Be Compassionate When Poverty Is Unavoidable

Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, but he who regards reproof will be honored. Proverbs 13:18, NKJV.

In the parable [Matthew 18:32] the Lord summoned the unmerciful debtor, and "said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him." "So likewise," said Jesus, "shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Those who refuse to forgive are thereby casting away their own hope of pardon.

But the teaching of this parable should not be misapplied. God's forgiveness toward us lessens in no wise our duty to obey Him. So the spirit of forgiveness toward our fellow beings does not lessen the claim of just obligation. In the prayer which Christ taught His disciples He said, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

By this He did not mean that in order to be forgiven our sins we must not require our just dues from our debtors. If they cannot pay, even though this may be the result of unwise management, they are not to be cast into prison, oppressed, or even treated harshly; but the parable does not teach us to encourage indolence. The Word of God declares that "anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10, NRSV).

The Lord does not require the hardworking man or woman to support others in idleness. With many there is a waste of time, a lack of effort, which brings to poverty and want. If these faults are not corrected by those who indulge them, all that might be done in their behalf would be like putting treasure into a bag with holes. Yet there is an unavoidable poverty, and we are to manifest tenderness and compassion toward those who are unfortunate. We should treat others just as we ourselves, in like circumstances, would wish to be treated.--Christ's Object Lessons, 247, 248.