

Sermon Notes

Series: How to Be A Peacemaker

Date: December 27th, 2009

Title: “Step 5: Determine to Forgive”

Text: Misc. Texts

Introduction

- When it comes to peacemaking, one of the most important questions for us to answer is whether forgiving sins committed against us is unconditional or conditional.
 - Some Christians believe forgiving sins committed against us is always unconditional. (cf. Mark 11:25)
 - Other Christians believe that forgiving sins committed against us should always be conditional. (cf. Luke 17:3-4)
- Well what do we do with this?
 - I mean... Is Jesus contradicting Himself?
 - Does one of these passages cancel out the other?
 - And which is it: Is forgiveness unconditional or conditional?
 - Well, I believe it is both.
 - I believe there are times when we can and should forgive unconditionally.
 - But at other times our ability to forgive is conditional – it is dependent on the person’s repentance.
- To me this is the only view that does justice to the whole of Scripture.
 - So instead of contradicting himself, Jesus is speaking the truth in both of these passages.
 - It just happens that he’s addressing two different situations.
 - And so let’s make a biblical distinction between when we should forgive unconditionally and when we should forgive conditionally.

1) First, WE SHOULD UNCONDITIONALLY FORGIVE THE MAJORITY OF SINS COMMITTED AGAINST US.

a) Need to first understand what forgiveness is.

- i) Not same thing as forgetting or excusing.
 - (1) Forgiving is an active process.
 - (a) It is an active decision to purge that sin.. to purge that incident from our minds.
 - (2) When we forgive someone’s sin we recognize sin for what it is – debt – and we choose to absorb the cost of their debt and cancel it.
- ii) And that’s why when we look at words that Scripture uses for forgiveness, we see that it means to release or to let go.
 - (1) It has the idea of releasing someone from the punishment or penalty their sin deserves.

(2) Based on the whole of Scripture, I would define forgiveness in this way:
Forgiveness is an active decision to release someone from the debt their sin created against you.

b) When we forgive someone who has sinned against us, we make several promises.

i) We promise not to intentionally dwell on the incident or become bitter with them. (cf. Eph 4:31-32)

ii) We promise not to slander or gossip about the person who offended us. (cf. Luke 6:27-28)

iii) We promise not to bring up the incident to the offender again or retaliate against them. (cf. Ro 12:19, 1 Thess 5:15)

iv) We also promise not to let their sin stand between us or hinder our relationship. (cf. 1 Cor 1:10)

c) And when it comes to the majority of sin, we should be able to make these four promises unconditionally. (cf. Pro 19:11, 1 Peter 4:8)

2) While it is true that we should unconditionally forgive the majority of sins committed against us, **WE SHOULD CONDITIONALLY FORGIVE THOSE SINS COMMITTED AGAINST US THAT CREATE A WALL IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS.**

a) Even though Scripture does command us to overlook sins, it doesn't command us to immediately overlook every sin. And one of the sins we're not to immediately overlook or forgive are those offenses that create a wall or barrier in our relationships.

i) And here's the thing... part of the reason we shouldn't overlook or forgive those sins are because we can't – at least not alone.

(1) How can we make that fourth promise (see above) when their sin has created a barrier.. when their sin has already created a division?

(a) We may be able to make the first three promises, but that forgiveness isn't complete until we can promise not to let their sin stand between us.. until we can say their sin won't a hindrance in our relationship.

(b) And we can't say that if someone does us serious harm or has no intention of repenting.

(2) Think about marital relationships –

(a) If a wife keeps cheating on her husband and never repents, how can he make that fourth promise and completely forgive her?

(b) Or if a husband keeps abusing his wife and has no intentions of stopping, how can she make that fourth promise and completely forgive him?

(c) As Pastor and Author John Piper has said, "There's a sense in which full forgiveness is only possible in response to repentance... When a person who wronged us does not repent he cuts off the full work of forgiveness. We can still lay down our ill will; we can hand over our anger to God; we can seek to do him good; but we cannot carry through reconciliation or intimacy." – John Piper *As We Forgive Our Debtors: What Does Forgiveness Look Like*

ii) For an example of conditional forgiveness – consider how God forgives us.

- (1) Attitude of Forgiveness in Luke 23:34
- (2) Granting of Forgiveness (upon repentance) in Acts 2:38, 1 John 1:9, etc.
- iii) And if we neglect to grasp the concept of conditional forgiveness we fail to see the connection between forgiveness and reconciliation.
 - (1) It's as if we think it's biblical to go up to the person we're alienated from and say "I forgive you – I just can't be close to you"
 - (a) Imagine if God said that?... "I forgive you – I just can't be close to you"... "I forgive you – but I can't be reconciled to you."
 - (b) But God doesn't say that.. instead after we repent.. and only after we repent, He says "I forgive you – and I can be close to you"
 - (2) Biblically, forgiveness and reconciliation are directly connected.
 - (3) So if someone commits a sin against you that doesn't harm the relationship.. and there's no wall between the two of you – Great!
 - (a) There's no need for reconciliation and you can forgive them unconditionally.
 - (4) But if someone sin against you does harm the relationship.. does create a wall - then things are different.
 - (a) You can only fully completely forgive them after they've repented.
 - (b) In those situations, you can only fully forgive them when the relationship has been reconciled.

b) Well, what does this look like? How do we practice conditional forgiveness?

2 Stages of Conditional Forgiveness

Level 1: Attitudinal Forgiveness

Emphasis: Vertical (between me and the Lord)

Purpose: To release bitterness in my heart and entrust the offender to God

Occasion: Occurs regardless of whether offender repents

Scriptures: Mark 11:25; Matt 6:14-15; Acts 7:60



Level 2: Granted Forgiveness

Emphasis: Horiz. (between me and offender)

Purpose: To reconcile broken relationship

Occasion: Forgiveness granted if offender repents

Scriptures: Luke 17:3-4; 2 Cor 2:5-7; Matt 18:15ff