

Our Calling to Forgive Others

In my previous article from Psalm 69 there was a reference to Jesus during the time of the crucifixion. We were reminded that, as Jesus received the mocking and reproach of others, he *never sinned—not once!* Rather, he prayed, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) It may be easy for some to reason in this way: “Jesus forgave them because he’s the Son of God, but I would find it hard to forgive those who harm me or my family.” And yet, we’re called not only to forgive, but to pray for and even love those who’ve sinned against us. And we *can* do that by the power of the Holy Spirit. There are numerous examples in church history of the covenant people of God who’ve followed Christ’s teaching and example in their suffering.

During the time of the Protestant Reformation, a young woman named Anne Askew would often pass out tracts that spoke of salvation in Jesus Christ alone. She would talk with anyone who would listen about the glories of the true gospel and her thankfulness for Jesus. After a while Anne gained such a reputation for speaking out for the true gospel that she was arrested, tried, and convicted of being a heretic. She was beaten until many of her bones were out of joint. Her persecutors only stopped beating her when she fainted. And yet, Anne was unwilling to recant her beliefs. When she would not recant, she was sentenced to death by fire.

On the day that her sentence was carried out, she was tied and surrounded by wood and other combustible materials to help with the fire. The materials were lit. Just before she succumbed to the flames she prayed these words aloud for all to hear: “Lord, I heartily desire of thee, that thou wilt of thy most merciful goodness forgive them, that violence which they do and hath done to me. Open also thou their blind hearts that they may hereafter do that right thing in thy sight....” Very shortly after uttering those words, Anne Askew burned to death. She was 25 years old. The question must be asked of all of us. Will we hold firmly to the gospel of grace when others are persecuting us for seeking to follow Jesus Christ? In a culture where Christianity is more and more being ignored and marginalized, will we stand when others begin to mock us? God knows the sorrows of his people, he loves us in Christ, and he calls us to forgive, love, and pray for our enemies. And yet, this *seems* to be the opposite of what we see in David’s prayer in the next section of verses from Psalm 69. Is David’s prayer opposed to the teaching and life of Jesus? This takes us to the truth that:

—God Will Judge the Impenitent

In verses 22-28 we see an example of what’s known as an imprecatory prayer. We’ve already called attention to the fact that Jesus Christ prays for his Father to forgive his enemies. In these next few verses David *seems to be* calling down curses on *his enemies* rather than being willing to forgive them. David’s words are interesting. Notice that David specifies that the most basic joys and human comforts in this life be taken away from his enemies. In verse 22 David wants

the joy of their table fellowship to be a snare to them—the peace that they’re experiencing to become a trap, which is just to say that they’ll be deceived and the peace they think they have will become judgment to them.

In verse 23 David prays that something as important as their eyesight will be taken away and their “loins tremble continually.” The Hebrew word translated “loins” can speak of the area around the hips which—if continually trembling—would picture a weakened and frail body. It could also refer to a woman who would no longer be able to bear children. This would also be a curse to them. This *may* be what David is referring to in verse 25 with the phrase, “May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents.” However, there’s another aspect of this that I’ll call your attention to. This verse is quoted in the New Testament in Acts 1:20 referring to Judas Iscariot. This lends support to the belief that David’s prayer is not a cry for personal vindication but rather, a recognition that God will judge the impenitent. Our calling is to follow the example of Jesus and *forgive* others. David’s prayer is, almost certainly, directed at what he knows God *will do* in the lives of those who never *truly* repent. These are the people who the Scriptures say will, one day, be judged by God and punished forever (Revelation 20:11-15).

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