

ARE YOU SERIOUS
EXPLAIN: What is Forgiveness
September 17, 2023

INTRO.: Inconceivable: it's how we began our series on forgiveness last week. Forgiveness apart from God makes no sense. Somebody has done something to me, and they don't deserve my forgiveness. The only way that forgiveness makes any sense or is even possible, is because of God. Forgiveness is rooted in the character of God. In Numbers 14 He is described as a "*forgiving God*;" literally a "*God of pardons*." That doesn't mean that He glossed over sin but that this is part of His character.

Psalm 130:4 But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

Daniel 9:9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;

Not only is forgiveness rooted in the character of God, He is the source of forgiveness. When the four men brought their paralytic friend to Jesus to be healed, they had to lower him down through the roof because of the large crowd. What was the first thing Jesus said to the man? It wasn't, "You are healed." That wasn't the biggest need of the man. These were Jesus' first words to him: "Son, your sins are forgiven."

The religious leaders observing this were indignant, for in that statement, Jesus was claiming to be God because only God can forgive sin. Jesus knew what they were thinking (evidence of His deity) and asked them two questions:

1) Why are you thinking these things? (you would have thought they would be stunned that Jesus knew what they were thinking)

2) Which is easier to say to this paralyzed man:

Your sins are forgiven

Or

Get up, take your mat and walk

Jesus then tells them what He wants them to know:

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

"know:" that they would know presently and continue to know

"has:" present tense (I currently have)

"forgive:" present tense (Jesus forgives sin now and ongoing)

Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the source of forgiveness. He is also the pattern for forgiveness, as He demonstrated what this looks like by becoming a man, living, dying, and raising again for our sins.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the believers in Ephesus says:

Ephesians 4:31–32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. **32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

When you take God out of the equation there can never be true forgiveness.

The River Can't Clean Itself

The Ganges River is one of the world's largest fresh water outlets, after the Amazon and the Congo. The headwaters emerge from a glacier high in the western Himalayas, and then drops down steep mountain canyons to India's fertile northern plain. Just after it merges with the Brahmaputra, the Ganges empties into the Bay of Bengal. It supports more than a quarter of India's 1.4 billion people, all of Nepal, and part of Bangladesh.

But sadly, the Ganges has also long been one of the world's most polluted rivers. The river is befouled by poisonous bi-products from hundreds of factories and towns. Arsenic, chromium, and mercury combine with the hundreds of millions of gallons of raw sewage that flow into the river on a daily basis.

But despite countless studies and evidence proving the river's polluted state, environmentalists have gained little traction in cleaning up the river. Why?

The Ganges River is a sacred waterway worshipped by a billion Hindus as Mother Ganga, a living goddess with power to purify the soul, and to cleanse itself. A recent article in *National Geographic* explains: "There is this belief that the river can clean itself. If the river can clean itself, then why should we have to worry about it? Many people say the river cannot be polluted; it can go on forever."

Source: Laura Parker. "Plastic Runs Through It." *National Geographic* (3-15-22)

You and I do not have the ability, the power, the reason to forgive apart from God! This morning the theme is, "*EXPLAIN*," that is "What is forgiveness?" How does one define or explain forgiveness? As we look at that we also want to look at "What forgiveness is not."

Where do we find the definition of forgiveness? As with everything else we turn to the Word of God, the Bible. Forgiveness is...

God's idea; **Costly** therefore not easy; **Possible** through **Christ**.

Forgiveness is **God's** Idea

I think it is important that we begin by looking at the words used for forgiveness and what they mean. I have gleaned these words and definitions from the following:

Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words by Lawrence O. Richards

Expository Dictionary of NT Words by W.E. Vine

Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary

International Standard Bible Dictionary (ISBE)

Let's look at the words used in the OT for forgiveness.

*The Hebrew verb *kāpar* is the word commonly used for atonement, in which sins were "covered" by offering a sacrifice as a substitute for the life of the sinner. In this sense *kāpar* obviously refers only to God's forgiveness of the transgressor (Dt. 21:8; Ps. 78:38; Jer. 18:23). (ISBE) It is used about 150 times. (Richards)

Psalm 78:38 Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath.

**nāsā'* is forgiveness in terms of guilt being taken away, atoned for, or borne, resulting in divine pardon (Ex. 28:43; 32:32; Lev. 5:1, 7; Nu. 14:19, 34; 18:1; Josh. 24:19; Ps. 85:3; etc.), and also of human forgiveness (Gen. 50:17; Ex. 10:17; 1 S. 25:28). (ISBE) The common word means "to lift up," "to carry or support," "to take up or away." (Richards)

Numbers 14:19 In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now."

**sālah* and its derivatives mean "to forgive, or pardon." This word group is used only of the divine offer of pardon to sinners. The offer is extended to all: (Richards)

Isaiah 55:6-7 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. **7** Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

(cf. Nu. 30:5, 8, 12; 1 K. 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50; 2 K. 24:4; Am. 7:2; Ps. 86:5; 130:4; Dan. 9:9; Neh. 12:7, 20). (ISBE)

**kāsā* has the general sense of covering or concealing, and from the idea of covering a person came that of covering sins (Neh. 4:5; Ps. 32:1; 85:2). (ISBE)

Psalm 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

God's motive in forgiving is clear in the OT, and there is celebration of God's character as a forgiving Person: (Lawrence O. Richards)

Exodus 34:7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

Second, the New Testament, which was originally written in Greek.

**charizomai*: "to be gracious," or "to give freely" It is used in the sense of "forgive." (Richards) It is not found outside of the writings of Luke and Paul, and in the sense "forgive sins" is peculiarly Pauline (2 Cor. 2:7; 12:13; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 3:13). It expresses, as no other of these words does, Paul's conception of the graciousness of God's pardon. (ISBE)

Colossians 2:13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

**aphiemi*: is a verb that occurs 146 times in the NT. It has the sense "forgive" 49 of these times, 44 of which occur in the gospels; but it has this meaning only once in Paul's writings (Rom 4:7). It is used in the sense of forgiveness of sins, of debts, and of crimes. The majority of the occurrences convey a meaning other than forgiveness: i.e. dismiss, release, leave, or abandon. (Richards)

Romans 4:7 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven (passive) , whose sins are covered.

**aphesis*: is found 17 times in the NT. In 15 of those occurrences it expresses forgiveness (often "remission" KJV) of sins. (Richards)

Matthew 26:28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

As we have taken a quick look at all these words for “forgiveness” one cannot escape the fact that they are all connected with God. We cannot grasp the meaning of forgiveness when we take God out of the picture! Thus, forgiveness is God’s idea. Forgiveness is:

Costly therefore **not Easy**

In the Old Testament when the Israelites brought a sacrifice for their sins, a burnt offering it had to be the best of your herd or flock.

Leviticus 1:3 “If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD.

Leviticus 1:10 “If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect.

In the book of Malachi God’s anger is aroused because the priests offered blind, lame, and diseased animals.

The OT sacrifices were meant to cover their sins. They looked forward to Messiah coming to forgive their sins. Jesus Christ the perfect sacrifice, came to provide the way of forgiveness, a restored relationship with God but what did it cost?

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 Peter 1:18–19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Hebrews 9:22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Philippians 2:6–8 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **7** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Even in our response to God there is a cost!

Mark 1:15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Jesus)

Acts 20:21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. (Paul)

Divine forgiveness does not overlook sin or dismiss it lightly. Rather, forgiveness is an act of God by which he deals, not with our guilt but with sins themselves. In forgiveness God removes the sins and makes the guilt moot. No wonder the teachers of the law objected when Jesus said to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven” (Mk. 2:5). Lawrence O. Richards

With what it cost God to provide forgiveness for our sins why do we think it will be easy to forgive others?

Forgiveness is God’s Idea

Forgiveness is costly therefore not easy

Forgiveness is:

Possible through **Christ**

I would add one word here: “only possible through Christ.”

Forgiveness does not come naturally. We will talk about this more as we continue this series.

I have had many people say, “Pastor, I just can’t forgive them.” Do you know what my response is? “You are absolutely right!” Since forgiveness is God’s idea how can we ever expect to forgive apart from Him?

I would go even one step farther. If you and I are not walking with God, we will not be able to forgive others. Think about what Jesus had to say to Peter about forgiveness. I preface this by saying that forgiveness was not an admired attribute in the culture of the day. The false deities being propagated were vindictive and mean.

Matthew 18:21–22 (NKJV) — **21** Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” **22** Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Or how about what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

Luke 6:27–31 “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. **29** If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. **30** Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. **31** Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Do not think you will be able to take this journey of forgiveness without Christ?!

Philippians 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Forgiveness is God’s Idea

Forgiveness is costly therefore not easy

Forgiveness is possible through Christ

As we have examined what forgiveness is this also leads us to what forgiveness is not.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT:

Pretending

You hear the phrase, “Forgive and Forget.” How hard is that to do? Somebody does you wrong and the next time you see them, what comes to mind? Yet, when we forgive we have the freedom to begin to forget. This doesn’t mean that after forgiving someone I get to hold onto the wrong and continue to bring it up again. Think about the definition of the various words for forgiveness: to cover, to take up or away, pardon, to be gracious, to give freely. It does mean that I put the sin behind me, through God’s strength and power, and not keep bringing it up.

This reminds me a bit of some of my sports teams. You have to be very historical if you are going to remember the last time the sports teams, I root for won a championship.

Hockey: 29 years

Football: 30 years

Baseball: 37 years

Basketball: 50 years

Sometimes we can be very historical, hanging onto things years after we have supposedly forgiven the other person. I would encourage you to seek Biblical counseling if you are struggling in this area.

Sweeping It Under The Rug

Moving forward without dealing with it. It is so important that Jesus says if you are at the altar and remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift and go, be reconciled to your brother.

Matthew 5:23–24 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Go prayerfully and consider not only what you say but how you say it. You know you’ve wronged someone you need to correct it.

Adding “But”

This includes making excuses for others and myself. Any apology that has a “but” attached to it is not an apology. When I say something or do something I shouldn’t, I need to apologize and seek forgiveness without saying, “but if you hadn’t....”

Each one of us needs to own up to our sin. Nobody can make me say things or do things that I shouldn't say or do. Everyone of us here is messed up and forgiveness fits us perfectly. Yes, my sin might be different than your sin, but I need forgiveness just as much as anyone else. Some sins have more ramifications and consequences than other sins, but it is still a sin!

ONE SIZE FITS ALL: You've seen those signs, right?! They end up fitting nobody but the need for forgiveness fits all of us.

Continuing to allow

Forgiveness is not just letting the sin continue. If there is abuse going on God does not expect you to remain in the abusive situation in the name of Jesus.

SO WHAT???

What are the take-aways from this message?

*Without knowing Christ personally and without walking with God I do not have the power to forgive or the reason to forgive.

*If I am struggling with forgiveness, it is wise to seek Biblical counseling

*The church (those who know Jesus Christ) should be the best at forgiveness because we recognize our own individual desperate need for forgiveness and how much God has forgiven us.

John 8:1–11 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. **2** At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. **3** The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group **4** and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. **5** In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” **6** They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. **7** When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” **8** Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. **9** At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. **10** Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” **11** “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

When I get a grasp of how much I have been forgiven it changes everything!

Luke 7:36–50 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. **37** When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, **38** and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. **39** When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.” **40** Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said. **41** “Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. **42** Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” **43** Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said. **44** Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. **45** You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. **46** You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. **47** Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.” **48** Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” **49** The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” **50** Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”