

Saving Face

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. –Genesis 45:8

You can make a friend for life by letting someone save face. I gather this is an Oriental expression, because for an Oriental the worst thing on earth is to lose face. Some have been known to commit suicide rather than lose face. But I have a suspicion that, deep down, we are all the same when it comes to losing face—none of us want it to happen. God lets us save face by causing our past (however foolish) to work out for our good.

Can you imagine the look on the faces of his brothers when Joseph said to them, “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God” (Gen 45:8)? Reuben may have said to Judah, “Did we hear him correctly? Did he say that we didn’t do what we did, but God did it instead?” To have believed a statement like that would have meant an unimaginable burden of guilt rolled off these men. It would have been news too good to be true.

For the one who totally forgives from the heart, there is little self-righteousness. Two reasons we are able to forgive are:

1. We see what we ourselves have been forgiven of.
2. We see what we are capable of.

When we are indignant over someone else’s wickedness, there is the real possibility either that we are self-righteous or that we have no objectivity about ourselves. When we truly see ourselves as we are, we will recognize that we are just as capable of committing any sin as anyone else. We are saved only by God’s intervening grace.

When we let people save face, we are doing what is right and just, not being merely magnanimous and gracious.

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