

Ethical Forgiveness

When I was asked to take the topic of Forgiveness I asked if I could address it in connection with the topic of ethics because of some of the work I have been involved in this year.

Most of you are aware that over the past year I have been involved in advocacy work with sexual abuse victims – but you may not be aware to what extent - and how many different cases I have been involved with or consulted on.

Three Things I Have Learned:

- **1. Sheltered + Ignorant:** I've lived a sheltered life and was grossly ignorant about the realities of sexual abuse from a victim's perspective.
 - Not only did I become aware of MY ignorance, but also the GENERAL ignorance that exists in the church on the subject.
 - Particularly: The permanent impact that sexual abuse has on victims in the forms of TRAUMA and GUILT.
 - Specifically, the guilt that results from the inability to just forgive and forget what has happened to them whenever the predator who assaulted them is not brought to justice or refuses to repent.
- This made me realize that we need to talk about the topic of Forgiveness in light of Major Trauma AND the context of Ethics.
- **2. Problem:** We have a growing issue in the church that CANNOT be ignored and MUST NOT be hidden.
 - I have spoken with dozens and dozens and dozens of sexual abuse victims in the church - all the way from preachers to little old ladies who were abused by church leaders, church members, or family members.
- **3. New Hatred of Evil:**

Proverbs 8:13

[13] The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.

Pride and arrogance and the way of evil

and perverted speech I hate.

I understand why God hates sin so much and yet at the same time it makes you
What I don't fully understand is how God keeps from ripping this world apart when He hears the cries of the innocent and looks down on all the wickedness in this world.

Example #1:

- What do you tell parents who discover their teenage son is struggling with severe depression and suicidality because he was brutally raped by one of his church peers several years prior, has never received justice, and doesn't know how to cope with it?

You DON'T do what some church leaders did when they:

- Downplayed the nature of the crime, '
- Said "this is no big deal – it happens all the time - that it was just a case of two boys fooling around"
- Refused to require reconciliation between the predator and the victim or his family
- And then proceeded to ignore the problem while stating that the victim needed to "just forgive".
- ***Saddest of All:*** They never offered help of any kind to the victim or his family.

That is a perversion of both justice and forgiveness.

Example #2:

- What do you tell a young girl in the church who is suffering through the trauma of having been used by her mother to produce child pornography for a brother in the church with whom the mother was having an affair?

What You DON'T Do:

- You DON'T:
 - Ignore the suffering of the daughter
 - Take a private generic confession from the mother – a confession by the way that contained lies - which is not in fact a confession
 - Cover it up and refuse to inform the congregation
 - Get angry with brethren who insist the crime must be reported to the police
 - And then tell the girl that she needs to "just forgive" and move on with life.

Yet that's what happened and it was a perversion of justice and forgiveness.

Example #3:

- What do you tell a fatherless young man who has been to hundreds of hours of therapy and yet still suffers from the trauma caused when his spiritual mentor - a preacher in the church - molested him during a gospel meeting?

I'll tell you what you do: You treat the young man like he is your own child or your own brother - you stand up for him - and you defend him against a wicked pervert. You don't shut up, you don't back down, and you don't care what anyone thinks about you.

You lift up the hands that hang down - Hebrews 12:12

And you rip the cover off sin and shine the light of the truth on darkness - Eph 5:10-11

Yet some church leaders have:

- Ignored the young man's cries - never once looking into his well being
- Called him a liar
- Claimed that the incident was consensual
- Claimed it was no big deal
- Treated the victim like he is the oppressor and the oppressor as if he is the victim
- And demanded forgiveness be granted to the unrepentant pervert

- Typical Response of Church Leaders to Accusations of Sexual Abuse:

- Refuse to listen to the victims
- Refuse to look at the evidence
- Refuse to investigate properly (*ask me what I mean by that in the Q&A*)
- And Demonstrate partiality in judgment by:
 - Defending the pervert
 - Attacking the victims
 - Perverting justice
 - And demanding Forgiveness rather than Repentance

Where is the mercy for the victims?!?!?!?!?

And then people wonder why these victims leave the church.

That is utterly wicked, perverse, unethical, and unmerciful.

Is it becoming clear *WHY* we need to talk about Ethics & Forgiveness?

I want to make two things Crystal Clear:

1- Everyone loves to use the Catholic Church and their sexual abuse problems as their whipping boy - but if we act like Catholic leaders and cover up sexual abuse, we deserve every bit of shame that they have received when the truth comes out - and the truth WILL come out.

Numbers 32:23

“...and be sure your sin will find you out.”

2- It is unethical and deeply harmful to heap the responsibility of healing on the back of a victim who is lying bleeding and broken in the street with the words - “just forgive”.

Point: That’s like telling a person who has been in a terrible car wreck to “just walk it off.”

We have got to rethink our Ethical Responsibilities and Conceptions of forgiveness when it comes to victims of sexual abuse.

I want to spend just a brief moment defining our terms:

1. ***Ethics.*** *When we speak of Ethics, what do we mean?*

Ethics are about Morals Absolutes that govern members of a community both individually and collectively.

When we speak of Ethics we are speaking about the Moral Responsibility of the individual to the Community and the Community’s Moral Responsibility toward the individual.

Example:

- This is the Love Your Neighbor Principle
- The Parable of the Good Samaritan tells us that when we come upon someone lying in the road broken and bleeding we have an Ethical or Moral Responsibility to help them.

When I speak of Ethics and sexual abuse victims I am speaking about our Moral Responsibility to assist in areas of justice and healing.

Major Point: What is super discouraging in advocating for victims of sexual abuse is not that no one believes you, but that few are willing to get involved because it just doesn't affect them – or because doing so will cause problems.

Sexual Abuse is a Good Samaritan / Ethical Problem

Folks: If Living Ethically and Speaking Truth causes problems – YOU'VE ALREADY GOT PROBLEMS.

You don't defeat evil or help the victim by silencing truth.

We MUST realize that we have an Ethical responsibility - not just to the victim - but to society at large to deal with sins that are communal in nature – and sexual abuse in particular.

2. *Forgiveness – When we speak of Forgiveness - How do we define it?*

Forgiveness is NOT just a matter of letting go of a problem.

Listen Carefully: *I'm not saying that victims should cling to their problems.*

1 Peter 5:7

casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

What I am saying: Casting anxieties on Christ is part of the healing process for victims, but casting anxieties is not forgiveness.

Illustration: When a woman loses her spouse and she casts the anxieties of her grief upon the Lord, she is not forgiving death or the devil– she’s simply asking God to help her walk through the valley of sorrow.

Let me share part of the biblical definition of forgiveness that we can build on:

Forgiveness Is = Canceling of Sin Debt

Matthew 6:12

[12] and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.

We are asking God to forgive our sin debts as we forgive the sin debts of our debtors.

Point: It is sin - NOT the person that is forgiven. Sin is the direct object, and the recipient the indirect object.

Point: We can’t talk about forgiveness without talking about the canceling of sin debt - which requires an acknowledgement of sin.

Question We Need to Ask:

What does the process of Debt Cancellation look like when dealing with the Major Issues of life?

6 Critical Truths About Ethics & Forgiveness:

Truth #1: Justice is the Foundation of God's Throne - NOT Mercy

If we get this point wrong we will develop a false understanding of forgiveness.

Two Critical Passages:

Passages #1 & #2:

Psalm 89:14

[14] Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

Psalm 97:2-3

[2] Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
[3] Fire goes before him
and burns up his adversaries all around.

Righteousness and Justice are the non-negotiable foundation of God's Reign.

***Forgiveness makes no sense in a world where righteousness and justice are not upheld.
If there is no right and wrong, there is no need for forgiveness.***

Church Leaders Who Are Upset With Me For Pursuing Justice

Ask: Don't you believe in forgiveness?

Response: Absolutely. Do you believe in justice?

For some reason many people think that Justice and Mercy are incompatible.

Listen: God is ALWAYS JUST - but there are conditional limits to His mercy.

You See: The only way for Forgiveness to be Just is if Forgiveness flows from Justice.

Let me illustrate:

Brother Beating His Brother

Illustration: Pretend for a moment that you have a couple sons and that the oldest son is always picking at the younger son and trying to start a fight with him. Over and over again you have told the older son to stop hurting his little brother, but once again you hear the older boy picking a fight followed by lots of screaming and crying coming from the younger child. You rush in and discover the youngest child lying on the ground bleeding out and the other standing over the top of him wailing away.

Question: What is your reaction as a parent?

Question: Are you going to go up to the child who is bleeding out and start lecturing them about how he need to forgive their brother who beat them? Are you going to threaten to punish him if he does not forgive? Or tell him that he will never get over the harm unless he forgives? How about telling him that God will send him to hell if he continues in a state of unforgiveness?

That's crazy right?

No, you're going to break up the fight, make sure the child on the ground is still alive, take the child who was handing out a beating and beat him within an inch of his life, threaten to finish the job if he chooses to act that way again, demand repentance, demand that he apologize for

hurting his brother, and THEN - after we have seen some punishment, remorse, and repentance - THEN we will help bandage the bleeding wounds of the younger brother and tell him he needs to forgive the one who hurt him.

Question: Why is the process of justice and forgiveness so easy to understand and apply when dealing with children, yet so difficult and convoluted when dealing with adults?

Mercy MUST flow from Justice.

Truth #2: God Is The Perfect Model of Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Listen Up: If our theory of forgiveness is different than the model of God through Christ, we have a False view of forgiveness.

- This means that the forgiveness God has demonstrated CAN Be and MUST Be practiced by His children.
- It also means there is only ONE DEFINITION of Forgiveness – NOT two.

Truth #3: Divine Forgiveness is Transactional Forgiveness

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that **He gave** His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes** in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Transaction: God has given His Son to make the transaction possible and Man MUST respond through obedient faith. Forgiveness from God is hereby described as a ***Conditional Transaction.***

When Christ came preaching, His entire message could be summed up as a Conditional Transaction:

Matthew 4:17

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Whether we are talking about Initial Forgiveness:

Acts 2:38

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ ***for the forgiveness of your sins;***

Or Continual Cleansing:

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Forgiveness is Transactional and Repentance is at its core:

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish ***but that all should come to repentance.***

Get These Points:

1. **Repentance is an ESSENTIAL element of Divine Forgiveness, and yet**
2. ***Conditional Grace is still Grace.***

With those points in mind, listen again to the words of Paul:

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Here are the Necessary Implications:

1. Since the Divine Model of Forgiveness is Transactional Forgiveness - human forgiveness must also be transactional.
2. Since Repentance is a NECESSARY Component of Divine Forgiveness - it is a NECESSARY Component of Human forgiveness.
3. Since God forgives when man repents, so we MUST forgive when our brother repents.
 - ii. A failure to do so is utter wickedness - Matthew 18:32

Major Point: The Transaction that is implied in Ephesians 4:32 is explicitly stated in Luke 17:3:

Luke 17:3

Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; **and if he repents**, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I **repent**,' you shall forgive him."

Three Inescapable Truths:

1. We must confront and rebuke sin.

Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin" Dietrich Bonhoeffer

2. ***We can't get around the Transactional nature of forgiveness - whether we are speaking about divine or human forgiveness. Repentance is THE KEY that makes the Transaction work and keeps it ethical.***
3. ***Unless we are prepared to teach Irresistible Grace, Forgiveness without Repentance is an impossibility.***

Biblical Definition of Forgiveness:

When you combine Ephesians 4:32 + Luke 17:3-4 + Matthew 6:12, forgiveness is biblically defined as: A conditional transaction that necessitates Repentance and results in the cancellation of a sin debt.

Listen Carefully: It is wrong to take the Biblical definition of forgiveness and substitute that definition with an Unconditional Model in passages where the biblical definition is assumed.

Example:

Mark 11:25

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Point: This passage does not define forgiveness, but rather assumes a biblical understanding of the concept. This passage cannot therefore be used to prove an Unconditional Model of forgiveness, but must be harmonized with definitive texts.

The Fact Is: Forgiveness is Biblically defined as: A conditional transaction that necessitates Repentance and results in the cancellation of a sin debt.

A Word About Repentance:

When we are speaking about sins against a brother, repentance means more than changed behavior.

- **Repentance in such cases requires:**
 - **Confession** - Luke 17:3-4
 - **Reconciliation** - Matthew 5:23
 - **Offer of Restitution** - Luke 19:8

Reconciliation: Matthew 5:23

A failure to obey this command renders our worship vain.
As one writer put it:

“We dare not come before the Heavenly Father to request forgiveness of our sins while refusing to request forgiveness of our sins from those against whom we have sinned.”
(Ardel Caneday)

Don't tell me: “I've repented” or “I've been forgiven” if your sin was against your brother and you have never sought reconciliation with your brother!

Story of conversation with Devin.

Reconciliation is a mandate.

Offer of Restitution: Luke 19:8

Surely, if the Good Samaritan was under the Moral Obligation to care for the man on the road, then the predator who has destroyed the life of his victim has a moral responsibility to at least take care of the financial burdens - such as medical or psychological bills that his actions have brought upon his victims.

A Word About Grace:

There is an idea that if humans fail to forgive unconditionally then they are not demonstrating Grace.

Such a position fails to recognize two truths:

Two Truths:

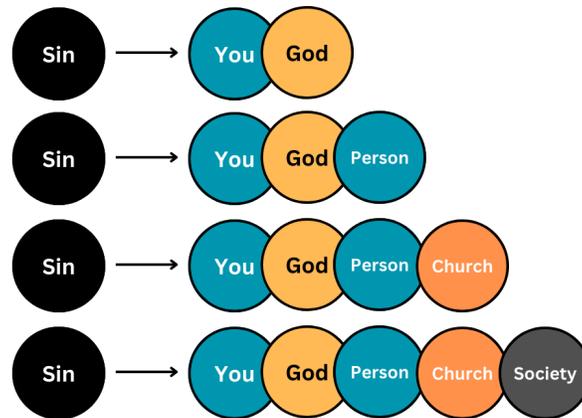
1. Conditional Grace is still Grace
That's true with God and it's true with man.
2. Man cannot be more gracious or forgiving than God.

Truth #4: Good Ethics Must Govern Sins Against Community.

One of the things we struggle with as American Christians is allowing our American Individualism to affect our understanding of responsibility to our neighbors and community.

Consider Carefully:

4 Types of Sins:



First, All Sin is Against God:

Get This Point: Whenever we sin against our brother we also sin against God.

Example: 2 Samuel 12:13 When Nathan confronted David over his sin against Uriah, David declared, “ I have sinned against the Lord.”

Side Note: We will talk more about the idea of *Unconditional Forgiveness* later on - but I want to make this point right here:

To unconditionally forgive sin when all sin is against God is to ignore the seriousness of sin and debase the cross of Christ.

That alone ought to make us reject the concept of unconditional forgiveness.

Second, Some Sins Are Communal In Nature From the Get-Go.

- When Saul persecuted Christians in Acts 8, he was sinning against the church.
- When Paul warned of wolves – Acts 20:29 – he warned of the danger such men presented to the flock – the church.
- When the brother at Corinth took his father's wife his sin affected and endangered the entire church - not just his own soul.

This is because we are individually members of the BODY.

This is why individual sins can become communal issues:

Matthew 18:15-17

Moreover if your brother *sins against you*, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, **tell it to the church**. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Third, Some Sins Are Against Society: Crimes

Example: Murder. Everyone recognizes that murder is a crime against society and that murderers need to be arrested for the sake of everyone in the community.

Point: If Alan Bonifey murdered my father, no one would have a problem with me reporting him to the police or saying that he needs to be thrown in prison.

Point: We are morally outraged about murder and its threat to society, but we are not morally outraged about sexual abuse when it happens in the church.

Now if it happens in the Catholic Church we have some moral outrage - but that outrage disappears when it happens in the church. No one cares if you report a murderer, but I have had several brethren VERY upset with me for reporting rapists.

Why is that?

Three Reasons:

1. Because sexual abuse does not threaten us personally in the same way murder does. We have an Ethics problem. We're more concerned about ourselves than we are our neighbor.
2. Because we are not dealing with the crime from the perspective of the victim.
3. Because we're more concerned about our reputation than our holiness.

Note: When we become more concerned with the REPUTATION of the church than its Holiness, we are in danger of becoming like what the Lord described:

Matthew 23:27-28

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ***So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.***

Truth #5: It is Unethical to treat all sins equally.

While it is true that all sin leads to hell, it is not true that all sins are equal.

1 Corinthians 6:2

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try ***trivial cases?***

Important Note: This passage echoes Exodus 18 where Moses appoints wise men to judge small matters but requires that Big Matters be brought to him and God.

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 is dealing with Trivial Matters. The verses the precede it in chapter 5 are not, and the verses that follow are not, but 6:1-8 is dealing with Trivial Matters and that is explicitly stated.

Two Points:

1. It is WRONG to claim all sins are equal and fail to distinguish between Trivial Matters and Major Issues.
2. 1 Corinthians 6 forbids taking **Trivial Matters** before unbelievers – not MAJOR ISSUES that include heinous wickedness.

Romans 13:1-6

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist ***have been instituted by God***. Therefore whoever resists the authorities ***resists what God has appointed***, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ***for he is God's servant for your good***. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. ***For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer***. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only ***to avoid God's wrath*** but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, ***for the authorities are ministers of God***, attending to this very thing.

Fact Is: Romans 13 requires – as in it is the WILL OF GOD – that wicked men be turned over to the authorities for prosecution by the State.

Why? Because they are wicked men and because the foundation of His throne is Justice.

Get These Points:

- Sexual Abuse is a BIG DEAL,
- It is UTTER WICKEDNESS,
- It should NEVER - NOT ONCE be named among God's people
- And it MUST be afflicted with justice.

Amos 5:23-24

*Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Truth #6: Forgiveness Does NOT Mean Freedom From Consequences

Fact Is: Consequences are an unavoidable reality of sin.

Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, *for whatever one sows, that will he also reap*. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Examples of Consequences Accompanying Forgiveness:

How about Israel in the wilderness:

Psalm 99:7-8

He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;
They kept His testimonies
And the statute that He gave them.
O Lord our God, You answered them;
***You were a forgiving God to them,
And yet an avenger of their evil deeds.***

- David – was forgiven for his sin against Uriah, but the consequence included the rape of his own wives, civil war wherein thousands died, and the death of multiple children.
- Saul – was forgiven in 1 Samuel 15, but the dynasty was removed from his family.
- Moses – forgiven for striking the rock, yet not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

- Paul – forgiven for persecuting the church and stoning Stephen, yet the memories would last.
- Divorce – the guilty party can be forgiven, but never allowed to remarry.

Two Reason for Consequences in the midst of forgiveness:

1. Because God’s love is ETHICAL – i.e. Communally Focused – NOT just individually focused.
2. Because God finds it fair to invoke permanent consequences on men when their actions have permanent consequences on the lives of innocent people.

We MUST Understand: Consequences are ethical, are meant to deter criminality, and look out for the well-being of the community.

Now, having touched upon the topics of Ethics, Justice, and Forgiveness, I want to spend the rest of our time discussing problems with the popular idea of unconditional forgiveness.

The Problems of Unconditional Forgiveness

Unconditional Forgiveness is the idea that repentance is NOT a condition of forgiveness and that when we are wronged we must simply “let it go” and “give it up to God” who can choose to punish or not punish the one that committed the sin.

I want to share 10 Reasons Why I Believe Unconditional Forgiveness is:

- ***Unethical***
- ***Unbiblical,***
- ***Does not work***
- ***Is dangerous***

10 Problems With Unconditional Forgiveness:

Disclaimer: I am not stating that all who hold to the position of Unconditional Forgiveness encounter all of these problems, but these are problems that arise from the doctrine.

PROBLEM #1: Unconditional Forgiveness Contradicts Two Critical Passages We Looked at Earlier:

Passage #1:

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, *as God in Christ forgave you.*

Passage #2:

Luke 17:3-4

Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and *if he repents*, forgive him, *and if* he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, *'I repent,'* you must forgive him."

Major Points:

Ephesians 4:32 & Luke 17:3-4 can be harmonized with EVERY Passage on Forgiveness – but they CANNOT be harmonized with Unconditional Forgiveness.

PROBLEM #2: Unconditional Forgiveness misunderstands Luke 23:34

Luke 23:34

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Three Points:

1. Are we to believe that the entire message of Jesus' preaching ministry "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" has now been subverted and replaced with Unconditional Forgiveness in the moment of the cross?
2. If Jesus unconditionally forgave those who crucified him, why did Peter condemn them **for the death of Christ** and tell them that they must repent and be baptized in order to be forgiven of their sins - Acts 2:38? Why did they stand condemned if Christ forgave them?

Response: Jesus the man forgave by God the Father did not.

Problem: Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins - **Matthew 9:5-6**

3. Are we prepared to teach Irresistible Grace from Luke 23:34.
 - a. **Point:** I can get why a Calvinist who teaches unconditional salvation might teach unconditional forgiveness from Luke 23:34, but I don't understand why we would be tempted to do so.

Forgiveness is conditional and the sinner MUST decide whether he wants to accept the offer or not.

PROBLEM #3: Unconditional Forgiveness Ignores the Process of Suffering:

Unconditional Forgiveness: Give it up so you don't have to suffer

Biblical Admonition For Suffering:

Love suffers long and is kind. (1 Corinthians 13:4)

Again, this is modeled after God:

Numbers 14:18

The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

Suffering is a reality of the Christian life - but that doesn't mean we have to suffer alone.

1 Peter 5:7

casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Luke 21:17-19

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost.
By your patience possess your souls.

Jesus did not command them to:

- "Just forgive".
- But to endure.

PROBLEM #4: Unconditional Forgiveness Confuses Forgiving with Forgetting.

Unconditional forgiveness defines forgiveness as "letting it go" and then takes that to mean that we must forget about the sin that was committed against us lest we become bitter.

Two Problems:

- 1. Though God forgives, He does not forget - and remember - our forgiveness MUST be modeled after His.***

Objection:

Jeremiah 31:34

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Response: If forgiving means erasing the memory of their transgression, why does God record the memory of their transgression in this very passage where He speaks of forgetting it?

If God forgets – erases the sins of His people that are forgiven – why are any failures of saved people recorded in Scripture?

Point: Clearly God did not forget the memory but rather forgot the debt.

2. Forgetting is impossible for victims of traumatic abuse.

You can take a victim of sexual abuse, isolate them from their molester, cram unconditional forgiveness down their throat, and even get them to buy into it – but as soon as their predator comes back into their presence they will immediately find themselves at square one.

Why?

Because an unrepentant predator is a dangerous person who will continue to hurt you and your body knows that it is in danger and that it is foolish to let your guard down.

Get This Point: Victims of extreme trauma cannot just forgive and forget – their bodies won't let them - no matter how much you or they may wish they were able to. When the trauma of the event so invades a person's life to the point that they can't get away from it – even when you are sleeping – telling someone to forget it and move on is harmful.

PROBLEM #5: Unconditional Forgiveness Falsely Asserts that Bitterness is the Automatic Result of Unforgiveness.

- If bitterness is the automatic result of unforgiveness, should we conceive of God as filled with bitterness and anger, unwilling to forgive?
- Furthermore, how do we explain John 20:23?

John 20:23

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

News Flash:

The greatest challenge for a victim is NOT having to practice biblical forgiveness, but having to endure injustice. If you want to keep a block of stumbling from your oppressed brother, seek justice on his behalf.

PROBLEM #6: Unconditional Forgiveness Misunderstands the Purpose of Forgiveness.

As one brother put it to me: “The “just forgive” position is really a “therapeutic forgiveness” that focuses on the feeling of the offended rather than the restoration of the offender.”

Listen: God did not design forgiveness primarily for His benefit. He designed it to benefit sinful mankind!

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward *us*, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for *us*.

The Fact Is:

- Christ died for *US* - ***Not Himself - For Our Healing - Not HIS.***

Point: If our forgiveness must be modeled after God’s forgiveness then our forgiveness must be ***offender focused, not victim centered.***

PROBLEM #7: Unconditional Forgiveness Teaches that Forgiveness Men Are Not Forgiveness.

What do I mean by that?

Unconditional Forgiveness Teaches: The victim must forgive the debt on their end, but that does not mean the debt is forgiven by God.

Premise: Man does not have the power to forgive sin.

Response: Though I do not have the power to forgive sins against God, or sins against another individual, I do in fact have the power to forgive sins AGAINST ME.

1. **If man does not have the power to forgive sins committed against himself, what are we forgiving when our brother who has sinned against us comes to us - Luke 17:3 - repents, and we forgive him?**
2. **If man does not have the power to forgive sins committed against himself, why do we pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” - Matthew 6: 12?**
3. ***If human forgiveness does not release the debt of the sinner, in what way do we forgive like God - Ephesians 4:32?***

In other words: If forgiveness for man just means to give it up to God, how is that like what God does? Who does He give it up to?

Get This Point: The reason we MUST seek reconciliation with the one we have offended – as is commanded in **Matthew 5:23** - is because forgiveness lies with that person.

PROBLEM #8: Unconditional Forgiveness is Frequently Weaponized Against Victims:

What do I mean?

Church Leaders: Demand that victims “just forgive” so that they don’t have to get involved with a messy situation or take a stand against a good friend.

Anna Salter put it well:

“We retain our peace of mind by making victims pay for it.” (Anna Salter, *Predators*, p 168)

Even worse, some leaders weaponize unconditional forgiveness to cover up what one of their friends or family members have done.

Predators weaponize unconditional forgiveness to make themselves out to be the Victim
by Complaining that people won't "just forgive" them.

That's pretty convenient because it doesn't require them to repent.

Major Point: The purpose of weaponising forgiveness is to make the victim look like the Bad Guy and the Predator the Good Guy.

Isaiah 5:20

[20] Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!

Here's a Radical Idea: Why don't we start demanding that offenders "Just Repent" instead of demanding that victims "Just Forgive!". That's a Biblical concept that can uphold BOTH Justice AND Mercy.

PROBLEM #9: Unconditional Forgiveness Sends a Wicked Message To Victims:

- It tells victims that they are the ones who have to change, though they have done nothing wrong.
- It tells them that they are the ones responsible for shouldering the burden of the crime.
- That their difficulties with healing stem from their sinful failure to forgive.
- And that they don't deserve justice.

That is a complete perversion of the Gospel of Christ!

Matthew 11:28

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Luke 18:7-8

And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

PROBLEM #10: *Unconditional Forgiveness empowers predators and endangers innocent lives.*

Widely held views of unconditional forgiveness and "forgive and forget" leave churches particularly vulnerable to serial sex abusers.

Dr. Anna Salter, never less than ten victims.

Salter states that religious people are particularly vulnerable to predators and then shares this quote from a pedophile she interviewed who targeted churches for his sexual crimes:

" I consider church people easy to fool... they have a trust that comes from being Christians... They tend to be better folks all around. And they seem to want to believe in the good that exists in all people... I think they want to believe in people. And because of that, you can easily convince, with or without convincing words." (*Predators*, p. 29)

That ought to make your blood run cold.

Here are some people who are pure evil and without hope.

Philippians 3:18-19

For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

2 Peter 2:3

And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Matthew 10:16

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

The sad truth is that there are wolves in this world who target churches specifically because of bad theology about forgiveness and we must not facilitate their wickedness.

I had a brother ask: How do you tell a difference between a sheep and a wolf in sheep’s clothing?

Answer: Sheep don’t eat sheep.

The Bible does not command us to convert wolves to sheep but rather to guard the flock against such men.

Closing:

I had a brother ask a helpful question: “If unconditional forgiveness is not the answer, and yet it is the answer given by a lot of psychologists, what do we have to offer as an alternative to people who have endured trauma and need help healing?”

Answer:

- 1. Cast your burdens on Christ for He cares for you – 1 Peter 5:7
- 2. Pray for the one who has wronged you – Luke 6:27-28
- 3. Initiate the transaction of forgiveness - even if that initiation is mediated.
- 4. Remember that Conditional Grace is still Grace.

- 5. Learn the art of love through suffering

Romans 12:20

Therefore

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”

- This means we do good so that our actions make the sinner aware of judgment and removes all excuses for the vengeance that will be meted out on them one day if they fail to repent..

Example: When Jesus was beaten and crucified He absorbed the blows in such a way that it left the hardened soldiers who stood by marvel and confess God. Not only that, but it caused thousands to repent and obey the Gospel when they realized their crime. Yet for those who refused to repent, the actions of Christ vindicate the Judgment of God on their wickedness.

- 6. Realize that one day there will be justice.

Hebrews 10:30-31

[30] For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” [31] It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Always Remember:

Delayed justice is still justice.

One day mercy will run out for the unrepentant, yet justice will never fail.

No passage makes this point so vividly clear as:

Revelation 6:9-11

[9] When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. [10] They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” [11] Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

And when the sixth seal was broken, Justice rolled down.

Do not presume upon the Mercy of God. He is a loving God, but the foundation of His throne is Righteousness and Justice.

Defining Forgiveness Discussion Points:

Common Definition: Give it up to God - Let Go and Let God.

Problem: There are a number of things that we give up to God that cannot be classified as forgiveness.

Example: Your spouse is in an accident and you are feeling overwhelmed by the circumstances and so you hand them over to God. Have you forgiven your circumstances since you handed them over to God?

Or maybe you are overwhelmed by the bills that come from the accident and you take your struggles and give them up to God. Have you forgiven your medical bills?

Point: This is not forgiveness - it is what 1 Peter 5:7 calls "Casting all your anxieties on the Lord..."

Granted: Sexual Trauma definitely classifies as an anxiety, but when we give it up to God, we are simply doing what we should do with ALL the anxieties of life.

Additional Notes: David's sin against Uriah was also a sin against God. There are thus two victims when we sin against our brother – Our brother AND God. Both demand apologies.

Investigations: 1 Corinthians 6 has nothing to do with Major Issues. We take Major Issues before unbelievers all the time and think nothing of it – Example: Drug addiction / Divorce Proceedings/ Custody Battles /