

Forgiveness!

The purpose of this sermon is to make one all to understand that there is virtue and blessing in forgiving our neighbours who trespass against us. This, admittedly, is the will of God. But to do otherwise is to work against our own spiritual interest or well-being.

Original Guilt

Through the disobedience of Adam, the entire human race became tainted with sin. There is none of his offsprings who can claim to be without a touch of the original guilt because all were born in sin. And so long as this evil world remains men will continue to come into being as sinners. King David as fully aware of this plight of human beings in which he himself, naturally, had a share, and so he declared: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and sin did my mother conceive me." – Psalm, 51: 5.

Men, under such a state of imperfection, are incapable of keeping all the commandments of God at all times without offending Him in one way or other. God Himself knows better In anyone else the frailty or Weakness of man. And so in exercise of His at mercy He is ever ready to fore the sons of men their transgressions provided they show deep sorrow for their wrong-doings and are willing to fore evil. – Job 33: 27-30; Proverbs 28: 13, 14. The Psalmist said: "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us."

"Like as a father pitieth his children, he LORD pitieth them that fear. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."-Psalm, 103 vs 8-14.

And in Isaiah 55:7, it is recorded: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

God does not forgive or show mercy indiscriminately. For those who love to do His will He shows mercy even if their forebears were wicked but He does not forgive those who are given to unrighteousness. Rather He punishes them; and if their children have similar evil inclination God can punish them even to the forth generation. In giving His commandments through Moses, God said: "I the LORD thy God am a jealous God (jealous, because He created us for Himself and not for the devil) visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; an, shewing mercy unto thousands of then that love me, and keep my commandments." – Exodus 20:5,6; see also Exodus 34: 6,7; Num. 14:17,18.

That God Almighty is merciful an forgiving there is abundance of evidence. When David, King of Israel, committed adultery by marrying Uriah's wife, God sent Nathan the prophet point out the gravity of his offence to him. David did not justify himself rather he contritely confessed his sin. Because of his repentance he was pardoned but the child, which was the fruit of his adulterous union with Uriah's wife, was slain by the Lord As it is written: "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."

"Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." – 2nd Samuel 12: 13, 14.

Apart from this instance of David there are other examples such as the cases of Ahab, Hezekiah and other Jews, that can be cited in regard to forgiveness of God, but space will suffice us to go into details.

In the Psalms it is clearly stated God forgives men their sins, n(make them continue in malpractices or ungodliness, but in order that may (car Him by refraining from and by keeping His commandment their own good. Said the Psalmist' "If 'Thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall s But there is forgiveness with that Thou mayest be feared; for the LORD there is mercy, and Him is plenteous redemption" Psalm 130: 3-4,7.

Essence of Forgiveness

During the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ not only did he teach his disciples the essence of forgiveness but he also put his teaching into practice. A certain woman who was known to be a sinner met Jesus Christ in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and because she showed repentance her sins were forgiven her by Christ. (Read Luke 7:36-50) He said to the woman: "Thy sins are forgiven."

When Jesus Christ was wrongly judged by the Pharisees for eating with publicans and sinners, he told them: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will bare mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."-Matthew, 9: 10-13.

The life of Jesus all through was a clean demonstration of all that righteousness connotes. On the occasion of his crucifixion, despite the indignity and reproaches he suffered at the hands of sinners, he still displayed his characteristic magnanimity, and he prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."-Luke 23: 34.

In his famous prayer, Christ taught his disciples to say to the heavenly Father: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Matthew, 6: 12) He gave reason for this when he added: "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."- Matthew, 6: 14, 15.

In this present evil world there are people of different characters and ha- bits. Some are good-tempered, kind, approachable and godly-disposed. Whereas there are also those in whom there is no milk of human kindness: they are ill-disposed, hardhearted, ~vengeful and wicked. Some of them even say openly that the word forgiveness is not in their dictionaries and' boast of being guided by the rule of "eye for eye, tooth for tooth".

We know that some people develop ungodly attitudes owing to certain circumstances or as a result of their experiences in their dealings with their fellowmen or mainly because of their ignorance of the laws of God. Take for example the case of a certain gentleman whose friend was caught flirting with his wife. The gentleman was very much irritated and decided to punish the friend for his misconduct. However, owing to the intervention of others who knew about the matter and the apparent remorsefulness of the friend, the gentleman forgive him. But when the son of the gentleman mistakenly killed a chicken belonging to the wife of the friend, he (the friend) insisted that the gentleman must pay for it and he did pay for the chicken.

Consequent upon this experience, the said gentleman vowed that never in his life would he

forgive anyone who offended him any more. He said his rule henceforth would be: "If you kick me, I kick you; if you kill my chicken, I kill yours; if you take my wife, I take your own." This outburst of the gentleman in breathing out vengeance was not without cause but then if he had had the understanding of the will of God he would never have reacted in such a manner. For he would have known that before. God, his friend was guilty and would have left him to God whose punishment no one can escape or bear. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12: 19-21.) Evil proceeds from an evil man. And King Solomon stated: "Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house." – Proverbs 17: 13.

Practical Illustration

Jesus made no mystery about the Christian principle as touching offences and forgiveness. His answer to the question of Peter the apostle is enough to give everyone more light. It is written in the Holy Bible thus: "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." (Matthew, 18: 21,22) The term "seventy times seven" as used by our Lord is a hyperbole signifying that as many times as our neighbour offends us and repents we should forgive him.

Christ went on to give a practical illustration to teach why it is rewarding to forgive our neighbour their trespasses in the following vein: "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 worshipped him, saying Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of the 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 fellowservant, 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."-Matthew, 18:23-35.

If men can learn lessons from the teachings of our Lord Christ, the greatest Teacher who had ever lived on earth, no one will ever threaten his neighbour with vengeance or declare never to forgive another. Christ told Peter as well as others to forgive "seventy times seven" times, that is to say, as many times as one is offended. However, there is a condition to the effect that the offender must show contrition for his offence. This point was made plain by Jesus Christ in his admonition to his disciples:

"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." – Luke 17:3, 4.

Blessing

It is a pity that there are people who do not know that it is profitable to show mercy and that forgiveness is a Christian virtue. In James 2:13, it is written: "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." And Jesus Christ said: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."-Matthew, 5:7.

No one can argue the fact that that portion of the Beatitudes just quoted is full of striking thoughts. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, whose understanding of the will and purpose of God, by virtue of special excellence, is beyond compare; was teaching a treat lesson. Who among men-mortal sinful men-can boast that he has never offended God? None, certainly.

Every so often men do break His commandments and sin against Him by word of mouth or written word, by deeds or by thoughts of their hearts. Yet He shows mercy.

But men have been warned that they shall be judged by God without mercy if they too do not show mercy to their neighbours. And according to Jesus Christ, those who are merciful are blessed in that they will also obtain the mercy of God.

It is not enough to preach forgiveness and reconciliation on soap-boxes. Let us all endeavour to see them manifested in practice. Christians are admonished to stop being mean and ill-tempered, and be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another just as God for Christ's sake has forgiven them. (Ephesians 4: 31,32.) These things are really necessary if peace and harmony must exist in human societies.

Finally, the exhortation of Paul, the articulate apostle, to charity, humility and sundry spiritual duties, addressed to the Christians at Colosse, must not be ignored. Among other things, he stated: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." – Colossians 3: 12-14. We have made the points clear enough. The importance of forgiveness was also given a clear expression by a famous English Poet, Alexander Pope (1688- 1744), in his saying: "To err is human, to forgive, divine." And remember that Jesus Christ our Redeemer had said: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."