

HENRY LAW



FORGIVENESS
OF SINS



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Forgiveness of Sins

by Henry Law

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Preface

"But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him." Daniel 9:9

To the congregation worshipping in the Cathedral Church of Gloucester. Dearly beloved in the Lord,

On stated days your expectation looks to me for teaching. To perform such duty is to every minister of Christ the joy of joys. Beyond all doubt the pulpit stands the highest post of man to appear as ambassador of the King of kings, and to proclaim the way of life, is a privilege which angels might ambitiously desire. I strongly feel this--no words can tell my estimate of this grand work. This hallowed exercise requires vigor, and energy, and strength--in its discharge every faculty should put forth power. But when the weight of many years depresses, these qualities must cease to bloom--decay will follow in the footsteps of declining life. It is now mine to feel this common lot of old age, and hence I seek some substitute for public service in so large a church. To supply then this absence of oral address I venture to present this volume to you.

Thus the pen strives to take the place of voice. Instead of looking on you congregated around me, I seek to sit beside you in your homes.

At fixed times your attendance may be reluctant, and your thoughts may stray; I thus come when leisure gives me welcome. Without intrusion I solicit some vacant moments. You shall not complain of wearying lengthiness; your averted look is my dismissal. But while you read, I have a willing flock--and while you read with prayer, I teach to profit.

This mode, also, of address may have especial use. Days may arrive when the pulpit may not be sought by you--your feet may be unable to tread the hallowed courts; age, or infirmity, or other suffering may keep you from the familiar seat. These pages then may find attention; and when the public springs are closed, these private drops may bring refreshment.

If this approach should win you to be wholly Christ's, my public silence will be your immortal gain. To promote this union in season and out of season is ministerial duty. Let me distinctly warn that without Him this world is utter nothingness--as boldly let me aver that to receive Him into the heart is every treasure won. Separate from Him, the public service is a casket with no jewel; religious forms are a mere skeleton; external rites are lifeless perfunction; Scripture is a dead letter; sacraments seal not the title-deeds of heaven. Religion not framed in Gospel-mold gives neither peace nor hope--its course is joyless, and its end is woe. This deep conviction prompts me thus to write.

It may be said this book repeats the truths which constantly I preached. From the pulpit it was indeed my aim to point to Christ, and woe would be to me if now I gave other direction. Another Savior or another Gospel is a fiction beguiling to sure ruin--it is better to be mute than gratify a craving for the conceits and fallacies of man. A Christless bauble glitters only to destroy--such trifling is, I trust, far distant from these pages. Their instant substance is to urge you to seek forgiveness of your sins, and every benefit of Christ's passion at the Atoning cross. Turn not from the humble effort because no eloquence or novel views attract--my yearning is

not to excite vain feelings, but eternally to save. It matters little what I think--it matters much what Christ's revelation says. I trust it is our common prayer, Let Christ increase, let man lie low.

Your devoted servant in Christ Jesus,
Henry Law, Gloucester, Oct. 30, 1875

The Need of Forgiveness (part 1)

"But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him."--Daniel 9:9

Such is the utterance of prophetic lips. Daniel here speaks, wrestling with God, and valiantly refusing a repulse. The words sparkle as a bright gem in his diadem of prayer. Their testimony has this exceeding value--in brief space they reveal our God as glorious in mercies and forgivenesses, and show in terrible contrast the rebel character of man. Thus the blessing of blessings--the essence of the glorious Gospel of our God--the forgiveness of sins, appears in bold relief.

It is superfluous to state that this proclamation is not limited to supplicating Daniel--it pervades the book of Revelation as fragrance the sweetest garden. Echoing texts reverberate the note that our God is "ready to pardon." Witness the answer when Moses prayed, "Show me Your glory." The glories of His name resound; but the bright chain was incomplete without the link, "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." (Ex. 34:7.)

Thus the ambassadors of Christ repeat the call, "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." (Isaiah 55:7.) And again, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins--and by Him all who believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:38, 39.)

Our sublime services, also, insert this truth in a most touching prayer--"O God, whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive, receive our humble petitions." And worshipers are taught individually to profess, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

It is not irrelevant here to state that the noble Reformer of Germany was fast bound in the dungeons of doubts and fears, sinking in the mire of despondency, and stumbling in the deepest gloom of darkness, when an experienced friend reminded him of this frequent avowal. Then light and peace enlivened his soul, and he went forth rejoicing and achieving wonders. He found God in Christ and triumphed in the strength of recognized forgiveness.

To this grand subject attention is now invited. May our forgiving God, by His enlightening Spirit, suggest each thought, supply each word, and grant a blessing according to His gracious will!

To estimate forgiveness rightly, it must be distinctly seen. It will be poorly prized, unless its value be weighed in balances of truth. It will not be sought, as surpassing all worlds in worth, until there be adequate knowledge of the miseries which it averts, the wounds which it heals, the joys which it kindles, the wrath which it quenches, the rescue which it achieves, the depths from which it raises, the heights to which it exalts. When sickness comes, a remedy is valued--shelter is entered, when storms impend.

What then is forgiveness as appertaining unto sin? What is the blessing implored in the petition--"Forgive us our trespasses"? It is remission of due penalties, the obliteration of incurred guilt, the withdrawal of just displeasure, the blotting out of accusing

handwriting, the burying all offences in oblivion, the hushing of the loud thunder of the law, the canceling of its tremendous curse, the consigning to a sheath the sword of justice. It is the frown of Jehovah softening into eternal smiles. It encounters sin, and strips it of its destroying power.

Hence evidently forgiveness implies that sin has preceded. It can only effect its wonders in the element of transgression--there must be sin before there can be remission. Where no offence exists, no pardon can be needed--they cannot be restored whose feet are always in right paths.

Thus we reach the fundamental position that sin gives occasion for forgiveness. Sin is the need which calls for its intervention. Let then this monster now be boldly faced; let its hideous features be narrowly scrutinized; let it be stripped of its deceiving mask; let the cheating tinsel disappear; let it be viewed in its naked deformity; let its essence and character, and work, and guilt be traced unsparingly.

I. SIN'S ESSENCE. What constitutes its character? No unanswerable question is here asked as to the parent of its birth--here is no search into its originating cause. The simple inquiry is--Where is its sphere of work, and what is its distinctive nature? Supreme authority replies. Scripture states in terms intelligible and incontrovertible, "Sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4.) Violation then of God's holy rule introduces sin--it breathes in the province of transgression.

God, as supreme in all His universe, fixes His mode of government. Accordingly He issues His commands--if these be outraged, the outrage is sin. Its essence is disobedience to God's law.

This essence appears in frightful enormity, when the purpose of this law is viewed. The sum of its requirements is worthy of the great Lawgiver. *In divine simplicity it only requires Love.* Its statute book enforces Love. It demands that the heart should beat in one pulse;

the affections flow in one channel; the will be bound by one fetter; the desires burn in one flame; the actions move in one path--Love. The whole inward man must be bright in one complexion--Love. Any deviation from this course constitutes sin.

This sublimity brightly shows the origin of the law to be divine. As a mirror it reflects Jehovah's excellence--it is the transcript of His glorious being; it is holiness on its highest throne; it is purity in its loveliest form; it is perfection without one alloy. How abominable then is that principle which hates and resists such code, and strives to crush it beneath insulting steps! How incontrovertible is the position that they need forgiveness who fight against God under the banners of this monster!

It follows that the need of forgiveness is universal, for sin exercises a sway co-extensive with all human life. It grasps each mother's son in its vile arms, and stops not its assaults while time endures. It moves with the mind's first movement--in the cradle it begins to stir. It grows with man's growth; it walks beside him in his every path; it adheres as the very skin, and lingers in each dying chamber. There is no lofty dwelling and no lowly hut which it frequents not. There is no period of day or night which can repel its step. It is a universal and life-long plague; for where is the man whose career is not continual deviation from the rule of love? Hence the need of forgiveness of sins is world-wide. Hence is the preciousness of the testimony, "To the Lord our God belong mercies;" in the plural, "and forgivenesses;" in the cumulative, "though we have rebelled against Him."

II. This need becomes more apparent, as advance is made from sin's essence to some of its developments. Here it appears a many-headed hydra, a fiend of various forms. Its outbreak towards God, towards the soul within, towards the world around, betray it.

(1) Let diverse instances show its conduct towards GOD. Its feelings may be thus classed.

Alienation. Whatever departs from God's rule departs from Himself. Contrariety to His law separates from His mind. Disinclination to His will moves altogether in an adverse course. It flees His face--it establishes an opposing interest. Far as the east is from the west, so far it is estranged from all that is divine. Sin is such alienation. They who are its slaves need to be forgiven, before they can see God's face and live.

Hatred. "The carnal mind,"--and every mind is such in which the Spirit dwells not--"is enmity against God--for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7.) By nature's instinct the secret chambers of imagination swarm with thoughts tainted with dislike of God, His name, His nature, His perfections, His cause, His people, His Word, His scepter, His kingdom, His Christ. Sin has strong inclinations, and they all are arrayed against His righteous ways. It has ungodly bias towards the abominable things which God hates. Surely the victims of this passion need to be forgiven, before they can be one with God.

Contempt. With haughty look it sneers at sacred precepts. It scorns them as weak precision. It spurns the restrictions of godly walk as derogatory to man's liberty. In the swellings of pride it tramples on the barriers which heaven has erected. Except forgiveness comes, the consequence is appalling woe.

Defiance. It raises an insulting head. It braves God's displeasure. It ridicules all penal consequences. It mocks at the thunder-bolts of threatened wrath. It regards the right hand of the Lord as impotent to strike. It boldly asks, "Who is the Lord that I should serve Him?" Unless forgiveness intervenes what will be the doom!

Rebellion. It shatters the yoke. It breaks restraining bands. It ignores submission. It boasts, "We will not have this man to reign over us." If power were equal to the will, it would invade the heaven of heavens, and hurl God from His throne. If forgiveness lingers, how terrible must be the end!

Treason. It enters into conspiracy with all heaven's foes. It joins hands with every adversary. It combines with all dark plots. It betrays the citadel of God's government. It opens the portals to admit all traitors. Without forgiveness, vengeance will be sure and just.

Robbery. God, as Sovereign, has a right to exact obedience. Sin defrauds Him of this due. It refuses payment of just demands. It withholds the allegiance of rightful service. It wantonly misuses every talent entrusted to its care. If not forgiven, how can it escape!

Such, and many more, are the developments of sin in reference to God. Thus the position is established, that vast is the need of vast forgiveness. How enchanting, now, is the sweetness of the words, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him!"

(2) The picture darkens when the developments of sin in reference to the SOUL are seen. It changes this garden of the Lord into a waste howling wilderness. Fragrant flowers cease to bloom; thorns and briars usurp their place. It dims the noblest jewel of God's creation. It tears away its robe of righteousness, and casts it forth to face the world naked, impoverished, impotent--without one sheltering rag--with no possession but ignominious shame. It weakens every spiritual faculty. It so blinds, that the *eye* sees as through a glass, most darkly. It so impairs the *ear*, that the voice of truth is not discerned. It cripples every energy. The *feet* are powerless to climb the upward path of life. It infuses moral leprosy. It renders earth a spiritual charnel-house--men live the tabernacles of dead souls. Behold this fair vessel a wreck on evil's rocky coast, and then ponder the work of sin! Will not the cry ascend--What need of forgiveness for such wrong! Will not the tidings be prized--"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him!"

(3) The case assumes more frightful hue when sin's inroads on the WORLD around is added. Doubtless sin is inborn. It is a hereditary disease--the seeds of every evil are innate in each heart. Unaided by contagion it would universally exist; but yet by contact, influence, example, it multiplies, and becomes more rampant. A spark from without kindles the dry stubble--bad men wax worse by bad fellowship. As Christ's disciples never move towards heaven alone, so evil beckons and decoys a multitude. Sin is a ready teacher, and has ready pupils. Let it be repeated, that each natural heart is from the cradle a hive of sin; but through evil suggestions and evil associations, evil broods swarm abroad on quicker wing. Tempted Eve becomes a tempter. Of Achan we read, "that man perished not alone in his iniquity." (Josh. 22:20.) Jeroboam the son of Nebat is branded, as the man "who made Israel to sin." Hence reproaches will embitter the miseries of the lost. Children will loathe misleading parents; companion will revile companion, as the first to lure to headlong fall.

When sin is contemplated running its infectious course--sowing universally the seeds of woe--ruining individuals, nations, generations--spreading a fatal plague--it cannot be denied that its course is ruinous. Perilous is the condition of man infected by it. Forgiveness must come, or sure and dreadful consequences ensue.

Why is this dark picture thus exhibited? There is no intent to leave any trembling, dismayed, cast down, fast-bound in shackles of despair. The true desire is to show in lovelier form the Gospel's smile--and to win readier acceptance for the tidings, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him."

Let it be repeated, that none can claim exemption from sin's grasp! "All we like sheep have gone astray." "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves." Sin's vile brand is upon all--but to all the Gospel comes, with cheering voice. It sweetly proclaims, the case is not hopeless--to perish is not inevitable--deliverance is provided--

remedy is at hand--rescue opens large arms. God extends a cup overflowing with forgivenesses. A way is opened, in which, without infringement of any holy attribute, He can pardon, restore to favor, and remit sin's curse. Full, free, complete, everlasting forgivenesses have come forth from the courts of heaven. They stand ready to spread their saving mantle round the sons of men. Who will not bless God for His revealed and unalterable property--"But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him." Let no one rest until he can say, "I acknowledged my sin unto You, and my iniquity have I not hidden. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Psalm 32:5.)

The Need of Forgiveness (Part 2)

"But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him."--Daniel 9:9

To the forgiveness of sins attention now reverts. The subject justly claims large share of pious thought. This mercy showers saving blessings from its wings; it blots out transgression and hides all iniquity in its sheltering arms. Hence no words can fully tell its worth.

Angels may gaze and marvel, but they have no experience of its joys; for none of that pure company exult in pardon. It is solely the heart-felt property of the redeemed. It will be the hymn of heaven; but its first notes must be learned on earth. To learn it well, there must be commencement in the rudimentary volume of its need. Portions of this dark book have been perused--sin's essence and its main developments have passed in review; and at frequent pauses the dreadful need was solemnly deduced. This need is prelude to the

tidings--"But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him."

The subject pursued leads to (1) sin's guilt; (2) sin's final doom.

I. SIN'S GUILT. Guilt is that property of sin which links it to God's wrath. It constitutes its criminality, and forbids immunity. That sin has this property is clear--it stands confessedly a convict. It is undeniably a transgressor of the law of heaven. It cannot plead that it is guiltless; therefore avowedly it merits punishment.

Thus in reference to GOD it has been proved to be alienation, hatred, contempt, defiance, robbery, treason, rebellion. Can such be its guilty state--can it evidently work havoc throughout all creation, and shall God sit indifferent, as though He saw no evil? The very thought strips Him of the glories of His holiness, and misrepresents Him as erecting a platform on which sin shall have free scope to act rebellion, and then be spared as innocent. Holiness ceases to be holy, except it inflict on sin the penalties of its guilt. Righteousness is no more righteous, if it withholds the righteous condemnation. Truth lies low in ignominious shame, if the words be not fulfilled, "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23.) "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Gal. 3:10.) The arm of Omnipotence is a broken reed, if it wield no sword to vindicate the honor and the majesty of God's kingdom. Thus the guilty cannot be screened as guiltless.

Doubtless God is rich in mercy--His mercy endures forever--His mercy reaches unto the heavens. "To the Lord our God belong mercies." If compassion were not a bright beam in heaven, there could be no remission of offence, no substitutionary offering, no transfer of guilt to a Surety, no Gospel, no Christ, no cross, no reconciling blood.

But mercy cannot annihilate the attributes which sit as compeers on the glorious throne. It lives co-equal with them. Its delight is to

exalt, to magnify, to glorify them. Patience may wait long, until settled purposes are fully ripe; forbearance may forbear, until the cup of wrath at last overflows; patience may endure, until the extremest limit be attained; but their honor must be maintained, and guilt not screened in Christ must encounter the just woe. The interceding voice, "Let it alone" at last will cease. God can by no means clear the guilty. Guilt then must receive its penal wages, unless some scheme be found to intercept the terrible result. Who now can fail to feel that the guilty sinner needs mercies and forgivenesses?

Let the page of EXPERIENCE be next read. It is written throughout with testimony that tremendous indications of divine displeasure pursue guilt. Amid sweet rays of mercy striving to break forth, big drops of wrath often descend. The present appearance of earth is mournfully significant--the whole creation groans and travails together. What is inscribed on all the tears and travail? These dark evidences proclaim that sin has polluted earth, and that guilt is the accompaniment of sin, and that penalty adheres to guilt.

Tears and sighs and anguish in multiform misery tell what sin has brought into this earth--sufferings and agony point to their prolific parent. Mourners ever mourning, the afflicted ever wailing, the bereaved ever disconsolate, sickness ever weakening, pains ever torturing, death ever doing its relentless work, graves insatiable, loudly tell that God has a controversy with earth. Thus the wide spread of misery proves that the guilt of sin awakens just displeasure.

Mark, next, the terrors of CONSCIENCE when aroused from apathetic slumber by the Spirit. See the man awakened to the real perils of his guilty state. He is brought into a new world, where all is dismay. He perceives that his feet totter on the brink of a terrific precipice. He sees an abyss yawning in his path. He trembles, lest the next step may plunge him into bottomless perdition. He looks back, and shudders at his past career--he looks above; the sight is

blackness of darkness--he looks onward, and hopelessness affrights him. All within stirs up remorse--all around is terror. The past cannot be recalled--the present must move onward--the future cannot be escaped.

In what mirror are these terrors seen? Surely in the mirror of sin's guilt. Conscience, in the Spirit's light, convicts of sin. Guilt is its inseparable companion--vengeance from heaven closely follows. The awakened conscience knows this and quakes.

Annals of the past confirm this statement--they exhibit terrific outbreaks of divine wrath. Let the old world tell its dreadful tale. Its wickedness exceeded all that is denounced as wicked--its trespass grew up unto the heavens. Enormity of evil cried aloud, and enormity of vengeance slumbered not. God opened the sluices above, and called the waters from their lowest caverns; billows upon billows swelled; one vast flood cleared the polluted earth, with the exception of one family. Each drop of that overwhelming deluge proves that sinful earth is guilty earth; and guilty earth cannot but call down wrath.

Let another instance lend corroborating aid. Omitting the cities of the plain--a smoking furnace, a flood of flame--let the miseries of Jerusalem in her final siege be pondered. Where can horrors be found like unto those horrors! The sword, the pestilence, the famine, the fire, the signs in the heavens, the wails of earth, surpassed all former prophetic indications. Vengeance sharpened its every fang to mangle and to torture. Jerusalem drank a brimful cup, and drank it to the very dregs. Whence comes this unparalleled anguish? Sin stands out as the guilty cause. Enormous guilt brought down enormous wrath.

Here let a shuddering glance look INWARD. Is not every child of man deeply immersed in guilt? "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way." (Isaiah 53:6.) "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23.) How then

shall the guilty escape, if no forgiveness hold back the arm of wrath! How precious now are the tidings--"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him."

Thus far the guilt of sin has been viewed, as exhibited in time, and as endured on the little space of this passing scene. But sin's results end not with earth's brief moment. Here is only the opening of the sluice--the stream flows onward into the ocean of eternity, and there the billows find no shore, no bottom.

It requires no small effort to proceed; but to pause here would leave the subject only on the threshold of its magnitude. Progress must be made--time's flimsy veil must be withdrawn; realities beyond must be distinctly faced.

II. SIN'S FINAL DOOM now meets us. Scripture abounds in warnings--their plainness is only equaled by their awe; their terrors are all faithfulness and truth. They speak loudly that men may ponder and escape. Blessed be the Holy Spirit for this arresting voice! He uncloaks the approaching day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God--"when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ--who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." (2 Thess. 1:7-9.) Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, are denounced on every soul of man that does evil. (Rom. 2:8, 9.)

There is no negative in this catalogue of woes. It is the aggregate of every form of positive endurance. Who can gaze with firm eye on the pictures of the Apocalypse! But they are portrayed for our admonition. Behold! He who is announced as the Word of God appears treading "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." (Rev. 19:15.) Here the omnipotence of God is

exhibited not only mighty in wrath, but fierce in wrath, infuriate to execute vengeance. What must that vengeance be!

Tremendous terms exhaust the powers of imagination. The voice thunders, "Depart from Me, you cursed ones, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Again the sound is heard of "blackness of darkness forever;" "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth;" "the worm that dies not, the fire that is not quenched." No drop of water cools the parched tongue, and these torments are to endure forever and forever. No hope of deliverance sustains the lost. No respite ever relieves. Intermission never brings a momentary ease. No glimpse of dawn gives prospect of a better day. What was, still is, and forever shall be. It is all pain without release, all misery for everlasting ages. It is the woe of an eternal night.

Such is the endless end of sin. Such are the penalties to which its guilt is righteously consistent. Such is its sure condemnation.

This picture is no fable; no fiction; no hyperbole. No color is inscribed too darkly. These are the true sayings of Him who is the Truth. But pictures, however vivid, fail to give exact idea. The painted flame shows not the sting and biting pungency of fire. They know little of the angry ocean's swell--of the agonies of a wrecked crew--of the strength of the infuriate lion--of the devastation of the volcano, who only see these images portrayed on canvas. As heaven to be really known must be attained, so sin's wages must be received before the fruit of its guilt can be conceived.

It will be happy if through this dreary passage a glorious prospect is attained. It will be so to all who now clasp to grateful hearts the good news--"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him." Let then the reviving truth now have free course and be glorified. A remedy is provided. A refuge is erected. A fortress of escape is near. A rescue is at the door. "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." (2 Cor. 5:19.) Christ comes to the

blessed work in obedience to the heavenly call, and the dictates of His love. He vicariously endures all these penalties. Hence "repentance and remission of sins are preached in His name among all nations."

Let the tidings be devoutly prized, "Christ has suffered the just for the unjust." In Him all manner of sin is forgiven to the children of men. This forgiveness of sins is the corner stone and glory of His Gospel. Gaining validity through Christ's blood, it remits all penalties to the believer, abrogates all demands, relaxes all bonds, cancels all debts, blots out every accusing charge, silences all threats, blunts every weapon of wrath, extracts the sting of vengeance, averts all miseries, removes all apprehensions, opens the prison-doors, loosens all chains, closes hell, makes a straight path to heaven, and crowns an innumerable multitude with blessings of celestial favor.

Let men be wise to seek in an accepted time this inestimable gift. Let them, the Spirit helping, secure this prize, and turn not from *the Father of all mercies, heaping on Christ the outpourings of His wrath, that He may heap infinities of bliss and glory on pardoned guilt.*

Let not the only hope be slighted. It shines in Christ and in Christ alone. He is the treasure-house in which forgiveness is stored. Let not the multitude, or magnitude, or heinousness of transgressions deter. "A fountain is opened for all sin and uncleanness." They who cast themselves therein are whiter than the whitest snow. Their blessed experience may truly testify, "But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him." "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1.)

The Originating Cause of Forgiveness

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."--Eph. 1:7

Forgiving mercy abounds in aspects which only vary to increase delight. These aspects are ever fresh joy in the days of earthly pilgrimage. They will not weary throughout eternity. What will prompt the ascription of glory and dominion "unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood"? (Rev. 1:5.) Surely it will be a realized pardon. To swell this chorus will be pleasures at God's right hand for evermore, and happiness in its fullest flow, and bliss on its highest pinnacle, and delight in its supreme perfection. The more this song is practiced now, the more will earth assimilate to heaven, and fitness ripen for eternal and divine worship.

Let then this theme be now contemplated from another stand-point. By gradual steps a position has been reached from which the expansive plan of forgiveness may be largely and intelligently surveyed. With this purpose the valley of humiliation has been entered--the urgent need has been portrayed. With open eye the truth has been contemplated that guilt is linked to sin, and guilt awakens God's wrath.

The fact, also, has been established that this tyrant enslaves each child of man and entwines adamant fethers of condemnation. What condition can be more appalling! Sinners are righteously obnoxious to God's vengeance and must eternally endure the penalty, unless some way be found for the entrance of forgiveness. But while the death-knell sounded, the reviving note was heard--"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him." "In Christ Jesus we have redemption through

His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace."

The question now occurs, Whence springs forgiveness? Where is the birth-place of this friend to sinners? Here the Word gives distinct reply--"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Precious and abundant is the revelation--a full cup of mercy is presented to our lips; Christ's blood is announced as the purchasing price; God's grace is added as the originating source. Let thoughts of the price at present be postponed; the origin and fountain-head claim first attention; and may the God of all grace send out His light and truth to guide and teach! For as the sun is only seen through solar light, so grace cannot be visible except grace lends enlightening rays.

To exclude misapprehension, it is well at the outset closely to scan GRACE. In its objective sense, as a heavenly attribute, it exhibits God in loveliest view. It is a bright jewel in the crown of His glory; it sits high on the throne of His perfections; it is love flowing in the deep channel of freeness. It finds its sphere of action not only in compassionating misery, wretchedness, distress, anguish, agony, woe; it looks tenderly on such sufferers in their most repulsive condition of undeserving and guilty; it yearns with pitying eye over the extremities of demerit--over those who are obnoxious to His wrath--under just condemnation--utterly without the slightest ray of excuse--righteously doomed to penal vengeance.

Misery may exist with no fault as its occasion--mercy may hasten to soothe and to allay it; but grace is more than mercy; it melts with pity over sinners in the lowest cells of guilt. It flies to avert execution when just sentence has gone forth. When no cause exists to soften, when every motive seems to steel the heart, grace freely loves, because it will love. Such is grace in Scripture statement; such is grace as the originating cause of the forgiveness of sins.

When the Spirit lends illuminating aid it is evident that unless grace had thus intervened no sinner could escape the wrath denounced. That this conclusion may be more deeply impressed let thought confront earth's final day. This day comes on apace. All who have ever breathed the breath of life must meet it. Suppose the great white throne to be now fixed, the judgment to be set, and the books opened. What do they show? Page upon page appears black with recitals of transgression.

When the record of daily life is publicly proclaimed, who among the children of men can lift up the head and boldly aver--These doings are not sins? Immunity is their due. This cannot be said. Truth now reigns. Fallacies have vanished; self-deceit no longer blinds; the light of heaven has dissipated all mists. "Every mouth must be stopped, and all the world must become guilty before God." (Rom. 3:19.) No flesh can seek acquittal on the plea of innocence.

But while guilt is acknowledged, are there pleas which can restrain the merited penalties, or can avail to win forgiveness? Let the examination advance as if the tribunal were some earthly bar, and the proceedings were conducted "after the manner of men."

Shall it be said--*These sins are small in magnitude and trifling in importance?* What, is not every deviation from the perfect law of love an offence of infinite amount? It must be so when measured by the majesty of the infinite Lawgiver. There is no little sin, because there is no little law, no little God. Can that be small which is allied to eternal wrath? No plea is valid which ignores the nature of offence.

Shall any plead the scanty number of their sins? Be it so, that in some cases through short time or restricted opportunities sins are comparatively few. There will be stripes more, and stripes fewer. But in what instance have they not been commensurate with the moments of life, and as swarming as the multitude of thoughts! Let it never be forgotten that if there were only one sin, it would be

violation of the law, and as such would call for penalty. It must obtain forgiveness or wrath must be outpoured.

Shall thoughtlessness and ignorance be pleaded? Perhaps awakened conscience may disdain such weak excuse; but if it be made it cannot extenuate, but rather it aggravates the guilt. Is thoughtlessness, with eternity at the door, no fault? Is ignorance excusable, with the Bible in the hand or within reach? Is not the Gospel within hearing? What more could God have done to awaken, to instruct, to guide? Account is due, not only for what is known, but for the knowledge within grasp. Escape is vain when based on willful blindness.

Where now shall the guilty flee? Shall penitence, contrition, shame, and tears be offered in arrest of judgment? What is their worth when weighed against God's just demands! Besides, when penitence, contrition, shame, and tears are real, they are evidence that grace exists. They are divinely genuine only in the territory of experienced pardon.

Such reasoning might be extended until imagination's inventions failed. But enough has been said. No ingenuity, apart from Christ and irrespective of God's grace, can fabricate one bar to check guilt's punishment. No urgency, no potency of pleas can claim remission.

Is then the sinner's case beyond all hope? Far otherwise. It is bright as the brightest rays of heaven. "But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him."

Whence then springs this reviving light? No reply except from heaven can satisfy. But the Word announces that *from the fountain of free grace streams of forgiving mercy flow!* "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Blessed be God, forgiveness flies swiftly from the heaven of heavens, speeded by the wings of grace. It makes large strides to blot out sin, but every step moves in the path of

grace. On every feature in the scheme of forgiveness the lineaments of free grace beam.

(1) Investigate the first conception of pardon. Here steps must move with meekest reverence. No advance can be safe except in the footsteps of the Spirit's teaching--but Scripture is not silent concerning counsels of grace. It is written with unmistakable intent, "He works all things after the counsel of His own will." Thus forgiveness is the result of deliberate resolve. The purchasing blood is declared to be "the blood of the everlasting covenant." (Heb. 13:20.) Jesus is announced as the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 12:24); and among the articles of this better covenant it is stipulated, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Thus *forgiveness emanates from deliberate eternal counsels in which free love reigns*. In accordance the sound is heard of "God's great love with which He loved us, when we were dead in sins," and again, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." These counsels consult for the sinner not as pardoned and restored, but that he may be pardoned and restored; not as extricated from the pit of guilt, but as lying helpless in its mire. Thus forgiveness originates from grace.

(2) Next, the prominent feature in the scheme of forgiveness manifests free grace. This feature is willingness to accept a substitutionary payment, to inflict vicarious punishment, to transfer guilt from the personally guilty to one capable to represent them. It consents to regard those in whose stead the Surety stands, as liberated, absolved, acquitted, justified, blameless, innocent. Hear the grand announcement, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him,"--His beloved Son, our Surety--"the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6.) A glorious note confirms the truth, "He has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Our God takes off sin from the actual perpetrator, removes the crushing burden, transfers the guilt, and

consequently the penalty and wrath. But nothing of merit on the sinner's part, nothing out of Himself moves God to this act. Grace calls and grace accepts a Substitute. Thus again, forgiveness springs from grace.

(3) What but grace induces Christ to undertake the Surety-place? Grace leads Him so to humble Himself as to put on the prison garb, and to represent the vilest prisoners. He, the all holy and all just, presents Himself as responsible for all iniquity, and appropriates to Himself all guilt. With no reluctant step He ascends the altar of the cross, He lays bare His heart to bury the sword of justice. He receives as His own due every vial of God's wrath, and drinks them to the very dregs. No merit in the sinners, for whom He thus endures, could move Him. In them everything is most vile, unlovely, repulsive--they are laden with abominations most abhorred. It is vain then to seek any moving cause, but free grace. Let then the song of praise be heard--through grace His people are vicariously punished; through grace they are most graciously forgiven.

(4) It is most pertinent to add that this forgiveness only works in the sphere of Christ. It is the property and privilege of those only who are one with Him, the members of His mystic body, the spouse of His heart, the branches of the true vine, the living stones annexed to Him the true foundation. The link which constitutes this union is FAITH. Faith sees Christ in all His beauty, glory, power and willingness to save. It recognizes Him as wholly suitable, supremely capable, divinely sufficient, infinitely willing. As such it flees to Him, embraces Him, cleaves to Him and becomes identified with Him forever. Whence arises this faith? Scripture decides, "therefore it is of faith, that it might be BY GRACE." (Rom. 4:16.) Faith is a free-grace gift. The Holy Spirit in love descends, bringing this seed from heaven, and implants it in the heart. Without faith there is no forgiveness through the work of Christ--and without grace there is no faith. Hence forgiveness is interwoven with grace.

(5) The Spirit in the plenitude of His love preserves, guards, waters, nourishes this plant, until mortality is swallowed up of life, and the headstone of redemption's pyramid is brought forth "with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." (Zech. 4:7.) *Thus from foundation to completion every stone in the fabric of forgiveness is laid and cemented by free grace!* "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace."

It is thus apparent that the scheme of forgiveness is heaven-born and worthy of its Author. It seats God on His high throne, and crowns Him with His eternal glory. It sinks man into the depths of his own nothingness and exhibits him as fast bound in fetters of helplessness; exposed to storms of wrath and unable to devise a shelter. It kindles in the redeemed heart flames of adoration praise and love. It awakens the only motives for grateful service and holy living. They who would work out their own forgiveness work as slaves, and fail and perish. They who work because they are through grace forgiven, work as happy and beloved sons. They fit to reign with Christ in glory forevermore.

The Price of Forgiveness (part 1)

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."--Eph. 1:7

A retrospective glance promotes intelligent advance. The need of pardoning grace has been established. Sin appeared a grievous, an appalling, a universal malady, spreading wide infection--it held Adam's family in iron grasp, and branded them as criminals

awaiting execution. No lip could qualify the truth--"All the world is guilty before God." (Rom. 3:19.) The province of nature and of self disclosed no hope. On one hand there was no help; on the other there was no refuge. Above, righteous anger frowned; below, perdition yawned. Despair seemed ready to engulf when the fair fields of grace arose to view, and a tender voice resounded--"But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him."

Next the inquiry was probed, "How can forgiveness acquire life?" In such matter no unsubstantial answer can give peace--anxious feet refuse to stand, except upon a solid rock. Scripture quickly removed all doubt--grace is proclaimed as the fountain-head of pardon. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Thus a scheme of forgiveness gains birth--it springs from the deep source of grace--it flows on in this channel, ever widening, expanding, and thus swells into the ocean of eternal glory. The word stands as a bright pyramid--"By grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves--it is the gift of God." (Eph. 2:8.)

But trembling sinners may still be tossed by ebbs and flows of fears. Sins continually start up in affrighting forms. Conscience drags them to light, as multitudinous as ocean's sands, as terrible as an army of giants. A dreadful book of account contains within and without unanswerable indictments--it shows charges of debts to God's justice, rebellion against His rule, robbery of His due, defiance of His authority, insults to His majesty, estrangement from His service, hatred of His holiness, contempt of His law--perpetrations all abominable in His sight. How then can grace, yearning to confer forgiveness, erase reckonings so countless, so black, so great! God is just, as surely as He is gracious. Grace cannot trample upon righteousness; holiness cannot be ignored. "God sits upon the throne of His holiness." (Psalm 47:8.) "Holiness becomes His house forever." (Psalm 93:5.) Truth too, demands that its every

word shall be magnified and honored. How then shall grace bring in forgiveness? Such tremblings haunt many breasts.

Here the Scripture in our front gives sweet reply. Its lovely light dispels these darkening clouds, and fills the skies with rays of peace. Let emphasis rest on its central clause--"In whom we have redemption *through His blood*, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

Grace originates forgiveness not arbitrarily, not in disregard of holy claims, not in violation of His co-equal attributes; but in fullest recognition of Jehovah's unity. Just payment must be made; and it is made by the atoning God-man. A wondrous stream flows from the wondrous cross--its value is infinite, because He who renders it is infinite. Its inherent boundlessness merits, earns, procures boundless remission of guilt--there can be no limits to its excellency; therefore there are no limits to its efficacy. As far as the east is from the west, its reach extends; therefore far as the east is from the west, it removes transgression from God's sight. It is unfathomable as the ocean's depth; therefore it buries all guilt in caverns beyond Omniscience's sight. Oh, scheme divine! It is surpassing ecstasy to ponder and adore it.

Sin might be punished without effort on the part of God. Let Him speak the word, and the armies of heaven issue forth to bind the tares in bundles for the burning. Let the restraining chain relax, and the inexorable jailer drags the condemned criminals to his cells of torment. Men left to their own ways will quickly people hell. It requires no intervention to destroy; but to introduce forgiveness demands the energies of heaven. This grace can gain no existence but through the death of God's co-eternal Son. Because He dies, forgiveness lives--all who are screened by forgiveness are cleansed and washed in blood. It is distinctly written, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." But this remission is secured; for Jesus gives the assurance--"This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:28.)

Thus the sacramental cup commemorates the full price paid, and echoes the words, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

Let now water be drawn from the deep wells of these glad tidings. Let the price be considered as covenanted, foreshadowed, sufficient. Other properties will present food for after-thought.

I. It is a covenant price. The everlasting covenant has exact terms--among them the price of blood is foremost. Let thanks be given for such a covenant, in all things ordered and sure. Let thanks be given that the Holy Spirit draws back the curtains of heaven's council-chamber, and shows some glances of the scene. Let the privilege of pondering these mysteries be gratefully and reverently used.

Here is a field in which no idle curiosity may sport, or sceptic speculation place unhallowed foot; but, traversed by faith, it leads into rich pastures. Revelation then discloses a covenant framed before the foundation of the world. The eternal Father stipulates with the co-eternal Son that Jehovah's glory shall be magnified in the accomplishment of salvation. To Christ belongs the main concernment--He is the substance of the whole--He is so intertwined in every part that He is emphatically called the Covenant itself. It is the Father's voice--"I will preserve You, and give You as a Covenant to the people." (Isaiah 49:8.) He is the "Surety" of it. As such He is pledged for the performance of its every term. He is the "Messenger" of it. As such He publishes its sure mercies. But especially He affixes to it the seal of blood. To accomplish this He takes man's nature, becomes bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, and thus is qualified to pay the price.

In foresight of this expiating death the prophet proclaims, "By the blood of Your covenant I have sent forth Your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." (Zech. 9:11.) The Apostle re-echoes the same--"Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our

Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work." (Heb. 13:20, 21.) Thus the covenant of eternal origin demands blood--forgiveness must be purchased by this price.

Peter, gazing with rapture on the scheme exclaims, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake." (1 Peter 1:18-20.) Thus line upon line confirms the glorious truth that blood is the covenanted price of forgiveness.

The Apocalypse in varied terms gives repetition. In its visions "the Lamb slain" appears. The countless multitude are arrayed in robes, "white in the blood of the Lamb." The rebels against God are described as they "whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Rev. 13:8.) The victim dies--conditions are fulfilled. O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, who will not bless You, who will not adore You--that You did covenant in eternal counsels to shed Your most precious blood to purchase forgiveness, and in time did redeem the pledge!

II. The price of forgiveness is not only covenanted and fore-ordained, it is also fore-shadowed. What grace arranged before time was, grace quickly testifies when time begins. Thus, before the cross was raised, its shadow cast its length over preceding ages. Before the price was really paid, foresight of it breaks forth in types, in visions, in prophecies, in promises. Heralds' voices proclaimed that He was approaching who would pay down the ransom. Let Eden's garden commence the proof. There sin enters and guilt is contracted. Punishment must follow. The woman's seed is announced as coming to avert this woe. The tempter shall bruise His heel, but He shall bruise the tempter's head. Here are the

intelligible tidings that a Deliverer should expiate by suffering. But in the garden more than this promise is given. The skins of beasts are used to form a clothing--natural death touched not these animals; no conclusion can be held but that they died in foreshadowing sacrifice. Thus the covenanted price assumes the distinct form of 'shed blood'. This typical blood flows on in never-ceasing stream--it continues its teaching at every patriarchal, every Jewish altar, in every sacrificing priest, in every reeking knife, in every dying victim, in the temple, on the great day of atonement, before the mercy-seat. Has this uniformity of blood no voice? Truly it anticipates the blood of Calvary for the forgiveness of sins.

The elders of the family of faith clearly saw its purpose--they rejoiced in sight of the foreshadowed price. Here was the essence of their peace, the strength of their hope, the power of their prayers. Such is the constant pleading at the throne of grace, "*Wash* me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Shall we, who can go back to Calvary and behold the price there paid, scruple to rejoice in the finished work, and to sue out its benefits? Rather let our trust in the accomplished work exceed the confidence of those who saw it only through the vista of long distance. We who live under the beams of the mid-day sun, should not be less joyous than those who saw through a dim twilight.

III. It is a Sufficient price. Vain would have been the covenant, vain the foreshadowing, if the price had failed in worth. But it is all-sufficient. The vastness of the demands indeed exceeds all thought. Satisfaction is due for all the injuries done to all divine requirements. The law requires perfect love at every moment of time, in every movement of the mind, in every thought, and word, and work. Every deviation, every shortcoming subjects the transgressor to the inexorable curse. O sinners, carefully view the debt of your sin! Pile mountains upon mountains until heaven's summit be overpast--the pyramid of your iniquities raises a far higher head. Count all the sands which ocean's bed contains--the

multitude of your iniquities is an outnumbering mass. For each offence the uttermost due must be paid, or the dreadful sum remains, and no door is opened to admit forgiveness--but the God-man brings price sufficient. Let justice now present its scales--in the one scale let sin be heaped; in the other scale let Jesus place His meritorious blood. It instantly and infinitely prevails. Justice can ask no more. Infinite worth is its inseparable adjunct--it is paid by Jehovah's fellow. This offering is greater homage to God's attributes than all earth's ruin--it brings more glory to Jehovah than the endless punishment of all who ever sinned. Their never-ending endurance could never have reached the end of the demand; but the blood of boundless value at once liquidates the whole.

Where sin tremendously abounds, the price most gloriously superabounds. Let the thought give comfort. Forgiveness thus comes not only most *graciously*, but most *righteously*. No holy requirement is relaxed--God is inflexibly and unchangeably just, while He freely justifies. It is a grand word, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.) Thus all obstacles are removed; the gates are widely open; the portals give free way. Forgiveness has clear path; it may enter every home and every heart, blotting out all sins, and bringing back the sons of faith to the bosom of a reconciled Father.

But one phrase of the text must not be overlooked. It is written, "In Him we have redemption." In Christ, in Christ alone, forgiveness dwells--He is the sphere, the element, the home, the condition, as He is the price of it. It is the exclusive portion of those who are in Him, who dwell in Him, are engrafted into Him, are cemented into Him, are united to Him, are one with Him, buried in His wounded side, risen with Him to newness of life, seated with Him in heavenly places. Apart from Him forgiveness has no place--there is only a fearful looking for of judgment to come; therefore Scripture cries, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is

near;" "Return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy, and to our God for He will abundantly pardon."

The Price of Forgiveness (part 2)

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."--Eph. 1:7

Forgiveness of sins still sparkles before our eyes as purchased by a wondrous price. The immensity of the claims against the sinner has shown a giant form--except these claims be fully satisfied forgiveness has not free course. The avenue is closed--it cannot fly to earth. But satisfaction is rendered--thorough price is paid. Jesus presented His blood. Its worth prevailed--all demands are cancelled.

This price has been already viewed in some of its aspects. It has been pondered as a COVENANT price, pledged in everlasting counsels, set forth from the foundation of the world. It has been seen as FORESHADOWED; announced in no ambiguous shape by types of multiform variety, and heralded by a long train of prophecies. It has been proved to be SUFFICIENT--it reached to the length and breadth, the depth and height of every requirement. It entirely silenced each opposing adversary--it enabled every holy attribute of God joyfully to concur in pardon. Thus forgiveness strides forth arrayed in conquering garb.

But the properties of this price are not yet exhausted; indeed they are, in every sense, inexhaustible. Let it suffice to add (4) it is accepted; (5) it is peace speaking; (6) it stands alone, without a colleague. May God, the Holy Spirit, supply each word! May He send forth the Gospel sound! May willing hearts receive it!

IV. It is accepted of God. The soul which has groaned beneath the load of sin, and trembled under apprehension of divine displeasure, and been scared by the thunders of the broken law, and seen hell gaping in the front, cannot easily be persuaded that forgiveness removes all peril. It dwells among startling fears, and trembles as on haunted ground. The willingness of Jesus to bear all guilt may be allowed; the infinite worth of His offered blood may be readily acknowledged--but misgivings may arise as to the acceptance of the offering. May not the price be rejected? If so, the guilt remains uncanceled, and punishment is not averted. May not justice turn from surety-payment? May it not inexorably require personal redress for personal offence? But these tremblings quickly vanish before Gospel-statements. The evidence is absolute that the price is graciously accepted. Grace *plans* the saving scheme and grace *receives* it.

The main proof comes from Jesus' resurrection. At Calvary He dies, and the price of blood is paid. If here the scene had closed, and Jesus had lain hidden in the tomb, the balance might have trembled between hope and fear. Optimistic hope might have maintained that such wondrous blood must certainly prevail; but fears might have whispered--There is no evidence of success--perhaps some difficulty has intervened. But when it is seen that death is impotent to detain the Substitute, that the shackles are relaxed, that the prison bars fly back, that the grave restores the victim whose blood had flowed, that the Surety returns, that He who was dead appears alive--then the evidence is complete, that the price is accepted, and full acquittal is obtained. Jesus by showing Himself alive by many infallible proofs sets to His seal that perfect success crowns the gracious work, that all the stipulated terms are fulfilled, that the price is accepted, and forgiveness granted.

Faith revives and triumphs when contemplating this blessed fact. Let thought fly back then to the resurrection day. Behold Jesus standing in the midst of the disciples. Here is no imaginary vision. Here is no phantom. He appears in a body of flesh and blood. The

same body which had been consigned in lifeless weakness to the tomb is now re-animate with all the faculties of life. His living voice utters words of comfort--"Peace be unto you." But what peace could guilty sinners take, if their forgiveness had not been achieved? Therefore when He had so said, "He showed unto them His hands and His side." The visible wounds prove that the payment of blood had been paid; but the wounds are exhibited by 'Jesus restored to life'. Here is proof that the payment was accepted, and the Surety was in consequence released.

Yet further apocalyptic vision opens to view the courts of Heaven. One stands in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders. He bears the form of "a lamb, as it had been slain." What is the significance of these marks of death? The signs prove that the extremest penalties of sin have been undergone--that the Lamb has died as an atoning victim. But death has not detained Him. He is alive--alive in heaven, alive before God. The Lamb who was slain is liberated and absolved, and exalted to all heaven's glory on the right hand of the Majesty on High. Perfect is this assurance--bright is this manifestation of accepted price! Where can doubts now show their face! They vanish as mists before the orb of day. The price is indubitably accepted--sins are forgiven--blood-bought souls are fully redeemed.

V. It is a peace-speaking price. Peace between heaven and earth--peace in the conscience--flows entirely from the work of Jesus. Remove this work, and an angry God wars against rebellious man. Obscure it, and ceaseless terrors rack the troubled mind. But Jesus has paid a price which introduces perfect peace. Hence peace is a title which He condescends to bear--the Spirit testifies, "He is our peace." Ambassadors go forth, "preaching peace by Jesus Christ." God "makes peace by the blood of His cross."

That this price secures reconciliation is sufficiently apparent from the fact of its acceptance. Let then this peace flow like a river through the soul, and exert its due influence in the courts of

conscience. Let all the family of faith be wise--let them not wrong their souls, and act as enemies to their chief comfort. Let them not take part with those who plot man's misery--let them not deny to the accepted price its legitimate province of speaking peace--let them not turn from their heaven-sent privileges. It is far worse than folly to sit trembling in the *shade of fear*, when God opens the *banqueting-house of joy*. It is affront to Him, that when He so forgives, His children should mistrust His goodness. It is dishonor to the blood of Jesus, that He should effectually obliterate transgression, and the pardoned one should mourn, and sigh, and weep, as though His blood had not flowed on the accursed tree, or flowed inglorious in worth. It is unthankfulness to close the door when He is willing to enter, waving the banner of peace-speaking blood. Let the accepted price be tightly grasped, and all its benefits be enjoyed.

When Satan reminds you of sins, and uses all devices to terrify, let this price be shown. It blunts his every weapon and silences his every charge--he flees dismayed at the sight, and peace is undisturbed. When STRENGTH declines and sickness weakens, let support be sought in the accepted price. Languor smiles when the prospect shows 'heaven opened'--all must be calm and bright when assurance whispers that sins are washed out. When the foot of DEATH falls heavily beside the bed, it comes as a welcome friend to lead to Him who paid the price. When THE GREAT WHITE THRONE is set, "Christ died" is a plea which truly will prevail. Let it be presented, and heaven's portals will fly open, and admittance will be granted to mansions of eternal peace. When faith thus acts on the accepted price, the Lord of peace Himself will give peace always, at all times, by all means. *Nothing can disturb the peace of him who fully knows that God is reconciled, and heaven purchased, and glory won!*

Let men hear and believe. "He who is exalted to be a Prince and a Savior to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins," has sent forth His voice, yes, and that a mighty voice. To the loving

penitent He proclaims, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you--go in peace." Expatriate in the wide domain of peace, repose under the shadow of the peace-speaking cross, glory in the accepted price!

VI. It is the only price. There can be none other--a lesser payment could not avail; a greater could not be found. This conclusion is instantly apparent from the acknowledged case. It has been clearly seen that the debt is of infinite magnitude, and therefore demands an infinite equivalent. To wipe out such stains infinite sufficiency must be found. No price then can be sufficient which involves not Deity. The blood of Jesus has this inherent--and this full price has been fully paid.

Let it not be said--But sins are wrought on earth; and what earth has forged surely it may remove--debts here contracted may here be paid. It cannot be denied that earth is the scene of sin's birth and cursed course. But transgression acquires its dreadful character because it assails, and insults, and defies God. Atonement therefore must deal with God, before forgiveness can be granted. But nothing framed on earth can negotiate with heaven--earth cannot produce a heaven-reaching price. The only price must be divine in origin and essence.

The question may be asked--Can heaven present no other price but the God-man's blood? It is inhabited by a countless host of angelic beings, beauteous, holy, shining in robes of pure perfection. Is not compassion for man the glowing inhabitant of their breasts? Are they not willing to undergo all suffering to rescue the guilty from just wrath? Will not their society offer price of forgiveness?

Let the case be supposed of such willingness and such offer. It must be vain. Their collected multitude must fail to present adequate merit--they cannot rise in excellence above *created* beings--they cannot expand beyond the *finite*. If they could be permitted to assume our nature, and so to obtain blood to shed; still it would be

created blood, and therefore its worth would be enclosed in small limits, and insufficient to pay infinite price. Thus neither heaven nor earth can give other price than Jesus.

The Father calls Him, Him only, to the work. He comes--He comes alone! "He treads the winepress alone--of the people there is none with Him." The conclusion is obvious, "Neither is there salvation in any other;" because no other hands hold the required price.

Such is the price paid for the forgiveness of sins. It is covenanted, foreshadowed, sufficient, accepted, peace-speaking, and there is none other! What wondrous lessons are inscribed on this display of grace! It tells what it alone can fully show--the terrible character of sin. The wail from miseries on all sides, and in all forms, and from all ages, speaks in dreadful terms. The shrieks from a drowning world--from the furnace of the cities of the plain--from the anguish of pain-stricken multitudes--from agonies of conscience, proclaim in notes of woe the fearful fruit of sin. But the cry from the Blood of the Cross is louder and far more significant. What must sin be, if no speck of it can ever vanish except when sprinkled with this expiating blood of Jesus? Let this be pondered, and the monster will be abhorred which ruins earth and peoples hell. Let this be pondered, and surely the offered pardon will be prized. The need cannot be denied--the danger is evident.

Let then the blessing of blessings, full forgiveness, be sought where only it can be found. Let all other hopes and pleas which are none, and worse than none, be totally resisted. Other course leads headlong to perdition, and rivets more tightly sin's crushing burden. Plausible cheats too often mock the world--let them be shunned, or they will lead their victims to misery's cells. Thus flowing tears may tend to effect ruin. It is indeed true that without repentance none can live; but weeping eyes buy no remission. Where is the penitence which would not awaken shame? Where are the tears which need

not tears to wash them? Where are the washings which need not to be washed anew?

Outward sins may be forsaken, and life reformed, and warm desires may burn for fellowship with God. But careful walk cannot recall the past. Doubtless "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14); but the strictest service is but the bounden duty of each day. Obedience, even if perfect, has no excess of merit to overbalance previous faults.

Thus it must be granted that there is no pardoning efficacy, but in the one appointed remedy. This price is a stream from heaven flowing by each side--all who plunge therein join the blessed company, "whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is covered." They are the accepted of Him "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

The Completeness of Forgiveness (part 1)

"Who forgives all your iniquities."--Psalm 103:3

Forgiveness of sins has been reviewed in relation to its NEED, its SOURCE, and its PROCURING CAUSE. Attention now rests on its COMPLETENESS. At the outset let it be stated, that here it eludes full grasp and exhausts description. It presents itself as a boundless ocean without shore--as a depth unfathomable by human line--as a sky without horizon--as an expanse ever widening as steps advance. He who has fled for refuge to a Savior's wounds, looks out from his high watch-tower, and limitless forgiveness spreads before him. He who washes in the fountain opened in the Redeemer's side, retains not the shadow of speck. His career, once so black, now vies with

the whitest snow in purity. The rapturous song is on his lips, "Who forgives all my iniquities."

It is a charming exercise to traverse the path which leads to this conclusion.

The completeness of the forgiving act is apparent from the essence and character of Him who forgives. This grace proceeds alone from God. All His acts are steeped in heavenly infinity. When then He forgives, He forgives like a God--fully, without measure, without restraining boundary. When forgiveness smiles from heaven, it smiles forever and never darkens into avenging frown.

The procuring price, also, proclaims complete forgiveness. Payments demand equivalent remission but this payment is infinitely worthy; therefore there can be no bounds to the recompense obtained. It must be entire--perfect.

Let it be granted that sins overtop the heights of heaven; forgiveness soars unspeakably above their summit. Let sins exceed the sea's innumerable sands; forgiveness outnumbered the total mass.

Moreover, the payment is made to secure heaven for a multitude which no man can number. But heaven can receive no inhabitant stained with one speck of evil. If one dark spot remains, its shining portals refuse admission. Hence, if forgiveness be only partial, the gracious purpose of the Savior's death is frustrate--heaven could not receive a white-robed multitude. But the many mansions will be all filled. The corollary is sure--forgiveness is complete.

But in the believer's journey to his heavenly home many sad days darken. Trials in various forms assail him; languor, disease, weakness, and pain, bring him into the gloomy chambers of depression; the spirit faints; the pillars of strength totter; the mind is feeble to grasp inferential proofs; mental vision will scarcely read aright the largest letters of argumentative conclusion. Our wily

adversary is skilled at these seasons to infuse a train of fears and doubts.

Hence the Spirit in His tender love has provided abundant support to counteract. He presents strong consolation for the heirs of faith. He has erected secure fortresses into which they may flee and rejoice. These fortresses are the positive assurances of God's Word--that glorious testimony of His mind and will--that seal of His faithfulness--that record of His immutable decrees--that treasure-house of delights--that garden of most sweet refreshments. In frequent phase, in diversified forms, in copious images, the announcement re-echoes that the believer's forgiveness is forever complete. The glorious theme is, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." God forgives all their iniquities.

Minds are well garrisoned which have these precious declarations prominent in memory, and ever ready for relief. Let it then be a glad task to meditate on some sayings of our God, planted by the Spirit in the paradise of truth. Their purpose is eternal consolation. Their power keeps the heart from sinking amid billows of despondency. They strike the key-note of unending hallelujahs. They present a cup overflowing with true joys.

I. Here the Scripture which introduces this section of the subject stands foremost. It is an assertion so simple, that none can misapprehend; so large, that it defies addition. David in rapture of devotion is ardent to enumerate His mercies. He chides his flagging soul--he strives to rouse his inner man. He exclaims, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all His benefits." When he proceeds to unfold the catalogue, what mercy outstrips others in claiming primary praise? What heavenly dealing takes the topmost place? It is forgiveness--forgiveness godlike and complete. Hear the announcement--"*Who forgives all your iniquities.*"

Let believers learn the happy art of using this word expertly, intelligently, with undoubting faith. Satan will often strive to bring our sins to remembrance. They readily appear in frightful mass, in vast accumulation. They swarm in all periods of life--in childhood's dawn--in blooming youth--in the prime of manhood--when the shades of declining age cast gloom. Offences crowd to light, openly committed or allowed in secret--acted in every condition and relationship of life--at home, in the family, abroad, in solitude, in the busy haunts of men, in the sanctuary, in the closet, in prayer uttered or neglected, in ignorance, in clear intelligence, when conscience slumbered, and when its voice gave warning, amid misgiving and in daring audacity, in defiance of convictions, in disregard of resolves and vows! Who can count the hideous spectres which are ready to revive and terrify the conscience? But when all sins in all their aggravations threaten, the multitudinous array may be confronted with this relieving word--"Who forgives all your iniquities."

Let the emphatic monosyllable "all" be prized. It is not said some, or few, or many--but "all." God so completely pardons that not one iniquity remains unpardoned. Thus forgiveness gloriously shines in splendor of completeness. Let believers beseech the Spirit so to increase their faith that they may clearly see and clasp to the heart this blessed article of salvation.

Sometimes the idea occurs that Bible-statements fail in general and universal design--that they are the peculiar property of the special speaker. Thus the doubt may arise whether the word of David extends beyond his own persuasion. Paul appears to dissipate misapprehension; he gives this comfort to the Church--"You, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has He quickened together with Him, *having forgiven you all trespasses.*" (Col. 2:13.)

Thus the assertion of David is adopted by Paul--what the patriarch states the Apostle re-echoes. Let all believers admit the wide

assurance, and place the foot of faith on all their sins obliterated by the Redeemer's work. Let them embody among their chief joys the truth so strikingly repeated, and shout--David's word and Paul's repetition are alike from heaven--"Who forgives all your iniquities." He has "forgiven you all trespasses."

Paul in this Scripture not only proclaims the completeness of forgiveness--he enforces it by illustration. He thus continues--"He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross." (Col. 2:14.)

First, the guilt is significantly portrayed--there is the record in antagonistic force. It is against to us as a fearful adversary. This record is the law's inexorable decree. But vain is this opposition--it is blotted out, canceled, thoroughly expunged, completely wiped away. Let the condemning record of ordinances be searched for--it cannot be seen--it is blotted out. To the believer, then, the law is no more an opponent fierce in threats--it is decked with smiles, as a calm and sweet rule of life.

The next announcement adds, "He took it and destroyed it." He has so removed it that it can no more obstruct the road to heaven. The gracious mode of removal is also expressed. Consolations are multiplied.

Christ took it and destroyed it, "having nailed it to His cross." That which is nailed to the cross cannot but expire. When Christ is thus nailed the condemnatory power of the law is also transfixed. By the flowing blood the penalties are completely paid--therefore the claim against us is completely abrogated, annulled, extinguished, death-stricken, crucified. In Christ uplifted on the accursed tree judicial wrath receives extinction. Let these expressive terms be duly weighed. They witness that forgiveness is complete--they swell the note, "Who forgives all your iniquities."

II. The pregnant meaning of the term, "blot out," demands still further thought. The Holy Spirit again and again selects it to express COMPLETE ERASURE. Isaiah gives confirming witness--he sweetly sings, "Pay attention, O Israel, for you are my servant. I, the Lord, made you, and I will not forget to help you. I have swept away your sins like the morning mists. I have scattered your offenses like the clouds. Oh, return to me, for I have paid the price to set you free." (Isaiah 44:21, 22.)

Here is the same expression heard from Paul's lips. The interpretation changes only to enlarge and deepen the assurance of complete forgiveness. In the mind of the Apostle sins appear as a debt registered in a book of reckoning; in the mind of the Prophet they are represented as thick clouds hanging in black folds in the skies. In each case they are blotted out. Let the Prophet's image be considered. Suppose the skies to be overcast; let the canopy above be as the curtain of night; then let the sun dart forth its piercing rays--where now is the obscuring mass? It is dissipated--dispersed--scattered--obliterated. Evanescence has absorbed it--no trace is left--the vault above is fair in brightness. In like manner, when the hand of grace exhibits the blood of Christ, the darkness disappears--appalling shade is chased away--the believer realizes complete forgiveness, and rightfully adopts the strain, "Who forgives all your iniquities."

The Holy Spirit deepening this truth adds line to line, and multiplies reduplication. In the catalogue of prophecies the same image had before occurred--"I even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins." (Isaiah 43:25.) The fact of *complete extinction* is thus again announced, and free grace shines brightly as the originating cause. Let faith be acted on the glorious word, and let joy have free course.

III. David presents another image worthy to be cherished. A grand note sounds in verse 12 of this Psalm--"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." The figure

pictures *immeasurable distance*--it represents space too vast for step to traverse or for eye to scan. Let a traveler move from the west striving to reach the east--the distance mocks the effort; as advance is made, the horizon continues as quickly to recede. In this picture is seen the *infinite removal* of transgressions. Legal vengeance never again can overtake offence--it disappears in undiscoverable regions. This blessing is the achievement of redeeming blood. It places impassable expanse between the offender and avenging pursuit--it completely, entirely, everlastingly liberates, relieves, rescues. They who believe the record may sing aloud, "Who forgives all your iniquities."

IV. Other images display the truth. Hezekiah in the joy of pardon pours forth his soul in praise. His words are worthy to be often and deeply pondered. Let his ecstatic utterance be heard--"You have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption--for You have cast all my sins behind Your back." (Isaiah 38:17.) Expressive is this picture. It is obvious, that objects "behind the back" cannot be before the face. The eye no longer can discern them--they are as completely hidden as if their existence had ceased. Thus our gracious God no longer fixes an avenging look on sins forgiven. Omniscience is His attribute; but omniscience fails to view them. Let this glad assurance be among the believer's treasures. Let him renew the strain, "You have cast all my sins behind Your back." "He forgives all my iniquities."

V. The mind of the Spirit which pervades Scripture again appears in Jeremiah's proclamation--"In those days and in that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare." (Jer. 50:20.)

It is here supposed that search for sin is made but the investigation fails. Sin is declared, in reference to wrath against God's people, to be a nonentity. They who prosecute the scrutiny are constrained to confess they "cannot be found." Let this grand comfort be fully

embraced. Let the song be prolonged, "He forgives all your iniquities."

VI. Again--when Micah ends his prophecy, in high glow of rapture he exclaims, "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19.)

The whole passage is bright as the mid-day sun in tidings of complete forgiveness. Let the last words only be noted. Where will all our sins be cast? Not on the surface of the waves--then they might float, be grasped, and brought again to land. No! they shall be deeply buried in ocean's lowest caverns, in the abyss of mighty waters, in the profundities of unfathomable depths. No more can any line extend to their concealing grave--no toil or skill can any more upraise them. They lie utterly beyond recovery--extrication is impossible. Thus the Apocalypse describes utter destruction--"A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all." (Rev. 18:21.)

Is all the fruit now gathered from Scripture's tree of complete forgiveness? No--abundance yet remains. Laden branches still drop their golden treasures--but at present enough has been said to awaken the full flow of gratitude.

Are there any who feel that they cannot sing, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgives all your iniquities"? The warning against such is fearful. They claim no portion in forgiveness! If they are unforgiven, what is their present condition--what their future doom? Let not the warning be unheeded. There is a broad path leading downwards to a prison-house where forgiveness never comes.

The Completeness of Forgiveness (part 2)

"I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins."--Isaiah 43:25

The Holy Spirit in the plenitude of His love seems never to weary in multiplying statements to console, enliven, and strengthen the children of faith. His abundant evidence of the completeness of forgiveness is proof. We are not left to the partial light of slender rays of hope--to constructive arguments from obscure premises--to a fabric of conclusion resting on unstable foundations. We are not sent to extract soul-ease from weak and ambiguous terms. Much is so strongly and so exuberantly said, that the beaming cup of instruction on this point can scarcely hold more. The pastures of this truth are green and spacious and refreshing--the river of this comfort flows on in broad and deep channels. Whoever are wise will largely use this full provision. Let them listen to the cry, "Eat, O friends, drink--yes, drink abundantly, O beloved." They will not grieve the Spirit by refusing to be cheered, when He so strives to cheer.

Let minds now revert to a precious statement on the *completeness of forgiveness*. Casual reference has already been made to it; but it stands out in proportions so grand and noble that it demands enlarged attention. Let it be heard again--"I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins."

Thought here contemplates--(1) the Speaker, "I"; (2) the repetition, "I, even I"; (3) the completeness "that blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins"; (4) the moving cause, "for my own sake."

I. The SPEAKER. Whose voice thus proclaims obliteration of transgressions? "Hear, O you heavens, and give ear, O earth;" hear, you sons of men, and all who breathe the breath of life. A silver trumpet thus introduces the word--"Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King." Jehovah speaks from His high throne--our God announces this complete remission. If other lips had thus addressed offenders, the word might have been empty, worthless, vain, and even worse--it might have relieved no doubts--healed no wounds--diffused no peace. Sin is terrible, because it is an offence against God. The offended One alone, can remit its penalties. There is sound intelligence in the question, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" "To the Lord our God," and to the Lord our God alone, "belong mercies and forgivenesses." It is rich mercy that the sole Dispenser of forgiveness here speaks. He whose hands alone contain the gift, opens them wide to scatter the blessing; He who only holds the key, unlocks His treasure-house of pardon.

II. The REPETITION. "I, even I, am He." The Person who forgives, twice shows Himself. This reduplication cannot be without strong cause--weighty motive must impel the Speaker; for *there are no superfluous words from divine lips*. It is at once apparent that our God, in the riches of His grace, desires thus to awaken attention, to rivet thought, to banish apprehension, to deepen confidence, to inscribe the truth deeper on the heart, to engrave it vividly and indelibly. Hence the timidity of doubt assumes the aspect of impiety--incredulity becomes insult. Here not only simple repetition appears; it appears with super-added emphasis--"I, even I." I, whom so many provocations have outraged; I, on whom your every movement has heaped affront; I, to whose happiness your salvation is not needful; I, whose justice would gain everlasting glory from your endless punishment--"I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions."

This important view is powerfully established by the context. Let it be heard in illustration of forgiving grace.

The preceding verses exhibit Jehovah arrayed in robes of majesty. As Creator He claims service from the creatures of His hands; He demands the due revenue of adoration--"This people have I formed for myself--they shall show forth my praise." The scene then changes; and He confronts them with appalling charges. In these, as in a mirror, the vileness of the human heart is seen. Worship is not rendered; prayer is withheld; communion is shunned and avoided.

"But you have not called upon Me, O Israel." Here is the sin of utter disregard--proud indifference cares not to seek communion. Here is the haughty language--Who is the Lord that I should seek Him? When such disregard prevails, service will be regarded as intolerable burden--it will be felt as an oppressive yoke. Hence the next words utter the reproach--"But you have been weary of Me, O Israel." Dreadful indeed is the state of alienation, when the worship of the Most High is shunned as irksome drudgery! It follows, "You have not brought Me the lambs of your burnt offering, neither have you honored Me with your sacrifices." The picture of irreligion darkens in frightfulness--all appointed ordinances are neglected; all due observance is withheld.

God then condescends to reason with these children of impiety. He shows that His demands imposed no burden--on the contrary, they were light and easily discharged. "I have not caused you to serve with an offering, nor wearied you with incense." But though requirements gave neither cost nor difficulty, they were contemned, and parsimonious neglect evinced. "You have bought Me no sweet cane with money; neither have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices." The reproach is next adduced, that not only honor, reverence, service, worship, were withheld; indignities were also heaped on God, and masses of sins were piled upon Him. He is weighed down--He is crushed--He is buried beneath the grievous load. "You have made Me to serve with your sins--you have wearied Me with your iniquities."

Such is the picture of man's hardness, ingratitude, and contempt of God. Much might most justly have been expected--provocation is the only return. Can a poor worm of earth thus venture to scorn Jehovah--to wrong Him--to tread Him beneath insulting feet? But it is so. The charge is unanswerable. What can the consequence be? Will patience cease to forbear? Will wrath arise? Will indignation blaze? Will fury stride forth? Will heaven's thunder peal, and lightnings tear, and the gaping earth devour? Will plague and pestilence do their worst? Will the broom of destruction sweep such offenders into the abyss of ruin?

The sentence follows. "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins." What exquisite pathos--what melting tenderness--what marvelous grace! How godlike--how unlike the utterance of man! Can eye behold and not overflow with tears? Can heart hear and not melt? Such is our God--such is our Gospel. Can we marvel that it triumphs and wins souls! Thus the Gospel is the proclamation of free, complete forgiveness; and thus it goes forth, conquering and to conquer. "I, even I; am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins."

III. Thus the focal luster of the word is reached--**the completeness of forgiveness.** God ordains forgiveness absolute, unbounded, unrestricted, unlimited, unfenced by boundaries, unconfined by barriers. He erects a lofty throne, on which this grace supremely reigns. This lesson is inculcated by the often repeated term, "He blots out." The Spirit again and again draws attention to the significant expression. David, out of penitential depths, pleads with God for entire remission of his guilt. This is his chosen phrase "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness--according to the multitude of Your tender mercies *blot out* my transgressions." Again "Hide Your face from my sins, and *blot out* all my iniquities." Agonizing for complete forgiveness, his wrestling cry adopts the term "*blot out.*"

It is true that the word has different shades of meaning, according to its context; but its main and general significance is neither vague, nor obscure, nor indistinct. It generally places sins in the most formidable light as registered and recorded debts. It displays them as written in the pages of a book of reckoning, rigidly--exactly--without extenuation; and then leads to the fact that they are completely erased--obliterated; expunged. Not merely crossed-out, for then they might be read again, and subsequent demand be made; but so eradicated that no trace can be discerned. The reckoning page no longer holds a single charge--no letter recording a claim remains. This general message is beyond dispute--one confirmation will suffice. Moses prays, "Yet now, if You will, forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I ask You, out of the book which You have written." And the Lord said unto Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book." Hence blotting out imports obliteration from the pages of a book. The term thus expresses complete erasure from condemning records.

To stamp reality on the picture of complete forgiveness, to fill to the brim the cup of grateful joy, let thought go forth to meet the Great White Throne. Behold, the books are opened; the register of sins disclosed. Where can condemning entries be found? Doubtless, innumerable charges had been noted; no violation of the Law had been overlooked. Expectation now looks for accusations to be certified; for sentence to be pronounced; for condemnation to be inflicted; for the mandate of execution to issue. But where is the charge? No statement of sins appears--omniscience finds them not. The accuser is baffled, foiled, and silenced. Proof fails. No evidence remains on which to base his charges.

But where are the sins? Without controversy they were perpetrated and recorded. They are "blotted out." By whom? Whose hand can reach and touch that book? I, says the Almighty God--"I, even I, have blotted out your transgressions for My own sake." I have sprinkled the page with obliterating blood; I have cleansed it with the purifying merit of a most precious death. Thus all indictments

vanish. Thus justly, righteously, gloriously is the believer absolved--thus he is completely, utterly, everlastingly pardoned. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1.)

Can believers desire more? Are they not more than satisfied? Is not the heart swelling and breaking with adoration? Will they not renew the song--"Who is a God like unto You, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?" Will they not exultingly reiterate, "All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto the children of men"?

But while called to such exuberant delight, gloom may occasionally cloud the brow. The believer may realize that all his sins are pardoned, and erased from accusing documents; that condemnation cannot touch him; that reconciliation is his purchased treasure; that smiles of favor beam around him; that heaven's bliss and glory shall be his everlasting portion. But the vexing thought may intrude, that God's memory will continually recall his many and his mighty sins. He tremulously may reason, If I cannot forget, will not God remember too? Amid all tokens of divine love, will not my mind revert to former scenes, and be downcast? I shall see, or think I see, amid heaven's smiles, a reminder of my sinful course on earth.

Let such thought be cast into oblivion's lowest depths. It is unscriptural--it is derogatory to the glorious Gospel of free grace. Mark how the word contradicts it--"I will not remember your sins." This forgetfulness is a bright article of the Covenant of Grace. It is there clearly announced--"I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:34.)

Let none say, How can this be? Let it not be objected, such mental process is contrary to all experience--it is alien to the properties of retentive thought. Let it be remembered that we are now dealing with God--His ways are not our ways. It is impious to limit Him to human incapacity--what is impossible to the creature is possible to

Him. The question is--Has He thus spoken? If so, it must be true, and will be realized to the full extent. The immutable word is, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins." No reverting look will ever recall the believer's guilt--the smile of bright, eternal forgiveness cannot be clouded. Forgiveness is complete.

IV. The moving cause may not be overlooked. The Holy Spirit again gives it prominence. **God's glory** is the ultimate design of forgiveness. Man reaps eternal benefit; but the spring from which the blessing flows is high in heaven. Man and man's deeds are universal provocation--in him there is no moving merit. If God did not originate forgiveness for the glory of His name, no sin could have been blotted out. But God's glory is His final end; therefore He blots out transgressions "for His own sake."

Thus He maintains a glorious name. Thus heaven shall re-echo with His praise, and eternity prolong, the grateful hallelujah. Thus all His attributes shall be displayed in one blaze of light. Mercy, tenderness, love and patience; shall not be eclipsed by justice, holiness, and truth. One portion of perfections shall not gain priority; but all shall sit harmoniously on one throne. Therefore, for His own sake, He opens a door for this complete forgiveness to go forth.

Who will not now pray with David, "For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great." And with Daniel, "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Your own sake, O my God." (Dan. 9:19.)

The Blessedness of Forgiveness (part 1)

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."--Psalm 32:1

Scripture exhibits many portraits of the blessed man--each abounds in lovely charms, and claims devout attention. In all there is a common feature--amid much diversity one similitude prevails. None rank among the blessed ones, who have not received forgiveness of sin. Apart from realizing views of pardon, there is no blessedness; for there is no abiding joy in the heart--no glowing beauty in the life--no solid hope in the future prospect. Let forgiveness be withdrawn, and what is man? A brand blighted by curse--a withered branch fit only for the burning--a wretched outcast in a wilderness of woe--a convict awaiting just execution. Scripture rejects such from its worthies. Blessed only is he "whose transgression is forgiven."

The subject has now advanced to this point of blessedness. But what expanded thoughts can grasp this glorious theme! What fervent words can adequately paint the bliss! Can temporal mercies be named in comparison? Their whole assemblage multiplied and magnified to all excess, is dim before this treasure. Without this adjunct their fullness is utter emptiness--their satisfaction is a mere blank--their sweetest cup holds no refreshment.

The sun may brightly shine--the breezes softly fan--wealth may fill the coffers--domestic joys may happily abound--friends may caress, health may be in firmest vigor; but amid these, and more than these delights, the unpardoned soul is empty, downcast, and forlorn. Such benefits in themselves are shadows with no substance. They cannot command continuance--a trembling hand holds them insecurely. Separation is near--soon, very soon, they may depart. An angry God looks angrily on all; and in His anger there is disconsolation, apprehension, dismay, misery. Nothing really smiles beneath God's frown; and this frown looks sternly on the unforgiven.

Can angelic blessedness compete with this enjoyment? Doubtless angels live and shine in supreme happiness forever--their wings expand in heaven's sunshine; but they come short of the ecstatic joy of reading reconciliation in a Father's face. They cannot sing, "Jesus loved us, and gave Himself for us, and bought us with the most precious price of His most precious blood." They cannot extol forgiveness springing from the heart of God, and flowing to them through the pierced side of the Lamb of God. There is, then, a blessedness which exceeds theirs--it is the blessedness of the man "whose transgression is thus forgiven."

This blessedness now invites review. It comes with two-fold aspect. It has an EXCLUDING hand, driving away all misery--it has an ADMITTING hand, bringing in all joys. It firmly banishes all affrighting foes; it erects a strong barrier against heart-trouble; it releases from the grasp of threatened woe; it slays disquietudes; it stands conqueror over tormenting apprehensions; it spoils all terrors of their sting; it sits in triumph over all causes of soul-anxiety. Collect all the enemies which terrify the heart--their weapons are blunted by forgiveness. In this fearful group the most prominent are, (1) the wrath of God, (2) the curse of the Law, (3) an accusing conscience, (4) the fear of death, (5) the dreadfulness of eternity. Let the several links of this appalling chain be marked in order.

I. God's wrath appears. Its form is DREADFUL; it justly comes to execute just vengeance. It is RIGHTEOUS; it is righteously aroused to vindicate His outraged rule. It is MIGHTY; it has unlimited command of every instrument by which misery can be inflicted. No human arm can resist. Where can the guilty hide from it? Let now the sinner meet it with forgiveness in his hand--instantly the avenging sword is sheathed, the thunderbolts of fury fall harmless! Why? The provoking cause is gone; therefore anger ceases--it dies at the feet of the forgiven man. The shipwrecked mariner on a rock of safety smiles upon the waves, the tempest, and the winds--their fury is escaped. Thus the forgiven survey the threats of wrath, and

tremble not--no commission goes forth against them. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

II. Next, the curse of the law rolls terrifically. Its voice is indeed the thunder's inexorable roar. It has no heart to melt into relentings--its stern frown cannot relax into compassion. It is charged to fall with all its weight upon each violator of its decrees--it must do this work unsparingly. An immitigable proclamation precedes it--"Cursed is every one that continues not in all things that are written in the Book of the Law to do them." Nothing but forgiveness can defy this curse. But the forgiven man calmly meets the uplifted arm--with thwarting plea he arrests its fury. He can truly say, "I am no more subject to such penalty--I hold absolute immunity. Christ, on Calvary's cross, endured my total curse--for me my Surety has exhausted this vengeance." In the Ark the rescued family marked unmoved the swellings of the engulfing deep; in Zoar's shelter Lot looked upon the fiery deluge, and felt that he was safe--so the sinner, sheltered in forgiveness, hears undismayed the blasts of legal threats. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

III. Next, Conscience is a restless troubler. Conscience is privy to the most secret movements of the mind; its eye is keen to mark all deviations from right course--its hand fails not to record; its memory refuses to forget. It cannot but be an adversary to sin; its voice is active in recital of past deeds--it shows in fearful array long trains of *thoughts, and words and acts* which no oblivion can bury. These are ready to re-appear at the judgment-bar; and they are justly liable to wrath.

This conscience, as a cruel tormentor, often haunts the terrified offender. How can it be shaken off? Where can escape be found? Let now 'forgiveness' appear. It meekly confesses the truth of every charge--it extenuates no guilt; but it points to the book of remembrance, and shows every transgression erased--all iniquity blotted out. Then the conscience is lulled into sweet peace. The

debtor no more turns pale at the creditor's approach, if he holds a discharge earned by the payment of a sufficient surety. The rebel flees not from the officer, if he can show the royal seal of pardon. So the sinner, who has received obliteration of every offence in the vicarious blood, peacefully produces his acquittal, and silences all threats of this accusing monitor. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

IV. Death to the unpardoned is an enemy clad in armor of terrors. Death comes on with step which never pauses; with hand outstretched, and ever nearing, to bear its victim from this short-lived scene. Its touch will soon extinguish mortal life, and perhaps most suddenly. Then reprieves are ended--the last sand of God's forbearance falls through; the worn-out thread snaps. Hiding-places no more can shelter--all fabricated refuges crumble away. Death is commissioned to dissipate all groundless hopes. Death bears the sinner from earth to meet the judgment-bar, at which delusions vanish, and all is the reality of solemn truth. Hence life-long apprehensions torment. But 'forgiveness of sins' changes the whole prospect--it deadens death's sting. This sting is sin--but forgiveness expunges sin, and so destroys the sting, and leaves the foe spoiled of his destroying weapon. The captive fears not the jailer's step, when he knows that he comes only to release. The forgiven can deliberately say, Jesus is my Friend, who purchased pardon for me; and death is my friend, who bears me to His arms. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

V. But to the unforgiven man eternity is the most terrifying prospect. He cannot extricate himself from everlasting existence; he cannot extinguish the torch of never-dying consciousness--he must drag on a never-ending day. He may sigh, "Will no night come?" The answer is, "Time is no more." Millions of years bring no end nearer--millions upon millions of ages, do not change the unchangeable expanse. Misery must be misery forever. The worm ever gnaws--the furnace never cools. Oh! what a marvel is it, that a sinner not delivered from eternal wrath can be free from agonizing

fear! But forgiveness dispels all these forebodings. What shall he fear whose sins are all washed out? Eternity's long day will not revoke forgiveness. It is as ever living as its Author, "I am that I am."

Such the blessedness of him "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," when viewed from the negative position of excluded terrors. It is high ground of happiness, and truly blessed are they whose feet stand firmly on it.

But the whole is not yet told. The hill of forgiveness has a more sunny side--the lips of the forgiven sing a sweeter song; pardon brings yet more ecstatic joys. Into the deeper flood, the Lord willing, our barks shall shortly launch.

But here a pause is made, with an appeal to shivering souls, strangers to this precious blessedness. Such is a sad condition--and it is voluntary, self-bound misery. Can more have been done by our gracious God to encourage sinners to enter upon this region of blessedness? Let the workings of His love be pondered--let Him be seen from all eternity arranging counsels of peace, sending His well-beloved Son to shame and agony, accepting His blood as full satisfaction for iniquity--and doubts must vanish as to His readiness to pardon. Let His long forbearance and His patient tarrying be marked. Is it not proof that He desires not the sinner's death, but rather is waiting to give welcome in the blood and mediation of His Son?

All out of hell, are within reach of pardon. Witness His faithful volume, so full of assurances, promises, calls. Could He have written more clearly, more largely, more lovingly to testify His delight in mercy? In His Gospel-ordinances forgiveness is the foundation-stone. They all are nothingness and mockery, unless God abounds in pardons. Is there no truth in the testimony of saints in all ages, who have tasted and found this gift of gifts? Are inviting calls a cheat? They surely testify that all who draw near to Him in

Christ undoubtedly obtain forgiveness. Clinging to Him in prayer, in Scripture, in ordinances, in holy, watchful, self-denying, God-fearing walk, they exclaim--His forgiving goodness and pardoning grace exceed all thought. Glad experience confirms, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

The Blessedness of Forgiveness (part 2)

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."--Psalm 32:1

The blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven presents fresh topics of happy thought. Advance will be more intelligent, if his state is rapidly reviewed. By the light and power of the Spirit he has discerned forgiveness springing from the depths of God's heart, provided by the infinitude of God's wisdom--flowing in the channel of the blood of Jesus--extending to his utmost need, and effectually cleansing his soul from all pollution. He gives thanks for this gracious gift dispensed in the harmonious concurrence of every Divine attribute. He welcomes and recognizes it as holy, just, and good; alike suitable to his ruined case, and bringing glory to God who wills, and plans, and bestows. Therefore, fleeing from every vain refuge, renouncing hollow confidences, he has embraced the sin-expiating cross, he has washed in the all-cleansing stream, and so has entered the blessed region of the pardoned. Such is his spiritual state--a state interwoven with all blessedness.

Hitherto the view of his blessedness has been negative. It has been exhibited as a barrier beating back all the waves which drown peace. Let the scene now change--let the positive benefits appear. The

former aspect was calm, because of the banishment of ruffling fears--this latter is far more joyous, because of the overflowing of all delights. Let us proceed then to sit down on the sunny side of redemption's hill, to bask beneath heaven's most invigorating rays, to roam in the richest pastures of God's choicest mercies, to draw water with joy from the very depths of salvation's well. Here is a spiritual paradise, where trees abound laden with richest fruit, and flowers diffusing sweetest fragrance. Here are groves of heavenly melody. At every turn hearts cannot refrain from singing, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

This positive blessedness invites attention from various points. It evidently includes (1) filial contemplation of God; (2) happy communion with Him; (3) bright views of providence; (4) alleviation in sickness; (5) comfort in death; (6) acquittal at the judgment-bar; (7) glory throughout eternity.

I. FILIAL CONTEMPLATION OF GOD. The forgiven man is bold to lift up his eyes and calmly to gaze on God. No clouds, no darkness intervene--no mantle shrouds the Father's face. Ready smiles sweetly look down. The light of His countenance clearly shines. His throne is in heaven, but it is a throne of grace--His seat is lofty, but it is a mercy-seat. His hands are full, but they dart no thunderbolts of wrath--they hold blessings for His adopted children. Glory is the encircling halo, but it is the glory of parental love. The forgiven man looks upward, and such is the sight which cheers him. He seeks God's face, and fears not. He acquaints himself with God, and is at peace. He studies God, and rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Is it not true, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven"?

II. HAPPY COMMUNION WITH GOD. Can the forgiven man thus lift up his eyes and not seek communion? The beauty and the grace mightily attract. He approaches--nothing forbids free access; nothing separates God from man but sin. But this dividing barrier is removed--this obstructing partition has been leveled--this

intervening gulf has been bridged. Forgiveness has swept away all hindrances. He holds in his hand the blood which opens the gates. Thus washed he comes to the very presence--to the audience-chamber, to the bosom of His God. With filial love he cries, "Abba, Father." He hears in reply, "My son." He is bold to pour forth floods of petition, to tell out all the secrets of his heart. Loving ears receive--loving lips reply. Sweet is this communion--hallowed is this fellowship. He dwells in God and God in him--heaven is frequented in spirit before earth is left. The forgiven flies upward and finds this welcome. It must be conceded, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

III. BRIGHT VIEWS OF PROVIDENCE. To him all providential dealings are the visits of a friend. In days of alienation their look was obscure, perplexing, or frowning. Now they are recognized as issuing from the council-chamber of parental wisdom--they are received as angelic guests, dropping blessings from their wings. They have on their front one common inscription--"God is love." They all are charged as David's captains--"Deal gently, for my sake, with my son."

Sorrows in manifold form may come, but they bring no bitterness. Burdens from many quarters may press, but they never crush. The whole tribe of losses may in turn impoverish; but they take not God away. His presence still remains, and then the cup is full.

Outward enjoyments may seem to retire; but the Author of all joy still abides. Chastenings may be many and severe; but they all whisper, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." (Rev. 3:19.) They all testify--He chastens for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Paul's thorn in the flesh was doubtless sharp; but the keen point was blunted when the gracious design was seen to keep the sufferer in the lowly valley of humiliation. Grief is not grief, where there is no curse. The furnace harms not, if it refines the ore, and only consumes dross. Bereavement leaves not

friendless, if it brings the chief Friend nearer. Trials do not destroy comfort, if they multiply the everlasting consolation.

Prosperous circumstances are now prosperity indeed, because so sweetly hallowed--the true enjoyment is now mixed in every cup of blessing. Health, domestic comfort, competence, friendships' delights, success in plans, are gilded by the rays of the heaven from whence they come. They are more joyous by awakening the joy of pious thanksgiving--they are elevated by the upward flight of reasonable gratitude. They cause the heart to burn in the rapturous praise, "They all come from my Father! See how He thinks of me--see how He delights to aid me--His eye is on me--His power works for me." The pardoned see this brightness in the face of every providence. Who can deny, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven"?

IV. ALLEVIATION IN SICKNESS. Forgiveness is a downy couch for hours of declining health. Earthly bodies are open to many invasions of disease. Sickness is often at the door waiting to gain entrance. Let then the strength decay, and pains give anguish, and days drag wearily, and nights prove strangers to repose; still the inner man revives when the Spirit reminds of everlasting pardon. Patience smiles, while faith whispers, "These sufferings lead not to eternal death; they waft the frail bark on its course to the land where the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick--the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." (Isaiah 33:24.) He is not depressed by malady, who has Jehovah-rophi smoothing his bed. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

V. COMFORT IN DEATH. Forgiveness whispers sweet comfort to the dying ear. Death comes without a frown when it walks hand in hand with assured pardon. Hard indeed is the couch when the past days record sin upon sin, with no blood to obliterate, with no Savior to redeem, with no Spirit to speak peace, when the eye dares not to face the prospect, and turns in anguish from the retrospect. Oh, the agony of departing when unpardoned sins haunt the sinking soul!

But when forgiveness lends its solid rod and its supporting staff the worn-out pilgrim quickens his last steps, and springs forward to intermingle with the glorious company of the saints in light. He has long reckoned death among his dearest treasures. The Spirit has taught him the truth, "All things are yours, whether the world, or life, *or death*, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3:22, 23.) He can say, To me to live has been Christ, therefore to die is gain. But death only can disclose the greatness of this gain. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

VI. ACQUITTAL AT THE JUDGMENT-BAR. This tribunal must be met. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Heb. 9:27.) But there are no terrors here for the forgiven man. Condemnation fastens only upon sin--but all his sins have been condemned in Jesus. Their full desert of punishment was paid when Jesus, on the accursed tree, drank to its dregs the penal cup. The vultures of destruction can find no prey. This is the morning of his proclaimed acquittal; this is the day of his coronation before all heaven, all angels and all men. He often sang on earth, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day." Now the reality, the welcome, the full redemption have arrived. The King's voice goes forth--"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" "and the righteous shall go into life eternal." Is not the conclusion just--"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven"?

VII. GLORY THROUGHOUT ETERNITY. The everlasting reign succeeds. Death, and hell, and all not written in the book of life, shall be cast into the lake of fire. Then the consummation and the bliss shall be fully experienced. The forgiven shall follow the Lamb wherever He goes. He shall see the King in His beauty; he shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. In God's presence he shall exult in the fullness of joy--at God's right hand he shall receive

pleasures forevermore. He shall be enriched with all the delight which God can give; he shall be enrolled with all the glory which God can confer. Why? Because no stain of iniquity remains. He has "washed his robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

This sketch but scantily displays how blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven. *Heaven must be reached and eternity exhausted before the full blessedness can be known!*

A solemn inquiry springs quickly from this glorious view. All men should inquire--Is this blessedness ours? Are we among the company of the forgiven? They are thus happy who by the Spirit's guidance have accepted the Gospel-provision, and have truly fled for refuge into the extended arms of Jesus. They are thus happy who, seeing the coming flood of wrath, have entered the only ark of salvation; and under a deep sense of imminent peril, of desperate sinfulness, have renounced self as a pit of ruin, and have trampled down all the rubbish of man-invented remedies, and have from the inmost soul, and with sincere faith, and with devout thanksgiving, embraced the full remission which God has decreed, which Jesus has bought, and which the Spirit lovingly proclaims. Let such as meekly, adoringly avow that the renunciation and the reception have been transacted; that they have thus turned in shame and loathing from self; that they have thus closed with Jesus, not turn from a brief word of exhortation.

Go in peace--your sins, which are many, are forgiven. But go and evince more and more by holy walk your utter abhorrence of all evil, that deadliest murderer of souls. Do not again take into your bosom again the viper whose venom caused the death of Him who bought this blessedness. Do not again fondle the monster who drove the nails into the Redeemer's hands and feet. "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:2.)

Go, also, and meditate more and more on the grace and worth, and work of Jesus, the source of this blessedness. Meditate until your

enraptured souls become one flame of love. To you who believe He is justly precious--all preciousness. The forgiven should be always chiding their souls to draw nearer in faith, in love, in praise. Hear the voice of the Church--"Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed--I am sick with love." "My beloved is the chief among ten thousand; He is altogether lovely." "Whom have I in heaven but You--there is none upon earth whom I desire beside You."

Go likewise and tell others what blessedness you have found. Compassionate the miserable whose sins remain, and on whom wrath abides; labor by the many means within your power to call them from their fearful state, and bring them to your inestimable bliss. The *forgiven* enjoy not forgiveness alone--the *blessed* strive to communicate and extend their blessedness; the *saved* seek to enlarge salvation's ranks; the *heaven-bound* seek to journey heavenward in joyful companies. They individually pray, "Draw *me*--and *we* will run after You." They continually invite, "Come with us." "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered."

Repentance, the Path to Forgiveness

"God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Savior that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel."--Acts 5:31

How wondrous is the revelation of this verse! It unfolds a heavenly scene. In the center Jesus appears, made in position "higher than the heavens," exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and thus advanced by distinct exercise of the Father's power. It specifies

two offices which He is thus glorified to discharge. As a PRINCE He shall wield the scepter of universal rule; as a SAVIOR He shall dispense eternal blessedness. It displays Him as, in consequence, bestowing two main gifts--repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Such is an outline of this vast Scripture. On the full expanse, however, gaze must not tarry; the present theme restricts thought to the union of repentance and forgiveness of sins. These are precious blessings from the hand of Jesus--but He does not grant them separately; they co-exist, as flowers of one stem--as songsters from the same nest. Is forgiveness given? Repentance precedes. The heart which has not been thus melted will not rejoice in pardon. If it delightedly basks in this sunshine it has reached the eminence through the low valley of repentance. The rich harvest follows seed sown in tears--the cheering rays shine after previous gloom. Heavenly wisdom places repentance in this station; thus a troop of fallacies is dispersed, and many an ensnaring net of Satan is totally destroyed.

Sometimes the enemy whispers to the awakened conscience, How groundless are all fears! God is love--He will not cast off creatures whom His will has formed--His boundless mercy forbids it. Thus Satan strives to retain souls in *undisturbed impenitency*, and lulls them to sleep on pillows of false hope.

Here it cannot be too strongly stated that God is rich in mercy, and that His mercy endures forever. But mercy is not the total of His mind. Let not the impenitent be deceived--unconditional forgiveness is a groundless phantom. Let none who neither feel, nor hate, nor shun iniquity, beguile themselves with expectation of immunity. Where is it written that pardons bless irrespective of the recipient's state? Flowers grow not on a rock. If mercy alone can arrest due punishment, none can be lost, and hell becomes a fiction.

Again, Satan is wily to use even the death of Jesus as a means of ruin. He artfully employs the cross so as effectually to check real

access to it. He sometimes allays soul-trembling by reminding that there is a fountain ever near, potent to cleanse--he strives to induce ease by insinuating that the precious blood hides all iniquity. Atonement free and boundless is indeed the glory of the Gospel. Let it ever be adoringly maintained that the stream from Jesus' side obliterates the crimson stains. But is it true, that His blood falls, without distinction, on transgressors? Look within the precincts of pardon--a vast multitude appears, all beautiful in purity; but each is marked with the stamp of penitence and faith--each has wept for sin, and fled in contrition to the cross. Such is the Savior's testimony--studiously He frames connecting links. "He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations." (Luke 24:46, 47.) Repentance precedes forgiveness; forgiveness closely follows.

Peter on the day of Pentecost sounds the same note. Full of the Holy Spirit, he had denounced appalling guilt on the consciences of the crowd; he pointed to their hands, stained with the Redeemer's blood; he boldly added, "God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36.) Then instantly he showed repentance as the direct path to obliterate their crimes--"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins." There is pardon through the Crucified, pardon even for His murderers--but it must be sought in the appointed way of penitential grief.

Once more, the same Apostle chides the amazed crowd in Solomon's porch. He cloaks not their frightful deed--he charges them with the sin of sins. "You denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life." (Acts 3:14, 15.) But away with despair. There is hope, bright and sure; there is all hope even for such guilt--but it shines only in the pathway of repentance. They who stifle consciousness of the evil, perish; they who confess and bewail it, live. "Repent and be

converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19.)

Such is the voice of heavenly truth--such are the inspired tidings. Hence the ambassador of Jesus is privileged to beseech--O you sons of men, loathe your polluted course; let tears of penitence attest your broken spirits. Come, smiting upon your breasts, to the atoning cross, and you shall be welcomed, and your sins all purged away, and no sight of them again appear. Be wise then--"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up." (James 4:10.) "He that covers his sins shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy." (Prov. 28:13.)

But when repentance is thus commended, its **essence** should be accurately stated. Cheats may assume fair form--all sorrow is not godly sorrow. Many may acknowledge the plague of sin with no true feeling of contrition--even tears may flow without heart-weeping. Weeds have semblance of sweet flowers--tinsel may glitter like the purest gold. Hence it is well that a discriminating glance should survey the features of Gospel-repentance. Let then its properties be tested--thus *error's downward slopes* may be escaped, and counterfeits be detected. It is possible to perish with a lie in the right hand.

Genuine repentance is a threefold cord. Three ingredients compose the cup--three rays combine to form the picture. The following phases are united.

I. Contrition--which writhes under deep pain. II. Confession--which humbly pours forth the bursting agony. III. Abhorrence--which flees the hated cause of this distress. When these deep feelings meet, repentance lives, a gift from heaven. From these standpoints let this grace be now surveyed.

I. CONTRITION. This is no shallow, superficial, transient emotion. It is not a slender reed, a summer brook, a morning cloud,

the early dew. It penetrates the lowest recesses of the heart, and shakes the fabric with a giant hand. It causes a very earthquake in the inward man--it beholds with horror the blackness, filth, and heinousness of sin--its rankling sting is keenest misery. It is not content with reviling sin as injurious to fair fame, as a blight on temporal prospects, and as the parent of reproach and shame--it discerns it, as rebellion against God. It beholds sin's impious hand uplifted against a loving Father--it loathes its character, as dark in ingratitude, treachery, impiety, and heartless hardness. The thought is torment that this monster has been so embraced. Contrition is thus an awakened anguish for indwelling and outbreking sin--its acts evince its depth.

Is not this prominent on the prophet's picture--"Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on all the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died." (Zech. 12:10.) Here is a melting image! We see the writhing misery of the broken spirit.

Let it here be added, that when such godly sorrow rends the soul, relief is near; for a blessed promise closely hastens to console--"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." (Zech. 13:1.)

Next the graphic instance of repentant Ephraim gives light. Contrition strains his very heart-strings. God in His sovereign grace had put forth a chastening hand--the agony of the smitten spirit soon wails. Mark the record--"I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, You have chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." Then prayer goes forth, "Turn me, and I shall be turned--for You are the Lord my God." Let the result be noted. The contrite heart thus mourns--"After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my

breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth." (Jer. 31:19.)

Another view of this agony is supplied by Peter. He miserably falls, and Jesus turns and looks upon him. In that piercing eye there was reproach which broke the heart--and love which bound it up. He felt the heinousness of his iniquity. No restraint could cloak his contrition--"He went out and wept bitterly."

It is sweet digression to observe how mercy flies to raise the downcast. The morning of the resurrection comes. At the sepulcher the angel bids the amazed women to be the messengers of glad tidings; but Peter is especially remembered--"Go your way, tell His disciples *and Peter*, that I am going ahead of you into Galilee." And as that blessed day advances, the risen Savior seeks the trembling disciple in his lonely shame. For when the two hastened back from Emmaus they found the eleven gathered together, and those who were with them, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to *Peter*." This contrition is an essential ingredient of repentance, and this godly sorrow ever hastens to nestle in redeeming arms.

II. CONFESSION. Can this beaming cup not overflow? Can the wounded heart thus smart, and out of the abundance no utterance burst forth? The burdened spirit cannot pine in silence--contrition in its lowest depths looks upward to the mercy-seat. It lingers not, but hastens to God's footstool--there in tears it relates its misery. Sorrow gives wings--the very burden quickens speed. It is conscious that God is not ignorant, but it seeks relief in telling its woe. Daniel gives example. Thus he testifies--"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I wore rough sackcloth and sprinkled myself with ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: 'O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and keep your commands. But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations.'" (Dan. 9:3, 4, 5.) He opens the sluice of confession, and casts off his

load in keeping nothing back. Mercy hears and joys to comfort. "I went on praying and confessing my sin and the sins of my people, pleading with the Lord my God for Jerusalem, his holy mountain. As I was praying, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the earlier vision, came swiftly to me at the time of the evening sacrifice." (Dan. 9:20, 21.)

There is similar instance in the heart-smitten prodigal. He feels his crushing wickedness--his heart is full and must find vent. "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before You, and am no more worthy to be called Your son." But pardoning love prevents him--"When he was yet a great way off his Father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." Contrition must confess, and forgiving tokens are pressed on the confessing lips.

Such, also, is the testimony of David--"I acknowledged my sin unto You, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Psalm 32:5.)

Let, also, the tender notes from apostolic lips be heard--"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.) *Thus contrition writhes, and confession sobs, and pardoning mercy calms the breast.*

III. ABHORRENCE. To compete the lineaments, hatred of and resolute abandonment of sin, must be added. Natural emotions may bewail iniquity; truth may confess its prevalence while the heart remains a stranger to utter loathing, and looks with lingering fondness towards its customary ways. Thus *Pharaoh*, terrified by appalling judgments, mourns, "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I beg you, my sin only this once." (Ex. 10:16, 17.) But the lament was as a flitting shadow--

it swiftly passed away. The heart was unmoved--evil as evil was not hated.

Saul, in momentary relenting, assumes the penitential garb, while his deadly passion was unslain. The fearful picture of the Psalmist is still life-like--"When God killed some of them, the rest finally sought him. They repented and turned to God. Then they remembered that God was their rock, that their redeemer was the Most High. But they followed him only with their words; they lied to him with their tongues. Their hearts were not loyal to him. They did not keep his covenant." (Psalm 78:34-37.)

Seeming repentance then may make unreal show. But when the Spirit implants this grace, loathing abhorrence of sin takes deep root. The whole heart is steeled in stout aversion--its every faculty and power arise in irreconcilable enmity--the whole inward man commences warfare without truce, and tramples it down beneath detesting feet, and hews it to pieces with unsparing severity. It wars not only against some forms of evil; it entirely, absolutely, universally loathes sin's every shape and semblance. It hates it in its very essence, as the enemy of God, as execrable in itself, as the misery of the world, as the viper which drank the life-blood of the Savior. It has been wisely said, "In true repentance every affection of the soul turns away from sin--*love* says, I will embrace you no more; *desire* says, I will never long after you more; *delight* says, I will never take contentment in you any more; *hatred* says, I will never be reconciled to you any more; *fear* says, I will watch, lest I be surprised by you any more; *grief* says, I will mourn and lament because the soul has been beguiled by you; *hope* says, I will look to Christ, that my poor soul may at length get victory over you." Thus true repentance flees from all sin.

Such is the essence of this grace. They who are wise will anxiously inquire whether it is their established inhabitant.

How much hangs on the decision! It is beyond dispute that without repentance there is no forgiveness, and without forgiveness wrath must abide forever. Perhaps the search leaves some disturbed with doubt. They may sigh--Would that genuine repentance gave indubitable signs! But why this shivering in a cheerless region? Doubtless no human efforts can create a heaven-kindled flame; but what are the offices which Jesus ever lives to execute? "He is exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Let prayer plead with Him--He will answer, and pour down this blessing, and carry on the holy work, until in thorough brokenness of heart and humble confession, and firm departure from all evil, the peaceful realms of pardon are attained.

Faith, the Means of Obtaining Forgiveness

"He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name."--Acts 10:43

Here precious tidings direct the anxious soul to peace. Can the fainting sinner hear the glad assurance and not revive? Can he welcome it, and not rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory? Blessed be the Father of mercies, that His word contains it! Blessed are they whose hearts through the Spirit savingly embrace it. Their life is high in grateful bliss--they revel in the riches of forgiveness.

It has been fully shown that countless sins stain Adam's race. Without forgiveness endless misery is the universal doom--God's frown repels and heaven is barred--the transgressor is shut up in hopelessness--his feet tremble on the abyss of ruin. But this Gospel is a message of forgiveness, and points to the road by which it is

approached. All who believe in Christ, whatever their wretched course may have been, are uplifted from the depths of guilt, and raised to salvation's heights. Trumpet-tongued is the proclamation, and everlasting is its echo--"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved"--"whoever believes in Him shall receive forgiveness of sins."

Forever this word is settled in heaven. Truth perishes--Holy Scripture loses its fairest charm--revelation is not an unerring guide--there is no sure path and no firm prop, if faith in Jesus grasps not forgiveness. This grand position is now reached. It is a sequel to the preceding topic.

The holy link which connects forgiveness and repentance has been marked. The Gospel-warning has been heard--that none sit down at the rich banquet of the pardoned, but lowly penitents, with hearts bleeding for sin, and lips humble in contrite confessions, and feet fleeing every evil way.

But now the kindred truth appears. The pardoned not only walk in the low valley of penitence; they moreover mount upward on wings of faith. The graces of repentance and faith may not be separated. Where the Spirit plants one, He surely adds the other--where one lives, the other thrives. If one be absent, the other has no place--they lead in concert to forgiveness.

Let this essential grace, then, now be viewed. It is from heaven and heavenly; it craves forgiveness and it surely gains; it seeks and truly finds; it knocks and the door yields--it extends a hand which instantly is filled, and closes to retain the prize. It bends an adoring head, which gloriously is crowned, and in the crown this bright jewel sparkles--"through His name whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins."

I. The necessity of faith claims foremost place. As Christ alone can efficaciously accomplish salvation; so faith alone can

instrumentally appropriate salvation. It is undoubted that all pardon results from the work of Christ. He alone earns it--repetition of this truth can never weary. On His cross He purchases it; by His blood He gains it; by His death He secures it. Every attribute of God beholds the mighty victim, and is infinitely satisfied. Justice surveys sinners sprinkled with this stream and testifies--'It is enough'. No claims and no demands remain--wrath allows that its fury is extinct, that every vessel is drained, and no drop left. Thus the work of Christ is the full price of pardon. Iniquity is obliterated by it, and is no more found. Sins are covered, and they disappear--forgiveness finds at the cross open door for its full exercise.

But how is interest in this efficacious work obtained? Who can claim Christ's death as their rescue, and His blood as their redemption? Who can, in clear conscience, realize beneficial portion in the finished work?

Participation in all Christ's merits is the exclusive privilege of those who are members of His body. If any are not one with Him, His work to them is as a severed branch--a thing of nothing. His sufferings are in vain where no vital union can be shown. None outside the Ark were saved. None escaped the avenger of blood, unless within the gates of refuge. Bread gives no nourishment unless received into the system. Remedies only heal when rightly used. A sinking mariner who spurns the life-boat courts a watery grave--none reach their home who stray in a wrong path; so none gain pardon but the sheltered in Christ's fold.

Now faith is the 'connecting' grace. It is the eye which sees Him, the heart which longs for Him, the mouth which feeds upon Him, the foot which runs after Him, the hand which grasps Him, the strength which holds Him, the holy boldness which cannot be restrained. It ventures to His arms, and hides itself in His wounds, and washes in His blood, and resolutely refuses to be parted from Him. Thus faith unites, connects, cements. Thus possession of the Savior is obtained. No other tendril twines around the stem. Love delights in

Him and adores; hope sees the riches of the promised inheritance and rejoices; patience waits long and is not weary; zeal toils and thinks all labor light; prayer brings each need to Him, and wrestles until it gains reply; praise sounds the glories of His name, and thrives on earth that it may thrive the more in heaven. But these graces separately and collectively, do not win a saving interest in Jesus--faith alone effects this union.

Hence as Christ is indispensable to procure forgiveness, so faith is necessary to gain oneness with Him; therefore every true minister cries, "Through His name whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins." Hence solemn warnings raise a checking hand--"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believes not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16.) The Baptist uttered words of unchanging truth--"He that believes on the Son has everlasting life; and he that believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36.) It is added by the faithful and true witness, "If you do not believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins." (John 8:24.)

II. FAITH'S ACTINGS next demand attention. It is a stirring principle--it kindles a burning flame, and gives sure proof of life; it is vigorous, and it works with vigor; it is energetic, and it puts forth energies. The seed from which it springs, the sap which invigorates, are alike divine. Therefore it grows, expands, exhibits blossoms, and bears fruit.

It sees the vanity and emptiness and worthlessness of human works to merit salvation. It knows that self brings ruin, but cannot repair the ruin; it is conscious that man can add sin to sin, and pile up mountains of transgression, but is utterly weak to remove one atom of sin. It allows that eternal condemnation is deserved, and that the guilty can construct no extricating plea. Therefore it flees from self as from a plague-spot--it rejects it as a crumbling reed; it seeks not remedy from what is poison. Thus in thorough self-aversion it speeds directly to the sure refuge.

It has enlightened JUDGMENT. It forms right conclusions--it adjusts all helps and means with wise discrimination; it seeks a fabric which has firm walls and bulwarks; it knows that many graces sweetly adorn a pardoned soul, but that not one holds saving merit--it feels that repentance will mourn, and wail, and weep, but that no flowing tears obliterate one speck of sin. It looks to Christ, and Christ alone, to wash and cleanse from sin.

It knows that LOVE will brightly burn and rapturously adore, and constrain the willing feet to run with joy the heavenward path; but it invests not love with power to gain forgiveness. It looks to Christ, and Christ alone, as the one efficacious source. It delights in HOPE, as a cheerful comrade mounting with glad wing to the heaven of heavens, and viewing with open eye the riches of the glorious home, and listening with anticipating ear to the ceaseless hallelujahs, and foreseeing the ages of eternal bliss; but it rejects it as the price of the expanded blessedness. It looks to Christ, and Christ alone, as earning the many mansions and the weight of glory.

It has keen relish for the WORD. In those rich pastures it finds sweet food--from those deep wells it draws refreshing draughts; in that clear mirror it beholds enchanting sights; in that divine school it learns transporting lessons; but it regards it only as a passive instrument used by the Spirit to convict and teach. While then it incessantly traverses the precious pages, it never trusts to them as the source of life. It looks to Christ, and Christ alone, of whom the sacred volume is the witness, and whose saving truths it wondrously reveals.

It listens especially to GOSPEL-INVITATIONS. They are many, precious, tender, full of constraining love. It receives them as calls to flee the world and all the transitory things of sense. But while it thus prizes this treasure, it gives it no wrong place. It heeds the voice, and hastens to Christ as the one home to which they point.

Similarly it luxuriates in the wide field of the PROMISES. It expatiates in their illimitable range--it blesses God for their varied richness and immeasurable extent. It sees that they give pledges of all blessedness, and proclaim the Triune Jehovah as the believer's enriching portion. It thus receives the title-deeds of heaven, and rejoices in the pledge of the coming glory.

But while it receives such rapture from the promises, while it trusts them as "Yes and Amen in Christ," it seeks not pardon in this assemblage of delights--it knows that they contain no efficacious help. Christ and Christ only can deliver--from Him alone it draws prevailing pleas.

Again, faith uses with high expectation all means of grace. It often seeks audience at heaven's throne--it doubts not that answers will come, and strength be obtained and mercy granted; its very breath is PRAYER. It obeys the precepts--"Pray always;" "Continue in prayer;" "Pray without ceasing." It finds, also, constant calls to PRAISE. Thus it encircles the high throne with adorations--in the house of its pilgrimage it begins the undying chorus of thanksgiving. It devoutly joins also, in public rites--it goes gladly with the holy flock to the appointed house of prayer; it is a foretaste of heaven to unite with worshiping crowds in confessing sin, and supplicating aid, and uplifting the melody of grateful joy.

It thus delights in public service; but above all it finds hallowed food in the sacramental feast. There, in consecrated elements, in the broken bread and outpoured wine it realizes Christ's saving sacrifice. In these signs and seals it gazes on Him hanging on the accursed tree, laying down His life, shedding His blood, purchasing pardon. But while it thus revels in the means of grace, it fully knows that they are the shell and not the substance, the pathway and not the end. Its eye intently rests on Christ, and Christ alone, as procuring, meriting, deserving, obtaining, buying, winning the forgiveness of sins. Thus the actings of faith always tend to Christ--it turns to Him as the needle to the pole; it never pauses until this

rest is reached. Are any elate with hope that this inestimable treasure is their own? Deep self-examination must precede assurance--faith is impersonated by many counterfeits.

Let men beware of *mere intellectual notions*, which dwell in the head, but pass not beyond this vestibule. How many readily bow before the revelations of Scripture--they confess that they are sinners; they see clear evidence that the cross has been erected, and that Jesus died thereon, and that its province is to bring salvation. But here they pause--they only give historic credence to indubitable facts; with no advance beyond this, there is no real possession of Christ's benefits. The devils know all this. The heart, the affections, the spirit are not here enlivened; there is no close personal reception. Such *intellectual* belief mounts not to the faith which grasps forgiveness.

Let *emotions* be suspected which for a while flutter and soon expire. In times of sickness and distress, under the lively teaching of the earnest preacher, when awakening providences speak loudly, many melt and weep, and extol the preciousness of Christ, and express admiring delight. Such is the company of the stony-ground hearers--the soil is scanty; no root sinks deep; no fibers cling to Christ. There is no indissoluble cement--trials, temptations, scoffs, ridicule, and reproach assail--this seeming faith then vanishes as smoke before the breeze. Such feeling is not the faith which secures sin's pardon. Such *temporary movements* stir only to subside.

Some advance further. They know their need; they see Christ's worth; they take some steps towards Him; but they cast not themselves wholly on Him. They embrace Him with divided love--they only take in part His *sacrificial* offering. They are ready to rejoice in all His dying work; but they cannot unbar every bolt of the heart, and admit Him to REIGN absolutely, universally, unreservedly. They cannot bring every thought into thorough captivity to His obedience. Some darling sin must still be fondled; some holy precept must be slighted. But saving faith is an honest

grace--it follows Christ fully; surrendering every feeling and desire to His will, consecrating every faculty of mind and body to His service. No *partial reception* secures forgiveness.

There is, also, an indolent, *inert faith*, which springs not to life-long labor. Faith knows its obligation, and strives by works of love to testify its gratitude. The constant cry is, "Lord what will You have me to do?" In paths of ardent zeal it presses towards the prize of its high calling. Energetic faith alone is bound up in the bundle of forgiveness.

There is, also, *a profession which never grows*. True faith at first may be a tiny plant; it may rear but a slender head--but if it be of heavenly seed, dews from above will nourish it, and ripening rays will make it fruitful. The heirs of this inestimable gift should live blessing God that He has so enriched them. They should incessantly ponder the grand truth, "Through His name whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins." They should love and work as children of God through faith. And that they may ripen in this joy, they should wax stronger in the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith."

Joy, the Fruit of Forgiveness

"Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven!"--Matt. 9:2

The tree of forgiveness, shaken by the hand of faith, pours down rich fruits. From the showers of descending blessings let holy joy be now selected. This bright inhabitant of the believing heart quickly springs from the glad tidings--"Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven." Joy is the product of this sweet assurance of forgiveness--it is among the rays which sparkle from the absolving work of Christ.

The cavilers who first heard the wondrous words, "your sins are forgiven," rightly reasoned, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" But He who thus speaks is the mighty God; Deity is His inseparable property--He usurps nothing beyond His own prerogative when with authority He dispenses pardon. As God He purchased, and as God He gives. Pardon is a myth, except it be divinely given; it is like the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

But when faith gains this resting-place joy must ensue; doubts, fears, hesitations flee. All the black clouds of terror, anguish, and dismay vanish; beams of bright light shine joyfully around--thanksgiving and the voice of melody dwell on rejoicing lips; sweet echoes repeat, "Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven!"

To animate faith let the scene of this utterance be visited. The spot was Capernaum, the place in which Jesus often rested, as His adopted home.

The name suggests warnings, which it would be omission not to heed. In privileges, advantages, opportunities, this city was exalted unto heaven; nevertheless it was brought down to hell. Blessings within reach were spurned; the day of grace was unimproved--therefore the voice of condemnation thunders, "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." Let all take notice--their state is fatal to whom the Gospel comes and works no saving change.

Here Jesus was unfolding His glorious truths--as a prophet He was revealing the way of life, the only remedy for sin. When He taught, multitudes thronged to hear; but seldom was concern more earnest. Luke relates, that "there were seated around Him Pharisees and doctors of the law out of every town of Galilee, and Judea and Jerusalem." Mark adds that the concourse was so excessive "that there was no room to receive them--no, not so much as about the door."

These eager listeners won great reward. Not only did they receive lessons mighty to save, they moreover witnessed a miracle of mercy; they heard, also, the announcement of sin forgiven, and witnessed the resulting joy. "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven!"

Here is encouragement to seek with diligence all means of grace. Divine power is accessory to the words of life. A preached Gospel is the channel in which the Spirit flows into hearts with converting, reviving, sanctifying might.

Attention is now attracted by a strange appearance. Four men advance bearing on a bed a palsy-stricken friend. Their desire is obvious, their motive is not hidden--they are intent on reaching Jesus; they are eager to place an afflicted comrade at His feet. They had received news that Jesus was able and willing to relieve; that He wielded power to dispense all cures--this persuasion prompted their intrepid steps.

But now an obstacle threatens to defeat their zeal. The thronging crowd forbids approach; no avenue is open through the dense mass. But ardent faith cannot be baffled. This grace labors and wearsies not--it has wondrous skill to invent and persevere; it scorns to succumb, and thus proceeds to triumph.

This narrative is a conspicuous proof. All approach is choked--be it so--the roof may be reached. It is not easy with such a burden to ascend; but these friends surmount all difficulties--they stay not, until the top is gained. They discover the spot where Jesus stands; they force an opening through the covering; they lower the pallet, and thus the palsied sufferer lies before Jesus.

Misery is now prostrate before mercy; infirmity is now admitted to the presence of the great Healer--the sick is now at the feet of Jehovah-Rophi. (Ex. 15:26.)

There is no statement that the paralytic uttered an imploring word--but there was eloquence in the speechless spectacle; and Jesus read the language of the act, and understood the supplicating look. Large is the promise to those who ask--they who seek find, and often receive beyond their warmest hopes. But sometimes before the lips speak He gives. It is so here. Jesus addresses him--"Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven!"

He knew that the root and core of malady is sin; He read the real anguish of the afflicted heart; His omniscience discerned the deep-seated pain; His skillful mercy applied the true remedy. He gave assurance that the oppressive evil was removed, and He bade the sufferer to take the full joy of pardon. He knew that bodily recovery with a soul unhealed could bring but evanescent joy. What is the worth of an undiseased frame holding a sin-sick soul? He saw, also, that the palsied man now lying at His feet had well-grounded expectations of healing--He pities the unhappy case; He honors the manifested trust; He blesses the undaunted effort. He freely dispenses pardon--"Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven!"

Oh, precious assurance! happy hour! blessed man! How rich is the harvest here reaped by faith! What joy would bound when this voice of mercy reached his ears! What love and gratitude would kindle!

All is bright and lovely while Jesus is prominent--the scene darkens when eyes turn to man. "He is fairer than the children of men--grace is poured on His lips." Evil also, frequently pollutes the sons of earth. Here is sad proof. Certain of the scribes now say within themselves, "This man blasphemes." They heard Him claim the power of forgiving sin; they knew such gift to be the sole prerogative of God. Their eyes were blinded--the light shone in darkness. They recognized not the divine Person in their midst.

Jesus perceived in His spirit their evil surmises. He proceeds to shatter their vile unbelief, and to manifest the glory of His Godhead.

He asks "Whether is easier to say, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Arise and walk?"

Let it be observed, He institutes no contrast between the comparative facility and difficulty of forgiving sin and dispelling sickness. Each act is far beyond the power of man; each work requires omnipotence.

The outward pretension is the matter of present inquiry. Jesus proceeds thus to meet the cavil. It may be regarded as an easy thing to say, "Your sins are forgiven," because forgiveness is an act consummated in the invisible world, in the court above, far beyond man's faculties to discern. If the pretension be empty boast there is no power to detect and to expose. But it is no easy thing to say, "Arise and walk." This claim is subjected to clear view--a failure convicts of undue assumption, and shows intention to impose. But if the latter power be evidently displayed the former can no more be questioned. He then triumphantly maintains His claim--"That you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, He said to the man sick of the palsy, Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house." Let the scene be closely watched. If there be failure, if the helpless continues helpless, Jesus' power to forgive is wrapped in doubt. If success follows, if malady freshens into health, then doubts vanish, assurance stands firm, persuasion is established--it is indubitable that Jesus on earth can forgive sins, and is mighty and eternal God.

The issue puts the crown on Jesus' head. Mark relates--"Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all." Jesus' power shines forth as the sun in his strength. He stands victor over prostrate doubts--He manifests ability to forgive sins. The palsied instantly is whole--the wasted sinews are braced; the trembling limbs are clothed with renovated strength--he takes up the bed on which he recently was motionless. The marveling, the amazed, the awe-struck multitude open a path for him; and he so

recently carried, because he could not walk, now strides as a strong man, carrying his bed.

Who can fail to be convinced! Who will not give praises and adore! Jesus is able to forgive sins, and He is Jesus still--His never-failing property is power and willingness to blot out transgressions.

The miracle is ended. Without controversy Jesus grants forgiveness according to His will. Let the corollary be received, that the sense of sins forgiven will fill the heart with holy joy. A sweet train of confidence and peace will follow the assurance--"Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven!"

It may be boldly asked--Where the sense of this forgiveness is seated in the soul, what can trouble or dismay? What blessedness short of heaven's realities can exceed the conscious happiness?

The man thus cheered looks upward--no clouds, no darkness hide his Father's face; no chill discourages; no frown repels--paternal smiles beam graciously. Every aspect speaks reconciliation, adoption, favor. It must be so; for the cause of alienation has disappeared. No sins remain to provoke wrath; no barriers check the stream of overflowing love. Shall he not sing, "I am of good cheer; my sins are forgiven!"

Holy confidence may now confront the attributes of God--not one can press a charge against him. JUSTICE brings no more demands--it grants full acquittal. The LAW no more rolls its tremendous thunderings and forks its bolts to dash into perdition. Its menaces are only fierce against sin; but the pardoned man no more provokes. Shall he not boast, "I am of good cheer; my sins are forgiven!" He enters boldly into the court of CONSCIENCE, and fears not to commune concerning the transgressions of past days. The faithful monitor accuses not--it is at ease, because these sins are blotted from the recording tablet. He exclaims, "I am of good cheer; my sins are forgiven!"

SATAN, also, is spoiled of his terrific weapons. He cannot bind the blood-washed one, nor drag him to the fiery cell. Shackles are broken; he has lost his power to enchain. Sins are removed by pardoning grace. The happy song is heard--"I am of good cheer; my sins are forgiven!"

When SICKNESS comes, its presence calmly announces speedy deliverance from the burden of the flesh. When DEATH displays its dart it has no terrors--its commission is to bring the pardoned spirit into the presence of the King in His beauty. The judgment-seat will be the scene of final acquittal; eternity will be the cloudless day in which delights will find no end. The true believer counts this joy his own. Hence it is no presumption to adopt the enraptured song, "I am of good cheer; my sins are forgiven!"

But there are some who may not thus exult--they have no title to this assured joy. It is sole the property of those who have embraced Jesus as their full redemption, and who count all things but loss for the excellency of His knowledge. Let those who hitherto have stood apart seek a saving interest in Him without delay. He waits to be gracious. Let hesitation no more detain--weak resolves often perish. Hell is peopled with Satan's irresolute and procrastinating dupes!

Love, the Fruit of Forgiveness

"A certain immoral woman heard he was there and brought a beautiful jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them."--Luke 7:37-38

"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much."--
Luke 7:47

These words occur in a Gospel story. The narrative is exquisite in pathos and exuberant in charms of writing; but it is mainly precious as enforcing lessons of eternal truth. It belongs only to Luke. Let it be approached with adoring gratitude to the Holy Spirit for guiding the pen of this Evangelist to record it, and with humble prayer that in His love He may apply it to promote salvation.

The prominent features teach that a realized sense of pardon kindles the flame of fervent love. It must be so, for the knowledge of much forgiveness cannot fail to fan affections into ardent blaze.

The pathway to this main improvement leads through pastures of refreshing incident. (Ver. 36.) Simon, one of the Pharisees, "invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so He went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table." That sect, as a class, regarded Him with suspicious enmity; but here a liberal mind shrinks not from hospitality. He calls Him to his table. Happy are they who honor Jesus--He will honor them. Happy are they who welcome Him to their hearts and homes--He comes the bestower of blessings.

Jesus complied--"He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat." He is ever ready to draw near when called. If He is absent from our bosoms the fault is ours--we fail to open the door, and crave His entrance.

(Ver. 37.) A startling approach now amazes the assembled guests. The circumstance is heralded by "Behold!" Observe--mark--ponder! Who is this stranger? A woman comes, infamous in the city as a sinner. Her name is not recorded--but her conduct shows her spiritual condition. The unknown is of the heavenly family--her name is in the Lamb's book of life!

It is error to identify her with Mary of Magdala. The appearance of the Magdalene in the next chapter forbids such thought; and no

evidence shows that the Magdalene, though grievously tormented, was vile in degrading sin. This stranger was a native of the city in which Jesus was now a guest, and there she was notorious for polluted living.

Tidings had reached her that Jesus sat at table in Simon's house. The narrative records no previous interview with Him; but the account compels the conclusion that she was no stranger to Him--that she had acquired knowledge of His grace and power--that her heart was warm in hope of rescue from the mire of sin and unclean slavery--that she looked through Him for pardon and salvation--hence her affections glowed, and love blazed brightly.

Her conduct manifests this state. Let her acts be noticed. Her heart was breaking with desire to testify her gratitude, and openly to honor Him. She could not resist the torrent of her feelings. She must draw near--she is deterred by no fear of obstacles; she disregards the charge of violating the world's proprieties. She took, perhaps, the best of her possessions--probably procured for personal embellishment--her alabaster box of ointment; she passed the door; she reached the guest-chamber--she saw her Lord; she rushed to the object of her love; and as He reclined on the couch before the table, she took her station behind Him.

Can she see Him and be thus near, and emotion not overflow? No--her heart melted. Tears flowed so copiously that they bedewed His feet; with her streaming hair she wiped away the fast-falling flood, and then in the fervor of her holy love she pressed these feet with her lips, and perfumed them with the fragrance of her balsam. The picture vividly proclaimed how she loved Jesus.

But whence this mighty glow of love? Her heart thus burned because her soul had received hopes of forgiveness. No other answer satisfies.

Did Jesus forbid her, or repel her? They little know His heart who doubt that He tenderly views tokens of love, from those whom He loved before the world began.

At this point it requires some violence to turn from the affecting view, and to fix our eyes on the host. He watched, and was offended. He reasoned--Can Jesus allow the touch of one so fallen and impure? He concluded that her character was undetected by Jesus--he suspected that a prophet's penetrating knowledge could not enlighten Him. He thought within himself--No man of God would have permitted such loving expressions from one who is notoriously a sinner.

Such notions prove utter ignorance of the heart of Jesus. The reproach of the Pharisees and Scribes is the glory of His Gospel--"This man receives sinners, and eats with them." Happy are they who can gratefully respond--This witness is true; delighted experience endorses it.

Jesus now shows that He is a prophet in high sense; that He could read the workings of the heart, and knew how to apply seasonable instruction. Replying to the inward feeling, He said, "Simon, I have something to say unto you." He then delivered a simple parable, and added a question which touched the core of the whole scene. "There was a certain creditor, which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pieces of silver, the other fifty." Thus both were deeply indebted; but the debt of the one exceeded that of the other in tenfold degree. "And when they had *nothing to pay*, he frankly forgave them both." Who can hear this, and not with adoration recognize the Gospel-scheme? We are all deeply in debt--we are utterly bankrupt--we stand convicted at the bar of God. But we are not cast into prison until we pay the uttermost farthing. Free forgiveness is within our reach.

There may be vast difference of outward guilt; but every sin is a debt, for which no culprit can make satisfaction. The least offender

is incapable of canceling his obligations--the greatest and the least are equally insolvent. The least cannot enter heaven without free forgiveness from sovereign grace; the greatest is admitted by the same door.

Jesus asked Simon, 'Which of them will love the most?' The Pharisee replied, "I suppose that he to whom he forgave most." The conclusion is right--love will be in proportion to the amount of the felt benefit. Jesus approved the judgment; and then, with touches of tenderness and power, contrasted the ardent love of the pardoned intruder with the cold reception of the host. He pointed to the woman at His feet--"Simon, do you see this woman? I entered into your house, you gave Me no water for My feet"--she has sent forth streams from the fountains of her eyes; she has washed them with her tears, while her towel has been the hair of her head. How little was your love! How great was the feeling of her heart!

"You gave me no kiss"--your lips never pressed My brow; but this woman, from the time I came in, beginning from the first moment and never pausing, has devoured My feet with kisses. How cold was your affection! How warm was hers!

"You did not anoint My head with oil." You did not bring the cheapest perfume for My head; but she has anointed My feet with aromatic balsam, with costly myrrh. How scanty was your gratitude! How profuse was hers!

He then touched the mainspring of her conduct--He disclosed the deep spring of her rapturous affection. This fervent emotion arose from mighty motive. She loved thus largely, thus intensely, because much had been forgiven her. She had grasped pardon--she believed that her many sins were all forgiven. Her much love gave evidence.

Perception of much pardon never fails to awaken such rapture. Grace covering immensities of evil begets immensities of grateful manifestation. He who is raised from the lowest depths

mounts on loving wings to the highest heights--the greater the burden removed, the swifter do the wings fly upward. Jesus added--"To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." The heart, conscious of but little relief, warms with scanty love. The debt seems small; the release is requited by small gratitude.

The reproach conveyed to the Pharisee is keen, though tenderly expressed. Coldness of love results from pardon poorly prized. No blaze of gratitude breaks forth, because no burning obligation has been felt.

Let not the erroneous thought intrude, that this penitent was forgiven because of her love. Love is not the cause, but the effect of forgiveness. It precedes not, but it surely follows--it produces not, but it is the certain result. This woman loved not, until she knew her large, her full, her unmerited pardon; but then love, as the sun emerging from a cloud, shone in full splendor.

Thus the Gospel subjugates the heart. "We love Him because He first loved us." The believer realizes, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." Responsive love breaks forth, "My heart, my soul, my body, all are His."

There is rich gain in this devoted love. Let the scene be again visited. The penitent retired not before Jesus gave a smiling look and cheering word--He now spoke with all authority, and sealed her pardon. Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven!"

In her service she won assurance; in her work of love she earned a harvest of abounding comfort. Jesus imprints on her heart that her sins were all behind His back, and blotted out of the book of remembrance.

But He dismissed her not without pointing to the instrumental cause of her success--"Your faith has saved you; go in peace." She had heard His words; she had been persuaded; she believed, and doubted not--she may now go to her home to repose under the

shadow of assurance, and to live in the calm serenity of reconciliation. All peace was now her heritage--she had right to enter on the tranquil domain. Such the narrative. The APPLICATION of this touching scene shall be brief.

I. This woman was abominable in guilt. She had wallowed foully in sin's mire. But she heard of Jesus--she obeyed His call. Sense of vilest evil formed no barrier; it urged her forward--she cast herself on Him, and was saved. This case, which is no solitary gem in the Gospel-casket, loudly encourages. Oh, sinner, though your sins be as scarlet, come to the Savior, and they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, come, and they shall be as wool; though they be piled as mountains upon mountains, His cleansing blood, His covering righteousness, shall hide all! Are you as full of malady as the notorious leper? A persecutor, a blasphemer, an injurious one, as Paul? As occupied by Satan, as Mary of Magdala--as thoroughly abandoned, as Manasseh--as dishonest as Zaccheus? Only come! He is pledged to cast out no suppliant. Come, and you shall be welcomed. All who look to the cross, as the smitten Israelites to the uplifted serpent, shall be healed. They who cry to Him in the faith of the dying thief shall enter Paradise.

II. All who can truly testify that they have accepted the Savior, and have looked with penitence and faith to Him, and have plunged into the open fountain, and have wrestled with Him for mercy, and are clinging to Him with embracing arms, **should bless God for His grace toward them.** Let them emulate the example of this grateful woman and show forth their love. Let them manifest it with the lip, and encircle His throne with the melody of constant praise, and chide their dull souls--"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all His benefits--Who forgives all your iniquities." It should be exhibited, also, in unremitted self-dedication. "Here we offer and present unto You, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto You."

All the means entrusted to their stewardship should be laid on Him, their altar. Especially they should labor to advance His kingdom among the sons of men, whether they be the ignorant at home, or the perishing in heathen-wilds. This is the test of love which Jesus asks--"Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" again, "Do you love Me?" and again, "Do you love more than these?" "Feed My sheep." "Feed My lambs." It is doubtful love which toils not in proclaiming Christ.

III. Abundant love reaps abundant harvests of delight. This loving servant gained the authoritative assurance, "Your sins are forgiven." So they who labor devotedly for Him advance far into those sweet gardens of joy, where the light of His countenance casts bright beams around--where the pure breezes of the Spirit bring inward health and freshness--where flowers of precious promises diffuse fragrance--where laden trees drop fruits of peace--where melody continually sings of safety, security, full redemption, eternal salvation. They who love Him most, and work most for Him, most frequently receive the tidings, "Your sins are forgiven!"

This assurance is worth ten thousand worlds. It gives so much that more can scarcely be desired. It makes every step on earth a sure and rapturous advance to the strong city of which salvation is the walls and bulwarks, and forgiveness is the open gate.

Filial Fear, the Fruit of Forgiveness

"There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared."--Psalm
130:4

In the train of feelings which issue from the forgiveness of sins, filial fear now claims a place. A brief introduction will pertinently

bring out this point.

Gospel-truth is ever armed with mighty power. It is an instrument of wondrous force--it enters the heart, as leaven into dough. It cannot be otherwise; for it is nothing less than an all-conquering weapon, framed and wielded by the Holy Spirit. It is a voice from heaven, and cannot speak in vain.

As it proceeds from God, so to God it tends. It stirs the soul to fly aloft--it detaches it from debasing commerce with mere earthly matters; it reveals celestial objects. This sight always transforms--"We all, with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.) It wins to that communion which by sure process restores the heavenly likeness, and establishes the predestined conformity to the Son of God.

When the Apostle, in burning fervor, speaks of Christ loving the Church and giving Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water, he emphatically adds that the accomplishment is "by the Word." (Eph. 5:26.)

It cannot be too frequently enforced that this Word thus triumphs because it is not of earthly origin. Its birthplace is not the human mind; it owns not human reason as its parent--it springs directly from the courts above. It is like the stream of the Apocalypse--"He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." (Rev. 22:1.) And as water mounts to its own level, so Zion's streams seek Zion's heights; as rivers rest not until they reach the ocean's bed, so God's own truth rolls surely to the upward home.

Happy are they who delight to breathe the atmosphere of revelation--souls thrive which are invigorated in this immortal climate!

It is folly to spend money on that which is not bread, and labor on that which profits not--rather let the enriching nutriment of this food be sought. One result instantly follows--such students advance in faith, in holiness, and every godly grace. If this were fit opportunity, how easily might the dark converse be exhibited. Who are they who stray and guide into vicious and licentious life? These misleaders are the pupils of the school of ignorance--the proud despisers, or bold impugnors, of the Bible. It must be so. If truth be banished, the Holy Spirit has no sphere; and if He be absent, Satan undisturbed rules his benighted captives. When light is excluded, darkness has unmitigated sway; then steps stumble in paths of peril. Hence exclusion of truth is the sure parent of a blind progeny, who show the lineaments of their father the devil.

This position might be largely amplified. The connection of ignorance with floods of sin is traced with ease. Similarly a patent link connects spiritual intelligence and true nobility of life.

But the subject directs to one exemplification. The Scriptural sense of forgiveness creates filial fear of God.

I. To help elucidation, let an unreal hypothesis be made. Let it be supposed, in opposition to all fact, that forgiveness exists not. Let God be placed in a character immeasurably alien; for a moment let Him be imagined, as stripped of His inseparable attribute, and known only as an unreality.

It is painful to fabricate such position--the pious mind shrinks from its sight.

It is supposed, then, for the sake of clearer reasoning, that forgiveness is an imaginary notion; that unmixed wrath is God's one feeling towards all sinners; that His heart is one abode of vengeance; that His look darkens with unvaried frowns; that His hands wield only weapons of destruction; that His breath fans no flames but torment; that He knows no relentings; that tender

compassion is a stranger to His heart; that mercy is not seated on His throne; that His illimitable resources only act to vindicate His honor, and to pour down impartial requital upon transgressors. For a moment let this supposition be admitted, remembering always that it is untrue.

What would be the frightful result? What feeling would surely rage within the conscious sinner's breast? He is not ignorant of his countless provocations; he knows that Omnipotence is justly his enemy; he sighs, 'Can mercy give no aid!' But on this hypothesis mercy has no existence. There is no forgiveness in the courts of heaven--therefore hope instantly withers. There can be nothing in prospect "but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." There is no door of escape, no refuge, no covert from the impending storm, no hiding-place from the near tempest. The sinner is doomed to brood over utter hopelessness.

In apprehension of inevitable woe, the heart would harden into very stone. Every feeling would be frozen into ice; every affection would congeal. If there is no loving Father in the world above, there can be no child-like reverence on earth. God would only be dreaded as an inexorable Potentate, reigning to inflict misery. Hence there would be one wide-spread feeling of SLAVISH HATRED. The hopeless sinner would reason, "What profit can arise from seeking to please Him? No devoted service can melt or turn--there is no ear open to receive cries; there is no eye to regard devoted efforts. Why should man seek favor, when all study would be vain?"

Thus malignant rancor would hold unchecked dominion; every evil passion would riot unrestrained; all barriers would be removed, and defiance would unfurl its standard--bold and reckless rebellion would savagely prevail. Hence, if there be no forgiving God, sullen hardness would make earth a foretaste of hell.

II. Let a curtain drop on this unreal scene. "There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." What proclamation can be louder? "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him." Let His voice be heard--"I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me." (Jer. 33:8.) And again--"None of his sins that he has committed shall be mentioned unto him." (Ezek. 33:16.)

Our God is a God ready to pardon. He multiplies to pardon. Forgivenesses, in ever-flowing streams, roll down from the deep springs of His eternal love. His treasure-house is full of pardoning grace--the sinner, pleading the name of Christ, may enter in, and revel in the abundance of forgiveness. These mercies never fail--they never can be exhausted. They are large as Deity itself--they extend to every form and mode of iniquity. No mountain of transgression is so lofty that forgiveness cannot over-top it; no ocean of iniquity is so vast that forgiveness cannot exceed it. The heart of God, in Christ, ever beats with this forgiving love--His hands are ever open largely to dispense it. From everlasting His wisdom formed the scheme which gives free scope to this overflowing mercy.

Mighty hindrances opposed this grace. These obstacles have already had much thought; but Scripture teaches to add line upon line. Let summation then proceed. The majesty of the holy kingdom must be kept inviolate--it must be magnified, exalted, and raised very high. This result is gloriously secured. Sin is punished; wrath is inflicted; vengeance receives all dues. But the person of the sinner is exempt--a Surety, a Substitute is found. This Surety is strong, no almighty, to endure, and wholly qualified to represent. God's well-beloved Son--His Fellow by eternal generation, man's brother by the assumption of man's nature--undertakes to expiate--"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins." In Him every hindrance is swept to immeasurable distance; in Him every plea for pardon is supplied. The contrite

sinner may fly to the mercy-seat, and bewailing his iniquities, may plead, 'Jesus died for these transgressions.'

In the garden, on the cross, He presented Himself a full, and perfect, and sufficient atonement. In testimony that every debt is paid, He rises again, and shows Himself infallibly alive. To perfect salvation He enters as triumphant Conqueror into the courts of heaven, and sits as unceasing Intercessor on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Thus pardon may be humbly craved as a blessing purchased, earned, merited, deserved, decreed. Forgiveness thus implored knows no delay--it descends, filling the heart with joy and the lips with praise. A loving voice thrills through the soul--"Son, be of good cheer; your sins, which are many, are forgiven." "Go in peace. Your faith has saved you."

Sweet is the result. The joy is so real, that even the reality of heaven can scarcely augment. **Let the happy recipient be viewed.** He tightly grasps forgiveness as his own--a deep conviction fills him that iniquity shall not be his ruin; that his many transgressions shall not sweep him to perdition; that no condemnation threatens him; that he stands before God spotless and clean, through the sprinkling blood, and bright and beautiful in the robe of undecaying righteousness. He realizes that--God is his reconciled Father; Jesus his complete Savior; the Holy Spirit his indwelling light, and guide, and consolation; heaven his promised abode; psalms of victory and songs of triumph his heritage forever.

Can a happier change be felt! Darkness is gone, and the true light shines; tumultuous passions calm into the reign of holy peace; tremblings have ceased; dread of God has fled. "The desert rejoices, and blossoms as the rose." "Instead of the thorn, comes up the fir tree; and instead of the brier, comes up the myrtle tree." "The ransomed of the Lord return and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads--they obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing flee away."

Filial fear has banished slavish trembling. The pardoned believer realizes his adoption into the household of faith and family of God. He is no more afar off--his desolation as an outcast is exchanged for citizenship with heaven, and fellow-heirdom with all saints. He exclaims, "This God is my God forever and ever!" This God is my Father while eternity rolls on! "I love Him because He has so loved me." With every faculty of mind and body I will serve Him, and show forth His praise. I will shun, as a viper, departure from His ways; I will reject offence as a poisoned cup; I will watch my every thought, lest any root of bitterness should arise; I will guard the portal of my lips, lest any evil sound should issue forth; I will strive to walk even as Jesus walked, and to abound with fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of His name. Thus he who lately trembled as a slave, warms into the loving child; and the criminal who sought concealment, now craves closer union. His ear is ever listening for directions; his lips continually cry, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" His loins are girt for daily service; his feet are shod with preparedness for work; his one pathway is sincere obedience.

Thus **the sense of forgiveness melts, and softens, and converts.** The sweet captivity of love prevails. A reconciled Father is adored, whose guiding eye is always sought. Others may abstain from evil, through selfish fear. The disgrace, the reproach, the loss of fame and friends may deter; but the pardoned soul sees a loving Father in every command, and vile ingratitude in each transgression. He feels with David--"Against You, You only have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight." He reasons with holy Joseph--"How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" He realizes His amazing mercy, and love constrains him to make God's will his chief delight. He knows that grace purchased pardon for him; so he lives as one bought by a price, and bound to glorify God with his body, soul, and spirit, which are no more his own.

The truth is thus incontrovertible--that the full reception of the Gospel leads to filial fear of offending his Savior. He is the saintliest

man who most entirely embraces the glad tidings of complete remission.

Hence the wisdom of constantly striving "to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The continuous charm of life should be to gaze on Jesus, and to study the full achievements of His work; the daily position should be beside His cross. Increasing knowledge of the purpose, aim, end, fruits of His dying love, should be the mind's pursuit.

Thus assurance would flow like a river through the soul. The first voice from the cross should be ever resounding in enraptured ears--"Father, forgive them," bestow the mercy which this blood procures.

Blessed, indeed, are they who rejoice in evidence that their iniquities are forgiven and their sins covered. They go from grace to grace; they enter on paths of joyous service. Theirs is the fear that loves, and the love that fears.

A Model for Imitation

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."--Ephesians 4:32

Divine forgiveness is here commended as a pattern. High and heavenly is the prescribed walk. Precepts from God admit no lower standard--His children must ever strive, the Spirit helping, to be holy, as He is holy; to seek perfection, as their Father is perfect; to purify themselves, even as Christ is pure. This molding in celestial likeness is mainly formed by study of the Word. The sacred truths, to which thoughts there are led, produce resemblance--this is a general position.

The present subject points to especial instance. The art of forgiving will be best learned by gazing on God, set forth in Scripture as the glorious Model. The students in this school will be conspicuous on the stage of life--forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them. Let the example first be viewed--the duty will then take a clearer form.

1. THE EXAMPLE. Grace has been seen as the deep SOURCE from which forgiveness springs; the cross has been uplifted as the procuring PRICE; representative atonement has shone forth as the central luminary of the Gospel-system--the surety-death has been exhibited as its axis of rotation. God, acting in the element of Christ crucified, acquits the sinner. His anger subsides; the torch of wrath is quenched; remission is won; pardon waves an olive-branch of peace. Thus God forgives, and stands forth as a Model for instruction.

(1) Is it asked, To what does forgiveness deal such mercy? It is replied--To every form of evil; to sin in its every phase; to every violation of the law; to vile omissions and to worse commissions; to boundless provocations; to repeated insults; to irritating affronts. It forgets the ingratitude which repays kindness with ill-treatment; it remits the debt of ten thousand talents; it wipes out robbery, and sacrilege, and wrong. Hateful is this spectacle; but forgiveness overlooks the total mass.

(2) Is it further asked, On whom does forgiveness look with rescuing eye? The answer is--It smiles on creatures who have daringly defied the great Creator, and trampled on His gentle rule; on children requiting their parents' love with enmity, and wounding their breasts with shafts of hate; on subjects warring against their rightful King, and harboring foul plots of treason; on servants withholding obedience from their Master, and wasting goods entrusted to their care; on men striving to seat Satan on the throne of God. Such is a picture of graceless man. From these forgiveness takes the filthy garments, and in their place gives heavenly robes!

(3) The inquiry follows, What moves God thus to forgive? No inducement from the side of man appears; no streaming tears persuade; no penitence, no contrition, no shame, no confession of iniquity, no acknowledgment of guilt, no downcast heads, no stricken hearts, urge melting pleas; no promises of change besiege the mercy-seat; no vain excuses strive to avert just wrath. Why then should criminals be spared? It is a fruitless task to seek a cause from earth--there is no motive but the heart of God. Grace reigns. Grace forms the scheme in which forgiveness works. Through the atoning blood, through the obedience of the Son of God, a heaven-high fortress is erected, in which the sinner may find sheltering mercy--in this fabric every stone is laid by grace. Thus God freely pardons, moved by the impulse of His love. When man deserves all woe, pardons dispense all blessings. Such is heaven's example. It is as bright as the eternal day; it is perfect as its Author; it is glorious as God.

II. THE DUTY. Those who rejoice in forgiveness are exhorted to emulate the grand Exemplar--"Forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you."

The precept thus to act assumes that opportunities will occur. The story of each day gives melancholy proofs. While Satan is at large, evil will not be dormant--at every turn its hateful image will be seen. The moral picture of this earth is sad. Love exerts not universal sway; kindness breathes not as an encircling element; tenderness flows not as a perennial stream; truth spreads not as pervading atmosphere--on the contrary--a swarm of provocations buzz with irritating sting.

Let direct acts of cruelty, injustice, wrong, not now be named--let the lesser excitements of the day be marked. A fly may tease, an insect may disturb--thus peace is ruffled without flagrant deeds. How often are pure motives mis-represented--the rightful fact distorted--calumnious reproaches circulated--disparaging reports diffused--unjust suspicions entertained--base charges whispered!

Hearts are wounded by the poisoned shafts of slander; and fair fame blasted by whispered insinuation, or the untruth of suppressed reality. Thus the causes of vexation are a prolific brood--rare is the day which knows them not. Hence angry feelings will be prone to rise; indignation will chafe against restraints; fretfulness will suggest that to resent such treatment is alike befitting and praiseworthy.

Let not such feeling nestle in the mind--let it expire before it can gain birth. Resentment grows not in the Gospel-garden--it is a weed of heathen wilds. Reproach is not the language of the school of Christ. Evil must not meet evil, nor sin compete with sin--such conduct reflects not heaven's rays, nor shows the features of the great Exemplar. Such erring steps stray widely from the heavenly rule.

The unforgiving spirit may sometimes frame excuse. It may be said that provoking conduct has been cruel, undeserved, and often-repeated--that much pain has been inflicted, and much loss in fame and character and property sustained. Doubtless there is aggravating cause, or no vindictiveness would rise. Waters are calm when no wind blows; the viper stings not unless touched; if no fire burns, no smoke ascends; the engine moves not without steam.

When the irritating cause is great, the door is widely open for Christian principle to stalk forth. Circumstances may render rebuke most easy; the offenders may be powerless to escape; the injured hands may hold the rod. These advantages give large opportunity for Godlike spirit to shine brightly--the Model shows all power forgiving utter weakness.

A secret thought will sometimes lurk, that such precept is beyond the power of man; that human shoulders are too weak to lift such loads. Doubtless unaided man is a frail reed. But why is he ever without aid? He who commands is ever near, and ever able to brace the nerves and to supply all strength. A child sinks not beneath a

weight when the parent lends supporting arm; a weak man on a giant's back can do grand work; Moses called to face a mighty monarch, shrinks not when assured, "Certainly I will be with you." The hosts of Midian were mighty--how can Gideon repel them? He heard the word, "Go in this your might;" and again, "Surely I will be with you." The promise was sure. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon" gained the victory.

The timid fleeing on the battlefield are often wounded in the back--the brave march on and tread down foes. Jonah seeks escape from duty, and meets the storm and prison in the sea. He, who obeys the call from heaven, finds to obey is strength. Is it not written, "He gives power to the faint, and to those who have no might He increases strength"? (Isaiah 40:29.) And again, "He that is feeble among them shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God, and as the angel of the Lord before you." (Zech. 12:8.)

He spoke what he had found, who said, "I can do all things, through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13.) They who strive to "forgive one another, as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them," will find the mandate to be ability.

He understands machinery best who sees it in its work. Let instances then appear, in which grace helped believers to forgive. Are any smarting under cruel usage, worn down by savage and relentless hate?--*Stephen's* dying scene gives counsel. Could death be more unmerited and more inhuman? He stood the saintliest of the saints of that day; the Holy Spirit dwelt in him in abundant measure--it was his joy and constant work to preach Christ Jesus and to call sinners to the way of life. But malice thirsted for his blood. Amid the shower of crushing stones, reproach stains not his lips--there is no call for retribution to avenge his cause. "He knelt down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep." (Acts 7:60.) Grace triumphed over nature's impulse. God's precepts through God's help, can be obeyed. Sweet is the word, "Do not say, 'I'll pay you

back for this wrong!' Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you."
(Prov. 20:22.)

Paul brings corroborating proof. He stands accused at the imperial bar--he is denounced as seditious, and causing peril to the state. No friend appears to intercede in his behalf, to testify his innocence, to bear witness to his blameless course. As with his Lord, so it is now with him--all forsook him and fled. But his Lord's own Spirit strengthened him. Christlike, he gently writes, "At my first answer, no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." Strong was the provocation to complain and to resent; but he was enabled to imitate heaven's Model, and to forgive, as God, for Christ's sake, had forgiven him. Thus in the effort there will be success.

Let it be added that *Christian profession implies a forgiving spirit*. What is the heaven-taught prayer? What is the constant utterance in public, in the closet, on the knees?--"Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us." Is this reality, or mockery? Let not hypocrisy insult the mercy-seat--let not the plea be false on which forgiveness is implored; let not untruth arrest the wings of mercy. Here let it be noted that when the lesson of prayer is ended, forgiveness is the point to which our Lord reverts. Solemn are the concluding words, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Let not the warning be in vain.

The thought then is untenable, that to forgive is to surmount impossibilities. The apostles when exhorted to this grace, conscious of insufficient power, prayed, "Lord, increase our faith." (Luke 17:5.) Let help be similarly sought. The hand which held the sinking Peter is near to aid. Difficulties will vanish--duty will become delight. Smooth is the path in which feet often tread.

Condemnation of an Unforgiving Spirit

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."--Matt. 18:35

The parable of a man, alike a debtor receiving mercy, and a creditor showing none, thus ends. The words impress the main lesson of the picture; they unveil its prominent feature; they exhibit the important point on which the eye should rest; they awaken the echo which should reverberate from the perusal.

The warning shows that unforgiveness from God is the doom of those who forgive not heartily, gladly, universally, unreservedly, every offending brother his every offence. To withhold forgiveness from offending man is proof that there is not forgiveness from the offended God. "Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you." Such is the inference. It is most distinct. May an expository review of the story instructively impress it.

At the entrance a caution may not be ill-timed. The parable teaches that the unforgiving shall not find forgiveness. Such is the appalling truth. But misapprehension must not here delude. It would be grievous error to infer that forgiveness on man's part constitutes in any sense the originating cause, and moving spring of divine pardon. God is not thus actuated. But still none have a saving interest in His absolving grace whose hearts are stern in unforgiving hardness.

Let discrimination analyze the case. The *fountain* of forgiveness of sin is grace--the *purchasing price* is the God-man's blood; the *recipients* are the children of eternal love--the flock given to Christ in counsels of eternal wisdom. They are loved, because God

willed to love them. They are forgiven, because Christ's blood has paid the total of their debt. They have washed in the fountain opened for all sin and uncleanness, because the Spirit has made them willing in the day of His power. They have, also, *forgiving hearts, because the same Spirit has softened, melted, hallowed them, and established His reign of gentleness and love.*

This forgiving spirit is sweet evidence that they are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of the heavenly inheritance. Without Him, there is no scriptural warrant for joying in the remission, which belongs only to the family of faith. He, who forgives not from his heart his brother all his trespasses, bears on his front those unrelenting features which exclude from fellowship with the forgiven.

These thoughts lead to the graphic lesson of the parable. Let advance be made with eyes fixed on the focus to which the rays tend, and only pausing to gather warrantable improvement from the embellishing circumstantials.

The scene thus opens (ver. 23)--"the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him." The reflecting mind instantly turns to our heavenly Father, arrayed in all power--the sovereign Ruler of the universe--who distributes to his servants their several talents, arranges their opportunities, and is about to institute the scrutiny of final reckoning. They are wise who walk and speak and live and work as they who know that they must be made manifest before the judgment-seat, and that everyone "must receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad."

(Ver. 24.) "When he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought unto him who owed him ten thousand talents." Enormous is the amount. Astounding is the debt. It almost surpasses calculation. A terrifying thought arises--All men are debtors to God's justice, and

who can reckon the inconceivable immensity of the obligation? Illustrations fail to span infinity--no words can paint a boundless magnitude. Count all the stars which sparkle on the breast of night--count all the sands which form the ocean's bed--count all the drops which constitute its billows--super-abounding sins exceed. Pile them, and the pyramid overtops the highest summit of the heavens. Let the ten thousand talents of transgression be estimated, and terror must petrify all hearts. Despair must sink into the lowest dust.

(Ver. 25.) "Since he had nothing to pay, his Lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." The sinner's condition is utter insolvency. In himself his only property is sin. Darkness cannot create light; sin cannot cancel sin; debt cannot liquidate debt--therefore, if justice takes its course, irretrievable ruin must ensue. The sentence is just--"Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness."

(Ver. 26.) "The servant therefore fell down and begged him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all." In agony the debtor is prostrate on his knees. He urges no denial--he makes no excuse; he pleads no extenuating circumstances. His importuning language is confession. He prays for respite. Seemingly bereft of reason, he promises an impossibility--even full restitution. Let the sinner learn hence to sink into the depths of contrition, and to utter only cries for mercy; but let him shun the notion that he can make any repayment by his own efforts, and in his own person. Such error may not be inferred from this portion of the pictorial scene.

(Ver. 27.) "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go." The narrative sweetly manifests pity, forgiveness, liberation. It is an exhibition of the Gospel of free grace. Our heavenly Father is rich in compassion--mercy is His precious attribute. It constitutes a grand portion of his essence--it reaches unto the heavens--it endures forever. It provides means in Jesus through which the chains fall from the sinner's hands, and the

prison-cell is not his doom. An obliterating decree expunges the whole claim.

But the servant's enormous debt was brought clearly to his view, before he sought or could esteem remission. So by the Spirit's power the sinner must be taught to feel his hopeless, lost, and ruined state, before he will extend the hand of faith to grasp the free-grace pardon, or can value its full blessing.

The scene now frightfully changes. *Surely the debtor thus graciously forgiven, will be melted into one flood of tenderness! Surely all his thoughts, and words, and acts will now flow in placid streams of gentleness!*

It is far otherwise! The story thus proceeds (ver. 28)--"The same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred pence." He goes out--Happy are they who ever abide in closest fellowship with God! In keeping near is safety, happiness, and holy living--in the slightest departure is peril, temptation, downfall.

This recipient of such goodness met a fellow-debtor who owed an hundred pence--an evanescent sum compared with his own debt just remitted--it scarcely amounted to a millionth part. Offences towards our fellow-men, though very grievous and most vile, have pigmy form beside our giant-sins against our God.

(Ver. 29.) "And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that you owe. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you all."

He hears the entreaty which he so recently had urged. He had prevailed. He is now supplicated by the like petition, and he miserably hardens. The heart of unrenewed man appears in odious colors--the nether millstone is of softer material.

(Ver. 30.) "And he would not, but went and cast him into prison until he should pay the debt." Unrelentingly he consigns his fellow-servant to the dungeon more justly merited by himself--he sternly inflicts the penalty so tenderly remitted to his prayer. Unmelted by a sense of his free and full pardon, he freezes into icy cruelty.

(Ver. 31.) "So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told their lord all that was done." Many eyes look watchfully around, and pitiless obduracy even here awakens indignation. Many Christian hearts, in meek complainings unto God, call down attention to surrounding misery, and pray Him to put forth His mighty hand to check all evil and redress all wrong.

Now the final scene is reached. (Ver. 32.) "Then his lord, after he had called him in, said unto him, O you wicked servant." For the first time reproof goes forth. "I forgave you all that debt because you begged me; should not you also have had compassion on your fellow-servant, even as I had pity on you?" *If the mercies of redemption, and the tenderness of the God of all grace fail to produce meek, loving, gentle, forgiving temper, the evidence is clear and sad, that the Spirit who uses the Gospel as His conquering power is not present. In such case the unsubdued heart has not been allured into the arms of Jesus.* To receive Him is to become partaker of His love--to abide in Him is to abide in heavenly-mindedness. The unmerciful are not fitting through grace for heaven, where the congenial song is praise for forgiveness without end. Is not the warning plain?--"He shall have judgment without mercy that has showed no mercy."

(Ver. 34.) "And his lord was angry, and delivered him unto the tormentors until he should pay all that was due unto him."

Such is the dreadful conclusion. Let its solemn message sink deeply into pondering thoughts.

(Ver. 35.) "So likewise;" in like measure, and the measure is torment until all is paid, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Unrelentings will fall on the relentless--they who spared not will not be spared--there is no pity for the pitiless.

It should not be wholly omitted that one occurrence here has raised perplexity. An inference has been wrongly sought, exciting some clouds of doubt. It appears that the mercy granted to the unmerciful servant was subsequently revoked. It has hence been imagined that a sinner forgiven today may through aggravated sin, be subsequently condemned. It is sufficient to reply that such fears are wholly in opposition to the whole tenor of Gospel-teaching. When God forgives, He forgives wholly, and forever. "With Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." "He hates divorce." "Repentance is hid from His eyes." Let it be added that this injurious inference is drawn not from the main lesson of the parable, but from its descriptive dress. The circumstantial drapery of a parable brings into clearer light a main lesson, but it never may be unfairly pressed to establish any doctrinal position.

Let none then cavil, but let all hold fast the rightful lesson. Let honest inquiry penetrate the heart, and see if any traces of enmity, malice, resentment, still linger. If so, let humble prayer ascend for increase of grace, that we may forgive the pounds due to us, and so may rejoice in evidence that God has forgiven our ten thousand talents. He may trust that God has forgiven him who feels that he can forgive all injuries. Mercy to others is reflection of mercy from above.

Here the thought can scarcely be repressed, How perfect is the Gospel-rule! If it had sway, the breast would resemble the ocean in repose--no storm would ruffle; no angry passion would disturb. Peace would walk hand in hand with joy, and every pulse be love. The promised scene would dawn--"Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them; and they shall be His

people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."
(Rev. 21:3.)

Eternal Glory, the Ultimate Cause of Forgiveness

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."--Rev. 7:9-10

The worth of forgiveness will not be fully known until time swells into eternity. To enliven hope and to encourage, strengthen, and embolden faith, the Holy Spirit withdraws the veil, and presents a prospect of the endless raptures which will then become reality. To this scene revelation here invites. Let revering hearts now intermix, and reap some first-fruits of the harvest which forgiveness will then surely reap.

I. THE TIME. When shall this bliss commence? It dawns when the endless age shall have arrived, and Jesus shall have "delivered up the kingdom to God the Father; when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power." (1 Cor. 15:24.) When the peaceful sway of the millennial prelude shall have brightened into fuller, richer perpetuity; when "the great white throne" shall be removed, because its work is finished; when death and hell, and whoever was not found written in the Lamb's book of life, are swallowed in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14), and the righteous shall have passed into

life eternal. (Matt. 25:46.) This day is surely coming. Let us in spirit meet it, and ask, 'Will it find us in the rejoicing throng, whose sins are pardoned through the blood of Christ?'

II. THE NUMBER. "Lo, a **great multitude**, which no man could number." How blessed is the sight! During the earthly state the redeemed appeared to be a little flock--a tiny speck in a dreary waste, a rare flower in a weedy desert. The solitary pilgrim often sighed, "I, I alone, am left." But now how changed is the scene! The collected throng baffles enumeration--to count the happy hosts eludes all power; numbers are impotent to reach their expanse; no vision can embrace them--their horizon has no bound. On the right hand and on the left they stretch beyond all gaze--in the front and in the rear their vastness spreads beyond all measure. They are "a great multitude, which no man can number." They all on earth had sins as countless as their countless throng; but all their sins are now forgiven!

How wondrous is the blood of Jesus! How matchless is its worth! The result is worthy equivalent of its expenditure. All the efforts of the revealing Spirit, all the labors of ministers who agonized in prayer and toil, all the devotedness of missionaries and martyrs who counted not their lives dear unto themselves, were well spent to promote this end. Amid this vast assemblage shall we have place? We cannot fail, if we tread the appointed way. This great multitude found pardon at the cross.

III. WHERE DID THEY COME FROM? Once they were sinners upon earth, but now they are gathered safe around the throne. They come from every part and portion of our globe; out of every nation, and all tribes and people and tongues. The Gospel-trumpet sent forth a world-wide note--"Their word went into all the earth, and their sound unto the ends of the world." The word cannot go forth in vain--"it shall not return unto Me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it." Here is fulfillment of the promise--here is the illimitable

crop gathered from earth's wide field. Let, then, the faithful missionary, whether in the obscurity of distant climates, or under tropic sun, or amid the savage inhabitants of the northern snow, be bold and fear not. He is gone at heaven's bidding, to do heaven's work--his message will triumph; the cross will conquer. The Spirit through the Word will give life, and souls will be born again, unto forgiveness, and join the happy throng. The call has reached us--at the bidding have we fled to Christ?

IV. THEIR POSITION. "They stand before the throne, and before the Lamb." Distance no more intervenes--separation's barriers have fallen. Sin once spread veils between the sinner and God's smile; ignorance interposed mists, and unbelief wrought blindness. But sin no more obstructs. Thus forgiven multitudes stand in the very presence of their God and of the Lamb. They have reached the grand consummation of all their holiest hopes; they enjoy fulfillment of their most wrestling prayers; they gaze fully, clearly on the face of God, and live. The rays of His glory shine upon them, and they endure the blaze, and perish not--rather they bask exultingly in His light. They read the expression of all His love; they ponder the open volume of His heart; they know even as they are known. Shall we stand among them and thus see God? It will be so, if we are sprinkled with the redeeming blood.

V. THEIR ROBES. "They are clothed in white robes." Sin had stripped them of the garb of innocence, and polluted them with filthy garments; but sin is all forgiven, and no defilement remains. But how is their clothing thus beautiful? "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They plunged into the cleansing stream. In faith they hastened to the remedial laver--its power was supreme. Through its virtue the scarlet stain became white as snow, and the crimson dye became white as wool. Shall we thus shine above the brightness of the sun? Have we thus washed?

They saw, also, by faith, the glorious obedience which Jesus in man's nature achieved. They put on the Lord Jesus Christ as a covering fit for the marriage-supper of the Lamb. They utterly shunned all merit of their own, and they received Him, and rejoiced in Him, and gloried in Him, as the Lord their righteousness. Shall we be similarly clothed? There is no doubt, if our shelter is in Christ.

VI. WHAT IS UPLIFTED IN THEIR HANDS? They wave palms. This emblem proclaims triumph and joy. Heaven is the place in which warriors rest, and the rejoicing sing. In the world numerous foes arose against them--their struggles were many; their conflicts were fierce; the battle was long; the fight was incessant.

But now victorious feet tread on the neck of every enemy. Sin never can again assail--the tempter can no more allure or threaten. Death has done its worst, and now they live securely in repose; the conquered grave has given up its prey; hell has no power to harm--enemies are swallowed up in victory. In token of this triumph they wave palms.

Shall our hands hold these pledges of successful combat? Good hope is ours, if we are fighting the good fight of faith, and are overcoming by the blood of the Lamb.

But the shout of triumph is a shout of joy, and palms express exuberant delight. The sin-forgiven drink deep indeed of the ever-flowing river of boundless bliss; but at present no tongue can tell, no image can depict, no heart can realize their full pleasures. They have all the happiness which God can confer; they have all the delights which the infinite capacity of glorified bodies and glorified spirits can contain. How wondrous is the amount! Who can estimate the pleasures at God's right hand for evermore! It is all theirs--all theirs forever. They feel it--they know it--they avow it--and in full realization every hand of all the innumerable multitude raises high its palm. Shall we be happy in this happiness? The

promise is sure to us, if the expiating blood has cleansed us from sin's polluting stain.

VII. THEIR SHOUT. Open the ear of faith and hearken. "They cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." When the assembled company of the redeemed thus fill the many mansions, what is the first sound heard? Salvation! Every voice is raised to cause the glorious home to echo and re-echo with the cry--Salvation! They all realize, We are saved; we are saved forever! Salvation is ours; we have reached salvation's shore; we have entered salvation's realms; we have obtained salvation's prize. "Salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Ofttimes in the world thanksgiving was upon their lips--grateful notes were their frequent song; they delighted to ascribe praise. But now, for the first time, 'realized salvation' is the sum of the ascription to their God. All their gratitude and all their joy is concentrated in this grand shout--"Salvation!"

They know what they possess, and they know, also, how they obtained it. Is there thought of self, and human merit, or man-earned heaven? The thought is abhorrent to a saved soul. It is far otherwise. All salvation is of free grace. "Salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." The Father decreed it, willed it, planned it. His love chose every one of that vast gathering in His Son; His grace gave the whole number to be His bride, His jewels, and His crown; His wisdom contrived the mode by which they should be cleansed from every stain, and gloriously enrobed in righteousness; and by the Spirit's power be purified, fitted, sanctified. Every stone in salvation's beauteous fabric was selected, prepared, placed by a loving Father's hand. "Salvation to our God!"

The chorus adds, "and unto the Lamb." Salvation unto Jesus--the appointed, the expiating, the satisfying, the accepted Sacrifice. By His blood He purchased, by His sufferings He won, by His cross He earned, by His passion He procured salvation. To Him, and to His

dying love and atoning merit be the praise. Without His death they must have died; through His death they live. Without His cross they must have passed into perdition; through His cross they hold salvation. Salvation is rightly ascribed to Him, for salvation is from His finished work. Hence sounds the melody of their grateful hearts. Befitting is this music for the redeemed to pour forth, for heaven to hear, for the Father and the Lamb to receive!

Here is the consummation of the bliss of the redeemed--here is the consummation of the work of forgiveness. God is glorified. All praise to His free grace! "Grace to it; grace to it!" is the universal and heaven-wide, heaven-long tribute.

Others indeed are present, who have no share in this forgiveness--even all the angelic hosts. Can they thus witness the joy of the forgiven, and hear this glory ascribed, and be unmoved? No--they fall before the throne on their faces, and worship God, saying, "Amen; blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever. Amen."

Is not forgiveness a blessed gift? Are not they happy who have gained it? Until we reach this rest of glory, while still we toil and struggle, while still we bear the pilgrim's staff--let us love and praise, and give glory to our God and unto the Lamb. Let our heaven begin before this earth is passed. Let faith exult before sight dawns; let hope take realizing flight; and let the constant feeling of our inmost souls be, "Salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!"

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