

“Practicing Biblical Forgiveness” Matt 5:21-26 and Mark 11:25, Sermon Notes
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Saving Grace Bible Church
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Morning Worship Service

Text:

²³ "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." (Matthew 5:23-24 NAS)

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." (Mark 11:25 NAS)

Introduction

We have been looking at a series on forgiveness

- I have heard comments from “Are you serious 8 weeks on forgiveness?” to “I really needed this series, thanks!”
- This is an intensely practical and helpful series and important for us to seriously consider

I have started the series with a couple of narratives to get our attention and I will conclude our series with a few narratives as well. But now we are in the teaching portion of this series. We now are going to look at a few passages where Jesus taught in sermons on forgiveness

- Matt 18:21-35 Jesus is asked by Peter a question
- Luke 7 Jesus responds to an event and judgment of His actions by Simon the Pharisee

We now turn our attention to Jesus direct teaching on forgiveness from the synoptic gospels

- We will be looking at an account of His teaching His disciples in the gospel of Mark
- And the Sermon on the Mount

Let me also make some comments about the topic of forgiveness

- There are two views, in the Church, on forgiveness
- The predominate and majority view of Christianity is that forgiveness is an unconditional release of debt
- This has been taught by the puritans – See John Owen’s Work in Volume 6 of his works
- See also Richard Baxter’s Practical Works Volume 1 A Christian Directory

In Baxter's work, I was first exposed to the flip flopping and difficulty of the subject

- Baxter asks on page 788, should we forgive another if he has not asked for forgiveness?
 - Here is clearly the question at hand. Those who hold to an unconditional forgiveness would expect Baxter to say yes
 - Those who hold to conditional forgiveness would expect to say no
 - What does Baxter say? "Yes" and "No"
 - If the 17th century Puritan is confused then it is no wonder it is still difficult for us to understand forgiveness today
 - Baxter seeks to make the case that we are to forgive our enemies unconditionally but we forgive our Christian brothers conditionally
 - This is an interesting solution to the forgiveness problem but no such explanation is given in scripture
 - Peter asks about forgiving our brother in Matt 18:21
 - Baxter says of the sinning Christian brother, "I must not forgive them, that is, by forgiveness continue them in the rest and usage of this brotherhood, till they repent. . ." pg 788

Oh the confusion of forgiveness

- I came to saving faith in the 1990's
- This was a time period where there was a bustling discussion on forgiveness
- Secular and Religious groups alike were writing on the subject of forgiveness
 - From the secular vantage point the modern Psychological movement was studying the health benefits for forgiveness
 - Dr.'s found that people lived longer and had better lives when they forgave others
 - There came a whole wave of teaching which basically said "The other person is not worth all the hassle so move on and just forget it."

Megan Bentencourt wrote a book entitled Triumph of the Heart: Forgiveness in an Unforgiving World

She quotes a Dr. who did a study on forgiveness and says that forgiveness leads us to this irrational choice: "You wronged me, but I forgive you anyway."

- Irrational choice being her word
- She continued with the Dr's quote

"A great deal of evidence converges suggesting that forgiveness is positive, healthy strategy for the individual to overcome a situation that otherwise would be a major source of stress from a psychological and neurobiological point of view. . . The fact that forgiving is a healthy resolution of the problems caused by injuries suggests that this process may have evolved as a favorable response that promotes human survival."

- Basically forgiveness is important for our health and keeps us from destroying ourselves or others

The secular world has been leading the charge in explaining the benefits of forgiveness. But they have no basis for how we forgive or what we forgive

- The secular world simply knows forgiving others is good for our health

This secular base with a spiritual twist has been taken in the book Total Forgiveness by R T Kendall

- In this book we learn to forgive others and forgive God
 - I have no idea – don't ask, it is his idea not mine

Then there was John MacArthur, the champion of Biblical forgiveness, who wrote the book The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness

- In this he teaches that the Biblical teaching of forgiveness is the unconditional release of sin's debt
- But he also says there are some sins we cannot forgive without the sinner's repentance. There are times where unconditional forgiveness is not an option see pages 128 to 134

Basically, John MacArthur teaches there are two kinds of forgiveness with the dominate form being unconditional forgiveness

"While it is often true that forgiveness involves a two-way transaction, it is not true of all forgiveness. There are times when forgiveness should be unconditional and unilateral, and there are other times when forgiveness must be withheld until the offender repents." Pg 119

- Basically here John teaches that forgiveness is both conditional and unconditional and he admits that the predominate teaching of the NT is for unconditional forgiveness. Pg 122

So we can summarize MacArthur as saying there are two kinds of forgiveness Conditional and Unconditional and that the predominate emphasis in the NT is that of Unconditional forgiveness. (See his explanation in last paragraph of page 121 where he contrasts Mark 11:25 and Luke 17:3,4)

Then of course I would be remiss if I did not say something about Jay Adam's and the modern counseling movement

- You cannot forgive without the repentance of the offender
- It would be wrong to forgive without confession and repentance
- Forgiveness is only conditional

As you can see with this landscape of various views and ideas it can be quite difficult to understand and explain forgiveness

- Therefore, we go to Jesus Himself
- We look to the teaching of our Savior

We admit that Jesus did not cover every circumstance or situation when He taught on forgiveness

- Instead Jesus gives us the principles and then it is up to us to go and apply these principles

This is why we call this study the forgiveness paradigm

- A Paradigm is a pattern. It is an example. We are looking at God's example or pattern of forgiveness from His own words
- It is possible for us to take the teaching of scripture and to force the message of scripture to fit together based upon our wider understanding of Scripture
 - This is how systematic theology works
- But in this study we are developing a Biblical or Exegetical Theology
 - That is we are studying each passage and taking a lesson or more from each of our passages and building our understanding of the pattern or practice of forgiveness

The Law was given this way

- The ten commandments and the law of God was not given as an exhaustive guide to cover every circumstance of life
- No, the law was given simply and then explained in various ways the law applied. From these applications, we can expand the law to all of the unique circumstances we face today
- The Law is simply love God and love others. It is expanded to the 10 commandments and expanded to the rest of the OT instruction on the law found in the Pentateuch

Forgiveness is the same way. Jesus lays out the principle by which we find God's pattern and expectation and then we go apply those principles to the circumstances we are facing

We now come to a new level of thought in regards to forgiveness, how does forgiveness impact our spiritual life?

Paradigm principles:

1. Our forgiveness of others cannot be exhausted
2. Forgiveness goes beyond our rights and what is fair and does the unexpected. It is a Lavish gift
3. God's forgiveness of us obligates us to be forgiving towards others
4. Forgiveness must be from the heart
5. Forgiveness produces a great love and appreciation in the heart of the forgiven sinner
6. If we are in sin we need to seek forgiveness and restoration right away lest our spiritual life be hindered
7. A lack of forgiveness of others will keep us from praying effectively

We are going to look at two sections this morning. Mark 11:25 and Matt 5:23-24

In these two sections of scripture we have Jesus teaching on forgiveness

- The context of Matthew, Jesus presents forgiveness as it relates to the law
- In the context of Mark, Jesus presents forgiveness as it relates to faith

Because there are textual variants in Mark 11:26, Matt 5:23-24 and Mark 11:25 are often compared together

Speaking of Mark 11:25

- “This command parallels Matt 5:23-24, where the context is offering a sacrifice in the temple.”
- Lane suggests that Mark was quoting from Matthew. Not sure how he could know this
- But it is likely a scribe added vs 26 in because of what he knew to be true about Jesus teaching

We will look at these verses together

Body

Matthew 5:23-24

- We learn this paradigm principle here:
- If we are in sin we need to seek forgiveness and restoration right away lest our spiritual life be hindered

I want to draw your attention to three truths in this passage which give us insight into righteousness and godly living

1. **The Ancient Command** vs 21
2. **The Righteous Requirement** vs 22
3. **Godly Restitution** vs 23-26

1. The Ancient Command

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER ' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' " (Matthew 5:21 NAU)

- You have heard that the ancients were told Vs 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43
 - Then He quotes Moses
 - Then He quotes the teaching of the day – shall be liable to the court
 - That is they should be guilty and will receive punishment
 - The Jews had changed God’s righteous demands and Jesus is coming along to restore God’s original design

You remember God’s design. Here is what God said about Murder:

"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man." (Genesis 9:6 NAU)

"You shall not murder." (Exodus 20:13 NAU)

- God’s commands was death for murder and murder was strictly forbidden
- Here instead of declaring the man guilty of violating the commands of God
- They said they were liable to the Court
- I think what is clear by what follows is that they had not gone far enough

- I think what Christ is establishing here is that the ancients have told you that you are guilty if you murder and you will face the courts because of your guilt
 - This much is true and right

But there is more:

2. The righteous requirement vs. 22

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell." (Matthew 5:22 NAU)

- Where the Pharisees and other teachers during Jesus time had gone wrong is that they did not go far enough
- They were only concerned about the externals
- Thus the contrasting, coordinating Conjunction BUT
- They have said this BUT they have not said enough

God is concerned about more than just the act of murder. God is concerned about the anger in the heart that leads to murder

- God is concerned about more than our actions, He is concerned about our motives
- Here Jesus makes it clear we need to be careful of our motives. IF we desire evil in our heart we are guilty
- This is where the ancients did not go far enough

To be clear anger is murder

"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3:15 NAU)

God weighs our hearts and measures our thoughts and tests the heart and mind to determine whether we are righteous or not

- This should show us that while someone can have a clean external life it does not mean they have a clean internal life
- God is concerned that we are clean inside out
- From the heart we desire to do good it will then flow out
- In God's economy the private life and the public life match. The thought life and the actions of life walk in unity
- Here is what makes Jesus statement so hard to accept: What we are privately is who we really are

Look at the progression here Jesus makes

- Angry with – guilty before the court (this was their standard) If you are just angry with your brother you have the same level of guilt as murder in light of the Ancients teaching
- You good for nothing – Supreme Court
- You fool – Guilty to go into Hell – Divine law court

The seemingly the weaker the offense, from the human perspective, the greater the punishment

The person who says to his brother you fool

- The idea of this word is calling someone an idiot, empty headed, clueless, brainless
- It is an Aramaic expression which gives the sense of calling someone an “empty headed fool”

What Jesus is demonstrating here is this:

If we have an attitude of contempt and guile towards another person we are guilty of hating them in our hearts and thus we are guilty as if we murdered them since we already committed that sin in our heart

The measure of our guilt

“guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” **γέεννα**

“Gehenna” is a metaphor for hellfire, used seven times by Matthew, which refers to the Hinnon Valley, where in ancient times human sacrifices were offered to the pagan god Molech (2 Ki 23:10) and where in Jesus’ day garbage was burned day and night, making it a perfect metaphor for eternal fiery judgment.” Pg 190 Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew

- Murder in the heart will make you guilty just like the act of murder
- It will deserve punishment and should be seen as evil as doing the actual act

3. Godly restitution vs 23-26

“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.²⁵ “Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.²⁶ “Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.” (Matthew 5:23-26 NAU)

- If we have sinned what should we do?
- This is always the question. If I am found in sin how should I respond?
- Jesus is so gracious here and it thrills my heart
- Christ helps his hearers understand how to deal with guilt

There are a series of principles laid out for us to deal with anger

1st Put on Love by seeking reconciliation immediately

Notice vs 23

- If you are in the middle of making your sacrifice and you know your brother has something against you then you go to them
- It is easy to be angry at others and keep them at a distance. Here while we are in the middle of seeking to worship God, we are to go to our brother
- How seriously should you take the guilt in your life?
 - Serious enough that you would stop worshipping God, making your sacrifice, and seek restoration

You see here Jesus has moved away from the instruction on murder to now instruction us about how to deal with differences with one another

- Many have used these verses to say a lot about the formal process of restoration

In fact, one commentator I read this week took vs 23 where it says “and then remember that your brother or sister has something against you” to mean that if they have sinned against you and even if you are innocent you should go seek them out for restoration

- I am not convinced this is what is going on
- This is not a formal description of victims seeking restoration
- Nor is this a description of how to deal with those who have sinned against you

Jesus is teaching us how to deal with our own guilt

1. Has something against you – can easily mean they have some reason to accuse you of doing evil
 - a. They can make a charge against you to accuse you and find you guilty
 - b. So this would mean if someone could rightly accuse you of sin you must seek restoration
 - c. Take sin seriously and deal with it
2. Make friends quickly – that is to say deal with what you have done to create an enemy
3. You will pay the last cent vs 26 – and Jesus here is talking about what we have done to transgress others, step on others toes, sin against others,

We are going to be held accountable for our actions so we must work hard to take sin seriously and address it

2nd We should deal with sin quickly

Vs 23 leave your offering

- Do not even take the time to complete your offering
- Leave it there bleeding on the alter and go make restitution
- Vs 25 make friends quickly with your opponent
- If you have transgressed, if you have sinned deal with it quickly

Stop making excuses for why you did it

- Stop hiding from the shame of it and deal with your actions
- Stop running from the accountability and address what God has brought out

It is not right to feel conviction of sin and then to just sit on it and remain silent

- Do not be surprised if you feel miserable when you do this
- God tells us to deal with guilt quickly
- If you are depressed because you are living in guilt, do you want to know how to get out of that depression? Seek restoration quickly. Take ownership of sin
- Do not suppress it. Do not imagine that it somehow vanishes. Do not suppose money, time, or gifts will make it go away
- Confess and repent
- Do it quickly so as not to give the devil an opportunity to destroy love in the body of Christ or your family relationships

3rd Principle – Restoration is the goal of the offender

- You broke the relationship you should seek to fix the relationship
- Our goal is to bring healing and restoration to the relationship
- Vs 24 and be reconciled to your brother
- Vs 25 make friends quickly with your opponent
- Often times people stop at saying I am sorry
- My bad
- As if the goal is simply admitting we were wrong
 - Clearly this is a good first step but there is more

We need to seek restoration. We want to prove ourselves innocent

- We want to labor to undo the wrong
- We want to work hard at making the situation right

Mark 11:25

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." (Mark 11:25 NAS)

Here in Mark's context we are dealing with forgiveness in the context of faith

What does true faith look like?

In the context, Jesus rebukes the fig tree for not bearing any fruit and the next day the disciples see the same fig tree and it is completely dead. The disciples are amazed by this and wonder what happened

- Jesus responded vs 22 "Have faith in God"

Jesus explains great prayer as being part of its great requests and its great sacrifice and care for others

- In this text Jesus gives the disciples two components needed for effectual prayer
 - The kind of prayer that seeks amazing things
 - Faith filled prayer
 - Asking a mountain to move
 - Must be prayer from a forgiving heart
 - Seek to demonstrate mercy
 - Seek to care for others
 - Seek to be selfless

True forgiving prayer is a selfless act before God

²³ "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be *granted* him.²⁴ "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be *granted* you."

Now notice some textual problems

- Vs 26 is either in brackets or italicized in your bible to demonstrate that it is not in the majority or major manuscripts
- My Bible notes that this verse is not in the earliest manuscripts
- The likely hood that verse 26 was added by a scribe who knew Jesus teaching in Matthew

This problem is obvious and well noted

- But others think that even vs 25 is out of place because the disciples ask about the fig tree and why it is dead and then Mark records Jesus breaking into a discussion on forgiveness in prayer
- Since the themes seem to be incongruous this text is treated with suspicion

There is no need for doubting the place of vs 25 in this text – accept that some do not like the message that it teaches

1. First it is clear vs 26 is a later addition by the scribes
2. It is not in error; It is sound teaching as we will see next week. But it is not part of what this passage is teaching
3. Second, the bigger theme of asking in faith, or praying in faith is the thrust of this passage

Now in the context of great faith we get a discussion on prayer and forgiveness

²⁵ "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." (Mark 11:22-25 NAS)

The first lesson from Matt 5:23-24 teaches us that if we are going to worship God and we are aware that we have offended our brother, so that they have something against us, we are to go to them and seek reconciliation

- This passage teaches us that if we are the victim of a transgression, if we have been sinned against and someone owes us a debt, we are to, by an act of great faith in God, to release them of that debt

The second Lesson, is that when we have been sinned against we demonstrate great faith in God and forgive the offender. A failure to forgive others will hinder our faith filled prayer life

Context of this great Act of faith

- Whenever you stand praying before God
- Prayer in any context
- Could be private or corporate prayer

Expression of Great faith – Forgiveness

- We are commanded here to forgive
- We cannot hold on to sin debts
- We need to be releasing others of their sin debts against us

How is it faith?

- Placing the sinner in God's hands instead of your own
 - We don't need to take retribution
 - We don't need to seek personal justice – God will bring them to give an account
- Placing yourself in God's hands to be comforted and protected rather than your own
- It is turning the sinner over to God to let God work with them
- It is believing God has forgiven us so much that we have no right to hold on to any debts against us

Husbands and Wives

- It is unwise and ungodly to be holding on to personal sins committed against you

Brothers and Sisters

- it is ungodly to be holding on to sins committed against you

This passage teaches us to be forgiving from the heart

while we are praying and we know we have someone to forgive we need to be forgiving

As we forgive, God is forgiving us also

This passages makes someone who holds to a conditional forgiveness very uneasy

Notice what is missing from the context

- There is nothing here about rebuking sin
- There is nothing about seeking restoration
- There is nothing about hearing a confession of sin
- There is nothing about repentance

It simply says “If you are praying and you have something against your brother, forgive.”

- Freely, fully, graciously, and unconditionally forgive

Oh this is where the tears begin

- How is that fair? Remember Matthew 18:21-35 it is not fair, it is merciful
- Why? Because you have been forgiven a great debt
- Won't they just get away with their sin? No?
 - HUH? You just said forgive them? Right there on the spot, how are they not getting away with their sin?

Someone may ask at this point, where in the Bible do you ever see someone praying, asking God to forgive sin, BEFORE the people have repented?

- It is crazy to think, that we are just called to forgive sin when we have been sinned against.
- THIS CANNOT BE WHAT THIS VERSE IS TEACHING
- Where does the Bible teach we forgive before the sinner repents?

I am glad you asked that question.

- Here in Mark 11:25
- Luke 23:34 – But you might say, “Well that was Jesus and we know he is more spiritual than us, and He is God.”
- Acts 7:60 – What is your excuse with Stephen?

We need to pay attention to this verse

1. Remember the setting – this is forgiveness granted to the offender as you are praying to God
 - a. It is a prayer that says Lord, I will not hold this sin against them
 - b. Lord, I am not looking for payment for this sin
 - c. Lord, I do not wish to hold this debt against my brother or sister
 - d. Lord, I have released any right to collect on this debt
 - e. Lord, help this sinner as I seek to help them
 - f. Lord, help me to be a help to my brother so he will repent and glorify you. Help me love him like you loved me when you sought me while I was still an enemy

The sinner is not getting away with their sin when we have forgiven from our heart. The sinner still has their responsibility before God. AND more importantly they will not receive the full benefits of our forgiveness until they have repented from their sin

- This passage simply teaches this, as we are praying we keep our spiritual lives healthy and our prayer life strong by forgiving sinners by faith
- This may be an act of great faith, for some have hurt us in significant ways, but we still forgive privately as an act of faith before God

“First, we are told that faith is essential to the success of our prayers. But then it is added, no prayers can be heard which do not come from a forgiving heart.” Ryle pg 239

“Our prayers must not only be earnest, fervent, and sincere, and in the name of Christ. They must contain one more ingredient besides. They must come from a forgiving heart. We have not right to look for mercy, if we are not ready to extend mercy to our brethren.” Ryle pg 239

“God’s free forgiveness of sins is our highest privilege in this world. God’s free forgiveness will be our only title to eternal life in the world to come. Then let us be forgiving during the few years that we are here upon earth.” Ryle pg 240-241

“The choice believers face is clear: hold a grudge or have their prayers heard. To put it another way, one cannot accept the full, gracious forgiveness of God and then be unforgiving of someone else (cf. Matt. 18:23-35).” MacArthur pg 149

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