

The Bond Linking Myself to my Neighbor

Gospel: Matthew 18:23-35: *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 fellow servants, 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 fellow servant 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 fellow servants 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: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, 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.*

"Shouldest not thou also have had compassion
on thy fellow servant,
even as I had pity on thee?"

The parable that the Lord Jesus poses to us today touches upon our most important daily affairs, which is our relationships with our neighbor, all our neighbors.

In the parable, the King symbolizes the Lord Himself who has the unique authority to forgive sins, as the Jews exclaimed when Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic. It seems that there is justice in the Kingdom of God. The conditions of the entrance to the Kingdom is defined and weighed, and the Master judges His servants. The justice of God and His standards, however, differs from human standards. The justice of God is His love. David says in the Psalms (143:1): "In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness." This means answer me through Your love and mercy. This is what appeared to be the case in the judgment of this Master with his servant. If this Master judged his servant according to human standards, he would have sold him and all his family... The judgment of God is far from our judgment as heaven is far from earth. His justice differs from our justice, as "mercy" differs from "regulations," "love" from "selfishness," and "forgiveness" from "revenge."

The scene that happened between the servant and his Master is repeated between this servant and another fellow servant the one Master. In the parable, Christ puts the same words in the mouth of the other servant towards the first one: "And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." But he refused, and threw him in prison! If this servant was in need and under persecution, than the need probably explains his harshness. But the first servant dealt with his fellow brother with much greed and toughness at the time when he was given much mercy from God. It would have been normal for him to be happy about the Divine mercy, and be courageous to

forgive and love even a little. But as the parable tells, he was an evil servant. The same words said in front of the loving God brought acquittal from ten thousand talents, and in front of the evil servant brought imprisonment!

The first servant did not only owe God, but also he had to repair his relationships with heaven and with humans. In the parable the Lord indicates that this servant has two relationships, the first with God and the second with the neighbor. The first is directly related to the second. Man is not just the servant of God, but also the neighbor of his fellow man. He is a servant and a friend. He is a worker under authority and an authoritative manager. This parable explains how the two relationships between man and God, and man and his neighbor are closely linked together. God looks at the servant in the same way as the latter looks at his fellow man, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

What brings our attention are the numbers mentioned in the passage. The servant owed ten thousand talents. The other servant owed the first one hundred pence. Ten thousand is the largest number in the time of the Holy Bible. It was a symbol of the "endless." Every talent weighs ten thousand pence. What can a man owe another? Some hurt or some gratefulness? How much does man owe God? Everything. The Apostle asks, is there anything good we did not receive? If we had to remember how numerous are our shortcomings, sins and weaknesses. ... We would have then understood that they are endless. On the other hand, if we meditate on the heavenly gifts bestowed on man, we would discover that His love is unfathomable. What we owe God is so big that we cannot repay, even if we sacrificed all our life for

His service, and even if we, as in the parable, sold all our belongings, the wife and the children...

The parable has clearly shown that the Lord did not judge the "condemned" for we are all condemned, but the evil. The servant was not condemned for owing so much to God, but because he could not forgive a little.

Sin in the eyes of God is the lack of love and the lack of forgiveness. Our sin to the Lord is not repaying what we owe Him, but is our evil dealing with our neighbor. Sin is not about our shortcomings towards God. On the contrary, it is about not dealing with our neighbor in the same way God deals with us. "Be merciful as your heavenly Father is!" In the Lord's prayer, the Lord taught us to continuously say: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are indebted towards us." On the Cross, Jesus Himself offered us an example of forgiveness by saying, "Forgive them Father for they know not what they are doing." The Christian Tradition followed the Master's example, and the first martyr Stephen repeated the same words of Jesus upon stoning him. Acquittal is a condition for forgiveness and the first signs of Christ's discipleship.

Christians ought to hate sin, but love sinners, and that's why they ought to forgive. The Lord Jesus builds forgiveness not on the basis of rights or exchange, but upon mercy and progress. Sin is condemned, but the sinner deserves to be loved. St. Paul emphasizes that if anyone sins, those who are spiritual ought to help this sinner in the spirit of meekness and love. The goal is building the other spiritually and not practice revenge. We condemn sin but we love man, even if he sins.

The Lord Jesus assures us in this parable that the way a servant deals with his fellow servant defines the way the Master deals with him. The other servant is a fellow worker. He is a brother. He will certainly receive the same paternal love. Then, who are we, servants, to judge him?

No one is exempt from the great debts owing to the Lord King and owing to the fellow servants. As the Psalmist says in 143:2, "For in thy sight shall no man living be justified." According to the principles of the Gospel, dealing with each other ought to be according to the basis and dealings of the Divine love: it is Forgiveness. Forgiveness is the bond of love. It is the light that comes to us from the Divine Sun, linking us with our neighbors and environment. Without forgiveness, human beings cannot live in harmony, but in discord.

Forgiveness is the bond
between my neighbor and myself.