

14. OBSTACLES TO FORGIVENESS

1. The "obstacles" in view here are subtle and systemic.
2. The so-called "healing of the memories." The idea is that unpleasant memories can be erased by "healing" them through psychological techniques. Is such a practice Christian?
 - a. The center of concern is for *oneself*.
 - b. The method becomes an "obstacle" because it *bypasses* the scriptural way of dealing with the past — through the loving confrontation, repentance, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
 - c. The "sufferer" is urged to "visualize" Jesus in the hurtful, remembered experience, assuring him or her that his healing presence will extract the bad effects from the experience.
 - d. What's wrong with this?
 - (1) There is nothing in the Bible about any such process.
 - (2) There is little or no concern shown for the offender.

Healing of the memories is a dangerous, inadequate substitute for the real thing. It is dangerous in that it leaves unforgiven and unreconciled the relationships of persons who thereby remain in wrong relationship to God as well. It is inadequate in that it fails to resolve the real problem underlying bad memories — lack of forgiveness. (Adams, 120)
 - e. Following the biblical injunctions regarding loving confrontation, conviction, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation is *not to make ourselves feel better*, but to restore the offender and heal the broken relationship, nevertheless, an (incidental) by-product is the genuine and lasting removal of the hurtful memories.

When one no longer brings up a matter to an offender, to anyone else, or even to himself, according to the promise "not to remember," he discovers that forgetting occurs more rapidly and more completely than he expected. (Adams, 120)

When he builds a new relationship with the offender, made possible only by forgiveness, and begins to see in him works appropriate to his repentance, focus on the forgiven brother or sister's past wrongdoings is replaced by pleasure and gratitude arising from his present righteous acts and attitudes. (Adams, 120–121)
3. Psychological "labeling."
 - a. Is the problem with people sin or "sickness?" If we misdiagnose, it will be easy to look for help in the wrong direction, from the wrong source, and perhaps even exacerbate the problem.

- b. Psychological/psychiatric "labels" are (at best) *descriptive*, but they are often taken to be *prescriptive* as well. Presuppositions are determinative. Frequently, these labels are allowed to become obstacles to dealing with sin in the proper biblical way.

The inevitable result is that sins — genuine violations of God's law — are redefined and excused; repentance, confession, and forgiveness are bypassed; and the brother who was wronged is left without recourse. Or on the other hand the wrongdoer is left in his sin and guilt, unforgiven, with all the dire consequences that arise from unforgiven sin. The devil has found a way, through psychotherapeutic terminology and categories, to effectively neutralize Matthew 18! (Adams, 123)

- c. What can be done about this problem?

(1) First, you must *recognize* the truth of the situation.

(2) Then, you must *instruct* others in *truly biblical counseling* that recognizes sin as sin, and show how to deal with problems through forgiveness.

(3) Above all, you must *do all God requires* you to do in the situation.