



The Forgiveness of God

Pastor Dillon Barber // September 3, 2023

Text: Exodus 34:6-7, Ephesians 2:1-10

Big Idea: Because of God's incredible nature, we can be forgiven of our sin.

Good morning friends and welcome back to Foothills Church. If we haven't met yet my name is Dillon, it's a joy to be here with you this morning. A quick matter of "family business", you guys are going to learn to cringe when I say those words. Many of you know Matt and Amy Anderson, they have been serving here at Foothills for a few years now. Matt serves in Classic and as our IT Director and Amy has been serving in Adult Ministries as our Admin. Well.... They are leaving us. Matt got an offer from Ramsey Solutions in Nashville, Tennessee and next Sunday will be their last Sunday with us. So, when you see them, give them a big hug and, "Thank you" and be praying for them as they start their new adventures. Amy has been gracious enough to continue to help us with Adult Ministry stuff until her replacement is found and trained and we get through some of the big events coming up, so you might still get a phone call or email from Amy, but it's from a distance. I will try really hard not to call them quitters until they are gone.

Ok, This morning will be the last in our Summer series titled *What's God Like?* I hope this series has been as encouraging to you as it has been for me. Today we are going to talk about the forgiveness of God. Forgiveness of sin is a major theme throughout all of scripture and a regular theme and topic in our church. It might actually be one of the most common topics that we discuss. Just this morning we shared Communion together, like we do every month, and we celebrated that the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross provides for our forgiveness of sin.

But what does forgiveness have to do with the nature of God or the character of God? As I wrestled with that question this week I came to this simple conclusion. Forgiveness is the natural outcome of all of God's attributes. God's holiness, his wrath, his sovereignty, his grace, mercy,

goodness, love, God's patience, and his nearness, all of them point us to a God who forgives. So this morning my hope is to show that forgiveness flows out of God's character.

To be fair, one could argue that forgiveness itself is one of the Attributes of God. Exodus 34:6-7 has been one of our favorite passages this summer where God revealed himself to Moses and described himself. Let's put that verse up on the screen again.

"The Lord the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation."

So right there in Vs. 7, the Lord is a God who forgives. The Hebrew word for forgiveness used here is **רָסָא** (rasa) meaning to lift up, to bear, to carry away or to forgive. So we get this sense of the word that forgiveness means to lift up or remove our sins from us. But why do we need forgiveness? What do we need forgiveness from?

1. Forgiveness is necessary because of God's holiness and wrath toward Sin.

Remember when Doug explained that God is Holy? He is totally and completely different, set apart from all of creation. God is unique in all of the universe. There are angelic creatures in heaven that live in the presence of God and all they do all the time is worship the Lord and declare "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty, who was and is and is to come." They say this over and over again. There is no one like God. No one that is worthy of our worship and praise. God is also morally holy. He is totally and completely separate from sin or evil in every way.

Tied closely to his holiness is his wrath. Because of his holiness, God hates sin in every form. He hates sin in a way that we cannot comprehend. He hates sin completely. It's hard for us to grasp how deep God's wrath is toward sin though sometimes we can get a taste of it.

[Illustration] Do any of you like gardening? Any of you gardeners? Ok maybe I can make this a little easier. Do any of you enjoy a ripe, delicious, garden grown fresh tomato? Well, my wife and I enjoy gardening. We live in Shingle Springs, in the country a little bit, and there are lots of critters in our yard. Deer, turkey, skunks, you get the idea. So we built a big fence around our garden and we have been growing a garden for a few years. Well, last year the ground squirrels moved in. And I could tolerate with some frustration the chewing on my sprinkler lines, and stealing the chicken feed, but this year they found my tomatoes. On several occasions I have gone out to the garden to pick a ripe tomato only to find it half- eaten in the middle of the garden path. That is an unforgivable sin in my opinion. I used to view squirrels as somewhat cute, furry, creatures on the stupid side. Not any more. Those rodents have now become objects of my righteous and holy wrath. Now I will use whatever means available to advance them in the circle of life if you know what I mean.

That is a tiny taste of God's wrath towards sin. In Romans 1:18 Paul reminds us: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness." We were once part of those godless and wicked people, objects of God's wrath. And we would still be there, destined for death both physically and spiritually for all eternity because of sin. (Kinda like the squirrels in my garden.) Our only hope, our only chance is through forgiveness.

2. Forgiveness is the overflow of God's goodness.

Thankfully, because of the many other aspects of God's nature, he made a way for us to be forgiven. We have been reminded this summer that

there is much more to God than his holiness and his wrath. We also learned about his goodness, his mercy, grace and love. Because God is all of these things, in perfect balance, we can be forgiven. We no longer have to fear for our lives because of our sin, but we can rest in the security of his grace and forgiveness.

Turn in your Bible to Ephesians 2. This has been the other most visited passage this summer. Today I want us to see how many of God's attributes are linked together to explain why and how God forgives. As I read, look for some of God's attributes. [Read Vs. 1-10]. (Wrath, Mercy, Great Love, Grace, Kindness).

Now, I realize that the word forgiveness is not in this passage, however, what we see Paul explaining is that because God is who he is, our sins have been removed from us, our transgressions lifted off us by the blood of Christ. He is explaining our redemption and forgiveness.

Now let's remember what these attributes of God mean. Mercy is defined as "actively showing compassion and forbearance towards someone whom you have the power to punish or harm." In other words. Mercy is not getting what we deserve. God has the power and justification to punish us for sin but he showed us mercy instead by offering forgiveness.

We defined the love of God as "An unconditional, steadfast, self sacrificing lovingkindness that is offered to all but experienced uniquely by those who receive his love." Forgiveness of sin is the overflow of God's love for us and as we learned this summer, Christ's death on the cross for our sin is the ultimate demonstration of love.

Grace is "undeserved, unmerited favor." Grace means we get something we don't deserve and that is forgiveness. We can't earn it for ourselves. We can't prove that we deserve forgiveness, instead forgiveness is offered to us because of God's grace.

Goodness, I know the word goodness is not present in the passage but everything in this passage, including kindness, points to God's goodness. Because God is good, we are offered forgiveness. He didn't have to, but because he is such a good, good father, he chose to offer us forgiveness through the blood of his one and only son.

Psalm 145:8-9 ties all of these attributes together for us so well. "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger (patient) and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all and his mercy is over all that he has made."

We have established that all humans are objects of God's holy wrath because of sin. And we have seen that because of God's goodness, mercy, grace and love, He has offered forgiveness freely through the blood of Jesus.

3. God is patiently offering forgiveness to all.

Now let's look at how God's patience extends his offer of forgiveness to those who are lost. Remember how Phil explained last week that when God is slow to anger that is a demonstration of his patience? God would be justified in wiping us off the planet (just like a garden full of ground squirrels) but he is incredibly patient. He desires that all would come to salvation. So he gently pursues us. He gently pursues the lost and patiently waits for them to respond to his love and receive his forgiveness. Not everyone will choose to respond. In fact, most will continue to stiff arm God and push him away. But some will respond, some will repent and turn to God and be forgiven. So for now God waits, and eventually his patience will come to an end.

Nevertheless, God shows his love, grace, mercy, and patience towards the lost because he wants them to be in relationship with him. He wants lost people to embrace Jesus and be saved.

4. Because God does not change, we can trust his forgiveness.

One more truth that we encountered this summer is that God is unchanging. Because he does not change, we can trust that his forgiveness is complete and sure. Doug touched on this early in the series. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. This means when God says we are forgiven, we are forgiven. It is finished. In our broken human nature we struggle to believe this sometimes.

As humans we tend to build up emotional scar tissue. We all get hurt sometimes. We all hurt others sometimes. We all do it. We say dumb stuff and hurt each other. We make mistakes and wound the people we love. And when we are healthy and walking with Jesus he gives us the ability to forgive. We reconcile and we forgive and we move on. Well what happens when that person hurts us again? Even if we reconcile and forgive again, there is some scar tissue. And if a person hurts us over and over we begin to lose trust. We might say that we forgive them, we might even be able to truly forgive them but we are less likely to trust them when they say they are sorry. We pull back relationally and emotionally because it hurts too much. Or maybe we just stop forgiving. Sometimes the wounds are so great that we simply can't forgive apart from the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

Remember God is not like humans. He does not have a limit to his forgiveness. He doesn't change his mind about forgiving us of our sins. He won't forgive you this week, and then next week turn it off. He doesn't keep a record of your sins and then when you reach 1000, or 10,000 or whatever just stop forgiving you. If God says you are forgiven through the blood of Jesus then you are forgiven. The end. God does not change. Now remember this is not a license to sin. This is not an excuse to just keep making the same poor choices over and over because God promises to forgive. It is simply a reminder that we don't have to fear that God will cut us off from his grace because we screwed up again.

Psalm 103:12. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Because God is unchanging, we can trust his forgiveness will not change or end.

5. Because of God's forgiveness we can be close to him.

This brings us to my final point this morning. The end result of forgiveness is nearness to God. The goal of forgiveness, the goal of Jesus and his incarnation, his teaching, his miracles, his sacrificial death, the goal of all of it is for us to be close to God. To walk with him and be near him and fellowship with him in an intimate and personal relationship for the rest of our lives, and then for all eternity. We can be near to God because of his forgiveness.

In Genesis 1, God created all things and it was good. And God would walk with Adam and Eve in the garden and it was good. In Genesis 3, sin entered the world and Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, cast out of God's presence. From that moment until now, the only way we could approach God and be near to him is through the forgiveness of sin provided by blood. For centuries it was through the blood of animals, but now through the righteous blood of Jesus, shed once for all. One day, the world will be made new, sin will be wiped out completely, and we will see God face to face. His name will be written on our foreheads and we will be with him, near him, close to him for the rest of eternity. That's the end goal. And the only way to get there is through the forgiveness of God, offered freely to us through Jesus.

[Invitation]

Maybe today you need to experience forgiveness for the first time. Maybe you are realizing for the first time that you are an object of God's wrath and you need God to wash you clean and forgive you and draw you near to him. God is inviting you to come close to him through the forgiveness he offers in the blood of Jesus. If that is you today I want you to take a moment and ask the Lord to forgive you. Surrender your life to

him and allow him to lead you and guide you and make you a new person. If you are praying that prayer today, please grab that Connect Card and mark the box that says "I committed my life to Jesus today." And bring it to me after service or take it out to the Welcome Booth. We want to follow up with you and talk about the decision you made.

Maybe you are a follower of Jesus, maybe you trust him but you are really struggling right now. Maybe you are out in the weeds, you've been pushing yourself away from God and allowing sin to get a hold of your life. When we distance ourselves from God sometimes we believe the lie that God doesn't want us back or that we have to get things cleaned up before he would want us back. Don't believe those lies. God wants to be near you right now. He won't give up on you and he won't grow weary of forgiving you. Maybe today is a good day to seek the Lord and repent, and be forgiven. To get back in step with Jesus and allow the spirit to minister to you.

Maybe you haven't been willing to forgive yourself. You believe, at least in your head, that God forgives you but you don't truly believe in your heart that you can be forgiven. Maybe you have secrets that you haven't surrendered to God. Sin that you believe you can hide from him the way you have hidden it from others. Maybe you have asked God to forgive you but you just can't forgive yourself. You've beaten yourself up about your sin for years and years and never let it go. Forgiving ourselves can be one of the hardest things to do. I hope that today you can finally surrender that sin and let it go. Hebrews 10:22, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkles to cleans us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."

Remember, forgiveness is the natural outcome of God's character. We need forgiveness because God is righteous and holy and we are not. God offers forgiveness freely to those who put their faith in him and in his son, Jesus Christ. Our forgiveness is provided for by the blood of Jesus which he shed on the cross. God forgives because he is good, loving,

gracious and merciful, gently pursuing the lost and patiently inviting them to come and be close to him. God's forgiveness is trustworthy and unchanging because God is unchanging. And finally, God has offered forgiveness because he loves us and want to be close to us, now and for eternity.

Before I close in prayer, I want to give you a moment to search your heart and ask for forgiveness. 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Whether it's for the first time or the 10,000th time, whether it is a deep secret you have been holding onto or something you said this morning, let's all take a few moments and confess to the Lord and seek his forgiveness.