

God Forgiving Sin

A SERMON DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 6, 1890,

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." [Isaiah 55:7-9](#).

AT first men have very low ideas of sin. It is a trifle, a mere mistake, a failure of judgment, a little going aside—but when the Holy Spirit begins to deal with them sin grows to be an intolerable burden—a fearsome thing full of horror and dismay. The more men know of the evil of sin, the more astounded they are that they ever should have found any pleasure in it, or could have made any excuse for it. Now, it is well when men begin to see the truth about themselves, for even if that truth breaks them into pieces and grinds them small as the dust of the threshing floor, it is well that they are delivered from the dominion of falsehood.

At this time, however, while the thought of sin becomes clear, the thought of pardon is not at first so clear. Sin is great and for that reason the sinner thinks it cannot be pardoned, as if he measured the Lord by his sin and fancied that his sin was greater than the mercy of God! Hence our difficulty with men who are really awakened, is to raise their thoughts of God's mercy in proportion to their raised idea of the greatness of sin. While they do not feel their sin, they say that God is merciful and talk very flippantly about it, as if pardon were a trifle. But when they feel the weight of sin, then they think it impossible that sin should be forgiven!

In our text God in condescension helps the sinner to believe in pardon by elevating his idea of God. Because God is infinitely superior to man, He can abundantly pardon. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." He can abundantly pardon because His Nature is not on our level. May God bless what I shall say and enable doubting ones to have confidence in Divine mercy and at once receive the pardon of our God!—

"Pardon for crimes of deepest dye, A pardon bought with Jesus' blood."

I. YOUR OWN THOUGHTS JUDGE PARDON TO BE IMPOSSIBLE. Let me show you why. To some it seems impossible that there can be forgiveness for them, because of some special, secret, gross and grievous sin. Most persons, when they remember their past lives, see a certain spot blacker than the rest. Perhaps more light falls upon that spot than upon any other, but certainly the eye of memory constantly returns to it. And when they take a view of their lives, they are overwhelmed by the remembrance of certain enormous

transgressions. In conversing with enquirers, it has been my painful lot to hear many an awful story which will never be repeated by me.

They weep over sins inexcusable, sins foul and terrible, but oh, it has always been a delight to me to be able to say, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men!" I have never heard in secret of any special action that has seemed to me—even seemed to me—to be beyond the reach of Divine Grace! "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." Those convicted of sin who think their cases heinous beyond all others are sometimes astonished when we tell them that many such have been forgiven and remind them how the Apostle, after he had mentioned all manner of enormities, says, "And such were some of you; but you are washed."

They fancy Christ only came into the world to save saints—but He came into the world to save sinners. They imagine that He saves those who think themselves sinners and are not truly such—but it is not so. Jesus did not come to save sham sinners, but those that have committed real sin and ought to be ashamed of what they have done. Jesus died for

the guilty. Do you think that the ransom paid in His blood on Calvary was for trifling offenses? No, verily, the Infinite One died because enormous sin was to be put away. Believe, then, in a great Savior for great sinners!

To others the difficulty of pardon seems to lie not so much in some special offense as in the number of their sins and the long continuance of them. "Look," says one, "I now perceive that I sinned when I did not think I was sinning. I sin in word, I sin in thought, I sin in motive, I sin in spirit, whereas I thought I had but few sins." In your room the air seems clear and pure enough till you let in a beam of sunlight through a hole in the shutter. Look! Look! Look! Why, dancing up and down in that ray of sunlight there are myriads of objects! So, within the action which appears quite innocent, there may be myriads of evils which are discovered to us by the light of God when the eyes of conscience have the scales taken from them.

To have lived in sin for 20, 40, 60, or 80 years appears to the awakened conscience to be a very dreadful thing—and a dreadful thing it is. It is cruel to provoke a person for five minutes—to go on provoking him for an hour is abominable—but to provoke God year after year, as sinners do—is a tremendous crime which might seem to be beyond mercy. So the heart feels and hence the need for such a text as mine. Others have been grievously oppressed with the idea that they could not be pardoned because of the willfulness of what they have done. "I did, on such-and-such an occasion," says one, "distinctly prefer sin to righteousness. I sinned against great light. I had to do violence to myself to go into evil company and to commit sin. I sinned by an awful constraint which I put upon my conscience."

Certainly this is a very grievous evil. To sin willfully is dangerous to the last degree. Willfulness is the very damnablest of sin. Sin committed of malice aforethought, against

light and against knowledge, is sin, indeed. I do not wonder that you think it impossible that you should be forgiven—but I would have you remember that your judgment is nothing as compared with God's Word and God's Word declares that if you forsake your way and turn to the Lord, "He will abundantly pardon." Be not astonished when I tell you that you are much worse than you think you are! Even though you have a very terrible idea of yourself, that idea does not come up to the truth. But, notwithstanding this, if you were 10,000 times worse than you are, still God, the infinitely merciful, is able, for Christ's sake, to forgive you all trespasses and to blot out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions and, as a cloud, your sins!

Behold, in the name of God I publish this great Truth of God—"He will abundantly pardon." "Sir," says one, "I sinned with a great falseness and treachery of heart, for I was baptized and joined a Church. I professed to be a follower of Christ and I have broken my covenant. I did know something of the salvation of Christ and I sinned against it. I did rejoice at one time in the light of God's Countenance and I wickedly went astray from Him." Yes, this is very, very, very grievous. But there is a text that says—"Return, O backsliding daughter," and I cannot go further until I have sounded it in your ear. May the Spirit of God send it into your heart! "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for My anger is turned away from them." "He will abundantly pardon" for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are His ways higher than your ways.

I hear one say, "But, Sir, there is about my sin this peculiar heinousness, that I have injured myself and others by my sin." Many a man has to carry in his bones the sins of his youth and though the physical consequences may not be averted, yet I would have him trust in Christ, that the guilt is, notwithstanding, blotted out. We may lead another into sin and that other may perish—and yet, amazing Grace—we may be saved. When David was forgiven, he could not restore Uriah to life, who had been slain through his wicked device. Worst of all, we may have led another into Hell. "Oh," says one, "if I have damned another, can I yet be saved myself?" Yes, yes, but as I say it I feel inclined to stop and ask you to sing—

"Who is a pardoning Godlike You, Or who has Grace so rich and free?" We cannot undo the mischief of our ungodly lives. The drunkard may become as sober as he pleases, but he cannot bring back those young lads whom he taught to drink. The man who was an unbeliever and who spoke against God and His Christ may turn and repent and be a faithful follower of Jesus—but the wicked things he taught may still linger in many minds—and go on poisoning them to their destruction. Sin is a spreading plague! It is a horrible evil! Were it not for the Cross, it would be a despairing business to talk with sinful souls—but the Cross, the Cross—it rises high above all the hills of sin and they that look to it shall find that God does abundantly pardon!

Perhaps one may even say, "But, Sir, my sin was of this kind, that I dishonored God—I denied the Deity of Christ! I used to grow red in the face against God's electing love and justification by faith. I hated the Gospel and I said all manner of contemptuous things about

God's servants and about God Himself." It is a sorrowful case, my Friend—but remember, there was one who was a persecutor and injurious. But he says, "I obtained mercy." When you hear the cock crow tomorrow morning, remember how Peter was forgiven and hope for mercy! Though sinners have defamed Him and blasphemed Him, profaned His Day and hated His Gospel, Jesus can wash them whiter than snow!

It is mine to proclaim at this time pardon for every form of transgression and iniquity. David said, "Against You, You only, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight"—and though you may be compelled to feel that your sin is peculiarly of that kind, yet the Lord will abundantly pardon, for He says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

II. But, secondly, GOD'S THOUGHTS OF OTHER THINGS ARE FAR ABOVE YOURS. I am not going to keep you long on that. It is quite certain that the best thoughts—the most logical thoughts, the most original thoughts, the most correct thoughts you have ever had—are not worthy to be compared with God's thoughts. Look in nature. The things you see in nature were, at first, thoughts in God's mind and He embodied them. Did you ever think such thoughts as God has thought in creation?

You take the wing of a fly, an insignificant thing and simple enough—but you put it under a microscope and you see it to be a fabric of great beauty, of exquisite delicacy and of marvelous adaptation to the end for which it was made. Many a person who has looked in a microscope has been overwhelmed with wonder! You put a needle under it, the best Redditch needle and it is a rough bar of iron—but you take any of the works of God and magnify them as much as ever you will, you never detect any roughness. Nothing can be better finished than God's little things. Even in minute matters His thoughts are not as your thoughts!

You fancy that you are so insignificant that He will not forgive you. Oh, but He that spends infinite wisdom upon the wing of a fly will care for you and spend infinite thought upon you that He may forgive you! You look up at the stars and your thoughts are that they are mere points of light. His thoughts are not your thoughts, for when you look through the telescope you discover that these are majestic orbs and you can hardly get God's great thought of the heavens into your head! An astronomer is compelled to worship. He is unable to compass the stupendous thoughts of the creating God! God's great thoughts in nature are infinitely above our noblest conceptions.

God's thoughts in Providence—how wonderfully they are above ours! You read history and everything seems to be a tangle. The stories of the nations look like "confusion worse confounded" and yet, before you have read through the chapter, you see in it all a plan and a method—

"From seeming evil still educing good, And better still, and better still, In infinite progression."

God works wonderfully in Providence in ways that we look not for. His thoughts are above our thoughts. It has even been so in your own mind as to the future. Read the prophecies and see what is yet to be. God's thoughts about a new Heaven and a new earth—how far above ours!

The book of Revelation, which gives us parts of God's thought about the future, is not to be understood by us as yet. We have to wait till facts explain it, for God's thoughts are above our thoughts. Why, take a simple matter like the resurrection of the dead. We bury the departed and their bodies are dissolved. God's thought is that they shall rise again! The seed shall become the flower. God's thoughts are far above any thoughts that can arise in your soul.

III. I merely throw that in as an interjectory head, to come to this—that HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT PARDON ARE ABOVE YOURS. God's ways of pardon are far above anything you can ever think. Look at yourself. Are you not slow to forgive? Some are sadly slow! It is a long time before they can get over an injury. God forgives readily. Through the death of His dear Son, He is able, without the violation of His justice, to forgive at once, freely, readily. There are no compulsions with Him—"He delights in mercy." It is His very Self to pardon, for God is Love!

Do not judge God's heart by that hard heart of yours! He is a God ready to pardon. You come to an end of your forgiveness before long. After being offended seven times, you do not go on to 70 times seven. If you did so, surely you

would make a great wonder of it and think that you deserved great praise. But God goes on to 70 times 70 times—on, and on, and on, and never comes to the end of pardoning mercy so long as a soul cries to Him for forgiveness. Some things you find hard to forgive. You say, "Well, now—now, this is really very provoking. I am of a forgiving spirit and I have overlooked offenses a great many times, but you do not expect me to endure such treatment as this? Surely, nobody can expect me to be always trod on."

No, nobody does expect it of you and if he did he would be disappointed! God does far more in the way of pardon than we ask, or even think. He argues not at great offenses, but as soon as we cry to Him for pardon, He answers with forgiveness. I am afraid I must say of some of you that you forgive, but you do not forget. Now, God promises to forget our iniquities. It is more than Omniscience can do to forget and yet God declares that He does forget. "I will cast all their sins behind My back," He says. "I will cast their iniquities into the depths of the sea. They shall not be remembered against them any more forever."

We forgive and yet feel some return of anger. You forgive, and mean it—but there are times when you get to chewing over the old offense and you feel grieved again. The offense sticks in your throat, does it not? It floats up again, though you thought you had drowned

it. But it is never so with God—there are no back reckonings with the All-Merciful. "I have blotted out," says He, "your transgressions." Once blotted out, they are done with forever. "The day comes, says the Lord, when the sins of Judah shall be sought for and shall not be found, yes, they shall not be, says the Lord." He has annihilated our sins. Is it not written, "He has made an end of sin"?

Dear Friend, I do not slander you when I say that you are not very eager to pardon. Are you? When you have been offended, you think a good deal of yourself, if, after persuasion and humble apology, you are ready to give your hand to the aggressor and end the dispute. You are not pining to forgive, but God is. It is He, the offended One, who seeks the offender and proposes to make peace with him. It is He that cries, "Hold," and bids transgressors come to Him—yes, pleads with them—"Be you reconciled to God." "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

Do you think that any of us would suffer much for the sake of being able to forgive another? "No," you say, "I do not see that I ought to suffer for his wrong. I will forgive him if I can do so freely, but I could not consent to be a loser thereby." Should there be a very serious difficulty in the way, so that you cannot rightly forgive without some atonement being made, would you make the atonement yourself? You exclaim with astonishment, "I make the atonement! How can you propose such a thing?"

Some time ago, a case did occur in which I tried to imitate the Savior and did so with a measure of success. Two Brethren had greatly grieved each other. One had acted very shamefully. I entreated the other to forgive him and as he did not feel willing to do so, I said, "There are certain consequences involved in what he has done. I will bear all those consequences and you may regard me as the guilty party if you please." Well, he said he could not be angry with me because I had done no wrong. However, I did bear the consequences of the wrong action and thus I made peace between the two.

The aggrieved Brother was able, by my interposition, to overlook the injury and yet to keep his word—but he regretted that I should be the scapegoat until I assured him I was pleased to do it, that I might bring them together again. It would not have been wise for me to ask the offended Brother to suffer himself the consequences of the other's offenses—but this is what God has done. He bears the consequences of our sin—and Jesus dies because our sin involved death. Miracle of mercy!—

"Who is a pardoning Godlike You,

Or who has Grace so rich and free?" All this was done because all the wisdom of God had been engaged to find out the way of doing it—you and I do not thus plot and plan how to forgive. If God were freely to forgive sin without atonement, it would not manifest His love so much as does that plan by which He, Himself, in the Person of His Son, suffered in our place that we might be reconciled to

God.

If I can end a quarrel as soon as I speak a word, there is little in it. But if it needs plotting and planning and contriving to make a way by which my pardoning the offender will not cause him to offend again, or will not lead other members of the family to think lightly of his offense and will prevent any mischief coming from the freeness of my pardon

to him, then you see how I love. And if it comes to this—that I must die, myself, before I can, without damage, freely forgive the offender—and if I do die, myself, for him, herein is love amazing—love beyond degree! O Souls, you that are listening to me now and think that God cannot forgive you, I hope that all this is sufficient to make you feel that you have made a mistake!

You have measured God's corn with your own bushel! He is greater at forgiving than you ever dreamed. Oh, He is a great forgiver! Wonderful is God in every position which He assumes, but when He takes to pardoning through the bleeding Sacrifice, then is He glorious, indeed! The silver scepter is the most majestic ensign of His royalty.

IV. I might finish here, but I wanted to say, had there been time, that GOD'S THOUGHTS ARE ABOVE YOURS

IN ALL THINGS WHICH CONCERN HIS GRACE. Would you mind reading the chapter through again? Just see the

very first verse as to the freeness of His Divine Grace. Your thought is that you can get nothing without paying for it— God's thoughts are, "Come to the waters, and he that has no money; come, buy, and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

But you think that if God were to save you He would perform it in a second-rate style. Not He! He will have no cheap salvations. If He supplies His people, it shall be most richly and freely. Listen to this—"Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." It is not a sip of the water, or a crust of the bread, or a drop of the milk—when Christ invites poor sinners to come—He invites them to a high festival! You that are the guiltiest may come to Christ and be among the happiest and the best of His saints! Nobody would ever imagine that a sinner could ever enter into covenant with God—that God should strike hands with guilty men and pledge Himself to Divine Grace.

Listen to this—"Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an Everlasting Covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." I remember a man, shut up in prison, under a long sentence and he was so violent that he was put into a solitary cell. The chaplain had done all he could as to bringing him to repentance. But one day he read to him this verse: "I will make an Everlasting Covenant with you." The man said, "I never heard of such a thing. Can God make a covenant with such a wretch as I am? Sir," he said, "it will break my heart." And it did break his heart and he became a new man in

Christ Jesus under the power of that amazing thought—that God would enter into covenant with such a wretch as he was.

Ah, well! I know your thoughts, poor Sinner! You think that if Christ will save you, yet He will never get much glory out of you! Listen! This is His Glory, that He should call a nation that He knows not, and people that know not Him should run to Him! He mentions a people who were so bad that our Lord Himself did not know them! A people so ignorant that, for certain, they did not know Him! This is to be His Glory, that He is to call them by His Grace—"For He has glorified you." There's a thought! It is not one of your thoughts, but one of the thoughts of God—that He will glorify Christ in the saving of great sinners.

"Ah, well!" says one, "I will go home and cry to God for mercy." That is your thought. Listen to God's thought! "Seek you the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near." Breathe a prayer to Him now. Look to Jesus with the eye of faith at once! The Lord help you to do so! Your thought is that salvation is to be won through months or years of labor and prayer. But pardon is given as quick as a lightning flash! The sin is there! The sin is gone! The dead soul lives! The lost soul is saved! While I speak the word, it is done and God is glorified!

Ah, still you think, "How can I be pardoned?" Listen to this—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Read the rest of the chapter and say to yourself, over each verse, "This was not my thought. This was not my way." End all your doubts with the last verse—"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Ah, my God! This is not my way and this is not my thought—

"Who is a pardoning God like You, Or who has Grace so rich and free?"

The Lord bring all of you, who are not saved as yet, to believe unto eternal life! And you that are His people, I beseech you, pray God to bless this word for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON— [Isaiah 55](#). HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—537, 512, 202.

Permitted to complete 36 years of consecutive sermons, the full heart of the Preacher exclaims, "Bless the Lord, O my Soul!" The spring has never ceased to flow. The Bible seems fuller and more rich in subject, now, than when we began to select themes from it. A few beauties here and there are all that we have been able to depict of "Your land, O Immanuel!" We have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, but that "whole counsel" is, in its fullness, as much beyond us as the sea surpasses the hollow of a child's hand! Yet has God set His seal upon our testimony in many conversions and edifications. Above all, to Him be Glory, that an afflicted and poor people, detained from public service, have by these