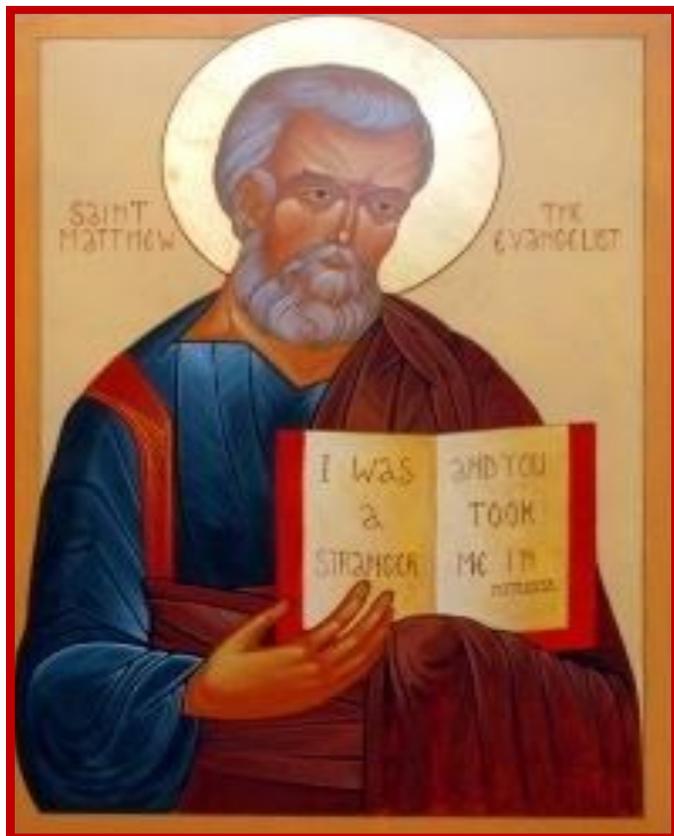


neighbours in our minds; and, on the other hand, how pleasing it is to God to lay them aside, and convert them into love, even as God receives the penitent sinner to His grace and the bowels of His love, and buries in oblivion all his past offences, even as though they had never been committed. Moreover, not once, but *seventy times seven*—that is, always—must we forgive our neighbour who repents of the offence which he has committed against us. In order to show this, Christ spake the parable of the *Ten Thousand Talents*—that is, of a very vast debt. Let us, therefore, who are but weak men, imitate God, who forgives us our daily offences against Him, and those very many and very grievous, as often as we repent. And therefore He bids us pray daily, Forgive us our debts, even as we forgive them that are indebted to us.



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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Continuation of Matthew 18: 15-35

Verse 15- *But if thy brother sin, Syriac, shall err*, in allusion to the wandering sheep, of which He had been speaking. Christ passes appropriately from little ones to sinners, because they are little, that is despised and abject. For what is more worthless than sin and sinners? As therefore He taught that the little ones who are offended must not be despised, so now He likewise teaches that sinners who offend and injure others must not be despised, nor must vengeance be inflicted upon them for the injuries they have done, but that they must be corrected in love, that they may be restored to God's grace, and to salvation. Christ therefore gives this as the remedy by which *scandals* may be taken away, even by the correction of him who caused the scandal.

Sin against thee. Certain Protestants expound the words *against thee*, to mean, thou alone knowing; if any one sin secretly and privately, secretly correct him; for the public sinner must be publicly corrected, as an example to others. But the words

infinite clemency, forgives sins not conditionally, but absolutely and irrevocably to the penitent, according to the words, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." *Rom. xi. 29.* Wherefore although the sinner who has been the object of pardoning grace, again fall into the same, or other sins, and will not forgive his neighbour, and thus proves himself ungrateful to God, yet does not the circumstance of this ingratitude so aggravate his sin, that on account of it all sins which have been already forgiven by God, are again imputed to him. For since God is the chief Goodness and Holiness, He cannot recall and set up afresh, sin which has once been done away. I may add that this ingratitude is not a peculiar sin, but only a general circumstance of all sin. General, I say, because in all and every sin there is a certain amount of ingratitude towards God. Wherefore in the court of the most good and merciful God this ingratitude does not aggravate the sin to which it is attached in the same way that it aggravates it at an earthly tribunal, among men. Wherefore the similitude and comparison of the parable are not to be sought for in this, but in the way in which Christ applies the parable in verse 35, viz., that God will not forgive the offences of those who do not forgive their neighbours, those offences I say, which they have in other ways contracted, or which they contract by their refusal to forgive others, or by their cruelty towards their neighbour. Wherefore sins which have been once forgiven by God are forgiven for ever, nor are they in any case recalled by God. So Theologians teach with S. Thomas, (3. p. q. 88. art. 1 and 3).

I say 3. These things are true, but not sufficient. They do not exhaust the whole scope and force of the parable. For in it, it is expressly declared, *And the lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors until he should pay all the debt*—that is to say, the ten thousand talents which had been already remitted. And it is subjoined, *So also will My heavenly Father do likewise unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive now every one his brother their trespasses*; namely, He will recall all your past sins which have been already forgiven, even as the lord recalled the past debt of his servant which had been already remitted.

This remitted debt, therefore, and sin is said to be recalled and to return, through that subsequent mercilessness and ingratitude. 1. Because this want of mercy is a deadly sin; for to be unwilling to forgive our neighbour a fault, is to cherish hatred, anger, and revenge against him, which is clearly mortal sin. And thus by this means the former state of sin and liability to hell returns. For he who will not forgive is a debtor to the wrath of God in the same way that he was previously, on account of other sins. For this sin is irremissible, because so long as a man will not forgive his neighbour for a trespass against himself, so long will not God forgive him his own faults. In this very way, therefore, that a similar new sin of mercilessness is committed, by means of it, in a kind of way, past offences against God seem to live again, because the state of sin and the liability to hell live again.

2. Because this ingratitude is a great aggravation of sin, and that in a deadly manner, if we believe Soto (*in 4 dist. 32, art. 3*), who asserts that it must be mentioned by a penitent in confession. Others take a milder view—that the circumstance of ingratitude aggravates the sin to which it is attached, only venially. For this ingratitude attaches itself to all sin. Theologians teach that it is especially to be discerned and taken account of in four kinds of sins; namely, hatred, apostasy, obstinacy and impenitence. For these four are directly repugnant to the very essence of the remission of sins; that is to say, either to faith, or charity, or repentance.

3. Although this ingratitude be not in itself mortal sin, yet it is often a cause of mortal sin. For God, on account of this ingratitude, withdraws the more plentiful supply of His grace from the sinner, and permits him to be more severely tempted by the flesh and the devil. Hence it comes to pass that he falls into more dreadful mortal sins, by which that former multitude of faults returns, which is signified by the *ten thousand talents*. God will require of him as much as the former debt amounted to, because of his want of mercy; although the debt may be of other sins than those which had been remitted, that the words may be fulfilled, "He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy." (James ii. 13.)

Verse 35: *So also shall, &c. From your hearts:* from the very bottom of your heart. For there are many who forgive with their lips, but not with their hearts. Christ, therefore, bids that the gall of rancour be cast out of the heart, and the honey of love substituted in its place. This parable, therefore, teaches how dreadful it is to keep anger and revenge against our

the prayers of his friends to bend the mind of the king, whom he knew to be liberal and large-hearted, to forgive him the debt. And in this he was not mistaken. Hence it follows:

Verse 27- *The Lord had compassion, &c.* The things are spoken parabolically to show how pleasing to God are a humble confession of sin, and prayer for pardon. Again there is signified how infinite is God's mercy which immediately forgave this vast debt of sin to the servant who asked for it. Here is the scope of the parable. It is *à priori* reasoning. Because God is essentially good and kind, therefore it is His uncreated and infinite goodness and kindness which does good to all, and pardons and spares all, just as it is the property of fire to give heat, and of the sun to give light. Thus the Church prays, "O God, whose nature and property it is to have mercy and to forgive, &c."

Verse 28- *But the same servant . . . a hundred pence.* This would amount to about four pounds of English money. See here the narrowness and covetousness of the human breast as compared with the largeness and liberality of the heart of God.

Verse 29. *And his fellow servant, &c.* He humbles himself before his fellow servant, and asks him to forgive him *the hundred pence*, in the self-same words with which that fellow servant had obtained from his master the remission of one hundred and twenty millions of crowns. But it was all in vain.

Verse 30- *But he would not, &c.* Greedily and rigidly does this servant stand upon his rights. And thus using them, he abused them, being unmindful of the mercy and clemency which the Lord had shewn to himself. Therefore he provoked the rigour of the justice of the same Lord against himself, and in fact had to suffer it.

Verse 31- *So when his fellow servants, &c.* This has to do with the adornment of the parable. For thus servants act in the houses of their masters, and in courts of princes. But this does not apply to the thing signified by this parable. For the saints and the blessed do not carry to God, or accuse the cruelty, or the sins of men, but rather excuse and cover them, and pray for them.

Verses 32, 33. *Then his lord, &c., had pity on thee. Arab. according to my mercy towards thee.* My mercy towards thee ought to have been the stimulus and the measure of the mercy which thou shouldst have shewn to thy fellow-servant. Measure I say, not equal, but proportional. For as I remitted ten thousand talents, it was thy duty to remit a hundred pence.

Verse 34- *Was wrath: Syriac, burnt with anger: the tormentors.* It appears from history, and from the civil law of the Romans, to whom at that time the Jews were subject, that debtors were accustomed to be delivered by their creditors to tormentors, who cast them into prison, and scourged them. The Emperor Constantine I. out of Christian benignity abolished the punishment of scourging debtors with scourges loaded with lead. Moreover, tormentors are demons, says Remigius, who torment souls of sinners in hell in a thousand ways. *Until he should pay, i.e.,* he must be tormented forever. For he could never pay that debt of ten thousand talents. So Chrysostom, Euthymius, Theophylact.

It may here be asked—Is then every fault and its penalty which has been remitted by God to a penitent sinner reimposed by Him on account of such ingratitude and mercilessness? For that seems to be asserted in this parable. I say, 1. This parable is true *in foro humano*, juridically, and in a parabolic manner, especially because civil right granted to a donee may be rescinded by the donor on account of ingratitude. For so great would be the feeling among men with respect to the pride and cruelty of the wicked servant of the parable, that every one would think he deserved to pay and atone for his former debts and sins, not as though what had been forgiven revived, but because they were all virtually included in his subsequent cruelty. And thus we see princes inflict punishment upon those who had offended them, and whom they had afterwards spared, if they subsequently carry themselves in an arrogant and ungrateful manner towards them. They exact the penalty of all their previous offences. Whence they are considered to have only conditionally pardoned them, the presupposed condition being that they shall amend, and be grateful, and carry themselves modestly.

I say, 2. That all this does not find a counterpart *in foro divino*, and in the thing signified by the parable. For God does not reimpose upon the sinner whom He has forgiven and who will not forgive his fellow men their trespasses against him, the sins which He has before forgiven. The reason is because God in His

against thee, are no where taken as meaning, thou alone being conscious. And Luke explains it as *against thee*. For he says, (xvii. 3), If thy brother sin against thee, rebuke him, but if he repent, forgive him; that, namely in which he has sinned against thee. This is the way in which S. Peter understood the expression, for he, having reference to these words of Christ, asks the question, *how oft shall my brother sin against me?* Christ alludes to Leviticus xix. 17. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, but openly rebuke him." Meaning do not cherish secret hatred against thy neighbour who has injured thee, but tell him plainly and openly that thou hast been wronged by him, that he may amend and make satisfaction to thyself and God by repentance. Whence Tertullian (*l. 4, contra Marc. c. 35*), understands this passage of Leviticus concerning brotherly correction, as if it had been commanded to the Jews.

You may say then, our neighbour is to be corrected only for sins against ourselves, not for those against God. I answer by denying the consequence, because Christ by synecdoche, speaking of injuries done to us, means to include all other sins. For there is the same, yea, a greater application to other sins. For if our neighbour is to be corrected for injuries done to us, much more for the offences by which he had offended God. We ought to love God better than ourselves: therefore we ought to ward off from Him their injuries, more than from ourselves. Christ however makes mention only of sin against ourselves, that He may put a bridle upon revenge, and substitute charity instead of it, and from charity brotherly correction. It is as though He said, if thy neighbour have offended or injured thee, do not make it publicly known or avenge it, but first reprove him lovingly and secretly. We must understand, if there be hope of amendment by such means, otherwise, omitting the private correction, we must proceed to correction in the presence of witnesses. But if there be no hope from this, we must tell it to the Church, *i.e.,* to the pastor or the prelate. But if not even from this there be hope of amendment, this correction must be altogether omitted, and left to God. The reason is an *à priori* one. As charity obliges me to succour my neighbour when he is in any grave corporal necessity, so much more does it oblige me to succour him in any spiritual necessity, such as a state of sin and condemnation. Rightly argues Suarez, (2. 2. q. 33.). In addition to the hope of profit, in order that this precept may bind, it is necessary that my neighbour should stand in need of my correction. If for instance I am reasonably afraid that unless I correct him he will fall in the like sins. This is proved, because this is an affirmative precept of mercy. It is therefore only binding according to the rules of similar precepts; therefore, only in a case of necessity.

It may be asked whether this correction be a matter of precept, or of counsel only? Again, whether it binds all the faithful, or priests and superiors only? 1. SS. Augustine, Chrysostom, Hilary, Basil, Theophylact, Bonaventura, and others, think that the correction of which Christ here speaks, has regard only to such as sin against us. As much as to say, Do not

inflict vengeance upon him who has injured thee, but lovingly correct him; and so this correction would be of precept rather than of counsel. Salmeron attempts to prove this view by many reasons, but what he says must be read with the greatest caution. For he might seem in his eleventh tractate to do away with this correction sanctioned by Christ altogether, and to find fault with it as useless, and often pernicious. But he does not express his own opinion, but that of others whom he cites, as he says expressly in the beginning of his eleventh chapter. Again he does not set aside the declaration of Christ, but the opinion of those scholastics and interpreters, who extend Christ's declaration to every kind of case whatsoever, who maintain that this mode of correction should be observed with respect to all sins, though Christ only enjoins it expressly with reference to the correction of those who sin against us. And Suarez himself shews that frequently this method cannot be observed, except to the detriment of the commonwealth, as clearly appears in a case of heresy, which creeps secretly like a cancer.

2. Johannes Archias (*in cap. Nativ. de Judiciis*), think that this correction is of precept to priests and prelates only; and of counsel to the laity. But this is too lax.

3. Others think that this correction is of precept to the neighbours only, since it would be incongruous that a man who is guilty of the same, or a similar fault, should reprove another for that fault. Abulensis seems to favour this opinion. But I say that the correction which is here enjoined by Christ is not merely of counsel, but of precept, and is binding upon all the faithful. For although Christ says in express words only that those who have sinned against us are to be corrected, yet by parity of reasoning He intended it to be extended to all sinners. So the interpreters and scholastics, with S. Thomas, *passim* (2. 2. *quæst.* 33). This is plain from the expression, *thy brother*. For brother denotes any Christian believer, and an equal rather than a superior. For although unbelievers are at times to be corrected, yet Christ is here speaking only of the faithful as belonging to Himself and subject to His Church. For infidels cannot be punished and excommunicated by the Church, inasmuch as they do not belong to it.

The reason is *à priori*, because this precept of correction is, both as regards its substance, as well as its method and order, not so much a positive command; and, according to the *jus divinum*, as of the *jus naturæ*, belonging naturally to charity and grace. For charity requires that we should bring back our neighbour when he sins into the way of salvation by correcting him; and that we should have regard to his shame as well as his good name. For as S. Jerome says, "If he lose shame and modesty, he will remain in sin." For it is not public and judicial correction which is here treated of, which deals with the just punishment of offences committed against the commonwealth, but that private correction which tends to the salvation of our neighbour when he sins. This reason is urged by S. Augustine (*Serm.* 16, *de Verb. Apost.*). "Rebuke thy neighbour," he says, "between thee and him alone, for the sake of the correction, and sparing his shame. For perchance he may, through shame, begin to defend his sin; and thus him, whom thou wishest to become better, thou makest worse." And again, "Forget thine own injury, not thy brother's fall, nor suffer

Verse 24- *And when he began, &c.* An Attic talent was equivalent to six hundred golden crowns. Ten thousand talents therefore would make a sum of six million golden crowns, a vast, an immense sum, altogether beyond the ability of a poor man to pay. And this sum would be twenty times as much, if we take the value of a Hebrew talent as our standard, for it was worth three thousand shekels, or twelve thousand French crowns. Thus ten thousand talents would be equivalent to a hundred and twenty million French crowns. And as Christ was speaking not to Greeks but to Jews, He would speak of the Hebrew talent. Consider then, that according to this parable, God requires of a sinner, who has committed but one mortal sin, more than if a master should require of a poor slave more than a hundred and twenty million crowns. For a single mortal sin, forasmuch as it is committed against God, and as far as in it lies, robs God of His Deity, is a far greater injury to God than all injuries done to all kings could be. It is a far greater debt than all the debts of all mankind, which are owed by them to all other men. For as God is far above all men, yea though they seem infinite in number, so does an injury against God surpass all the injuries done to men, and contract an infinite guilt and debt of punishment. Wherefore this vast amount of debt pertains rather to the thing signified, that is to say, mortal sin, than to the actual parable of the servant. For what servant could contract a debt of one hundred and twenty millions, unless he stole the king's treasury, or destroyed, or betrayed a whole realm? Moreover if one mortal sin be a debt of one hundred and twenty millions, of how many millions will his debt consist, who has committed a hundred, a thousand, yea many thousand mortal sins? Now this suits the words *seventy times seven*. As though it were said—if God forgives you so vast a multitude of sins, far more in comparison than ten thousand talents, much more ought we to forgive all the trespasses of our neighbours, which are of far less consequence against us. Especially since God forgives us, upon this condition, our great faults, that we should forgive our neighbours their few and small faults. See Matthew vi. 14. The reason is an *à priori* one. Because God is infinite goodness, so also is sin an immeasurable evil. From hence it follows that no mere creature can make any equivalent satisfaction for mortal sin. Yea not all the works of the saints can make compensation for even one sin. Therefore in order to make an equivalent satisfaction for sin it was necessary that the Son of God should become incarnate, and should suffer; as the Fathers teach. Lastly: sin is rightly compared to a talent, because like a talent and weight of lead it sinks a man down to hell.

Verse 25. *When he had not, &c.* It was the law amongst various nations that if a debtor could not pay, his creditor might sell him with his wife and children, and pay himself with the price for which they were sold. That this was the custom among the Jews is seen from 2 Kings iv. 1., where the wife of a prophet who had died, said to Elisha, "Behold the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen."

Mystically: S. Jerome, "As the wife of the just man is called wisdom, so also the wife of the unjust and the sinner is called folly, whose children are evil thoughts."

Verse 26- *Falling down, upon his knees, or his face: Besought him.* Many Greek MSS. read, *παρεκάλει*, but the greater number with the Syriac have *προσεκύνει αὐτῷ*, *worshipped him*. The Arabic has, *Be patient, and I will give thee what is thine*. This servant, that he may escape the sale of himself and his family into slavery promises mountains of gold. "O my master! I will pay thee all I owe." But this was impossible. But he would gain time, that through the delay he might employ

Symbolically, S. Gregory (*lib. 32, Moral. cap. 12*) teaches that eleven is the symbol of sin, because this number transgresses the number of the Decalogue, ten. But seven is the symbol of totality, because in the seven first days of the world God created and set in order this whole universe. Again, in seven days, perpetually recurring, the whole of time is included. Seventy-seven is composed of eleven times seven.

Therefore, seventy-seven signifies that all sins of every kind must be forgiven. This number, then, is the symbol of the plenary and perfect remission of all sins, when so ever a sinner repents. "Christ," says S. Hilary, "has an allusion to Lamech, who said, when confessing his homicide, 'Vengeance shall be taken of Cain sevenfold; but of Lamech, seventy times seven'" (Gen. iv. 24). See what I have there said. For as Lamech was punished, as it were, in seventy-seven generations, for as Josephus says, he had seventy-seven sons, who all perished in the deluge, so Christ our Saviour, by whom all sin is done away, was born from seventy-seven generations. For in the genealogy of Christ, as given by S. Luke, from God and Adam unto Christ there are numbered, inclusively, seventy-seven generations.

Moraliter: Learn from hence the breadth of the heart, and the abyss of the love of Christ, who wishes us to forgive our brother seventy times seven, that is, whenever he offends against us. For if he wills us weak men to have so great charity and liberality, what do we think must be the abyss of love which He hath in Himself? Appositely says S. Augustine, "He sins once, I forgive. He sins a second and a third time, I forgive. He sins a fourth time: he must be chastised. Let us correct by words, and if need be, by stripes. But let us forgive the offence, let us put away the fault from our memory, that even though some discipline be imposed for love's sake, gentleness may not depart out of our heart." This number will be far greater, if with Origen we take the words exactly. For Christ said not, seventy times and seven times, but seventy times seven, that is to say four hundred and ninety; as it is clearly in the Greek, *ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά*. So many times does Christ wish us to forgive a penitent his offences. According to this meaning there will be an allusion to the seventy weeks of Daniel. For these make four hundred and ninety years which elapsed from the decree for rebuilding Jerusalem unto Christ, by whom there is full remission of all sins. See what I have said on Daniel ix. 24.

Verse 23- *Therefore the kingdom of Heaven is likened, &c.* The scope and signification of this payable will become apparent from the post-parable, ver. 35. *So likewise will your Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother.* This is the end in view of the parable, and the parts of it which pertain to this are to be referred to the thing signified. The other emblems are only for the adorning of the parable, having nothing to do with its signification, strictly speaking. Such mere emblems in this case are the command in ver. 25, for the sale of the wife and children; and the accusation of the cruel servant by his fellow-servants (vcr. 31). Again the scope of the parable is intimated by the word therefore, which has reference to the preceding verse. The force of it is as follows: "That ye may know how pleasing it is to God, and how it has been enjoined by Him, that we shall forgive our brother who has trespassed against us just as often as he repents, I therefore subjoin a parable, in which I compare the kingdom of Heaven to a king taking account of his servants."

him to perish through thy silence. If thou alone knowest his fault, and reprovest it before others, thou art not a corrector, but a betrayer."

Wherefore, in order that this correction, which of itself is an odious thing, may be fruitful and efficacious, two principal things are needed; namely, charity and prudence, or discretion. Charity; that he who sins may feel that the correction proceeds not from hatred, or pride, but from love and compassion. Prudence, that it may be done modestly and gently, and with such circumstances of time and place and manner, as that he who has sinned may receive it gratefully, and may amend, according to the Apostle's words, "Instruct in the spirit of meekness, &c." (*Gal. vi. 1.*) As S. Leo says (*Epist. 84.*), "Let there be benevolence rather than severity uppermost in the corrector; let there be more of exhortation than of fussiness; more of love than of power."

Moreover so great is the need of mutual correction of faults that a certain holy father was wont to say that there was nothing so great a cause of ruin as the lack of brotherly correction, and the violation of the precept to avoid impurity. S. Augustine (*l. 1. de Civit. Dei. c. 9.*) testifies that because of the omission of this brotherly correction, the good as well as the bad in this world are afflicted with very grievous calamities. The *Gloss* says, he who sees his brother commit a sin, and keep silence, is equally in fault with him who does not forgive him who repents. The very elements teach us the benefit of this correction. For so fire chastises, and by burning purifies the air. The air by the blasts of winds chastises and purifies the water. In like manner so does the water the earth. There can be no Christian charity in any one unless he afford the medicine of correction to an erring brother. In the last place, ordinarily, brotherly correction is only of obligation when the sin is mortal. Although indeed Cajetan, Valentia and D. Soto, think we are under an obligation to correct when the sin is venial. But this does not seem to be generally true, nor is it usual in practice, unless grave loss or scandal follow from the venial sin. For otherwise the burden of correcting every single trifling fault and, being corrected for them, would be equally intolerable both to the corrector and the corrected: Indeed it would be morally impossible. (*See Suarez 2. 2. tract. de charitate, disp. 8. sect. 2.*)

Verse 15 (Continued)- *If he shall hear thee, &c.* Thou hast saved him who was ready to perish, and hast gained for God and heaven, him who was in danger of hell; yea thou hast gained him for thyself, because both thou and he had suffered loss from discord, as S. Chrysostom says. "By the salvation of another, salvation is gained for ourselves also," says S. Jerome.

Verse 16- *But if he will not hear thee, &c.* Christ orders that if the person corrected reject a secret admonition, he must be corrected in the presence of one or two others, and this for two reasons. The first is that he who is not ashamed in the presence of one may be ashamed in the presence of a

greater number, and that several witnesses may the more easily and effectually convince him of sin, and persuade him to amend.

Verse 17- *But if he will not hear them, &c.* This is the third stage to be observed in the order of correction, that those who are unwilling to listen to him who admonishes them, nor yet to the witnesses, may be brought before the Church, that is to a pastor and superior, or a prelate, as to a spiritual father and a judge, that he may paternally, but with greater authority, correct the sin, and so bring about amendment. But that if the sinner will not be reformed, he may as a judge cut him off from the company of the faithful. Five acts, says Suarez, are to be noted in this order of correction, as given by S. Matthew. The 1st is private admonition: *Tell him his fault between thee and him alone.* 2. Correction, *before one or two witnesses.* 3. Denunciation: *Tell it to the Church.* 4. The rebuke of the prelate, *if he will not hear the Church.* 5. Coercion by means of excommunication: *let him be to thee as a heathen.*

For various reasons this order may be omitted, or inverted. And there are times when it is right that he who has sinned should be immediately brought to a superior, as Salmeron shews upon this passage. The first of such cases is when the sin is public, so that it is impossible by means of secret admonition to preserve the good name of the offender. 2. When the sin is against a third person, or the commonwealth, such as heresy, which eats like a cancer, and which ought therefore to be at once repressed with the utmost rigour by the pastor and bishop. 3. If it be evident that private admonition, or before witnesses will be of no avail. For as Adrian says, "To strive in vain, and to labour for no other end than to gain hatred, is a mark of the utmost folly." 4. If he who is corrected waives his right, and is content that his transgression be straightway laid before the superior. As it is in the Society of Jesus, those who enter it are expressly asked about this matter, whether they be willing that it shall be so. Among the Jesuits therefore, and other similar religious orders, a different method of correction is prescribed, namely that the case shall be immediately taken before the Superior, for this rule is set before the religious at their entrance. They waive this particular right of caring for their reputation. No wrong therefore is done them.

The first reason is because it is expedient for the general good, lest the sin should infect others, and that the superior should take immediate steps to guard against it. 2. Because Religion is the school of humility and mortification, and of contempt of honour and reputation. 3. Because Religious are brethren. And he who corrects seems to set himself up as the superior of him who is corrected. Hence, our rule commands that no one shall reprove another. S. Augustine (*Epist.* 109), in his rules for monks, ordains that if a monk shall see another casting a wanton glance, he shall admonish him privately—if he repeat the glance, he shall tell it to the superior. S. Basil has a similar rule (*Reg.* 46). Rashly, therefore, have some persons carped at this rule of religious orders. For these statutes have been approved by the Apostolic See. The statutes of the Dominicans have a similar provision. So S. Thomas, Richard, Angelus, Salmeron, Suarez, and others. Vide Suarez (*tom. 4, de relig. cap. 7*), where he adds that in the Society of Jesus and other religious orders, this rule of Christ is observed wherever there is any certain hope that secret correction will produce amendment. Moreover, in episcopal and abbatial visitations a different order is

because we disagree among ourselves, and he gives the cause. As in music, unless there be harmony and concord between the sounds, the hearer is not gratified. So is it with the Church; unless there be agreement, God does not delight in it, nor listen to its voice."

Some writers, arguing from the major to the minor, prove, not inaptly, the authority of Councils. For the declaration is a general one, and has proportionally greater force as respects Councils, than as regards other things. For if Christ be in the midst of two, much more must He be in the midst of the whole Church, gathered together in His Name, and represented by the Prelates and Bishops. For Councils are properly gathered together in the Name of Christ, *i.e.*, by His authority, that they may increase and propagate His faith and glory. Wherefore when they ask in the Name of Christ that they may not err in faith, that they may reform the manners of the faithful, that they may have the assistance of the Holy Spirit, they certainly obtain these things. This is especially true of Ecumenical Councils, but it is applicable to Provincial Councils also, when they are legitimately constituted, and approved by the Pope.

In heaven. The *Gloss* says, By this He shows that God is above all things, and that He can fulfil what He is asked to do. Or, *in heaven* may mean *in the Saints*, which is equivalent to saying, that whatever they ask shall be done for them, because they have Him with them, from Whom they ask.

Verse 21- *Then came Peter, &c.* Peter was led to ask this question in consequence of what Luke (xvii. 4) says Christ added upon this occasion. "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." Where *seven times* means the same as often, or indeed always, when thy brother repents. But Peter did not clearly understand whether *seven times* were to be taken definitely for the precise number seven, or whether it were to be taken indefinitely for as often as might be needed. He asks therefore Christ to explain His meaning, and to tell him exactly how often he was to forgive his brother his trespasses. Peter's breast was narrow as yet carnal, and bounded by the flesh. He could not understand the infinite abyss of mercy which there was in the Divine nature of Christ.

Verse 22- *Jesus said unto him, &c.* That is, times innumerable thou shalt forgive thy brother's trespasses, if he repent. This is what I meant when I said (as in Luke xvii. 4) *thou shalt forgive him seven times.* By *seven times* I meant *seventy times seven*, that is always, times without number. So SS. Chrysostom and Augustine (*Serm. 15 de Verb. Dom.*). "I dare to say that if he shall sin against thee seventy times eighty thou shalt forgive him, or a hundred times eight. For if Christ found a thousand sins and forgave all, withdraw not thou thy mercy. For the Apostle says, "Forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

Verse 19- *Again I say unto you, &c.* The connection of these words with what precedes is difficult to be traced. Therefore it has been taken in various ways. 1. Some are of opinion that the words refer to *the two witnesses*, of whom Christ speaks in verse 16. Then the Gloss expounds, if two of you shall agree upon earth either in receiving one who is repentant, or in rejecting one who is proud, or about any other matter, about which they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in Heaven.

2. Jansen draws out the connection thus—If two shall ask anything of God, He will grant it: how much more therefore will He ratify the judgment of the Church in binding and loosing? And Maldonatus thus—“In order that ye may not err in the judgment of binding and loosing, let prayer precede it. For if ye judge in My Name, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, ye shall obtain.” 3. Francis Lucas thus—To you, O ye Apostles, not only do I give the power of binding and loosing, but another great gift as well. It is that if two of you agree to ask anything of God, ye shall obtain it. 4. Clearly and correctly, SS. Jerome, Hilary, Chrysostom, refer the words to the advantage of unity, of which He makes mention, verse 15: for the sake of which He instituted the precept of fraternal correction. It is as though Christ said, I have ordained that if any one sin against thee, thou shalt not pursue him with hatred, but shalt kindly correct him, with this end in view, that if two of you, especially if ye have been previously at enmity, or disagreement, should agree together, and unitedly ask anything of God, they may obtain it. Hear S. Jerome, “Christ’s entire preceding discourse had invited to concord; and now He makes a promise of a reward, that we may with eagerness hasten unto peace. For He says that He will be in the midst of two, or three. Thus the Apostles persevering in prayer with one accord, obtained the Holy Ghost at Pentecost.” (Acts i. 14.)

If two: S. Chrysostom and Euthymius restrict this promise to the Apostles. Anastasius to the corrector and the corrected. Origen, to a husband and wife, that if they agree to abstain from the use of matrimony, that they may give themselves to prayer, they shall obtain whatever they ask. But I say that the words refer to all faithful Christians, for to them Christ was speaking in the persons of the Apostles, who alone were present.

Concerning anything, any proper thing, whether it be small or great, whether easy or difficult. Only you will understand that they must ask faithfully, hopefully, humbly and perseveringly: also that the thing asked for is expedient for them. For if it be not expedient, God will not give them what they ask, but something else which is far better and more profitable for them.

Verse 20- *In My Name, i.e.,* for My sake; in respect of Me; for My sake and My love, seeking nothing but Me and My glory.

There am I, &c., i.e., there I stand, and co-operate, and guide their desires and prayers, and fulfil them. I am in the midst of them, as the Holy Ghost is in the midst of the Father and the Son, as it were the love and bond of both. S. Hilary gives the reason, “Because He who is peace and love will make his dwelling-place with good and peaceful dispositions.” And Origen says, we often fail to be heard of God,

observed. For then it is ordered, on pain of censure, that sins shall be denounced. But bishops and abbots proceed not according to the method of fraternal correction, but of judicial enquiry. And of this Christ says nothing in this place.

Lastly, let the three following canons be noted, for if they be observed, nothing will be done amiss as regards brotherly correction. 1. Let the general good—that is, of the state, or the community—overweigh everything else; and, therefore, individual advantage. 2. Let the good of the soul, and the salvation of our neighbour, take precedence of the care of his reputation. 3. Always consider your neighbour’s reputation, as far as is consistent with the general good, and the salvation of his soul.

Tell it to the Church: that is, to the pastor who presides over your own Church. You ask, What is here meant by *the Church*? SS. Jerome and Anselm in this passage, and S. Gregory (*lib. 4, Epist. 38*) understand the company of the faithful; as if Christ here intended that an offender should be reprov'd before them, and put to shame, and so corrected. Zwinglius and the Protestants follow this with avidity, that they may find a sanction for their democratic and popular form of Church government. Whence Castalini profanely translates *tell the Church, tell the republic*. Others render, *tell the community*. But S. Chrysostom, Theophylact, Euthymius, and others (*passim*) understand by *Church* the pastors and prelates of the Church, who represent the Church (either individually or in Synod) as magistrates represent a republic, and a king a kingdom. This is proved—1. Because Christ here orders the Church to be heard, *i.e.,* obeyed by him who is accused; otherwise he is to be accounted as a heathen. But this obedience is only rendered to the prelates of the Church, as is plain; yea, this reason persuaded Calvin to agree with our opinion. 2. Because Christ—explaining what is meant by *the Church*—subjoins, *whatsoever ye shall bind*; as if to say, Ye, O ye Apostles, as princes of the Church, and those who shall succeed you as bishops and pastors. 3. Because the universal custom of the Church has been that such a one should be brought to Pastors, Bishops, the Pope, or a General Council; not before the people. 4. Because to do otherwise would be contrary to the law of nature and a grievous wrong to our neighbour. It would be to defame him, if his crime were a secret one. Those Calvinists therefore who denounce the crimes of their adulterous members and other sinners publicly in the Church, as though Christ here commanded it, offend grievously, and sin against charity. The true meaning is, if a brother, when reprov'd, will not hearken to him who corrects him in private, or even before two or three witnesses, let him be brought to the Prelate, who as Rector represents the Church, that he who despises private persons, may at least reverence the Prelate, and give heed to his correction. But if he will not, that then the Prelate, who not only has the office of private correction, but has the care of the whole Church, may provide that the wickedness of him who is reprov'd may not affect the whole body; but that he may separate him as a diseased sheep from the

rest of the flock, and may excommunicate and expel him. Hence it is plain against the same Protestants that the Church is visible, forasmuch as it ought to be approached by him who corrects, and seen and obeyed by him who is corrected.

You may say, If, then, the prelates themselves, and especially if the Pope sin, he ought in like manner to be brought before a general council, and therefore the Pope is subject to it, and consequently the government of the church is aristocratic—not monarchical. So Abulensis (*quæst.* 108), Panormitanus, Gerson, Almain, and others, who, in accordance with this opinion, deposed Pope Eugenius IV., in the Council of Basle. But this rash act of theirs was shortly afterwards annulled and repudiated by the Council of Florence. I reply, therefore, by denying the consequence, as far as the Pope is concerned. For if Bishops sin they must be brought before the Pope, that they may be corrected by him. For the rule of which we have been speaking does not apply to the Pope, but to all others who have superiors. But the Pope has no superior upon earth—not even the Church, or a general council. For he is the head of the whole Church, as the perpetual usage and consent of the Church holds with the Lateran Council under Leo X. (*Sess.* 11). This is why it was once declared by acclamation in a council of one hundred and eighty Bishops at Sinuessa to Pope S. Marcellinus, when he repented after a fall. “Thou judgest thyself by thine own mouth: it is not our judgment, for the chief See is judged by none.” S. Damasus is the authority for this, and Platina in his *Life*. The Pope is greater in the Church than a king in his kingdom. For a king receives his power from the state, but the Pope receives his power not from the Church, but directly from Christ. Wherefore, under no circumstances can he be deposed by the Church, but can only be declared to have fallen from his Pontificate, if, for the sake of example, he should chance (which God forbid) to fall into public heresy, and should therefore, *ipso facto*, cease to be Pope, yea, to be a Christian believer.

But if he will not hear, &c. For he who despises the Prelate of the Church giving him admonition, despises the Church of which he is a ruler, and shows thereby that he will not be a son and citizen of the Church. Wherefore he must be accounted not a faithful Christian, but a heathen and a publican, that is to say, a public sinner.

Again, *let him be as a heathen*, implies that you must not eat with him, nor greet him (1 *Cor.* v. 11, and 2 *John*, verse 10), that he may be confounded by the disgrace, and acknowledge his fault, and return to the Church. For excommunication is pronounced against a sinner, not to cause him to perish, but in order that he may amend.

Verse 18- *Verily I say unto you, &c.* Christ here explains what His Church is, and its power and authority; viz., that by the Church, Apostles and Prelates are meant, to whom He has given the power of binding and loosing both from sins and from excommunication, so that whomsoever they shall absolve from their sins on earth, God will absolve in Heaven: and whomsoever they, by excommunication shall eject from the company of the faithful, God will blot out his name from the Book of Life, and from the number of the blessed.

Whatsoever ye shall bind: Origen, Theophylact and Anastasius of Nice (*q.* 74) think that these words likewise pertain to the precept about correction, and therefore apply to all Christians. They explain as follows:— To whatsoever penitents you, O ye faithful, remit any offence which they have committed against you, God will remit it to them in heaven: but to those to whom ye do not remit, neither will God remit it to them. But this is an explanation which cannot be upheld. This is plain from the following consideration, that Christ speaks of the Church in opposition to private sinners, and those who correct them. Therefore by the Church He means her Prelates, and not the faithful generally. Again, because He assigns judgment and a tribunal to the Church, (and this belongs only to Prelates) to which obedience ought to be rendered, on pain of being considered a heathen, and afterwards refers to that judgment of the Church this general power of binding and loosing, both internal, *in foro conscientiæ*, and external, *in foro externo*, by excommunication, the opinion of Origen cannot be correct. For the sinner is brought to the Pastor of the Church, that he may be moved to repentance and confession, and so be absolved from his sin, and be justified and reformed, but if not that he may be excommunicated. So SS. Chrysostom, Hilary, Augustine, and others, *passim*. Wherefore theologians rightly gather and prove from this passage, the power of excommunication, as well as the sacrament of penance after the method of judgment and absolution. The Emperor Theodosius understood this, when being expelled from the Church by S. Ambrose because of his slaughter of the Thessalonians, he made his moan, “Even to slaves and beggars there is access to the temple of God, but I am shut out. For I know the Lord hath said, ‘Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.’” Wherefore as a suppliant, he asked for absolution from S. Ambrose. This he obtained, and fulfilled the penance which he enjoined upon him. The Council of Basle take note from S. Thomas that there are three kinds of binding and loosing recognised by Catholics. The first is of authority, which belongs to God alone. The second of excellency, which is peculiar to Christ. The third, which has been granted by Christ to priests alone. Moreover this power of binding and loosing is a very ample one, and embraces various particulars, as I have shown in chapter xvi. 19.

Observe here the beautiful order of Christ’s discourse. In the beginning of the chapter, when the Apostles were disputing about precedence, He puts the humility of the little ones, as it were a bridle upon them: and warns them lest by their ambition they offend the simple folk, and those who are as yet feeble in the faith of Christ. Then in verse 15, He gives a remedy against scandal, brotherly correction; and He says all these things to the Apostles, as representing all the faithful. Then because He gives as the final stage of correction, that the Church must be told, that is to say, the Prelate of the Church, He intimates what His authority is, by saying, *whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, &c.* For this power of binding and loosing appertains to Prelates, not to the rest of the faithful.