

Count It Not Against Them

Acts 7:51-8:13 As Stephen was being stoned he prayed. "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60, KJV).

I never understood the importance of Stephen's prayer that day until I attended a seminar on forgiveness. This seminar opened my eyes to the importance of remitting the sins of others. Jesus gave this power to His disciples and to all those who would believe after them. John 20:21-23 records this vital impartation of power: "Peace be unto you: as my Father has sent me, even so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins you retain, they are retained" (KJV).

In this passage in Acts Stephen remitted the sins of those who stoned him. He prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Saul was present at the stoning of Stephen. The Scriptures say, "And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58). Later we are told by Scripture that "Saul was consenting unto his death." It was through this prayer of Stephen's that Saul was open to hear from God on the Damascus Road. Stephen's prayer paved the way for Saul's conversion. We can do the same through praying for others in this way. First John 5:16 tells us how to pray for those we see sin. "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that."

Instead of criticizing and judging a brother when we see him sin, we should pray for him. We should cry out as Stephen did

to the Lord, "Count it not against him." What happens when we remit the sin of another? We first must confess if we have committed a similar sin. We first must remove the beam from our own eye before we can pray effectively for the one that we see sin. When we remit a person's sins, that person is then able to hear the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit, and that person can then come to repentance. We are also praying for the protection of that person until that day when he repents and is cleansed from that sin. What a privilege we have as priests to remit the sins of others so Satan will not take advantage of them in their sinful state.

**READ: 1 Kings 8:1-66; Acts 7:51-8:13; Psalm 129:1-8; Proverbs
17:1**