

34 - Forgiveness

by Ben Torrey

To be forgiven by God, we must forgive others and release them from all obligation to us, extending our love and rejecting revenge.

Duration: 8:39

Scripture: Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 6:12, Matthew 6:14-15, Matthew 18:21-22, Matthew 18:32-35, Mark 11:25, Ephesians 4:32

Topics: "Forgiveness"

Description

In this sermon, Ben Tory discusses the importance of forgiveness in our relationship with God. He highlights that while God's forgiveness is available to anyone, there is a condition attached to it. Quoting from Matthew 6, Tory emphasizes that we must forgive others in order to receive forgiveness from God. He also references Matthew 5, where Jesus teaches that seeking reconciliation with others is a prerequisite for presenting offerings to God. Tory concludes by emphasizing the unlimited nature of forgiveness, as Jesus instructs Peter to forgive not just seven times, but seventy times seven.

Transcript

Good evening, this is Ben Torrey once again, continuing this series of talks on fundamental requirements for the type of relationship that God expects us to have with each other. Tonight I will speak about forgiveness. Of course we all know that we need to ask God to forgive us our sins, but how often do we reflect on the fact that he attaches a big condition to that? What, you may ask, isn't God's forgiveness unconditional? Yes, in one sense it is, but in another very important way it is not.

God's forgiveness is equally available to the greatest sinner as to the greatest saint. It is available to anyone, anytime, anywhere. But there truly is a condition.

Let's look at scripture. Turning to Matthew 6 where the Lord is teaching his disciples how to pray, he utters perhaps the most famous of all prayers, a father who art in heaven. As he continues the prayer, we read in verse 12, This word debts can in this context be understood as sins.

Skipping to verses 14 and 15, following the conclusion of the prayer, we read, your transgressions. You see, there is a condition. If we want to be forgiven by God, we must forgive those who sin against us, who hurt us.

Of course, we would probably like to ask with Peter what we see recorded in Matthew 18, 21 to 22. Then Peter came and said to him, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. In other words, do not count how much you must forgive.

Jesus follows this statement with the parable of the steward whose debt was forgiven by the king, only to turn around and throw in jail those who could not pay him. When the king heard of it, he took back his forgiveness. Reading from Matthew 18, 32 to 35.

Then summoning him, his Lord said to him, you wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave in the same way that I had mercy on you? And his Lord moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

In another passage, Jesus makes it clear that not only must we forgive, we must also seek forgiveness whenever necessary. And if we don't, God will not receive our worship or our offering. This is Matthew 5, 23 and 24.

Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your offering. It does not matter how heartfelt our prayers are.

It does not matter how great our sacrifice is. It does not matter how many people we win for Christ. If we hold resentment in our heart, God will not receive any of that from us.

If we do not seek to be forgiven and to make it up with our brother, God will not accept our effort. We might as well not bother. So, what does it mean to forgive? First, I want to say what it is not.

Forgiveness is often tied to forgetting. Forgive and forget, we often hear. But there may be important reasons why we actively remember, such as when the person habitually falls into the same sin and we need to protect ourselves or others.

We can forgive while at the same time holding back trust and protecting ourselves from danger of repeat offense. The other thing that I want to say that forgiveness is not is ignoring the sin or the action that has hurt us. Many times people think they are supposed to ignore a hurt, pretend it did not happen.

They think that this is what it means to forgive. Another thing that forgiveness is not is escape from punishment. True, God's forgiveness to us is an escape for us from eternal death and damnation.

But remember, a price still had to be paid. Jesus forgave us, but at the forfeit of his own life. No, forgiveness does not mean forgetting.

It does not mean we ignore the harm and it does not necessarily mean that the forgiven person is released from all obligation. In fact, God expects that when we repent and ask for forgiveness, we provide recompense to the one whom we have injured. If it is not these things, then what is it? It is a conscious decision to release the person from all obligation to us, to reject revenge and to extend our love.

Now, if we are releasing the person from all obligation, then what about forgiveness not releasing a person from making recompense? Well, it all has to do with why. It may still be right for the person to give recompense, make restitution because that is the right thing for him to do. If we, on the other hand, have forgiven, then we are not requiring it for our own sake.

A judge may tell them to repay, but we truly no longer care. We no longer hold it against him. Regardless of whether or not the other person provides restitution, the main thing is that we get rid of all bitterness or grudges that we hold in our heart.

We do not talk about what the other person has done. We do not stew on it or brood over it. We let it go.

By doing that, we are in a position to set that person free. Incidentally, we also set ourselves free as well. You cannot be a truly free individual if you hold unforgiveness in your heart.

And as we have already seen from scripture, we would have no business expecting God to forgive us of anything. So, how do we truly forgive? Some things are easier than others to forgive. A lot depends on whom we need to forgive and how deeply we are hurt by the other.

What about the really deep hurt or betrayal? What about the hurts that keep piling up over the years? How can we forgive? Perhaps we can't. So what do we do? We turn to Christ. We start with a simple prayer, something like this, Lord, I know you command me to forgive and that if you don't, you won't forgive me.

The truth, Lord, however, is that I can't forgive this person. I don't have it in me to do it, even though I know that's wrong. Please forgive me for my lack of forgiveness and help me to truly forgive.

As of now, I choose to forgive that person, but I need your grace to make this choice real in every way. Please help me, Lord. The Lord knows our heart.

You will be surprised at how such a prayer gets answered. I have found also that the best way to put this choice to forgive into real action that bears fruit is to start praying for the one who hurts you. Pray that God intervene in their life, that they come to realize what they have done, that they be set free from their own sin, shame, and fear, and that God bless them.

You cannot pray this way for very long without coming to see the other person in a completely new light and without finding your heart going out to them. The forgiveness truly becomes complete. Is there something that you have held on to and not forgiven? I urge you to make the choice to forgive right now and ask God for the grace to forgive.

With that, I will say good night until next week.

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