

Miscellaneous

The Nuts and Bolts of Forgiveness Part 1 - What does it look like?

April 3rd, 2011

Text - Various

Scripture Reading - Psalm 32:1-5

We started talking about forgiveness two weeks ago and Lord willing we're going to talk about it for the next two weeks as we lead up to Palm and Easter Sunday.

- Two weeks ago we looked at the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18 and talked about how *it is the power behind Christian forgiveness*.
 - o If you truly get this parable there's really not much else that needs to be said about forgiveness.
 - o Context is Peter's question "How often do I need to forgive my brother when he sins against me?"
 - o 200,000 years wages (\$6 billion) vs. 20 weeks wages (\$12,000)
- This week I want to begin to look at "the nuts and bolts of forgiveness" by answering the first of two questions.
 - o What does forgiveness look like?
- Next week we'll look at the second question.
 - o How do we do it?

What does forgiveness look like to forgive your brother from the heart and how do we know whether or not we've done it?

This is such an important question because of what Jesus says at the end of the parable of the unforgiving servant...

- **Matthew 18:35 (ESV)**
³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."
- **Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV)**
¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

To answer this question, I want to look at it through the lens of Ephesians 4:32.

- **Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)**

³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, *just as in Christ God forgave you.*

- God calls us to forgive each other, just as in Christ He forgave us. That's what it is to forgive our brother from the heart. So what does that look like?

What is doesn't look like is excusing, ignoring, or forgetting about the wrong things that have been done to us. God doesn't do this, and I don't think He expects us to either.

- God never excuses, ignores, or forgets about a *single sin* we commit. He *never* sweeps our sins under the carpet and pretends they never happened.
- In fact, He does just the opposite. He exposes our every sin and keeps careful track of them.
 - o **John 3:19-20 (ESV) - Jesus is the light of the world**

¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.
 - o **Matthew 16:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.
 - o **2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
 - o **Revelation 20:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

o **Matthew 12:35-37 (ESV)**

³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

God doesn't excuse, ignore, or forget about our sin. He sees every one of them, He writes every one of them down, and one day He will hold us accountable for them. Thus forgiving your brother from the heart does not look like sweeping their sins under the carpet and pretending they never happened. So what does it look like?

What it does look like is *not holding their sins against them*. I think that's what David is saying in Psalm 103:12

• **Psalms 103:12 (ESV)**

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he *remove our transgressions from us*.

When God removes our transgressions from us He does not excuse, ignore, or forget about them, He no longer counts them against us. He wipes our slate clean not in His mind, but in His heart. He doesn't allow our past mistakes to affect His current love for us. He harbors no bitterness toward us and desires the best for us and not the worst. *That's what Godly forgiveness is all about. It's not excusing, ignoring, or forgetting, it's loving in spite of.*

But does forgiving your brother from the heart mean that you must return to the way things were before the break in the relationship occurred? In other words, if you don't trust someone as much, want to spend as much time with them as you used to, or even like them as much as you used to, does it mean you haven't forgiven them from the heart? I think the answer to that question is *possibly, but not necessarily*. Let me explain.

The sad fact of the matter is that sin breaks down relationship. *The degree to which a relationship can be restored is dependent in small part on the amount of damage done and in large part on the degree to which a person is truly repentant.*

- If a small amount of damage has been done and the person is truly repentant, there is a good chance that the relationship can make a full recovery.
- If a large amount of damage has been done and the person is unrepentant, there is little to no chance that the relationship can return to the way it was before.

In a case like this, God still requires us to forgive the unrepentant person from the heart like we talked about earlier: not count their sins against them, not harbor bitterness, to desire the best for them and not the worst, to love them in spite of their sins, etc., *but I do not believe that He requires us to pick up where they left off as if nothing ever happened.*

- God doesn't pick up where He left off with us when we are unrepentant and once again, I don't think He requires us to either. Here's what I mean...

Even as Christians, unrepentant sin affects our relationship with God. Though our every sin, past, present, and future is forgiven the moment we trust in Christ, and though God's love for us is unconditional because of Christ, He still requires us to live a life of *ongoing repentance*. When we sin against Him and put up a barrier in our relationship, God expects us to quickly and humbly acknowledge our sin, repent of it, and to turn to Him for forgiveness. When we do this fully, He gladly forgives us and our relationship with Him is fully restored.

However, when we choose to hang onto our sin, not to acknowledge it to Him, not to repent of it, and not turn to Him for forgiveness, that sin will continue to be barrier in our relationship until it is repented of. Because we are His adopted children through faith in Christ, He still loves us, wants the best for us, and harbors no bitterness toward us, but there is a break in our relationship because of our sin. Things will not go back to normal until we acknowledge our sin, humble ourselves, and turn to Him for forgiveness.

This is why it so important to "keep short accounts" with God.

King David is a great example of how unrepentant sin breaks down relationship with God, even for the Christian.

- David had a great relationship with God. God called him a man after His own heart. God deeply loved David and David deeply loved God, but when David committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered her husband Uriah, and then refused to repent, his relationship with God was miserable.
- **Psalms 32:1-5 (ESV)**
¹A Maskil of David. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ²Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.* ⁴*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah* ⁵I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

Had David not repented of his sin, it would have continued to negatively affect his relationship with God, *potentially for eternity*. But because David was eventually broken over his sin and fully repentant, God fully forgave Him, and their relationship was fully restored.

That's why I say the degree to which a relationship can be restored is dependent in small part on the amount of damage done *and in large part on the degree to which a person is repentant*.

- David's sins against God were HUGE, especially since he was the King of Israel. He was God's special, chosen instrument. His representative on earth and His and primary leader of His covenant people.
- If full restoration of relationship was dependent in large part on the amount of damage done, David would have been SUNK.
- But thankfully that is not the case with God. Despite His MASSIVE SINS, David was fully repentant, God was fully forgiving, and their relationship was fully restored.

Thankfully full restoration is always obtainable for us as well, if we're willing to repentant.

- Imagine how hard it would be to have God love you and forgive you but keep you at arm's length because He doesn't

trust you, want to be around you, or like you as much as He used to.

- Imagine how hard it would be if your bridges with God were permanently burned or had to be rebuilt through years of proving yourselves worthy of His trust, time, and friendship.
- Unfortunately, I think this is the world a lot of Christians live in.
 - They think they are always behind the 8-ball with God and that He is constantly frowning down on them.
- Thankfully it is not reality.
 - God promises that if we will acknowledge, confess, and truly repent of our sins God will not only forgive us, but fully restore us *every time*.

Unfortunately, though it is ideal, full restoration is more difficult to obtain with others.

- No one likes to have someone they were once close to hold them at arm's length. No one likes to have someone they were once close to not trust them as much, want to be around them as much, or even like them as much as they used to.
- Everyone desires for things to go back to the way they were. Everyone desires full restoration. It is ideal and it is ALWAYS what we should shoot for.

Why is it so hard to obtain?

- With us, sin is almost always a two way street
 - With God, it always clear who is in the wrong... WE ARE ☺!
 - With us, it much more difficult to sort out
 - Our blindness to sin and pride get in the way
- The trust factor
 - With God, we know He is completely trustworthy, and He doesn't need to trust us to completely restore the relationship because He's not dependent on us for anything.
 - With us, neither of these things are true.

What can we do to obtain it?

- Want it both for our self and *the other person*
- Go for it by...

- o Taking the log out of your own eye and going to the other person ASAP
- o Assuming the best and being willing to trust again

In summary

- Forgiving your brother from the heart does not mean excusing, ignoring, or forgetting about their sins.
- What it does mean is not holding their sins against them and loving them and wanting the best for them in spite of their sins.
- Forgiving your brother from the heart does not necessarily mean that your relationship will be fully restored and that things will go back to normal though this is ideal, ought to be sought after, and can be obtained.
- The degree to which your relationship can be fully restored is largely dependent on repentance. If both you and your neighbor are willing to fully take the log out of your own eye and extend grace to each other, full restoration is obtainable even in the worst of situations.

This idea of repentance is where I want you to focus as we move to celebrate communion now.

- Our communion with God is dependent on two things...
 - o Jesus' death on the cross and our repentance