

Biblical Forgiveness- The application Part 1

Matthew 18:15-22,35 (NKJV)

15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that *'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'*

17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

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."

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.

.....

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

So last week we looked at the forgiveness of God. We established that all sin is punished. All sin is against God. Sin creates a debt that requires punishment and forgiveness removes that debt by placing it on Christ. Forgiveness is also necessary to restore fellowship. But it is not a new forgiveness. It is a bringing to bear the forgiveness that Christ already accomplished.

There is something I would like to add to last week's sermon. It was a point Jay Adams made that I think is very important.

Forgiveness is not **a feeling** by God. It is a **promise by God** that a certain thing will be accomplished. These are just a few examples.

Isaiah 43:25 (NKJV)

25 "I, *even I, am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; **And I will not remember your sins.**

Hebrews 8:10-13 (NKJV)

10 *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

¹¹ *None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.*

¹² *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and **their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.**"*

God is promising that He will do something. He will not go against His promise. It is a commitment on the part of God to not allow this sin to ever be held against us.

I know that my presentation has been a little disorganized. And it might continue to be. But there is so much important about the topic I do not want to miss. This is the point I want to make here. I believe that forgiveness between a believer and a believer is a commitment by one believer to act toward the other according to what God says is true. It is a pledge of orientation. Now when God says I forgive you, God has no needs. He has no struggle. He does not waiver. He is completely consistent.

We are not. So when we pronounce forgiveness to another believer, no matter what view we might have about forgiveness, we cannot always pronounce our endorsement of God's forgiveness **once and done by us**. But we can declare it true of God. What I find is that **my experience** of forgiveness of another believer is more like **a promise than an event**. When I say, "you are forgiven", I am really announcing something that I believe to be true about God and I am committing to orienting toward that person as being in that same forgiven state. I am stating my commitment to treat them like God treats them. Sometimes I may fail. And that is sin. I may allow the hurt I feel to control my actions and I will try to make the offending party hurt because I hurt. I may bring up their past sin to hurt them, to make them pay. And that is not forgiveness.

I think it is a lot like marriage. At one point I say "I do". But from that day forward everything I do toward **some tempting alternative** has to be according to my commitment. I either honor marriage or dishonor it. I honor forgiveness or I dishonor it. I act according to it or contrary to it. And acting contrary to it is sin. When I act contrary to forgiveness, I am telling God that I think I deserve better treatment than He received. I have been sinned against greater than He has.

In the last sermon I talked about answering the question, have I forgiven this person? I think now that it is the wrong question. The question is really am I now acting according to the forgiveness I believe is true for this person? Am I acting according to forgiveness or contrary to it? That is really the question. And we are very likely to waiver.

The quality of our forgiveness is only measured according to how well it aligns with the forgiveness that God does.

OK

So this morning we are going to be looking at the forgiveness that Christians are to do.

Now we need to start with the understanding that forgiveness is not **an option** to a Christian. It is absolutely a **requirement**.

Matthew 6:12 (NKJV)

12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NKJV)

14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Does this mean if we will not forgive that we will lose our salvation? No. This is where the importance of the context of the rest of scripture comes in. The point is that if we are not a **forgiving** person, we are not a **forgiven** person. If we will not extend forgiveness, we are showing solid evidence that we have never received it. This is like saying someone living in darkness is not in the light. It is just a logical conclusion.

So we need to get this. If a brother sins against us and repentantly confesses their sin to us and ask us to forgive them, we must. Absolutely. No question. We must.

But the next question is also crucial. What does that mean? What are we doing? What are the implications?

We will talk next week about two common views of Christian forgiveness. One believes that all forgiveness between people is conditional to their repentance, confession and request for forgiveness. The other view believes that there are two kinds of forgiveness. There is the specific kind that is conditional and there is a general kind that is unconditional. I think of it as a big F and little f forgiveness. No matter which you believe the following is still true.

There are many people who are very shallow in regard to their understanding of forgiveness. And they take it to mean that **we pretend** that we do not know what we now know. After all when God forgives us he removes it as far as the east is from the west.

But again we must be very specific in our definitions. We need to be very clear in our thinking.

Our brother Sproul explained that God does not suddenly gain amnesia when He forgives our sin. Scripture is consistent that when God forgets our sin it is in regard to remembering it against us. God will no longer remember a single sin against us in judgment. And praise God for such a wonderful truth. But God will remember our sin in an effort to help us become what He wants us to become.

In the Old Testament God had no trouble reminding Israel of her past. He used those sins to warn them of the danger of repeating them. And this was for their benefit.

Paul reminded the Corinthians of their past when he said this-

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

So Paul did not regard mention of people's past sin to always be off limits. And we might say wait. I remember when Paul said this:

Philippians 3:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And Paul did say it and he meant it. But he also said this:

1 Timothy 1:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry,

¹³ although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.

Forgetting is usually used in scripture with a very narrow focus. It is not amnesia. It is refusing to remember something for a very specific purpose. It is a fool who does not learn from his past. Remembering is very useful if we are ever to understand why we do things. A past that cannot be remembered cannot be learned from.

So not all reminders of sin come from the **Accuser** of our souls. Sometimes they come from the **Savior** of our souls. Sometimes our repentance has not really gone to the heart of the sin. We float theories about our motives or actions that are simply not true. And when that happens it is a mercy of God to remind us of a reality that we have not yet repented of.

When the **devil** reminds you of a sin, it is to **condemn** you for a sin. It is to cause you pain, to discourage you, to cause you to doubt your salvation.

When the **Holy Spirit** reminds you of a sin, it is to **free you from it** or to **keep you from committing it again**, or to **gain a new appreciation for grace**. Do not believe the lie that all reminders of sin are from the devil. Not all reminders of sin are given to prove a lack of forgiveness of sin. That is always the Devil's goal, but that is not the Holy Spirit's and often not fellow believer's goals.

I may touch on this later again but I wanted to state it here. When we forgive a brother who has confessed his sin to us, we are agreeing with God that this sin will no longer be punished. That means that if we act according to forgiveness, we will never use the reminder of that sin to punish them for what they did. We will not bring it up for the purpose of hurting them, maybe making them hurt for the way they hurt us. This is one evidence of whether we are acting according to forgiveness of someone.

Again, we need to think deeply about this. The pat answers rarely provide the answers we need.

So what is this forgiveness of sin that believers are to do? What does it actually entail?

15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'

There are a bunch of things to learn here.

First, when you are sinned against what are you supposed to do? Are you supposed to go home and let that wound fester? Are you supposed to stubbornly resist acting upon it? Are you supposed to suck your thumb and pity yourself? Are you supposed to pretend that the sin never happened so you don't have to do anything? Are you supposed to wait for that person to come to you?

Guess what. Every one of those answers is wrong. If you want to obey Christ and you think a fellow believer has sinned against you the instruction is very clear. It is not a suggestion. It is a command and if you will not do it you are

sinning. You get yourself into the presence of the one you have a gripe against and you start talking.

Now there are some sins that are very clear. If a person is committing adultery, that is usually a pretty clear sin. If you know that they have stolen something from you, that too is often very clear. But often the sins are suspected sins. In that case we do well to lead with questions. We may want to ask why the person did what they did? Or did they really do what we think they did? But it is very clear that if we are sinned against it is our obligation before God to go. And if we refuse to go and we sulk in our hurt, we are being disobedient to Christ and maybe even rebellious. This is a big deal.

Then we go and if we discover that this truly is a sin, or we already know that it is a sin, we confront that person. Now notice who is involved in this. You and the person sinning. That is what scripture says. If everybody and their brother knows about it before we go, guess what? We have already blown it. And maybe there are times when we need advice. That can happen. But often our sharing about how we perceive another person has wronged us has nothing to do with getting wisdom in how to deal with it. It is often just gaining support in our feeling miffed and hurt.

We really do need to do what Jesus says.

The second thing we notice is that the goal is to be heard and gain our brother. The goal is always reconciliation. The whole process is to be part of the ministry of reconciliation. This cannot be emphasized enough. We are never to become the sin police in the hopes of busting someone. No. We want restoration. And we will do anything we can in that regard.

Paul makes much of this ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

¹⁸ Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,

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.

While this passage does not use the word forgiveness, it describes very well what we are doing to get people to want to seek forgiveness. And that is our ministry. We are to bring the word of reconciliation, telling people how they can be made right with God, how they can be reconciled back to God. We could say without stretching any truth, how to be forgiven by God. Because the result of God's forgiveness is described here- **not imputing their trespasses to them**

Notice the wording here. We are ambassadors. What does an ambassador do? We speak in another's behalf. We will refer back to this in a little while. We also see the same word here.

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.

In Matt 5, in which Jesus is teaching much the same thing as in Chapter 18, we are told this is the process of reconciliation. In this case it says reconciliation to our brother. But what is it that we are confessing? Sins. And who are those sins primarily against? God.

Now back to Matt 18:16

What do we do if the person does not hear us, if they will not admit that they are wrong? We forgive them. Right? Isn't that what Christians do?

If that is true we get no sign of that from the Matt 18 passage. If they will not repent, we are not done ministering to this person. We take another witness. This is very significant because this is how courts of law were handled in the old testament. Everything legally binding had to be established by two witnesses. One versus one was not legally binding. When doing official legal business there were requirements. And two witnesses was a requirement. Right off the bat we get the idea that there is something official about this business. There is something legally binding about the process. This isn't at all frivolous. It is extremely serious. Because the outcome to this process has a lot of serious implications. This is like a legal proceeding.

How does that compare to our ideas of forgiveness? Do we regard forgiveness in light of something so serious and formal?

When we go about this the way Jesus prescribed it is very serious and there is a degree of formality to it that we are not wild about.

We are establishing a legal fact about guilt or innocence.

¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax

collector.

I don't think the point here is one, two, three strikes you're out. I don't think it is limiting our efforts to 3 tries. But it is describing the escalation process. In my IT world, as a problem becomes more urgent and more difficult to solve, the problem gets escalated to more hands, more expert or maybe authoritative hands. This is done because resolving the problem is so important.

So we need to do everything we can to bring someone living in sin to repentance. We prefer the more private approach. But **definable deliberate** sin in the church of Christ is too dangerous to be tolerated. It is like poison in a well. It cannot be allowed. It must be resolved or removed. That is how big of a deal Jesus made of it. So we pull out all the stops, and we try to keep it as private and as focused on reconciliation as we can, through the process.

Now, if it comes to the final stage of telling it to the church, who is likely to be involved? The leadership of the church is going to have to discern if this is a sin and if the next step should be pursued. They are, after all, responsible for this sort of thing.

The point here is that elders have got to be men who are committed to this process of reconciliation. And in that process it is essential that they can **discern what sin is** and that they are committed to **pressing this issue and not relenting**. They must be committed to knowing what sin is, calling sin sin, and not backing down, no matter what it costs them, until that sin is confronted and either **ended** or the offending member is **removed from the church**. A person is not qualified for leadership in the church if he will not discern what sin is and if He will not carry out what Jesus said to do with sin. Elders are going to have to do what Christ commanded regarding these situations. And they cannot relent. This ministry of reconciliation is going to be a huge part of what elders must do. And there is very little pleasant about it unless the sinning party repents.

One of the elder's job, as well as everyone's job in the church, is to confront definable deliberate sin and drive it to one of two conclusions. Repentance or removal. There are no third options. It is our job. And we must do it.

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."

What does it mean to bind or loose? The Jewish people hearing this would have understood this clearly. To bind would mean it was to declare that it was forbidden. To loose would mean to declare that it was allowed. It was a determination of what was forbidden and what was allowed.

Now the verb tenses here end up teaching us that it isn't exactly what it looks like. You could get the idea here that we decide, and then God gets with the program. Jesus isn't saying, you guys are so important I will do whatever you tell me to do. No. He is saying that you have the important position of representing what I say in these transactions. When you act according to my Word, and decide according to my Word, then you are completely representing me in what you allow and what you forbid. Basically this is saying, when you pronounce a sin, it is a sin. When you pronounce what is not a sin, it is not a sin. And God is in the midst of that process. He is standing in agreement of it.

And as they announce a person's guilt or a person's innocence, as long as it agrees with God's Word, God is right there saying yes, that is the truth.

The two or three gathered are not in a prayer meeting. They are not doing church. No. They are involved in the ministry of reconciliation. They are declaring a person's guilt or innocence. And they are doing everything they can to bring that person back into solid fellowship with Christ.

Now what are the alternatives here. If you have 2 or 3 pronouncing what sin is to a person who is believed to have sinned, there are only 4 possibilities. They pronounce that the person has sinned, and he admits that he has sinned. They pronounce that the person has sinned and he declares that he has not sinned. They declared that the person has not sinned and he declares that he has not sinned. Or they declare that the person has not sinned but he still believes that he has.

That is the nature of truth.

And there is only one big problem here. It is when the 2 say that he has sinned and he says that he has not. That escalates the problem.

We are going to break here. Next week we are going to talk about alternative views to the topic of forgiveness and their implications. Then we will go on to the process and heart of what forgiving each other is like.

I added two documents to our Facebook page that represent 2 different views of our place in forgiveness. Please try to read them this week. It will help you understand the complexity of the topic and to understand other people's point of view. At the end of the day we want to live according to the truth.