Considerations Regarding Forgiveness

General Application

Heber J. Grant, Conference Report, Oct. 1920, 5-7; Gospel Standards, 259-262. Some years ago a prominent man was excommunicated from the Church. He, years later, pleaded for baptism. President John Taylor referred the question of his baptism to the apostles, stating that if they unanimously consented to his baptism, he could be baptized, but that if there was one dissenting vote, he should not be admitted into the Church. As I remember the vote, it was five for baptism and seven against.

A year or so later the question came up again and it was eight for baptism and four against. Finally all of the council of the apostles, with the exception of your humble servant, consented that this man be baptized, and I was then next to the junior member of the quorum. Later I was in the office of the president, and he said:

“Heber, I understand that eleven of the apostles have consented to the baptism of Brother So and So,” naming the man, “and that you alone are standing out. How will you feel when you get on the other side and you find that this man has pleaded for baptism and you find that you have perhaps kept him from entering in with those who have repented of their sins and received some reward?”

I said, “President Taylor, I can look the Lord squarely in the eye, if He asks me that question, and tell Him that I did that which I thought was for the best good of the Church enough, and that I did not propose to let any such man come back into the Church.”

“Well,” said President Taylor, “my boy, that is all right. Stay with your convictions; stay right with them.”

I said, “President Taylor, your letter said you wanted each one of the apostles to vote the convictions of his heart. If you desire me to surrender the convictions of my heart, I will gladly do it. I will gladly vote for this man to come back. But while I live I never expect to consent if it is left to my judgment. That man was accused before the apostles several years ago and he stood up and lied and claimed that he was innocent, and the Lord gave to me a testimony that he lied, but I could not condemn him because of that. I got down on my knees that night and prayed God to give me the strength not to expose that man, seeing that he had lied but that we had no evidence except only the testimony of the girl that he had seduced. And I prayed the Lord that some day additional testimony might come, and it did come, and we then excommunicated him. And when a man can lie to the apostles, and when he can be guilty while proclaiming repentance of sin, I think this Church has been disgraced enough without ever letting him come back into the Church.”

“Well,” repeated President Taylor, “my boy, don’t you vote for him as long as you live, while you hold those ideas; stay right with them.”

I left the president’s office. I went home. My lunch was not ready. I was reading the Doctrine and Covenants through for the third or fourth time systematically, and I had my bookmark in it. But as I picked it up, instead of opening where the bookmark was, it opened to—

“Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him [her] the greater sin.

“I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.” (D&C 64:9-10.)

[“And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds.

“And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the Church, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by commandment or by revelation.

“And this ye shall do that God may be glorified—not because ye forgive not, having not compassion, but that ye may be justified in the eyes of the law, that ye may not offend him who is your lawgiver …” (D&C 64:11-13.)]

As I closed the book and said, “If the devil applies for baptism and claims that he has repented, I will baptize him.”

After lunch I returned to the office of President Taylor and I said, “President Taylor, I have had a change of heart. One hour ago I said, never while I live, did I expect to ever consent that Brother So and So should be baptized, but I have come to tell you he can be baptized, so far as I am concerned.”

President Taylor had a habit, when he was particularly pleased, of sitting up and laughing and shaking his whole body. He laughed and said, “My boy, the change is very sudden, very sudden. I want to ask you a question. How did you feel when you left here an hour ago? Did you feel like you wanted to hit that man right squarely between the eyes and knock him down?”

I said, “That is just the way I felt.”

He said, “How do you feel now?”

“Well, to tell you the truth, President Taylor, I hope the Lord will forgive the sinner.”

He said, “You feel very happy, don’t you, in comparison. You had the spirit of anger, you had the spirit of bitterness in your heart toward that man, because of his sin and because of the disgrace he had brought upon the Church. And now you have the spirit of forgiveness and you really feel happy, don’t you?”

And I said, “Yes, I do. I felt mean and hateful and now I feel happy.”

And he said, “Do you know why I wrote that letter?”

I said, “No, sir.”

“Well, I wrote it, just so you and some of the younger members of the apostles would learn the lesson that forgiveness is in advance of justice where there is repentance; and that to have in your heart the spirit of forgiveness and to eliminate from your hearts the spirit of hatred and bitterness, brings peace and joy; that the gospel of Jesus Christ brings joy, peace and happiness to
every soul that lives it and follows its teachings.” —CR, October 1920, 5-7.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 298-299. This forgiving spirit has a quantitative as well as a qualitative aspect. Forgiveness cannot be a one-time program. …

If we have been wronged or injured, forgiveness means to blot it completely from our minds.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 282-283. A common error is the idea that the offender must apologize and humble himself to the dust before forgiveness is required. Certainly, the one who does the injury should totally make his adjustment, but as for the offended one, he must forgive the offender regardless of the attitude of the other. Sometimes men get satisfactions from seeing the other party on his knees and groveling in the dust, but that is not the gospel way. …

Yes, to be in the right we must forgive, and we must do so without regard to whether or not our antagonist repents, or how sincere is his transformation, or whether or not he asks our forgiveness. [Italics in original.]

Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 277. If they commit an evil today, and another tomorrow, but wish to be Saints and to be forgiven, do you forgive them, not only seven times, but seventy times seven in a day, if their hearts are fully set to do right.

Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 277. You are not as you should be, unless you can correct every person you know to be wrong, without having personal ill-feelings against them.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 295. When Church members cannot resolve their mutual problems alone [the first step], they sometimes reach a point where the Church steps in to help.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 273. Sometimes the best people, and even the best Church leaders, though having the finest intentions, give offense and injury without meaning to do so. In my work, I have run into this often.

But neither real nor fancied offenses from others, leaders or not, justify the spirit of selfishness, jealousy, recrimination and resentment that sparks and then rekindles feuds and hostility. It is this same spirit, nourished by hurt feelings and fancied slight, which causes rifts and feuds in wards and branches. Those in positions of authority sometimes have their actions and motives questioned and are resented by members of their wards and branches and stakes when instead these members should be understanding and forgiving and willing to support and accept counsel from the leaders.

**Forgive To Be Forgiven**

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 261. Since forgiveness is an absolute requirement in attaining eternal life, man naturally ponders: How can I best secure that forgiveness? One of many basic factors stands out as indispensable immediately: One must forgive to be forgiven. 

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 267. The Lord will judge with the same measurements meted out by us. If we are harsh, we should not expect other than harshness. If we are merciful with those who injure us, he will be merciful with us in our errors. If we are unforgiving, he will leave us wretting in our own sin.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 268-269. The Lord can judge men by their thoughts as well as by what they say and do, for he knows even the intents of their hearts; but this is not true for humans. We hear what people say, we see what they do, but being unable to discern what they think or intend, we often judge wrongfully if we try to fathom the meaning and motives behind their actions and place on them our own interpretation. A person who judges anyone else is just as likely to judge his Church leaders, often thereby bringing disharmony and contention to our wards and branches. But the spirit of forgiveness and not of judgment is what is required—forgiveness and understanding. …

People who are inclined to sit in judgment on others should read and reread these words of Paul to the Romans … [Rom 2:1-3.] …

He who will not forgive others breaks down the bridge over which he himself must travel.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 297. Frequently, pride gets in our way and becomes our stumbling block.

**Those Who Won’t Forgive**

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 263. Many people, when brought to a reconciliation with others, say that they forgive, but they continue to hold malice, continue to suspect the other party, continue to disbelieve the other’s sincerity. This is sin, for when a reconciliation has been effected and when repentance is claimed, each should forgive and forget, build immediately the fences which have been breached, and restore the former compatibility. …

The early disciples evidently expressed words of forgiveness, and on the surface made the required adjustment, but “forgave not one another in their hearts.” This was not a forgiveness, but savored of hypocrisy and deceit and subterfuge. As implied in Christ’s model prayer, it must be a heart action and a purging of one’s mind. Forgiveness means forgetfulness. One woman had “gone through” a reconciliation in a branch and had made the physical motions and verbal statements indicating it, and expressed the mouthy words forgiving. Then with flashing eyes, she remarked, “I will forgive her, but I have a memory like an elephant. I’ll never forget.” Her pretended adjustment was valueless and void. She still harbored the bitterness. Her words of friendship were like a spider’s web, her rebuilt fences were as straw, and she herself continued to suffer without peace of mind. Worse still, she stood “condemned before the Lord” [D&C 64:9], and there remained in her an even greater sin than in the one who, she claimed, had injured her.
Little did this antagonistic woman realize that she had not forgiven at all. She had only made the motions.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 264. Some people not only cannot or will not forgive and forget the transgressions of others, but go to the other extreme of hounding the alleged transgressor. Many letters and calls have come to me from individuals who are determined to take the sword of justice in their own hands and presume to see that a transgressor is punished.... “I can never rest, so long as that person is a member of the Church.” Still another said: “I will never enter the chapel so long as that person is permitted to enter....”

To such who would take the law into their own hands, we read again the positive declaration of the Lord: “... there remaineth in him the greater sin.” (D&C 64:9.)

Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, 187 (Conf. report in *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1949, 712). Why does the Lord ask you to love your enemies and to return good for evil? That you might have the benefit of it. It does not injure him so much when you hate a person, especially if he is far removed and does not come in contact with you, but the hate and the bitterness canker you unforgiving heart.

“Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” And the Lord said: “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy time seven.” (Matt 18:21-22.) ... When they have repented and come on their knees to ask forgiveness, most of us can forgive, but the Lord has required that we shall even forgive if they do not repent nor ask forgiveness of us.

It must be very clear to us, then, that we must still forgive without retaliation or vengeance, for the Lord will do for us such as is necessary. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” (Rom 12:19.) Bitterness injures the one who carries it, it hardens and shrivels and cankers....

Another impressive example of unholy judging comes to us in the Lord’s parable of the unmerciful servant who owed to his lord ten thousand talents, but being unable 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 fell down and begged for a moratorium. When the compassionate lord had forgiven his debt, this conscienceless person straightway found one of his fellow-servants who owed him an hundred pence. Taking him by the throat he demanded payment in full, and upon failure of the debtor, cast him into prison. When the lord heard of this rank injustice, he chastised the unmerciful servant....

According to my Bible, the Roman penny is an eighth of an ounce of silver, while the talent is 750 ounces. This would mean that the talent was equivalent to 6000 pence, and ten thousand talents would be to one hundred pence, as 600,000 is to one. The unmerciful servant then, was forgiven 600,000 units, but would not forgive a single one.

I met a woman once, demanding and critical. She accused her stake president of harshness and would have dispose him if she could. She had committed adultery, and yet with her comparative debt of sixty million pence, she had the temerity to criticize her leader with a hundred pence debt. I also knew a young man who complained at his bishop and took offense at the leader’s inefficiency and his grammatical errors, yet he himself had in his life sins comparable to the talents and had the effrontery to accuse his bishop of weaknesses comparable only to the pence.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 272. I mentioned bitterness and hatred, which so often accompany the unforgiving spirit. Bitterness poisons mostly the one who harbors it in his heart. It generates hatred, and “whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” (1 John 3:15.)

Generally, the hated one does not even know how bitter is the animosity leveled against him. He may sleep at night and enjoy a reasonable peace, but the one who hates estranges himself from good folk, shrivels his heart, dwarfs his soul, makes of himself an unhappy pygmy.

**Forgiveness—No Guarantee of Exaltation**

Boyd K. Packer, Conference Report, *Ensign* November 1995, 21. Forgiveness will come eventually to all repentant souls who have not committed the unpardonable sin (see Matt 12:31). **Forgiveness does not, however, necessarily ensure exaltation**, as is the case with David (see D&C 132:38-39; see also Psa 16:10; Acts 2:25-27; *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 339).

“Father, forgive them ...”

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 167; (see also 280). When the Lord, in his dying moments, turned to the Father and requested, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34) [see JST, Luke 23:35], he was referring to the soldiers who crucified him. They acted under the mandate of a sovereign nation. It was the Jews who were guilty of the Lord’s death. Again how could he forgive them, or how could his Father forgive them, when they were not repentant? These vicious people who cried, “.... His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt 27:25) had not repented. Those who “reviled him” on Calvary (Matt 27:39) had not repented. The Jewish leaders who tried Jesus illegally, demanded his crucifixion from Pilate, and incited the mob to their vilest actions had not repented.

Joseph Fielding Smith, “Fall-Atonement-Resurrection-Sacrament,” address to Seminary & Institute personnel at the LDS Institute of Religion adjacent to the U of U, 14 January 1961. Now I’d like to make one comment aside from this [2 Ne 9:26]. Brother [William E.] Barrett said, and very correctly, that the Lord on the cross said to those who crucified him, speaking to his Father, “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” (Lk 23:34.) Now the idea has gone forth all through this Church from one end of it to the other, and many of our writers have written it, that the Lord in all his great mercy forgave those who put him to death, that is, the Jews who were responsible for his death. When I read
the *Life of Christ* by Papini, a Catholic, something struck me when he said, and correctly, the Savior did not name the Jews. He was speaking of the Roman soldiers who were only doing their duty as they had been commanded to do. Then I read the same thing in the inspired translation of the Bible by the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Lord did not forgive the Jews, nor will he forgive them. Peter tells you that. He will not forgive the Jews until his second coming. (See Acts 3:11-21. See also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 188.)

**Exceptions to the Rule — No Forgiveness**

Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 214-215. My brethren and sisters, if we would build up ourselves, or ever become worthy to inherit the kingdom of God, we will do so on the principle of eternal truth. The truth is what will make us free; free from error, prejudice, selfishness ignorance, contention … free to have joy in our hearts for all things good and for the welfare of mankind; free to forgive those who err because of lack of judgment and understanding.

But the Spirit of truth, mark you, will not tolerate and will not forgive determined, premeditated and deliberate wrong in man or woman, in the world — truth will not tolerate it. *We cannot forgive that kind or class of crime and wickedness*. We cannot, or if we do, we transgress the laws of God, for he has no sympathy with Satan, nor with him who knoweth to do good and doeth evil; who knoweth to do right but is determined to do wrong. There is no forgiveness to such without humble and most contrite repentance of sin.

When one gets far enough along in the crime of wickedness and disobedience to the principles of the gospel, and in the abandonment of love for his fellowmen and for The Church of Jesus Christ, so that he will fight and lie about the Church and the truth, and seek by every power within his reach to injure and wrong them, there is no forgiveness for that man, and if he goes just far enough, there is no repentance for him either.

Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 154-155. … to make bad men good, if it is possible for them to repent of their sins, and to make good men better. That is the object and purpose of the Church, that is what it is accomplishing in the world. And it is very strict in regard to these matters. Drunkards, whoresomongers, liars, thieves, those who betray the confidence of their fellowmen, those who are unworthy of credence—such, when their character becomes known, are disfellowshipped from the Church, and are not permitted to have a standing in it, if we know it. It is true that there are none of us but have our imperfections and shortcomings. But when a man abandons the truth, virtue, his love for the gospel and for the people of God, and becomes an open, avowed enemy, it becomes the duty of the Church to sever him from the Church, and the Church would be recreant to its duty if it did not sever him from communion, cut him off, and let him go where he pleases. We would do wrong if we hung on to and tried to nurture such evil creatures in our midst, no matter what the relationship may be that exists between us and them. Therefore, I say again, the Church of Jesus Christ stands for virtue, honor, truth, purity of life, and good will to all mankind. It stands for God the Eternal Father, and for Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent into the world, and whom to know is life eternal. This is what the Church stands for, and it cannot tolerate abomination, crime and wickedness, on the part of those who may claim to have some connection with it. We must sever ourselves from them, and let them go. Not that we want to hurt them. We do not want to hurt anybody. We never have, and we do not intend to, hurt anybody. But we do not intend to be hurt by those who are seeking our destruction, if we can help it. It is our right to protect ourselves.

Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 8:174-175. We should have charity; we should do all we can to reclaim the lost sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, and bring them back to be saved in the presence of our Father and God. If we do this, our charity will extend to the utmost extent that it is designed for the charity of God to extend in the midst of this people.

But I have no love or charity for a wicked and corrupt scoundrel, who commits iniquity with his eyes wide open, though I pity and regret the condition of the human family in their ignorance. They would come to the light, but for one thing — their deeds are evil [D&C 10:21], and they do not mean to have them reproved. They would be rebuked, and they will not bear it; and so they pass on, and will, until they are punished.

Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 194. The defiler of the innocent is the one who should be branded with infamy and cast out from respectable society, and shunned as a pest, or, as a contagious disease, is shunned. The doors of respectable families should be closed against him, and he should be frowned upon by all high-minded and virtuous persons. Wealth, influence and position should not screen him from their righteous indignation. His sin is one of the blackest in the calendar of crime, and he should be cast down from the high pinnacle of respectability and consideration, to find his place among the worst of enemies.

Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 273. The merciful man shall find mercy. When a man designedly does wrong, he ought to be chastised for that wrong, receiving according to his works. If a man does wrong through ignorance, and manifests sincere sorrow for the wrong, he is the one whom we should forgive seventy times in a day, if necessary, and not the one who hasdesignedly done wrong and repents not.

Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 240. I have not the least desire to mingle with or look upon the faces of those who hate God and his cause.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 301. Why is it that those who do the least in the building of the kingdom seem to prosper most?