

The forgiving lord

(*Matthew 18: 21-35*)

“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.”

Peter's idea of forgiving “seven times” was all right as far as it went, but to Jesus it was insufficient and incomplete. Many a good Christian has had the nobility of character to forgive another man, through great compassion or through understanding his point of view or through seeing that he could not really have meant it, or something of the sort; but in doing so he is still holding the possibility of sin as a reality, because he is still seeing his friend as a physical being of flesh, blood, and bones, possessed of a mortal mind and therefore continually liable to sin and error. Is not that actually malpractice? It is certainly not Science and was not good enough for the Master. Can we be knowing the truth of anyone while there is still any ingredient of error in our thinking?

Jesus wanted to rouse his active student, Peter (and all men) to see that he must allow his sense of the allness, oneness, and perfection of the nature of God to be followed out in all its implications to convince him that there is no matter and no mortal mind out of which to create a sinner or produce a sin to forgive. God is Spirit, and knows only the spiritual, which includes no element of matter to produce or introduce sin.

It is helpful to bear in mind that the term “matter” is used in a special sense in Christian Science, not just to refer to so-called material substance, but also as a name for the entire dream that there is “intelligence, substance, and life in non-intelligence and mortality”

(S&H 591:9-10). However much this dream tries to impress itself on us, it is still unreal, a myth, a lie, never a *living* error. It is "that which mortal mind sees, feels, hears, tastes, and smells only in belief" (S&H 591:14-15).

We cannot forgive sin until we see that in the Science of being there has never been sin in us or anyone else or indeed any sin whatever; and in order to see that, our understanding of the completeness of the infinite, as symbolized by the "seven" and first illustrated in the story of the seven days of creation, must be carried through until we have proved to ourselves that this means that there can be nothing in opposition to Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, and Love. There can be no mortal mind in opposition to the divine Mind, no matter in opposition to Spirit, and so on with all the terms for God revealed to Mrs Eddy. Then we can see that there is no place for sin to originate and therefore it has never had reality. When we realize that sin is non-existent from Principle's viewpoint, we can then properly eradicate it from our thought with regard to any attempt to identify it with ourselves or any other individual. That is the only way in which sin can be "Christianly and scientifically reduced to its native nothingness" (S&H 572:5-6).

If, for instance, we said of a friend, "He is such a loving individual, but I wish he wasn't so impatient [or so mean, or whatever it may be]" and we felt a sense of warmth and compassion towards him because of his loving character and yet we left to lie idle that thought about impatience or meanness being part of his nature, we might have forgiven him Christianly in a limited sense, but we would not have reduced the sin scientifically to its native nothingness. To fulfil the requirements of Mrs Eddy's statement we need the large, loving outlook of the good Christian, but this must be lifted above the normal interpretation of the word "Christian" into its natural completeness in Science by the annihilation of any thought which could suggest that impatience and meanness exist even as possibilities in that expression of God called man. Then and only then have we reduced sin to its native nothingness both Christianly and scientifically. That is why Mrs Eddy follows her statement with these words: " 'Love one another'

(I John,iii.23), is the most simple and profound counsel of the inspired writer" (S&H 572:6-8). Love must be complete or it is not worthy of the name. Would a good housewife say she had spring-cleaned a room if even one corner had been overlooked?

Jesus could not have used the phrase "seventy times seven" casually, for the Gospels make it clear that he employed such numbers as 3, 4, 7, 10, and 12 with a keen awareness of their spiritual implications. He was not only underlining the thoroughness of the work required for true forgiveness, but also showing the tools with which to do that work. The "seventy" combines the "seven" and the "ten". The "seven" stands for the complete sevenfold nature of God which Jesus understood; this was first symbolized in the Bible at the beginning of Genesis and has been defined in our age by Mrs Eddy in the seven synonymous terms for God. The "ten" was used throughout the Bible as a symbol of practical application. The ten fingers of the hand denote just this, and the Ten Commandments reveal how divinity and its requirements are to be made practical on this human plane. Jesus saw the need for the "seven" to be substantiated in human thought, and in this age we can do it by applying through reason the revelation given by the seven synonymous terms for God, so that we find it expressed in human experience. The "seventy" thus symbolizes a process of thought which lifts the "seven" beyond any superficial or merely theoretical interpretation to living, practical reality. This was depicted by the beloved disciple John when he wrote, "That which . . . our hands have handled . . . declare we unto you." And the phrase "laying on of hands" really stands for bringing the divine to the human, so that we see the human from the divine standpoint as it really is. This is the touch which touches human experience not vaguely and with a vague sense of the spiritual realm, but radically, effectively, and with healing.

To illustrate: if it appears that someone has wronged us, the only way to forgive him — to cleanse thought scientifically of the claims of materiality — is to see what it actually means that he is the expression of God — the expression of Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, and Love. Merely *saying* that he is the expression of God is not

enough. If we say that he is the expression of the divine Mind, this must carry with it the full acknowledgment that right here and now he is the expression of intelligence in every direction of his being; he understands others and finds unity in ideas because as the idea of Mind he knows that there is only one Mind, and that Mind is infinite and the same for all. As the expression of Spirit he is pure, clear, and wholly spiritual in his nature, pure in all his reasoning and deductions — such an estimate goes far beyond the human sense of spirituality. As the reflection of Soul he is not pushed about by the testimony of the human senses, but has the joy and certainty of Soul in all his thoughts and feelings. As the idea of Principle he loves Principle and is Principled in all that he is and does. As the expression of Life he is alive, immortal, deathless, with no element of self-destruction anywhere in his being. As the man of Truth he loves Truth and responds to and represents Truth in every aspect of life; if the claim is that he has spread lies about us, this is no more than a belief which tries in vain to contend with the fact established in him by Truth itself. And he is loving, not because of any human reason, but because Love itself expresses itself to others through him in a way that is unique.

Through this flow of spiritual reasoning we have made a practical demonstration to ourselves of what the “seven” means in his character-expression. We are thereby left with a wonderful concept of the whole being of that particular individual. The “seven” which he reflects has become real to us, and through this “laying on of hands” we can genuinely accept that it is true that he is wholly spiritual. Jesus said, “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.” And so if we come forth from the seven synonymous terms for God and see what it means in the earth-scene that man is the expression of this sevenfold nature, we then “go to the Father” again with a much truer sense than before of both God and man.

This is only an outline of the tremendous challenge involved, but it is the work of man here in this preparatory school of earth, with all its claims and all its symbols based on those claims. The phrase “until seventy times seven” indicates that when man has done this work, he

has emphasized for himself the integrity and purity of the sevenfold nature of God and consequent sevenfold nature of man and the universe. Through taking up the challenge of Truth he has made Truth true and unchallengeable as far as he is concerned. Accepted rightly this work is stimulating, joy-giving, and above all has a healing effect, for it expels error from every corner of thought and therefore is the only true forgiveness for oneself and for all whom one's thought embraces. Human consciousness thereby loses itself as human consciousness and becomes the expression of Principle, or Principle's expression of itself, which is true manhood and womanhood.

It must have been Jesus' devotion to the detailed activity of good covered by his requirement to Peter which so equipped him every moment of his day that he could address the paralyzed man with that powerful, all-encompassing statement of Truth which freed him: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matthew 9:2). And as we understand this, we glimpse too that vision of perfection and its active elimination of all that would oppose it which took hold of Mrs Eddy's consciousness as she read those words and the flood-tide of scientific revelation lifted her to that realm where, as she tells us, she saw "Life in and of Spirit; this Life being the sole reality of existence" (Mis.24:17-18). This revelation so possessed her consciousness that all else was dispelled and she was healed of an injury which, prior to this, had been pronounced fatal. She tells us in this passage that she rose, dressed herself, and ever after was in better health than she had before enjoyed.

"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid

hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

Christendom has misinterpreted the Master's teaching in this parable, which follows his statement to Peter, and has missed its Science. The story of the forgiving lord and his servant shows that if we think of ourselves as sinners, owing something to Principle through our sins, but forgiven by a kindly God who lets us off, we still have sin as reality. The result is that we react to sin in our brother man as reality also and consider penalty inevitable. The whole belief of sin and penalty goes on repeating itself, until we learn from our perfect Principle that there is nothing in that Principle and its infinitude — no matter and therefore no mortal mind — out of which to create either sin or sinner.

Mrs Eddy makes plain Jesus' teaching on this subject on page 67 of "Retrospection and Introspection," when she writes, "The sinner created neither himself nor sin, but sin created the sinner; that is, error made its man mortal, and this mortal was the image and likeness of evil, not of good. Therefore the lie was, and is, collective as well as individual. It was in no way contingent on Adam's thought, but suppositiously self-created. In the words of our Master, it, the 'devil' (*alias* evil), 'was a liar, and the father of it'" (lines 18-25).

Principle "forgives," not by admitting a sin as real, but with the thoroughness of its whole system precluding all error because all space is filled with Truth. Principle is always saying, "I am All" and "I AM

THAT I AM.” Thus it is forever annulling everything that mortal mind would say of man. Principle is not static, but active — not active against evil, but so active in good that this does away with evil. Light never contends with darkness, but just reflects itself and so there is no darkness. True forgiveness means erasing the claim that there is anything to forgive. If Principle is always going on, always expressing itself through its idea, then the claim that something unlike Principle ever really happens is a lie and should be thoroughly cleared from our thinking. “The law of Life and Truth is the law of Christ, destroying all sense of sin and death. It does more than forgive the false sense named sin, for it pursues and punishes it, and will not let sin go until it is destroyed, — until nothing is left to be forgiven, to suffer, or to be punished” (No. 30:2-6).

There is no mortal mind because there is no mortality in opposition to the infinite, eternal, and immortal, and so there is no effect of mortal mind in any direction or in any way. It has no “space to occupy, power to act, or vanity to pretend that it is man” (Mis.173:18-19). If we see that, we are left only with Principle’s mandate and Principle’s manifestation.

Having banished belief in any source for evil, we can then cut out belief in everything which could issue from such a source. The theory of forgiveness lies in seeing that there can never have been anything unlike Principle. The practice of it involves living the specific truth which contradicts the lie. Living the truth is what closes the door on the error. It is necessary for complete healing, because by living the specific truth we are wiping out that which previously enabled the undesirable quality to find identity in our consciousness. If we see for our friend the unreality and indeed the impossibility in Science of some error and live the reality of its opposite in all our thinking about him and in our whole attitude towards everything to do with him, as well as in our own life, then, like Jesus, we are not holding error “by affinity nor by infirmity” (Un.57:15-16) and again like Jesus we can say in some degree, “the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” In proportion as we live the truth, we find the dream vapourized in the true somethingness of what we are living. By living the

real, we find the real and it is real to *us*.

Mrs Eddy says, "material history is drawing to a close" (No.45:27), and it can do so for anyone through the growing strength to him of the spiritual idea, not in its past but in its present, for its impelling purpose in the "now" is what constitutes its real history, without beginning or end. If we will allow errors to "serve as waymarks to the one Mind" (S&H 267:24), those waymarks will dissolve into their native nothingness, and only the one Mind and its manifestation will be left. And so forgiving "seventy times seven" entails taking up the specific truths and living them in detail, in order to see demonstrated the nothingness of the errors. This is going beyond the letter into the spirit. The letter shows us what to do, the spirit comes when we do it. We enter into what has been shown us and become at one with it and then the spirit of the thing possesses us and we have the joy of its fulfilment.

Paying Principle what we owe involves paying our best attention to coming as much as we can into the consciousness which is Principle's and being that consciousness in our consciousness. By doing that, we are at peace with ourselves, because we are conscious that we are doing what is right; irrespective of the amount or quantity of that right, we know that we have the quality right, and this sets us at rest. Even a dog knows when it has stolen a bone from the larder, because of its innate sense of what is right and what is not, and no man can avoid his perception of what is Principled.

"Paying our debts" to Principle means paying back Principle's language to itself through understanding. If we admit that some evil has no place in Principle, no origin in Principle, and we accept Principle's idea, we are "paying back" Principle in its own coin and currency. The language of Principle contains not a single element of finity, error, or of anything to be forgiven, and what we owe to Principle is the acknowledgment of this.

Human compassion recognizes error and has pity. Principle sees no error and spells out *its* compassion in words such as those used by Jesus to the paralyzed man, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." He was saying, in effect, "None of that stuff ever be-

longed to you, or you would not have suffered under it, so have the joy of realizing that it was never you, for that gets rid of all the suffering." There is no stronger evidence of man's perfection than the fact that the truth inherent in him cannot be satisfied with an error, but pursues and evicts it until it is cleared out completely, thus demonstrating that he *is* by nature and by instinct perfect. Otherwise there would be no suffering. Truth does not make the suffering; it is our expression of Truth which will not allow us to express anything but Truth, and so eradicates any suggestion of, belief in, or indulgence of any quality other than that which is true and real. Dis-ease in error proves that it is no part of us, because if it were our native element, we would be at ease in it.

Forgiving "seventy times seven" is like a good housewife not stopping until every speck of dirt or dust has been dealt with and yet in the process enjoying herself. Therefore like Paul we can "take pleasure in infirmities," for they show us something which does not belong in our mentality or character and just has to be shaken out. A good housewife is grateful when the dust is shown up in some corner, so that it can be removed and a clean atmosphere established; the whole activity gives her happiness.

So we can take pleasure in finding out what never could have been us or anyone else and therefore was bound to make us uneasy. It shows itself up in the dis-ease or suffering and makes it plain that it is not us; and as we see clearly that it was never us, because it never happened, since it was not God-made and, as the Scripture tells us, "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made," the dis-ease itself deserts us. Our consciousness of God and of what we are "torments" us if we depart from what we know man is by nature and by instinct and by everything. The error has to be exterminated. Truth cannot be satisfied with anything less.

The parable shows that if we can understand how Principle operates to forgive us because it sees nothing wrong in us as its idea or expression, then we must go on to reflect Principle by seeing nothing wrong in others. If we fail to do this, we are bound to suffer, just as any departure from Principle in any one of its expressions, whether it

be in mathematics, music, or any other sphere, leads inevitably to trouble. Principle forgives us everything because it sees nothing to forgive, and we must reflect that same state of mind or attitude towards everything in our experience, or else we cannot receive the benefit of what Principle is doing for us. If we allow something in our mind which is apart from Principle, different from Principle, we suffer for it. Suffering is not enjoying the state of mind which Principle is enjoying and thereby not being our true and natural selves. It is not Principle that punishes, but we who punish ourselves if we are not being like Principle in our outlook.

As students of Science, we can discern and see how Principle holds us in its consciousness as perfect beings. Principle never alters in that. If we wish to enjoy the benefit of this, we must have the same consciousness of ourselves and of everyone as Principle has of us. Mrs Eddy gives us our cue as to how to do this in her words, "I will listen for Thy voice, Lest my footsteps stray" (Mis.398:1-2). The moment we listen and conform to Principle's consciousness, we are free from suffering or penalty, just as when we conform to the principle of arithmetic. If we have been calculating wrongly in arithmetic, we simply say, "I am not going to do that again," and we go ahead; we are not held back or penalized from that moment.

So the important thing must be to see what Principle is knowing, and make sure that we know the same. When we see as Principle is seeing, the results are bound to be beneficial. If we join in with the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," we have "the tree of life," whose leaves are for "the healing of the nations" (Rev.22:1,2), and so "all whom [our] thoughts rest upon are thereby benefited" (My.210:10-11).

We must get into the stream — we cannot originate good ourselves, but we can get into the stream, as Jesus did continually. He was *in* the flow of good, surrounded by good, a "gentle beam of living Love" (Po.29:15). So we must first realize and feel that God loves us, acknowledge Principle's love for its idea, and so get right with God, and then see that we love everyone in the same way. Prayer is "the utilization of the love wherewith He loves us," and it is "learning to

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love, and to include all mankind in one affection" (No.39:19,17-18).

To sum up: if we wish to obey the lesson of the parable, we should bear in mind that we cannot truly love, or truly forgive sin, as long as we believe in the reality of matter, for all sin is based on belief in the reality of matter and hence of mortal mind. Both Jesus and the Science taught by Mrs Eddy show us that that is the cardinal point of difference between their method and the methods of the rest of mankind. In the finest religions there is the constant call to practise kindness, goodness, compassion, forgiveness of sin, and so forth, and the finest adherents of those religions obey this call to an extent that is worthy of much admiration, but none of these attributes can be properly practised until men take the "seven" of Spirit's onliness and root out the belief that there is opposition to Spirit called matter and a matter-world. To have a concept of anyone as material is unloving in itself.

Mrs Eddy tells us specifically that the difference between her teaching and that of all others, except Jesus and his apostles, is that "*by knowing the unreality of disease, sin, and death* [all these effects are based on belief in the reality of matter], you demonstrate the allness of God" (Un.9:28-1). The Master was underlining that very point for Peter, and his whole life emphasized it. When he said, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," he cut out any reliance on or belief in matter as having anything to do with God or man. In that statement there is no matter and no material man. If there is no matter, there is no sin, therefore only by knowing that there is no matter can we know that there is no sin. The sevenfold nature of the one perfect Principle gives us the tools wherewith to confront the false teaching of the ages and dispute its claims by clearly knowing that there is no mortal mind, and because there is no mortal mind there is no matter; consequently all effects attributed to such a realm, such as sin, hate, fear, and so forth, do not exist because that realm does not exist. The "seven" shows us the nature of God and therefore of man as the only reality. The "ten" shows us how to dispense with belief in matter by applying to the human situation the truths given us by this understanding of God and

man. Through this we become convinced of the integrity and completeness of the sevenfold nature of God, thus fulfilling Jesus' requirement, "Until seventy times seven." That is, the work and the demonstration covered by the term "seventy" makes the sevenfold nature of God truly real not only "in heaven," but also here "on earth." "Thy kingdom is come; Thou art ever-present" (S&H 16:31). Using the "seven" in practical demonstration in the "ten" multiplies for us the true meaning of the "seven" — hence the phrase "seventy times seven."

There could be no other method by which to come out of the dream of life, truth, intelligence, and substance in matter and thus get rid of the effects of that dream. In this way, and in this way only, can a Scientist *be* a Scientist *and* a Christian and understand and practise what Jesus meant here. This certainly makes strenuous demands, but how else can the so-called strenuous demands of mortal mind on our thought and attention be obliterated? As Mrs Eddy asks so pointedly of us all, "Will you doff your lavender-kid zeal, and become real and consecrated warriors?" (Mis.177:14-15)