

FORGIVENESS:
Will That Be One Goat Or Two?
Message 9
Date: 4/17/2011
Scripture: Philippians 3:12-16

INTRO: This message was to begin like this: This is the last message on the series on forgiveness. It is now the second to last message. I have to deal with some questions, and then in light of our prophecy conference and the warnings about the NA teachings, or the new spirituality movement, I want to show you the adoption of the NA movement of unconditional forgiveness. One of our church folk alerted me to this as discussed on You Tube by Gerald Jampolski and Diane Cirincione. I am thankful for this information. Let me also encourage you to read the books that Warren Smith has written and you will learn of some of this in his books. So I must give at least a brief warning about this matter.

In the last message we began to consider the practical aspects of the view that forgiveness follows repentance. We looked at the argument most labeled against the view I have been presenting, and that is if you don't forgive, the only other option is to become bitter. We set out the difference of dealing with matters when we are wronged by a believer or an unbeliever. When a believer wrongs us, we do not simply unconditionally forgive. The Bible nowhere instructs that. We have **read that into** several passages but it is never so stated. We said that to keep from becoming bitter we are to rebuke the one who wrongs us. If this fails there are two other steps to follow, and if those fail, the wrongdoer is to be excommunicated. In all of this, we must learn to trust God by faith. The victory comes by obedience to God and faith that He will do what is right.

When we are wronged by an unbeliever, we are to love them; do good to them, and pray for them. To avoid bitterness, we bring this matter to God, place it in His hands, and rest in His promise that if this person does not make it right, He, Almighty God will take vengeance in due time. Victory comes by obeying the Word of God and trusting God by faith in His promises. This is the true way of overcoming bitterness.

Well, we want to look at a few more malpractices. The first is to let time heal.

A. Malpractices

2. Letting Time Heal

Sometimes we think we can get away with dealing with sin between believers by letting time pass. And when enough time has passed and things are forgotten, sometimes the relationship is renewed. So we let time heal things. Herod and Pilate were enemies. And when they had the matter of condemning Christ on their hands, they became friends again, not by dealing with things, but because they had a common enemy.

So, let us say I say something rude to my wife. I have offended her. Then I feel bad. So I wait for a while until things go over a bit and then I do something nice and then things are OK again. Let us say I do something wrong to you and after some time has gone by we both let by-gones be by-gones and then after some time even maybe become friends again.

This kind of dealing with wrong lets 'self' live without going to the cross. To repent, is to say, "My dear, what I said was uncalled for. I was wrong to say that. Would you forgive me for saying those words to you?" This is the way of the cross. The songwriter rightly says 'the way of the cross leads home'.

And beside all that, by truly taking care of sin through repentance and confession, you can save yourself some money too! Now you don't have to take your wife out for supper or buy her roses! And, if you do, now it may be out of true love.

3. The cliché 'forgive and forget'

The cliché 'forgive and forget' is used in the unconditional forgiveness sense. It could go David Jeremiah style. Just pray in the morning before you get up and forgive anybody that might hurt you and then forget it.

What is important to understand is that when repentance and confession have taken place, now

it is time to forgive, and then it is time to forget. And right at this point I want to add a word about forgetting. I will tell you this, forgetting is much easier when true repentance has taken place. But when repentance has not taken place, forgetting is like trying to get out of your mind the fact that a lion is after you when you are running for your life!

Now it is absolutely crucial that we understand what forgetting is. Let me set out two kinds of forgetting. I will give these two kinds of forgetting names from the tenses of the verbs in which they are found. There is past tense forgetting and present tense forgetting.

Let me give past tense forgetting first. You see, usually when we think of forgetting, we are thinking of something that we can no longer recall. That is past tense forgetting. It is forgotten and I can't recall it. Let me give you an example. The NT word to forget is *lanthano*. To forget in the sense that we usually think about is given in Hebrews 12:5 (read). Here the word *eklanthanomai*. It is used in the perfect tense, which is a past tense. Here was something the Hebrews should not have forgotten, but they had. It was something they had forgotten and it didn't come back to mind. That is past tense forgetting and that is what we usually think of when we think of forgetting. Forgetting in this sense does not mean it is erased from our minds. It is there, but refuses to be recalled. In the case of the Hebrews, they forgot something they should not have forgotten, so the writer put it back into their minds again by reminding them.

One day, as Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee with His disciples, He warned them about the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. And the disciples thought He was talking about literal bread and Mark 8:14 says, "Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat." There, again, is past tense forgetting.

But there is another kind of forgetting. It is for things we cannot seem to forget. For example, when a marriage partner is unfaithful, or a child is abused, or you have accidentally killed your own child, these things are not forgotten in the sense we have just talked about. They come back and back and back. They haunt and they hunt until they make a kill. Such things, seemingly, cannot be forgotten.

Jay Adams, in his book on forgiveness, gives a picture through a little story of how impossible such things are to forget. He writes, "A tale is told of a king whose exchequer was running low. So he called all his alchemists and said, 'Fellows, you've been working at this process of turning baser metals into gold for quite some time now. I need gold. This is Monday; I'll give you till Friday to come up with a formula or off go your heads.' Friday came and heads rolled, one after another, until the king came to the last alchemist who said, 'I've got it!' The king replied, 'You'd better, or your head will roll too. Let's hear the formula.'

So the alchemist told him: so much limestone, butterfly wings, a dash of lizard tongue--you name it! When he finished the king said, 'Is that it?' 'That's it,' said the alchemist, and headed for the door. 'Don't leave town,' said the king. 'Right,' said the alchemist. But as he was leaving, he turned and said, 'Oh, I forgot to tell you, King; if you think of an elephant while you are stirring the pot, it won't work.'"

Well, that alchemist lived to a ripe old age, because every time the king stirred the pot, he could not forget that he was not to think about an elephant. Some things are impossible to forget in past tense forgiveness.

So, let me give you some good news. You can forget such things as an unfaithful partner, or abuses of any kind. It was something the Apostle Paul learned to do. You can imagine how often the devil must have tormented him and said, "Oh, you holy and righteous man, how many people did you

not have killed because of the very One whom you now preach. You vile hypocrite. You should crawl in a hole somewhere and die." How many times do you think the devil taunted him with his past? But he learned to forget. Here is the secret. It is present tense forgetting. It is not something that doesn't recall itself to the mind. You can only too readily remember it. It may well be something that torments the mind. So, what is present tense forgetting?

Go with me to Philippians 1 (read 3:13). Now the word to forget here is *epilanthanomai* but now it is in the present tense. Here is the key to forgetting such things that are impossible to forget in past tense forgetting. It is forgetting, present tense; not forgotten, past tense. And how do you keep on forgetting, present tense? You choose to not dwell on it. When it comes, you say, "I will not dwell on this." And it will come again and again, and you say, "I will not let this defeat me. This thing has been repented of and forgiven, and I will not dwell on it." And then it will come again and again. Paul wrote Philippians many years after he became a Christian and he still had not forgotten past tense, but he was still forgetting, present tense.

If someone has wronged you, I do not ask you to forget it without justice happening. If the one who wronged you is a Christian, rebuke him and deal with it whenever possible. If you cannot deal with it or if the one who wronged you was an unbeliever, hand vengeance or justice over to God and say, "Lord, I am content. I know You will take care of this" (Rom. 12:17-21).

4. Apologizing or Saying "I'm Sorry"

Now let us go to the mal-practice of apologizing. I learned something new as I was preparing for this series about apologizing. When I went to Bible school, there was a course we could take called 'Apologetics.' It was a course on defending the faith, and I wondered why a course on defending the faith was called 'Apologetics.' So let me read for you a definition of the word

'to apologize' from Funk and Wagnall's dictionary. It is "to offer or make an excuse; acknowledge, with regret, any fault or offense." Basically, an apology is a defense. That is why the course on defending the faith is called Apologetics. John MacArthur says in his book on forgiveness: "The word *apology* comes from the Greek *apologia*, which literally means 'a speech in defense of.' Apologies are often nothing more than self-defense." End quote.

Generally an apology is the world's substitute for repentance. It is not repentance. When, a few years ago we had all the church problems and I said things needed to be made right I was told many times, "Jesus never demanded an apology." That is correct. But He does require repentance! In Luke 13:1-5, twice He said, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

My wife is reading a book on the fast growing church in China. And the writer gives the one major difference between Chinese and American believers and that difference is that in China **repentance** is deeply stressed. In America it is not. I have come to a solid conviction that the two major things that conform us to the image of Christ are repentance and faith. But we have almost eliminated the need for repentance in personal relationships, and are fast approaching the view that it is not necessary for salvation either. Listen to preachers when they give the sinner's prayer. Listen to the modern gospel. Do you know what it is? It is simply to accept Christ. Often there is no word about repentance! And that is not the Gospel. It is a half a gospel, and it is deadly.

Now let me say this, that there is a proper time to apologize. Remember, an apology is a defense. Let me give you an example. My wife and I were in the city of Edmonton a short while ago. We were in the West Edmonton Mall on a Saturday and it was crowded and busy. As I was walking along in one place while my wife was shopping in a lady's store I was looking off at something. Another person was coming the other way and was looking

off in the other direction and we ran into each other. I did not say, "Oh, forgive me for sinning against you." I said, "Oh, I'm sorry." By that this person knew it was accidental and I felt badly about what had happened. This does not call for repentance, but politeness calls for expressing how badly one feels about having bumped somebody else in a way that seemed rude, but it was an accident. Saying, "I'm sorry" is a defense and it has its place.

When a Christian sins against another, saying, "I'm sorry" will not do. Now repentance is required. So if saying, "I'm sorry" is not enough, what is one to do? Well, you name what you did, that is confession, acknowledge that that was wrong, and then ask for forgiveness. Here is an example: "Tom, could I come see you about what I said to you yesterday." And then when you see him you say, "Tom, yesterday when I said that I had paid \$3000.00 for that car, I lied to you. I actually only paid \$900.00. That is a lie. I'm asking if you would you forgive me for that?" You see, many times we simply want to say, "I'm sorry" but we do not want to name what we did. Confession is to say the same thing. When I confess I say the same thing I did. It is true repentance that brings about confession. You see, before the second goat was sent into the wilderness on the Jewish day of Atonement, Israel's sins were confessed over this goat.

5. Forgiving ourselves

We need to deal with yet another malpractice on forgiveness and that is the idea of 'forgiving ourselves.' Jay Adams says, "Ever since the modern emphasis on self flooded the church, along with the principles of the self-esteem movement, there has been an emphasis on forgiving oneself" (pg. 60). End quote.

There are things we feel we need to forgive ourselves for. Let us say I have run over my own child and killed the child. How do I find relief from guilt? Well, if it was a pure accident, there is nothing to forgive. Is it a sin to have

an accident? So how do you deal with the guilt? I have to learn to believe God. He has said that all things work together for good to those who love God. Do I believe that? So how do I handle this? I say, "Lord, I trusted you before this happened and I trust you now. I do not know why this happened to me. You have said the secret things belong to You and I am willing to leave it with You. In the middle of this, as badly as I feel about this, I trust You."

But what if you were angry. Say the tractor broke down. Your child is underfoot. You tell him to get out of the way and then, just as you get the tractor going, there he is again, begging for a ride. Because you are angry you order him to go home in no uncertain terms and get in your tractor. When all is set, you back up to get around the bin, and unbeknown to you, your son was behind the tire of your big machine and when you have backed up far enough, you see him in front of you, dead. It was an accident, yes. But guilt now runs deeper than on a pure accident. You should have checked to make sure he was clear of where you were going. But the frustration you were experiencing caused you to be careless. Now what do you do?

I would recommend first, to repent before God for being angry and letting that cause you to fail to be alert. After confessing, then accept His forgiveness. Repentance and confession brings about forgiveness. Now comes the need for us to accept that forgiveness, and in such cases this will be very difficult. Second, when you tell your wife and family what happened, confess exactly what happened and ask them to forgive you for the pain and the loss you caused them due to being angry. It is not forgiving yourself, but accepting forgiveness that is the key to such situations.

Recently I was sent a link to U Tube that was a presentation by Jerry Jampolsky and Diane Cirincione. These are NA teachers such as influence Rick Warren, and they said, "You have to forgive yourself too! Some people say you

can't! Oh yes you can!" What began as a faulty Christian teaching has become a full blown New Age concept. The same is true of unconditional forgiveness.

6. Forgiving God

There is another unbiblical expression, and that is forgiving God. An earthquake in Japan has just left thousands with missing relatives. It is possible to be angry about this and even become very bitter. And when our anger is towards God, we feel we need to forgive Him. But, to feel the need to forgive God is to say He sinned! That is horribly out of line! So how do we handle it when circumstances you seemingly can only blame God for cause you to become bitter?

Well, there is a verse of Scripture almost all Christians are familiar with after being a Christian even for a short time, and that is Romans 8:28. It says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." This text says we 'know' this. When we become bitter or angry about situations like I have just mentioned, then we do not yet 'know' this.

Our text also says ALL things. Not almost all things, but ALL things. I have told you about a scholar who did deep studies on the Greek word for 'all' and he found something profound. It means 'all'.

Let me give you a little story, though I have told it to you before. John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He did not marry. He did not have children. He did not have a home the way most normal people do. He lived in the wilderness and he learned the Word of God. He lived on locusts and wild honey. No pleasantries like most of us experience. He preached repentance and as such had to expose sin and sinners. This is an unpopular business. He recognized the urgency of the time to such an extent that he could no longer enjoy what most of

us enjoy. My wife and I have just heard Russ Stendall, a missionary to Columbia. He was chained to a tree for months by the Gorillas. And he said that when he was set free, he could no longer enjoy a Western book or any fiction. So I understand that he got such a hold of the seriousness of life, that he could no longer enjoy such things. That is what John the Baptist was like, only on a much deeper level.

Well, he preached faithfully. One day, he faced that old fox, Herod, up to his sins. He got Herod mad. Herodias, his illegitimate wife too. And Herod put him in prison. And John sat in prison. And he sat there. And he sat there. And then he began to stew there. And finally he could handle it no longer and he sent two of his disciples to Jesus. You see, he realized he was the forerunner of the Messiah. And he know that in a few short years the Messiah would set up his kingdom. Daniel's prophecies were very clear that the time was very close. And surely, for all he had sacrificed he would play a significant part in that long awaited kingdom. But days turn into weeks and weeks into months and he is starting to doubt.

So he called for a few of his disciples and said, "Go and ask Jesus if he is really the Coming One, or do we look for another?" And Jesus said, "You go tell John all the things you hear and see. The blind see. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. Some of the dead are raised. The poor have the Gospel preached to them." Well, that should about do it. John should know who He is from the very things he himself has heard were happening. But then Jesus says, "Oh, by the way. Tell John, 'Blessed is the man who is not offended in Me.'"

Now somebody who feels the need to forgive God has truly only been offended in the Lord. It is a fault, not of the Lord, but the one who is offended. There is NEVER a need to be offended in the Lord. No matter what He allows, we can trust He knows what He is doing. So the true Christian in Japan should be able to say, "The Lord gives

and the Lord takes. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Well, John needed to trust God just a little further. What he did not know was that his ministry was finished and his reward was just before him. And a short while later, he would hear Roman boots making their way to his cell. And in a very short time his head was severed from his body and he went to heaven. I want to ask you this morning, are there things you feel you need to forgive God for? Thank goodness this kind of thinking is quite foreign to our people. But if you feel you need to forgive God for something, acknowledge that God makes no mistakes and then tell Him you are very sorry for doubting Him. Then thank Him for what He has done for you.

CONCL: And so in conclusion, when one believer has sinned against another, letting time heal is a malpractice. It avoids dealing with matters. Forgive and forget is a saying that has its place, but not before repentance has taken place. But when repentance and confession has taken place, and forgiveness is extended, it is time to forget. And what about apologizing? What about self defense? It has its place when an accident has taken place, but it will not do when one person has wronged another, or sinned against the person. Now repentance is due. Apologizing and saying 'I'm sorry' is no substitute for repentance.

Then there is the malpractice of 'forgiving ourselves'. Think that phrase through. It is amazing what we can come up with. It is like we are two people in one. And last, the idea of forgiving God. If you have done that, remember, you have called God a sinner. If you are ever tempted into considering the need to forgive God, remember, you are about to call God a sinner. Never let that happen.