

Expository Tracts, No. 11.

FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER.

BEING

THOUGHTS ON MATT. XVIII. 21–35.

BY THE

RIGHT REV. BISHOP RYLE, D.D.

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FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER.

MATTHEW XVIII. 21–35.

- 21 Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?
- 22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.
- 23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.
- 24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.
- 25 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.
- 26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
- 27 Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.
- 28 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.
- 29 And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
- 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt.
- 31 So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.
- 32 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:
- 33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?
- 34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.
- 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

READER,

In these verses the Lord Jesus deals with a deeply important subject,—the forgiveness of injuries. You live in a wicked world, and it is vain to expect that you can escape ill-treatment, however carefully you may behave. To know how to conduct yourself when you are ill-treated is of great

moment to your soul. Come now and hear what Christ teaches.

1. In the first place, *the Lord Jesus lays it down as a general rule that you ought to forgive others to the uttermost.* His Apostle Peter puts the question, “How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times?” He received for answer, “I say not unto thee till seven times, but until seventy times seven.”

The rule here laid down must, of course, be interpreted with sober-minded qualification. Our Lord does not mean that offences against the law of the land and the good order of society are to be passed over in silence: He does not mean that people are to be allowed to commit thefts and assaults with impunity. All that He means is that you are to study a general spirit of mercy and forgiveness towards your brethren. You are to bear much, and to put up with much, rather than quarrel; you are to look over much, and submit to much, rather than have any strife. You are to lay aside everything like malice, strife, revenge, and retaliation: such feelings are only fit for heathens; they are utterly unworthy of a disciple of Christ.

Reader, think what a happy world it would be if this rule of Christ was more known and better obeyed! How many of the miseries of mankind are occasioned by disputes, quarrels, lawsuits, and an obstinate tenacity about what men call “their rights!” How many of them might be altogether avoided, if men were more willing to forgive, and more desirous for peace! Never forget that a fire cannot go on burning without fuel: just in the same way it takes two to make a quarrel. Resolve, by God’s grace, that of these two you will never be one. Resolve to return good for evil, and blessing for cursing, and so to melt down enmity and change your foes into friends. (Rom. xii. 20.) It was a fine feature in Archbishop Cranmer’s character, that if you did him an injury he was sure to be your friend.

2. In the second place, the Lord Jesus supplies us with *two powerful motives for exercising a forgiving spirit*. He tells a story of a man who owed an enormous sum to his master, and had “nothing to pay:” nevertheless, at the time of reckoning his master had compassion on him, and “forgave him all.” He tells us that this very man, after being forgiven himself, refused to forgive a fellow-servant a trifling debt of a few pence: he actually cast him ‘into prison,’ and would not abate a jot of his demand.—Our Lord tells us how punishment overtook this wicked and cruel man, who, after receiving mercy, ought surely to have shown mercy to others; and finally, He concludes the parable with the impressive words, “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

Reader, you are taught in this parable that the great motive for forgiving others ought to be the recollection that we all need forgiveness at God’s hands ourselves. Day after day we are all coming short in many things, “leaving undone what we ought to do, and doing what we ought not to do.” Day after day we all require mercy and pardon. Our neighbours’ offences against us are mere trifles, compared with our offences against God. Surely it ill becomes poor erring creatures like us to be extreme in marking what is done amiss by our brethren, or slow to forgive it.

Another motive for forgiving others ought to be the recollection of the day of judgment, and the standard by which we shall all be tried in that day. There will be no forgiveness in that day for unforgiving people. Such people would be unfit for heaven: they would not be able to value a dwelling-place to which “mercy” is the only title, and in which “mercy” is the eternal subject of song. Surely if men hope to stand at the right hand when Jesus sits on the throne of His glory, they must learn, while they are on earth, to forgive.

Reader, let these truths sink down deeply into your heart. It is a melancholy fact that there are few Christian duties so little practised as that of forgiveness. It is sad to see how much bitterness, unmercifulness, spite, hardness, and unkindness there is among men. Yet there are few duties so strongly enforced in the New Testament Scriptures as this duty is, and few of which the neglect so clearly shuts a man out of the kingdom of God.

Would you give proof that you are at peace with God, washed in Christ’s blood, born of the Spirit and made God’s child by adoption and grace? Then remember this passage, and act upon it. Like your Father in heaven, be forgiving. Has any man injured you? This day forgive him. As an old divine says, “We ought to forgive ourselves little, and others much.”

Would you do good to the world? Would you have any influence on others, and make them see the beauty of true religion? Then remember this passage, and act upon it. Men who care not for doctrines, can understand a forgiving temper.

Would you grow in grace yourself, and become more holy in all your ways, words, and works? Then remember this passage, and act upon it. Nothing so grieves the Holy Spirit, and brings spiritual darkness over the soul, as giving way to a quarrelsome and unforgiving temper. (Ephes. iv. 30–32.)

Would you pass through life with comfort, and see good days? Then remember this passage, and act upon it. Quarrelsome and implacable tempers are one great cause of the unhappiness which abounds in this world. Resolve to be one of those who will forgive “seventy times seven,” and you will never have cause to regret it. In the long run of life the man of peace is never a loser. Remember the words of St. Paul: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom. xii. 19–21.)

Last of all, would you like to leave good evidences behind you when you die? Would you like to be one whose Christian character no one can deny after you are buried? Then remember this passage, and act upon it.

Under every provocation, and in all circumstances, be a forgiving man. This is the best and most infallible proof that a professed member of Christ is what he professes. No Christian is so like Christ as the Christian who is a great forgiver; no one is so like the devil as the implacable and unforgiving man. Reader, remember the words of St. Paul: “Even as Christ forgave you, so also do you.” (Colos. iii. 13.)