



Forgiveness Of Injuries --- Answers to Why What & How We Forgive Others!

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Matthew 18:21-35

In a conversation with his disciples just before, our Lord had directed what course to pursue in reference to a brother who sins against you, and in what way to seek redress of our grievances. The subject arrested the attention of Peter. The duties enjoined and the precepts delivered by Christ, were new, striking, important. Peter was anxious for more information, and for some specific rule. He knew, doubtless, that the rabbinical law of forgiveness said, that "three offences were to be remitted--but not the fourth," and putting what, perhaps, he supposed an extreme case, he asks if he shall forgive his brother "Up to seven times?" thus more than doubling the number which the Talmud required him to pardon.

To this question Christ promptly answers, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times;" thus inculcating a breadth of forgiveness widely removed from the narrow law of the Rabbis on the one hand, or the supposed liberality of Peter on the other.

But our Lord did not design to affix any definite limit to the number of offences which it was our duty to forgive. Seven, as is well known, was, among the Hebrews, a number representing perfection, and therefore is frequently used in the Scriptures to denote frequency, fullness, multitude; so that, to forgive "seven times" means to forgive many times--but to forgive "seventy-seven" expresses the full and perfect forgiveness which should be manifested towards all offenders.

Here, then, was the utterance of a great and heaven-born principle--the unlimited forgiveness of injuries! And to illustrate this principle on a scale commensurate with its real greatness, our Lord related the parable of "The Unmerciful Servant."

In this parable "a certain king" is represented as taking "account of his servants," or fiscal managers, to whom were committed the farming and collecting of his royal revenues. He had scarcely "begun to reckon," before his attention was drawn to one who "owed him ten thousand talents." When he "was brought unto him," it was found that he had nothing with which to pay, being hopelessly bankrupt. He was evidently a tributary prince or treasurer, in whose custody were placed the revenues of the realm, and who had abused the confidence of the king by appropriating to himself "ten thousand talents." This amount, even taking the talent at its lowest value, was more than equal to the enormous sum of fifteen million dollars, and evinces, at once, the elevated dignity to which this servant of the king was raised, and the boldness of the embezzlement which he attempted on the royal treasury.

Confessing his inability to pay, the king, termed here "his master," because, in those countries, all subjects, from the lowest to the highest, were the virtually owned servants of the monarch, "commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." This severe penalty for insolvency was one often used in the East, as is testified to by sacred and profane writers; and, even in the Roman law, wife and children being part of the father's possessions, were sold with him into slavery, when he could not pay his debts.

As soon, however, as he learns the order of his king, and knowing the miserable servitude into which it will plunge him--an abasement, the more galling because of the height from which he fell--he falls down, and, in oriental fashion, "worships him"--prostrating himself upon his face before him--"saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will payback everything!" Touched with the abject misery of the suppliant, and feeling in his own heart the relentings of compassion--the king orders his fettered prisoner to be loosed; revoked the sentence which consigned him to the auction-mart of the slave; restored to him his wife, his children, his goods; and "forgave him the debt."....

Let us examine, then, the basis on which this doctrine rests, and the arguments by which it is sustained.

William Bacon Stevens,1857

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