

Remit or Retain sins

John 20:23 *Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

This is one of the most misinterpreted and misunderstood passages in the Word of God. The interpretation of this verse has been the subject of debate for many years.

What has been believed and has been taken out of this passage:

- 1) Certain members of the clergy have the authority to forgive sins. We should therefore go to them and repent of our sins.
 - i) This is not what this passage teaches. No man has been given the power and authority to forgive sins. Forgiveness of sins comes only in one way—not by confessing our sins, but by believing and confessing Jesus who died on the cross for our sins. No man has the power to forgive sins. Only God does possess such power and has delegated such power to us in certain circumstances limited to only other sins besides not believing on Jesus as our Lord and Savior. With that in mind, we have not been given to remit one primary sin—the sin of not believing on Jesus. This can only be remitted by believing that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose again from the dead.
 - ii) However, it is certain that it does not mean that we have the ability to justify a person from their sins and enable them to be born again. Only God possesses such power.
- 2) Another interpretation or application of this passage has been that when we fail to witness, then we are retaining people's sins unto them and if we do witness to them, we are remitting their sins.
 - i) Nothing can be further from the truth. This is not what this passage is teaching, and that teaching cannot be backed by other passages of scripture. We want to witness to others, but not for the purpose of remitting people's sins, but so that they can receive forgiveness through faith in Jesus, not intercession or remittance of the believer or the church. If for some reason we did not witness to them, we do not have this put on us as our responsibility. That is not sound bible interpretation and teaching. This passage is not advocating that we can forgive sins.

What is it teaching then?

This is parallel to Matthew 18:17-18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

This passage is dealing with the momentary effects of sin in a person's life. Sin has temporary effects it brings in our lives. These effects could be emotional or physical. These have certain destructions and hurts they cause in our lives. **The power that Jesus gave us is to remit the consequences of sin temporarily in one's life, not for eternal purposes.** This is not a substitute for putting faith in Jesus. We just can't have another person remit these sins through prayer. One must believe in Jesus to remit the biggest sin of not believing in Jesus as one's savior.

We can remit one's sins (consequences) through intercession and praying that even as one has sowed in the flesh and is sown to reap the corruption of the flesh (Galatians 6:8), that person is protected and spared from reaping that corruption. In prayer or intercession, we break the hold of Satan over them and loose them from any Satanic bondage. Because this is a temporary fix for that situation, it must be consistently repeated if the person we are praying for is continuing to live in sin and rebellion.

The other side of this is the power to **retain** people's sins (consequences) **through withdrawing our intercession in hopes that the person will reap what he sowed, and it causes him to turn back to God.** When one is not responding to direction and correction and we have remitted their sins as mentioned above, we need to then retain their sins to them so that they can learn through the pain of the consequences of their sin and become aware of the need to repent. This is not punitive, but it is done for redemption purposes. It is done to help the person repent.

This is similar to what Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 ¹ *It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.* ² *And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.* ³ *For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,* ⁴ *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,* ⁵ *To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

- a) Paul recommended that the church retain this man's sins by withdrawing intercession, relationship, and fellowship from him. He would be turned unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh and reaping what he had sowed.

In 1 Timothy 1:19-20, It speaks of two men who began to blaspheme. What Paul did was to use his God-given authority to remit and retain the sins of these men which was intended to clean the church of this leaven. Paul had the authority to bind and loose given to him in Matthew 18:17-18.

This could have been the same ploy used by Peter in purging the early church of this deception and greed of Ananias and Sapphira, although it looks a lot more severe. Nonetheless, the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The church was still at an infant stage and if this sin was left to abound, it would have destroyed the body.

A practical role a church can play I have experienced

When I refer to the church, I'm not speaking of the church building. I'm referring to the body of believers.

I heard of a story of a man of God who was married, and his wife was pastoring in one country, and he was in another. I heard that she refused to move to where he was to support and pastor alongside him and she demanded that he be the one to move where she was, leaving the work he was doing to go support her and her cause, by default trying to assume the position of the head rather than the helpmeet (Genesis 2:18). Her approach was scripturally perverted, and it destroyed their marriage. The wife, while she was doing a good cause in the ministry, was out of order.

What does the church have to do? What role can it play to ensure that the wife goes to support her husband and be the helpmeet (Genesis 2:18) God created her to be? Does the Church need to withdraw fellowship and support? I believe so, if she is in rebellion.

If a wife is not willing to move to support her husband, I believe the local church has to apply all **kinds of pressure to force her or put her in a position of no options and alternatives, but to go be with her husband**. This approach could be a last resort or first depending on the person being dealt with and the circumstance. If the church continues rendering support, it will enable her to stay and not go.

I know of a godly woman who housed a newly married young woman but realized if she did not force her out, she would never go to live with her husband. She realized she needed to kick her out of her house so she could go be with her husband while she was pretending and coming up with constant excuses and not wanting to move where he was. Finally, because she had no place to stay, that decision from the woman of God she lived with forced her to move.

In both these scenarios (the wife pastor and the married young woman), the church (body of believers) needed to withdraw **fellowship, physical and financial support, and babysitting help**, etc (all symbolism of retaining sins)—and she will move. If she is pastoring in a different location apart from her husband, she needs to resign and relocate to him. This is one of the ways to keep that relationship and marriage intact, but if the church does not do that, she may never do the right thing. There comes a time when some (babes) need to be compelled to do the right thing while they are still in a place of either immaturity, ignorance, or rebellion. This is one of the ways to achieve that.

In conclusion, the man is the head of the home. He is the CEO and there is an anointing to lead and be the head. While one can take the position from someone of a CEO, but you can't take the anointing (God's divine enabling ability and empowerment). You aren't anointed to be the head. Saul was the head, but David was the "anointed head". Who will do better?