

A SERMON ON MICAH VII. 18.

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?—MICAH vii. 18.

THE words express an admiration of the Lord's incomparable goodness and pardoning mercy. The question is, how they are brought in here in this place? The prophet had prophesied of great things which God would do for his people, and the fountain of all is his pardoning mercy.

Obs. That the ground and foundation of all our hope and comfort in our restoration after our distresses is the Lord's pardoning mercy.

The state of God's people now was mean and calamitous. They were fallen by their iniquity; yet not fallen past recovery, not sunk beneath all hope: ver. 8, 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall I shall arise.' The church adviseth her adversaries to sobriety and moderation in using those advantages they had against her; for the Lord hath his times, as of chastening and casting down his people, so also of delivering and raising them up again, and clothing their enemies with shame. Therefore the prophet speaks of building up the fallen walls, ver. 11, 12. Desolate churches have their time of restoration, when God will do marvellous things for his people, ver. 15, and so reckon with their adversaries that they should move out of their holes like worms out of the earth, because they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, ver. 16, 17. And then presently, in the text, 'Who is a God like unto thee?' &c. This abrupt and passionate admiration of God's pardoning mercy sheweth that all these promises had their rise there. There were great difficulties to be overcome before these promises could take place, but the greatest difficulty and obstruction lay in their sins. And the prophet wondereth more at his grace subduing sin, than at his power overcoming difficulties. Instances we have: Jer. xxxi. 34, God had promised great things to his people, both as to their spiritual and temporal condition; the reason rendered there is, 'For I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sins no more.' So Jer. xxxiii. 8, 'I will cause the captivity of Judah to return; for I will cleanse them from their iniquity.' That is the ground of all.

Reason 1. Sin is the greatest obstacle. Take that out of the way,

and then mercies come freely from God: Isa. lix. 2, 'Your sins have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you.' While sin remaineth unpardoned or unrepented of, God withdraweth his precious presence, and will not be seen of his people, to hear, and help, and bless them: Jer. v. 25, 'Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good things from you.' If there be any restraint of God's blessing, it is because of man's sin. So that remission or pardon is *gratia removens prohibens*; it removeth that which stoppeth our mercies. As when the obstruction is removed, the fountain floweth forth freely; so when sin is removed, that which letteth is taken out of the way.

Reason 2. Sin is the cause of all our evils, as well as it stoppeth and hindereth our mercies; it is the great makebate, as well as the great obstacle. Sin being pardoned, the cause of the misery is removed; and the cause being removed, the effect ceaseth: 2 Sam. xii. 13, 'The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.' The proper wages and recompense of sin is death; and sin being gone, death is gone. So Isa. xl. 2, 'Her warfare is accomplished.' What is the reason of such a sudden change? 'Her iniquity is pardoned.' A foul stomach breedeth an aching head. There is no getting rid of an aching head till the stomach be purged. Effects continue as long as causes work and exert their influence.

Reason 3. Outward mercies, were they never so great and full, would never yield any true satisfaction, unless they be joined with reconciliation with God and pardon of sin. Here God promiseth to give them light after darkness, to make their enemies move out of their holes like worms out of the earth; but all this is nothing unless God pardoneth and passeth by their transgressions. Sin is apprehended by God's people as the greatest evil. Till that be gone, their comforts yield them no solid satisfaction. *Quid prodest regium alimentum, si ad Gehennam pascuit?* A traitor, till execution, may have allowance according to his quality from his prince; so may the Lord bestow many common mercies on those who are yet left to everlasting destruction. No solid happiness till pardon: Ps. xxxii. 1, 2, 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered: blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.' Till we be received into God's favour, and justified, we have no solid ground of rejoicing—

Use 1. To reprove—

1. Them that look not after pardon of sin in their distresses, but temporal blessings in the first place. These howl rather than pray, Hosea vii. 14. Their suits to God are like the moans of beasts rather than the groans of a sanctified heart.

2. Those that hope to remove evil, either by sinful means or natural means, without being reconciled to God. (1.) Sinful means. As Saul in his distress goeth to the witch of Endor. These do more entangle and involve themselves. Fear is an ill counsellor, and urgeth men to use indirect and evil means to avert the things feared; and so, whilst they think to avoid their danger, they hasten and increase it, Prov. x. 24. Instances are frequent. Samson's wife, the Philistines threatened to burn her and her father's house with fire

unless she would betray her husband's secrets, Judges xiv. 15. She doth so, and Samson taking his revenge; they fulfil what they threatened, Judges xv. 6. The children of Israel murmured at the report of the spies, and said, 'Would God we had died in the wilderness,' Num. xiv. 2; and God saith, vers. 28, 29, 'As ye have spoken in my ears, so will I do unto you; your carcases shall fall in this wilderness.' The rebels against fatherly government were afraid of scattering; they would build a tower, 'lest they should be scattered on the face of the earth' (a solemn place wherein to meet), Gen. xi. 4; and for that reason God 'confounded their language, and scattered them,' ver. 8. Jeroboam, to secure the kingdom in his own house, set up calves at Dan and Bethel, lest the people should return, when they went up to Jerusalem to worship, to their natural lord, 1 Kings xii. 26; and this very thing became a snare to the house of Jeroboam to cut it off and destroy it, 1 Kings xiii. 3, 4. The Jews were afraid of Christ, lest the Romans would take jealousy at their frequent resort to him, John xi. 48; and for that reason wrath came upon them to the uttermost. Many will help themselves by sinful compliances, seek to preserve their families, and thereby they ruin them. The second commandment is express. The way to secure ourselves is not to commit new sins, but get a pardon of the old. (2.) By lawful means. Usually means are cursed when we tamper with them before we have made our peace with God. Israel's going forth without a peace-offering, Judges xx.; Asa seeking to the physicians before the Lord, 2 Chron. xvi. 12, will sufficiently instruct us in that. Therefore 'acquaint yourselves with God, and be at peace, and good shall come unto you,' Job xxii. 21. Bustling in the world occasioneth more trouble till our peace be made with God. There is no getting out of the comfortless pit but by the blood of the everlasting covenant, Zech. ix. 11. All our mercies come from a covenant of love, and a covenant made sure by the blood of the Son of God. David had his sins pardoned before his health restored, Ps. ciii. 3. First iniquity removed, then the disease.

3. It reproveth those that, lying under the fruits of sin, have not an heart to seek their recovery from the Lord's pardoning mercy. The church here was fallen under God's indignation, and that by reason of sin: ver. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.' It was a rod dipped in guilt; and yet hopeth in the Lord for a restitution to wonted privileges, because none like him in pardoning. When God covereth himself with frowns, there is no cause of despair. God threateneth that he may not punish, and punisheth that he may not punish for ever. God maketh show of departing that we may hold him the faster, and threateneth to remove from a person or nation that he may not indeed remove, but that we may entreat him to stay. And, indeed, he is not hard to be entreated. He that is going away showeth us the way how to keep him still; when he flieth from us, he draweth the soul that it may run after him, Ps. lxxiii. 8. When he seemeth to remove, he doth not go out of sight, that you may always follow him; and if you follow him, he will stand still. If he seem to be wholly out of sight, it is that you may seek him early and earnestly, Hosea v. 16. He hath left somewhat behind him to draw the soul to him. When he smiteth very sorely, it is to awaken a

drowsy sinner, that we may bethink ourselves, and not perish for ever: 'Who is a God like unto thee?'

Use 2. To instruct us what should most affect our hearts; not so much God's acts of power as his acts of grace. The church here admireth more his pardoning mercy than his glorious power in her restoration; that mercy should find the way to them, notwithstanding sin, yea, many sins. The godly are sensible of the desert of sin, and their inability to satisfy justice for it. The impediments of God's power lie altogether without God; but the impediments of his pardoning mercy within him. The soul pauseth upon this, that God is just and holy; therefore, when mercy rejoiceth over judgment, there is the triumph of the saints. The effects of God's power are more obvious to our apprehensions, but the fruits of his pardoning mercy are more suspected because of our ill-deservings. It is notable here that God pardoneth as *El*, as a strong God. *Quis Deus fortis par tibi?* So Junius, Who is a strong God like thee in pardoning? Partly to show that he doth not pardon out of need, but choice. He could avenge us, but he will not. Men forbear their enemies out of policy, not out of pity. The sons of Zeruiah may be too hard for them; otherwise, 'Who findeth his enemy and slayeth him not?' We are always in God's power, yet he pardoneth and spareth us. The more power men have, the more they are given to oppression and acts of violence. God is able to destroy us, but he showeth his power rather in pitying our miseries and relieving our wants, in pardoning rather than in punishing; partly to show the concomitancy of his power with his pardoning mercy. He will be strong in pardoning; he will pardon so as to subdue enemies, to remove lets and impediments. So Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, 'Jehovah, Jehovah, El, the Lord, the Lord, the strong God, merciful and gracious.' So Num. xiv. 17, 18, where Moses alludeth to the former place: 'Let the power of my Lord be great.' So doth this to both of them: 'Who is El like thee?'

But to come more closely to the words.

Doct. That the chief glory of the true God consisteth in the pardon of sins, wherein there is none like him.

I shall evidence it by these considerations—

1. We have not a true apprehension of God till we see him singular and matchless in excellency, and do give him a distinct and separate honour far above all other things which are in the world. We are bidden not only to glorify God but to sanctify God, Isa. viii. 13, and 1 Peter iii. 15; to think and speak somewhat of God that cannot be thought or spoken of other things; for to sanctify is to set apart from common use. And when it is applied to God, it signifieth to set him above on the highest point of eminency, to reverence and adore him in our hearts, as to love him and trust in him, and fear him above all other things. The Lord, out of his love, thinketh no people like his people. *Quis sicut tu?* It is used of God and Israel: Deut. xxxiii. 29, 'Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?' We are to love God, and serve him, not by chance, but by choice; not because we know no other, but no better; to see a superlative excellency in him, to single him out as the only name above all other names. As Exod. xv. 11, 'Who is like unto thee among the gods? who is like

unto thee, glorious in holiness?' So Ps. lxxi. 74, 'Thy righteousness O God, is very high; who is like unto thee?' So Ps. lxxvii. 13, 'Who is so great a God as our God?' Thus do the people of God, in these and many other places, exalt the glory of his attributes beyond all compare, and see something in their 'beloved above all other beloveds,' Cant. v. 9; and so their souls are more settled in their choice, and fortified against temptations, whilst they do not measure God by the line of created beings, and by these expressions raise their thoughts and hearts into an holy wonder. We are too apt to fancy God after the model of the creature, and so transform his glory into the similitude of such finite beings as we ourselves are. No; who is like him for goodness and power? If we speak of strength, he is strong; of goodness, there is none good but God; of wisdom, God is only wise, &c.

2. Among all his excellences, his pardoning mercy shineth forth most conspicuously in the true religion, and is represented with such advantages as cannot be found elsewhere. His style and name is 'a God of pardons,' Neh. ix. 17. So when he proclaimed his name before Moses, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, his pardoning mercy maketh up the greatest part of his name. Now names are *a notioribus*, from such things as are most obvious and observable in them to whom the names are given. To evidence this, that no God is like our God, consider—

[1.] The business of a religion is to provide sufficiently for two things which have much troubled the considering part of the world—to provide a suitable happiness for mankind, and a sufficient means for the expiation of the guilt of sin. Happiness is our great desire, and sin our great trouble. Both these are fully laid down in the scriptures. There we find what is true happiness, and there also how the grand scruple of the world may be satisfied, and their guilty fears may be quenched by the expiation of sin. It was sin that plunged us into mischief, and that cut us off from the favour of God, and did forbid all communion with him and enjoyment of him; therefore the great question of the fallen creature is, 'Wherewith will God be pleased?' and 'What shall I give for the sin of my soul?' Micah vi. 7. The whole world is in dread of provoked justice: Rom. i. 32, 'Who knowing the judgment of God, and that they which commit such things are worthy of death.' Men are sensible of a sentence of death passed upon them, the fear of which puts them in bondage and trouble all their days, Heb. ii. 14.

[2.] Till there be a due course taken for the pardon of sin, there is no provision made for establishment either of the creature's comfort or duty. (1.) Not his comfort. All the world is *ὑπόδικος τῷ Θεῷ*, Rom. iii. 19, 'become guilty before God,' answerable to him for the breaches of his law, and standeth in dread of his righteous anger and wrath. Nothing obtrudeth itself upon our thoughts but the comfortless sight of our misery when we are serious; and men are never perfect, as appertaining to the conscience, Heb. ix. 9, never upon sound and good terms, but racked with perplexing fears. (2.) Not his duty; for religion can never take deep root in our hearts till some hope be established that God will not deal severely with us, nor call us to an account for all our errors and swerving from his holy law: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.' Forgiveness

encourageth us to the hearty service, worship, and obedience of God, whereunto otherwise we could have neither hand nor heart. But since he will forgive the penitent supplicant, and pardon the slips and frailties of our lives, this draweth us to obedience; whereas a desperation of his mercy would certainly avert us from it. We are not in a desperate and hopeless condition; God will allow pardon to the penitent. If our condition were altogether hopeless, it would engage us in a course of sin, without any thought of returning or repenting; as they said, Jer. xviii. 12, 'There is no hope,' &c.

[3.] Natural light giveth some evidence of this truth, that God is placable. The gentiles were all of this opinion, that their gods were inclined to pardon. Thence came all their sacrifices and expiations. They thought their gods would be propitious to sinners if they did come humbly and ask pardon. We see in the daily course of God's providence that God forbearth the worst, doth not stir up all his wrath against them. They have life, and food, and raiment, and ease, and liberty, and friends, and wealth, and honour, Rom. ii. 4. All these forfeited mercies are continued to us; and God doth not deal with men in utmost rigour, which showeth that he is willing to be appeased and ready to forgive upon terms consistent with his honour and the common good. Yea, his commanding us to forgive one another is an argument that mercy and forgiveness are pleasing unto God. It is the glory of a man to pass by an offence. If this be a perfection or glory in man, reason will tell us that somewhat of this may be expected from God. Certainly our condition is not desperate and past all hope while we are yet in the way, and under an obligation to use means for our recovery. And the Lord inviteth us by daily mercies, Acts xiv. 17. This showeth the possibility of a pardon to fallen mankind. We are not *in termino*, as the fallen angels are.

[4.] It showeth a possibility, yea, a probability. In all false religions there can be no solid and firm persuasion of pardon. Partly because there is no sufficient expiation of sin, even in the judgment of those who knew least of the nature of sin and the malignity of it. They were still at a loss for a recompense to appease angry justice. They were sensible that sin is a wrong done to God, and that its wages is death; that there must be satisfaction given, some amends for the wrong done, and some means used to appease God. Therefore they had several ways and inventions how to wear off this sense of sin; sometimes by mock sacrifices, as many now would droll away conscience. So Alexander ab Alex. Thucydides. They offered painted sacrifices. The gods of the heathens were false gods, and therefore contented with an imaginary satisfaction. Sometimes real sacrifices, wherein they hoped to prevail by the pomp and cost of them, hundreds of beasts; sometimes by dolorous impressions on their own bodies, as Baal's priests gashed themselves. The devil delighteth in the torture and destruction of the creature; he ruleth by fears, and all the dark superstitions in the world are supported by a spirit of bondage, and this fear of provoked justice. Sometimes offer their children in sacrifice, or chose out some men who should die for the rest. Cæsar telleth us of the old Gauls, *Quod pro vita hominis nisi vita hominis reddatur, non posse Deorum immortalium numen placari arbitrantur.*

(2.) The other reason is, because there was no law of commerce established between them and that which they conceived to be God; no certain promise to build upon. The gentiles are described to be, Eph. ii. 12, 'Strangers to the covenants of promise.' Something they knew of vice and virtue, but nothing of sin and righteousness in order to a covenant. We have a covenant, wherein remission of sins and salvation by Christ is put into a stated course. The covenant is the church's charter, whereby she holdeth these privileges. (3.) They had no advocate to plead for them, as we have, who is to make our peace with God in case of breaches, 1 John ii. 1, 2. Indeed, they had a conceit of a sort of middle powers. They had their mediators, 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6, *Λεγόμενοι θεοί, λεγόμενοι κύριοι*; but no true mediator to go between God and them. As they had their celestial and supreme deities called by this title among the heathens, so inferior deities, a second order, agents between the gods and men. But all this is a fabulous supposition, no way satisfying the heart of a reasonable creature.

[5.] In the christian religion all things are provided for which are necessary to establish a regular hope of pardon.

(1.) There is full satisfaction given to divine justice, and the foundation laid for pardon in the death of Christ, Eph. i. 7. If God will pardon sins, there must be some course taken to keep up the honour of his justice and the authority of his law, or else the government of the world could not be kept up. God is not to be considered as the wronged party only, as a private man may forgive the wrong done to him, but as the judge and governor of the world. Sin is a disobedience to his law. He that hath offended God as a lawgiver shall be punished by him as a judge, unless some course be taken. God must be known to be a righteous God still, Rom. iii. 25; leave some brand upon sin, Rom. viii. 3; check those thoughts of impurity which indulgence to carnality breedeth in the hearts of men, Deut. xxix. 19, that God's law and government may not be brought into contempt, and sinners take liberty to sin without fear. Now, to all these ends Christ came, to purchase forgiveness for us by his own blood.

(2.) We have privileges offered to us by a sure covenant in Christ's name, Luke xxiv. 47, and Acts v. 31. The gospel is an indenture drawn between God and us, wherein is required repentance, and promised forgiveness of sins; or, if you will, a testament, wherein precious legacies are left to us by our dying Lord; and pardon of sins is the first. This sealed and solemnly conveyed to us in the Lord's supper, Luke xxii. 20; the new testament, that is, *Σημείον καὶ σφράγις*, Mat. xxvi. 28, 'My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins.'

(3.) It is dispensed upon rational terms, such as faith and repentance. (1.) Faith: Acts x. 43, 'To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.' It is fit that those who would have benefit by Christ should acknowledge their Redeemer, and thankfully accept of the benefit procured by him and offered in his name, and heartily consent to his conduct and government, that he may bring them home to God again, and put them into a capacity of pleasing and enjoying him.

Faith is our thankful owning of our Redeemer unto the ends for which God hath appointed him. (2.) Repentance is required: Acts iii. 19, 'Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.' It was agreeable to the honour and wisdom of God that those who would be reconciled to him should be sensible of this weighty debt which is upon them, and heartily confess their sins, and with brokenness of heart sue out their pardon, 1 John i. 9; for it was not meet that sin should be pardoned till the creature doth relent, nor for the honour of God's majesty that we should take pardon otherwise than upon our knees: Jer. iii. 13, 'Only acknowledge thine iniquity.' Our case is not compassionate till we are sensible of our wrongs, and willing to return to our duty. An absolute pardon, without any stooping on the creature's part, would open a flood-gate to all profaneness and indulgence to our lusts. Thus there is a condescency to God's nature in the terms required.

(4.) In the manner of dispensing forgiveness. God doth it in a free, full, and universal remission of our sins. It is a free pardon: Isa. xliii. 25, 'I, even I, am he that forgiveth your iniquities for my name's sake, and will remember your sins no more.' It is not given without our desiring, yet without our deserving. God doth it for his name's sake, pitying our misery, and for the glory of his own mercy, Isa. lii. 3. As the sale was without any gain and benefit to us, so the redemption and recovery without any cost to us. It cost Christ dear, but to us it cometh freely. It is a full pardon; for God pardoneth not by halves, and so as to reverse it again, but fully: Micah vii. 19, 'Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.' The persons accepted to grace and favour are made capable of salvation, Rom. v. 10. So universally: Mat. xii. 3, 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.' No reservation of any one sin but that sin for which men will not ask pardon. Our sins are infinite, many of them in every pardoned sinner, Ps. xix. 12; Ps. xl. 12, 'They are more than the hairs of my head;' and those not ordinary infirmities, but sometimes heinous transgressions; yet free grace pardoneth all, not only in one, but in all believers; and doth remain as full and overflowing in God to pardon self-condemned sinners as ever.

Application. 1. Information. To show us the excellency of the christian religion above other religions in the world, because it discovereth pardon of sins upon such terms as may be most commodious for the honour of God and satisfactory to our souls. The heathens were mightily perplexed about the terms how God might dispense it with honour, and man receive it with comfort. That man is God's creature, and therefore his subject; that he hath exceedingly failed and faltered in his duty and subjection to him, that therefore he is obnoxious to God's just wrath and vengeance, were truths evident by the light of nature and common experience. Therefore they had their terrors and convictions, and that God needed to be atoned and propitiated by some sacrifice of expiation; and the nearer they lived to the original of this institution, the more clear and pressing hath been the conceit hereof; and the more remotely, the more have these notions degenerated and been gradually depraved. But in all their cruel and

dark superstitions there is no rest for souls. They knew not the true God, nor the proper ransom, nor had any sure way of covenant to convey pardon to them, but were still left to this puzzle and distraction of thoughts, that they could not make God just without some diminution of his mercy, nor apprehend God merciful, without making him unjust. Somewhat they conceived of the goodness of God, but they could not apprehend him reconciled to the sinner without debasing his holiness, and not such an enemy to the sin: 'Thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself;' and therefore had not such notions of the remission of sin as would breed repentance and true holiness, or work in them any true change of heart and life. Their pardon of sin was but a probability, their rites to procure it slight and ridiculous, or else barbarous and unnatural, giving their 'first-born for the sin of their souls;' and the effects of this apprehended expiation were too weak and ineffectual to reduce them to God. The Jews had many sacrifices of God's own institution, but such as 'did not make the comers thereunto perfect as appertaining to the conscience,' Heb. ix. 9. The great price and ransom that was given to provoked justice was known to few. They saw much of the patience of God, but little of his forgiveness. Their ordinances were rather a bond acknowledging the debt than an acquittance revealing the discharge; therefore called 'The handwriting of ordinances against us,' Col. ii. 14, and Rom. iii. 24, 25. And therefore the redemption of souls is spoken of as a great mystery, which then was but sparingly revealed: Ps. xlix. 4, 5, 'My mouth shall speak of wisdom;' and again, 'I will utter my dark saying.' What was that wisdom, that dark saying? See ver. 7, 8, 'None can give God a ransom for his brother; the redemption of the soul is precious.' Eternal redemption by the Messiah was a dark thing in those days. No mere man is able to rescue a sinner from the power of death, to which he is sentenced by the law of God. So again, in more early days, in Job's time, it was 'an interpreter, one of a thousand,' that brought this message to the distressed sinner, that 'God had found a ransom,' Job xxxiii. 23, 24. They were persons rarely found that were employed in that work, or had a discovery of the mind of God about it. So that you see what an hidden thing this atonement, that lieth at the bottom of pardon of sins, was in those days: they knew little of this great transaction. Oh! what cause have we then to bless God for a more clear and open discovery of this blessed truth!

Use 2. To put us upon self-reflection. Do we entertain this offered pardon as such a singular thing deserves? Sure if there be none like God in pardoning, we should not be affected with it as some ordinary thing. Here, therefore, I shall inquire what impression it should leave upon us.

1. The sense of God's glorious grace in pardoning should work in us a great love to God, and commend and endear him to our hearts, or else we do not entertain it with that singular affection which so great a benefit and so glorious a project of his love deserveth, but lightly pass it over as a common thing, or a piece of stale news: Rom. v. 8, 'God commendeth his love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly;' Luke vii. 47, 'Her many sins

are forgiven to her, therefore she loved much.' Certainly the self-condemning sinner will be deeply affected with this grace, and the saints are always admiring, Eph. iii. 18, 19. Did you ever feel in your hearts what a glorious work of mercy he hath wrought in our redemption? Are your souls more engaged to him? Have you any of the saint's admiration of the height, length, breadth, and depth of this love and grace?

2. Where it is rightly entertained it breedeth admiring thoughts. Everything about God is marvellous, but especially his mercy: 'He hath called us into his marvellous light,' 1 Peter ii. 9. We never have any true apprehension of God in any of his attributes till he filleth us with wonder: 1 Sam. ii. 2, 'Is any holy as the Lord?' Deut. xxxii. 31, 'There is no rock like our rock;' Ps. lxxxvi. 8, 'Among the gods there is none like thee, O Lord; neither are any works like thy works.' Now, since the chief glory of God consists in his grace, and one special act is the remission of sins, therefore we do not rightly entertain this discovery of God unless we are raised into some admiration of his grace. This was God's end: Eph. i. 6, 'That we might be to the praise of the glory of his grace.'

3. Such as breedeth a reverence of God: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' and Hosea iii. 5, 'They shall fear the Lord and his goodness.' That sense of pardon which worketh no reverence, but rather a contempt and commonness of spirit in all our transactions with God, is justly to be suspected.

4. It confirmeth us in the true religion, Jer. vi. 16, Mat. xi. 28, 29. In a consultation the inquiry is, Where shall I have any rest of soul? Carnal comforts tickle the senses. False religions leave us in darkness and perplexity; and doubtful, uncertain, loose proposals of grace breed a vanishing delight, which is lost upon the increase of knowledge and a little serious consideration; but the grace of Christ truly propounded soon brings ease and peace. Now this is a confirmation: 1 John v. 10, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself;' an argument in our own bosoms.

5. It taketh off the heart from other things, and bringeth us back from the flesh to God; for where this comfort maketh a due impression, the sensitive lure hath less force. No joy like joy in God and reconciliation with him by Christ, Rom. v. 11. Delight is not abrogated, but preferred; it is most chaste, rational and pure; an holy delight in a pardoning God.

6. It giveth us strength and encouragement to new obedience. Who would not serve a pardoning God, such a pardoning God? Titus ii. 11, 12, 'The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly,' &c. Teacheth, not by way of instruction, but persuasion. If it doth not engage us to ready gospel obedience, our apprehensions are not right, 2 Cor. v. 14. As God is matchless and singular in his mercy, we should be singular in our obedience.

7. It melteth us into the forgiveness of others. God doth exceed man so far that it is a shame to retain our anger, Hosea xi. 8, and Isa. lvii. 8, 9. We must not measure God by our scantling. He

pardoneth; none like him. Man is revengeful, inexorable, but God is a God of pardons; his pardoning mercy is suitable to his greatness, and other excellences of his nature. Now, what impression doth this make upon us? Eph. iv. 32, 'Forgiving one another, as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.' We have been a thousand times more disingenuous to God, Mat. xviii. 26, 27. He that owed ten thousand talents, upon his entreaty the lord forgave him the debt; but he was inexorable to his fellow-servant that owed him but an hundred pence. The implacable, inexorable nature of man is one of the greatest degeneracies of human nature. To retain a sense of wrong, to watch opportunities of revenge, is to represent the image of the devil in its proper colours.

8. It teacheth us to entertain with reverence the grace tendered to us in the Lord's supper, that was designed and appointed for the representation and remembrance of Christ, and the solemn communication of the benefits thereof to the penitent believer. Now forgiveness of sins is one expressly mentioned, Mat. xxvi. 28, 'For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins.' Christ hath purchased for us the remission of sins, and we are to yield him that obedience which he requireth upon the account of having so dealt with us. Here Christ and his new testament gifts are solemnly delivered to us, the wondrous love of God manifested. Now, what becometh us more than admiring his pardoning mercy, and making God amiable to us, and to express our joy and thankfulness? Here we come to profess communion with a reconciled God, and to take a sealed pardon out of his hands.

Use 3. To press you to admire the grace of God in the pardon of sins. It will never be unless we look upon it—

1. As a necessary mercy. Three things make it necessary—law, conscience, judgment. By law we are condemned, though not executed: John iii. 18, 'He that believeth not is condemned already.' This sentence standeth in force till we repent and believe. And then conscience: Rom. ii. 15, 'Which show the works of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.' So judgment: Acts x. 42, 43, 'He it is that was ordained by God to be judge of quick and dead; and to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.' Now to them that have a sense of these things, that look shortly to appear before the bar of God, and are afraid of his displeasure, it will appear to be a necessary mercy.

2. It is a great mercy. If forgiveness of sin had been a small thing, it had not been purchased at so dear a rate: Eph. i. 7, 'We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.'

3. It is a sure mercy. If we be qualified to receive it, God's truth and justice lies at pawn to make it good to us.

Use 4. Comfort to refresh the weary, and make glad the mournful soul. We are apt to say, None like us in sinning; but remember, none is like God in pardoning. Penitent believers should take comfort in this, notwithstanding their great sins before conversion, and slips and failings since, your consciences accuse you of so much unthank-

fulness to God ; yet, Rom. viii. 33, 34, ' Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? it is God that justifieth ; who is he that condemneth ? it is Christ that died,' &c. When you are sensible of the great wrong done to God, remember Christ hath satisfied for it, and God is readily inclined to pardon you. There is no mercy for them that fear not justice ; no justice for them that fly to mercy. God hath erected a throne of grace for them that judge and condemn themselves, and will wonderfully discover the riches of his grace.
