

# Sermon on the Mount Part XXV Forgiveness: Conditional / Unconditional

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[ 0 : 00 ] I really appreciate the season of the year, and I was just thinking that really maybe my message should more correspond to something along the line of Christmas as opposed to what it does.

But then in retrospect, I'm going to be talking about the subject of forgiveness, and I can't think of anything that is tied up to Christmas more than that. That's the whole reason for the incarnation. That's the whole reason for the manger is so there could be a cross. And tied to that, of course, is the forgiveness that is wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ.

So forgiveness, I guess, is about as Christmassy as you can get. And we're going to be reading from our scripture portion, if you will look in your bulletin for the pink sheet that is indicating responsive reading.

And as we read through this, I want you to note, if you will, the theme that is recurring, having to do, of course, with forgiveness, taken from three different portions of scripture, Matthew, Ephesians, and Colossians.

[ 1 : 07 ] And I want you in particular to note, if you will, the great disparity that exists in some of the statements that are given about forgiveness.

Some would call this disparity a flat-out contradiction. And these are folks who are eager to say the Bible has a number of contradictions in it.

Well, we don't believe that such a thing exists. But we are eager to admit there are a number of places in the Bible that do very much appear to be contradictory.

And we're going to be talking about some of them this morning, even as we read these passages. But I think you will discover that they are not, in fact, contradictory at all.

So if we may begin in the very first verse, which is in the regular type, I will read that. And if you will follow them responsibly with the bold type, we will note the distinctions that are given here.

[ 2 : 15 ] Our Lord is speaking here in this particular portion from the Sermon on the Mount. And by the way, that's what precipitated this whole thing. We came to that passage in the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 6.

And it begins with this. Jesus was speaking and he says, For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive them for their transgressions. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification, according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

And the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.

[ 3 : 42 ] Let having hands out of us to sit here in the dead of, and to see him through the kingdom of the cross, which was also to us. And he had taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

When he had disarmed the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through him. And therefore, when the one who is the act of your judge, he can do our duty for the three, for the respect of the festival, for the new people who are the saddest.

Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come. But the substance belongs to Christ. As I was telling folks at the 9 o'clock hour this morning, our message today is going to be decidedly different.

It isn't going to be a message at all that will contain answers or conclusions, as is usually the case. But it will consist mainly of propositions and questions to be addressed and hopefully answered in future messages.

My intention is to get all of us thinking and ruminating on these questions and possible answers throughout the coming weeks. I would anticipate and welcome any and all questions or comments you may generate as we move through the material.

[ 5 : 08 ] Let me know what you are thinking and what questions are occurring to you. You can do this via the offering box that you submit questions anonymously. Just write out your questions, drop them in the box.

You may sign them if you want, or you may not sign them, whichever you prefer. Or if you care to ask the questions during each session or at the conclusion of each session.

So I will make sure that today you will have ample time to add any questions to the questions that I ask. I have searched my history and my spirit.

And I have tried to arrive at what I think are the most prominent kinds of questions that many people have on their mind. Sometimes even Christians.

And of course, non-Christians think about these things too. But apart from their searching the scriptures, there are no possible answers available to them. So I'm going to pose a number of propositions upon which this is going to be built.

[ 6 : 15 ] And by the way, it will be readily apparent that we are at least briefly needing to interrupt the Sermon on the Mount because we have come to this portion of scripture in Matthew 6, the same portion that we read earlier, where Christ said, if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

I cannot just devote a message or two to that and continue on. I suppose I could if we were on some kind of a rigid time schedule and needed to conclude the Sermon on the Mount within a short period of time.

But that possibility is already well blown out of the water. So we are in our 20th or 21st message regarding the Sermon on the Mount, and we're about halfway through.

So it will probably take the balance of 2014 to get through it. So we're going to take a brief aside. It won't be part of the Sermon on the Mount, but it will be part of a very, very, very, very important subject.

I don't know how many varies that was, but every one is justified because humanity's greatest single need is for God's forgiveness.

[ 7 : 30 ] There's no greater human need than that. It's the greatest need for the entire human race. And that was addressed by the reconciling of the world in a corporate reality through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When he did what he did on that cross, he freed the entirety of the human race from the legal bondage that they had due to Adam's transgression.

This means, as in Adam, all die. Not most, not some. But as in Adam, all die.

Even so, in Christ shall all be made alive. You cannot make the first all refer to all of humanity and the second all refer to Christians only.

The second all means the same all as the first all. As in Adam, all die. So in Christ shall all be made alive.

[ 8 : 42 ] This is a corporate redemption. Christ died for the sins of the whole world. No exceptions. But we see in 2 Corinthians 5, to which we will not now go, but for your consideration, there are two references to reconciliation.

And the first is, the Apostle Paul says, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. This refers to the inhabitants of the world, of all times, past, present, future.

Reconciling the world unto himself. And then, two verses later, he says, We beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

What does that mean? It sounds like double talk. Earlier, he said, the whole world is reconciled. A couple of verses later, he pleads for them to be reconciled.

What does this mean? That, too, might appear to be contradictory. It is only an indication that in the first reconciliation, where God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, he was doing that by lifting the penalty of Adam's transgression.

[ 10 : 00 ] That means we are all accountable and responsible for our own sin. We cannot blame it on Adam. And then, two verses later, when he says, We beseech you in Christ's stead.

In other words, it is just as if, Paul is saying, it is just as if Christ were here himself. He is not, but we are doing this in his name, in his stead.

Be ye reconciled to God. That indicates, in my interpretation of that, which you'll have to examine for yourself and see whether you believe it to be valid or not, it refers to a personal reconciliation. And the personal reconciliation is predicated upon the reality of the corporate reconciliation. This means that we can go anywhere and everywhere and tell people, Christ died for your sins. He made it possible for you to come to him because he paid the penalty for sin. Now, what is required is your response to what God did in Christ.

[ 11 : 13 ] And that is a personal thing. And when you exercise faith, trust, reliance, dependence on Christ and Christ alone, that is your answer to what God did in Christ when he died for the sins of the world.

You personalize that. You take it to yourself. It is an individual salvation. Because Christ died for the sins of the world, you can come.

So come. And whoever comes will not be denied or turned away. That gives us a gospel to preach. Because Christ died for the sins of the world, you can come.

And it is incumbent upon you to come because we are held accountable for what we do with our volition, with our will. And when you exercise faith in Jesus Christ, all you are doing is responding with your will to what God already did in Christ.

You are appropriating it. You are personalizing it. You are making it your own. That results in regeneration. That results in your being saved.

[ 12 : 21 ] That makes your internal person, your spirit within you, regenerated, saved, born again, whatever you want to call it. It takes place inside.

Only God can reach there. We don't know how he does that. But we know he does. So we've got corporate salvation for the whole human race, or corporate redemption for the whole human race. But we have personal salvation. If you do not see the disparity here, and make the distinction obvious, what I think is an obvious distinction, then you end up flirting with or embracing universalism.

And universalism simply says, because Christ died for the sins of the whole world, the whole world is going to heaven. It does not mean that. And it does not say that.

But it does say Christ died for the sins of the whole world, and that frees us to come to God because the way of access has been opened. So, an individual's greatest single need is for God's forgiveness.

[ 13 : 28 ] It is addressed by the individual response of faith from the mind, heart, and spirit of the individual. Thus, then, God responds to the response of man.

Man confesses his sin, and God responds with forgiveness and salvation. This is the individual's greatest need, first and foremost.

The individual's second greatest need is the knowledge and assurance that he has God's forgiveness. The basis for it all is not that you have done something right, but that Jesus Christ has done something right.

I want to ask the question, explain the questions, and the implications behind them, and then spend the following sessions attempting to answer the questions with, Thus saith the Lord.

So, prepare yourselves, if you will, please, for stirring up that gray matter within you, and reflecting somewhat on these, and I hope you will be doing this throughout the week, because we will begin addressing them, not next Sunday, because we have something special planned that I've already mentioned, but beginning two weeks from now, and it will extend well into the new year.

[ 14 : 56 ] In the Bible, we have sin, that's one thing, and sins, that's an entirely different thing, but related, and we have iniquities, and transgressions, and trespasses.

They are all related, but they are all different. Oh, and yes, we have one more that is in a special category that we will address, and it's called abominations.

They are all related, but they are in a different category. We will be asking and answering questions like, why would anyone spurn God's forgiveness?

But that's precisely what multitudes of people do. Why would anyone do that? We will address that. Why would anyone think they do not need God's forgiveness?

First of all, they have no idea of God's holiness. Secondly, they have no idea of their sinfulness. Ignorance and arrogance are married.

[16:10] Arrogance is nothing more than ignorance gone to seed. Arrogance is ignorance with an attitude, and when it comes to the issue of sin, we're going to find there are some really tough attitudes.

And this is why the scriptures refer to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the cross being an offense to people. Why are they offended by that?

They're offended because it points the finger toward their guilt, toward their own sin. And people do not appreciate that. We hear things like, I'm a good person.

No, you aren't. And if you really knew what you really are, you would be scared to death, and you would flee to the first savior you could find. You think you are a good person because you are deluded with your thinking and logic system, which is part of your fallenness.

And you rationalize and you reason with a warped intellect. Only the scriptures can change that.

And this is common to humanity. We all, in our Adamic nature, we all have a warped intellect.

[17:27] That was part of the fall. It affects our thinking and the conclusions we reach. We engage in faulty thinking. We think things are true that aren't true at all.

And we think things that are false that aren't false at all. That's because our thinking is marred. It is systemic to the human nature.

It is part and parcel of the human problem. And yet, we so often do not recognize it. So, that has to be taken into consideration as well. How can we know we are truly forgiven?

One of the lousiest, worst reasons that you can give is, oh, I just feel it in my heart. Baloney. That won't sustain you through the hard times.

You need something a lot more powerful than that. How do you really know that you are forgiven? What is the basis for God's forgiveness? What makes it possible for a holy God to forgive unholy people?

[18:31] How long does God's forgiveness last if you are forgiven? How long is that good for? We'll note the distinction between standing in state and position in practice, their differences and why they matter.

Is God's forgiveness conditional? Or is it unconditional? Well, it's both. And doesn't that sound contradictory?

How can it be both? How can it both be conditional and unconditional? The passage that we read earlier in our responsive reading from Matthew chapter 6 is said by our Lord as plainly as anything can be spoken.

For if you forgive not men's trespasses, neither will God forgive you. That's a condition. Christ made it very clear.

If you refuse to forgive your brother for whatever, God's not going to forgive you. And then we come to the Colossians 2 passage that we read. And Paul talks about God having forgiven all our trespasses.

[19:41] What does that mean? And how does that square with the first one? And I'll give you a clue. And those of you who are somewhat dispensationally exposed to our interpretation of the scriptures, it will not come as a surprise to you.

But it's very, very important that you note when Christ said that, he was speaking from the other side of the cross.

He was speaking to a Jewish community in a Jewish setting exclusively. And he told them, if you do not forgive your brother, God will not forgive you.

But then in the Colossians 2 passage, he says, God has forgiven us all trespasses. How do you square those two? You don't.

They can't be squared. Don't try to square them. It's impossible. One is addressing a situation that existed before the cross and the other after the cross.

[20:48] Dear friends, can you not readily subscribe to the concept that the cross changes everything?

Indeed, it does. And included in the everything is God's mode and method of forgiveness. It was one way before the cross regarding the Jewish people.

It is another way after the cross regarding Jew and Gentile. If you don't make that distinction, you have no alternative but to arrive at a contradiction.

Why do we not, as believers, need to ask for God's forgiveness? Think of that. Christians are not to ask for God's forgiveness. What are the implications there? Why is it insulting to God for a Christian to ask for God's forgiveness?

[ 21 : 56 ] It really is. And I'm not splitting hairs, but I'm giving you some solid theological content that we will be able to support from the text.

And I want you to be thinking about this. Well, if you don't ask for God's forgiveness, how in the world can you get it? And do Christians have a blanket forgiveness?

And then somehow later some kind of specific forgiveness? How does that work? Is it presumptuous to assume God has forgiven us?

It is so sad to realize that there are multitudes of believers who lie awake at night worrying about whether or not God has forgiven them.

And how can they know? And one day they feel forgiven. And the next day they feel so loaded up with guilt they can't believe that God has forgiven them.

[ 23 : 05 ] Life is too short to live it that way. Who wants their spirit tied up with that kind of anxiety? God wants us to be at peace, to be at rest, to relax in him, to be assured, to know of a certainty where you stand with him.

Not worrying and wondering and losing sleep over whether you've prayed enough, whether you've confessed enough, whether you've done this enough or that enough. And how can you know that God has forgiven you?

It's tragic because this is one of the most priceless commodities that God has provided through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. And so many believers do not enter into that rest.

It's so sad. You have things placed to your account in heaven that you don't even know are there and you can't derive the benefits from them because you don't know you can write checks on it.

It's sad, but it's true. And frankly, for those who are in the body of Christ, there's no excuse for that. How do I know I have not committed the unpardonable sin?

[ 24 : 11 ] Most Christians can't even agree as to what it is, much less as to whether they've committed it. And no treatment on the subject of forgiveness would be complete without dealing with that.

So we will have to spend some time with that. And what is the ultimate fate of the unforgiven? Is forgiveness possible after physical death?

Why or why not? These are the kind of things we will be addressing in upcoming sessions. And I want to provide you. I made a promise to myself that I was going to allow plenty of time this morning for the insertion of any questions or comments that you may have.

And we will get them on the record because... ..

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