

FORGIVING.

IF THINE ENEMY BE HUNGRY, GIVE HIM BREAD TO
EAT, AND IF HE BE THIRSTY GIVE HIM WATER TO
DRINK: FOR THOU SHALT HEAP COALS OF FIRE
UPON HIS HEAD, AND THE LORD SHALL REWARD THEE.

Proverbs 25: 21, 22.

There is no subject on which the teaching of the Proverbs more strikingly anticipates the morality of the New Testament than that of forgiveness... to our enemies. Our Lord Jesus Christ could take some of these sayings and incorporate them unchanged into the law of His Kingdom, for indeed it is ^{not} possible to surpass the power and beauty and truth of the command to feed those who have injured us if they are hungry, to give them drink when they are thirsty, and in this Divine way to kindle in them repentance for the injury which they have done. This is the high-water mark of moral excellence. No better state can be desired. When a human spirit is habitually in this tender and forgiving mood, it is already united with the Father of spirits, and lives.

It is unnecessary to point out that even the saints of the Old Testament fall short of the lofty standard which is here set before us. The Psalmist, for example, is thinking of coals of a quite different sort when he exclaims, "As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them, let burning coals fall upon them, let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits that they rise not up again."

It needs no proof that forgiveness is better than revenge. We all know that:

Revenge, at first though sweet.

Bitter ere long back on itself recoils.

We all know that the immediate effect of forgiveness or forgiving our enemy is a ~~flow~~

sweet flow of tenderness in the soul, which supasses in delight all the imagined joys of vindictiveness; and that the next effect is to

soften and win the foe himself; the scornful look relents, the tears of passion give place to those of penitence, the moved heart is eager to make amends. We all know that nothing more powerful affects our fellow-men than the exhibition of this placable temper. We all know that in forgiving we share God's prerogative, and come into harmony with His Spirit.

Yet here is the melancholy fact that notwithstanding this proverbial truth, taken up into the teaching of our Saviour, and echoed in the writings of His Apostles, even in a Christian society, forgiveness is almost as rare as it was in the days of King Solomon. Men are not ashamed --- even professing Christians are not ashamed -- to say about their enemies, "I will do so to him as he has done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." We even have a lurking admiration for such retaliatory conduct, calling it spirited, and we still are inclined to condemn one who acts on the Christly principle as weak or visionary. Still the old bad delight in seeing evil fall on the head of our enemies glows ~~xxx~~ in our hearts; still the act of vengeance is performed, the bitter retort is given, the abusive letter is written, with the old sense of unhallowed pride and triumph. Mankind needs a power which can successfully contend against the storm of passion and self-will, in those terrible moments when all the calm lights of reason are quenched by the blinding surf of passion, and all the gentle voices of goodness are drowned by its roaring waves.

Sometimes we hear it said that the moral teachings of Christ is not original, but that all His precepts may be found in the words and writings of ancient sages, and His teaching about forgiveness is anticipated by the proverbs. Yet, Christ claim does not rest upon His teaching, but upon the Divine and supernatural power which Christ has at His command to carry out His doctrines.. To know right - To know that we should forgive does not mean we will forgive.

Christ gives us power - the power of Christ the fountain of living waters opened in hearts the grafting of the withering branches upon a living stock, the indwelling of Christ Himself, as the spring and principle of every holy action, and the effectual restraint on all our ungovernable passions..

The teaching of Christ presents for the practice of a forgiving disposition. He always bases the duty of forgiveness on the need which we have of God's forgiveness: He teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;" and gain in the story of the unmerciful servant, who demanded the full payment from his fellow-servant just when his lord had pitifully remitted his own debt, He tells us that forgiveness of our enemy is an indispensable condition of our being forgiven by God. "His lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also my Heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not one his brother from your hearts.

Which of us would dare to cherish the bitter thought, or proceed with our plan of vengeance, if we remembered and realised that our own vindictiveness would make our own pardon at the hands of God impossible.

The first and most radical result of the New Birth is that God takes the place which Self has occupied. Consequently, all the emotions and compassions which are stimulated by self-love give place to those which are stimulated by the love of God. God's ways of regarding men, God's feelings towards men, God's yearnings over men, God's pity towards men, flow into the changed heart, and so preoccupy it that resentment, hatred, and malice are washed out like dregs from a cup which is rinsed under running water.

This Christlike conduct is one of the most beautiful traces of God's likeness, in even bad men, a characteristic to which there is no parallel in the animal creation, that though

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passion awakes passion, wrath warth, and vengeance revenge - so that savages and ungodly men pass their whole lives in an unbroken series of blood feuds, the hideous retaliation bandied from tribe to tribe and from man to man, generation after generation, the spirit of meekness, proceeding not from cowardice, but from love, disarms passion, sothes wrath, and changes vengeance into reconciliation.

But if you have ever by the sweet spirit of Christ so mastered your natural impulse as to return good for evil lovingly and whole-heartedly, and if you have seen the regenerating effect in the beautiful subjugation of your foe and his transformation into a friend, it is not necessary to say much of the reward which God has in store for you.

The highest reward that God can give to His creatures is to make them partakers of His nature as He has made in His own image. When we share in a Divine attribute we enter so far into the Divine bliss; and in proportion as this attribute seems removed from our common human nature, our spirit must exult to find that it has been really appropriated. The pulse of the Divine heart ~~flows~~ beats in him; the tides of Divine life flow through him. He is like God - God who opposes to man's ingratitude the ocean of His pardoning love, he is conscious of that which is the fountain of joy in the Divine Being; surely a man must be satisfied when he awakes in God's likeness. And that satisfaction comes to every one who has heaped coals of fire on his enemy's head by feeding him in his hunger, and giving him water when athirst. Say not, "I will do so to him as he has done to me, I will render to the man according to his work." Love your enemies, pray for them which despitefully use you.

*FORGIVENESS - THE POWER OF CHRIST
WITHIN YOU. - NOT KNOWLEDGE - BUT
POWER*