

It is true, there are some sins so terrible that those who commit them become indeed sons of perdition. They become so far removed from the influence of light and from the spirit of glory, that even the Apostle of love, John, who loved to lie with his head upon the Savior's breast, has told us that for such it is not proper that we should pray. But these are the few. These are the ones who by their repeated acts of wickedness, have removed themselves entirely from all opportunity of atonement and of redemption. But we believe, as a people, that the great majority of God's children will find the way open before them by which they can regain the position that they have left in His heavenly home, and that without violating the laws of justice, without mitigating or setting aside the penalties that the Lord has decreed shall be visited upon those who displease Him. And it is proper that we should ask ourselves, how may this be done? Inasmuch as the best amongst us is continually sinning; inasmuch as all the sons and daughters of God are at times forgetful of their royal descent, oblivious of their heavenly and divine pedigree, and act as if they think that they have been always mortal, and that they always will remain mortal, subject to all the temptations of this life and prone to all the weaknesses of this existence; instead of remembering that, as sons and daughters of the great "I am," they should learn to love the things that are godly; that, as kings and queens, they should learn to love the things that are kingly, and to hate the things that are groveling and degrading in their nature. The Lord has declared, in language that cannot be mistaken, that forgiveness for sins can be secured by sinners in certain ways, and by these certain means only. He has not said that every one who utters with his lips words of supplication; that every one who declares with his organs of bodily speech that he is repentant, shall receive forgiveness; but only those who bring forth works meet for repentance. It is unto them that the hand of mercy shall be extended. It is unto them that the Lord will grant the priceless blessing of forgiveness.

By what means can we show unto the Lord that we are in the least worthy of that great boon? What are those works meet for repentance which the Lord seems to require at our hands as an evidence before Him of our sincerity? They may be summed up in many ways. But without seeking to sum them, if I read aright, the doctrines that He has preached, the lessons that He has taught, the counsels and instructions that He has given, certain conditions are necessary in order that any one amongst us may receive forgiveness for misdeeds.

First and foremost amongst those requirements, he must be willing to forgive others who have sinned unto him. And without going further, if that be not done, if this condition be not complied with, by the words of God that have been given unto us under many varying circumstances, the boon of forgiveness will be withheld from sinners in His sight. If you doubt that, take the words of Himself, when a man upon the earth. While talking with His disciples on one occasion, as they

were sitting at His feet, receiving instructions and asking certain questions as to the proper course of procedure under particular conditions, Peter said, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Jesus said unto him, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, until seventy times seven." And then, endeavoring to make clear unto His listeners, His full meaning by illustrations, He went further, and said:

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

I believe there are many lessons in these words of Christ's, as indeed are there in all Christ's words. Consider the circumstances under which these instructions were given. Until Christ came, the code commonly known as the law of Moses was observed among the Jews with more or less fidelity. And that law is oftentimes called the law of carnal commandments, inasmuch as the Lord found it necessary to give specific instructions unto His people, even as to the details of their dealings one with another. He laid down the principle, under that theocratic form of government which prevailed in the day of Moses, that if a man robbed his brother, such and such course should be taken with him; that if a man lied about his brother, such and such things should be done unto him; that if a man did not repent of his wicked deeds; that if he gave way to drunkenness, or to gluttony, or to uncleanness in person, such and such penalties, or punishment, or retribution should be heaped upon him; those penalties having in all cases been determined upon with the view of reforming the wicked-doer. And when Christ came, the Jews still lived under that law, to a certain extent. One provision of the law was still in force

among them—that which provided for strict and impartial retribution to be made in kind for all wrongs committed. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," was an adage among them. If a man robbed another, he must be made to restore in kind what he had taken, many fold; and then the one from whom he had stolen had certain claims upon him. If a man murdered another, the nearest relative of the murdered man had the right to take the slayer's life, unless the latter could reach one of the cities of refuge provided for that purpose. But the Lord sought to teach another doctrine. He said on many occasions that He came to supplant some of these provisions; and He taught unto them lessons of mercy, and gave unto them instructions that were materially different from those they were accustomed to receive from the teachers and preachers in their synagogues.

Under those conditions and circumstances, it is not at all surprising that Peter should marvel at this doctrine, and should ask of the Lord some definite limit as to the forgiveness to be meted out unto offenders. Therefore, said he unto Jesus, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" I know not what suggested the number seven unto him; but it came to his mind, perhaps, in remembrance of some pharasaical formula, and possibly he thought that that would be a very liberal allowance. Lord, shall I forgive my brother if he sin against me seven times? And the answer of the Great Master was, "Not seven times, Peter, but seventy times seven." A number great enough to show unto Peter that forgiveness must be infinite; that man must not set up a certain barrier beyond which he will not forgive.

But, you may say, does that not open the road, as it were, and give excuse unto sinners, that they may offend with impunity, because men against whom they offend have been required to forgive them? Leading up to that which the Lord said unto Peter, in answer to his question, was another piece of doctrine that Jesus had laid down. He said unto His disciples:

"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

What meant He by that? If a man's heart be filled with bitterness towards his brother, and the brother go unto him and take steps towards a perfect reconciliation, and strive to make good any injury that he has done and any wrong that he has committed, and in place of bitterness he implant within the heart of that man the feelings of love and of companionship and brotherhood; if he rescue him from that ungodly condition of hate to that divine state of forgiveness and of love, has not the one who brings about that change some claim to the title of being a temporary savior? Has he not won that brother from the path of error to the path of rectitude? Has he not brought him back again into the fold of companionship and love? Therefore, said the Savior, "go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." And I believe that meant, "and unto thee shall be given