

IN ITS THREE ASPECTS:

ETERNAL, RESTORATIVE,
GOVERNMENTAL.

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FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

ETERNAL FORGIVENESS.
RESTORATIVE FORGIVENESS.
GOVERNMENTAL FORGIVENESS.

ROM a divine standpoint there are three great consequences of sin:

- Its eternal consequences.
 Consequences relating to our practical enjoyment of fellow
 - ship with God.

 3. Governmental consequences.

In connection with these three consequences of sin there are three aspects of forgiveness brought before us in Scripture, which we shall first

simply name, and then, in dependence upon the Lord, seek to bring before the reader in greater detail.

The first we shall call Eternal, or Redemption forgiveness.

The second, Restorative forgiveness.

The third, Governmental forgiveness.

At the very start of our Christian

course we get the first. Indeed,

scripture does not contemplate such a thing as a believer without the forgiveness of his sins in this aspect of it. He receives it as a repentant sinner, trusting in Him whose precious blood in its changeless efficacy has accomplished for us eternal redemption. This is why we have called it Eternal, or Redemption for-

The second is that which the Christian needs whenever he grieves the Holy Spirit by an allowance of evil. It is the forgiveness of a child who knows his relationship with

the Father, but who has, for a time, lost the enjoyment of it through sin.

The third relates to the ways of God with His people here below. The term "government," in this connection, may at first sound unfamiliar to some; but our prayer is that the reader may not only be able to grasp the meaning of the term, but that its deep significance may, by the Holy Ghost, be brought to his soul in power.

I. Redemption or Eternal Forgiveness?

There are four important questions in connection with this aspect of forgiveness, which God's word clearly answers.

- 1. How is it procured for us?
- 2. How is it received by us?
- 3. How is it assured to us?
- 4. What are its effects upon us?

1. FORGIVENESS PROCURED.

Many anxious souls make sad mistakes about this question. Some seem to have got an idea that earnest prayers and tears of repentance will procure it; others that amendment in the future will procure forgiveness for the past. But such souls seem to forget that when God forgives us He can only do so in righteous consistency with His own holy character. Let them listen to Scripture, and the answer to our question will be found distinct and plain enough.

It is by the blood of Christ, and by His blood alone, that our pardon is procured. Nothing could right-eously procure the forgiveness of our sins, but that which makes atonement for them. Compare the following verses:

"It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." (Leviticus xvi. 11.)

"Without shedding of blood is no remission." (Heb. ix. 22.)

"This is My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. xxvi. 28.)

"We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. i. 7.)

If anything else, nay, if everything else put together, could have procured it, would not God have spared His blessed Son the shame and suffering, the humiliation and judgment of the cross? When He cried in the garden, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," if, apart from His sacrifice and death, there had been such a possibility, would it not there and then have been manifested? Think of Him in that hour of agony, sweating, as it were, great drops of blood; think of His strong crying and tears, and let those words, "If it be possible," sink deeper and deeper into your soul.

brought about by prayers and cries

and tears, would not His prayers have

If our forgiveness could have been

procured it? And did they? No. All that took place in Gethsemane was but in anticipation of the atoning work of the cross. Oh, think again of those words, "If it be possible." Think of what followed upon the tree, and never again let the thought find place in your heart, that anything but the blood-shedding of Jesus could procure your forgiveness.

If you were in a court of justice,

under sentence of death, would stand-

ing to plead for forgiveness avail you

Or, even suppose that your case was not so serious, and that you were only sentenced to imprisonment for debt, would trying to "beg off" discharge your account? Would all your promises for the future wipe out one item of the past? You know perfectly well that they would avail you nothing.

If, then, when justice claims that a penalty shall be inflicted, or a debt paid, pleading words, good intentions, well-meant promises, and even the most genuine contrition, will not clear you at a human tribunal, how can you expect that they will procure your pardon before the throne of God?

Beside all this, the Judge has spoken. God Himself has decided the point. In words too distinct and clear to be mistaken or reasoned away He has declared, that "without shedding of blood is no remission." (Heb. ix. 22.) No blood shedding, no remission. Rest assured therefore, dear reader, that nothing short of the blood of an accepted Sacrifice will avail to secure the forgiveness of your sins before God.

But, thank God, He who claimed in righteousness has provided in grace; and the provisions of the altar are equal to the claims of the throne He who said, "IT IS THE BLOOD that maketh an atonement for the soul," has also said, "I HAVE GIVEN IT to you upon the altar." (Lev. xvii. 11.) Thus believers can say, "We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. i. 7.) Mark well those two blessed realities. THE GRACE OF GOD the source, THE BLOOD OF CHRIST the means, of our forgiveness. The grace of God provides the Lamb, the blood of the Lamb procures the forgiveness, and the Spirit of grace proclaims it far and wide to sinful men; while the heart of God delights to bestow the forgiveness upon a broken-hearted penitent. He "abundantly" pardons, He freely forgives. "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." (Luke vii. 42.) When the sin-offering was offered

When the sin-offering was offered to procure forgiveness for an offending Israelite, three important things took place. (Leviticus iv.) 1. The blood

was poured out at the bottom of the altar (part of it having been presented before the Lord). 2. The body of the animal that stood in the offender's stead was burnt to ashes outside the camp; a solemn figure, pointing to the blessed Sin-bearer under the consuming judgment of God. 3. The fat (the excellence of the victim) went up as a sweet savour to God from the altar of burnt-offering, speaking of God's acceptance of that which had taken place in the offender's behalf; and upon this ground he was pronounced to be "FORGIVEN." (Lev. iv. 31.) Now these three things, namely, the outpouring of the blood, the consuming of the victim outside, and the burning of its fat inside, could not

burning of its fat inside, could not possibly be repeated either in the type or the Great Antitype. That which met God's claims—the blood shedding—and that which exhausted the wrath due to us—the victim consumed (in

type)—can never take place again. Their consequences for the believer are eternal. Because of its unchanging efficacy, the application of the blood never need be repeated; the shedding of the blood never could be.

2. FORGIVENESS RECEIVED.

It is through the blood alone that forgiveness is procured, and through FAITH alone that we get it. GRACE provides.

THE BLOOD procures. THE SPIRIT proclaims. FAITH appropriates.

The moment we have faith in the precious blood of Christ, its full, eternal efficacy is applied to and rests upon our souls; forgiveness through that blood is from that moment ours

-declared to be ours by the Spirit's testimony in the Word. "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth

on Him shall receive remission of

sins." (Acts x. 43.) "Through this

Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things." (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) It is not through any proved merit of the past, nor any promised merit for the future, that we get it; but simply through faith in the work and merits of Another-of Him whom God has raised from the dead, in proof of His acceptance of what He had done. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission (or passing over) of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God . . . that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans iii. 25, 26.) That is, before the death of Christ, God passed over the sins of believers on the ground of what was going to be done; and though it was "through the forbearance of God," yet it was righteous forbearance, inasmuch as it was in view of the "one full payment" to be made for them. Since the cross, a believer is forgiven on the ground of the value of the blood which has been shed.

3. FORGIVENESS ASSURED. We can only be unwaveringly cer-

tain of anything as we rest with unwavering confidence on reliable evidence. We must have the needed information, and we must have it from a trustworthy source. For example, you wish to go by steamboat to some Continental port, but upon consulting your Bradshaw you find (as is sometimes the case), opposite the name of the place you wish to reach, the words, "NO INFORMATION," meaning that when the Guide went to press the hours of sailing had not been received from the shipping office. If this is your only means of information, how are you going to make sure of the start-ing of your boat? It would be all guess work. Certainty would be out of the question. Again, we will suppose that you find the needed information, but on another page of the Guide read that the proprietors "do not hold themselves responsible in any way for inaccuracies." How could you, under such circumstances, be unwaveringly sure? But when we come to gospel testimony, we must bear in mind that God Himself is the Author of it.

"God hath spoken." (Heb. i. 1, 2.) "The word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." (1 Peter i. 25.) It is the GOSPEL OF God, and therefore, as the apostle said to the Corinthians, "As God is TRUE our preaching to youward was not yea and nay."

How distinct and clear are these divine utterances through the lips of the apostles Peter and Paul. For

example, turn to Acts x. 43: "To Him

[Christ] give all the prophets witness,

that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." Could anything be plainer? Now turn to Acts xiii. 38, 39: "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things." If, through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and His precious blood, God declares that forgiveness is yours, "as God is true," dear reader, it is yours. But perhaps you say, "I fear that

my faith is too feeble to claim the blessing. We only ask, Is it strong enough to make Christ Himself the object of your trust? Is He your only confidence? Is His precious clood your only plea? Then, whether you think you can claim it or not, the word of God claims the blessing

for you, and you have but to put your Amen to it. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." "All that believe ARE JUSTIFIED FROM ALL THINGS."

The testimony of one's feelings is as mereliable as the testimony of God's word is sure; and though it seems so natural to cling to them, one could never depend upon inward emotions for an assurance of pardon.

If I had, for the ground of my assurance, certain happy feelings and nothing else, who is to decide for me whether those feelings are those of a truly forgiven soul, or whether I am deceiving myself?

Before my feelings could give me assurance, I should first need assur-

ance about my feelings!

Let it not be supposed by this that we wish either to ignore or make light of feelings in their right place. On the contrary, we firmly hold that every true believer expe-

riences a feeling of joy and comfort when he is made sure of pardon-"joy and peace in BELIEVING." It is solid comfort, too, for he has a divine ground for his assurance. But it must be remembered that it is possible to have the feelings religiously wrought upon, and yet this divine ground be lacking. Take an illustration from history. The Duke of Somerset was one of the last men beheaded upon Tower Hill. It was in the reign of Edward VI. Just as the fatal moment was approaching, a mounted messenger in the service of the Crown-a member of the council—came riding towards the scaffold. He followed a number of officers who had ridden through the crowd in hot haste to the same place of melancholy interest. The

assembled crowd no doubt thought that this member of the council had been sent to stop the execution, and began to cry, "A pardon, a pardon!"

The shout was carried forward till it reached the scaffold, causing a hectic colour to mount to the cheeks of the condemned duke. How must he have felt, think you, to have heard such tidings at such a moment? How his bosom must have heaved with emotion at the welcome news! But whatever his feelings may have been, they were not of long duration. Though the news seemed good, it proved to be groundless. Popular opinion was mistaken. Though thousands of voices might have joined in the cry of "Pardon!" though the duke's own feelings may have loudly echoed the flattering report, King Edward did not send a message of pardon, so that all the rest was but cruel mockery, the fabric of human imagination. The announcement was welcome, but it lacked one thing-royal authority. If the assurance of our forgiveness

If the assurance of our forgiveness is to be solid and lasting, we must get it from the highest authority-

do, the comfort of that assurance will be sure to follow. But never confound assurance with the comfort which naturally flows from it; nor imagine that any amount of comfortable feeling could give you solid assurance, though it must necessarily accompany it. Two things mark well. Because GOD has spoken I am SURE. Because I am sure I feel at rest.

from the word of God; and when we

Perhaps the most serious mistake that can be made as to the matter before us, is the notion that for-

THE EFFECTS OF KNOWN PARDON.

giveness can be known without its producing any effect in the life and affections of those who know it. There are at least three great effects produced by the knowledge

forgiven one. 1. It produces happiness. "Blessed

of forgiveness in the soul of the

[or happy] is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." The Psalm which thus speaks of the forgiven man ends with gladness and a shout of joy. (Ps. xxxii. 1, 11.)

2. It produces LOVE. "To whom little is forgiven the same loveth

little." The woman of the city who had the forgiveness of "many sins," "loved much." (Luke vii.)

3. It produces FEAR. Nothing can move the soul to holy, jealous care like the forgiving love of God in Christ. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." (Psalm cxxx. 4)

(Psalm cxxx. 4.)
This is not a slavish fear. It is not a fear of losing His love, but of grieving it. It is a fear which has its very spring in the knowledge of a love that can never be either checked or changed; a love that spent itself upon me when I was

that shares its all with me now that I am eternally saved. Who would not fear to grieve such love as this? "Who would not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?"

II. Restorative Forgiveness. There is a difference between not

being able to see, and what is called losing our eyesight. A person who is suffering from the presence of a few particles of dust in his eyes may have no more real enjoyment of eyesight than a man stone-blind. Yet no one would therefore conclude that he has lost his eyesight. Remove the disturbing particles, and he may see as well as ever.

In a similar way a Christian may, through the coming in of evil, be as practically destitute of the enjoyment of his relationship with the Father as

one who was never in it. But it is of all importance to see that the relationship still remains undisturbed. The relationship does not depend upon his enjoyment of it; but his enjoyment does depend upon his walking in the communion of that relationship. There is something deeply humili-

ating, and yet withal abundantly refreshing, in considering this part of of our subject. Our shameful failures seem all the sadder in the light of the devoted love of Christ; yet instead of that love being diminished by these failures it only thereby finds a new way of displaying itself. So we read, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John ii. 2.) Not content with taking our place in judgment, He will plead our cause in glory also. He will never give His people up. Never. What grace!

The work of the cross can never be repeated. Never again, as Saviour, will He take up the question of sin's

judgment. That question was eternally settled for the believer when He cried, "It is finished." On the other hand, His work as heavenly Advocate is not yet finished; nor will it be until the whole ransomed Church is for ever beyond the reach of sin. You will notice that it is when we sin, not when we are sorry for sinning, that He exercises His office of righteous Advocate. It cannot be too firmly grasped that our repentance and restoration as believers are the results of His advocacy, and not their procuring cause. Oh, what a blessed, perfect, "all-the-way-home" Saviour

He is!

This then, briefly, is His side of our restoration. Now come to ours.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John i. 9.)

What could be more simple than

this? How plainly it teaches that sin truly confessed is sin surely forgiven.

And then, how solidly assuring are those two words, "FAITHFUL and JUST." How they remind us of the one righteous payment, of the never-to-berepeated settlement of the cross. If Christ had not righteously settled the question of our sins on the tree, He could not righteously have pleaded our cause on the throne. To plead for pardon without suffering for the offence, would be to ask God to pass by sin without judging it—an ever-lasting impossibility! But He has "suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God"; and therefore God is "faithful and just" to forgive us our sins the moment we confess them.

Alas! however, the point of restoration is sometimes but slowly reached. Unjudged and unconfessed sin has produced cold reserve in the heart of the failing one; and instead of open, frank confession, there is a guile-

ful silence, although, perhaps, all the while God is manifestly dealing with him to bring about true restoration. It seems to have been so in the case of David. (See Psalm xxxii.) Listen to his own sad tale. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." He was like a fever-tossed patient, trying every possible posture, but finding rest in none. This restlessness is one of the principal signs of a saint out of communion; like the "troubled sea," he "cannot rest." Captain Hare, who went down with over 300 men in H.M.S. Eurydice, is said to be the writer of the following lines on Jeremiah xlix. 23, "There is

sorrow on the sea; it cannot be quiet." We only quote them by way of illustration. The poet enquires of the sea

the secret of her restlessness, and gives us her supposed answer.

"Then the ocean's voice I seemed to hear, Mournfully, solemnly, sounding near, Like a wail sent up from the caves below, Fraught with dark memories of human woe, Telling of loved ones buried there, Of the dying shriek, of the dying prayer. Telling of hearts still watching in vain For those who shall never come home again; Of the widow's groan, the orphan's cry, And the mother's speechless agony.

Oh, no! the ocean can never rest With such secrets hidden within her breast."

That this is only a poetic idea we are free to confess; but change the last couplet a little, and it would be true of every soul away from God to day—

Never again will that Christian rest Till those guilty secrets are all confessed.

Was not David's restlessness, and is not the restlessness of many a saint since then, attributable to some unjudged, unconfessed, hidden secret? But when the heart and mouth are at last opened, how full and free the

pardon! "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." (Psalm xxxii. 5.) Should the reader happen to be one of the unhappy number above described, let us implore you, before going further, to get on your face before God; review the past under His holy, searching eye; confess your sins; judge yourself; hide nothing that is evil; spare nothing that is unworthy of Him whose holy name you bear. Oh, do it now, do it now! He will receive you freely. "He will abundantly pardon." Do not imagine because you are restless and miserable that He has changed: nor think that your failure has made Him less faithful. For if even "stripes" be needed

ful. For if even "stripes" be needed to express His unchanging interest in you, and He be forced to inflict them, you will not receive one stroke too many; and all you do receive will be the direct proofs of His

perfect love. (Psalm lxxxix. 30-34.)
"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." (Heb. xii. 6.)

III. Governmental Forgiveness.

Perhaps there is no subject less thought of, and less understood even by Christians generally, than the ways of God in government; yet how distinctly they stand out upon the pages of His holy Word, and in the history of His people in all ages.

Now it is certain that unless we grasp the thought of God's government, we shall fail to understand the meaning of governmental forgiveness. It will be necessary, therefore, first to speak a little of the former.

GOD'S WAYS IN GOVERNMENT.

You will find the broad principle of it expressed in Gal. vi. 7-9. Let us quote the passage in full: "Be not

deceived: God is not mocked: for what-

soever 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. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." There are certain consequences which follow certain lines of conduct in this world, and God permits them, both in the case of His own people and in that of the children of darkness. Whatever a man sows he reaps. For example, What is the origin of the common expression, "Murder will out"? There can be no doubt that it is to be found in Genesis ix. 5, 6, "At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." A man shall reap what he sows. It is a well-defined principle in the record of God's ways with men, and entirely distinct from

grace. We shall see presently that a man may be in the full enjoyment of God's grace and yet be the subject of some governmental dealing at the same time; and, moreover, that God can overrule the results of fleshly sowing to further the ends of grace.

It may help the reader to understand more clearly the difference between grace and government if we draw his attention to the fact that when it is a question of government, a sin is not necessarily done with even when it is confessed.

"But" says one "you have just"

"But," says one, "you have just shown us that it is done with—done with for ever!"

Yes. As a question of God's judgment upon it as guilt—i.e., as to the matter of our salvation—the sin just confessed was done with on the cross when Jesus said, "It is finished"; that is, before even it was committed. Then, secondly, as to the enjoyment of our relationship, it is done with the moment, with a

broken heart, we honestly confess it.

But be it remembered all the same, that there is a sense in which it may not necessarily be done with; that is, in connection with God's government. Take a suggestive illustration. We will suppose the case of a man who, before his conversion, was a confirmed drunkard. He makes a clean break with the world and his old habits, and for years goes on brightly. He grows in the truth, and is even used of God in preaching to others. He fills, under his employer, a post of peculiar trust; one for which only the very steadiest of men would be eligible. A few years roll by, and then, alas! his love begins to decline; his appetite for heavenly things decreases, while his relish for what is earthly and sensual increases; old tastes are afresh cultivated, old worldly associations, especially those of the more refined type, become

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gradually revived. They do not in these circles consider him nearly so "narrow" as he used to be, and welcome his gradual return to their convivial gatherings. One day he has been out of town for his master, and in the evening, on his way home, he calls to see a friend—one of those semi-religious, love-the-world type of people so common in the present day. He is asked to take a glass of stimulant, and though at first he refuses, with a little friendly pressing he takes it, and then a second also. The old thirst is so powerfully revived that after leaving his friend's house he steals down a back passage to some bar parlour, and takes another glass, then another and another until his brain reels, and he can only stagger his way home! On the road a worldly young gentleman, a relative of his master's, and employed in the same office, meets him, and observing his condition taunts him with it. In

savage rage he lifts his hand, and, striking the young man down, leaves him bleeding on the kerb-stone. He reaches home and goes to bed.

Having slept off the effects of the alcohol he awakes. But imagine his mortified feelings as he says to himself, "Was I the worse for drink last night? Is it possible? Did I strike

that relative of my master's in the street? Is it not some horrid night-mare?"

His poor wife can but too surely corroborate the first part of his enquiry, and with bitter tears she

does it.

"What! I, a Christian, under the effects of liquor, striking a man in the street! Can it be possible!" he exclaims. "Can it be possible!" He gets out of bed; and, like a wounded worm writhing from the cut of a

ploughshare, he lies prostrate on the bedroom floor in anguish unutterable. How he lashes himself! How he

loathes himself! No words could express the intensity of his mental agony. God's ploughshare has entered his soul, and he reviews the past in His presence. He traces the varied steps in his spiritual decline; judges himself unsparingly; weeps over the sad dishonour he has brought upon his blessed Lord; confesses his sins, and is forgiven.* (1 John i. 9.) But is the matter done with? Far from it. The next day he receives a summons for "brutal assault." His master, a worldly man, is shocked beyond measure at such conduct from a professing Christian. He feels he can no longer trust him in such an important. post, and with undisguised indignation dismisses him from his service. Nor is the reaping even now done with.

• While this supposed case is thus stated to bring out more distinctly, by way of illustration, the side of government, the fruit of full restoration is not so quickly reached. It is easier to condemn and confess some act of sin than to judge the state that led to it. (See Num. xix. 12.)

For many a long day he is made to feel the effects of his worldly course. He is reaping what he sowed. Out of employment for months, his wife suffers, his family suffers, and oh, how keenly he suffers! Then there is his testimony as a Christian. Oh, what a blow it has sustained! And all this, though his soul had been truly restored

Now this principle, we say, runs through the whole of Scripture. It is stamped upon the whole page of history, sacred and profane; it is interwoven in the affairs of nations; it makes its mark on families and on individuals; and, let even sceptics

Take the history of the Jews since the death of Christ. They chose, on that momentous occasion, "a robber" in preference to Christ. "No king but Cæsar" was their cry. "Crucify

say what they will, it will be found

that their own histories furnish no

Him"—the true Messiah. And how

have this world's "Cæsars" treated

them since? Read their history.

Witness their treatment in modern

days, even in cultivated, religious

Europe, and say whether they have not reaped what they sowed in preferring a Gentile monarch or even a "robber" to Jesus. What nation has been robbed in such a wholesale way as they? Again, they cried, "His blood be upon us and our children." They gave thirty pieces of silver to a traitor to get rid of Him; and then, when poor Judas threw the money at their feet in bitter remorse, being too religious to put it into the temple treasury, they bought a piece of ground with it, and called it "the field of blood," a place "to bury strangers in." Now where, upon the face of the earth,

could you find a country of the same

size that has been such a scene of

bloodshed as the land of Canaan?

It has, for that guilty nation, been indeed "a field of blood." Could any other place be found where so many "strangers" have been buried as in that land? Witness the Crusades. What thousands upon thousands of the very flower of Europe fell in those years of fierce and deadly conflict! Yes, truly it has been a place "to bury strangers in."

Take a case from the Old Testa-

ment. Adoni-bezek was one of the

heathen lords of Canaan. The combined forces of Judah and Simeon made battle against him and took him captive, cutting off his thumbs and great toes. It seemed very severe treatment, but there was God's government behind it. Adoni-bezek was only reaping what he had sown, and his own lips are made to confess it. Mark what he said: "Three score and ten kings, having their thumbs and

their great toes cut off, gathered their

meat under my table: as I have done

so God hath requited me." (Judges i. 6,

7.) Be not deceived, ye stout-hearted,

ye unconverted doing your own will.

"God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Take again the history of one of the patriarchs. At his mother's instigation Jacob killed a kid, and while he was entertaining his father with its flesh, he deceived him with its skin. Then a second bit of deception is practised. To get a wife is the plea for his hasty departure, although the real reason was Esau's rage against him. Now mark first how the mother reaps. Her plan of a "few days'" flight to her brother Laban turned out to be a twenty years' absence, and, as far as history records, she never set her eyes again upon her beloved Jacob! Then, when he gets to Laban, he is almost immediately called to reap what he had just sown. Laban deceives him in promising to give him Rachel. Jacob had taken

advantage of Isaac's darkness to deceive him, and now Laban takes advantage of the darkness of the evening to deceive Jacob.

It does not always follow however.

It does not always follow, however, that we reap as quickly as this. It was many years after Jacob had killed that kid, and deceived his father with it, that his sons killed a kid, and,

with it, that his sons killed a kid, and, sprinkling its blood upon Joseph's coat, deceived him with it!

Turn now to the history of another Old Testament saint. David had stained his character, and disgraced his throne by two of the darkest crimes of which man could possibly be guilty. (2 Samuel xi. xii.) He committed adultery with the wife of one of his most faithful subjects, and then,

adultery with the wife of one of his most faithful subjects, and then, to cover his crime, planned the death of her unsuspecting husband. "Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword" (2 Sam. xii. 9) is the charge subsequently brought against him. It was a kind of second-hand murder.

A year of apparent indifference

on David's part followed. But was David's God indifferent? Far from it. Faithful Nathan waits upon the guilty king. The touching story of the ewe lamb is told, and David's anger is "greatly kindled" against the man. Could he possibly have a subject so base? (Wait and see, King David.) "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold because he had no pity!" It is wonderful how indignant we can be with other people's failings, and how marvellously tender with our own! But if we only thought a little more of God's government, it would assuredly make us more tender with one another. For it is a principle of His government that "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." (Matthew vii. 2.) "He

shall have judgment without mercy,

that hath shewed no mercy." (James ii. 13.) How little David weighed what he

was saying, or guessed for whom he was legislating, until those four simple monosyllables, "Thou art the man," fell upon his ears. Let them have issued as gently and tenderly as possible from Nathan's lips, they must have come like one of heaven's

thunderbolts to his royal hearer's conscience. David is now reminded of God's past kindness to him, of the many deliverances He had wrought for him, when another had unrighteously sought his life; of the many favours He had bestowed upon him. Had He not lifted him from the sheepfold to the throne? And if that had been "too little" He would have given him still more. But what, after all, had been his returns for

such unheard-of favours? He had proved himself a despiser of God's commandments, an adulterer, a murderer! Such had been his guilty sowing; now for the righteous reaping: "The sword shall never depart from thine house."

This opens. David's line and from

This opens David's lips, and from the depths of his inmost soul, and without the shadow of excuse for himself, bursts forth the honest confession, "I have sinned against the Lord." What follows? With equal promptness from the mouth of the

promptness from the mouth of the prophet come the gracious words, "The Lord hath put away thy sin" (or, more literally, The Lord hath made thy sin to pass over); "thou shalt not die."

Ah! God is more merciful to David

Ah! God is more merciful to David than David would have been to one of his own subjects. Thou shalt not DIE! How "rich is His mercy"; how "abundant in mercy and truth" is our Saviour-God. Still, there is the governmental side to be looked in the face. David had but re-echoed the claims of God's own government in Israel when he had said, "He shall

restore fourfold." (Exodus xxii. 1.)

It is true, the judgment of God for David's crime was to be borne by David's greater Son-by Jesus, the Lamb of God. It is equally true that he was restored to communion with God, restored to the joy of His salvation, and that he wrote many a precious inspired psalm after that. Yet the sword never departs from his house until he had restored "fourfold." David had pronounced the sentence; God would see it faithfully carried out. First, Bath-sheba's son dies. One lamb has gone! Then David sees his own sin reproduced in his two sons; incest in Amnon is followed by murder in Absalom. Thus another lamb has gone! Then Absalom is slain by Joab's dagger. A third lamb gone! Another still remains, and in him David appears to reap in a twofold way. Adonijah was apparently a good-looking youth, and a favourite of his father's.

David seems to have neglected to

exercise the necessary rule and discip-

line in his own family circle; for we

read, "His [Adonijah's] father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" And we may be sure of this, that if the head of a house fails to exercise proper authority, somebody else will soon take the reins. This was sadly verified in the case before us. Adonijan says (before his father dies), "I will be king." What is the solemn sequel? At the command of Solomon (the son of Bath-sheba) David's fourth lamb falls by the sword! How deeply must David's heart have felt all this, for he lived to see at least three out of the four cut off by the sword, and the fourth on the way to it. Perhaps the bitterest part of all the results of our fleshly sowing is what we reap in the bosom of our

The Lord grant both writer and

own families.

reader to profit by our meditation upon this solemn subject.

GOVERNMENTAL FORGIVENESS.

The truth of the governmental dealings of God would be more than any of us could bear up under, were it not that, as the Head of government, it is His prerogative, in sovereign mercy, to arrest, or under certain conditions, to mitigate the results of our sowing to the flesh; in other words, to grant governmental forgiveness.

You get an example of governmental forgiveness in the case of the sick person prayed over in James v. 5. Here you will notice, the forgiveness of sins and the restoration to health go together. It was not redemption forgiveness; for, as we have seen, the "prayer of faith" on the part of others could not accomplish that; nothing but individual faith in the

precious blood of Jesus. Nor would it

appear to be communion forgiveness

either, for there is manifest fellowship of heart between him and the

elders of the church before the healing and forgiveness are brought about. The ground of governmental forgiveness is widely different to that in the other aspects of forgiveness. In the first and second aspects the ground is more distinctly pronounced. In the one which we are now con-

sidering all we can do is to bow to His mighty hand in government, and patiently wait for His merciful interference on our behalf. In the first two it is entirely a question of one's self personally before God. That is, I have faith in the blood of Christ for myself, as though there was no other sinner on earth; or I make personal confession, as though I was the only erring saint in existence. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." (Ps.

li. 4.) But government touches my relationship with others. It answers more to what is brought before us in connection with the trespass-offering, where, under certain conditions, repaas sacrifice to God.

ration had to be made to man, as well Will you now turn to Mark xi. 25, and read the passage, "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses"? This does not refer to our salvation for the next world, but to God's governmental dealings with us in this. Think how entirely different it is to "Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." "We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins," when it is a question of eternal forgiveness. Or to, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins," in the matter of the believer's restoration.

to the parable at the end of Matthew

In connection with this, if you turn

xviii., you will get the Lord's own illustration of governmental forgiveness. A king (head of government) and his servants are here brought in review before us. One owes the king ten thousand talents, or, in our money, about one million eight hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds sterling (£1,875,000). When demand is made he has nothing to pay, and his lord commands that he should be sold, his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. (Notice here, by the way, how a man's family is bound up with him in the ways of government.) The servant falls down before him, owns the righteousness of the claim, submits to it, and expresses his readiness to put the matter straight if it were ever in his power to do so; upon which the whole is forgiven. But he has a fellow-servant who owes him an hundred pence, or about £3 2s. 6d. of our money, a mere

paltry sum in comparison with his own debt. His fellow-servant takes towards him exactly the same ground as he himself had done towards his master, but not with the same result. This creditor makes his demand, but does not treat his debtor as the king

had treated him. "He laid hands upon him," "took him by the throat," and eventually "cast him into prison."

Now when the king heard of it he was wroth, and having called him into his presence, and reminded him of his own mighty debt, and of the full forgiveness he had received at his hands, brought upon his un-

merciful head the whole consequence of his own debt.

The blessed Lord then adds the following solemn statement: "So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

Is there not a danger, because we are under grace, and know something of eternal forgiveness through the blood, of forgetting the ways of God in government and that aspect of forgiveness of which the Lord speaks so plainly here?

What, then, would God have us learn by it?

speak of the need of mercy and

Why, that if our own past histories

governmental forbearance on His part, we should, if we wish to receive such at His hands, be very careful to show the same to others. Alas! we can be as hard as flints, and as sharp sometimes, especially when we think we have a righteous cause to maintain. Not that we should be lax as to evil. If a brother has sinned against us, God would not have us cover up the evil, or wink at it in any way. But let us beware of an unforgiving spirit: let us fast and pray and be broken about it: let us go to our brother and seek to exercise his conscience; or, as the Lord so simply expresses it, "If thy brother trespass against thee rebuke him: and if he repent forgive him"; remembering that "with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry

the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, and not be heard." (Proverbs xxi. 13.) "With the merciful Thou wilt shew Thyself merciful; with an upright man Thou wilt shew Thyself upright; with the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself unsavoury." (2 Sam. xxii. 26, 27.)

If these are not the unfoldings of

God's grace, they are the principles of His government, and must not, as such, be ignored by us.

We must not forget, however, how often God comes in, in His mercy, if not to arrest the consequences of

sowing to the flesh, yet to make

them serve for our highest good. Think, for example, of Nathan's next visit to David. When Bathsheba's second son was born, we are told "the Lord loved him," and sent His prophet to David to tell him so. This was Solomon, and we all know what favours God heaped upon him afterwards. What a faithful, gracious God is ours! Again, how refreshing and encouraging to our souls to see the mercy of God in connection with Jacob. If you had asked him in earlier days, when his sons were growing up all around him, what were the two chief desires of his heart, he would probably have said, "I would like to see all my children well cared for, but that 'coat of many colours'

around him, what were the two chief desires of his heart, he would probably have said, "I would like to see all my children well cared for, but that 'coat of many colours' upon the shoulders of little Joseph plainly declares that I should be glad to see him exalted above all the rest." How surprised he would have been had you said, "Well, Jacob

God is going to use two of the worst things that ever happened to youthings apparently most at war with these wishes of yours—to bring them about in a way you could never have expected." What could be worse than losing Joseph in the way he did? And next to that came the famine, threatening all the rest with starvation. Yet if he had not lost Joseph as he did, he would not have been exalted to the

highest place in Egypt, and when he was exalted Jacob might never have known of it but for the famine. This seems all the more wonderful when, we remember that it was in connection with reaping what he had sown years before, that he was deceived as to the real secret of Joseph's mysterious absence.

Aspects of Forgiveness Compared.

It may be helpful, before closing our remarks on this important subject, to give the reader an illustration which will put these three features of forgiveness side by side.

The father of a large family, we

The father of a large family, we will suppose, has godly exercises as to the companionships which his boys should have. He expresses to them his distinct wish that they should amuse themselves within the limits of an enclosed orchard which adjoins

the house, and expects, of course, that his wish will be obeyed.

One evening a policeman goes to the house and asks to see him. He

has called to say that his son Walter had thrown a stone and broken a certain draper's plate-glass window. The boy Walter is called for, and not being found in the orchard with the rest, the father fears the worst. He goes with the policeman to the

not being found in the orchard with the rest, the father fears the worst. He goes with the policeman to the draper's; finds that the stone had really been thrown by his son—that several witnesses had seen him do it. The draper insists either upon full payment for the damage, or on summoning the boy before a court of justice.

justice.

"What amount will cover the whole?" enquires the troubled father.
The sum of ten guineas is demanded.

The sum of ten guineas is demanded, and forthwith paid; a receipt is put into the father's hand, and he returns home.

Now who can, after this, bring that boy before a court of justice for his offence. No one. The one full payment—accepted by him who received the injury—has settled the matter for ever. So with the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the verse of our hymn expresses it—

That God can ne'er forget,
But one full payment cleareth
His memory of all debt.
When nought beside could free us,
Or set our souls at large,
Thy boly work Lord Jesus

Thy holy work, Lord Jesus, Secured a full discharge."

"The trembling sinner feareth

Or, in the language of another mn—

57

"If He has my discharge procured,
And freely in my place endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine."

But to return to our figure. The father and the erring son have not yet met. The relationship is still there, but there is practically no fellowship between them. On reaching home the father has to undertake the painful duty of calling his muchloved boy to account. He deals with him as he thinks a father ought to deal with such a case of wilful disobedience, and then telling him that he is not to go out again of an evening unless he bids him, he sends him upstairs to his bedroom.

Presently his brother comes to the father and asks if Walter can see him. The request is granted, and

then, with sobs, the poor boy tells his sad story; how that the whole thing began by his looking over the wall with longing eyes at some boys playing in the street; that this led to going a little way outside the gate to join them; that on another night he had gone down the first street with them, and that this evening he had reached the market-place; that while there a quarrel had taken place and stone-throwing resorted to, in which he had joined as eagerly as any of them, ending in the accidental smash of the draper's window by a stone from his own hand. "But, worst of all, father," says the troubled lad, "I several times disobeyed you. Can you forgive me?" The father, believing that the boy

The father, believing that the boy thoroughly condemns himself for his whole course of disobedience, gives him a word of loving admonition, and assures him, before going to bed, of his most hearty forgiveness. Thus

is fellowship restored between them, answering to restorative forgiveness in the Christian.

The next evening comes round, and after tea the rest of the children are preparing for their usual run in the orchard, when Walter enquires if he also can go out.

"No, my boy." "But, father, I thought you had

forgiven me!" "And are you not forgiven? Has the draper or the policeman been after you to-day?" "No, father."

"Why?"

"Because you paid the whole penalty which I had brought upon myself by throwing the stone through the window."

"Then in that respect you are forgiven. Again, did I not give you your kiss as usual this morning? Had you not your usual place at the table, and did you not share the same fare as the best-behaved child I had there?"
"Yes, father."

"Have I shown any coldness, or manifested any difference whatever in my manner toward you; or have I even mentioned last night's sorrowful event in your hearing? No," the father continues, "our personal fellow-

ship was restored last night; but I

could not, in the government of my

household, pass over such a thing with lightness; and this not only for your own sake, but for that of your brothers and sisters. For this reason you cannot go out any night until I think well."

At first the poor boy frets and pouts about it. But the father firmly and kindly insists that he is not to go outside the house after tea.

Presently he settles down to some school work; bows submissively to his father's hand in home government, and night after night so thoroughly learns his home-lessons, that at the

week's end a report comes from his teacher that he has gained the highest marks in his class for homework. Next night the father says, "Now,

my boy, you can go out." He sees he has not only bowed to parental rule and authority, but has been a positive gainer by the whole affair, and thus he is GOVERNMENTALLY forgiven. So with us. It is not enough to

thus he is GOVERNMENTALLY forgiven. So with us. It is not enough to be restored to communion with the Father and the Son by the Spirit; we must bow to God's hand in government; we are called upon to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in due time. We are to pass the time of our sojourning here "in fear," for we call on a Father "who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work." (1 Peter i. 17.) Yet it is not a slavish fear, for we are told in the same epistle to cast all our care upon Him, for "He careth" for us. (Chap. v. 7.)

our behaviour, and not fall into the

But He would have us jealous of

deceptive formality of sinning and confessing, sinning and confessing; and imagining that there the matter ends. "For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews xii. 29.) If nothing but the blood-shedding of Jesus could secure our eternal forgiveness; if nothing but the prevailing advocacy of Christ could insure our restoration; be assured, God will not allow us to tamper with sin with impunity. He will, we may be sure, give us, sooner or later, to feel His hand in government. Nor is it of any avail to struggle against it. It is such a "mighty hand." Yet, let us never forget that there is a mighty, mighty love behind every movement of it. Let us not allow the thought of what God's hand is in government to dim the thought of what His heart is in grace; and on the other side, never allow the professed knowledge of His

grace to be linked with looseness of walk and worldliness of ways; or deceive ourselves by the idea that such a course can be winked at in the sanctuary. We shall not always reap in kind. In the secret bitterness of soul agony we may often reap what we have sown-and, no doubt, the deeper the inward exercise, the lighter the outward stroke—but in government, all must be left with Him "who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work."

(1 Pet. i. 17.)

The Lord grant His rich blessing to both reader and writer of these pages, and so deepen in our souls the sense of His holiness and love, that we may walk the more softly before Him, cleave the more closely to Him, and work the more heartily for Him, until the goal be reached. GEO. C.

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