

# Sermons on the Forgiveness of Sins

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## Psalm 130.4.

**'But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.'**

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

**There are two propositions to be considered in the verse:**  
**I. That forgiveness belongs to God.**

## **II. That the forgiving mercy of God is a powerful motive of adoration and obedience.**

I propound to discourse of the first, and to touch upon the second in the application.

**In managing the point with light and order, it is requisite to consider;**

**1. What is contained in forgiveness.**

**2. The arguments that demonstrate that forgiveness belongs to God.**

**I. What is contained in forgiveness.**

This necessarily supposes sin, and sin a law that is violated by it: the law implies a sovereign Lawgiver, to whose declared will subjection is due, and who will exact an account in judgment of men's obedience or disobedience to his law, and dispense rewards and punishments accordingly.

God by the clearest titles 'is our king, our lawgiver and judge:' for he is our maker and preserver, and consequently has a full propriety in us, and absolute authority over us: and by his sovereign and singular perfections is qualified to govern us. A derived being is necessarily in a state of dependance and subjection. All the ranks of creatures in the world are ordered by their Maker; his 'kingdom rules over all.' Those in the lowest degree of being are ordered by power. Sensitive creatures are determined by the impulses of nature to their actions; for having no light to distinguish between moral good and evil, they have no choice, and are incapable of receiving a law. Intelligent creatures, endowed with judicious and free faculties, an understanding to discern between moral good and evil, and will to choose or reject what is propounded to them, are capable of a law to direct and regulate their liberty.

To man a law was given by the Creator, (the copy of his wisdom and will) that has all the perfections of a rule: it is clear and complete, enjoining what is essentially good, and forbidding what is essentially evil. God governs man conveniently to his nature: and no service is pleasing to him but the result of our reason and choice, the obedience of our supreme leading powers. Since the fall, the light of the understanding compared with the bright discovery it afforded of our whole duty in our original state, is either like the twilight of the evening, the faint and dim remains of the light of the day, when night draws a dark veil over the world, or like the dawning of the morning, when the rising sun begins to scatter the darkness of the night. The latter comparison I think is more just and regular ; for it is said, that the Son of God 'enlightens every

man that comes into the world.' The innate light discovers there is a straight line of truth to regulate our judgment, and a straight line of virtue to regulate our actions. Natural conscience is a principle of authority, directing us to choose and practise virtue, and to avoid vice; and according to our neglect or compliance with its dictates reflects upon us. It is hardly presumable that any are so prodigiously wicked, as not to be convinced of the natural rectitude in things : they can distinguish between what is fair and what is fraudulent in dealings, and acknowledge in the general, and in judging of others, the equity of things, though they elude the force of the conviction in the application to themselves. Now since common reason discovers there is a common rule, there must be a common judge to whom men are accountable for the obliquity or conformity of their actions to that rule. The law of God is revealed in its purity and perfection in the scripture.

The law binds first to obedience, and in neglect of it to punishment. Sin is defined by the apostle John to be 'the transgression of the law.' The omission of what is commanded, or doing what is forbidden, is a sin. Not only the lusts that break forth into action and evidence, but inward inclinations, contrary to the law, are sin. From hence results a guilt upon every sinner, which includes the imputation of the fault, and obligation to punishment. There is a natural connexion between the evil of doing, and the evil of suffering: the violation of the law is justly revenged by the violation of the person that breaks it. It is an impossible imagination, that God should give a law not enforced with a sanction. This would cast a blemish upon his wisdom, for the law would cancel itself, and defeat his ends in giving it: it would reflect a high dishonour upon his holy majesty, as if he were indifferent with respect to virtue or vice, and disregarded our reverence or rebellion against his authority. The apostle declares, that 'all the world are become guilty before God ;' that is, justly chargeable with their crimes, and liable to his judgment. The act of sin is transient, and the pleasure vanishes; but the guilt, if not pardoned and purged away, remains for ever in the records of conscience. 'The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond; it is graven on the tables of the heart.' When the books of eternal life and death shall be opened at the last day, all the unpardoned sins of men, with their killing aggravations, will be found written in indelible characters, and shall be set in order before their eyes, to their confusion: 'the righteous Judge has sworn he will forget none of their works.' According to the number and heinousness of their sins, a sentence shall pass upon them: no excuses shall suspend the judgment, nor mitigate the immediate execution of it.

The forgiveness of sins contains the abolition of their guilt, and freedom

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

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

### **1. It is the high and peculiar prerogative of God to pardon sin.**

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

It is true, God pardons as a father, according to that most gracious promise, 'I will spare them, as a father spares his son that serves him;' Mal. 3. but as invested with the dignity of a sovereign. Our Saviour directs us, in the perfect form of prayer dictated to his disciples, to pray to God for the forgiveness of our sins, as 'our Father sitting in heaven'

upon a high throne, from whence he pronounces our pardon. His majesty is equally glorious with his mercy in that blessed dispensation. His royal supremacy is more conspicuous in the exercise of mercy towards repenting sinners, than in the acts of justice upon obstinate offenders. As a king is more a king by the pardoning humble suppliants by the operation of his sceptre, than in subduing rebels by the power of the sword: for in acts of grace he is above the law, and overrules its rigour, in acts of vengeance he is only superior to his enemies.

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

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

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

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

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

The attribute of which pardon is an emanation, is usually expressed by grace and mercy. It is said, the 'grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men: we are saved by grace.' Grace implies free favour. There is in this respect a difference between love and grace. Love may be set upon an object worthy of it. The primary object of God's love is himself; whose excellent and amiable perfections are worthy of infinite love. The love of parents to children is a duty most clearly natural, and duty lessens the desert of performing it; but grace is exclusive of all merit and dignity in the subject, and of all obligation in the person that shows it. God's most free preventing grace is exercised without an motive in us that deserves it.

The grace of God may be considered as exercised in our creation and our redemption. In the creation it was absolutely free: for angels and men were in the state of nothing, there was only a possibility of their being. Now there could be no attractive merit before their existence. It is

true, goodness is glorified and crowned by communicating: the world is a bright efflux of the divine glory; but this does not lessen the free goodness of the Maker. There was no constraint upon God to make the world for his declarative glory: for his essential glory is truly infinite, and wants no external appearance to make it complete. The universal church pays humble homage to the great Creator; 'acknowledging, that for his will and pleasure all things were created.'

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

The creating goodness of God is eclipsed in the comparison with his saving grace. The first supposes us without any deserts of his favour, but this supposes our exceedingly bad deserts: the first was free, but this is merciful and healing grace. Mercy revives and restores us when deservedly miserable. This grace and mercy is of so pure a nature, that the most tender human inclinations to relieve the afflicted, are mixed with self-interests compared with the mercy of God towards us. Our bowels relent, and affections are melting at the sight of persons in deep misery. But there is an inward and involuntary constraint of nature that excites such feeling resentments: and our compassion is moved by reflection upon ourselves, considering that in this open state we are liable to many disasters and wounding sorrows: but God is infinitely free from all disturbing passions, and exempted from all possible evils. To represent the immense love and mercy of God in its endearing circumstances, and to demonstrate his readiness to forgive, we must consider what he has done in order to his pardoning sinners.

**1.** If we consider God as the supreme lawgiver and judge of the world, as the protector of righteousness and goodness, and the revenger of all disorders in his moral government, it became him not to pardon sinners without the punishing sin in such a manner as might satisfy his injured justice, and vindicate the honour of his despised law, and declare most convincingly his hatred against sin. Now for these great ends he decreed to send his Son from his bosom, to assume our nature, and to suffer the contumelious calamity of the death of the cross, to make a propitiation for our sins. This was the contrivance of his wisdom, which the most enlightened angels had no presaging notions of. Now can there be a more clear evidence and convincing reality, that God is ready to forgive

sins, than the giving his only begotten Son, a person so great and so dear, the heir of his love and glory, to be a sacrifice, that he might spare us? In this dispensation love was the regent leading attribute, to which his wisdom, justice and power were subordinate: they were in exercise for the more glorious illustration of his mercy. We have the strongest argument of God's love in the death of his Son, for our pardon was the end of it. From hence it is evident, that God is more willing to dispense his pardoning mercy, than sinners are to receive it.

**2.** God's readiness to forgive appeals in the gracious and easy terms prescribed in the gospel for the obtaining pardon.

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

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

It may be objected, that the condition of the law, and the condition of the gospel, compared relatively to our depraved faculties, are equally impossible. The carnal mind and affections, are as averse from repentance and receiving Christ as our Lord and Saviour, as from obeying the law. Our Saviour tells the Jews, 'ye will not come to me that ye may have life : and no man can come to me unless the Father draw him.' Which words are highly expressive of our utter impotence to believe savingly in Christ. But there is a clear answer to this objection; the difference between the two dispensations consists principally in this: the law requires complete and constant obedience as the condition of life, without affording the least supernatural power to perform it. But the gospel has the spirit of grace a concomitant with it, by whose omnipotent efficacy sinners are revived, and enabled to comply with the terms of salvation. The spirit of the law is styled the spirit of bondage from its rigorous effects: it discovered sin, and terrified the conscience, without implanting a principle of life that might restore the sinner to a state of holy liberty. As the flame in the bush made the thorns in it visible, without consuming them; so the fiery law discovers men's sins, but does not abolish them: but 'the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that is, the gospel, has freed us from the law of sin and death.' I will more particularly consider the gracious terms prescribed in the gospel for the obtaining pardon; 'Repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.' The requiring of them is not an arbitrary constitution, but founded in the unchangeable nature and congruity of things. **Repentance signifies a sincere change of the mind and heart from the love and practices of sin, to the love and practice of holiness, upon evangelical and divine motives. The principal ingredients in it are, reflections with grief and shame upon our past sins, with stedfast resolutions of future obedience.** It is a vital principle productive of fruits suitable to it: it is called 'repentance from dead works, repentance unto life.' It is the seed of new obedience. Repentance in order of nature is before pardon, but they are inseparably joined in the same point of time. David is a blessed instance of this: 'I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' Psal. 32. The sum and tenor of the apostle's commission recorded by Luke is, 'That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in the name of Christ to all nations.' Luke 24. That a repentant sinner only is qualified for pardon, will be evident in

considering,

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

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

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

holiness shines in its glory.

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

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

That repentance is an evangelical grace, the gift of the Redeemer: 'Him has God raised to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sin.' Acts 5. 31. The law did not allow of repentance, nor promise pardon. The design of it was to keep us in the favour and communion with God, but afforded no means of reconciliation after our offending him. Repentance was no degree of perfection before man's fall, but is a relief of his imperfection after it. The law called the righteous to obedience, the gospel calls sinners to repentance.

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

That the grace of God is very conspicuous in dispensing pardon, according to the order of the gospel to repenting sinners. For first, repentance renders the divine mercy most honourable in the esteem of those who partake of it. Our Saviour tells us, 'The whole need not a physician, but those who are sick.' He that feels his disease, and is strongly apprehensive of its danger, values the counsel and assistance of a physician above all treasures. The repenting sinner who is under the strong conviction of his guilt, and his being always obnoxious to the judgment of God, and eternal misery the consequence of it, he values the favour of God as the most sovereign good, and accounts his displeasure as the supreme evil. Repentance inspires flaming affections in our prayers and praises for pardon. The repenting sinner prays for pardon with as much fervency as Daniel prayed in the den, to be preserved from the devouring lions; or as Jonah prayed out of the belly of hell for deliverance. He addresses not with faint but fainting desires for mercy; 'Give me pardon, or I die.' Jonah 2. The insensible sinner that

is secure in the shadow of death, may offer some verbal requests for pardon, but his prayer is defective in the principle: for he never feels the want of a pardon; he prays so coldly as if unconcerned whether he be accepted or no. And with what a rapture of admiration, and joy, and thankful affections, doth the pardoned penitent magnify the divine mercy? The christian Niobe that was melted into repenting tears 'loved much, because much was forgiven her.'

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

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

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

To this I answer, there are two means of our union with Christ: the principal is the quickening spirit descending from Christ as the fountain of the supernatural life, and a lively faith wrought in us by his pure and powerful operation, that ascends from us and closes with him. It is said,

the second Adam was made 'a quickening spirit:' and he that is joined 'to the Lord is one spirit.' As the parts of the natural body are united by the vital influence of the same soul that is present in the whole; so we are united to Christ by the holy spirit that was given to him without measure, and from his fulness is derived to us. It is clear therefore beyond all contradiction, that faith is not antecedently requisite, as the means of conveying all graces to us from Christ.

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

In short, there is a perfect agreement and sympathy between reason and divine revelation in this doctrine, that God pardons only the repenting sinner. The contrary assertion is an impeachment of the rectitude of his nature, and directly contrary to the design and tenor of the gospel. If a man be justified as ungodly, the evangelical command of repentance for the remission of sins is useless and unprofitable. What a pernicious influence upon practice this doctrine may have, is obvious to any that consider it. I shall only add, if God pardons men as ungodly, 'How shall he judge the world?' It was prophesied by Enoch, 'Behold the Lord comes with ten thousand saints to judge all that are ungodly for their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodlily committed.' Now as the apostle James argues against the perverseness of men, 'when from the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing; doth a fountain send forth sweet water and bitter?' Jam. 3.10. This instance is incomparably more strong with respect to God than to men. It is more consistent and conceivable that a fountain should send forth fresh water and salt, than that the holy and righteous God, in whose nature there is not the least discord, should justify some as ungodly, and condemn others as ungodly for ever.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the evangelical condition of our obtaining pardon. This will appear by considering the nature of faith. **Saving faith is an unfeigned persuasion of the power, and desire of Christ to save sinners, that induces the soul to receive him, and rely on him, as he is offered in the gospel.** We are assured of his all-sufficiency, and of his compassionate willingness to save us; 'He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him.' Our Saviour declares, 'Whoever comes to him, he will in no wise cast out.' Faith is seated in the whole soul, and according to the truth and transcendent

goodness of the object, produces the most precious and sacred esteem of it in the mind, and the most joyful consent and choice of it in the will.

**Accordingly a sincere believer embraces entire Christ as 'a Prince and a Saviour,' and is as willing to be governed by his sceptre, as to depend upon his sacrifice.** Acceptance and reliance are the essential ingredients of justifying faith. This is the doctrine of the everlasting gospel. The angel declared this to the shepherds, 'Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.' Luke 2. 10. 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ is come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' 1 Tim. 1. 15. Faith is indispensably necessary to our obtaining forgiveness. Faith is the channel wherein the precious issues of his blood and sufferings are conveyed to us.

To make more evident how necessary and gracious a condition faith in the Redeemer is, for our pardon, I will briefly consider the foundation of the covenant of life in the gospel. After man had plunged himself into damnation, God having decreed, that without satisfaction there should be no remission of his sin; and the sinner being utterly incapable of enduring such a punishment in degrees, as might be truly satisfactory, it necessarily followed, he must suffer a punishment equivalent in duration. To prevent this, there was no possible way but by admitting a surety, who should represent the sinner, and in his stead suffer the punishment due for sin. A threefold consent was requisite in this transaction.

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

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

(3.) It is as clear, that the consent of the guilty is requisite, who obtains impunity by the vicarious sufferings of another. For if he resolves to bear his own guilt, and wilfully refuses to be freed by the interposing of another between him and the punishment, neither the judge nor the

surety can constrain him to it. Now all these concur in this great transaction. As the creation of man was a work of solemn counsel, 'Let us make man,' so his redemption was the product of the divine counsel. I may allude to what is represented to us in the vision of the divine glory to the prophet Isaiah: 'I heard the Lord saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, here I am, send me,' Isa. 6.8. Thus the rise of our salvation was from the Father. He makes the inquiry, who shall go for us, to recover fallen man? The Son interposes, 'Here I am, send me.' The Father from his sovereignty and mercy appointed and accepted the Mediator and surety for us. It was no part of the law given in paradise, that if man sinned, he should die, or his surety; but it was an act of God's free power as superior to the law, to appoint his Son to be our surety, and to die in our stead. And the aspect of the law upon a sinner being without passion, it admits of satisfaction by the sufferings of another. It is said in the gospel, 'God so loved the world,' so above all comparison and comprehension, 'that he gave and sent his only begotten Son into the world, that the world through him might be saved.' The Son of God, with the freest choice, did interpose between the righteous God and guilty man for that end. He willingly left his sovereign seat in heaven, eclipsed his glory under a dark cloud of flesh, degraded himself into the form of a servant, and submitted to an ignominious and cruel death for our redemption. When he came into the world, he declared his full consent, with a note of eminency: 'Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: then said I, lo I come to do thy will, O God.' Upon this consent of the Father and the Son, the whole fabric of our redemption is built. It is the resultance from it, that the execution of justice on Christ is the expiation of our sins, and by his sufferings the full price is paid for our redemption. There is a judicial exchange of persons between Christ and believers, their guilt is transferred to him, and his righteousness is imputed to them. 'He made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' 2 Cor. 5. His active and passive obedience, his doing and dying are as truly accounted to believers for their acceptance and pardon, as if they had meritoriously wrought out their own salvation.

The sinner must give his consent to be saved by the death of Christ upon the terms of the gospel. This constitution is grounded upon the eternal articles between the Father and the Son in the covenant of redemption. Our Saviour declares, that 'God gave his Son, that whosoever believes in him, should not perish, but have eternal life.' Notwithstanding the full satisfaction made for our sins, yet without our consent, that is, an applicative faith, no benefit could accrue to us. 'He dwells in our hearts by faith:' and by that vital band of our union we have communion

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

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

**3. That God is ready to forgive, is fully proved by many gracious declarations in his word,** the infallible expression of his will. 'We are commanded to seek his face for ever,' his favour and love: for the countenance is the crystal wherein the affections appear. Now all the commands of God assure us of his approving and acceptance of our obedience to them: it follows therefore, that it is very pleasing to him, that we pray for the pardon of our sins, and that he will dispense it, if we pray in a due manner. When he forbade the prophet to pray for Israel,

it was an argument of decreed ruin against them: 'Pray not for this people, for I will not hear thee.' Jer. 7. 16. To encourage our hope, God is pleased to direct us how to address our requests for his mercy: he directs 'Israel, that had fallen by iniquity, to take words, and turn to the Lord, and say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the praise of our lips.' Hos. 14. To this is added a solemn renouncing of those sins that provoked him to anger. His gracious answer follows, 'I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely.' If a prince draws a petition for an humble suppliant to himself, it is a strong indication that he will grant it. God joins entreaties to his commands, to induce men to accept this mercy. The apostle declares, 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ: as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead be reconciled to God.' 2 Cor. 5. Astonishing goodness! how condescending, how compassionate! The provocation began on man's part, the reconciliation is first on God's. That the King of heaven, whose indignation was incensed by our rebellions, and might justly send executioners to destroy us, should send ambassadors to offer peace, and beseech us to be reconciled to him, as if it were his interest and not ours, is a mercy above what we could ask or think. With commands and entreaties he mixes promises of pardon to encourage us to come to the throne of grace: 'Whoever confesses and forsakes his sins, shall find mercy.' This promise is ratified by the strongest assurance: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' 1 John 1. The pardon of a repenting sinner is the effect of most free mercy, but it is dispensed to the honour of God's faithfulness and justice, who is pleased to engage himself by his promise to do it. And though the word of God be as sacred and certain as his oath, for it is impossible for him to change his will, or to deceive us in the one as well as the other: yet to overcome the fears, to allay the sorrows, and satisfy the desires of repenting sinners, he was pleased to annex his oath to the promise, Heb. 6. 18. which is the most infallible character and note, that the blessing promised is unchangeable.

He adds threatenings to his invitations, that fear which is an active and strong passion, may constrain us to seek for his mercy. Our Saviour said to the Jews who did blind and harden themselves in their infidelity, 'If ye believe not that I am he,' the promised Messiah, 'and come to me to obtain life, ye shall die in your sins.' John 8. 24. The threatening implies a state final and fearful, beyond all expression; for they who die in their sins, shall die for them to eternity. Hell is the sad mansion of lost souls, filled with extreme wrath and extreme despair: and where despair is without remedy, sorrow is without mitigation for ever. From hence we may be convinced, how willing God is to pardon and save us, in that

knowing how we are entangled with pleasant sins, he reveals to us what will be the eternal consequence of sins unrepented and unforgiven, a punishment above all the evils that are felt or feared here, and above all the patience and strength of sinners to endure.

If men yield themselves to the call of his word without, and of his spirit within, and humbly accept of the terms of mercy, it is very pleasing to him. We are assured by Jesus Christ, who is truth, that there is 'Joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine persons that need no repentance.' God himself declares with a solemn oath, 'that he delights not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and live.' The holiness and mercy of God are two of his most divine perfections, his peculiar glory and delight. Now what can be more pleasing to that most pure and compassionate being, than to see a sinful creature conformed to his holiness, and saved by his mercy? If the internal joy of God, wherein he is infinitely blessed, were capable of new degrees, it would rise higher in the exercise of his forgiving mercy. There is a clear representation of this in the parable of the prodigal: at his return his father received him, with a robe and a ring, with music and a feast, the signs of joy in its exaltation. But if sinners are hardened, in obstinacy, and notwithstanding God is so willing to pardon them, are wilful to be damned, with what variety of passions does he express his resentment? He incarnates himself in the language of men, to make them understand his affection to them. Sometimes he expostulates with a tender sympathy, 'Why will ye die?' as if they were immediately falling into the bottomless pit. He expresses pity, mixed with indignation, at their chosen folly and ruin; 'How long ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and fools hate knowledge?' What reluctance and regret does he express against proceeding to exterminating judgments? 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.' Hos. 11.8. With what a melting passion does the Son of God foretel the decreed destruction of Jerusalem, for rejecting their Saviour and salvation! 'When he came near he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. Like a mild judge that pities the man, when he condemns the malefactor.

Those who interpret some expressions of scripture, that 'God laughs at the calamity of the wicked, and mocks when their fear comes,' Prov.1. and is inexorable to their prayers, in such a sense as evacuates most gracious declarations of God, to induce sinners to repent and believe for their salvation, they draw darkness out of light: for those threatenings

are directed against obstinate rebels that frustrate the most powerful methods of mercy, and reject the call of God, in the day of his grace; and by way of retaliation, their prayers are ineffectual, and rejected in the day of his wrath. And that he is so highly and irreconcilably provoked for their despising his mercy, is a certain indication how highly he would have been pleased with their humbly accepting of it. **Let none then by a vile and wretched suspicion, that God's repeated calls to sinners to return and live, do not signify his serious will, detract from the glory of his goodness, and blaspheme his unspotted holiness.** His excellent greatness assures us of his sincerity. Why should the glorious majesty of heaven court despicable creatures to be reconciled? We are infinite descents below him, and no advantage can accrue to him from us. Temporal princes may be swayed by interest to send false declarations to rebels in arms, to reduce them to obedience: but what can the Most High gain by our submission or lose by our obstinacy? Counterfeit kindness proceeds either from the hope of some good, or the fear of some evil: and of both God is absolutely incapable. We are all obnoxious to his severe justice: there is no occasion that he should intend by the gracious offer of pardon, to aggravate the sin and sentence of those who refuse it. **Whosoever with heart breaking sorrow, and unfeigned hatred of his sins, seeks for pardon by the Mediator, he shall find his experience of sparing mercy equal to the highest expressions of it in scripture, and exceeding all his thoughts.**

**4. It appears, that God is ready to pardon, in that he is so slow to punish.** Though all the divine attributes are equal in God, and there is an entire agreement between them, yet there is a difference in their external operations. St. John declares, 'God is love;' that signifies his communicative goodness, the exercise whereof is more free and pleasing to him than the acts of revenging justice. 'He does not afflict willingly the children of men.' Lam. 3. His mercy in giving and forgiving flows as water from a fountain: acts of justice are forced from him (like wine from the grapes) by the pressing weight of our sins. In the first day of judgment a Saviour was promised before the curse was threatened. Notwithstanding sinful men break his laws, and trample on them before his face; they 'resist, and grieve, and quench his spirit:' yet he delays the execution of judgment, that his 'longsuffering may lead them to repentance.'

This will appear by considering that God's forbearing sinners is not, 1. For want of discovery of their sins, human justice may suffer a guilty person to escape punishment for want of clear evidence, but this case is not incident to the justice of heaven. 'God is light' with respect to his purity and omniscience. His fiery eye pierces through the thickest

darkness wherein sins are committed, and all the arts of concealment used to cover them. He sees all the sins of men with the eye of a judge; 'all things are naked and open before his eyes with whom we have to do.' Therefore it is said, 'God will require what is past,' and will observe what is to come, in order to judgment.

2. It is not from a defect of power that the wicked are spared. Great princes are sometimes hindered from the exercise of justice, when the guilty person is supported by a prevalent party against them: for the power of a prince is not in himself, but in those who are his subjects. This David was constrained to spare Joab, after the murder of Abner, because of his interest in the army; 'the sons of Zeruah were too hard for him,' he feared their rebellious resistance. But the power of God is inherent in himself, and depends upon no creatures: 'O Lord, be exalted in thine own power.' He fears none, and is to be feared by all. With one stroke of omnipotency he can destroy all his enemies for ever. He can with more ease subdue the most stubborn rebels, than we can breathe. His strength is equal to his authority, both are truly infinite. The guilty are spared sometimes from the vicious partiality of princes to their favourites, or a wretched neglect of justice: but the high and holy King is without respect of persons: he hates sin with a perfect hatred, and is angry with the wicked every day. The scripture gives an account why execution is respited: 'the Lord is not slack, (as some men count slackness) but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' 'He waits to be gracious,' and spares men in order to their salvation.

**5. It appears that God is ready to forgive, in that upon the first suit of humble and penitent believers he presently pardons them.**

If we consider how long men continue in a course of voluptuous or profitable sins, how many repulses to the offers of mercy they are guilty of, it might justly be expected, that God should with disdain reject their petitions, or not be entreated without a long exercise of repentance, and continued, submissive, and earnest solicitations for his mercy. But the King of heaven keeps no state, the 'throne of grace' is always open and accessible to humble penitents: when their hearts are prepared, his ear is inclined to hear them. David, after his commission of very foul sins, and long continuing in a state of impenitency, yet upon his melting in the sense of his wickedness and resolution, to humble himself by a mournful acknowledgment of it, he was restored to the divine favour. 'I said I would confess my sins, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' Repenting Ephraim is an admirable instance of God's relenting bowels to sinners: 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself; thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the

yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth: is Ephraim my dear Son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy on him, saith the Lord.' The prodigal upon his resolution to return to his Father, and debase himself as utterly unworthy of being received as a Son, 'While he was in the way, his Father saw him at a distance, and ran to him, fell on his neck and kissed him, and entirely forgave his past rebellion. The soul-wounded publican said, 'Lord be merciful to me a sinner;' and was justified rather than the proud pharisee.

**6. It is a convincing argument, that God is ready to forgive sin, in that he affords grace to men to prepare them for his pardoning mercy.** Repentance and faith are sacred plants that do not spring from our earth, but have their roots in heaven. 'God gives repentance unto life.' Acts 11. 'Faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.' Eph. 2. In our corrupt state sin is natural to man, and hath entirely possessed all his leading faculties. 'The carnal mind is enmity against God,' Rom.8. and judges according to the carnal affections which deprave it. The will is rebellious, and strongly inclined to charming lusts: temptations are so numerous and delightful, that sinners will venture to be miserable for ever, to enjoy the pleasures of sin that die in the tasting. It is true, such are the inviolable inclinations of the human nature to happiness, that no man can love undisguised death, nor choose damnation for itself: yet the affection to sin is so overruling, that they will not forsake it though complicated with death. The wisdom of God tells us, 'those that hate me love death,' Prov. 9. that is constructively. Our Saviour compassionately reproves the Jews, 'ye will not come to me that ye may have life.' John 5. This is the cause of their remaining in a state of guilt for ever.

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

Besides the common grace afforded to natural men, there is a

supereffluence of grace bestowed upon some to convert them, which infallibly obtains its end. Those who are the patrons of free-will methinks should allow that God is master of his own will, and the free dispenser of his own grace. This especial grace works powerfully, yet conveniently, to the reasonable nature. There is no charm so sweet, no constraint so strong; as the operation of it: for the understanding is convinced by so clear and strong a light, of our being undone for ever without God's pardoning mercy, 'that his loving-kindness is better than life;' and this is represented to the will with that powerful application, that the will certainly chooses it. When there is a wavering and indifferency of the will to a propounded object, it is either from some defects in the object, or in the apprehension of it: but when the supreme good is so represented, that it fills all the capacities of the soul, the will as certainly embraces it, as one that is burnt up with thirst, and near a cool stream stoops and drinks to quench it. The holy spirit, who knows the manner of his own operations, expresses the efficacy of them in the resemblances of the creation and resurrection, wherein the divine power cannot be frustrated; yet it is so congruous to the frame of man's nature, that the freedom of the will is then in its most noble exercise: 'men are drawn to Christ by the teachings of God;' not by overruling violence upon their faculties, but by instruction and persuasion suitable to them.

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

### **3. I now come to notice, that God is abundant in forgiveness.**

This God has declared in words so full and expressive, as may exceedingly satisfy the most tender and fearful spirits: 'let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways, than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' The distance is so great between the heavens and the earth, that the sun, so vast a globe of light, seems to be of a small circumference; and the stars of the first magnitude, though many times bigger than the earth, appear like glittering points of light. This comparison is so convincing as may assist us in our contemplation

of his mercy. The apostle saith, 'God is rich in mercy.' Eph. 2. It is not said, that he is rich in substance, though the earth be the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. He is rich in his own perfections, not in external things. It is not said, God is rich in power, though he is almighty; nor in justice, but in mercy: this signifies, that of all the divine perfections, none do shine so radiantly as his mercy. This reflects a lustre upon his other attributes. His goodness is the foundation of his glory. He pardoned ten thousand talents to the servant that was insolvent, and his treasure is unwasted.

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

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

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

2dly. Divine forgiveness extends to sins of all kinds and degrees, habitual and actual. Though no sins are absolutely small, being committed against the majesty of God, yet comparatively, with respect to their quality and circumstances, there is a manifest difference between them. Some are of a weaker tincture, some are of a deeper die: some slightly wound the conscience; some waste it, and let out its vital blood: some do as it were whisper against the sinner, some cry for vengeance. Sins of ignorance and infirmity, sins of sudden surreption, that steal upon us without observing, sins by surprise of the passions, when there is no time to deliberate, have extenuating circumstances: but sins against light, wherein there is more of the nature of sin; sins against mercies, which in the language of the apostle, are a 'despising of God's goodness:' sins against solemn vows, wherein men break double bands,

the law of God and their sacred engagements; sins committed habitually and presumptuously, as if God were ignorant, or indifferent and unconcerned, or impotent and without power to punish offenders: these sins derive a greater guilt, and expose to a more terrible punishment. Now a gracious pardon is offered in the gospel to all sinners, whatever the quality and circumstances of their sins be, if they apply and address themselves to the father of mercy through the compassionate Mediator, and forsake their sins. Of this we are assured from the most solemn declaration of God to Moses, 'the Lord is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin.' The promise is comprehensive of all sorts of sins, how manifold and mighty soever. Besides, to encourage us to repent and believe, God promises pardon for sins of the fiercest provocation. Judah had violated the marriage-covenant with God by their impure idolatries, yet he offers to receive them. 'Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, saith the Lord.' Relapses into rebellious sins argue a strong propensity to them, and exceedingly aggravate their guilt; yet God promises pardon for them : 'Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.' There are eminent instances of God's pardoning mercy recorded in the scripture. The apostle having enumerated many sorts of sinners guilty of enormous crimes, idolaters, adulterers, abusers of themselves with mankind, tells the Corinthians, 'and such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the spirit of our God.' There is one sort of sinners excepted from the general promise of mercy, those who sin against the Holy Ghost. The reason of the exception is not, that the Holy Spirit is superior in dignity to the Father and the Son, for they are all coeternal and coequal, but from his operations, that is, the revealing the truth and grace of God in the gospel. Now the obstinate malicious contradicting the truth of the gospel shining in the minds of men, and the perverse despising the grace of the gospel, is unpardonable to infinite mercy. Those who are guilty of that sin, have transformed themselves into the image of the devil, and salvation cannot save them. But no others are excluded from repentance and pardon.

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

1. The pardon is as full as free, according to his excellent goodness: the imputation of the fault ceases, and the obligation to punishment is abolished. We have clear evidence of this from the scripture. God assures those who repent and reform, 'though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they

shall be as wool.' Pardon is more than a reprieve or suspension of judgment, it is a perfect freedom from it: a repenting believer is as clear from the charge of the law as an innocent angel. 'There is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.' Rom. 8. Our cleansing from the defilements of sin is imperfect, therefore we must be always purifying ourselves, till we attain to absolute purity: but our pardon is perfect. It is irrevocable; we are assured, that as far as the east is from the west, God removes our transgressions from us. As soon those distant points may be united, as guilt may be fastened upon those whom God has pardoned. The prophet declares, that 'God will subdue our iniquities, and cast them into the bottom of the sea:' Psal. 103. from whence they can never rise. God promises, 'I will forgive their iniquities, and remember them no more.' Mich. 7. Pardon is complete and final. It is the misery of the wicked, 'they are condemned already;' Jer. 31. 34. they live by a reprieve and suspension of judgment: it is the blessed security of believers, they 'shall not fall under condemnation.' There is such an inconstancy in the nature of men, that they often repent and revoke the favours and privileges they have bestowed; they like today, and loath to-morrow the same persons: but the blessed God is not subject to change or contingency. His love, his purpose, his promise to his people, are unalterable.

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

displeased for their sins: 'whom the lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.' Earthly parents in their various fits of folly, sometimes 'chasten their children only for their pleasure,' and sometimes spare the rod to their ruin: but our heavenly Father is equally wise and compassionate, and uses such discipline as is requisite for their profit, to prevent their continuance in sin, that would be destructive to them. Believers 'are chastened of the Lord, that they may not be condemned with the world.' 1 Cor. 11. 32. And the wisdom and love of our Father and physician mixes such bitter ingredients, and in that proportion, as are requisite for the quality of the disease, and the strength of the patient. 'He corrects them in measure;' he will not suffer them 'to be tempted above what they are able.' Their afflictions are deliberate dispensations. The nature of them is signified in the word chastisement: the correction of a child is in order to his amendment: they are medicinal, and have a main relation and prospect to the future, to make us more fearful to offend God, and careful to please him. They are more lively and sensible lessons of our duty, than the instructions of the word, and are of the same order.

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

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

2. The entireness of this great benefit is evident in that God restores his love and forfeited favour to all that are pardoned. Princes sometimes pardon offenders, but never receive them into their favour. Absalom was recalled from banishment, but for two years was not admitted to see the king's face. But God does magnify and manifest his love to those whom he pardons. He does not distinguish them from the angels that always obeyed him. He forgives our sins as entirely as if they had never been committed, and is reconciled as if he had never been offended. We have the most clear discovery of this in the parable of the prodigal. It might

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

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