

A Sermon.

By the REV. GEORGE HUTCHESON, M.A., of Edinburgh and Irvine (1674).

(Eighth Sermon of Series on Psalm 130.)

“But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” – Psalm 130:4.

After that I had spoken to this godly man, his humbling sense and sight of the desert of sin, in the third verse, I began to speak to this remedy of pardoning mercy with God, upon which he layeth hold; and I took up the words in that general note, that there is pardoning mercy in God for sin, and that is the only refuge for sinners, sensible of the burden of sin, and of the desert of sin; and told you, that I have a purpose (if the Lord will) to prosecute this point, in the resolution of several questions, which yet may be reduced to a few general heads, which were hinted at. That which now I am upon is, the consideration of that which is pardoned, sin, iniquity, or transgression, where I spoke to one particular; that all mankind have sinned, and done that which will need a pardon. They have iniquities, even the most godly which make them, when they are sensible of them, to look upon it as good news to hear of pardon. That which I further proposed to be spoken to, was,

1. That, as all have sinned, so sin is a crime, a debt, a burden, that men stand in need to rid their hands of.
2. That sin is a debt that man cannot satisfy, but must have it done away by remission; it must consequently follow, that the unpardoned man is in a woful plight. And,
3. That if this be a debt that can only be done away by pardon, then to a sensible man this will be the chiefest of good news, “That there is forgiveness with God.”

As to the first of these, and the second in order, proposed to be spoken to on this branch, when it is granted that all have sinned, the stupid and careless will look lightly upon it. Wherefore it is to be considered in the next place, what sin is to the right discernor: it’s a crime, which, since he cannot expiate, hath need of pardon; it’s a debt, which, since he cannot satisfy, hath need of forgiveness. This imports, that to be lying under the burden of sin is no light matter to a man that knows his case through sin. I shall take notice of the notion under which sin is expressed (Luke 11: 4 with Matthew 6:12), where sin is called our debt. I shall not insist here to clear that every man’s sin is his own debt, contracted by himself in his own person, or in the common root Adam, and that he hath not others to blame for it; though as Adam did lay over his sin on the woman which God gave him, so is every one ready to do, yet when God and the sinner reckon, he will find that he must reckon for his sin by himself, or by a surety; but waiving that, that sin is called a debt, it is not to be understood that man is obliged to sin, for obedience is that which is required, and which we are obliged to pay to God; but what is imported in this metaphor, I shall lay open before you in these four.

1. A man that is indebted, and not fulfilling his bond, is liable to the law; so the law of God is an hand-writing against sinful man, obliging him either to do his duty or to satisfy justice for his fault; or if he cannot do that, and there be no other remedy, to undergo everlasting punishment in hell.

2. The debt is heightened by this: that for all the means offered to man, directions, threatenings, promises, opportunities, power and ability to do good in the time and station he lives in, gifts, qualifications and talents, he becomes debtor to God; and by the not improvement of these his sin is heightened thereby.

3. As sin resembleth a debt, so it is a debt above all other debts. A man under the debt of sin is in a more dreadful plight than any under other debt; the latter may be able to pay it, and though he be broken, he may come up again; but a man under the debt of sin can never pay. Again, a man under debt, if he cannot pay, he can shift his creditor; but for a man under the debt of sin, there is no shifting of God his creditor, Psalm 139:9, “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” Again, though a man be under debt, and not able to shift his creditor, yet his creditor is not always in a readiness to attach him, though he be in his view, because he is not in a legal capacity to reach him; but we are in God’s reverence every moment. Again, other debt reaches the body only; this debt of sin reaches the soul also. And to add no more, other debt may reach a man with inconveniences in his life, but when he is dead his debt is paid. But the punishment of this debt reaches a man chiefly after this life. All these clear that sin is a debt above all other debts.

4. And I shall add that sin may well be compared to a debt on this account, that sinners, until they fall upon a right method of seeking pardon, they much resemble an ill debtor; an ill debtor desires not to hear of his accounts, far less to sit down and cast them up. So it is with these ill debtors, they put the ill day far away. They cannot hear of a day of count and reckoning, nor to sit down and examine what they are owing. And what is it that engages a man, either to essay to be an atheist (I say essay to be one, for he will never be one in earnest), or turn voluptuous and drown himself in sensual pleasures, but to hold down the cry of his conscience, that would call him to count and reckon? Again, when an ill debtor is brought to think upon his accounts, how ashamed and afraid may he be, not knowing when he shall be seized upon, turned out of all he hath, and put in prison. And though impenitent sinners will not let it light that they have any fears, yet their consciences can bear them witness to many over-castings of heart, upon apprehension of what may be the close of their course. Again, ill debtors are full of dilatories [put-offs], shifts, and delays; they will promise fair, but will not perform; and so it is with sinners that are not thinking on repentance in order to pardon. They will take fair in hand; many have that much good nature, civility, or policy to take with a reproof, and say they will mend and repent, they will cast off the course they are in, and do better; but all these are dilatories to give the creditor fair weather, without satisfaction. And, further, to add no more, an ill debtor loves not his creditor, yea, often hates him; and though impenitent sinners dare not say they do not love God, yet what spiteful and hateful thoughts do often rise up in their hearts against God! Why? they cannot get this done, and that done, but they must be accounted sinners, and cited to appear before the judgment seat of God to undergo a sentence of punishment; and is that good thus to repay Him so, because He craveth this debt? All these resemblances contribute to make it out that man is a debtor, and sin is a debt that he cannot satisfy. Are they not fools, then, that make a sport at sin? As Solomon says (Proverbs 14:9), “Fools make a mock at sin;” but they would sport at leisure, if they considered what a debt this debt of sin is. Men in their right wits have so smarted under it, and the consequences of it, that their hearts have been smitten and withered as grass, and they have forgotten to eat their bread (Psalm 102:4). They have had no soundness in their flesh, because of God’s anger, nor rest in their bones, because of their sins. Their iniquities have been a burden too heavy for them, their wounds have stank, and been corrupt because of their foolishness (Psalm 38:3, etc.). And where art thou that art lying under that debt, and never think of putting it off? Certainly thou must be under a distraction.

And this leads me to the third thing in order that I proposed to be spoken to, that is, that sin being a great debt, and a debt we cannot satisfy, a man lying under it, if he be sensible of it, will look upon it as the saddest posture and plight he can be in. Sin will be a most heavy burden to a sensible man; and I shall in short make it out, in a five-fold respect, what a woful plight an unpardoned criminal and debtor is in.

1. An unpardoned man is a dead man, a gone man, as the Lord tells Abimelech, Genesis 20:3, "Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife." Every unpardoned man is a dead man; he is like a condemned malefactor, the sentence is pronounced upon him, the day of his death is appointed; though he eat and drink and sleep, he is reckoned a dead man.

2. An unpardoned man is capable of no good thing, Isaiah 59:1,2, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." And Jeremiah 5:25, "Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you." They have turned away the good things ye had, and have withholden other good things from coming to you; so that the unpardoned man is capable of no good, and all the good that he gets is but a snare to him. The good things he hath are feeding and fattening him to destruction.

3. An unpardoned man is in a woful plight, because, all that he doth, till his person be reconciled and taken into favour with God, how good soever it be in itself, is sin and an abomination to God; he may do many good turns that are good upon the matter, but would ye have the Scriptures' verdict of them, as they come from Him: read Proverbs 15:18; 21:4; and 28:9, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, the plowing of the wicked is sin; he turns away his ear from hearing of the law, even his prayer shall be abomination;" whence it is clear, all the good that an unpardoned man does is sin.

4. An unpardoned man is in a pitiful plight, because to him there is no comfortable bearing of trouble; but where the pardon of sin is, it sustains a man under trouble, and makes him bear it cheerfully. Men that never trouble themselves to repent and seek pardon, they had need of much fair weather, for unpardoned guilt will have a dreadful echo in a storm to them. Of the pardoned man it is said, Isaiah 33:24, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." A man's being forgiven his iniquity, will make him forget that he is sick, and will make him bear trouble comfortably, which an unpardoned man cannot get done. And,

5. An unpardoned man is in a woful plight, because death will have a terrible aspect upon him. To the pardoned man, death is a friend, a messenger sent to call him home, a chariot sent to carry him to heaven; but to the unpardoned man, death is the king of terrors, the wages and cursed fruit of sin. O! the sweet sight of Christ, and of pardon, that meets the pardoned man at death and judgment, somewhat whereof is hinted in these words, Acts 3:19, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you." But O! what a dreadful lying down, and rising out of the grave, will the unpardoned man have. So ye have heard, that as all have sinned, so sin is a debt that hath need of pardon, the non-forgiveness whereof puts and keeps a man in a most woful condition, and being so,

I proceed to the fourth and last thing I proposed to be spoken to here; that is, that sin being a debt, and such a debt as can only be taken away by pardon and forgiveness, then it might be good news, the chiefest of good news to the man sensible of sin, that iniquity will be forgiven, that "there is forgiveness with God," and this is it in the text, for verse 3, he sayeth, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, who can stand?" But verse 4, "Forgiveness is with thee," that is it ye have, Matthew 9:2, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." Now for this pardon, the nature of it, and the terms upon which it is attained, it will come in, in its own proper place to be spoken to. Here, I am upon consideration of the thing remitted, and that, which I shall pitch upon is, that there is a remission of sin attainable by sinners in the due order. It's a blessed article of our creed, the remission of sins. When I spoke of the remission of sin, I spoke of the remission of all sins, great and small, in their nature and

number. There is forgiveness with God for iniquities. I confess there is an exception made, Matthew 12:31,32, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven;" Hebrews 10:26, "For if we sin after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins;" and 1 John 5:16, "There is a sin unto death." But the sin against the Holy Ghost needs not trouble the sensible sinner that would fain have pardon. It is true, it should warn all to beware of malicious sinning against light, and having sinned, to beware of running away from God; but the sensible sinner, that is seeking peace and pardon, needs not to be afraid of it. That sin is therefore irremissible, because the sinner comes not to seek pardon; but if thou hast the sense of sin, and if it be thy desire and endeavour to repent and to have pardon, it is an evidence that thy sin is not that unpardonable sin.

But that I may make something of this, I shall deduce it in two or three branches. The first whereof shall be,

1. That small sins need pardon.
2. That gross sins are pardonable.
3. A word to the consideration of the persons whose sins are pardonable.

1. The smallest of sins needs a pardon. We are not (as Papists would charge us) stoics, who affect a parity and equality of all sins; we grant there are different degrees of sins, and different degrees of punishment – a beating with many stripes, and a beating with few stripes (Luke 12:47,48). But yet when we assert this difference, we dare not with them assert venial sins, that deserve not everlasting wrath without repentance, and fleeing to Christ for refuge. Sure the Apostle tells us, Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." What death? look to the opposition, and it will clear it, "but the gift of God is eternal life." If the gift of God be eternal life, the wages of sin must be eternal death. And that he says it of sin indefinitely, it's equivalent to a universal "the wages of sin is death," so that they must take away the nature of sin from these sins they call venial, or grant the wages thereof is death. And likewise, Matthew 12:36, Christ tells us, that "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment;" and an idle word might seem a small sin. Well then, if the smallest sin needs a pardon, look that we do not practically make a distinction of mortal and venial sins. Even gross men, if they fall into gross outbreakings, it will affect them somewhat when they do not heed their ordinary escapes. Godly persons also are culpable here, a scandalous sin will affect them, and so it should, but how little are they affected with wanderings of mind in holy duties, idle words and thoughts, habitual distance from God, and is not that a practical distinguishing of sin? It is true, none can, in repentance, distinctly overtake all their failings, for Psalm 19:12, "Who can understand his errors?" Yet we ought to do what we can to overtake them, and if we cannot overtake them, be at God's footstool with them, mourning over them in the bulk.

But 2. As the smallest of sins needs a pardon, so the grossest of sins are pardonable in the due order. "There is forgiveness with him for iniquities," as in the text, and Isaiah 55:7, "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." He will pardon greatest sins in their nature and kind, and hence David saith, Psalm 25:11, "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." And Isaiah 1:18, the Lord says, "Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." And these great sins are pardonable in the due order, whether they be done in ignorance, as Paul's persecution was, 1 Timothy 1:13, "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Or whether they be committed through the power of temptation, even against light, as Peter's threefold denial of his Master was, yet not being malicious it is pardoned. Again, as great sins for nature and kind are pardonable, so great sins for the

multitude and number of them, when they are like a cloud, and a thick cloud, he will blot them out, Isaiah 44:22, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions and sins." And that word, Isaiah 55:7, "He will abundantly pardon," in the original it is, "he will multiply to pardon one and more, a multitude of them;" and Psalm 40:11,12, David pleads for mercy, for innumerable evils, for iniquities that are more than the hairs of his head. And as God pardons great sins for kind, and many for number, so frequent relapsing in these sins (which I may speak to afterward), Jeremiah 3:1, "She that hath played the harlot with many lovers, is allowed to return." And He that bade Peter, Matthew 18:22, "Forgive his brother, not only seven, but seventy times," will much more do so to His penitent people, renewing their repentance. But when I say He will pardon great sins, I would have it well applied. It is not to embolden any body to sin. Thou that so improvest this doctrine, dost turn the grace of God into wantonness; and thou that ventur'est on sin, because God is merciful to pardon great and many sins, and thinkest thou may take a whelp's fill of sin, and then go and repent and get mercy (the woful shift that many follow), O! remember that repentance is not in thine own hand; nay, I will say more, thou bearest a sad evidence of one that will never get the grace to repent.

But that abuse of this doctrine being laid aside, ye shall (while I am upon the explication of this great article of faith) take a word or two of inference in the by. And 1. It may be great encouragement to sensible sinners, thou who art sensible of thy sins, that thy dyvour [debtor] bill of great and many sins, if thou come in the right order, needs not keep thee back. Thy desire to come and repent, and seek pardon, tells that thou art not guilty of that unpardonable sin, and therefore stand not aback for scarlet and crimson coloured sins, nor for relapsing in these sins. There is forgiveness with God for those iniquities. And that ye may grip the better to this when it is intimate, that God is such a pardoner of sin, ye would look to the infinite price of the Son of God, whereby He purchased pardon, and upon which pardon of sin is founded; and ye would look to that infinite and super-abounding grace in God, inclining Him to pardon; and when these two are laid together, and well considered, all thy doubts about pardon will amount to this, whether thy iniquities or Christ's death, thy abounding sin or God's superabounding grace, will carry it? And reason will determine it in favour of Christ's purchase and the superabundant grace of God.

2. Let me leave this as a witness against slights of this offer of pardon; I believe there are many engaged as the Jews were, Jeremiah 2:25, who said, "There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." The matter is past redding. There is little appearance that ever we will do well, and therefore we mind not to do well. But here is a witness laid at thy door, whatever thy condition be, God and thou are yet in trysting terms and thou hast the offer of pardon upon repentance, and turning to Him. Art thou as mad as the man that had the legion of devils, Mark 5:9, will thou employ Christ, He can cure thee? Though thou were like Mary Magdalen, out of whom Christ cast seven devils, Luke 8:2, He can cast them out, and set thee down a worshipper of Him at His feet. Thy scarlet and crimson coloured sins, He can make white as the snow or wool. Thy scattered affections, as the wind, He can fix upon the nail fastened upon the sure place. If thou wilt come and reason with Him, thou shalt find Him as good as His Word. And shall not this be a witness against slights of pardoning grace, that such profligate wretches, runaways, and backsliders are within the reach of pardoning mercy, and there is a royal proclamation made of it, wherein it is offered unto them, and yet they slighted it? All the wrath of Sinai shall not be so terrible to such, as this will be one day, that in the name of Christ we proclaimed pardon to you, providing ye seek it in the right order; and look how ye will answer the Lamb sitting down on His tribunal of majesty.

I thought to have spoken to the persons, who they are that are pardoned, and that they may call God "Father," who seek pardon, and how that it secludes not the vilest of sinners

upon repentance, and how it makes against the Novatian error, that thrusts repentance out of the Church; and to that case of godly men, their relapsing in sins they have repented of and whether such be pardonable, but the time having cut me short, I shall forbear to break in upon these for the time. The Lord bless for Christ's sake what ye have been hearing!

[Continued in October 1919]

[May 1919]

A Sermon.

By the REV. D. M. MACDONALD, North Uist.

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” – Romans 5:1.

In this Epistle the main doctrine stated by the Apostle is one of the most precious in the Word of God. It is that of the manner in which a sinner may obtain the forgiveness of sins

and a righteousness that will make him acceptable to God in his person and services. Just as the sun is the centre of the solar system, so the doctrine of justification by faith in the Lord Jesus may be regarded as the sun or centre around which all the other doctrines group themselves. The Apostle had to deal with Jewish and Gentile believers, and, in order to show that the Jew was no better than the Gentile, he proves each alike guilty in the sight of God. The privileges of the Jew did not make him better in disposition than the unprivileged Gentile. On the contrary, his privileges made his offences all the more grievous, and his condemnation the more severe. The Gentiles had no privileges to boast of, and, being left to the light of natural revelation, did not attain to the knowledge of God which the Jew possessed. But they did not make use of the natural revelation as they should have done, for they became idolaters, and deliberately ignored the existence of the only living and true God. After having proved that all are in the same condemnation, the Apostle proceeds to show that all must be saved in God's appointed way. This way is revealed in the Gospel which he announced. It is independent of the law, and yet approved by it. The righteousness which God demands is offered as a free gift. As a concrete example, he mentions the case of Abraham, who was justified when he believed God's promise. His faith was reckoned to him for righteousness, and this is the case with regard to every believer in every age. Faith was in existence before circumcision. Abel by faith offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous.

In considering the verse, we propose to notice: –

- I. – The Person who justifies;
- II. – The parties justified;
- III. – The nature of justification; and
- IV. – The fruits of it.

I. – Let us consider, in the first place, then, the Person who justifies.

It is evident that this can be none other than God Himself, in His character as Judge. He is declared in the Scriptures to be Creator, Lawgiver, and Judge. On Mount Sinai He gave the moral law to the Jews. They were commanded to obey this law, and in doing so their true happiness would have consisted. But both Jews and Gentiles, having broken the law, are condemned by it. In His character as Judge, God is absolutely impartial, just, and unerring. He will mete out perfect and unerring justice to every member of the human race. While believers will be openly acknowledged and acquitted by Him in the final judgment, the ungodly shall be condemned to everlasting punishment.

II. – *The parties justified.* –

They go through certain experiences which culminate in their being brought from darkness to light. Some of them live in the world more careless than others. They manifest openly that they are the servants of sin. They are not ashamed to do those things that are not convenient. Sin is that which they delight in. Godly parents and a good example are utterly disregarded. The claims of God are put far away from their thoughts. In this state they may have continued for a longer or shorter period. Others do not run to the same excess of riot. They are correct in their outward life and conversation, but they know not the Gospel in its saving power. They are alienated from the life of God. The mind, that is enmity against God, has dominion over them, and they are content with the things that perish in the using.

By nature there is no difference between God's people and others. All are in the same condemnation. They are without hope, without Christ, and without God in the world. Such is the lamentable condition in which the Holy Spirit finds them when He quickens them from the dead. They are utterly undone, having no power to deliver themselves from the grasp of spiritual death. They may be compared to Lazarus in the grave. He could not move a hand or

foot until the power of the Saviour was exercised in his body. So it is, when Christ by His Spirit works in His people, that they come to seek Him, and find no rest until they put their confidence in Him.

The operations of the Holy Spirit are necessary to convince them of their need of salvation. He comes forth from the Father and from the Son to apply to believers the redemption procured for them by their Saviour. His work in the sinner begins when He convinces him of sin. *Conviction is necessary* in order to make the sinner see the evil of sin, and his need of being delivered from its power. It may be of long or short duration. God is sovereign in His dealings, and He may keep a sinner a long time under conviction before granting him deliverance. The Philippian jailer was only for a short time under conviction when liberty of soul came to him.

Some may think that a long process of conviction of sin is necessary before a sinner can be saved, but that is not the case. The Word of God does not say that a sinner must be convinced of sin for a long or for a short time before coming to Christ. He is urged, as a sinner, to come at once to Christ with all his sins. Conviction of sin, although present in every case of conversion to some extent, does not save the soul. It is through faith that sinners are made heirs of salvation.

It is not infrequently the case that individuals become much exercised concerning their state for eternity, and yet never attain to a saving knowledge of Christ. There may be much conviction of sin and confession of sin, of a kind, where there is no evangelical repentance. When the agitation in the soul subsides, the sinner becomes more hardened and more indifferent than ever. In this connection it is of solemn interest to notice the confessions of sin made by false professors, as recorded in the Word of God. Judas said, "I have sinned." But there was no true penitence in his case. Similar acknowledgments were made by Balaam and Saul, yet there is no reason to believe that they became true believers.

Under conviction of sin, the sinner now becomes concerned about his salvation. He believes that God exists, and knows all his shortcomings, and becomes afraid that at any moment he may be called to give an account of his sins in thought, word, and deed. The consciousness of this makes him feel very uneasy. His former practices are given up. No longer does he neglect prayer or the means of grace. The allurements of a sinful world become thoroughly repugnant to him, and his great desire is to obtain the remission of his sins. His transgressions are not now the trivial faults they at one time appeared to be; they are a deep felt and awful reality. The remembrance of them fills him with fear. Desiring to appease God for them, he resolves to work out a righteousness that will atone for all his shortcomings. He begins to walk circumspectly, and attends diligently the ordinances of grace. Like the Apostle Paul, in his unregenerate days, he will win heaven by his good deeds and religious performances. In this state he continues for a time, not obtaining any real relief, until at last the spirituality of God's law is revealed to him, and then his self-righteous hopes die. He sees that he cannot be saved through his own righteousness, for sin revives and he dies, discovering that the law which he thought brought life only brings death. He resembles, in this condition, the poor traveller, of whom it is said elsewhere that, when on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho he was maltreated and left half-dead by the roadside, unable to do anything for himself. The good Samaritan picked him up, and attended to his wants. So the convinced sinner finds that he cannot save himself nor believe in Christ in his own strength.

It is at this juncture that the Holy Spirit reveals to him the way of salvation through Christ, and enables him to exercise faith in the Lord Jesus, the fruit of which is reconciliation between the sinner and God. Believers cordially fall in with this way of salvation. They see that it is honouring to all the attributes of the Godhead, and secures in a righteous manner the forgiveness of all their sins. Justification takes place in the court of heaven and in the court of conscience. The guilt that lies on the conscience is removed, and the forgiven sinner is

enabled to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and ceases to put confidence in the flesh. His soul is filled with the love of Christ, and all things, in comparison with his Saviour, become loss and dung to him.

Such, my dear friends, is the experience of the parties justified, each of whom is convinced of sin, led as a sinner to Christ, and enabled to believe on him. If this be true of any of you it is a token for good.

III. – In the third place we shall now dwell upon the *nature of justification*. – The question may be asked: “What is justification?” A better answer cannot be given than that of the Westminster divines in the Larger Catechism: – “Justification is an act of God’s free grace unto sinners, in which He pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in His sight, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.” There are several things to be noticed in this definition.

First of all, observe that justification is an act of God’s free grace. This means that it is a sovereign as well as a judicial act. It is of His free favour that He pardons the sinner on the ground of another’s righteousness. He acquits the sinner when he believes in Christ. His sins are forgiven; his guilt is removed; and his person accepted. An earthly king, such as King George V., might, in the exercise of mercy, pardon a subject guilty of treason, but he could not remove his guilt. In the eye of the law, the man, although pardoned, would be as guilty as ever. But when God deals graciously with His people He not only pardons them, but also removes their guilt, through the application to them of the precious blood of His own Son.

Again, justification is the act of a moment. It takes place at a certain time, and is not repeated. The time is when the believer accepts Christ as his personal Saviour. It is given to some of God’s people to have very clear apprehensions of the time when they were justified. Others of them have not such distinct recollections of the Lord’s dealings with them, but they can at least say, like the blind man whom the Saviour healed, “Whereas I was blind, now I see.” There was a time when they were indifferent to the claims of Christ, but another time came when He became precious to them.

It is to be observed that the justified sinner is not only forgiven, but accepted and accounted righteous through the imputation to him of the righteousness of Christ. This is entirely opposed to the Roman Catholic view of justification. According to it, righteousness is infused into the believer. He is sanctified and renewed by the acceptance of grace and gifts. The Word of God declares plainly that the sins of the believer are imputed to Christ, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer. But, if imputation means infusion, then we should have to maintain the blasphemous doctrine that our sins were infused into Christ. “To justify” means in the original – Hebrew and Greek – to reckon or count righteous, not that the sinner is sanctified and justified by having righteousness infused into him. The Romish theology confuses sanctification and justification, mixing both together instead of making a clear distinction between them.

From having considered briefly the nature of justification, we now pass on to notice its causes. A great philosopher has stated that there are four causes for the existence of things. Making use of his observation, we shall consider:

(1) The first cause of justification – that is *the moving cause*.

It is the love of God to perishing sinners. It is written by the Apostle John that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” It was not on account of any worthiness in men that He loved them. They were utterly undeserving of this favour, and He would be just in rewarding them according to their sins. In His sovereign mercy He determined from eternity to save the objects of His love; and infinite wisdom discovered a method consistent with the glory of the

divine attributes whereby sinners should be restored to the favour of God. It is a matter of constant wonder to the people of God that He should set His love on them. This feeling is accentuated when they have a conscious enjoyment of His love being shed abroad in their hearts.

(2) The second cause of justification is the *meritorious work of Christ*.

Before sinners could be forgiven, it was necessary that atonement should be made for sin and the price of their redemption paid. The inflexible justice of God demanded satisfaction. His holy and just law demanded obedience. It was not in the power of fallen men to give either law or justice that which they sought. Where, then, could deliverance be obtained? The inspired Isaiah furnishes an answer. This is what he says: "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore, his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak." Again, "And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me: and my fury, it upheld me." It is evident, from what the prophet says, that the second Person of the adorable Trinity came forth to satisfy the demands of law and justice. The psalmist bears similar testimony to Isaiah, for he says, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea thy law is within my heart." The satisfaction required would need to be one of infinite merit, and infinite merit could be found nowhere but in Christ. In order, then, to procure the eternal salvation of His elect, the Saviour had to assume our nature, sin excepted, and in human nature had to endure the penalty due to sin. Throughout His life He rendered perfect obedience to the divine law, and in His death bore its curse, at the same time giving ample satisfaction to God's justice. It could now say, "I have found a ransom." Having finished the work that was given Him to do, the eternal Son of God, after rising from the grave a triumphant conqueror, ascended up on high to reign at the right hand of the Father, world without end. The intrinsic worth of His satisfaction was so great that it was sufficient to redeem and reconcile to God worlds of sinners. However numerous, however aggravated, however vile the sins of a sinner may be, there is here sufficient merit to atone for them. There is hope for the most abandoned profligate who repents of his sins and makes believing application to Christ, for His precious blood cleanses from all sin. The infinite merit of this atonement is imputed to believers, rendering them perfect in God's sight. In themselves they are undone, but, clothed with Emmanuel's righteousness, neither law nor justice can find imperfection in them. If you feel your need of this atonement, and prize it above all things, then you may conclude that you are of the number whom God has justified.

(3) The third cause of justification is *faith*.

It may be described as the instrumental cause. Some think that there is merit in faith itself, and therefore make it the ground of our acceptance with God. It is Christ only who saves, not faith. Mere assent to the truth is not the meaning of the faith that justifies. Faith has for its object a person. "Is faith a person?" asked Dr. John Duncan; "was faith crucified for you?" The ground of merit is the finished work of Christ, and the instrument of appropriating this meritorious ground is faith.

It has been well defined as "belief passing over into trust." It is the gift of God; a sinner cannot work it in his own heart. Arminianism would lead men to think that they can, but that is a delusion. It is the Holy Spirit who implants this grace in the soul, and faith enables the believer to receive Christ as his Saviour. He accepts Him as his Prophet, Priest, and King, and looks to Him alone for righteousness and salvation. But faith in and by itself alone does not

procure salvation. Here we may repeat what has been already said: it is only the instrumental cause of justification. By means of it the Christian is united to Christ in a union which neither time nor eternity shall break.

There are three elements in faith.

In the first place there is *knowledge*. The Apostle says, "How can they hear without a preacher?" This implies that sinners must have some knowledge of Christ, and of what He did to procure redemption. Knowledge is the apprehension of an object. Faith is an assent to its truth. Through the preaching of the Gospel and reading the Scriptures sinners can attain to an intellectual knowledge of the Person and work of the Saviour, and this knowledge precedes the spiritual knowledge that faith implies. The Holy Spirit enables the believer to see the excellency of Christ, and His sufficiency to meet all his needs. The result is that the Saviour becomes to him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Like Paul, his chief desire now is to know Him, and to experience the power of His resurrection.

The next element in faith is *belief*, or assent. In general, "belief is grounded on our senses, the integrity of our consciences, and the intuitions of our reason, which in turn are grounded on the existence and veracity of God." But the belief which is of the essence of faith rests upon the faithfulness of God and personal experience of the power of the truth in giving spiritual enlightenment. The quickened sinner believes God's testimony concerning himself as a sinner. The truth searches him, and shows him what he is. He feels that sin has corrupted him in all his faculties, and that from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is no soundness in him. The fountains of the great deep are broken up in his soul, and he now sets his seal to his character, as described in God's Word. The demerit of sin is also revealed to him. He sees it in its loathsomeness, and comes to abhor it. He realises in some measure how dishonouring it is to God and destructive to the soul. The penalty due to it, he considers to be just; and the question for him now is, "How can God justly forgive me?" He is led to see that the satisfaction rendered by the Saviour to law and justice is a sufficient answer. In Him "truth met with mercy, righteousness and peace kissed mutually."

The third element in faith is *trust*. The scriptural expressions, "Looking to Christ," "Receiving Christ," "Coming to Christ," imply trust as an essential implicate of faith. We cannot act in any of the ways indicated in these expressions without having regard to Christ as a Saviour and Deliverer. The believer is cut off from putting confidence in the flesh; his trust is in the Lord Jesus. He has committed his soul to the keeping of a faithful Redeemer. "They that put their trust in him," it is written, "shall not be put to shame."

Trusting in morality, or personal goodness, or one's own righteousness, will not save the soul. These are foundations of no value for eternity. But the sinner, whose trust is centred in Christ, rests upon a foundation that will never be moved. You are invited to put your trust in the great Saviour of the lost, and, if you do so, you have the assurance of God's Word for it, that you will be saved with an everlasting salvation.

(4) The fourth cause is the *glory of God*.

This is the final cause of justification. All things were created by God for His own glory. It is the ultimate reason for the existence of all things, and God is glorified pre-eminently in redemption, and in the justification of His people.

IV. – In the fourth and last place, we must now notice very briefly the fruits of justification. It is declared in our text that we have peace with God. The meaning of the word "peace" here used is reconciliation.

The first fruit of justification is reconciliation with God.

This implies that the believer's state is changed. God the Father receives him graciously, and bestows upon him spiritual blessings. All his iniquities are blotted out, and all things now work together for his good. His peace of conscience is accompanied with joy, and this joy is a

foretaste of the eternal blessedness that Christians shall obtain in the kingdom of Heaven. The Person through whom reconciliation is effected is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only Mediator between God and men. Through Him God deals graciously with such as seek His favour; and it is through Him alone that sinners can have access to God.

And now, in conclusion, the question for each one to consider is, Do we know anything of the justification and reconciliation spoken of by the Apostle in this verse? If not, it is written, "Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation." Let each one of you, my dear friends, above all things, seek a personal interest in the Lord Jesus, for to know Him is life eternal. Amen.

[June 1919]

Communion Table Addresses.

By the late REV. PROFESSOR JOHN DUNCAN, LL.D.

Edinburgh.

(Hitherto Unpublished.)

TABLE SERVICE NO. V.

[This Table Service was delivered in Free St. Luke's, Edinburgh (Rev: Dr. Moody Stuart's),
on Communion Sabbath 12th July, 1868. – ED.]

(Address before Distribution of Elements.)

Communicants, I must take it for granted that, as you are in duty bound to examine yourselves before sitting down at this table, you have been examining yourselves of your knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of your faith to feed upon Him, of your repentance, love, and new obedience. It is very solemn work this, for a man to sit in judgment on himself

about such great matters as these: about knowledge to discern the Lord's body – and oh, the distinction between the Lord's body and common bread and wine – about faith to feed upon it; about repentance, genuine repentance flowing from faith in the crucified Saviour, looking on Him and mourning, and being in bitterness; about love to embrace Him in all His loveliness, and to give the whole soul over, loving Him; and about new obedience, as the evidence of unfeigned faith, faith that works by love.

And the result may have been very different in different persons. In none, I believe, can the result of an examination, too important to be entered upon and conducted without earnest imploration of that Spirit who reveals and discovers, have been otherwise than humbling. While different in different individuals, in none really led by the Spirit of God can the results have been otherwise than very humbling. Still, some in the main may have been enabled to see these graces in them, and in some good and abundant degree as evidences of God's grace, and of God's having dealt bountifully with them. To these I do not mean at present to speak; it becomes them to be thankful.

But others, examining themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, the result may have been this, that they have very little knowledge of the Lord's body and of the peculiar nature of the sacramental relation between the Lord's body and blood and this bread and wine. Then, examining themselves of their faith to feed upon Him, the result may have been that they see much more of Christ's worthiness to be trusted than of their trust in Him. They feel poverty of trust, while yet the most perfect satisfaction of soul that their souls, if they were ten thousand souls, might, on the warrant of the Gospel, be well committed to Him, and if committed to Him, would be safe in His hands. Then, examining themselves of their repentance, the result may have been this, a discovery of the greatness of their impenitence, of the hardness of their hearts, making precious that name of Christ "exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance." There is this sweet name, "Exalted . . . to give repentance," which they would have and can get from none but Him. Then, examining themselves of their love, the result as to their own love to Christ may have been only (shall I say only?) a discovery of how exceedingly lovely and loving He is, making them even doubt if they have a spark of that love, which could be called the reciprocity of His love, yet giving such a feeling of the want of love as is founded on the glorious Saviour's worthiness, and as endears the promise, "The Lord thy God shall circumcise thy heart to love the Lord thy God." And as for their new obedience they may have found that, however Christian friends and neighbours may comfort them about it, *they* cannot be comfortable. Oh, beware of flatterers; beware of the flatteries of Christians, who at best will regard it unwisely. Look at your new obedience; how scanty it has been, how little worth! Well, a humbling sense of this leads to a high appreciation of the promise, "I will cause them to walk in My ways." Now such are worthy communicants. I do not say that the happier and more comfortable are unworthy communicants; far from it. But, concerning such as I have described, I venture in the Lord's name to say that they are worthy, accepted communicants. "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness;" "He will regard the prayer of the destitute."

But now let us speak of the Master of this feast, and of the feast which He has prepared for us, of which He is both the Entertainer and the Viands.

In that wonderful Fifty-third of Isaiah, that precious representation and anticipation of the evangelical history, we read, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all. . . It pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath put him to grief; when his soul shall make a sin, a trespass offering (I quote from the Hebrew), he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days. . . By the

knowledge of him shall my righteous servant, my engaging one, justify many: for he shall bear their iniquities.” Here then, in this wonderful chapter, so often quoted in the New Testament – in this rich Old Testament gospel, this Old Testament anticipation of gospel times – two words are ever repeated, the prophet comes over them again and again, each being in his mind so expressive. They are *He, He, He*, and *We, we, we*. First, then, the prophet gathers us into and upon a person, He, He, He. And who is He?

“In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God and the Word was God; the same was in the beginning with God. In Him was life.” This leads up to that mystery which is at the bottom of all, the eternal generation of the only-begotten Son of God. “We show unto you that eternal life,” not in Adam, made a living soul, but “That eternal life which was with the Father.” Not only the living One, but life. “With Thee (the Father) is the fountain of life.”

The first thing then that we have to attend to about the “He” is that He is God’s eternal, only-begotten, well-beloved Son, of the same essence with the Father, equal in power and glory. Life to the lost, to the dead, could come from no other source than the eternal life itself. But, “As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself;” that which distinguishes the true God from all that are called gods being the “having life in Himself.”

Then the second thing is that “The Word was made flesh.” The eternal generation would not have profited us without the incarnation, though the incarnation would have profited us nothing, if He who became incarnate had not been the eternal, only-begotten Son of God. He would not in his incarnation have been life to us, if He had not been the everlasting life. To Adam, had he stood, He might have been life, the communicator of life, but to fallen beings, to the lost, to the dead, that suffices not, neither the eternal generation without the incarnation, nor the incarnation without the eternal generation. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman.” And so we come to the body. Thus said the eternal Son to the eternal Father, in the prospect of the incarnation, and to all the ends thereof, according to the covenant that He should make His soul an offering for sin, and therefore must have a human soul to offer: “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God, a body hast thou prepared me.” The Son’s assumption is also recorded in the words, “Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.” And here was, as intimated to the Virgin, the highest work of the Holy Ghost “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

And that is the body which was broken for us, and this is the “He” who was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. This is He. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Angels and archangels for ever prostrate themselves before Him, as the eternal, co-equal Son of the Father; but for us men He took this body. “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman.” If that had been all, He would have been just worshippable. Whatever might have been the ends of His being made of a woman, He would have lost nothing of the glory of His godhead by that; the angels would have worshipped Him. But He was “made under the law.” I speak not of the wisdom of God, which does not do anything without an end, but looking at the thing itself, He might have been made of a woman, without being made under the law. We know that God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but might He not have taken a body to condemn the world in? He came not into the world to judge the world, but might not the Judge of men have become man in order to come nigh them just to be their Judge? But “God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law,” not as an individual person, for then His obedience would have been due for Himself; not as an individual – He was not under Adam’s covenant – but as a

substitute. For us sinners, enlightened in the knowledge of Him, inclined and enabled to believe on Him, for us He was made under the law. He came into our place, He took our whole place, and in our stead fulfilled all righteousness, and subjected Himself to penal endurance. What a stoop! “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

But, secondly, there is the “We”: but who are “We”? Who are we, set forth in this contrast and relation? The contrast is between Him, being the Holy One of God, and us sinners, transgressors, iniquitors; that is the contrast. And with the contrast, the relation, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Was ever the like heard of? Will ever the like be heard of again? It is the wonder of the universe. He is a unique person in His work, and His obedience unto death is a unique obedience; and He, in His Word, is the unique, glorious, unfathomable truth.

So Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us, and the passover is to be eaten with bitter herbs. The paschal lamb is sweet feeding, but it is to be eaten with bitter herbs. And He is sweet, but sin is bitter. Transgression is bitter, wounding is bitter, and bruising is bitter, and putting to grief is bitter. Sin is bitter, and the soul made an offering for sin is a bitter thing. Witness Gethsemane and Calvary, the holy and righteous One made sin for sinners, the blessed One made a curse to redeem the accursed. It is sweet to take the cup of salvation, but it has these bitter ingredients. “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn, and shall be in bitterness.” And so for us poor sinners there is just this remedy for our sin, what Bunyan in his “Pilgrim’s Progress” (2nd Part) prescribes for Matthew when he has eaten the bitter fruit, “*Sanguis Christi cum grano penitentiae*” (“The blood of Christ with a grain of repentance”).

And so, seeking that He may give you along with them the faith and the repentance and the love and the new obedience, I put into your hands the symbols of His broken body and shed blood, that, while you with the mouth feed on these symbols, you may in your hearts, by faith, feed on the reality symbolised.

(Address after Distribution of Elements.)

He shunned it not; He hid not His face from shame and spitting. He felt the bitterness of it all – (witness Gethsemane and Calvary) – but He drank the bitter cup, my Lord and my God. We could not prepay such love; and we cannot repay such love. So the only sacrifice is a eucharistic one – thanksgiving. “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?” “I will take the cup of salvation.” What shall I render to the Lord for one benefit? I will take another benefit.

Now, communicants, you are not your own; you are bought with a price. Ah! when you were your own masters and mistresses, miserable bond-slaves you were, to yourself, to Satan, to the world. But now, “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” Your bodies are not your own; they are His, for “This is my *body*, which is broken for you.” Your spirits are not your own, but His, for “Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.”

Ye do not belong to this world. “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world,” this present evil age. “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people,” that is, a singularized people, altogether distinct from and distinguished from the world. “That he might redeem us from all iniquity.” The pieces of the sacrifice, and God and Abraham between them! “And

purify unto himself a peculiar people.” The refiner’s fire and the fuller’s soap – (*an allusion to the “action” sermon preached by Dr. Moody Stuart*).

Be not conformed to the world in its sentiments, in its notions, in its views, in its pursuits. You do not belong to it; you are bought from it. You belong to your purchaser; you do not belong to sin. “Know ye not, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death?” “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” You are redeemed from the curse of the law, and so from the law as a covenant of works. Not from all obligation of its precepts; that cannot be. The original obligation of creatures is enhanced by the obligation of redeemed creatures. But you are redeemed from its precepts as regards its covenant of works obligation. The primary obligation of creatures cannot be dissolved; the obligation is enhanced by redeemed and new creature ones. But “Ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” Paul says that Christ is the husband of the Church. Now, legitimate children all are the united product of the husband and the wife. So all good works are the product of Christ, the husband, and of the espoused soul. “Married to another, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” Let us, like the disciples, come to the marriage. Let us hear the woman of Samaria get her short lesson which saved her. Let us hear the thief on the cross get the few words which saved him. The things hid from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes; nor can all the malice of wicked men prevent this.

A single word brings about this spiritual marriage, and from it proceeds a great deal. It grows much in spiritual meditation. “Of him my meditation shall sweet thoughts to me afford.” Plenty of bitter ones we shall have; but, if meditation affords us sweet thoughts, sweetness will enter our hearts, and make them sweet themselves, and from the communication of sweetness they will go out in sweetness. Meditate, meditate, meditate.

And what are we redeemed to? Unto God. “Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us unto God.” For Christ as Mediator is Mediator between God and men, and “God raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God,” in God the Father. In the life of faith, it is *conjugal* faith and love and obedience toward Christ, and *filial* faith and love and obedience toward God. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.” And finally He will present them, before the presence of the Father’s glory, saying, “Behold I and the children whom thou hast given me!”

Meanwhile – meanwhile – it is the crucible and the tub. We have need of these. Let us not grumble at them. But in the crucible and the tub we have need of patience, that, after we have done and endured the will of God, we may inherit the promise. The Lord sanctify you in soul, body and spirit, and bring you at length to His heavenly kingdom.

[June 1919]

Communion Table Addresses.

By the late REV. PROFESSOR JOHN DUNCAN, LL.D.
Edinburgh.

(Hitherto Unpublished.)

TABLE SERVICE NO. VI.

[This Table Service was delivered in Free St. Luke's, Edinburgh (Rev. Dr. Moody Stuart's),
on Communion Sabbath 11th July, 1869. – ED.]

(Address before Distribution of Elements.)

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The foundation having been laid, not simply in the Word of God, but laid doctrinally before us this day, in the High Priest over the household of God, and the one offering by which He hath perfected for ever all “them that are sanctified;” we are here directed by these words into the way of our personal dealing with God on this foundation. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Mark, these words are not to be isolated; it will be pure Socinianism if they are isolated from the High Priest and His one offering; yet in

that connection they point out to us the way of our dealing with God through this High Priest as regards the remission of our sins. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Ah! sin is easily committed – I say not whether sin is or is not easily forgiven; both are true; the expiation cost so much – but sin indeed is not easily confessed. David is one example. He roared all the day long. He had sung "The Lord is my Shepherd," and so on. Sweet had been his communion with God, but he had been tempted, had fallen, and had sinned most grievously, both in adultery and murder. And when he had sinned, he would not part from God, and he would not confess to God. If he could have parted with God, he would not have roared, and if he would have confessed to God, he would not have roared; but he would do neither – would neither part with God nor confess to God – and so there was nothing for him but roaring, while his moisture was turned into the drought of summer. God remembered him, sent His prophet and made the king unwittingly condemn himself, and the moment that conviction was carried home, the prophet proclaimed, in the name of God, his absolution.

Still we find in the Fifty-first Psalm that he came to God through the High Priest. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." That is sacerdotal; it is the Priest. He had to come to God; nothing would satisfy him but God's own priestly absolution. But we find David saying, in this Thirty-second Psalm, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Wonderful transaction! "I said, I will confess." He roared, and would not confess. Like a son who has grieved and offended his father, and fallen into disgrace, the filial heart was still in him, and the filial heart would not give up his Father, and the pride would not own his sin. But at last, "I will confess, and thou forgavest." David was about to make his confession: "I said, I will confess;" the forgiveness came. Not without confession, but when he said, "I will confess." When the heart was open to make a clean breast of it, when he made up his mind to tell God, God waited no longer. He might have waited longer, I do not say before He pardoned, but before He intimated the pardon; but the words, "Thou forgavest," are the language not only of a man forgiven, they are the language of a man who knows that he is forgiven, of a man to whom God has intimated it. So, when he had made up his mind to confess, he was not left to go on with his confession; whatever way it came, when he resolved to call on the Father, there was the indication of His answer. And then David took up the list of sins, and read on; and he read: "This sin is forgiven, and that sin forgiven, and the next sin forgiven." The list was read as the list of forgiven sins. Oh, to read over the list of sins committed put into your hand, when, what was to be read as a list of debts due to divine justice, is now put into your hand as a list of debts forgiven by divine mercy, debts of gratitude, of binding obligation.

And it is to confirm faith in this forgiveness through the broken body and shed blood of Christ, believing communicants, that you are invited to this Table. By faith of the operation of the Spirit of God, you have been in your measure enabled to receive Christ – I say not, without doubts and difficulties – while salvation in one of its parts, sanctification, is incomplete, these will stand – but with more or less of confidence in the divine grace and mercy, through the High Priest, and His broken body and shed blood alone, you have been enabled to receive Christ Jesus the Lord. You have fed on that body broken and that blood shed, set before you in the word of the truth of the Gospel; and to strengthen and confirm faith – not to produce, but to strengthen and confirm it – the Lord has invited you to His Table. That which has been set before you in word, and which faith has received in word, the same is set before you in sign and seal, that it may be received as symbolised and sealed. Yea, for further and more effectual and powerful application, He hath called you to His Table, where He gives you His flesh and blood, both in word explicatory of

the sign and seal, and in sign and seal confirmatory of the Word. "My body," the incarnation of the Word. "My body broken." Ah, what a breaking should we have had for ever, had it not been broken!

(Address after Distribution of Elements.)

"Forgive us our debts." "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared," and plenteous redemption. "Debts;" and sins are treated as debts in the whole transaction of our forgiveness. There is no relaxation of the demands of God's law; there is no taking down, even to believers, of the spirituality and extent of that law. There are no indulgences; sins are forgiven, but they are ever treated as debts. And so the law stands, and we do not make void the law through faith; God forbid! Yea, we establish the law. There are no indulgences. Believers are not under the law as a covenant of works; they, through the law, are dead to the law, and married to another, yet "not as without law to God, but under the law to Christ." And with regard to the precepts of the law, God gives no indulgences; though He will multiply to pardon, He will not change the law; the gospel is that He will multiply to pardon, but will not take down His demands. Debts are debts, the debts of sins which we have contracted, and the debts of obedience which are due from us.

O, therefore, let us remember that perfect obedience is God's demand, which He will not take down. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." That ever is our debt, as well as the debt for sin contracted. But oh, how sweet it is to confess sin before a sin-forgiving God! A sin-forgiving God! In this thought there are two considerations, the greatness of God's pardoning heart, as well as the satisfaction of divine justice; because grace is not founded on the atonement; the atonement is founded on grace. The atonement is God's device through which His grace, self-moving, can flow forth, reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. The atonement did not make God propitious, merciful, long-suffering, but God's great love said, "I am ready to forgive, if I can do it justly," and His infinite wisdom finding that He could do it justly in this way, He resolved on the sacrifice, on this way to it. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us" – the gift of His Son is the fruit of the love – "and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

But to return, in conclusion, to where we commenced – "I will confess." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." It is John Owen, I think, who has said "It is sweet to mourn over forgiven sin, and to water a free pardon with tears." Lately I was reading an address of the godly Flavel's to the ministers of England, after the great deliverance which God had afforded at the glorious Revolution. He calls upon them to fling aside all their animosity and jealousy, and unite in thanking God for the great deliverance, and in duly improving it by the faithful discharge of their ministerial duties. Then he says, in very beautiful Latin, "And let us not be ashamed to confess our faults, shortcomings and provocations. For nothing is unbecoming to us which is honourable to God. And our faces will appear beautiful in His eyes, when He sees the tears of joyous gratitude followed by the gush of penitential shame and sorrow for our manifold sins." The Lord give us open hearts, to hide no sin from Him, that, while we confess with shame, we be not ashamed to confess!

[July 1919]

A Sermon.

By the REV. MURDO MORRISON, Lochinver,
Retiring Moderator of Synod.

Preached at Opening of Free Presbyterian Synod at St. Jude's Hall,
Glasgow, on 20th May, 1919.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
Now, if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood,
hay, stubble,” etc. – 1 Corinthians 3:11-12.

Before we begin to speak directly to the words which are contained in the text, we should like to refer to two outstanding events which have taken place since we last met as a Synod. One of these was fraught with far-reaching consequences and joyful interest to the whole world, that is, the ending of the War. As the awful war of four years and a-half, embracing the whole might and resources of all the civilised nations of the earth, developed into its last stages, it was becoming increasingly evident that victory was veering round with increasing volume to the side of the Allies, and the final sigh of relief from the strain and tension of these years came to the minds of all on the Germans' request for an armistice. The hearts of God's people rose in gratitude to Him for such an end to the appalling conflict, but what now gives grief and sorrow to their hearts is to see the abounding impenitence, the ever-increasing unbelief and the indifference to the truths, claims, and judgments of God on the part of the

people as a whole, as well as on that of the nation in its corporate capacity. On this account, we fear we may look for further judgments on the land, judgments which may take diverse and more overwhelming forms. We, however, pray and hope that the Lord may, in His infinite mercy, prevent resumption of hostilities, because the International horizon is still overcast with threatening clouds. May the Peace Treaty which has been drawn up result to all future time in the promotion of peace and goodwill between all nations, until in the Lord's own time it comes to pass that all the mighty kings on earth shall fall down before Him, and all the nations of the earth shall do Him service.

The second event is one which was fraught with a more immediate and direct interest to ourselves as a Church – that is, the separation of three brethren from us, to whom we were deeply attached, and whom we were accustomed to respect. The haste and precipitancy with which the preliminaries were carried through in regard to so weighty and delicate a matter as Union between two bodies, the relations of which had formerly been so acute on account of outstanding differences, were in themselves calculated to defeat the end so strenuously advocated by these brethren. It gave much grief to all truly concerned about the cause of Christ in Scotland – not only in our own Church, but, we venture also to say, in the Free Church. We do not deny but they may have had mingled feelings themselves in doing what they did. Two of those who left had championed, and unsparingly laboured in, the cause of Christ as represented by the Free Presbyterian Church from the very beginning of the movement, and at this time of day exchanged this cause, which, at any rate, all Christian friends, within and without, will admit, and enemies cannot deny, was noble, truthful, faithful and self-denying in its origin and history up till now – exchanged it for one of which those qualities could not be predicated to anything like the same extent. In advocating for Union, which is, on strictly Scriptural, Confessional, and practical grounds quite right, but which strict grounds, we are sorry to say, were wanting in this advocacy, our erstwhile brethren went the length, by the step they took, of breaking a unity of a more reliable nature than the one which they took such a leap to find. In so serious a matter one should be fully persuaded in his own mind, and should not unduly influence others; and people, adhering to a cause which, at whatever cost, they would have faithfully approximating as nearly as possible to the standard of the whole counsel of God, should in no wise be influenced to divert from it; rather should it be that those who are at a further remove from this standard should be influenced and directed to get as near to it as they possibly can, in dependence on the Spirit and Grace of Christ. We are convinced more and more in the light of present-day religious tendencies, which are so derogating to the honour and glory of the Lord and of His Christ, as well as ruinous to the eternal interests of the souls of men that a united front within the Free Presbyterian pale should have been maintained, and from its standard unfurled, the cry should go forth unceasingly, “Rally round the flag of the old evangel, and true reformation principles, as embedded in God's Word, and so maintain a united and stronger front against the floods of the enemy.”

Let us now, in dependence on the Spirit of God, endeavour to say a few things from the words of our text.

I. – The laying of this foundation, which is “Jesus Christ.”

II. – The building which is reared upon this foundation.

I. – We may, and ought to, consider the laying of this foundation under at least two aspects.

The first is that which relates to God's direct hand and work; and,

The second respects the apostle's labour.

First, Jesus Christ, according to the apostle, and according to the uniform testimony of God's Word and the experience of the saints of God, is the only foundation of the whole of true religion as well as of the salvation of lost sinners. As a foundation laid for the above-mentioned purposes, its exclusiveness is emphasized by the negative form in which the apostle states this very truth, inasmuch as he says: "For other foundation can no man lay," etc. The laying of any other and of all other foundations, on the part of any man, is absolutely excluded by the fact of this foundation being already a laid foundation.

1. The laying of Jesus Christ as a foundation for His own Church in the world was the work of God Himself in the first instance. There is no foundation laid, and consequently no house built, without some man being engaged upon the work. When one – to use a figure – is to build a house, his first thought is about selecting a place, and then marking it out and setting it apart, after which he digs deep and prepares for laying the foundation, so that it might be made firm and secure. Christ was elected and set apart in the eternal councils of peace. And who did this? It was God the Father.

(1) God the Father laid this foundation in a past eternity, and this was no less than His beloved Son, who ever dwelt in His bosom, who was always His delight, and who was an all-sufficing object of His love from everlasting. God's love to poor sinners required the giving up and the setting apart of His own Son – this all-sufficing object of His love. None among created beings could be found sufficient to undertake this work, or to become this foundation. The persons in the adorable Trinity entered into a mutual arrangement before the foundations of the world, that sinners who were the objects of their love should be infallibly saved and brought to the enjoyment of the inconceivable glories of heaven. All the conditions which were proposed between the persons in the Trinity were voluntarily accepted by the Son. He gladly undertook to fulfil perfectly all these conditions – the assumption of our nature, the taking unto Himself all our legal relations and responsibilities which we sustained to God's holy law, the enduring of the awful penalty which man's guilt incurred at the hands of an infinitely holy and righteous God. Man's sinful and miserable state, into which he came as the necessary consequence of his own doing in the exercise of his own free will, under Satanic temptation, was divinely foreseen and divinely anticipated, and hence divinely provided for. Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, was seen by John, in the revelation given to him, as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Though He was not actually slain before the world was – a thing which could not be until He had actually appeared in the flesh, in our nature, in which alone it could be possible for Him to die – yet He was, in virtue of His covenant engagements and in the mind and intention of God, a Lamb slain before the world was at all. Thus, Jesus Christ was the foundation laid by the Father before the world was.

(2) This foundation, being elected and laid in the councils of salvation, is marked out and held before the view of sinners in time. It is pointed out in the first promise after man fell: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel." Promises concerning Him, as the Saviour and Deliverer from sin, were further amplified and multiplied in the course of time. All the shedding of blood, the sacrifices of animals, and the different kinds of beasts slain for sacrificial purposes, which were appointed of God under the Old Testament dispensation, were typifying and foreshadowing the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The whole of the ceremonial ritual under the law of Moses was but pointing men to the coming Saviour who was to offer Himself through the Eternal Spirit without spot to God, and who, by the one sacrifice of Himself, hath perfected for ever them who are sanctified. Further, we have many clear predictions and prophecies of the Messiah, the Lord's anointed, which speak of Him as if He had already come, as if His work were already finished, as if the glory which should follow were already His. This, we might look upon, as a preparing for the laying of the foundation. How clear was the Prophet Isaiah, the human vehicle through whom

the Holy Spirit announced many hundreds of years beforehand the laying of their foundation. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16). To Him says Peter all the Prophets bear witness, and so did the Patriarchs, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so did certain of the Judges and so did the Psalmist. After He had risen from the dead, and had on one occasion joined Himself to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, He, rebuking their unbelief, said: – "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

(3) He is actually laid, that is, Jesus Christ is actually laid as God's foundation in Zion in the fulness of time. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). In order to the laying of this foundation, God the Son must come down from heaven, and speaking with all reverence, dig deep to lay firmly the foundation of the house. Consider, then, for a few minutes how deep this foundation is laid. The Son, of the same essence with the Father, having power, glory and honour equal to the Father, possessing the ineffable perfections and attributes of the divine nature, just as His Eternal Father does, condescended to draw over all this essential and unspeakable glory the veil of humanity; all this wonderful glory was, for the time of His birth, life, humiliation, obedience, death, and the time He remained under the power of death, concealed and obscured from the view of the wicked world, except that, at intervals in His wonderful life, rays of His glory penetrated through with ineffable lustre, as, for example, in His miracles, His heavenly speeches and conduct, and in His transfiguration on the mount. To His people it was given to see somewhat of this glory while He was on earth; for John says: – "The Word was made flesh, and we beheld his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Thus, He came from the Father's bosom to be born in a stable and laid in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes, for there was no place for the Lord of life and glory, who made the heavens and the earth, and who claimed a right to all their belongings in which to appear and be born – no place higher than the stable of an inn. O the marvellous condescension exhibited in this act! O the infinite depths of meanness, humility, and lowliness into which He voluntarily descended! He who was rich became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be rich. As soon as He is thus born the life of the holy child Jesus is sought. The jealousy of the great ones of the earth is excited, and the infant of days should be put to the sword. Divine providence must come to the rescue. During His whole life He was subject to all the reproaches, dishonour, enmity, wrath, malice, and false accusations which the minds of wicked men and the councils of hell could devise and cast upon Him. He was thus a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. There was no distinct place of residence for Him who was the Creator of all, but was one who had nowhere to lay His head: "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Hungry, thirsty, and weary was He, as He went from place to place, healing the sick and all manner of diseases among the people, showing mercy to the miserable, and proclaiming pardon to the guilty, and cheering with the comforts of His grace and salvation the poor and the needy. Yea, words will fail to recount the gracious, merciful acts, and personal dealings of His life.

This same Lord of life and glory receives the cup of wrath into His hand in the garden of Gethsamane, and as He beheld it and what He had to drink until not a drop was left without His tasting of it, in His blessed soul and body, He cried – "Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me; but not my will but thine be done." "My meat and drink is to do the will of him that sent me." He fell three times forward on His face, crying and repeating the same words,

while His soul was exceeding sorrowful unto death, and while He sweated great drops of blood which fell to the ground. Surely He was one who had His vesture dipped in blood, indicating the awful agony of His holy soul in the garden. But soon after, this suffering ended in His being betrayed by one of the twelve, and sold for thirty pieces of silver; in His being denied thrice with oaths by Peter, His professedly foremost friend and companion; in His being forsaken by all the other disciples. He is laid hold of as a common, and worse than common, malefactor. He is apprehended, arraigned, falsely accused, and wickedly and unjustly condemned to die, and His death to take the most malicious, accursed and agonising form. No dissentient is heard against the wicked and unjust sentence consigning Him to death, for they all cried – “Away with him, away with him, crucify him, crucify him.” He suffered from His Father, in the position of a righteous Judge, condemning Him for the sins of His people, which He imputed to Him, for it was the Father’s wrath against sin which He tasted of to the full, and made His heart to melt within His bowels like wax. He suffered from the wicked world of Jew and Gentile, whose enmity and malice knew no bounds, and was like a flood overwhelming His soul. He suffered from all the powers of darkness and hell, and their councils failed not to scheme all possible plans to encompass His death. Moreover, the thousand sins, each of which was a heavy burden in itself, of every one of the redeemed, who are countless in number, were laid upon Him as He stood in His Own Person responsible for them all as their suffering surety before the Lord His God. And when He cried out, “It is finished,” He died, and gave up the ghost. Continuing under the power of death until the third day, He rose, despoiling death and hell of all their terrors for the redeemed.

What a foundation has God Himself laid! There is no creature in heaven or in earth sharing the honour with Him in this matter. “The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.” The laying of it entailed infinite cost, infinite labour and suffering to God Himself, and what awful responsibility is his who refuses to accept Jesus Christ, God’s Son, as his only foundation for eternity? Well is He worth now being tested by poor sinners, because it is a foundation laid deep in his Eternal Person, two natures and His three-fold offices, Prophet, Priest and King, and particularly in His Priestly office, of which we have endeavoured to speak above, a foundation for the exercise of the others.

2. We may now briefly mention *the qualities of this foundation*.

(1) It is a sure foundation in opposition to all false ones. It is so sure as never to fail the poor creature who places his trust in Him. In one’s own changing feelings and frames you may not have a sensible hold of this foundation, but the sureness and certainty of this foundation is to be found, not in our feelings, but in the everlasting covenant, in God’s promise, and in the least true, gracious desire after Him. The foundation is sure there. It is a sure foundation to you, poor soul, who find Him to be all-sufficient to your needs, and is heartily satisfied with Him as your Saviour, and as yours alone.

(2) It is a strong foundation. He is described in Scripture as a strong tower, and also a strong rock. He is strong to withstand all the mighty assaults of His enemies and of the believer’s. He is strong to support, with no danger of giving way in the least, all the burdens each believer, and all believers, from first to last, can lay upon Him. The foundation is as strong and fresh now as it was thousands of years ago.

(3) It is an immovable foundation. Many attempts have been made to overthrow it in past history. Oceans of heresies have dashed their proud waves against this foundation, and it remains now as firm as ever. There was the Cerinthian heresy, which denied that He came into the world clothed in human flesh, and held that it was a celestial body He had. There was the Arian heresy, which denied His true divinity, and levelled Him to the position of the highest created being. There is the Socinian heresy, which denies there are three persons in

the Godhead; and various others, which space will not permit to consider. And all these heresies are still rolling their proud billows, while they, from time to time, suit their form and movement to the mood of the age and generation. Very particularly are these found in the Churches of this land.

(4) It is an everlasting foundation. It is not for a time, or for all time; it is to exist the same unalterable rock and foundation through all eternity. Those whose feet are fixed upon this rock and foundation are united to Him, and shall continue so for ever.

Secondly: The second aspect under which we now consider the laying of this foundation is as it respects the labours of Paul and other apostles. Paul informs us that no one had reason to boast of men. Even the best and the most eminent servants that Christ richly owned were but men who planted and who watered. It was God alone who gave the increase. Some among the Corinthians were inclined to overlook this fact, and wished to be considered as followers of either Paul or Apollos. This the apostle deprecated. He would have them to consider that they and other apostles were only fellow-labourers or co-workers with God in His Church on earth. The Corinthian believers were God's husbandry or God's building. Paul and Apollos and others were labourers with God in promoting the interests of this husbandry, or in helping to erect and finish this building. He gives himself a further designation when he says, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon." Therefore, as a wise master-builder he laid this foundation in the Corinthian Church: –

(1) As one who preached the gospel for the first time where Christ was not preached before. It was, indeed, eminently characteristic of Paul that he loved to preach Christ, and thus lay Him as a foundation in places that had never heard of Him before. He thus says himself: "So have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation" (Romans 15:20). Where there is no true, faithful, and scriptural preaching of Christ as God's only foundation, laid in Zion, to a congregation or in a Church, in its organized and corporate capacity, there is no foundation at all laid, in the sense of Paul. The building for which such are responsible is one reared on the sands of men's imagination, not on this foundation of Paul, because our text says, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Could anything be clearer and more self-evident? He took care that Christ Jesus – considered with respect to all the faithful representations and aspects under which He reveals Himself in the gospel – would be the exclusive theme of his sermons, discourses, and exhortations. "For I determined," he says in another place, "not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Of what real avail is anything else? Is anything beside this to do for perishing men in view of death and eternity? Verily not! Why are poor men so foolish as to be deluded with subjects and themes that are as the shifting sands of time, and as the mire down which they sink until they are finally engulfed in the destructive vortex?

(2) There is another way of looking at laying this foundation, from the point of view of the gospel preached. We read of the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, and it is upon this foundation that all believers are built and rooted up and established in the faith. The Old Testament prophets and all the apostles held Christ forth in all His fulness and glory, as the Holy Spirit enabled them, as the only Mediator between God and men, through whom God is reconciled to sinners. They unmistakably pointed out to Jew and Gentile that Christ was the end of the law for righteousness; that the Mosaic economy was at an end, and the whole body of the ceremonial law became dead and buried with Christ's death and burial, never again to be resurrected. They took care and precaution to clear away the shadows and the types and carnal ordinances, imposed indeed "until the times of reformation," and to lay bare in full view the

sure foundation which they were thus laying by their preaching. Just like the man who, about to build a house and to lay first the foundation, clears away the earth and rubbish until he comes to a rocky and stable ground on which to lay the foundation. This was indeed the method employed by the prophets, and especially by the apostles.

II. – Now, let me come to consider briefly the second general head of our discourse: – *The building which is to be reared on this foundation.*

1. No foundation can have any meaning except with regard to the edifice which is to be built upon it. There must be a building reared on the foundation. When we see a man laying a foundation, we are sure that he is to build a house there if he has the wherewithal to do it, unless he be like the man spoken of by Christ in the gospel who began to build a house and had not the wherewithal to finish it; for he did not first sit down to calculate the cost, and men began to mock him. There are many religious professors in this age who set out to build a house and have left it as they began, because they had not sufficient stock to finish it. Their profession was never built upon this foundation; they never experienced the new birth which is wrought in the soul by the effectual operations of the Spirit of grace. You find them in the college and divinity hall; in the pulpit, in the sessions, and in the pew. But in considering the building we, first of all, take it as it comprehends believers themselves; and, secondly, as it comprehends the doctrines of God's word.

(1) The building comprises all true believers. When a man lays the foundation for a house, he then goes to get the stones for the building. They may have to be quarried out of the rocks hidden under the earth, but stones he must find, where and howsoever he can, if the building is to go on. All mankind are alike by nature; there is no difference, in respect of their nature, between those who repent and believe, by God's grace, and those who do not. They are all dead in trespasses and sins, and, like the rock, the stony heart of man does not feel, is not moved, and is not impressed by all the different ways in which God deals with him. Thus we are by nature like the flinty rock and adamant stone. But Jeremiah says by the Spirit, "Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29). So the word of God, by means of the law and gospel, is like a hammer, breaking the rock in pieces. This hammer is wielded by the hand of the Holy Ghost, and when so wielded the most unwieldy material and irrefragable rock will break before its inevitable blows. A man's heart is thus awakened to some realisation of his awful condition as a lost sinner. The rock, hidden, but broken under this hammer in the hand of God's Spirit, comes now to the light. It is yet to endure many blows of this hammer, to mould its shapeless mass into its fitting shape so as to be placed on this foundation. Though they are thus quarried out, as they are described by Isaiah: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness; look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged" (Isaiah 51:1) – though they are thus awakened to concern and roused out of their spiritual death, they would never come to Christ, the foundation of themselves, any more than the stones the man quarries for his house, and brings into shape, will move to the foundation until carried thereto. It is God's own work, from first to last, to work upon every stone which He is to place on the foundation and in the building. It is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Never do these stones live spiritually until they are thus laid and fixed upon this foundation. Like the mortar which cements the stones to the foundation and to one another in the walls of the building, so faith, working by love, is the mortar which unites these stones to Jesus Christ, the foundation, and which unites believers to one another. Thus we have lively stones, as Peter tells us in the following words: "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:3-5).

Thus they are lively stones by their coming into living union with Jesus Christ, the living stone and the sure foundation. The building, in this sense, is still going on. To illustrate this further we quote the words of Paul in writing to the Ephesians: – “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:20-22). These stones lay their whole weight upon this foundation; their burdens, their sins, their cares and anxieties; their hope, faith and love; their whole salvation, and that of others. He is sure, strong, immovable, and everlasting, to bear them all, and He never fails. This is how these stones build upon this foundation, and such as thus build upon Jesus Christ will have what is described in the verses following this as gold, silver, and precious stones, which cannot be consumed or burned up, but will come forth with all the greater effulgence and beauty through the fires of temptation and trials and suffering through which the Lord brings them – “That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be formed unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Everything which men cleave to and is not of this nature is like wood, hay, and stubble, which will be consumed in the fire of God’s law, and the fire of His Spirit, and the fire of His judgment at the last day; it may even go out, and be consumed in the fires of suffering and temporal judgments in this world, because what is wood, hay, and stubble, cannot survive so severe an ordeal.

(2) Let us look upon the building from a doctrinal point of view. Doctrines may be divided into two kinds, and both are represented by the material spoken of in the 12th verse. What are truly the doctrines of God’s word are represented by “gold, silver, and precious stones”; what are not so, such as false and pernicious views of these doctrines, are represented by the “wood, and hay, stubble.” There is, first, then, the outstanding doctrine of the Fall of man. Unless you have this doctrine solidly rooted in your soul’s experience, as it is in the word of God you will never build aright on this foundation.

Pelagianism in the early centuries sought to make out that man was not deprived of God’s image to the extent that he was unable to render himself acceptable to God by emulating good example. He was not a fallen creature at all, except to the extent that he could be led astray by wicked example. Could anything be more like hay and stubble than this? It is entirely opposed to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit concerning the Fall. This destructive view reappeared in a more refined and evangelical dress in the notorious Declaratory Act of 1892. According to this Act – and it is a dominant article of the Creed of the larger Presbyterian Churches of Scotland – man is not entirely destitute of God’s image; he still retains vestiges of the image of God upon his soul. But, the truth is that man’s natural conscience shows clearly that, while he once bore this image, which consisted in righteousness and holiness, he bears now not the least vestige of heavenly knowledge, righteousness and holiness, of which the divine image on man consisted originally. All the record we have of the experiences of God’s saints in the world confirms beyond doubt the Scriptural teaching of the total depravity of the human soul. He “must be born again” of the Word and Spirit of God, in order to the restoration of this blessed image. Such views as are opposed to this are wood, hay and stubble that shall be burned. But the doctrine of the Fall is like gold, silver, and precious stones, which the true Church of Christ always builds upon the foundation.

The second doctrine which may be mentioned, as like the precious metals, gold and silver, is election, or eternal election. This is denied also in the Declaratory Act, and the false Arminian view of this blessed and precious truth is now the generally accepted view in all the Presbyterian bodies of Scotland and England, except such as abide by and assert, maintain, and defend the doctrines of God’s Word, as confessionally embodied in the Larger and Shorter Catechism and the Confession of Faith. We, without boasting, and, we hope, in the

spirit of humility, hold strongly to the scriptural view that all who are saved in time were embraced in the decree of eternal election, which decree, in fact, makes it certain that such shall be effectually called, and their salvation rendered secure for ever. The Arminian heresy, so repugnant to all who are taught of God concerning the utter helplessness of man, as well as his moral and natural inability to good, holds that man is able to repent and believe under certain aids of the Spirit, and that his election is conditioned upon his believing, so that the sinner is elected only in view of his repentance and faith! How delusive and puerile! What wood, hay, and stubble is this! And how many there are who build this chaff and rubbish on Christ the foundation. The doctrine of election is very comforting to the believer who is established in the faith, and to the aged saint, as the prospect is before him of an immediate dissolution. "The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, yet my loving-kindness shall not depart from them neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy upon thee."

The third doctrine, which is gold, and which the true visible Church of Christ builds upon Christ the foundation, is effectual calling and regeneration. The interest of the most of people in Christ in this day of declension, goes no further than a mere expression of belief in, or assent by the natural understanding to, the gospel, an outward reformation of life and manners or a sacramental profession. If one has some morality and common courtesy and common honesty, and is a fair churchgoer, he is a Christian and believer. Thus they build hay and stubble upon this foundation. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again." This doctrine is like gold, silver, and precious stones.

Fourthly, the doctrine of a definite atonement by Jesus Christ. There is no countenance whatever given in God's word to a universal and unrestricted atonement. It is only universal in the sense that it is freely offered to all to whom the gospel comes, but it is a definite atonement, and shall remain, so it matters nothing what the popular view is, because the wish to have it so is father to their thoughts – definite in the sense that all who were ordained to eternal life shall be infallibly saved by Christ's atonement. "I lay down my life for the sheep." "Mine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and not one is lost, except the son of perdition." Anything contrary to this is stubble and hay, which shall be burned up.

Fifthly, justification by faith, as an instantaneous act of God, the righteous Judge, without regard to anything in the sinner; Sanctification, proceeding in the soul from the moment God's Spirit works in him, and carried on until his death; Adoption, as also an act of God's free grace, whereby sinners are received into the membership of God's household; the continual Intercession of Christ on their behalf in heaven, promising and performing all needed support, strength, grace and perseverance unto the end; all these doctrines are like gold, silver, and precious stones which the true Church of God has built in the past, and shall ever build upon Christ, the sure foundation. But all false faiths, creeds, views, inconsistent practices, and empty professions are wood, hay and stubble that will be consumed in the fire. If they will not be burned now in mercy, in the conscience and life by the fire of God's law and Spirit, they will be consumed in the fire of His sore chastisements and awful judgments at death and at the judgment seat. May the Holy Spirit give us grace to make suitable application of these things! Amen.

[August 1919]

A Sermon.

By the late REV. PROF. JOHN DUNCAN, LL.D., Edinburgh.

[This sermon was delivered in the Free Buccleuch Church, Edinburgh, on
Sabbath evening, 4th October, 1863.]
(*Hitherto Unpublished.*)

The Parable of the Prodigal Son: – Luke 15:11-32.

The teaching of Jesus, especially His teaching by parables, so full of condescension, attracted to Him a multitude, and that even of those who were not of the most respectable class – the publicans and sinners. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, but the publicans and sinners felt in Him an attraction. He could associate with them, teach them, and speak to them, altogether free from sin, altogether contrary to sin, and yet in such a way as drew the hearts of sinners to Him, making them feel at once that they dealt with one who was holy and one who was compassionate and kind; different from the austere sanctimoniousness of the Scribes and Pharisees – hypocrites who repelled by their sternness the people of whom they said: “This people, which knoweth not the law, is cursed.” Rabbi, with his long robe and fringes – the holy man, with a face as sour as vinegar and a heart sourer and bitterer still – had nothing about his religion to draw and attract. But when they saw the publicans and sinners coming to Jesus, they murmured. They were holy men, and they must keep by themselves; they could not bear the pollution of this accursed people which knew not the law. And He who would not enter into this, their judgment, showed to them what He was. “Like,” they would think, “draws to like; and you may judge of what kind of teacher Jesus is by the company which He keeps – publicans and sinners. And with all His fine teaching, it shows He has no such abhorrence of their character – no genuine virtue about Him – that He receiveth sinners; not only so, enters into social intercourse with them – ‘receiveth sinners and eateth with them.’”

Jesus addressed to them these three parables. The two first seem to have special reference to first conversion; the third, to the recovery of the backslider. The things that are lost – it is noticeable in the two first – are altogether passive. In the first of all it is the sheep that is lost, and the shepherd goes and finds it; the sheep does nothing but

stray. In the second, in the same way, the piece of money is lost, and the woman lights a candle and goes and seeks till she finds it: the piece of money lies quiet all the while. In the third parable it is the son who comes to himself; "I will arise and go to my father." Still, we need not restrict it to the case of the backslider. There are circumstances in it common to every case of repentance, and in it is a most fit description of repentance; as there is in the case of all the three parables, when we allow for what may be exclusively connected with the calling of the Gentiles.

I am not intending to explain the parable of the prodigal son, but only to make a few remarks on some particulars contained in it. There were the two sons, the elder and the younger, and the father, whose character we learn from the parable, must have been kind and indulgent. Discontented at home with the paternal roof, the younger son makes a proposal to the father: "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me," and we read that "He divided unto them his living." The elder son was content to remain at home, and his conduct, for aught we know, seems to be justly represented in his own words, "Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." If there was reference to the Jewish nation, then we may suppose our Lord to take the Scribes and Pharisees, according to their own judgment, "Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." Allow it to be so. But the younger son would see the world; would go to distant climes. He gathered together his goods and took his journey into a far country, and soon he, who was discontented at home, "wasted his substance with riotous living." These two circumstances agree well together as far as character generally goes. Discontentment with his father's home could not, from the father's character, have any other ground than the wish to be free from restraint, free to do what would not be permitted in a home so well regulated as his father's was. So he, acting as he was likely to do, "wasted his substance with riotous living." Then came the famine, and he went and hired himself to a citizen of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. A young gentleman, evidently, he, who had been at the top of all enjoyment amidst his riotous companions and lord of the board, is now a swineherd. And mark, this young gentleman is a Jew, and the swine is an unclean animal against which all his feelings of nationality and religion, if he had any, as it is likely he still retained some, provoke him. But this is what he has to do against the calls of hunger. "He began to be in want" – the very swine's food he would have been glad to eat, but was not allowed. Then he "came to himself" – adversity taught its lesson. Experience, it is said, teaches fools, but it does not always. Not even experience is always a successful teacher; some are such fools that they will not learn even in that school. But in his case it had its effect; he came to himself. He had been acting like a madman before. He was like a madman to leave his father's home and all the good he might have had there; like a madman, thus to spend his fortune out in this strange land in that riotous living, exposing himself first to degradation, and then to danger and death. It was, and he now felt it to be, acting like a madman.

Ah! sin is madness and folly, and now he counts it such. This long journey and riotous living, what was it? To see life; to see the world. Life! life! like a madman. And now he is a sadder but a wiser man – he came to himself. Now, all we are sinners; all of us left our Father's home. The whole family of Adam in Adam was with God, before we belonged to the devil; and we left God and attached ourselves to Satan – joined him in his disobedience and rebellion. And so, even in the case of first repentance, it may be said that the sinner comes to himself, and says, "I will arise and go to my Father" – his father, at least, by creation. Now, if we be all such by nature, either we remain as this prodigal was, or now, like him, we have come to ourselves. Which is the case? Are we still far away from our Father's home? We may be assured – consciousness, conscience

itself might tell us; the Word of God tells us expressly what our natural character is – that we are by nature alienated from God by wicked works. Well, have we come to ourselves? When we come to ourselves, we begin to say, “How foolish, how mad, I have been.” Why, where was the wisdom in leaving your Father’s home? “What iniquity have ye found in me,” says your Father, “that ye are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity and are become vain?” What evil has God done you? Say, what good has the devil done you? If, as the Scripture says, the friendship of the world be enmity with God, what good has it done you to be its friend, and, in this friendship, God’s enemy? Is that a wise condition? Is it good? Is it right? But putting the “right” aside, is it wise? If there be holiness, justice, and goodness in God, does not reason as well as Scripture testify that we have sinned without cause? If there be omniscience and omnipotence in God, does reason not convince us that enmity against Him is a dangerous thing? “Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?” Shall the clay exalt itself against the potter? Shall feeble dust and ashes wage war against the arm of Omnipotence? Well, he came to himself and said, “How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger; I will arise and go to my father. Things are better at home than here.” Ah! yes; he sees at last, starving beside the trough, that his father’s home is a better place. There is plenty there, joy there; not these husks, not the swine-trough, not starvation, but plenty. And in thy Father’s home – thy Father, backslider, for such He is in a sense by creation; thou wast with Him, at least, in Eden, for we are all one race in unity of nature and unity of privilege and of covenant – thy Father’s home in this respect, that thou wert belonging to God before belonging to the devil, the world, and the flesh. Well, there is plenty in this Father’s home. “Ah! but I, foolish, left it.” “I will arise and go to my Father.”

Well, if he had not come to himself, this is the last thing that would have come into his mind. Without having come to himself, pride would have kept him away. “Ah, I will starve rather than go back. How will my father receive me? I could bear reproach much better. My father is a kind man, and if he receive me with open arms, *that* will be most humbling. No, no; let me not think of that!” But the man had come to himself, and so there might be misgivings, very likely there were, but there was a hope. “Ah, there is no one like my father yet, and there is no place yet like my father’s home. I was a fool to leave it; acknowledging it, I will go back. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.” In returning, he returns as a prodigal, a penitent prodigal, not hiding, not cloaking his sin. Till men come to themselves, they conceal and hide and cloak their sin. Guile, deceit, falsehood, is a cloak which men wrap over their sin. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” “I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” “I’ll make a clean breast of it; I will go back with shame, for it is fitting; to me belongeth shame and confusion of face, and so I will take it; the shame of my bashful countenance shall cover me, and I will speak low out of the ground.”

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.” The sin is against heaven, for in the parable it is against an earthly father, and in the case of an earthly father, the sin is not only before the father, but also, and principally, against God; as David says, who had sinned grievously against Bathsheba and against Uriah, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” “And am no more worthy to be called thy son.” “That is a dignity and happiness which I cannot now aspire to; I have deprived myself of every right.” “Make me as one of thy hired servants.” “My father’s home! I am content to be a day labourer in my father’s home, if I am only at home. Ah! a lowly place befits one so degraded, and with that I shall be content, and will, though a born son, take the place of a hired servant.”

He said, "I will arise," and *he arose*. Mark, when he came to himself, there was a good resolution, but you know the proverb that a certain place is paved with good resolutions, good resolutions not carried into effect. He said, "I will arise," and he arose. Christ spake this parable: "A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not – but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, Sir – and went not." Which was the better son? He who did the will of his father. But this did better than either. He said, "I will arise," and he arose. Is there anyone here who is saying now, who is beginning to come to himself or herself, and saying, "It is time to arise, I need to arise, I should arise?" Is there anyone come to, "I *will* arise?" Perhaps there is someone saying, not only, "I *should* arise, but I *must* arise some time, for the famine will come." The riotous living may be going on just now, and by riotous living, we are to understand all enjoyment that is not of God, but of the world. The riotous living may be going on, it may not have come to an end, but the famine will come, and the pigs and the husks will come. "I know it; I will need to arise *then*." Death may come and say, "No, you must consult with me first." But are you saying, "I must arise," or "I will arise?" I hope some one or more may be saying this, but you must not halt there. "I must arise," *that* is compulsion. "I will arise"; *that* looks like goodwill; that is a good thought. Now let the "I will arise" be followed by the arising. Up, up. You who are saying, "I will arise," put not off till to-morrow, "I will arise to-morrow; I will arise when I go home to my closet." Go there, but say, "I will arise now." Your Father is in the closet; He has been waiting for you there long, perhaps all your days, and never been visited. But He is waiting *here*, and here still more than in the closet, for He, who sees in secret and will reward openly, says that He loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob; that is, that He has more pleasure, and is more abundantly present, in this assembly, than even in the closet.

"I will arise and go unto my father; and he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." Ah! though old men have not keen eyes – and it may be his eyes were dim with age – the loving heart gives keenness to the eyes. "Ha! there is my poor lost son coming back." And the father "ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And the son began his confession. Before he arose he had pondered what he was to say to his father, and all the way home he had been laying it to heart. It was not a mere form of words that he was going to say – the form of words he had laid to his heart. But his father would not allow him to finish. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants," he was going to say, but he had not time; his father broke in, and the father said to his servants, "Bring forth the very best." Not the place of a hired servant, but the very best.

Now, this is the reception given to a penitent, to a returning prodigal. It is through Jesus he is received – the Shepherd who has come to seek and find the lost. The Shepherd thus loves, and His loving Father thus receives the sinner coming to Him through Jesus Christ His Son.

And now there was a glad home – music and dancing, the fatted calf, eating and drinking, and mirth. The elder son, we will leave him to his bad humours. He would not call the prodigal his brother. "Thy son," he said; "no brother of mine." But the father is glad and the servants are glad. Well, there is joy in heaven before the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, it is said. And yet the angels' joy is perhaps not what is principally intended. In the other cases, the man who had found the sheep called in his friends to rejoice with him, and the woman who found the piece of silver called in her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her. And so it is said, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." That is, God rejoices, and then, no doubt, all the angels looking on – all His friends – rejoice with Him. God the Father rejoices in heaven when a lost one is brought

back; the Son of Man, who came to seek and save the lost, rejoices; the glorifier of Christ, the Holy Spirit, rejoices; holy angels rejoice, and, no doubt, glorified men. And why this joy? This is over what? "Over one sinner that repenteth." O, sinner, sinner, you have a great thing in your power – a thing which no believer in this assembly has in his power; for "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." Yes, now the son has come home. I trow the fatted calf is not killed every day; music and dancing are not every day. The family is a happy family, and live happily day by day; but there is constant employment on the farm or estate which must be attended to. But the day of return is not a work day, but a feast day. Is there no sinner here – no one individual sinner – who would like to make all heaven ring for joy? Repent, repent, repent; and make all heaven shout at the sight.

And now, let us close with one more look at Jesus, with the publicans and sinners drawing round Him to hear Him. Ah! grace is poured into His lips. Who can speak to sinners as Jesus speaks? Who can give them the welcome that Jesus gives them? Ah! it cost Him dear to have such words to speak. He must die, the just for the unjust, ere ever He could have such words to speak to the lost ones, to the lost sheep whom He came to seek and save. Though His deriders said it, yet it is true "He saved others; himself he cannot save." Nay, for this not saving of Himself is the great necessity for His saving others. "The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep," and then He can say, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

May He lay His hand on thee, and seek and save thee! Ah! more confidence may I repose in Him than in you. And yet, O ye sinners, going astray, may you now be as sheep restored to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls!

[September 1919]

A Sermon.

By the REV. GEORGE HUTCHESON, M.A., of Edinburgh
and Irvine (1674).

(Ninth Sermon of Series on Psalm cxxx.)

“But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” – Psalm 130:4.

I have now broken in a little upon this great article of our creed, the remission of sins – the great gospel-news, the glad tidings of the gospel of peace to them that are in the psalmist’s posture as in the third verse, that there is no standing before God, marking iniquity in strict justice, according to the covenant of works. I am as yet detained on the first head that I proposed to be spoken to on this subject, that is, the consideration of that which is pardoned. It is iniquity, as in the preceding verse, sin or transgression, let it be called by whatsoever name it will; and as to this, I spake to these things.

1. That all have sin.
2. That sin is a debt and burden, which they who take a right look of, will see great cause to desire to be rid of it.
3. That sin being such a debt or burden, the unpardoned man, if he get a right look of his own condition, he will find himself in a woful plight.
4. That sin being such a debt as can only be done away by pardon, and such a burden as puts the unpardoned man in a woful plight, it follows, that it is good news, the best of all news to a sensible sinner, that there is pardon for iniquity with God. When a man hath said verse 3, “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, who can stand?” he may add verse 4, “But there is forgiveness with thee.” And here ye may remember, that it was cleared how the least sins need a pardon; as also how the greatest sins for nature, number, or other circumstances, are pardonable, and that sensible sinners need not be troubled with that sin against the Holy Ghost, seeing their very flying to the remedy of sin in Christ is a sufficient evidence that it was not in them.

I was the last day cut short by time from speaking a word to these persons whose sins are pardonable. And this I would now speak to, before I go to the other heads I proposed to be spoken to. And the ground of that which I would say of them whose sins are pardonable, I shall take it from that pattern of prayer, Matthew 6:9,12, “Father, forgive us our debts.” They are children who may come to God for pardon of sin; and to open this a little, I shall speak to these three from it.

1. It would be remembered, that these who are not children must come and become children in the due order, that they may attain to the privilege of pardon. When children only are allowed to beg pardon of sin, it secludes none who are unpardoned from coming to God

through the elder brother Jesus Christ, that they may be put among the children by adoption, for, Isaiah 55:7, "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," or multiply to pardon; and Ezekiel 33:15,16, "If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of the sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him;" there shall be no more word of them; which (as I said the last day, when I spake from these words) leaves a sad check and ground of decay at the door of rebels, to whom the fountain for sin and uncleanness is kept open, and they have pardon in their offer, but will not follow the right method of obtaining mercy and pardon. They will not come and be children, but continue rebels still. And it leaves also a caution and a check to many, who, if anything be hinted at of their faults, will claim to pardon, and yet they will not give themselves up to be children, they would live rebels, and yet be pardoned. But ye must come to be made children, who in faith would pray, "Forgive us our sins."

A second word which I would say from this is, that as children are daily falling in sin, so their daily sins are pardonable. There were many dangerous and damnable errors in the ancient Church, concerning the sins of church members, that come here to be reprov'd. Some looked upon the sins of church members, as the old agnostics, the progenitors of the libertines, did, they held that sins in godly persons consisted only in opinion; that regenerate men, do what they would, if they should commit the most vile and abominable acts, they were not sins in them. This is nothing but corrupt-principled monstrous profanity, or monstrous profanity rooted in a corrupt principle; and those that would hold themselves out of that fearful gulf, they would beware of the Antinomian principles, as that God sees no sin in believers, that His law is not to be the rule of their walk, that they need not repent, etc. For libertinism is but a new edition of Antinomianism in folio. Others again acknowledged sin to be in the godly, but they slighted repentance, and therefore, when scandals fell out in the church, they did not require any acknowledgment of their offence who had fallen in these scandals, but while they were reeking in these abominations, they entertained church communion and fellowship with them. This was a turning of the grace of God into lasciviousness, and it is the result in part of that Antinomian principle of the remission of sins from all eternity; so that, according to their opinion, repentance was not required in order to pardon of sin, but for intimation of pardon. And there was a third sort, such as the Novatians, who looked so on gross sins after baptism, as, though they would not seclude them from pardon on repentance, nor would they seclude such sinners from making profession of their repentance, yet they would not absolve them, nor admit them to church communion and fellowship, particularly in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but left them to God, to make of them what He pleased. Now in opposition to all these is the truth I am upon. We confess that sins after the receipt of great mercies are very heinous, Ezra 9:14, "Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations, wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us?" Judges 10:13, "Ye have forsaken me, and served other gods, wherefore I will deliver you no more." And sin, in particular after regeneration, is so much the more heinous, that God hath been gracious; therefore the Apostle having spoken of the abounding grace of God, where sin had abounded (Romans 5), at the close, he begins the next chapter with these words, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" He abominates that after regeneration there should be a relapsing in sin, yet the text here intimates "there is forgiveness with God" for the iniquities of godly men; and the pattern of prayer, Matthew 6, tells the children, that they may go to God and seek the forgiveness of sins, which says they would be daily sinning, and God would

allow daily pardon on them in the due order. And consequently, it was horrid cruelty in the Novatians to seclude such as fall in sins after baptism from absolution and church-fellowship, and they would not pardon where God did pardon, which made Constantine at the Council of Nice say to Aclesus their Bishop, "I see no other of it, but ye would make a ladder to go to heaven your alone, and would have none with you." I confess the godly are not to be hugged under their failings, but their failings are rather to be aggredged [viewed as aggravated]; yet upright walkers, as they are most tender in their conversation, so are they most charitable in passing judgment upon others, though they have their failings.

But there is a third word I would say from this, and that is to clear, whether all sorts of sins in the godly are pardonable? This is a case that hath troubled the learned, and may trouble tender consciences, whether, when a man hath repented a sin, and found the bitterness of it, and hath found God's favour and pardon intimated upon his repentance, he may again fall into that sin, and get it pardoned over again. A case, I say, that some who are tender may be troubled with, when they have fallen in sin and thereafter have found it bitter, and have been at God, confessed it, and believed pardon, and yet they have been over-hailed in the same sin over again. This, I confess, before I say anything to it, is a sad case. It is sad to see folks, after regeneration, and tasting of the grace of God, falling in the same sins again; and it's yet sadder to see a person, after he hath been smarting for it, running back to that very folly, particularly if it be an outbreacking sin, and the learned could hardly find an instance in Scripture of that relapsing in sin in the godly. It is true, Peter did thrice deny his Master, and Lot was twice drunken and twice fell in incest, but none of these were after repentance and intimation of pardon; for Peter was kept in the hurry of the temptation till his sin was thrice out with him; and so it was with Lot, yet I shall give two words for clearing the case.

1. That as regeneration makes not the saints perfect, so neither do I see a ground that a saint's repenting for a particular fault should keep him from a relapsing in that fault, and needing of pardon. It is true, Psalm 85:8, God's speaking of peace to His people is with a caution, "That they turn not again to folly;" but to say, if repentance be true, a man will not fall in that folly he hath repented, it is not Scriptural. Regeneration is our initial repentance, and if that do not prevent falling in sin, it is no wonder that a particular act of renewed repentance will not do it; all the repentance, grief, or sorrow that a person hath attained to for sin, is but a creature, that except God concur, cannot keep him from falling in sin; and God hath not made an absolute promise, so to concur with a penitent, that he shall not again fall in the same sin. How often doth a penitent, when he hath repented to-day of his passion, pride, wandering of mind in duty, etc., fall in the same sins to-morrow; and if he may, notwithstanding of repentance, fall into lesser faults, why may he not after repentance fall into grosser? We find also godly men after their repenting for their failings, falling in grosser outbreackings. David, after he had repented his falling in trouble, and his using sinful shifts to be out of it, fell in these gross and scandalous sins of adultery and murder; and he that fell in these sins after repentance for other escapes, why might he not, after repentance, have fallen in these same sins over again, if the grace of God had not prevented it? For though repentance for particular faults leaves behind it an impression of the bitterness of these sins, and makes them to be loathed, which will make it more improbable they will be relapsed in, yet it is not impossible; otherwise, true repentance being for all sin, it should prevent relapsing in any sin.

A second word which I shall say for clearing the case shall be this, that as true repentance is not to be measured by relapsing in sin, so it is contrary to Scripture to

determine that relapsing in sin after repentance is unpardonable; it is not the sin against the Holy Ghost, and it is therefore pardonable. Isaiah 55:7, "Our God will multiply to pardon;" even as often as the sinner repents and comes again to Him to seek pardon, were it till seventy times seven, as He bids us forgive others when they sin against us (Matthew 18:22, and Hosea 14:4), He hath promised to heal backslidings. Now these are after repentance, when His people fall back in the same sins, out of which they have been recovered by repentance; and for instances of this, ye shall only ponder these two. One is (2 Chronicles 18), Jehosaphat joining in affinity with Ahab, for which he is reprov'd by a prophet (chapter 19:2), and his repentance is apparent in the reformation he fell about. And yet (chapter 20:35) he falls in the same sin in joining with Ahaziah, to make ships to go to Tarshish in Eziongeber, which were broken, for which he was also reprov'd, repented, and was pardoned. Another instance is that of Jonah, a man that fled from the presence of the Lord, when sent to Nineveh, and is brought to repentance for that sin in the belly of the fish (chapter 2). Yet he falls in the same sin (chapter 4:2), not in fleeing away from God, but in repining at His mercy, and, in his opinion, declaring it was needless to go to Nineveh, and justifying his former fleeing away: these are two clear instances of relapsing in sin after repentance and pardon for it. This I would not have abused. I may have occasion hereafter to speak to what prejudice relapsing in sin brings with it; as that it will bring former pardon in question, and under debate, and though a penitent may be pardoned, yet it is dangerous to board [jest] with sin, after God hath spoken peace to return to folly, and to proclaim that all the bitterness folk have found in sin is nothing. Only I cannot conceal the truth of God from any that may be under a temptation; that having repented such and such sins, they have relapsed in them, and therefore, as they question their repentance, so they think they are to expect no more pardon. Ye have it cleared from Scripture, that these are but temptations; that God would multiply to pardon upon repentance (Isaiah 55:7), and though folks have played the harlot with many lovers, and among hands have rued their wanderings, they may return again unto the Lord (Jeremiah 3:1). Now I have done with the first general head of this doctrine, concerning the remission of sin, to wit, the consideration of that which is pardoned.

I proceed to the second general question, and that is, anent the author of pardon, or who is it that pardons iniquity, even God. "There is forgiveness with thee," says the text, that is (as I expounded in the entry), "It's Thy property, in opposition to all pretenders – it's Thy property and prerogative, when both the law and the conscience have condemned, to pardon and forgive sin." This is a truth that was held fast in the Jewish Church, when it was most corrupt; therefore (Mark 2:7), when Christ pardoned the man, sick of the palsy, the scribes say, "Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?" And it is one of God's titles (Exodus 34:6,7), that He forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin: and He taketh it to Himself, as His prerogative, Isaiah 43:25, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions;" and Matthew 9:2, etc., Christ, in curing the palsy man, parallels the pardoning of his sins with the healing of his disease as proofs of His deity: showing that both were alike difficult, and proved Him to be God.

I must here clear a seeming difficulty, that is, that pardon of sin is attributed to others, both ministers and private persons. It's attributed to ministers, as John 20:23, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you; receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained;" but certainly it's God only who can loose a man from everlasting wrath due to him for sin, and it's the Word of God only that can declare whom God will pardon. Only (as Ambrose says well) ministers are judges in the matter of pardon; but without any absolute authority in that matter. And for clearing of this, ye would distinguish betwixt the external court in the Church, and the internal court in the conscience. In the external court in the Church, ministers have a power from Christ to remit scandals to scandalous persons upon their serious profession of

repentance; to take in a man that hath fallen in a scandalous sin upon the profession of repentance, and to remit the scandal. In the internal court of the conscience, ministers have a ministerial power upon scandalous sinners and their repentance, ministerially to declare, they are pardoned on their repentance; and they are walking according to their commission, “Whose sins they bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever they shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19, and 18:18). But ministers, *ex plenitudine potestatis* [from fulness of power] (as the Pope speaks) have not an absolute and unlimited power to pardon whom, and when, and as they will. They are but delegates, and must walk according to their commission in pardoning of sin, or rather pronouncing pardon of sin, neither have they power of pardoning sin upon conditions of their own devising, such as penances, pilgrimages, visiting of Rome in the year of jubilee, etc., where (to mark it in the by) the Papists’ method in this is preposterous: they first pardon, and then enjoin penance, and such things as Christ hath not prescribed; neither must they take money and dispense with repentance, a fruit of faith, upon which pardon is promised. This is but a cheat, to hold their kitchen reeking. Caesar Borgia, the son of Alexander the Sixth, when he had lost an hundred thousand crowns at the dice, passed it in a sport, saying, “Those are the sins of the Germans,” that is, they had been purchased for the remission of their sins. Again, it is attributed to private persons: and for private persons their pardoning of sin, the Scriptures speak clearly to it, as in that pattern of prayer, Matthew 6:12, “Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors;” so Ephesians 4:32, “Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you;” and Colossians 3:13, “Forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” But private persons’ forgiving of sins is the forgiving the injuries done by men’s sinning to them; rules anent which I may meet with ere I have done with this theme. But though a private person is bound to forgive injuries done against him, it is still with a reservation of God’s interest, and the sinner must account to God. Notwithstanding from all which (to resume) it’s clear, whatsoever hand man hath in forgiving sin, God is the principal creditor, whose law is violated, whose majesty is offended, whose justice must be satisfied, and therefore it’s His property and prerogative to forgive sins, and loose from the obligation to wrath that sin deserves.

In making use of this, I shall not digress to deal with Papists, who in receiving pardons from their priests, use not a judgment of discretion, whether the persons pardoning them be acting according to their instructions and according to their own principles; for if they did, they might be easily nonplussed. They put the power to give indulgences entirely in their Pope, and assert that their priests are commissioned by him to dispense them, but they can only have a human faith concerning that commission; for, beside that the Pope’s power to do so is upon many accounts questionable, when they ask, How we know the Scripture to be the word of God? we might ask them, How they know the Pope who must give these indulgences to be the Pope? That he is a Christian, and hath gotten baptism? For, according to their own principles, the Pope is no Pope except he be baptized. Now, they cannot certainly know their Pope is baptized, that being one of their grounds, that baptism is not administered except the intention of the priest go along. Now, they cannot be certain that the priest who baptized the present Pope had an intention to baptize him while he went about that action, therefore they cannot be certain of any pardon this present Pope shall give them, nor can they have anything but a human faith as to the pardon of their sins. But the judgment of God is visible upon them for not receiving the truth in love; God hath been provoked to give them up to strong delusions to believe lies. And (shall I add further?) it’s a plague and a snare to profane men that walk in the imagination of their own heart, adding drunkenness to thirst, that they have this woful shift: get them a priest, and let them have an absolution, and then they are as ready to take in a new swack of sin as ever they were; this is the woful cheat that follows their way.

If folk walk thus on a principle of conscience, they are to be pitied, but when profligate men run that way, they drive their carnal interest, and have a sleeping God to their conscience, under all their abominations.

But passing this, and leaving particular inferences till the afternoon, I shall give you these three words:

1. If God be the only pardoner of sin, they make a very blind block that pardon themselves for all their faults, that is, who can commit all sorts of iniquities and cast them over their thumb when they have done. Thou that dost so, shall know that God only is the pardoner of sin ere long, and that thy pardon will not stand.

2. It leaves a sad check on all them that satisfy themselves with the plaudits of the world. Why? They are good folk, cried up and commended of their neighbours; if they have done wrong, they will confess it, make reparation or restitution; but what is all that, if God pardon thee not, though thou shouldst get never so many to hug thee or assoil thee, so long as God, the only pardoner of iniquity, doth not assoil thee? And

3. It leaves a sad check also on them that care not to displease God to please men; and O! what snares to men are these, that give themselves to be pleasers of men, with displeasing of God. They make no bonds of any sins if they can please them they are obliged to. But thou that dost so will find thou hast made an ill bargain when the reckoning comes; for they cannot forgive thy sin when thou standest before God, neither wilt thou get men for thy intercessors. God only is the pardoner of iniquity, and therefore they make a very foolish bargain, who to please any, stand not to displease God.

[Continued in May 1920]

[October 1919]