



The Priority Of Forgiveness

“Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5:24).

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. 26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing” (Matthew 5:23-26).

God focuses on what matters most in life and with our interest at His heart. Whenever He commands us to do something, it is for our good. Our limitations in understanding can sometimes make us see things in a different perspectives from God, but the obedience of faith bring blessings untold “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

When someone offends us, or we are offended by their actions, we may have reasons and justifications to hold grudges and refuse to forgive, not realising that such harms us more than the offender. A minister once pointed out that refusing to forgive is like drinking poison and expecting that the offender will die. Unfortunately, it does not work like that, as it is the person that drinks a poison who will suffer the consequences of it.

In this teaching Jesus explains the priority of forgiving before other religious activities as failure to do so blocks the channel to God. But we do not often see it that way as from our perspectives the sacrifice appears more important. When our views differ from that of God, we must always remember that He is our creator, and knows better what is best for us. Therefore,

“Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison” (Matthew 5:25).

even when we do not understand, we must form the habit of obedience.

Our thinking can also get in the way of obedience and blessings. Remember possible thoughts and options that may be going on in the mind of this worshipper, e.g.:

- 1) I have travelled so far to get to the temple in Jerusalem, and have been in the queue for so long to get to the point of meeting the priest who will offer the sacrifice, therefore, it would amount to ‘unacceptable’ waste of time to go back to reconcile first and then come back to start all over again.
- 2) If I leave the animal here to go back to first reconcile, there is the risk that the animal could be stolen or die of starvation before I come back.
- 3) If I go back to reconcile first everybody who sees me will think that I have been a terrible sinner, and I will lose my reputation.
- 4) It should be okay to make best use of this opportunity to offer the sacrifice first, and reconcile later.

Jesus teaching highlights the following important principles in relationship with God and success in life:

- 1) First things must always come first. With God, forgiveness precedes acts of worship.
- 2) Forgiveness is associated with corresponding actions towards reconciliation.
- 3) The importance of finding common grounds of agreement with adversaries as a principle for limiting damage to us, even when we are innocent.

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