

Matthew 6:7-15; 18:21-35
The Fruit of Love: Forgiveness
WRCoB 8.11.24

The Lord's Prayer, our focus last week
Included a powerful plea

**Matthew 6:12 RSV Forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.**

Our Scripture Lesson today
From the Sermon on the Mount
Has Jesus expanding on these words.

Here it is again with a little different verbiage.

Matthew 6:14-15 The Message

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ **“In prayer there is a connection between what
God does and what you do. You can't get
forgiveness from God, for instance, without also
forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you
cut yourself off from God's part.**

I admit to being a little unsettled by these two verses.

They do not rest well
With my perceived understanding of God.

And then, to make myself even more disturbed

Jesus teaches The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant
Which raises the same question

Is God's Forgiveness Conditional?

IS IT that God's forgiveness is contingent
Upon our forgiveness of others.

The parable teaches about a servant forgiven
Of a colossal financial debt by his servant.

But this same man who had been shown such mercy
Refused to extend that same grace
To his own servant who owed him a pittance.

He even went to the extreme measure
Of placing him in a debtors' prison
And having him tortured tortured.

Fellow servants witnessed this
And went and reported him to the Master

Who then threw him into debtors' prison
With these words

Matthew 18:33, 35 CEB

³³ Shouldn't you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?'

Jesus sums up his parable .

³⁵ "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Not a very comforting story of God's love and grace.

Another text supporting the same idea is from Mark.

Mark 11:25 CEB

²⁵ And whenever you stand up to pray, if you have something against anyone, forgive so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your wrongdoings.

It is an uncomfortable teaching

Even contradictory to our understanding of God.

We are taught that God is Love.

1 John 4:16 CEB

God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them.

Love is the essence of God.

And God loves you no matter what.

God's love is unconditional.

Whether you're are black, white, red or yellow

Whether you are rich or poor

Whether you have been good or bad.

You are made in the image of God.

And no matter who you are or what you have done

God loves you. PERIOD! FULL STOP!

God's love is a steadfast
An unwavering presence in our lives.

How then can forgiveness
A gift of God's love, be tied to our own actions?

~~

God forgiveness is a free gift, freely offered
But it requires our acceptance.

When we accept God's love and forgiveness
It opens the door to redemption and salvation
The repair of a broken relationship.

We can choose to receive or not to receive
God's invitation of forgiveness.

John B MacDonald asks us a challenging question.

*Can you give me one example from the Bible in which
God does not forgive?"*

*"Well, yes. There are numerous instances in which
God does not, or will not, forgive."*

Here are two examples
One from the OT and one from the NT

Lamentations 3:42 NLT

**⁴² "We have sinned and rebelled,
and you have not forgiven us."**

Luke 12:10 NRSVUE

10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

God always loves.

But the Bible says God does not always forgive.

While God's love is constant and absolute
The forgiveness that flows out of that love
To accept it is a choice we make.

We can choose to receive God's forgiveness
Opening the door of redemption and salvation.

Or we can remain bound by resentment
Unwilling to forgive the debts held against us.

God forgiveness, while a divine attribute
Available to us at any and all times
Is offered with certain conditions.

Does this mean that God's mercy is conditional?

In a way, yes.

It's possible that these verses
Are not about earning God's forgiveness
But about experiencing its transformative power

Because maybe, the key to our understanding
Is that forgiveness is not so much
About the offender but about the forgiver.

We choose to relinquish the burden of resentment
To break free from the chains of bitterness.

When we forgive, we are not ignoring the wrong
But we choose healing for ourselves.

God's love, in its infinite wisdom
Understands our brokenness
Our capacity for both great love and deep hurt.

It is a love that invites us into a process of restoration
A journey of healing and reconciliation.

Forgiveness is an integral part of this journey.

It is a gift we receive
And a gift we are called to extend.

While God's love is relentless
The experience of that love in our lives
Is contingent upon our willingness to forgive.

It's a paradox, perhaps but one that reflects
The complexity of the human heart
And the depth of God's grace.

We cannot experience God's love and grace
Without it being extended out towards others.

There is a direct correlation between
Being a RECEIVER of forgiveness
And being a BEARER of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the fruit of love.

When we experience the immensity of God's love
God's forgiveness

It transforms us, compels us
To extend that same grace and mercy to others.

Forgiveness becomes a visible and tangible
Expression of God's love
And the love that grows within us

God's love in us is the seed
That grows into the fruit of forgiveness.

When we become aware and convicted
Of God's great love and forgiveness

It transforms our hearts
To extend grace and mercy to others.

When we fail to offer grace to others
It stymies the Spirit's grace in us.

And sometimes when we offer grace to others
God's forgiving grace
Becomes even more powerful
And assessible to us.

But if we harbor ill-will towards others
It is difficult if not impossible
To experience God's loving-kindness.

Donald Hagner from the Word Biblical Comentary

These verses are a forceful way of making a significant point that it is unthinkable—impossible—that we can enjoy God’s forgiveness without in turn extending our forgiveness towards others.

The late Henri Nouwen explains it this way

You have to keep saying to yourself: “I am being loved by an unconditional, unlimited love and that love allows me to be a free person, center of my own actions and decisions.

The more you can come to realize this, the more you will be able to forgive those who have hurt you and love them in their brokenness.

Loving one another means
 Forgiving one another over and over again.

For God so loved the world He gave—and forgave.

Through God’s grace and forgiveness
 We are capable to love as the Lord has loved

And we are commanded
 To love as the Lord loved.

Jesus patiently explained this to Peter
 Who was wondering about the limits of forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-22 CEB

21 Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?”

22 Jesus said, “Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times.

Love forgives.

We accept it from God and offer it to others.

If we don't accept God's love
God's forgiveness becomes unavailable.

~~

And so, let us experience God's great love for us

Let us cultivate our hearts
So that they might be filled
With both love and forgiveness.

Let us remember the immeasurable mercy
Shown to us and extend that same grace to others.

And let us trust in a God whose love endures forever
Even when our ability to forgive falls short.

God calls us to live in the light
Of God's unconditional love
Offering forgiveness as a gift received.

Our journey of faith requires courage and humility
And a heart of grace and forgiveness.

May God's transformative power of forgiveness
Fill us to overflowing

So that we might embrace the grace received
And the heart to extend it to others.

Prayer:

God of love and forgiveness, open our hearts to the depth of Your grace. Help us to understand the profound connection between Your love and forgiveness. Guide us on the path of healing and reconciliation, empowering us to forgive freely, to love unconditionally, and to experience the fullness of Your love in our lives. Amen.