

## **FORGIVING AND BEING FORGIVEN**

**- MATTHEW 18:21-35. - JULY 31. -**

**"If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." – Matthew 6:14.**

ST. PETER'S query, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him; until seven times?" is a query that comes to many. It is a question that at some time and in some manner or form is quite sure to come to all the followers of Christ. Imperfect ourselves and surrounded by others who are imperfect, we continually have need to exercise mercy, benevolence, forgiveness. There is something in the human mind which naturally appreciates justice and takes special note of injustice done toward us. It is also remarkable how many people take a delight in meting out justice to an offender against the law. It is this spirit which has been noted in mobs. Men and women and children work themselves into a very frenzy, as advocates of justice, in expressions against a guilty wretch who escapes the clutches of the law and a just penalty, and insist upon taking vengeance into their own hands. It would appear that many of those who participate in mobs have at times been guilty of nearly or quite as great crimes as those which they reprehend in another and would punish. It would appear that there is a craving in the fallen flesh to do violence to another, or to see violence done, if only there could be an excuse for it on the score of justice. Alas, poor creatures, how wrong such a condition of heart, how reprehensible in the sight of God! And yet those who thus wrongfully give loose rein to their passions, quiet their own consciences, at least, by concluding that they are viewing the matter like God, loving justice and hating iniquity.

It is true that Justice is the foundation of Divine Government – that God is just; but it is also true that God is loving and kind, and that he accepts to himself the very name of love, for "God is love." Such should learn that to be in the Divine likeness is to govern one's self and one's course by the rules of justice, but to measure the course of others by the rule of love and sympathy, generosity and forgiveness.

In answer to St. Peter's question, our Lord said that we should forgive a brother not only seven times, but seventy times seven. What a breadth of generosity is here suggested! How it tells us of the loving mercy and forgiveness of him with whom we have to do! But let us remember another statement of this same matter, where it is implied that before the forgiveness is granted, it is to be at least desired, if not sought. "If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day and seven times a day shall say, 'I repent'; thou shalt forgive him" – or **[R4650 : page 234]** to the extent of seventy times seven. We must even assume that the Lord meant that in our hearts we should already forgive the brother his trespasses, even though we might wisely wait to express our forgiveness until his attitude manifested some desire for it. The disciples of Christ are to be continually in the attitude of generosity and filled with the spirit of forgiveness as is the heavenly Father – ready and waiting to be gracious, and under proper conditions, to manifest that readiness.

To illustrate this matter the Master spoke a parable. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain King which would take account of his servants" (v. 23). But, as we understand him, he meant that the church at the present time is the embryotic Kingdom and is being dealt with by the Lord after the manner of the illustration in this parable. It is not therefore an illustration of God's dealing with the world. He is not dealing with the world at all. He is not calling them his servants in any sense of the word – only believers, consecrated ones, occupy this favorable

position of Divine relationship and only these are meant in the parable. Furthermore, the parable does not even consider the church on the score of original sin. It is not the thought that original sin may be cancelled on account of prayer. The penalty for original sin needed to be satisfied, not by the prayer of the sinners, but by the precious blood of Christ. But after having our sins forgiven through turning from sin and faith in Christ, and through consecration to the Lord and begetting of the holy spirit, then we are his servants, and the parable relates to these only.

The first servant mentioned in the parable had been very derelict as a servant of God. As a follower of Christ he had come far short. The time of reckoning came. He realized it and besought Divine favor and mercy, promising to do all he could to make up for the deficiencies. He was heard; the sentence upon him was stayed. But when he went forth to find a fellow-servant who owed him a trifling sum and would have no mercy upon him, his master was very angry and declared that he, too, must be harshly dealt with and receive no mercy, because he had shown none to his fellow-servant. His Lord's words were, "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion (mercy) upon thy fellow-servant even as I had mercy on thee?" And he "delivered him to the tormentors until he should pay all that was due." The amount due would not include any part of the penalty of **[R4651 : page 234]** original sin, but merely the penalty for the shortcomings of the transgressor as respects his covenant relationship, as a servant who was also a debtor from the time he became a servant.

The Lord's words concluding the parable are, "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother his trespasses." In another text our Lord inculcates the same thought in different words, saying: "If ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

The purpose and object of our heavenly Father in thus dealing with us seems not clear to all. It is not that he wishes to retaliate. It is not that he would say to us, "If you are mean towards others I will be mean towards you." Rather the lesson is this, "I am kind to the unthankful; I have been very gracious to you in the forgiveness of your original sin and in accepting your consecration to be my servant and in bringing you into my family, but I have called you into this position for a special purpose and you will not be fit nor be prepared for the service I desire for you unless you learn the lesson of forgiveness and generosity; hence, for your sake I make the rule that I will be no more generous to you and your imperfections than you are generous toward your brethren in their imperfections. I do this in order to teach you a great lesson which cannot be so well learned in any other way. What I am seeking in you as my servant is perfection in my character-likeness.

You are too inclined to look at the justice of my character and to copy it and to deal severely with others who are your debtors. I wish to make clear to you that the grandest elements of my character are illustrated from the standpoint of my love and sympathy, my kindness and forbearance. Because I desire you to progress in this character-likeness and so come to the position where I can use you in my service more abundantly, therefore I rule that you must be forgiving and gracious one toward another even as I have already been gracious toward you, and even as I propose yet further to be gracious to you, if you will abide in harmony with my spirit of love and seek to walk in my way. I am ready to forgive the loving and generous who are seeking to copy my character; I am ready to be kind and generous and forgiving to the greatest degree."

=====