

A Story

A father tells his child “Do not play ball in the front yard. You might break mommy’s new statue of Mary.” You already know what comes next. The child plays ball and the statue is broken. The child is sent to their room and all entertainment taken away for a week. The child is also told they will pay for the statue out of their allowance.

Forgiveness

One might be tempted to say the father did not forgive the child because the child was punished. But forgiveness and punishment are two separate consequences of bad behavior. When bad behavior hurts us so much that we just cannot forgive, the result is usually separation and we cast the other person out of our life. The child was not cast out. The father did not pack up the child’s clothes and tell them to move out. The child was forgiven.

Temporal Punishment

The father had no choice but to invoke some form of punishment on the child. Without punishment, the child would not learn that disobedience has consequences. Without punishment, the child may continue to disobey. Without punishment, the child could end up breaking a life-threatening rule, like not playing ball in the street. The father does not want to lose the child to more serious offenses. So, temporal punishment is necessary. It provides life lessons and hopefully leads to changes in behavior that, in the long run, will benefit the child. Temporal punishment is not (and should never be) vengeance upon a child.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction is undoing the damage. It is restoring things to what they were before the incident happened. Whereas the loss of entertainment privileges was punishment, paying for the statue was restoring things to the way they were before the incident. Saying “I’m sorry” is nice, but a sincere apology requires suitable restoration.

Saving up temporal punishments

Consider...what if, each time the child disobeyed, the father invoked a punishment but then gave the child an option to take the punishment immediately or save them all up until their 16th birthday. Living in the moment, the child may opt to delay all punishments. The child heads down a wrong path and disobeys more and more. Then, on their 16th birthday, they regret that decision. Instead of a birthday party with friends they are sent to their room for 3 months without any entertainment and they are handed a bill for all the things they broke over their short lifetime. The child always hoped the father would just forget about it or drop the punishments, because the father loves the child. But a deal is a deal. Thankfully, the torture will end and the child will gain happiness again.

Explaining the parable

Sin is disobedience to our Father and putting our temporal pleasure above His rules...rules He lovingly makes only for our own benefit and safety. Our Lord Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. By God’s grace, we respond in faith to Jesus, the Father forgives us and does not cast us away from Him eternally. God does not take vengeance upon us when we sin, but we must do penance and satisfaction. If we accept the salvation of Jesus, but refuse penance and satisfaction until we die, we will “pay every penny” in Purgatory. But even through the torture of Purgatory, we know we will be restored to God and return to Him with joy in His Heavenly Kingdom.

Meditation:

- Some say Jesus “paid the price” (not Scriptural). Does this mean penance and satisfaction is not needed?
- Is turning from sin important to me? How often do I examine my conscience and try to do better?
- If the torture of Jesus was our punishment, then every time we sin do we cause another lash on His body?
- Would receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation more frequently help me learn and reduce sin in my life?
- Is being separated from Jesus even 1 minute in Purgatory worth all the pleasures of life?