

Forgiveness of Injuries.*

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THE PROCEDURE IN FORGIVENESS.

Our Saviour was obliged to give his disciples a method of procedure in adjusting their difficulties. In this rude world difficulties spring up even between Christians. Christ's directions are for brethren,—“if thy brother sin against thee”—they are for those in the church: “Tell it to the church.” It has been doubted if the word translated “church” could possibly mean this here. It is urged that the Christian church was not organized till some time afterwards. True enough; but Christ was preparing the way for the church and apparently He had outlined His plans in reference to it to His disciples. This was not the first time that He had used the word. He had previously said, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” Evidently the word had a definite meaning and the meaning it has to-day. A “brother” then was a fellow church-member, a brother Christian. If things go wrong between these brethren what course is to be pursued?

1. Let the aggrieved move in matter. Why so? Ought not the aggrieved to seek out the aggrieved and ask his pardon? Certainly, but he may not know that he has hurt his brother. It is quite possible to say a thing thoughtlessly or do a deed ignorantly that rankles in another's breast while the offender is innocent of any intent of harm and knows nothing of the feeling he has aroused. The remedy for this is in Christ's direction and is to be found in no other way. Let the aggrieved, then, ask for an explanation.

2. There must be a personal effort to right the wrong.

The two meet: they talk over the trouble; the aggrieved honestly tries in a Christian way to secure reparation. This means much. If the two are Christians, misunderstanding and even injustice will melt away like the mist of the morning.

3. But if this does not succeed the third step is for the aggrieved to continue his effort at reconciliation by an interview with witnesses. They can testify to the truth of what he has said. They can add their persuasions to his. And if the effort fails they can testify to the church what has been done.

4. But if this fails, then let the trouble be brought to the attention of the church. The church should adjust the trouble if possible. A family is bound to do all it can to harmonize its members. The church is a family.

5. But if this fails, what then? “Let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican.” This is a direction for the aggrieved party. How far does it apply to the church? Just so far, and no farther, as it finds itself obliged to share the grievance of its injured member. If the offense be real and serious, the church cannot well avoid espousing the cause and sharing a sense of injustice.

The treatment required is simple and not severe. The brotherly relations cease—and that is all. The Gentile and the publican were not in the same social circle with the disciples. There was not and could not be intimacy between them. So one who is unrepentant and persistent in his injury is to be let alone. The old relationship is impossible. He should be kindly treated. His welfare should be sought. But confidence in him is gone; his hostile spirit continues; intimacy is no longer possible. This means a withdrawal of fellowship on the part of the individual aggrieved and it may mean the same on the part of a sympathizing church. Action taken thus cautiously is ratified in heaven, and thus God gives His children, guided by the Spirit, a certain power to bind and loose.

Peter raises a new question. It relates to

THE NATURE OF FORGIVENESS.

How often shall I forgive my brother? The Pharisee says three times. Is seven times enough? No, says Christ, let it be seventy times seven, by which he evidently means, let it be without limit. Forgiveness is not so much the doing of a thing a certain number of times as it is the possession of a right spirit. What we need is a forgiving spirit, always ready to receive an explanation and to restore the penitent to favor. But there cannot be forgiveness without repentance? No God will not forgive us without repentance, and He does not ask a greater grace in us towards one another. It is impossible to restore one to brotherly relations who persists in his hostility. To attempt to do it

were absurd. But the moment that he repents his wrong forgive him and restore him. Until that time, if you have gone through the steps for his reclamation as directed by Christ, you are justified in denying him the old brotherly relation, but not in seeking him harm or in neglecting to do him good so far as you are able.

THE REASONS FOR FORGIVENESS.

Christ set these forth in the parable of the unmerciful servant. One reason is that we have the divine example for such forgiveness. God is ready to forgive us. He sets us an example that we should do as He has done to us.

A second reason is our vastly greater need for the divine forgiveness. We must have that forgiveness for the sake of peace. We cannot be happy and live in alienation from our Father. We are impelled to seek Him and cry for pardon for our sins. But how illogical and absurd for us to hope for the divine forgiveness when unwilling to forgive a brother man whose injury to us is infinitely less than ours to God. God accepts His children's grievances as His own and He cannot and will not forgive us while we persist in treating wrongly our brother man.

One other reason for our exercising forgiveness is that to fail to do so in accordance with the divine directions is a sin and must be punished. It is both disobedience to God and injustice to man. It is, still further, in direct opposition to God's plan in dealing with man and to the spirit of Him whose name is Love.

The Potsherds of Egypt.

Prof. Sayce in a recent article written from Cairo gives an interesting account of the numerous finds made in Egypt during the past few years of records written on fragments of broken pottery belonging to the time of the Roman occupation. The exceeding cheapness of the material no doubt caused it to be preferred to papyrus and the ink used still remains wonderfully distinct. Of course many of the fragments are now unintelligible, but enough have been deciphered to show their general character. The great majority of these “ostraca,” as they are called, represent business transactions, such as bank loans and payments of taxes. In fact the largest collections have been found on the sites of the old custom houses, and show as nothing else could the exactions which were forced from the poor peasantry on one pretext or another. After giving a number of specimens he continues as follows: The ostraca, however, are not always concerned with the tax-collector and his victims. One of those in my possession gives a “list of the donkey boys of Karnak, with the names of their fathers, and though the list was doubtless made out for the purpose of extracting money out of them, the same cannot be said of two other ostraca which I have obtained from Karnak. On one of these we read; “Orion the younger to Pautis; you will do well to come to me. If you have found a boat, bring it to me, and (if) you have found one 1st it come quickly.” On the other the handwriting of which points to the reign of Augustus, we have an interesting peep into life in a public office at the time: “My lord Iaidorus, when you come bring me the lexicon to the first book of Illiad, as I have already begged you to do.” The clerks in the civil service, it would seem, were not wholly forgetful of literature.

It is not often, however, that we come across anything so human among these dry bones of a dead civilization. We have for the most part to be content with the light thrown by the ostraca on the inner life and social history of Egypt in the Greek and Roman age, and the proofs they give of the merciful way in which the patient and industrious fellahin were taxed. The wonder is that such overreaching did not exhaust the province sooner than was actually the case, or that the peasantry of Upper Egypt did not more often rise in rebellion against their avaricious masters. Everything was taxed and taxed to the uttermost farthing. The taxes were paid, partly in money, partly in kind, wheat being of course the standard of value. Among them I must not forget to mention the castor oil which still plays so important a part in the toilet of the dark-skinned belles of Nubia, as well as in the diltary of their husbands. Even olive oil, which was manufactured in the presses at Thebe, is called in one of my ostraca by the name of the less inodorous liquid.

*A Meditation based on (Matt. xviii. 15-35); in the Bible Study Union Course on “The Teachings of Christ.”