he came to himself when he realized that his father's employees were better off than he was. And only after that, that he came to this realization, did his mind open up about what he should do. And then he said, "I gotta go back to my dad. I was better off. I was so much better off before!"

Now let's look at the father's behavior because this directly relates not only to God the Father, but to us when somebody sins against us or we have been offended. In his heart, it was obvious the father had already forgiven his son. He was just waiting for his son to come back. He was waiting for his son to repent and change, but he'd already forgiven him. And the minute he saw the son on the horizon, he didn't have to think this through. He didn't have to fast and pray about it. He had already forgiven the son. And the minute he saw him coming back, he was out to meet him and to hug him and to publicly forgive him of what he did.

Now the father's actions tell us the process of face-to-face acknowledgement of forgiveness, because guess what happened? The son repented. Then the father forgave just like we read in Luke 17 and verses 3 and 4. It says, "If he repent, forgive him." The son repented. Then the father publicly forgave. In front of the whole family, in front of all the employees and in front of the eldest son, he forgave his son and welcomed him back into the family, to the flock.

But notice this! When the son left, the father didn't chase him. The father didn't go after him even though it was his only son. Now think about that. Let's ask the question: Why did the father not go after him? Why did the father just leave him alone?

Well, it's obvious based on everything we've covered so far because initially when the son got his money, left the house, blew out the door with bags of gold or whatever he had, going wherever he was going, there was no acknowledgement of sin or wrongdoing on the son's part.

And if the father had chased after him, it would have borne no fruit whatsoever. The son was determined to do what he was going to do. And the father was wise enough to understand that if he had gone to chase him, it wouldn't have borne any fruit. The son was not acknowledging his sin, not acknowledging his frame of mind. Therefore, it was absolutely useless; it would bear no fruit to go after him and whine and cry and tug on his coattails begging him to come back. The father was smart enough to say, "Look, my son is in a wrong spirit. He's in a wrong attitude. He will not listen. I can't get through to him. So, let's just let him go and hopefully he will learn the hard way."

And we realize that many times—the father realized—that many times your children have to learn through pain. And God the Father realizes that with all of us. He can proclaim His Word in the Bible. Many times we don't listen. And the only way our eyes are opened is when we become fed up with the pain of doing what we've been doing. Then God can talk to us.

And the father came out—remember—only after the son came to himself. And when it was obvious the son was in a different frame of mind, a repentant frame of mind, and was coming back with no preconditions, then the father ran and hugged him and kissed him and welcomed him back. And once the son repented and turned and came back, the father immediately forgave. Just as Paul urged the Corinthian Church to forgive this young man once he had repented and once he changed, let him back into the flock. The father allowed the son to come back to the flock, but once he had changed.

Now, from these Scriptures that we've looked at regarding *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, let's ask the question: What conclusions can we draw about reconciliation, about forgiveness from these Scriptures?

Point Number One—we're going to have seven of them and then we'll close.  
Point Number One:

We must always forgive in our heart.

That is clear from Matthew 18. Let's understand that God is always ready to forgive us and does so at the instant we repent. But God is ready to forgive. God wants to forgive. And we read earlier in Luke 15 verse 7 where Christ said, "Likewise there's joy in heaven over a sinner that repents, compared to ninety and nine people who don't need repentance." God doesn't hold grudges. And God forgives immediately upon repentance. And God doesn't demand penance.

Now we know the Catholic Church, when you go in the confessional and you confess your sins in a confessional, they give you something to do. You've got to do so many laps of the beads or you've got to go do this work or that work. That's penance.

I grew up in El Paso, Texas. And obviously there's a very large Hispanic population both in El Paso and across the border in Juarez, Mexico. So there are a lot of Catholic Churches. A lot of my friends were Catholic.

And at Easter time every year, over in Juarez, Mexico there's a pyramid shaped butte. And it's probably three, four, five hundred feet above the desert floor. It's just kind of a conical thing. And there's a road that winds around it up to the top. And on the top, they've got this gigantic cross.

Well, there is a society of women and nuns and lay people that every year they walk up that. It's probably quarter mile-half a mile. It's a dirt road, gravel road, dirt. They walk up that on their knees for penance for their sins for the previous year. And it was on TV or it was in the newspaper. And they'd show pictures of these bloody, just bloody, bloody, bloody knees of these women who had walked

on their knees that quarter mile-half a mile—whatever it was—to get to the top and then kneel down in front of this cross with bloody knees asking God to forgive as though that very act somehow would convince God that He should forgive them more than if they didn't do it.

You see God doesn't demand penance. And, frankly, neither should we! If somebody sins against us, we have no right to demand penance because God does not demand that of us. And I've heard people in God's Church say, "Well, before I forgive him, he's gotta—" and then lay out a bunch of terms and conditions. That's not what Matthew 18 says.

That's not what the father did in The Lost Son. The father didn't demand, "Well, you've got to do this, and you've got to do this. And I'm going to send you out there and you're going to have to slop pigs for ten years before I even speak to you." Didn't do any of that! He forgave him immediately once he knew the son had repented.

It's like Dorothy's mom, Gunhilde Tucker, said, "Holding a grudge is like taking a poison and hoping the other person dies." And that's what happens when we hold grudges. And we cannot! Matthew 18 says, "You must forgive." And we have to forgive in our hearts. And then Luke 17 tells us how to do it face-to-face. If they come to you and apologize, then you immediately forgive just like the father did in The Lost Son.

Remember God forgives us to the same degree that we forgive others. If we forgive quickly, God forgives quickly. If we forgive without reservation, God forgives without reservation. If we forgive without penance, God doesn't require penance.

Look at Matthew chapter 6—I know you know these—verses 14 and 15. This is a Scripture that we cannot forget. This is under the Point Number One that we have to forgive in our hearts. Matthew 6 verse 14 and 15, Christ says:

**Matthew 6:14.** For if [you] forgive men [or women] their trespasses [if you do that], your heavenly Father will also forgive you: (KJV)

Verse 15:

**Matthew 6:15.** But if [you] forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (KJV)

Now that person who said, "Well, before I forgive them, they've got to do this and this and this," then God says, "I'm going to do the same to you. Before I forgive you, you're going to have to do this and this and this." Now if I sin, I don't want God doing that to me. I want Him to forgive me right away. Therefore, it's incumbent on me to forgive right away also.

We should also be willing and ready to forgive in our hearts. Matthew 18 verse 35 stresses that in our hearts, we should always forgive as God is always ready to forgive. And this is regardless of whether they have directly repented unto us

or not. If they haven't come to themselves, if they haven't come to us and apologized, we still in our hearts should have forgiven them. Because when and if they do, we can forgive, we can display it instantly as the father hugged the son.

And we read in Matthew 18 there is no limit—seventy times seven—there is no limit to the number of times we're to forgive.

Let's understand, in closing out Point Number One, let's understand that forgiveness only takes one. It only takes one person to forgive. And that's me and that's you. It only takes one. And God requires it of us.

So Point Number One:

We should always be ready to forgive.

Point Number Two is our goal when we have offences like that. We sin against somebody or somebody sins against us, we offend somebody or somebody offends us:

Our goal should be reconciliation.  
Our goal should be coming back together.

Not writing people off! Look at Matthew chapter 5. We're going to read verses 23 and 24. This is some of the very basic stuff that Christ taught us in His very first sermon. I'm going to read it out of the New King James. It just puts it in more modern English. Matthew 5 verses 23 and 24:

**Matthew 5:23.** "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, (NKJ)

We might say "kneel down and pray."

**Matthew 5:23b.** and there [you] remember that your brother has something against you, (NKJ)

Then He says, God says, Christ says, "I don't even want you to start the prayer or finish the prayer."

**Matthew 5:24.** "leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (NKJ)

So Christ is telling us that if somebody has something against us and we know about it, it's incumbent upon us to go to them and try and try to reconcile, to try to heal the barrier.

Now reconciliation can only occur unless two conditions are met. These two conditions must be met for reconciliation to occur.

The first one is that to be reconciled the one who sins must repent. The one who caused the offense, the one who sinned against his Brother or Sister, that person must repent. And he must repent in front of, face-to face of the one that he offended or he sinned against, or she.

Let's look at James 5 and verse 16. James 5 and verse 16, this is why this verse is here. It is talking about healing. And this occurs in the very same very context of physical healing, but this is referring to a spiritual face-to-face relationship healing. James 5 verse 16:

**James 5:16.** Confess *your* faults one to another, (KJV)

It is not a sign of weakness to go to somebody and tell them, "I sinned. I shouldn't have said this. I shouldn't have done this."

**James 5:16.** Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that [you] may be healed. (KJV)

You may be healed with your Brother or Sister!

**James 5:16b.** The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man [avails] much. (KJV)

And this relates directly to what we read in Matthew 18 and verse 15. It says, "If your brother hears you,"—it says, "go to your brother alone. If your brother hears you". . What does it say? "You have gained your brother." That means you have reconciled with your brother. You're no more estranged from your brother or Sister. You've gained your brother. You're now reconciled.

So, the first thing of the two conditions for reconciliation is:

The person that did the sinning, that committed the offense, has to repent. Not only to God, but in front of the person he or she offended.

The second condition for reconciliation is:

The one that has been sinned against, the one who has been offended on the receiving end of offense must forgive.

Must forgive! Because Christ said—remember in Luke 17? "If your brother trespass against you," and says, "If he repents seven times in a day, comes to you, then seven times in a day you must forgive." The one who has been offended, the one who has been sinned against must sincerely forgive the sinner, tell him so or her so, and not hold a grudge.

So that means when we look back in our lives, if somebody has sinned against us or deeply offended us, we have to be prepared for them to walk in the door tomorrow or the next time we pick up the phone to hear their voice on the other end, we have to be prepared to have already forgiven them in our hearts. That when they say, "I am sorry," that you say immediately, "I forgive. Not a problem.



We're okay." But you have to have already forgiven them in your heart to be able to do that. And it tells us that there is no limit to the number of times we should do that if somebody sincerely comes and sincerely repents.

Now let's understand a point here about reconciliation. If somebody comes and repents, somebody comes up to you and says, "I am sorry. I said something I shouldn't have said. I did this that I shouldn't have done." That person then makes themselves very vulnerable. They're opening themselves up, their innermost being. They're opening themselves up and saying, "I am imperfect. I sinned. I was wrong." And in doing so, you become very vulnerable.

And the person on the receiving end of that apology can't take advantage of that! And I've seen people do that. They somehow erroneously view repentance like that as a sign of weakness. They're up here; you're down here. "You sinned against me and I'm going to make you pay. I'm going to hold it over you. I'm going to spit in your face. I'm going to make you obey all these terms and conditions." And all of a sudden now, "I'm here and you're there. You're weak. I'm strong because you came and apologized." And some people, particularly people in God's Church who have a worldly view—and I find a lot of times businessmen have this—is that when somebody comes and apologizes, they view it as a sign of weakness.

And it is most definitely not! It takes huge strength, huge character to humble yourself and go to somebody and say, "I screwed up. I goofed up. I'm sorry. I was wrong. I was in a wrong spirit. I was in a wrong attitude, and I apologize to you." It takes great strength of character to do that.

So let's understand that our goal should be reconciliation, but understand it takes two to reconcile. The one who sinned repents in front of the one that he offended and the one who was offended must forgive. And when that happens, reconciliation is possible. But if only one happens, you're not going to have reconciliation. You might have forgiveness, but you don't have reconciliation. But we're told in Matthew 5 that our goal should be reconciliation.

The Third Point:

If one admits that they have a problem or that they have sinned, then they can be worked with.

They can be dealt with, if you admit you have a problem or if you admit you have sinned. And so, therefore, if somebody is of a repentant mind, then we have to make the effort as God's people to reconcile. We have to make the effort as God's people to leave the ninety and nine and go after the one as we read in the Scriptures.

Let's go to Galatians 6 and verse 1. This tells us that we should go to our Brother or Sister, leave the ninety and nine, leave the flock and go to somebody who is lost and make an effort to try to bring them back. Galatians 6 and verse 1:

**Galatians 6:1:** Brethren, [It says,] if a man [or it could be a woman] be overtaken in a fault, (KJV)

Now the Greek word for *fault* can mean trespass, offense or sin. So this is directly in the subject of what we're talking about.

**Galatians 6:1:** if a man be overtaken in [an offense or a sin], [you who] are spiritual [meaning deeply converted], restore such a one (KJV)

Meaning: you go after them to restore them to the flock. You go after them to bring them to back to the flock. He says:

**Galatians 6:1b.** restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering [yourself], lest [you] also be tempted. (KJV)

Meaning: you don't go over there and start beating him up. You don't go over there and start telling him how superior you are and how weak they are. You go in the spirit of humility.

Now remember in Luke 15 in leaving the ninety and nine, it talked about *the owner* of the sheep. It didn't say *the shepherd*. It says, "If a man have sheep." Now it could be the shepherd who owns the sheep, but it also could be the owner. So, it's not just the shepherd that has to go. It's incumbent on all of us to go. Therefore, all of us have to go and try to restore a sinner, as we read in Galatians 6 and verse 1.

Let's go to Proverbs 12 and verse 15. And see that we need to have a repentant attitude, a humble attitude if we're going astray and somebody, our Brother or Sister, comes and tries to talk sense into us. Proverbs 12 and verse 15 says:

**Proverbs 12:15.** The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes: (KJV)

Now that son when he left, he took his inheritance and blew out the door, he was right in his own eyes! He was fed up with his dad. He was fed up with the dad's business. He was fed up with the family. And he was going to go out and he was going to do it his way. And he was a fool, but he was right in his own eyes.

Proverbs 12 verse 15, the latter part:

**Proverbs 12:15b.** but he that [listens] unto counsel is wise. (KJV)

Now that young man was not listening to any counsel. That's why the father didn't go after him. Benjamin Franklin said once that:

They, who will not be counseled, cannot be helped.

And this young man could not be helped because he wasn't of a mind to take advice from anybody, particularly his father.

And remember Matthew 18:15? It says, "If he hears you, you have gained your brother." So hopefully, we would hear if we've gone astray. And let's understand that once we repent, then God forgives. God does not forgive us prior to our repentance. Now He did those who nailed Him to the cross because they didn't know better. But we've been called. We have God's holy spirit.

So in Luke 7 and verse 44 notice: This is an account where Christ came into a house. He sat down and a woman came and began kneeling at His feet. And notice what He said, Luke 7 and verse 44. Simon had invited Him to his house and notice what Christ says to Simon versus what He says to this woman who's kneeling at His feet.

**Luke 7:44.** And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, [He says, Simon you see] this woman? [He said,] I [came] into [your] house, [and you didn't give] me [any] water [to wash] my feet: but she [has] washed my feet with tears [her tears], and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head. 45) [You didn't give] me [any] kiss [when I walked in your door]: but this woman since the time I came in [has] not ceased to kiss my feet. (KJV)

And about this time, I'm sure Simon was shrinking in size.

Verse 46, He says:

**Luke 7:46.** My head with oil [you didn't] anoint: but this woman [has] anointed my feet with ointment [this whole time, mixed with her tears]. 47) Wherefore I say unto [you], Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* [loves] little. (KJV)

Then notice what He did. He turned to her and:

**Luke 7:48b.** said, [Your] sins are forgiven. (KJV)

Now why do you think this woman was crying? Why do you think she was kissing His feet and anointing His feet with oil? She was repenting. She was sick of her life! She recognized who Christ was. And she recognized He could forgive her sins. And she was humbling herself as much as one human can to another by getting on her knees on her feet, kissing the feet of Christ, crying, and wiping His feet with her hair. And she did that because she had a change of heart. She had a change of mind. She had a change of spirit. And Christ understood that. And then He said, "Your sins are forgiven."

And so what I'm saying is until we get to that point, if we get to that point, then we can be worked with. Then leaving the ninety and nine will take affect and will bear fruit. You see to be part of the flock again—going back to Luke 15—to be part of the flock again and to become *not lost*, one must acknowledge the sin and repent. Christ said that in verse 7. Remember? "There's great joy over a sinner who repents," likening that sinner to the lost sheep.

Now remember, David did so. The deal with Bathsheba—we won't turn there—but in 2 Samuel 12 beginning in verse 13, what did he say to Nathan in front of the whole court? He says, "I have sinned against the Eternal." He acknowledged his sin. And in Psalm 51 and verse 3, he said:

**Psalm 51:3.** I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. (KJV)

Then God could begin to work with David once he acknowledged his sins and once he repented.

And God could begin to work with the lost son once he came to himself and said, "I gotta go repent. My father's employees are better off than I am." You see once they come to themselves, then leaving the ninety and nine and going to the one will bear fruit. Prior to that time, however, the son didn't admit he had a problem. The son didn't think he had a problem. So going to him would bear no fruit at all. Let's understand this. It's one of the biggest barriers in counseling people.

We cannot solve a problem unless we admit we have a problem.

And I can't go and counsel with somebody about some issue or problem if they never recognize they have a problem. You can't fix something that you don't feel is broken.

And so, The Third Point:

If we admit we have a problem, then we can be worked with.

God can only work with us when we acknowledge our sins. And leaving the ninety and nine and going to the one can only work when the one repents and wants to be restored, wants to come back to the flock. If they don't see their sins, if they don't acknowledge their sins, if they don't want to come back, going after them bears no fruit.

And you know, as parents, you've seen your kids in wrong attitudes. And if they're in a wrong spirit, you can talk all you want. You can cry tears. You can beg and do all that. They will not come back, if they're in a wrong spirit.

So Point Number Three is that:

If we admit we have a problem, we can be worked with.

That leads us to The Fourth Point:

If one refuses to accept they've done anything wrong, they cannot be worked with.

It's like talking to a stone. It just doesn't work. Remember God does not forgive us if we do not acknowledge our sins and repent. Let's go to Matthew chapter

11. Let's read verses 21 and 22. God will not forgive us if we don't admit we have a problem and we want to change it. Matthew 11 verse 21, Christ is looking out and notice what He says. Matthew 11 verse 21, He says:

**Matthew 11:21.** Woe unto [you], Chorazin! woe unto [you], Bethsaida! (KJV)

He's looking out from a hilltop looking at these little towns. He said:

**Matthew 11:21b.** if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22) But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. (KJV)

Why? Because they hadn't repented! Now Nineveh (Remember?) was preached and prophesied against and guess what? They repented. They changed. But Chorazin and Bethsaida had not and Christ was lamenting that.

You see the lost son in the beginning didn't admit he had a problem. Couldn't see his problem, didn't admit it. The father was wise enough to leave him alone because it wouldn't have borne fruit. It wouldn't have done any good. Now he came to himself by conditions that he himself created. You see he became poverty stricken because he blew all his money. He created the very conditions that finally opened up his mind. He learned only through pain. Then once that light bulb when on and that realization occurred that "I have screwed up mightily," only then could he be dealt with and worked with.

To solve a problem, you have to admit you have one. Prior to that time, it does no good.

Let me give you a personal example. I was being called at the time I was in the military. I was a young Lieutenant in Kincheloe Air Force Base in Northern Michigan, the upper peninsula of Michigan. And I was a Deputy Squadron Commander at the time of the support squadron. And so I was on the base most of the time. And the base librarian, who was old enough to be my dad—it was a civilian position—befriended several of us young lieutenants. He kind of took a fatherly approach to us. And we'd have coffee together, coffee and donuts during the day. And he turned out to be a really good friend.

But one day, he didn't show up for coffee. He just disappeared. Next day he wasn't there. Next day he wasn't there. And I found out later that he had a problem with alcohol and had checked himself into a rehab clinic. And a couple of weeks later he was back. And, of course, you're young; you don't know what to do or what to say. So we didn't say anything. Just pretended it didn't exist and kind of carried on as we had before.

And this went on for several months. I don't know, six, eight months. And he disappeared again. And I got worried this time. So I went to him. And I said,

"John, something going on here." "Oh. No, no, no. I've been sick." Or he gave me all these kinds of fuzzy excuses.

And I said, "Well, mind if I come over and see you." And he said, "No, no, come on over." And so I went over to his house. And he went out somewhere. I think he went out to use the bathroom or something. I went into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator and there was a bottle of wine in there. Obviously he shouldn't be doing that.

And as it turned out, he asked me to spend the night. So I spent the night. And before I went to bed, I marked the bottle, the level of wine. The next morning I got up and the level was the same place, but it kinda looked different. So I poured out a little bit and took a sip of wine and it was half water. And so I knew what John was doing.

And I confronted him. And he lied to my face. "No!" He said. He went over and over it. And then I pushed him and pushed. "No." He had done nothing wrong. Absolutely nothing wrong!

And then he was gone. Didn't show up for work later that day, the next day, the next day and the next day! And I chased him through just about every bar in the Upper Peninsula. "Oh yeah, he was just here. He bought rounds of drinks for everybody." And finally the police caught him. He was DWI, pulled him over. And he left. He had to go back into rehab, lost his job.

And my point is—John to me never admitted he had a problem. And my chasing him all through those bars and going to him and pleading with him and asking for him, it bore no fruit at all. It was a waste of time because he was not ready to acknowledge his problem. He just wasn't.

So let's understand. No amount of leaving the ninety-nine and going after the one works if they don't admit they don't have a problem. And today, sometimes in the Church, we make a mistake by going after somebody who should be left alone for a while. You see going after them too soon enables their behavior. If the father had gone after the son and whined and cried and pleaded, it just enables the son's behavior. And he would continue doing what he's doing. They need to feel what separation is like, just as the young man in 1 Corinthians needed to see what separation from the flock is like. They remain lost if they don't acknowledge their sin.

Now let's think about this—this is very important.

A sinner, if he does not change, is being in danger of being a lost sheep.

And none of us wants to be separated from the flock and none of us wants to be lost. But if we sin and don't acknowledge our sin, we are in danger of becoming a lost sheep. A sinner if they don't change is in danger of becoming a heathen and a publican as we read in Matthew 18 and verse 17. If he does not hear you after you go to the Church, he is as a publican and as a heathen. Let's understand that.

But let's also understand when Matthew 18 and verse 17 says, "He becomes a heathen and a publican to you," that means somebody who doesn't believe in God, that it means somebody who is outside the faith. Let's understand it doesn't mean you should hate them. Let's understand it doesn't mean you shouldn't be at least pleasant on the surface to them.

However, you cannot have a close personal relationship with somebody who is outside the flock. We can have a pleasant relationship with a neighbor or a co-worker, but it's not the same relationship you have with somebody in the flock that believes the way we do and have a common bond of God's holy spirit.

So it says when you become a heathen and a publican it's like somebody who is outside the Church and you have to be aware of their motives. You have to be aware of what they say because they're not part of the flock any longer.

So that takes us now to Point Number Five:

Only God can open our minds and lead us to true repentance.

Not a human being. Only God! God opened the lost son's mind once his stomach became hungry. God, and only God, brought circumstances to pass in that young man's life that would help him see himself. God could have caused the famine. God could have opened the door for him to go to work for the pig farmer. And God was leading that person down the road to come to himself. Only God can do that!

Let's go to Romans 2 and verse 4. Let's understand: We cannot open another human being's mind. Only God can do that! Once God opens the mind, we can help. Romans 2 and verse 4, Paul says:

**Romans 2:4.** Or [despise you] the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; [he says, Don't you know] that the goodness of God [leads you] to repentance? (KJV)

Only God can lead us to repentance and open the mind.

So the leave the ninety and nine and go after the one, it only works if that person recognizes they have a problem. When you go to them, do they leave the door open a little bit and admit that they might have a problem? Then they can be worked with. If they slam the door and say, "Unh uh, no way! Not my problem. I didn't do that. I don't take any responsibility for that." Then nothing happens. So remember the lost son, the father came to him only when he had repented, but he didn't chase after him because God hadn't opened his mind.

That leads us to Point Number Six:

Before somebody comes to himself, if they cause division, then they should be avoided altogether.

If they cause division before they come to themselves! If the lost son had asked for his inheritance, but had not gone to another city, but stayed home and began to party and have prostitutes come in and wine, women, and song, the father would have—without doubt—sent him away. The father would have kicked him out of the house. And Romans 16 verse 17—we won't turn there—applies. It says, "mark them which cause divisions among you and avoid them." The father would have had to do that. And avoiding them is a microcosm of what it's like to be cut off from God, cut off from the flock, cut off from God—if they cause division.

Now the last point, Point Number Seven:

The process of forgiveness and reconciliation depends on the humility of all that are concerned with the issue.

Humility on the part of the sinner:

To admit that they have a problem, to go to God in repentance, and then to go to the one they've offended, and admit their error. That takes humility.

Humility on the part of the one who is sinned against:

That when the sinner comes and repents, they don't make them pay; they don't make them walk on their knees; they don't make them grovel, but they are equals because the one who's been sinned against realizes they've sinned too; and they acknowledge their forgiveness; they give a big hug and then reconciliation occurs.

Also humility on the part of those who attempt to help—remember Galatians 6:1? "Those of you who are spiritual if you catch your brother in a fault, go to them" in what? "A spirit of meekness!"

And you go to them not lording it over, not cracking a whip, telling them what an awful person they are. You go to them and say, "Look, I've sinned too. I've made these mistakes too. And I see you doing this and you're my Brother (or my Sister) and I don't want you to be hurt. I don't want you to leave the flock! I don't want you to become a lost sheep or I don't want you to become as a publican and a heathen. Listen to me, please!" It takes humility.

And a lack of humility, I'm here to tell you, is at the core of so many personal problems between God's people—a lack of humility on somebody's part somewhere.

So let's understand—let's understand that we've seen Seven Points here of how we can draw from the Bible principles of reconciliation and principles of forgiveness. And what has happened in the Church in recent years and in the last two or three years, frankly, there's no more important subject than *Reconciliation and Forgiveness* and leaving the ninety and nine and going after the one at the right time and under the right circumstances.



So I hope this has cleared up any misunderstanding of these Scriptures. And let's understand that God tells us what we should do and how we should do it in the subjects of *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* and leaving the ninety and nine. What we have to do now—all of us—is we have to apply those Scriptures. Not talk about them. Not read them and then blow them out of our mind. We must apply them! So let's understand what the Bible has to say about *Reconciliation and Forgiveness*.