

Forgiveness

By Elder David Pyles

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. – Mt 6:14-15

With these important words, the Lord Jesus elevated forgiveness to the top of Christian priorities. Surely nothing good can come of a state wherein one is without the forgiveness of God. There is no hope of heaven without it, and even those who have been forgiven eternally can still fall under His chastisements if not forgiven in a temporal sense. A heart that harbors bitterness and malice should not expect to see many bright and happy days.

Jesus taught forgiveness to degrees that frankly seem unreasonable upon first impression. For example, consider:

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. – Matt 18:21-22

One would think that a man surely has justification for bitterness if offended 490 times in a day, so the preliminary conclusion is that Jesus intended a sizeable degree of exaggeration with this commandment; however, the perspective is radically changed by what follows:

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 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 fellowservants, 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 fellowservant 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 fellowservants 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: Shouldest 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. –
Mt 18:23-19:1*

This very sobering parable obviously settles the question. In His commandments to forgive, Jesus meant exactly what He said, and defended it with an argument that no reasonable conscience would dare presume to refute. It follows that a forgiving heart is about the surest recipe one could find for happiness and success, and an unforgiving heart is on a sure path leading to sorrow and loss.