

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM JOEL (7/3/21)¹

Q: Please tell us about forgiveness. What is it? What it is not? Is it necessarily a conscious process? What actually is done by the forgiver?

A: Well now, it is a conscious process. As a matter of fact, nothing takes place in your experience that isn't a conscious process. Even if some things at some time become subconscious, they nevertheless are conscious. Let me show you this.

In order to forgive, I must actually have the feeling of not wanting you punished—I mean the wrongdoer. Now what is the use of saying that I am praying for your forgiveness if I do not consciously feel that I want you to be released from your sins and from the penalties of your sins? So therefore, it must be a conscious knowing. Conscious knowing what?

All right, you and I have sinned. Why quibble about it? You know it, and I know it—in some degree, some matter, omission or commission. Now, as an individual, humanly, I have been brought up as you were: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Supposing for example, you were called to jury duty, and it was a capital case, and the question is asked you, “Would you serve on a jury where there is a case for death penalty?”

Now, supposing your answer was, “I can't because I'm a Christian.” Would they let you off? No! No, they wouldn't. You would have to say, “I would not bring in a verdict of capital punishment.” Then they'll let you off. But if you say you're a Christian, that doesn't mean that you don't believe in “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” because the Christians have adopted the ancient Hebraic teaching of an eye for an eye, and it is now Christian. It is perfectly Christian for you to want the murderer murdered. See that?

Now how are you going to change that except by a conscious act? You yourself must say, “Wait a minute. Wait a minute. No longer an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth, but forgive my enemy.” Oh. Oh, no longer an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. At this level of consciousness, God hath no pleasure in your dying. Well certainly I'm not going to send you into death then. It is not my function to be my brother's judge. Who made me a judge over you? Who told me to sit in judgment on your offenses? Oh no!

So actually, it should be enough really to be excused from the jury just to say, “I'm a Christian.” And that should mean of course, you can't serve, because the teaching is, “Put up thy sword. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.” No longer an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but forgive. But no, we have not yet adopted that into Christianity, as Christianity is practiced. And so to be excused, you would have to say, “I do not believe in capital punishment,” and you'd have to make it very personal.

All right. Now the question is before us here, “We want to be God-governed. Can we be God-governed if we're willing to sit in judgment on our brother? Can we be God-governed if we want to sit in on somebody else's death? No! No, we can't. Therefore, forgiveness has to be a

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conscious act. You yourself must know why you are forgiving. You are doing it because you're not sitting in judgment on anyone. It doesn't mean that they are going to be absolved from the penalty of their sin. It doesn't mean that, because you haven't got the ability or the power to absolve them. It only means *you* are not holding them in condemnation to it.

Remember that when the Master said to the woman taken in adultery, "*Thy sins be forgiven thee. Neither do I condemn thee,*"² he also said, "*Go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee.*"³ In other words, no one can absolve another. We can only absolve ourselves from sitting in judgment on the other. And so, if I look out at a thief saying, "Neither do I condemn thee. I forgive thee," it doesn't mean he's not going to pay the penalty for his theft.

On the other hand, if he is receptive—and I have witnessed this in my prison work, where men serving terms for crimes came to this realization, and they were changed almost in the twinkling of an eye. And right after that, they were pardoned or paroled and wondered how it happened. It happened because they were no longer under the sin. Therefore, they were no longer under the penalty for sin. They were receptive to this love, this forgiveness. Therefore, it is a conscious act.

Now what actually is done by the forgiver? I'll tell you. The forgiver releases *himself* from judgment. The forgiver releases *himself* from hate, from condemnation, from criticism, from judgment. The forgiver releases *himself* from bearing false witness against his neighbor. That's what the forgiver does. And that is why, the moment the forgiver does this, he is under the law of love, which is the law of God. And now healing can take place in mind and body. At the same time, if the one forgiven is at all spiritually attuned, the act of forgiving awakens a spiritual sense in them and changes their nature.

I saw that work out in this way. I was appointed First Reader of Christian Science services in a prison, and usually eleven, ten, twelve, thirteen men attended this service. And, my first weeks as a Reader were difficult, because unconsciously I had the idea that I was talking down to them, sort of telling them to be good.

I realized, of course, that this is not the way; that my part was to realize the spiritual nature of their being, even if they didn't realize it, or the judge didn't realize it, or the jury hadn't realized it. My function on that platform, was to realize that—"*Call no man on earth your father*"⁴— they had the same Father I did. Therefore, we were of the same spiritual household, same spiritual family. Therefore, we were all spiritual being.

Well now, what happened there was that the attendance grew so rapidly that at first, we were accused of drawing them in because we had a nice soloist. Well, we removed the soloist, and we got a very fat man! But our attendance kept increasing. At the end of two years, instead of that eleven or twelve, we had one hundred eighty to two hundred, and we had at that time fifteen men doing healing work inside the prison!

That's what took place inside of two years by a conscious act of forgiving. Not saying, "Oh, you sinner, I'll let you off." That's not forgiving. Forgiving was really forgiving: "Thy sins be forgiven thee. Now, let's start all over, and let me recognize your true identity and no longer feel that I'm more righteous than thou, but rather that spiritually we are one." And you see, in that

² John 8:11

³ John 5:14

⁴ Matthew 23:9

recognition, the men in the prison who had enough spiritual attunement were drawn to that service.

We even had the experience on a Thanksgiving morning of hearing the guards go through the prison and saying, "Eleven o'clock Christian Science services, and no free gifts!" And we still had our full attendance, without free gifts, because we had something else. We had this act of forgiveness. We had this act of understanding.

In our human identity, we're all sinners. We're all under the belief of good and evil. We're all trespassing against God's will and God's way. But we have embarked on the spiritual path, and this entails, first of all, a realization that we are not good men and women or bad men and women. We are states and stages of consciousness, and at certain stages more evil gets through us than good, and at other stages more good gets through than evil. But eventually, there must neither be good nor evil go through us. There must only be God.

That is where we come to the Master when he can say, "*Why callest thou me good?*"⁵ I'm not good. There is good flowing through me; it is God flowing through me." And that's what you feel. That's what uplifts you. That's what heals you. That's what reforms you. It isn't me. I've stepped out of the way. I am a beholder, watching this spiritual Presence within me do its work in your consciousness. I don't do anything, I don't use it. God isn't a tool that I can swing around and use the way I want. I am a beholder, watching the Spirit of God operate in consciousness, and as light, dispel darkness; as Truth, dispel evil; as good, dispel evil, injury, so forth.

*"Father forgive them, they know not what they do."*⁶ Let Thy light shine within them, Thy Presence be always with them, Thy Grace feed and sustain them." And this is living in an attitude of not being good, just wanting to let God flow, and be the Good.

⁵ Matthew 19:17

⁶ Luke 23:34