

FORGIVENESS:
Will That Be One Goat Or Two?
Message 7
Date: 3/13/2011
Scripture: Luke 17:1-10

INTRO: We have now laid the theological groundwork for an understanding of forgiveness according to the Bible. We started with a divine problem. Man had sinned and how can God justly restore sinful man to Himself. Justice requires that every sin receive its just due, but if that happened to man, all would die and go to hell. Well, God found a way. He took man's punishment of death Himself and then required two things from man; repentance and faith.

I gave you the story of Timothy McVeigh. He murdered 168 people in the Oklahoma bombing. Christians all over called for the unconditional forgiveness of Timothy McVeigh. Signs were put out, "We forgive you Timothy McVeigh". And while they poured out forgiveness to this unrepentant murderer he said to the families of his victims: "You're not the first grandparent to lose a granddaughter or a grandson. I'll use the phrase – and it sounds cold, but I'm sorry, I'm going to use it, because it's the truth – *get over it.*"

Well, we saw that there are two views to forgiveness by Christians. The vast majority hold to unconditional forgiveness, while a small percent, among whom I am, say that true forgiveness requires repentance first. We have seen this verified in the feast of the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament and in a parable given by Jesus in the NT.

And so, out of all the foregoing, let me spell out for you the series premise. A premise is a proposition that serves as ground for argument or for a conclusion. As I give my premise you will find it nothing new because this is what I have been telling you all along. So, here is my premise. Forgiveness can only truly happen if the condition of repentance is met. Forgiveness is conditional. Unconditional forgiveness is not forgiveness at all. One goat will not suffice to complete the biblical picture of forgiveness. I trust the parable that Jesus gave on this subject is sufficient evidence that repentance precedes forgiveness.

With all that we have covered I want to briefly discuss this series premise and then give you a comprehensive

definition of forgiveness in order to give evidence for the premise. I would normally give that at the beginning of a series but have left it until now because the majority of listeners would not understand or agree with the definition due to the fact that very, very few have ever studied this subject. They have simply accepted that which is commonly taught.

VII. THE SERIES PREMISE - define rep somewhere in message?

A. Brief Discussion

So, for our brief discussion. In my studies I have concluded that the matter of forgiveness is a part of a larger topic, the topic is that of the restoration of a broken relationship. Restoration presupposes a break in a relationship. When man sins, he offends Almighty God and man's relationship is cut off from God. For this reason Ephesians calls such people 'dead in trespasses and sins.' When that happens, before things can come back to normal, restoration has to take place. And for restoration to take place, a number of things have to happen, one of which is forgiveness.

We will take man's relationship to God to understand this concept. We go back to man's very first relationship. When Adam sinned, the relationship between God and man was broken. The offense was man's disobedience to the command of God. It was sin. The offender was man. The offended was God. In order for reconciliation to take place, the anger of the offended has to be 'satisfied'. The anger I am talking about is not the outbreak of a tantrum or any such thing, but that feeling of offense that harms the relationship. The character of God is offended by sin.

Now the price for sin is beyond man's capacity to pay. We saw this in Matthew 18. Man can never do enough good to make up for one sin. So, for reconciliation to take place, justice regarding the wrongdoing has to take place first. The only justice that satisfies God's wrath over sin is the death of the sinner. But if man were to give his life for his sin, he could never be saved. And so, because of God's great love for man, He resolved to seek to

restore man to His favor. The very first thing God had to do was find a way to pay for man's sin without man dying for it. If man was punished by the just price of his sin he would die, but he could never be saved then. How will God pay for man's sin without man dying for it?

God found a way that not even the devil could have foreseen. God would become man, and take the place of man in death. He would pay for man's sin out of His own pocket, so to speak. Here is the picture of the first goat on Atonement Day.

But simply the payment for sin alone does not complete what is necessary for restoration. If it did, every sinner would have been restored to God when Jesus died on the cross. But Jesus' death on the cross does not restore man's relationship with God. God has done His part, now man has to do his part. What God requires from man to be restored to Him is twofold: repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is the second goat. The sins of Israel were confessed over the second goat, and then it was sent away. There is repentance and forgiveness.

So, for man to be restored to God's favor, man's sin must be dealt with. God's anger against sin must be 'propitiated', satisfied. Then man must repent and believe. It is then, that reconciliation can take place. John MacArthur, in his book on forgiveness, says, "Reconciliation to God presupposes complete forgiveness" end quote(15). Before reconciliation can take place, forgiveness must take place. No options. For this reason God paid for man's sin in Christ. Forgiveness is available to every person. But God has so set out forgiveness that it requires repentance and faith to appropriate this forgiveness.

Now the problem of reconciliation between God and man is twofold; God's anger must be resolved and man must be brought to repentance and faith. Before we are saved, we are at enmity with God. There is animosity from us toward God. So man must be brought to repentance before any reconciliation can take place. So John MacArthur says, "...the greatest impediment to our salvation is not even our hostility against

God. It is His wrath against us" (17). Later he says, "The wrath of God against sin therefore poses the biggest obstacle of all to any sinner's forgiveness" (19).

Then he writes this very helpful paragraph, "So how does God reconcile sinners to Himself? On what grounds can He extend forgiveness to sinners? Here we are brought face to face with the need for atonement. If God's wrath is to be satisfied, if God is going to be propitiated to the sinner, a suitable atonement is required. God must fulfill the demands of justice by pouring out His wrath on a substitute. Someone must bear the sinner's punishment vicariously" end quote (19). Now, that is one theologically loaded paragraph.

So in support of the premise I have given, let me give a precise and extended definition of forgiveness from the Bible as I understand it.

B. Comprehensive Definition

1. Precise Definition

It is crucial on any subject that one define it. For example, if you should talk to a Mormon and you were discussing the new birth and he agreed with you as to its necessity, you would need to see if you and he are talking about the same thing. When a Mormon uses the phrase 'the new birth' he does not mean what you mean. You may think he agrees with you but he does not. Definition is essential. But before I do that, let me point out that forgiveness is one link in a chain of events. Let me give these first and then define forgiveness as I see it.

It all begins with a relationship between two people. So we begin with a relationship that is whole. Two people can freely communicate. Then one person sins against the other, and the relationship is broken. This is what happened between Adam and Eve and God in the Garden of Eden. Then a wall comes between these two parties by the sin of the one against the other. In order to restore the relationship, the offended person,

the one sinned against, must be propitiated, or satisfied. This is justice. Since Christ died for us, that justice has happened, but now, to bring it into effect in this relationship, the offender needs to repent. When the offender has repented, now the forgiveness of the offended one needs to be extended. When that happens, the relationship is restored to wholeness. So repentance is the last thing that takes place before the relationship is restored.

And so, as we set out to look at this subject of forgiveness, I want to define for you what I believe it is. So here is my definition:

"Forgiveness is the sending away or bearing away of a sin or sins based on the death of Christ for that sin and the repentance of the offender, which relieves the anger of the offended and the guilt of the offender and provides everything needed to reconcile their relationship to wholeness."

Now to understand that definition we need to go through it point by point and we will do so by expanding the definition.

2. Expanded Definition

a. The major point

The major point of this definition, grammatically is that forgiveness is the 'sending or bearing away of a sin or sins'. The OT word for forgiveness is *nasa*.

The word translated 'to forgive' in the NT is *aphieemi*. It comes from two words, apo = from + hiemi = to send. The basic idea is 'to send away'. When sin is borne away, or sent away, it is forgiven. Forgiveness sends away the sin. One sided, or one goat forgiveness does not send the sin a way. Subjective forgiveness does not send the sin away. Only when repentance has taken place can forgiveness be extended and the sin sent away. Forgiveness sends the sin away.

So we now want to look at this definition of forgiveness in its modifying parts.

b. The modifying points

-Its basis

We have said, "*Forgiveness is the sending away or bearing away of a sin or sins based on the repentance of the offender...*" So what we have here first is the basis of forgiveness, and that is the death of Christ for our sins and then the repentance of the offender. Second, it is the sending away of the offense by the offended party. When repentance has taken place by the offender, forgiveness is to take place on the part of the offended person. Failure to forgive after the offender has repented is a wrong of the highest order! We have seen this already. The offended party is to send the sin away. So we said in the definition, "*Forgiveness is the sending away or bearing away of a sin or sins based on the repentance of the offender...*"

-Its effects - restoration of relationship

Now, what are the effects of repentance and forgiveness? When repentance has taken place the offense is sent away. So we said, "*Forgiveness is the sending away or putting away of a sin or sins based on the repentance of the offender...*" But then we went on to say that repentance and forgiveness is that, "*...which relieves the anger of the offended and the guilt of the offender and provides everything needed to reconcile their relationship to wholeness.*"

True forgiveness provides the last part of what is necessary to restore the relationship to wholeness. True forgiveness brings about reconciliation. John MacArthur says, "Reconciliation to

God presupposes complete forgiveness" (JM pg 15). That is, there is no reconciliation between God and the sinner until forgiveness has taken place. But, when forgiveness has taken place, reconciliation takes place. I hold that the very same thing holds true when people forgive each other.

C. Conclusion

So my conclusion on this subject is that when one person has sinned against another, in order for reconciliation to take place repentance and forgiveness must happen, and in that order. When we say we forgive without repentance, that is not forgiveness. As a matter of fact, when a Christian wrongs a Christian, and we forgive without repentance, we are disobedient to the commands of Scripture.

The Bible does not say, "If your brother sins against you, forgive him." That is unbiblical. (Luke 17; Matthew 18).

VI. THE RELATIONAL POINTS

We want to go over to another point now. In forgiveness, it is usually relationships that are involved. Sin does not always involve relationships. When Timothy McVeigh murdered 168 people in the Oklahoma bombing he had no relationship with most if not all the people who had relatives killed in that bombing. But he had blood on his hands that could only be cleansed by forgiveness and it could only be cleansed by those whom he affected. In that event all kinds of people extended forgiveness to him that had absolutely no relationship to those who were killed at all. Does that kind of forgiveness cleanse? It does not. When somebody sins against you, can I forgive him? No.

But in most events forgiveness involves relationships. I see seven phases in relationship restoration when the relationship has been broken by sin.

A. Relationship - A relationship, such as we are talking about is the unbroken communion between two or more people. One person cannot have a relationship. It takes two or more. The depth of relationship will vary from one person to another, but there is still a relationship. Jesus had a closer relationship to many of His followers than he had with others. He had a closer relationship with the 12 disciples than with all others. He had a still closer relationship with three of His disciples than with the other 9. Then He had a special relationship with one disciple, and that was John. But they were all relationships.

Relationships are very important. When God would render the most serious command between Christians to correct one another He instituted excommunication. Excommunication is ex communication. It is the cutting of a relationship between a sinning member who will not repent and the rest of the church. So, the first key point in forgiveness is a relationship.

B. Sin

The second point is sin. Sin between people breaks relationships. A relationship that comes to an end because one person got married and the other did not is not necessarily a bad thing but it may have a deep affect on the relationship. A relationship ended by sin or offence is a bad thing. A relationship between believers that has been broken by sin, but is carried on in public as though nothing were wrong is hypocrisy. Vine's dictionary says, "...it was a custom for Greek and Roman actors to speak in larges masks with mechanical devices for augmenting the force of the voice; hence the word became used metaphorically of a 'dissembler, a hypocrite.'" Hypocrisy looks like one thing on the outside but is different on the inside. When you see an actor's mask, you do not see the real actor. The word 'hypocrite' is used 15 times in the NT and every time by the Lord Jesus, and He very severely condemns it.

C. Separation

The third point in a relationship is separation. When one party sins against the other in a relationship, it usually wants to break the relationship. A wall comes between the offended and the offender. An unhealthy separation has occurred.

D. Propitiation

The fourth point is propitiation. To restore the relationship after sin has occurred, the first thing that has to happen is that the offended must be satisfied with the price the offender is willing to pay. With regard to sin, the price is not payable. No amount of good deeds can pay for sin. So the death of the offender is required. But God took the place of the sinner by way of substitution and paid the price Himself.

When Jesus died on the cross, He paid for all sins. He did not forgive all sins, He paid for them. In that price is included that which is needed to repair human relationships. But though the price has been paid, something is required to put it into effect.

E. Repentance

That brings us to the fifth point. The question is this: What does it take to put the price that has already been paid into effect in human relationships? Since the price for sin was paid by God, what is now required to qualify for forgiveness the one who has wronged another? It is repentance! Repentance is a change of mind and it is this change of mind that changes behavior.

Man's relationship with God can only be fixed by repentance. We saw in Matthew 18, that repentance causes God's compassion to come alive and He forgives. Man's relationship with man can only be repaired by repentance of the wrongdoer as well. It is absolutely amazing what repentance can do. It can stir to compassion very hardened people.

F. Forgiveness

Repentance brings us to the sixth point, and that is forgiveness. When repentance has taken place, the

extension of forgiveness is an obligation for the offended person. It is a very grievous sin not to forgive when repentance has taken place as we have already seen. Forgiveness sends the sin away and promises to never bring it up as an issue again. But forgiveness does not complete the cycle. However, it leads to the last point in the whole process which is reconciliation.

G. Reconciliation

The seventh and last point is reconciliation. Reconciliation becomes the responsibility of the offended party after the repentance of the offending party. Once the offended party restores, the relationship is once more intact. Only after the repentance of the offending party and the forgiveness of the offended party, is true reconciliation possible. Reconciliation does not necessarily mean that the relationship is restored to the same depth as before. Sin wants to always leave scars. But it does mean that the relationship is repaired and can now begin to grow again. It does happen sometimes, that a relationship can advance beyond what it was before.

Now let me deal with one question. When a person has repented of a sin to another and the other does not forgive, what then? What do you do when a person is not willing to forgive after the wrongdoer has repented? I believe the one who has repented is no longer responsible for the relationship. It all lies in the hands of the one who will not forgive. And such a person God will deal with in the debtor's prison, the conscience until he or she is willing to repent and confess.

I believe that Mark 11:25, used almost universally to prove unconditional forgiveness fits right here. I believe in Mark 11:25 Jesus is referring to a person who was wronged and the wrongdoer repented but this person would not forgive. Now he is standing before the Lord to pray and the Lord says, "Don't bother talking to Me until you have taken care of this very serious matter of unforgiveness". The verse reads like this: "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your

Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." So verse 26 says, "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

CONCL: So, in conclusion, having laid the groundwork from which to build a definition, we have now defined forgiveness in detail. Here it is: *"Forgiveness is the sending away or bearing away of a sin or sins based on the death of Christ for that sin and the repentance of the offender, which relieves the anger of the offended and the guilt of the offender and provides everything needed to reconcile their relationship to wholeness."*

Furthermore, we looked briefly at the cycle of a relationship being broken and then brought back to restoration. It begins with a complete relationship when sin separates the relationship. Then comes propitiation followed by repentance which is followed by forgiveness and thus brings about restoration.

And so, these past seven messages now prepare us to deal with some of the nitty gritty issues of life. That is what we plan to do in the next message. If this be true, how then shall we live?