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PARDON OF SIN.

ITS NATURE, NECESSITY, PROPERTIES,
AND EFFECTS.



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PARDON OF SIN.

THE Scripture doctrine of the pardon of sin is most important and interesting. It diffuses itself, like the heart blood, through the whole system of Christianity. It is the most prominent, necessary, and consolatory ingredient in the religion of a sinner. Nothing short of the belief of it can quiet the awakened conscience, and nothing short of the possession can bless the transgressor with safety and felicity. To render its exercise compatible with the honour of eternal justice, the Son of God became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and the dispensation of grace, by which the guilty transgressors of the divine law are made partakers of it, is the most brilliant and pleasant gem in Jehovah's crown of glory. He claims the pardon of iniquity as his peculiar prerogative, distinguishing him from all others, and this is that crown of glory which he will not give to another: and the more numerous and enormous the iniquities pardoned, the brighter

shines the glory of his pardoning mercy, and the more rapturously the forgiven exclaims, "Who is a God like unto thee that forgivest iniquity?" In unfolding the nature, necessity, properties, and effects of pardon, the following observations, comprising the amount of what the Scriptures deliver on this subject, deserve and shall receive consideration.

1. That pardon, in respect of its nature, is a remission to the sinner of the penalty incurred by his crimes, releasing him from suffering personally the punishment which his transgressions of the law of God deserved. Pardon is a blessing that every man eminently needs, for we are all guilty, dreadfully guilty. We are hereditary traitors. As the descendants of rebel Adam, we are by nature children of wrath, and disposed from our youth to rebel, and, as soon as we are able, unite with his enemies against our righteous sovereign. Actuated with malignant spite against God, from hatred of him and love to iniquity, we engage with all our powers in the service of sin, and willingly embrace every opportunity to oppose him and serve his enemies. This is the course pursued by every one of our rebel family, until we all accumulate transgressions infinite in number, and many of them dreadfully aggravated. We are chargeable not with one but with innumerable crimes against the Lord our God, and each of these deserves his wrath and curse both in this life and in

that which is to come. To this curse we are all liable, and therefore eminently need pardon. For the divine, like every other law, is sanctioned with rewards and punishments. It denounces death, the wages of sin, against every transgression. Every transgression, therefore, of the divine law not only pollutes the transgressor, constituting him impure, unmeet for holy society, services, and enjoyments, but also makes him guilty—liable to suffer the punishment the law denounces against the transgression with which he is chargeable. This liability to punishment is the guilt of sin, and precisely that in sin which pardon respects and removes. Pardon does not, indeed, dissolve the connection between sin and guilt, guilt and punishment; for the intrinsic damnability of sin remains, and punishment and guilt are inseparably connected, and never have been and never will be separated. But though guilt remains an essential ingredient in sin, and though guilt and punishment are inseparable, yet it is not essentially necessary that, in every instance, the transgressor should personally suffer his own punishment. The plan of salvation presents us with an instance of the transfer of the guilt of the offender to his surety, and of the escape, on this account, from suffering personally the punishment his crimes deserve. Sin is punished, and yet the offender is exempted from enduring it. This remission of the penalty, this exemption from enduring it, because en-

dured by Christ, his substitute, is the pardon of sin which every sinner needs, and which is so amply and deservedly celebrated in holy Scripture, and forms one constituent part of the justification of the ungodly.

The terms, phrases and allusions, employed in the Bible to describe this pardon of sin, contribute much to exhibit its genuine import, and to enhance its importance. These are taken from the aspects under which it is contemplated. Viewed as an intolerable and oppressive burden, as it is found to be in truth and in the experience of every awakened sinner, pardon is the lifting up of this burden, and removing it as far as the east is distant from the west. When sin is viewed as a putrefying carcass, as something exceeding loathsome, pardon is the hiding and covering of it with the blood of Christ, as that evil and abominable thing which God's heart hates, and his pure eye cannot behold. "Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose iniquities are covered." "Thou hast covered all their sins." At other times, sin is regarded as an immense debt of suffering we owe to the justice of God: pardon is, then, the blotting it out of God's book; it is his remission of the debt, on account of its payment by our surety. Being paid by him, its payment cannot in justice be exacted from us: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is Christ that died." "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in

Christ Jesus." God, for his sake, hath freely forgiven the iniquity of their sin, cancelled their every obligation to punishment, and they are passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation. Blessed state! Enviably privilege!

2. The pardon of iniquity originates in the gracious nature of God, and is regulated, in respect of exercise, by a sovereign purpose of his heart. The fountain-head of the stream of pardon is traced up, by God himself, to his very nature. When he would show Moses his glory, disclosing to him the divine nature as far as it was possible for mortal to apprehend it, he proclaims his name, composed of those remarkable titles, "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." This proclamation, by competent authority, informs us that compassions flow in the merciful heart of our God, that he is as essentially and necessarily gracious as he is omnipotent, eternal and independent. And had he not been so, we would necessarily have perished for ever. Had not mercy been one of his essential attributes, even his Son dying for our sins, could not and did not render him gracious, any more than it constituted him God over all, blessed for ever. The Saviour died, not to make God gracious, but because he was essentially so—to open up an egress for his grace flowing forth to enrich miserable man: "God so

loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish but have everlasting life." Though angry at the ungrateful and rebellious conduct of his wicked children; like an affectionate father, while he detested their wickedness, his heart yearned over them, his paternal compassion sought out a method, consistent with his character, to reinstate them in his favour: "But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity."

But if pardoning mercy be as essential to God as his omnipotence, eternity, and independency, it will naturally occur to the reflecting mind,—why, then, is not every transgression of sinning angels and men pardoned? The reply is obvious, and ought to be satisfactory, for God himself has furnished it. In reply to Moses' prayer, "I beseech thee to show me thy glory," he said, Ex. xxxiii. 29, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee, and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." This declaration evinces that it is no less essential to God to regulate the exercise of his pardoning mercy, by a sovereign purpose of his heart, than to be gracious. He cannot but be gracious; but his own good pleasure opens and directs the current of mercy.

In reflecting on the essential attributes of God's nature, we are never to forget the difference between these, as existing in him,

and properties inherent in the works of his hand. All natural causes necessarily operate at all times according to the whole extent of the derived powers they possess. The sun shines and cannot but emit all the light, heat, and influence it possesses. All that moral agents possess is the gift of God, and they are bound, from their dependence, to exert themselves at all times to the utmost of their ability to promote his pleasure by preventing all the evil, and by performing all the good they can. But this is not the case with God, and his whole procedure demonstrates the contrary. For it would be impious to assert that he was unable to prevent the existence of sin among his works, or that he has always exerted all his powers to the utmost in working. Though he was from all eternity possessed of power, goodness and wisdom, those attributes of his, for reasons known to himself, were not exhibited till, about six thousand years ago, he called creation into being, and still upholds it. Even in creation his mercy found no exercise; it was not displayed before any species of intelligence; and when it was exerted, to show his sovereignty and that his mercy in respect of exercise is not necessary, but regulated by his will, that he is under no obligation to give it scope, he has mercy not on all the miserable, but "on whom he has mercy." To the praise of the glory of his justice he consigned over the angels that fell to everlasting misery, and to the praise of the freedom of his grace

he selected from among the sons of men vessels of mercy to be prepared for himself. Paul thus states the matter, Eph. ii. 4—7, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus." When pardoning mercy, then, is traced up to its fountain, it is seen originating in the gracious nature of God, and regulated in respect of dispensation by his good pleasure. The saint ought to admire the freeness of divine grace, and the obstinate sinner finding fault because Jehovah does what he wills with his own, ought to be silent and adore his sovereignty.

3. That this pardoning mercy of God flows to sinners only through the blood of Christ the Mediator. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin. God has set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins." Though God is essentially compassionate and gracious, prone to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sins, he can do so only in consistency with the honour of his justice, faithfulness, and holiness. For in vain are the omnipotence and sovereignty of God resorted

to, and the cry raised, that to assert that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins is limiting the Holy One of Israel, and reducing him below the level of man, whose glory it is to pass by a transgression. They that thus speak and write forget that Jehovah is both the just God and the Saviour. They overlook the fact that no one perfection of his nature can be exercised at the expense of another, and that he has never said, determined, or done any thing without a respect had at once to his every perfection, and to every part of the works of his hands. His justice and faithfulness were pledged for the punishment of sin, and till vindicated rose higher than the heavens against pardon. Without outraging the claims of justice and denying himself, God could not remit sin without the shedding of blood; and his government furnishes not one instance of his having done it. His justice has taken hold on sinning angels, and because no satisfaction has been made for their transgressions, it retains them in prison till the last farthing is paid. It is only in Christ that God is reconciling sinners to himself, not imputing to them their trespasses. This was explicitly taught the church under the ancient economy. For it was because of the substitution and acceptance of the ancient sacrifices in room of the guilty offenders, that their offences were remitted, and where no sacrifices were appointed for certain sins the transgressors were cut

off without remedy. In no instance could the transgressor be admitted to divine fellowship till the appointed victim was offered. And in the assembled judgment, every one who is not washed from his sins in the blood of Christ will be consigned to everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. God is merciful, and delivers from going down to the pit, only because he has found the ransom. For while the sinner continues in his guilt, and the demands of the law against him remain unsatisfied, he can have no communion with God, and divine mercy can find no honourable egress to benefit him. In the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ, however, all the demands of law and justice are fully answered, every obstacle to the egress of divine mercy is removed, God is pacified and delights in pardoning the guilty. In him the guilty have redemption, even the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of his grace.

4. The pardoning mercy of God is revealed only in the Scriptures, offered to all in the dispensation of the gospel, and embraced by faith wrought in the heart by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Though the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, and though the heavens declare his glory and the firmament showeth forth his handy works; they have no tongue,

no voice to announce with distinctness and certainty his pardoning mercy. It is too deep to be sounded by the short line of reason, too vast to be comprehended in its narrow span. From imperfect traditions and dubious inferences, from the patience and goodness of Deity, conjectures might be formed, but no certain information attained, respecting the remission of sin. Nature, whether fallen or upright, rather lifts up its testimony against it. Law and conscience proclaim, "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, written in the law, to do them:" they know nothing of pardon. Hence, Adam, tainted with guilt, instead of humbly confessing his iniquity, in hope of pardon, previous to the revelations of mercy, was horribly afraid, and sought to hide himself from the presence of the Lord, among the trees of the garden. The devils never conceived any hope of pardon, and therefore never sought it. Sullen despair and malignant hatred of God continually actuate them. Neither would man have supplicated pardon, submitted to God, and engaged in his service, unless he "had proclaimed his name," "the Lord God merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." David, when he asserts, "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared," distinctly intimates that the hope of pardon is the sole ground of, and encouragement to religion, with the guilty.

This hope of pardon constituted the good

news announced in Paradise, and which was developed in subsequent revelations of mercy, and has proved the solace and support of the guilty in every age and place. Now, forgiveness of sin is preached unto all nations, in the name of Jesus. He is exalted as a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sin. From his high throne he is proclaiming with all the benignity and authority of a sovereign, "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." To sinners of every description, he is offering the remission of sin. He thus addresses even the stout hearted, and far from righteousness, "Come, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool."

This pardon of sin, revealed in the word, and offered to all in the dispensation of the gospel, is embraced by *faith*, wrought in the heart by the agency of the Holy Spirit. "Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation by faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sin. To him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth on him shall receive the remission of sins. Be it therefore known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that be-

lieve are justified." Such was the language in which the first preachers of the gospel addressed their hearers, and through its instrumentality the Holy Spirit convinced them of sin, wrought faith in their hearts, and they gladly accepted of pardon in the name of Jesus. Such has been the mode according to which the saved have entered into heaven. Through faith in the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin, they have been pardoned and washed, and thus have been made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. It is in the same way that the guilty are still saved, and in the same way all that will hereafter believe will be saved.

5. The pardon of sin is altogether perfect, worthy of God to bestow, and suitable for us to receive. Such a pardon must be full, free, and everlasting.

It must be *full*. It is so when it extends to all sins, however numerous, and to all their aggravations, however enormous. And such is the pardon which God dispenses. It liberates the guilty, not from some, but from every indictment. It extends not only to some, deemed trivial offences, but also to the most complicated transgressions, attended with every circumstance of enormity. With delight God and saints expatiate on this precious truth. David, who had experienced its reality, in transports of gratitude, thus sings, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth

all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases." Ps. ciii. 2, 3. In admiration of plenary pardon, the prophet exclaims, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Mic. vii. 19. In the 85th Psalm, verse 2, the church sings—"Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin." To show that the church and individual believers, in their grateful confessions of plenary pardon, have not outstretched the truth, God himself comes forward and declares, "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. xxxiii. 8. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." If additional evidence of this charming truth were needful, it is at command. We have practical evidence of it. A bloody Manasseh, a persecuting Saul, and a dying thief, pardoned and admitted to heaven, proclaim the fulness of divine forgiveness, and forbid the most guilty wretch to sink into despair. And truly, without this divine forgiveness extending to all sins, original and actual, of heart and life, great and small, the condition of the pardoned could not emphatically be pronounced blessed. For, unless all his sins were remitted, his condition would be deplorable, and his ruin certain. From the

guilt of one sin he could never redeem his soul: its weight would sink him into the ocean of divine wrath.

That all past and present sins are forgiven, in justification, is generally conceded, but it has been questioned by some, whether all the future sins of the justified are also forgiven. With few exceptions, this also has been conceded. All difficulties on this subject seem to vanish, when we distinguish between justification as passed in the court of God, and as intimated to the forgiven. In the court of God, justification is a simple act, and is never repeated. It secures the person forgiven against all future punishment on account of sins to be committed, as against those that have been already committed; and invests him with an absolute and unconditional title to eternal life. Both of these are as perfect, the first moment of pardon, and as certain, as they will be through all eternity. Hence Paul declares that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" that "they are passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation." And we perceive that this must be the result, when we contemplate the ground of their justification—the perfect obedience and sufferings of Christ, their surety. Both are fully imputed to them, and found a perfect title to life. In respect of intimation, to the conscience of the justified, of their forgiveness, the case is very different. They may be long haunted with doubts and fears, before

they are blessed with assurance, and this assurance may be afterwards obscured and lost, and the manifestations of it again and again vouchsafed. This renders it proper that every saint should pray daily for a renewed and increased evidence of pardon and acceptance; and, also, that the sense of his original pardon may be continued and augmented all his days. It is vain to object to this representation, that sins cannot be forgiven till they are actually committed. There is no more impracticability in remitting sins before they are committed, than there was in Christ expiating, on the cross, the sins of his people, that have been committed since his death. In justification, all our sins, future as well as past, are pardoned. It is always spoken of as perfect. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." In justification, the believer is clothed with the perfect, imputed righteousness of Christ his surety, and this covers all his sins, so that God sees no iniquity nor perverseness in him. He that is justified has eternal life, in title and right; but without a full pardon and acceptance this is impossible.

This pardon is not only full, but also divinely *free*. Though it cost Christ, the Prince of life, his heart's blood, it is to us as free and unconditional as grace can make it. Over the gate of mercy, where all the blessings of the gospel are exhibited, refreshing as water, nourishing as milk, and exhilarating as wine, the inscription is written

in legible letters, "WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE." It is a market, but a market of free grace. The blessings sold there are above all created price. And, had any been exacted, they never would have found purchasers, nor come into our possession. For, what have we to offer to the Lord as an equivalent for his salvation? And had they been sold, they would not have been of grace, the manifestation of which is the ultimate end of their bestowment. In bestowing this, the Lord reigns as a sovereign, dispensing gratuitously the richest favours, and disdaining every equivalent. "We are justified freely by grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." "In him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." The praise of pardon is to the glory of grace. Human merits and deserts, all conditions and prerequisites, all good done or to be performed, are entirely set aside as of no value nor influence in our pardon. Saith God, "I, even I am he that blotteth out thy iniquities for my own name's sake, and will not remember thy sins." The history of redemption attests the truth of these declarations. What but grace procured the pardon of the adulterous woman of Samaria, or of the crucifiers of the Lord of glory? What worth was found in the thief on the cross, casting reproaches on Christ, or in Saul, breathing out slaughter against the church, to deserve the forgiveness of their sins?

Credulity, legality, and human pride themselves, can fix on no meritorious act intervening between their crimes and pardon. And these were set up, not as peculiar monuments of pardoning grace, but patterns of all that should believe—directing and encouraging the most guilty and hell-deserving to betake themselves to divine mercy, and to cry, “Pardon my transgression for thy name’s sake, for it is very great.”

This pardon is not only full and free, but also utterly irreversible, even *everlasting*. This is its crowning property, and constitutes the most essential ingredient in the blessedness of the pardoned. For if they might be to-day in a state of favour and pardon, and to-morrow relapse into sin and be cast into hell, where would be their blessedness? But they are left to no such dreadful danger; for all their sins are remitted, and shall never be revived or imputed to them to their condemnation. This is enforced by the word, promise, and oath of Jehovah himself, and embraced with exultation by the pardoned believer. “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” This is not merely the word, but the covenant-promise of him that cannot lie. And that we might have strong consolation in the belief of it, the Redeemer has confirmed it by his oath. “As I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will no more be wroth with

thee, nor rebuke thee; for the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed out of their place, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Resting on this oath David declares, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." When these opposite and most distant points meet, then, and not before, will pardoned sins return for our condemnation. Resting on the same oath, and exulting in the perpetuity of forgiveness, the prophet asserts—"Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." What is cast into the river, or even the shallows of the ocean, may be found, but the most ponderous works, with all their burdens, if cast into the depths of the sea, would utterly disappear; and though sought for, could never be recovered. In like manner, when our iniquities are sought for, they shall not be found.

No blessing short of pardon, and of such a full, free, and everlasting pardon as this is, would have answered us. We were guilty, and perdition or pardon must be the issue. As guilty, God's heart was against us, and his face was covered with the frowns of anger, and all gracious communion suspended. Our sins separated us from the fountain of felicity, and the source of joy. Pardon, the inlet to all blessedness, is opened, and it flows into our souls in deep and re-

freshing streams. "Blessed is the man whose transgressions are pardoned, whose iniquity is covered, and to whom the Lord imputeth not his sins." Yea, pardon was not only indispensable to our security and felicity, but precisely such a pardon as the gospel reveals and offers; for if it had not been full, we would have remained under the condemnation of some of our sins, and would thus have perished. Had it not been entirely free, we never could have attained an interest in it. And had it not been irreversible, our souls would have been tortured with perpetual anxiety lest we should forfeit it and perish for ever. But such is the pardon of the gospel, that the sinner, conscious of innumerable crimes and utter worthlessness and helplessness, may approach the throne of the eternal Sovereign, and implore and obtain the full, free, and everlasting pardon of all his sins according to the riches of divine grace.

6. We are furnished with the most irrefragable evidences of the reality of this full, free, and everlasting pardon. Nothing is more easy or common than a notional belief of pardon, when sin and divine wrath are unfelt; while the enlightened and awakened conscience, dreading damnation, finds nothing harder than a practical, influential belief of it. The awakened sinner clearly perceives that he deserves damnation, and that justice will not consent to his escape, but must offer him up as a victim to its un-

bending rigour. Aware of this, God has furnished the most satisfactory evidences that he forgiveth iniquity, transgression, and sin. The whole gospel, from first to last, is a continued testimony that there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared. Its amount is, "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins." Hence the doctrine of forgiveness sounds in the Bible not like the drop in the bucket, but like many waters; it glimmers not like the light of the feeble taper, but blazes as the sun shining in his strength. Every acceptable prayer that has ascended from the humble heart unto God, and every sacrifice that has burned upon his altar, combines with the gospel in attesting that Jehovah delights in showing mercy. Prayer has no place among fallen spirits, deprived of all hope of pardon, and obtains among rebel men, only because their sovereign has opened to them the door of repentance and pardon. The person, incarnation, life, death, and exaltation of the Mediator, attest Jehovah to be a God that forgiveth iniquity. These are all the result of his mercy and love, the blessed channel through which pardon flows to the guilty. Every fresh arrival from earth of a soul to glory, attests to all the angels of God, that he whom they serve forgiveth transgressions and sins; and multitudes of believers on the footstool have the assurance of their own pardon, which is to them the

ground of their rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.

7. That God taketh a sovereign, complacential delight in the pardon of iniquity. It is the delight, the refreshment of his heart. He rejoices in it with joy and singing: the shouts of the sons of God and the songs of morning stars, heard when the corner-stone of the earth was laid, never yielded him half the satisfaction he feels in saying to the trembling penitent, "Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." While the angels rejoice at the return of man, their prodigal brother, God the Father goeth forth to meet him, freely forgives him, cordially welcomes him, and in token of his complacency, arrays, adorns, and feasts him. Because it is with difficulty that we forgive our brother his hundred pence, we suppose that God is averse to remit our ten thousand talents, and never does it without a grudge. We would accept of it, if we could steal it unseen by God, and thus obtain it without importuning him unwilling to bestow it. Thus feeling and acting, we forget that he is God and not man. His thoughts and ways are happily not as ours. He pardons, he multiplies to pardon. All his heart is in it. He delights to show mercy, and for this there are two ample reasons.

(1.) The forgiveness of sin is the distinguishing prerogative of the God of Israel, the exercise of which is competent to him

alone. "Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity?" It is not more eminently the incommunicable prerogative of Jehovah to create and govern the world, than to forgive the transgressions of his own law. He is the alone lawgiver who can save or destroy the transgressor. Combined creation labours under both a physical and moral inability to pardon a single violation of the law of heaven. For to this there is required a full comprehension of its enormity, a comprehension pertaining to him, who at one intuitive glance perceives the full extent of the transgressor's relations to himself, to his laws, and to the whole creation. This, therefore, must render every creature for ever incompetent to dispense pardon to the guilty. But granting it were possible to attain a degree of knowledge qualifying for this exercise, where is there a creature invested with the moral right to cancel the connection established by the Creator between the violation of his law and the personal endurance, by the transgressor, of the punishment incurred? It would certainly be presumption and usurpation for one government to absolve the rebellious subjects of another government, by an act of indemnity from the punishment their rebellion merits. If another invades my rights, where is the third person authorized to intrude himself and shield the invader from suffering the penalty due to his crimes? And where is the privileged person author-

ized to dispense with the punishment incurred by any violation of the laws of heaven, to say to the guilty, Thy sins are forgiven, no punishment shall overtake thee? Ministers may officially proclaim this, but God alone, the author of the law and the avenger of its infractions, can cut asunder the link between sin and the personal suffering of the transgressor. This is a part of his glory, and he will not give it to another. The exercise of this prerogative as much distinguishes him from all called gods, and from every part of the work of his hands, as the creation and preservation of the universe.

(2.) The provision he has made for the dispensation of pardon, yields him his richest revenue of glory. Though all the works of God's hand reveal his nature, character, and perfections, each part contributes not equally to his glory; there is a beautiful gradation observable among them. The vegetable rises above the inanimate, the animal above the vegetable, and the rational above the animal in the discovery of God. Angels and men are his moral image, reflecting his righteousness, knowledge, and holiness. In every survey he took of creation, he pronounced it "good;" but when adoring angels poured in throngs around his throne, and the grateful praises of man ascended before him, with complacency he pronounced all "very good." Now, a higher revenue of glory accrued to the Creator from the new and more extensive display given of the un-

bounded perfections of his nature. But still in the heart of God there remained other perfections equally dear, and which required an object for their display, an object not found in all the creation which God had made. No indication as yet existed of retributive justice and mercy, and redeeming love in which he delights, had not emitted a solitary ray, discovering their existence, and the mutual relations and distinct actings of the persons of the adorable Trinity. Man formed after the image of God, falls into sin and the wretchedness of ruin. Retributive justice now appeared demanding, and through the substitutionary obedience and suffering of the Mediator, obtaining satisfaction. Redeeming love and pardoning mercy now also found a full and honourable vent, and a suitable object, and flowed forth in all their enriching plenitude. The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the consolation of the Spirit, shone forth in mild radiance of glory, eclipsing the lustre of creation, till it is thrown into the back ground, and hardly noticed, but to shed its light on the work of salvation. In it every divine perfection that appeared in creation shines forth with increased splendor, and others, which had not all appeared, are exhibited in redemption in the most attractive lustre. The angels of glory find a new subject of inexhaustible contemplation, and look intensely into it to learn the manifold wisdom of God. The redeemed from among men contemplate with admira-

tion this pardon devised by the Father, procured by the Son, and applied by the Spirit, as the chief of Jehovah's ways; and he himself glories in being known by the name of the God that pardoneth iniquity. "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity whereby they have transgressed against me. And it shall be unto me a name of joy, and a praise, and an honour before all the nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I will do unto them." This is the language of complacency, and as it is God's own in surveying the pardon of his people, we may well conclude that he glories in forgiveness as the brightest and most distinguishing constellation in his glory, and in hallelujahs of praise, we may sing, "Who is like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity?"

8. God not only pardons our sins, but also in one and the same act accepts and treats us as righteous. David so far pardoned Absalom that he allowed him to return and reside at Jerusalem, but refused all personal intercourse with him. The father of the prodigal treated better his returning penitent son. He accepted him, and treated him as though he had never departed from his house. So acts God in reference to returning penitents. They come out of prison to rejoice with him. He forgives all their sins and imputes righteousness unto them without works. He puts them among his children, and gives them the goodliest of the heritage of nations.

Behold, then, the dreadfully dangerous condition of unpardoned sinners. All ye that are such, ponder seriously on it. You have frequently and grossly violated the holy and righteous law of your Sovereign, incurred his wrath, and fallen under his curse. On you, although you feel it not in your state of infatuation, rests the guilt of accumulated sins, and unless removed it will send you into the depth of hell. The curse of the broken law is on your persons and possessions, poisoning all your enjoyments, and will pursue you into the prison of eternal death. The God of heaven has condemned you already, and his wrath abideth on you. It has separated you from all enjoyment of his favour, which is better than life. You have never had one smile of his reconciled countenance. This curse has come in part on your body and outward lot. The privations and sufferings which you now endure are only the beginning of your future and consummate sorrow. Be not deceived, these are not empty words, but the true sayings of God. His very nature and your constitution, the character of sin and of the divine law infallibly secure the condemnation of every impenitent and unpardoned sinner.

Awake, awake! careless, thoughtless, hardened sinner, before the day of acceptance pass away, and Jehovah swear in wrath that thou shalt not enter into his rest. Though your condition be deplorable and dangerous in the extreme, it is not utterly desperate.

There is as yet hope concerning you. The God of Jacob delights in pardoning mercy, and is ready to forgive all that call upon him in truth. However long you have continued in the commission of iniquity, though you be doubly leagued by nature and practice with sin, he will cleanse you from all your transgressions and pardon all your sins. Awake, therefore, and attend to your appropriate work. Consider your ways. Carefully review your whole past conduct, till you ascertain and are affected with the number and desert of your crimes. Confess them unto the Lord and abandon them. He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy. Let this confession be true and ingenuous—sincere and full, mixed with sorrow and shame. Judge yourself unworthy of the least mercy, and deserving severe punishment. Cry for pardon; eternally renounce the love and practice of sin, and live unto the Lord with the whole heart. Give glory to the God of Israel, by betaking yourself to his mercy, in Christ Jesus; and let this be your course, however others act. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near. Behold also the dreadful desert of sin, and the unbending rigour of divine justice. Such are sin and law, that where sin is committed, there is no redemption without the shedding of blood divine. Had an inferior sacrifice satisfied the claims of justice and expiated the guilt of sin, assuredly Jehovah, the source of wisdom,

clemency, and love, would never have given up his Son unto death that we might have redemption through him, even the forgiveness of sin. In this we see how inexorable law is, and how dreadful is sin. Behold in this glass both of these truths, and learn to hate and detest all sin, to dread avenging justice, and to take refuge in the pardoning mercy of God. This is our only safe retreat, and to it let us flee.

Let the forgiven also contemplate and duly improve the pardoning mercy of God. Deeply are you indebted to it, and it ought to occupy your meditation by day and night, and be the theme of your wonder and praise. Remember how numerous, continued, and provoking were your sins, and yet God graciously forgave their iniquity. Others, not worse than yourself, have been left under the dominion of sin, while you have been selected and forgiven. You have found that he would have mercy on whom he would have mercy, but beware lest you turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.

Through carelessness and temptation have you relapsed into sin, dishonoured your character, defiled your conscience, offended fellow-worshippers, grieved the blessed Spirit, insulted the Saviour, and provoked the indignation of the God of Israel? In consequence of all this, is your communion with heaven suspended, your spiritual life benumbed in torpor; or is conscience in terror, till joy has ceased and you are undergoing

severe chastisement? Betake yourself instantly to the pardoning mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Confess and forsake, and he is just and faithful to forgive. Be familiar with the penitential portions of the Bible. Repair to the fountain of Christ's blood, which cleanseth from all sin and healeth all diseases.

Is a sweet sense of forgiveness refreshing your soul? Worship God in the beauty of holiness. Walk circumspectly before him, lest Satan again entice you and sin prevail, and cast a black cloud over the serenity of your joy. To increase this joy dwell much on the nature, means, and consequents of forgiveness. Remember that it delivers from immense evil, and interests in incalculable good; that it comes in the channel of Christ's blood; gives you a covenant right to all temporal good; secures all spiritual blessings, exemption from penal evil, and the mitigation and sanctification of all afflictions.

As a testimony of gratitude, and an evidence of your own forgiveness, forgive from the very heart every one that transgresseth against you. And having much forgiven, love your forgiving God much, abounding in all works of righteousness, and continually stirring up your soul and all within you to bless and magnify his holy name, who has forgiven all your iniquities.