

Forgiving Others

by David Watts

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him” (Luke 17:3-4).

Observant readers will notice that Jesus did not offer the above words as mere advice or as a recommendation which we are free to accept or to reject at our pleasure. His words amount to a command, and that command rests upon the authority of the Eternal One who shall judge our hearts and deeds in the final day.

A Difficult Command

If we have discovered it already, we will almost certainly learn before we die that obedience to this command is not always easy, though we can obey it. Disobedience to it will damn our souls.

Perhaps the difficulty of always forgiving all who wrong us accounts for the fact that the petition, *“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”* is the only part of the Disciples’ Prayer that Jesus elaborated upon. Immediately after that model prayer, Jesus explained: *“For 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. 7:14-15). Similar consequences of an unforgiving spirit are further illustrated by Christ in the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18). The implacable servant was delivered to *“the tormentors,”* and Jesus added: *“So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses”* (Matt. 18:35).

Forgive From The Heart

When Jesus commanded us to forgive a penitent offending brother, He did not mean mere lip-service “forgiveness.” The story of the man who told his brother, “I’ll forgive you, but I’ll never forget what you did to me,” has probably been repeated, though less candidly, more than many of us suspect or would like to admit. Admittedly, sincere forgiveness does not require *literal* amnesia respecting the forgiven wrong, but the kind of forgiveness Jesus demands is *“from the heart”* (Matt. 18:35), and that requires complete forgiveness!

Forgive As God Forgave

Genuine, heart-felt forgiveness is an attribute of the new man, and is made possible not only by the knowledge that Christ requires it, but also by the remembrance of our own forgiveness by God. Paul admonished the Ephesians, *“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”* (Eph. 4:31-32). A similar admonition is found in the same apostle’s epistle to the Colossians (3:13). When asked to forgive one who has wronged us, it should help us all to remember that yesterday we needed such forgiveness from our heavenly Father, and tomorrow we may need such forgiveness from both God and our brethren.

Conclusion

To state the matter bluntly, we must forgive the penitent brethren, or we will go to hell!

