

OF
PARDON AND FORGIVENESS OF SIN.

ISAIAH xliii. 25.

I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

IN the foregoing verses, we have a heavy accusation drawn up against the people of the Jews : in which they stand charged both with sins of omission and of commission.

By the one, they showed themselves weary of God ; and, by the other, God became weary of them.

“ Thou hast not called upon me, nor brought me thy burnt-offerings, nor honoured me with thy sacrifices, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel : ” as it is in 22d and 23d verses. Thou thoughtest my commands grievous, and my service burdensome : and though, as thou art my sworn servant, I might compel thee to work ; yet I have borne with thy sloth, and suffered my work to lie undone. “ I have not caused thee to serve with offerings, nor wearied thee with incense : ” as it is in the 23d verse. Nay, as if rejecting my service had not been indignity enough, thou hast even brought me into a kind of servitude ; even me, thy Lord and Master : thou hast wearied my patience ; thou hast loaded my omnipotency : “ Thou hast made me serve with thy sins ; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities : ” v. 24.

And what could we now, in reason, expect should be the close of so heavy an accusation, but only as heavy a doom and sentence ? “ Thou hast brought me no sacrifices : therefore I will make thee a sacrifice to my wrath. Thou hast not called upon me ; and, when thou dost call, I will

not answer. Thou hast wearied me with thy sins : and I will weary thee with my plagues."

But there is no such expected severity follows hereupon but, "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions: for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." The like parallel place we have concerning Ephraim : Isa. lvii. 17, 18. "He went on frowardly in the ways of his own heart:" Well, says God, "I have seen his ways:" and, what! "With the froward, shall I show myself froward?" No: but "I have seen his ways, and I will heal him."

Here is the prerogative of free grace; to infer pardon there, where the guilty themselves can infer only their own execution and punishment. It is the guise of mercy to make strange and abrupt inferences from sin to pardon.

The words are a gracious proclamation of forgiveness; or, an act of pardon passed on the sins of men: and contain in them three things.

1. Here is the Person, that gives out this pardon; and, that is God: accented here by a vehement ingemination, "I, even I, am he."

2. Here is the pardon itself; which, for the greater confirmation of our faith and hope, is redoubled: I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins.

3. Here are the motives, or the impulsive cause, that prevailed with God, thus to proclaim pardon unto guilty malefactors; and, that is, for his own sake. "I am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake."

1. As for the first particular, I, even I, am he;" we may observe, That God seems more to triumph in the glory of his pardoning grace and mercy, than he doth in any other of his attributes.

"I, even I, am he." Such a stately preface must needs usher in somewhat, wherein God and his honour is much advanced. Is it therefore, 'I am he, that spread forth the heavens, and marshalled all their host; that hung up the earth in the midst of the air; that breathed forth all the creatures upon the face of it; that poured out the great deeps, and measured them all in the hollow of my hand; that ride upon the wings of the wind, and make

the clouds the dust of my feet?' This, though it might awe and amuse the hearts of men, yet God counts it not his chiefest glory; but, "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out transgressions, and forgiveth iniquities."

So we find, when God condescends to show Moses his glory, he proclaims, not the Lord, great and terrible, that formed all things by the word of his mouth, and can destroy all things by the breath of his nostrils: no; but he passeth before him with a still voice, and proclaims himself to be, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."

So that, when God would be seen in his chiefest state and glory, he reveals himself to be a sin-pardoning God: "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins."

2. As for the pardon itself, that is expressed in two things: "I am he, that blotteth out, and will not remember."

Blotting out implies, that our transgressions are written down. And written they are, in a two-fold book; the one, is in the book of God's remembrance; which he blots out, when he justifies a sinner: the other, is the book of our own consciences; which he blots out, when he gives us peace and assurance. And, oftentimes, these follow one upon the other: when God blots his remembrance-book in heaven, that blot diffuseth and spreadeth itself even to the book of conscience, and blots out all that is written there also. Man blots his conscience by committing sin, but God blots it by pardoning it; he lays a blot of Christ's blood upon a blot of our guilt: and this is such a blot, as leaves the conscience of a sinner purer and cleaner than it found it.—Blotting out of transgression implies a legal discharge of the debt. A book, that is once blotted and crossed, stands void in law: whatever the sum and debts were before, yet the crossing of the book signifies the payment of the debt. So is it here: "I will blot out thy transgressions:" that is, 'I will acquit thee of all thy debts; I will never charge them upon thee; I will dash them all out: I will not leave so much as

one item, not one sin legible against thee.' This is the proper meaning of this expression and notion, of blotting out transgression and sin.

And this is one thing, that pardon of sin is expressed by.

It follows, in the next words, "And I will not remember thy sins." Not that there is truly any forgetfulness in God: no; his memory retains every sin which we have committed, surer and firmer than if all our sins were written in leaves of brass. But God speaks here, as he doth elsewhere frequently in scripture, by a gracious condescension, and after the manner of men; and it is to be interpreted only by the effects: "I will not remember their sins;" that is, 'I will deal so mercifully with them, as if indeed I did not remember the least of their provocations: I will be to them as one, that hath utterly forgotten all their injuries.' So that this, not remembering of sin, denies not the eminent act of God's knowledge, but only the transient act of his justice; and is no more than his promising not to punish sin; as if God had said, 'I will not be avenged on them, nor punish them for their sins.'

And here we may see what abundant security God gives his people, that they shall never be impleaded for those sins, which once they have attained the pardon of: they are blotted out of his book of remembrance. And, that they may not fear he will accuse them without book, he tells them, that they are utterly forgotten: and shall never be remembered by him, against them, any more.

3. Consider *the impulsive cause*, that moves God's hand, as it were to blot out our transgressions: and, that is, not any thing without himself, but, says God, I will do it "*for mine own sake.*"

This admits of a two-fold sense, efficient and final.

First. "For mine own sake:" that is, 'because it is my pleasure: I will do it, because I will do it.'

And, indeed, this is the royal prerogative of God alone, to render his will for his reason: for, because his will is altogether sovereign and independent, that must needs be most reasonable, that he wills. If any should question why the Lord passed by fallen angels, and stooped so low as to take up fallen man; and, why, among men, he hath rejected many wise and noble, and hath chosen those that

are mean and contemptible; why he hath gathered up and lodged in his own bosom, those that wallowed in the filth and defilement of the worst sins, when others are left to perish under far less guilt: the most reasonable answer that can be given to all, is this, 'I have done it, for my own sake: I have done it, because it is my will and pleasure to do it:' even the same reason that God gave unto Moses: "I will be gracious, because I will be gracious; and I will shew mercy, because I will shew mercy:" Exod. xxxiii. 19. which was the same answer, that our Saviour gave to himself: Luke x. 21. "Even so, Father; because so it seemed good in thy sight.

Secondly. "For mine own sake:" we may take in a final sense: that is, 'I will do it, because of that great honour and glory, that will accrue to my great name by it.'

The ultimate and chief end of God in all his actions, is his own glory. God bestows pardon and salvation upon us, chiefly for the manifestation of his own glory; even the glory of his mercy and free grace. Our salvation is therefore accomplished, that it might be a means to declare to the world how merciful and gracious God is: not so much for our good, as for his glory; not for our sakes, but for his own sake. Such a parallel place we have in Ezek. xxxvi. 22. "I do not this for your sakes, saith the Lord, but for my holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen." 'I will show mercy unto you; not so much that you may be delivered, as that my holy name, that you have profaned, may be redeemed from that dishonour, that you have cast upon it, and may be glorified among the heathen.'

And thus we have the full interpretation of the words; and, from them, I shall raise and prosecute this observation, that *the grace of God, whereby he blots out and forgives sin, is absolutely free and infinitely glorious.* "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgression for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

I. Though this doctrine of free grace hath deserved well of all; as being the best tenure of our present enjoyment, and the best prop for our future hopes; yet hath it, in all ages, found bitter enemies; and, of old, like the

procurer of it, been crucified between two thieves, the Gnostics and the Pelagian heretics.

The Pelagians deprive it of its freedom, and enslave it to the will of man ; affirming, that God therefore pardons and saves some, because they will, by the power of their own nature, work faith in themselves ; whereas, the truth is, therefore God works faith in them, because he will pardon and save them. Thus they make free grace a handmaid, to wait upon the motions of free will. Now this is greatly derogatory to free grace, for men to bottom their faith and pardon upon the arbitrariness of free will ; and not upon the almighty sovereign grace of God, that first moves the will to believe, and then pardons it upon believing.

As these depress the free grace of God ; so there are others, that ascribe too much unto it : of old, Islebius, in Luther's time ; who was the first ringleader ; of latter days, the Antinomians. And these think the grace of God is so free, as to supersede all necessity of working, for it or with it ; and that it is enough for us to sit still and admire it, and so to be hurried away to heaven in a dream. Nay, some, even in our days, have, upon this principle, arrived to that height of blasphemy, as to affirm, that we never so much glorify free grace, as when we make work for it by stout sinning.

i. Now therefore, that we may avoid both these extremes, it will be very necessary to state aright, *how the grace of God is free*, and *how it is not free*.

Now there are many sorts of freedom : a freedom from natural necessity : a freedom from violent co-action, and from engaging promises, and the like : but these are not pertinent to our present business.

When grace, therefore, is said to be free, it must be taken in a two-fold sense, free from any procurement, free from any limiting conditions.

And, accordingly, I shall propound the resolution of two questions :—whether the grace of God be so free, as to exclude all merit and desert : and then, whether it be so free, as to require no conditions.

1. *Whether the grace of God be so free, as to exclude all merit and desert.*

In answer unto this question, I shall lay down three propositions.

(1.) That *the pardoning grace of God is not so freely vouchsafed to man, as to exclude all merit and desert on Christ's part.*

There is not the least sin pardoned unto any, but it first cost the price of blood, even the precious blood of the Son of God. It is this blood, that crosseth God's debt-book; and blotteth out all those items, that we stand indebted to him for. As Christ now sues out our pardon, by his intercession in heaven; so he bought out our pardon, by his sufferings on the cross: for, "without shedding of blood, there is no remission:" Heb. ix. 22. And, "This is my blood," says our Saviour himself, "which is shed for the remission of sins:" Mat. xxvi. 28. And, "we are not our own," but we "are bought with a price; even with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: as the two great apostles speak: 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. 1 Pet. i. 19. Some have made bold, and possibly with no bad intention, to call Jesus Christ the greatest sinner in the world; because the sins of all God's people met in him, and were imputed to him; they were his, by a voluntary susception and undertaking. And, if the foregoing expression may be allowed, there is one in heaven, the highest in glory, whose sins were never pardoned; for our Lord Christ paid down the utmost farthing that either the law or justice of God could exact, as a satisfaction for those sins that he voluntarily took upon himself: and, therefore, by law and justice, and not by free grace, he hath taken possession of heaven for himself, and is there preparing mansions for us. In respect of Christ, we receive nothing of free grace, or of free gift; but all is by purchase; and, as we ourselves are bought with a price; so is every thing we enjoy: even common and vulgar mercies come flowing in upon us in streams of blood: our lives, and all the comforts of them, much more our future life, and all the means tending to it, are paid for by the blood of Christ. So that the grace of God is not so free, as to exclude all merit on Christ's part; who hath purchased all we enjoy or hope for, by paying a full and equitable price to the justice of God.

(2.) *The infinite grace of God, in giving Christ to us and his blood for us, through which we have pardon merited, is absolutely free ; and falls not under any merit, either of ours or of his.*

It falls not under any merit of ours. For, certainly, could we have merited Christ out of heaven, we might as well have merited heaven without Christ. When God, in his infinite wisdom, foresaw how we would reject and despise his Son ; first spill his blood, and then trample upon it ; he did not account this demeanour of ours to be meritorious of so great a gift.

Which is yet more to the glory of God's free grace, he bestowed Christ upon us ; not only without any merit of ours, but without any merit of his also. It is free grace, that pardons, that sanctifies, that saves us ; yet all this Christ purchased for us by a full price. God will have a price paid down for all other things of a less value ; that so he might hereby set forth his own bounty, in parting with his own Son for us without price.

(3.) *Pardon and grace, obtained through the blood of Christ, in respect of any merit of ours is altogether free and undeserved.*

We cannot of ourselves scarce so much as ask forgiveness ; much less, therefore, can we do any thing that may deserve it. All, that we can do, is either sinful or holy : if what we do be sinful, it only increaseth our debts : if it be holy, it must proceed from God's free grace, that enables us to do it ; and, certainly, it is free grace to pardon us upon the doing of that, which free grace only enables us to do. Far be it from us to affirm, as the papists do, that good works are meritorious of pardon : what are our prayers, our sighs, our tears ? yea, what are our lives and our blood itself, should we shed it for Christ ? All this cannot make one blot in God's remembrance-book : yea, it were fitter and more becoming the infinite bounty of God to give pardon and heaven freely, than to set them to sale for such inconsiderable things as these are : heaven needed not to have been so needlessly prodigal and lavishing, as to have sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world, to lead a miserable life and die a cursed death, had it been possible for man to have bought off his own guilt and to have

quitted scores with God, by a lower price than what Christ himself could do or suffer.

And, so much, for the resolution of the first question : God's pardoning grace, though it be purchased, in respect of Christ ; yet is it absolutely free, in respect of any merit of ours.

2. The second question is, *whether the grace of God be so free, as to require no conditions on our part.*

Of gifts, some are bestowed absolutely, without any terms of agreement ; and some are conditional, upon the performance of such stipulations and conditions, without which they shall not be bestowed.

Of which sort is this grace of God ?

I answer,

(1.) *The sanctifying and regenerating grace of God, whereby the great change is wrought upon our hearts in our first conversion and turning unto God, is given absolutely, and depends not upon the performance of any conditions.*

Indeed we are commanded to make use of means, for the getting true and saving grace wrought in us ; but these means are not conditions for the obtaining of that grace : for the nature of conditions is such, that the benefits which depend upon them are never bestowed, but where the conditions are first performed : and therefore we call faith and repentance conditions of eternal life, because eternal life is never conferred upon any, who did not first believe and repent. But, certain it is, God hath converted some without the use of ordinary means ; as St. Paul, and the thief on the cross. Therefore, though we are commanded to use the means ; yet the use of means and ordinances cannot be called conditions of our regeneration. And, indeed, if any thing could be supposed a condition of obtaining grace, it must either be a work of nature, or a work of grace : now a work of grace it cannot be, till grace be wrought ; and to go about to make a work of nature a condition of grace, is to revive that old error of the Pelagians, for which they stand anathematized in count Palestine many years since. Sanctifying grace is given freely, excepted from any conditions, though not excepted from the use of means.

(2.) *Justifying and pardoning grace, though it be free,*

yet is it limited to the performance of certain conditions, without which God never bestows it upon any; and they are two, faith and repentance.

And these graces God bestows upon whom he pleaseth, without any foregoing conditions. Faith in Christ is the freest gift, that ever God bestowed upon any; except that Christ, on whom we believe. But pardon of sin is restrained to faith and repentance, as the conditions of it; nor is it ever obtained without them. These two things the scripture doth abundantly confirm to us: "Whosoever believeth on him shall obtain remission of sins;" Acts x. 43: "Repent, that your sins may be blotted out;" Acts iii. 19: "Whosoever believeth on him;" there faith is made the condition of pardon: "Repent, that your sins may be blotted out;" there repentance is made the condition of pardon. These two particulars correspond with the two-fold covenant of grace, which God made with man. His absolute covenant, wherein he promiseth the first converting grace: this covenant is independent of any conditions, a copy of which we have in Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." And then there is God's conditional covenant of grace, wherein he promiseth salvation only upon the foregoing conditions of faith and repentance: this we have, Mark xvi. 16. "He that believeth, shall be saved."

Thus I have stated the great question concerning the free grace of God. The first sanctifying grace of God is so free as to exclude all conditions; but the justifying and pardoning grace of God is limited to the conditions of faith and repentance: and both sanctifying and justifying grace are freely bestowed, without any merit of ours; but not without respect to the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who hath purchased them at the highest rate, even with his own most precious blood.

ii. In the next place, I shall endeavour to set before you *some particulars wherein the glory of God's free grace in pardoning sin may be more illustrated*; that it may appear God assumes to himself this, as the greatest honour, to be a sin-pardoning God. And,

1. This highly commends the freeness of pardoning grace, in that *God decreed to bestow it without any request or entreaties of ours.*

No rhetoric moved him, besides the yearnings of his own bowels. This was a gracious resolution, sprung up spontaneously in the heart of God, from all eternity. He saw thee wallowing in thy blood, long before thou wert in thy being : and this time was a time of love ; even a time before all times. What friend couldest thou then make in heaven ? What intercessor hadst thou then, when there was nothing but God ? When this design of love was laid, there were neither prayers, nor tongues to utter them. Yea, Christ himself, though now he intercedes for the application of pardon, did not then intercede for the decree of pardon : he could not then urge his blood and merits, as motives for God to take up thoughts of forgiving us ; for, had not God done so before, Christ had never shed his blood, nor wrought out salvation for us. What arguments, what advocates did then persuade him ? Truly, the only argument was our misery ; and the only advocate was his own mercy, and not Jesus Christ.

2. *God pardons sin, when yet he is infinitely able to destroy the sinner.*

And this greatly advanceth the riches and freeness of his grace. The same breath, that pronounceth a sinner absolved, might have pronounced him damned. The angels, that fell, could not stand before the power and force of his wrath ; but, like a mighty torrent, it swept them all into perdition : how much less, then, could we stand before him ! God could have blown away every sinner in the world, as so much loose dust into hell. It had been easy for his power and justice, if he had so pleased, to have triumphed in the destruction of all mankind, but only that he intended a higher and more noble victory ; even that his mercy should triumph and prevail over his justice, in the pardoning and saving of sinners.

3. *God pardons sin, though he might gain to himself a great renown ; as he hath on the damned.*

God might have written thy name in hell, as he hath written theirs ; and might have set thee up a flaming monument, and inscribed on thee victory and conquest to

the glory of his everlasting vengeance : both books were open before him, both the book of life and of death ; and the contents of both shall be rehearsed, to his infinite glory at the last day. Now what was it, that dictated thy name to him ? that guided his hand to write thee down rather in the book of life, than in the book of death ? that set thee down a saint, and not a sinner ? pardoned, and not condemned ? What moved him to do all this for thee ? Truly, the only answer that God gives, and which is the only answer that can be given, is the same, which Pilate gives concerning our Saviour, " What I have written, I have written."

4. *Consider the paucity and smallness of the number of those, that are pardoned.*

Professors of Christianity are calculated, by some, to possess not above the sixth part of the known world : and if, among them, we make a proportionable abatement for those that are professed idolaters, for the grossly ignorant, for the profane, and for the hypocritical ; certainly, there will be but a small flock remaining unto Jesus Christ : here and there one picked and culled out of the multitudes of the world ; like the olive-berries, of which the prophet Jeremiah speaks, left on the top of the uppermost branches, when the devil hath shaken down all the rest into hell. Now is it not infinite mercy, that thou shouldest be found among these gleanings after harvest ? that thou shouldest be one of these few ? God might have left thee to perish upon the same reason that he left others ; but he gathered thee out of all nations, kindreds, and languages of the earth, to make thee a vessel of mercy for himself. Indeed, thou canst never enough admire the peculiar love of God to thee herein, till the last day ; when thou shalt see the small number of those that are saved, standing on the right hand of Christ, compared with the vast numbers of those that perish standing at the left hand of Christ, and seest thyself among the small number of those that are saved.

5. This also commends the freeness of pardoning grace, that *whereas the fallen angels themselves were absolutely excepted out of God's act of indemnity and oblivion ; yet fallen man is again restored unto his favour.*

Them, God hath reserved in chains of darkness, unto the judgment of the great day : us, he hath brought into glorious light and liberty. Our sins are blotted out of the book of God's remembrance : whereas their names are blotted out of the muster-roll of God's heavenly host.

Now, here, there are four things, that do greatly advance the glory of free grace ;—their natures were more excellent than ours, their services would have been much more perfect than ours, their sins were fewer than ours are, and their pardon might have been procured at as cheap a rate, and at as little expence, as ours.

And yet, not them, but us, God hath chosen to be vessels of his mercy.

(1.) *Their natures were more excellent than ours.*

They were glorious spirits ; the top and cream of the creation : we, clods of earth ; the lees and dregs of nature : our souls, the only part by which we claim kin to angels, even they are of a younger house, and of a more ignoble extract : how are they debased, by being confined to these lumps of flesh, which, with much ado, they make a shift to drag with them up and down the earth ; rather as fetters of their bondage, than instruments of their service ! nay, so low sunk are we in this slime of matter, that we have not excellency enough so much as to conceive what a pure, heavenly, orient substance a spirit is. And, yet, such as we are, dust and filth, hath God gathered up into his own bosom ; though he hath disbanded whole legions of angels, and sent them down into hell. In these natures of ours, hath the Son of God revealed, or rather hid himself : even he, who “ thought it no robbery to be equal with God,” thought it no scorn to become lower than angels : “ He took not on him the nature of angels ; but the seed of Abraham.”

(2.) *Their services would have been more perfect, upon their restoration, than ours can be.*

Indeed, when we arrive at heaven, our services, our love, our joy, and our praises, shall then attain to a perfection exclusive of all sinful defects : but, even then, must we give place to the angels ; as in our beings, so in our actings also. Had God restored them and given them a pardon, heaven would more have resounded with the shouts

and hallelujahs of one fallen angel, than it can now with a whole concert of glorified saints: they would have burned much more ardently in love, who now must burn much more fiercely in torments: they would much more mightily and sweetly have sung forth the praises of God, their Redeemer, who now curse and blaspheme him more bitterly; and as far have out-stripped a saint in the work of heaven, as they shall do a sinner in the punishment of hell. And yet free grace passeth by them, and elects and chooses narrower hearts to conceive, and feebler tongues to utter, the praises of their Redeemer; whose praises ought therefore to be the more, because he chooses not them that may give him the most.

(3.) *Their sins were fewer than ours are.*

We cannot exactly determine what their sins were: only the apostle gives us a hint, that it was pride which gave them their fall: 1 Tim. iii. 6. "Not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." Whether it was pride, in that they affected to be God, or in that they scorned to be guardians and ministering spirits unto man, or in that they refused to become subject unto the Son of God who was shortly to become man, the schools boldly enough dispute, but no man can determine: but, whatever it was, this is certain, God was speedy in the execution of wrath upon them; tumbling them all down headlong into hell, upon their first rebellion. The time of their standing in their primitive state is conceived to be very short; for their creation, though the Socinians hold it was long before, must fall within the compass of six days; for, in that space, the scripture tells us, God made heaven and earth, and all things therein; and, therefore, within the space of six days, he created the angels also: some refer their creation to the first day's work; others to the fourth day: and it is probably thought, that Adam's continuance in innocency was not much above one day; and yet, even then, there were fallen angels to tempt him: so that their glorious and blessed state could not, according to this computation, last above six or seven days; such a speedy issue did God make with them upon their very first sin. But, how are his patience and forbearance extended towards sinful

man ! he drives Adam out of Paradise ; but it was of free grace that he did not drive him into hell, where he had but a little before plunged far more excellent creatures than Adam was : his patience is prolonged to impenitent, unbelieving sinners : he bears with their proud affronts ; waits their returns ; and, with a miracle of mercy, reprieves them for a much longer date, than he did the angels themselves. How much more then ought free grace to be extolled by us, which did not so much as relieve the angels for one sin ; and, yet, every moment grants out a free and absolute pardon to his servants, not for one sin, but for reiterated provocations ! they could not obtain respite, and we obtain pardon. How many leaves in God's remembrance-book stand written thick with multitudes of sins ; and, yet, no sooner doth God write down, but he also wipes out ! His pen and his sponge keep the same measure : our sins find constant employment for the one, and God's free grace and mercy find constant employment for the other.

(4.) Add to this what some with great probability affirm, *the same price, that bought out our pardon, might have procured theirs also.*

By which it plainly appears, that there is no other reason, why our estate differs from theirs, but only God's free, sovereign grace. Upon the same account, God might have damned all mankind that he damned the angels for ; and, at the same cost, he might have saved all the fallen angels, at which he saved some of mankind. The merits of Christ are the price of our pardon and redemption ; and these have in them an infinite worth, and an all-sufficient expiation : not for our sins only ; but for the sins of the whole world, both men and devils : the streams of Christ's blood shed on the cross for us, were sufficient to quench the flames of hell, and utterly to have washed away the lake of fire and brimstone : hell might have been depopulated, and those black mansions left void without inhabitants for ever, and the devils and men might have been common sharers in that same common salvation ; for, Christ having an infinite dignity in his person, being God as well as man, his blood the blood of God, his sufferings the sufferings and humiliation of a God, this enhanced

his merits to such a redundancy, as neither fallen angels nor fallen men, were their sins more and their miseries greater, were ever able to drain out: not a drop more of gall and wormwood should have been squeezed into the cup of Christ's sufferings, though it had proved a cup of health and salvation to them, as well as to us. And, yet, such was God's dreadful severity, that he excluded the angels from the benefits of Christ's death, though he had been at no more expences to save them; the price of whose pardon and redemption would have been the same: and yet we, such are the infinite riches of his grace and mercy, are redeemed by a price that infinitely exceeds the purchase! O the freeness and riches of God's grace, that he should thus pass by the angels, and pitch upon and choose such vile wretched creatures as we are!

6. *Pardoning grace is free; whether we consider the generality of its designation, or the speciality of its application.*

(1.) It is free in its *general designation*; in that God hath designed and purposed, to forgive the sins of all the world, if they will believe and repent.

It is the universality of grace, that mightily exalts its freeness. Now what can be more universal, than that proclamation of pardon, that God makes to poor sinners, in Acts x. 43. "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins?" The whole world is under this conditional promise: not one soul of man excepted: be thy sins more than the sands, greater than mountains; though the cry of them reacheth up to heaven, and the guilt of them reacheth down to hell; yet thou hast no reason, O sinner, to exclude thyself from pardon, for God hath not: only believe and repent. But, as general as this pardon is, yet is there somewhat that is discriminating in it, that makes it more illustrious; for it is not tendered to devils and damned spirits: Christ is not appointed to be a Saviour unto them, nor is his blood a propitiation for their sins: they are not under any covenant of grace, nor have they any promise of mercy, no not so much as conditional: it is not said unto them, "Believe, and you shall be rescued from the everlasting residue of your torments; believe, and

those unquenchable flames, you are now burning in, shall be put out : " no ; God requires no such duty from them, neither hath he made any such promise to them ; yea, should it be supposed, that they could believe, yet this their faith would not at all avail them, because God hath ordained no ransom for them, and resolves to receive no other satisfaction to his justice than their personal punishment. But, while we are alive, we are all the objects of God's free, pardoning grace. And, if any man, that hears the sound of the gospel, and upon what terms God hath proclaimed forgiveness of sin, shall notwithstanding perish in his sins, it is not because God hath excluded him from pardon, which he doth, seriously and with vehement importunity, offer and urge upon him ; but because he excludes himself, by his own impenitency and unbelief, in not accepting of it.

(2.) Pardoning grace is free in *the special application of it*.

The application of pardon is not made unto any, till the performance of those conditions upon which pardon is tendered ; and they are faith and repentance. Now, herein, is God's grace infinitely free, who first fulfils these conditions in his children, that so he may fulfil his gracious promises unto them of life and pardon. The conditional covenant of grace promises pardon and remission of sins, unto all, that shall believe and repent : but, notwithstanding all this, the whole world might perish under a contracted impotency, whereby they could not believe nor repent, did not the absolute covenant engage God's truth to work faith and repentance in the hearts of his people. So that one covenant promiseth pardon, if we believe and repent ; and the other covenant bestows this faith and repentance upon us : the conditional covenant promiseth pardon of sin and salvation, if we believe and repent : and the absolute covenant promiseth faith and repentance to us, to enable us to believe and repent. And what could God do more, that might farther express the freeness of his grace to us, than to pardon, upon condition of faith and repentance, which faith and repentance he works in us ? This is to pardon us as freely, as if he had pardoned us without any faith or repentance at all.

7. God sometimes selects out the greatest and most notorious sinners, to vouchsafe grace and pardon to them; when he suffers others eternally to perish under far less guilt.

He makes a difference in his proceedings, quite contrary to the difference which he finds in men's demerits. And wherefore is this, but only to show forth the absolute freeness of his grace? Greater debts are blotted out, when smaller stand still upon the account, only that it may be known, that God is free to do what he will with his own; and that he will show mercy to whom he will show mercy; and whom he will he pardons. How many heathens, men of improved natural endowments and proportionable virtues, yet, not having faith in and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, are excluded from pardon and forgiveness, whose sins rather show them to be men, than not to be Christians! Whereas others, under the noon-tide of the gospel, are guilty of such flagitious crimes, that show them to be monsters rather than men; and yet these, upon their faith and repentance, obtain pardon and remission: as if it were with God, as it is with men; the more there is to be remembered, the sooner he forgets. These riches of pardoning grace, St. Paul admires and adores, when he tells us, concerning himself, "I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy:" 1 Tim. i. 13.

8. God decrees to pardon, without foresight of merit or worth in us.

When we lay before him, as the objects of his mercy, divine love did not foresee any attractive comeliness in us, but made it. When we were cast forth "to the loathing of our persons," yet then was it "a time of love;" and even then, when we were "in our blood," God said to us, "Live." When we were full of "wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores," divine love condescended to bind them up and cure them. Such miserable deformed creatures were we! and could there be anything amiable in such an object as this? only, hereby, God puts an accent on the riches of his love; laying it out upon such as were not worthy, with a design to make them worthy.

9. God pardons, not only though he saw no merit in us; but, which is more to the glory of his free grace, though he

foresaw that many future wrongs and injuries would be added to those which we had already done.

He foresaw all our provocations and rebellions ; how we would abuse his grace, and turn it into wantonness : he saw the rebellions of our unregeneracy, and the infirmities of our converted state. Yet, though he foresaw all before they were, he resolved not to see them when they are : Numb. xxiii. 21. "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel." And this, though it ought not to encourage us in sin ; yet it may be a support and comfort to us, when, through weakness and infirmity, we have sinned ; that God, who loved us and decreed to pardon us, when he foresaw how sinful we would be, will not certainly now cease to love us and pardon us, when we are as vile and sinful as he foresaw we should be.

10. *The Lord Jesus Christ, by whom alone we are pardoned, is freely given to us by the Father.*

What price could we have offered, to have brought down the Son of his eternal love from his embraces ? What was there in us, to draw a Saviour out of heaven ? Were we so amiable, as to move him to divest himself of his glory, and to eclipse his Deity in our mortal bodies, only that he might become like such poor worms as we are, and take us unto himself ? Ask no more ; but admire : "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is a mystery, that the whole college of angels can never comprehend ! What, God condemn his Son, that he might pardon rebels ! The Son of God blot his Deity in our flesh, only that he might blot out our transgressions with his blood ! This is such transcendently free grace and love, that in this we have an advantage above the angels themselves ; standing higher in the favour of God, upon this account, than they do.

Now compact all these ten particulars, in your thoughts, together, wherein the freeness of pardoning grace most illustriously appears ; and you will find there is good reason for God, in the text, triumphantly to ascribe to himself, "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out your transgressions."

iii. *The application, which I shall make of this truth, I shall only briefly mention,*

1. Is the pardoning grace of God thus free? *Take heed then, that you do not abuse nor turn it into wantonness.*

Shall we continue in sin because God so freely pardons sin? God forbid! who would make such an accursed inference as this, that ever had the least sense or touch of divine love upon his heart? Every one loves to have his ears tickled, with this soft, sweet, downy doctrine of God's free grace and love; and, when they hear it, they stretch themselves upon it, and lull themselves fast asleep in sin: but what says the wise man, Prov. xxv. 27? "It is not good to eat much honey." No: there is no such dangerous surfeit, as upon the sweet and luscious truths of the gospel. This honey leaves a deadly sting in men, that abuse it to encourage themselves in sin. It is such disingenuity, to argue from freeness of pardon to freedom in sinning, that, I dare say, No heart ever had a pardon sealed to it by the witness of the Spirit of God, but utterly abhors it. What! therefore to provoke God, because he is ready to forgive! What! to multiply sin, because God is ready to pardon! What is this, but to spurn at those bowels of mercy, that yearn towards us; and even to strike at God with that golden sceptre, that he holds out to us, as a token of love and peace? Certainly, they, who thus argue and who thus act, never knew what a sweet and powerful attractiveness there is, in the sense of pardoning grace and love, to win over the heart, from the practice of those sins that God hath forgot to punish.

2. *This should engage us to love that God, who so loved us, as freely, for his own sake, to forgive us such vast debts and such multiplied sins.*

This is the import of that speech of our Saviour, he loveth most, to whom most is forgiven. And, hence it is, and you may commonly observe it, that none are such great lovers and admirers of free grace, as those, who, before conversion, were the vilest and most flagitious sinners.

3. *Since God doth so freely pardon us, let this teach us, and prevail with us, to pardon and forgive the offences of others.*

This is that, which the scripture doth urge, as the most natural inference of this doctrine of God's pardoning grace.

Thus the apostle : Eph. iv. 32. " Be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you." Say not, as ignorant people are wont to do, ' I will forgive, but I will never forget ; ' for God doth forgive and forget too : I will blot out your transgressions, and I will remember your sins no more. Your sins against God are talents ; others' offences against you are but pence : and if, for every trivial provocation, you are ready to take your brother by the throat, and wreak your wrath and vengeance upon him, may you not fear lest your Lord and Master, to whom you stand deeply indebted, should also deal so with you, for far greater crimes than others can be guilty of against you, and cast you into prison until you have paid the utmost farthing ; especially considering that you pray for the forgiveness of your own sins, as you do proportionably forgive the sins of others : " Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

And thus I have opened and demonstrated unto you the former part of the doctrine, that the grace of God, whereby he blots out and forgives sin, is absolutely free.

II. I am now, in the next place, to prove, that *it is infinitely glorious.*

This I shall endeavour to do, by considering pardon of sin, in the nature of it, in the concomitants of it, and in the effects and consequences of it : from all which it will appear, both how great a mercy it is to us, and how great a glory it is to God, that he blots out and forgets sin. And,

i. Let us consider *the nature* of pardon of sin : what it is.

And this we cannot better discover, than by looking into the nature of sin.

" Sin," therefore, as the apostle describes it, " is a transgression of the law." Now to the validity of any law, there are penalties, literally expressed or tacitly implied, which are altogether necessary. The guilt contracted by the transgressing of the law, is nothing but our liableness to undergo the penalty threatened in the law. And this guilt is two-fold : the one is intrinsical and necessary ; and that is the desert of punishment,

which sin carries always in it: the other is extrinsical and adventitious, by which sin is ordained to be punished. These two things are in every sin. Every sin deserves death; and God hath, in his law, ordained and threatened to inflict death for it.

Now it being clear, that pardon and remission of sin is nothing but the removal of the guilt of sin: the question is, whether it removes that guilt, that consists in the desert of punishment: or that, which consists in the voluntary appointment of it unto punishment; or both.

To this, I answer, pardon of sin does not remove the intrinsical desert of punishment; but only the adventitious appointment and ordination of it unto punishment, flowing from the will of God, who hath in his own law, threatened to punish sin. Remission doth not make, that the sins, even of believers themselves, should not deserve death; for a liableness to the penalty of the law, in this sense, is a necessary consequent upon the transgression of the law: but, because God, in the covenant of grace, hath promised not to reward his penitent servants according to the evil of their doings, therefore pardoning grace removes this guilt of sin arising from God's ordination of it unto punishment. As, suppose a traitor should accept of the proffer of a pardon, the guilt of his treason ceaseth not in the inward nature of it, but still he deserves to be punished; but this obnoxiousness of his, through the prince's favour and appointment is taken away, and so that guilt ceaseth: so every sin, which the repenting sinner commits, deserves death; but, upon his believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, this liableness unto death ceaseth, being graciously remitted to him by God.

The scripture sets forth this pardon of sin in very sweet and full expressions. It is called a covering of sin: Ps. xxxii. 1. "Blessed is the man, whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." Though our covering of our sins is no security from the inspection of God's eye, who clearly beholds the most hidden and secret things of darkness; yet, certainly, those sins, that God himself hath covered from himself, he will never again look into, so as to punish for them. Nay, yet farther, as a ground of comfort, pardon of sin is not only called a

covering of our sins from God's sight, but a covering of God's face and sight from them : so we have it, Ps. li. 9. "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." It is a casting of our sins behind God's back, as a thing that shall never more be regarded or looked upon : so it is expressed to us, Isa. xxxviii. 17. "Thou hast, in love to my soul," says good Hezekiah, when a message of death was brought to him by the prophet, "cast all my sins behind thy back." It is a casting of them into the depth of the sea : from whence they shall never more arise, either in this world to terrify our consciences, or in the world to come to condemn our souls : so we have it in Micah vii. 19, "I will cast all their iniquities," says God, "into the depths of the sea." It is a scattering of them, as a thick cloud ; so it is called, Isa. xlv. 22. "I will scatter their sins as a cloud, and their iniquities as a thick cloud." And, in the text, it is called a blotting out and a forgetting of sin : "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins : " a blotting out, to show, that God will never read his debt-book against us ; and, a forgetting it, that we may not fear, that God will accuse us without book.

These, and such like expressions, with which the scripture doth abound, do very much illustrate the mercy of God, in pardoning of sin : and I shall unfold it in these following particulars.

1. *Pardon and remission of sin, is no act of ours, but an act of God's only.*

It is nothing done, by us, or in us ; but an act of God's Free Grace merely, without us : and therefore God ascribes it wholly unto himself : "I, even I, am he." And when our Saviour cured the paralytic, the Scribes stormed at him as a blasphemer : "Thou blasphemest," say they to him, not knowing him to be God ; "for who," say they, "can forgive sins but God only ?"

But, be it an act of God's only, and not ours, and an act wholly without us, what comfort is there in this ?

Much : and that, upon these grounds ; because God's acts within us are always imperfect in this life, but God's acts without us are always perfect and consummate.

Sanctification is a work of God's grace within us, now this work, because it meets with much opposition in every faculty, from inherent sin which spreads itself over the whole soul, is therefore always in this life kept low and weak. But pardon of sin, is an act without us, in the breast of God himself, where it meets with no opposition or allay : nor doth it increase by small degrees ; but is, at once, as perfect and entire, as ever it shall be.

I do not mean, as some have thought and taught, that God, at once, pardons all the sins of true believers ; as well those they do or shall commit, as those they have already committed : but, only, that what sins God pardons, he doth not pardon gradually. There is nothing left of guilt upon the soul, when God pardons it ; but there is something left of filth upon the soul, when God sanctifies it.

And, therefore, as it is the grief of God's children, that their inherent holiness is so imperfect here, that they are so assaulted with temptations, so dogged by corruption, so oppressed and almost stifled to death by a body of sin that lies heavy upon them ; yet this, on the other side, may be for their comfort and encouragement, that God's pardoning grace is not as his sanctifying grace is, nor is it granted to them by the same stint and measure. A sin, truly repented of, is not pardoned to us by halves ; half the guilt remitted, and half retained : as the papists fancy, to establish their doctrine of purgatory : but it is as fully pardoned as it shall be in heaven itself.

(1.) And hence it follows, *though the guilt of sin be removed ; yet it is not our repentance that removes it.*

For then, as no man's repentance is absolutely perfect, so no man's sins should be fully pardoned ; but still there would be remainders of guilt left upon the conscience, as there is still a mixture of impenitency in the best Christians. But pardon and remission is not mingled with guilt, as grace is with sin ; because it is an act of mercy wrought, not in our breasts, but arising in God's only, where it meets with nothing to allay or abate it, and it is infinitely more perfect than our repentance can be.

(2.) Hence we may infer, that *our pardon is infinitely more sure, than our assurance of it in our own consciences can be satisfactory.*

For the sense of pardon is a work of God's Spirit within us, which commonly is mixed with some hesitations, misgivings, doubts, and fears: and, therefore, though our comforts be never so strong, though it be spring-tide with us, yet our ground for comfort is still much more. O what rich and abundant grace is this in God towards us, that exceeds both our grace and our comfort! And, therefore, though, O Christian, thy sanctification be the best evidence of thy justification and pardon; yet is it not the best measure of it: for thou art justified and thou art pardoned, much more than thou art sanctified. Sanctifying grace in thee, indeed, is in its first rudiments and inchoation; but pardoning grace in thy God, is consummate and perfect.

And that is the first thing.

2. *Remission of sin makes sin to be, as if it had never been committed.*

Things, that are forgotten, are no more to us, than if they had never had a being. Now God tells us, that he forgets our sins: "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

Nor is there any long tract of time required, to wear the idea of them out of his memory; as is necessary among men, to make them forget the wrongs and injuries done to them by their fellow-creatures: for God forgets the sins of his children, as soon as they are repented of; yea, sometimes sooner than our consciences do: for, many times, a Christian, after a heart-breaking repentance for some great sin, lies under the upbraidings of conscience, when God hath forgiven it; yea, and forgotten it also. God's officer is not so ready to acquit them, as God himself is. He forgets, as though no provocation or offence had ever been committed. "He retaineth not his anger for ever," says the prophet: Micah vii. 18, not for ever; but, so soon as ever we grow displeased with ourselves, he begins to be well-pleased with us: no sooner do sorrow and grief overspread our faces, but favours and smiles clear up his face to us.

See this gracious disposition of God, in Jer. xxxi. 19, 20. Ephraim is there brought in bewailing his sin: "Surely," says he, "after that I was turned, I repented:

and, after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh : I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." Now, what doth God, but presently embrace him, with most tender and most melting expressions of love, as if he had never been angry, nor had any cause for it? "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

And, therefore, O Christian, thou, who now perhaps criest out in the bitterness of thy soul, 'O that I had never committed this or that sin against God! O that I had never offended him in this or that manner!' Why thou hast thy wish, O sinner, herein: for God, when he pardons sin, make it as if it had never been committed against him.

3. Hence it follows, that, *upon remission of sin, God no longer accounts of us as sinners, but as just and righteous.*

It is true, after a pardon is received, we still retain sinful natures: still, original corruption is in us, and will never totally be dislodged out of us, in this life: but, when God pardons us, he looks not upon us, as sinners, but as just and righteous. A malefactor, that is discharged by satisfying the law or by the prince's favour to him, is no more looked upon as a malefactor; but as just and righteous, as if he had never offended the law at all. So is it here: we are both ways discharged from our guilt; by satisfaction unto the penalty of the law, in Christ, our surety; and by the free grace and mercy of God, who hath made and sealed to us a gracious act of pardon in Christ's blood: and, therefore, we stand upright in law; and are as just and righteous in God's sight, as if we had never sinned against him.

O how great consolation is here, unto the children of God! They account themselves great sinners, yea, the greatest and worst of sinners; but God accounts them just and righteous. They keep their sins in remembrance, as David speaks, "My sin is ever before me;" when

God hath not only forgiven, but forgotten them. They write and speak bitter things against themselves; when God is writing out their pardon, and setting his seal unto it.

4. *Pardoning grace can as easily triumph, in the remitting of great and many sins, as of few and small sins.*

What a great blot upon the heavens is a thick cloud, and yet the beams of the sun can pierce through that, and scatter it easily. God will blot out our transgressions as a thick cloud : so himself tells us, by the prophet : Isaiah xlv. 22. " I will blot out thy transgressions, as a cloud ; and thine iniquities as a thick cloud." A great debt may as easily be blotted out, as a small one. Ten thousand talents is a great sum ; yet it is as easily and freely forgiven, by the great God, as a few pence. God proclaims himself, to be a God " pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin ; " that is, sins of all sorts and sizes. The greatest sins, repented of, are no more without the extent of divine grace and mercy ; than the least sins, unrepented of, are without the cognizance of divine justice. Isaiah i. 18. " Though your sins be as scarlet, yet shall they become as white as snow : though they be red as crimson, yet they shall be as wool."

And can there then be found a despairing soul in the world, when the great God hath thus magnified his grace and mercy above all his works ; yea, and above all ours also ? Say not then, O sinner, ' My sins are greater than can be forgiven : ' this is to stint and limit the grace of God, which he hath made boundless and infinite ; and thou mayest, with as much truth and reason, say, thou art greater than God, as that thy sins are greater than his mercy. Of all things in the world, take heed that thou be not injurious to this rich grace, to this free love and mercy, that pardons thee even for its own sake. God pardons thee for himself, for his own sake ; and dost thou fear, O penitent believing soul, that ever he will condemn thee for thy sins ? no ; but as much as God and his mercy are greater than our sins, so much more reason will he find in himself to pardon the repenting believing sinner, than he can find reason in his sins to condemn him.

Thus we see what cause of comfort there is in this pardoning grace of God. And thus also we have considered pardon of sin in its own nature.

ii. We shall now consider pardon of sin in its concomitants and adjuncts.

And so we shall take a view of those things, which do inseparably accompany it : and thereby also we may see, how great and unspeakable a mercy it is.

It is a mercy, that is never bestowed upon the soul singly and alone ; but evermore comes environed with whole troops of associate-blessings. As,

1. *Pardon of sin is always conjoined with the acceptance of our persons.*

Indeed these two are the twin parts of our justification : and, therefore, we have them coupled together, Eph. i. 6, 7. " He hath made us accepted in the beloved." " In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." The whole mystery of our justification stands in these two things, remission and acceptance. Remission takes away our liableness unto death, and acceptance gives us a right and title unto life : for, to be accepted of God in Christ, is no other, than for God, through the righteousness and obedience of Christ imputed to us, to own and acknowledge us, as having a right and title unto heaven. And, therefore, we have mention made of pardon and an inheritance together, as the full sum of our justification : Acts xxvi. 18. " That they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among those that are sanctified." It is not, therefore, O soul, a bare negative mercy, that God intends thee, in the pardon of thy sins : it is not merely the removing of the curse and the wrath, that thy sins have deserved ; though that alone can never be sufficiently admired : but the same hand, that plucks thee out of hell by pardoning grace and mercy, lifts thee up to heaven by what it gives thee together with thy pardon, even a right and title to the glorious inheritance of the saints above.

2. Another concomitant is this ;—*whomsoever God pardons, he doth also in some measure sanctify.*

He subdues our sins, as well as blots them out : he abates their power, as well as removes their guilt. And,

indeed, it were no better than lost labour, for God to pardon sin, if he did not purify the sinner also : for, were but the least sin and corruption left to rule and reign in us, we should presently run ourselves as far into debt and arrears, as ever we were. Indeed, the best Christian, in whom grace is most prevailing and corruption weakest, yet even he stands daily and hourly in need of pardoning mercy : but yet, withal, his sins are not of so high a nature, nor so deep a stain, as usually the sins of wicked men are : his sins usually are such, rather for the manner of them, than for the matter of them : God, by his pardoning grace, forgives infirmities, failings, and defects ; and, by his sanctifying grace, ordinarily keeps him from the commission of more gross and scandalous sins. And how then can we enough admire the rich grace of God, that not only forgives us our debts, but withal bestows a new stock upon us, to keep us from running into debt again, in any great and desperate sums !

3. Pardon of sin is always conjoined *with our adoption into the family of heaven.*

Herein is the love of God greatly seen : not only to pardon rebels ; but to make them his children : not only to forgive debtors ; but to make them heirs of his own estate. The same precious blood, that blots out our sins, writes us down heirs of glory and co-heirs with Jesus Christ himself. O infinite and unspeakable mercy of God, thus richly and bountifully to give as well as freely to forgive ! that he should thus instate us, at present, in his love and favour ; and, hereafter, instate us in his glory ! This is not the manner of men, O Lord ; but, as far as the heavens are above the earth, so far are the thoughts of God above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways : and, therefore, “ as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our sins from us.” And why so far, but only that he might make room for these great and unspeakable mercies of justification, sanctification, and adoption to intervene ?

And, so much, for the second thing proposed, namely, the concomitants and adjuncts of pardon of sin.

iii. Let us now consider pardon of sin in *the effects and consequences of it.*

And from hence also it will appear, how transcendent a mercy it is, and how just a title God hath to glory in it, when he saith, "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions."

Mercies temporal and spiritual, the blessings of this life and the glory of a future, whatever indeed can be called a mercy or good thing, doth acknowledge itself a retainer to this primitive and fountain-mercy of pardon of sin.

In such a heap of them, I shall only cull some few that are most conspicuous.

Remission of sin may be considered, either as it lies in God's eternal intention, or in the Spirit's temporal application of it. The one, is God's purpose, before all time, to forgive us : the other is the execution of that purpose in time.

1. If we consider pardon of sin *in God's eternal purpose and intendment*, so there are two blessed effects flowing from it : and they are these ;—the sending of Jesus Christ into the world ;—the great gift of faith.

(1.) *The sending of Jesus Christ into the world*, who is the cause of all happiness unto sinful man, was itself the effect of this purpose of God, to pardon and forgive sinners.

It is very difficult to trace out the order of the divine decrees concerning the salvation of mankind ; and to pass from one of them to another, as they lie ranked and methodized in God's breast : and divers, that have attempted to search out these ' *arcana Dei*,' this art and mystery of justice and mercy, have trodden in paths different from one another ; and, doubtless, many of them differing from the truth also. I shall not stand to draw a scheme of these decrees of God. Let it now suffice us to know, that God, from all eternity, foreseeing the sin and misery, which man would, by his permission and his own sin, involve himself in, did, for the manifestation of the riches both of his mercy and justice, enter into counsel, how to pardon and save him. This was the end of God's design, even to restore again to happiness some of mankind ; even as many, as he should select out of the mass and common rubbish of sin and misery, and set apart for himself. But how shall this end be accomplished and brought about ?

Justice brandisheth its sword in the face of sinners : and demandeth as great a share of glory in punishment, as mercy doth in pardoning : and God is resolved to glorify both of these attributes of his, in their several demands. This now put him upon ransacking of the deepest counsel that ever lodged in his heart, even of an adored Mediator ; in whom justice receives full satisfaction, and mercy triumphs in a full pardon, and both are infinitely glorious. For this end, God sent down his Son from heaven to earth, to become a propitiation for us ; and so, through the shedding of his blood, to obtain remission and forgiveness of sins for us. God's mercy and his beloved Son could not rest together in his bosom ; and, therefore, his purpose of pardoning sin was so efficacious, that, to make room for the displaying of his mercy, he sends his own Son out of heaven, never to enter again there, till, by his merit and sufferings, he had procured remission of sins for all those that believe in him. Hence the apostle, Rom. iii. 25, 26. tells us, that " God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through God's forbearance, that he might be just, and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus : " as if the apostle had said, God could not be just, if he should justify sinners that deserve his wrath, unless he had sent forth Jesus Christ into the world to become a propitiation and sacrifice to his justice for their sins ; for, having threatened in his unalterable word to inflict vengeance upon all that are guilty, his truth obliged him to this dreadful severity upon all, since all are guilty : but Christ, taking on him the guilt of sinners, by his undergoing the wrath of God and the curse of the law hath so fully appeased divine justice, that now God, though he doth not punish sinners in themselves, can yet be just and the justifier of sinners : therefore, he sent forth Christ to be a propitiation. God's eternal purpose, to glorify his justice in the punishing of sin, and yet to glorify his grace and mercy in pardoning sinners, wrought this great effect of sending Christ into the world, whereby two such different ends might with infinite wisdom be accomplished. So that Christ, who is the cause of all our happiness and mercy,

is yet himself the effect of God's purpose and intent to pardon sin. And what can be said more to advance the greatness of this mercy? a mercy so great, that one of the fathers, St. Gregory by name, doubted whether it were more misery or happiness, that Adam fell; since his sin and fall occasioned such a wonderful Redeemer, and such a glorious salvation: 'Fœlix culpa,' says he, 'O happy fall, that obtained such a Redeemer!'

(2.) Another blessed effect of God's purpose in pardoning sin, is *the great gift of faith*.

Indeed, to give Jesus Christ were utterly in vain, did not God withal give faith to accept him. To tender Christ to an unbeliever, is to offer a gift where there is no hand to receive it. Hence, that God's purpose of giving pardon might stand valid, that the death of Christ might not be fruitless, and that his blood might not be like water spilt on the ground that cannot be gathered up again, God decreed to bestow faith upon them that believe, that may convey to them the benefits of Christ's merits in their pardon and remission.

These two blessed effects follow in God's purpose and intention of pardoning sin; even the gift of Christ to procure, and the gift of faith to apply, pardon unto the soul.

2. And, more especially, let us consider pardon of sin *in its temporal and real application*.

And so the happy effects of it are manifold. I shall only instance in some, at present.

(1.) Pardon of sin gives *an inviolable security against the pursuits of avenging justice*.

This is its formal, and most immediate effect. Justice follows guilty sinners close at the heels, and shakes its flaming sword over their heads: every threatening contained in this book of God stands ready charged against them; and their sins make them so fair a mark that they cannot be missed. Hence is that sad complaint of Job, "Why hast thou set me up as a mark?" into which he emptied his arrows as into his reins: Job vii. 20. Now while justice is driving the sinner before it from plague to plague, resolving never to stop till he hath driven him into hell, the great assembly and meeting of all plagues; mercy interposes, and lays its arrest upon it: and this

gracious act of pardon rescues us, though under the hands of the executioner, and ready to be turned into hell. Here, the challenge, that justice makes to us, ceaseth : and we are left to walk safely, under the protection of mercy : for, when God issues out a pardon, he calls off justice from its pursuit. Thus you have the psalmist thankfully acknowledging. Ps. lxxxv. 2. "Thou hast forgiven our iniquities?" and what follows? "Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger." Nor is it to be feared, O soul, that thou shalt ever more be questioned for those sins that are once forgiven thee: God's acts of oblivion can never be repealed: no: God sets an everlasting sanction upon them, and justice shall never again molest thee: Jer. xxxi. 34. "I will forgive their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." And, indeed, well may divine justice seize its pursuit of the guilty sinner: for, always, when God pardons a sinner, he turns his pursuit after Christ, and satisfies all his just demands upon him: for, though we are the principals in the debt, yet our Surety, who stands bound for us in the covenant of redemption, is far the more able and absolving person. Now is not this an unspeakable mercy, that justice and vengeance, the heavy strokes of which many thousand wretches lie under, and which thy sins have provoked and armed against thy own soul; that might, every sin thou committest, that is every moment of thy life, strike thee dead in the place; in the dread of which, if thou hast any tenderness of conscience left in thee, thou must needs live in continual fearful expectations of this wrath of God, to destroy thee as his enemy; is it not infinite mercy, that God should call in the commission given to his justice, that mercy might secure thee from it? What is this, but the effect of pardoning grace, that gives this destroyer charge to pass over all those, upon whose consciences the blood of Christ is sprinkled for the removal of their guilt?

(2,) Another blessed effect of pardon of sin, is *peace and reconciliation with God*.

And what happiness can be greater, than when the quarrel betwixt heaven and earth, betwixt God and the inner, is taken up and compounded? Open wars have

been long proclaimed, and long maintained on either part: ever since the first great rebellion, man hath stood in defiance with, and exercised great hostility against his Creator; and God, on the other hand, hath thundered out whole peals of curses against these rebels, and hath slain whole generations of them eternally dead upon the place. God hath still maintained his cause with victory, and man his with obstinacy; and this war would never cease, did not God proclaim pardon and forgiveness to all that will lay down their arms and submit.

Now, hereupon, peace is concluded fully: for God's pardoning of sinners manifests him to be fully reconciled to them.

So the apostle tells us, Rom. v. 1. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." God is a sworn enemy to all guilty sinners. Himself hath affixed this title to the rest of his name that he *will by no means clear the guilty*. Guilt hath a malign influence: not only on our consciences, to discompose them with terrors and affrightments; but on God's countenance also, to ruffle it into frowns and displeasure. Now when God pardons sin, he wipes away this overcasting cloud: and, the cause of enmity being removed, his face and favour clear up to us.—And then pardon of sin is a strong inducement to us, to lay down the weapons of our warfare, and to be at peace with God. What argument can be more prevailing, where there is any principle of ingenuity? "When God thus proclaims peace, shall I continue war? He pardons, and shall I rebel? He is reconciled, and shall I be implacable? Shall I persist in those sins, which he forgives? No: far be it from me. I submit to that God, whose rich grace conquers by condescending, as well as his power by crushing." And thus the soul lays down its weapons at the feet of God; and humbly embraces the terms of agreement propounded by him in the gospel.

(3.) Pardon of sin *lays a good foundation for the soul's near acquaintance and communion with God.*

Guilt is the only thing, that breeds alienation. "Your iniquities," says the prophet, "have separated between you and your God:" Isa. lix. 2. Nor, indeed, is it pos-

sible, that a guilty sinner should any more delight in conversing with God, than a guilty malefactor delights in the presence of his judge. And, therefore, we see, when Adam had contracted guilt upon himself by eating the forbidden fruit, how childishly and foolishly he behaved himself! God calls him, and he runs behind a tree to hide himself! What a sudden change was here! Adam, who but a little before was his Creator's familiar, now dreads and shuns him: his guilt makes him apprehend God's call, to be no other than a summons to the bar. Nor, indeed, can it be otherwise, but that guilt should produce alienation betwixt God and the soul: for look how distance grows between two familiar friends, so doth it here: if a man be conscious to himself, that he hath done his friend an injury; what influence hath this upon him? why, presently it makes him more shy and reserved to him than before: so is it here: consciousness of guilt fills us with a troublesome, ill-natured shame: we are ashamed to look God in the face, whom we have so much wronged by our sins: and this shame is always joined with a slavish and base fear of God, lest he should revenge himself upon us, for the injuries that we have done to him: and both this shame and fear take off from that holy freedom and boldness, which reverently to use towards God, is the gust and spirit of our communion and fellowship with him; and all these lessen that sweet delight in God, that formerly we relished in the intimacy of this heavenly fellowship. And what can be the final product of all this, but a most sad alienation and estrangement between God and the soul? But pardon of sin removeth these obstructions; and causeth the intercourse betwixt God and the soul to pass free, because it gives the soul a holy and yet awful boldness in conversing with the great and terrible majesty of God. So much sense of pardon and reconciliation as we have, so much boldness shall we have ordinarily in our addresses to God: what is the reason that the consciences of wicked men drag them before God; and they come with so much diffidence, dejectedness, and jealousy? it is, because they are conscious to themselves of guilt that lies upon them; and this makes them look on God, rather under

the notion of a judge, than of a friend or father; and this makes them perform their duties so distrustfully, as if they would not have God take any notice that they were in his presence. But, when a pardoned sinner makes his addresses to God, he may do it with a holy freedom: the face of his soul looks cheerfully, and he treats with God with an open heart. What ground is there now, for such a confidence as this is? for poor, vile dust and ashes, to appear thus before the Great God of heaven and earth?—Guilt is removed: peace is made in the blood of Christ: all enmity is abolished: all quarrels are decided: and it becomes not him, to serve God with such suspiciousness as guilty sinners do. Hence we have that expression of the apostle, Heb. x. 22. “Let us draw near” to him, “in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience;” that is from a guilty and accusing conscience: now when the heart and conscience are sprinkled with the blood of Christ, whereby this guilt is taken off, then hath a man good ground to draw near to God, “in full assurance of faith.”

(4.) Pardon of sin *lays a good ground for peace in a man's own conscience.*

I do not say, that peace of conscience is always an inseparable attendant upon pardon of sin; for, doubtless, there are many so unhappy, as to have a wrangling conscience in their own bosoms, when God is at peace with them: but this is certain, that pardon of sin lays a solid ground and foundation for peace in a man's own conscience; and, were Christians but as industrious as they should be in clearing up their evidences for heaven, they might obtain peace whenever they are pardoned. What is there, that disquiets conscience, but only guilt? nothing, but the guilt of sin, doth it: this is that, which rageth and stormeth in wicked men, and is as a tempest within their breasts: this is that unseen scourge, that draws blood and groans at every lash: this is that worm, that lies perpetually gnawing at the heart of a sinner: this is that rack, that breaks the bones, and disjoins the soul itself. In a word, guilt is the fuel of hell, and the incendiary of conscience: were it not for guilt, there were not a more pleasant and peaceable thing in all the

world, than a man's own conscience. Now pardon of sin removes this guilt; and, thereby, makes reconciliation between us and our consciences: and, therefore, says our Saviour to the paralytic man, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." Might not some say, 'This is an impertinent speech, to say to one that was brought to be cured of a sad infirmity of body, that his sins were forgiven him, whilst yet his disease was not cured?' No: our Lord Christ knew, that there was infinitely more cause of joy and cheerfulness to have sin pardoned, than to have diseases cured: to have all calm and serene within, not to have a frown or wrinkle upon the face of the soul, to have all smooth thoughts and peaceful affections; this is some faint resemblance of heaven itself, and is never vouchsafed unto any but where pardon and the sense of it are given to the soul.

(5.) He, whose sins are pardoned, may rest assured, that *whatever calamities or afflictions he may lie under, yet there is nothing in them of a curse or punishment.*

It is guilt alone, that diffuseth poison through the veins, as of all our enjoyments so of all afflictions also, and turns them all into curses: but pardon of sin takes away this venom, and makes them all to be medicinal corrections; good, profitable, and advantageous to the soul. See how God, by the prophet, expresseth this: Isa. xxxiii. 24. "The inhabitants shall not say they are sick:" why so? for "the people that dwell therein, shall be forgiven their iniquities." When sin is pardoned, outward afflictions are not worth complaining of: the inhabitants shall not say, we are sick. A disease then becomes a medicine, when pardon hath taken away the curse and punishment of it.

God hath two ends with respect to himself for which he brings punishments upon us: the one, is the manifestation of his holiness; the other, is for the satisfaction of his justice. And, accordingly as any affliction tends to either of these ends, so is it properly a punishment, or barely a fatherly chastisement. If God intend, by the afflictions which he lays upon thee, the satisfaction of his justice, then, thy afflictions are properly punishments, and they flow from the curse of the law: but, if the

manifestation of his holiness be all he intends by them ; then, are they only fatherly corrections, proceeding from love and mercy.

Those, whose sins God hath pardoned, he may afflict for the declaration of his holiness ; that they may see and know what a holy God they have to deal with : who so perfectly hates sin, that he will follow it with chastisements, even upon those, whom his free grace hath pardoned.

God inflicts no chastisements upon those, whom he hath pardoned, for the satisfaction of his justice : and, therefore, they are not curses, nor properly punishments ; but only corrections and fatherly chastisements. Christ hath satisfied the demands of justice for their sins ; and God is more just, than to exact double satisfaction for the same offence, one in Christ's punishment, and another in theirs. The apostle tells us, Gal. iii. 13. " Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." It is not the evils that we suffer, that makes them curses or punishments, be they never so great ; but only the ordination of these evils to the satisfaction of divine justice upon us. And, therefore, Christ, in scripture, is said to be made a curse ; not simply because he suffered : but because he was adjudged to his sufferings, that thereby satisfaction might be made unto the justice of God.

Hence, therefore, with what calmness and peace may a pardoned sinner look upon any afflictions ! Though they are sore and heavy, though they seem to carry much of God's anger in them ; yet there is nothing of a curse, or of the nature of a punishment : the sting was all of it received into the body of Christ ; and now God's righteousness will not suffer him to punish them again in their own persons, whom he hath already punished in their Surety. Imagine what affliction thou canst. Art thou pinched with want and poverty ? Dost thou sustain losses in thy estate, in thy relations ? Art thou tormented with pains, weakened by diseases ; and will all these bring death upon thee, at the last ? Yet, O soul, if thy sins are pardoned, here is nothing of a curse or punishment in all this : justice is already satisfied, by Christ's bearing the curse of the

law for thee. Come what will come, it shall not hurt thee. Afflictions are all weak and weaponless; they are only the corrections of a loving Father, for the manifestation of his holiness, and for thy eternal gain and advantage.

Very sad is the condition of guilty sinners: for, whether they know it or not, there is not the least affliction, not the least gripe or pain, not the least slight or inconsiderable cross, but it is a punishment inflicted by God upon them, for the guilt of their sins. God is now beginning to satisfy his justice, and these are sent by him to arrest and seize on them: he now begins to take them by the throat; and calls upon them to pay him what they owe him. Every affliction to them is part of payment, and is exacted from them as part of payment. Oh, the vast and infinite sums of plagues, that God will most severely exact from them in hell, where they shall pay to the utmost farthing! There is not the least calamity, that befalls wicked and unpardoned sinners, but carries the venom of a curse in it; and is inflicted by God upon them, in order to the satisfaction of his justice on them: which complete satisfaction he will work out upon them in their complete torments in hell.

So much for this time and text.

THE END.

THE END.