

UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS 1

Text: Luke 23:26-34

INTRO: It is some time ago that I began a series that I called "The Subtle Undoing Of The Fear Of The Lord." Because of the stressful time we entered last fall, I changed subjects mid-stream and did a number of messages on the beatitudes of Matthew 5. There is no question that the fear of the Lord has been zapped out much of North American Christianity. As my wife and I spent hours driving the other day, on the news was this dilemma. A mother of a seven year old boy had his gender changed to a girl, and now she wanted him/her to be able to use the girl's washroom. I understand the school had already gone through the trouble and expense of making a non-gender specific washroom, but the mother insisted that he/she should be allowed to use the girl's washroom. This was a Catholic school. Tell me, where are we? We might soon make Sodom and Gomorrah blush.

And largely undetected a subtle kind of thinking has entered the Church, and we have lost the fear of God that once was in North America. And I ask, what has brought us here? I have concluded that we have lost our fear of God, and though many things have contributed to this, there are some things that have and are very subtly contributing to this degeneration. I have proposed that the teachings of unconditional love, unconditional grace, unconditional forgiveness and unconditional eternal security have made their contributions to bringing us to where we are.

In the earlier messages we had already completed two messages on the fear of the Lord. Then we took three messages to deal with the subject of unconditional love, which is one of the major areas I believe that subtly diminishes a healthy fear of the Lord. Then we took time for two messages on the subject of unconditional grace. There are two other matters that have seriously eroded the fear of the Lord in the Church in my estimation, and they are the teachings of unconditional forgiveness and unconditional eternal security. I do believe in eternal security, but not unconditional eternal security.

This morning we want to begin to look at the subject of unconditional forgiveness. We will not be looking at this in any detail because in the past I have done 10 messages on the subject of forgiveness. I called that series:

Forgiveness: Will That Be One Goat Or Two? You see, Israel commemorated seven feasts each year. These seven feasts fell in the first seven months of the religious year. And the highest and holiest day of the whole year was the Day of Atonement. That is the sixth feast of the seven. And this day was the day of Israel's forgiveness of sins. And the forgiveness of sins required two goats not one.

I was sent an amazing quote some time ago which was given by William Booth. He lived from 1829-1912, and was the founder of the Salvation Army. Here is what he said over 100 years ago, "The chief danger of the 20th century will be religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and heaven without hell."

Now, unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness go together. It seems to me that those who hold to the one, usually hold to the other as well. The New Age movement loves both of these teachings and certainly we must ask ourselves; if unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness are biblical, what makes them so popular in the NAM? It is this. It is because both of these teachings do not require the cross. Both do not cut across the self life. Rather, they pamper the self-life. They are cross-less teachings. You do not need to embrace the cross of Christ in these areas if you embrace these teachings.

I read recently that Martyn Luther gave three marks of a true church. 1, the true Gospel is preached there. 2 they practice the right ordinances and 3, they practice church discipline. But if you practice unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness; church discipline wants to cease. If you look at the modern church, you will see that that is what has happened. How can you discipline someone you have already forgiven? You cannot even reprove somebody you've already truly forgiven. Unless of course, you are not talking about true forgiveness.

I have mentioned to you before that the writers of "The Daily Bread" booklet we are all familiar with, at least in the past, have never endorsed the teaching of unconditional forgiveness. One of their booklets was written by Pastor Gary Inrig. And he said this: "Forgiveness is one of the most misunderstood subjects in the Bible." Gary Inrig does not hold to the present popular view of forgiveness.

My wife and I were listening to a message by D. Martyn Lloyd Jones the other day. And he was in a passage that talked about an angel coming to speak to the deacon, Philip in the book of Acts. And from that angel he reminded his listeners of the fact of the supernatural realm. Because we are born into a material universe, we are mostly aware of the material realm around us. We are not so aware of the spiritual realm around us unless we are truly living right and aware of the teaching of the Word of God on this matter. That spiritual realm around us is very real. The demonic realm is very real. Let me ask you a question: Is the devil's work present in our country? Well, with the news item we heard the other day, he is almost as powerful in our country as he was in Sodom and Gomorrah. Now I ask, is he present in our community? We would have to be entirely blind to deny it. Now let me ask you, is he present in our professing Christianity in our community? Again, only blindness would deny that. Now let me ask you the most important question. We easily know the answers to the previous questions I asked, but let me ask this now: How is he present in our country, our community, and our churches? How? You see, that question is not quite so easy. Let me answer it: He is present in multiplied thousands of demons, evil spirits. Now let me ask you this: Do you believe that?

I was reminded to mention this because I have sensed tremendous spiritual opposition to these messages I am now about to do, and I ask you to pray for the delivery of these messages.

I. DEFINITION

So we come to the subject of forgiveness. And of course, the first thing we must do is define what we mean by forgiveness. The original word in the NT is *aphiemi*. This word comes from two words. The root is '*hiemi*', meaning *to send*. To this root is added the word '*apo*', a preposition meaning '*from*'. It is 'to send from'. Thus, with regard to sin, when one forgives, one sends away the sin that has been committed against one. In the OT the word for 'to forgive' is the word '*nasa*'. It means to lift up, and thus to lift up and bear away.

Here is how I define forgiveness in brief: *"Biblical forgiveness is the sending away or bearing away of a sin or sins."* And here is an extended definition, *"Biblical 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. This relieves the anger of the offended and the guilt of the offender and provides everything needed to reconcile their relationship to wholeness."*

II. TWO MAJOR VIEWS

A. Unconditional Forgiveness

Now, there are two major views of forgiveness with regard to sins between people. There are those who say that forgiveness between people is different than it is between man and God. When one person sins against another, the one sinned against is to immediately forgive if he or she wants to experience a life free from bitterness. God, of course, cannot forgive like that because He requires that repentance take place first. But man must do this.

When the NAM teaches unconditional forgiveness, they mean unconditional forgiveness. But, as far as I can find, this forgiveness is not for reconciliation with the wrongdoer. This forgiveness is simply therapeutic in nature. It is for the benefit of the person who has been wronged.

I expect that most Christians who hold to unconditional forgiveness do not hold at the same time that the wrongdoer is forgiven. Their purpose for forgiving is exactly the same as that of the NAM. It is therapeutic in nature. It is for the benefit of the one who has been wronged, not the wrongdoer. Some, and maybe most Christians who hold to unconditional forgiveness still hold that the other person is not forgiven. They have forgiven the wrongdoer but the wrongdoer is not forgiven. The wrongdoer, they hold, must still repent though the wronged person has forgiven. Not even mental gymnastics can objectively support such a view.

Here, I understand, is how it works. When I am wronged, I am to immediately forgive. However, though

I have forgiven the wrongdoer, the wrongdoer is still not forgiven. And that, no matter how you wiggle the words, does not work. And once you have forgiven in this way, who will yet confront the wrongdoer?

Now, I maintain, that if the wrongdoer is not forgiven, neither has forgiveness taken place. The sin has not been sent away, it has not been borne away. It is still there. That is unbiblical forgiveness. It does not work and it is not real.

David Cloud writes, "Closely associated with the doctrine of unconditional love is unconditional forgiveness. Over the past two decades this has become a major element of the psychology movement. It is a form of therapy. It is considered a channel to inner healing and self-esteem."

He further says, "The movement of therapeutic forgiveness is all about self. It is unconditional forgiveness for *my* sake, to help *me* feel good about *myself*, to have personal peace of mind, to have personal self-esteem and psychological wholeness, even to gain "good karma points" and avoiding "inhibiting our very life-force."

"I am taught not only to forgive others unconditionally, but also to forgive myself and even to forgive God. R.T. Kendall says that since 'God has allowed bad things to happen ... He has allowed us to suffer when we didn't do anything that we know of to warrant such ill-treatment ... We therefore must forgive him--but not because he is guilty, but for allowing evil to touch our lives'" (*Total Forgiveness*, p. 33).

"What blasphemy, what foolish audacity, for a mere man to think that he can forgive Almighty God! This is definitely the worship of a false god. Like unconditional love, unconditional forgiveness is unscriptural. Biblical forgiveness is predicated on confession and repentance", end quote.

The best name for this teaching I heard from David Cloud. He called it 'therapeutic forgiveness'. That is forgiveness for my own sake, not for the other. It is this that the New Agers take hold of. I was just

given a quote by someone named Satsuke Shibuya. Here is what it says, "Forgiveness is not about letting someone off the hook for their actions, but freeing ourselves of negative energies that bind us to them." That is as New Age as you can possibly get, but that is the key to unconditional forgiveness, no matter who holds to it.

B. Conditional Forgiveness

That then, in brief, is unconditional forgiveness. Others, including myself, say that forgiveness between people is conditioned on repentance, just as it is between man and God. Repentance must take place first, before forgiveness can legitimately be given. We must first be clear about this, that forgiveness between man and God is conditioned on repentance. If that is not true then universalism, the view that all will be saved, must also be true, and we know it is not. So, the unquestionable truth is that if man does not repent before God, there is no forgiveness from God, and Scripture says we are to forgive like Christ forgave us (Col. 3:13).

And the question is, if forgiveness between man and God is conditioned on repentance, is forgiveness between people conditioned on repentance? The unconditional view says, *When I am wronged, I must forgive on the spot; no conditions, simply forgive. To fail to forgive is to harbor an unforgiving spirit and will lead to bitterness.* And so, if I do not forgive immediately when I have been wronged, that is wrong of me. They say that Jesus, when He hung on the cross forgave those who crucified Him and they had not repented and we are to forgive like Christ forgave. Stephen, they say, forgave those who were stoning him though they had not repented. This is the biblical thing to do. We too, must forgive unconditionally.

I had a call on my answering machine some time ago. The recording said, "I have just been through your series on unconditional forgiveness or 'One Goat Or Two.' You are right on the money. Keep these after burners on high heat. I listened to Dave Hunt years ago and he warned of what was coming into the church

through psychology and such teachings. God bless you."

Let me make a note here though. Colossians 3:13 says in the KJV, "...forbearing one another, forgiving one another..." There are many things where we bear with one another. We do not require repentance for every little thing that bothers us. We give the Lord time to work in another person's life. That is forbearance. But if it is a sin that cuts one's relationship, then repentance is required. When that happens, the Scriptures teach that we are to rebuke such a person. And then the relationship cannot be restored to normal unless repentance takes place, or one lives in hypocrisy.

Now, let me add here that very few areas create more hypocrisy than this one. How many a person has been wronged to where the relationship is cut, but when they meet in town the smile is as nice as can be? A lot of hypocrisy takes place in such situations when they are not properly dealt with.

But before we leave this, let me say this about those who hold to unconditional forgiveness. There are some who find peace by forgiving in this way. That is not because this is the biblical way of taking care of such matters. What they have done is not truly forgiveness, because if the wrongdoer has not repented he is not yet forgiven. If true forgiveness had taken place, the other person would be free from that sin. What has happened is that those who claim they have forgiven the other person have simply given up the right to justice or vengeance. That is what may help one overcome such things and keep one from bitterness. But it is not forgiveness. It is simply therapeutic forgiveness. It is based on selfishness. It refuses to deal with sin as the Bible requires. And it is not truly forgiveness because the wrongdoer is not yet forgiven.

At the best of times, very few who forgive in this way actually rebuke the other person, and that is what the Bible requires (Matt. 18). Some who hold this view still believe that the one whom they have forgiven still needs to repent. But, of course, then they are not forgiven either. Their view of

forgiveness is such that they can forgive the other person without the other being forgiven. This is therapeutic forgiveness and it is unbiblical and wrong.

III. SCRIPTURES USED FOR THIS VIEW

A. Mark 11:25

We want to now look at some Scriptures that are used for unconditional forgiveness. There are two texts that bear looking at; Mark 11:25 and Luke 23:34. Turn to Mark 11:25. Probably the most used Scripture is Mark 11:25. It is also the only Scripture I know, that if taken without considering the larger context of the rest of Scripture seems to teach unconditional forgiveness. It says, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." If one were to take this verse alone, the natural conclusion would be that of unconditional forgiveness. But it is an established principle that one's interpretation of one verse must not contradict the clear teaching of other verses. The larger context of Scripture does not teach unconditional forgiveness.

For example, if we should establish the doctrine of salvation based on John 3:16 alone, we would conclude that repentance is not necessary for salvation. As a matter of fact, some do that. The only thing required is to believe. But that would contradict other clear passages that require repentance as well (Mark 1:15 and many others). It is a major theological error of the Church today to offer salvation simply on the basis of believing. The Scriptures clearly teach that repentance is required as well.

When Jesus came preaching the Gospel, Mark 1:15 says that He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel." In Luke 13:1-5 He said, "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I

tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.'"

From these passages, and there are many more, we learn that Mark 11:24 cannot mean that if you have something against anyone, that is, they have wronged you, and they have not repented you are to forgive anyway. If that were the case, it is a contradiction to such clear passages as Luke 13:1-5 (read). So I understand Mark 11:25 to teach that if someone has wronged us, and they have come to us in repentance, and we have not forgiven them, then when we stand praying and the Lord reminds us of that, then we are not to continue our prayer until we have first taken care of that matter.

For example, there are two requirements of man to have his sins forgiven so that he might be saved: repentance and faith. So we cannot base our entire doctrine of salvation on one verse, not even John 3:16. Nor can we base our entire doctrine of forgiveness on Mark 11:25. Divine forgiveness is conditioned on repentance. That is indisputable. But we can go even farther and say that human forgiveness is conditioned on repentance as well. Consider Luke 17:1-3 "Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." I don't think any Scripture could be clearer on this subject.

But, someone will say, "Is Mark 11:25 the only verse that is used for the unconditional view?" No, here are some other Scriptures that are often used and we won't take time to deal with them but you may wish to do so (Matt. 18:35; Matthew 6:12; Matthew 6:14-15). I don't think we need to spend time on them.

B. Luke 23:34

The second passage that is almost always used to support unconditional forgiveness is found in Luke 23. For this we will take time. Turn to it (read verse 32-34). It is understood that when Jesus said these words as He hung on the cross that He forgave those who crucified Him, though they had not repented. He just unconditionally forgave them. So we too must do the same. That teaching is so clearly wrong it is hard for me to see how anyone could come up with such an interpretation.

So, look very carefully at this verse. Notice first that it does not say, "Father, I forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He did not say, "Father, I forgive them." But that is how it is almost universally understood. But instead of saying He forgave them, He was asking God to forgive them. He said, "Father, forgive them..." He did not say, "Father, I forgive them..."

Second, note carefully whom Jesus is speaking about. He is not speaking about Pilate or the Jewish Sanhedrin, who were responsible for Jesus' crucifixion and who also knew what they were doing. Pilate knew He was condemning an innocent man. The Jews condemned Him for envy. Jesus is not here talking about them. Whom is He talking about when He says, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do?" Well, He is looking down at the soldiers who are doing what they were told to do. They are doing their job. They have crucified hundreds of people before this. And I ask you, were those soldiers responsible for this dastardly deed? Or was it those who commissioned them to do it that were responsible? The answer is clear.

Third, His request was that God would forgive these men who were simply carrying out instructions. Jesus did not say He forgave them. He asked God to forgive them. And did God forgive them? We are not told. Fourth, His request that God would forgive them was on the ground of the ignorance of those who had crucified Him. He said, "for they know not what they do." He is not now talking about Pilate, or the Sanhedrin. Both of them knew what they were doing. He is talking about the soldiers below Him, and they are

only doing their job. Think this through before you view this verse as saying Jesus forgave them. He did not.

Fifth, what we have here is a case that could be likened to a Christian being wronged by a non-Christian. When we are wronged by unbelievers we might be able to say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?" But, usually when a Christian wrongs a Christian, he knows what he is doing. So, this would not apply in such cases and therefore cannot teach unconditional forgiveness.

It is also said that Stephen forgave those who stoned him before they repented. So we go to Acts 7 (read 59-60). Did Stephen say, "Lord, I do not lay this sin to their charge?" No, he did not. Nor could he rightly have done that. He requested that God would not lay this sin to their charge. Do you think God did not lay this sin to their charge?

Adolf Eichmann, the German SS officer responsible for the death of an untold number of Jews under Adolf Hitler, who said he had his feet hanging over six million Jews, was apprehended long after the war and put on trial before a non Christian tribunal. He said, "How can you blame me for this. I only did what Hitler told me to do." And do you know what this unbelieving tribunal found? He was found guilty because he did what Hitler told him to do. Their conclusion was, "He must die by hanging."

I want to go to another point. We want to consider why it is that people believe in unconditional forgiveness. What are the reasons for this view? We will only be able to begin this topic this morning.

IV. WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IN UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS

A. The Misunderstanding Of Some Scriptures

Let me begin this point by asking this question: Why do people believe in unconditional forgiveness? This view has developed, as I see it, largely because certain passages have been taken without consideration of the whole subject of forgiveness. We have looked at some of those already. The main ones

would be Mark 11:25; and Jesus' words on the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." These passages lend themselves to such a view if they are not compared with other Scriptures that clearly teach otherwise. This kind of misunderstanding has existed throughout Church history.

Let me give you an example from Church history. In the book, "Martyr's Mirror" is this story of Laurwerens De Walle, Antonis Shoonvelt, and Kallekin Strings. After they had suffered many tortures on the rack and stood strong, they were delivered to the inquisitor of the secular authorities. The inquisitor then testified that Lauwerens Van de Walle and Antonis Schoonvelt were both sentenced by the authorities to be publically strangled and burned at the stake for which preparations were then made. Kallekin Strings, a lady, sat there with her head resting in her hands, completely exhausted. But she still let her voice be heard boldly. The book says, "They were brought with their arms tied together, and coming to the place where they were to be offered up, they fell down upon their knees, and prayed to God. **When they had arisen, the executioner asked their forgiveness for what he was about to do,** and they kindly forgave him, according to the teaching of Christ in Matt. 6:14" (653). That is one of the passages I mentioned earlier, and it was misunderstood by some back then as well.

Let me ask you, do you think that these martyrs responded in a biblical way? Is it possible to forgive someone for such a huge sin, even before it is committed? I believe it is not even possible to forgive them after the sin is committed if there is no repentance.

Let me give you an example of this kind of teaching from a modern day teacher, Dr. David Jeremiah. He has a lot of good teaching in other areas but he fails miserably here. He says 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 that quote is simply full of theological errors. Do you know what this kind of teaching does to Christianity?

Now I ask you, the response of those early martyrs and the response of David Jeremiah to such wrongdoing, is it biblical? Do you think, if people went to heaven, they would think like that? I would say to forgive somebody like that is an injustice. As a matter of fact, though these martyrs said they forgave those who were about to martyr them, do you think God forgave them? Would not His attribute of justice be meaningless? When He says, "Do not avenge yourselves, I will repay", does He mean that? Of course He does!

Now I want to open a window in Scripture for you into just such a case as this to show you how those who were martyred for their faith responded once they got to heaven. They were martyred for their faith, and when they got to heaven, they said, "O Lord, forgive those who martyred us. They did not know what they were doing." Does the Bible say that? Go with me to Revelation 6. It is a prophecy of the tribulation time when millions upon millions of Christians will be martyred. And I want you to see what they said about their murderers once they got to heaven (read Rev. 6:9). Now, here you see, we have martyrs. And now look at verse 10 to see what they said (read).

Now don't look at the text any more. Can you not see how unbiblical and ungodly people are once they get to heaven! They want vengeance! Horrifying! Now don't look at your text. I want to tell you what God did to correct this horrible thinking. He said, "Away with such non Christian thinking. You are in heaven now and you must not think like that. You are perfect now and you cannot sin here, so never say things like

that again in my heaven! You see, in heaven people are perfect, and vengeance, which is the meeting out of justice are never heard of again!"

Now I know you know that the Bible does not say that. I did that to make a point. And now you may look at verse 11 to see what God really said (read).

Just imagine how ungodly those martyrs are, saying things like that in heaven. And they are in a place where you cannot sin! What do you think anybody in today's church would say if somebody said such things before he died! But what did God say? Now look at verse 11. It says, "And a white robe was given to each of them..." Woa, just a minute. You mean you can talk like that in heaven and get away with it? Well, they, rather than being reprimanded are given white robes. Do you know what white signifies? Righteousness! So we go on, "...and it was said to them that they should rest a little longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed." And do you know what God promised all through the Bible? He said, "Do not avenge yourselves. Vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord." Do you know what vengeance in such passages means? It means, 'out of justice'. It is the meeting out of justice. And those who do such things, and do not repent, they will go to hell. God will put them in hell.

When I went to Bible school one class I took was on the book of Psalms. And our teachers did not know, like many Christians today, how to treat the imprecatory Psalms. To imprecate is to call down judgment on others. Look at Psalm 139 (read 19-24). Did you notice in what context the last two verses we are so familiar with were given?

"But," you say, "that is the OT!" And I answer that Revelation 6 is in the NT. I ask you, do you know how to deal with the imprecatory Psalms, or other such Scriptures? I remind you that they are part of the Bible. I think if we read them and let them sink down into our souls, they would help balance out our present teaching on unconditional eternal security, unconditional love, and unconditional forgiveness.

Why do people believe in unconditional forgiveness? It is, at least in part, because of the misunderstanding of some passages that are commonly misinterpreted. This teaching of unconditional forgiveness is a misunderstanding of Christians from the early church until our day. But I believe in our day, along with such new teachings as unconditional love, and unconditional eternal security, this is a teaching that has been responsible for subtly undermining the fear of the Lord.

CONCL: And so, we bring this first message on unconditional forgiveness to a close. We have defined forgiveness this morning. It is to send away or bear away a sin committed against one upon the repentance of that person. We have also looked at the most used Scriptures to defend the view of unconditional forgiveness. There are only a few. And last, we began to look at why people believe in unconditional forgiveness. We said first, it is because of the misunderstanding of just a few Scriptures.

In the next message we want to look at a second reason why people believe in unconditional forgiveness. It is the view that if I do not forgive, I will become bitter. That is a problem, but for those who unconditionally forgive, it still remains a problem. Then I want to give a number of problems that come from holding to the position of unconditional forgiveness. And last, and it will probably take another message, I want to give the two-fold requirement for true forgiveness.