

## FORGIVENESS

by

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*14: For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:*

*15: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

[St. Matthew 6: 14-15]

*21: Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*

*22: Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*

[St. Matthew 18: 21-22]

...

A rich man with hundreds of slaves had one by the name of Paulus, whom he trusted fully, making him steward over all his household. One day he went with Paulus to the slave market to buy some new men. Before bargaining, they examined the human merchandise, observing their musculature to see if they were worth their price. Paulus saw for sale a weak, old man. He implored his owner to buy this slave.

The rich man, Proculus, answered mockingly, 'But he is good for nothing.' 'Buy him,' Paulus insisted. 'He is cheap. And I promise that the work in your household will go as never before.'

So the owner yielded. And it really was true that all the work went better than ever. But Proculus observed that Paulus now worked for two men. The old slave did nothing. Paulus tended him, gave him the best food, and made him rest the whole time.

Proculus asked Paulus, 'You know I value you. I don't mind your protecting this old man. Only tell me who he is. Is it perhaps your father? Paulus answered, 'It is one to whom I owe more than to my father.' 'Is it your teacher?'

‘No. Somebody to whom I owe more.’

‘Who is it, then?’

‘This is my *enemy* (emphasis supplied) . He is the man who killed my father and sold us, the children, as slaves. As for me, I am a disciple of Christ, Who has taught us to love our enemies and to reward evil with good.’

[An edifying illustration of FORGIVENESS from the time of the ancient Christians of Rome]

...

You seek, not simply what is to your own advantage, but what also benefits your fellow human beings. You are not quickly provoked by those who are angry with you. You are not resentful if wrong is done to you, nor do you rejoice if your friends act unjustly, though you do rejoice with them over the truth of their righteousness. You put up with disagreeable eventualities. You believe in things in simplicity and innocence, and hope to receive everything promised to us by God. You patiently endure all trials, never rendering evil for evil. And, laborer of love that you are, you never waver in your love for your fellow beings.

[Nikitas Stithatos, On Spiritual Knowledge, # 87, p. 168 in *The Philokalia, Volume Four* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, Faber and Faber Limited, London, U.K., first published 1995, Paperback Edition, 1998.)]

### Repentance Is The Key To Forgiveness -

Forgiveness follows sincere repentance. Remember Christ forgave the Apostle Peter pursuant to his contrition and repentance. Christ’s priests have authority from Him to remit sins, but His pastors are instruments of His mercy and do not remit these sins on their own authority but in the name of the Holy Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

There is no sin which cannot be forgiven *if and only if* the sinner truly repents. Yes, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven, but this should be understood to mean unrepentant blasphemy. It is the sinner’s failure to repent of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that is not forgivable:

... the reason why the forgiveness of sins is not possible is to be found in the sinners themselves, and not in the will of God; more precisely, it lies in the lack of repentance of the sinners. How can a sin be forgiven by the grace of the Holy Spirit, when blasphemy

is spewed forth against this very grace? But one must believe that, even in these sins, the sinners, if they offer sincere repentance and weep over their sins, will be forgiven. ‘For,’ says St. John Chrysostom about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, ‘even this guilt will be remitted to those who repent. Many of those who have spewed forth blasphemies against the Spirit have subsequently come to believe, and everything was remitted to them’ (Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew). Further, the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council speak of the possibility of forgiveness for deadly sins: ‘The sin unto death is when certain ones, after sinning, do *not* (emphasise supplied) correct themselves... In such ones the Lord Jesus does not abide, *unless* (emphasis supplied) they humble themselves and recover from their fall into sin. It is fitting for them once more to approach God and with contrite heart to ask for the remission of this sin and forgiveness, and not to become vainglorious over an unrighteous deed. For *the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart*’ (Ps. 33: 18).<sup>2</sup>

Christ stresses the curative powers of forgiveness. When we forgive others, we bring forth the Father’s forgiveness of us. We are not to hold grudges. If any of us has a grievance with any other person at this moment, dismiss it from your heart and don’t let it back in! The Lord reminds us of the Father so we will revere Him and remember we are His children, the offspring of God the Father Almighty. The Father forgives, so we, His children, must also do so.<sup>3</sup>

When we approach Holy Communion, we must do so holding no malice or ill feeling against any others. If you have had differences with other parishioners, go to them beforehand and ask their forgiveness. When this spiritual disruption is cured, then take Holy Communion. I can recall an Orthodox Divine Liturgy where two clergy were very upset with each other about the seating arrangements (of all things) for an Ordination ceremony. The issue became so heated that one slammed the Scriptures down on the Holy Table. Both went through the Divine Liturgy without reconciliation. By all means, do not emulate this kind of behaviour and let us pray that it is the exception and not the rule!

God ‘Conditions’ His Forgiveness But Our Duty To Forgive Is Unconditional -

He forgives us for our trespasses *if* we forgive others. He laid down our Christian duty in The Lord’s Prayer:

*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

Since even after sin-cleansing baptism, we still sin because of our spiritual frailties, we repent and ask Christ to forgive us. He will “as we forgive others”. If we keep remembering the wrongs that people have done to us and refuse to forgive them, God will *not* forgive us:

For if we forgive men their trespasses, our heavenly Father will also forgive our trespasses. By forgiving our brethren we find

forgiveness of our own sins; the Lord's mercy is hidden in mercy and forgiveness for our neighbour.<sup>4</sup>

We forgive others unconditionally. It is wrong to say if you repent, I will forgive you. After all, it is the Holy Spirit Who forgives us if we forgive others. God follows our lead. If we won't forgive, neither will He!<sup>5</sup> Failure to forgive others is cruelty, and our meek God hates it.<sup>6</sup>

Forgive always, forget real or imagined grievances/wrongs. Have faith in Christ and from that faith do the good works that are integral components of salvation. Faith and good works flowing from one's faith complement each other. Both are necessary for salvation!

*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*<sup>7</sup>

Flowing from humility, forgiveness is an essential 'good work'. Let's take action *now*, and reconcile with all our neighbours!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Father Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, (translated & edited by Fr. Seraphim Rose) Second Edition, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1994, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol. I* in the series, Bl. Theophylact's Explanation of the New Testament (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, pp. 43-44.

<sup>5</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> *id.*, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> St. James 2:26