

Sermon on the Mount Part XXXIII - Conclusion of Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] is our conclusion on forgiveness. We have two passages. First, I would like you to please turn to the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, and there we'll be looking at verses 25 through 32.

2. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

Be angry, and yet do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.

He who steals must steal no longer, but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

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.

[1 : 27] Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God and Christ also has forgiven you.

Then I would like you to turn to the book of Colossians, and instead of chapter 4, we're in Colossians 3.

And in Colossians 3, we'll be looking at verses 12 through 17. So as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving each other.

Whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

[3 : 00] Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom, teaching, and admonishing one another, with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

I trust you probably noted the similarity between these two passages that Gary just read.

And I think the similarity is easily understood when you consider that the Apostle Paul was writing to two different churches, each of which had some of the same needs. So it was no doubt needful for him to express some of the things to the people at Colossae that he had expressed to the people at Ephesus.

And in essence, congregations the world over generally have pretty much the same kind of needs spiritually, although sometimes there are differences depending on what's going on in the congregation.

[4 : 27] But in both of these passages, the Apostle points out the importance of a forgiving spirit, that we who have been forgiven for so much ought to be eager and willing to forgive others who have wronged us.

James tells us that in many ways we offend all. That simply means that we cannot function in society without saying some things that we shouldn't say and doing some things that we shouldn't do to one another.

These are called offenses, and they always precede, of course, a need for forgiveness. Forgiveness is the greatest single need that any human being has, anywhere, at any time, under any circumstance.

There is no greater need than the forgiveness that God has to offer. And there is nothing that will have more severe consequences, one way or another, in all of the eternity to come, apart from the reality of being forgiven, or not being forgiven.

So, due to the inexhaustibility of Scripture, we could re-plow this soil in the Sermon on the Mount and continue to turn up new concepts and applications found in its words.

[5 : 55] This is not true only of the Sermon on the Mount, but it's true of Scripture generally. It's true of the subject of forgiveness as well as all other themes of the Word of God.

One can never reach the bottom of any of them. So today, without ever having reached any bottom, we do reach a conclusion about this magnificent gift called forgiveness.

We have pondered, at length, the ins and outs of forgiveness and its conditionality here in the Sermon on the Mount, and we have carefully compared it to the unconditionality of forgiveness that is expressed in these epistles of the Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 John.

Several conclusions about these differences were reached, but none were so great as the event of the cross of Christ, because the death of the Lord Jesus Christ changed everything.

When you read the Scriptures, particularly in distinguishing the content of the Gospels with the content of the epistles and the book of Acts that come after, you always have to ask yourself doctrinally, now, is this thing I am studying and considering, is it something that was expressed before the cross or after the cross?

[7 : 16] Because with the cross of Christ and what was accomplished on that cross, everything changed. In fact, all of human history from the time of creation in Genesis and the fall in Genesis 3 forward to the time that Christ came and was made sin for humanity, that's what everything was looking forward to.

All of the apostles, all of the patriarchs in the Old Testament beginning as far back as Adam, because Adam was there.

Adam was there when God cursed the serpent and said the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. And that, of course, is dealing with the finality of the serpent and the finality of sin.

And that all anticipated the coming one day of one who would be called a redeemer. And the redeemer would simply pay the price that was due to buy back humanity that was lost, all of creation that was lost.

And that's precisely what Jesus Christ did. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. If you want more detailed information about this, I suggest you check the compact discs that are available back there.

[8 : 42] There's a number of them. You can look on the index in the back. And if you see subjects in there that are of interest to you, please feel free to take them. They are all free. And if you want to take some to give somebody else, we would appreciate that, your help in distributing them.

These are really bottom line issues. They are absolutely critical. I cannot think of a more important subject to preach on than that of forgiveness and the basis that makes it available.

We come into a right relationship with God through what Jesus Christ accomplished on that cross. And there isn't any other way. There just isn't any other way.

And the reason there isn't is because this is the only way God provided. salvation, coming into a right relationship with God, is not something that you obtain just by looking around and by religion shopping like you're going through a cafeteria and saying, well, that looks good.

I'll take a little bit of that and a little bit of that and a little bit of that. And that's the way it seems to a lot of people, but that's not the way it works. There is but one way provided, and God was pleased through His grace to provide one way.

[10 : 02] You understand, He didn't owe creation salvation. He didn't owe creation redemption. We had no claim on God to do something.

He did it solely out of His grace, out of the nature of His character, which is love. He did it because He chose to do it. He didn't do it because we had it coming, because we deserved it, because God couldn't resist it.

No, no. It was according to His good pleasure that He created all things, and according to His good pleasure, He redeemed us. So it is all due to Him.

And this subject of forgiveness is one that many people with great anxiety lay awake at night wondering whether they've done enough to be forgiven, whether God has really forgiven them.

And this is probably life's most unsettling issue. I cannot think of anything more anxiety-ridden than that because I experienced that myself. I went through that.

[11 : 07] It was probably no more than a year or a year and a half after I had become a believer. And I started questioning. Did that really happen to me?

Or was I imagining it? Did I really put my faith in Christ? Did I do it right? And did God really save me?

And how do I know that? And sometimes I don't feel very saved. And let me tell you, when you are struggling with issues like that and you do not know where you stand, whether you are forgiven or not, it can be very unsettling.

And it was to me as a 22-year-old who hadn't been a believer for more than maybe a year, a year and a half. And I was in my freshman year at Cedarville College. It was Cedarville College then, it's university now.

But it was an agonizing time. And as I look back on it, I know why it was so agonizing. And it was because of this. I knew enough about the importance of the subject to understand how critical it really was.

[12 : 17] And I'll never forget Dr. Arthur F. Williams, who was the dean of students and Bible teacher there at the time. Godly man had come out of the pastor of a church in New York.

And I sat down with him for probably a couple of hours and had a very heartwarming talk with him. And he gave me some literature and I began reading it and thinking about it and praying about it.

And the subject came up to my mind that we were talking about just this morning in the nine o'clock hour. Why do we believe the Bible? Why do we accept it as our only authority? And who says it's the Word of God?

What makes it the Word of God? Why do you believe this stuff? And there as a young man, I was able to really get that settled. And a firm conviction settled over my soul.

And it hasn't changed since. And that was about 55 years ago. Each year I find it growing more and more. So it's an exhilarating thing. It is a liberating thing to know that you know where you stand with God.

[13 : 30] And it isn't just a big question mark. Because that's what it is for a lot of people. If you don't really have a handle on grace, then you've got nothing left but works and merit and do-goodism.

And you can beat yourself to death with, have I done enough? Have I prayed enough? Have I given enough? Have I believed enough? Have I confessed my sin enough?

And on and on and on. Did it ever occur to you that one of the principal things God wants you to do with your salvation is enjoy it? Enjoy it.

Revel in it. Luxuriate in it. The very God of heaven has reached down into your heart and regenerated you, made you a new person on the inside.

And you still don't understand how he did that or how that happened. But he did. And he says he did. It all comes down to as we said earlier in the nine o'clock hour.

[14 : 42] The issue is authority. It always has been. It always will be. What is your authority for what you believe? If it's your parents, God bless them.

But somebody else's parents believe something entirely different. Which one is right? If it's your church, well, we all know how churches differ, don't we?

You could throw a rock and hit another church from here that believes differently than what we do. What makes us right and them wrong? Or what makes them right and us wrong?

What is the authority anyway? Is there such a thing as an overarching authority? Is there such a thing as a spiritual, moral, north star by which everything has to line up?

And our answer is, there is. There is. And that north star is God's word that he has provided.

[15 : 44] Of course, I've got issues with it. There are lots of things in this book I don't understand. And I don't expect to live long enough to figure them out. But I'll tell you this, the things that are most important are the things about which God has spoken the most clearly.

That's worth something in itself. And he has made the connection, the way to him ever so clear and the need for forgiveness and the basis for forgiveness.

I've come to the conclusion also, in connection with this whole subject, that forgiveness, in addition to it being so critical and so absolutely essential, it is supported by, undergirded by, love.

That's the thing that is to prompt our forgiveness. That's what prompted God to forgive us. But we're told in Romans 5.8, but God demonstrated, God put on display his love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

What is behind Christ dying for us is love. God so loved this world that he gave his only begotten son. Love is what prompts God to forgive us.

[17 : 16] He loves us. Love is what is to prompt us in forgiving one another. And the reason I say that is because forgiveness is a gift.

Why would you give someone a gift? Well, I suppose there are all kinds of motives. People may give gifts in order to get gifts, but the greatest motive behind gift giving is that you give it out of love.

It is a gift. And you know, when someone wrongs us, hurts us deeply by something they said or did. Maybe it's one of the proverbial metaphors that I use.

There are offenses that are darts, that people hurl darts at us and they lodge in our human spirit.

But a dart, a dart doesn't take up much room and the pinprick of a dart is pretty small, but it still hurts. And then there's the arrow that's bigger.

[18 : 26] The offense really gets our attention. When somebody shoots an arrow of offense into our human spirit and it lodges there, it hurts a bunch.

People can say things that cut you right to the quick, really hurt, or do things to you. but neither the dart nor the arrow compares with the spear.

That's the biggie. And when somebody hurls a spear at your human spirit, like someone whom you had always trusted and they turned out to betray you.

And it really, really, like, like infidelity in a marriage, that's a spear. That hurts like you can't imagine.

man, and to be able to forgive for something like that takes a pretty magnanimous person.

[19 : 38] And you know what's the basis for our forgiving someone? A Christian ought to never find themselves saying something like, I just cannot and will not forgive them for that.

Is there anybody here? I'm not asking for show of hands. You wouldn't want to admit it anyway. But is there anybody here that thinks that way? You look back on so and so, that low down, dirty, no good for nothing.

One of these days he's going to get his and I just want to be there to see it. That's an unforgiving spirit.

That's caused by resentment which morphs into bitterness which wants to see them get theirs. that's an ugly scene.

But you know Christians are capable of that? Why should we forgive someone who has hurt us so deeply? I'll tell you why.

[20 : 39] It's because someone has forgiven you someone whom you have hurt a lot more deeply. Be you kind one to another forgiving one another even as God in Christ's sake has forgiven you?

Wow. And if we say we can't forgive someone are we saying we have a higher standard than God does? But bear in mind that when we do forgive we are giving that person a gift the gift of forgiveness because the very need for forgiveness presupposes that a wrong has been committed.

there's no point in forgiveness if nobody's been offended or hurt. Forgiveness only comes into play as a need when there has been a real offense committed when there's something to be forgiven for.

And then when we forgive we give them a gift. And if you feel toward that person the last thing I want to do to that lousy so-and-so is to give them a gift then you've got an unforgiving spirit.

And you know what you need to do? You need to obtain forgiveness for that. That's right. For a Christian to be unforgiving is an oxymoron.

[22 : 04] It's a contradictory thing. We ought to be eager to forgive those simply because of how much we have been forgiven.

this is the kind of thing that can linger on in a person's spirit for a long time. And if the need is there in your heart or mine, I hope it persists until we deal with that issue.

I have some leftover questions I want to just briefly run by you. I think this will clear up the questions that were submitted and be as brief as I can with these can we forfeit forgiveness once received?

Is this forgiveness a transaction that is complete? Can a believer have a spiritual hissy fit and in being angry with God tell him you don't want his old forgiveness?

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine a believer telling God you know what you can do with your forgiveness just forget it I don't want your forgiveness you ever gotten really angry with God or told him off like David the psalmist and why would we do that?

[23 : 29] I'll tell you why I think is the major reason for Christians doing that is sometimes we really get ticked with God because he won't be reasonable and see things our way you ever been there?

where were you when I needed you? How come you let that happen? You're supposed to be in charge of everything why didn't you step in here and short circuit that thing?

Why didn't you keep that person from spraying Kennedy and I were at the people where are you anyway? These are questions that the world asks them where was God when the tsunami hit and 34,000 people were wiped out and the Jews today are still asking where was our God when the Holocaust was taking place and 6 million of us were eliminated where was our God and you know that very fact has resulted in multitudes of Jews turning to atheism because they can't believe that the God of the Bible could possibly exist and stand aside while six million Jews of so-called God's chosen people were wiped out?

There were a number of Jews that said farewell to their God, the God of Moses and Abraham. I don't want anything to do with you. I don't even think you exist. And if you do, you're not the kind of God I want anything to do with.

Lots of Jews have told God that. And lots of Christians have told God to get lost because he wouldn't do this for them. He wouldn't do that for them. He wouldn't answer this prayer or whatnot. And you know, that's humanly very understandable.

[25 : 16] We can carry great, great weights of disappointment. Phil Yancey, one of my favorite authors, has written a fantastic book. I think it just celebrated its 20 or 25th anniversary.

Can't believe it's been out that long. Fantastic book. If you ever see it anywhere, pick it up. It's a great book. It's called Disappointment with God. Great book. Great book.

Well, Christians can do these things. So, I suppose, yes, it is possible for a Christian to want to forfeit his forgiveness. Say, I don't want your old forgiveness. But in reality, it is a transaction that is completed.

And you know something? God knows and understands fully a Christian's temper tantrums. And just like, just like you might have a 14 or 15 year old who is desperately counting on some activity that they want to do with their friends, and you as the meany old parents say, no, you are not going.

Oh, I hate you! Well, they're having a temper tantrum. Christians can have temper tantrums too. with God their father. And even say stupid things like I hate.

[26 : 43] And I suspect there's a whole lot of teenagers who told their parents, I hate you! And what's a parent supposed to do? Doesn't it cut you right to the heart?

I mean, to hear your own flesh and blood say something like that? What's a parent's response to be to something like that? How about this? Well, I'm really sorry to hear that you feel that way.

But you know what? I love you anyway. And I don't care if you do say you hate me. You're still not going. Or are you going to say, oh, I can't stand for them to say things like that.

I want my child to love me. And once they figure out that that's your game plan, you're duck soup. you're done.

Because kids know how to manipulate like pros. I mean, they start when they're about two years old and they know what works. So, no, once you have received the grace of God, it is not going to be retracted from you because you don't deserve it due to your behavior.

[27 : 57] It wasn't your behavior that saved you by the grace of God. It was God's grace. And God's grace is the keeping factor. Don't worry about God saying, okay then, if that's the way you feel, I'll take my forgiveness back.

You're back on a plain old garden variety sinner once again. That is an utter impossibility practically and theologically and doctrinally.

Need we confess our sin in order to be saved? Does this not add something to the gospel of grace? I think there's a lot of confusion here among grace believers who just don't understand what is involved.

It is absolutely essential that you confess your sin in order to be saved. Now, hear me well because this is an important distinction. It is not, thank God, it is not necessary that you confess your sins in order to be saved.

You don't have that much time. None of us do. Not only that, you can't even think of them. What would you do if you had to itemize and list every sin you've committed?

[29 : 13] I would despair right from the beginning and say, this is a study in futility. This is going nowhere. I can't even remember them. Well, nobody can. At least if you've got some mileage on you, you can't.

Because a sin is anything that is contrary to the character and nature of God. How does that play out? Wow! It's in word, thought, and deeds.

Who could possibly enumerate those? No, you don't have to confess your sins in order to be saved, but you do have to confess your sin. And therein lies the difference.

The difference is your sinful nature. You have to acknowledge that you are a sinner. That shouldn't take a terrible amount of convincing to anyone when you understand that sin is anything that's contrary to the character and nature of God.

That includes lying and stealing and just the whole, well, you can just start with the Ten Commandments. And when you confess your sin, all that means is, and I've often said this, you are not saved by confessing your sin, but you cannot be saved without it.

[30 : 26] Because when you confess your sin, that is singular, your sin nature, not all of your sins, thousands of them or however many there are, when you confess your sin, the word confess in the Greek is homo legao.

Homo is the word from which we get the same, the same, as in same sex, as in homogenized milk. It is all the same.

There's no cream on top with the other down below. It's all mixed together. It means the same. And legao is the word which means, in the Greek, it means to say. And when you confess, you say the same thing.

That means you agree. When you confess your sin, you agree that you are a sinner. And this is why I say it's impossible to be saved without acknowledging, confessing, admitting your sin because if you won't admit your sin, you've got nothing to be saved from.

So when you admit your sin, confess your sin, acknowledge your sin, own up to your sin, take responsibility for your sin, that's what it means to confess your sin. No one can come to God and say, Heavenly Father, I really don't understand why I'm here because I'm not a sinner.

[31 : 43] I've never sinned and I want your forgiveness. Well, that's plain stupid. Isn't it? What's the point?

What are you doing? Doesn't make any sense. When we come to God, we acknowledge, we admit our flawed, failed psyche.

We say things and do things that are displeasing and contrary to God and that's sin. In other words, all we are asking you to do is, would you please admit you're a member of the human race?

That makes you a sinner automatically. We're all sinners. The only difference is there are forgiven sinners and there are unforgiven sinners.

But we're all sinners. No exceptions. The only one who was without sin was without sin which made him eligible to pay the price for all who were sinners.

[32 : 46] And that, of course, was the person of Christ. So, must we admit our sin to be saved? We've already touched on that. I think that apart from that admission, there is no need of salvation.

And repentance is ingrained in this as well because repentance refers to a change of mind. And it is true we are not saved by repenting because we can change our mind about sin.

We can say, okay, I acknowledge, I admit, I'm just like everybody else, I am a sinner. And you know what? I kind of like it.

I don't want to change anything. I want it to stay just the way it is. I want to be able to do my own thing however I want. I want to be able to sin with a high hand.

I want to be able to pursue any pleasure that I want, any vice that I want, any evil that I want. I want to have complete, absolute liberty about everything. Oh, and oh, by the way, I also want God's salvation.

[33 : 51] Forget that. There isn't any repentance there. That's pride in one's sin. That's a demand to maintain one's autonomy.

There's no salvation there. But when we come to God, acknowledge our sin, and say, I recognize this offends God.

I recognize that my sin condemns me just like it condemns everyone else. I recognize that I am without God's forgiveness. forgiveness. And I don't like that.

I want that forgiveness. I don't want this kind of life anymore. that is repentance.

That means you change your mind. And the only reason anyone changes their mind about these things is because of information.

[34 : 54] And when we preach the gospel, all we are doing is giving people information. information, it gives them a reason to change their mind.

The gospel contains bad news. Bad news always has to come first because if there is no bad news, there's no need for the good news.

bad news. It's the bad news that sets the stage for the good news. And the bad news is a bitter pill for man to swallow because we like to think that we're better than that.

But we're not. We're under the just condemnation of a holy God. That's bad news. And the good news comes to our rescue. God has provided a way out.

God has overcome the bad news with good news. That's what the gospel means. Good news. Yes, you are a sinner.

[35 : 55] Yes, you are condemned. Yes, you are deserving. But God loves you and has made more than ample provision for you in the person of his own dear son.

He paid a price that you could not pay. He paid a debt that he did not owe. But you can receive the benefit of what Christ accomplished for you.

You can be forgiven, cleansed, pardoned, saved, regenerated, made a whole brand new person in Christ and given.

Eternal life as an absolute gift doesn't cost you a thing. But it costs God everything.

That is amazing. John Newton calls it amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

[37 : 07] I once was lost but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see. Wow.

That is amazing. It's properly named that. Amazing grace. It's wonderful. Do you know that? Have you ever really thought about that down deep in your soul?

have you ever really wondered about connecting with God and what does it take and how can that be real? How can that be true?

How can you have that? You can have it by exercising your will, your volition. You take Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, sin bearer, and you do that with your will.

You don't do it with your emotions. This is a really important point. I want to get this across. You don't do it with your emotions although very often the emotions are involved but it's your will that counts.

[38 : 20] It's your volition that counts. It's a deliberate decision that you make. And it is not based on your feeling. It's based on your intellect.

can you imagine can you imagine here is this sweet young couple standing here before the pastor who's about to pronounce the vows and when it comes time he looks at this sweet young thing and he says do you feel like getting married to this guy?

It isn't what he says is it? He says will you take this man and will you take this woman?

Do you feel like taking her as your wife? Like I said the feelings are not absent of course this is a highly emotional moment but you don't make the decision with your emotions and those who do usually don't have what it takes for the long haul you do it with your will with your intellect it is a deliberate definite specific decision that you make and just as you say to each other I will I do feeling has nothing to do with it because the intellect and the will is on a much higher elevation plane than the feelings don't mix the two it's a decision of the will when you exercise faith you do that with your will not your feelings would you pray with me father these are really heavy and very important issues and if they weigh heavily on someone's heart we are grateful because they need to they are of such incredible importance that you have made them set forth so clearly in your words so many times our prayer this morning is for anyone who may be here perhaps here for the first time perhaps they've been here for years but they've never with their will really understood what is involved and they've never made that definite deliberate decision to take

Jesus Christ as their savior and father our prayer for any dear person here this morning struggling with these issues of forgiveness and of sin and of not knowing where they stand with you our heart really goes out to them because we know what it means to be in that position and it's very agonizing but when when we believe on the Lord Jesus and the spirit of God comes in the peace that passes all understanding can take over and we're so grateful for that for anyone who may be here this morning questioning struggling with these issues wondering worrying about where they stand we pray even now that they may be willing to just open their heart and mind and say Lord Jesus Christ there's much about this that I don't understand but

[41 : 58] I do understand that I have a need and I can't meet it only you can meet it and I want you to do that I am so grateful that you were willing to give as a gift your son the Lord Jesus to be my substitute and I know I don't deserve that but you did it out of your great love and I want to thank you for that and as best as I know how with all my fears and doubts and questions I know I want to deliver myself to you for for your salvation I want Jesus Christ in my life I want to put my faith and trust in him I want to live for him and I'm counting on you to help me do that thank you Lord Jesus amen if that is a prayer that in the privacy of your seat right where you are you have made

I can't tell you how happy I am for you and the scripture tells us that there is joy in the presence of heaven among the angels over one sinner who repents and heaven may be rejoicing right now you know sometimes as I look back over ministry here I've had people tell me maybe five ten years after the event when they came to know the Lord and I said well when was that and I said well it was when you were in the book of Romans chapter five and I was sitting right over there and I received Christ as my savior and I never knew that even in two years later because they didn't tell me right away so if you have made that decision this morning I want to assure you you are among friends and people who love you care about you and I would urge you to tell someone about your decision and if you want to tell me that you made that decision I'll rejoice with you and I have some literature that I'd like to give you that would really help you to get a good start in the Christian life so feel free to approach me and see me after we dismiss here.

I'd really like to open this up for Q&A; now but I realize once again I've taken your time as well as mine so I'll have to defer on that but you're still encouraged to submit any questions you may have a number of people write out their questions and drop them in the offering box and I'll do my best to answer them and we'll try to do that next week then.

All right. Well, the Lord bless you and thank you for being here this morning. Have a great day, snow and all. Happy Valentine's Day.