

The Red Letters of Jesus: Forgiveness

March 18, 2025

Today's topic is **forgiveness** -- one of the most profoundly difficult yet defining features of Christianity. Unlike any other belief system, Christianity alone teaches that forgiveness cannot be earned - not by good deeds or even by being a good person. Forgiveness is a gift, freely given by God, entirely unearned and undeserved. This radical grace is the foundation of our salvation, revealing the depth of His love and centrality of forgiveness to His character.

Forgiveness is at the very heart of God's nature, made manifest through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save it, offering us full forgiveness and eternal life with Him.

Forgiveness is both a defining mark of those who follow Christ and a command of how we are to live as His people.

Discussion Question #1:

- A. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Forgiveness is a defining mark of those who follow Christ"?
- B. What is your response to the statement: "Forgiveness is a command"?

C.

Matthew 18:21-35 (NIV), also known as The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant:

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

29 “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

30 “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Forgiveness is not always easy - often it is one of the most challenging things to do - but it is the way of freedom - the freedom to love without bitterness, to heal without resentment, and to live fully in the grace of God.

Our posture should be like David’s in Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV): “*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*”

Discussion Question #2:

Has anyone here **offered** forgiveness to another person whether it was deserved or not?
What led you to make that decision?

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you”. - Lewis B. Smedes

Luke 7:36-50 (NIV)

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 38 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 people 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 forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

43 Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“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—as her great love has shown. But whoever 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.”

This passage isn't just about forgiveness. It's also about the response to forgiveness. It's about the gratitude that forgiveness produces, and the extravagant acts of love and devotion that flow from that gratitude. It's also about the contrast between love and hardness of heart. Between humility and judgment. Between gratitude and entitlement.

This parable reveals something important: those who recognize the depth of their own need for grace are often the ones who respond with the greatest gratitude.

Discussion Question #3:

Has anyone here **received** forgiveness from another person? If so, would you be willing to share your story?

The poet William Blake says that “the glory of Christianity is to conquer by forgiveness.” We are to wage our wars here on earth in the same way that God waged war against sin - to conquer the bitterness and anger and brokenness in this world by forgiving others.

“Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.” - Martin Luther King Jr.