



THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES

Comrades and Friends, — Many good people find the forgiveness of injuries to be a very difficult task. They say: 'I know that Jesus Christ bids me to bless them that curse me, to do good to them that hate me, and to pray for them that despitefully use me and persecute me. That I can understand, and that I can do; but when it comes to forgiving them and loving them, notwithstanding their ill-treatment, that seems to be almost impossible; at least, it appears very difficult.'

Now I want to say something that will help those who feel thus in the discharge of the duty, confessedly difficult as it may be.

I. — Begun by remarking, that there are few of us who do not know the pleasure of being ourselves forgiven when we have inflicted a wrong upon others.

We never used to tire of singing:

'Twas a very happy day, and no mistake,
When Jesus from my heart did take
The load of sin that made it ache,
And filled my soul with joy.

There are few of us that have not known the satisfaction which follows the assurance that the wrongs we have done to others have been forgiven and forgotten. Indeed, the forgiveness of injuries is ever an agreeable experience, not only to those who have sinned, but to those who have been sinned against.

II. — If it be so good a thing to be forgiven by those whom you have injured, it must be equally good, or better still, to forgive those who have injured you.

1. Now, we all have opportunities for displaying this grace, seeing that we are so often called upon endure things that we regard as injuries.



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2. Experience proves that many of the injuries of which we complain are often purely imaginary. Almost every day of our lives we are led to suppose that people have said or done things of which they have never thought of saying or doing; or that their words have had a meaning attached to them other than that which they intended.

3. Again, many of the real injuries we are called upon to suffer are made by our imaginations to appear far more serious than they really are. Molehills are magnified into mountains, and trifling wrongs are magnified by gloomy imaginations until they appear next door to crucifixions.

None the less, there is reality enough in some of these injuries to make the angels weep. Again and again my heart has been pierced by incidents of shameful injuries and cruelty which some of my people have had to suffer. Wrongs inflicted by husbands on wives, or by wives on husbands; by parents on children, or by children on parents. Wrongs done by masters to servants, or by servants to masters.

4. Such wrongs will not allow themselves to be passed by; they must be dealt with. They wound the very soul. Have they not made for some of us hours and days and weeks of unhappiness? Have they not endangered our confidence in God and lessened our power for usefulness? In some cases they have even hindered the progress of Christ's Kingdom, and ruined men, women, and children for time and eternity. In every case they grieve the Heart of our dear Lord. Very well, they must be dealt with. What shall we do with them?

III. – The great majority of these injuries should be forgiven right away.

Let me name some advantages flowing out of the exercise of such forgiveness:

1. God demands it.
2. Jesus Christ prays for it.
3. The holiest men and women who have ever lived have acted on this principle when injured.
4. Your own welfare depends on it.

Oh, the time and money and energy wasted on keeping a quarrel alive and active!

5. Your own peace demands it.



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Is there anything more destructive to that rest of soul, which is the foundation of happiness, than the fire of anger and the spirit of revenge?

6. The prosperity of your own religion requires it.

Oh, the souls that are robbed of spiritual power by the cowardice that refuses to own, and the stubbornness that refuses to forgive, an injury!

7. The prosperity of your Corps demands it.

IV. – Now what ought you to do when placed in such circumstances?

1. When those who have injured you repent, you have no course open but to forgive them straight away.

No matter how often the wrongdoer may have offended, if the offence is followed by what you have reason to believe is genuine repentance, you are bound to forgive him.

You will remember that when Peter asked our Lord whether he was to forgive his brother more than seven times, Jesus replied, 'I say not until seven times, but until seventy times seven.' What do you say to that?

2. Again, when the offence has been committed in ignorance, you are alike under an obligation, I think, to forgive those who have injured you.

Anyhow, you ought not to cherish any resentment against the wrongdoer, whether he repents or not.

Did not our Lord set us an example in this respect, when He looked up to Heaven from the cross, and prayed for His murderers in that never-to-be-forgotten petition, 'Father, forgive them; they know not what they do'?

3. But not only ought you to forgive those who injure you ignorantly, but so to explain the conduct of which they complain, that they may be led to see where they have been mistaken in the charge they bring against you.



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It is not enough for you to say of those who, with or without reason, have injured you, 'Let them alone, their bad feelings and evil conduct do not matter to me.' These things do matter to you, for they are an offence to your Lord, and an injury to your soul, and a damage to the Kingdom. You are under an obligation to explain your conduct, in the hope that a proper view of your conduct may satisfy your enemy that he is wrong in the feelings he entertains towards you, so causing him to dismiss from his mind the wrong feelings he cherishes, and so end the strife.

Hear what Jesus Christ says on this point: 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' This means, that before you draw near to God in prayer, you are to give your enemy, if you have one, the opportunity of ending the quarrel.

V. – But, you ask, when those who have injured us refuse to accept the explanation we offer, and are manifestly prompted in their conduct by jealousy, malice, or other wrong motive, what are we to do then?

Well, in that sad case, I advise you to do four things:

1. Pray for them. In all sincerity and love, ask God to show them where they are mistaken, and lead them into the light.
2. Dismiss all feelings of revenge or malice from your heart towards them.
3. Watch for some opportunity to show them kindness, thereby doing them good in return for evil.
4. Do not brood over in private, or talk about in public, the injuries you have suffered, more than is necessary, but commit the matter to Him that judgeth righteous judgement.

Should there be anyone here with revengeful or malicious feelings in his heart, let me urge him to go down on his knees just here and now, and ask God to forgive him for cherishing such un-Christlike feelings.

Should there be any Comrades here this morning who refuse to shake hands with each other, let me press the need for reconciliation before the service closes; nay, let me urge them to kneel



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together at the Mercy-Seat, and ask God to forgive them, and to fill their hearts with love to one another, to their Comrades, and to all mankind.

Your affectionate General,
William Booth.