

Sabbath. The text Hosea vi. 6 is found no more in the cycle of "killing" testimonies. It has been preserved only in Irenæus, *Adv. Haer.* IV. xvii. 4, and in the *Apostolic Preaching* c. 96. And here it occurs in the remarkable form which confirms our argument: "The Law will not command any one to pass the Sabbath in quiet and idleness who keeps Sabbath every day, who *in the godly Temple of the human body* serves God worthily and does justice every hour; for it is said: I want mercy and not sacrifice, knowledge of God and not holocausts." The orthodox Church had accepted the whole old Testament, and so, if only theoretically and as a doctrine, has to defend both Temple and Sacrifices.

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THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GRACE OF GOD IN FORGIVENESS.

I.

(1) THE grace of God is His personal activity, and forgiveness is the restoration of personal relation to Him. We must avoid all language that would depersonalise what God does in this relation. What God does, and how man is related to Him, is determined by what God Himself is. We are in no way concerned with the abstract conception of the philosophical schools, which has so injuriously affected the theology of the Christian Church. It is with the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ with whom alone we have to do. While the Fatherhood of God is partially revealed in Creation and Providence, in His care and bounty towards all men (*Matthew vi. 25-34*), yet it is in Redemption that the Fatherhood alone finds its full expression. Here God's Fatherhood is His *com-*

municative and reproductive perfection ; He made man for fellowship with Himself, and likeness to Himself ; and when sin interrupts that fellowship and destroys that likeness, He restores that relation in the revelation and redemption in Christ Jesus.

(2) It is this activity of God that is described as His grace. God's love for man means that He sets a *value* on man which can be measured only by what He does for man, that He has an *interest* in man so that man's sin is His loss, and man's recovery is His joy, and that He has a *purpose of good* for man, this fellowship with and likeness to Himself. (Luke xv.) God's love appears as *grace* inasmuch as man is not only, as creature, dependent, subject, *inferior* to God, but as sinner is *unworthy* of the love of God. Grace is love which persists, despite *unworthiness*, in order that it may recover and restore *worth*. It is not a *thing*, a *quality* which God mysteriously, by sacraments or such other means, infuses into man ; it is the *character* of the activity of God in relation to man as sinner. It is in Jesus Christ and His Cross that that activity finds its full and final manifestation and efficacy. Accordingly to the apostolic benediction (2 Cor. xiii. 14) the love of God comes in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ ; and we must avoid getting away from "the green pastures and still waters" of His Shepherdhood as our Saviour and Lord into the arid wastes of the dogmatic definitions of His work for and in men.

II.

(1) In grace God as Father regards and deals with men as sinners ; it is needful then, though very briefly, to indicate what is to be understood by *sin*. The three fundamental relations of man are to himself, to his fellows, and to God. When he, by the abuse of his freedom, injures his own

nature his act may be described as *vice*. While the injury is most manifest in such habits as drunkenness or uncleanness, yet we should not restrict the term *vice* to these, but should use it as widely as the term *virtue*, its opposite, for the hurtful reactions of man's act upon himself. When a man does wrong to one of his fellow-men, his act may be described as *crime*, and this term should also be used in the widest sense, and not limited to those wrongs which society recognises and punishes as such. But every act of man has a reference not only to himself and his fellows, but also to God, for not only in Him do all live and move and have their being, not only are all his offspring (Acts xvii. 28), but He is the Father over all, and He is Himself injured and wronged by every evil deed which is done by man. It is in this relation to God that *vice*, or *crime* is also *sin*.

(2) We shall not gain the distinctively Christian view of sin if we relate it to the *law* of God and not to His *love*. It is not with an abstract principle of righteousness that man is concerned, but with a concrete purpose of God for the good of man. In a moral reference sin may be conceived as *disobedience* to God's law, in a religious reference it should be thought of as *distrust* of God's love. It is estrangement from God as well as defiance of Him; and these two react the one on the other; estrangement provokes defiance, and defiance intensifies estrangement. In sin the purpose of God is opposed in both its aspects; His fellowship is refused, and His likeness is rejected. The child of God refuses to live with, and in so living to grow like to the Father. We need not now concern ourselves with the origin of sin in the individual or the race, but with its distinctive nature. Nor need we concern ourselves with the imperfect apprehension of their own sin which so deceives and holds sinners captive. What we

aim at is the conception of sin which corresponds with grace as that is exercised by God in Jesus Christ for forgiveness.

III.

(1) What then is forgiveness? It is not primarily the annulment of the consequences of sin present and future. (a) If a man by his *vice* has brought disease on himself, or disorder of his nature, deterioration of his character, or if he has by his *crime* brought on himself the penalty of the law, or loss of reputation among his fellows, the forgiveness of his sin by God will not at once end these consequences. He may continue to suffer them even as he rejoices in God's forgiveness. But it is untrue and cruel to affirm, as is sometimes done, that in these respects forgiveness makes no difference at all. It does a great deal. *First of all*, these consequences, if not at once removed, are often to a great extent mitigated; some measure of health is restored to the man who lives virtuously, some recovery of reputation among his fellows is possible to the man who shows them that he has indeed "turned over a new leaf," and a restoration of character, as we shall see, follows and follows inevitably on the recovery of his relation to God. *Secondly*, even if the consequences remain, the man himself is so changed that, as will afterwards be shown, as they now are for him they are changed.

(b) In the preaching of a former time great stress was laid on the consequences of sin; hell-fire was preached with passion and power; eternal punishment was an impregnable article in the creed of orthodoxy. I cannot regret the change which has taken place. For, on the one hand, the conception of God as Father, revealed in Jesus Christ, makes incredible such a view of His treatment of men. And on the other hand the Christian life, or what

was taken for it, was begun from a wrong motive—fear, and not love. I shall not go so far as to affirm that the motive of fear must never be appealed to to arrest the sinner on his downward course, but fear alone can never be an adequate motive for the highest kind of Christian life. Much of the irreligion of which we complain to-day is due to the fact that not only has the motive of fear lost its force, but that the motive of love has not had the place given to it in the preaching of the past that it should have had. We are still in a stage of transition, and we must not make haste to despond. We preachers must learn to preach the love of God with the passion and power with which the fear of hell was preached.

(2) Even if we generally accept this change of emphasis, we must not go to the extreme of denying that there are future consequences of sin, a judgment to come. If the future life be, not a fuller disclosure of God than that given in Christ, but a fuller discovery by man of what God is, and how God regards sin, if at death a man learns to know himself, and cannot then as now evade that knowledge, if some of the present consequences of sin in a man's nature and character are continued, and it may even be increased under the conditions of the unseen world, then in a real sense the solemn warnings of the Holy Scriptures remain true, and we can still preach with conviction that the wages of sin is death (Romans vi. 23), that as a man soweth so shall he also reap (Galatians vi. 7). Forgiveness does not mean that all such apprehension is emptied of content. Death will not sever the continuity of life. We dare not affirm that none of the consequences of sin in this life will be carried into the next; but even if they should be, what has already been said about the present consequences will hold good. And we may surely add that faith is the root of which the fruit is love, and the flower hope; and for

the forgiven man there is no longer "a certain fearful looking for of judgment" (Hebrews x. 27), but a confident assurance that God's love hereafter will do greater things for him than it is doing, or can do, here. Only let the stress always fall on the present relation to God as the ground of any hope for the future good, and never solely on that future good. To have God as Father is heaven, to live without God is hell—this is where the accent should ever fall. While the preacher, then, should not primarily appeal to fear or hope, yet he is warranted not only by texts of Scripture, but by all the facts of life as now disclosed to us, in speaking very seriously and solemnly of the judgment to come. How God will finally deal with sin, whether by the complete victory of His grace over man's sin or by the extinction of the personalities who by continued defiance and estrangement have forfeited their right, or lost their capacity to continue as persons we cannot tell. But we can and we ought to make clear that there can be no peace for the wicked here or hereafter until they have made their peace with God in Jesus Christ.

(3) When in the consciousness of sin which the experience of forgiveness meets we have removed the fear of the consequences thereof, what remains? It seems to me two things—the *sense of guilt* and the *feeling of enslavement or weakness at least*. (a) The sense of guilt is not merely the apprehensions of the consequences, the knowledge of liability to punishment, although in men of insensitive conscience that may seem all. The sense of guilt is the sense of self-condemnation, the consequent sense that the relation to God has been disturbed: there may not be hostility, there may be indifference, or at most a feeling of uneasiness. Man made for fellowship with God misses it, although he may not be conscious of the extent of his loss. When conscience is awakened, there is acute misery, and that

not only fear of punishment, but sense of loss—loss of our own esteem of ourselves, and loss in relation to God: God is not to us, nor we to Him, what He wants to be to us, and we now wish Him to be. It is the disturbed relation to God which is the core of the consciousness of sin which craves forgiveness.

(b) With a man of less intense spiritual consciousness, and more active moral conscience, it may be the sense of enslavement to sin, impotence to overcome sin, such as Paul expresses in Romans vii., which becomes the more prominent. In Paul the two elements were both present, although the second finds more poignant personal expression. Augustine felt the moral impotence most acutely; in Luther, again, it seems to have been the consciousness of guilt as estrangement from God which was his great trouble.

(c) Those two elements correspond to the two elements in God's purpose for man which have already been mentioned—fellowship with Him, and likeness to Him. And although, in individual experiences, the emphasis on these two elements will vary yet in any constructive statement we must be careful to do justice to both. God is not to be regarded as Lawgiver and Ruler alone who is concerned only about men's obedience to His law. He is also Father, and He wants men to receive and to respond to His love. A change of character is not enough; there must also be a change in the conscious relation to God, a desire for and a delight in communion with Him. The sinner fully conscious of his sinfulness desires not only to be made good, but also, and even still more, to know that God as his Father looks on him with favour, and not displeasure, and seeks and grants him communion with Himself.

(4) We can now attempt to define what forgiveness is. It is primarily *the restoration of the personal relationship*

to God, and only secondarily, although as an essential consequence, *the restoration of the personal character* of the sinner. (a) This order must be insisted on, not as a subtlety of theology, but as a reality of experience. A man is not forgiven when he becomes good ; it is as he is forgiven that he becomes good. To use the distinction which theology makes, and which it is sometimes useful to recall, forgiveness is not an analytic act, discovering and expressing what already is, or even is going to be, but a synthetic, not only foreseeing what will be but creating the very possibility of its so being. Goodness becomes possible to a forgiven man as it was not, and could not be before. God does not forgive us because He knows that we are going to be good, and so accepts the intention for the deed ; but He forgives us in such a way that the desire, the motive and the power of becoming good come to us. It is not theological subtlety, but experimental superficiality to say that God takes the will for the deed, and that He forgives what we now are for the sake of what He knows that we are going to become. Whatever this may call itself, it certainly is not New Testament Christianity. We must go a good deal deeper into religious and moral reality than that. God knows that we are sinners, even as we know ourselves to be, and yet in forgiveness God regards and treats us as His children in fellowship with Himself.

(b) How can this be ? How can He regard the things that are not as though they were ? It is because in Christ forgiveness is a creative act ; it not only logically distinguishes the sin which God condemns from the sinner whom He accepts, but it really separates the sinner from his sin. Offered fully and freely in Jesus Christ without reservation and qualification, it wakes such *penitence* and *faith* in the sinner as leads him to condemn his own sin and to separate himself from his own sin, so that he may attach himself

to the God who forgives. By the grace of God in forgiveness the attitude of the sinner is so changed to God and to sin, that the sin God still judges no longer personally attaches to the man God forgives ; but it is God who has made the new creation which He can now pronounce good, and in which He can take His delight.

(c) We do injustice to the grace of God in forgiveness if we say that our penitence and our faith are the condition of it, that if we repent and believe, God will forgive. That was the expectation of the Psalmist (Ps. li. 17), but God in Christ goes beyond the aspiration of the Psalmist. Repentance and faith are the *products* of the forgiveness which grace offers and conditions of the full appreciation of that grace. The light brings the sight by which it is seen. The initiative lies with God ; and it is His action which brings about in man those conditions which are necessary to make forgiveness fully effective. It is all of grace, penitence and faith, the aspiration, motive and power of the new life.

(5) We shall again involve ourselves in difficulties of thought, if we remain in the region of theological conceptions only. The creative act of forgiveness is the creative personality of Jesus Christ ; in it God Himself comes and gives Himself to man. Repentance is the personal response to the judgment on sin which the sacrifice of the holy love of Christ evokes. Faith is the personal response to the lovingkindness and tender mercy to sinners Christ's whole personality conveys. His perfection inspires the aspiration after holiness. His love, to which we respond in love, constrains us to self-surrender and self-dedication to Him. He, present as life-giving Spirit, is the inward power by which the restoration of personal character is effected. God's forgiveness is no forensic act of acquittal of the accused at the bar ; it is love's self-identification with sinners in

all that Jesus was, did, and suffered, so that they in turn will identify themselves with the holy love which judges their sin and yet forgives them—the sinners.

(b) Thus the two aspects of forgiveness are inseparable. The grace which cancels guilt also makes holy. Justification and sanctification can be separated as theological abstractions. But a moral and religious monstrosity is produced wherever and whenever a man thinks that he can claim forgiveness without seeking and striving for holiness. As long as a man tolerates and compromises with his sin, he is not and cannot be fully forgiven, for the separation has not taken place between the sinner and the sin which the creative act of forgiveness effects. God's condemnation rests, and must continue to rest, upon the sin, but not on the sinner in so far as he is now separated from that sin. It seems to me we should be using language with greater accuracy if we never spoke of the *forgiveness of sin*, but only of the forgiveness of the sinner, who as forgiven is now no longer identified with the sin on which God's judgment rests and must ever rest. Without this separation there may be a passing-over of sin in God's mercy (Romans iii. 25), but not the forgiveness of grace.

(6) When the sinner by forgiveness becomes the child of God in fellowship with God and growing in likeness to God, the inward change—the new creation within—brings about an outward change, "the old things pass away, and behold all things become new" (2 Cor. v. 17). When there is peace with God, all things work together for good (Romans v. 1, viii. 28); redemption interprets providence. Even the consequences of former sin, so far as they remain, become no longer penalty, but chastisement, and a chastisement of peace, a discipline of religious disposition and moral character, consistent with the new filial relation to God. Outward circumstances which the estranged heart might

regard as token of God's displeasure, the heart reconciled may use as a means of grace, a condition of growth in holy love. Death even is robbed of his terror, and becomes the minister of the God of grace. This is what Ritschl means by the dominion over the world which follows justification. The changed relation to God results not only in a changed character, but even in changed conditions under which the relation and the character are perfected.

(7) This is the typical and ideal experience of the Grace of God in Forgiveness. (a) It must be frankly and fully conceded that the actual experience of Christian men approximates only more or less to it. All that God's Fatherhood means is not realised. The penitence is inadequate and the faith uncertain, and so the new creation is not completed. The aspiration after holiness wavers; the motive of the constraining love of Christ is opposed by other desires and purposes. The power of the Spirit is not fully claimed, used, and enjoyed. But this actuality is not the reality, but the reality is what God is and does in Christ, and our experience gains reality only as the ideal typical experience is approached.

(b) What, it seems to me, in view of the tendency of modern psychology to give exclusive attention to the subjective process in man, to reduce religion to a human experience, we need to emphasise is the objective reality of the grace of God in forgiveness. That is the measure and standard of what Christian life is, for that is the pledge and the power of the creation of that life. Instead of cultivating the habit of introspection of ourselves, which will result in disappointment and despondency, we should form the practice of contemplating God in Christ, for in that alone there lies for us certainty and confidence. While morality, as distinguished from religion, lays stress on what man ought to be and do, and on what man can be and

do, religion emphasises what God is, and does, and what God can make man become. Religion is nearer reality than morality, and it is in religion alone that morality can find its fulfilment. We shall live *best* as we live *most* in the experience of the grace of God in forgiveness.

(8) Although the paragraphs which follow may go beyond the strict limits set by the title, yet in my judgment the treatment of the subject would be incomplete did I not develop a little more fully what has been said about Christ as the agent or the channel of, or still better Himself the grace of God in forgiveness. (a) The earthly ministry of Jesus did convey the grace of God in forgiveness, as several instances familiar to us all show. But Christian thought has always more closely associated this grace with the sacrifice of Christ upon His Cross; and in so doing has the warrant not only of the greatest of the apostles, but even of Christ Himself. What is the reason for this? Let the answer be attached as closely as can be to the previous statement as to the nature of forgiveness. Judgment of sin does not cease in forgiveness, but the sinner is so detached, by God's creative act of grace in making him a new man in Christ Jesus, from that sin that the judgment which still rests upon it no longer falls on him.

(b) That continuance of judgment on sin, and that separation of the sinner from the sin, must be manifest and operative in that creative act. Did man not see and approve God's judgment on sin, and reproduce it in his penitence, he would not separate himself from his sin so as no longer to be morally responsible for it; and it is in the Cross of Christ that the human conscience reads most clearly the condemnation of sin by God. Did not man discover and accept God's goodwill toward him in so severing him from his sin that its judgment need no longer fall upon him, he could never exercise the faith by

which he identifies himself with the grace of God; and again, it is in the Cross of Christ as in no other word or deed that grace makes its potent appeal to faith.

(c) That Christ might do *in us* what He does by His Spirit, He must needs do *for us* what He has done in His Cross. Christ in His Cross separated Himself from sin by His vicarious suffering of the consequences of sin which He approved as God's judgment on sin, and this He did not as an individual act, but as an act representative of all mankind, because recreative in all men who will respond in penitence and faith. Christ on His Cross so identified Himself with the human race in His holy love that God in Him has made "mankind sinners" His very own care and charge. God in Christ entered into the most intimate personal relationship with mankind in Christ in dealing with sin in judgment, and man in forgiveness. It is as man identifies himself with God in sharing God's judgment of sin, that the personal relation of God and man, disturbed by sin, is restored.

(d) If, in closing, a personal note may be forgiven, it is now forty years since my mind began to be engaged, strenuously and sometimes even tragically, with my experience of the grace of God in forgiveness, and during all these years the conviction has grown upon me, that, however my thoughts may have been "widened with the process of the suns" in criticism, science, psychology, philosophy, theology, yet God forbid that I should glory save in "the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal. vi. 14).

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