

FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

"FORGIVENESS often seems to be more divine than any other virtue because it costs so much and is such an unmistakable proof of love. It cuts directly athwart that self-interest which is the gravest temptation, the deadliest danger, of our lives. He who can and does forgive in anything like God's own spirit and manner has taken a long step toward ideal righteousness.

"We are to forgive those who have injured us, both for our own sakes and for theirs. For our own, because we need to learn to repress that indignant self-justification which is far too eager to exalt our own rights and belittle those of others; because we cannot consistently ask of them the forgiveness which we too often need unless we are willing to grant it in turn; and because we never can be sure that in their circumstances we might not have given offense, equal to, perhaps even greater than, theirs.

"For their sakes, also, because they may have battled long and nobly with the temptation to wrong us before yielding, and deserve credit for it; because they need to be encouraged to begin again and do better; because they are our brothers and sisters before God; and because, if we continue implacable, they will have good reason to doubt whether our spirit is truly that of our heavenly Father, and such a doubt is an injury to them which we can prevent.

"Moreover, forgiveness ought to be hearty and convincing, not merely that of the tongue, but evidently the glad renewal of confidence. And, if we are to imitate the divine example set us, it ought to be renewed in all its sincerity as often as needed, provided it be sought with equal honesty. Seventy times seven! That means indefinitely – if the offender be in earnest.

"This suggests a limitation which is right and inevitable. He who seeks and receives forgiveness must prove his sincerity by the effort to avoid renewed offense. A merely formal request for forgiveness does not necessarily involve genuine penitence, and nobody has the right to impose upon one whom he has injured by pretending to be sorry when he is not sorry. Such a hypocritical wrongdoer must, for his own sake and for the general good, be refused forgiveness until he seeks it in the proper spirit. Travesties of penitence need rebuke, not pardon. Christian dignity, and the very dignity of God himself, must not be thus mocked. But with this exception it is both a sweet privilege and a solemn duty to forgive indefinitely, even as we hope to be forgiven."

– *The Congregationalist*.
