

[R2294 : page 123]

"FORGIVE AND YE SHALL BE FORGIVEN."

– APRIL 24. – MATT. 18:21-35. –

OUR Golden Text (Luke 6:37) is not to be understood as applicable to everybody: to so understand it would be to ignore the ransom and faith in the same, and other conditions of discipleship. It is applicable only to the class mentioned, "ye," – believers, already justified and brought into harmony with God. The divine arrangement to forgive our sins presupposes a realization on our part of our own imperfections, and that we who desire to have our own sins cancelled will be magnanimous to others. And the Lord makes this a condition of our discipleship: we must not only start with justification, forgiveness of our sins, but we must continue by seeking to put away "all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit," and to become more and more copies of God's dear Son. As we receive more and more knowledge of the divine character, and as we more and more seek to copy it, we should correspondingly become more and more generous, kind, loving, God-like. If we fail to develop this character, the knowledge received has not profited us; and instead of continuing justified before God, we will be reckoned as having lapsed again into sin – and [R2294 : page 124] greater sin, because of greater light – and will be treated of the Lord accordingly.

Peter evidently recognized this principle in general: he saw that it was his *duty* to forgive the trespasses of his repentant brother. But he was doubtful how far this principle of forgiveness should go. Our Lord had instructed them in this matter early in his ministry: he had taught them to pray, "Forgive us our debts [sins, trespasses], as we forgive our debtors," and he had explained the meaning of this to them, saying, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." – Matt. 6:12,15.

It is not necessary for us to suppose that one of Peter's brothers was a great annoyance to him, continually doing him wrong and continually needing to repent of it and to be forgiven. We may suppose that Peter was turning over in his mind the broad teachings he had received on general principles to ascertain of the Lord definitely how far this *rule* of forgiveness was to be applied in the ordinary affairs of life. He no doubt made what he thought a very liberal suggestion, that the proper limit of forgiveness would be seven times: but our Lord's answer must have given him still broader and deeper views on the subject – "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."

It is difficult for some to see how the principle of justice applies in the matter of forgiveness. They reason that God did not forgive the sins of the world, gratis, that he exacted a penalty, a full *corresponding price* – the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, as a "ransom for all;" and reasoning upon this, they say, If Justice in the Lord demanded a full payment of the penalty, why should not we, in copying God, likewise demand full reparation from those who seek our forgiveness in more trivial matters? Reasoning thus, they very generally overlook several facts; (1) The penalty was exacted, not of an imperfect fallen man, as is each of us, but of a perfect man, created in the image of God (father Adam), whose sin was wilful and deliberate. (2) That, so far as sinners were concerned, God's gift was a *free gift*. He did not exact the penalty of *us*. (3) If he had exacted the penalty of us, we could never have paid it. (4) If we were perfect men ourselves and dealing with others who were likewise perfect, a law of Justice and demands of Justice would be in order; but since we are transgressors ourselves and objects of divine grace, and since our fellow-creatures are in the same pitiable plight through the fall, there is no room for us to take our stand upon Justice. He who stands upon Justice will fall before the sword of Justice. Hence, our Lord declares, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." If you realize your own weakness and imperfection and need of help from on high, and if you exercise a similar generosity in the smaller affairs of life with your fellows in tribulation, you will

be the kind for whom God designed the full measure of his grace: so long as divine favor does not thus reach your heart and mellow it toward others, you are not of the class to whom the full measure of divine favor will be extended, but will be accounted unworthy of the full ultimate blotting out of your sins.

We are to remember that our sins are not now blotted out, even when we are reckoned justified: our sins are merely "covered;" our Lord hides them from his sight, deals with us as though we had no sins, receiving us into his family and making covenants with [R2295 : page 124] us, as though we were perfect, righteous. Thus the Apostle quotes from the Prophet David, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord *will not impute* sin; blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered." (Rom. 4:7,8.) Mark the distinction between the iniquity and the sin. The word "iniquity" carries with it the sense of wickedness, lawlessness, while the word "sin" has merely the thought of transgression: and many of our transgressions are wholly without iniquitous intention. Believers who are seeking to escape from sin, that sin should have no more dominion over them, are forgiven the moral obliquity connected with the sin, which they now no longer sympathize with, but hate; and the sin itself, while not blotted out, is covered. So, therefore, should any return to sin, "as a sow to her wallowing in the mire," he removes the covering of sins, and falls back where he was before, "having forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." – 2 Pet. 2:22; 1:9.

The time for the blotting out of sin is, thank God, near at hand. So far as the overcomers of this age, the Gospel Church, are concerned, the blotting out of every vestige of their sins, to be remembered no more, comes with the destruction of the flesh in death. In our flesh (in our imperfections, mental, moral and physical) is the record of sin; and this which God so graciously covers from his sight will entirely disappear in the grave. In the resurrection these overcomers will be granted new bodies, free from all the marks or blemishes of sin, perfect, likenesses of their Lord: not only free from

sin *reckonedly*, but free from sin *actually*, and without a trace or mar thereof. Oh, how we long for the blotting out of sins!

Later on, as the Millennial day shall advance, the work of blotting out the sins of humanity in general will begin: but the operation will be different with them than with us. Ours by an instantaneous resurrection, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye:" theirs will be a gradual blotting out – a work of restitution. The restoring of the original nature of man in its perfection will mean the blotting out of mankind's [R2295 : page 125] mental, moral and physical blemishes, and their gradual restoration to that perfect condition in which father Adam was before he sinned, which is declared to have been "the image of God," with which God was well pleased.

These two thoughts – the present covering of our sins and the future blotting out of every trace of them, are called forcibly to our attention by the words of the Apostle Peter. Speaking on the day of Pentecost, he urges his hearers, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted [receive now the covering of your sins through Christ by faith and have as a result the divine favor and instruction in righteousness], that *your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come* from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you: whom the heavens must receive [retain] until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began." – Acts 3:19-21.

To the apostles and to us, even "all those who should believe on him through their word," our Lord gave the illustration or parable of The Two Debtors. The parable is not of general application, but merely applicable to the Kingdom of Heaven class – the Church – called to run the race and, by the grace of God, to win the prize of joint-heirship with their Lord in his coming Millennial Kingdom. The generosity of the King in the parable, toward his servant who was so greatly in his debt, illustrates God's magnanimity, mercy, toward us through Christ.

The debt, ten thousand talents, was an enormous one, representing in value about twenty millions of dollars: this debt fitly represents our great obligations to God as a race, and our utter inability to meet the obligations. Adam was already "sold under sin" and his entire family was involved in the slavery, when God graciously had mercy on us through Christ and provided for our liberty. The liberated servant, whose prayer for mercy was heard, represents the Christian believer who has been made free from sin.

The parable proceeds to show a wrong course of action which, alas, we often see exemplified; for some of those who have received divine grace in abundant measure are very hard-hearted, uncharitable, unforgiving, vindictive, malicious and vengeful toward those who trespass against them, and whose trespasses are sometimes purely imaginary. We do not live in a day in which a creditor may wantonly inflict physical abuse upon his debtor, nor need we expect under present enlightenment that any Christian would feel like wreaking his vengeance upon his fellow servant by physical force: no, thank God, the day of the rack and fagot and crucifixion is gone. But we live in a day when, nevertheless, the same spirit can and does manifest itself, but in less flagrant, tho not less cruel and sinful forms. The modern method of attack upon an enemy is not with pincers to pull out his finger and toe nails, nor with red-hot irons to gouge out his eyes, nor with molten lead to fill his mouth and ears; but instead the weapon is slander, back-biting, evil-speaking, and according to its degree it may be the spirit of murder (as pointed out in "Helpful Rules for Our Daily Life" in our issue of March 15). Indeed, our Lord seems to have taken more notice of the evil-speaking that would come upon his people, than of the physical sufferings, for over and over again he points out, "They shall *say all manner of evil* against you falsely, for my sake." – Matt. 5:11.

What shall we say of the Christianity of the brother or sister who, meeting a debtor, or one whom he esteems to be a debtor (justly or unjustly), thus abuses his fellow servant? But it is much more

important that we should know how the Lord would regard such an one, and in the parable before us he has answered it fully. In the parable the King was wroth and called the forgiven but unforgiving servant to account, pronouncing him at once a "wicked servant." And applying the lesson of the parable, our Lord declares: "So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from the hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

Let it not be overlooked that our Lord here very particularly called attention to the difference between an outward and formal expression of forgiveness with smooth words, and the true forgiveness which is from the heart. The former, or outward forgiveness, is only lip-deep, and means that a wrangling of an evil, unforgiving spirit is within, and that it will only be a matter of time until the pent-up force of malice and hatred will break forth in words of slander. God reads the heart and, whatever the lip professions may be, he will not consider these unless the heart and life correspond with them. It is in vain, therefore, that anyone should say, I love my brother, and at the same time seek either by word or act to do him injury. All the evil-speaking, malice, hatred, envy, strife, proceeds from *evil in the heart*: hence, the necessity on the part of all who desire to be of the Lord's body, that they "purge out the old leaven of malice" that they may be members indeed of the unleavened loaf – the body of Christ.

The fact that in the parable the evil servant was delivered to the "tormentors" is not to be understood to mean that the heavenly Father will deliver every unfaithful servant to the torments of devils to all eternity. The tormentors of olden times (and also of today in some Oriental countries) inflicted scourging or **[R2295 : page 126]** other torment upon accused persons for the purpose of extorting from them money or information or whatever they may be unwilling to give up. The analogy to this in God's dealings with his people might reasonably be expected along the lines of earthly disciplines, such as the Apostle referred to, saying of one, I have delivered him "unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the

Lord Jesus." (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20.) This might mean financial difficulties or losses, or physical ailments, disease or what not. Not infrequently, we believe, the Lord through these agencies teaches his servants important lessons respecting their own weaknesses, and introduces and develops in them patience with others and more of his own holy spirit – meekness, patience, gentleness, brotherly-kindness – Love. We do not mean to intimate by this that the trials and difficulties of life are always in the nature of chastisement and corrections in righteousness. We understand that sometimes they are tests instead of chastisements – tests to prove the degree of our loyalty to the Lord, and to develop in us larger degrees of faith and of the various graces of the spirit.

We cannot properly leave this subject without calling attention to certain conditions which ought to precede forgiveness. For instance, in the parable the king does not exercise compassion until the debtor asks for it: so also God does not forgive our sins until we acknowledge our sins and ask his forgiveness. Likewise, in the parable, the second servant, who owed a hundred pence (about sixteen dollars), asked mercy of the one to whom he owed it, before that one was obliged to forgive: and in a further comment on the subject, mentioned by Luke (17:3,4), our Lord expressly states the propriety of expecting those who trespass against us to make some acknowledgment of their fault before expressing full forgiveness. He says, "If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, *saying, I repent!* thou shalt forgive him."

We are not to accept one portion of the divine direction and to ignore another portion: we are not to say that our Lord meant it, when he said, "forgive him," and that he did not mean it when he said, "Rebuke [R2296 : page 126] him; and if he repent, forgive him." With the majority of people, however, it would probably be quite unnecessary to urge the propriety of repentance; – *unless they were the transgressors whose duty it is to repent*. Most people are sufficiently disinclined to forgive, to wait until their forgiveness is

asked. The trouble is that then the large majority apparently do not "forgive from the *heart*" but merely from the lips. Heart forgiveness leaves no sting, no animosity, no grudge.

On the other side of the question, however, a caution is necessary. The Christian is to have the loving, generous disposition of heart, a copy of the Heavenly Father's disposition. In trivial affairs he is to have so much sympathy and love that he will take no notice, just as God for Christ's sake deals with us and does not impute sin to us, except as it represents knowledge and wilfulness. With such a rule operating amongst Christians, a determination not to recognize as an offence anything that is not *purposely* done, or *intended* as an offense, would be a great blessing to all, and the proper God-like course. The transgressions to which our Lord refers, are not trivial affairs of no consequence, are not evil surmisings and imaginings, are not rumors, are not fancied insults, but positive wrongs done us, which are susceptible of proofs, and on account of which it is our duty, kindly and lovingly and wisely to give some proper rebuke; – some intimation that we recognize the wrong and that it has grieved us and hurt us. Then comes in the divine rule respecting the one and only proper manner of rebuke, pointed out in Rule No. V., page 85, this journal.

The disposition to forgive should be with us always, and should be manifested by us at all times. Our loving generosity and kindness and desire to think no evil or as little evil as possible, should be manifest by all the words and acts of life. This is God-like. God had a kind, benevolent, generous sentiment toward us, even while we were yet sinners. Nor did he wait for the sinners to ask forgiveness, but promptly manifested his desire for harmony and his readiness to forgive. The whole Gospel message is to this effect: "Be ye reconciled to God." Our hearts should be so full of this disposition toward forgiveness that our faces would not have a hard look, nor our words of reproof a bitter sting: they should *manifest* the loving forgiveness that we should have in our hearts at all times.

Forgiveness, "in your hearts," is the condition which is always to obtain there: we should never harbor any other feeling than that of forgiveness and good will toward all, no matter how seriously they may have trespassed against us: and if this be the case, we will be longing and anxious to exercise the forgiveness outwardly and to express it to the repentant ones. Hence, we will not seek to compel the most elaborate statement on the part of the penitent; but, like the father of the prodigal, to see the repentant one coming in an attitude of humility will touch our hearts and prompt us to go out part way to meet him, and to forgive him, and to kiss him, and to put on the robe of fullest fellowship and brotherhood.

"If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." – Matt. 6:15.
