

## **Forgiveness of Sin and Consequences of Sin ( Rev (Dr) Quek Suan Yew )**

These are the two very important factors to consider when a sin has been committed. This is more so when the sin is committed by a leader in the church. When this happens, many things come into play including the sinner's relationship with members in the congregation. The sinner's family is in the church and should not be embarrassed by the sinner having to publicly confess his sin. The service of the one who has sinned in the church is another consideration that can cloud the entire matter, especially when the sinner has been serving in the church faithfully for many years. The third consideration which could be the most confusing is that if he has repented of his sin already, why can't the church just forget the matter and move on and let the sinner return to service as if nothing has happened? These views are common with regard to forgiveness and consequence of sin. What does the Bible say on this matter? Every believer of Jesus Christ must want to know because this is not a subjective consideration but a biblical one.

This is important because if we have a low view of sin, then the church has sinned against God. Not only will God not bless the church but He will punish as well. Yes, it is a sin to have a low view of sin. On the other hand, if we over punish the sinner, then the problem is also one of sin where we overstep our boundaries and cause that sinner to despise God and his faith. The biblical approach is paramount. We do not wish to sin against God even as we deal with sinners in the church. I am sure all of us agree that the appropriate punishment needs to be meted out. For example, when the LORD imposed the punishment of death upon the man who deliberately picked up sticks on the Sabbath day in Numbers 15:32-36, it reveals God's high regard for keeping the sabbath and also for breaking it. The death penalty was also imposed on adultery, kidnapping, smiting father or mother, cursing father or mother, etc. God has a very high intolerance for these sins when He imposed the death penalty. Therefore, believers too must have the same high intolerance when serious sins are committed. Therefore, any punishment enforced by the church reflects the view of the church on that particular sin, whether it is a trivial sin or a serious sin.

**Forgiveness of sin** – Forgiveness is an essential trait in every believer. He must be ever ready to forgive anyone for any personal sin committed against him. Note that the nature of the sin is personal. It must not be confused with sins committed against God for which only God alone can forgive. The sins against God would be doctrinal in nature, such as attacking God's perfect Word and the Name of Christ. The believer has no right to arbitrarily forgive on behalf of God if the person does not stop attacking God's Word or Christ. It is not within any believer's right to do so for it is not his name that is attacked. For example, if a person attacked God's perfect Word through his writings and he repents of his sin, he also has to remove his writings if they were posted on the internet. He must also make a public apology on the same website where the attacks were placed. If his writings caused believers to be stumbled because of his attacks on God's perfect Word, then he must post on the same website a statement of apology for his sin against the believers. If it is a personal sin against another believer such as a slanderous remark, and he apologizes for it, the offended believer must willingly forgive from his heart as clearly taught in the Bible in Matthew 5:38-46. To not forgive is a sin (cf Matthew 18) like is to be like Christ in all things, including Christ's perspective of sin and the meting out of the consequence of sin, especially when the sin is committed by a pastor, ordained

minister or an elder! The reason is that a higher standard of holiness is expected and demanded of them!

**Standard of Holiness** – **Luke 12:48** (KJV) teaches that a higher standard of holiness is demanded from those who have been given more by God “But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” Holiness means a higher standard of ethics and morality whereby their words, actions and life as a whole are to be beyond approach as measured against the perfect Word of God. The more an ordained minister or elder is used by the LORD to serve Him, the more he is expected to live by a higher standard of holy living. Everyone is to look at him as an example of holiness. This is what maturity is when Jesus says that all believers are to show Christ by their good works. When others see the believer’s good works, they will glorify God (Matt 5:13-16). If this is expected of every believer, how much more when it comes to the leaders of these believers, such as the pastors and elders!

When the standard of holiness is lowered, the congregation suffers. This is tantamount to teaching the congregation that when the servant of God serves, he is allowed to sin once in a while and the congregation is supposed to turn a blind eye! He has done so much for the LORD; therefore, let us give him another chance! This line of argument is taken from the courtroom of the world. It is common tactic of the defendant’s lawyer to cite his many “good” deeds to mitigate his crime and to secure a reduced sentence. When both congregation and leaders think this way, the church is doomed. The LORD cannot and will not bless such churches. This kind of church will inevitably die! The way to preserve the church from become like the world is to maintain a high standard of holiness as set by the LORD according to Holy Scriptures. If God’s standard of holiness as revealed in the Bible is rejected and or diminished, who then sets the standard of holiness for the church? No one can! When God’s standard of holiness is lowered, it will be like the days of the Judges when every man will do what is right in his own eyes. Anarchy will prevail and sin will become a norm; the powerful and the moneyed people will rule the day with their evil and carnal influence!

The Bible says that when an elder has committed a sin, he has sinned against God and the people who trusted and elected him. He has to go before the congregation and confess his sins. This is non-negotiable. The Bible teaches us that an elder is to be highly respected and honoured. Therefore when he sins, the consequence will commensurate with the high office that the LORD has set for His church. **1 Timothy 5:17-20** (KJV), “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. 18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. 19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. 20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” For example, a pastor who commits adultery while in office, will have to repent of his sin in public. He cannot just keep it quiet and keep it within the family, the Board of Elders, and God. God says he has to confess his sins publicly for he has brought great shame to the Name of Christ and has betrayed the trust that God’s people had placed on him to protect, love and care for them. He has hurt them and defiled them and used his position as pastor to commit adultery. He will not be allowed to serve as pastor again even after repentance. His service will be greatly diminished.

Arguments like, “his family will be shamed if he has to repent publicly” are not to be entertained. The people of God and the Board of Elders must do what is right according to Holy Scriptures. They must have no respect of faces and judgment must be meted out with all its accompanying consequences. The pastor who sinned should have thought of God’s judgment and the consequences of sin before he sinned! If such arguments are allowed to affect the punishment of sin, are we then saying that it’s all right for the pastor who has sinned and who has no family member in the congregation to be punished to the full extent of the law of God? Such a travesty of justice will surely incur the wrath of God upon God’s people.

**CONCLUSION** – Yes, every believer must forgive all the time and for all sins that are committed against him personally. But we must not forget the difference between forgiveness of sin and the consequences of sin. May God help us to maintain the standard of holiness that God has set for all His people as revealed in Holy Scripture. We cannot do anything less. To do anything less is to sin against God.