

The Reign of Grace

Chapter 5

By [Abraham Booth](#)

PARDON of sin is a blessing of superlative worth, because absolutely necessary to present peace and future salvation. Without it, no individual of Adam's race can be happy. When the conscience of a sinner is wounded with guilt, and oppressed with fears of Divine wrath, it is sought with ardour, as the most desirable thing; it is received with joy, as the first of all favours.

But great and necessary as the blessing is, had it not been for that revelation contained in the Bible, mankind would have lain under a sad uncertainty, whether there was any such thing as *forgiveness with God*. Being conscious of guilt, yet partial in their own favour, they might have pleased themselves with conjectures, that he would not finally condemn all his offending creatures: but they could never have arrived at certainty. For by whatever medium they might have come to the knowledge of God, as the Author of nature and Sovereign of the world, by the same mean they must have known that perfection is essential to the Divine character; and, consequently, that the Deity must be infinitely opposite to moral evil. But whether such as had rebelled against their eternal Sovereign might be forgiven, consistently with his perfections and purposes, and without impeaching his honour as a righteous governor; this unassisted reason could not have determined. Under what obligations then are we laid, to adore the condescension and goodness of God, who has not left us to grope in the dark, and to form a thousand wild conjectures about an affair of such vast importance! For, possessing a divine revelation of the richest grace, we are taught with absolute certainty, that *there is forgiveness with our Maker and Sovereign*. This revelation of mercy is of great antiquity, and almost coeval with time itself. It was known to the patriarchs; it was exhibited in a clearer manner under the Mosaic economy. But, by the incarnation and work of the Son of God, it has received the highest confirmation, and shines in all its glory. Jehovah's pardoning goodness was loudly proclaimed to Moses, and makes a conspicuous figure in that sacred name, by which the God of Israel was known to the church in the wilderness: *As the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed THE NAME OF THE LORD. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, THE LORD, THE LORD GOD, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, FORGIVING INIQUITY, TRANSGRESSION, AND sin. Yes, to the eternal Sovereign belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him.*

This capital blessing of the new covenant is represented in the book of God by many strong metaphors, and in a rich variety of language; yet all in exact correspondence to the different views which are there given of the dreadful nature and complicated evil of sin. Is the sinner described as all over *defiled*, and *loathsome* with hateful impurity his pardon is denoted by the *perfect cleansing* of his person, and by the covering of all his filth. (Psalm xiv. 3, xxxii. 1, and lxxxv. 2. I John 1. 7. Rev. i. 5) Is he compared to a wretched *insolvent*, and his offences to a debt of *ten thousand talents* his pardon is represented *by blotting out* of the debt, or by a *non-imputation* of it. (Psalm xxxii. 2, and li. 1, 9. Matt. xvii. 24) Is he likened to a person who labours under the weight of a *heavy burden*, that galls his shoulders and sinks his spirits his forgiveness is represented by *lifting up*, and by removing the painful encumbrance. (Psalm xxxviii. 4, and xxxii. 1. Matt. xi. 28) Are his transgressions, for their nature, number, and effects, represented by *clouds*; black, lowering, low hung clouds, that are just ready to burst in a storm and to deluge the country his pardon is described by their *total abolition*, by *blotting them out* from the face of heaven, so that no trace of them shall be found, nor any mortal be able to tell what is become of them. (Isaiah xliv. 22) Is disobedience to the Divine law pronounced *rebellion* against the Majesty of heaven, and the sinner considered as a *convict* under the sentence of death forgiveness consists in *reversing the sentence*, and in *remitting the penalty* due to his crimes. Under this consideration, which is the proper notion of pardon, the language of a gracious God is, *Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom*. The Lord is pleased to represent the same invaluable blessing, by *casting our sins behind his back; by casting them into the depths of the sea; by removing them as far from us as the east is from the west; by remembering them no more; and by making scarlet and crimson offences, white as wool, yea, whiter than snow*.

In this forgiveness grace reigns, and the riches of grace are displayed. It is an absolutely perfect pardon; and to make it so, three things are required. It must be full, free, and everlasting. That is, it must extend to *all* sin; it must be vouchsafed without *any conditions* to be performed by the sinner; and it must be *absolutely irreversible*. But these things deserve a more particular consideration.

That forgiveness which is equal to the wants of a sinner, must be *full*; including all sins, be they ever so numerous; extending to all their aggravations, be they ever so enormous. Every sin being a transgression of Divine law, and every transgression subjecting the offender to a dreadful curse; if the guilt of every sin be not removed, if the penalty due to every sin be not remitted, the curse must fall upon us, and wrath must be our portion. Hence appears the necessity of a full pardon in order to happiness. And as it is essentially necessary, so it is granted. The Scriptures declare, that when our offended Sovereign pardons any of the human race, he forgives all their sins. For, says the King, whose name is the LORD OF HOSTS: *I will cleanse them from ALL their iniquities u, hereby they have sinned against me: and I will pardon ALL their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me*. Delightful declaration!

To forgive sin is a Divine prerogative. None can dispense the unspeakable favour but God. This he declares he will do: and that he will not only forgive some sins, or a few, but all; all entirely.

Let us hear another ambassador from the court of heaven. The prophet Micah, when speaking of the King Eternal, with an air of thanksgiving and of joy, declares, *He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us, He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast ALL their sins into the depths of the sea. He will turn again;* not as an incensed adversary, to execute vengeance; but as a friend and a father to manifest his grace. Beholding with pity our miserable condition and helpless circumstances, *He will have compassion upon us;* he will relieve our distress, and richly supply our various wants. As disobedience is the cause of all our misery, and that abominable thing which he detests, *He will subdue our stubborn iniquities;* he will remove their guilt by atoning blood, and annul their dominion by victorious grace. *And* as a further expression of pardoning love, *Thou wilt cast,* not a few, or the greater part only, but *ALL their sins into the depths of the sea.* Their sins, as a burden too heavy for them to bear, as an object too hateful for thee to behold, thou wilt forever remove from them, forever cast out of thy sight. Here the fulness and the perpetuity of Divine forgiveness are expressed with all the force of language. Another infallible writer expresses the glorious truth, and celebrates the ineffable blessing, in language of exultation. To hear his words is delightful; to partake in his joy is transporting. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Who forgiveth ALL thine iniquities, who healeth ALL thy diseases.* Such is his language, and such the ground of his exuberant joy: and a solid foundation it is for incessant thanksgiving. For when, and to whomsoever, God pardoneth sin, he so forgives it, that, as to the eye of his vindictive justice, he *sees it no more;* there is none to be found that can be charged upon them. (Num. xxiii. 21. Jer. 1, 10. Rom. viii. 33) Hence there is no condemnation to such persons.

This forgiveness is worthy of God, and suitable to the chief of sinners. Proceeding from sovereign grace, it reaches the foulest crimes and the most abominable transgressions. By this gracious pardon, scarlet and crimson sins are made *white as wool, yea, whiter than snow.* The bloody sins of Manasseh; the madness of rage in a persecuting Saul; the bitter taunts of the thief against the Son of God, when both were in their expiring moments; and the sin of crucifying the Lord of glory; these, all these, with their various and horrid aggravations, have been pardoned. These, though inconceivably heinous, and some of them such as were never committed, either before or since, have been forgiven by a gracious God. The blood of Christ is possessed of infinite energy, arising from the superlative dignity of Him who shed it, and is able to *cleanse from all sin.* From each sin, be it ever so heinous; from all sins, be they ever so numerous. Thus grace, like a mighty and compassionate monarch, passes an act of oblivion on millions and millions of the most aggravated offences and complicated crimes.

Did the most abandoned profligates know what forgiveness there is with God,

they would no longer be held by the devil under that injurious persuasion and fatal snare, *There is no hope*. Nor would they form the rash conclusion, *We have loved strangers, and after them will we go*. (Jer. ii. 25) JEHOVAH is the God of pardon. This is his name and this is his glory. (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. Neh. ix. 17) For thus saith the Lord, *I will pardon all their iniquities and it shall be to me a NAME OF JOY, A PRAISE, AND AN HONOUR, before all the nations of the earth, and all the angels in heaven, which shall hear of all the superlative good that I do unto them*. (Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9) Astonishing words! The Sovereign of all worlds, seems to glory in pardoning mercy, as one of the brightest jewels in his own eternal crown. Well, therefore, might the church cry out in a transport of joy, *who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity* of the most complicated and shocking kind; *and passeth by, with the utmost readiness, the transgression of the remnant of his heritage. He retaineth not his anger forever;* and the glorious reason is, a reason which ought never to be forgotten, *because he DELIGHTETH in mercy*. (Micah vii. 18)

Come, then, poor trembling sinner! though conscious that the number and magnitude of your sins are inexpressibly great: come, let us reason together, and contemplate the riches of grace. What though you are by nature an apostate creature and a child of wrath; though you have, by innumerable transgressions, violated the law of God and incurred its everlasting curse; though you are grown hoary in rebellion against your divine Sovereign, and look upon yourself as a monster of iniquity; though your sins of heart, of lip, and life; sins of omission, and sins of commission; sins of ignorance, and sins against knowledge; like an armed host in terrible array besiege you on every side, and call aloud for vengeance on your guilty head; though, to heighten your misery, the enemy of mankind should come in like a flood, and load you with horrid accusations; should tell you that, by your offences, you have dared God's vengeance to his face, and solemnly mocked him in your duties; and so set a keener edge on all your sensations of guilt; and, to complete your distress, though your own conscience turn evidence against you, ratify the dreadful verdict, and pronounce the deserved sentence, so that you are ready to conclude you are almost a damned soul, and that *your ease is absolutely desperate*; yet still there is relief to be had. Notwithstanding all these deplorable circumstances, there is no reason to sink in despair. For, behold! there is full forgiveness with God; and such is his mercy, *he waits to be gracious* in bestowing the invaluable blessing. As he never comers the favour on account of any thing amiable in the object, so he never withholds it, on account of any peculiar aggravations in the sinner's conduct or character. To dispute this, is to deny that salvation is by grace. Divine mercy is not conditional, narrow, or limited; not like that which is exercised by men, backward to interpose, till something inviting appear in its object. No; it is divinely sovereign, and absolutely free.

Consider, O disconsolate soul! how many millions now inhabit the regions of immortal purity and exult in bliss, that were once loathsome with sin, and laden with guilt; pressed with fears, and ready to sink in despair; in a word, altogether

as abominable and wretched as you can possibly be. Reflect a moment, and see whether you cannot find, among those *spirits of the just made perfect*, such as were by nature the same, and before mercy was showed, no better by practice than yourself. There you will find that adept in every kind of wickedness, the idolatrous and bloody Manasseh. (2 Kings xxi. 2 Chron. xxxiii) There you may see the perfidious Peter; the man who, contrary to the dictates of his conscience, to the warnings of his Master, and to his own most solemn protestations, denied, with oaths and curses, (Mark xiv. 71) his Lord and Saviour. There you may behold many of the profligate Corinthians; persons that were once a reproach to their country, and a scandal to human nature. While near to the Son of God, and seated on thrones of bliss, you cannot but behold many of those Jerusalem sinners, who imbrued their hands in the blood of our divine Lord. These make a distinguished figure among the shining hosts; the very thought of which must revive the heart of a drooping sinner. In a word, there you will see sinners of every sort and of every size. So that, be your sins like a debt of millions of talents; be they more in number than the stars in the firmament, and heavier than the sand of the sea; yet this *full* forgiveness superabounds. Let this be your rest and this your joy, that grace reigns in the pardon of all sin.

The next requisite in a complete pardon is, that it be *free*; or, in other words, not vouchsafed on any conditions to be performed by the sinner. In regard to Christ, our surety, the pardon of any, even the least offence, was suspended on the performance of the most dreadful conditions and the hardest terms. The terms, the conditions were, his incarnation, his most perfect obedience to the divine law, and subjection to the most infamous death of the cross. As to Christ our substitute, blood was the rigorous condition; blood was the dreadful demand; even the pouring out of *his own blood* was the righteous requisition of Divine justice. For *without shedding of blood*, even the blood of the Prince of life and Lord of glory, *there is no remission* of any offences. The atonement of our glorious High-Priest is that which satisfies the claims of justice, which procures the pardon of sin, and pacifies the consciences of men when pained with a sense of guilt.

This forgiveness is, notwithstanding, absolutely free to the pardoned sinner. It is dispensed according to the riches of divine mercy, and is received in a way of grace. As it is written, *We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*. The death of Christ is the meritorious cause, and the glory of God is the ultimate end that Jehovah has in view when he bestows the blessing. *God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. I, even I am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own sake*. The last passage is so remarkably apposite that I cannot forbear transcribing it more at large. *But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings, neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast brought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices,*

but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. After such a heavy charge; rather, after such a complication of charges exhibited against them, who could expect but the next words would flash vengeance, and denounce utter destruction! But, lo! rejoice, O ye heavens! and shout for joy, O ye children of men! every syllable is balm, every word teems with consolation. JEHOVAH speaks; let the worst of sinners attend and hear! I, whom thou hast so notoriously offended, *even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions*; not because thou art humble, or any way qualified for mercy, but *for mine own SAKE*; to demonstrate the riches of my grace, and to display the glory of all my perfections. *And so fully and effectually shall this be done, that I will not remember thy sins any more.* Here we have the apostle's declaration finely exemplified; *Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.* In the instance before us, we behold a people, highly favoured of the Lord, neglecting his positive appointments, though easy to be performed; we behold them *restraining prayer before God*, and quite weary of his worship. Yea, we hear their Sovereign complain that they have caused him to serve with their sins, and wearied him with their multiplied crimes; and yet these impious wretches are pardoned. Amazing mercy! Sin abounds like a flood, but grace abounds like an ocean. If pardon thus circumstanced be not absolutely free, in respect of the criminal, I think it would puzzle the most fruitful invention to contrive a form of words to express any such a thing.

The Spirit of inspiration, speaking by the same prophet in another place, declares, *For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him; hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.* What expedient does the Lord try next? Since these milder methods did not reclaim the obstinate, rebellious, covetous wretch, it might naturally be expected that God would proceed immediately to lay on severer strokes, and to make him feel the vengeance of his lifted arm. But reigning grace does wonders, such wonders as will fill heaven with hallelujahs to all eternity, *I have seen his ways, says the Lord.* Surely, then, he will teach him not to offend any more, by inflicting an awful punishment, and by making him a signal example of avenging justice! Such would be the determination and conduct of men, in dealing with a stubborn, yet impotent adversary. But Jehovah's methods of reclaiming offenders, and of softening the hearts of his hardened enemies, are not like ours; they are in a peculiar manner his *own*, and highly becoming himself. He adds (amazingly gracious indeed!) he adds, *and will heal him* of these his inveterate maladies. *I will pardon all his offences, and lead him also in the ways of obedience.* And, having shown him the infinite evil of his former conduct, and possessed his heart of godly sorrow, *I will restore comforts unto him, and to all his mourners.* A gloriously free pardon indeed! Here grace takes the rebels in hand; and what is the consequence? Why, their spiritual diseases are healed; their crying sins are pardoned; the sons of Belial are reduced to obedience, and made partakers of heavenly joy.

Let us now consider some few of those eminent and everlasting monuments of

grace as it reigns in the free pardon of sin, that stand recorded in the New Testament. Saul, afterward called Paul, was a barbarous persecutor of the children of God. The sacred historian informs us, that his rancorous heart *breathed out threatenings and slaughter* against the saints of the Most High. Had it been in his power, he would have dealt destruction among the Christians by every breath he drew. Would you see a further description of his malice and rage against the peaceful and holy disciples of Jesus? Would you behold this tiger in human form pursuing and devouring the innocent lambs of Christ, to the utmost extent of his power! then read the following words: *I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme. And, being EXCEEDINGLY MAD against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.* Is it possible for words to express a more diabolical temper, or a more savage barbarity? What had the objects of his implacable fury done, that he became so highly incensed against them? The grand offence was, they loved our Lord, and owned him for the true Messiah. For this he stirred up all his rage, and would not suffer them to live. He might well acknowledge, when he came to his right mind, *I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious.* Yet this man, than whom none can be greater enemies to God, none more vile or unworthy, this butcher of the members of Christ, *obtained mercy.* On a sudden, when his thoughts were big with slaughter, and his heart thirsting for blood; when he was aiming, if possible, to extirpate the Christian character, and cause the remembrance of a crucified Messiah to cease from the earth; even *that* was the time the persecuted Saviour chose to manifest his love to him. He was powerfully struck with conviction, called by grace, pardoned and justified, and became an heir of eternal salvation. Nor was he required to perform any condition, as in the least entitling to these blessings, or as qualifying for them. Is it recorded of him, that he was *exceedingly mad* against the Christians? His own pen has informed us, that the grace of our Lord was *exceeding abundant* toward him. So that though sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

But some, perhaps, may be inclined to think, that the grace exercised toward Paul was as extraordinary as the means of his conversion were miraculous. Let the apostle himself determine the case. He says, *For this cause I obtained mercy, that what?* That I might appear as a singular instance of Divine mercy? that I might enjoy a favour not vouchsafed to any of my fellow-sinners? No; but *that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, FOR A PATTERN to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.* (1 Tim. i. 15. Eph. ii. 6, 7) Hence it is plain, that the long-suffering and grace, which were manifested in the pardon and salvation of Saul the persecutor, are to be considered, not as a particular instance of sovereign bounty, rarely, if ever, to be repeated, but as the very *exemplar* of what should be showed to millions and millions of transgressors in succeeding ages even to all who should afterward believe on Christ to life eternal.*

*That lively and evangelical writer, Hervey, when treating on the conversion of Paul, expresses himself in the following manner: "Observe this man, in his

unconverted state. He *breathes out threatenings and slaughter* against the Christians. Can any thing denote a more iniquitous and savage temper? The roaring lion and the raging bear are gentle creatures, compared with this monster in human shape. Still the description of this barbarity heightens. *I was exceedingly mad against them. I compelled them to blaspheme; and punished them in every synagogue.* The practice, not of a man, but of a fiend! 'Tis the very picture of an incarnate devil. What has this infernal wretch that may recommend him to the Divine favour? If ever there was a sinner on earth, that had sinned beyond the reach of mercy, beyond the possibility of pardon, surely it must be this Saul of Tarsus.

"But the Divine mercy, disdaining all limits, is overflowing and unmeasurable. Where sin has abounded like a flood, Divine mercy abounds like an ocean. The favour of man is backward to interpose till something amiable and inviting appears in the object. But the grace of God is immensely rich and infinitely free. It prevents the most vile and hardened rebels. It brings every requisite and recommendation, in its own unspeakably beneficent nature. It accomplishes all its blessed ends, not by any towardly disposition in the sinner, but by that one glorious righteousness provided in the Saviour. This overtook the persecutor on his journey to Damascus. Light and life were poured upon him, not from any dawn of reformation in himself, but from a very different quarter. By opening, as it were, a window in heaven, while he was sojourning even in the suburbs of hell. *He saw that* JUST ONE. He received the inestimable gift. He was made partaker of the salvation, which is in Jesus Christ.

"See, now, what an effect this faith has upon his conduct. It causes a total revolution in the sentiments of his mind. It gives a new bias to every faculty of his soul. It introduces an absolute change into the whole tenor of his behaviour. As great and marvellous a change, as if you should behold some mighty torrent, turned by the shock of an earthquake; and rolling those waters to the east, which, from the beginning of time, had flowed incessantly to the west. He adores that Jesus whom he lately blasphemed. He preaches that faith which he once destroyed. And he is ready to lay down his life for those believers whom, not long ago, he persecuted unto death." *Theron and Aspasio*. Vol. iii p. 233, 234. edit. 5th.

The case of Zaccheus the publican, of the Samaritan woman, and of the Philippian jailer, loudly attests the glorious truth for which I am pleading. Zaccheus was chief among the publicans, and, it is highly probable, was not the least among the extortioners. Among his neighbours, his employment was detestable, his character profligate, and his company scandalous. That his employment was detestable, none can doubt. That his character was profligate, appears from hence. The office of *chief among the publicans*, was what no son of Abraham, who had not lost his reputation, or who was not of an abandoned, shameless character, would undertake. And that his company was esteemed scandalous, is evident from that keen reflection upon the conduct of Jesus, when

he became a guest at his table. *They murmured, saying, that he was gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner; a worthless, infamous fellow.* A complaint of the same kind with that of Simon the Pharisee: *This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, for she is a sinner; a person of ill-fame, one that is a reproach to her sex.* But, notwithstanding the unworthy character or conduct of this Jewish publican, he is instantaneously converted. No course of duties, prior to his believing on Christ, is assigned him. No qualifications, as predisposing for pardon, mentioned. *This day, without any previous preparation, is salvation come to this house.* Nay, before our Lord expressed those gracious words, Zaccheus made haste, came down from the tree, and received him *joyfully*. Now, as things were then circumstanced in reference to the entertaining of Christ, it is not at all probable that he should have received him *joyfully*, without believing in him; nor could that have been, without receiving the remission of sins. This, therefore, is a noble instance of an absolutely free and unconditional pardon.

The conversion of the Samaritan woman is an instance much to our purpose. This woman lived in ignorance of God and his worship, and in the vile practice of adultery, till, by a remarkably gracious providence, she met with our Lord. He made himself known to her. She believed on him; confessed her faith in him; and, consequently, received that forgiveness which is by him. Nor can we suppose, without offering violence to reason and Scripture, that Christ considered her as having complied with any terms, or having performed any conditions, qualifying for that pardon and those blessings which were vouchsafed to her.

The conversion of the Philippian jailer is equally apposite, and equally strong in proof of our point. The jailer was a Gentile idolater, a barbarous persecutor, and, in purpose, a self-murderer. Yet, being awakened in his conscience, he was directed by an infallible guide to *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ* immediately; with the strongest assurance that in so doing he *should be saved*. Had Paul and Silas thought of any predisposing or qualifying conditions, to be attained in any way, or performed by any means; had they thought the performance of religious duties, a course of humiliation for sin, or the evidence of any degree of love to God, previously necessary to faith in Jesus for pardon and acceptance; no doubt but those ambassadors of Christ, who shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God, would have given some intimation of these things to the trembling querist. But as they directed him immediately to trust in the Saviour, as free for any, free for the vilest of sinners, without giving him any such intimation; we may conclude that they did not consider any thing necessary for that purpose. Now, as their judgment and conduct in these important affairs are acknowledged to have been according to the mind of God, we may venture to assert, that there is no good disposition, no holiness, nor any fruits of sanctification requisite, as the condition of pardon.

I might produce various other instances, from the volume of revelation, to the

same purpose; but I shall content myself at this time with selecting one. It is that of the thief on the cross: and as his ease is very remarkable, the reader will excuse me if I a little enlarge upon it. This man died the most ignominious death; a death which was not commonly executed on any offenders, but such as were the refuse of mankind, and guilty of atrocious crimes. To this death he was deservedly brought; his own conscience acknowledging the justice of the execution. A hardened villain we find he was, according to the testimony of two evangelists, even after he was fastened to the cross. Matthew informs us, *that the THIEVES also, which were crucified with Christ, took up the Words of reproach and blasphemy, which were uttered by the chief priests, scribes, and elders, against Jesus the Son of God, then dying for the sins of men; and cast the same in his teeth.* And Mark says, *THEY that were crucified with him, reviled him.* (Matt. xxvii. 44. Mark xv. 32) Hence it appears, that they were both most obdurate wretches; that they were both guilty of persecuting the dying Saviour, to the utmost of their power, and of blaspheming his offices and work. This vilest of miscreants, justly suffering for his own crimes, could not be ignorant that Jesus was nailed to the cross for claiming to be the Son of God, and for professing himself to be the Messiah; nor could he be unacquainted with the meaning of those sarcastic reflections, that were cast upon him by malevolent rulers and an insolent rabble. Yet he joined the common cry; he poured the bitterest reproaches on the most innocent and glorious Person that ever appeared in the world. This he did when Jesus was in his dying moments, and when his own body was extended on a cross, transfixed with nails in the most sensible parts, and racked with exquisite pain. Such a conduct, in such circumstances, evidently discovers the most astonishing degree of impenitence for his own crimes; the greatest abhorrence of the bleeding Immanuel; the highest insensibility of his own state toward God, and unconcernedness about the momentous affairs of an eternal world. He acted as if his tormenting others were a relaxation of his own pains. Whence could such a conduct proceed whence, indeed, but from the principles of atheism, or from the rage of a devil?

Such was the state of this thief, till some time after he was crucified. Such were the qualifications which he possessed, predisposing for pardon. Yet he, though enormously vile, (let reigning grace have the glory!) was pardoned. Being convinced of the superlative dignity of Jesus Christ, as well as the injustice of his condemnation; being informed of the design of his sufferings, and of the nature of that work he was then finishing; when the other thief, his companion in wickedness, continued his opprobrious language, he rebuked him sharply, and addressed a prayer to the dying Jesus. In which prayer he acknowledged his deity; owned him as Lord of the unseen world; and as having authority to dispose of crowns and thrones in glory, to whomsoever he pleased. In doing which, he paid him the highest honour which mortals can pay to the true God. His petition is, *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!* Jesus answers him with that majesty and condescension which becomes none but the Supreme Possessor of heaven and earth. *Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.**

*How amazing the methods of grace! How mortifying to human pride is the conduct of Christ! In the time of his public ministry he was addressed by a very decent, respectable, and apparently *devout young ruler*. A person who, to outward appearance, was very promising, and likely to be an honour to the Redeemer's rising interest. Yet, notwithstanding all his recommendations of worldly property and polished manners, of honourable character and devout address; he was sent away *exceedingly sorrowful*. But here we behold the holy Jesus returning the most gracious answer to the very first petition of an abandoned malefactor, a thief even just before he breathed his last. Consequently, he was so far from having any recommendations, either of person or of character, that every thing about him was quite the reverse. So true are those words, though spoken with an ill intent; *Behold a friend of publicans and sinners. The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick*, appears to have been the maxim on which Messiah formed his conduct. And why should the righteous, or the self-sufficient, be offended at this, if they can do without the manifestation of such grace, others cannot. But if the elder brother will be displeased, because the prodigal is accepted, who can help it? Such, however, as feel their want, and look to the cross alone for relief, will entirely acquiesce in the conduct of Christ; being well persuaded, that it is for his eternal honour, and for their everlasting salvation. Luke xviii 18-23.

The petition of the dying criminal supposes faith in the illustrious sufferer, as the all-sufficient Saviour; and the gracious answer which Jesus returned, irrefragably proves it. His comprehensive petition being readily granted, we may infer that his offences were pardoned and his person accepted. Now, can it be supposed that the dying Redeemer, when he vouchsafed pardon to him, considered him in any other light than that of a notorious offender, a most ungodly wretch? Is it possible to conceive, with any appearance of reason or of Scripture, that this thief performed any entitling or qualifying conditions, previous to the mercy and forgiveness that were granted and manifested to him?

Can we imagine that this thief, when he said *remember me*, could possibly consider himself as any other than the vilest miscreant?*

*"*Memento mei, hominis flagitiosissimi sub peccatum venditi, bipedum pessimi, et peccatorum maximi; quando veneris in regnum tuum, ut et ego gratiam inveniam apud te, et firmam ac securam sub alis aeternae tuae majestatis stationem.*" MERCKEN, *Observ. Crit. in Passion.* D. N. I. C. p. 789.

Yet, with great boldness, and no less acceptably, he uttered the words. Nature teaches and pride suggests: "This is a kind of language becoming none but the dying lips of prophets, of apostles, or of martyrs; of such as have been eminent for good works and pious services all their days." Whence, then, could this infamous man derive such a degree of holy boldness, so acceptable to the bleeding Immanuel? With what confidence, or upon what ground could he say,

Remember ME? It is impossible, I should think, for the invention of man to find any other reason; nor can all the hosts of angels find a better, than that grace which reigns. That grace (let angels and the spirits of just men made perfect dwell on the charming sound! let the worst of sinners look at it and rejoice in it!) that grace, which was the only basis of hope for the greatest apostles, and the most holy among the children of men, is an all-sufficient ground of dependence, even for blasphemers and persecutors, for thieves and murderers; or, as Paul says, for the *chief of sinners*.

Here we behold with wonder and contemplate with joy the conduct of the Lord Redeemer in making choice of one as his companion to glory, when he made his exit and left the world. Of one who had not like Enoch, walked with God; not like Abraham, rejoiced to see the day of Christ, and longed for its commencement; nor like old Simeon, waited with ardent expectation for the consolation of Israel; but of one who, for aught appears to the contrary, had devoted all his time and all his talents to the service of Satan; of one, whom the sword of civil justice permitted not to live; and who, in the eye of the public, was less worthy of mercy than Barabbas himself, who was guilty of *sedition and murder*; was a vile incendiary and a bloody ruffian. Astonishing procedure of Jesus, the Judge of the world! When such a wretch is saved, who can despair? At that ever-memorable and amazing period, when the Son of the Highest was in the pangs of dissolution, Jehovah was determined to show, by an incontestable fact, that the salvation which was then finishing, originated in sovereign mercy, flowed in atoning blood, was equal to the wants of the most abominably wicked, and terminated in his own eternal glory, as its ultimate design. This, this is grace, indeed! Grace,

"Not to be thought on, but with tides of joy, Not to be mention'd, but with shouts of praise."

Can we cease to admire the power of his divine grace in the salvation of this thief? What all amazing difference takes place in a few hours, as to his character and state! When first extended on the cross, we view him one of the most hardened wretches whose character is recorded in all history. Then we hear him pray, and behold him a sincere penitent. And lo! before the day is elapsed, even while his body a deformed spectacle! still hangs on the gibbet and declares to all the world that he was not fit to live; his immortal spirit enters the portals of paradise, and is blessed with the beatific vision. Surprising transition! As a nuisance to society and a pest to the public, he is brought to the cross, and from thence is translated to a throne of glory. Here, also, we behold, in a striking light, the sovereignty of grace. For the other thief, though not more unworthy, dies unrelenting, and is lost forever. Here the Almighty shows that he *will have mercy on whom he will have mercy; for one is taken and the other left*.

I cannot conclude my remarks on this very extraordinary fact, without observing, That as the death of the Son of God was the most wonderful event that ever did,

or ever will take place on the theatre of the world; and as it was intended to be a foundation of hope for sinners, in the most desperate cases; so the circumstances attending it were wisely adapted to answer that gracious design in its utmost latitude. The Prince of life was *numbered among transgressors*; was crucified between two thieves. He died, not only the most abhorred of deaths, but in the worst of company. Nor was this a casual thing: it was determined by Jehovah, and the subject of ancient prophecy. This was graciously ordered, in the purpose and providence of God, to afford relief to the most flagrant offenders. Had any the least regard been paid to moral character and human excellence, in that most amazing of all transactions, unbelief and pride would soon have concluded that it was principally intended for the more respectable part of mankind, for those who want but little assistance, and would be able to do tolerably well without it. On such a supposition, what must have become of notorious criminals, and of those who consider themselves as awfully guilty and wretched? What, but absolute despair would have awaited the entirely worthless, though these are the persons in whose salvation mercy delights, and for whom the great atonement was provided. Had the companions of Christ on the cross been persons of a shining character for humanity and piety; nay, had they been of equal repute with Ezekiel's worthies, Noah, Daniel, and Job; though mankind by common consent might have agreed to pronounce their execution an outrageous violation of justice, and have execrated the Judge who condemned them; yet the dying Jesus would still have been *numbered with transgressors*. But this would have afforded small encouragement to those, who are not only condemned by divine law, and stand guilty in their own consciences, but have also, by a criminal conduct, incurred the public odium. Such would have been ready to infer, that their case was entirely hopeless; and, therefore, as despair of the future was the most rational thing, to present pleasures, however sinful, would have been still more eagerly pursued by them. But reigning grace was by no means willing that the most abhorred of men should be reduced to such a dreadful situation. In order, therefore, to prevent this, the Holy One of Israel was not only *crucified*, to show that he died under a charge of the highest guilt, and was made a curse, but he was crucified between *two convicts* that were thieves and ruffians. He made his exit, and was numbered with such as all the world agree to pronounce *transgressors*; with such as have ever been esteemed by all nations as unworthy to live. But why was this, if not to show, that as the best of men have no solid foundation of hope, except the blood of the cross; so the very worst and the vilest that ever deserved a gibbet, have no reason to sink in despair while they behold the Lord of life expire in such company; and especially when they remember that he took one of those villains with him to glory?

My reader, perhaps, would be ready to think it a gross affront to his character, were I to assert that he stands on the *very same terms* with this thief, in regard to acceptance with God; and that the most upright of men have nothing more to plead before their Maker than he had. Yet this is a certain truth. For salvation is entirely by grace; and grace is unconditional favour. Grace, therefore, has no regard to any real or supposed difference among men. All whom it relieves are

considered as on the same level; the moot moral, and the most profligate, being equally without help and hope in themselves. We may therefore conclude, that whoever looks for salvation by any other grace than that which saved this thief, will meet with a dreadful disappointment.

In the several foregoing instances, grace, in the free pardon of sin, does not only appear, but appears with majesty; it not only shows itself, but demonstrates its power to be infinitely great and supremely glorious. These remarkable cases stand engrossed by the pen of inspiration, as so many *acts* and *precedents* of the court of heaven; and were recorded for our yes, reader, for *our* observation, instruction, and comfort. They were ordered to be transmitted to posterity by the King eternal *that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, through Christ Jesus.*

The blessed effects produced on the minds and morals of all these enormous offenders, by the manifestation of grace and a grant of pardon, deserve our consideration; as they are a standing testimony to the truth of that saying, *There is forgiveness with Thee, that thou mayest be feared.* When Paul came to experience the power, and to taste the sweetness of pardoning grace, no labours were too great for him to undertake; no sufferings were too severe for him to undergo, on the behalf of his Divine Master. He counted not his very life dear, so that he might propagate the glorious truth, and promote his Redeemer's honour. Zaccheus was instantly changed in his dispositions and conduct: for the extortioner made restitution, and put on bowels of mercy. The woman of Samaria immediately drew numbers to hear that gracious voice which quickened her own soul; and to receive him, as the Christ, by whom she was instructed, pardoned, and comforted. The jailer manifested a ready obedience to the commands of our Saviour, as King in Zion, by submitting to the ordinance of baptism. He evinced his love to the saving truth, by washing the stripes of his two illustrious prisoners, and by treating them at his hospitable board with a cordial welcome. And the thief, the few moments he had to live, after he enjoyed the blessings of grace, confessed his offences, justified God in the punishment he then suffered, and, in love to the soul of his partner in villany and infamy, reproved him for his blasphemy, and warned him of his danger, the dreadful danger of suffering eternal wrath.

I am persuaded that the testimonies and facts, already produced and pleaded, in order to prove that pardon is *free*; detached from all works, dependent on no conditions, to be performed by the sinner, are quite sufficient. Otherwise, I might easily add to their number, by producing other examples and more declarations from the sacred volume. But these I omit, and shall only remind my reader of that remarkable and truly evangelical text, *When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.* Now, as none can deny that pardon of sin is essential to a state of reconciliation with God, so it is impossible the reconciliation and forgiveness of those who are *enemies* to him, should ever take place on account of any thing amiable which they possess, or of any thing good

which they have done. Such a supposition, if any were absurd enough to make it, would confound the two absolutely contradictory ideas of enmity and friendship.

Here let us pause a moment, and indulge reflection. Is there no forgiveness of any offender, or of the least offence, but by *shedding of blood*, the infinitely precious blood of Jesus, our incarnate God? How awfully evil, how inconceivably great the malignity of sin! The dignity of the Person who suffered for it; the superlative interest he had in his Father's love; and the more than mountainous weight of Divine wrath which he bore in his complicated sufferings; much more strongly express the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the infinite purity of God, than the everlasting punishment of the damned. Here we behold in the clearest light, that our Sovereign is absolutely just, as well as divinely merciful, in granting a free pardon to the worthless and guilty. Here we behold the righteous Judge, and the suffering Saviour, inflexible justice, and triumphant grace, in the same point of light. The curse is executed in all its rigour, and mercy is manifested in all its riches. Here the great Lord of all appears, dispensing innumerable and free pardons; but in such a way as preserves the honours of his law inviolate, and maintains the rights of his Divine government, in such a way, as is the surprise of angels and the wonder of heaven. To contrive it, was the work of infinite wisdom; to manifest it, a display of boundless grace. In such a method of dispensing forgiveness, how safely may the alarmed conscience rest! For while it is most happily adapted to impress the mind with an awful sense of the infinite evil of sin, the purity of the divine laws, and the extensive demands of the holy law; it encourages the most unreserved confidence in mercy thus revealed, and cherishes the liveliest hope in grace thus reigning.

Is there a full and free forgiveness; a forgiveness vouchsafed without any terms or conditions to be performed by the enfeebled and corrupted creature? How shamefully then do those persons injure the grace of God, and veil its most shining excellencies, who teach, or imagine, that pardon of sin is not to be expected, nor can be received, till the sinner is prepared for it by a course of humiliation, of self-denial, or of holy conversation? This pardon, far from being suspended on conditions to be performed by us, flows from sovereign grace, is according to the infinite riches of grace, and is intended by Jehovah to aggrandize his grace, in the view of all the redeemed, and before the angels of light, both here and hereafter. *That forgiveness which is with God*, is such as becomes the Majesty of heaven; such as is suited to his infinite excellencies. When the Lord of the world pardons offenders, in so doing he demonstrates his **DEITY**; or, that he is infinitely superior to all his creatures in acts of forgiveness, as well as in every perfection of his nature. For thus it is written: *I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim.* What is the reason of this forbearance? It follows, **FOR I AM GOD, and not man.** In reference to the pardon of sin, Jehovah again declares, *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 higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.* He freely forgives our ten thousand talents, whereas we can

scarcely forgive those who are indebted to us *an hundred pence*. Thus the Lord, in bestowing a full and free pardon on guilty, perishing creatures, exceeds the utmost of human desert, the highest instances of human compassion rather, all our expectations and all our thoughts. May a lively sense of this free forgiveness rest on the mind, comfort the heart, and elevate the affections of my reader! Then shall his conduct declare, that, as it is a blessing immensely great, and comes to sinners through atoning blood, so it is connected with true holiness that it is a strong incentive *to fear the Lord*; to love, adore, and obey him. Then shall he *be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God*.

This forgiveness is *everlasting* and irreversible, which is the last and crowning requisite of complete pardon. Various passages in sacred writ evince this glorious truth. Among many others, that charming clause in the new covenant is not the least remarkable. *I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities WILL I REMEMBER NO MORE*. This declaration, and the blessing signified by it, enter into the very essence of the new, the better, the unchangeable covenant. If the Lord, whose royal prerogative it is to punish, or to pardon the criminal, declare that he will *remember his iniquities no more*, we may rest assured, that it is an everlasting pardon, a forgiveness never to be reversed. This declaration is not simply a *promise*; though a mere promise, from the God of truth, is irrevocable; but it is a promise in a federal form, an absolute promise, which faithfulness itself is engaged to fulfil. The continuance of a pardoned state, not depending on conditions to be performed by the sinner, but on the perpetual efficacy of our Lord's atonement, and on the inviolable faithfulness of the eternal God, there is all possible security that a full and free pardon, once granted, shall ever abide in its full force, and in all its glory.

The same comfortable truth is taught and confirmed by David. *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us*. Hence we infer, that the sins of those who are forgiven shall never come against them to their condemnation, unless those two opposite points, the east and the west, should ever meet, and so cease to be what they are. Nor can that blessedness which the Psalmist, in another place, ascribes to the pardoned sinner, be accounted for on any other supposition. *Blessed is he, whose transgression is forgiven*. For if *all* his offences were not forgiven, and *that forever*, what peace for his conscience here, what hope of glory hereafter, could he enjoy? If the continuance of his pardoned state depended on his own obedience; if, by a relapse into sin, he should again be liable to condemnation and wrath, all his present enjoyments and future hopes would not deserve the name of *blessedness*, the tenure by which they are held being so precarious. *Precarious!* I retract the expression. There would be all the certainty on the opposite side that could be had; not the least probability in his favour, or the least ground to suppose that he would ever obtain eternal happiness. The conscience being awake, present peace will always keep pace with a hope of future felicity.

Another inspired penman thus expresses the joyful truth. *Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea.* The transgressions of the pardoned sinner are here compared to a stone, or to some other ponderous thing; which, when cast into the fathomless deep, is absolutely irrecoverable by all the art and power of man. The loftiest towers, the most enormous mountains, with all their cumbrous load of rocks and forests, if cast into the ocean, would all entirely disappear and be lost forever. By this expressive and striking image does the Holy Ghost represent the perpetuity of that forgiveness which is with God, and is vouchsafed to the believer. Conformably to which, the Lord says, *The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found.* The reason of this assertion is contained in the following words: *For I will pardon them whom I reserve.* A convincing proof, that those who are pardoned by the God of grace, have all their sins forgiven, and that forever. Isaiah, the evangelist of the Jewish church, has a passage much to our purpose. He represents the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, addressing his people in the following manner. *As I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but roll kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee.* Here we have, not only the word, but the oath of Jehovah, in attestation to the glorious truth: and if these fail, "The pillar'd firmament is rottenness, And earth's foundation stubble."

The apostle of the Gentiles having this glorious truth full in his view, is bold to challenge every enemy, and to defy every danger. What less can be the import of that heroic language? *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Who shall condemn?* If the blessing of pardon were ever to be reversed; if a sinner, having been once acquitted from condemnation, should again fall under the curse and be liable to perish, there would be no foundation for these bold expressions.

Such is the nature and such the properties of Divine forgiveness; even of that forgiveness, which is the purchase of Immanuel's pains, and the price of redeeming blood. The doctrine of pardon is an essential branch and a capital article of that truth, which is by way of eminence called **THE GOSPEL**. For the cheering language of that heavenly message is? *Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this illustrious Jesus is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.* Such is the import of the evangelical testimony; and the glorious blessing is received by faith in the dying Redeemer. As it is written; *To him give all the prophets witness, that, through his name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins.* Believing the infallible record, which God has given of his Son, we receive the atonement. The propitiating blood of Christ is sprinkled on our hearts, pardon is applied to our consciences, and peace enjoyed in our souls.

It is no real objection to the truth advanced, that the Lord lays his chastising hand

on the objects of this forgiveness. For though he corrects them, and frequently with some degree of severity, on account of their backslidings, yet those chastisements are instances and evidences of his paternal affection, and of his constant care over them. They have the strongest assurances that he *will never take from them his loving kindness, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail.*

Nor is it any way inconsistent with the doctrine maintained, that believers are expressly commanded to pray for the pardon of sin, and that this command has been frequently acknowledged in the conduct of eminent saints, whose characters are recorded in the holy Scriptures. For, to use the words of a learned author, "Very frequently when the saints pray, either for the forgiveness of their own or others' sins, their meaning is, that God would, in a providential way, deliver them out of present distress; remove his afflicting hand, which lies heavy upon them; or avert such judgments which seem to hang over their heads, and very much threaten them, which, when he does, is an indication of his having pardoned them. We are to understand many petitions of Moses, Job, Solomon, and others in this sense. (Exod. xxxii. 32. Num. xiv.19, 20. Job vii. 21. I Kings vii. 30, 34, 36, 39, 50) Besides, when believers now pray for the pardon of sin, their meaning is, that they might have the sense, the manifestation, and application of pardoning grace to their souls. We are not to imagine, that as often as the saints sin, repent, confess their sins, and pray for the forgiveness of them, that God makes and passes new acts of pardon; but, whereas they daily sin against God, grieve his Spirit, and wound their own consciences; they have need of the fresh sprinklings of the blood of Jesus, and of renewed manifestations of pardon to their souls: and it is both their duty and their interest to attend the throne of grace on this account."

How glorious, then, is that *forgiveness which is with God*, that pardon I have been describing! It has every requisite to make it complete in itself, and suitable to the indigent, miserable sinner. It has not one discouraging circumstance to forbid the most guilty, or the most unworthy, applying to the ever-merciful Jehovah for it. It is full, free, and everlasting, every way complete and worthy of God. It was absolutely necessary to the peace of our consciences, and to the salvation of our souls, that it should be of such unlimited extent, of such unmerited freeness, and of such everlasting efficacy. Less than this would not have supplied our wants, or have served our purpose. If it had not been *full*, taking in every kind and every degree of sin, we must have suffered the punishment due to some part of it ourselves, and then we had been lost forever. If it had not been entirely *free*, we could never have enjoyed the inestimable blessing, for we have nothing, nor can we do any thing to purchase it, or to qualify for it. And if it had not been *everlasting*, never to be reversed, we should have been under continual anxiety and painful apprehensions, lest God should, on account of our present unworthiness or future failings, recall the blessing when once bestowed. But, being possessed of these properties, the vilest sinner has no reason despondingly to say, "My sins, alas! are too many and great for me to expect pardon." None have any cause to complain, "I long for the blessing;

it is dearer to me than all worlds; but my strong corruptions, and utter unworthiness, render me incapable of ever enjoying it." Nor have any occasion to fear lest, after the comfortable enjoyment of the superlative privilege, they should forfeit it, and again come under condemnation and wrath.

What shall we they say to these things? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound in a perfect pardon? God forbid! So to act, would, if possible, be worse than devilish, and more damnable. Rather let the pardoned criminal say, yes, he will say, with the warmest gratitude, Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lowing kindness and tender mercies.

Before I conclude this momentous part of my subject, I will transcribe a few lines from a celebrated author of the last century; celebrated, not more for his very superior learning, than for his great penetration in spiritual things, and his experience in the Christian life. Treating of Divine forgiveness, he says, "The forgiveness that is with God, is such as becomes him, such as is suitable to his greatness, goodness, and all the other excellencies of his nature; such as that therein he will be *known to be GOD*. What he says concerning some of the works of his providence, *be still, and know that I am GOD*, may be much more said concerning this great effect of his grace, *Still yourselves, and know that he is GOD*. It is not like that narrow, difficult, halving, and manacled forgiveness, that is found amongst men; but it is full, free, bottomless, boundless, absolute—such as becomes his nature and excellencies. It is, in a word, *forgiveness that is with GOD*, and by the exercise of which he will be known so to be. If there be any pardon with God, it is such as becomes him to give. When he pardons, he will *abundantly pardon*. Go, with your half forgiveness, conditional pardons, with reserves and limitations, unto the sons of men. It may be, it may become them; it is like themselves. That of God is absolute and perfect; before which, our sins areas a cloud before the east wind and the rising sun. Hence he is said to do this work *with his whole heart and his whole soul*; freely, bountifully, largely to indulge and forgive unto us our sins, and to *cast them into the bottom of the sea*. Remember this, poor souls, when you are to deal with God in this matter. If we let go the free pardon of sin, without respect unto any thing in those that receive it, we renounce the gospel. Pardon of sin is not merited by antecedent duties, but is the strongest obligation unto future duties. He that will not receive pardon, unless he can one way or other deserve it, or make himself meet for it, or pretends to have received it, and finds not himself obliged to universal obedience by it, neither is nor shall be partaker of it." *

* Dr. Owen, *On the hundred and thirtieth Psalm*, p. 202. 227, and on Heb. viii. 12. This eminent writer loudly proclaims the charming truth. He no more feared this doctrine leading to licentiousness, than he valued the applause of the self-sufficient moralist. He treats of a full, free, and final forgiveness, like one who knows its real value, experiences its unutterable sweetness, and glories in it as

his own privilege, He labours his noble subject, and repeats the joyful truth. Whereas, many of our modern preachers, who pretend to reverence the doctor's memory, admire his profound learning, and, in a general way, applaud his judgment; when handling the same subject, either directly contradict him, or whisper the grand truth in faint accents, as if they questioned the certainty of what they would seem to affirm, or were apprehensive of some pernicious consequences attending it.

Now, reader, what think you of this glorious pardon? Is it suitable to your wants? Is it worthy of your acceptance? You are, perhaps, one of those careless mortals that are at ease in their sins, and eagerly pursuing the tantalizing pleasures of this uncertain life. But can you be contented to live and die in utter ignorance of this forgiveness? Is pardon a blessing of small importance, or have you no occasion for it? Sinned you have, condemned you are, and, without forgiveness, you die to eternity. Start, O start from your stupor! Your state is dreadful, though not desperate. Your sins are upon you, the law of God curses you, and you are in extreme danger of eternal damnation. You are tottering, as it were, on the brink of a dreadful precipice, and nodding on the verge of the burning lake. Can you sleep in your sins, can you rest in an unpardoned state, when it is all uncertainty whether the next hour may not transmit you into an eternal world; place you at the bar of God, and put you beyond the possibility of relief? May Divine grace forbid your continuing another moment in such an awful situation! For, another moment, and your life may be gone; another moment, and your soul may be lost; and then your loss will be irreparable, inconceivable, and eternal.

Is my reader sensible of his want, and longing for the matchless blessing? Then look to the dying Jesus. Your iniquities, it is true, abound; but pardoning mercy, through his atonement, superabounds. Be of good cheer: take encouragement: for the favour you so earnestly desire is a free gift. Blessed be God for the amazing mercy! Such are the methods of grace; and such is the nature of this forgiveness, that as your eternal salvation is bound up in the enjoyment of it, so the everlasting honour of Jehovah is unspeakably advanced by freely bestowing it. There is no reason, therefore, that you should stand at a trembling distance, as if there were no such favour for you; but with boldness you may look for it; in a way of grace through the blood of Christ, and truth itself has most solemnly declared that you shall not be disappointed.

Are you comfortably acquainted with the pardoning goodness of God, having much forgiven, you should love much. The remembrance of a blessing so immensely rich, the sense of a favour so extremely high, should enlarge your heart with all holy affections toward the Lord Redeemer; should animate all your devotional services; should cause you to compassionate your offending brother, in forgiving him his *hundred pence*, considering that God has forgiven you *ten thousand talents*, and make you zealous of every good work. This forgiveness, far from being an incentive to vice, will bias your affections on the side of virtue; will cause you to love God as infinitely holy, and to abhor sin, as a direct

opposition to his immaculate purity and revealed will. Yes, a sense of pardon, when warm on your mind, will work in you godly sorrow for all sin, for the latent corruptions of your heart, no less than the open transgressions of your life, and will cause you to confess them before God with shame and grief. Such are the genuine effects of Divine forgiveness. These fruits will necessarily appear, in some degree; and he who professes to know the pardon of his transgressions, but does not forgive his offending brother, and lives under the dominion of sin, *is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

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