

"SMILES THAT STILL BLEED"

Fake Forgiveness

(Matthew 18:21–22)

Matthew 18:21–22 (NKJV)

"Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'

INTRODUCTION

Years ago, two brothers in Christ quarreled bitterly. One said, "I forgive you." The other replied, "I too have forgiven." They shook hands, smiled, even sang in the same church the following week.

But from that day, one brother quietly avoided the other. He would change his route in the market, switch seats in church, decline joining any group the other belonged to. Outwardly—peace. Inwardly—bleeding wounds.

Beloved, that is **not forgiveness**. That is a **smile that still bleeds**.

There was once a woman who was deeply wronged by her close friend. Betrayed, insulted, abandoned — she vowed never to forgive. Years passed. In church she lifted her hands, prayed, and even testified that she had forgiven. But deep in her heart, she hoped never to see that friend again. She avoided gatherings, changed her seat when the friend entered, and even rejoiced secretly when misfortune fell on her offender.

But here is the tragedy: while she thought she was punishing her friend, she was slowly becoming what she hated. She began mistreating others, speaking harshly to the innocent, suspicious of everyone — because unforgiveness always leaks.

Church, many of us live this story. We claim forgiveness, but what we practice is **fake forgiveness**.

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which is a smile that still bleeds.

Jesus once told a shocking parable in **Matthew 18**. A servant, forgiven of millions he could never repay, went out and choked his fellow servant who owed him little. Church, isn't that us?

We praised God for His mercy, but choke others with avoidance, bitterness, and silent punishment. We have renamed our revenge, brand it as a smile and called it forgiveness that was never real because it still bleeds.

FAKE FORGIVENESS IS STILL UNFORGIVENESS

Jesus commanded: "Forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven" (**Matthew 18:22**).

Yet we brand our own version of forgiveness:

"I've forgiven, but I don't ever want to see you again."

"I forgive, but let us never work together again."

This is not forgiveness but separation clothed in politeness which is a smile that still bleeds.

Real forgiveness restores fellowship; counterfeit forgiveness avoids it.

Scenario Applications:

Quarreling co-workers who claim to have forgiven each other but secretly hope for transfer to another office or tender their resignation.

Church members who **"settle"** but move to another congregation to avoid meeting.

Families split for decades *[we have witnessed situations like this in congregations, where families carry long histories of bitter rivalry and unresolved tension]* because smiles covered bleeding grudges.

WHEN OUR PRAYERS BETRAY US

Proverbs 24:17–18: "Do not rejoice when your enemy

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falls... lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him."

Many Christians are trapped in this snare.

I believe many have either never truly encountered this passage, or even after hearing it today, though we may not say it aloud, deep within we would rather God had removed these verses from the Bible entirely.

For almost nothing stirs the human heart more than seeing a wicked person, an offender, someone we dislike or an oppressor, recover from a fall, rise again to prosperity, and experience good things after a terrible downfall.

And on the rare occasion it does, we often silence the thought immediately.

Many Christians cannot pray good for those who hurt them.

But do you realize that the very moment you find the strength to humble yourself

in sincere, heartfelt prayer—choosing to release your right to be angry, to seek revenge, or to wish evil on your offender—that is the moment you begin to understand what Christ prayed on the cross and what Stephen prayed while being stoned.

It is the moment you recognize that your offender is acting out of immaturity, unaware of the danger they have brought upon themselves.

It is the moment you begin to ask God for mercy on them—that they might realize their wrong, repent, and be delivered from such a lifestyle.

And it is also the moment you remember how many times you have offended God, and even hurt a neighbor, relative, sibling, parent, spouse, child, or fellow believer, and so you, too, cry out for mercy.

The True Measure Of Forgiveness

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Brethren, this is the kind of prayer that brings true healing.

Sadly, when we are offended, such a prayer rarely even crosses our minds.

And if we pray, our prayer direction is secretly *[smiles that still bleeds]*, sometimes openly: “Lord, deal with them! Show them pepper! Destroy their business!”

Some even rejoice when calamity befalls an offender—feeling vindicated.

But Jesus says: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” **(Matthew 5:44)**.

If we pray evil, we risk provoking God to **turn mercy toward our offender** instead.

THE IGNORED COMMAND

Matthew 18:15: “If your brother sins against you, go

and tell him his fault, between you and him alone...”

Today, this verse irritates many Christians.

We often choose to bottle up our anger and bitterness, carrying it silently within rather than expressing it to others.

Only when a close and trusted friend *(a friend who has not offended (me/us) yet [To a large extent, many of our closeness in the church today exists only because the other person has not yet offended us. But the moment an offense arises, that friendship quickly dies])* approaches do we sometimes open up.

And when asked why we don’t confront the offender directly, we quickly say, ‘I’ve forgiven, I’ve moved on, let’s leave the matter there.’

Or we prefer gossip, avoidance, and third-party intervention.

But avoiding the offender never heals—it only festers.

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True forgiveness confronts in love, corrects in wisdom, and restores in grace.

FORGIVENESS FREES YOU, NOT JUST THEM

Carrying grudges is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

Unforgiveness chains the soul, blocks prayers, and breeds hypocrisy.

Brethren, we must recognize the danger of what *a smile that still bleeds—fake forgiveness* brings to us.

While we may live this way, keeping bitterness within, God in His mercy still shows us kindness and even blesses us. Yes, He does.

But do we realize this is also a snare? Because we may wrongly interpret God's continued blessings as approval for our decision not to forgive.

This is the very kind of deception Jesus warned about when He said many

will be shocked at the things that will keep them from entering heaven—doing things in His name, yet not in the way He commanded. ***(Matthew 7:21–23).***

Among these are failing to love one another genuinely, refusing to visit with compassion, and neglecting the truly needy even when we have the resources to help ***(Matthew 25:41–46; 1 John 3:17).***

True forgiveness is not weakness; it is Christlikeness.

CONCLUSION & APPEAL

Beloved, how many of us are smiling on the outside while still bleeding on the inside?

How many “forgiven” quarrels are just unspoken separations?

If we will truly forgive:

- Pray sincerely for that person.
- Stop rejoicing at their downfall.

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- Seek peace and restore fellowship where possible.

Let us not present to God **smiles that still bleed**, but hearts that are healed and free.