



Actions, Consequences, and Forgiveness

Monday Manna – by Luis Cervino

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As business and professional people, executives and entrepreneurs, every day we deal with employees. We hire them, give them job descriptions and responsibilities, and compensate them for their time and talents. But how many of them do we truly know?

We have resumes to tell us about educational and employment backgrounds. We can consult their personal references. And once they are hired, we can observe their behavior – how they handle their assignments, how they interact with coworkers and customers, and how diligently they pursue their work.

However, even then we cannot be certain that we truly know them. They might seem loyal people, but only in a crisis, under stress, or faced with strong temptations does their true character come out. What do we do when the employee who seemed so reliable betrays our trust by lying, spreading false rumors, taking advantage of others, stealing or even committing fraud? Sadly, those forms of wrongdoing do occur.

Granted, there are company or corporate rules to which everyone must abide. And in the case of illegal, unethical or immoral activity, pertinent laws must be enforced. But there is an even greater question of how we should respond internally, as well as relationally with the individual suspected of committing an offense.

Maybe our initial reaction is shock, disappointment – and then anger. We feel betrayed, victimized by the person's deceptions. If we are followers of Jesus Christ, we should ask the proverbial question: "What would Jesus do?" Because as we read the story of His earthly ministry in the gospels, we know Jesus often responded to situations in ways contrary to standard expectations. When we feel ourselves being filled with anger, we need to consider the biblical admonition: "Do not sin by letting anger control you" (Ephesians 4:26). Or as another translation states, "In your anger do not sin."

When someone has clearly broken rules or laws, steps for discipline or punishment are necessary. But it is also important to ask whether redemption is possible – whether we should take the initiative to extend forgiveness. We see Jesus teaching about this in Matthew 18:21-22, when His follower Peter asked, "Lord, how many times do I have to forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus responded, "I don't tell you that up to seven times, but up to seventy-seven times."

We might respond, "Well, that applies to personal relationships. But we are talking about business. There are rules, standards, and laws that must be upheld and enforced. If I forgive the offending person, nothing will have happened, and he or she may continue to harm people or businesses!"

That is true. Wrong actions have consequences, whether they are professional, social, physical or even spiritual. In most cases, the punishment must fit the crime. We cannot and should not shield wrongdoers from the consequences of their actions. However, as Christians who have received forgiveness from others and most importantly, from our Father in heaven, we are called to forgive others. Earlier in the passage cited above, Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over" (Matthew 18:15).

The one who has stolen or destroyed must make restitution and face appropriate penalties, but from a spiritual perspective, their wrongs can still be forgiven. We can harbor a grudge, or we can forgive. I choose to forgive; it is healthier. It frees us from stress and bitterness, and we might win our brother over.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had to fire someone for stealing from your business, or for committing some other form of wrongdoing? If so, what was that experience like for you?
2. What about having some of your personal property stolen or damaged? How did you react initially? If you knew who carried out the wrongdoing, how did you respond to that person?
3. Turning things around, has there ever been a time when you needed to ask for forgiveness? What was the circumstance, and what kind of response did you receive? What kinds of feelings did you experience at that time?
4. Much has been said in this Monday Manna about forgiveness. How can we reconcile that step, which is largely a spiritual act, from the consequences and necessary penalties of someone's wrongdoing? Does forgiving mean we also must attempt to forget the wrong that was done? Why or why not?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Exodus 22:1-15; Matthew 6:9-15, 18:15-35; Ephesians 4:31-32; Colossians 3:12-14