



Monergism

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PSALM 130:4

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

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by William Bates

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What is Contained in Forgiveness

But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.
PSAL. 130:4

THE Psalmist, in the first and second verses, addresses God with earnest desires for his saving mercies: "Out of the depths have I cried to thee, O Lord: Lord hear my voice: let thine ear be attentive to my supplication." He humbly deprecates the severe inquiry of divine justice; ver. 3. "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities: O Lord, who shall stand?" If God should with an exact eye observe our sins, and call us to an account, who can stand in judgment? who can endure that fiery trial? The best saints, though never so innocent and unblamable in the sight of men, though never so vigilant and watchful over their hearts and ways, are not exempted from the spots of human frailty, which according to the rigour of the law, would expose them to a condemning sentence. He relieves and supports himself under this fearful apprehension with the hopes of mercy: "but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." It is in thy power and thy will, to pardon repenting and returning sinners, "that thou mayest be feared." The fear of God in scripture signifies the humble holy reverence of him, as our heavenly Father and Sovereign, that makes us cautious lest we should offend him, and careful to please him. For this reason the fear of God is comprehensive of all religion, of "the whole duty of man," to which it is introductive, and is a principal ingredient in it. The clemency and compassionate mercy of God is the cause of an ingenuous filial fear, mixed with love and affiance in the breasts of men. Other attributes, his holiness that framed the law, justice that ordained the punishment of sin, power that inflicts it, render his majesty terrible, and cause a flight from him as an enemy. If all must perish for their sins, no prayers or praises will ascend to heaven, all religious worship will cease for ever: but his tender mercy ready to receive humble suppliants, and restore them to his favour, renders him amiable and admired, and draws us near to him.

There are two propositions to be considered in the verse:

I. That forgiveness belongs to God.

II. That the forgiving mercy of God is a powerful motive of adoration and obedience. I propound to discourse of the first, and to touch upon the second in the application.

In managing the point with light and order, it is requisite to consider; 1st. What is contained in forgiveness. 2dly. The arguments that demonstrate that forgiveness belongs to God.

1. What is contained in forgiveness. This necessarily supposes sin, and sin a law that is violated by it: the law implies a sovereign Lawgiver, to whose declared will subjection is due, and who will exact an account in judgment of men's obedience or disobedience to his law, and dispense rewards and punishments accordingly. God by the clearest titles "is our king, our lawgiver and judge:" for he is our maker and preserver, and consequently has a full propriety in us, and absolute authority over us: and by his sovereign and singular perfections is qualified to govern us. A derived being is necessarily in a state of dependance and subjection. All the ranks of creatures in the world are ordered by their Maker; his "kingdom rules over all." Those in the lowest degree of being are ordered by power. Sensitive creatures are determined by the impulses of nature to their actions; for having no light to distinguish between moral good and evil, they have no choice, and are incapable of receiving a law. Intelligent creatures, endowed with judicious and free faculties, an understanding to discern between moral good and evil, and a will to choose or reject what is propounded to them, are capable of a law to direct and regulate their liberty.

To man a law was given by the Creator, (the copy of his wisdom and will) that has all the perfections of a rule: it is clear and complete, enjoining what is essentially good, and forbidding what is essentially evil. God governs man conveniently to his nature: and no service is pleasing to him but the result of our reason and choice, the obedience of our supreme leading powers. Since the fall, the light of

the understanding compared with the bright discovery it afforded of our whole duty in our original state, is either like the twilight of the evening, the faint and dim remains of the light of the day, when night draws a dark veil over the world, or like the dawning of the morning, when the rising sun begins to scatter the darkness of the night. The latter comparison I think is more just and regular; for it is said, that the Son of God "enlightens every man that comes into the world." The innate light discovers there is a straight line of truth to regulate our judgment, and a straight line of virtue to regulate our actions. Natural conscience is a principle of authority, directing us to choose and practise virtue, and to avoid vice; and according to our neglect or compliance with its dictates reflects upon us. It is hardly presumable that any are so prodigiously wicked, as not to be convinced of the natural rectitude in things: they can distinguish between what is fair and what is fraudulent in dealings, and acknowledge in the general, and in judging of others, the equity of things, though they elude the force of the conviction in the application to themselves. Now since common reason discovers there is a common rule, there must be a common judge to whom men are accountable for the obliquity or conformity of their actions to that rule. The law of God is revealed in its purity and perfection in the scripture.

The law binds first to obedience, and in neglect of it to punishment. Sin is defined by St. John to be "the transgression of the law." The omission of what is commanded, or doing what is forbidden, is a sin. Not only the lusts that break forth into action and evidence, but inward inclinations, contrary to the law, are sin. From hence results a guilt upon every sinner, which includes the imputation of the fault, and obligation to punishment. There is a natural connexion between the evil of doing, and the evil of suffering: the violation of the law is justly revenged by the violation of the person that breaks it. It is an impossible imagination, that God should give a law not enforced with a sanction. This would cast a blemish upon his wisdom, for the law would cancel itself, and defeat his ends in giving it: it would reflect a high dishonour upon his holy majesty, as if he were indifferent with respect to virtue or vice, and disregarded our reverence or rebellion

against his authority. The apostle declares, that "all the world are become guilty before God;" that is, justly chargeable with their crimes, and liable to his judgment. The act of sin is transient, and the pleasure vanishes; but the guilt, if not pardoned and purged away, remains for ever in the records of conscience. "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond; it is graven on the tables of the heart." When the books of eternal life and death shall be opened at the last day, all the unpardoned sins of men, with their killing aggravations, will be found written in indelible characters, and shall be set in order before their eyes, to their confusion: "the righteous Judge has sworn he will forget none of their works." According to the number and heinousness of their sins, a sentence shall pass upon them: no excuses shall suspend the judgment, nor mitigate the immediate execution of it.

The forgiveness of sins contains the abolition of their guilt, and freedom from the deserved destruction consequent to it. This is expressed by various terms in scripture. Pardon relates to some damage and offence which the offended party may severely vindicate. Now although the blessed God in strictness of speaking can receive no damage by rebellious creatures, being infinitely above the impression of evil: yet as our Saviour speaks of one that looks upon a woman with an impure desire, that he has committed adultery with her in his heart, though the innocence of the woman be unstained; so the sins of men, being acts of foul ingratitude against his goodness, and notorious unrighteousness against his authority, are in a sense injurious to him, which he might justly revenge upon them, but his clemency spares them. The "not imputing sin" is borrowed from the accounts of servants with their masters; and implies the account we are obliged to render the supreme Lord for all his benefits which we have so wretchedly misimproved: he might righteously exact of us ten thousand talents that are due to him, but he is graciously pleased to cross the book, and freely to discharge us. The "purging from sin," implies it is very odious and offensive in God's eyes, and has a special respect to the expiatory sacrifices, of which it is said, that "without blood there was no remission." This was typical of the precious blood

of the Son of God that purges the conscience "from dead works;" from the deadly guilt of sin that cleaves to the conscience of the sinner. By the application of his blood the crimson guilt is washed away, and the pardoned sinner is accepted as one pure and innocent.

2. I shall next demonstrate, that forgiveness belongs to God. This will be evident by the following considerations.

First. It is the high and peculiar prerogative of God to pardon sin. His authority made the law, and gives life and vigour to it, therefore he can remit the punishment of the offender. This is evident from the proportion of human laws: for though subordinate judges have only a limited power, and must acquit or condemn according to the law, yet the sovereign may dispense with it. This is declared in scripture by God himself: "I, even I am he, that blots out thy transgressions for my name sake:" Isa. 43 he repeats it with an emphasis. He is proclaimed with this royal title; "the Lord, gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin." It is a dispensation of divine sovereignty to pardon the guilty.

It is true, God pardons as a father, according to that most gracious promise, "I will spare them, as a father spares his son that serves him;" Mal. 3 but as invested with the dignity of a sovereign. Our Saviour directs us, in the perfect form of prayer dictated to his disciples, to pray to God for the forgiveness of our sins, as "our Father sitting in heaven" upon a high throne, from whence he pronounces our pardon. His majesty is equally glorious with his mercy in that blessed dispensation. His royal supremacy is more conspicuous in the exercise of mercy towards repenting sinners, than in the acts of justice upon obstinate offenders. As a king is more a king by the pardoning humble suppliants by the operation of his sceptre, than in subduing rebels by the power of the sword: for in acts of grace he is above the law, and overrules its rigour, in acts of vengeance he is only superior to his enemies.

It is the peculiar prerogative of God to pardon sin. The prophet challenges all the reputed deities of the heathens as defective in this royal power: "who is a God like unto thee, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin?" Mic. 7. The pharisees said true, "who can forgive sins but God only?" For it is an act of empire. The judicial power to pardon is a flower inseparable from the crown: for it is founded in a superiority to the law, therefore inconsistent with a depending authority. A creature is as incapable of the supremacy of God in pardoning sin, as of his omnipotence to create a world: for they are both truly infinite. Besides, the power of pardoning sins, necessarily implies an universal knowledge of the minds and hearts of men, which are the fountains of their actions: and according to their ingrediency the moral good or evil of them rises. The more deliberately and wilfully a sin is committed, the sinner incurs a greater guilt, and is obnoxious to a more heavy punishment. Now no creature can dive into the hearts of men: "they are naked and open to the piercing eye of God alone." Add farther, the authoritative power to pardon, has necessarily annexed to it the active power of dispensing rewards and punishments. Now the Son of God alone "has the keys of life and death in his hands."

It may be objected, that our Saviour declares, that "the Son of Man has power to forgive sins." The answer to this will be clear by considering, there are two natures in Christ; the divine nature, that originally belongs to him, and is proper to his person; and the human nature, which is as it were adoptive, and was voluntarily assumed. Now the divine person is the sole principle and subject of this royal dignity, but it is exercised in its conjunction with the human nature, and attributed to the Son of Man: as in the humiliation of Christ, the principles of his sufferings, and the actual sufferings, are solely in the human nature, but upon the account of the personal union, they are attributed to the divine person. It is said, "the Lord of glory was crucified," and "the blood of God" redeemed his church.

The church of Rome, with high presumption, arrogates to their priests a judicial power of forgiving sins: and by the easy folly of the

people, and crafty deceit of their instructors, exercise a jurisdiction over conscience. To avoid the imputation of blasphemy, they pretend there is a double power of forgiving, supreme and subordinate; the first belongs to God, the other is delegated by commission to the ministers of the gospel. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction: for the power to pardon is an efflux of supremacy, and incommunicable to the subject. A prince that invests another with an absolute power to pardon, must either relinquish his sovereignty, or take an associate to share in it. This pretence of the papists is such a lame evasion, as that which they are forced to make use of to clear themselves from the charge of idolatry in their worship of angels and saints: their excuse is, that their worship of angels and saints is inferior in degree, and imperfectly divine; as if there could be different degrees in divine worship, which is absolutely and necessarily supreme. The ministers of the gospel have only a declarative power, as heralds or ambassadors, to propose the terms of the gospel for the obtaining pardon, and to apply the promise of pardon to those who appear qualified for it. But to pronounce and dispense pardon, they have no judicial authority: for it is not presumable that the wise God should invest men with that authority which they are utterly incapable to exercise.

Proofs that God is Ready to Forgive

Secondly. God is ready to forgive. The power to pardon without an inclination to it, affords no relief in the agonies of an accusing conscience, and the terrors of eternal judgment. The merciful will of God declared in his word, is the foundation of our blessed hope, and encourages us in our requests before his throne: "for thou Lord art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all that call upon thee." Psal. 86.

The attribute of which pardon is an emanation, is usually expressed by grace and mercy. It is said, the "grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men: we are saved by grace." Grace implies

free favour. There is in this respect a difference between love and grace. Love may be set upon an object worthy of it. The primary object of God's love is himself, whose excellent and amiable perfections are worthy of infinite love. The love of parents to children is a duty most clearly natural, and duty lessens the desert of performing it; but grace is exclusive of all merit and dignity in the subject, and of all obligation in the person that shows it. God's most free preventing grace is exercised without any motive in us that deserves it.

The grace of God may be considered as exercised in our creation our redemption. In the creation it was absolutely free: for angels and men were in the state of nothing, there was only a possibility of their being. Now there could be no attractive merit before their existence. It is true, goodness is glorified and crowned by communicating: the world is a bright efflux of the divine glory; but this does not lessen the free goodness of the Maker. There was no constraint upon God to make the world for his declarative glory: for his essential glory is truly infinite, and wants no external appearance to make it complete. The universal church pays humble homage to the great Creator; "acknowledging, that for his will and pleasure all things were created."

The divine goodness to angels and man in their original purity, was grace: for although the image of God shining in them was attractive of his approbation and acceptance, yet they deserved no benefits from him: there is such an infinite distance and disproportion between God and the creatures, that they cannot by a common right claim any thing as due from his majesty. Besides, he is the productive and conservative cause of all their active powers, and the efficacy of them.

The creating goodness of God is eclipsed in the comparison with his saving grace. The first supposes us without any deserts of his favour, but this supposes our exceedingly bad deserts: the first was free, but this is merciful and healing grace. Mercy revives and restores us

when deservedly miserable. This grace and mercy is of so pure a nature, that the most tender human inclinations to relieve the afflicted, are mixed with self-interest, compared with the mercy of God towards us. Our bowels relent, and affections are melting at the sight of persons in deep misery. But there is an inward and involuntary constraint of nature that excites such feeling resentments: and our compassion is moved by reflection upon ourselves, considering that in this open state we are liable to many disasters and wounding sorrows: but God is infinitely free from all disturbing passions, and exempted from all possible evils. To represent the immense love and mercy of God in its endearing circumstances, and to demonstrate his readiness to forgive, we must consider what he has done in order to his pardoning sinners.

1st. If we consider God as the supreme lawgiver and judge of the world, as the protector of righteousness and goodness, and the revenger of all disorders in his moral government, it became him not to pardon sinners without the punishing sin in such a manner as might satisfy his injured justice, and vindicate the honour of his despised law, and declare most convincingly his hatred against sin. Now for these great ends he decreed to send his Son from his bosom, to assume our nature, and to suffer the contumelious calamity of the death of the cross, to make a propitiation for our sins. This was the contrivance of his wisdom, which the most enlightened angels had no presaging notions of. Now can there be a more clear evidence and convincing reality, that God is ready to forgive sins, than the giving his only begotten Son, a person so great and so dear, the heir of his love and glory, to be a sacrifice, that he might spare us? In this dispensation love was the regent leading attribute, to which his wisdom, justice and power were subordinate: they were in exercise for the more glorious illustration of his mercy. We have the strongest argument of God's love in the death of his Son, for our pardon was the end of it. From hence it is evident, that God is more willing to dispense his pardoning mercy, than sinners are to receive it.

2dly. God's readiness to forgive appears in the gracious and easy terms prescribed in the gospel for the obtaining pardon. There are two ways of justification before God, and they are like two ways to a city: one is direct and short, but deep and unpassable; the other lies in a circuit, but will bring a person safe to the place. Thus there is a justification of an innocent person by works, that secures him from the charge of the law; and a justification of a sinner by faith in our all-sufficient Saviour. The first was a short way to man in the state of integrity: the second, such is the distance of the terms, takes a compass. There is a shorter passage from life to action, than from death to life. There is no hope or possibility of our legal justification. The apostle saith, "that which the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. 8. The expiation of sin, and renewing us into the image of God, are obtained by the gospel. The law is called, "the law of sin and death:" which must be understood not as considered in itself, but relatively to our depraved nature. The law supposes men in a state of uncorrupted nature, and was given to be a preservative of our holiness and felicity, not a remedy to recover us from sin and misery. It was directive of our duty, but since our rebellion the rod is turned into a serpent. The law is hard and imperious, severe and inexorable, the tenour of it is, "do, or die for ever." It requires a righteousness entire and unblemished, which one born in sin cannot produce in the court of judgment. Man is utterly unable by his lapsed powers to recover the favour of God, and to fulfil his obligation by the law to obedience. But the gospel discovers an open, easy way to life, to all that will accept of salvation by the Redeemer. The apostle expresses the difference between the condition of the law and the gospel in a very significant manner. "Moses describes the righteousness which is of the law, that the man that does those things shall live in them: but the righteousness which is of faith speaks on this wise, say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven, that is to bring down Christ from above; who shall descend into the deep, that is to bring Jesus Christ again from the dead? But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth, and shalt believe in

thy heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Rom. 10. The meaning of the apostle is, that things in heaven above, or in the depths beneath, are of impossible discovery and attainment, so it is equally impossible to be justified by the works of the law. The anxious sinner seeks in vain for righteousness in the law, which can only be found in the gospel.

It may be objected, that the condition of the law, and the condition of the gospel, compared relatively to our depraved faculties, are equally impossible. The carnal mind and affections are as averse from repentance and receiving Christ as our Lord and Saviour, as from obeying the law. Our Saviour tells the Jews, "ye will not come to me that ye may have life: and no man can come to me unless the Father draw him." Which words are highly expressive of our utter impotence to believe savingly in Christ. But there is a clear answer to this objection; the difference between the two dispensations consists principally in this: the law requires complete and constant obedience as the condition of life, without affording the least supernatural power to perform it. But the gospel has the spirit of grace a concomitant with it, by whose omnipotent efficacy sinners are revived, and enabled to comply with the terms of salvation. The spirit of the law is styled the spirit of bondage from its rigorous effects: it discovered sin, and terrified the conscience, without implanting a principle of life that might restore the sinner to a state of holy liberty. As the flame in the bush made the thorns in it visible, without consuming them; so the fiery law discovers men's sins, but does not abolish them: but "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that is, the gospel, has freed us from the law of sin and death." I will more particularly consider the gracious terms prescribed in the gospel for the obtaining pardon; "Repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." The requiring of them is not an arbitrary constitution, but founded in the unchangeable nature and congruity of things. Repentance signifies a sincere change of the mind and heart from the love and practices of sin, to the love and practice of holiness, upon evangelical and divine motives. The principal ingredients in it are, reflections with grief and shame upon our past

sins, with steadfast resolutions of future obedience. It is a vital principle productive of fruits suitable to it: it is called "repentance from dead works, repentance unto life." It is the seed of new obedience. Repentance in order of nature is before pardon, but they are inseparably joined in the same point of time. David is a blessed instance of this: "I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Psal. 32. The sum and tenor of the apostle's commission recorded by St. Luke is, "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in the name of Christ to all nations." Luke 24. That a repentant sinner only is qualified for pardon, will be evident in considering,

(1.) That an impenitent sinner is the object of revenging justice; and it is utterly inconsistent that pardoning mercy and revenging justice should be terminated upon the same person at the same time, in the same respect. It is said, "the Lord hateth all the workers of iniquity; and his soul hates the wicked." The expression implies the intense degrees of hatred. In the glorious appearance of God to Moses, when proclaimed with the highest titles of honour, "The Lord God, gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin," it is added, "he will by no means spare the guilty," that is, impenitent sinners. We must suppose God to be of a changeable flexible nature, (which is a blasphemous imagination, and makes him like to sinful man) if an impenitent sinner may be received to favour without a change in his disposition. God cannot repent of giving a holy law, the rule of our duty, therefore man must repent of his breaking the law before he can be reconciled to him. The truth is, man considered merely as a sinner is not the object of God's first mercy, that is, of pity and compassion: for as such he is the object of God's wrath; and it is a formal contradiction to assert that he is the object of love and hatred at the same time, and in the same respect. But man, considered as God's creature, involved in misery by the fraud of the tempter, and his own folly, was the object of God's compassion; and the recovery of him from his forlorn wretched state, was the effect of that compassion.

(2.) Though mercy considered as a separate attribute might pardon an impenitent sinner, yet not in conjunction and concord with God's essential perfections. Many things are possible to power absolutely considered, which God cannot do: for his power is always directed in its exercise by his wisdom, and limited by his will. It would disparage God's wisdom, stain his holiness, violate his justice, to pardon an impenitent sinner. The gospel by the promise of pardon to such, would foil itself, and frustrate its principal end, which "is to purify us from all iniquity, and to make us a people zealous of good works."

(3.) If an impenitent sinner may be pardoned as such, he may be glorified: for that which qualifies a man for pardon, qualifies him for salvation: and the divine decree establishes an inseparable connexion between them; "Whom God justifies he glorifies." Rom. 8:30. If a sinner dies immediately after his pardon is passed, nothing can intercept his being received into heaven. Now this is utterly impossible; the exclusion of such is peremptory and universal, "for without holiness no man shall see God." The admission of an impenitent sinner into heaven, would pollute that holy place, and unconsecrate the temple of God wherein his holiness shines in its glory.

It is objected by some, that the requiring repentance to qualify the sinner for pardon eclipses the grace of the gospel.

I willingly acknowledge, that a religious jealousy, lest the freeness and honour of divine grace in our pardon should be lessened, is very becoming a christian; but it is ill-grounded and ill-guided in this matter. This will be evident by considering;

That repentance is an evangelical grace, the gift of the Redeemer: "Him has God raised to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sin." Acts 5:31. The law did not allow of repentance, nor promise pardon. The design of it was to keep us in the favour and communion with God, but afforded no means of reconciliation after our offending him. Repentance was no degree of

perfection before man's fall, but is a relief of his imperfection after it. The law called the righteous to obedience, the gospel calls sinners to repentance.

That there is no causality or merit in repentance to procure our pardon. The mercy of God for the most precious merits and mediation of Jesus Christ is the only cause of pardon. A flood of repenting tears, an effusion of our blood, are of too low a price to make any satisfaction to God, to deserve a return of his favour. The most sincere love of holiness, and stedfast resolution to forsake sin, which is the principal part of our repentance, can be no satisfaction for our past offences, for it is the natural duty of man before the commission of sin: repentance is only a vital qualification in the subject that receives the pardon.

That the grace of God is very conspicuous in dispensing pardon, according to the order of the gospel to repenting sinners. For first, repentance renders the divine mercy most honourable in the esteem of those who partake of it. Our Saviour tells us, "The whole need not a physician, but those who are sick." He that feels his disease, and is strongly apprehensive of its danger, values the counsel and assistance of a physician above all treasures. The repenting sinner who is under the strong conviction of his guilt, and his being always obnoxious to the judgment of God, and eternal misery the consequence of it, he values the favour of God as the most sovereign good, and accounts his displeasure as the supreme evil. Repentance inspires flaming affections in our prayers and praises for pardon. The repenting sinner prays for pardon with as much fervency as Daniel prayed in the den, to be preserved from the devouring lions; or as Jonah prayed out of the belly of hell for deliverance. He addresses not with faint but fainting desires for mercy; "Give me pardon, or I die." Jonah 2. The insensible sinner that is secure in the shadow of death, may offer some verbal requests for pardon, but his prayer is defective in the principle: for he never feels the want of a pardon; he prays so coldly as if unconcerned whether he be accepted or no. And with what a rapture of admiration, and joy, and thankful affections,

doth the pardoned penitent magnify the divine mercy? The christian Niobe that was melted into repenting tears "loved much, because much was forgiven her."

This establishment that repentance qualifies a sinner for pardon, is most beneficial to man, and consequently most illustrates pardoning mercy. We must observe, that sin does not only affect us with guilt, but leaves an inherent corruption that defiles and debases the sinner, and strongly inclines him to relapse into rebellion. Now repentance gives the true representation of sin in its penal consequences, the anger of the Almighty, the terrors of conscience, and makes it evident and odious to the soul. David had a piercing conviction what a foul sin adultery was, when his "bones were broken." Repenting sorrow strikes at the root of sin, the love of pleasure. This makes us fearful to offend God, and to fly all the alluring temptations that will betray us to sin. This makes us obedient. The melted metal is receptive of any form. Contrition is joined with resignation: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Was the voice of repenting Saul.

It may be objected, that we read, "God justifies the ungodly," but the answer is clear. The apostle does not intend by the ungodly, an impenitent sinner, but makes the opposition between the ungodly and one that perfectly obeys the law, and is consequently justified by works: and in this sense the most excellent saints here are ungodly. Besides, the apostle does not assert that God absolutely pardons the ungodly, but qualifies the persons: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Now justifying faith and repentance are like Tamar's twins: repentance is first felt, and then faith exerts itself in applying the merits of Christ's death for our pardon.

It is replied by some, that all grace is communicated from Christ, as our head, and supposes our union with him, of which faith is the vital band, and consequently the first grace, by which all other graces are derived to us.

To this I answer, there are two means of our union with Christ: the principal is the quickening spirit descending from Christ as the fountain of the supernatural life, and a lively faith wrought in us by his pure and powerful operation, that ascends from us and closes with him. It is said, the second Adam was made "a quickening spirit:" and he that is joined "to the Lord is one spirit." As the parts of the natural body are united by the vital influence of the same soul that is present in the whole; so we are united to Christ by the holy spirit that was given to him without measure, and from his fulness is derived to us. It is clear therefore beyond all contradiction, that faith is not antecedently requisite, as the means of conveying all graces to us from Christ.

There are two acts of faith: the first respects the general offer of pardon in the gospel to all repenting believing sinners: the second is the application of the promise of pardon to the soul. The first is antecedent to evangelical repentance: the second is clearly consequent in the order of nature, for the promise assures pardon only to "the weary and heavy laden that come to Christ for rest."

In short, there is a perfect agreement and sympathy between reason and divine revelation in this doctrine, that God pardons only the repenting sinner. The contrary assertion is an impeachment of the rectitude of his nature, and directly contrary to the design and tenor of the gospel. If a man be justified as ungodly, the evangelical command of repentance for the remission of sins is useless and unprofitable. What a pernicious influence upon practice this doctrine may have, is obvious to any that consider it. I shall only add, if God pardons men as ungodly, "How shall he judge the world?" It was prophesied by Enoch, "Behold the Lord comes with ten thousand saints to judge all that are ungodly for their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodlily committed." Now as St. James argues against the perverseness of men, "when from the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing; doth a fountain send forth sweet water and bitter?" Jam. 3:10. This instance is incomparably more strong with respect to God than to men. It is more consistent and conceivable that a

fountain should send forth fresh water and salt, than that the holy and righteous God, in whose nature there is not the least discord, should justify some as ungodly, and condemn others as ungodly for ever.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the evangelical condition of our obtaining pardon. This will appear by considering the nature of faith. Saving faith is an unfeigned persuasion of the power, and desire of Christ to save sinners, that induces the soul to receive him, and rely on him, as he is offered in the gospel. We are assured of his all-sufficiency, and of his compassionate willingness to save us; "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him." Our Saviour declares, "Whoever comes to him, he will in no wise cast out." Faith is seated in the whole soul, and according to the truth and transcendent goodness of the object, produces the most precious and sacred esteem of it in the mind, and the most joyful consent and choice of it in the will. Accordingly a sincere believer embraces entire Christ as "a Prince and a Saviour," and is as willing to be governed by his sceptre, as to depend upon his sacrifice. Acceptance and reliance are the essential ingredients of justifying faith. This is the doctrine of the everlasting gospel. The angel declared this to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ is come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." 1 Tim. 1:15. Faith is indispensably necessary to our obtaining forgiveness. Faith is the channel wherein the precious issues of his blood and sufferings are conveyed to us. To make more evident how necessary and gracious a condition faith in the Redeemer is, for our pardon, I will briefly consider the foundation of the covenant of life in the gospel. After man had plunged himself into damnation, God having decreed, that without satisfaction there should be no remission of his sin; and the sinner being utterly incapable of enduring such a punishment in degrees, as might be truly satisfactory, it necessarily followed, he must suffer a punishment equivalent in duration. To prevent this, there was no

possible way but by admitting a surety, who should represent the sinner, and in his stead suffer the punishment due for sin. A threefold consent was requisite in this transaction.

(1.) The consent of the sovereign, whose law was violated, and majesty despised: for as there is a natural distinction between persons, and between the actions of persons, so there must be between the recompences of those actions: consequently the sinner is obliged to suffer the punishment in his own person. From hence it is clear, that the punishment cannot be transferred to another without the allowance of the sovereign, who is the patron of the rights of justice.

(2.) The consent of the surety is requisite: for punishment being an emanation of justice cannot be inflicted on an innocent person, without his voluntary interposing to save the guilty. A surety is legally one person with the debtor: otherwise the creditor cannot exact, by the rule of right, the payment from him, which is fixed by the law upon the person of the debtor.

(3.) It is as clear, that the consent of the guilty is requisite, who obtains impunity by the vicarious sufferings of another. For if he resolves to bear his own guilt, and wilfully refuses to be freed by the interposing of another between him and the punishment, neither the judge nor the surety can constrain him to it. Now all these concur in this great transaction. As the creation of man was a work of solemn counsel, "Let us make man," so his redemption was the product of the divine counsel. I may allude to what is represented to us in the vision of the divine glory to the prophet Isaiah: "I heard the Lord saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, here I am, send me." Isa. 6:8. Thus the rise of our salvation was from the Father. He makes the inquiry, who shall go for us, to recover fallen man? The Son interposes, "Here I am, send me." The Father from his sovereignty and mercy appointed and accepted the Mediator and surety for us. It was no part of the law given in paradise, that if man sinned, he should die, or his surety; but it was an act of God's free

power as superior to the law, to appoint his Son to be our surety, and to die in our stead. And the aspect of the law upon a sinner being without passion, it admits of satisfaction by the sufferings of another. It is said in the gospel, "God so loved the world," so above all comparison and comprehension, "that he gave and sent his only begotten Son into the world, that the world through him might be saved." The Son of God, with the freest choice, did interpose between the righteous God and guilty man for that end. He willingly left his sovereign seat in heaven, eclipsed his glory under a dark cloud of flesh, degraded himself into the form of a servant, and submitted to an ignominious and cruel death for our redemption. When he came into the world, he declared his full consent, with a note of eminency: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: then said I, lo I come to do thy will, O God." Upon this consent of the Father, and the Son, the whole fabric of our redemption is built. It is the resultance from it, that the execution of justice on Christ is the expiation of our sins, and by his sufferings the full price is paid for our redemption. There is a judicial exchange of persons between Christ and believers, their guilt is transferred to him, and his righteousness is imputed to them. "He made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. 5. His active and passive obedience, his doing and dying are as truly accounted to believers for their acceptance and pardon, as if they had meritoriously wrought out their own salvation.

The sinner must give his consent to be saved by the death of Christ upon the terms of the gospel. This constitution is grounded upon the eternal articles between the Father and the Son in the covenant of redemption. Our Saviour declares, that "God gave his Son, that whosoever believes in him, should not perish, but have eternal life." Notwithstanding the full satisfaction made for our sins, yet without our consent, that is, an applicative faith, no benefit could accrue to us, "He dwells in our hearts by faith:" and by that vital band of our union we have communion with him in his death, and as entire an interest in all the blessed benefits purchased by it, as if whatsoever he did and suffered had been for us alone. "He is a propitiation by

faith in his blood." Of this full consent of the sinner, there is an excellent example in the apostle: he expresses it with the greatest ardency of affection; "I count all things but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ." Phil. 3:9. Like as a poor insolvent debtor, ready to be cast into a perpetual prison, longs for a surety rich and liberal, to make payment for him: thus St. Paul desired to be found in Christ, as an all-sufficient surety, that he might obtain a freedom from the charge of the law.

The establishment of the gospel, that faith be the condition of our pardon, so that none can be justified without it, is from pure grace. The apostle assigns this reason why all works are excluded, those performed in the state of nature, or by a principle of grace, from being the procuring cause of our salvation, that it is to prevent vain-glory in men that would result from it. "You are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of your selves: it is the gift of God." Ephes. 2. The pardon of sin is a principal part of our salvation. He positively declares, that justification "is therefore of faith, that it might be by grace." Rom. 4. If justification were to be obtained by a condition of impossible performance, it were no favour to offer that blessed benefit to us: but it being assured to a believer that humbly and thankfully accepts of it, the grace of God is exceedingly glorified. To make this more clear, faith may be considered as a productive grace, or a receptive: as a productive, it purifies the heart, works by love; and in this consideration we are not justified by it. Faith hath no efficiency in our justification, it is the sole act of God: but faith as a receptive grace, that embraces Christ with his precious merits offered to us in the promise, entitles us to pardon. And in this way divine grace is exalted: for he that entirely relies upon the righteousness of Christ, absolutely renounces his own righteousness, and ascribes in solidum the obtaining of his pardon to the clemency and favour of God, for the sake of the Mediator.

3dly. That God is ready to forgive, is fully proved by many gracious declarations in his word, the infallible expression of his will. "We are commanded to seek his face for ever," his favour and love: for the countenance is the crystal wherein the affections appear. Now all the commands of God assure us of his approving and acceptance of our obedience to them: it follows therefore, that it is very pleasing to him, that we pray for the pardon of our sins, and that he will dispense it, if we pray in a due manner. When he forbade the prophet to pray for Israel, it was an argument of decreed ruin against them: "Pray not for this people, for I will not hear thee." Jer. 7:16. To encourage our hope, God is pleased to direct us how to address our requests for his mercy: he directs "Israel, that had fallen by iniquity, to take words, and turn to the Lord, and say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the praise of our lips." Hos. 14. To this is added a solemn renouncing of those sins that provoked him to anger. His gracious answer follows, "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely." If a prince draws a petition for an humble suppliant to himself, it is a strong indication that he will grant it. God joins entreaties to his commands, to induce men to accept this mercy. The apostle declares, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ: as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead be reconciled to God." 2 Cor. 5. Astonishing goodness! how condescending, how compassionate! The provocation began on man's part, the reconciliation is first on God's. That the King of heaven, whose indignation was incensed by our rebellions, and might justly send executioners to destroy us, should send ambassadors to offer peace, and beseech us to be reconciled to him, as if it were his interest and not ours, is a mercy above what we could ask or think. With commands and entreaties he mixes promises of pardon to encourage us to come to the throne of grace: "Whoever confesses and forsakes his sins, shall find mercy." This promise is ratified by the strongest assurance: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1. The pardon of a repenting sinner is the effect of most free mercy, but it is dispensed to the honour of God's faithfulness and justice, who is pleased to engage himself by

his promise to do it. And though the word of God be as sacred and certain as his oath, for it is impossible for him to change his will, or to deceive us in the one as well as the other: yet to overcome the fears, to allay the sorrows, and satisfy the desires of repenting sinners, he was pleased to annex his oath to the promise, Heb. 6:18 which is the most infallible character and note, that the blessing promised is unchangeable.

He adds threatening to his invitations, that fear which is an active and strong passion, may constrain us to seek for his mercy. Our Saviour said to the Jews who did blind and harden themselves in their infidelity, "If ye believe not that I am he," the promised Messiah, "and come to me to obtain life, ye shall die in your sins." John 8:24. The threatening implies a state final and fearful, beyond all expression; for they who die in their sins, shall die for them to eternity. Hell is the sad mansion of lost souls, filled with extreme wrath and extreme despair: and where despair is without remedy, sorrow is without mitigation for ever. From hence we may be convinced, how willing God is to pardon and save us, in that knowing how we are entangled with pleasant sins, he reveals to us what will be the eternal consequence of sins unrepented and unforgiven, a punishment above all the evils that are felt or feared here, and above all the patience and strength of sinners to endure.

If men yield themselves to the call of his word without, and of his spirit within, and humbly accept of the terms of mercy, it is very pleasing to him. We are assured by Jesus Christ, who is, truth, that there is "Joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine persons that need no repentance." God himself declares with a solemn oath, "that he delights not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and live." The holiness and mercy of God are two of his most divine perfections, his peculiar glory and delight. Now what can be more pleasing to that most pure and compassionate being, than to see a sinful creature conformed to his holiness, and saved by his mercy? If the internal joy of God, wherein he is infinitely blessed, were capable of new degrees, it

would rise higher in the exercise of his forgiving mercy. There is a clear representation of this in the parable of the prodigal: at his return his father received him, with a robe and a ring, with music and a feast, the signs of joy in its exaltation. But if sinners are hardened in obstinacy, and notwithstanding God is so willing to pardon them, are wilful to be damned, with what variety of passions does he express his resentment? He incarnates himself in the language of men, to make them understand his affection to them. Sometimes he expostulates with a tender sympathy, "Why will ye die?" as if they were immediately falling into the bottomless pit. He expresses pity, mixed with indignation, at their chosen folly and ruin; "How long ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and fools hate knowledge? What reluctancy and regret does he express against proceeding to exterminating judgments? "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Hos. 11:8. With what a melting passion does the Son of God foretel the decreed destruction of Jerusalem, for rejecting their Saviour and salvation! "When he came near he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. Like a mild judge that pities the man, when he condemns the malefactor.

Those who interpret some expressions of scripture, that "God laughs at the calamity of the wicked, and mocks when their fear comes," Prov. 1 and is inexorable to their prayers, in such a sense as evacuates most gracious declarations of God, to induce sinners to repent and believe for their salvation, they draw darkness out of light: for those threatening are directed against obstinate rebels that frustrate the most powerful methods of mercy, and reject the call of God, in the day of his grace; and by way of retaliation, their prayers are ineffectual, and rejected in the day of his wrath. And that he is so highly and irreconcilably provoked for their despising his mercy, is a certain indication how highly he would have been pleased with their humbly accepting of it. Let none then by a vile and wretched

suspicion, that God's repeated calls to sinners to return and live, do not signify his serious will, detract from the glory of his goodness, and blaspheme his unspotted holiness. His excellent greatness assures us of his sincerity. Why should the glorious majesty of heaven court despicable creatures to be reconciled? We are infinite descents below him, and no advantage can accrue to him from us. Temporal princes may be swayed by interest to send false declarations to rebels in arms, to reduce them to obedience: but what can the Most High gain by our submission or lose by our obstinacy? Counterfeit kindness proceeds either from the hope of some good, or the fear of some evil: and of both God is absolutely incapable. We are all obnoxious to his severe justice: there is no occasion that he should intend by the gracious offer of pardon, to aggravate the sin and sentence of those who refuse it. Whosoever With heart breaking sorrow, and unfeigned hatred of his sins, seeks for pardon by the Mediator, he shall find his experience of sparing mercy equal to the highest expressions of it in scripture, and exceeding all his thoughts.

4ly. It appears, that God is ready to pardon, is that he is so slow to punish. Though all the divine attributes are equal in God, and there is ail entire agreement between them, yet there is a difference in their external operations. St. John declares, "God is love;" that signifies his communicative goodness, the exercise whereof is more free and pleasing to him than the acts of revenging justice. "He does not afflict willingly the children of men." Lam. 3. His mercy in giving and forgiving flows as water from a fountain: acts of justice are forced from him (like wine from the grapes) by the pressing weight of our sins. In the first day of judgment a Saviour was promised before the curse was threatened. Notwithstanding sinful men break his laws, and trample on them before his face; they "resist, and grieve, arid quench his spirit:" yet he delays the execution of judgment, that his "long-suffering may lead them to repentance." This will appear by considering that God's forbearing sinners is not, 1. For want of discovery of their sins, human justice may suffer a guilty person to escape punishment for Want of clear evidence, but this case is not incident to the justice of heaven. "God is light" with respect to his

purity and omniscience. His fiery eye pierces through the thickest darkness wherein sins are committed, and all the arts of concealment used to cover them. He sees all the sins of men with the eye of a judge; "all things are naked and open before his eyes with whom we have to do. Therefore it is said, "God will require what is past," and will observe what is to come, in order to judgment. 2. It is not from a defect of power that the Wicked are spared. Great princes are sometimes hindered from the exercise of justice, when the guilty person is supported by a prevalent party against them: for the power of a prince is not in himself, but in those who are his subjects. Thus David was constrained to spare Joab, after the murder of Abner, because of his interest in the army; "the sons of Zerviah were too hard for him," he feared their rebellious resistance. But the power of God is inherent in himself, and depends upon no creatures: "O Lord, be exalted in thine own power." He fears none, and is to be feared by all. With one stroke of omnipotency he can destroy all his enemies for ever. He can with more ease subdue the most stubborn rebels, than we can breathe. His strength is equal to his authority, both are truly infinite. 3. The guilty are spared sometimes from the vicious partiality of princes to their favourites, or a wretched neglect of justice: but the high and holy King is without respect of persons: he hates sin with a perfect hatred, and is angry with the wicked every day. The scripture gives as account why execution is respited: "the Lord is not slack, (as some men count slackness) but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." "He waits to be gracious," and spares men in order to their salvation.

5ly. It appears that God is ready to forgive, in that upon the first suit of humble and penitent believers he presently pardons them. If we consider how long men continue in a course of voluptuous or profitable sins, how many repulses to the offers of mercy they are guilty of, it might justly be expected, that God should with disdain reject their petitions, or not be entreated without a long exercise of repentance, and continued, submissive, and earnest solicitations for his mercy. But the King of heaven keeps no state, the "throne of

grace" is always open and accessible to humble penitents: when their hearts are prepared, his ear is inclined to hear them. David, after his commission of very foul sins, and long continuing in a state of impenitency, yet upon his melting in the sense of his wickedness and resolution, to humble himself by a mournful acknowledgment of it, he was restored to the divine favour. "I said I would confess my sins, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Repenting Ephraim is an admirable instance of God's relenting bowels to sinners: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself; thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth: is Ephraim my dear Son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy on him, saith the Lord." The prodigal upon his resolution to return to his Father, and debase himself as utterly unworthy of being received as a Son, "While he was in the way, his Father saw him at a distance, and ran to him, fell on his neck and kissed him, and entirely forgave his past rebellion. The soul-wounded publican said, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner, and was justified rather than the proud pharisee.

6ly. It is a convincing argument, that God is ready to forgive sin, in that he affords grace to men to prepare them for his pardoning mercy. Repentance and faith are sacred plants that do not spring from our earth, but have their roots in heaven. "God gives repentance unto life." Acts 11. "Faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God." Ephes. 2. In our corrupt state sin is natural to man, and hath entirely possessed all his leading faculties. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," Rom. 8 and judges according to the carnal affections which deprave it. The will is rebellious, and strongly inclined to charming lusts: temptations are so numerous and delightful, that sinners will venture to be miserable for ever, to enjoy the pleasures of sin that die in the tasting. It is true, such are the inviolable

inclinations of the human nature to happiness, that no man can love undisguised death, nor choose damnation for itself: yet the affection to sin is so overruling, that they will not forsake it though complicated with death. The wisdom of God tells us, "those that hate me love death," Prov. 9 that is constructively. Our Saviour compassionately reproves the Jews, "ye will not come to me that ye may have life." John 5. This is the cause of their remaining in a state of guilt for ever.

Now such is the mercy of God, that he gives his spirit, to assist men by his illuminating, preventing, restraining and exciting grace, to forsake their sins, that they may be saved: and if they did faithfully improve the lower degrees of grace, (though they can claim nothing by right) he would from his good pleasure afford them more grace: but they are so averse from God, and strongly bent to the present world, that they so long resist the pure motions of grace in their hearts, till the gales of the Spirit expire, and revive no more; according to that terrible threatening, "my spirit shall no longer strive with man, for he is flesh." Gen. 6.

Besides the common grace afforded to natural men, there is a superfluency of grace bestowed upon some to convert them, which infallibly obtains its end. Those who are the patrons of free-will methinks should allow that God is master of his own will, and the free dispenser of his own grace. This special grace works powerfully, yet conveniently, to the reasonable nature. There is no charm so sweet, no constraint so strong, as the operation of it: for the understanding is convinced by so clear and strong a light, of our being, undone for ever without God's pardoning mercy, "that his loving-kindness is better than life;" and this is represented to the will with that powerful application, that the will certainly chooses it. When there is a wavering and indifferency of the will to a propounded object, it is either from some defects in the object, or in the apprehension of it; but when the supreme good is so represented, that it fills all the capacities of the soul, the will as certainly embraces it, as one that is burnt up with thirst, and near a cool stream stoops

and drinks to quench it. The holy spirit, who knows the manner of his own operations, expresses the efficacy of them in the resemblances of the creation and resurrection, wherein the divine power cannot be frustrated; yet it is so congruous to the frame of man's nature, that the freedom of the will is then in its most noble exercise: "men are drawn to Christ by the teachings of God;" not by overruling violence upon their faculties, but by instruction and persuasion suitable to them.

Now from hence it is evident that all the persons in the Godhead concur in bestowing this admirable blessing, the pardon of our sins: they all willingly join in this undivided work, though with different operations. The father pronounces our pardon from the throne: his majesty shines without diminution or condescension of his person in forgiving us. The Son purchased our pardon by the sacred treasure of his blood. The holy spirit qualifies us, and applies the pardon of our sins to us.

3. I now come to notice, that God is abundant in forgiveness. This God has declared in words so full and expressive, as may exceedingly satisfy the most tender and fearful spirits: "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways, than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." The distance is so great between the heavens and the earth, that the sun, so vast a globe of light, seems to be of a small circumference; and the stars of the first magnitude, though many times bigger than the earth, appear like glittering points of light. This comparison is so convincing as may assist us in our contemplation of his mercy. The apostle saith, "God is rich in mercy." Ephes. 2. It is not said, that he is rich in substance, though the earth be the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. He is rich in his own perfections, not in external things. It is not said, God is rich in power, though he is almighty; nor in justice, but in mercy: this signifies, that

of all the divine perfections, none so shine do radiantly as his mercy. This reflects a lustre upon his other attributes. His goodness is the foundation of his glory. He pardoned ten thousand talents to the servant that was insolvent, and his treasure is unwasted.

The Extent and Freeness of Divine Forgiveness

I will consider the extent of his pardoning mercy, and the entireness of it.

I. The extent of it, with respect to the number and quality of the sins that are pardoned.

1st. The number of them. David, after an attentive consideration of the purity and perfection of God's law, breaks forth in a very great anxiety, "Who can understand his errors?" Who can enumerate the many defections from that strait rule of our duty? "In many things we offend all." We are obliged perpetually to obey and glorify God: yet in every action, even in our religious duties, there are many defects and defilements that want pardon. How many swarms of vain and unprofitable thoughts of carnal, covetous, proud, envious, and revengeful thoughts and desires lodge in the hearts of men? What a torrent of idle, sensual, vain-glorious and passionate words flow from their lips? How many thousand sinful actions proceed from them? When the enlightened conscience seriously reflects upon our sins of omission and commission, how astonishing is their vast number? What a mountainous heap appears? They reach as low as hell, and rise as high as heaven. It would tire the hand of an angel to write down the pardons that God bestows upon one penitent believer.

2dly. Divine forgiveness extends to sins of all kinds and degrees, habitual and actual. Though no sins are absolutely small, being committed against the majesty of God, yet comparatively, with

respect to their quality and circumstances, there is a manifest difference between them. Some are of a weaker tincture, some are of a deeper die: some slightly wound the conscience; some waste it, and let out its vital blood: some do as it were whisper against the sinner, some cry for vengeance. Sins of ignorance and infirmity, sins of sudden surreption, that steal upon us without observing, sins by surprise of the passions, when there is no time to deliberate, have extenuating circumstances: but sins against light, wherein there is more of the nature of sin; sins against mercies, which in the language of the apostle, are a "despising of God's goodness:" sins against solemn vows, wherein men break double bands, the law of God and their sacred engagements; sins committed habitually and presumptuously, as if God were ignorant, or indifferent and unconcerned, or impotent and without power to punish offenders: these sins derive a greater guilt, and expose to a more terrible punishment. Now a gracious pardon is offered in the gospel to all sinners, whatever the quality and circumstances of their sins be, if they apply and address themselves to the father of mercy through the compassionate Mediator, and forsake their sins. Of this we are assured from the most solemn declaration of God to Moses, "the Lord is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." The promise is comprehensive of all sorts of sins, how manifold and mighty soever. Besides, to encourage us to repent and believe, God promises pardon for sins of the fiercest provocation. Judah had violated the marriage-covenant with God by their impure idolatries, yet he offers to receive them. "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, saith the Lord." Relapses into rebellious sins argue a strong propensity to them, and exceedingly aggravate their guilt; yet God promises pardon for them: "Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." There are eminent instances of God's pardoning mercy recorded in the scripture. The apostle having enumerated many sorts of sinners guilty of enormous crimes, idolaters, adulterers, abusers of themselves with mankind, tells the Corinthians, "and such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye

are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the spirit of our God. There is one sort of sinners excepted from the general promise of mercy, those who sin against the Holy Ghost. The reason of the exception is not, that the Holy Spirit is superior in dignity to the Father and the Son, for they are all coeternal and coequal, but from his operations, that is, the revealing the truth and grace of God in the gospel. Now the obstinate malicious contradicting the truth of the gospel shining in the minds of men, and the perverse despising the grace of the gospel, is unpardonable to infinite mercy. Those who are guilty of that sin, have transformed themselves into the image of the devil, and salvation cannot save them. But no others are excluded from repentance and pardon.

2. As the extent, so the entireness of pardon offered to sinners declares God's abundant mercy.

1st. The pardon is as full as free, according to his excellent goodness: the imputation of the fault ceases, and the obligation to punishment is abolished. We have clear evidence of this from the scripture. God assures those who repent and reform, "though your sins be as scarlet" they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Pardon is more than a reprieve or suspension of judgment, it is a perfect freedom from it: a repenting believer is as clear from the charge of the law as an innocent angel. "There is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Rom. 8. Our cleansing from the defilements of sin is imperfect, therefore we must be always purifying ourselves, till we attain to absolute purity: but our pardon is perfect. It is irrevocable; we are assured, that as far as the east is from the west, God removes our transgressions from us. As soon those distant points may be united, as guilt may be fastened upon those whom God has pardoned. The prophet declares, that "God will subdue our iniquities, and cast them into the bottom of the sea:" Psal. 103 from whence they can never rise. God promises, "I will forgive their iniquities, and remember them no more." Mich. 7. Pardon is complete and final. It is the misery of the wicked, "they are

condemned already; Jer. 31:34 they live by a reprieve and suspension of judgment: it is the blessed security of believers, they "shall not fall under condemnation." There is such an inconstancy in the nature of men, that they often repent and revoke the favours and privileges they have bestowed; they like to day, and loath to-morrow the same persons: but the blessed God is not subject to change or contingency. His love, his purpose, his promise to his people, are unalterable.

From the sense of God's pardoning mercy, conscience is freed from those just terrors that are the consequents of guilt. "The blood of Christ purges our conscience from dead works:" Heb. 9:14. from the deadly guilt of sin that cleaves to the conscience. A temporal prince may pardon a murderer; and conscience with a countenance of despair may summon him to appear and be accountable for his bloody crime before the high and everlasting Judge: but those who are "justified by faith, have peace with God." When the original bond is cancelled, the counter-part has no force; conscience is subordinate to God, and when he justifies, has no authority to condemn. When God "blots out the iniquities of his people as a thick cloud," there is a clear sky, a divine calm and serenity in conscience. It may be enquired how the complete pardon of sin is consistent with the temporal evils inflicted upon the children of God for their sins. The answer is obvious and easy. Temporal evils inflicted on the children of God, are declarative of his holy displeasure against sin, but are not for satisfaction to vindictive justice: this would be derogatory to the love of God, and the meritorious sufferings of our Saviour, who did not compound with God, but made full and absolute satisfaction for our sins. In the 12th chapter to the Hebrews, where the apostle so divinely and accurately treats of this argument, there is a clear account of the cause, the nature, and the product of the temporal sufferings of God's children. The cause of them is the love of their heavenly Father displeased for their sins: "whom the lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." Earthly parents in their various fits of folly, sometimes "chasten their children only for their pleasure," and sometimes spare the rod to their ruin: but our heavenly Father is equally wise and compassionate, and uses

such discipline as is requisite for their profit, to prevent their continuance in sin, that would be destructive to them. Believers "are chastened of the Lord, that they may not be condemned with the world." 1 Cor. 11:32. And the wisdom and love of our Father and physician mixes such bitter ingredients, and in that proportion, as are requisite for the quality of the disease, and the strength of the patient. "He corrects them in measure;" he will not suffer them "to be tempted above what they are able." Their afflictions are deliberate dispensations. The nature of them is signified in the word chastisement: the correction of a child is in order to his amendment: they are medicinal, and have a main relation and prospect to the future, to make us more fearful to offend God, and careful to please him. They are more lively and sensible lessons of our duty, than the instructions of the word, and are of the same order.

The product of the chastisements of God's children, "is the pleasant fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby:" Heb. 12. that is, the sanctifying graces of the Spirit, repentance, faith, hope, patience, self-denial, contempt of the world, resignation to the divine will, are exercised, illustrated, and increased in those christians who with unfainting perseverance endure affliction.

In short, death that was the penal effect of sin, (for the first man while innocent was immortal) though continued, yet the sting is taken away, the quality of it is changed: the issues of it are vastly different to the saints and the wicked: to the saints it is the period of their fears and sorrows, the final remedy of all their miseries; to the wicked it is the beginning of their woe. The saints pass through the darkness and corruption of the grave into the kingdom of glory: the wicked pass to the blackness of darkness for ever.

2dly. The entireness of this great benefit is evident in that God restores his love and forfeited favour to all that are pardoned. Princes sometimes pardon offenders, but never receive them into their favour. Absalom was recalled from banishment, but for two years was not admitted to see the king's face. But God does magnify and

manifest his love to those whom he pardons. He does not distinguish them from the angels that always obeyed him. He forgives our sins as entirely as if they had never been committed, and is reconciled as if he had never been offended. We have the most clear discovery of this in the parable of the prodigal. It might have been expected, that his father should have reproached him for his obstinate deserting his house, his wasting his portion in lewdness and luxury, and that bitter constraint forced him to return: no, he dearly embraces him, and cancels all the debt of his past offences with a most affectionate kiss: and whereas the poor penitent presumed only to be received as a servant, he was restored in the most affectionate manner to the dignity and relation of a son; and universal joy was diffused through all the family for his return. If our Saviour had not made this relation with all its endearing circumstances, our narrow hearts durst never presume and promise to us such compassionate love of God to repenting sinners. But whoever imitates the prodigal in his return, shall find the reality to exceed the representation. I shall add some examples of this love of God to those who repent. Mary Magdalen had been guilty of foul sins, yet our Saviour graciously received the tender expressions of her grief and love, to the astonishment of Simon: "She washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed them:" and after his resurrection appeared first unto her as his endeared favourite. It is recorded by the evangelist, with an infinite emphasis of his love, that "he first appeared to Mary Magdalen, out of whom he had cast seven devils." Peter, in whose denial of Christ there was such a mixture of infidelity, ingratitude, and impiety, he promised he would die with him or for him; yet being questioned not with terror by an armed magistrate, not surprised by a subtle examiner, but at the question of a maid renounced him, yet he was restored to the honour of his office, and the affection of his master. It is very observable, that when he appeared to Mary Magdalen, he directs her to tell his disciples and Peter of his resurrection; he particularly mentions Peter, to raise his drooping spirit by this new assurance of his love.

This happy privilege belongs to all penitent believers, for whomsoever God pardons he prefers, and adopts into his family, and makes them heirs of heaven. The first beam of mercy shines in the pardon of our sins, which is an infallible assurance of freeing us from the punishment of sin in hell, and of our obtaining the joys of heaven. Our Saviour has by his meritorious and voluntary sufferings paid our ransom from eternal death, and purchased for us a right to eternal life: accordingly "whom God justifies he glorifies. The formal effect of justification is the restoring us to the forfeited favour of God, and from that fountain all blessed benefits flow. God declares concerning his people: "They shall be mine in the day that I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spares his son that serves him:" Mal. 3. which two acts of the divine mercy are inseparable.

Caution Lest Men Abuse this Doctrine

1. Use of caution. The first use shall be of caution, lest men abuse carelessly and contemptuously the doctrine of divine forgiveness. Many sin freely, as if they believed the permission of sins, or presumed upon a ready remedy, and are without fear of judgment to come. This is the language of their actions, though not of their tongues. There is not a worse sort of sinners out of hell. If that which should soften and reclaim sinners hardens them, the case is desperate and incurable. To correct the vile conceits men have of obtaining an easy pardon of their sins, though habitually committed upon that account, let them consider,

(1.) The angels who were the first and brightest offspring of the Creator, for one sin were decreed and doomed to an exclusion from the glory of heaven for ever. Mercy did not suspend the sentence: their mighty numbers, and the nobility of their nature, did not incline the Judge of the world to spare them. They are now in the chains of powerful justice, and have perpetual hell within them. And shall rebellious men, who are but dust in their original composition and final resolution, expect to escape vengeance? If we should see a

hundred noble men executed in a day, the sight would strike us with terror: how much greater reason is there awfully to adore the inflexible Judge, for such a dreadful execution and example of justice upon an innumerable company of angels?

(2.) To pardon sin is an act of greater power than to create the world: if we consider the distance of the terms, and the difficulty of the means, there is a wider distance between a righteous God infinitely provoked by sin; and the guilty creature, than between a state of not being, and the actual existence of the world. One powerful word raised this great world from its native nothing. But to accord the divine attributes between which there seemed a repugnance, and reconcile God to sinful men, cost the dearest price. The anxious sinner makes inquiry, "Shall I give the first-born of my body for the sin of my soul;" Mic. 7. That is too mean an offering: no less than the firstborn of the Almighty could by the sacrifice of himself make an atonement for our offences.

(3.) Vengeance belongs to God as well as forgiveness. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Rom. 1. It was decreed in heaven, it is denounced in his word, and shall be executed by his just power in its season. There is a time to pardon, and a time to punish. God is styled "the God of: patience:" in the present world "his patience has its perfect work." But in the next world justice will gloriously appear against the wicked who are devoted to destruction. Forbearance is not forgiveness. The last day will close the accounts of the Judge of the world with sinners, and a terrible arrear will be exacted of them for all the treasures of his goodness and clemency wasted by them.

(4.) Those who indulge themselves in a course of sin upon this presumption of an easy pardon, are the most unworthy and incapable of divine mercy. They sin against the nature and end of grace: and by an immediate and direct opposition to it in the proper notion of grace, cut off all their pleas for it. It is true, God is very merciful, and easy to be entreated by those who sincerely repent and

reform their lives: but he is inexorable to all those who harden themselves in their sins by the false and presumptuous hopes of his mercy. He declares in his word, that "when sinners despise the curse threatened against them, and bless themselves in their hearts, that they shall have peace, though they walk in the imagination of their own hearts, to add drunkenness to thirst; the Lord will not spare them, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against them, and all the curses written in this book shall lie upon them without mitigation or intermission." Deut. 29. No less punishment than eternal damnation is equal to their sin. They resist and renounce mercy by their abusing it to the worst ends, yet are confident of their interest in it. What a prodigious contradiction is there between the hopes of presumptuous sinners and their practices? They kindle his anger every day, and inflame anger into wrath, and wrath into vengeance, and yet strongly fancy they shall find mercy. What a diabolical wonder is it, as astonishing as extraordinary miracles, but that it is commonly seen, that men without a promise, and against the threatening, should expect the favour of God, that is the portion of his children, and continue in high and actual rebellion? If a spark of reason or grain of faith were shining in their breasts, they would be restless in the apprehension of his fiery displeasure. The tempter over-reaches their minds by a double delusion, that they shall have time and grace to repent, and over-rules their wills, that the most terrible threatenings and divine dissuasives are not effectual to make them forsake their sins. They are secure, though not safe one hour: for it is in the power of their Judge, and they have reason to fear in his purpose, "to destroy them suddenly, and without remedy." Prov. 29. The presumptuous conceit of immense mercy has so fully possessed their minds, that like a powerful opiate it makes them sleep securely upon the brink of ruin: but conscience is of an immortal nature, and though it may be stupified, it cannot be extinguished. In the present life sometimes a sharp affliction awakens it into a furious activity; and then presuming sinners that have been indulgent to their lusts, despair of pardon: for when mercy, that is our only advocate in his bosom to avert wrath for sins against the other attributes, shall turn our

accuser, and solicit justice to revenge its dishonour upon those who have abused it, there remains no shadow of hope to refresh their sorrows. But suppose the charm be not unbound, and the self-deceiver continues his evil course to the end of life, and perishes pleasantly with the vain hopes of mercy, yet immediately after death his conscience will be irresistibly convinced of his outrageous provocations of the righteous God, and be more tormenting than the hottest flames of hell.

Let us attend to the instructive inference in the text, "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared:" that is, with a fear of reverence for his amiable excellencies, for the attractive of his pardoning mercy; and of a caution, lest by abusing we should make a deadly forfeiture of it. If God should appear as an irreconcilable Judge, armed with terror against all offenders, the apprehension would produce hatred, and a dreadful flight from him: it would make men boldly wilful, and harden them in their rebellions: for if they cannot be pardoned for their past sins, and can be but damned for their continuance in them, they will give licence to their roving and impetuous appetites, and commit iniquity with greediness. Now God has appointed a way for the pardon of sin, wherein there is a bright and equal discovery of his greatness and goodness, his purity and righteousness, that his law may be more sacred and inviolable, more remembered and obeyed by us. He has declared in the death of his Son, wherein the equal extremes of ignominy and torment were combined, what an evil sin is, that required such a mighty expiation. We may from the depth of his sufferings conceive the excess and height of our provocations: we may understand the deadly guilt of sin, that can only be washed away in the blood of Christ, the fountain of remission. To turn the grace of God into wantonness, to be more loose and secure in committing Sin, is to turn the antidote into poison, and defeat his blessed end. It is a main article of our reconciliation, "The Lord will speak peace to his people, but let them not return to folly." We may conceive, that God speaks to the pardoned sinner what our Saviour said to the man whom he

miraculously healed, "Go away, sin no more, lest a worse thing befall you."

It is both the duty and disposition of those who have received the pardon of their sins, "to fear the Lord and his goodness." There is no principle more clearly natural and sensible than this: dependance includes observance; the receiving benefits obliges a person to the benefactor. Accordingly the psalmist expresses the affections of the human and the holy nature, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" Psal. 116. and breaks out in an ecstasy of thankfulness, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant, thou hast broken my bands." The repenting believer receives pardon from God with joyful admiration, that fastens his mind in the contemplation of his glorious mercy: the serious thought of it kindles a sacred fire in his breast: as it is said of Mary Magdalen, "Much was forgiven her, for she loved much." Love to God that results from his pardoning love to us, is singular and supreme, and necessarily produces an ardent desire to please and glorify him, and an ingenuous grateful fear of offending him. The soul that has felt "the terrors of the Lord," as the holy and righteous Judge of the world, and afterward has been revived by the light of his countenance, and has tasted how good the Lord is, how is it possible to resist such dear and immense obligations? How prodigious to turn the strongest and sweetest engagement to reverence and obedience, into an encouragement to do that which is odious and offensive in his sight? To sin against light heightens a sin into rebellion, but to sin against revealed love makes it "above measure sinful." This is so contrary to natural conscience and supernatural grace, that it is the leprosy of the wicked, not the spot of God's children: "Do you thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?" The upbraiding reduces them to a defenceless silence, and covers them in black confusion. When divine grace pardons our past sins, it cures our depraved inclinations to future sins.

The clearest discovery of the heart is by reflections on God's mercy. The fear of God's justice is natural, the reverent regard of his

goodness is a spiritual affection. There is a great difference between filial fear of the divine goodness that is so becoming the breast of a christian, and so congruous to our present state, and servile fear, that is the proper character of one in the bondage of sin.

The filial fear of God is an ingenuous voluntary affection, flowing from love, and freely exercised, and esteemed the "Treasure of the soul." Servile fear, the sequel of guilt, is a judicial impression from the sad thoughts of the provoked majesty of heaven; and if the offender could dissolve the bands of conscience, he would throw it off. Filial fear is mixed with joy, it is the preservative of God's favour to us; it makes us more circumspect, but not less comfortable: it opposes security, but establishes the assurance of faith: the fear of the Lord, and "hope in his mercy," are united graces. Servile fear "has torment," it is an alarm within that disturbs the rest of the sinner; it is a fretting fire that secretly torments him in his most luscious fruitions. Filial fear restrains from all sin in the heart and life, because it dishonours and displeases God; it denies the carnal appetites with sweetness and satisfaction to the soul; it excites us to obey God with choice and complacency. Servile fear induces an abstinence from some sins, which fly in the face of conscience, and which the sinner loves, and urges to the outward performance of duties, which he hates. The slavish spirit is afraid to burn, not to sin; he is fearful to be damned, not to displease God. Filial fear is a serious and habitual constitution of the soul, inseparable from it in all times and places, it is influential into the whole life. Servile fear is a sudden passion, and transient: sometimes a sharp affliction, a piercing sermon, awakens a secure wretch into a fit of terror. Filial fear keeps the soul close to God, makes it solicitous, lest any sin should intercept the light of his countenance, and obstruct communion with him, which is the paradise of a saint: it is the gracious promise of God to his children, "I will put my fear into their hearts, and they shall never depart from me." Servile fear makes the sinner shy of God's presence, and as unwilling to find him, as a saint is to lose him: he is not pleased with solitude, lest the guilty conscience should have time of recollection, and should look to the

Judge above: he takes no delight in the society of saints, and the enjoyment of the ordinances, because God is peculiarly present there; and above all things he is afraid to die, because then "the spirit returns to God that gave it." In short, the filial fear of God ascends with the soul to heaven, and is the eternal respect that the blessed spirits continually pay to his adorable perfections. Servile fear attends the sinner to hell, and settles into despair for ever.

It Affords Strong Consolation to those who are Wounded in Spirit

2. Use of comfort. The doctrine of divine forgiveness affords strong consolation to those who are wounded in spirit in the sense of their sins. Those only who feel the intolerable burden of guilt, will come to Christ to find rest: and only those our Saviour invites and promises graciously to receive. A tender and timorous conscience does often impute the guilt of sin, when it is abolished; a seared conscience does not impute it, when it abounds. God has revealed his mercy in so full a manner, as to answer all the allegations of a repenting sinner against himself. He objects his unworthiness of pardon: but this cannot exclude him from it: for the grace of God springs from within, and has no original cause without itself. It is like a celestial fire that feeds itself: God declares his sovereign pleasure in the exercise of mercy: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." Exod. 33. If mercy were bestowed only upon the worthy, none could be saved: "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The humble penitent urges against himself, that he has been a singular and extraordinary offender, that none is like him in sinning: but we are assured none "is like God in pardoning." The number of our sins is terrifying: this so affected the psalmist, that he fainted with desponding fear; "My sins are like the hairs upon my head, therefore my heart fails me." Mic. 7. But the multitude of God's mercies incomparably exceed our numerous sins. They are renewed every moment of our lives:

stupendous infinity! they are over "all his works;" and over all his attributes. "God is love," and love covers a multitude of sins.

The killing aggravations of our sins strike us through: but there is not so much evil in sin as there is goodness in God. Our finite acts cannot preponderate his unlimited essence. He declares, "I am God and not man, therefore ye are not consumed." Hos. 11. We hardly forgive a few pence, he forgives ten thousand talents. He is God, infinite in mercy, and as liberal as infinite. Delight in sin is an aggravating circumstance; but "God delights in mercy." Continuance in sin inflames the guilt; but his mercy extends to eternity.

I shall add, for the support of returning penitents, some examples of God's forgiving great sinners recorded in scripture. He charges the people of Israel, "thou hast made me serve with thy sins, and wearied me with thine iniquities." Isa. 43:25. It might be expected, that the next words should have been, I will revenge your dishonouring of me according to the glory of my majesty, and the extent of my power: but he promises pardon; "I even I am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions for my name sake, and will not remember thy sins." By the comparison of their sins, he illustrates the glory of his mercy. Lot, guilty of incest with his daughters; David, of murder and adultery; Manasseh, a sorcerer and idolater, that burnt his children alive in sacrifice to the devil and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; Mary Magdalen, out of whom seven devils were cast; Peter, who was so faint-hearted and false-hearted, that with execrations he denied his master; Paul, that was a bloody persecutor; are the instances of the astonishing omnipotent mercy of God, who can as easily pardon the greatest sins as the least, and makes no difference when our repentance is sincere, and our faith unfeigned: though according to the degrees of their guilt conscience should be affected. How many pardoned sinners, miracles of the divine mercy, are in heaven happy in the love of God, and glorious in holiness, who were as deeply guilty and polluted as any that now mournfully seek the favour of God? These are examples of grace so excellent and so divine, to encourage us in our addresses for pardon. The apostle Paul

tells us, "that for this cause he obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering for a pattern to them who shall hereafter believe on him to everlasting life." 1 Tim. 1. There is the same motive in God; he forgives sins for his name sake: the treasures of his mercy are not wasted by communicating: there is the same merit in Christ; his precious blood shed upon the cross is pleaded in heaven, "He ever lives to make intercession for us: and if we obtain the same precious faith, we shall have the same acceptance. In short, let those who are overwhelmed with fear consider, it is not only our privilege, but duty to trust in the divine mercy: we are commanded "to believe in the Mediator:" despair is more dishonourable to God than presumption, in that it is a sin directly against a superior attribute, the exercise of which it his delight and dearest glory.

Be Excited to Seek Pardoning Mercy

3. Use of exhortation. Let us be excited to seek the pardoning mercy of God with humility, with fear and all possible diligence, lest we should not obtain it. Our hearts should be set upon this with the most intense zeal, "for it is our life." Every impenitent sinner is under the condemning sentence of the law, and there is but a step between him and death: the only hope is, that it is not yet ratified by the judge, nor inflicted, but it is reversible by suing out a pardon in the superior court of the gospel. Now it is astonishing, that when the danger is so great and present, (for it is as morally impossible to be sure of time to come, as to recal time past) that men should be so unconcerned and secure, and neglect the main work for which they are spared by the admirable patience of God. Time is certainly short, and uncertainly continued; and when the oil that feeds the lamp of life is spent, the next state is the blackness of darkness for ever to all unpardoned sinners: now the sceptre of grace is extended to us, we are within the call of pardoning mercy; "God waits to be gracious:" but there is a sad assurance, if we do not sue out our pardon in the present life, the time of our reprieve, death is immediately attended with eternal judgment; the belief of which makes the prince of

darkness, with the most stubborn spirits of hell, to tremble: yet men continue in the guilt of their unrepented sins without fear, and wretchedly deceive themselves with a vain presumption that the door of mercy will be open when they leave the world; or bear up themselves by the numberless multitude of stupid sinners, and make a resolute reckoning they shall do as well as the most. They are studious and contriving, active and ardent about the affairs of this low life, and careless of being reconciled to God, a matter of the highest concernment and eternal consequence. Prodigious folly, never enough lamented! though vengeance from above is ready to fall upon them, and hell below with its dark horrors is open to swallow them up, yet they are stupid and fearless: the remembrance of this will rack and torment them for ever; for when extreme folly is the cause of extreme misery, the sufferer is the most cruel enemy to himself.

"Let us therefore seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near." Now God offers his pardon to the greatest sinners that will humbly submit to the gracious terms proposed in the gospel for our obtaining it. Besides what has been said of faith and repentance, I will more particularly consider what God requires of guilty creatures in order to their pardon.

The Properties of Confession of Sin

(1.) To confess. The confession of our sins is indispensably requisite to qualify us for pardon. The promise is express and full, "He that confesses and forsakes sin, shall find mercy." Prov. 28:13. That we may not be deceived in the application of this promise, I will briefly consider what is preparatory to this duty, the properties of it, and the connection of pardon with it.

The understanding must be enlightened by the divine law to discover sin. The law is the rule of our duty, and the obligation to obey it is immediately conveyed by conscience. While there is a cloud of

darkness in the mind, there will be a silence in the conscience. Paul declares, that he "was once alive without the law, that is, not understanding his guilt, he presumed on his justification; but when the "commandment came" in its light to convince him of the transgression of it, the apparition of sin in the clear glass of the law struck him dead. There must be a discussion of conscience, a comparing our actions with the rule, to discover their obliquity: for sins unknown and unconsidered cannot be confessed. Some sins are notorious, and present themselves to our knowledge and memory: others are of a weaker evidence, inquiry must be made after them. It is an unpleasant work to rake in the sink of a corrupt heart, but it is necessary.

The properties of confession are,

1st. It must be free and ingenuous: that which is extorted by bitter constraint is of no value and acceptance. Pharaoh, an obstinate rebel, upon the rack, acknowledged "he had sinned." It is true, the penal effects of sin may be the first excitation of sinners to consider their ways, but the Holy Spirit by that means so deeply affects them with the evil of sin, that they voluntarily confess them before the all-discerning Judge. David declares, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old: I said, I will confess my sins, and thou forgavest them." He came to a deliberate resolution, "I will confess them."

2ly. Confession must be sincere and full, that our sins may be more evident and odious to us. The covering of sins is like the keeping a serpent warm, that will sting more fiercely.* The concealing sin argues the love of it, and is a bar against pardon. "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, in whose spirit there is no guile." Psal. 32:2. It is not said, in whose spirit there is no sin, but no guile, no reserved allowed sin. The sincere penitent pours forth his heart "like water before the Lord." Of all liquids none are so clearly poured out of a vessel as water: wine or oil leave a tincture. We should in confession pour out all our sins, and leave no tincture of affection to them. If it be said, how can we confess our sins that are

above our counting? It is true, but we must reserve none. We must confess the kinds of our sins, against the first and second table, that were both written with God's hand; sins of omission and commission, and particular sins of greater guilt: we must wash off their deceitful colours, that they may appear in their hellish shape, and more deeply affect us. Men are very averse to this duty, and apt to conceal or extenuate their sins. The art of concealing and excuses is learnt from the first transgressor. When God called, "Adam where art thou?" though his dread to appear before the divine presence was a tacit confession of his fault, and his hiding himself discovered his sin; yet he does not acknowledge his sin, but alledges the consequence of it, his shame, to be the cause of his guilty fear. "I heard thy voice, and was afraid, because I was naked." Gen. 3:10. And to extenuate his offence, transfers his guilt on the woman, and constructively reflects upon God as the cause of it: "the woman which thou gavest me, gave me of the fruit, and I did eat." The wicked excuse did infinitely aggravate his sin. The woman lays her fault at the serpent's door, "the serpent beguiled me." Aaron pretends that the people compelled him to idolatry, and that the golden calf was not the effect of design and art, but of chance: "I cast the gold into the fire, and there came out this calf." Exod: 2. Saul coloured his rebellion with the pretence of religion: "he kept the best of the cattle for sacrifice." 1 Sam. 15:15. In short, as in sweating, it is observed that a general sweat of the body is for its advantage, but the sweat of a part only is the symptom of a disease: so a clear unfeigned confession is for our profit, but a semi-confession is counterfeit, an indication of hypocrisy.

3dly. Confession must be mixed with sorrow and shame in the remembrance of our past sins.

A piercing deep sorrow from spiritual principles and persuasives is the ingredient of an acceptable confession. There is a natural sorrow proceeding from the impression of afflicting evils. Sense is very tender and apt to resent what is oppressive to it. A sinner that has wasted his estate, blasted his reputation, shortened his life by his

excesses, and hastened his damnation, may feel anguish in his breast for his sins, the procuring causes of his punishment. But this sorrow proceeds only from the sense of external evils, not from the melted heart for the intrinsic evil of sin: as marble pillars are wet, from the moisture of the ambient air. It is the miserable man, not the miserable sinner that mourns. This sorrow is consistent with the love of sin; and when the penal evil is removed, the sinner returns to the practice of it. Carnal sorrow only respects a man's self as a sufferer: it is in hell, in the extreme degrees, "there is weeping for ever.

There is a godly sorrow, of which the Holy Spirit is the spring. It is the promise of God to his people, "I will pour forth the spirit of grace and supplication upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and they shall see him whom they have pierced, and mourn over him, as one mourns for the death of his first-born." The persuasive of our sorrow is answerable to its principle. The serious contemplation of our bleeding dying Saviour, is a spiritual and powerful motive to melt us into the tears of repentance. How congruous is it, if the purchase of our pardon cost our Saviour his bloody agony, that the applying of the pardon to us should cost us the most bitter sorrow? Divine grief is more from the memory of the evils we have committed against our heavenly Father, than from the evils we suffer. Carnal sorrow is barren and unprofitable. It may be said of it, what the wise preacher says of wild mirth, "What dost thou?" Only that sorrow that comes from heaven is accepted there: one spiritual tear is of more value, and efficacy with God than a torrent of natural sorrow.

Repenting sorrow is an indispensable qualification in order to our pardon, not merely from the will of the law-giver as the reason of our duty, but from the congruity of the thing itself. It is observable, that it is the wisdom and kindness of the God of nature, that the food that preserves life is pleasant to our taste, to invite us every day to eat, and renew our strength; but physic that is necessary for the recovery of health, is very distasteful, that our aversion to it may make us circumspect, to prevent all excesses that are the causes of diseases. Thus the sorrowful confession of sin which is medicinal to the soul, is

very afflicting; it wounds the spirit, and breaks the heart, that we may be jealous of ourselves, lest we eat of the forbidden fruit that requires so bitter a remedy.

Godly sorrow, though it be very afflicting to nature, yet the exercise of it is more satisfying to a sincere penitent, than all the pleasures of sin. In two cases grief is pleasant: when it is upon the account of a person dearly loved; a parent indulges his sorrow for the death of a child that was the life of his life. Or when pain is beneficial and an advantage: as in the application of a plaster, we are pleased with the pain it causes, that being a sign and effect of its healing operation. Now both these considerations are mixed with repenting sorrow: for it principally arises from the reflection upon sin, as that which has so dishonoured and displeased the blessed God our maker, preserver, and redeemer; that we have preferred the pleasing our corrupt and licentious appetites, before the obeying "his holy, just, and good will." The repenting sinner declares his love to God by his grief for offending him, and voluntarily remembers his past sins, and is pleased in overflowing sorrow for them. And this sorrow is preparative for peace: "unutterable groans" are introductive of "unspeakable joys: the Holy Spirit "that convinces of sin is the blessed Comforter."

The confession of sin must be mixed with shame. All the just causes of shame, guilt, turpitude, folly, and disappointment, are complicated in sin. The repenting sinner, by consciousness and reflection upon sin, that induces so heavy a guilt, that defiles the soul with so deep a pollution, that no ray of its original purity remains, that debases it infinitely below its heavenly descent, mourns with tears of confusion for what he has done. Repenting Ephraim bemoans himself, that he had been rebellious against the methods of God's mercy, like a refractory bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: and his recoiling thoughts made him to smite on his thigh, to be ashamed to the degree of confusion for his disobedience. How affecting an object he was in God's eye, the immediate answer declares: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake

against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Jer. 31. The psalmist reflecting upon his being almost vanquished by a vexatious temptation, degrades and vilifies himself, "so foolish was I and ignorant, and like a beast before thee." Psal. 73. Ezra in the confession of the holy seed's mixing with heathen idolaters, saith, "O Lord, I blush and am ashamed at the foul deformity of their sin." The apostle upbraids the Romans with a stinging reproach, "What fruit have you of those things whereof ye are now ashamed, the end whereof is death?" When a foolish choice is made, and the folly is detected, and experience disappoints the expectation, the natural consequent is shame. At the last day, when the filthiness and folly of men shall be published before God, and all the angels and saints, how much rather would they be hid in the darkness of their graves, than be clothed with confusion before that glorious and immense theatre? The sorrowful confession of sin, with deep shame here, will prevent the exposing the sinner to public shame hereafter.

4ly. Confession must have concomitant with it, the judging ourselves as unworthy of the least mercy, and deserving severe punishment. The apostle assures us, "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." He does not say, if we are innocent we shall not be condemned, for then who can appear before the high and enlightened tribunal of heaven? But if we acknowledge our guilt, and the righteousness of the sentence to which we are obnoxious, we shall be spared. We cannot satisfy God's justice, but we must glorify it: in this the admirable mercy of God appears. Suppose a court on earth, wherein the rule of judgment were, that all the faults which the guilty confess and condemn themselves for, should be pardoned, and only those they conceal should be deadly to them; how willingly and humbly would those who are conscious of many capital crimes, and are summoned to appear, accuse themselves? In the court of heaven, if we are faithful to God and our own souls, in the confessing our sins, and passing sentence upon ourselves, we prevent his sentence against us.

5ly. Prayer for pardon must be joined with the confession of sin: "the Lord is good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all that call upon him." God who is rich in mercy, has appointed prayer as the means of our receiving it; it being most honourable to him, that we should have a serious sense of our wants and unworthiness, and our absolute disability to supply them: and by our desires we should glorify his power and love, whereby he is all-sufficient and ready to bestow upon us his blessings. Prayer for pardon must have these ingredients: 1st. Humility is the most becoming qualification of a suppliant to the high judge of the world, to reverse the sentence of eternal death. The deep apprehension of our guilt will humble us before his dreadful tribunal. 2dly. Fervency, which is the life of prayer. A cold prayer, the spiritless motion of the lips, is so far from inclining the divine mercy to pardon us, that it increases our guilt, and provokes God's displeasure. If our apprehensions were as real and quick of our spiritual wants as of our temporal, our prayers would be as ardent for supplies. Our desires should be raised in the most intense degrees, in some proportion to the value of the blessing; they should be strong, as our necessity to obtain it. The pardon of our sins is the effect of God's highest favour, of that love that is peculiar to his children, it is the fruit of our Saviour's bloody sufferings; without it we are miserable for ever, and can we expect to obtain it by a formal superficial prayer? It deserves the flower and zeal of our affections. How solicitous and vehement, and unsatisfied should we be, till we have the clear testimony that we are in a state of divine favour? Only fervent prayers are regarded by God, and recorded in heaven. We disvalue his pardon by our indifferency and faint desires. In our petitions for temporal things, our affections should be temperate, always mixed with resigned submission to the will and* wisdom of our heavenly Father, who knows what is better for us than we do, and loves us better than we do ourselves: but in praying for the pardon of our sins, our affections should be inflamed, we should as it were offer violence to the King of heaven, and be unsatisfied without it.

What ardent and repeated addresses were made by David for this great blessing: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation." He prays as if the ghost of Uriah were always in his view, covered with blood, and reproaching him for his treacherous cruelty. The affairs and pleasures of his kingdom could not divert and calm his spirit, till he was restored to the joyful sense of God's saving mercy. If it be said, that David's complicated sins were of a crimson guilt, and justly terrified his conscience with the apprehension of vengeance: I answer, it is true, but supposing that preventing grace has kept us from sins of a high nature, whereby we should have incurred greater guilt, and been exposed to greater punishment, yet even the best men are in infinite need of pardoning grace: for the least sin makes us guilty of eternal death, and the infinite number of our sins, though according to the carnal conceits of men small, would be overwhelming. What is weaker than a drop of water, yet the sea that is a collection of innumerable drops of water, does often by an irresistible inundation drown the land. The wind is a collection of many vapours, which singly are of no force, yet it often tears up the strongest trees, and overthrows the firmest buildings, If the numerous sins of one man's life were set in order before his eyes, he would sink into the depths of despair, were not the divine mercy superabundant to our abounding sins. We must renew our requests for pardon every day: it is more necessary than to pray for our daily bread. We contract new guilt every day: and as our Saviour tells us, "he that is washed needs to wash his feet," that is, the sins of frailty and daily incursion must be purged away by serious repentance, and the application of the blood of Christ, and our earnest prayer for pardon. It is the cruel character of satan, he accuses the "Saints before God day and night:" he is an ardent accuser, and watchful always to find matter to provoke God's displeasure against us. It is therefore a duty of daily revolution, to pray for our pardon. Besides,

the neglect of seeking for the daily pardon of our offences against God, argues the despising his anger, and consequently the despising his love, which is infinitely provoking. We are commanded not to let the "Sun go down upon our wrath, much less upon God's." Repentance is not an initial act of sorrow, but must be renewed all our lives. God's pardoning us is not a transient act, but continued, as conservation is a continued creation.

Prayer for pardon must be mixed with faith in our "blessed Advocate, who ever lives to make intercession for us." If we could fill the air with our sighs, and heaven with our tears, we could not incline the righteous and holy God to pardon us: his justice is inflexible, and his pardoning mercy a sealed fountain; it is by the precious merits and mediation of his Son we are reconciled to him. Jesus Christ is the same powerful compassionate Saviour, "yesterday, to-day, and for ever." His obedient sufferings are of infinite value, and everlasting efficacy.

Lastly. Confession of sin is a relative duty, and must be joined with forsaking of sin. The sharpest sorrow, the most confounding shame for sin, the strongest desires for mercy, without the forsaking of sin, are ineffectual. There must be a renouncing of sin in our hearts, a resolution firm and permanent against it, an avoiding the appearance and approaches of sin, and an actual leaving it. If it be said, it is impossible we should preserve ourselves from all sin: St. John tells us, "If any man saith he has no sin, he is a liar, there is no truth in him." I answer, we must distinguish between sins: there are some, which while we are united to flesh, that is a principle of weakness, and are in this open state, surrounded with temptations, we cannot absolutely be freed from. Such are sins of ignorance and inadvertence, and of sudden surreption: for grace is not bestowed in such a degree of eminence to the saints here, whereby they may obtain a clear and final victory over them: but if we pray, and watch, and strive against them, and mourn for their adherence to us, "God will spare us as a father spares his son that serves him." And it is a certain sign of our sincerity, if we are gradually cleansing ourselves

from them. If they grow and increase, it is a sad indication: as it is said, if a scald in the head spreads, it is a leprosy. Lev. 5:13. But there are sins of a more heinous nature the not forsaking whereof excludes from heaven: such are enumerated by the apostle, "The works of the flesh are manifest, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I have told you in time past, that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Gal. 5. Besides, if the love of any sin remains in the heart of a man, he cannot be justified here, nor glorified hereafter. An indulged sin, though small in the matter, is great in the disposition of the sinner. In short, God requires sincere repentance, expressed in the confessing of our sins, not to inform him, for neither the solitude or secrecy wherein sin is committed, can hide us from his all discerning eye: though there is no witness to accuse and give evidence, nay if the sinner could extinguish his conscience, yet God will set the sins of men in order before them, and convince the guilty, he needed not their confession to discover them: but the humble, ingenuous and sorrowful confession of sin is required, that his mercy may be more illustrious in the pardon of our sins, and that the sinner may fear to return to folly. And this confession must be attended with the forsaking of sins, in order to our pardon, because of his immutable perfections. A malefactor may justly be condemned for his crimes, and though he remains impenitent and obstinate in evil, may be pardoned, because a temporal prince is capable of various apprehensions and passions, and may deflect from the rule of justice: but the Judge or the world is unchangeably righteous and holy, and cannot pardon sinners to the disparagement of his majesty, his purity and justice.

The Duty of Pardoning the Offences of Others

Our pardoning the offences of others is an evangelical condition of our obtaining pardon: we are commanded, "When ye stand praying, forgive if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." Mark 11:25, 26. The command is peremptory and universal, frequently and severely urged upon us by our Saviour. The reasonableness and congruity of it is most evident, if we consider the disparity of the object, or the number of offences. Our sins against God are relatively infinite, for his majesty and authority are truly infinite, which are despised and abused by the transgression of his laws: they are against all the duty and motives of justice and gratitude that oblige reasonable creatures to obey their Maker. Now the offences and injuries done to us are incomparably less: for we are mean creatures, far less in comparison to God, than a worm is to an angel; and by our sins are "viler than the earth." Besides, the obligation that should restrain men from being injurious to us, are of infinitely a lower nature. The disparity in the number is very considerable. Our sins against God are like the sand upon the sea-shore, their number is astonishing: our imaginations have been continually evil, from the dawning of our reason: but offences against us are comparatively few: for the variety of objects in the world often divert the thoughts and passions of our enemies from us. We owe to the Lord ten thousand talents, a vast sum that can never be paid if it be not forgiven, and shall we be unwilling to forgive a few pence? What is more becoming than that we who want a great pardon, should give a little one? The divine mercy is proposed as a model for our imitation. We must pardon entirely, and take no revenge for injuries done to us, but return love for hatred, good for evil, for so God does to us. We must not only forgive, but forget injuries in the sense of love; not like those who pardon in words, but retain the memory of offences, and upon a slight occasion renew their resentments. We must forgive great offences as well as small, and renew our pardon as often as offences are repeated, unless we will set bounds to the divine mercy. We must rejoice more in pardoning than in revenging injuries, and seek to be reconciled to those who are

averse from us, for that is according to our pattern. It is pretended, that by bearing a single injury, we expose ourselves to a double injury: but we must imitate our heavenly Father: if we do not follow him in forgiving, he will follow us in retaining our sins. The psalmist tells us, "With the merciful God will show himself merciful, but with the froward he will show himself froward." A holy and righteous punishment in retaliation of their sinful disposition.

The pardoning injuries is contrary to corrupt nature, and the duty is difficult, but the reward is infinite. Though it seems to vilify us, as if defective in our minds, not to understand injuries, or in courage not to repay them, which makes men hard to forgive; yet upon calm consideration we shall esteem it a duty easy and honourable: for it prevents the inflaming our passions, and the troubling of ourselves and others: it is an act of royalty, and makes us superior to them: it is the noblest victory, and often conquers and changes an enemy into a friend. And above all motives this should recommend it to us, it seals our pardon from God, and conveys the most clear and comfortable sense of it to us: for, as the psalmist excellently argues, "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear: he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" If we are by divine grace inclined and enabled to pardon frequent offences against us, shall not the God of all grace be ready to pardon our many offences against him? Our Saviour reasons from the love of natural parents; "If you that are evil know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to those that ask it?" The illation is as strong in forgiving love. If we who are of an unforgiving nature sincerely forgive those who injure us, and restore them to our favour, how much more shall God who is love, forgive our sins, and be reconciled to us?

Divine Forgiveness a Powerful Motive to Thankfulness

4. Use of gratitude. The divine forgiveness should be a powerful motive to thankfulness. David addresses his soul in an ardent and lively manner; "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name." Psal. 103:1, 2. He excites every faculty, the understanding to consider and value the mercies of God, the memory to register them, and retain a thankful sense of them, the affection to celebrate them. He repeats the call, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." We are apt to forget favours, and remember provocations. Benefits are written in the dust, injuries are engraven in marble. But strong affections will make indelible impressions of thankfulness. If we duly consider the greatness and goodness of God, and our meanness and unworthiness, "that we are less than the least of his mercies," we must be convinced every benefit we receive from God deserves to be remembered and acknowledged with serious thankfulness. That God draws a curtain of rest about us in the night, provides for us in the day, regards us with a compassionate eye, and relieves us in our wants and sorrows, should cause such deep affections as flow into outward declarations of praise.

It is true, our most solemn recognition of his benefits is but at poor duty compared with his immense bounty to us: our thanksgiving is an echo to God's mercies, that repeats a few syllables: What can our fading breath add to his blessedness and glory, that are in the highest degree of perfection, and truly infinite? But it is measurable, that as all our blessings flow from his mercy, they should fall into the sea of his glory: and when our souls bless him, he accepts our sincerity, and does not despise our thanksgivings for want of perfection.

In the recounting God's benefits, the psalmist mentions in the first place the pardon of sin, a "who forgives all thy iniquities" as the principal and foundation of all the rest. This in a most powerful way entered into his heart, and kindled a sacred fire there. I will briefly show, that the pardon of sin is so divine a benefit, that it deserves our

most solemn thankfulness, and that it inclines and disposes the soul to that duty.

1st. That the pardon of our sins deserves our most solemn thankfulness, will appear by an evident light, if we consider the nature and quality of the benefit, the means by which it is obtained, the circumstances in the dispensing it, and the consequents.

(1.) The quality and the nature of the benefit. Our blessedness consists in the forgiveness of our sins. David inspired from heaven declares, "blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." Psal. 32:1. The worst effect of sin is the separation between God and the soul. In his presence "is fulness of joy," in his absence fulness of sorrow. "Go ye cursed," is as terrible a part of the sentence as the "everlasting burning." Hell is the element of sin and misery: wherein the fire made fierce with brimstone, and the undying worm of conscience, torment the wicked. Now the pardon of sin secures us from the wrath of God, the supreme evil, and the cause of all other evils.

Besides, the love of God that pardons us is our sovereign good, and is the productive and conservative cause of all good: it bestows upon us celestial happiness, in comparison of which all the degrees of worldly honour, and power, and pleasure, and riches, are but dross and dung. The pardon of sin has inseparably annexed to it the privilege of adoption, and a title to the kingdom of glory. Our Saviour declared to the apostle, that the end of the gospel is "to open the eyes of men, and to turn them from darkness to light, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me." Acts 26:18.

God permitted the fall of man, to raise him to a more excellent and stable felicity. Adam was dignified with dominion over the lower world, and seated a prince in paradise; but his happiness depended upon his obedience, and that upon the freedom of his will, which proved a dangerous endowment by his abuse of it. He was foolish

and fickle in the best state of nature: he affected an independent immortality, "and being in honour, became like the beasts that perish." But the pardon of sin is the foundation of eternal happiness. Those "who are justified shall be glorified, and made equal to the angels," who are constant in good, as the devils are obstinate in evil. The blessed state above is secure and unforfeitable: the saints are incapable of sinning and dying.

(2.) The means whereby our pardon is obtained. I shall not dare to determine, that God could not have pardoned us by his sovereignty without satisfaction to his justice, but he has been pleased to save us in a way most honourable to himself, and comfortable to us. The psalmist tells us, according "to the name of God, so is his praise." Psal. 48. As his excellent attributes are manifest in his works, understanding creatures adore and celebrate them. The wisdom of God so gloriously appears in the way of our salvation, that the admiring angels praise him for ever. And the goodness of God is so conspicuous in saving us by Christ, that our exuberant affections should be poured forth in thankfulness. The remission of our sins is "by redemption in his blood." It was an expression of David's piety, that he would not serve God with "that which cost him nothing," 2 Sam. 24:24. but purchase the sacrifice by a price: and it was the high expression of God's love, that he would not save us with that which cost him nothing, but with the sacred treasure of heaven, the precious blood of his Son. Besides, the guilty conscience has so quick a sense of God's revenging justice, that our assurance would not be so entire in his mercy, without satisfaction made by the sufferings of our blessed Mediator. In this we have the advantage of David, who had not so clear a discovery of the means of our pardon, but a general knowledge of the forgiveness of sins; yet that inspired such flaming affections into his breast, that he begins the eucharistical psalm for that mercy, and concludes it with, "bless the Lord, O my soul:" but we that "have had Jesus Christ evidently set forth as crucified before our eyes, to reconcile God to us;" we to whom it is revealed, that "the robe of our salvation" is woven out of his bleeding bowels, in the same proportion as our knowledge of this mysterious

mercy, our thankfulness should exceed his. If any do not with the most ardent affections acknowledge the mercy of forgiveness so dearly purchased, it is an unhappy sign he has no interest in it.

(3.) The circumstances of dispensing our pardon. I shall consider two that make the divine mercy more glorious and worthy of our thankfulness.

That pardoning mercy was dispensed to us, notwithstanding our continued rebellion against God. A prince is sometimes induced to pardon a criminal, by the solicitations of his friends, and by his prayers and tears; but the divine goodness was the sole mover for us, and interposed between justice and our offences. Instead of appeasing God by humble and mournful submission, and ardent addresses for mercy, we repeated the provocations of his displeasure every day. How long did he with unwearied patience "wait to be gracious?" If after ten thousand denials of accepting his mercy, he had forsaken us, we had been as miserable as we are sinful. But notwithstanding our being inflexible to the innumerable calls of his word, impenetrable to the pure motion of his Spirit, and insensible of his excellent goodness that leads sinners to repentance; though the love of heaven or fear of hell could not prevail with us to forsake our sins: when we were prepared for wrath, and averse and utterly indisposed for the receiving his mercy, then his grace, as free as omnipotent, gave us repentance unto life, and qualified us for pardon, and bestowed it upon us. The extenuation of our sins is inconsistent with the exaltation of grace: but the more humble we are in the deep sense of our guilt, the more thankful for the divine clemency. That God was pleased to "crown us with loving-kindness and mercy," when a killing charge of innumerable offences was levelled against us, O goodness, truly divine and infinite, and should accordingly affect us with admiration!

2dly. Pardoning mercy distinguishes between sinners of equal guilt, and often saves those of greater guilt when others die eternally: this comparative heightens God's love and our thankfulness. How many

are surprised and cut off in a course of sin? how many die without repentance, and are under a notorious necessity of perishing? yet we that were as bad or worse, neither melted and made pliable by his goodness, nor bettered by his judgments, he spared, and by his grace cleansed and changed us, that we might partake of mercy. In this dispensation the question of the apostle may be put in its full force, "who made thee to differ?" Nothing within us, nothing without us, distinguished us from those that perish; there were the same polluted principles in our hearts, and the same rebellious sins in our lives: only the mercy of God that has no moving cause but itself, made the difference. Let the comparison be contracted between us and our associates in sin, and as the sun-beams concentrated in a burning glass, it will more inflame our thankful affections. How many that were joined in the commission of social sins, of intemperance, uncleanness, unrighteousness, and the like, are dead, and without the reserve of pardoning mercy, and some were rescued from damnation, as due to them as to the rest. At the last day, when there shall be an everlasting separation between those at the right hand, and those at the left hand of the Judge of the world, we shall understand the riches of grace that distinguish between us and the partners of our guilt: as by seeing us justified and received into glory, their sad exclusion will be aggravated to extremity; so by seeing them doomed to destruction for ever, the saving grace of God to us will be more glorious.

(4.) The consequents of pardon in the present life deserve our most affectionate thankfulness.

For first, The pardon of sins gives us a regular title to all temporal blessings, and the truest sweetness in their fruition. God is the universal and absolute proprietary of all things in this world, being made by his creating power, and continued by his preservative power. By our rebellious sins we were under a just deprivation of them. Now the pardon of sin takes off the deadly forfeiture, and restores the use and benefit of temporal blessings to us. It is true, God by his general bounty affords supplies to his enemies: "the sun

rises with his cheerful light, and the rain falls upon the just and unjust;" and wicked men have a civil right to their possessions: but they are not the gifts of his special love to them. The prodigal was first pardoned, and then entertained with a feast. The love of God gives a cheerful tincture to all his benefits. It is emphatically said, "God, even our own God, shall bless us." As he is pleased to value and accept the meanest service that is mixed with our affections to him: a cup of cold water that comes from the spring of love, shall have its reward: so his love raises the price of every blessing. The psalmist having set forth the riches, and prosperity, and peace of a kingdom, breaks forth, "happy is the people that are in such a case." But he presently revokes it, and ascends with a gradation of light and force; "yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord;" who are in a state of divine favour. Temporal blessings, if they are not the gifts of God reconciled to us in the Redeemer, are snares that alienate the hearts of men from God, and foment their lusts, and prepare them for final destruction. The rich man had his good things here; and was tormented after his sensual fruitions. A rebellious sinner is spared for a time, and punished for ever. The king of Sodom was rescued from captivity by Abraham, and reserved for destruction by a shower of fire and brimstone.

And secondly. The pardon of our sins allays and mitigates all afflictions in the present state. The conscience of guilt mixed with affliction, is like the poisoning a sword that makes it wound more deadly. The spirit of a man may bear temporal evils; that is, by counsel and constancy may support himself under them; "but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Conscience in anguish by the feeling of God's wrath for our sins, and fear of the extremity of it hereafter, is an intolerable evil. Let the affliction be a light touch upon the outward man, yet when the afflicted person considers, that it is sent from God as an enemy, and it is the beginning of his wrath that is a consuming fire, he is dispirited and sinks under the weight of it. How can frail man encounter with offended omnipotence, sinful man conflict immediately with the holy God? The sense of guilt makes a man a terror to himself, and consequently makes afflictions to be

more piercing and dolorous. Whereas when the soul is established in the peace of God, it finds consolation in his pardoning love, superior to all kinds and degrees of external evils that can afflict us here. It is the happy privilege of the inhabitants of Zion, the holy city, "they shall not say they are sick, for their iniquities shall be forgiven." Isa. 33. ult. The divine Comforter fortifies their faith in the promises of the blessed issue out of all their afflictions: "all things work together for the good of those who love God." Our love to God is the reflection of his love to us, that is powerful so to order all evils, that they shall harmoniously conspire to our eternal happiness. The impression of this in the spirits of God's children, makes them patient and submissive with resignation under all afflictions. It is certain the fastening of the mind in contemplation of an excellent object, may cause so strong a diversion, that bodily pains are much mitigated. The martyrs, by the powerful impression of the glorious reward, seemed to be in an ecstasy, without feeling in the midst of their cruel sufferings. The prophet Habakkuk triumphantly declares, "although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines: the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat: the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls." Though all the supports and comforts of life fail, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Joy is the affection of prosperity; but as the scalding drops of God's wrath upon the conscience turn all the comforts of a man into torment, so the cordial drops of his love change afflictions into consolations.

I will now show that the pardon of our sins produces an excellent temper and disposition of soul to praise God. Love to the benefactor, and joy in the benefit, are the incentives of thankfulness. They tune the heart and tongue in the music of praise. When they are raised to a flame, they have a kind of charm, of rapture and ecstatic force, and transport the soul above itself in expressions of praise. These holy affections in the angels and saints above are in their exaltation: and the circle of their employment is, to acknowledge and admire, to reverence and magnify God, for his absolute excellencies, and his relative benefits. Love and joy are regulated by their objects and

motives. Exceeding love and joy, when terminated on worldly things, are exceeding folly: they are empty and vanishing, a sudden blaze that dies in a moment. But the pardon of our sins infinitely endears God to us, and produces a substantial permanent joy. His love, though our hearts be as hard as a rock, as cold and dead as the grave, will melt us, and kindle a holy heat of affection, a love singular and supreme to God, according to the excellency of the benefit. Love will ingeminate the praises of God: "thou art my God, I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee." Psal 118. Our joy in the benefit will be according to our extreme want of it, and the strength of our desires to obtain it. Without the pardon of our sins, "it had been better for us we had never been born;" or made in a lower rank of creatures incapable of damnation. According to the conviction of the greatness of our misery, our longings will be for deliverance: "the desire accomplished is a tree of life." The tree of life was in the midst of paradise, the centre of its pleasures. According to the degrees of our desires, such is the sweetness of fruition. Now when the soul is overwhelmed with the fearful apprehensions of everlasting death, how ardent are the desires of pardon? how unsatisfied without it? and what impressions of joy are felt from the sealing its pardon? Solomon tells us, "that good news from a far country is like cooling water to one burnt up with thirst." How much more refreshing is the testimony of the blessed Comforter from heaven, to one fainting in the estimations of conscience, that his sins are pardoned? David expresses his valuation and earnest longing for the favour of God, and his joyful sense of it: "there be many that say, who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon me: thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased:" Psal. 5 an inward cordial joy, that far exceeds the counterfeit joy in the countenance, that ends in heaviness. Now the thankful sense of a benefit is correspondent to the joyful sense of it, and the joyful according to our languishing longing after it. Fervent prayer for the pardoning mercy of God, and a frozen acknowledgment of it, are utterly inconsistent. There is no joy in the world so sensible and affecting, as the joy of one saved from present death. A condemned man values and rejoices more in receiving two

lines where his pardon is contained, than in the conveyance of a kingdom Hezekiah, when under the sentence of death in his sickness, how passionate were his addresses for recovery? How exuberant were his joy and thankfulness for his rescue from perishing? "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day." Isa. 38:19. He resolves to renew the praises of his gracious preserver every day: "the Lord saved me; therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord." Ver. 20. Had he so quick and warm a sense of the divine mercy that saved him from the grave, how much more ardent should our acknowledgments be for the saving us from hell? If we have the feeling of sin, as we have of sickness, and are as duly sensible how much the life of the soul, our excellent and immortal part, is to be preferred before the life of the frail and perishing body, our joy and thankfulness would be in the highest elevation, in remembering forgiving mercy. This will be the argument of the high and everlasting praise of God in heaven.

I shall conclude with this advice, Let us not content ourselves with verbal acknowledgments of this real and glorious benefit: let our thanksgiving be joined with thanksdoing; then we shall be accepted. Of this we have the most comforting assurance from God himself; "he that offers praise glorifies me: and to him that orders his conversation aright, I will show the salvation of God." Psal. 50 ult.

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