

FORGIVENESS:
Will That Be One Goat Or Two?
Message 2
Date: Jan. 16, 11
Scripture: Matthew 18:15-20

INTRO: Forgiveness, will that be one goat or two? Does the Bible teach unconditional forgiveness, or does it teach conditional forgiveness? That is our subject. In the first message we said that the major issue lies in the question; Can man truly forgive his fellow man without repentance first taking place? We know one thing for certain, God cannot and God will not. There can be no question about that. And I have said that if man can forgive without repentance taking place and it works, man is capable of something God is not capable of.

I want to make available to you a message done by Reg Kelly which you can also download from sermonaudio.com. It is called, "When Forgiveness Will Not Work." As always, use discretion as you listen. There are a number of copies available after the service and if there are not enough we will make more. His view is that unconditional forgiveness is as bad as Catholicism's sale of indulgences. In other words, unconditional forgiveness encourages sin.

This morning we want to look at the two positions of unconditional or conditional forgiveness in a little more detail. We will begin by looking at the unconditional position first. This is what I call one sided or one goat forgiveness.

II. THE TWO POSITIONS

A. Unconditional Forgiveness

1. Definition

We begin then with a definition of this position. This view basically says that forgiveness should be extended to our fellow man even if repentance does not take place. In Christianity today, the most common view of forgiveness is this view. In a little longer form, here is how I would define unconditional forgiveness: *When I am wronged, I must forgive on the spot; no conditions, simply forgive. To*

fail to forgive is to harbor an unforgiving spirit and will lead to bitterness.

And so, if I do not forgive immediately when I have been wronged, I am committing a very big error. Jesus, when He hung on the cross forgave those who crucified Him and they had not repented and we are to forgive like Christ forgave. Stephen, when he was stoned, forgave those who stoned him though they had not repented. This is the biblical thing to do. We too, must forgive unconditionally.

2. Explanation

So, let me explain this view. Let us begin with the NISBE. Here is what they have to say about this: "Forgiveness is always a matter of divine privilege rather than human right, for the price of sin must first be paid before the conditions can exist for forgiveness to become a reality. Thus, when under the New Covenant the vicarious atonement of Christ on Calvary is appropriated personally by penitence and faith, the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin, and results in pardon, peace, and the restoration to favor" (340). That is all correct. Then later they write, "It is not to be supposed, however, that failure to repent on the part of the offender releases the offended from all obligation to extend forgiveness. Without the repentance of the one who has wronged him he can have a forgiving state of mind. This Jesus requires, as is implied by, 'if you do not forgive your brother from the heart' (Mt. 18:35). It is also implied by the past tense in the Lord's Prayer: 'as we also forgive our debtors' (6:12). It is this forgiving spirit that conditions God's forgiveness of our sins (Mk. 11:25; Mt. 6:14f.)."

In brief, if you have been wronged, repentance must take place before restoration can happen. But, the wronged person is still to have a 'forgiving state of mind'. The problem is there is a vast difference between a forgiving state of mind and forgiving. A forgiving state of mind

does not bring about true reconciliation, real forgiveness does. A forgiving state of mind is not forgiveness. Those who hold this position give Mark 11:25 as evidence. But Mark 11:25 does not speak of a forgiving state of mind but of forgiveness.

Now let us consider this teaching in the words of MaClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia. I have told you before that this encyclopedia was written long ago and in their article they quote from the 'Zion's Herald', January 2, 1867. You will have to listen carefully. They write: "Some confound things that are separate and different the act of forgiving with the act of loving with approbation. - **Repentance and confession are indispensable, when one has intentionally injured us in any way, to restore him to our fellowship and approbation. But what is a necessary condition of this is not a necessary condition of forgiving.**" Here is what they are saying. When a relationship has been broken by sin, in order to restore the relationship, repentance HAS to take place. But, you can forgive without reconciliation taking place. Think that through and see if you can make your mind play enough tricks to accept that.

Then they go on like this, "Blending these two things together, and thinking of them as if they were one and inseparable, has doubtless caused some to differ in opinion from others who clearly discern the proper distinctions." What are they saying? To say that forgiveness and reconciliation go hand in hand is to fail to make the proper distinctions. I scratch my head when I hear learned people say such things.

Then they go on like this, **"It is a mistaken idea that in the matter of forgiveness we are strictly to imitate God the Father, and not forgive those who trespass against us until they repent and ask our pardon."** Again, what are they saying? They are saying God only forgives after repentance, but it is a mistaken idea that we strictly imitate Him in this. God only forgives after repentance, but we must forgive even if

there is no repentance. But, the Bible says we are to forgive like Christ forgives. And how does He forgive? Only after repentance. But we are not to STRICTLY follow His example?

They give a lot of verbiage then, but end like this, "**Hence there is an objective and a subjective view to be taken of the duty of forgiveness – an act in the heart, and an appropriate outward and formal expression of it. The former should be performed at once, to prevent greater evil to ourselves, while the latter may wisely be delayed until the proper occasion for it arrives.**" Let me explain this.

According to them, there are two *forgivenesses*, if that is a word. There is the forgiveness you extend before a person repents. That is subjective forgiveness. It is forgiveness from the heart. The second forgiveness is objective forgiveness. That is the forgiveness you extend when the person actually does repent. Now they are quoting an article from the Zion's Herald, January 2, 1867. So this unconditional view is not entirely a newborn.

-Now John MacArthur claims he is an 'unconditional forgiveness' preacher. But then he says this, "It is obvious from Scripture that sometimes forgiveness must be conditional. For example, in certain cases the offender is to be confronted and ultimately even excommunicated from the church if he or she refuses to repent (Luke 17:3; Matt. 18:15-17)" (119). So is he a conditional or unconditional preacher? In the true sense of the word he is a conditional view preacher.

MacArthur later writes, "If we were obligated to confront one another for every paltry misdeed, we would be doing little else. Indeed, Scripture gives us another principle for dealing with the vast majority of petty infractions: overlook the offense. Forgive unilaterally, unconditionally. Grant pardon freely and unceremoniously" (120).

Now MacArthur commits an error in the sections I quoted. He says Scripture instructs that in some cases forgiveness is conditional and he gives Luke 17:3 and Matthew 18:15-17 and he is correct. But then he says, "If we were obligated to confront one another for every paltry misdeed, we would be doing little else. Indeed, Scripture gives us another principle for dealing with the vast majority of petty infractions: overlook the offense. Forgive unilaterally, unconditionally. Grant pardon freely and unceremoniously"

The way I view it he makes a very obvious error here and that is equating *overlooking* with *forgiving*. He says Scripture gives another principle and he calls that 'to overlook'. Again, that is correct. The Biblical word is 'forbearance'. But then he defines this 'overlooking'. He says it is to, "Forgive unilaterally, unconditionally. Grant pardon freely and unceremoniously." That is a major error! Just check the meaning of those two words. We will be looking at this later in the series.

3. Reasons for this view

Now, we ask the question, why do people believe in unconditional repentance? What are the reasons for this view? Well, it is, as I see it, because certain passages taken without consideration of the whole subject lend themselves to that such a view. We will look at those later. But beyond that, there are certain other matters that cause one to think this way.

-First, it is viewed that a person who does not forgive unconditionally is carrying an unforgiving spirit and in the end it will creep into bitterness. The way to avoid an unforgiving spirit is to forgive, even if there is no repentance.

-Second, it is viewed that if a person does not forgive, is he holding a grudge. It is either forgive or hold a grudge. But is it true? Well,

what is a grudge? Webster's 1828 dictionary says of the verb to grudge, that it is to murmur, to repine or to complain. Of the noun it says it is sullen malice or malevolence; ill will; secret enmity or hatred. So, if somebody has wronged you and you do not forgive, is that the only way you can act as a Christian? God forbid! We will see that later as well.

Now if a wrong has taken place between two Christians, is your only option to forgive or to carry a grudge? I can say from experience that is not so. Secondly, I believe that when somebody has wronged you and a feeling has come between you, that is an offense has taken place, and you greet each other and act as if everything is OK, that is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy deceives people. Hypocrisy is being two faced.

So, what is the answer. The answer is to do what the Bible says, and it says if your brother sins against you, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him. And if he does not repent? Take one or two with you and if that fails, take it to the church and if that fails, he is to be excommunicated, not forgiven. The Scriptures tell us how to deal with matters when we are sinned against.

-Another reason people believe in unconditional forgiveness is that it is the only way to avoid bitterness. If I do not forgive, it is a given that I will become bitter. The only way to keep from becoming bitter is to forgive. But is that correct? No. We will see later how to deal with matters when we are wronged by believers and how to deal with them when we are wronged by unbelievers, but never are we told to forgive, when no repentance has taken place.

-There is yet another reason given why we must forgive, even though there is no repentance. It is that if we do not forgive, that means we must avenge ourselves, and the Bible says we are not to do that. Here is what McClintock and Strong say: "It is a mistaken idea that in the matter of forgiveness we are strictly to imitate God

the Father, and not forgive those who trespass against us until they repent and ask our pardon. God is clothed with the responsibilities of moral government over his creatures, while we are not. If he had made it our duty to revenge our own wrongs, and administer just punishment to the doers of the wrong, then it would be right and wise to follow his example in that particular. But the case is far otherwise. The Lord not only relieves us of that responsibility, but has commanded us not to usurp his prerogatives: 'Avenge not yourselves.'" But, I ask, do we have only two options; forgive or take revenge? No. We will see that later.

Well, so go the reasonings of well intentioned Christians who hold to unconditional forgiveness. So we go to the view that forgiveness is conditional.

4. Scriptures used for this view

Probably the most used Scripture is Mark 11:25. It says, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." If one were to take this verse alone, the natural conclusion would be that of unconditional forgiveness. But it is an established principle that one's interpretation of one verse must not contradict the clear teaching of other verses. One must deal carefully in establishing doctrines, using the Scriptures that bear on that particular subject.

For example, if we should establish the doctrine of salvation on John 3:16 alone, we would conclude that repentance is not necessary ofr salvation. The only thing required is to believe. But that would contradict other clear passages that require repentance as well (Mark 1:15). It is a major theological error of the Church today to offer salvation simply on the basis of believing.

When Jesus came preaching the Gospel, Mark 1:15 says that He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel." In Luke 13:1-5 He said, "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

There are two requirements of man to have his sins forgiven so that he might be saved: repentance and faith. So we cannot base our entire doctrine of salvation on one verse, not even John 3:16. Nor can we base our entire doctrine of forgiveness on Mark 11:25. Divine forgiveness is conditioned on repentance, that is indisputable. But we can go even farther and say that human forgiveness is conditioned on repentance as well. Consider Luke 17:1-3 "Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." I don't think any Scripture could be more clear on this subject.

Here are some other Scriptures that are often used and most of them will be explained later as we go along in this series but you may wish to look at them (Matt. 18:35; Matthew 6:12; Matthew 6:14-15).

I do want to take a little time with two much misunderstood passages. The first is when Jesus

hung on the cross. It is understood that when He hung on the cross He forgave those who crucified Him, though they had not repented, and that is not in the biblical record. You must see this for yourself so turn to Luke 23 (read verse 32-34). Now look at the verse very carefully and do not let me misread it, "Father, I forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." What is wrong with that? I read it the way it is almost universally understood.

Second, whom did Jesus ask God to forgive? Pilate? The Jewish Sanhedrin that brought Him to Pilate? The army that brought Him to the Sanhedrin? No. He is looking down at the soldiers who are doing what they were told to do. I ask you, were those soldiers responsible for this dastardly deed? Or was it those who commissioned them to do it? Third, His request was that God would forgive them. Did God forgive them? We are not told. Fourth, His request that God would forgive them was on the ground of their ignorance, for He said, "They know not what they do." Think this through before you view this verse as saying Jesus forgave them. He did not.

It is also said that Stephen forgave those who stoned him before they repented. So we go to Acts 7 (read 59-60). Did Stephen say, "Lord, I do not lay this sin to their charge?" No, he did not. He requested that God would not. Do you think God did not? Adolf Eichmann, who said he had his feet hanging over six million Jews was apprehended and put on trial before a non Christian tribunal. He said, "How can you blame me for this. I only did what Hitler told me to do." And do you know what this unbelieving tribunal said? "Hang him."

Now I want to take you to one more Scripture. I want to take you to a Scripture that tells us how Christians respond once they get to heaven after they have been killed here on earth like Stephen was. Do you know what they say? Go with me to Revelation 6 (read verse 9-10). And do you know what God said to them? Here is what He

said, "Away with such non Christian thinking. You are in heaven now and you must not think like that. You are perfect now and you cannot sin here, so never say things like that again in my heaven!" Just imagine how ungodly those martyrs are, saying things like that in heaven. And they are in a place where you cannot sin! What do you think anybody in today's church would say if somebody said such things before he died! But what did God say? (read 11).

When I went to Bible school and I learned the book of Psalms. And our teachers did not know, like many Christians today, how to treat the imprecatory Psalms. To imprecate is to call down judgment on others. Last week my wife read a portion of an imprecatory Psalm to me. Come with me to one last Scripture, Psalm 139 (read 19-24). Did you notice in what context the last two verses we are so familiar with were given?

"But," you say, "that is the OT!" And I answer that Revelation 6 is in the NT. I ask you, do you know how to deal with the imprecatory Psalms, or other such Scriptures? I remind you that they are part of the Bible. I think if we read them and let them sink down into our souls, they would help balance out our present teaching on unconditional eternal security, unconditional love, and unconditional forgiveness.

CONCL: This morning we have very briefly looked at the view that says we must unconditionally forgive our fellow man. Though, mind you, God cannot, we must. The basic reason for this view is that if you do not forgive that means you are carrying a grudge, you will be angry and you will become bitter. But when this is handled biblically none of these are true!

Did Jesus forgive those who crucified Him before they repented? No! I did not mention it earlier, but do you know on what ground He asked God to forgive his executioners? Their ignorance. Did Stephen forgive those who stoned him? No! We do know from Scripture that punishment in hell is lessened if the sins were done in ignorance? Read Luke 12.

The question remains, should believers forgive before repentance takes place? A better question is, can you truly forgive if no repentance takes place? If they extend forgiveness before repentance, is such a sin actually forgiven? Think that through during this next week.