

How Oft shall I Forgive My Brother?

Mrs. E. G. White.

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

"But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? and his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

This parable is designed to show the spirit of tenderness and compassion which man should manifest for his fellow man. The pardon of this king represents a pardon that is supernatural,--a divine forgiveness of all sin. Christ is represented by the king who, moved with compassion, forgave the debt of his servant. Man was under the condemnation of the broken law. He could not save himself; and for this reason, Christ came to this world, clothed his divinity with humanity, and gave his life, the Just for the unjust. He desired to give in his own life an example of the forbearance that man should exercise toward his fellow man.

When the debtor pleaded for delay, with the promise, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all," the sentence was revoked; the whole debt was canceled; and he was soon given an opportunity to pattern after the master who had forgiven him. Going out, he met a fellow servant who owed him a hundred pence. But he who had been so mercifully treated dealt with his fellow laborer in an altogether different manner. His debtor made an appeal similar to that which he himself had made to the king, but without a similar result. He who had so recently been forgiven was not kind, and tender-hearted, and

pitiful. The goodness, mercy, and love shown to him he did not exercise in dealing with his fellow servant. He heeded not the request to be patient. The goodness shown to him only hardened his heart. The small sum owed him was all that the ungrateful servant could keep in mind. He demanded all that he considered his due, and carried into effect the sentence which had been so graciously revoked for him.

The lesson to be learned is that we must have the spirit of true forgiveness, even as Christ forgives the sinner, who can in no case pay his enormous debt. We are to bear in mind that Christ has paid an infinite price for the souls of men, and we are to treat them as Christ's purchased possession.

It is not to be thought that this parable teaches indolence. The word of God teaches that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat. The Lord does not require the hardworking man to support those who are not diligent. There is a waste of time, a lack of effort, which brings to poverty and want. If these faults are not seen and corrected by those who indulge them, all that might be done in their behalf is like putting treasure into a basket with holes. But there is an unavoidable poverty; and we are to manifest tenderness and compassion toward those who are unfortunate.

In the prayer which Christ taught his disciples, he said: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." By this he did not mean us to understand that in order to be forgiven, we are not to require our just dues from our debtors; but if through unwise management they have been placed where they can not pay, they are not to be treated harshly, oppressed, nor placed in prison.

There is no virtue in advocating that theft or fraudulent actions shall go unpunished; but there are matters connected with the church that are to be kept within its own borders. Personal revenge is not becoming to a child of God. If he is abused, he is to take it patiently; if defrauded of that which is his just due, he is not to appeal to unbelievers in courts of justice. Rather, let him suffer loss and wrong. The one wronged may feel injured, and may be tempted to cause oppression to his fellow man; but if he follows this course, he reveals that he has not the Spirit of Christ.

Christians need not contend for their rights. They stand under the protection of the banner of Christ. They are to acknowledge the supreme authority of the King of kings and Lord of lords. In matters of difficulty between them and their brethren, they are not to appeal to Caesar or to Pilate. An account is kept of all these matters; and in his own good time, Christ will avenge his own elect. God will deal with the one who defrauds his brother and the cause of God. "Vengeance is mine," he says; "I will repay."

The apostle Paul charges us: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same mind, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." "Only let your

conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. . . . For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

Too often when wrongs have been reproved again and again, and the wrong-doer confesses his fault, the one who has suffered becomes weary, and thinks he has forgiven quite enough. But the Saviour has given us an example how we should deal with those who err. "If thy brother trespass against thee," he says, "rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." Do not hold him off as unworthy of your confidence. Consider "thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

The spirit of forgiveness is to be cherished; yet the Lord says, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him." The trespass may be against ourselves, or against some other soul whom Christ has purchased with his own blood. These wrongs are not to be passed by. The Lord has commanded us not to suffer wrong against our brother. It is only right that indignation be felt against wrong-doing; for by it Christ is dishonored. Sin is to be called by its right name, and is to be plainly laid out before the wrong-doer. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee," Christ said, "go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

In his charge to Timothy, Paul says: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." Again he says: "There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers. . . . Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."

Christ knew the perversity of the hearts of men, even of those who should be brought into church capacity, and he outlined the course to be pursued. He knew that this, if followed, would close the door to misunderstanding, alienation, and strife. But these directions have been largely disregarded by the professed people of God, and dissension is the result.

Christ is the instructor of his people. He would have them sit at his feet as little children, and learn the lessons that are so essential for them to know. "Verily I say unto you," he said, "except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter

into the kingdom of heaven." Strife for superiority is the result of yielding to the temptations of the enemy. No man should cherish the idea that he must be first; that he must be above his brethren; that his voice must be the voice in counsel, and in the plans laid. When man places himself where God should be, he is just where Satan is pleased to have him. And by exalting himself in those who will listen to his suggestions, Satan is carrying forward the same work that he began in heaven.

It takes time and patience to grow in Christlikeness of character; but it is a very easy matter to accept the attributes of Satan, and fall into his ways. It is an easy matter to become accusers of the brethren, and to set ourselves up as a standard of character; and the deception of Satan will be complete unless decided resistance is made against the first approach of the enemy. Unless God is sought in prayer, unless his converting grace comes to the soul, there will be no inclination to oppose Satan's wily temptations.

Paul asks, "Is Christ divided?" Have we not one spiritual Head? Christ has been the uniting stone, the chief corner-stone, in all ages. The patriarchs, the Levitical priesthood, and Christians of today, all have their center in him. He is all and in all. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

The cross of Christ is the pledge of our fellowship and union. The time must come when the watchmen shall see eye to eye; when the trumpet shall give a certain sound; when "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim" any more.