

Injustice Is a Great Sin (ELDER PAISIOS OF MOUNT ATHOS)

Date : 7 Ιουνίου, 2008

Injustice Draws the Wrath of God

It is important for a man to have God's blessing. It is great wealth! What God blesses will stand firm; it will not crumble. Whatever is not blessed, will crumble. Injustice is a great sin. All sins have some "extenuating circumstances", but injustice has none. Injustice draws the wrath of God. It is a tremendous thing! Those who commit injustice set their heads on fire. You see them do all kinds of injustices, and then their loved ones die and they seem not to care at all. How can people who are so unjust prosper? They do the things they do, they give the devil rights over them, and for this reason they suffer so much, they get sick and so on and then they come to you and say, "Pray that I get well!"

Most bad and harmful things happen when we wrong other people. For example, when a fortune is made unjustly, the owners may live a few years like royalty, but, in the end, they will spend all their money on doctors. Remember the saying: "What is gathered by the wind is also scattered by the wind." Or remember what the Psalm says, "*Better is a little that the righteous hath than the abundance of many wicked*" (1). What they collect is spent, blown away. Rarely will an illness, a bankruptcy and so on be sent as a trial from God. In such cases, one's reward will be great, and he will later become richer, as happened with Job. Some people are buried and their bodies do not decompose; it's usually because they have done some kind of injustice.

The Unjust Person Is Tormented

An unjust person and in general all those who commit injustice and do not ask for forgiveness, end up haunted by their conscience and the indignation of those they have treated unjustly. For if the wronged do not forgive and complain, then the unjust are tormented and suffer very much. They cannot sleep. They feel like they are at the mercy of crashing waves that twist them around from every side. It's a mystery how the perpetrator is informed of this! When we love somebody and think about him in a good way, he knows it. So too, in this case, the victim's pain tears the unjust into pieces! It does not matter where he may be, in Australia or in Johannesburg; as long as the person he has treated unfairly is indignant with him, he cannot find peace.

- And what happens if he is insensitive?

- Do you think that insensitive people do not suffer? The best they can do is resort to some sort of entertainment to be distracted. Then again, those wronged may have forgiven the offender but still harbour some resentment. In this case, the victim suffers to a degree, but the wrongdoer suffers to an even greater extent from his victim's indignation. But if the perpetrator seeks forgiveness and his victim refuses to forgive him, then it's the victim that suffers. There is no greater fire than the inner burning of the soul by the conscience. Unless one repents in this life for the injustices he has committed and makes reparation, his soul will be tortured and eaten away by woodworm and in the eternal life by the "sleepless worm". Even if he has no other way of showing repentance, the least he can do is have the right intent.

I remember how this one lawyer, who committed many injustices, suffered at the end of his life. He practised his profession in a province with many stockbreeders. Naturally, their herds would damage the fields, and many shepherds would hire him because he could convince the Justice of the Peace or the agronomist with his cunning arguments. The poor farmers could rarely find justice for damage done to their crops, and they even found themselves in trouble. Everyone knew this lawyer and no honest man went near him. I should tell you about the advice that a Spiritual Father gave a sensitive shepherd.

This shepherd had a small herd and a sheep dog. The dog had given birth to puppies and he gave them all away except one that he kept for the mother. It happened that this ewe had gone missing leaving behind its little lamb that was still suckling. With its mother missing, the little lamb would run after the dog to find nourishment, something that relieved it as well. Thus, the two animals had got used to each other and one would find the other. As hard as the poor shepherd tried to separate them they would not part. Because the shepherd was a sensitive man, he thought of asking his Spiritual Father if the lamb's meat would be edible or not. Knowing how poor the shepherd was, the Father thought for a while and then said to him, "My son, this lamb is not edible because it fed on the dog's milk, but you know what you should do? Since all the other shepherds bring gifts of lambs and cheese to this certain lawyer, you should bring him this lamb to eat. He is the only one who has a blessing to eat it, since everyone knows what an unjust man he is."

When this unjust lawyer reached old age, he became bed-ridden and suffered from nightmares for years and could not sleep. He also suffered a stroke and could not even speak. The Father tried to make him at least write down his sins, but he had lost control of himself. The Spiritual Father was thus forced to read him the blessing of the Seven Youths (2) so that he could close his eyes and get some sleep. He would even read exorcisms to give him a little peace, until finally the man passed away and was laid to rest. May God grant him the true rest.

- Geronda, many people believe that they are under a magical spell. Is it really possible to put a spell on someone?

- If a person repents and goes to confession, such spells are not effective. For witchcraft to stick, a person must be guilty of some injustice, such as harming someone or fooling a girl. In this case, he must repent and ask for forgiveness, confess, settle spiritually and restore the wrong he has done. Otherwise, even if all the priests in the world would read an exorcism for him, the spell would still not go away. But even if no witchcraft is involved, the resentment borne by the soul he has treated unjustly is enough to torment him.

There are two forms of injustice: material and moral. Material is when we harm another person with regard to material things. Moral injustice is when the wrong is of a moral nature, such as when a man deceives a woman; and if she happens to be an orphan, the burden on his soul is five-fold. Do you know that bullets will go after wrongdoers in war? There you can clearly see the justice and protection of God. There's no room for dishonour in war. A bullet will find its way to an immoral person. Once, my company was on its way to replace a battalion. On the way, we got hit and returned fire. I remember that one man from my company had actually committed a dishonourable act the day before. He had raped a pregnant woman, poor woman. And guess what? He was the only one who got killed that day! Horrible, isn't it? Everybody was saying, "This beast deserved to die." In the end, the devious and cunning try to escape one way or another, but they are not spared. We know from experience that those who truly believe and, as a result, live an honest, Christian life, have their honest bodies protected from enemy fire; it's like they carry a relic of the Holy Cross and even more than that.

One's Descendants Are Also Tormented by Injustice

- Geronda, when I left to join the Monastery, my family was unjust to me. Should I ask for what legally belongs to me?

- No, that's not the proper thing to do.

- I fear that something bad may happen to them as a result of this injustice.

- Now, this is what I call pure *philotimo*. If I were you, I would tell them, "I want nothing for myself. But I would like you to give the share that is rightfully mine to the poor, with your own hands, starting with our poor relatives. I am asking for this because I don't want the wrath of God to fall on your children". You see, sometimes a father may give away his fortune for the good of his soul, to create a charitable institution for example, and leave nothing to his own child.

The grandparents in a family may have done something wrong and still live a good life, without consequences. But their children or grandchildren may suffer. They become sick and are forced to give the money their ancestors made unjustly, to doctors, to pay back the injustices of their grandparents.

A family I once knew was going through many difficulties. The head of the family got

very sick first, went through a lot, was bed-ridden for a few years, and then passed away. Then his wife died and later his children, one after the other. His fifth and last child passed away recently. Even though they were a very rich family, they lost everything and ended up poor, because they had to sell their property to pay the doctors and the various expenses. I used to wonder why all these horrible things, sickness and accidents, were happening to them. I happened to know some of the members of the family and it did not seem to me to be the good kind of trial, the kind that God sends to those He favours. Rather, it seemed to me that God's spiritual laws were put into effect. I wanted to be certain, so I tried to find out more about the family from reliable sources, namely, some old folks who lived in the same town.

I learned that the man had inherited a certain fortune from his father which he increased by doing all sorts of wrong things. So, if a widow, say, were to ask him for a loan to pay for her daughter's wedding, and promised to return the money once she had harvested the crops, he would ask for a piece of land she owned. And, as she was in great need, she would have to sell him the land at any price he offered. Another man would ask him for a loan to pay the bank and promise to repay him after having harvested the cotton. He would demand the poor fellow's land and would get it for nothing, as the farmer was afraid the bank would come after him. When someone else asked him for a small loan to pay the doctors, he would seek to take his cow from him, for pennies. This is how he made his fortune. The pain he caused to all these poor people was returned not only to him and his wife but also to his children. So, the spiritual laws came into effect and caused them to suffer the very same things that their actions had caused to others. In order to pay all their medical expenses, and so on, they sold their land for nothing and after becoming poor, they left this life for good one after the other. God, of course, with His love and sense of justice will judge them accordingly. The others who were harmed, all the poor folk who were forced to sell out their belongings to pay off the doctors, all these people will be rewarded for the injustices they endured. And, of course, the unjust will also pay their due.

The One Who Wrongs Us Is Our Benefactor

- Geronda, how should we consider someone who treats us in an unfair way?
- How should we consider him? We must treat him like a great benefactor who makes deposits on our behalf in God's Savings Bank. He is making us eternally wealthy. This is not a matter of minor importance. Are we not supposed to love our benefactors? Shouldn't we express our gratitude to them? In the same way, we must love and feel grateful to the person who has treated us unjustly, because he benefits us eternally. The unjust receive eternal injury, whereas those who accept injustice with joy will be justified eternally.

A pious family man had suffered many injustices in his work. But he was full of kindness and endured it all without complaining. He came to the *Kalyvi* once and told me all about it and then asked me, "What do you advise me to do?" "What you should

do," I said, "is to expect the divine justice and the divine return and to be patient. Nothing is lost. In this way, you are putting 'money' in God's 'Savings Bank'. You will surely receive dividends in the next life, for all the trials you are going through now. You should know that the Good Lord rewards the unfairly treated person even in this life. And if He does not always reward him, He will surely do so with his children. God knows. He has providence for His creature. Where there is patience, things fall into place. God provides. We need patience, not logic. Since God is watching, He is observing us, we must surrender unconditionally to Him. You see, the Righteous Joseph did not say a thing when his brothers sold him into slavery. He could have said, 'I am their brother'. But he said nothing, until God spoke and made him king (3). But when one has no patience, he suffers. From that point on he wants things to come his way, as it suits him, and as is comfortable for him. But, of course, he does not find comfort that way, and things don't come out the way he wants them to come."

When someone is wronged in this life either by men or by demons, God does not worry, because the soul benefits as a result. Many times, however, we say that we are wronged, while in reality we are the ones causing the harm. We must be careful to distinguish the two.

"Render Therefore to All Their Due" (4)

- Geronda, when we purchase something for the Monastery, some people don't want to issue us a receipt. What must we do?

- They should always issue you an invoice and you should limit your needs and demands. This is what I would do. God will provide for what you need. If we monks ask people not to issue invoices, we make others sin. They think to themselves, "Since the Monasteries are doing it..." When we, who are supposed to obey the commandments of God, operate in this fashion, what will people think? Won't they be scandalized? The Holy Scripture reads, Render therefore to all their due. Even when I send a letter with a person and not through the post office, I still put a stamp on it. Lay people may justify their actions, but if the Monasteries act like them, there will be little honesty left and the Gospel will be put aside. When we do not give from our possessions - and if any one would sue you and take thy coat, let him have thy cloak as well (5) - we are giving a negative sermon, a negative example, that allows the secular people to find an excuse for their faults. They are looking for a way to comfort their conscience. We must be careful because we will have no justification for our actions on the Day of Judgment. Our goal should be primary to defend the spiritual principles and not only the material things. When, for some reason, they do not give you an invoice, you must consider this a spiritual loss.

- Geronda, it happens sometimes that someone gives a small amount as a donation to the Monastery and wants a receipt for a bigger amount in order to present it as a

tax-deductible expense. What must we do in this case?

- You must tell them, "We don't issue receipts for a bigger amount. If you don't agree, we will return your money and you may find someone else who may accommodate you." Be careful not to catch this disease.

- Geronda, a workman asked us to fire him so that he would collect unemployment benefits while still working for us.

- Oh no, that is not right. Even a person with only a bit of conscience left in him would not do such a thing. It does not become a Monastery to get involved in such matters. It is better that you pay the workman a double wage, even if you are in financial difficulty, in order to discourage him from such behaviour. It's that serious. Blessed deeds bring more blessings, while injustice brings disaster. You should be very careful with these matters. Avoid bargaining with the workmen either. This is why we have fires and other catastrophes in Monasteries.

An employee takes an oath to perform his job in an honest way. For us monastics, this oath is twice as demanding. The promise we make is spiritual, and if we break it, the sin for us is twice as bad. Be careful to strike a balance, and create a different, a higher standard. I detect a wound swelling. It will break and clear up. God will not give His Grace in a wrong situation, because the only one being helped in that case would be the devil. Be careful to put sincerity and honesty first. Otherwise, you will end up like a drunken man who cannot walk straight. Can anyone in that condition stand on his own two feet? God's wrath will come and we'll be put to the test. In the first phase, gold will be separated from brass. In the second phase, it will become clear how many carats of gold each one of us is worth.

The world is full of lies. People now grow into liars. They have made up a new kind of conscience. I will not become a liar and turn into something I am not, because society demands it. I'd rather tell the truth and suffer. One must be careful not to enter in the orbit of secularism. Of course, our financial system today is of little help. People are forced to declare a smaller income.

Once, I scolded some income tax officials who happened to be believers. "What are you doing?" I asked them. "You must make sure to keep some of the yeast intact. I know of too many things that go wrong! Someone comes to the Revenue Service and says, 'I have an income of one million drachmas.' The official declares that the man has an income of three million drachmas. He assumes that he is revealing only a part of his income, as is common practice, and that this hike will make up the difference. If, however, he is dealing with a conscientious person, tripling his income in this manner will backfire; it will make the man cheat on his taxes the next year. In other words, instead of helping change the situation for the better, you are making things worse." "But we don't know when they are telling us the truth," the income tax person said. "When you start leading a spiritual life, you will know," I replied. "Then you will be able to understand and discern the difference. God will inform you, and you will know."

How the World Has Cheapened

People's malice has exceeded all bounds. They try to deceive one another and they consider it to be an achievement! Our world has become so cheap! Everything they make these days is a fake. And imagine that today people make more money than their parents and grandparents who were poor and only made a little. The quality of most things is so cheap. One day someone brought me some tomato plants. Each plant was inside a very small bag containing coarse soil, and some coarse sand to keep the moisture. They didn't even bother to pour some water or manure; they had sprinkled some on the top like salt and pepper! When I took them out of the bag, I realized that their roots were rotten. I had to put a layer of soil on top, so that the plants could grow new roots.

They are so clever in tricking people! Listen to this. Someone had brought me a big box with pastries. "I will open it," I said to myself, "when I have a large company.

If I open it now, it will attract ants." So, one day, I had a large gathering and I figured that the box should be enough and I should even have some left-over. As soon as I opened it, I saw that it was full of wrappings ... and the actual container with the sweets was so tiny. The rest of the box was empty. Another time, they brought me a fancy box with pastries, all wrapped in ribbons. "I will keep it," I thought, "for the students of the Athonias Academy" (6). Well, inside there were Turkish delights, stale and hard as a rock! I would never treat people with this kind of sweet!

- Geronda, don't they see that this is a type of injustice?

- No! They consider it to be an achievement. Sin has become fashionable nowadays and cheating someone is considered to be a sign of cleverness. Unfortunately, the secular spirit sharpens the mind in deception and people consider it a clever achievement to wrong their fellow human beings. There's even an expression, "He's as smart as a devil; he gets things done." Inside, of course, the man suffers from the checks of his conscience, his little hell.

The Just Person Has God on His Side

Not all people fit well in the world today, especially those who want to lead spiritual and honest lives; they seem to have such a hard time.

- Geronda, why don't they fit?

- When someone is sensitive and finds himself in a harsh environment and people make his life hell, how can he put up with it? Either he has to begin cursing, or he must leave. But that's difficult because one needs to make a living. His boss tells him, "I trust you because you don't steal, but put some rotten produce among the fresh. Take these fresh clover bales and stick some fermented ones in the package." He even makes him manager in order to keep him on the job and the poor man has to do as told to stay employed. And of course, he cannot sleep at night and starts taking sleeping pills. Do you know how hard life is for honest people? They run into all kinds

of difficulties and have to take all kinds of abuse from their employers. Life becomes hell for them. And they cannot quit because they have a family to feed. If they stay on, it's trouble everyday. They are between a rock and a hard place. Wherever they turn their eyes, they see a dead end. It makes one go crazy. So, they carry on and try to manage as best they can.

In another case, one employee did all the work while another colleague would only show up to collect his pay check. I know of someone who was department head somewhere. When the new government came to power, they removed him from the post and replaced him with a party member who had not even graduated from High School. They made him department head but he knew nothing about the work and so they could not really send the previous manager away to some other position. What did they do? They just added a second desk in the office. The old boss did the work and the new one was just sitting there smoking, chatting and drinking coffee ... and being completely shameless. And in addition to this, he would say whatever came to his mind while all responsibility fell on the other employee who was doing all the work, until he finally couldn't put up with the situation anymore and left the job, the poor soul. "Maybe I should go somewhere else, there's not enough space for two desks," he said one day and got up and left, because the new head was making his life hell. We are not talking about one or two days. It is unbearable to have someone like that over your head every day.

The just person is usually given the worst position, or may even lose his position to others. They abuse him and step all over him. Don't we have the saying, "They walk over corpses; they stop at nothing?" But the more people push the just and righteous person down, the more the Good God lifts him up, like a cork. It's not easy though and it takes a lot of patience. Patience clears up so many things. The person who wants to live a virtuous life and be honest in his work, be it a labourer, a merchant, or whatever else, must accept the fact that, once he begins work, he may have to reach the point of not being able to even pay the rent, for example, if he has a store, for the blessing of God to come to him. But he should not have this as his goal: "If I should reach that point, then I will surely have plenty of customers." One must not think that way or aim at that, because then, God will not bless him. But when he decides to live as God wills and resolves not to cheat or overprice things, God will not abandon him. Another person may gain much profit by overpricing. At first, he makes a lot of money and becomes rich, but then people find out that he is dishonest, and his business goes stony broke. On the other hand, the honest merchant gains customers and hires more employees. So he is tested in the beginning, but wins in the end. The good person is tried and tested by evil and cunning people; he has to pass through the card (7).

When someone follows the devil's path, and comes up with tricks and all kinds of deceptive schemes, God will not bless his work. Schemes of deception don't work; they appear to flourish, but they collapse in the end. It's important that we start with God's blessing in everything we do. A just man has God on his side. And if he has some boldness before God, then miracles happen. When someone lives according to

the Gospel, he is entitled to divine help. He walks with Jesus Christ. What can we say? The man has earned His blessing. This is the foundation of it all. Once that is given, there is nothing to fear. The important thing is that Christ, Panaghia and the Saints should find rest in everything we do, and when that happens, we will have their blessing and the Holy Spirit will overshadow us. Honesty is the most precious Holy Cross. If someone is dishonest even if he has a piece of the Honourable Cross on him, it's like he has nothing. But if one is honest, he has God's help even though he doesn't have a piece of the Honourable Cross. Now, if he has both, well, then he's got everything!

The Just Person Is Rewarded in This Life

I have seen injured souls who have endured injustice with good thoughts, and have been showered with God's Grace in this life. Many years ago a pious, simple and good-natured Christian man came to see me. He asked me to pray so that Christ may enlighten his children when they grow up, to endure without grudges a great injustice done against them by their relatives. He told me the affair. As far as I could see, he was really a man of God.

He was the oldest of five children. After the untimely death of his father, he stood by his younger siblings like a good father. He worked hard, increased the family fortune, bought more property, land and so on, and helped his two sisters get married. His younger brothers got married too and they took all the good fields, the olive groves and so on, leaving him with a few useless, barren and sandy fields. In the end he got married too, and had three children. By that time, he was older, and was worried about his children, that they may be bitter over the injustice when they would grow up. He used to say to me, "I am not concerned about it for myself, because I read the Psalter. I do one reading in the afternoon and two before dawn. I almost know it by heart. You don't read anywhere in the Psalms that the unjust prosper. God looks after the just. You see, Father, I am not sad for the land I lost, but for my brothers who are losing their souls." He went away at that time, and visited me again some ten years later.

He was very happy: "Remember me, Father?" he asked, "remember me?" "Of course," I replied and asked how he is doing. "I am wealthy now," he said. "And how did you get rich, my good brother?" I asked him. "Well, all that useless, sandy land of mine appreciated greatly because of its location on the beach. This time, I have come to ask your advice about how I should spend my money." "You should make sure your children have a home to stay and put aside enough money for their education." "I have enough for that," he said, "and more." "Well, then give some to your poor relatives and to other poor people that you know." "I have done so, Father," he said, "but it's still a lot." "Then, you should give some to repair the Church in your village and the Chapels in the countryside." "I have done that too," he said, "and I still have plenty." "Then," I told him, "I pray that Christ guides you to do good to those who

really need it." I asked him about his brothers. He started weeping. "I don't know, Father, I have lost track of them. They sold their land in the village, the olive groves and the fields, and I have no idea where they are now. They had gone to Germany first, then to Australia and that's the last I've heard of them." I was sorry I had asked about his brothers. I hadn't realized how sad he would get. I tried to console him and he left at peace. I told him that we should both pray to get good news from them. Later I remembered the Psalm, / have seen a wicked man overbearing, and towering like a cedar of Lebanon. Again I passed by, and, lo, he was no more; though I sought him, he could not be found (8). That's exactly what happened to this man's brothers. There's nothing worse than the injustice. Make sure you have God's blessing in whatever you do.

1. *Ps 37:16*

2. *Seven Youths of Ephesos (252 A.D.). Their Feast Day is commemorated on 22 October and 4 August.*

3. *Cf. Gen 37:20 f.*

4. *Rom 13:7.*

5. *Mt 5:40.*

6. *The Athonias was established in 1748 on Mount Athos as an Academy of Greek studies. Today it functions as an Ecclesiastical High School.*

7. *Card is a wire-toothed brush or a machine fitted with rows of wire teeth, used to disentangle fibres, as of wool, prior to spinning.*

8. *Ps 37:35-36.*

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*LOVE for Contemporary Man", Part 1, Chapter 4, p. 87-104, Holy Monastery
"Evangelist John the Theologian" SOUROTI, THESSALONIKI, GREECE)*