

DIVINE FORGIVENESS ADMIRERD AND IMITATED

NO. 1841

A SERMON
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another,
 if any man have a quarrel against any:
 even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”
 Colossians 3:13*

To whom is this exhortation addressed? The apostle speaks thus in the twelfth verse—“Elect of God, holy and beloved.” Here are three particulars. They are, first of all, “elect of God,” that is to say, chosen according to His eternal purpose. They are made choice ones by being thus chosen.

Next, they are sanctified by the Spirit of God, and are, therefore, called “holy”—this holiness appertaining to their persons and their pursuits, their calling and their conversation. When the Spirit of God has fully done His work, He sheds abroad in their hearts the love of God, so that experientially they feel themselves to be “beloved.” To abide in the love of God is the fruit of election, and the result of holiness.

If any of you can with humble confidence claim these three titles, “elect of God, holy and beloved,” you are among the most favored of all mankind. Of you the Father has made a special choice. In you His Holy Spirit has wrought a special work, and you possess within your souls the special joy of living in the love of God.

“Elect of God, holy and beloved”—it is as you enjoy these three things that you will find it easy to carry out the precept which is now set before you, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

Note in our text, before we proceed to the full discussion of it, what an honor this Scripture puts upon our Lord Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 4:32, a similar precept is placed in a rather different form, for it runs thus—“Even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.” Here, as if to show the true and proper equality of the Christ with God, it is written, “Even as Christ forgave you.”

In the Revised Version they read, “even as the Lord forgave you,” but they place in the margin, “Many ancient authorities read *Christ*.” In that case we see that Lord and Christ were interchangeable terms when those ancient authorities were alive.

None can forgive sins but God only. He alone forgives against whom the sin is committed. Sin, therefore, being against Christ, and Christ being able to forgive it, we see that He is exalted on high to give remission of sins. He shares in the high and royal prerogative of God, seeing He is able to forgive sin.

Does not this expression seem to say that albeit the apostle and other inspired writers had many things to write of, yet one thing was always upon their hearts, namely, to honor their Lord? Is not this a proof of how thoroughly they were under the influence of the Spirit of God, of whom Jesus said, “He shall glorify me”?

Whatever He is teaching, whatever duty He is enforcing, whatever promise He is delivering, He takes care to do it so that the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted in the hearts of His people thereby. Let us, in our hearts, adore the Anointed One, Christ Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God—and never let us hesitate to honor the Son even as we honor the Father. Let us, as penitents, adore the pardoning Savior, seeing He has power to forgive sins, and has cleansed the myriads of His redeemed from all their iniquities.

But brethren, while this gives glory to Christ, what a weight is lent to the precept, since it is supported by the example and the authority of our divine Lord—“Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” What a model is set before us! How perfect is that spirit of love which we are to manifest! Even as Christ forgave us we are bidden to forgive others.

What nobler pattern could have been chosen? Surely He that trifles with this precept, or thinks it one that is left to our option to obey or to neglect, cannot rightly know the dignity of the Christ in whose pierced hand this law is held forth before our eyes. Depend upon it, this command so wondrously linked with the Person of the pardoning Christ, is of no common importance. If the law given by Moses was so solemnly binding, what shall we say of this law which is embodied in the life of the Lord Jesus?

Surely I shall scarcely need to plead with you, who are His disciples, that you give your heart’s best attention to such teaching. Your Lord Himself stands before you. You remember how He forgave you all your trespasses, and I am sure you will give earnest heed to His exhortation to forgive. May the dove-like Spirit now brood over this assembly, and create love in all our bosoms.

Two things are to be done. First, let us *study the pattern of forgiveness* here set before us. And then, secondly, let us *copy it for ourselves* in our forgiveness of those who trespass against us.

I. Carefully STUDY THE PATTERN OF FORGIVENESS set before us in the text.

“Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” *What is this forgiveness of Christ?* You know how He exhibited it in His daily life. He was much tried, but He was never provoked to wrath. Both by friends and by enemies He was made to suffer, yet He neither accused the one nor the other to His great Father. He never reviled those who reviled Him, but patiently yielded to their malice, giving His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair.

His disciples He gently rebuked, but He never spoke to them in anger. A life of forgiveness was crowned by His dying prayer for His persecutors, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” He loved His enemies. He lived for His enemies. He died for His enemies. He was incarnate gentleness, the mirror and paragon of forgiveness.

Observe, that He forgave offenses most great and grievous. It was a horrible thing that when the Lord Jesus came into the world moved by pure love, He was not welcomed, but Herod sought to slay the young child.

Afterwards, when He appeared publicly among men, the Jews took up stones to stone Him. He was treated with contumely. His miracles were ascribed to the devil, and His holy and unspotted character was traduced by His being called a drunken man and a winebibber.

He was the firstborn of the Lord of the vineyard, but when the husbandmen saw Him, they said, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be our’s.” You know with what scornful cruelty they treated Him in the hour of His passion. What could the malice of hell have invented more contemptuous and cruel than that which men used towards the Well-Beloved? Had He been the basest of beings, His sufferings would have been too cruel. Men did all they could against Him.

Say not that *you* have never thus transgressed. Oh, sirs, we, also, have crucified Him, for our sins were laid upon Him by JEHOVAH. We also must confess, “He was despised and we esteemed him not.” There was a time when we, who are now His followers, once “hid as it were our faces from him.” He called us, but we gave Him no answer. He wooed us, but we were blind to His beauties.

We can never remember this without deep emotions of regret. We used no other friend so ill. We crucified Him and slew Him, as far as we were able to do it, by our rejection of His love. And yet He has forgiven us. He is ready to forgive all such as seek His face. Oh, the splendor of that love which blots out sins like ours! What a flood of grace is this which rises above the tops of the mountains of our sins, and covers them forever.

It matters not how black or crimson our transgressions may have been, the moment we come to Jesus He makes us whiter than snow. He puts away the most horrible of offenses, the most glaring of transgressions, in a moment. He says, “I forgive you. Go, and sin no more”—and we, then and there—receive a perfect pardon.

I would that all of you who have never sought that grace would be induced by this blessed fact to come with all your sins about you, and receive immediate absolution from the hand of your Lord.

Remember, also, to increase your wonderment at His forgiveness, that these offenses which were committed against Christ were altogether wanton and unprovoked. He could demand of His adversaries, "For which of those works do ye stone me?" Towards no man had He acted unjustly or even harshly. He had been all tenderness and lowliness in every place towards all sorts of men—and yet certain men became incensed against Him because of His goodness.

Did they refuse to love Him because He was altogether lovely? Did they despise Him because He was so truly great? Such is the depravity of the human heart that the very virtues of Christ provoked the hostility of men. What has my Lord Christ ever done against any of you? Wherefore do ye refuse Him?

I have heard many a man say, "If I had done anything whatever to provoke this ill-will, I could account for it, but they persecute me wrongfully." It was pre-eminently so in the case of our Lord, who says in the Psalm, "They hated me without a cause." Yet He forgave this wanton malice. He continues to forgive such causeless wrong.

With His own blood He blots out horrible insults against His person, His people, His Gospel, and His love. Even you who oppose His kingdom and refuse His service, shall be at once forgiven if you will bow your hearts before Him, and accept that rich mercy which His hand is so ready to bestow. See what a pattern is here of the passing-by of the greatest and most malicious offenses! How can hatred live in the presence of such love?

This pardon Christ has shown to the most unworthy persons. Of all whom He forgave when He was here below, none deserved such kindness. In fact, to talk of deserving forgiveness is a contradiction in terms. Certainly in me—and I have no doubt in you, my brothers and sisters—who have tasted of His infinite mercy, there was no presence of claim to His mercy in our cases.

If He had left us in our sin, if He had passed by us and allowed us to perish, what complaint could we have brought against Him? Since He loved us and forgave us, it must have been because of something within Himself—it could not have been from anything in us. We are unworthy, but He is gracious—and herein He teaches us to pardon the most provoking and worthless of those who trespass against us.

Be it never forgotten that He always had the power to have executed vengeance upon any one of us if He had been pleased so to do. Some men pardon because they cannot punish—they are too weak to execute vengeance, and therefore they refrain from it. Half the forgiveness in the world comes rather from a feeble hand than from a forgiving heart.

But the Christ could have crushed His adversaries in a moment if He had willed it, and yet He freely forgave. When they said, "Come down from the cross"—suppose He had instantly loosed the nails and leaped among them—where had they been? They would have begged the rocks to fall upon them, and the mountains to cover them from His face, if He had but manifested the glory of His power. But He was not provoked to leave the cross, or to break the silence of His passion by so much as a rebuke. Mercy was stored like honey in His heart, and pardon dropped its sweetness from His lip.

The Lord has been greatly long-suffering with ourselves when a breath might have destroyed us. We might easily have been destroyed in accidents which befell us, or we might have died in our various sicknesses, and so have sunk to the lowest hell. But instead of slaying us, our Lord even interposed to spare us—to spare us when our life was rebellion. When He could so easily have blotted out our lives, He did not do so, but in boundless mercy blotted out our sins. Let us magnify His amazing grace, and imitate it in our lives.

I want you for a moment to consider the question, *How did He forgive?* The manner of our Lord's forgiveness is as noteworthy as the pardon itself. The Lord Jesus came and pardoned us when that act of grace was unsolicited. Before we had thought of mercy, He had thoughts of mercy toward us.

I remember reading in one of our magazines a story of a city missionary who discovered a poor girl who had wandered from the ways of virtue, and he had sought to restore her to a better life. He spoke

with her till she became somewhat tender of heart. He inquired about her family, and learned that she had once enjoyed a happy home, and had known a tender father's love. "But he would never look at me now," said she. "I am sure he never would—I am such a degraded creature that I could not venture near his door."

"Have you never written to him?" "No, I could not write to him. It would be of no use. I could not expect him to send me an answer, and it would break my heart to be refused." "We will try," said the good man, "we will write to him." He wrote to the father, and the next post brought back an answer, with the word, "Immediate," written upon the envelope.

The sum of the letter enclosed within was, "Ready to forgive." She was taken to her father. She was soon locked in his embrace. All was forgiven—the wanderer was restored. Notice that her father had been praying for her, night and day, ever since she left his roof—and he had longed to receive her to his home again. Her seeking his forgiveness did not cause it—it was in his heart long before—and no doubt it was because of his cries and tears that God in mercy touched his girl's heart, and brought her home.

O sinner, before you think of Christ, He has thoughts of love towards you. He says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." The forgiveness is first, and the returning to the Lord is urged as a consequence of that forgiveness. Pardon is not first in the matter of our personal experience, but it is first as matter of fact with God. Oh! the mercy of the Lord Christ, that before we know our sin, He has made atonement for it by His own precious blood.

The Lord Jesus Christ is to be held up as an example of pardoning love for the true and hearty way in which He forgives sin. Forgiveness, when it comes from human lips in measured, studied phrase, is not worth the having, for the heart is not in it, or it would be more free and joyful. The Lord Jesus Christ absolves sinners with all His heart. He never acts in a cold, formal manner.

Never does He outwardly forgive and in secret retain His wrath—but wholly, entirely, joyfully, He puts away the sin of those whom He forgives—and puts it away forever. When He forgives, He forgives the whole of our faults, follies, failures, and offenses. There is a certain solidarity about sin, so that it makes up one lump.

I read the other day of a certain theologian speaking of Christ having put away original sin while He left actual sin. Nonsense! Sin is one and indivisible. Iniquity is not to be done up in separate parcels. The sin, the iniquity of men, is spoken of in the Bible as one thing. Although we sin multitudes of times, the various streams all flow into one sea of evil—when sin is forgiven, all sin is put away—not a shred, nor fragment, nor particle remains.

The Lord Jesus drowns all the hosts of sin in the depths of the sea, and the whole of our guilt is swallowed up forever. This is great forgiveness, indeed. Glory be to Him who gives it! Let us follow Him in His truth and heartiness.

This forgiveness, again, is given by the Lord Jesus Christ in the most complete possible manner. He keeps no back reckonings. He retains no reserves of anger. He so forgives that He forgets. That is the wonder of it. He says, "I will not remember thy sins." He casts them behind His back—they are wholly and completely gone from His observation or regard.

Alas, such is poor human nature that even fathers, when they have forgiven a wayward child, will, perhaps, throw the offense in his teeth years after, when he again offends. But it is never so with Christ. He says, "Thy sins shall not be mentioned against thee any more for ever." He has done with the sins of His people in so effectual a way that not a whisper concerning them shall ever come from His mouth so as to grieve them.

They will, themselves, remember their sins with deep repentance, but the Lord will never challenge them on account of their past rebellions. Blessed be the name of Christ for such complete forgiveness as this.

The Lord Jesus Christ forgives His people in a continuous manner. He forgave us long ago—He still forgives us. He does not forgive and afterwards accuse. His forgiveness is eternal. It is not a reprieve He

gives to you, believing ones, but a free pardon, under the King's hand and seal, which shall effectually protect you from accusation and punishment. "In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve."

He has finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. Send to hell a pardoned sinner! It were a contradiction to the very nature of God. Condemn those for whom Jesus died! Why, the apostle mentions that death as a conclusive answer to the challenge, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

How shall He intercede for us and yet accuse us? It is impossible for Christ to be both Redeemer and Condemner to the same persons. So perfect is His pardon that our sin has ceased to be. He has put away sin forever by the sacrifice of Himself.

Greatly do I admire the very gracious way in which that pardon is given. Some people offer forgiveness in an ungracious way. They make it appear that they are coming down from such awful heights when they forgive a fellow mortal. In great dignity they march down in state from their own splendid innocence to the poor brother who has done them a wrong—as good as saying, "I will condescend to do this, though it is an awful stoop for such an angelic being as I am."

You never feel that about the Christ, for He places His pardon down so low that He seems to say, "Receive My mercy, I beg you to receive it." He speaks as if He were favored by a sinner's accepting His forgiveness. He humbles Himself, and never scalds a sinner with scornful pity.

Though the Christ condescends more than all the condescensions of all men put together, "for worms were never raised so high above their meanest fellow worms," yet the condescension is so real and royal that there is no ostentation in it. He is to the manner born—He condescends naturally, like condescension's own self.

Some are proudest when they stoop, but Jesus graciously seems to put Himself on a level with us, aye, and even to go lower than we are, that He may lift us up. Admire as much the way in which Christ forgives as the forgiveness which He bestows. It breaks my heart to think what a loving Christ He was to me when I sought His forgiveness. Truly, "He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not"—He frowned and thundered when I looked to my own righteousness—but when I turned to His Gospel of free grace, I had from Him not even a hard word—but He was all love and tenderness to me, the chief of sinners.

Above all, the greatness of His forgiveness is seen in the fact that the offense had brought great trouble into the world, and He bore that trouble. The sinner, by his wrong doing, had subjected himself to great loss and calamity. Now, when we forgive a person who has done us a wrong, we say, "I freely forgive you, but you have involved yourself in certain consequences which you will have to bear, and out of these I cannot help you."

Our blessed Master seemed to say, "Sinner, you have sinned yourself under the curse of God. You have sinned yourself into misery and into death—and as the proof that I do freely forgive you—I will take all this suffering and this death upon Myself. You have done the wrong wantonly and wickedly, but I will bear the consequences. You have knotted the whips, they shall scourge My shoulders. You have sharpened the nails, they shall pierce My hands and feet. You have put yourself under curse and penalty, I will bear the curse of death that you may be free."

Was there ever mercy like this? Do not all who know this love accept it gladly? Sinner, do ye not know this? Have you never heard about it? Know you not that the Lord, even Jesus, the Son of God, is able to forgive you all your trespasses—that it will be a joy to His heart to do so, and to do it at once? Oh, that before that clock shall strike again you may be able to say, "There is therefore now no condemnation, for Christ has put away my sin." This is not according to the manner of men—it is Godlike. It is a sure proof that Jesus is the Son of God, for who could act like this but One who is Himself the Son of God?

Thus have I set before you, in my poor way, this great forgiveness, and the manner of it. I trust you have had an experience of it. Assuredly we all need such forgiveness—do any of you deny it? May the Holy Spirit open your blind eyes, and melt your hard hearts. According to the text, those who have received pardon know that they have it, for Paul speaks positively—“Even as Christ forgave you”—as if it were a matter of fact well-known among the people of God.

There is a theory abroad that we may be forgiven and not know it—that Jesus may forgive, and we may never discover it until we come unto our dying moments. That is a wretched kind of Gospel. But by the true Gospel we may know we are forgiven, and be sure of it—surer than if we saw, written by the autograph of Christ, the words—“I have forgiven thee.”

The eyes may deceive, but the witness of the Spirit of God within the heart can never delude us. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, and if you are resting alone on Him, your sins, which are many, are forgiven you, “for the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” Knowing that we are forgiven by Christ, let us be clear and decided in our forgiveness of others—not in word only—but in deed and in truth let us exhibit a forbearing spirit.

II. You see your example. Our second word is, COPY IT FOR YOURSELVES.

If the Holy Spirit enables you to write according to this copy, you will have the approval of the Lord resting upon you. See how large and clear the letters! It will be no small success if you can reproduce them. “Even as Christ forgave you”—the imitation should be as exact as possible. Mark the “even,” and the “so,” and endeavor to keep with your gracious Lord.

Notice, however, in the text, that this precept concerning the imitation of Christ in forgiveness is *universally applicable*. The text is not long, but see how unqualified is its range. “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any.” You see it is not put that superiors are to forgive inferiors, or on the other hand, that the less are to forgive the greater—but the circle of the command includes the whole. It is, “forbearing one another.”

The rich are to be forbearing to the poor. The poor are to be forbearing to the rich. The elderly man is to forgive the junior for his imprudence. The junior is to bear with the petulance and slowness of the elder. It is an all-round business, implying that one of these days I shall have to forgive you, and you will have to forgive me.

Personally, I tax your forbearance to put up with me, and I need not say that sometimes I have need to exercise forbearance towards one and another in so large a church. We have all our own angles and edges, and these are apt to come into contact with others. We are all pieces of one puzzle, and shall fit in with each other one day, and make a complete whole.

Yet just now we seem misshapen and unfitting. Our corners need to be rounded. Sometimes they are chipped off by collision with somebody else, and that is not comfortable for the person with whom we collide. Like pebbles in the river of the water of life, we are wearing each other round and smooth, as the living current brings us into communion—everybody is polishing and being polished—and in the process it is inevitable that some present inconvenience should be sustained. But nobody must mind it, for it is part of a great process by which we shall all come into proper shape, and be made meet for endless fellowship.

“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another”—you see it has two sides. “Ah,” says one, “I cannot understand it. People ought to be far more forbearing to me.” Just so, but the first point is that you should be forgiving towards them. What numbers of church members think that the duties of a church are all one-sided.

“I was ill, and nobody came to see me.” “Did you send for anybody to see you?” “No, I did not.” Brother, before you find fault, remember your own fault—you have violated the command, “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church.” “But nobody exhibits Christian love,” says one. Is that true of yourself? I have noticed that the man who says that love is dead is usually rather short of love himself.

How very different the church looks to different eyes—one sees a thousand virtues to admire, and another a world of evil to expose. One gratefully cries, “When I was ill, the dear brethren came to see me so often that I had to ask them not to stay very long.” Another grumbles, “I might have laid there a month, and nobody would ever have come near me.”

We understand the reason for this difference—the tone of the speech is the key to the riddle. As a rule, with what measure we mete, it is measured to us. I do not find Christ’s people to be one half so faulty as I am myself. I meet with many Christians whom I think it an honor to know, and commune with—and those of another sort are useful to me as warnings, and as fields for exercising my graces. The forgiveness and the forbearance are needed all round, and we must both give and take. By the sweet love of Jesus, let us not fail in this business.

Let me say here that this matter is an absolutely essential one—*this forbearance and this forgiveness are vital*. Be not deceived, God is not mocked. No man is a child of God who has not a likeness to God, and no man is forgiven who will not himself forgive.

In the Middle Ages a certain baron had a feud with another nobleman, and determined to avenge himself for some insult, real or imaginary. His enemy was to pass by the castle with a small retinue, and therefore the baron determined to waylay him and kill him, or, at least, to punish him severely and exact a ransom.

A holy man who lived in the castle begged and entreated the baron to forbear from bloodshed, and make peace. But for some time he pleaded in vain. The baron would not be appeased, but swore that he would be avenged of his adversary. So this godly man begged one favor of him, namely, that he would come with him into the chapel and offer prayer before he sallied forth.

They knelt together in prayer, and before they rose the saintly man said, “My lord, repeat after me the Lord’s Prayer.” He went on saying word by word, as the other did, till he came to that, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.” There the good man stopped, and said, “I charge you not to say this unless you really mean it! Do not mock the Lord. You may not go out and fight if you thus speak with God. You will have to appear before God, and be judged for your sins, for you will not be forgiven if you do not forgive. Choose, then, either to utter this prayer and forgive, and be saved, or to refuse the prayer, and go forth to battle and be lost.”

The baron paused and bit his lip, but at last his better spirit prevailed, and he cried, “I cannot renounce my hope of heaven. I cannot renounce my hope of forgiveness. Therefore my enemy shall pass by my castle in safety, and I will say, ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.’”

Do not attempt to deceive God. If you must lie and cheat, practice your impositions upon your fellow men, but do not imagine that you can flatter your Maker or deceive the Omniscient One. If you will not forgive, say so, and expect eternal perdition. But if you profess to be a Christian, obey this great and essential precept, and forgive as Christ forgave you. Be honest, be straight with God, for He will be honest and straight with you. But if you cannot and will not forgive, then look forward to a portion with the tormentors, for even the loving Jesus says, “Neither shall my heavenly Father forgive you.”

In urging you to this copying of Christ, let me notice that this forgiveness of those who offend against us is *gloriously ennobling*. We are not asked to perform a duty which will in the least degrade us. Revenge is paltry—forgiveness is great-minded. Was not David infinitely greater than Saul, when he spared his life in the cave, and when he would not kill him as he lay asleep on the battlefield? Did not the king humble himself before David when he perceived David’s forbearance?

If you would be the greatest among men, bear injuries with the greatest gentleness. If you would win the noblest of conquests, subdue yourself. To win a battle is a little thing if it be fought out with sword and gun. But to win it in God’s way, with no weapons but love, and patience, and forgiveness—this is the most glorious of victories. Blessed is that man who is more than a conqueror, because he inflicts no wounds in the conflict, but overcomes evil with good. In the process of such a conquest the warrior is himself a gainer.

A nation in fighting, even if it wins the campaign, has to suffer great expense and loss of life. But he that overcomes by love is the better and stronger man through what he has done. He comes out of the conflict not only victor over his adversary, but victor over sin within himself—and all the readier for future war against evil.

He glorifies God and himself becomes strong in grace. Nothing is more glorious than love. Your Master, who is King of kings, set you an example of gaining glory by enduring wrong. If you would be knights of His company, imitate His graciousness.

Notice that this imitation of Christ is *logically appropriate to you all*. Brothers, if Christ has forgiven you, the parable we read just now shows that it is imperative that you should forgive your fellows. If our Lord has forgiven us our ten thousand talents, how can we take our brother by the throat for the hundred pence, and say, “Pay me what thou owest”?

If we are, indeed, members of Christ, should we not be like our Head? If we profess to be His servants, are we to pretend to a dignity greater than our Master, who washed His disciples’ feet? If He forgave so freely, how dare we call ourselves His brethren if our spirit is hard, and malice lingers within us?

I say, to conclude, that this copying of Christ is *most forcibly sustained by the example given in the text*. We are to forbear and to forgive. “Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” I have heard it said, “If you pass by every wanton offense, and take no notice of it, you will come to be despised, and regarded as a person of mean spirit—your honor demands vindication.”

When Christ forgave you, did His honor suffer by that forgiveness? You transgressed most wickedly, and yet He forgave you—do ye regard Him as less honorable because of that readiness to pass by offenses? Far from it—it is His glory to forgive. The hallelujahs of saints, and the songs of angels are sent up to His throne the more heartily because of the richness of His grace, and the freeness of His mercy.

Dishonor indeed! What pride it is on the part of such poor creatures as we are to talk about our honor! Where is the honor of revenge? It is a dishonorable thing to put yourself on the level of him who injures you.

A heathen philosopher used to say, “If an ass kicks you, is it necessary for the maintenance of your honor to kick that ass again?” That speech looks like a noble one, but yet it is too much flavored with contempt. When you speak, or even think of another who has wronged you as though he were only worthy to be regarded as a beast, you are not right in spirit—a degree of evil remains in your heart.

Think of the offender without contempt, as well as without resentment. Believe that he is a brother worth winning. Say, “If he does me an injury, for that very reason I will do him a double service. My only vengeance shall be double love. I will not allow myself to even think hardly of him. I will put the best possible construction on all that he does, and thus show that the spirit of Christ is in me, conquering the spirit of fallen humanity both in me and in him.”

Says one, “If we always overlook offenses, other people may also be tempted to do us wrong also.” Our text furnishes us with a ready answer to this. The Lord Jesus Christ forgave you. Have you met anybody who has been tempted to do wrong because the Lord has forgiven you? He has freely forgiven myriads of poor unworthy sinners, and has that promoted sin? No. Is it not the very groundwork and case of holiness in the world, that Jesus is so gracious as to pardon sin?

Why, then, should your forbearance do harm? Do not pretend to be so very wise, for therein you censure your Master. You are not the ruler of the world. It is not for you to be refraining from good for fear that evil may come of it—attend to your own ways—forgive every one his brother his trespasses, and leave consequences with God.

“Oh, but,” says one, “I know several pious persons who are very unforgiving.” You do not know any really good man who is of that character. I make bold to say that no man is really good if he has not a forgiving spirit. Unwillingness to forgive is a grievous flaw in anyone’s character. But if there were such

good people, what have you to do with them? Is the servant to imitate his fellow servant, especially in his faults?

The example set before you is, “Even as Christ forgave you.” You have nothing to do with either saints or sinners in this matter. Your Lord says to you, “What is that to thee? Follow thou me.” Perhaps you do not know all the story which you think proves that a good man has been unforgiving—and if you do know it, you are no judge of others. Mind your own business, and even “as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

But I hear another one saying, “These persons would not have forgiven *me*.” Just so, but then you are a child of God—you are, “elect, holy, and beloved.” You are not to lower your standard to that of publicans and sinners. Does not Christ continually say, “What do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans and the sinners the same?” “If you love them that love you, what thanks have ye?”

But if you love them that despitefully use you, then blessed are you when men shall persecute you. In that case you have an opportunity of showing your love to your Lord. When Dr. Duff first read to some young Brahmins in the Government school the precept, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you,” one of the Brahmins cried out with delight, “Beautiful! Beautiful! This *must* have come from the true God. I have been told to love those that love me, and I have not always done *that*—but to love my enemies is a divine thought.”

That young man became a Christian under the influence of that precept. Do not darken this light, but be sure to display it in your life, that many may be attracted to Christ by its luster. Let your goodwill go forth even to the worst of men, for Christ’s sake. Forget *their* evil as you behold *His* goodness.

“Well,” says one, “I would forgive the fellow, but he does not deserve it.” That is why you are to forgive him. If he deserved it, you would be bound to do him the justice which he could claim. But as he does not deserve it, you have here an appeal to your Christian love. Does not your heavenly Father give good things to the unthankful and to the evil? Did not Jesus forgive the undeserving when He forgave you? Does He not overlook our wretched characters when He has mercy upon us?

I hear one say, “I cannot forgive.” That is a terrible confession. The apostle of the Gentiles said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Is not the same strength available for you? Some persons find forgiving and forgetting to be hard work, but as you are bound to do it, or stay out of heaven, you must cry to God for help, and set about it with determination.

If you are indeed a child of God, you will soon find the difficulty gone. Indeed forgiveness will become easy to you. To be forgiven is such sweetness that honey is tasteless in comparison with it. But there is one thing sweeter still—and that is to forgive. As it is more blessed to give than to receive, so to forgive rises a stage higher in experience than to be forgiven.

To be forgiven is, as it were, the root—to forgive is the flower. That divine Spirit, who bears witness with our spirit when He breathes peace into us because we are pardoned, bears yet a higher witness with us when He enables us truly to pardon all manner of trespasses against ourselves.

Let it never be said in a Christian church, that fellow members bear a grudge against one another. I do not know that it is so in your case—assuredly it should not be so anywhere. Let it not be said of any Christian man that he is unloving, ready to take offense, apt to bear malice, or quick to anger.

Cultivate forbearance till your heart yields a fine crop of it. Pray for a short memory as to all unkindnesses. I bless God that I know a man who finds it easy to forgive and to forget all offenses against himself. He takes no credit for so doing, for no one ever offends him in a way which is worth remembering.

That man has been reminded again and again of the misbehavior of unreasonable and unkind men, but he has honestly said, “I had quite forgotten it.” He does not claim this forgetfulness as a virtue, for as a matter of fact his memory has become weak in that direction, and he has no desire to strengthen it. He has never tried to recollect unkindnesses, and now by long disuse his memory happily fails him upon such matters.

That man has often enjoyed exquisite pleasure in doing good to those who have injured him—and he can truly say that at this moment he bears no ill-will to any soul upon this earth. He does not think this to be any singular attainment, for his belief is that every follower of Jesus should be of the same mind.

Do you not think the same? I am sure I do. I heard this man once say of another, “He spoke against me that which was false, but if he had known more about me, he might have said something far worse and have been nearer the truth. Perhaps my false accuser believed what he said, and thought he was doing a right thing in protesting against what he thought was my fault. At any rate, no one can harm my character, unless I do so myself.” It is a wise thing to profit by every accusation, whether true or false, by trying to be better.

Let us so live as to be able to say, “I am as much at peace with all men as a child new-born.” Thus shall we wear the mark of the Spirit of God. In a word, my brethren—“Even us Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 18

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—30, 202, 203

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.