

"THE HIGH COST OF UNFORGIVENESS"

INTRODUCTION

Someone once told Mark Twain that he was very troubled by the things that he didn't understand in the Bible. Twain replied that he had been more troubled by the things in the Bible that he did understand than by those things he didn't understand.

So it is with many Christians today. Those of us who are serious about following the way set down by the Man of Galilee have certainly been troubled by the words, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". It's not always too happy a thought to be told, as we are in the Lord's Prayer, that we must give in order to receive; that we must let loose and let go of all indignation, no matter how justified it may be. Even the disciple, Peter, asked Jesus, "Master, how often shall we forgive, until seven times?" Whereupon Jesus answered, "I say unto you, until seventy times seven!" ...an unlimited number.

DEVELOPMENT

Peter could well have been saying, "Look, you just can't go on forgiving people! Just how much can a person take?". But Jesus puts it on the basis of law, rather than emotion. If you want light in the room, you must turn on the switch. If you refuse, you'll sit there in the darkness - and the darkness is of your own choosing.

Now you may feel that it is too much to forgive those who have deliberately and spitefully used you; that you have a right to your indignation and your bitterness. But, remember, you will have to pay the price for a broken connection in the Divine circuit. You can choose unforgiveness, but along with it you are choosing discomfort and perhaps an ulcer or heart trouble and some misfortunes in every area of your life. There is a high cost label that goes with unforgiveness. Far better, to forgive and forget.

The only answer is to turn on the light. That is, to let go of the bitterness, not so much because your "enemy" deserves or doesn't deserve to be forgiven - but because you need to forgive. You need that healing touch, that healing unity that only right thinking can bring.

INTO FOCUS

I would like to bring one thing into focus. Abusive and criminal acts are committed that should not be forgiven while they are being committed. Obviously, this treatment would only encourage wrongdoing. But we must forgive when the deed is done. We must cleanse ourselves of enmity, for we cannot afford to hold on to it.

Of course, we can condemn an act, but we must forgive the person. I do not mean to treat this subject glibly, or give the impression that we can toss off our emotions quickly or easily. This is not something that we can do by an easy act of will. But our goal, I believe, must always be to replace judgement with understanding - for when we understand enough, we discover that there is really nothing to forgive.

There are those who say that the criminal acts of men prove that human nature is evil. However, it is not human nature, but human nurture that is the problem. No one is born with negative thoughts. Wherever you see anything wrong, someone taught a child. And, when we try to achieve vengeance, or some form of redress or satisfaction, we're creating a whole new wave of human nurture - negative nurture.

We need to take a good look at this matter of vengeance and revenge in our society...to the issues of criminal justice, capital punishment.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Two Hindu priests were walking on a long journey when they came to a river crossing. They discovered a fair lady who was unable to cross the river for fear of the heavy, swirling waters. Priests were not allowed to touch women, but one took pity and carried her across. For miles thereafter, the second priest kept berating the first one for breaking his vow. Finally, the first priest said, "My good friend, I carried the woman only across the stream and promptly put her down; you have been carrying her for the past 20 miles."

Perhaps there is some grudge or some matter that you've been carrying for some time and some distance that you need to put down...to let go of, to forget.

I read about a man who was cheated out of a great deal of money many years ago by a business partner, who himself went bankrupt sometime later. The errant partner met his problem, searched himself and saw the emptiness in his values. He changed his self image, and eventually went on to become extremely successful, both in wealth and happiness. Finally, he made many efforts to recompense for his act and repay his partner. But the man who had been cheated has lived for twenty years in anger and bitterness, which has been doubly painful as he has watched his former partner go on to succeed. He still refuses to forgive, or to accept repayment. Now, where is the problem. The cheating partner has long since been healed, but the cheated one has carried his burden through years of self-induced hell.

God always forgives man for his mistakes, but we are not so generous. This is the meaning of the parable read for the scripture. Many of us continue to punish ourselves for acts that we deem "unforgiveable". But by Divine Law nothing is unforgiveable. The duty of forgiveness occupied a large place in the teachings of Jesus. Unlimited forgiveness was to be the dominant spirit of His kingdom. Evil of every kind - personal, social, international - is to be overcome by good. Seventy times seven expresses an unlimited number. To forgive is to be Godlike.

CONCLUSION

Someone has said, "When you are sick of being sick, you will get well".

This certainly is true of persons, of groups, of nations. When we have "had it", we will rise to a new level of consciousness, find peace within ourselves and peace within the world.

Forgiveness is not an act. It is an attitude. And when we are willing to subscribe to that attitude, we will find that the whole force of the Universe is on our side as we seek changes from war to peace, from bitterness to love.

PRAYER

"Dear Lord and Father of mankind, Forgive our foolish
ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind, In purer lives thy
service find,
In deeper reverence, praise."