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Robert Glen Johnston

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir\_johnstonr@csl.edu

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THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION  
ACCORDING TO THE PARABLE OF  
THE MERCILESS SERVANT (MATT. 18)

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of New Testament Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

Robert Glen Johnston

June 1957

Approved by:

Harold K. Schaumann  
Advisor

Henry W. Peimann  
Reader

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

#### Introduction: Objectives of the Study

It is an accepted maxim that theologia parabolica non est argumentativa. It is, thus, not accepted procedure to derive a doctrine from a parable. Yet the proposition of this thesis is to show how the doctrine of justification is related to this parable by demonstrating how God's act of justifying men is described herein.

In the parable of the Merciless Servant, a parable of the kingdom of heaven, we have set before us a vivid portrayal of God's act of declaring us innocent, pictured particularly in the servant's master loosing him and forgiving him the tremendous debt of ten thousand talents. Here the pronouncement of forgiveness is made living and real to us by way of application of the parable to ourselves.

Yet there are those who feel that the parable does not present salvation as sola gratia, but rather, because the forgiveness once spoken had been rescinded, as something in which man must necessarily co-operate for his salvation. Thus the purpose of this theses is to show how the doctrine of justification is realistically described in the parable at hand and to demonstrate that even here Scripture teaches no other way of salvation than sola gratia.

Thus the problem investigated has been: Does the parable of the Merciless Servant teach salvation to be entirely or in part the work or co-operation of man? In the course of the thesis the reader will note that the conclusion which has been reached is that the parable does not teach salvation as something effected by human co-operation, but rather that it is in toto an act of divine grace. In the expected (but not forthcoming) mercy of the merciless servant we find not a means by which the king's forgiveness was to be earned or merited. That had been given freely and unconditionally. This mercy rather should have been the result, and was the expected result, of the king's complete forgiveness. Faith alone saves; but "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). This expected mercy, then, is not to be considered as a means of salvation, but solely as the expected response to God's grace.

This thesis has undertaken to illustrate this by presenting on the following pages a detailed study of the parable in the light of the doctrine of justification. The remainder of chapter one and the material of chapter two will give the reader a definition of the terms used, namely, the definition of a parable along with a discussion of the occasion of the parable of the Merciless Servant, a definition of the Biblical term "justification," a definition of "the kingdom of heaven," and a concluding section on the

relationship existing between the kingdom of heaven and the Biblical concept of justification. Chapter three presents a discussion of the first reckoning of the master with his servant, the servant's tremendous debt of ten thousand talents, and how this portion of the parable is to be applied in connection with the doctrine of justification and the concept of the kingdom of heaven. Chapter four continues and develops the first reckoning of the lord with his servant, dealing particularly with the pronouncement of the lord's judgment, the plea of the servant for mercy, the compassion of the lord and his exoneration, and, again, the relationship this has with justification and the kingdom of heaven. How the doctrine of justification and the kingdom of heaven apply to the merciless servant's conduct toward his fellow-servant is the subject of chapter five. Chapter six deals with the subject of the second reckoning in the parable, in which the forgiveness is rescinded and punishment pronounced. Here we have striven to answer the question: Can sins once forgiven be laid again on the sinner? and have endeavored to show how and why this is done on the basis of the doctrine of justification and the proper concept of the kingdom of heaven. Chapter seven gives a summary conclusion of the thesis.

The major sources from which the data for this thesis were taken include Dr. C. F. Keil's "Commentar ueber das Evangelium des Matthaues," John Bright's "The Kingdom of God,"

"The Gospel According to St. Matthew," vol. II, in the Pulpit Commentary, and "Echt evangelische Auslegung der Sonn- und Festtags=Evangelien des Kirchenjahrs."

### The Definition of a Parable

The parable is a particularly frequent type of figurative language employed in the Scriptures. It is used in Holy Writ exclusively to present only spiritual truths, never going beyond what is probable. The parable must always adhere to the realm of reality. Thus we have arrived at the definition of a parable as a statement of a spiritual truth, a law or principle of the kingdom of God, by means of a description or narration of facts in the world of nature or in human experience, which are presented in such a way as to illumine facts in the spiritual world.

For a proper understanding of the Biblical usage of the term it is necessary to note the use of the Hebrew word *לְפָנָיִם* and the Greek words *παραβολή* and *παραομιλία*. The Hebrew word *לְפָנָיִם* is frequently translated "parable" in the septuagint and in the Authorized Version. We find the word translated thus in such passages as Numbers 23:7, 23:18, 24:18, "And he took up his parable"; Job 27:1, 29:1, "Moreover Job continued his parable"; Psalm 78:2, "I will open my mouth in a parable"; Proverbs 26:7, "The legs of the same are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools"; Ezekiel 17:2, "Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the

house of Israel"; Ezekiel 20:49, "Then said I, Ah Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak in parables"; Micah 2:4, "In that day shall one take up a parable against you"; Habakkuk 2:6, "Shall not all these take up a parable against him." In each of the above the Hebrew word is לְפֶה, which term has included in it the idea of the New Testament παραβολή, as used in the Synoptics, and παροιμία, as used in the Fourth Gospel.

However, the word לְפֶה has four basic meanings: (1) a parable or similitude (Micah 2:4; Habakkuk 2:6); (2) a sentiment, a sententious saying, or a maxim (Ezekiel 18:2; 1 Samuel 10:12; Proverbs 26:7; Job 27:1; Job 29:1); (3) a proverb (Proverbs 1:17; 6:6; 17:12; 19:13, et cetera); (4) a by-word or subject of a taunting proverb (Isaiah 14:4; Numbers 21:27; 23:7; 23:13; 24:13).<sup>1</sup> To these a fifth may be added, namely, dark sayings or riddles (1 Kings 10:1; Psalm 78:2; Proverbs 30:4; 30:15; Ezekiel 17:2; 20:49).

Both παραβολή and παροιμία are occasionally translated "parable." Significantly R. C. Trench points out that this interchange of words arose "partly . . . from one word in Hebrew," לְפֶה, "signifying both parable and proverb; which circumstance must have had considerable influence upon writ-

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<sup>1</sup>B. Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 522.

ers accustomed to think in that language."<sup>2</sup> The word  $\lambda\psi\eta$ , Trench points out further, is rendered in the Septuagint with  $\pi\alpha\rho\omicron\mu\iota\alpha$  in the title of the Proverbs of Solomon and with  $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\beta\omicron\lambda\eta$  in passages like 1 Samuel 10:12 and Ezekiel 18:2.<sup>3</sup> Thus we note that the words are not intended to be used interchangeably. The word  $\pi\alpha\rho\omicron\mu\iota\alpha$  basically refers to proverbs, maxims, or adages, while  $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\beta\omicron\lambda\eta$  has reference more particularly to the parable as such.

In a discussion of the parable it should be noted that the parable needs only to correspond as a whole with the central truth it is intended to convey. Its details merely form the frame and need not themselves convey new truth. The main thing in a parable is its point of comparison. After this has been found, the application of the parable itself will show the degree in which the details make that point clearer.

Properly speaking, a parable has three parts. These are (1) the occasion and the scope of the parable, (2) the picture, presented in the form of a story, and (3) the religious or spiritual application. Of these three oftentimes only number two is expressed. Rarely is number three given. What is not specifically stated is usually suggested by the context, but not in every case. Though they are to

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<sup>2</sup>Richard C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: Tibbals Book Company, n.d.), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

be definitely related and associated with the parable, points one and three, listed above, are not usually considered a part of the parable proper. In the text and context of the parable of the Merciless Servant part one is found in verses twenty-one and twenty-two; part two, the parable proper, in verses twenty-three through thirty-four; and part three, in verse thirty-five.

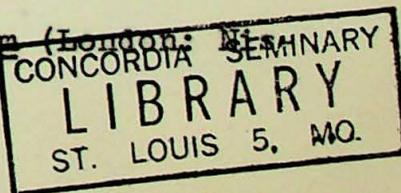
A discussion of the method of interpreting parables is also imperative in order to make our discussion on the subject of parables complete. For centuries the parables of Christ had been treated allegorically in the traditional teachings of the Church. They were viewed as a composite of cryptograms and, in the light of such a view, were understandably regarded as something which had to be deciphered, bit by bit. Pertinently C. H. Dodd remarks:

The probability is that the parables could have been taken for allegorical mystifications only in a non-Jewish environment. Among Jewish teachers the parable was a common and well-understood method of illustration, and the parables of Jesus are similar in form to rabbinic parables. The question, therefore, why He taught in parables, would not be likely to arise . . . . In the Hellenistic world, on the other hand, the use of myths, allegorically interpreted, as vehicles of esoteric doctrine, was widespread, and something of the kind would be looked for from Christian teachers. It was this, as much as anything, which set interpretation going on wrong lines.<sup>4</sup>

The most important point to remember in interpreting the parable is that the typical parable presents but one

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<sup>4</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Messers. Faber and Co. Ltd., 1950), p. 15.



single point of comparison. We do not, however, want to say that certain other minor truths may not be gleaned. But a word of caution is in place that these secondary details be kept strictly subordinate. They dare mar neither the realism of the story being presented nor its unity.

Basically, the parables of Jesus are parables of the kingdom of God. This is a fixed principle on which the interpretation of the parables of the kingdom of God must be predicated. In this light the ministry of Jesus is to be represented as "realized eschatology," that is, "as the impact upon the world of the 'powers of the world to come' in a series of events, unprecedented and unrepeatable, now in actual process."<sup>5</sup> This bears mention here, though the subjects of "realized eschatology" and "future eschatology" will be presented at greater length in connection with the discussion in chapter two of the kingdom of God.

It becomes necessary for the interpreter, furthermore, to find, if possible, the actual conditions of the Lord's ministry under which the parable was spoken. This may be referred to as the "setting in life," the Sitz im Leben of any given passage in the Gospels. The school of Gospel criticism known as Formgeschichte, or "Form-criticism," has rightly pointed out that the teachings of Jesus, as they have come down to us, have been colored and thus affected by the

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

change in condition as they pertained in the period between the Lord's ascension into heaven and the completion of the Gospel accounts.

In applying the above material to the parable at hand Joachim Jeremias states:

The parable of the Wicked Servant . . . illustrates the preceding exhortation to unlimited forgiveness (xviii, 21f.), which can hardly have been its original purpose, since in the parable itself nothing is said about repeated forgiveness.<sup>6</sup>

Though I do not agree with the above position, it is presented to show that the actual Sitz im Leben is doubtful. However, this does not dull the edge nor remove the stark reality of the lesson which the parable is intended to convey. By viewing the parable as panoramic in form and understanding the anticipated mercy that should have followed the mercy of the master as the natural consequence of God's grace in the life of the Christian, we can easily see how the theme of repeated forgiveness can be found in it. Thus we will point to verses twenty-one and twenty-two as the occasion for the parable, if not for Christ Himself, at least for the early Church.

The point of comparison in the parable is not that the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king. Joachim Jeremias points out that behind the Greek expression *ἡμοῦν*, as

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<sup>6</sup>Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 75.

used here, there lies the Aramaic abbreviation l<sup>e</sup>.<sup>7</sup> This necessitates, he says, the translation "It is the case with . . . as with. . . ." <sup>8</sup> Thus the kingdom of heaven is not like an earthly king, but rather the kingdom of heaven is like the settling of accounts, referring to both of the reckonings as well as to what is intermediate. We then arrive at this point of comparison, basic to the entire parable, that like the merciless servant we too shall suffer the loss of God's forgiveness pronounced upon us, if we do not respond to His grace by being willing to forgive others.

Thus the central truth of the parable is the necessity of possessing a forgiving and merciful spirit towards our fellow-men. This is affirmed by the words of Christ in the verse following the parable proper, verse thirty-five.

In attempting to recover the original significance of the parables, one thing above all becomes evident: it is that all the parables of Jesus compel his hearers to come to a decision about his person and mission. For they are all full of "the secret of the Kingdom of God" (Mk. iv, 11) that is to say, the recognition of "an eschatology that is in process of realization." The hour of fulfilment is come, that is the urgent note that sounds through them all. . . . God's acceptable year has come. For he has been manifested whose veiled kingliness shines through every word and through every parable --the Savior.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 78

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 159

## CHAPTER II

### INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

#### The Definition of "the Kingdom of Heaven"<sup>1</sup>

The Greek word βασιλεία, like מלכות, its equivalent in Aramaic, is rendered in both the Authorized Version and Revised Version as "kingdom." Fundamentally, however, the word βασιλεία means "reign;" it expresses sovereignty, kingship, kingly rule. Thus the expression "kingdom of God" or its alternate, "kingdom of heaven," denotes the sovereign lordship of God. The concept of the kingdom of God "involves the whole notion of the rule of God over his people, and particularly the vindication of that rule and people in glory at the end of history."<sup>2</sup> This was that kingdom, referred to so often by the Old Testament prophets, for which the believing Jews of the Old Testament yearned and waited.

The concept of the kingdom of God has arisen and developed from the words of God to Moses on the heights of Mount Sinai. The words pertinent to our discussion here are recorded in Exodus 19:3-6:

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<sup>1</sup>Much of the material in this subdivision is based on John Bright, The Kingdom of God (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), passim.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Verse six of the above quotation is especially pertinent:

"ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation. Here God offered to take Israel as the people over whom in His grace He would rule. God's offer, presented to the people by Moses as He had directed, was immediately accepted by Israel when the people responded: "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). Here, then, Jehovah, the covenant God, was establishing for Himself a "peculiar people," a people over whom He would rule in a very particular way, namely through His grace.

During the course of history, however, the scope of this kingdom which God had called into being from Sinai progressed and developed. Gradually the concept of the kingdom of God was separated from Israel as a state and in its scope went beyond Israel. Israel's history bears mute testimony to the fact that she had violated the Lord's covenant repeatedly by holding the laws of God in contempt. But a remnant did remain faithful to the terms of the covenant by holding the promises of God dear.

In Christ's coming we see that remnant being called out from Israel as a nation and in this remnant lay the seed of the New Testament kingdom of God. This calling forth of a remnant became the longing hope of believing Israel--its yearning for the founding of the Messianic kingdom, the kingdom of God. Thus John Bright rightly says:

The two Testaments are organically linked to each other. The relationship between them is neither one of upward development nor of contrast; it is one of beginning and completion, of hope and fulfillment. And the bond that binds them together is the dynamic concept of the rule of God.<sup>3</sup>

This is, as mentioned, a rule by grace, in which we are the benefactors. Through Christ this kingdom exists, for it is always closely connected with the covenant of grace. God's dealings, His sovereignty by grace, were not carried out because of an obligation resting upon God outside of Himself. God's righteousness necessitated the payment for sin; His grace and love laid the burden of guilt on the Messiah. Therefore God's dealings with men in the Old Testament, namely His calling of Israel as His kingdom and under His regal sovereignty where they were to serve Him in humble obedience, presupposed the fulfillment of God's promise of Him who would one day crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3: 15). The victory of the kingdom of God is thus one which is

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 196f.

accomplished through the vicarious atonement of Christ, the Promised One of God. Thus in Christ the concept of the kingdom of God as the Scriptures know it reaches its climax. Therefore John the Baptist was able to proclaim in his sacred office of the way-preparer for Christ: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). So it was also that Christ proclaimed at His coming "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23).

It may seem almost unbelievable that this Jesus of Nazareth, meek and lowly and, in general, despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3), should bring with Him and His humble ministry the dawning of this new era. Yet, though tiny were its beginnings, it is just that! For what Christ began at His first coming will surely progress and reach its ultimate conclusion, its final victory. Thus we would note that the kingdom of God is a force already present in the world, a power at work here and now.

But this kingdom also evidences a severe tension, for, although it is indeed present and a victorious reality, it is nevertheless at the same time future and far from victorious. The struggle between that kingdom and Satan with his cohorts continues in a battle of fury which seems from day to day to increase rather than diminish. But there is no doubt as to the outcome of that battle. When the dying Christ proclaimed from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:

30), He was not only declaring that man had now been reconciled to God but that the victory of God's kingdom had been won. Thus the ultimate triumph of His kingdom has been achieved, namely the foes' unconditional surrender. John Bright speaks of the continuing "cosmic struggle" as being "now in the nature of a rear-guard action, a mopping up."<sup>4</sup> Included in this unconditional surrender of all of God's enemies is the restoring under God's rule of all of creation. In his stirring Pentecost sermon Peter declares of Christ's ascension and subsequent second coming: "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21). Also to be included is the acknowledgment of Christ by all powers in heaven and on earth. Of this Paul speaks when he says: "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Philippians 2:10). In a somewhat longer passage the Apostle writes:

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom of God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.<sup>5</sup>

Already the prophet Isaiah, as the spokesman of the Lord of hosts, foresaw this as a part of the ultimate victory of the kingdom. Jehovah, speaking through him, said: "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear" (Isaiah 45:23).

In the army of that kingdom, whose victory is not only assured but already won by Christ, marches the Church, chosen and called out by God to be a people over whom He in His grace reigns. They are to reveal before the world the righteousness of that kingdom. By her peculiarly Christian conduct she is to let her light so shine before men, that they may see her good works and glorify her Father, which is in heaven (Matthew 5:16), that is, her life is to be a constant testimony of this fact that God has set her apart, has sanctified her, to be His own people and thus, by her testimony, to bring others under God's gracious rule.

Thus the fact that the Biblical concept of the kingdom of God is essentially God's rule in contrast to ours needs stressing. God gives His kingdom; man has not built it. God Himself is active in its initiation and progress and completion. It is basically His activity of crushing the

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<sup>5</sup>1 Cor. 15:24-28.

power of Satan and his allies. Yet, man still has his role to play in that kingdom by responding to the offer which God makes man in regard to His kingdom. How men individually respond to that offer is shown by their attitude to Jesus Himself, for in the person and office of Christ God's reign in the sense of the kingdom of which we are speaking was ushered in actively. Thus when the individual accepts Jesus, he accepts the kingdom of God; when the individual rejects Christ, he rejects that kingdom and its blessings.

Basic to a discussion of what the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, means in the parable of the Merciless Servant, or, for that matter, in any of the parables of the kingdom, are the words of the Lord spoken through the prophet Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 31:31-33 we read the words:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

The parable of the Merciless Servant shows this covenant in the process of completion. Thus the meaning of the kingdom of heaven in this parable is that God, when He is at work establishing His rule, takes account of men. He teaches them to know by the proclamation of the Law that they are in dire

need of His grace. When man realizes himself to be morally bankrupt God delivers to him the message and assurance of reconciliation through Christ. This unmerited favor of God God expects to produce results in the life of the sinner. But when this result is not forthcoming, then God refuses to continue forgiving, in fact, He casts again upon the ungrateful sinner the entire burden of His guilt. That individual has lost not only the possession of divine grace, but also his status as a member of the kingdom of God; he is fallen from grace. This is the word of caution expressed by the Lord in response to the query of Peter whether forgiveness could be reckoned in mathematical terms.

#### The Definition of the Biblical Term "Justification"

God's manner of justifying sinners, as presented in the pages of His Word, is a method unheard of by men. Man's system of justification is by means of the Law. God's way is laid down briefly as that of justification. The Apostle Paul says: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith" (Romans 3:28). The apostle does not deny the objective reconciliation of man, accomplished by Christ in His work of redemption. Here he is dealing with the matter of subjective reconciliation, with the matter of the sinner accepting the historic fact of the atonement. In this sense we say, in the spirit of Paul, that the moment the sinner comes to faith in Christ or, to say the same thing in ano-

ther way, when the sinner believes the Gospel, he stands before God justified. For God in the Gospel is offering to men that forgiveness of sins which Christ earned for the totality of lost mankind on Calvary's cross. The acceptance of this offer of God's grace, the acceptance by faith, is that which accomplishes the individual's justification before God.

Sola gratia expresses, as Scripture clearly states, the fact that man's justification, then, is completely without the works of the Law. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28), says Paul. Again, he writes: "Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace" (Romans 4:16) and "not of works" (Ephesians 2:9). "Man is not justified by the works of the law" (Galatians 2:16).

The passage quoted above, Romans 3:28, presents a clear summary of the doctrine of justification. If the words of this passage are permitted to stand, namely that justification is accomplished by "faith without the deeds of the law" (πίστεως... χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου), and stand they must as God's inerrant Word, then we may draw the following conclusions from it: (1) Justification cannot be based on a gratia infusa, but solely on a favor Dei propter Christum. (2) Justification must thus be found outside of man, in the Gospel of Reconciliation, and not as something in man. (3) Justification is an actus forensis, a declaring righteous of him

who is unrighteous, rather than a making righteous of the unrighteous. (4) Justification knows of no gradation; it is either possessed wholly and completely or it is not possessed at all. (5) This kind of justification is possessed by the troubled sinner as something sure and certain.<sup>6</sup>

Article four of the Augsburg Confession presents the following simple, yet complete, definition of justification:

Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight.

Rom. 3 and 4.<sup>7</sup>

Lutheran theology presents this doctrine of justification as the central and chief teaching of Christianity. On this all of Christian doctrine and the Christian Church as a whole either stands or falls. Christ Himself has presented this doctrine as the very heart and core of His teachings. He expressly states that the purpose of His coming was "to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28) and that the purpose of His death was the shedding of His blood, "which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew

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<sup>6</sup>Franz Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, translated from the German by Dr. Theodore Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), II, 505.

<sup>7</sup>"Augsburg Confession," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), Article IV, p.45.

26:28). As the central truth of the Christian religion, all the doctrines of Scripture are placed into a definite relationship to the Biblical doctrine of justification. Dr. Franz Pieper in his Christian Dogmatics shows this interrelation of the teachings of Scripture to this doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

To summarize, man is not justified by his works. A man may, indeed, be governed and led by the Holy Spirit, that is, with the power of God, the Holy Ghost, dwelling in him and operating in him, continue in and maintain a right relationship with God, though even here there are many sinful deviations from the path God would have us tread, and therefore also a daily need for God's gracious forgiveness of our sins. But the establishment of that relationship, which coincides with the Biblical usage of the word "justification," is solely and alone an evidence of God's gracious good-will for Christ's sake. Justification is not primarily a making righteous, but a declaring righteous, accomplished by Christ's work on Calvary and accepted and made one's own by faith and trust in this grace of God for Christ's sake. Thus justification is not to be viewed as something in man, but as God's attitude or disposition toward sinful mankind.

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<sup>8</sup>Pieper, op. cit., pp. 513f.

The Relationship Existing Between the Kingdom of Heaven  
and the Biblical Concept of Justification

Sin is like a great wall, separating man from God (Isaiah 59:2). Being separated from God, man is naturally separated from the rule of God. The holiness of God reveals His hatred of sin; the justice of God demands punishment for sin. But "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Thus the wall of partition between God and man was destroyed and through Christ His holiness and justice were completely satisfied. With this universal reconciliation the portals of the kingdom of heaven were thrown open for all to enter. When the individual through the operation of the Spirit in the means of grace accepts that message of the Word of Reconciliation, he becomes a member of the kingdom of heaven. By faith he becomes a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17); he has a new heart and a new will; he lays his life and his all into the hands of God. Where that faith is divinely created, there God rules and dwells and reigns supreme.

It is true that even for the members of the kingdom of God there are still many sins and deviations from the divine will, so that they must daily confess their manifold sins and transgressions. But God's grace forgives these sins and the individual remains a member of the kingdom of heaven so

long as he does not, by leading a life of wilful sin against God, grieve the Holy Spirit and thus drive him out of the heart and life. Such an one thereby also loses any claim to a part in the kingdom of God.

Pointed and pertinent here are the words of Dr. Martin Luther, when he wrote in the Smalcald Articles:

What I have hitherto and constantly taught concerning this I know not how to change in the least, namely, that by faith, as St. Peter says, we acquire a new and clean heart, and God will and does account us entirely righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. And although sin in the flesh has not yet been altogether removed or become dead, yet He will not punish nor remember it.

And such faith, renewal, and forgiveness of sins is followed by good works. And what there is still sinful or imperfect also in them shall not be accounted as sin or defect, even [and that, too] for Christ's sake; but the entire man, both as to his person and his works, is to be called and to be righteous and holy from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us [unfolded] and spread over us in Christ. Therefore we cannot boast of many merits and works, if they are viewed apart from grace and mercy, but as it is written, 1 Cor. 1, 31: He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord, namely, that he has a gracious God. For thus all is well. We say, besides, that if good works do not follow, faith is false and not true.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>"The Smalcald Articles," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), Article XIII, p. 499.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RECKONING AND THE SERVANT'S TREMENDOUS DEBT INDICATE MAN'S GREAT NEED FOR GOD'S FORGIVENESS

#### The Picture Presented by the Parable

The picture intended in the parable of the Merciless Servant is that of a king in his dealings with one of his servants (verse twenty-three). The point of comparison in the parable is that the kingdom of heaven is like the settlement of accounts and, therefore, to be preferred is the translation "It is the case with the kingdom of heaven as with a man, a king, who desired to settle accounts with his servants," et cetera. Since Christ compares the kingdom of heaven to the manner in which this certain king reckoned with his servant, the parable properly speaks of God's dealings with men in general. This would be the reference of verse twenty-three to the servants of the king (δοῦλῶν αὐτοῦ). We find, however, that the picture is one of the king's dealings with "one" (εἷς) of his servants according to verse twenty-four. Thus each one, individually and separately, is to place himself into the position of this servant when the question arises on the lips or in the heart, "Shall I forgive my brother again?"

The king, as he is presented in the parable, is not to be viewed as a western monarch, whose powers and authority

are limited by the people over whom he rules, but rather as an Oriental despot, over against whom all, from the most influential to the most common, stand in a position of absolute subordination. Under these circumstances the reckoning of accounts, as mentioned in the opening verses of the parable, takes place.

### The Reckoning and Its Application

*συνᾶραι* (from *συναίρειν*) has the meaning "to take up (a matter) with (some one)." In the New Testament the expression *συναίρειν λόγον* has the more technical meaning of "to adjust accounts," "to compare (and thence, to settle) accounts," "to make a reckoning," "to reckon (in order to receive payment)"; "to audit."

This reckoning is not to be identified with the final reckoning of Judgment Day, as is indicated in passages like Matthew 25:19: "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them" and 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether they be good or bad." But rather that which is done here in time, in the course of man's period of grace, though it finally culminates in the judgment (verse thirty-four). This reckoning is brought to us in a variety of ways, but all of them may be summed up as

a preaching of the Law. It might be a terrified conscience, adversity, or sickness, when we are made aware of the fact that these things are in the world because of sin; it might be a coming face to face with a possibly fatal catastrophe, or even at those times when we are naturally inclined to retrospection as at the passing of another year.

Here, then, in this taking account we see the use of the Law as a mirror. And this fits in perfectly under our topic: "The Doctrine of Justification in the Parable of the Merciless Servant," for we witness here the use of the Law as an auxiliary to the Gospel, preparing the heart for the message of forgiveness.

Further, we see God as the king in the parable. To Him, already by right of creation, but then no less by virtue of redemption and sanctification, we have an obligation of obedience and glorification. We note, also, that we are not our own lords, but His servants, duty bound to serve Him. This fact is brought to our attention with striking emphasis when we are brought to account for our spiritual debts before God.

#### The Servant's Tremendous Debt

The debt is presented as one of ten thousand talents (*μυριάων τάλάντων*). There is a division of opinion as to just what the value of a talent is. This becomes understandable when we are made aware of the fact that many na-

tions of that day used the talent, strictly speaking, a weight, as a unit of money in larger transactions. Thus we find Hebrew talents, Attic talents, Syrian talents, et cetera. Then, too, there were the heavy talents and light talents, which were about one-half the weight of the heavy talent, and the silver talents and gold talents. But even in the discussion of, for example, a heavy Hebrew talent, there is considerable variation as to the estimate of its actual value. In our own day we see, too, the fluctuating value of the dollar and, therefore, must realize the difficulty in establishing a true comparison between the ten thousand talents of our text and an equal sum in American dollars at 1957 par. Figures range from ten million dollars to three hundred million dollars plus.<sup>1</sup> Suffice it to say that the point is not the actual sum, for the Greek word *μύρια* also has the meaning of "countless," but rather the fact that the debt was tremendously great, even considering the lowest estimates and at present day inflated monetary values.

A parable never goes beyond the realm of possibility; it must adhere to reality. Very briefly, then, we would consider the question of the plausibility of this figure, ten thousand talents.

We may account for the vastness of the debt by supposing the defaulter to have been one of the chief

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<sup>1</sup>Paul E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), New Testament, Vol. I, 102.

officers of the king, a farmer or administrator of the royal revenues, . . . one to whom some chief post of honour and dignity in the kingdom had been committed,--a satrap who should have remitted the revenues of his province to the royal treasury.<sup>2</sup>

Though the word used here is δούλος, which basically means "slave," nonetheless, the term δούλος is applied to the great officers of the state by, for example, Herodotus and Xenophon.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we are not confronted here with a discrepancy nor yet with a necessarily hyperbolic statement.

Again, to grasp properly the vastness of this sum we would compare the figure of ten thousand talents, used here, with other large sums referred to in the Scriptures. For example, we are told that twenty-nine talents of gold were used in the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 38:24); that the Queen of Sheba presented King Solomon with one hundred and twenty talents (1 Kings 10:10); that a tribute of thirty talents of gold was required of King Hezekiah by the king of Assyria (2 Kings 18:14); that David and the princes of Israel prepared eight thousand talents of gold for the future Temple (1 Chronicles 29:4-7). Thus is brought into focus the tremendously vast debt which this servant had amassed.

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<sup>2</sup>Richard C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: Tibbals Book Company, n.d.), p. 123.

<sup>3</sup>The Pulpit Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Vol. II, 214.

### Man's Great Need of Forgiveness

Man as he stands before God by nature is indeed in need of God's justification or declaration of forgiveness. The servant, as he is brought in before the king, came to realize the greatness of his debt. It is the terrors of conscience and anguish of heart which causes him in this moment of great fear, when his world seems to be tumbling down upon him and destroying him, to cry out the promise: *πάντα ἀποδώσω σοι*, "I will repay thee all!" That is, to be sure, a promise that would have been impossible for him to keep and no one would have realized that any more than this servant himself, over whose head this tremendous debt was hanging. He realized that one means only was open for his escape and, therefore, he begs: *μακροθύμησον ἐπ' ἐμοί*, "be longsuffering towards me"; "give me time!" Though it was, indeed, an impossible promise, after all if the king's heart was moved by his plea, the decreed punishment would at least be postponed!

The same relationship exists between man and God. When we are brought into reckoning before the King, we must come face to face with the same stark realization. To hope for cancellation of the debt,--that is too much even to hope for the Law holds out no such hope,--but if only, we say in such an hour, the King will be lenient and, at least, postpone the threatened and impending judgment!--that is all for which we

might hope. But even then man must realize his utter inability to keep a promise like that of the servant, "I will pay all back to Thee, O Lord!" In fact, the harder we try to keep such a promise the worse we become. We see, for instance, the Apostle Paul before his conversion, desirous of achieving his own righteousness before God, progressing to a passive zeal in watching the garments of those who stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58). From that point we note the progression to himself "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). Dr. Martin Luther also illustrates this point. In his quest for peace with God he entered the monastery and meticulously observed the rules of the Augustinian order. Thus we realize that even here man must remain utterly hopeless, for the Law is not a means of grace, but rather proclaims the curse of God (Galatians 3:10).

#### The Application of This Reckoning to the Kingdom of God

As a result of sin man, as he is born into the world, is separated from God and, as a result, is separated from the kingdom of heaven. But God, in going about the business of re-establishing His reign within the hearts of men, must break man's will, defiant to the divine will by nature. This God does through the preaching of the Law. Man's will is broken by the proper understanding of what the consequences are when he follows the dictates of his own perverted

will. This is especially true when the thought of an actual reckoning with the Almighty, the thought of judgment, is brought into the foreground. The proclamation of the Law is not the means by which men are brought into the kingdom of God. Yet it is the means by which the heart of man has his own will crushed and thus is prepared to hear the message of the Gospel and to receive in the stead of the sinful, perverted will, the will of God. The terrores conscientiae, aroused in man by the realization of his accountability before God, thus paves the way for man's entrance into the kingdom of God. For when the will of God replaces the rebellious will of man, then God rules in the heart of that individual; where the will of God reigns supreme in a man's heart and life, there God has reestablished His kingdom. Thus the Law, in its relation to the kingdom of God, is that means by which God leads man to realize his hopeless and lost condition. Thus, though it is not the means by which men are brought into that kingdom, for that is solely and alone the result of God's grace, yet it is God's way of preparing man for his reception of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE INITIAL ACTION OF THE LORD IN THE PARABLE SPEAKS OF GOD'S ACT OF JUSTIFYING MAN

#### The Judgment and Its Application

In the lord's dealings with his servant who had amassed this tremendous ten thousand talent debt we see that the lord does not immediately exonerate his servant. The first thought of verse twenty-five answers the question, "Is he able to repay this huge debt? Does he have the ready cash to return what he has embezzled from his master?" The response is negative (*μὴ ἔχοντες δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀποδοῦναι*). In turn the king asserts his right and issues orders to the effect that the servant is to be sold and payment to be made (*ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος πρᾶθῆναι καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἔχει, καὶ ἀποδοθῆναι*). From these words of the text we see that not only the servant himself, but all that belonged to him, even his wife and children, was to be sold in order to make restitution. The monies realized from the sale of the servant, his wife, children, and belongings would not be equal to the size of the debt, ten thousand talents, but were merely to be accepted on account of the debt. For the purpose of the parable, it emphasizes the right and privilege of the lord.

In such passages as Exodus 22:3: "He should make full

restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft" and Leviticus 25:39-41, 46:

And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his father shall he return. . . . And ye shall take them (heathen) as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondment for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel ye shall not rule one over another with rigour.

the directives for an insolvent debtor are implied, the second passage containing the inference that his family could also be sold. Clear examples of this process of law are presented in passages like 2 Kings 4:1: "The creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen." Compare also Psalm 44:12: "Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price," Isaiah 50:1: "Which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?" and others.

Yet at the time of Christ it seems that this custom had probably vanished among the children of Israel. Further, nothing is stated in the Mosaic law regarding the imprisonment of insolvent debtors and their families. Finally, the use of "tormentors" (*Basaristais*), verse thirty-four, seems definitely to indicate a foreign atmosphere, since the Old Testament law was far more merciful in dealing with such cases. These various points again, as in chapter two where

the absolute power and authority of the lord are pointed out, causes us to view these circumstances as they would pertain in one of the Oriental, despotic kingdoms and not among the Jews as a nation.

So the Lord deals with His debtors. Our relationship to God is that of *δοῦλος*; He is *κύριος*, a *βασιλεύς*, a *δεσπότης*. He does not immediately pronounce them free. Rather He sells them, that is, He casts them aside, as it were, as those who are alienated and estranged from Him. This is the stern pronouncement of the Law, "The soul that sinneth it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). His purpose is not to drown men in total despair--only despair of their own righteousness--, but to lead them to a deep terrores Conscientiae. He desires to bring the sinner to an understanding of the full size of His guilt. So it is His will through the Holy Spirit operative in the Word to lead the sinner to acknowledge his actual relationship to God by nature--that of a totally bankrupt individual, morally and spiritually.

Now there is no longer a need for the servant to hide his sin. The master has found out his guilt! Nothing remains to be done but to acknowledge his sin. So (*οὖν*) the servant falls on his knees (*πίπτων*) before his master, acknowledging thereby the truth of the condemning facts known by his lord.

So the sinner stands before his God with his sins laid bare. Denying them would be self-deception (Galatians 6:7)

and of no avail. The Almighty, who searches the hearts and reins of men, knows full well the record of the past. We see no word of defense spoken. The sinner realizes in the light of God's clear will that he is guilty of sin and transgression against the Lord of heaven and earth. No complaint is registered that the sentence is too harsh. The sinner knows that God is doing nothing beyond what His power and right permit. The only course open is to fall on our knees before God and acknowledge our sin. This acknowledgment of sin is a divine work, necessary for the sinner to realize his lost condition and to plead for God's mercy and grace.

#### The Plea for Mercy and the Promise

"Give me time!" (*μακροθύμησον ἔπ' ἐμοί*) is the servant's plea (verse twenty-six). Now, as mentioned already in chapter three, the servant has come to the realization that there is but one way to avert the imminent judgment, namely, through the pity and compassion of his lord. There is no rehearsal of the long years of service or of anything else (as the Pharisee in the temple, Luke 18:11-12) by means of which he might arouse the master's sympathy, except his plea, "Give me time!" Nothing--absolutely nothing--will be able to defer his master's sentence but the clemency of the master himself.

However, to this is added the promise (verse twenty-

six), "I will repay thee all" (πάντα ἀποδώσω σοι). The promise, as mentioned previously, is impossible to keep, to be sure, though he still foolishly wants to work it off. But the point is that we find here a man who is in desperate straits and especially one who is aware of his precarious predicament. It is the anguish of the moment that now causes him to make such a rash promise. The stay of the sentence--that is his sole object now. Thus we find him as one whose awareness of his situation permits him to hope against hope for nothing more than the postponement of his master's order. A quashing of the sentence?--that is too much even to hope for!

By way of application this portion of the parable speaks, in a sense, of man's conversion. The steps presented by the parable are three-fold: (1) a humbling of the sinner by the pronouncement of God's judgment for sin upon the sinner; (2) a confession by the sinner of his guilt under the Law of God, which necessarily incorporates an understanding of God's justice in His sentence; and (3) a seeking of God's pity and compassion by the sinner, though we would note that the servant in the parable doesn't really ask for his lord's gracious forgiveness, but for time to work off the debt.

#### The Lord's Compassion and Exoneration

The word σπλαγχιςθεΐς in verse 27, "having been moved

with compassion," indicates that the plea of the servant was not in vain; it is heard by the master and he, in turn, is moved to show mercy. This compassion is not dictated by the servant; he, rightly, deserves to fall under the lord's sentence. It is absolutely undeserved. But it is this compassion for his servant that causes the master to exonerate his unfaithful servant.

So the heavenly Father is moved with compassion toward the doomed sinner. Nothing in man prompts this love, for by nature we are sinners and the enemies of God (Romans 5: 8, 10). Undeserved, we find God's compassion for sinful man an evidence of God's true attitude toward mankind. For it is this compassion, this love, which caused God to send His only-begotten Son as the Savior and Redeemer of men (John 3: 16-17; compare also Romans 5:8-11).

Verse twenty-seven also speaks of a two-fold favor bestowed by the lord: ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἐκείνου ἀπέλυσε αὐτόν, καὶ τὸ δάνειον ἀφῆκε αὐτῷ. First of all, the lord favors his servant with a release from the sentence which he had just shortly imposed (ἀπέλυσε αὐτόν). The master has rescinded the previous command. Already the lord has done more than the servant had hopefully anticipated. The pronouncement is not merely postponed, but canceled. Secondly, he forgave him the debt (τὸ δάνειον ἀφῆκε αὐτῷ). Here again the undeserved goodness of the king is seen. The word δάνειον has the meaning of "loan." Though the servant

had been guilty of a serious and shameful crime, the lord compassionately regards that which apparently had been embezzled by his servant merely as a loan, something which had for a time been borrowed. Thus we note the euphemy in *δάρελον*, "what he borrowed." All further obligation as far as the debt of ten thousand talents is concerned was erased. This second gracious favor of the master is even greater than the first. The past has been completely and fully forgiven.

So the Lord deals with those who seek His compassion. The main points of the parable again have their spiritual application in the doctrine of justification and in the kingdom of God. Nothing in man dictates God's bestowal of grace. Quite the contrary, man is absolutely undeserving of our heavenly Father's mercy. Here too this forgiveness is complete. Not only is the sinner's eternal punishment for sin removed from those who plead for His mercy, but also the guilt of sin itself. God wipes the record clean. But this grace is, however, not an absolute grace. Rather it is to be understood, as Scripture teaches in such passages as Romans 3:24, as "grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," and brought to us by the Holy Ghost. Thus we find all three articles of the Creed joined together here in the justification of man: (1) the heavenly Father pronounces His forgiveness of sins upon the sinner; (2) the Son, by the shedding of His blood, has provided the ransom for man's re-

demption; and (3) the Holy Spirit proclaims the forgiveness of sins and makes it our very own possession through the Word and Sacraments.

With this vital experience of tasting that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8), having received the declaration of God's gracious forgiveness, being justified freely through the merits of Christ, man's heart becomes the temple of God. Here God establishes His kingdom and thus men are prepared for God's rule in their hearts by God Himself. When the above has occurred in the life of the individual he becomes a living stone in the structure of God's spiritual temple (1 Peter 2:5); he has been made by God's grace a member of the kingdom of heaven. Thus we see pictured the on-going activity of God in re-establishing His rule over and among men, as it had prevailed when God first created man in Eden.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ILL-TREATMENT OF THE FELLOW-SERVANT REVEALS AN UNBECOMING RESPONSE TO GOD'S GRACE

#### The Finding of the Fellow-servant

The servant went out (*ἔξελθὼν*) from the presence of the lord, completely freed from his debt. There are those who press the point of this *ἔξελθὼν*, applying it to a going out from God when we fail to remember how great our sins have been and how great was God's forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> However, this seems to press the word too far and is certainly unnecessary for the proper understanding of the parable. Therefore, it is better to regard the word as nothing more than an indication that the proceedings of verse twenty-seven had come to an end and the servant was once more permitted to return to his regular activities.

In the first portion of verse twenty-eight we are told that having left his master's presence the servant found (*εὗρεν*) a fellow-servant. Dr. P. E. Kretzmann is of the opinion that this finding was not accidental, but the result of a deliberate searching for the servant who owed him the comparatively small debt of one hundred pence. Thus is "the

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<sup>1</sup>Echt evangelische Auslegung der Sonn- und Festtags-  
Evangelien des Kirchenjahrs (St. Louis, Mo.: Druckerei der  
Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1876), Fuenf-  
ter Band, 97.

malice of the deed brought out"<sup>2</sup> and so the sin was aggravated. However, the Pulpit Commentary, with which we here concur, regards this finding as a chance meeting of the two servants and then makes the observation: "Here . . . was providentially offered an opportunity of showing that his lord's goodness was not thrown away, but had entered his heart and controlled his conduct toward others."<sup>3</sup>

#### The Fellow-servant's Debt

The debt owed, according to the second portion of verse twenty-eight, was one hundred pence, or denarii (ἑκατὸν δηνάρια). As with the talent the value of the denarius is debatable, partly because of the fact that its value fluctuated from time to time. The denarius was the equivalent of one day's wages. Estimates may be found as to the actual value of the denarius ranging from around fourteen cents to nineteen and one-quarter cents. Thus the debt of this fellow-servant probably amounted to somewhere between fourteen dollars and nineteen dollars and twenty-five cents.

The comparison between this debt and the debt which had been forgiven to the merciless servant is interesting and

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<sup>2</sup>Paul E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), New Testament, Vol. I, 102.

<sup>3</sup>The Pulpit Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Vol. II, 215.

enlightening. Various authorities, among them Trench,<sup>4</sup> presents the ratio as one to one million two hundred and fifty thousand. Others, among them the Funk and Wagnall's New Standard Bible Dictionary,<sup>5</sup> set the ratio at one hundred denarii to sixty million denarii, or one to six hundred thousand. The actual comparison, however, is not the point at issue, but merely the realization that by comparison the debt of this fellow-servant was a paltry sum and again heightens the sin of mercilessness on the part of this servant.

This comparison has its spiritual application in this, that it emphasizes the disproportion between our own sins against God and the comparatively small and insignificant sins of our neighbor against us. One who is truly merciful and forgiving toward his neighbor is one who fully realizes the actuality of this disproportion for himself and within his own life.

#### The Demand and the Violence

The third portion of verse twenty-eight presents the unmerciful servant's demand, "Pay me that thou owest!"

(ἀπόδος εἰ τι ὀφείλεις). The Pulpit Commentary, using the

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<sup>4</sup>Richard C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: Tibbals Book Company, n.d.), p. 126.

<sup>5</sup>Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Bible Dictionary, edited by M. W. Jacobus, E. C. Lane, and A. C. Zenos (Third Revised Edition; New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1950), p. 591.

reading ὅ τι ὀφείλεις, says:

Many manuscripts and later editors . . . soften the demand by reading εἰ τι ὀφείλεις, si quid debes, "if thou owest aught," as though the creditor were ashamed of mentioning the paltry sum due; or else it is simply a fashion of speaking, not to be pressed as if any doubt was intimated concerning the debt. It might almost be rendered, "Pay, since thou owest something."<sup>6</sup>

However, εἰ τι ὀφείλεις is attested as the ancient text by manuscripts A, B, C, D, and others. As is indicated in the above quotation from the Pulpit Commentary, the interpretation need not be considered a softening of the demand. In fact, that would be out of harmony with the context, which shows the true character of this servant. Dr. C. F. Keil makes a satisfying remark in this regard when he says: "Auf dem ἁπόδος der Nachdruck liegt: Bist du was schuldig (und das ist der Fall), so musst du bezahlen."<sup>7</sup>

That the servant has no doubt in his mind as to the actuality of the debt nor that he is ashamed of mentioning the small sum of one hundred pence is evident by the accompanying violence. Having laid hands on him, or, after he had seized him (κρατήσας), he took him by the throat (ἔπιλεξεν). The main verb here is in the imperfect tense, possibly expressing continued action, though the conclusion of the action is to be inferred from the context, verse thirty. With this interpretation of the imperfect the following point in

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<sup>6</sup>Pulpit Commentary, loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Carl F. Keil, Commentar Ueber das Evangelium des Matthaeus (Leipzig: Doerffling und Franke, 1877), p. 384.

verse twenty-nine must be regarded as only a temporary cessation of the servant's violence, if, to be sure, that much is to be found in the text. The use of the imperfect here is probably that of a conative imperfect, which would then bear the translation, "Having laid hold of him, he tried to choke him."

Thus the inhumane character of the man is presented. But the point stressed in the over-all picture of the parable is not the degree of inhumanity of this servant, but rather the fact of his merciless character, which is especially evident in verse twenty-nine.

#### The Plea for Mercy and the Promise

As we view in verse twenty-nine of the parable the plea for mercy and the promise of the fellow-servant, we find both striking similarities and striking contrasts with the situation as it pertains now and as it did earlier in the parable when the servant stood before his lord, the king, verses twenty-four to twenty-seven. Both had accumulated a debt. Both were called upon to pay their obligations. Both were unable at the time at least to satisfy the debt. Both fell down at the feet of their creditors. Both pleaded for an extension of time to meet the payment of their debt. Both presented to their creditors a promise to repay the entire debt. Both pleaded for an extension of time to meet the payment of their debt. In this connection the verbal

similarity particularly between verses twenty-six and twenty nine should be noted. Certainly this similarity should have reminded this servant of his own recent plea to his lord for compassion and his own impossible promise of repayment. But so there are also striking contrasts between the two situations. First of all, there is the contrast in the size of the debts--one hundred pence and ten thousand talents. There is, furthermore, the contrast revealed in the promises made; the former one (verse twenty-six), an impossible one; the latter (verse twenty-nine), one that certainly could have been kept if an extension of time had been granted. May we not also find a contrast in the way in which the debts were contracted? The merciless servant's debt was discovered as the king was straightening out the accounts of his officials. The parable would seem to indicate an act of embezzlement. On the other hand, the indebtedness of the fellow-servant seems to be one indicated as something known, for the servant "went out and found one of his fellow-servants which owed him an hundred pence" (verse twenty-eight). So it would seem that this debt was a legitimate debt, contracted, plausibly, as a loan. Especially do we see the contrast in the conduct of the two creditors. The one (verse twenty-seven) does not only grant the request of the debtor, but does far more than is expected or hoped for. He completely and freely releases the servant from his debt and permits him to leave, entirely cleared. But how different

was the conduct of the merciless servant with his fellow-servant:

### The Servant's Mercilessness and the Exacted Punishment

In verse thirty of our parable we are told that to the repeated pleas (παρεκάλει, imperfect), "Give me time" (μακροθύμησον ἐπ' ἐμοί), "and I will repay thee" (καὶ ἀποδώσω σοι), we have a repeated refusal (ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἤθελεν, "and he would not," also an imperfect). The mercy which had such a short time before been shown to him had left no imprint on his hard heart. The mercy of his lord had not moved him to mercy. He had not only been granted his request, but more-- he had been freed from the entire debt. Now he cannot find it in his heart to give his fellow-servant the extension of time he desires. On the contrary, it has become for him a matter of receiving payment of the debt on the spot or exercising his legal rights.

Since the fellow-servant did not have the funds available to pay the one hundred pence debt, the servant "went out and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt" (verse thirty). Whether we are to find in these words an indication that the creditor himself brought his fellow-servant to the prison or merely that he did not rest until the doors of the prison closed behind him is actually immaterial as far as the parable itself is concerned. At any rate, the action of the servant was indeed harsh and merciless.

### The Application

Though the action of the servant was inhumane, legally he was within his rights. To assume anything else would be to turn the point of the parable. We have here a parable of the kingdom of heaven and to regard the action of the servant as illegal would be to present one whom the law itself would have condemned. Thus Trench remarks:

The lessons which it teaches are different; lessons which they need to learn who are not under the law, but under grace; and this chiefly--that it is not always right, but often the most opposite to right, to press our rights, that in the kingdom of grace the summum jus may be the summa injuria. This man would fain be forgiven, while yet he did not forgive. But this may not be. A man must make his choice. It is free to him to dwell in the kingdom of grace; finding love, he must exercise love. If, on the contrary, he pushes his rights, as far as they will go, if the law of strictest severest justice is the law of his dealings with his fellow-men, he must look for the same as the law of God's dealings with him, and in the measure wherein he has meted, that it shall be measured to him again.<sup>8</sup>

As the servant had experienced the goodness of his lord (verse twenty-seven) in loosing him completely from the astounding ten thousand talent debt, so he should have been moved to emulate his master. This is the unquestionable verdict of the Scriptures when we consider the spiritual application of our parable. Especially noteworthy are passages like Ephesians 4:23-24: "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created

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<sup>8</sup>Trench, op. cit., p. 127.

in righteousness and true holiness," Colossians 3:13: "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye," Luke 6:36: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful," John 15:12: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you," and others (compare also passages like Leviticus 19:2 and Matthew 5:48).

This response is to be found within the kingdom of God. God by His grace establishes His rule within the heart of man through that justification which is extant in and through Christ. "The ethics of Jesus are the ethics of the kingdom"<sup>9</sup> and He taught "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). So the individual who has been made a member of the kingdom of God and over whom God rules in His grace and mercy willingly subjects himself, his will, his heart, his all to the omniscient, benevolent will of God. "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (I Thessalonians 4:3) and a basic principle of the sanctified life is practicing mercy and grace in the life of the individual member of that kingdom. That is the basic principle of the kingdom as God Himself has shown us in His work of creating His people. Thus the exercise of grace becomes a sine qua non of the sanctified life and of

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<sup>9</sup>John Bright, The Kingdom of God (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 223.

a member of the kingdom of God. John Bright observes:

The Church, then, is called to be a people over whom God rules, who exhibit the righteousness of his kingdom before the world. In other words people set apart to God.<sup>10</sup>

It will be noted that this particular portion of our parable does not speak of justification as such, but presents a subject very closely related, namely the fruits of justification. James tells us that faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 20, 26), that where there are no fruits of faith, there saving faith is lacking and whatever kind of faith we might have, if any, is not divinely wrought, but spurious, hypocritical, and self-deceptive.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 261f.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FORGIVENESS RESCINDED

#### BESPEAKS GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT

##### The Fellow-servants

Verse thirty-one opens with the words: ἰδόντες οὖν οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτοῦ. Who are these fellow-servants (σύνδουλοι)? These are individuals in the same station of life as the imprisoned servant, who in verse twenty-eight is referred to as ἓνα τῶν συνδούλων αὐτοῦ. These are both termed fellow-servants in reference to their subordinate position to the king. In applying this portion of the parable there are those who say that the angels are intended.<sup>1</sup> Such point to Revelation 19:10, where an angel calls himself a fellow-servant, a σύνδουλος. Again, in verse ten of Matthew eighteen we are told "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." On the basis of this they declare that there can be no doubt of the fact that the angels bring before God what they see on earth. However, we need not press the point of the parable to that extent. There is no indication that we are to understand the angels as the "fellow-servants" here.

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<sup>1</sup>Echt evangelische Auslegung der Sonn- und Festtags-Evangelien des Kirchenjahrs (St. Louis, Mo.: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1876), Fuenfter Band, 100.

Who, then, are they? The natural understanding of the text is that they are other men, troubled and "very sorry" when they see the inhumanity of man toward man and raise their complaint before God.

Verse thirty-one continues: τὰ γενόμενα ἐλυπήθησαν σφόδρα, they "were very grieved (or, distressed) with respect to the things which had happened." Here is presented the attitude of the fellow-servants. Here are mortal men who know that the seeds of evil still exist within their own hearts. As fellow-servants under the king and in a parable of the kingdom of heaven we do the text no injustice to find them to be individuals who themselves had experienced grace and mercy. But realizing also the obligations which the personal experience of grace imposes, they are filled with sorrow when they see these obligations forgotten by others. They fully realize, too, that the seeds of evil within their hearts, if unchecked, would blossom forth in similar sin. Therefore they are grieved at the servant's lack of mercy, but not, as verse thirty-four says of the lord, wroth.

The concluding words of verse thirty-one are: καὶ ἔλθόντες διεσάφησαν τῷ κυρίῳ ἑαυτῶν πάντα τὰ γενόμενα: "and, having come, they told the lord himself fully all that had happened." This should not be regarded as an act of malice or vengeance on the part of these fellow-servants, but as an act of justice as they take the part of their oppressed fellow-servant. Thus it is that they lay the matter

in its entirety before the king. "The just cannot hold their peace at the sight of oppression and wrong, and God confirms their judgment."<sup>2</sup>

Strictly speaking, we have here an anthropomorphism. God needs no informers as does an earthly king, who must first be informed of what goes on in his kingdom before he is able to act properly in any particular matter. God's eyes are over all the earth; He knows all things. His omniscience makes Him immediately aware of what is transpiring here on earth.

So the servant is brought into the presence of his lord for the second time, verse thirty-two.

#### The Rebuke of the Lord

The lord addresses his servant in this second appearance before him as *δοῦλε πονηρέ*, "O evil servant!" Here the lord speaks to his servant in a manner which was not even used in the face of the servant's ten thousand talent deficit. No such word of reproach as *πονηρός* had been spoken. It is his lack of mercy that prompts the use of the adjective "evil." In the eyes of the master his merciless servant has committed a crime as despicable as theft--or may we even go so far as to say worse! The servant's ingratitude

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<sup>2</sup>The Pulpit Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Vol. II, 216.

and cruelty had indeed brought forth the word *πονηρέ* from the lips of his lord.

Continuing the address of the lord to his servant in verse thirty-two, the lord presents to the servant the reason for his anger. The master reminds his servant: *πάντα τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἐκείνην ἀφήκασαι, ἐπεὶ παρεκάλεισάς με*, "all that debt I forgave you since you entreated me." Merely because of the request for an extension of time, the king had been moved, not only to grant that request of his servant, but to go beyond it and simply cancel the entire obligation, tremendously large though it was (verse twenty-seven).<sup>3</sup>

Verse thirty-three continues the words of the lord to his unforgiving servant: *οὐκ ἔδει καὶ σὲ ἐλεῆσαι τὸν συνδουλόν σου, ὡς καὶ ἐγὼ σὲ ἠλέησα*, "was it not necessary that you also be merciful to your fellow-servant, even as I was merciful to you?" Two things are to be noted from the original Greek: first of all, *ἔδει* is in the imperfect tense, signifying the continual necessity of showing mercy laid upon those who have experienced mercy; secondly, though the Authorized Version uses two different words, "compassion" and "pity," there is in the Greek no change in the word (*ἐλεῆσαι . . . ἠλέησαν*). The guilt of this man is not that he needed mercy himself and thus failed to show it to others, but rather in the fact that he had received mercy and

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<sup>3</sup>Supra, pp. 26ff.

still he himself remains unmerciful. Trench calls this "a most important difference!"<sup>4</sup> With these words of his lord spoken, nothing more need be said; his sin has been bared, the king's words to his servant are concluded, the servant himself remains silent with no excuse to offer. Realizing his guilt, the servant knows that further pleas for leniency would be useless.

#### The Pronouncement of Punishment

The actual pronouncement of punishment is preceded in verse thirty-four by an expression of the lord's attitude toward his servant's conduct: καὶ ὀργισθεὶς, "and being indignant (or, enraged)." Let us note that of man it is said that he becomes grieved, or distressed, in the face of such action; the lord becomes indignant. The Pulpit Commentary points out that "this . . . is the prerogative of God."<sup>5</sup>

The first step of the pronounced punishment is only implied. This would be a rescinding of the forgiveness bestowed previously (verse twenty-seven). At that time the lord was dealing with his servant as a creditor to a debtor. Now the circumstances have changed and the master deals with his servant as a judge to a criminal. That the rescinding of the forgiveness is definitely implied is evident from

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<sup>4</sup>Richard C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: Tibbals Book Company, n.d.), p. 129.

<sup>5</sup>The Pulpit Commentary, loc. cit.

what follows in verse thirty-four.

Verse thirty-four speaks of the tormentors, *τοῖς βασανισταῖς*. Some, for example, Harper's Analytical Greek Lexicon,<sup>6</sup> tone-down this word in the New Testament, referring it merely to the prison-keeper or jailer. No doubt the reasoning is that neither Jewish nor Roman law at that time recognized the office of a tormentor nor permitted such treatment of those in prison. Yet, when the whole situation is analyzed, we find that if such an interpretation of *τοῖς βασανισταῖς* is correct, then the punishment pronounced here is, in reality, less severe than that threatened when the servant was first brought in as a debtor. Then not only he himself, but all that he had, right down to his wife and children, was to be sold into slavery. Therefore, we concur with the interpretation of such, as P. E. Kretzmann,<sup>7</sup> the Pulpit Commentary,<sup>8</sup> Trench,<sup>9</sup> and Keil,<sup>10</sup> who interpret the word literally to signify those whose office it was to put prisoners through the torture. Again, may we note the fact,

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<sup>6</sup>The Analytical Greek Lexicon (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers; London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, Limited, n.d.), p. 67.

<sup>7</sup>Paul E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), New Testament, Vol. I, p. 102.

<sup>8</sup>The Pulpit Commentary, loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup>Trench, loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Carl F. Keil, Commentar Ueber das Evangelium des Matthaeus (Leipzig: Doerffling und Franke, 1877), pp. 384f.

as presented previously,<sup>11</sup> that the circumstances of the parable dictate the interpretation that we are here confronted with a situation taken not from among the Jews or the Romans but from the life and activities of an Eastern plenipotentiary monarch.

The actual punishment of the servant is pronounced in verse thirty-four in the words: ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν τοῖς βασανισταῖς, "his lord gave him over to the tormentors." The servant is delivered to the tormentors, of course, for them to exercise their office on the servant in the king's name and on his behalf.

Continuing in verse thirty-four the text tells us: ἕως οὗ ἀποδῶν πᾶν τὸ ὀφειλόμενον αὐτῷ, "until he should repay all that was due him." This section deals, in the first place, with the duration of the punishment. Strange as it may seem, this verse is used to support an eternal judgment of wickedness by some and a limited judgment on wickedness by others. To the second group the "until," ἕως, is interpreted to refer to an ultimate cessation of punishment, namely, when the debt has finally been paid. But, as we are to interpret Scripture in the light of Scripture, we find that our text actually holds to the former group and thus in reality teaches an eternal judgment on sin. It should be stressed, first of all, that "until," ἕως, does not neces-

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<sup>11</sup>Supra, pp. 24f. and 33f.

serily imply that the condition can be fulfilled or will be fulfilled. Secondly, when we view the circumstances of the parable we are led to no other view than that here we have a situation in which ἕως is used in an unattainable condition. The promise of the servant to repay the entire debt if only an extension of time would be granted (verse twenty-six), we noted, was an impossible one.<sup>12</sup> Now, imprisoned and in the hands of the tormentors, he would have no means and no opportunity whatever of gathering together such a large sum as ten thousand talents. Thus we find here the evidence of an eternal punishment upon the sins of unregenerate man.

From the above portion of the text we learn, secondly, that the former obligation of ten thousand talents is again laid on the unmerciful servant. Modern editors have omitted ἀὐτῷ, and thus regard the phrase to be more general than the debt of ten thousand talents. Their interpretation, then, is that the debt referred to here is a new one that has been incurred, one of ingratitude and inhumanity. Yet the ἀὐτῷ is well attested and thus the clear indication of the text is that it refers to the debt of ten thousand talents.

#### The Question That Arises

The above understanding of the text, however, does pose

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<sup>12</sup>Supra, p. 29.

a question. The question that arises is: Can sins once forgiven be laid again on the sinner? Here Trench has some especially fine remarks. He points to the fact that the forgiveness of sins is always associated with a living communion with Christ, that abiding in Christ and possessing the forgiveness of sins go hand in hand. If we have one, we have the other; if we lose one, we lose the other. But can sins once forgiven be laid again on the sinner? Trench responds with the statement that the sinner,

sinning anew, falls back into the darkness out of which he had been delivered, and, no doubt, all that he has done of evil in former times adds to the thickness of that darkness, causes the wrath of God to abide more terribly on that state in which he now is, and therefore upon him.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Scripture teaches, for example, in Matthew 11:16-24, degrees of eternal punishment, based upon the gravity of the sins committed, the severest punishment resting upon those to whom the Gospel had been preached in rich measure, but had been rejected, and particularly upon those who had fallen from grace. (Compare also such passages as Matthew 12:45; Luke 11:26; Matthew 23:14; Mark 2:40; 1 Timothy 5:8; 2 Peter 2:20).

Finally, Scripture speaks of unbelief as the basic cause of condemnation. Jesus taught, "he that believeth not the son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36), and, again, "he that believeth not shall

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<sup>13</sup>Trench, op. cit., p. 131.

be damned" (Mark 16:16). Against those who minimize sin and its consequences it must be maintained that all sins are worthy of damnation and against those who minimize the work of Christ it must be maintained that, in fact, unbelief alone damns. Where there is unbelief, however, all other sins once again take on their condemnatory character. For along side of passages like John 3:36 and Mark 16:16 (quoted above), there are those that name other sins as cause of damnation besides unbelief, for example, "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), "no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:5), "without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Revelation 22:15), and

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

Thus when God's grace is despised (and so it is when men fail to permit God's grace to operate in and through them), man rejects also his right to the experience of that

grace. The inevitable result is greater damnation.

### The Doctrine of Justification

It is true that this portion of the parable is more closely linked with the doctrine of sanctification and good works than with the doctrine of justification. Yet there is a nexus indivulsus, an inseverable connection, between the two. Good works are an effect, a consequence, of justification. Therefore a brief discussion of this effect of justification, dogmatically called justitia inhaerens, as it is applicable here, is not out of place.

It is incorrect to say that sanctification and good works are necessary to salvation. Scripture clearly teaches that man is saved by grace for Christ's sake through faith without the deeds of the Law.<sup>14</sup> Yet good works are an exercise of faith prompted by the Holy Spirit and are a mark of the believing child of God. With full support of the Scriptures, then, we can say that good works are necessary--necessary because God wills it! Paul writes, "this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3) and John declares, "this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (1 John 3:23).

On the other hand, Scripture also teaches that evil

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<sup>14</sup>Supra, pp. 18ff.

works destroy faith because thereby the Holy Spirit is grieved and finally withdraws from the heart. This had been the case with the unforgiving servant in the parable. His failure to flee sin, to avoid the evil and do the good, ultimately drove the Holy Spirit from his heart and with Him faith. The inevitable result was the loss of his personal justification before God.

### The Kingdom of God

As God goes about His work of establishing His rule, a people is created on the basis of forgiveness. To refuse to forgive is to refuse to accept the basis on which God has created this people. Therefore, those who would be partakers of the kingdom of heaven must consider their actions regarding mercy towards others, as also the other Christian virtues. The privilege of receiving God's grace lays upon us the obligation of bestowing that grace on others in our daily living. As we see God's grace evident in the establishment of His kingdom, so it should be seen in our lives as members of that kingdom.

Where that is not found in the life of the individual, there we find the King's anger kindled, for that man has not permitted God to establish His throne within his heart; there God has not been permitted to reign supreme. and being wroth, the King recalls the pardon, the unmerciful debtor is put to the torture, the everlasting torment which God

has in His justice reserved for those who would seek God's mercy for themselves and yet refuse mercy to another.

Thus the application of Christ in verse thirty-five is clear and pointed: "So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if ye, each one, forgive not his brother from your hearts." The Authorized Version appends the words "their trespasses" to this verse. The words are found in several original manuscripts. However, they are omitted in the great majority of manuscripts, in the Vulgate, and by most of the modern editors, including Nestle,<sup>15</sup> and are actually unnecessary to make the sense of Christ's statement complete and therefore we have followed the above (Nestle) in the translation presented. The Pulpit Commentary says of this appendage: "They have been, perhaps, added to obviate a certain abruptness in the conclusion of the parable."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Eberhard Nestle, editor. Novum Testamentum Graece. Novis curis elaboravit D. Erwin Nestle, adjuvante D. Kurt Aland (Editio vicesima secunda; New York: American Bible Society, 1956), p. 49.

<sup>16</sup>The Pulpit Commentary, op. cit., p. 217.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY CONCLUSION

#### The Kingdom of God in Its Relation to This Parable

We have in this thesis been concerned with a parable of the kingdom of heaven, or of God. Christ is, therefore, presenting, in response to the query of Peter (verse twenty-one), a principle that applies within that kingdom of God. That principle is that a lack of a forgiving spirit thwarts God's gracious determination to rule within the heart and, therefore, excludes such a one from the kingdom of God, for such an individual has not accepted the terms of the covenant. In St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans the Apostle says:

For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Romans 2:25-29).

Thus the kingdom of God is composed of those who are circumcised in ears and in heart, constantly attuned to receive God's will and to do it willingly and out of love, from the heart. The members of the kingdom are a people of clean heart, for the righteousness that God desires to find in

His children is not a state of merely being occupied with religion, but an obedience to God that is motivated inwardly and thus the individual continues in "all the words of this law to do them" (Deuteronomy 27:26).

This kingdom is here now. Jesus said: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matthew 12:28). John the Baptist, the herald of Christ, preached: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). With the coming of Christ the kingdom of God also came. The power and might of that kingdom has already been released and thus is indeed a real thing. Yet it is, at one and the same time, something that belongs into the future in its consummation. Though the functions and reality of that kingdom have already come and have been established, it is still in the process of completion. When this process of completion has come to an end, then will dawn the eternal day and the kingdom of God will stand complete, triumphant, and glorious.

#### Summary Conclusion of the Parable Proper

In the parable of the Merciless Servant we are to see the world's need of forgiveness. The call to reckoning, referred to in verses twenty-three through twenty-five of Matthew eighteen, is God's way of dealing with all men in general. This is God's way of bringing His kingdom to men. It is a necessary antecedent for the proclamation of the

Gospel-message of forgiveness. The Law, with its use here as a mirror to show us our need for divine grace, is thus functioning as an auxiliary of the Gospel. This reckoning is not the reckoning of the final judgment, but a reckoning which God makes with individuals, one by one, as it were, during the course of life. It is an act of God's mercy and grace, rather than wrath and judgment, for by this means He is desirous of bringing men into His kingdom and under His rule. For God desires the sinner to learn and to understand rightly his position as it is before God, namely condemnation under the Law. Thus the divine plan is to lead men away from self-deception and self-righteousness to a firm reliance and trust, or, simply stated, faith, in God's benevolence and mercy. This fact is again emphasized in the parable when the subject of the size of the debt is presented--a debt of ten thousand talents. The implication is that the debt is so enormous that it is in reality countless. Only when man realizes the enormity of his sins, the mountain of his guilt, does he sense a real need for God's grace and the forgiveness of his sins; only then does he desire to experience the kingdom of God as a haven of refuge.

Thus man's realization of his need for forgiveness must lead one step beyond, namely to an understanding and appreciation of the magnitude of God's grace. As the lord in the parable withdrew the pronouncement of punishment and also the obligation of the debt, so the heavenly King drowns our

sins, as it were, in the depths of the sea. In this manner the sinner becomes a recipient of God's grace, a grace that far exceeds man's fondest dreams, a grace that satisfies man's every spiritual need. As a recipient of God's grace, that individual has in one and the same act also become a member of the kingdom of heaven.

Where this grace of God has been bestowed on the sinner who has come to know his guilt and has sought divine compassion there must be response. Even among men there is the normal expectation that love shown should beget love in return. This is true especially among the children of God. This response is to show itself, first of all, in love to God and, from thence, because God Himself has declared it to be His will, in love to one's neighbor. It follows, then, that forgiveness received from God will show itself in forgiveness shown to others. The practice of that grace which we have experienced at the hands of God in our every-day living is incorporated in the covenant of the kingdom.

The warning of Christ, then, becomes of vital importance to every Christian. We should by way of personal experience and application heed the fact that "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother" (Matthew 18:35). This fact of the immensity of God's forgiving love toward us is the fact that must constantly be before the mind's eye of the Christian. How much easier it is to show a for-

giving spirit toward our brother or sister when we first remind ourselves of this fact! But beyond that, as the parable clearly indicates, we must realize that in proportion to our sins against God (compare the ten thousand talents) our neighbor's shortcomings over against us are truly trivial and comparatively insignificant (compare the one hundred pence).

This activity of the consecrated, sanctified life is to comprise the entire life of the individual, from the time of his spiritual rebirth until his death, following which the image of God will be fully restored in the bliss of eternal glory. It is to be his spiritual meat and his spiritual drink to do the will of God from the heart; it is to permeate his every activity, even down to the most menial task and the most seemingly secular and unspiritual activities of our every-day life. Love to God and one's fellowmen is vital to this activity of the sanctified life. Our parable under discussion refers but to a particular avenue in which this consecration shows itself, namely in showing a forgiving spirit toward our fellow-beings.

But what is the case with those who do not show this kind of life even though they have experienced God's compassion and forgiveness? The answer, too, is presented in this parable of the Merciless Servant. Truly, his ill-treatment of his fellow-servant reveals that unbecoming response to God's grace. The lesson to be derived is very

clear. The result of this unforgiving spirit was the rescinding of the divine forgiveness and subsequent judgment and condemnation. Evil works had destroyed faith, God's grace had been despised, and thus he had rejected his personal right to the experience of that grace. Such a one has not permitted God to rule within his heart with His grace. The inevitable result is the loss of his right to membership in the kingdom of God and finally will end in a greater damnation.

#### The Doctrine of Justification in the Light of the Parable

In the course of this thesis we have not endeavored to establish the principles of the Scriptural doctrine of justification on the basis of the parable of the Merciless Servant. Rather, the purpose has been to show how this parable illustrates the doctrine of justification by bringing to bear on the parable the clear teachings of Scripture in regard to this doctrine. A doctrine cannot be derived from the figurative portions of Scripture, but, once established from clear passages of God's Word, the parable, and for that matter other portions of Scripture in which figurative language is employed, may be used to describe how the particular doctrine is thereby illustrated. In this parable we have endeavored to demonstrate how God's act of justifying men is set forth along with the truth of how this act is to function in the life of the individual.

The parable does not speak of works as a means of salvation. Clear and forceful are the passages of Scripture which treat of salvation as being sola gratia. The opening four chapters of the Epistle to the Romans are classic in their presentation of this truth. The Apostle summarizes the teaching of these first chapters of his letter when he says: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Not only in regard to this parable, but throughout the Scriptures, the testimony is sure and definite, namely that good works do not achieve salvation.

Quite the contrary, the parable of the Merciless Servant by way of implication holds before our eyes the grace of God in Christ Jesus in all of its beauty and grandeur. God wants to rule in the hearts of men. Therefore, He confronts sin and the sinner; He shows His heart of compassion and in His grace forgives our iniquity and transgression and sin; He gives us new hearts and a new will in order that, in willing obedience, we follow Him as our great King and our highest good. That is His justification at work. Thus we witness the King canceling his servant's tremendous debt of ten thousand talents, not only in regard to its rightful punishment, but as well in respect to its guilt. But this saving grace of God is not an absolute grace. God does not merely wink at sin. Sin must be punished and is punished by

God. Therefore, the pronouncement of forgiveness is not an exercise of God's supreme power, but man "is justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24), for "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:4), and "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). He it is who has borne both the punishment and the guilt for the sins of man--for all men of every age.

Yet the parable does speak of works. This is shown in the parable especially in a negative way by the lack of mercy and its consequences upon him who so recently had experienced such great and unexpected and even un hoped for mercy at the hands of his lord--un hoped for because it was beyond that which he felt he could even desire from his master. Yes, the parable does speak of works as a consequence of God's act of justification. Here we are able to make the statement that good works are necessary. Dr. Franz Pieper says:

The statement, "Sanctification and good works are necessary," is correct and ought not be criticized. The very fact that it is the Holy Scripture's mode of speaking, elevates it above all criticism. . . . On the question, in what sense, then, one should speak of a necessity of sanctification and good works, Scripture answers, that sanctification and good works are necessary because God would have them, calls for them (Necessitate voluntatis et praecepti sive mandati divini). . . . This necessity, however, is not coercion, compulsion (necessitas coactionis), but to be conceived as a willingness or second nature of the Christians, since they according to their new man glad-

ly and with pleasure do the will of God.<sup>1</sup>

Thus there is an undeniable relationship existing between the doctrines of justification and sanctification.

Again we refer to remarks of Dr. Pieper:

What Scripture, and the church continuing in the Scriptures, teaches of the relationship of justification or faith to sanctification or good works, can be summarized into these two chief points: 1. There is an inseverable connection (nexus indivulsus) between justification and sanctification. Where justification is present, there is in every case also sanctification. 2. But in this nexus indivulsus the cart must not be put before the horse, that is, sanctification and good works must not be put before justification, but be left in their proper place as consequence and effect of justification.<sup>2</sup>

So also the Formula of Concord, in stressing that the order between faith and good works must be maintained, cautions:

This should not be understood as though justification and renewal were sundered from one another in such a manner that a genuine faith sometimes could exist and continue for a time together with a wicked intention, but hereby only the order [of causes and effects, of antecedents and consequents] is indicated, how one precedes or succeeds the other. For what Luther has correctly said remains true nevertheless: Faith and good works well agree and fit together [are inseparably connected]; but it is faith alone, without works, which lays hold of the blessing; and yet it is never and at no time alone.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Franz Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, translated by Prof. Walter Albrecht (Springfield, Illinois: Concordia Mimeo-graphing Company, Concordia Seminary, n.d.), Vol. III, 18f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>"Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), Article III, pp. 929ff.

Thus the parable of the Merciless Servant presents to us in panoramic form under the picture of the servant the eternally disastrous story of all who grieve the Holy Spirit by their lives and thus drive Him and faith out. It is properly called panoramic in form because it begins with the incidents leading up to the spiritual rebirth by faith and, for those such as the Merciless Servant, ends with the pronouncement of God's anger and wrath and ultimately with the Last Judgment and its condemnation. The solemn warning presented by Christ is forceful and one which no one is able to lay aside indifferently without bringing upon himself God's displeasure and, if unchecked, eternal damnation.

Christ taught His disciples to pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). "As we forgive our debtors" cannot be regarded as the reason which should move God to forgive our sins. It is His unfathomable mercy and loving-kindness that alone serves as the basis for His forgiveness. Rather this fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer teaches us that the grace of God, experienced personally in the forgiveness of sins, is to serve also as the motive for us to show mercy toward our fellow men. Thus it is an admonition to all who pray, "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," that they constantly practice this forgiveness toward others. Only when this mercy is practiced in the life of the indi-

vidual is he able to come again and again to ask God to forgive his own, greater sins with a good conscience and with the sure hope of being heard.

We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come." We are therewith requesting God in His grace to establish and maintain His rule within our hearts and lives, but also to extend that rule over those who as yet have not accepted Him as King of kings. This second petition also has its application here in the parable of the Merciless Servant. May the Lord grant to each of His followers the gift of His Holy Spirit, so that for us His kingdom may not be lost, but, on the contrary, that more and more the evil inclinations of the Old Adam might be overcome and God reign unrivalled and supreme!

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