

Of the Pardon of Sin.

by John Gill

The sermon explores the biblical doctrine of the pardon of sin, emphasizing its basis in Christ's atonement and the nature of God's forgiveness.

Scripture: Leviticus 4:20, Psalm 51:1, Psalm 130:4, Daniel 9:9, Matthew 26:28, Acts 5:31, Romans 2:12, Ephesians 1:7, Hebrews 8:12, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Grace and Forgiveness", "Pardon of Sin"

Description

John Gill expounds on the doctrine of the pardon of sin, emphasizing that it is rooted in the satisfaction made by Christ. He explains that forgiveness is a revelation of the gospel, not attainable through natural understanding or the law, which offers no hope of pardon. Gill highlights that all sins, regardless of their nature or severity, can be forgiven through the grace of God and the blood of Christ, and he outlines the effects and properties of this pardon, including peace of conscience and access to God. He also addresses common questions regarding the nature of sin and the conditions for forgiveness, affirming that true repentance and faith are essential for experiencing God's mercy.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 6--Chapter 7

OF THE PARDON OF SIN

The doctrine of pardon properly follows the doctrine of satisfaction; for pardon of sin proceeds upon satisfactory made for it. Forgiveness of sin, under the law, followed upon typical atonement for it: four times, in one chapter, it is said, the priest shall make atonement for sin, and it shall be forgiven (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35), and as often in the next chapter (Lev. 5:10, 13, 16, 18), and in other places. This doctrine is of pure revelation; it is not to be known by the light of nature; "as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law" (Rom. 2:12), for anything the light of nature suggests, concerning the pardon of it; men may fancy, from the goodness and mercy of God, that he will forgive their sins; but they cannot be certain of it that he will, since he is just as well as merciful; and how to reconcile justice and mercy in the pardon of sin the light of nature leaves men in the dark; they may conjecture, that because one man forgives another, upon repentance, God will do the same; but they cannot be sure of it: besides, grace must be given to a man to repent, as well as remission of sins, or else he never will repent.

Nor is this a doctrine of the law, which gives not the least hint of pardon, nor any encouragement to expect it; "as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law", condemned without any hope of pardon (Rom. 2:12). "Every transgression and disobedience" of the law, or word spoken by angels, "received a just recompense of reward"; that is, proper and righteous punishment (Heb. 2:2). Nor does the law regard a man's repentance, nor admit of any; "he that despised Moses' law died without mercy!" (Heb. 10:28).

But the doctrine of pardon is a pure doctrine of the gospel, which Christ gave in commission to his disciples to preach, and which they preached in his name, and to which all the evangelic prophets bore witness (Luke 24:47; Acts 13:38; 10:43). Concerning which may be observed, 1. First, The proof that may be given of it, that there is such a thing as pardon of sin: this is asserted in express words by David; "There is forgiveness with thee" (Ps. 130:4), and by Daniel, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses", full and free pardon of sin (Dan. 9:9).

It is a blessing provided and promised in the covenant of grace, ordered in all things, which, without this, it would not be; this is a principal blessing in it; the promise of which runs thus; "I will be merciful to their unrighteousnesses, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12). It is in the gracious proclamation the Lord has made of his name, and makes a considerable part of it as "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin!" (Ex. 34:7).

Christ was "set forth", in the purposes of God, to be "a propitiation, through faith in his blood, for the remission of sins"; and he was sent forth, in the fullness of time, to shed his blood for it; and his blood has been "shed for many for the remission of sins!" and it is procured by it; or otherwise his bloodshed and death would be in vain (Rom. 3:25; Matthew 26:28; Eph. 1:7), and it is in his hands to bestow it; having ascended on high, he has received gifts for men, "even for the rebellious"; and among the gifts for them pardon of sin is one; Christ is "exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance unto Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31), and it is by his orders, published in the gospel, as before observed; to which may be added, the numerous instances of it, both under the Old and under the New Testament; as of the Israelites, who, as they often sinned, God had compassion on them, and forgave their iniquities; even though he took vengeance on their inventions, (Ps. 78:38; 99:8) and of David, Manasseh, and others, and of Saul the blasphemer, the persecutor, and injurious person; and of other notorious sinners (Ps 32:5; 1 Tim. 1:13; Luke 7:37, 47).

It is in this way God would have his people comforted, when burdened and distressed with the guilt of sin, (Isa. 40:1,2 Mt 9:2 and they are, at times, favored with a comfortable experience of it, and peace of soul from it (Ps. 85:1-3; Rom. 5:11), they are directed to pray for it, and do pray for it; to which there would be no encouragement if there was no such thing (Ps 32:5; 51:1, 2, 7-9; Dan. 9:19; Matthew 6:12). To add no more, forgiveness of sin is included in complete salvation, and is a part of it, and without which it would not be complete; nay, without it there could be no salvation; forgiveness of sin is a branch of redemption by the blood of Christ, which is explained by it (Eph. 1:7). 2.

Secondly, The phrases by which the pardon of sin is expressed, and which will serve to lead into the nature of it. 2a. By lifting it up, and taking it away; "Blessed he whose transgression is forgiven", and is "lifted up", taken off from him, and carried away (Ps 32:1). Sin lies upon the sinner, and lays him under obligation to punishment, unless it is taken off; and the sins of God's elect are taken off of them, and laid on Christ, and bore by him, and removed from them, as far as the East is from the West; so that when sought for they shall not be found, God having pardoned those he has reserved for himself: and sin lies upon the conscience of an awakened sinner as a burden too heavy

for him to bear; which is taken away by the application of the blood of Christ; and who gives orders to take away the filthy garments of his people, and clothe them with change of raiment, and puts away their sins, that they shall not die. 2b.

By the covering of it; "Blessed is he whose sin is covered" (Ps. 32:1). "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin" (Ps. 85:2). Sin is something impure, nauseous, and abominable, in the sight of God, and provoking to the eyes of his glory, and must be covered out of sight; and this cannot be done by anything of man's; not by his righteousness, which is but rags, a covering too narrow to be wrapped in, and can no more hide his nakedness than Adam's fig leaves could hide his; nay, it is no better than a spider's web; and of which it may be said, "Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works" (Isa. 59:6), sin is only covered by Christ, who is the antitype of the mercy seat which was a lid or cover to the ark of the same dimensions with it, in which was the law, and prefigured Christ, as the covering of the transgressions of it by his people, from the sight of avenging Justice; and whose blood is the purple covering in the chariot of the covenant of grace, under which his people ride safe to glory; all their iniquities being out of sight; and whose righteousness is unto and upon all that believe; a garment that reaches to the feet, that white raiment with which being clothed, the shame of their nakedness does not appear; yea, being clothed with this robe of righteousness and garments of salvation, are as ornamented as the bridegroom and bride on the wedding day; hereby their sins are covered, so as not to be seen any more, and they appear unblameable and irreproveable in the sight of God. 2c.

By a non-imputation of it; "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity" (Ps. 32:2), does not reckon it, or place it to his account, or bring any charge against him for it, or punishes for it; but acquits him from it, having imputed it to Christ, placed it to his account, charged him with it, laid the chastisement of it on him, or the punishment of it on him, and received satisfaction from him for it. 2d. By a blotting of it out: in such language David prays for the forgiveness of sin; "Blot out my transgressions, and blot out all mine iniquities" (Ps 51:1, 9), and in the same way God declares his will to forgive the sins of his people; "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions" (Isa. 43:25), which language is used, either in allusion to the crossing of debt books, drawing a line over them; or to the blotting out a man's handwriting to a bond or note, obliging to payment of money; hence the phrase of "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us" (Col. 2:14).

Sins are debts, and these are numerous, and sinners poor, and unable to pay them; wherefore God, for Christ's sake, freely forgives, and draws the line of Christ's blood over them, and cancels the obligation to payment: or else to the dissipation of a cloud, by the sun rising or breaking out through it; "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions; and as a cloud thy sins" (Isa. 44:22). Sins may be compared to clouds for their quantity, their number being many; for their quality, being exhaled out of the earth and sea, and mount up to heaven, cause darkness, and intercept light; sin rises out of the earthly minds of men, who mind earthly things, and who are like the troubled sea which cannot rest; and the sins of some, like those of Babylon, reach up to heaven, and call for wrath and vengeance to come down from thence; sin causes the darkness of unregeneracy, and is often the reason of darkness to such who have been made light in the Lord; it intercepts the light of his countenance, and of Christ, the Sun of righteousness: now as a cloud is dispersed and dissipated by the breaking forth of the sun, which, overcoming the cloud, scatters it, so as it is seen no more: in like manner, through the rising of the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings, an application of pardoning grace is made for his sake; upon which darkness is dispersed, light and joy introduced, a serene heaven of peace and comfort follow: and as a cloud is so dispersed that it is

seen no more, so sin is pardoned, in such sort as not to be seen any more, or to be set in the light of God's countenance unto condemnation; and though as fresh clouds may arise, so new sins may be committed, which yet are removed and cleansed from, by the blood of Christ, and the efficacy of it, for the continual pardon of it, through the repeated application of that blood. 2e.

By a non-remembrance of it; "And their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12; Isa. 43:25). God forgives and forgets; having once forgiven them, he thinks of them no more; they are out of sight and out of mind; his thoughts are thoughts of peace, and not of evil; he remembers not former iniquities, but his tender mercies, which have been ever of old. 2f. By making sin, or rather sinners, "white as snow": so David prays, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7).

So the Lord promises; "Thy sins shall be as white as snow" (Isa. 1:18). "Her Nazarites are purer than snow" (Lam. 4:7). Being justified by the righteousness of Christ, clothed with that fine linen, clean and white, washed in his blood, and their garments made white therein, and all their sins forgiven for his sake, and so all fair without spot or blemish. 3. Thirdly, What sins are pardoned; sins both with respect to quality and quantity. 3a. First, For quality; they are called "trespasses".

Sin is a walking on forbidden ground, for which a man must suffer, unless forgiven: and "transgressions" of the law of God; a passing over and going beyond the bounds and limits prescribed by it: and "iniquities", which are contrary to the rules of justice and equity; and sins, errors, aberrations, strayings from the rule of God's word: when God is said to forgive "iniquity, transgression", and "sin", it takes in every kind and sort of sin; every sin is against God, though some are more immediately against him than others; they are contrary to his nature, which is pure and holy; whereas, nothing is more impure and unholy than sin is; and therefore it is abominable to him, and hated by him; and hence sins are called abominations; not that they are so to sinners, for they delight in them; but to God, to whom they are so very disagreeable: there is an enmity in sin, and in every sinner's heart, to God; every sin is an act of hostility against him, it is a stretching out the hand against God, and a strengthening a man's self against the Almighty; it strikes at his Deity, and is a contempt of his authority; and yet he forgives it: it being committed against him, an infinite Being, it is objectively infinite, and requires an infinite satisfaction; and without it is punished "ad infinitum".

Sin is defined, "a transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), a breach, a violation of it; which accuses of it, pronounces guilty for it, and curses and condemns; and is only forgiven by the Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Sins are sometimes represented as "debts"; because, being committed, they oblige to the debt of punishment, which God remits; the sinner owing more than ten thousand talents, and not able to pay, he frankly forgives all for Christ's sake; of which the year of release from debts under the law was typical: sins, with respect to men, are called diseases, and they are incurable, but by the grace of God and blood of Christ; and pardon of sin is expressed by healing them; "who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases" (Ps. 103:3; Isa. 33:24; Mal. 4:2). 3b.

Secondly, for quantity; all trespasses, sins, and transgressions are forgiven (Col. 2:13; Ps. 103:3). Original sin, the sin of the first man, and the sin of all men in him, by which all are made, constituted, and accounted sinners; which is the source and fountain of all sin, and is the iniquity of us all, which was laid on Christ, and he satisfied for, and is forgiven for his sake; of all sin, it cannot be thought this should be left unforgiven: all actual sins which spring from thence; the works of the flesh, which are many and manifest; some are more secret, some more open, some lesser, others greater, more daring and presumptuous; some sins of commission, others sins of omission; but all are forgiven; see (Isa. 43:22-25 and not only daily failings and infirmities, but all backslidings, revolts, and partial apostasies, (Jer 3:12-14,22 Ho 14:4

and, indeed, every sin, excepting the sin against the Holy Ghost (Matthew 12:31, 32), and why that is unpardonable has been observed, (see Gill on "Matthew 12:31" and on "Matthew 12:32"). 4.

Fourthly, The causes of the pardon of sin. 4a. First, The efficient cause is God, and not any creature, angels or men. 4a1. It is not in the power of men to forgive sin; one man may forgive another an offence, as committed against himself, but not as committed against God; saints ought to forgive one another's offences that arise among them; as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them, (Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13). Ministers can remit sin ministerially and declaratively, but not authoritatively; no man that goes under the name of a priest, or a minister of the word, has a power of absolution, or has authority to absolve men from their sins: all that a true and faithful preacher of the gospel can do is to preach remission of sins in the name of Christ; and to declare, that whoever repent of their sins, and believe in Christ, shall receive the forgiveness of them; and which declaration of theirs God abides by and confirms; and whose sins, in this sense, they remit, they are remitted (John 20:23).

To assume a power to forgive sin, and absolve from it, is the height of antichristianism; it is with respect to this that antichrist is said to sit in the temple of God, "showing himself that he is god", by taking that to himself which belongs to God only; namely, to forgive sin; this is one of the blasphemies, and a principal one, which his mouth is opened to utter, to dispense with sin, grant indulgences of it, and pardons for it (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:5, 6), the highest angel in heaven cannot forgive, nor procure the forgiveness, of one sin; they could not for those of their own kind that sinned; nor can they for any of the sons of men. 4a2.

There is nothing a man has, or can do, by which he can procure the pardon of sin, either for himself or for others: no man, by his riches, and the multitude of his wealth, can give to God a ransom for himself, or his brother, make atonement and satisfaction for sin, and obtain the pardon of it; "riches profit not in the day of wrath": when God comes to deal with men for their sins, and pour out his wrath upon them for them, bags of gold and silver will be of no avail. Nor is pardon of sin to be obtained by works of righteousness; could it, it would not be of grace; for grace and works are opposed to each other; men would be saved by works, contrary to the scriptures, since pardon is included in salvation, and that is by grace, and not works: besides the blood of Christ would be shed in vain; for as if righteousness, or justification, came by the law, then Christ died in vain; so if pardon of sin came by the works of the law, and obedience to it; in like manner Christ must have died in vain.

Once more, the best works of men are due to God; he has a prior right unto them, and therefore cannot be meritorious of pardon; nor is there any just proportion between them and pardon, and eternal life; one debt cannot be paid by another, or the debt of punishment be remitted by the debt of obedience. Nor is pardon procured by repentance; they are both gifts of grace; and though given to the same persons, the one is not the cause of the other; at least, repentance is not the cause of remission; for true, evangelical repentance, flows from, and in the exercise of it is influenced by the discovery and application of pardoning grace; (see Ezek. 16:63).

British tears will not wash away sin, notwithstanding these, it will remain marked before God; the tears the woman, a sinner, shed, and with which she washed Christ's feet, were not shed to procure the pardon of her sins; but flowed from a sense of pardoning love manifested to her (Luke 7:37, 47). Nor is pardon procured by faith, as the cause of it; faith does not obtain it by any virtue of its own, but receives it as obtained by the blood of Christ (Acts 10:43; 26:18). Nor is it procured by a submission to the ordinance of water baptism; baptism neither takes away original sin, nor actual sin; not as to the guilt thereof, as the case of Simon Magus shows; for though the three thousand are directed to be "baptized in the name of

Christ, for the remission of sins"; and Saul was advised by Ananias, to "arise, and be baptized, and wash away his sins" (Acts 2:38; 22:16), yet the meaning is not, as if remission of sins was to be obtained by baptism, or sinners to be cleansed from them by it; but that by means of this ordinance, they might be led to the sufferings, death, and bloodshed of Christ, represented in it; for whose name's sake remission of sins is granted, and whose blood was shed for it, and cleanses from it. 4a3.

God only can forgive sin; it is his sole prerogative; it belongs to him, and to no other (Mark 2:7; Isa. 43:25; Dan. 9:9). And this appears from the nature of sin itself; it is committed against God; and none but he against whom it is committed can forgive it; it is a breach of his righteous law; and none but the Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy, can remit it, or free from obligation to punishment for it. Besides, if there was any other that could forgive sin, then there would be one equal to God; whereas, "Who is a God like unto him that pardoneth iniquity?" (Micah 7:18), and it may be observed, that saints in all ages, under the Old and under the New Testament, never made their application to any other but to God for the forgiveness of sin; nor are they ever directed to any other for it (Ps. 51:1; Dan. 9:19; Matthew 6:9, 12; Acts 8:22). 4a4.

Yet all the three Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, have a concern in it. God the Father made an early provision of this blessing of pardon in his heart, in his purposes, in his council and covenant; and sent his Son to be the propitiation for it, and for the remission of it, through faith in his blood; and does bestow it for his sake; in which he shows, not only his grace, but his justice and faithfulness; for upon the bloodshed of his Son for it, he is "just and faithful to forgive sin"; just, in that the blood of Christ is a sufficient atonement for it; and faithful to his counsels, covenant, and promises, concerning it.

Christ, as God, and the Son of God, has power to forgive sin, even as Immanuel, God with us. God in our nature, and when he was here on earth; of which he gave proof, by another act of his divine power, bidding a lame man take up his bed and walk (Matthew 9:2, 6). As God man and Mediator, his blood was shed for the remission of sin; and by it was obtained; as the Advocate of his people he calls for it, and demands and requires the application of it when it is wanted; and as the exalted Savior he gives it, and in his name it is preached, according to his orders, by the ministers of the gospel.

The Holy Spirit of God has also a concern in it: he convinces men of sin, and of their need of the pardon of it; he makes it manifest; he takes the blood of Christ, and applies it to the conscience, which speaks peace and pardon; he pronounces the sentence of it in the conscience of a sinner; he is the Holy Spirit of promise, and he seals up the pardon of sin in a promise; and witnesses to the spirits of God's people that they are pardoned ones. 4b. Secondly, The impulsive moving cause of pardon, is not neither man's misery nor his merits; not any works of righteousness done by him; nor even any of the graces of the Spirit in him; but the sovereign grace and mercy of God, through Christ, (Eph 1:7; Ps. 51:1; Luke 1:77, 78). 4c.

Thirdly, The procuring meritorious cause of it, is the blood of Christ, which was shed for it, has obtained it, and for the sake of which God forgives sin; which virtue it has from the human nature being in union with the divine Person of the Son of God; see (Heb. 9:14; 1 John 1:7). 5. Fifthly, The effects of pardon, that is, when applied; for the effects of it are not sensibly perceived unless applied; which are, 5a. Peace of conscience; when sin is charged upon the conscience, and there is no sight and sense of pardon, there is no peace; but no sooner is there a view of interest in justification, by the righteousness of Christ, and pardon by his blood, but there is peace, which that blood speaks and gives; and which the world cannot take away; a peace that passeth all understanding, and is better experienced than expressed. 5b.

Cheerfulness of spirit: when sin lies as an heavy burden, without a view of pardon, the mind is depressed; it is filled with gloominess, and melancholy apprehensions of things, if not with despair, as in the case of Cain: a spirit, wounded with a sense of sin, and without a view of pardon, who can bear? But when the Lord says, "Son", or "daughter, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee!" cheerfulness takes place; the spirits, that were sunk, are raised; the head, that was bowed down, is lifted up; that countenance, that looked dejected, smiles; the soul is caused to hear joy and gladness; and the bones that were broken are made to rejoice. 5c.

Comfort of soul: while a gracious soul, under a sense of sin, apprehends that God is angry with him, he has no comfort; but when he manifests his pardoning grace, then he concludes his anger is turned away, and he is comforted: and this is one of the ways and means in which God would have his people comforted by his ministers; "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; cry unto her, that her iniquity is pardoned" (Isa. 40:1, 2), and when their ministry is accompanied by the Spirit of God, comfort is enjoyed. 5d.

Access to God with boldness and confidence: a soul, under the weight and pressure of the guilt of sin, moves heavily to the throne of grace; and when it comes there cannot lift up his eyes, but looking downward, and smiting on his breast, says, "God be merciful", or propitious, "to me, a sinner!" but when it has a view of the blood, righteousness, and sacrifice of Christ, it comes with liberty, boldness, and confidence; particularly when it has a clear and comfortable sight of the pardon of sin, through the blood of Jesus, it has boldness to enter into the holiest of all, and come up to the seat of God, and claims interest in him. 5e.

Attendance on divine worship with pleasure and delight: this flows from a sense of forgiveness of sin, and is one end of it; "there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared", that is, worshipped; for fear is put for worship, both inward and outward; and especially denotes, serving the Lord with reverence and godly fear. And to have the conscience purged from dead works by the blood of Christ, both puts a soul into the best capacity, and into the most suitable frame to serve the living God, (Ps. 130:4; Heb. 12:28; 9:14). 5f.

Love to God and Christ is raised, promoted, and increased, by an application of pardon; which, as it is an evidence of the love of God to a sinner, it produces love again; the poor woman in the gospel, the notorious sinner as she had been, loved much, many sins having been forgiven her (Luke 7:47). 5g. Evangelical repentance, and the exercise of it, are much influenced by pardon of sin being applied: the tears of repentance, shed by the poor woman before mentioned, flowed from a sense of pardoning grace and mercy; sin never appears more odious than in the glass of forgiving love; shame, confusion of face, and silence, are never more manifest, than when a soul knows that God is pacified towards it for all that it has done; this produces a godly sorrow, a sorrow after a godly sort, for sin committed against a God of love, grace, and mercy; faith first looks to Christ, and beholds pardon through him; and then evangelical mourning and repentance follow upon it (Ezek. 16:63; (Zech. 12:10). 5h.

Thankfulness of soul for such a mercy; than which there cannot be a greater: if a man is truly impressed with a sense of it, he will call upon his soul, and all within him, to bless and praise the Lord for all his benefits; and particularly for this, "who forgiveth all thine iniquities" (Ps. 103:2, 3). Think with what gratitude and thankfulness a condemned malefactor, and just ready to be executed, receives his pardon from the king! with that, and much more, souls sensible of sin, the demerit of it, and danger by it, receive pardon of all their sins, through the blood of Christ, from the King of kings. 6.

Sixthly, The properties of pardon. 6a. It is an act of God's free grace; it is according to the "riches" of it; that is, the plenty of it, which is abundantly displayed in it; and according to the "multitude of his tender mercies", mercy being richly shown forth in it, (Eph 1:7 Ps 51:1. It is an act of the Father's grace, who has found the ransom; and, upon it, delivered men from going down to the pit of corruption; has set forth Christ to be the propitiation, through faith in his blood, for the remission of sins, and does, for his sake, freely forgive them: and it is an act of the Son's grace, in shedding his blood for the remission of it: and it is an act of the Spirit's grace, to lead to the blood of Jesus, which speaks peace and pardon; to that fountain opened to wash in for sin and uncleanness; to take of the things of Christ, his blood, righteousness, and sacrifice, and show interest in them, and make application of them.

Pardon of sin is one of the things freely given of God, which the Spirit gives knowledge of; and it is an act of sovereign, unmerited, and distinguishing grace. God bestows it on whom he pleases, according to his sovereign will, and on persons altogether undeserving of it, who have been guilty of all manner of sin, of sins of omission and commission; and yet to such he says, "I, even I, am he that blot out thy transgressions for mine own sake" (Isa. 43:25), and it is bestowed on some, and not others, who are equally as bad as the others; and on men, and not angels; for to the angels that sinned no sparing pardoning mercy is extended; only to rebellious, sinful men. 6b.

It is a point of justice; God is just, while he pardons those that repent of their sins, confess them, and believe in Christ; "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9), just on account of the blood of his Son being shed for the remission of sin, and faithful to his counsel, covenant, and promises, to grant it upon that footing; and hence also Christ, as an advocate, calls for it, and demands it in right of justice; that it be applied to his people, for whom he shed his blood; and became the propitiatory sacrifice for their sins; which he powerfully and effectually pleads on their behalf, (1Jo 2:1,2. 6c.

It is a complete act; it is a forgiveness of all the sins and trespasses of God's people, not one is left unforgiven; and it is done "simul" and "semel", together and at once; though the manifestation and application may be made at different times, as wanted by believers; yet in the mind of God it passed at once; even a full as well as free forgiveness of all sins, past, present, and to come. Nor is it any objection to this, that then sins must be forgiven before they are committed; so they are, in virtue of Christ's suretyship engagements, and the performance of them. [1] 6d.

It is an act that will never be repealed; it is one of those gifts of grace which are without repentance, and will never be revoked; it is a blessing God has given in covenant, and in and with his Son Jesus Christ, and it is irreversible; it is one of those things which God does, which are for ever; sins once pardoned are always so; when sought for they shall not be found; they are removed from the pardoned sinner as far as the east is from the west; God has cast them behind his back, and will never set them more in the light of his countenance; he has cast them into the depths of the sea, and will never fetch them up again. 6e.

It is one of the chief articles of faith, and blessings of grace; it stands the first of those benefits, on account of which the Psalmist called upon his soul to bless God for, (Ps 103:2,3 next to eternal election, it is reckoned among the spiritual blessings saints are blessed with in Christ; being a branch of redemption through his blood (Eph. 1:3, 4, 7), and happy is the man that has an interest in it; he has peace and comfort now, and may rejoice in hope of the glory of God hereafter! 7.

Seventhly, answer some questions relating to pardon of sin; which do not so naturally fall under any of the above points. 7a. Whether any sin is venial or pardonable in its own nature, and does not deserve eternal death? The reason of this question is, the distinction the Papists make between venial and mortal sins; some sins, they say, are in their own nature venial, pardonable, or not deserving of eternal death, only some lesser chastisement, while others are mortal, and deserving of death: but there is no room nor reason for such a distinction; no sin is venial or pardonable in itself but mortal, and deserving of death; though every kind of sin is venial or pardonable, or rather is pardoned through the grace of God and blood of Christ, excepting one.

There is a difference in sins, some are greater, others lesser; (see John 19:11) some are breaches of the more weightier matters, or precepts of the law, as those against the first table of it; others of the lesser matters, or precepts of it, as those against the second table; some are attended with more aggravated circumstances than others, being committed against light and knowledge, and under the enjoyment of great blessings and privileges (Luke 12:47, 48; Matthew 11:22, 24) while others are done ignorantly without knowledge of the Lord's will, and not favored with means that others have; yet every sin is mortal, or deserving of death: death was threatened to sin before it was committed, in case it should: and the first sin brought death into the world with it, and the end of all other sins is death; death is the wages and just demerit of sin; every sin is committed against God, and is objectively infinite, and deserving of infinite and everlasting punishment; it is a breach of his law, and every disobedience to that has a just recompense of reward annexed to it; righteous punishment, or the wrath of God it reveals and works; the breach of the least of the commands of it is liable to divine resentment; and he that offends in one point is guilty of all; the least sin leaves a stain which what is done or used by the sinner cannot remove; and such pollution excludes from the kingdom of God; the least sin, even every sin of thought, word, and deed, will be brought into judgment, and must be accounted for: though all manner of sin is venial, or pardonable, or is pardoned through the grace of God and blood of Christ; God forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin, which include all sorts of sin; sins of the greatest magnitude, and of the deepest dye, are blotted out for Christ's sake; such as are like crimson and scarlet become through him as white as wool, as white as snow; his blood cleanses from sin; every sin is forgiven, but the sin against the Holy Ghost (Matthew 12:31, 32). 7b.

Whether any sin will be forgiven in the world to come? The reason of this question is, because it is said of the sin against the Holy Ghost, that it shall "not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come"; which seems to imply, that though that sin shall not then be forgiven, others may: but the meaning of the expression is, that it shall never be forgiven; it is a phrase expressive of endless duration, that that sin shall always remain unpardonable, and does not suppose anything concerning other sins; and therefore the answer to be returned to the question is, that there will be no forgiveness of any sin at all in the other world.

As for the sins of God's people, the remission of them is perfect; all of them have been laid on Christ, and bore by him; and he has finished and made an end of them all; and has made perfect reconciliation and satisfaction for them; and God, Christ's sake, has forgiven all trespasses, and no new sins will he committed by them; the will of God will be done by them with the same perfection as by the angels; there will be no sin in them, and done by them, to be pardoned; there will be indeed a general declaration of pardon, and of their being blessed with that and all other blessings comprehended in Christ's address to them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father"; and they will live under a continual sense of pardoning grace, and in admiration of it, and thankfulness for it; but no particular act of pardon will be passed by God, nor

applied to them for any particular sin: and as for others, the door will be shut upon them at the day judgment; the door of the ministry of the word; repentance and remission of sins will be no more preached in the name of Christ; after this there will be no repentance of sin in sinners, nor faith to believe in Christ for the remission of sins; these graces will not be bestowed on any in the other world, the door of mercy will be shut, and never opened to men any more. 7c.

Whether the sins of pardoned ones will be made known and exposed to others in the day of judgment! I think not; my reasons are, because none but their good works are taken notice of in Matthew 25:1-46 because it does not seem consistent with the nature of pardon: pardon of sin is expressed by a covering of it; when God forgives sins he covers them, and he will never uncover them, or take off the blood and righteousness of his Son; and if he does not uncover them, who can? neither angels, nor men, nor devils: it is a blotting them as a cloud; and when a cloud is broke to pieces and scattered, it can never be collected together any more; sins are cast behind the hack of God, and into the depths of the sea; and are removed as far as the east is from the west, and can never, though sought for, be found more.

Nor does it consist with the state and condition of the pardoned ones that their sins should be exposed; Christ, who has taken so much pains to sanctify and cleanse his church, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, will never suffer their sins ever more to appear; the church will now descend from heaven as a bride adorned and prepared for her husband, having the glory of God upon her, and clothed with the shining robes of immortality and glory, as well as with the fine linen, clean and white, the righteousness of her Lord; it will now be her open consummate marriage with the Lamb; and it seems quite out of all character, that he should suffer her faults, failings, sins, and transgressions, to be exposed on her wedding day; and which would, one would think, cause shame and blushing, which seems not consistent with that state of happiness. 7d.

Whether it is now the duty of saints to pray for the pardon of sin? Prayer itself is a moral duty, and incumbent on all; and the light of nature will direct persons in distress to pray to God for relief; and when they suppose they have offended. Deity by sin, and he is angry with them, and his judgments are, or they fear will come upon them; it is natural to them to pray unto him to forgive them, and deliver them out of present troubles, or what they fear are coming upon them; as may be observed in Jonah's mariners, who were heathens; and the apostle directed Simon Magus, an unregenerate man, and known by him to be so, to "pray" to God if perhaps "the thought of his heart" might be "forgiven" him (Acts 8:22).

But this comes not up to the question, which is, Whether pardoned sinners should pray for the pardon of sin? to which it may be answered, That either these pardoned ones have a comfortable sense and perception of the pardon of their sins, or they have not; if they have, they have no need, at present at least, to pray even for the manifestation of it to them, since they have it already; if they have not a comfortable view of it, which is sometimes the case of pardoned ones, as it was of the church, when she said, "We have transgressed and rebelled, thou hast not pardoned" (Lam. 3:42), they will then see it both their duty, and privilege, and interest, to pray for a comfortable view and fresh manifestation of it: and whereas saints are daily sinning in thought, word, or deed, Christ has directed to make a daily petition of it, that when we pray that God would give us "day by day our daily bread", that he would also "forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:3, 4), and it appears to have been the practice of saints in all ages to pray for the pardon of sin in some sense, and as it seems in the sense suggested; so Moses prayed when the people of Israel had sinned at Sinai, "Pardon our iniquity and our sin" (Ex. 34:9), so David prayed, "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great" (Ps. 25:11).

A strange plea this! a reason, one would think, why it should not be pardoned, than why it should be pardoned; and it was so great in his apprehension, that if he had not a discovery and application of pardon made to him, he could not bear up under it; and as he prayed thus, and with success, he observes it for the encouragement of other saints to do so likewise; "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord", and so he did; "and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin; for this shall everyone that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found" (Ps. 32:5, 6), that is, for the pardon of their sins, and the evidence of it, when they stood in need thereof; so Daniel prayed for himself and others, "O Lord hear, O Lord forgive" (Dan. 9:19), and so New Testament saints are directed by Christ to pray, as has been observed: but then it must be understood in an explained sense, consistent with the nature of pardon, as procured by Christ, and passed by God; it cannot be supposed that saints should pray that Christ's blood may be shed again to procure fresh pardon for them; nor that any fresh act of pardon should be passed in the divine mind, since God has forgiven all trespasses through the blood of his Son, shed once for all; but that they might have fresh manifestations, discoveries, and application of pardon, as they stand in need of them, being continually sinning against God: in no other sense can I understand that pardon of sin can be prayed for by the saints. [2] There are several other questions that might be put, but they are superseded by what has been already said concerning them; as, Why the sin against the Holy Ghost is said to be unpardonable? the reason of which is given (see on "Of Actual Sins &c.").

And whether one man can forgive another? and in what sense? to which the answer is, He may, and in some cases, ought; as it is an injury and offence to himself: and whether sins against God can be forgiven by himself without a satisfaction to his justice? and whether if, upon a satisfaction, how can pardon be free, or of free grace? The answer to these questions may be found in a preceding chapter. ENDNOTES:

[1] "Justificatio virtualiter peracta est---cum filius statim post lapsum datus est mediator et sponsor electorum ex decreto", Gen. iii. 15. "itaque hoc sensu quadam ratione peccata possunt dici fidelibus remissa, antiquam sunt commissa", Leydecker. Synops. Theolog. Christian. I. 5. c. 5. s. 33.

[2] "Petitur quotidie remissio peccatorum a justificatis, ut sensus et manifestatio ejus magis magisque percipiatur, pro ut singularia peccata postulant", Amesii Medulla Theolog. I. 1. c. 27. s. 25.

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