

THE GOD-LIKENESS OF FORGIVING.

– MATT. 18:21-35. – JULY 8. –

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." – Matt. 6:12.

OUR last lesson forewarned us that offences, snares and stumblings would come to the Lord's people, and cautioned us against being in any sense or degree the causes of these offences – against any conduct which would prove a stumbling-block or in any way be injurious to others. Today's lesson takes up the matter from the opposite standpoint, instructing the Lord's followers how they should deal with the injurious persons when they are of the household of faith, "brethren." Feeling the great importance of this subject, we have heretofore repeatedly made it prominent in these columns and associated publications, and especially in DAWN, Vol. VI. This seemed the more necessary because the matter has been apparently so generally neglected by others. Now, having seen some good remarks on the subject by Dr. Peloubet, we take pleasure in quoting the same in preference to repeating our own arguments, which to some might become wearisome. Dr. Peloubet says: –

"Every one receives criticisms and wrongs which try his temper to the utmost. Especially is this true of the ambitious spirits who seek to be first, as described in our last lesson. As Professor Bruce says, 'An ambitious man is sure to be the receiver of many offences, real or imaginary. He is quick to take offence and slow to forgive or forget wrong.' But the danger assails all classes.

"Go to him privately and alone. If our object is to gain our brother and help him to do right, we will not make known the wrong to others, make it a matter of notoriety, for that makes the settlement far more difficult. The offender's pride, or even self-

respect, will tend to keep him from acknowledging his fault. This is a most important principle. The wise head of a great asylum told me that in dealing with the insane it was of the utmost importance to keep away the audience, and that almost every one was influenced by the presence of others. The wisest teacher of my acquaintance deals in the same way with his boys. Deal with them alone whenever it is possible. Thus thy brother will be more likely to hear thee, and thou hast gained thy brother, gained him for righteousness, for salvation, for a Christian life, and probably as a friend.

"If this fails then the next step is to get help from one or two others; and if this fails, from the larger community. If this fails, he is to be to you as a heathen and a publican, outside of your religious and social company, but not outside of your love and care and desire to help. (See Rom. 12:19,20.) In all cases the object is not revenge, but to save and help the offender. Henry Ward Beecher used to say that he looked upon those who maligned him and said bitter things against him as sick people whom he must try to cure of their moral disease."

"SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN"

After explaining to his followers how best to avoid taking offence from the brethren and how best to help brethren out of the wrong position of being offenders and being injurious, the matter is brought up afresh by Peter's question regarding the number of times that we should be willing to receive injuries from another and take them patiently, and, exercising a forgiving spirit, should try to have the injuries discontinued. It will be noticed that the Lord is not laying down any rule by which we may deal with the world, but merely the rules which should govern amongst his followers. As respects the world we are to expect opposition, misrepresentation, slander, opposition of every kind. "Marvel not if the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated

you" – "Whosoever will live godly in this present life shall suffer persecution." – John 15:18; 2 Tim. 3:12.

Such oppositions from the world we are to take as a matter of course, and not be surprised at the fiery trials that will try us, but to consider that the Lord is wise in permitting such experiences and able to make them all work out for our good. It is within the household of faith that the special trials sometimes come, from the very quarter whence we least expect them, but these also must be taken patiently; we must not render evil for evil nor railing for **[R3801 : page 198]** railing toward the Lord's members nor toward the world; we must, as the Apostle says, be patient toward all.

Notice that Peter's query is, If my brother trespass against me how often shall I forgive him? Seven times? Peter no doubt had in mind the thought that seven was the symbol of perfection, and that this might mark the reasonable limit of mercy and forgiveness. He did not, of course, consider that if that were a divine law it would mean that he himself might be forgiven of the Lord not more than seven times for imperfections, shortcomings, etc. Our Lord's answer is broad and sweeping – "I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven." Some are disposed to translate this until seventy and seven times, but evidently the Lord's intention was to imply that forgiveness should be granted as often as it is sought with any manifestation whatever of sincerity.

This is not merely advice from the Master to his followers – it is a command. It is not optional with us how we shall do toward our brother, for the great Teacher has assured us that if we have not the forgiving spirit we cannot be his disciples. His words are, "If ye do not from the heart forgive men their trespasses neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." All, then, who realize their need of divine mercy and forgiveness and who

receive the great Teacher's instruction on this point will be careful to cultivate in their hearts in every sense a forgiving spirit, a loving, generous disposition. And by this all men may know the disciples of the Lord of mercy. We quote Dr. Peloubet again: –

"Our hearts are like reservoirs, and outward occasions draw out whatever is within and only that. If they are full of love and forgiveness, kindness and desire to help, then no matter how often – seventy times or seventy times seven – some act of others call forth the feelings of the heart, it will be met by love and forgiveness and help. As all need to be forgiven, so all need to forgive. There are enemies who injure us by word and deed. There are others who say evil things about us carelessly and attribute wrong motives, pervert what we do and say. 'They speak daggers.' Insults are offered, even friends sometimes do the most annoying and trying things, that are apt to remain in the memory and fester like a thorn in the flesh."

"The kindest and the happiest pair
Will find occasion to forbear;
And something every day they live
To pity – and perhaps forgive."

Dr. Hale refers to people who "have given a new turn to an old text. In their own private 'R.V.' of the New Testament they read: 'Whosoever speaketh a word or committeth a wrong against God, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh a word or committeth a wrong against me, it shall not be forgiven him.'"

"The forgiving spirit seeks to do all the good possible to the one who has wronged us. It yearns to help him and to save him from his sin. It proves this feeling of forgiveness and love by doing good, as God sends the rain and sunshine on the evil and on the good."

"Always and under all circumstances we must have a forgiving heart, whatever the offence against us or the attitude of the offender. We must never have the spirit of hatred or revenge or retaliation. We must never brood over wrongs, but must make all possible allowances and excuses. 'If thou [R3802 : page 198] canst not make thyself such an one as thou wouldst, how canst thou expect to have another in all things to thy liking?'"

"Heir of the same inheritance,
Child of the selfsame God,
He has but stumbled in the path
We have in weakness trod."

"An old Spanish writer says, 'To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; but to return good for evil is Godlike.'" – Archbishop Whately.

"I have known a man to nurse the tiny cocatrice egg of unforgiveness till it has burst into the fiery serpent of crime."

– Farrar.

THE DEBT OF A KING'S OFFICER

By way of impressing this lesson our Lord gave a parable to his disciples. This parable represented a great king who, making an accounting with his officers charged with the collection of taxes, found one of them short in his accounts in a very large sum, ten thousand talents, estimated to represent nine million dollars. Justice laid hold upon the debtor and was about to execute its penalty when he appealed for mercy and extension of time in which to make good the deficiency. The king was compassionate, forbore the collection of the debt and let the servant go free.

This is our Lord's illustration of the proper exercise of mercy. The one thus dealt with does not represent the world of sinners, Adam and his race, for whose deliverance from the

penalty a ransom price is demanded from justice. This parable is often thus used improperly against the Bible argument of the teaching of the ransom, that the death penalty against Adam and his race could not be lifted or set aside except by the payment of the ransom price, the corresponding price, our Lord's death. That this is not the teaching is clearly shown by the statement, "The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a certain king which would make a reckoning with his servants," etc. This declaration respecting the Kingdom of Heaven lifts the parable entirely out of connection with the world in general, which is not either in embryo or otherwise the Kingdom of Heaven: it definitely locates the parable in the Church, and these servants of the king as amongst those who have already been justified through faith in Christ and who have already made consecration of themselves to the Lord and become thus his servants entrusted with his goods. The signification of this feature of the parable, then, is that if any of the Lord's people, his disciples, come short they have a throne of grace and mercy to which they may approach that they may "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." – Heb. 4:16.

THE DEBT OF A FELLOW-SERVANT

As representing the wrong course, the reprehensible course of some, the Lord in the parable before us pictures the forgiven officer as going forth from his king's presence with the latter's kind words still ringing in his ears and in the exercise of his unmerited freedom, and, finding a fellow-servant who owed him an hundred pence – a small bet probably representing not more than a hundred dollars proportionately in our money and time. Instead of a proper and generous feeling toward his fellow-servant, instead of sympathy and love for him corresponding to that which had **[R3802 : page 199]** been bestowed by the king upon himself, this servant caught the lesser debtor by the throat saying, "Pay me that thou owest." The fellow-servant used

toward him the very same words that he had used to the king, saying, "Have mercy upon me and I will pay thee all." But he did not, but cast him into a prison. He was hardhearted, not at all after the likeness of his generous master, the king. Even his fellow-servants recognized this; they felt a pity for the unfortunate one and told it unto their lord. They knew well enough the king's generous disposition to be sure that he would not favor such an intemperate exercise of justice.

The king sent for his officer and upbraided him for the matter, saying, I remitted thy debt because thou besoughtest me; I showed mercy to you. Should you not also have shown mercy to your fellow-servant? The question was left without an answer – the answer was clearly enough implied. He who had received so great mercy should have been moved with compassion toward a fellow-servant in a small affair. The king was wroth, was angry, with that servant, justly so. He had proven himself unworthy of the mercy bestowed upon him. Nor was it too late yet to punish him for the matter, for his debt had merely been remitted or set aside and not blotted out. Thus it is with all of the Lord's people; we are dealt with on the basis of faith; God is in earnest if we are in earnest. Our blemishes and shortcomings will not be permitted to stand between us and the glorious things to which we have been called if we are faithful to the extent of our ability, and if as a part of that faithfulness we have the Spirit of Christ, for if we have not the Spirit of Christ, the spirit of love, the spirit of forgiveness, gentleness, etc., we are none of his.

It is in line with this that the Apostle writes that sins shall be blotted out at the second coming of Christ. (Acts 3:19.) They will be blotted out when in the resurrection we come forth as New Creatures, sown in weakness, raised in power; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown natural or human bodies, raised spiritual bodies, glorious. Then that which is perfect having come, all the imperfections and blemishes will be fully blotted out, never to be

revived either by the Lord or others. But meantime, while we have our standing of faith, our blemishes are merely covered while we are permitted to give a demonstration of the loyalty and sincerity of our consecration and earnestness of desire to walk in the footsteps of the Lord.

WHAT THE UNMERCIFUL MAY EXPECT

Our Lord, after concluding the parable, makes a direct application of it to his disciples, not to the world, although in a certain sense or degree there is a general principle expressed which is applicable to the world in proportion as each comes under enlightenment and instruction. Our Lord says, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." How solemn these words, how clear cut, how unmistakable their import. In no uncertain terms they assure us that whatever our faith, whatever our works, they all amount to nothing if we do not attain to that spirit of love which is merciful, generous, long suffering, patient toward those who do injury to us, whether they be brethren of whom we might expect the more, or whether they be enemies of the world from whom we must expect less, consideration. Mercy is an element of love, and Love is the fulfilling of the whole law of God.

The propriety of the Lord in thus dealing with us is evident. He is seeking a special class for the Kingdom – to be associates with our Lord Jesus in the great work of ruling and blessing the world. Only those who possess the divine character of patience, forbearance, sympathy, compassion, mercy, love, could possibly be suited to the divine purpose in respect to the great work of blessing all the families of the earth. We are accepted in Christ because of our profession that we love these qualities in him and desire to be copies of God's dear Son. If we fail to improve the various lessons and opportunities afforded by the Lord, to

cultivate this character, then in the same proportion we fail to make our calling and election sure.

The king delivered the unmerciful servant to the tormentors. Such was the custom of oriental countries at that time and to some extent still. We are not to understand that our Lord had sympathy with those barbarous customs, but that he was speaking to the people from the standpoint of custom which they would understand. Elsewhere the Scriptures assure us that any who are the true servants of the Lord and who fail to come into accord with his Spirit willingly, will be turned over to Satan, to tribulation, to hard experience, that by these they may be profited and learn to appreciate things from the Lord's standpoint. (1 Cor. 5:4,6.) For instance, Revelation 7 first speaks of the little flock, the Bride class, as composed of 144,000 – the nucleus of which were Natural Israelites, in whom was no guile, and who became the nucleus of spiritual Israel, and to whose numbers since throughout the Gospel age the Lord is gathering those from amongst the Gentiles who enter into covenant relationship with himself and manifest his Spirit. Aside from these so selected, the same symbolical picture shows us a great company whose number is known to no man – whose number was not predestinated – these are out of every nation, people, kindred and tongue. These, unlike the 144,000, do not sit with Christ in the throne, but are pictured as being before the throne. These have not, like the others, kept their garments unspotted from the world, have not had the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them richly, so that his merit constituted the robe of forgiveness for them without blemish, that by a wrong spirit and a wrong course they have bedraggled their robes, and therefore, we are told, they must wash them and make them white in the blood of the Lamb, and this washing is represented as being done in "great tribulation." These tribulations correspond to the torments of the parable upon the servant who did not exercise toward his fellows the spirit of

mercy. As again it is stated, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." – Matt. 5:7.

"FORGIVE US AS WE FORGIVE OTHERS"

It will be remembered that in our Lord's prayer he sets forth this principle for our instruction and guidance, that we must not expect of the heavenly Father mercy for our shortcomings and blemishes and continuance in his favor and ultimately joint-heirship in his Kingdom, unless we cultivate in ourselves the same spirit. How beautifully and how simply the Lord states this matter in the prayer, "Forgive **[R3803 : page 200]** us our debts as we forgive our debtors." (Matt. 6:12.) How emphatically the Lord states it again, saying, "If ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14,15.) These trespasses, be it noted again, do not refer to the one original sin on account of which condemnation of death passed upon the whole human family and on account of which Christ died and on account of which the curse is ultimately to be rolled from every member of the race so that there shall be no more curse. (Rev. 22:3.) These trespasses are our own individual shortcomings and blemishes which we have inherited and which the Lord is very willing to overlook and excuse for those who will comply with the conditions of their Covenant and be followers of the Lord Jesus, filled with his Spirit and striving to walk in his steps.

Archbishop Hare has represented the attitude of the unforgiving many as implying their prayer to the Lord thus, –

"O, Lord, I have sinned against thee many times; I have been often forgetful of thy goodness; I have broken thy law; I have committed many secret sins. Deal with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, even as I deal with my neighbor. He hath not offended me one hundredth part as much as I have offended thee, but I cannot

forgive him. He has been very ungrateful to me, but not one hundredth part as ungrateful as I have been to thee, yet I cannot overlook such base ingratitude. Deal with me, O Lord, I beseech thee, as I deal with him. I remember and treasure up every little trifle which shows how ill he has behaved to me. Deal with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, as I deal with him."
