

Biblical Forgiveness- The Application Part 2 Sept 29

There are two general views of forgiveness.

I will not present this perfectly so it is probably something we will need to talk about in Sunday School. And I doubt that anyone perfectly represents either extreme, so the two views may have all kinds of blends.

Both views believe this verse-

Ephesians 4:32 (NKJV)

³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

But they apply them very differently.

For the sake of clarity-

I will call the first view as the **Godly characteristic view** and the second view the **Godly business view**.

I used to believe the Godly Characteristic view. Then over time I came to believe and be convinced that the Godly business view is best. But there are scriptures that back both.

There are a lot of serious scholars (that we like) who hold both views. And they hold them based on lots of scriptures.

The **Godly Characteristics** view says that God is very forgiving. We certainly cannot deny that fact. We are here because God is forgiving and that is wonderful. This view believes that it is a virtue for believers to show relational forgiveness. The essence of this forgiveness is not always that people are truly forgiven by God, but they are humanly restored to fellowship with the person they have wronged. The forgiveness granted is **unconditional**. A person does not need to be truly repentant to be forgiven relationally. They can be sorry. Or in many cases they can be not sorry at all. But they are offered forgiveness **unconditionally** in a gesture believed to represent the forgiveness offered them by God. This is held out as a godly attribute since our God is so wonderfully forgiving. And there are lots of scriptures about God covering sins that would appear to say that this truly is a virtue. The idea is that **to be a forgiving person**, even to people who have not asked for it, is **to reflect the character of God**, a godly characteristic. The virtue is not that God's forgiveness **is conveyed** by the action but His **forgiving characteristic** is represented. The person is not forgiven by God. But fellowship is restored to the people who have wronged us, or we have

released them from the relationship wrongs they have committed against us even if they never ask.

Now I am biased. I do not believe that view. But I would never withhold fellowship from a person who does. And I have to admit that the view **could** be right when it does not include the forgiveness of **discernable intentional sin** within the church. How to handle that kind of sin is clearly prescribed in scripture. John MacArthur makes a good case for the Godly Characteristic view.

I always have to be open to the idea that maybe I believe what I believe because I am old and I have thought a certain way for a long time. But in my mind, it is more like once I have seen something I cannot un-see it.

I believe that forgiveness is conditional. I believe the **Godly Business** view. This view holds that Christians are representing God in the actual **business of forgiveness**. We are saying on earth what God is saying in heaven. And we are pronouncing forgiveness on earth, and we are conveying our whole hearted endorsement of it, based on truths that God has clearly revealed.

I think one of the clearest scriptures that supports this view of forgiveness is found in

John 20:22-23 (NKJV)

²² And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained."

And then again we need to look at the text that Jarrod read this morning.

2 Corinthians 5

¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

I believe that this ministry of reconciliation is what Jesus is talking about in both John and Matthew 18 where our study started. The ministry of reconciliation is calling on **unbelievers** to **come** to Christ and begin a **relationship**, and for believers to **repent** and renew their **fellowship**. It is calling people to reconciliation of first, relationship and then fellowship.

What is reconciliation?

The establishment of friendly relations between parties who are at variance with each other, making peace after an engagement in war, or readmission to the presence and favor of a person after rebellion against the person.

Holman Bible Dictionary.

That is exactly what we have been talking about. I think a usable definition of forgiveness is this. **Forgiveness releases a moral obligation and restores fellowship between parties, but is not void of consequences.**

And we are the ambassadors. And in this case, our role as an ambassador is not just to have the **characteristics** of the country or leader that we represent but to represent that country in **what we pronounce to be true**. We are stating to the dignitaries of another country what our country's leader has authorized us to say. We are conducting our leader's business. What we state is as if God is saying it through us. That is the primary reason that I believe what we are doing in forgiveness is Godly business.

2 Cor 5:20 is all about getting sins forgiven.

When we are involved in the ministry of **reconciling people to God** we represent the interests of God.

Now I think I need to add something here. Wrongs done to us are intertwined with wrongs done to God and our forgiveness to others is intertwined with God's forgiveness to others. An ambassador is free to represent his country in a view that he completely distains, but he must do his job anyway. That is where this imagery falls apart. And I feel I have not done an adequate job of explaining this up till now.

Let's look at Matthew 5

Matthew 5:23-24 (NKJV)

²³ Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Do you see how the reconciliation is entwined here? The worshipper is coming to the alter in worship directly with God. But the worship of God is interrupted by the realization that there is a brother I have sinned against. They are not separate things. My sin against my brother is a sin against my God and it will not do to ignore it.

So I go to my brother and get that fellowship with my brother reconciled.

Guess what. My fellowship with God just got reconciled as well. Forgiveness is never a transaction done at arm's length by a believer. Remember how

Jesus said- ³⁵ **So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."**

We are **doing forgiving** at the same time we are **endorsing God's forgiveness**. And we are doing everything we can to conform **our forgiving** to the way that **God forgivess**. We are asking God to forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

If we forgive a person in Jesus name we must do it **in our hearts** the way God does it in heaven. And that is costly. And to the degree that the sin directly affects us and hurts us, it is to that degree that it is difficult.

I used to think that if I really loved a person that it would make it easier to forgive that person. I was wrong about that. There is an incredible irony about forgiveness. The more you love a person, the more that you have unconditionally committed yourself to that person's well being, the more you have done that, the more deeply their sin affects you. And the more deeply the sin affects you, the more costly it is to forgive them. The irony of forgiveness is that the price goes up the more you love them. How do we know? Who loved us the most? Jesus. Who suffered the most for our sin? Jesus.

A while ago I purchased something online. I thought I was purchasing a product. Then monthly charges started hitting my bank account. I realized I had mistakenly signed up for a monthly service that I was obligated to pay. Has forgiveness ever been like that for you? It has for me. We can hear a confession and say, I forgive you. And we have no idea what are saying. We have no idea what we were committing to. And when the implications of the sin committed begin causing us pain we have to regroup. We have to reorient. We have to reconsider the monthly charges to see if we are willing to pay them. And biblical Christlike forgiveness is saying **yes** from **the bottom of our hearts** to every monthly installment. We cannot expect **love** to take away the price of forgiveness. But we can expect for love to make us **willing** to pay that price.

So while we are carrying out the business of what God is doing, our hearts and actions are intertwined in all of it. If forgiveness is easy, we probably aren't doing it right.

Now back to our Matthew 18 passage. I warned you I would skip around.

¹⁸ **Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**

¹⁹ **Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.**

20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

We are going to focus here on what **God does** and what **a man does** in forgiveness, because this passage can be misunderstood to give a man power over God. And that is not what is going on here.

John MacArthur says this about these passages.

Christ's promise was that when His people bend their wills to His, He will endorse and empower their act of obedience.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Matthew 16-23.

The rabbis sometimes spoke of a principle or action as being bound in heaven or loosed in heaven to indicate, respectively, that it was forbidden or permitted in light of God's revealed Word. A Jew of that day would have understood that Jesus did not mean that men could bend heaven's will to their own but that God (here called heaven, a common Jewish substitute for God's covenant name, Yahweh, or Jehovah) had an expressed principle with which the church must conform.

The grammatical construction in the passage also clarifies its meaning. As in [Matthew 16:19](#), shall be bound and shall be loosed translate future perfect passives and are more accurately rendered "will have been bound" and "will have been loosed." The idea is not that God is compelled to conform to the church's decisions but that, when the church follows Christ's pattern for discipline, it conforms its decisions to what God has already done and thereby receives heaven's approval and authority.

Perfect passives are also used in [John 20:23](#) in regard to forgiving or retaining sins. Believers have authority to declare that Sins are either forgiven or not forgiven when that declaration is based on the teaching of God's Word. If a person has received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the church can tell him with perfect confidence that his sins are loosed, that is, forgiven, because he has met God's condition for forgiveness, namely, trust in His Son. If, on the other hand, a person refuses to receive Christ as Savior and acknowledge Him as Lord, the church can tell him with equal confidence that his sins are bound, that is, *not* forgiven, because he has not met God's condition for forgiveness.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Matthew 16-23.

Do you see what this is saying in Matthew? Believers are to be involved in the process of discerning sin and confession based on what the Bible says. And as

we get it right and represent God in the process, we proclaim to the person committing the sin that either **their sin is covered by Christ** or that we have **no evidence that the sin is covered by Christ**. We have evidence if there is full confession and repentance and a willingness to see justice done, no matter what it requires on the behalf of the one committing the sin. We have no evidence of forgiveness if any of those things are not true.

If the person who **committed the sin** is attempting to use the process to remove themselves from **the consequences of their sin**, we have no confidence that the confession is Spirit led. We cannot pronounce forgiveness of sin at that point because we cannot be sure the Holy Spirit has brought about the confession of sin. We cannot be sure this person has a relationship to God.

But if there is true repentance and a willingness to have justice done, if there is a willingness to do whatever can be done to reduce the effects of the sin committed, if there is a willingness to take on the responsibility for the sin and everything that comes with it, then the believers can represent God in pronouncing that the blood of Christ has already covered the sin this person has committed since they are clearly a believer who is living by faith in the one true God.

At the bottom line, the issue is always, is this person **in Christ** or **are they not**. We can have no confidence at all of a person's relationship with Christ if they will not obey Christ in regard to sin. The individual sin is not really the issue. the **relationship** is the issue. But the individual sin becomes the test point of whether the relationship exists or whether it does not. We are called to get involved in this process of **affirming a believer's relationship** or **calling it into question** due to his rebellion. We are performing heavenly work.

Now if this is truly the forgiveness that Christ commands there are a whole lot of implications we need to consider.

First, we cannot and should not forgive someone in the body of Christ who does not ask for forgiveness. If they claim to be a believer in our body we are required to go to them and to challenge them. We can't just sit back and wait. We must go or we are being disobedient to our Lord. But if the person does not hear us, we are **not allowed** to forgive them in the sense that we pronounce them in good fellowship. If we forgave them in that sense it would present a wrong representation of Christ. Christ is not forgiving them. We are His ambassador. We **cannot** forgive them.

The million dollar question here is then, is there another sense. The **Godly characteristic view** would say that yes, there is. There is human forgiveness

where we simply choose to not hold that sin against the person even though we admit that they are probably standing under God's condemnation. They would rely on the verses about love covering a multitude of sins and the longsuffering and forbearance of God. They would say that there is room for this and they call it forgiveness.

John MacArthur talks about a dear friend of his who holds **the Godly business view** and he says his friend keeps telling John that when he uses the word "forgiveness" he is using the wrong word. I laughed when I read it because I thought, yes Mr MacArthur. That is because it is true. But Mr MacArthur lays out a good argument for it being the right word. I already made that available on facebook.

Anyway, I think some of the issue truly is semantics. A lot of Christians live out very similar applications of God's word while describing it very differently. And fortunately there is enough love in the body of Christ to allow for these kinds of differences all day long.

For example. If you are new to this **Godly Business view** you might say, "Well then I am free to hate someone who sins against me and to be embittered towards people who have not confessed their sin and don't seem to have any signs of doing so." Well, is that what Christ said? Just because we are not free to pronounce God's forgiveness on them, does that mean we have to give in to fleshly responses and reactions? No. Christ told us exactly what we had to do in these instances. But it has nothing to do with forgiveness. Christ never, at any time, instructed us to forgive our enemies. If you don't believe me, look for yourself. You won't find it. But there are only 2 options for those who have done us wrong inside the church. The first is that they repent of the sin and receive pronouncement of God's forgiveness (apart from us or with our involvement.) Or the second is that they do not repent and will eventually work their way out of the church.

If a person outside the church does us evil, they may likely never repent of it. In fact, in one sense, apart from coming to Christ they cannot repent of the sin. This is what Romans tells us about how we should respond to anyone who is unrepentant who has done us harm.

Romans 12:17-21 (NKJV)

17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord.

²⁰ **Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."**

²¹ **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

Do we not think that our brother Paul would have told us to forgive these people if that is not what Jesus wanted? I think to believe that **he would not have thought of that** requires a stretch of the imagination. No. He gives us **exactly** what God requires that we do toward unrepentant people who have done us wrong. We must **trust God** to provide **either future reconciliation or future justice**. And God is an expert in vengeance. So we can trust Him. And in the mean time we are told what we must do. **We must love them**. And we are told what that means. We are to do good to those who abuse us. And in this example we meet their needs.

Now do we have another strategy? Are we **smarter** than God? Are we **better** than God? There are plenty of times that I do not like this. But this world is not my creation. I did not do anything to provide my salvation. So if I have learned anything it is that I do best to shut up and do what God says.

In keeping with this thought about what to do toward the unrepentant, there is something that is very common that has crept into the church. This is the idea that we must forgive others their sin because **it is good for us**. It releases us from bitterness, hatred etc.

But I firmly believe that scripture does not tell us to forgive the unrepentant in order to free ourselves from our bitterness and resentment. No. We trust the situation over to God. And, keep in mind, this is after we have **confronted** the person with their sin if they claim to be a believer.

Modern Christianity has this very messed up. There is a boatload of material out there that says forgiveness is what we do **to free ourselves** of all of our bitterness and hatred and hurt. But another million dollar question is, where did that teaching come from? I cannot find a single verse that tells us that believers are to forgive because **it is good for the believers**. No. Everything about forgiveness is for the **good of the one being forgiven**. Forgiveness does not free me from anything. If anything it gives me a burden that I did not have before this. If someone has wronged me and they confess it to me, now I must pronounce God's forgiveness of it. Now that sin has been laid on me. Before this, I may not have known about it. Now it is a weight I must carry. If you do not believe that forgiveness puts a burden on you, it is likely that you have never been involved in forgiveness for something that deeply hurt you. We see the dilemma in the answer to Peter's question.

Matthew 18:21-35 (NKJV)

²¹ **Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother**

sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Basically as long as we have reason to believe that the repentance is sincere we are to pronounce God's forgiveness to that person. We are actually just affirming their salvation. And if God has forgiven it, that has implications for us. We can no longer define that person by their sin. We must see them from a forgiven perspective. We must restore fellowship as much as their sin allows. We will talk next week about the consequences of sin. But for now we need to understand that this forgiveness we pronounce is truly that agreement that this person will never be judged by God for their sin. And that fellowship has been restored between God and that person. We cannot withhold that if we have no reason to believe that person is not telling the truth. And at this point we need to be careful to not trust our seemers.

Now there is one more scripture we must deal with this morning.

³⁵ So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

We mentioned before that we cannot hold forgiveness of our brother or sister at arm's length. Our heart has to be in it. And the heart, in scripture, is our whole person. We as a person have to get behind what God is doing and endorse it with our self. We need to say, yes this is good what God is doing. It is good that He will forgive this person and never hold this sin against them. That is what we are required to do. It is not an option for superior Christians. It is a requirement of **all Christians**.

Now we need to take a quick look at the implications of all the things we have covered today. If we are truly ambassadors in the ministry of reconciliation, we must be representing God in the forgiveness of sins. In doing so we must discern that the thing committed is a sin. We must discern as best we can that the sinning party is repentant of the sin they are confessing. And then we represent God in agreeing with, pronouncing, and aligning our own hearts with the fact that their sin is forgiven in Christ.

If I am presenting scripture accurately we are not free to pronounce God's forgiveness on unrepentant sin. We are not free to forgive sin that is committed by those who have never made peace with God. We are not advised to forgive sin psychologically to free ourselves from bitterness or anger. We must think clearly about the whole process.

But we must forgive those who confess their sin and repent inside the church, even when the forgiveness of that sin costs us dearly. Because it will never cost **us** the price that it **costed Christ**.

And if the person will not repent and confess the sin, we must take the steps of removing that person from our fellowship. There should be no steps made that would allow the guilty party to think that they are forgiven by God of their sins in any degree in any manner if they refuse to turn from them.