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DO YOU FORGIVE ALL YOUR ENEMIES ?

THERE are many good reasons for doing so.

He who does not forgive his enemies, will often *mistake friends for foes*. Being revengeful, he will be suspicious. He will misconstrue men's actions, and misjudge their motives. Should any give him that rare token of valuable friendship which consists in affectionate reproof, he would esteem it unkind. For the same reason he would cherish jealousy, and would mark almost all actions with an evil eye. Turning friends into foes, in this way, is most injurious; it is self-torment.

But suppose that some are your real enemies. Perhaps you have given them much provocation. If so, remember their fault does not cancel yours, nor can their sin be a cloak for your criminality. At least, be honest, and take as much blame to yourself as you ascribe to them.

Although your enemy wantonly intends to do you evil, yet *God may superintend to do you good*. So his hatred shall not hurt, and may even benefit you. Thus, the plotting of Joseph's brethren led to his promotion at the court of Pharaoh. The curses of Shimei were the precursors of David's triumphant return to the holy city. "Let him alone," said the royal fugitive, "and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. *It may be the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.*" In like manner, when your enemies assail you, look up to God and say,

"When men of spite against me join,
They are the sword, the hand is thine,"

and he will not suffer the sword to prosper against you.

God commands you to lay aside all malice—to put off anger, wrath, and bitterness—to recompense to no man evil for evil—to forbear, and to forgive. He who breaks God's commandments, must bear God's anger.

They who do not exercise forgiveness, *shall not receive it*. He who lives and dies unpardoning, lives and dies unpardoned. The true Witness hath said, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your tres-

passes." What terror these words bear to all the unfor-
giving.

Not to forgive is a daring *assumption of the awful prerogative of God*. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." Surely God will rebuke the intrusion of yourself into his judgment-seat. So the blow which you aim at your fellow-sinner and fellow-servant will return upon your own soul.

The *best and wisest men* in every age have practised forgiveness. When Stephen was enduring that dreadful death by stoning, he cried, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." All the martyrs followed his example. When reviled, they blessed. And saints of later times have done the same. How creditable it is to the memory of one of the reformers, that "he never forgot any thing except injuries." Who would not be like such a man?

To forgive the most bitter enemies is to be *like Jesus*, who, beholding the unfeeling cruelty of his enemies in mocking his dying agonies, yet in that dreadful hour not only prayed for their forgiveness, but framed an argument in extenuation of their guilt: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Would you not be like Christ? Can you ever be "satisfied" until you awake *in his likeness*?

You wish to be *great*. Then remember, that there is more greatness in ruling your own spirit than in taking a city. The poorest of all contrite souls has the preëminence over him who should subdue the earth to his sceptre, but should not subdue his own passions. "It is the glory of man to pass over a transgression." To err is human. To revenge is devilish. To forgive is divine.

It is a mark of peculiar guilt and folly not to forgive. The best authority teaches, that "anger rests only in the bosom of fools," and that to "hate a man is to be a murderer."

Forgiveness often *converts foes into friends*. It may thus affect your enemies. It would be very pleasant to secure the good-will of those who dislike you. But resentment will only irritate and enrage. No enemy is won by hatred. Leviathan is never thus tamed. "Grievous words stir up anger." It is "a soft answer" that "turns away wrath." Learn to overcome evil with good.

Remember, too, that *you are not much hurt until your soul is hurt*. The bitterness of enemies is not the bitterness of death. Who can harm you if you follow that which is good? Malignity in striking one dagger against the bosom of its object, buries ten in the heart of the assailant. The most expensive of all methods of being equal to your foe is to hate him. The cheapest mode of gaining a lawful and undoubted advantage over him is to forgive him.

He who does not forgive, must prepare for strife and every evil work. It is a wise rule to "leave off contention before it be meddled with." Defile not thy conscience, im-bitter not thy life with wars and fightings.

Besides, you and your enemy will soon *stand together at the same bar of omniscient judgment*. If he has to be judged, so have you. Nor can you deny that you have often and very wickedly sinned against God. Why should you not be merciful, that "you may obtain mercy?" You owe your Lord ten thousand talents. Why should you not forgive your fellow-servant fifty pence? If God bring you into judgment, you cannot answer for one of a thousand of your heinous sins against him. Does it then become you to be unforgiving respecting the few and slight offences committed against yourself?

Christianity is practically worth very little to him whom it does not enable to triumph over all sinful enmities. To embrace the bitterest enemy in the arms of holy benevolence is one of the earliest, and simplest, and grandest achievements of vital and evangelical piety. Shall your religion be worthless?

Prayer for your enemies will be much more likely to make them ashamed and miserable, until they cease their hostility, than any thing that revenge can inflict. Even persecution herself has been known to grow pale, and to quake under the influence of hearty prayer.

Eternity is near. Unconceived glories or terrors will soon strike awe into every soul of man. Then all the petty strifes among the potsherders will be divested of their unreal consequence; and many things on earth regarded as great, will consume away like the fat of lambs. Look at the grounds of your enmity. Can you justify it in eternity?

Thus are you called and urged to the duty of forgiveness. More sublime sanctions attach to no human obligation.

And now, *do you forgive all your enemies?* Perhaps you say, "I can forgive, but I can't forget." If you mean, that you cannot erase from the tablet of your memory all impression, so as to be wholly unable to recollect the offence, then you are not required to forget. In this sense Jehovah does not forget our offences. Yet he says, "Their sin and their iniquities will I remember no more." Now we are required to forgive *as* he forgives. When you are required to forget as well as forgive, the meaning is, that you must not willingly retain a remembrance of the offence—thoughts of it must not be cherished—the recollection of it must not awaken animosity; nor must the repetition of the offence rekindle old anger or hatred. You must also forgive, however often the offence be repeated, though it be "seven times a day," or "seventy times seven." You must love your enemy; pray for him; wish well to him; do him good; if he be hungry, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; if he be naked, clothe him. And you must do all sincerely, habitually, benevolently, willingly; not for a pretence, nor by constraint of the fear of hell. The sorrows and sufferings of your most cruel, unrelenting, and persevering foe must be no matter of joy to you. "He that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished." You must "love your enemies." To do so is the badge of discipleship in the school of Christ, and the token and pledge of eternal life. If you find no such spirit in you, then you are a guilty, unpardoned, unholy sinner, in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. Therefore you must be converted. You must be born again. In malice you must become a child. Without a thorough change of heart you cannot be saved. The alternative is regeneration or perdition. You must be born again, and your enmity slain, or you must sink to endless woe.