

ON THE
DIVINE FORGIVENESS.

PREPARED ORIGINALLY

FOR THE

CHURCH AT NICHOLASVILLE,

AND NOW PUBLISHED (BY REQUEST)

FOR THE BENEFIT OF

THE LEXINGTON BIBLE SOCIETY.

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"I am THE WAY, and the truth, and the life."—John xiv. 6.

LEXINGTON:

PRINTED BY THOMAS T. SKILLMAN.

1812.

TWO SERMONS

ON THE

DIVINE FORGIVENESS.

"There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."
Psalm cxxx. 4.

PERHAPS there is not in any Christian land, one solitary individual, capable of reflection, whose heart does not bear secret attestation to the truth of that scripture: "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness." Indeed it is no unusual thing to hear the most profligate express a wish that they were christians; and own their firm conviction that the truly pious are the truly blest. This decision is not to be wondered at, tho' proceeding from the mouths of such judges. "*The wicked,*" saith God, "*are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt*"; and the mind must be beyond conception sottish, which could form an opinion different from that just named, when contrasting its own embittered experience, with the peace that is the acknowledged portion of them whose hearts are stayed on him. Were there any thing surprising in the case, it must be the cause which can influence men to pursue so unremittingly a course which they know to be unpleasant; and to shun so studiously, what they themselves acknowledge to be the way of peace. Our own hearts, however, will furnish an easy solution of this seeming difficulty. We are guilty before God; and guilt is always suspicious. It seems incredible that, being as we are, God should regard us with a look of kindness. We therefore either shroud ourselves in darkness from the illuminations of his word, and strive to quell our fears by courting such false sentiments as serve to represent him less holy than he is, and ourselves less guilty than the scriptures say;—or else plunge at once into the desperate and horrible conclusion resolved upon by Judah of

old: "There is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart." This is *the leading feature* of what the Scripture denominates *unbelief*: and the result last mentioned is the one which it most generally produces. Conscience seconds God's testimony to his own holiness and our pollution: and we cannot give him credit for so unmingled and immeasurable goodness, as is necessary to make his grace abound above and beyond our sin. We are prone to imagine that his favour to the upright results from their uprightness; that purity and patience have purchased them his fellowship: we feel the conditions too hard for flesh and blood, and therefore, in most instances, relinquish the pursuit, resolving to let darkness shroud the issue of our course, and be happy while we may.

You will not ask me for proof of these positions. You have the witness in yourselves. How many are there, even in this little assembly, who would sigh for God's salvation, if they really thought it attainable by them; but who are kept back from applying to the *God of salvation*, through fearful apprehensions of his righteousness and purity, and the painful sense of their aggravated crimes. But could you, my brethren, hear, to-day, a voice from Heaven, addressing you individually, and inviting you to come: or were a messenger from the skies to occupy this pulpit, and assure the thoughtless and the abandoned, the grey-headed and the gay, that God had provided a pardon which would cover all your crimes, and was asking nothing at your hands, but that you should be willing to be blessed;—are you not ready to believe that your kindling hopes would dictate an eager response to that exclamation of the Church: "How beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that sayeth unto Zion thy God reigneth!" Do your hearts tell you that these would be your emotions; and suggest what must in all probability be your future course? Would you really rejoice to receive this day complete forgiveness of all that you have been doing; and be permitted to look up to the God who made you, as your father and your friend?

THEN HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD. For though no angel shall descend to give you this assurance; yet the great God has himself descended, and having declared that very thing, has sealed it with his blood: though no voice from heaven shall salute your astonished ears, yet the voice of the Eternal, speaking in the scriptures, says more and better than your hearts could dictate, were excursive fancy to frame its utmost wish.

My brethren, *you mistake* the nature of the holy scripture, when you suppose its lessons harsh and melancholy: You mistake its representations of the blessed God, when your terrors paint him with an angry scowl. Suppose there were no bible, and no Lord Jesus Christ; sin would not be less hateful, nor its punishment less sure. You would only be living, as many of your fellow men are at this moment living, in perplexity and darkness; you would sink, as they shall, into the arms of death, unapprehensive of your danger, and immediately awake to horrible surprize. No, it is not the scripture that creates your danger. It but reveals what is in itself most certain; and reveals it that you may learn and pursue the way of life. But the voice of God's salvation heaps no new sorrows upon the man of grey hairs; nor can the salutation of his peace blight the roses of the virgin cheek, or damp the cheerful smile.

It is our present intention to shew you that such as we have suggested, is the forgiving God; and that the very pardon after which your hearts imagine that they would bound, is placed unshackled before you every one, for acceptance or rejection, as you will live or die. This is precisely the idea under which the subject is presented by the Psalmist. He speaks of forgiveness as resulting from the goodness of God, not from human worthiness; as being imparted that men *may fear him*, not because they *have done so*. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord! Lord hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee *that thou mayest be feared*."

There are evidently two things suggested in the text, to each of which a few moments attention shall be devoted.

I. That all true fear of God is necessarily preceded by forgiveness; and

II. That such forgiveness as our nature needs, is really to be had.

1. Forgiveness goes before the fear of God. Or, in other words, it is the only proper course, to seek first the pardon of our offences; and then to manifest our thankfulness for pardon, by walking in God's fear. Thou forgivest, says David, "*that thou mayest be feared*." This is one of those points of which it is eminently true, that the wisdom of God is foolishness with men. In human apprehension, it appears repugnant to all notions of propriety, that the utmost earnestness and watchfulness should be of no avail in procuring the favor of God toward an unpardoned sinner; or that with respect to his forgiveness, the

sweet child of nature and the most abandoned monster should occupy the same level. And therefore we find not only the champions of infidelity and the abettors of all false religion, arrayed against this principle; but likewise those multitudes of errorists of every name and age, who make pretensions to the Christian faith, but, like the Jews of old, "have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." It is however, as you see, the doctrine of the text—of the scriptures at large: and though *apparently* repugnant to the first suggestions of reason, we are prepared to shew that it is not only a reasonable and proper arrangement, but that really *no other can be made*, if there be forgiveness with God at all.

The supposition that we may have the fear of God, before we are put in possession of forgiveness; or that our previous attempts to cultivate it will commend us to his favor, is alike repugnant to every thing we know of *the penalty of sin, of the economy of grace, and of the human constitution.*

What is meant in scripture, by *the fear of God*? or what are those dispositions that can recommend us to his favor? Surely not the twinges of a guilty conscience, or our horrible outcry under the apprehensions of punishment; while at the same time we neither hate sin, nor feel one emotion of reverence or regard for God, but merely tremble at his fearful judgments. By the fear of God, the scriptures intend that mingled sentiment of love and reverence, which leads us to obey him out of choice, and renders obedience pleasant. It is that kind of sentiment which a dutiful and respectful child harbors for a parent whom it loves to obey, and whose displeasure pains it more than the fear of punishment. This is the import of the word, when used in a good acceptation, as is evidently the case in the text. And hence it is called "*the beginning of wisdom.*" It is holiness—it is piety; and therefore cannot precede, but follows after God's forgiveness. This is abundantly plain from the considerations just hinted, and which a very few words will serve to lay before you.

1. The fear of God, as we have just now explained it, and as it expresses the state of mind allied with happiness, necessarily presupposes the existence of spiritual life. But the state of condemnation, and it is *to that* forgiveness has respect, necessarily involves in it the opposite condition, or the state of spiritual death. The sentence which binds death upon the soul must then be first removed; or it cannot possibly perform the acts of life. Men grievously mistake when they call this life *a state of probation*: as if no decision could take place upon the relations in which we stand to God, till the term of human life expires.—

The very idea of pardon supposes that this decision has already taken place. For if men have not been found guilty, what room is there for the exercise of forgiveness? The fact is, that the state of human innocence was the state of probation. The moment we became sinners we became likewise condemned; for the same law announces duty and denounces penalty. Therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ has said: "He that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God."* Every human being, every creature that needs forgiveness, is a sinner. It is only by union with the Son of God that guilt is taken away: and if we do not by faith apply to him, we of course remain as we were, that is, *under condemnation*. But if *under condemnation*—if "*alienated from the life God,*" what room, what occasion for those acts of spiritual life in which piety or the fear of God consists, and which cannot in fact exist but in his favor.

This principle is important: view it in another form. It appears to be a part of God's settled constitution for the government of all his creatures, of whatever nature, or to whatever order belonging, that that which corrupts itself perishes by corruption. This we do know, most certainly, to be a principle which pervades the material world; and the scripture being judge, it operates, if possible, still more decidedly on the moral world. God teaches us in terms not to be mistaken, that the being which perverts and abuses its faculties and powers to the purposes of sin, shall be given over to *the dominion of sin*, as in part, the punishment of its offence:—shall be tossed by its own passions; tortured by its own desires; hurried from wickedness to wickedness, in search of a felicity that can never be found but in himself. This perpetual tumultuation of the human heart, is what he compares to "*the troubled sea, when it cannot rest;*" a state most justly inflicted, because it will not rest in him. Hence it is called "*the service of sin,*" "*the dominion of sin,*" "*captivity to sin.*" And God's forgiveness is called, a "*loosing of the captive,*" a "*breaking his fetters,*" a bringing him "*into the liberty of the sons of God.*" The dominion of sin then is part of its punishment; in other words, of the curse of the law. And the redeemer has decided it a plain case, that we "*cannot serve two masters.*" If already the slaves of sin, because sinners; the sentence must be reversed, forgiveness must be granted, we must be brought out from under the tyranny of the present master, before we can yield the least obedience to the blessed God.—

Therefore, the Apostle Paul encourages christians in their obedience, by urging this principle: "sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law but under grace."* The forgiveness of God has nullified the sentence of the law; the dominion of sin, therefore, which was part of its penalty, no longer lies upon you: ye are under grace; and grace shall *reign* in your hearts. This sentiment he confirms by another expression, and in terms, if possible, still more explicit: "When ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness."—"But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."†

Settle it therefore in your hearts, that you can never do any thing really pleasing in the sight of God—no never perform one single act of acceptable obedience, till you first obtain your pardon, and therefore an interest in eternal life. "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination"‡ saith the scripture. "Unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth."|| The utmost you can do, is to tremble at the lash; to abstain from things you love above all, *not from the love of God*, but because his terrors frighten you. And as well might the villain who trembles at the gibbet, call his anguish repentance, and put in a plea for pardon, as guilty men lay stress on that obedience which the terrors of the Almighty wrest from their unwilling hands. No,—as sinners against God, you not only stand condemned for sin, but are adjudged to its dominion: and that dominion must be broken, the curse must be rescinded by the forgiving God, or, as the Scriptures speak the truth, **YOU NEVER WILL FEAR HIM.**

2. The same thing is abundantly evident from the very texture of the œconomy of grace. That pure and child-like obedience of *the heart*, which is alone of great price in the sight of God, those fruits of righteousness which adorn the believer and glorify his God—all these things are "*fruits of the spirit*," say the scriptures. And the holy spirit, since forfeited together with human innocence, is never given, as the spirit of grace, but in immediate connexion with the salvation of God's Son. Faith itself is ranked by an apostle¶ among the fruits of the spirit; and "*without faith*," says that same apostle, "*it is impossible to please God*."§ If then we would make the smallest, the very first advances in the fear of the Most High; if we would only assay those ways which our imaginations represent as '*pleasantness*,' we must

* Rom. vi. 14.

†id. 20, 22.

‡Proverbs xxi. 27.

||Psalm l, 16.

¶Gal. v. 22.

§Heb. xi. 6.

do it in the strength of covenanted grace, and under favor and protection from the Lord of life.

3. If further proof were wanting, we should have it, and that too of the most decisive kind, in the very constitution of the human mind. Guilt, it has already been remarked, is always suspicious. And it is neither reasonable nor possible that we should love the being by whom we have good grounds to suppose that no return is made; but rather that he has already taken his stand, and that every purpose of his heart is bent against us. Now this is on all hands acknowledged to be the situation of an unpardoned man. It follows of necessity where guilt goes before. It is then mockery to human feeling to talk of loving God, of being sincerely devoted to the furtherance of his glory, or of cherishing a child-like submission to his sovereignty; while we do not know but that, as now the objects, we shall shortly be the victims of his severe displeasure:—while we do not know but that that very glory may speedily call for the prostration of our happiness and annihilation of our hopes:—while we do not know but that the sovereignty of him who gave us an existence, surrounded with the dangers, and partaking in the guilt of the nature we inherit, may one day plunge us to the bottom of that gulf where awful sovereignty displays tremendous justice!—Yet it is true that God has made you partaker of a nature which (by its own fault indeed) inherits sin and death. It is true that you are therefore an offender, and as such, the wrath of God abides upon you. It is true that many of your fellows have already sunk beneath the weight of those tremendous judgments, which the sovereign God dispenses upon sinners at his pleasure. And while you thus stand before him, unjustified, unsanctified, with “all your imperfections on your head,” and cannot tell but that the blood in which he next shall bathe his sword, will flow from the fountains of your life, can you have the madness to talk about your loving God? or to say with the Redeemer and his favored followers, “*hallowed be thy name*”? No! so long as you have being you must love *yourself*. You cannot delight in that which, from whatever cause, is become the fountain of your misery, or the object of your just and terrible alarm. It is therefore the voice of nature, as well as the testimony of God speaking in the scriptures, “*we love him because he first loved us.*” Forgiving goodness must first remove your fears, the voice of tenderness must soothe the enanguished spirit, the blandishments of love must play around the heart; and then it will melt down under the sense of kindness, and wonder how it could ever abuse the patience and goodness of such a being, and resolve to do so no more.

But suppose no such assurance, no such comfortable and *well-founded hope*; and to talk of sinners really fearing God, is to belie the strongest principles of human nature. A great degree of uncertainty and doubtfulness about our case, has a direct tendency to estrange the heart from God; and how much more a thorough persuasion that all is not now right! especially when accompanied with just and terrible forebodings, that our course will end unhappily. We cannot possibly love that from which we anticipate nothing but wretchedness; nor can we cordially associate with those whose fellowship does not promise reciprocity of feeling. Therefore, say the scriptures, "*The carnal mind is enmity against God: it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*"* And were it possible for wicked men to realize their destiny, as completely as is done by the spirits of the Pitt, there would result the same undisguised and unmingled hatred of God, and the same blasphemies would issue from their lips. But happily he holds their eyes, that they cannot see it *now*. Though rejecting the proffered and only possible deliverance, they contrive many ways to calm or obliterate the sense of danger. God meanwhile prolongs his patience and bounty; they requite him with decent professions of respect and thankfulness: and thus this world is kept from becoming a scene of torture and wickedness, as intense and unrestrained as that which they must witness at the consummation of their sorrows.

Such then, in few words, is the evidence that may be collected upon this subject, from the considerations before hinted. Let us now look at *the actual state of things*, and we shall find proof enough that we have not been mistaken in our calculations. What genuine fear of God do you really discover among men who never sought for pardon in the blood of Jesus? They either shrink from the discoveries he has made of himself, and take refuge under covert of infidelity and false religion; or else at once conclude that things are past remedy, strive to obliterate their sense of coming sorrow, and go on in their tresspasses.—All corruptions of vital christianity result from distrust of God's forgiving goodness. Men cannot trust the sincerity of his promise: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." They cannot cast themselves on sovereign mercy, in whatever light displayed, for fear it should deceive their hopes. And hence they cannot endure the glare of God's perfections, as discovered in the scriptures. Sovereignty must be eclipsed; holiness must be veiled; justice must be mitigated;

truth must be cast down; and consistency kept out of view;—and when they have thus dismantled Heaven of all that gives *stability* and *efficacy* to its laws, it is no hard matter to conjure up a system which shall represent “*the ungodly*” as standing “*in the judgment*,” and “*sinners in the congregation of the righteous*.” We do not advert to any particular class or sectary of men. We intend, without distinction, every individual, Infidel or Christian, who “*have not SUBMITTED themselves to the righteousness of God*,” and our allusion points as much to your modern gnostic, who trusts for salvation to the soundness of his views; as to the tithier of “*mint and anise and cummin*”; who, with the pharisee of old, is thankful for the favor that he is “*not as other men*”:—as much to the man who impiously tilts at the sovereignty of God, under the impression that it may do himself a mischief, as to him who would tear from the head Jesus Christ the glory of his divinity, that he may, with more security and more consistency, enjoy the consolations of a self-dependance.

We repeat it then, that every corruption of living Christianity, every hope and every act of worship that is bottomed on any other foundation than sovereign mercy in the Redeemer’s blood, proceeds from distrust of such forgiveness and such a God as is revealed in scripture, and can be of no manner of service to the ill-fated framer of his own opinions. You must therefore obtain forgiveness as the *first step* of your religion; and then you will feel no maner of inducement to corrupt the truth, or to shrink from its inmost scrutiny. The terrors of God’s sovereignty will be dissolved in grace: the thunder of his power will roll harmless overhead: and his gleaming sword will not blast your vision, though waved in terror from on high.

The sum of the whole is this: “They that are in the flesh cannot please God.”* The great majority, we see, do not attempt to please him. They even refuse the factitious quiet of a false religion; and either boldly outface all evidence of their accountability and guiltiness, or at once concluding that their condition is past remedy, plunge into the vortex of business and gaiety, and steep their senses in forgetfulness. Brethren, it is our happiness to know, and we account it this day our privilege to declare to you a better way. A way which does not indeed prevent us from acknowledging with our Psalmist, “*If thou Lord shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand*”: but nevertheless a way which emboldens us to say—to say to you EVERYONE—to say upon indubitable evidence, and therefore with an eager joy, that whosoever of you applies will not be disappointed, for “*there is forgiveness with him THAT HE MAY BE FEARED*.”

* Rom. viii. 8.

SERMON II.

"There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."
Psalm cxxx. 4.

"THE COMMANDMENT WHICH WAS ORDAINED TO LIFE," says the apostle Paul, when giving some account of the conflict he endured, about and after the time of his conversion—a conflict which, in its progress, rooted out all his former notions of his own attainments, and placed him naked and guilty before the searcher of the heart, divested of every hope but what shone through the righteousness of the son of God—"the commandment which was ordained to life," says he, *"I found to be unto death."* He lost all his former confidence in that promise of the Eternal. *"The man which doeth these things shall live by them;"* for he found he had offended, and that his judgment was *to die*.

Did there not, my brethren, a disappointment somewhat similar chill your hearts, after that you had followed us a little while in the discussion of the text? We promised to lead you *"to Mount Zion and unto the City of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel."* But you have been witnessing only *"blackness and darkness and tempest."* Your hearts beat high in hope of that forgiveness which we had promised to display in all its allurements and in all its freedom. But you heard only that terrible and forbidding sound, *"the leopard cannot change his spots nor the Ethiopian his skin."* You saw yourselves not only without any recommendation, but without the power to recommend yourselves to mercy. Hope brightened for a moment, only to expire; and your hearts died within you. But do not despond, my brother. It was just the experience of our good apostle; and the bitter disappointment which he thought to be *to death*, he found to issue in eternal life. May God, of his infinite mercy, grant a similar result to you! It was the dictate of his mercy, not of his severity, to conclude *"all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all."** And for a kindred reason, it is the dictate of his good-

ness; not of his severity, to teach you—to teach you even in the text, that unless his forgiveness shall precede your first attempt, all efforts to enlist his favour on your side, will be but labour lost. Remember that though the gospel of God's son discovers to you this appalling difficulty, yet it is not the gospel that creates it.—Were there no saviour, no salvation provided or annouced, it would still be a necessary and eternal truth, that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” And if he tell you a truth so humbling and discouraging, it is that you may learn the extent of your danger; that his mercy may cut you off from “*the refuges of lies*,” and that, despairing of help from any other quarter, you may, all guilty and polluted as you are, apply where indeed the remedy is lodged, and find your rest in the Redeeming God.

Let no man then be afraid to learn that he is a sinner; to learn that he is helpless; to learn that he is *condemned*. This lamp of God's ordaining, which to your terrified imagination seems ever and anon to dart a sickly gleam, serving only to discover the horrors that surround you, gleams nevertheless upon the gate of heaven. It discovers indeed that you are weak, it discovers that you are wicked; but it sheds its lustre upon that record of his grace “*let not your heart be troubled*.” For though the curse decides so sternly, and operates so strangely, that you cannot cultivate that Godly fear which might command his favor; yet mercy itself has provided its own plea, “*there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared*.”

To the developement of this, the most interesting and consolatory of all truths, your attention was to be called in the

II. Place. It forms no part of our present design, to display minutely the *nature* or *medium* of that forgiveness, which you have already seen to be so indispensable, as ever you would taste the peace of God on earth, or see his face in Heaven. None of you, we trust, can be ignorant that “Jesus Christ, of the seed of David”—“was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.” Let it suffice then to remark *generally*, that the forgiveness of which we are in quest is to be found only in him. The God of the spirits of all flesh, is the God of truth and righteousness. It is a law of his empire, as immutable as just, that “the wages of sin is death.”* And if after having said so, the threatening were not accomplished, he must falsify his own word, and stand (a thought not to be suggested without the utmost horror!)—a convicted liar before the universe he made. Add to this that *the sceptre of his kingdom is a sceptre of righte-*

ousness.* It is the glory of his government that "the work of a man he will render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways."† But if, while "to the upright" he shews himself "upright," and "to the pure" shews himself "pure," he did not also "to the froward shew himself froward,"‡ righteousness too would be very far from God: the order and beauty of his government must forever disappear. From these principles results what the scriptures uniformly and every where teach, *the soul that sins shall die*. And, therefore, unless some way had been devised, in which forgiveness could be granted, without prejudice to righteousness and truth; in which sin might be punished and yet the sinner saved; the case of the guilty had been an hopeless case.

It is with a view to this, as the actual state of things, that the mediatorial kingdom has been erected in behalf of sinful men. A constitution as remarkable for stupendous wisdom, as for its condescending grace. The second person of the blessed God-head, the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, who owed no obedience to the law imposed on man, and was in no wise bound to interfere in our behalf, voluntarily assumed our nature into union with his own; agreed to suffer, in that nature, the full penalty by righteousness and truth exacted for man's sin; and to stand, in our room, a candidate for that eternal life which had been promised to human obedience, but which, once lost, could never be reclaimed. In all that he did, he acted not as an individual, but as *a public person, as the head of a community*, which must flourish or decline, accordingly as he should miscarry or succeed. Upon his single arm hung the destiny of millions. My brethren, you well know the result. The Lord Jesus Christ *did* fulfil that law which his fellow men found it impossible to keep. He *did* bear the weight of that unmingled and unutterable wrath, which his fellow men were fated to sustain. And though his flesh was supported by the power of his divinity, and his mind buoyed up with the certainty of success, and of the abounding glories that awaited him; yet the strength even of Jesus was "*dried up like a potsherd*," and his "*heart melted like wax*"§ within him. His were the pangs of that eternal death which the unsanctified must feel in the eternal world. But after he had endured those horrible pangs which, in every other case, the scriptures represent by a lake of fire and a never-dying worm; after the Father had withdrawn his light, and cheerful consolations, and left the universe to Jesus, black and comfortless as hell; in one word, af-

*Heb. i 8.

†Job xxxiv. 11.

‡Psalm xviii. 25, 26.

§Psalm xxii. 14, 15.

ter every thing else that goes to comprise the wages of iniquity had been by him sustained, he paid that debt which would have been to men the beginning of sorrows, and sunk into the tomb. Thus then may God be "*just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.*" What he did, he did in human nature, and whosoever wears that nature is invited to partake.

Would you have assurance of the validity of the ~~garden~~ ^{garden} prof-
fered in the blood of Jesus Christ? God himself has set to his
own seal, in as much as he raised him from the dead. For while
he stood charged with our guilt, and liable to the whole of that
penalty which the scriptures call *death*, it could not be but that
justice must take its course, and the threatening be executed to
the uttermost. But having, for the space of a few hours, sus-
tained that deluge of wrath, and those avenging shocks of God's
omnipotence, which would have annihilated all the creatures in
the universe: and must therefore, in every other case, give place
to limited sufferings, but of unlimited duration—having thus at
once sustained the death which is the wages of iniquity, "*it was*
not possible that he should be holden of it." He therefore broke
the fetters of the last enemy, reassumed the life he had laid
down, and ascended into Heaven, "*having obtained eternal re-*
demption for us."

Would you therefore know the extent of God's forgiveness?
or what evidence may be had of his willingness to bestow the re-
demption thus provided? Look, we pray you, on the ascended
Saviour, and you need not ask again. "He that spared not his
own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with
him also freely give us all things?"—"If, when we were ene-
mies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much
more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." These
are appeals which the scripture makes; and they are appeals to
your plainest sense. The sin of man, however prolonged or
however aggravated, calls but for the death of man: and shall not
the death of Jesus wipe that stain away! The cloud interposed
by thine iniquities between God and thee, is of but little extent—
sufficient indeed to envelope thy head amid the horrors of eternal
night; but nevertheless limited by the ransom that produces life—
and shall not the sun of righteousness, resplendent in his glories,
disperse the gathering gloom? When we contrast the merits of
Jesus with the sin of man, or the mercies of God's covenant
with our just deserts, we contrast "*great things with small.*" E.

*Acts ii. 24.

†Heb. ix. 12.

§Id. v. 10.

†Rom. viii. 32.

ven in his mercy God is like himself, grand above conception, deep beyond our search, and wide as that immensity, compared with which the universe is but a point. The provision he has made is made in *Jesus Christ*: free therefore as the gift of God's own Son, bestowed *unsought, unhopèd-for*; boundless as "the divinity that stirs within him;" and tender as the mercies of the weeping Nazarene.

But your difficulty does not lie here. You believe that the blood of Jesus is an unanswerable plea; and that whoever is interested in the merits of his death has abundant grounds to rest securely. You are convinced that it is only in union with the Son of God that you ever can taste the pleasantness of wisdom's ways. And you would therefore most willingly become a christian man. But you fear his rejection, though you should apply. You doubt his willingness to save every one that may come to him. Especially, you doubt his willingness to save *you*. You fear perhaps that your course of wickedness has been too long, or too aggravated to leave any hope of mercy. And you have a *thousand doubts* and a *thousand difficulties* which keep you from going directly to him. My brethren, we have already shewn you that it is vain to think of any other way. Pardon of sin is the first step to life. By keeping back, you may indeed lose, in a great degree, the sense and the recollection of the enormities that frighten you away from him. But *he* cannot forget them. The lapse of time will not decrease their guilt, nor render their punishment less certain. You are placed, then, just in the situation of the lepers who sat at the gate of Samaria, in time of famine. *If you sit there you die*. If you go to the Lord Jesus Christ, just as you are, guilty and ignorant and helpless, you can but die at last. Had you therefore *no assurance*, the experiment were worth trying. But this, we are now to shew you, is not the case. We assure you, therefore, in the name of the living God, that if you will only go, he is ready to receive you; if you will cast yourselves upon his mercy for that forgiveness which comes by Jesus Christ, the blood of his cross shall sanctify you, and the curse will be gone by forever. You have already seen that his atonement is a satisfaction made by the Infinite one: and surely you will not have the madness to suppose that your transgressions, however aggravated, can exceed, can equal, *can be even named* beside the value of the surety—sacrifice. Or that God, after having made such a sacrifice for men, and in the gospel proffered it for their deliverance, should still be unwilling for you to, "be saved by his life;" and by requiring *yours* while you present the surety's blood, set higher honor upon the miserable recompense

your little sufferings could afford, than upon the matchless atonement of his Almighty Son. But "we have a more sure word" than any that *our* reasonings could dictate on this subject. What says the Lord Jesus Christ himself? He is the best interpreter of the gospel of his grace: What says the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? If there be one thing clearly revealed in scripture, it is this; that the son of man "*came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance:*"* "*to seek and to save that which was lost.*"† And if there be one assurance confirmed above every other, it is this: "*him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.*"‡ All those are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself; and they require no miserable interpolations of our own. They contain in fact *the sum* of the gospel of his grace. And every thing else delivered in the scripture is designed to give assurance of this truth, to shew us our need of the blessings it announces, and to lead us to the best improvement of it.

If then thou art *a sinner*, if thou art to be ranked with "that which was lost," *to thee* "is the word of this salvation sent." As there is not under heaven an individual sin, or an assemblage of sins, that can counterpoise the value of the surety's death; so there is not upon earth an individual sinner that falls without the compass of his invitation. He assumed our nature, and his message is *to men*. "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart."§—"Ho, *every one* that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."||—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."¶—"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways: for why will ye die?"** Such, my brethren, are some few of the assurances which the God of salvation has given you in his word. They comprise, as was said, the very es-

*Mark ii. 17.

†Luke xix. 10.

‡John. vi. 37.

§Prov. viii. 4, 5.

||Isaiah lv. 1, 2.

¶Id. i. 18.

**Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

sence of the gospel. And lest all this should not be sufficient to assure the guilty and far from righteousness, how ready he is to pardon and to bless; he gave it as his parting commandment, just before he ascended to his Father and his God, that this gospel should be preached "*to every creature.*"* And after all this, can you still doubt whether "the promise is *to you?*" What further assurance could you require—what further assurance can possibly be given, than that which the very terms we have quoted involve? No man may attempt to explain them away, by restricting their application to persons whose attention has been awakened, or whose enmity against God has been partly subdued by grace. They are terms that suggest no limitation, admit of no exception; but spread their glad tidings far and wide, as the miseries and necessities of them that hear; or as the empire of human wickedness itself. This it were easy to evince, by a distinct analysis of each of the passages we have submitted. That, however, would be a work of more time and labour than can be at present devoted to it. Let a single instance suffice.

We have a familiar confirmation of the truth just now asserted in the passage quoted from the beginning of Isaiah lv. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." This, it is on all hands agreed, is an offer of that salvation which is brought near to sinners in the gospel of peace. There is no dispute about the objects intended by the emblems of *wine and milk*. They are evidently employed to designate those spiritual blessings and enjoyments, which are as necessary to the existence of the *inner man*, and therefore as indispensable to satisfy the cravings of the immortal spirit, as *wine and milk*, or as food and drink in general are, to the continuance of animal life, and to satisfy the cravings of animal appetites. It is, moreover, abundantly plain, that the offer here made is co-extensive with the characters who are said to thirst; "*every one that thirsteth*" is invited to "come to the waters." The only remaining question relates to the party addressed. And upon the decision of this question hangs the decision of the whole matter. If it be true that by "*every one that thirsteth,*" is meant only such as "*hunger and thirst after righteousness;*" then it will necessarily follow that the proffer here

*Mark xvi. 15.

made is limited to such. But if by those who thirst, we are to understand, not merely every one that is thirsting after righteousness, but *all who are thirsting after happiness*; and who are, therefore, endeavouring to satisfy the incessant cravings of the heart, in any of those ways by which felicity is sought (and it is plain that the whole human race comes under this description); then the result will be, that as the offer is co-extensive with the characters addressed, every man, who reads or hears this gospel, is invited to partake.

WHO ARE THEY THEN THAT THIRST? For to "*every one*" of them license to drink "of the river of the water of life" is proffered. This question is completely settled in the second verse. They are they who "spend money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not." They are such as must turn from this vain pursuit, and direct their thoughts to something very different, if they would "eat that which is good and let their soul delight itself in fatness." Now to look upon this as a description of persons who are seeking "the kingdom of God and his righteousness," would be of all things the most preposterous. It certainly is not true of these blessings that they "are not bread;" nor can it be true that they who seek them, "labour for that which satisfieth not." It is in vain to object that this sentence is descriptive of those who seek them after a wrong manner; as, for instance, by works and not by faith; and who therefore *must* fail in the pursuit. Because it is very evident that the expressions "that which is not bread" and "that which satisfieth not," are not at all calculated to designate the *mode of seeking*, but depict very clearly the unprofitable nature of *the things sought after*. They must then be referred to those who are seeking the happiness of their nature in things in which God never placed it; that is, in the gratification of their appetites and passions, by whatever name distinguished, or in whatever way indulged. These are they who "have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water:" whose expectations are continually disappointed, and whose dissatisfied and deceived hearts are perpetually crying "GIVE, GIVE." It is then *to characters like these*, as well as every other, that the offer of the gospel is brought nigh. And it is while engaged in the very act of pursuing lying vanities, that they are invited to participate in all the blessedness which the covenant of peace secures.

We did not then deceive you, when we said that "*to you* is the word of this salvation sent." If any man be "lost," be spending his "labour for that which satisfieth not,"—if he *need* repen-

tance, if he be *a sinner*, if he be *a son of man*, the word of this salvation is *to him*.

Let no man unbelievingly or hesitatingly inquire how he can be saved, or where find a warrant to apply; provided it should appear that Christ the Lord died not for him. **ART THOU A SINNER**: saith the gospel: then his invitation is *to thee*. Bow to the proffered grace: for it is written, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."* The living God will take care of his own consistency. And though thy little—thy *shallow* intellect should forever be unable to fathom the counsels of his wisdom; yet surely it will be matter neither of disgrace nor of regret, that you trusted the Being "too high to understand," and found him faithful to the thing that he had spoken.

If you ask why so few are made partakers of this mercy; seeing all the transgressions of all the sons of men are but as the interposition of an atom floating in a sun-beam, compared with the radiance of the orb of day: we give you the answer furnished by himself, in a conversation with the Jews: "Ye *will not* come to me, that ye might have life."† Men disbelieve the record God has given of his son. They cannot think there is such a depth of goodness, even in the great God himself. They therefore flee from the rock of salvation laid by him in Zion. If they call themselves believers, they yet reject this counsel of the all-wise God. They therefore carve the scriptures to their liking; walk in counsels of their own devising; and are left, in awful sovereignty, to perish in their blood.—If you ask why the heathen are not made partakers of this grace; we say God is the disposer of his own beneficence, and he bestows it where he will. Thy forefathers once were heathens, and thy mother's children walked without the light. It is thus he executes his everlasting counsels, and establishes his firm decree. When men will be mad, he often leaves them to their madness, and glorifies his sovereignty through rejected grace. Or when darkness veils the earth, and gross darkness the people, he sends his gospel to enlighten where he would have his mercy come, and leaves other sons of darkness to the wages of their sin.

But this day the light of heaven flashes in *your* eyes. You can have no plea for rejecting his forgiveness. And if because the privilege may have been withheld from others, whom he left in awful sovereignty to perish in their blood, you turn away indignantly from the mercy proffered *you*—my brother, my sister, thou mayest indeed be fulfilling the counsels of his wisdom—but God

*John vi. 37.

†Id. v. 40.

is witness, and thy soul is this day witness, that the guilt and the misery are thine.

Now, therefore, "ye dead and dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!"—"Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me."*—"The spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And *whosoever will*, let him take the water of life freely."† Who in this assembly is a sinner against God? Who sighs for God's salvation? Who would, to night, lay his head upon his pillow, under the protection of the God of Pardons? Who would be tranquil in the day of last accounts, when the rocks shall be splitting, the ocean roaring, the mountains catching fire, and the elements melting with fervent heat? TO-DAY, THEN, IF YE WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART!" Let no one be afraid to find the utmost extent, or the fullest evidence of his guilt and wretchedness. Let no one be afraid to search to the bottom his profession of the faith, lest he should discover himself to have been but a self-deceiver, solacing his heart with "*a name to live*" while he was dead. If thou art but *a sinner*, an helpless creature, *a lost man*, there is comfort for thee in the message of the text. In Jesus Christ there is "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;" and *it is proffered unto thee:—proffered unto thee*, that thou mayest have the grace to fear him: *proffered unto thee*, that thou mayest have the privilege to serve him: *proffered unto thee* that thou mayest behold his glory, in the peaceful regions of Immanuel's land. Amen.

*Rev. iii. 20.

†Id. xxii. 17.