

Episode 6

Forgiveness

God's forgiveness and our forgiveness. Jesus, in "The Lord's Prayer," taught his apostles to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Mt. 6:12) In "The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant" (Mt. 18:23-34), the wicked servant who was forgiven his debts by his king immediately went out and refused to forgive the debts of his own servant. When the king heard this, he withdrew his forgiveness and had his unforgiving servant put in jail until he paid all his debts. Why does Jesus link God's forgiveness of our debts to our forgiving our debtors? This is because we cannot receive and experience God's forgiveness until we have first forgiven those who trespass against us. Our loving and merciful Heavenly Father freely forgives his erring children, but this forgiveness is blocked by our own unforgiveness, and is not available to us until we forgive others.

Forgiveness and entrance into the kingdom. We enter God's kingdom by faith, but it is God's forgiveness of our debts that accepts our faith as the price of admission. We receive this forgiveness in so far as we forgive our fellows. Thus, it becomes clear that our forgiveness of others is essential to our entrance into the Father's kingdom. The Father's will for us is that we learn to forgive others who have wronged us and in so doing we open the way for our own forgiveness and acceptance into the kingdom of God.

Forgiving others. How do we forgive others? The secret to our freely forgiving those who have wronged us lies in our understanding of their nature, their past experience, and true desires. The better we understand our neighbor the easier we will find it to forgive him, and even to love him. When we truly love our neighbor as ourselves our forgiveness is easy and natural. To forgive is Godlike and divine. Our failure to forgive is the measure of our immaturity, our failure to attain adult sympathy, understanding, and love. As God's child I am called to forgive others just as I look to the Father to forgive me.

10. Character

Character development. God is our loving heavenly Father, and He loves us, his mortal sons and daughters, with an infinite Fatherly affection. Like any good earth father, He wants the best for His children. His supreme mandate, "Be you perfect, even as I am perfect," (Mt. 5:48) directs us to strive for a perfection of character, a nobility of character, like that of our Father. He has bestowed upon us his indwelling spirit to act as a pattern and guide for our personal development. Moreover, He sent his divine son to live on earth and make clear the kind of character he would have us develop. The character displayed by Jesus is a perfect demonstration of the loving and merciful character of the Father. Although the high perfection of Jesus's character is well beyond the reach of normal human

beings, the character he developed clearly reveals the kind of character we should strive for in our lives.

What is character? My Webster's Third International Dictionary defines character generally as, "the complex of accustomed mental and moral characteristics and habitual ethical traits marking a person, group or nation.... It also provides a more specific definition of character as, "a composite of good moral qualities typically of moral excellence and firmness blended with resolution, self-discipline, high ethics, force and judgment...." Our character is the result of the decisions and actions we take in our lives. When we decide and act the meanings and values of this experience become a part of our character. Our moral and spiritual character is the consequence of the accumulation of all our personal decisions.

How do we develop our character? A positive heredity and the genuine love of a home are necessary to achieve the full development of a normal character. The most valuable part of a child's character training will come from his parents at home. Marriage is best designed to bring forth those higher motives and impulses that are indispensable to a strong and moral character. We develop our character by the unselfish service of others. The habitual practice of meditation, prayer, and worship will eventually formulate themselves into a spiritual character.

Courage. Our exercise of courage is the basis of our character acquirement and the measure of our strength of character. We grow in courage by bravely facing our problems and fears. Courage was very heart of Jesus' teachings, and his personal courage grew to such heights that it overcame all fear. His watchword was "fear not." In our prayer and worship life we may seek to exchange our fear for God's courage.

Strength of character. Strong characters are not derived from not doing wrong but from actually doing right. We must decide and resolve to, "Do what is right." in all circumstances, especially when we feel a strong temptation to take another course. In a strong character emotional responses are integrated and coordinated. The degree to which our intellectual and spiritual powers are associated and combined adds to or subtracts from our strength of character. When the scientific, moral, and spiritual insights of a person are unified they produce a strong character consisting of a factual science, a moral philosophy, and a genuine religious experience.

Growth in strength of character. We grow in strength of character by grappling with hardships and reacting to disappointments. Tribulation may be the tempering fire that transmutes the soft iron of immature character into the tempered steel of real character. Fear and anger weaken character. An important measure of our strength of character is our ability to resist the holding of grudges

and to withstand brooding in the face of deep sorrow. The true measure of our strength of character is our trustworthiness, our ability to bear responsibilities and successfully accomplish assigned missions.

Develop a righteous character. Jesus taught, “In my Father’s house there are many mansions.” (Jn. 14:2) It is the Father’s will that his children survive death and continue their ascension on the “mansion worlds.” This means that we must choose to do the Father’s will and develop a righteous character that can exist and go forward on the higher spiritual worlds of Heaven. Jesus taught in the beatitudes, “Happy are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.” (Mt. 5:6) A righteous character is the prerequisite for admission to Heaven and the spiritual life that follows. Our job here on earth is to seek and attain that level of righteousness, of progressive character development, that is sufficient to pass judgment and be reborn on the Heavenly worlds. Our transformation of character is demonstrated as we increasingly bring forth an abundant harvest of the character fruits of the spirit. As in other phases of our human experience we may look to Jesus for inspiration and guidance in developing a true survival character. When we bring forth the fruits of the spirit we are simply manifesting the character traits that Jesus demonstrated in his perfected earth life.

