

FORGIVENESS:
Will That Be One Goat Or Two?
Message 8
Date: 4/3/2011
Scripture: Matt. 5:33-48

INTRO: It is a while since we last were on this topic of forgiveness. I am very grateful I have had this opportunity to study this matter in greater depth. I have changed my mind on a few things and learned some very good new things.

In the last message I told you we have now laid the doctrinal or theological foundation for the understanding that forgiveness can only truly be extended on the basis of repentance. In a note from Lou Sutera lately, he mentioned that he had given the series on bitterness that I did some years ago and that I gave to him, to several others to listen to. What they all, apparently disagreed with, though they liked the teaching, was the premise I hold to. I gave you that premise in the last message. So in the previous messages we have laid the theological foundation for the view that forgiveness is conditional.

Now we want to see how that works out in the 'nitty gritty' of life. I had intended to do this in one message, but will take two messages for this. I hope to settle at least the majority of questions on how to live if one holds to the view of conditional forgiveness.

This morning we want to look at what I have called the malpractices of forgiveness. There are a number of views of forgiveness that I believe are wrong, such as forgiving God or forgiving myself, or apologizing or saying, "I'm sorry" etc.. In the next message I want to seek to answer a number of those kinds of questions.

VII. THE COMMON PROBLEMS

A. Malpractices

1. Unconditional forgiveness

a. When wronged by a believer

The very first malpractice we need to deal with is that of unconditional forgiveness. We have said throughout this series that

forgiveness is conditional. Now that raises a major question: If we are not to unconditionally forgive a believer when a believer sins against us, what are we then to do? Will we not become bitter if we do not forgive? The answer most commonly given is that one must forgive or become bitter. There are no other alternatives. But, there is another alternative. The Biblical one. The answer is, as we have mentioned numerous times, that we are not told to forgive but to rebuke. Right here is the major point missed by almost all teachers on forgiveness. But the Bible is not unclear. (Matt. 18:15-18; Luke 17:1-3). Matthew 18 instructs us that if the offender does not hear us, we are to take another believer or two and try again. If he still does not change it is to go to the church and if he does not change now, he is to be excommunicated! The Bible could not be much clearer on this subject. Since we have spent time on this already, we will move on to a very important question raised by unconditional forgiveness which I promised to answer somewhere and we will do it now.

But before I do that, let me mention something here. I have never heard of the church excommunicating anyone for the above reasons and the fault cannot entirely be laid at the feet of church leaders. The fault lies with the people in the church. You say, "How so?" The first two steps of Matthew 18 are the responsibility of individual believers. Only after the first two steps have been followed is the matter to go to the church leadership. I have been in church leadership for 17 years and have never had a matter like this brought to me.

I have just recently listened to Dr. Charles Stanley. I do not know if there will be more than two messages but both preach unconditional forgiveness with no bars hold. The moment somebody wrongs you, you must forgive or you will be bitter and unloving

until you do. No Mention of Matthew 18. No mention of Luke 17.

Then pastor Boehlig gave me this from Dr. David Jeremiah in his book on prayer. I want to mention something I have mentioned to you before, and that is that we have to be discerning, even when we read or listen to otherwise sound, evangelical preachers. Pray for discernment. And then, just because a writer holds a different view than you or I do on some secondary point, we must not throw out everything else they might have to say. For example, Dr. David Jeremiah still has a lot of very good teaching.

So with that bit of forewarning, listen to Dr. Jeremiah on the subject of forgiveness in his book on prayer, "Every morning when you pray according to the pattern of the Lord's prayer--praise, priorities, provision--when you come to this part about personal relationships and forgiveness, pray this way: 'And, God, sometime today, someone is going to hurt me, and I forgive them already. In my heart I forgive them.' You leave your prayer closet and begin your day, and in a matter of minutes, somebody hurts you carelessly, even intentionally. And you say, 'That's OK. I forgive you.' 'What do you mean you forgive me?' 'I did it this morning.' 'You what.' I did it this morning in my prayer time.' You forgave me for what I just did this morning in your...?' You're weird.'" End quote (pg 75). And then David Jeremiah says, "I love those kind of weird people."

Now I ask a question: If I can forgive a day in advance, why not a week or a month or even a year? Well, why not just do it for the rest of my life and get it over and done with? With that, let me add one word on being hurt. We are often hurt by things others do that are not sin. In these matters it requires forbearance not forgiveness. Now let me tell you something you will struggle with and will have to do a lot of thinking to understand.

When we are 'hurt', when our feelings are hurt, it is a sign that the self life is alive and well and has not been to the cross to be crucified on some issue. You say, "But, what the other person did hurt." The fact that we hurt by that is a sign that self is on the throne, not on the cross. So let me read for you the first of those 'Seven Evidences of the Crucified Life' I gave you a while ago. It goes like this:

1. When you are forgotten, or neglected, or purposely set at naught, and you don't sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight but your heart is content and restful in Christ, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE CRUCIFIED LIFE.

The flesh and the self life sting and hurt under many things. You see, the other person might even be wrong, but when my response is hurt feelings, I give evidence to an uncrucified life.

So, with that, let me answer another major question on forgiveness. Here is the question: There are many testimonies of those who have forgiven unconditionally and they got peace about that matter. They have overcome. How can unconditional forgiveness be unbiblical if it works? Nancy Leigh Demoss says, "You have let the person off your hook, but the person is not off God's hook yet." In her books that is forgiveness but true forgiveness lets you off every hook. So here is what I believe has happened in such a case. This person that 'forgave' unconditionally, has not truly forgiven but has come to the place where he or she is willing to place all justice or vengeance into God's hands. It is not forgiveness. It is fully surrendering justice to God. We are willing to place all revenge into God's hands and wrongly call it forgiveness. We have called it by the wrong name. It is this surrender that brings peace. We wrongly call it forgiveness. So the benefit of this unconditional forgiveness, wrongly so named, is actually the willingness to forego justice for now and let God deal with it. That is why it brings peace. If the person is not off God's hook yet, the truth is the person is

not yet forgiven. If the person was truly forgiven they would be off of every hook. The goat would be dead. But as long as the one goat is alive, there is no true forgiveness.

With that, let me deal with one more question. What if the believer who wronged you belongs to another church? Answer, take the matter to that church. But, what if that church does not deal with such matters? My advice is to tell this believer that until this is cleared away, he will be to you like a heathen and a publican. Whenever you have done all possible to restore a situation and there is no repentance, my advice is not to fellowship with such a person until there is repentance.

Now you will say, "Can a believer actually do this?" Let me give you a scenario. A professing believer, whether in your church or any body else's, is living in adultery or such like sins. You have brought that to the attention of the church. The church refuses to do anything about it. By the way, if that happens to be your church, see if you can find another one that obeys God in such circumstances. But if the church fails to deal with it, obey the Scriptures anyway. Go with me to 1 Corinthians 5 (read v.11).

But what if the matter is not as serious as that? Turn now to 2 Thessalonians 3 (read 6-15). I want to remind you that this passage is Scripture just as well as John 3:16. We ought to obey this passage as well as others.

b. Wronged by an unbeliever

What we have been dealing with is what we are to do when we are wronged by a believer or when a believer lives in sin and the church does not deal with it. But I want us to consider another matter. What are we to do when we are wronged by an unbeliever?

Well, let us begin by noting something very important to this whole matter. I want you to

look first at Matthew 18 (read 15a). Note very carefully that this is a 'brother'. Now go to Luke 17 (read vs. 3). Again, note that this is a brother. Now turn with me to Luke 6 (read 27). Now note that this is not a brother, but an enemy. Now go with me to Romans 12 (19-20). Again, he is speaking about an enemy, not a brother. It is the failure of almost if not all those who hold to unconditional forgiveness that these passages all speak of believers. To the teachers of unconditional forgiveness, if a brother sins against you, that constitutes an enemy. This is failure to make a very important distinction that God so carefully makes.

Now let me make another very important point. The Bible, as far as I can find, never tells us to forgive the unbeliever when he wrongs us. The passages we will now read are often taken as dealing with fellow believers and they are usually taken as referring to forgiveness and that is wrong on both counts. These passages deal with how to handle things when we are sinned against by unbelievers and do not even mention forgiveness. Let us start by read Luke 6:27-36: "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to *those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be

great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

Now I ask you, is this passage regarding your brother or your enemy? Second, what did it say about forgiving? Nothing! But the passage is full of instruction on what to do. Love them; do good to them; bless them etc...

What about when the unbeliever persecutes us? Well, listen to Matthew 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Again, there is nothing on forgiveness but here is plenty of instruction.

Listen again as I read Matthew 5:43-45: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

And so, when the unbeliever does all kinds of evil things to us, are we instructed to forgive him? No. Does the Bible say that when the unbeliever persecutes us or treats us badly, we are to forgive him? No! We are told to rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. We are to love him. We are told to bless him. We are told to pray for him. If he takes our jacket, we are to give him our shirt too. If he makes us do something, we are to do something extra. If he wants to borrow from us, we are to give it to him. If he takes our things, we are not

to ask to have them back. Yes, we are to love our enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and our reward will be great, and we will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore we are to be merciful, just as our Father also is merciful.

So, how do you keep from getting bitter when an unbeliever wrongs you and you are to love them and do good to them and pray for them etc...? For the answer to that, go with me to Romans 12 (read 19-21): "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 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.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Again, this passage addresses how to handle things when Christians are wronged by unbelievers. And again, there is not a word about forgiveness. Yet the passage is full of instruction on how to deal with unbelievers when they wrong us! The very first thing we are instructed is that we are not to avenge ourselves. Now the word translated 'avenge' in this passage is *ekdikeo*. It literally means, 'out of justice'.

So listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:38-45: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to

those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

Now remember, this instruction is not with regard to dealing with believers. It is unbelievers that are in view. So how does one live instruction like this? First, by not taking vengeance.

Let me quote from the series I did on bitterness where I deal with this in greater detail: "Now we need to spend a little more time here. This is a very important verse in knowing how to deal with things so that they do not bring bitterness. The desire for vengeance when we have been wronged is what LEM calls an "ineffaceable feeling in the heart of every man which Paul recognizes and which God will honor in due time" (Romans 12:19). When we have been wronged, we have a desire inside that says, "I want this made right!" Maxwell says that is an ineffaceable desire. That means, you can't get rid of it. It is there! ...

"Now in Romans 12:19, the KJV and the NKJV both say we are to, "give place to wrath." The question is whose wrath are we to give place to, ours or God's? How one interprets this is very important as to how one handles being wronged by others, and thus avoiding bitterness. I am convinced that it means we are to commit the case to God and make room for His wrath because He is also angry about this and He will avenge you in due time. This is such an important point that I want to take some time to show from both translators and commentators that I am not just following my own thinking here.

"So, I believe it is God's wrath we are to give place to. Further, I think a good way to translate the verb 'give place' is 'make room

for' and what we are to make room for is God's wrath. The ESV says, "...leave it for the wrath of God..." That is an interpretive translation but gives the sense I think is in the passage. The HCSB says, "...leave room for His wrath..." that is, "...leave room for God's wrath..." The RSV says, "...leave it to the wrath of God..." So there is support from translators to the view I have given.

"There is also support from commentators. Barnes comments thus: "Its obvious design is to induce us not to attempt to avenge ourselves, but to leave it with God. To *give place*, then, is to leave it for God to come in and execute wrath or vengeance on the enemy. Do not execute wrath; leave it to God; commit all to him; leave yourself and your enemy in his hands, assured that he will vindicate you and punish him.

"Calvin says, "To give place to wrath, is to commit to the Lord the right of judging..."

"Robertson's Word Studies: " 'Give room for ... the wrath' of God instead of taking vengeance in your own hands."

(In the bitterness series I give more evidence of this.)

Continue quote: "I think a better translation of, "...give place to wrath..." is, "...make room for wrath...", that is, make room for God's wrath because He will take care of it. So what do we do with issues that cannot be resolved? We give this thing over to God and then say, "Lord, I give this to You. You deal with it. You said that vengeance is Yours and I take my hands off and give it to You." You see, if I avenge myself, I have not made room for God's wrath. If I give this matter to God, and if this person does not take care of this matter, God will. It is His promise that He will repay. The word 'to repay' is *antapodidomi* and it means 'to give or pay back'. God will pay back. Justice WILL be

done. Absolutely every injustice will some day be made right or receive punishment in eternal hell-fire. Now you see, I can become bitter, or I can hand these things over to God, and trust Him with it. If I am bitter, I am not trusting Him with this matter. If I truly trust Him, and that He will repay, I may well even begin to feel sorry for the other person, rather than become bitter."

So, as Christians, whatever we do, we are not avenge ourselves, but *rather*, we are to give place to wrath; for it is written, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord. Therefore if our enemy is hungry, we are to feed him; if he is thirsty, we are to give him a drink; For in so doing we shall heap coals of fire on his head. We are instructed not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.

And when it says we are to give place to His wrath, I believe it means we give these things over to God and we make room for His wrath. When we avenge ourselves, we have taken away all room for Him to do this and He does it much better than we possibly can. So, when we are wronged, we move over and leave the justice of it to God. He WILL see to it. He will make the wrong right some day.

CONCL: So, in conclusion, what do we do when a Christian sins against us? Our first task is to rebuke them. Then, if we cannot resolve it, use the three step process of Matthew 18. If the person is from another church or whatever the case be, and we can do nothing about it, use the principle of 2 Thessalonians 3:14, "...note that person and do not keep company with him that he may be ashamed."

Now, you may wonder, what kinds of things should we take a stand on? It is when your 'brother sins against you.' There are all kinds of minor issues that we can live with. The Scripture clearly teaches both forbearance and forgiveness. On the many smaller issues, the word is forbearance. It is to bear with someone or endure. There are many things we can endure in relationships and still keep the relationship intact. We do not need to confront or rebuke on every petty

issue. Sometimes the hurts we experience from others may be our own fleshliness or selfishness that is the problem. But when we are sinned against and it separates our relationship, it is time to rebuke.

Second, what are we to do when we are wronged by unbelievers? I do not find any Scripture that says, 'Forgive.' All injustices we are to bring to God and say, "Lord, you have said, 'Vengeance is mine' so I am handing this over to you. I trust you with this." And when have done that, then we are to love them. Do good to them. Pray for them and so on.

Ill. of Henry Reader if time.