

The Remission of Sins

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"This is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."—(Matt. xxvi. 28)

If the purpose of shedding the blood of Christ was to obtain the remission of sins for men, how important that blessing ! There is only one thing that can stand between man and his God, only one thing that can keep a man out of heaven, and that is sin. There is only one way, as we attempted to show this morning, by which we can get rid of sin, and that is by the forgiveness of it. And consequently, he who dies with his sins forgiven is admitted into heaven—its gates stand wide open to him. On the other hand, the Savior says to certain men, "Ye shall die in your sins, and where I go ye can not come." To die in sin is to die with sins unforgiven.

REMISSION OF SINS IS NOT REPENTENCE

But the expression here used, is "the remission of sins." What does this mean? I believe that there are a great many people who have a serious misconception of what is meant by the remission of sins. They have come to identify remission of sins with a change of heart. They think that it is a change which takes place within the soul, in which the love of sin is taken away, and the love of God and of righteousness and truth, takes the place of it. Now, there is such a change as that in the heart of every one who becomes a Christian. The love of sin must be totally eradicated, and the love of God must take its place. The desire, the great and earnest longing, for a holy life and full communion with God and everything that is good, must take possession of the soul when a man becomes a Christian.

But let me say that this change takes place in repentance. It is repentance that involves a change of our hearts, a turning away from sin, and a repudiation of it by the force and strength of our will—a longing after everything that is good and true in Christ and God. That is repentance.

And you have read your New Testament to very little purpose, if you have not long ago learned that repentance precedes the remission of sins. We are told that John the Baptist came in the wilderness preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; or, the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins, as in the revised version. That shows that repentance precedes remission of sins. The Savior Himself says that repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in His name among all nations, and the Apostle Peter exhorted the people in the great discourse in the third of Acts, saying, "Repent and turn, that your sins may be blotted out." So, it is clear as day that this change called the remission of sins, does not take place in repentance, but follows it, and that the change of heart required in order that we may be saved, does take place when we repent. Nothing could make it plainer that it is a great mistake to suppose that remission of sins is an inward change of the soul of man.

REMISSION OF SINS IS FORGIVENESS

The same word in the Greek is translated remission that is translated forgiveness. The two English words, remission, and forgiveness, are used interchangeably, and they mean the same thing. So then, if you are ever again in any confusion of thought about that somewhat unusual expression, remission of sins, remember that it means precisely the same as forgiveness of sins.

Now forgiveness is one of those simple English words, the meaning of which is so obvious to every person that it is hard to give a definition of it. The definition would not make it any plainer. Everybody knows what it is to forgive, although we practice it so little. Everybody knows what forgiveness is. We extend it sometimes to one another—not as often as we should. That is remission. The only difference between the two words is that in the word remission there is a figure of speech. Literally, to remit means to throw back, or throw away, and it is used simply because, when God forgives our sins, He is contemplated as throwing them away, tossing them clear off, outside of all subsequent thought or concern in regard to them.

There is another expression used in the Scripture for the same thought, which is also figurative. I quoted it awhile ago. "Repent and turn," says Peter, "that your sins may be blotted out." They are contemplated in that expression as having been written down in some book, of God's remembrance as it were, and God in forgiving them is figuratively represented as blotting out that writing. And blotting out with the ancients was a little more complete than it is, usually, with us. When we write something down with ink, and blot it out, there still remain some marks to indicate that once there was a writing there. If you write on a slate and rub it out, some marks are often left. The ancients used a wax tablet.

You take one of our common slates and fill it with wax even with the frame, and you will have an ancient wax tablet. A sharp pointed instrument made the marks in the wax, and when they wished to blot it out, they turned the flat end of the stylus and rubbed it over, and there was an absolute erasure of every mark that had been made. That is the figure, then, used by Peter for the forgiveness of sins—indicating that when God forgives sins, they are not only thrown away, as in the expression remission, but they are blotted out—the last trace of them being gone, and gone forever. In perfect harmony with this last thought, another expression is used. One of the terms of the new covenant that God makes with Israel in these days under Christ, is this, "their sins and their iniquities, I will remember no more" (Heb. viii. 6-13). That is a very surprising, an astonishing statement. I do not know how God makes oath to forget them. We can't forget them: I don't know how He does. I don't know exactly what He means when He says, "their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more;" unless it means, I will never bring them up against you any more. They are gone. I have thrown them away; they are blotted out. Brethren, after having lived and groaned under sin, with a conscience that has ground us and tormented us for a long time, how blessed the relief—how unspeakably blissful the state, to know that they are blotted out — that they are thrown away—that they will never be brought up by the great God against us in all eternity— that in the day of judgment no mention will be made of them! That is the happy condition of the man who is redeemed by the blood of Christ, and has obtained the remission of sins.

And now, you have already seen from what I have said in explaining these expressions, not only that the

change called remission of sins is not a change that takes place within us, but that it is an act of the mind of God with reference to us. He it is who forgives. He it is who blots the record out of the book that He keeps. He it is that throws them away. It is He who will remember them no more forever. The whole process of the remission of sins, is an act in the mind of God with reference to us. It is not at all a change within us. The change that takes place within us must precede it. All the change necessary for our salvation from sin, as regards our own hearts and souls, must take place. Therefore He pronounces our freedom from sin. Thus then we dispose of the question as to what remission of sins is.

CERTAINTY OF PARDON – NOT BY FEELINGS

Now we raise another: How are we to know, beyond any doubt, so as to feel safe and settled in it, that our sins are forgiven?...that we are redeemed and delivered and blessed in this unspeakably glorious and blissful way?

This is a very important question. Thousands and thousands of people live today, and have lived in ages past, serving God with all earnestness of soul, who have never in all their lives come to be satisfied on this question. They sing all through their Christian experience: "Tis a point I long to know; Oft it causes anxious thought; Do I love the Lord, or no? Am I his, or am I not?"

That is a very doleful life to live. Uncertain, unsettled, in regard to the most momentous question that can affect your souls for time or for eternity. I feel quite sure the Lord did not intend us to live on that low ground of doubt, and gloom, and hopelessness. I am sure that there must be a way by which we may know that our sins are forgiven, and may know when it is done. But this question is answered very often by men in this fashion: "I know the very hour and the very minute when my sins were forgiven, for I felt it all through my soul, and all the world could not convince me to the contrary. You see there is a great disparity between the experiences of men. Some never get over their doubts, and some leap over them with one glorious bound, and shout "Halleluiah! " So, they know it by the way they feel. They felt it when it took place. They felt the sins rolled off. They felt light and joy coming in like a blaze from heaven, and they were full of bliss and glory and praise. They could not contain themselves without a shout. I wonder if that is true. I wonder if that is the way that we are to know^ that our sins are forgiven. If it is, what a vast multitude of people who never find it out!

Now one thing is certain about this—that every man, in his right senses, knows what takes place in his own soul. He knows it by the power we call consciousness, a power given to every rational being, by which he takes knowledge of every action or change that takes place within himself. So, if the forgiveness of sins is a change that takes place within the sinner, of course he knows it by feeling it. But we have just now seen that it is not any such thing; that it is an act of God, and that it takes place in heaven, not within the sinner's heart. Then he can not know it by what he feels. He cannot know it by consciousness. Impossible that he should know it thus. The only way by which I can know whether my neighbor, whom I have offended, has forgiven me, is—how? By feeling he has forgiven me? You find a little child that has sneaked off into the corner, and sat down there, and has been crying and crying bitterly, until finally it wipes its tears, gets up and goes to play. You say, "My child, what were you crying about?" "Because I offended mother." "Well, why did you quit? Why are you playing and cheerful now '?

Why did you wipe all your tears away?" "Because mother has forgiven me." "Well, how do you know?" "Why, I feel it right here." There is no child in Louisville that is as silly as that. She might say, "Because mamma came and kissed me;" or, "Because mamma spoke kindly to me;" or, "Because mamma said, 'My child, I am sorry I hurt your feelings; jump up and run and play.'" She might say, it was because mother said something that proved to her that she had forgiven her. But never, "Because I feel it here."

Or, you go to the penitentiary where there are seven or eight hundred poor wretches confined on account of their crimes, and find a man, if you can, who thinks that the governor has pardoned him. "Well, my friend, I understand you believe you are pardoned." "Yes, I am sure I am pardoned." "How are you so sure?" "Why, I feel like I am pardoned." All the prisoners would laugh at him. They all know—everybody knows—that one can not tell that another person has forgiven him an offense by the way he feels. Well, then, how in the name of common sense can a man know that God has forgiven him, away up yonder in heaven, by the way he feels. That is a great mistake. I think I hear some one mentally saying, "Why, sir, do you pretend to deny this experience which good men so often have?" No. No doubt in the world they feel, or felt, precisely as they say. No doubt about that. There are too many good, honest, earnest people, who are constantly proclaiming such experiences as that, for any man of sense to doubt the reality of the feelings of which they speak. Of course they feel so. Is it proof, though, that God forgave their sins at that time? It is no proof. Because God is up in heaven, and it is an act of His up there, and they can not know it by the way they feel.

But then, you want to know, is there any way to account for that feeling, except by claiming that it was the experience of the forgiveness of sins? Yes, a very natural, easy way to account for it. That little child, of whom I spoke, went off and dropped down in a dark corner, and cried and cried until it cried its cry out, and naturally felt better; crying brought relief. Sorrow can't last always. Gloom and despondency can't last always. We would die under sorrow, if it did not waste itself, like water from a vessel when it is tapped. We could not live under it. The darkness, the gloom and the horror, that a widow experiences the night her husband dies—they would kill her if there was not a natural reaction of the soul by-and-bye, by which the tears are dried up; and although she does not very soon become lively and cheerful, there comes a strange kind of calm over her troubled soul, which she does not know how to account for. It is the natural reaction of the human spirit, after being pressed down under a weight of woe. Now, if I have been taught that when I come to a full conviction about my sins, and am racked with agony in thinking of the hell to which I am going, and of the angry God who is stretching out His hand over my guilty head, and at length my feelings get calm, this change of feeling is proof that my sins are forgiven, I must at once be very happy. Believing this to be a proof that my sins were forgiven has the same effect on me as if it were a reality.

Then again, there is such a thing as human beings working themselves up into a state of ecstasy. It is seen in heathen lands; it is seen among Mohammedans. It is seen all the world over; for where there is an extreme desire to get into a highly elated and ecstatic state, men and women, by a great exertion, can often work themselves into it, especially when they have others round about them who urge them on. If they mistake everything that is calculated to help them through such a struggle and for divine help, believe that when they reach that state of ecstasy, this is a gleam of pardon from heaven, they can

not restrain the shout of praise, the halleluiah, the "glory to God," which bursts from their lips. But all this is a natural working of the human soul will this takes place within our own hearts.

It is not that act of the Almighty in heaven in which He says, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven." It is not that. It is on earth, and He is in heaven. If a man is convinced that he is pardoned, he is just as happy as if he were, though wrongly convinced. A man up in the penitentiary was deceived. Some of the officers concluded they would play a joke on him: so they brought to him a pardon regularly made out on the blank form the Governor uses, with his name signed, and a fictitious appearance of the seal of state, and said: "Here, Tom, the Governor has pardoned you. Here's your- pardon." The poor fellow believed it, and began to leap and dance and throw off his old striped clothes, and call for those he wore to prison ; and looked to see the officer come who was to take him out. He was as happy as could be, until he waited long and nobody came, and he saw the crowd begin to titter at his expense; and then he sank. While he believed that the pardon was genuine, he was just as happy as if it had been. And so, any person, on reaching a certain state of feeling which he verily believes is proof of forgiveness of sins, would be as happy as heaven could make him, for a little while. But how uncertain the foundation on which such convictions rest. What a common experience it is for those who have been thus led to think that they were pardoned, to doubt and doubt for a time, and then, when there comes a glorious wave of feeling, to say. Oh! it is true, I was converted, and then, when a gloomy wave rolls over the soul—all doubt and gloom again. This is the unhappy experience of a vast multitude of the good people of this earth, all growing out of the mistaken idea that we can tell whether .God has forgiven our sins or not by the way we feel.

CERTAINTY OF PARDON – BY GOD’S WORD

How can we know? How can we settle this momentous question? I do not think there is any other way, except to get some word from God in regard to it; some sign, or some token, or some message direct from Heaven; something that God has said Himself that makes it plain. If I have offended my friend, and he extends his hand, and says "My dear brother, I want to make up this quarrel," then I know he has forgiven me—I experience no doubt or uncertainty about it.

I presume then that God has some way of communicating the fact of forgiveness to us, in plain, clear indications that it came from Him. A good many years ago, when they were first putting up telegraph wires — shortly after Morse extended the line from Washington to Baltimore—there was quite a prominent preacher in the vicinity where I lived, who admitted that we can not know that our sins are forgiven without some such communication on the subject, from God ; but he said, "Brethren, God has a kind of a spiritual telegraph reaching from Heaven to earth, and touching every human soul ; and when He forgives the sins of a man. He touches that spiritual wire at the other end, and it is immediately communicated to the heart of the penitent sinner." Well, that came very much nearer being an explanation in harmony with the facts in the case, than what I was talking about a while ago. But how about that spiritual telegraph? If it comes down from God and I do not see it, nor hear the ticking of the instrument, all I know as to whether the message has been sent or not is what I feel. What evidence have I except my own feelings in the matter? The explanation is unsatisfactory; the illustration does not

help out the case, because it leaves the sinner still to look into his own feelings to know whether or not God has forgiven him.

Now there is a way, and it is this—God has said, over and over again in his blessed written word, in the plainest possible language, what you and I shall do in order to forgiveness of our sins; what we shall think; what we shall feel; what we shall believe; what we shall do; and He pledges His own blessed word that when we do these He will forgive us. When a man knows these things, and complies with them to the very last point, he has God's pledged word that his sins are forgiven—the word of Him who cannot lie. Here is something solid to build on, the pledged word of the living God. This makes it certain.

The things He tells us to do, are things we cannot be mistaken about. God says, when you do these you shall be forgiven. In this way we may have the highest evidence this universe affords that our sins are forgiven. We build on a rock, when we rest our convictions on such an assurance as this.

We might illustrate. Take the matter of executive pardon. The Governor says to the poor convict in the penitentiary, here is a pledge for you to sign of the kind of life that you will lead hereafter if I set you free. I leave it here on this table. The very moment you sign it I pardon you. When the man studies it all over, makes up his mind, takes his pen and signs the paper, what assurance has he of a pardon? He is just as certain of it, as that the word of the Governor is good. I give you a check for one thousand dollars. I say to you, Go down to the bank now, endorse that check, and hand it to the cashier, and he will place it to your credit on his books, and you can draw on that bank for one thousand dollars. You go and do it, and when you walk out and shut the door, do you feel any certainty that you have one thousand dollars there that you can draw on? You feel just as certain of it, as you are certain of the honesty and solvency of that bank. You go away perfectly satisfied that you have one thousand dollars there, although you have not seen a cent of it. You have not handled a single dollar of it; yet it is there; it is yours. You do not doubt it. Just so in this case with God. When God says, “Do so and so, and your sins, I will blot them out, every one of them, and remember them no more forever”; when you have done those things, as sure as God tells the truth, you are pardoned. You are forgiven. You do not rest it upon any uncertain emotions of your own heart, the cause of which you cannot always tell. You rest it on the solid rock of the promise of the living God.

Has God thus dealt with us? I will say in brief what I expect to set forth fully and elaborately in subsequent discourses that He has. He has said that he that believes in His dear Son with all his heart, **repents sincerely of all his sins, and is buried with the Lord in baptism, shall be forgiven.** Can you believe God? If you can, if you do, and go and do these three things—one with your mind; one with your heart; one with your body; when you have done them all you have to doubt the truthfulness of God before you can doubt that your sins are forgiven; and I have never in all my life, met a man who intelligently acted thus, that ever had a lingering doubt to the last day of his life that his sins were then and there forgiven.

Are there sinners in this house tonight with unforgiven sins? Oh I what a condition you are in. What a condition! You can't go to heaven with those sins. Where Christ and God are, you can not go. Die with the guilt of those sins upon your soul, and the penalty that God has attached is yours for eternity. You

can not be happy while you live in sin. It has torments with it day after day, and the only easy moments you have in the world are when, by some strange infatuation, you forget that you are a sinner, and forget your God—forget death and eternity. You know this very well. Do you desire remission of those sins? Do you desire that they be blotted out of God's remembrance? Do you desire the stain of that guilt to be taken out of your heart? Do you desire heaven and the angels to smile upon you, instead of frowning '? Do you desire a hope of immortality to cheer you on your way? Then come to Jesus according to those conditions by which He offers you that which He purchased with His own blood, free and complete and perfect and eternal forgiveness, and you will be happy.

You will experience all that I have just now described, and more. Beyond all the conception you have ever formed will be the peace of mind, passing all understanding, which will take possession of your soul. We plead with you to come; do not delay; but, as you are now a sinner, and the Savior is now before you, be saved by casting yourself upon his mercy tonight.