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GOD'S FORGIVENESS OF SIN

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DEFINITIONS

"SIN is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God."*

Law, as concerns moral beings, is a rule of conduct enforced by penalty. Law, therefore, is composed of two elements: precept and penalty. Precept tells what to do, and penalty tells the consequences of not doing. Subtract either element from law, it ceases to be law.

Forgiveness is a remission of the penalty due the sinner for non-conformity to, or transgression of law.

UNIVERSAL NEED OF FORGIVENESS

Every human being needs forgiveness, for (Rom. iii. 23) "All have sinned." All have failed of perfect obedience; "all have gone out of the way" (Rom. iii. 12), *i. e.*, all have sinned.

In every just law—which every law of God is—both of the elements of law are right. If I break the preceptive part of the law, equity declares it to be right and just that I should suffer the prescribed penalty, and wrong and unjust that I should not suffer it.

THE ETHICAL GROUND OF FORGIVENESS SOUGHT

But a serious ethical question arises just here. If forgiveness be the remission of penalty, the question inevitably presents itself, How, or on what ethical ground, can God remit the penalty, or forgive, and not thereby himself do wrong?

A satisfactory rational answer to this problem is thought to present one of the greatest difficulties with which the Biblical and theological discipline has to deal. Indeed, many have given it up as unsolvable, and have

*Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 14.

taken the doctrine of forgiveness as simply resting on the authority of divine revelation. Let us see. My moral sense, in common with that of others, tells me that I ought to suffer the penalty of my sin; that it is eternally right that I should suffer it, and eternally wrong that I should not. It demands that the penalty incurred must be suffered. So, whatever answer is given to meet the question, it must certainly include the penalty satisfied; for, if the penalty be not endured, the righteous penal element of the law is violated, and still another—and, if possible, worse—sin is committed.

The Bible proclaims the fullest and freest forgiveness. When, therefore, God forgives a person, it can be only on the ground that the penalty of his individual sin has been met. But how? The ready answer is, Through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ! "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." I Peter 3:18, "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for [Gr. *huper*, 'instead of'] the unjust"; for, as Meyer observes, "substitution is implied." I Thess. 5:10, "Christ died for [*huper*, 'instead of'] us," or in our stead. And these texts are only samples of much Scripture of similar import. The teaching plainly is that Christ came into the place of the sinner and suffered the penalty which was due to his sins.

But it may be said: "The fact of Christ's substitution is plain enough, but the difficulty is not resolved; for"—and this is the real crux of the question—"how can an innocent person justly suffer the penalty which another and guilty person deserves? What is the rationally ethical ground, or basis of right, of the transaction?"

THE ETHICAL GROUND FOUND

Let it be supposed that you, the one just now reading these lines, have sufficient capital, and that I, the writer of them, have none, and that affluent you take penniless me into business partnership with you. In the eye of the law, and for all the purposes of the business, we are as one person. Your business acts are the acts of the firm; so are mine. In our business I incur an obligation—give

check, for instance. Your money, or, as I may now say, *our* money, pays it. I commit a business sin: the firm stands for it. My iniquities may pile up to the full measure of the firm's ability to cover them; but it has to cover them all the same. The principle is plain: the acts of one are the acts of the firm, and the liabilities of one are the liabilities of the firm. From any ethical point of view no fault can be found with it. There is nothing of business wrong or injustice in it. Moral sense pronounces it right.

Now, *this partnership idea is precisely the New Testament idea of the relation between Jesus Christ and the believer!*

Says Holy Writ: "Ye were called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 1:9). The word translated "fellowship," *koinonia*, means "to have things in common," or in "partnership." Again, "ye are partakers of (in partnership with) Christ" (I Pet. 4:13). Still again: "And truly our fellowship [same word again that means 'to have in common' or 'in partnership'] is with Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3). And these partnership words are used in the New Testament, in various relations, *thirty-nine times*. Thus, getting at the interior and real meaning of these terms, we clearly see the great and glorious fact of our partnership with the Lord Jesus Christ, or of his partnership with us, in which he assumes our liabilities and discharges them. And not only does he bear our liabilities while one with us, but—that the union may be solid and spotless, that no breath of ill-aspersion may tarnish its good name—he assumes all the liabilities we incurred before we entered into the partnership. Such becomes our oneness with him, we are told (I John 4:17), that "As he is, so are we in this world."

Is our moral sense satisfied with the rightfulness of the common, familiar, and everywhere-accepted principle of the business partnership? On precisely the same ground it should be satisfied with the rightfulness of the believer's moral and religious partnership with Jesus Christ, in which sin is forgiven. And this partnership with all that it means to us, is the free gift of divine grace to the sin-

ner who repents and accepts Christ as Saviour and Redeemer.

This, it is submitted, gives a satisfactory answer to the difficult question raised, and presents the ground and rationale on which God can rightfully forgive sin and be just while justifying the sinner that believeth in Jesus.

GOD'S FORGIVENESS OBTAINED.

The way is now open for us to consider God's treatment of sin. The Scriptures are very explicit and full in their teaching concerning the believer's sins and God's treatment of them. They are:

1. Confessed. Ps. 32:5, "I said I will *confess* my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." 1 John 1:9, "If we *confess* our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

2. Cleansed white. Isa. 1:18, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as *white as snow*; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

3. Forgiven. Eph. 4:32, "God, for Christ's sake, *hath forgiven* you." 1 John 2:12, "Your sins *are forgiven* you for his name's sake."

4. Abundantly pardoned. Isa. 55:7, "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*." Micah 7:18, "Who is a God like unto thee that *pardoneth* iniquity? . . . He delighteth in mercy."

5. Covered. Ps. 32:1, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is *covered*." Ps. 85:2, "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast *covered* all their sin."

6. Behind God's back. Isa. 38:17, "For thou hast *cast* all my sins *behind thy back*." (Therefore he cannot see them.)

7. Removed. Ps. 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he *removed* our transgressions from us."

8. Cast into the sea. Micah 7:19, "Thou wilt *cast* all their sins into *the depths of the sea*."

9. Blotted out. Isa. 44:22, "I have *blotted out*, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins."

10. Not to be mentioned. Ezek. 33:16, "*None* of his sins that he hath committed shall be *mentioned* unto him."

11. Forgotten. Heb. 10:17, "And their sins and iniquities will I *remember no more*." Isa. 43:25, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake, and *will not remember thy sins*."

While all this is true, blessedly true, concerning the believer's sins with respect to God, how is it with respect to himself?

ALAS! MAN FORGIVES NOT HIMSELF!

David could sing of the blessedness of forgiveness (Ps. 32:1), yet he says, "My sin is ever before me" (Ps. 52:3). His sin was forgiven, blotted out, remembered no more of God, but it was not erased from his own mind.

The eminent Dr. John Todd, of Pittsfield, when a little lad, was bidden to go for some medicine for his sick father. Unwillingly he started, but quickly returned with the lie that "the druggist had not got any such medicine." The father suffered greatly for the want of the remedy, and soon died. Dr. Todd, through all his after life, often had a heartache over that act of falsehood and disobedience to his dying father. Repentance secured God's forgiveness; but he could not cast out his sin from his own consciousness.

Dr. Samuel Johnson, the great lexicographer, when a boy, was asked by his sick father to carry a package of books to the village of Uttoxeter, and sell them from a stall in the market-place. Through silly pride, the boy refused to obey. Fifty years afterward, when at the height of his fame as one of the most distinguished scholars of his day, he went to Uttoxeter, visited the market-place at the time of business, and with uncovered head stood for an hour in a pouring rain on the very spot where the book-stall stood. "This," he says, "was an act of contrition for my disobedience to my kind father." And this touching scene is represented in marble on his monument. If penitence procured pardon, it could not expel the haunting memory of his sin.

There is a tradition that never, all his life long, did the remembrance of his denial of Jesus leave Peter, and that, morning by morning, he rose at the very hour when the look of the Master broke his heart, to pray once more for pardon. He was abundantly pardoned at the outset; but the mordant memory of his sin was ceaselessly with him.

In the "Life of Phillips Brooks," there is an account of an extraordinary sermon he delivered at Harvard from the text, "Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." An able minister wrote upon the margin of his copy, "We never get rid of any act: it is a part of ourselves." The problem of psychology is, not how we can remember, but how we can ever forget anything. Apparently none of the mind's acquisitions are ever lost. According to the old illustration, the lad's sins drove the nails into the post: penitence pulled them out again; but the holes, the sad memorials of his wrongs, remained!

While ever must be proclaimed God's freest and fullest pardon for the uttermost of pardonable sin—He is "ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon him" (Ps. 86:5)—yet, alas, the terrible fact remains, *man cannot forgive himself!*

THE CONDITIONS OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS.

The conditions of forgiveness, on the divine side, are met in the atoning redemption work of the Saviour, Jesus Christ; but on the human side there are conditions to be complied with.

1. *Repentance.*

At the outset, it was declared of Jesus' ministry that it was "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins" (Lk. 1:77); so John, his forerunner, came "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Lk. 3:3). Jesus, answering the tower of Siloam enigma, said: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:5). At the close of his

ministry he told his disciples "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations (Lk. 24:47). Accordingly, Peter, in his pentecostal sermon, said: "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).*

It is not baptism that secures forgiveness, but repentance, for Peter says in his next discourse: "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19); and in a subsequent discourse forgiveness is predicated without baptism, and therefore it cannot be urged as a pre-requisite, or as essential, to pardon: "Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). In keeping with this, St. Paul said to the Philippian jailor: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). He was baptized afterwards (Acts 16:33), but that was no part of the ground of his salvation. And Jesus himself said: "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life" (John 5:24), and "This is the will of Him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life" (John 6:40). Repentant, the sinner reaches out the hand of faith—exercises the mind-and-heart act of believing—and receives pardon and everlasting life.

*The exegesis which makes Acts ii, 38 teach that baptism is an indispensable necessity in order to remission of sins must manifestly, in view of the succeeding texts adduced, be wrong. It should therefore be so interpreted as to consist with those texts. As is well known, the lines of the early Greek manuscripts were written "solid," i. e., without punctuation marks or even division into words. Division into words, punctuation, parentheses and the like, have since been made to meet what are thought to be the sense requirements. Printed as truth demands, thus:

"Repent (and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ) for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost,"

the grammatical relationship would be indicated, and the doctrine involved would be made plain. In the immediacy of those initial events in the founding of the Christian Church, baptism was hastened as it was the formal or outward certification that repentance had taken place. The thief on the cross must have been forgiven (Lk. 23:43), but he could not have been baptized.

Repentance, then—which, of course, involves the act of faith—is the first human condition of forgiveness.

But just what is repentance?

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says: "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, a new obedience" (Q. 81).

Someone has thus defined it: "Repentance is sorrow for sin ending in reformation"; and a writer of the seventeenth century has exquisitely said: "Repentance is the tear which stands in the eye of faith as it beholds Christ on the cross." A soldier being asked what repentance is, with military promptness replied, "It is right about face."

A Sunday School teacher, by questioning her class of boys, deduced this: "Repentance is to be sorry for sin and not do it again."

In "The Hymns for Infant Minds" by the sisters Ann and Jane Taylor (1782-1886), occurs this definition remarkable for its simplicity and sufficiency:

"Repentance is to leave
The sins we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve
By doing so no more."

2. *Forgiveness of others.*

In the Lord's prayer Christ teaches this petition: "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12), and he adds: "For if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:15). Several months later, instructing his disciples in regard to prayer, he says: "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any, that your Father which is in heaven may forgive your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mk. 11: 25.26).

Utter forgiveness, therefore, of any and all who have

sinned against us is another condition, on the human side, of receiving divine forgiveness.

But are there no conditions to be fulfilled by the other in order to forgive him?

If the answer be either *yes* or *no*, it will tell only part of the truth; so, that we may have the whole truth, let it be both *yes* and *no*. Forgiveness is an act in which an offender is pardoned and he is considered and treated as not guilty. But this act is the concomitant of, and is produced by, a feeling, sentiment, principle, spirit, back of the act. We should, then, distinguish between the forgiving act and the forgiving spirit, or, to put it in other terms, between forgiveness outwardly declared and forgiveness inwardly cherished.

Jesus says, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him" (Lk. 17:3), and this forgiving act must be exercised, if need be, not only seven times, but must extend into "seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22); *i. e.*, to say, the exercise of the forgiving spirit is to be unlimited so long as the condition of the repentance on which it is based is fulfilled.

But if the other does not repent? Says one: "To forgive a knowingly wicked act without repentance would be to encourage wrong doing, to confirm the trespasser in the fault and in the purpose to repeat it, which would work deep and lasting injury to him. It is therefore evident that no Christian has a right to forgive a trespassing brother unless he repents. Christ declares the object of exacting repentance, and of laboring to produce it, to be the reformation of the offender: 'If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother'; not merely gained him as a friend, but saved him by turning him from the error of his way."

Though the forgiving act be not exercised, there must nevertheless be back in the heart the forgiving spirit, for Christ says, "If ye *from your hearts* forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:35), you shall not be forgiven. There must, consequently, be inward forgiveness even though there be inhibited its exercise outward in declared pardon. So, here is the answer to

the question: Yes, there must be the forgiving act if the offender repent, and No if he does not repent; but there must be the inward forgiving spirit whether he repent or not.

A spiritual adviser is said to have insisted that a man, preparing for imminent death, must forgive his enemy on whom he had vowed vengeance. The enemy was brought to his bedside and the sick man expressed to him forgiveness, but he added, "Mind you, all this goes for nothing if I get well"! That, it is to be feared, is like the forgiveness of a great many people; which is no forgiveness at all.

It ought to be noted that while our forgiveness pardons another's wrong, it does not endorse his character or his conduct. It is not, after all, so much a clearance of him as it is a clearance of ourselves. He has done wrong, to be sure, but the conditions of forgiveness fulfilled by him, the duty of forgiveness becomes ours; and whatever may be the state in which our forgiveness—whether of act outwardly or of spirit inwardly—leaves him, our discharging the duty, most of all puts ourselves right with God, and so opens the otherwise obstructed way by which we obtain forgiveness from Him.

He who cannot or does not forgive others, breaks down the bridge over which he himself must pass, for everyone has need to be forgiven.

3. *Confession.*

An initial and prerequisite thing in approach to God by the sinner, between which two sin intervenes, is confession. It is the vital link between the soul and God.

When John began his ministry in the wilderness, "there went out to him all the land of Judea confessing their sins" (Mk. 1:5). These are the ones to whom he could offer, and did offer, remission. Says David, "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:5). "He that covereth his sin shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just

to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). Confession is, so to speak, an instinct of the heart. Unconfessed sin bars the way of approach to God, confession opens it.

The needfulness of confession to God of sin *en bloc* and in particular is plain enough; but how about confession to others?

Perhaps there is no matter in practical Christian experience that has brought keener pain to sensitive-conscienced souls than that of confession of sin to those against whom we may have sinned. And who is there that does not desire to have this question satisfactorily treated, and, if possible, settled?

Realizing the importance, the difficulty, and the delicacy of this phase of the subject the author, instead of depending upon his own thought, is glad to avail himself, not only as to substance but much as to form, of editorial matter in the *Christian Herald* and the *Sunday School Times*, which gratefully he does with the permission of the editors of both journals.

'Charles E. Hurlburt, Director of the African Inland Mission, said at the Victorious Life Conference at Princeton: "Confession is a dangerous thing." The consecrated Bible student and teacher, Dr. Arthur T. Pierson, is quoted as having said on this subject of confession: "God does not want us to wash our dirty linen in public." Neither Mr. Hurlburt nor Dr. Pierson were speaking of confessing our sins to God; this is an imperative obligation and a sacred privilege. They were speaking of making confessions to others for the sake of confessing, an imaginary duty which has indeed tormented some earnest, sincere Christians, and which Satan can bring before us in his effort to drive us beyond God's will.'

'Confession of sin (in the manner urged in James, v. 16, "Confess therefore your faults* one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed") is often a source of cruel torture to sensitive souls. It should be very clearly understood that if we have wronged any one in

*The Greek word rendered "faults," *paraptoma*, is used in the New Testament 23 times, and is translated by the word *fall* (2) *fault* (2), *offence* (7), *trespass* (9), and *sin*, Eph. i.7, ii.5, Col. ii.13.

thought, word, or deed, it is our duty to confess it to that person; but a wrong which may be so far back in the past that it can justly be said to affect no one but God and ourselves, and which a quickened conscience is insistently bringing before us, needs to be confessed only to God.' 'The entire passage in James is dealing with the subject of bodily healing, and with the calling in of elders of the church for special prayer for such healing in the name of the Lord. If the sick one has committed sins, we are told, in connection with this special ordinance of prayer and healing, that he will be forgiven those sins; and obviously such sins are to be confessed at such a time. But the passage is not dealing with the subject of confession in general.'

'There is nothing in the Bible that tells the Christian to make public confession of his sins, or to confess his sins to any human being, merely in order that "justice" may be satisfied and the sin be made known to another. The Christian is always to confess his sins to God, against whom every sin is directed; and if we thus "confess our sins he [Jesus] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). When confession to God has been made, then confession of that sin need not be made to any human being unless some one has been defrauded or injured by our sin and our confession to that one will help to undo the injury or make good the loss.' 'This is a reasonable principle: confess a sin to any one who will be injured, defrauded, or wronged in some way if that confession is withheld. But unless actual injury or injustice will be done by withholding confession, there is no sound reason for believing that the confession is necessarily required by, or pleasing to God.'

'Confession merely in order to let others know of our sin, when their knowing it will do neither them nor any one else any good, is not only unnecessary but is unscriptural. No Christian should ever be required to confess sin simply to humiliate him.' 'There is no spiritual value in voluntary self-mortification. When our sins find us out and put us to public shame, we have no right to com-

plain, and should bear it meekly; but self-exposure is no duty, and we should accept it as a merciful dispensation when we are saved from open humiliation, and all the more when our exposure would involve others. It is a sacred duty to shield those who love us from shame on our account.'

'When one has sinned and has repented of his sin, has confessed it to God, has been forgiven through the redemption and advocacy of Jesus Christ, and then has repaired the injury to the utmost of his power, or is going on to repair it as rapidly as he can, let him drop the whole matter of confessing to anybody else unless further confession is necessary to save some one from injury or loss. God wants us to forget all about any further confession and leave the matter wholly with the forgiving and restoring love of God. The devil loves to torture sincere and conscientious Christians with the devilishly false idea of the duty of confession in directions where God does not want confession made.'

Such, then, are the conditions, on the human side, to be fulfilled in order to God's forgiveness of our sins: repentance, forgiveness of others, confession.

It seems fitting to have at just this point a word in regard to the Romish doctrines of Confession and Absolution. We have been treading on holy ground. Into these sacred precincts may only two persons come: God and the individual soul, the forgiving God and the repentant sinner. The intrusion of a third party—most of all his official intrusion—is a sacrilege. How the common text, "Confess your faults one to another" (Jas. 5:16)—plainly a mutual affair between Christians generally—can be twisted and tortured into a law for compulsory priestly auricular confession, passes comprehension. Do the parties in the confessional habitually, or ever, change places? The Romish doctrine of Confession is absolutely without any Scripture warrant whatsoever. And "who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mk. 12:7). This doctrine of priestly Absolution is simply blasphemous. It is most noteworthy that in the founding and foundation of the Christian Church, no human minister of religion

is ever called a "priest." There were apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers (Eph. 4:11), elders (Acts 14:23); 1 Tim. 5:17), overseers or bishops, deacons (1 Tim. 3:1, 10; Phil. 1:1), but "priests" never, never! St. Peter indeed speaks of "an holy priesthood," "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), but this applies to all believers alike. Says Hastings' Bible Dictionary: "The New Testament never describes the Christian ministry as a priesthood, or the individual minister as a priest, except in the general sense in which these terms are applicable to all believers." To import, therefore, the term priest into the Christian Church as a class distinction, is entirely unscriptural and unwarrantable, and to credit any man, or any set of men, with a priestly or sacerdotal function, is to dishonor Jesus Christ the great High Priest of our profession, and to rob each priest-believer of his spiritual birthright. For a "priest," a man that doesn't exist, to claim to do a work impossible for a man to do, forgive sins—a work that can be done by "God only"—is the sublime quintessence of fraud and false pretense. To appeal to Matthew xvi. 19, xviii. 18, John xx. 22, 23, in support of the doctrine, fails, for there the reference is not to absolution judicial, but only declarative, and a matter that belonged to the apostles only, or if it could descend from them it could only be declarative, humanly certifying what God has already done.

LIMITATIONS OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS?

Are there reaches to which God's forgiving grace does not extend? Is its scope boundless, universal? Or is it subject to limitations?

Forgiveness is certainly limited by what is called the "unpardonable sin," for Jesus says, "I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not

be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. 12:31, 32). But is this all?

Early in the author's ministry his young people, in decorating the church for a Harvest Home service, sprung upon the arched wall back of the pulpit, in white immortellees on an evergreen background, the words, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," from the passage in Galatians vi. 7, 8, "Be not deceived: God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Raised into capitals in the minister's mind was this text which he had long been laboring with, not able to preach upon it for he felt he could not master it. Here is the "reign of law," which modern science has made so emphatic. Everything is under law, from the molecule to the mountain, from the unit to the universe. This law of sowing and reaping—inexorable—covers not only the realm of the material, but of the moral and the spiritual as well. Nature offers no forgiveness. Providence has no forgiveness. If this law extends to moral and spiritual things, forgiveness is ruled out: there is no place for the exercise of mercy. Such was the difficulty.

At length relief came. It came from Psalm xcix. 8, "Thou answerdest them, O Lord our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." Here, plainly, is such a thing as pardon *with* punishment. But how do they consist together?

Reflection will make it appear that law has a two-fold relation: 1. To God as enacted on his personal authority; and 2. To the constitution of things, into which it enters as a constituent factor. God can, and does, forgive transgression of law as relates to him personally, but as relates to the constitution of things, there is no forgiveness: a man must reap as he has sown.

Here is a man, suppose, that walks off an open unbridged way while drunk and breaks his arm, and the next day is converted and becomes a Christian. Does his

conversion mend his arm? Repentance for infraction of moral law against drunkenness brings pardon, but it does not heal arm-fracture caused by transgression of gravitational natural law. He reaps what he has sown.

Because of David's heinous sin recounted in 2 Samuel xi., Nathan the prophet said: "The sword shall never depart from thine house" (xii. 10), and it never did. So far as the monarch's sin was against God's personally enacted sixth and seventh commandments, it was, upon his repentance (see Psalm li.) forgiven; but so far as it was against the social constitution, against public good order, against the vivifying forces of governmental life, in a word against the nature of things, there was no forgiveness. He had to suffer for his wrong, and the avenging sword smote its way through the rest of his career, down the generations of his descendants, and his kingdom is still a lost kingdom.

Too many have been the cases of good Christian brethren, respected and loved, of great influence for good because of what they were and for what they did as religious workers, who, in an unwitting moment, in some sudden surprisal, under stress of some overmastering temptation, have fallen. They have humbled themselves before God, received his forgiveness and recovered their place of fellowship with him; but their crime against society, against the church—was that forgiven? Nay, verily. In the loss of confidence in them, in the disesteem of those who loved them, in their loss of opportunity and power for service, and in other ways, they have reaped oh, how sadly, what they sowed. God may, does, bless his holy name! forgive sins against himself personally, but as respects his laws which work in the constitution of things, be not deceived: God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth in that realm shall he certainly reap.

Not simply in the lives of individuals, but in the history of nations are multitudinous illustrations of the un-failing certainty of this law. We might point to Babylon, Egypt, Rome, Spain, France, Belgium, the slaveholding States of the American Union, and most of all to

Germany, not to mention other domains. God says that they that shed the blood of the saints shall have blood to drink (Rev. 16:6). The needy when he crieth, the poor that have no helper (Ps. 72:12), shall have their avenger. The crime sooner or later brings the penalty, inexorably, pitilessly, and it is not confined to the individuals guilty of the crime—often does not touch them at all—but comes upon the governments of men collected in their national capacity.

Whence it appears that there are limitations to God's forgiveness,—limitations that perhaps many have thought of but little or none at all. Clearly, the mode of presenting the gospel that is becoming quite popular, a method which some one has vigorously if coarsely characterized as an "indiscriminate slobber of mercy," is a mistake. It may be good natured and "sweet" and all of that, but so far as it has been presented inconsistently with the law of sowing and reaping, so far it has been presented falsely. Possibly, in the light of these considerations, there may be need of modifying current views of the scope of God's forgiving grace, and of toning up our Christian thinking.

FORGIVENESS—APPROPRIATION, ASSURANCE, ENJOYMENT.

Whatever may be the limitations, there is enough within the scope in which forgiveness ranges, supremely to engage the thought, interest, concern, of every human being; for upon the fact of forgiveness depend present religious enjoyment and eternal weal.

Says Psalm xxxii. 1, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." The Hebrew word, *ash're*, translated "blessed," is a noun found only in the plural construct, where, says Gesenius, "it takes the nature and force of an interjection;" and so the rendering may well be, "O, the blessednesses of the forgiven one, whose sin is covered." Blessednesses! Love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance!

But it is an unfortunate fact that in Christian experience many professed believers do not get the satisfaction,

the enjoyment, that is rightfully theirs simply because they do not appropriate what they are perfectly entitled to. Why not?

One reason is a lack of faith which may be attributed to what the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls "an evil heart of unbelief" (iii. 12), which too often remains even in those whom he is addressing as "holy brethren" (iii. 1). Another reason is because so many find it difficult, such is their sense of unworthiness, to believe what seems to them too good to be true. Still another is because of the feeling in the natural heart—which furnishes a congruous ground for the unscriptural and false doctrine of penance—that they must do something to merit and so purchase the forgiveness they covet. President James McCosh in his volume of "Gospel Sermons," speaking of such, says: "They have sinned, and so they acknowledge that they need forgiveness. But they will repent and so earn it. They have sinned, but they will make amends by their future conduct. They will pay for their pardon, and thus have a claim upon it. They will confess their transgressions unto the Lord, and thus will make an offended God propitious. But it is not thus that God dispenses pardon, bartering it for something given or done by us, and thus allowing us merit and a sense of merit. The forgiveness has been earned, has been bought by a great price by Christ's own blood, but it cannot be purchased by any works, by any sacrifices of ours. It is presented as a free gift, and must be so accepted" (p. 122).

Says Romans iii. 22, "The righteousness of God is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." "Through this man"—Jesus—"is preached the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things" (Acts 13:38, 39). "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake" (1 John 2:13). It is upon all them that believe; justified from *all* things; *are* forgiven. We are pardoned, not because we feel so or so, not because of any work or worthiness of ours, but because of accepting what Christ has done for and proffers to us. "Justi-

fied . . . we have," not shall have, but "*have*" (Rom. 5:1). Forgiven: God says so; we have his immutable, unshakable, unbreakable word for it, which is our all-sufficient ground of assurance. Assurance is simply taking God at his word. Here we may implicitly, satisfiedly rest. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar" (1 John 5:10).

Says Dr. Ludlow, in his "Captain of the Janizaries," "Beware lest you carry compunctions for the past after thou hast repented and prayed. That is to doubt God's grace." Said Dr. Watkinson at Winona, "If God does not remember my sins any more, I will not remember them myself against myself."

A station agent on one of the great trunk line railroads from the East to the West, saw a man walking on the tracks carrying a huge package apparently containing household utensils as well as clothes. He seemed tired, though he trudged sturdily on. The agent stopped him and ordered him off the track, telling him that he was liable to arrest for trespass, besides incurring the risk of being killed by a train. The man, who was a Hungarian, demurred and produced a railroad ticket good from his starting point to his destination. The agent looked at him in amazement, and asked him why he was walking when he might ride. The Hungarian replied that he thought the ticket gave him only the privilege of walking over the road. His right was explained to him, and the tired man delightedly boarded the first train that stopped. Is not a similar mistake often made by Christians who do not avail themselves of their privileges? Forgiven, "justified from all things" (Acts 13:38, 39), they have a "ticket" that entitles them to transportation over the whole trunk line of pardon, from starting point to finish, without trudge, burden bearing, or care on their part.

A Christian man had revealed to him certain sins, which he confessed definitely and in detail, and was about to plead for forgiveness, when suddenly he realized that he should now thank God for having already forgiven them. He simply took God at his word.

It is for us to appropriate what God has provided and

proffers; to rest in the assurance that he has done what he says he has done; and to enjoy all the blessedness of the forgiven state.

Sin is the most awful thing in God's universe; pardon is the greatest need in God's universe; forgiveness is the most blessed thing in his universe.