

THE SAFEGUARDS OF FORGIVENESS

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“And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However...”
2 Samuel 12:13, 14.

“HOWEVER.” There was a qualification to the pardon granted to David. There is no need for me to enter into any of the details of his enormous sin. To make any excuse for it would be to become a partner in it. It was without excuse and if David, himself, were here with us, there is no one present who would so bitterly condemn him as he would condemn himself. He would be provoked to the utmost indignation by any attempt to offer an apology for the great transgression into which he fell, surrounded, as it were, by so many circumstances which tended to make it even worse than it otherwise might have been.

In reading this narrative, one cannot help being struck with the fact that when Nathan had brought home the sin to David—and the conscience of the monarch which had been sleeping for some months was awakened to a true sense of his guilt, pardon was at once granted to the sorrowing penitent. As soon as he said, “I have sinned against the Lord,” the same Prophet who had, by God’s Grace, brought him to conviction of sin, gave him the assurance of absolution—“The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.” Truly—

“Wonders of Grace to God belong.”

The pardoning of great sin is amazing, but the pardoning of great sin so rapidly—the forgiveness immediately following the confession—is among the things to be set down as worthy of special gratitude in the heart and special praise with the lips. One fears, however, lest, by the preaching up of the abounding mercy of God in suddenly putting away great sin, some might be led to think lightly of sin. It has been often raised as an objection to the full proclamation of the Grace of God that it tends to make men think that the escape from sin is very easy and, consequently, causes them to imagine that sin, itself, is a less deadly thing than it really is. Now, I will not deny that Antinomianism is natural to the human heart and, as there have been men who have turned the Grace of God into licentiousness in the past, so there will be, in the future, men who will make out of God’s mercy an argument in favor of their sin. Those who act thus are among the very worst of sinners, “whose damnation is just,” as Paul wrote concerning those who said, “Let us do evil, that good may come.” I have read that a spider will extract poison from the flower from which the bee extracts honey so, surely, from that very Truth of God from which a renewed heart extracts reasons for holiness, unregenerate men have been known to extract excuses for sin! If they do so, I can only say that they are “without excuse.” Some have actually caused the precious blood of Jesus Christ, Himself, to be to them a savor of death unto death by using the Doctrine of the Atonement as an excuse for their transgressions! If they do so, however, it certainly is not the fault of the Truth of God, nor the fault of the Infinite wisdom and prudence of God, for He has, in many remarkable ways, taken care to put safeguards around His free mercy. He does forgive and He will forgive, blessed be His holy name—and however men may pervert His mercy, He will not cease to bestow that mercy upon sinners! He will still continue His loving kindness, yet He has put safeguards around the Doctrine of forgiveness—and of the safeguards I am now going to speak.

And, first, I shall speak of *the safeguards which were provided in David’s case*. And then, secondly, *of those which are provided in our own case*. This will lend us to notice, in the third place, *God’s grand aim with us and what other great endeavor should be in connection with that aim*.

I. First, then, let us notice THE SAFEGUARDS THAT WERE PUT AROUND DAVID'S CASE, lest David, or anyone else, should think that because sin was readily forgiven, it was in itself a little thing.

For, notice, first, that *David was made to see his sin in its true light before it was forgiven*. Nathan did not go to him and say, "David, you have committed a much greater wrong than you have supposed. You have disgraced your character and you have brought dishonor upon the God you love—but you are forgiven." No, he uttered a parable which set David's own character before him as being of the very base and meanest kind. The description of the traveler who came to the rich man, who then went and took the one ewe lamb from the poor man with which to make a feast for the traveler, was well conceived. It was a trap in which David was cleverly caught and made to see himself, though he had not the slightest idea, at the moment, that he was seeing himself at all. But when Nathan said to him, "You are the man," he was made to feel that he was a mean wretch who deserved to be condemned to death. His indignation was awakened against himself and against his own actions—and thus the Lord took care that David should not receive pardon till he had realized the greatness of his sin! This would be a strong check to him in the future, keeping him from ever falling into that sin again.

Moreover, *he was made to condemn himself*. Before Nathan said to David, "You shall not die," the king had pronounced sentence upon himself, for he had said, concerning the man described in the parable, "As the Lord lives, the man that has done this thing shall surely die," not knowing that it was himself whom he was condemning! But he pronounced his own sentence—and after that he was forgiven. Now, dear Friends, this is just what the Lord does with sinners before He pardons them! First, He makes them see their sin. Some of us remember well when that terrible spectacle haunted us day and night. We had long known that we had sinned, but we had no idea that sin was such a monstrous, horrible thing as we then saw it to be. We had read of strange monsters of the deep, hideous and terrible creatures, but when we saw sin, we beheld something more frightful and loathsome than our worst dreams had ever brought before our minds! Then we condemned ourselves. Well do I remember when I signed my own death warrant—had the Lord then threatened to strike me dead upon the spot, I could not, even if He had given me leave to plead with Him—have urged any reason why He should not destroy me! I have a thousand times wondered that my soul was not sent to Hell! At night I have feared that I should be there before the morning light and, in the daytime, I have often trembled lest, before the night should come, I should find myself in Hell. Having thus condemned myself, then it was that God forgave me—and I do not believe that any sinner is ever forgiven until he consents, in his soul, to the Justice of God if he should never be forgiven. He must know that he is a sinner and that sin is an exceedingly evil and bitter thing, for which he deserves to be sent to Hell! And when he reaches that point, then pardon will come to him. O dear Brothers and Sister, do you not see what a blessed check this is upon that man? Now, when he receives forgiveness, he receives it as one who knows what that forgiveness covers, and who also knows the condemnation from which that pardon has delivered him!

There was, in David's case, the further safeguard that *he was made to feel the majesty of the Divine Word*. When Nathan came to David as God's representative, he spoke to him a simple parable to which a child might listen with interest. But there was great majesty in it, for it unveiled the secrets of the guilty monarch's heart. It made him see himself as he appeared in the clear, translucent light of Heaven—and not as he might have represented himself in a more favorable light. Read the whole page and note how Nathan made the truth lash him to the quick—"Thus says the Lord God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul; and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto you such and such things. Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight. You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house; because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife."

Nathan does not spare him! Every word is like a sharp sword piercing him to the heart. David is made to feel that the Word of God can search out his most secret things and make him see himself in his true character, disguise himself as he may! And then, when he had confessed his sin, the same stern Prophet who had spoken so severely, said to him, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." Oh, how welcome that message must have been to David! How soft and sweet those sounds must have been to his ears after the harsher notes to which he had listened—just as we have sometimes heard the martial music that has thrilled and startled us and then there has come a soft strain of gentle music,

or else a brief season of welcome silence by which our ears have been rested and refreshed. So was it when Nathan turned from condemnation to comfort and said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.” This would henceforth always be a check to David, for he would feel that if he sinned, that Word of God would again find him out—that Word which had first stricken him to the dust by its severity—and then had won his heart’s love by its tenderness.

A fourth safeguard was this—*David was made to see the greatness of his sin by the effect which it produced upon others.* Nathan said to David, “By this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.” As you read some of his Psalms, you can see that David knew that the Lord’s enemies did blaspheme because of his sin. The party that loved the Lord was strong at court just then and the king was the patron and head of that party—but there were men of Belial who were the ungodly party in the land. And when they caught the king, himself, tripping thus, I guarantee you that they talked of it at every street corner. It was a sad topic for the faithful ones to speak of and the saints of God, when they met together, must have wept, for they could make no excuse for the king’s crime—and they must have felt that a very deadly stab had been given to the cause of truth and righteousness. David was made to realize all that and it must have helped to keep him from sinning again in such a fashion because he loved the cause of God, and the house of God, and the servants of God—and there had been a period, in his past life, when he would not have believed that it were possible for him to be the means of breaking down the walls of Zion! When he had been forgiven, his first anxiety was that God would undo the mischief which his sin had worked and, therefore, he prayed to the Lord, “Do good in Your good pleasure unto Zion: build You the walls of Jerusalem.”

In addition to these safeguards, there is that, “however,” which I have included in our text. I call the serious attention of every carelessly-walking Christian here to that, “however.” How many times my eyes have rested upon that word and it has chastened my sins, and driven me to my God! David was forgiven, but from that day the sword never departed from his house. God let him know that although he was pardoned, some of the results of his sin still remained. The guilt of it was gone, as Nathan said, “The Lord has put away your sin,” but the evil effect of it was still manifest—and that must be dealt with by the Lord’s chastising rod. What a sad change came over David’s life from this time! Recall the name of Tamar, Amnon and Absalom, and think how degraded his own family had become. Then, one and another rebelled against him—enemies within his kingdom and without sought to overthrow him and, after his sin in numbering the people, God’s own angel was sent to smite the nation with a terrible pestilence. The earlier part of David’s life was full of music and dancing—the latter part had far more of mourning and lamentation in it. After his great fall, he had to go softly all the rest of his days and his dying testimony, though full of faith, was marred by the regret, “although my house is not so with God.”

He was a man so highly favored of God and so much after God’s own heart in many ways, that if he could have been without the rod, God would have spared him. If this sin of his could have been winked at and he could have been delivered from its consequences without chastisement, God would have delivered him. But it was not possible. God does not give such exemption as that to any of His children and He did not give it to David. That warm heart of His which in many respects was so excellent, was apt, from its very fervor of affection, to crave too much of the love of the creature. So David had to be chastised again and again. God did not afflict him willingly—He did it because it was for his good. This folly in the heart of His child could not be driven out by anything but the rod and, therefore, the rod he must have. He was a grand man, one in whom the Grace of God shone very conspicuously, but he was a man of like passions with ourselves and we have reason to thank God that he was—because his experience becomes all the more instructive to us from the fact that while it teaches us that God can and will forgive us if we repent of our great and gross sins, yet it also teaches us that sin is an evil and a bitter thing and that, though the guilt of it may be removed, the evil consequences of it will cling to us and be a subject of sorrow to us till God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.

II. Now, secondly, I want to point out to you THE SAFEGUARDS IN OUR OWN CASE. I cannot say that the safeguards are the same in every case because the experience of God’s children vary considerably.

In the case of some of us, when God’s forgiveness came to us, we could not think lightly of sin, because, *for a long time before we found mercy, we had been under a terrible sense of guilt.* I am not speaking of all Christians, but there are some of us who were for weeks, or months, or even years, waiting in outer darkness before the Gate of Mercy was opened to us. I will not deny that it was our unbelief in Christ that kept us there, but, at the same time, I see how God, in His wise Providence, overruled even that to make us ever afterwards hate sin as burnt children dread the fire. Oh, what burns

of that sort I had! They seemed as if they would never heal, the fire had gone so deep. I felt that I could sympathize with Job when he said, “My soul chooses strangling, and death rather than my life,” for I feared that no mercy could ever come to me. I have blessed God a thousand times that I was so long in finding Christ because through that very experience I have been the better qualified to speak to others who are in a similar condition. John Bunyan was for years tossed about with inward tumults through a deep sense of sin. And when, at last, at the sight of the Cross, the great burden rolled off his back and disappeared in the sepulcher of Christ, he did not think sin a little thing! It had been such a dreadful burden to him for so many years that he ever afterwards abhorred it and adored the wondrous love which had forever delivered him from its power. With some persons there is a check which operates throughout the rest of their lives as the result of that long period of depression of spirit and despair of soul which preceded the hour of light and joy. God kept us out in the cold so long in order that, ever afterwards, we might know what it was like and not want to go outside again. He made us feel the aching of the hungry belly so that we might not again wander into the far country and long to feed from the sinner’s trough. After our past experience there, our Father’s arms about our neck became all the more precious to us and there was the less likelihood that we should ever go back to that state of sin and sorrow from which we had escaped!

I say again that this is true only of some—it is not necessary for all, and it is only a few of God’s servants who have passed through such an experience as that. But I think I may say that all who receive God’s mercy have this safeguard, that *for a greater or less period, they have been made to feel the death-swoon of sin*. It may last but a few minutes, but, before Divine Mercy comes to the heart, there is usually a striking of the soul with the chill horror of despair and there is also a driving into the very marrow of the soul that sharp two-edged sword of God which kills all carnal confidence. In the case of persons who are suddenly brought into the life and light of full salvation, their sight of sin in its horror is but momentary. They hang over the precipice and feel as if they were gone, but, at that very instant, the Divine Hand is stretched out to remove them. The sentence of death must be passed upon all men because all have sinned—we have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we may learn not to trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. That glimpse of the open jaws of Hell, though it is but for an instant—that sight of the descending axe of Divine Vengeance and of our own neck laid upon the block is enough to make us, even in a moment, pass through a process which divorces us forever from the love of sin, makes us feel that it is a deadly and damning thing and causes us to cry unto God to deliver us from it! That sense of sin is, I take it, a part of the safeguard which God provides for each forgiven man to prevent him from drawing inferences of licentiousness from God’s abundant mercy to him.

But there is a better safeguard than that. *The fact that Jesus Christ is our Sacrifice and Savior ought to prevent us from ever going into sin again*. You may have heard of the king who made a law that any person committing a certain crime in his country should have both his eyes plucked out. It happened that the very first criminal brought before him, under that law, was his own son whose guilt was clearly brought home to him. His father was the judge and there remained nothing for him to do but to pronounce upon his son the sentence that he should have both his eyes torn out. But, rigid as he was as a law-giver, such was the father’s tenderness of heart that he bade the officer first pluck out one of his son’s eyes and then take out one of his own. I should think that that father’s empty eye socket would always remind his son of the crime which he had committed—and eventually prevent him from ever offending in that way again. Surely, that crime could never be pleasant to him after it had been so painful to his father! Believer, look at your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and say to Him, “What are these wounds in Your hands, dear Lord? What are those scars on Your feet, and what is that deep gash in Your side which leads to Your very heart?” “These,” He says, “are the wounds caused by your sins, for I was wounded for your transgressions, I was bruised for your iniquities—the chastisement of your peace was upon Me, and with My stripes you are healed.”

O my Brothers and Sisters, the next time you are tempted to sin, let the open wounds of Jesus appeal to you and cause you to say, “I cannot crucify my Lord afresh and put Him to open shame by again sinning against Him.” This will help to hold you back when the tempter draws near you. The “cords of a man” and the “bands of love” will draw you the other way much more forcibly and you will say, with Joseph, “How, then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” You may also say, “It is true that sin has not slain me, but it has slain my Substitute. It is true that sin has not cast me into Hell, yet it brought Hell upon my Substitute. It is true that the wrath of God passed by me, but it fell upon my Well-Beloved, the Bridegroom of my heart, who, in Infinite mercy, bore it all for my sake.” The remembrance of this fact

will be a most blessed safeguard to hold you back from sin—pardon is free to you, but it cost Him His all and, because of what it cost Him, you feel that you must not sin again.

Remember also that great as the Grace of God is in pardoning sin, *He gives, with pardon, other mercies which are equally great, namely, repentance and renewal of heart.* Wherever the forgiveness of sin comes, there comes with it a turning from sin, a leaving of sin, a fresh view of sin, a different estimate of it. And the heart that once had sought its own pleasure, now seeks God's pleasure! And the man who formerly loved carnal delights is moved to long after heavenly delights from the very moment of his forgiveness. I speak advisedly when I say that the Doctrine of "believe and live" would be a very dangerous one if it were not accompanied by the Doctrine of regeneration. If God did not change the nature of the forgiven sinner, it would be a dangerous thing to give him free forgiveness—but when the two things go together, they counteract any evil which might have sprung out of either the one or the other by itself—and all good and no evil can come from them when they are preached in their due connection. "Believe and live," is true. But "You must be born again," is equally true. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved," is Apostolic Doctrine, but so is this, "Repent you, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Change of heart accompanies the forgiveness of sin—and wherever that change of heart is given, there springs up in the renewed soul a deep sense of gratitude to God. "How much I owe!" says the renewed man. "How graciously the love of God has been manifested in my case! What great sin He has forgiven! What enormous transgressions He has blotted out. Now I cannot help loving Him—oh, that I loved Him even more!" And this gratitude becomes in itself a very powerful means of checking the soul in any impulse that it has towards sin—and an equally forceful incentive in driving it onward towards righteousness, "for the love of Christ constrains us." It does constrain us! We do not say that it *ought* to do so, as some do when they misquote the text. Its constraining power draws us onward and upward towards our Lord!

These things put together, by the power of God's most blessed Spirit, lead the renewed man into a holy cautiousness and great watchfulness of soul. I wish I could say that I see as much of this spirit in all professors as I would like to see. But, alas, Brothers and Sisters, I do not! Sin, the very smallest sin—if there can be a small sin—is a great evil and we ought to be deeply and solemnly anxious that even the least deviation from the righteousness of God should not be found in us. If any of you were told serpents which had escaped from their den, were hiding somewhere in your house—perhaps near your bed, or in a cupboard or bookcase—I know that when you reached your house tonight, you would look very carefully on the doorstep and in the hall, to see whether there was a young viper there. You would turn up the doormats, in case there might be one concealed there! But you would not be satisfied until you had thoroughly searched the house from top to bottom, in order that those deadly snakes might all be captured and destroyed! This is just what you ought to do with yourselves, Brethren, for the snakes are there! In every part of your nature, these venomous creatures have been hatched and they have multiplied beyond all calculation. Sins of all shapes and sizes lurk within you! And if God's Grace does not keep you watchful—before you are aware, you may be painfully conscious of their deadly power!

There is this fact that you must have often noticed—I feel sure that *whether you are aware of the sin itself, or not, you will soon have to be aware of the consequences of it.* You cannot fall into any sin without losing, in some measure, the sweetness of your fellowship with God. I do not need to look out of my window in order to know that there are clouds across the sky. I can tell that the clouds have come, for the light is dim in the room where I am reading. So, I may not be conscious that I have fallen into sin, but the very dimness of the light of God's Presence becomes the indicator to my soul that it is so. Perhaps you have had a prosperous day in business and the friends you have met with have all been very kind and cheerful, and nothing has happened during the day to distress you. Yet when you get home, you feel heavy and dull, and you say to yourself, "Why is this?" It is simply that God has been causing you to see that the sweetness of the creature cannot make up for the lack of the Presence of the Creator. If God were to give you all earthly good and yet took His Presence from you—which He will do if sin is within you, and unrepented of—the loss of His Presence would be a greater loss than the loss of the whole world, or even of Heaven itself! If you are in the habit of walking with God—and I trust that many of you are—you will take note of the least stain of sin. You have, perhaps, seen a handkerchief that looked perfectly white. But if there has been a snowfall and you have laid that handkerchief down upon the snow, you have seen its defilement in contrast with the whiteness of the snow! So, if you live near to God, you will have a very high standard of what you ought to be—and you will see a great deal more sin in yourself than you ever used to see. The fact of your living near to God will never lead you into presumption, nor cause you to think lightly of sin, but it will make

what you used to call little things to assume hideous proportions and you will say to yourself, “What a sin it was that I, who have spoken face to face with God, should make that silly remark to my neighbor, a remark that could not minister edification to anybody—that I, who have had power with God in prayer, should be put out of temper by a poor silly maid, or be made to forget myself altogether by some trivial temptation which I ought to have been able to master, and could have mastered if I had given it the least thought!” You may rest quite certain that if God honors any man in public, He takes him aside privately and flogs him well, otherwise he would get elevated and proud, and God will not have that! He will not have Big-Self to serve Him—He will take him down from his high pinnacle and grind him to powder, so as to get all the pride out of him!”

III. The last point, on which I can only speak briefly, is this. ALL THIS INDICATES WHAT GOD’S GREAT AIM IS AND WHAT OURS OUGHT TO BE.

God’s aim is not merely to forgive us and to free us from the penalty of sin, but *to take sin out of us and get rid of it altogether*. The Lord might have forgiven David and yet not have used the rod upon him as He did. That child might not have died, but might have grown up to be David’s comfort and joy. And Absalom might not have turned out such a scapegrace, but might have been his father’s best helper. God might have arranged matters so, but He did not see fit to do it. He seems to say, “My dear child, David, I love you so well that, while I fully forgive you, I will take such measures with you as will effectually prevent you from ever falling into that sin again. I will so deal with you that should you ever have such a temptation as this again, your tendency to that sin shall be very decidedly checked.” Long before his sin with Bathsheba, there were various indications as to David’s special liability to temptation. That sin only threw out upon the surface the evil that was always within him! And now God, having made him see that the deadly cancer is there, begins to use the knife to cut it out of him. God’s business with you, if you are His child, is to get rid of the sin that is within you—to purge you not merely with blood and with hyssop, but with fire, till He has made your nature very different from what it now is.

Our aim should be in conformity with God’s aim, that is to seek to get rid of sin altogether. You have first to realize what your sin really is. It may be that, this day, you have lived a blameless life so far as it can be seen of men, but what about your thoughts? You have never committed adultery as David did, but how many adulteries have you committed in your heart? You were never actually a murderer—God forbid that you ever should be! But when your evil passions have risen, how many times have you been a murderer in the sight of God? We are not merely to imagine that if we bring our outward moral conduct into conformity with the will of God, we are all right—we are also to look within. Every thought of evil is sin! A photographer will tell you that the object presented to the camera leaves an impression upon it even though the exposure of the sensitive plate was only for the fraction of a moment. Notice, Brothers and Sisters, whenever sin is brought before your mind even in imagination, whether it is attractive to you or not. I hope that you catch yourself saying, “O my God, how is it that I can think of such a thing with any degree of tolerance?” You feel that you would not commit that sin—you would rather die than commit it—yet you are not as displeased as you ought to be at even the thought of it. Perhaps you almost wish that you might do this evil thing. If so, that shows which way your nature still gravitates—to the old nature which is so corrupt that it stinks! And when it stinks most in your nostrils, it is, perhaps, best for you, for then it drives you away from being proud of it and takes you to that dear Savior in whom alone your life can ever be found!

Brothers and Sisters, in all your spiritual engagements, note how far your heart is really in them. Do not be content if you can say, “I went to the Tabernacle last Thursday night.” Did you really worship there in spirit and in truth? Did you profit by the Word read and preached? Do not be satisfied if you can say, “I read a chapter in the Bible and offered prayer to God this morning.” What is the use of all this if your heart was not in the exercise? “Rend your hearts, and not your garments,” is a message which would sometimes be appropriate to you. What we have to look at is how near the soul gets to God, and how far it gains the mastery over sin. If it is a question of the forgiveness of our sin for the sake of Him who hung upon the Cross, blessed be His name, we have that and we have it perfectly in Him! If it is a question of our righteousness in the sight of God, so far as the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is concerned, that also is ours, as everything else that is His is ours! But as to the cleansing of the heart, the purging of all secret places, the driving out of every lurking sin and the getting rid of every imagination and wish and desire that is contrary to God, this has to be battled for, through faith in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Eternal Spirit! And the complete victory has yet to be

gained. We must still continue to cry with Paul, “Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But with him we can also say, “Thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are not to shut our eyes and fancy that the war is over, that all our spiritual enemies are slain—but we are to press onward to the end! Perhaps, even at the very end, we may have a stern fight with fierce temptations, as John Knox and many others have had, but, in the name of the Lord, we will destroy them! In any case, we must not give way to sin. We dare not let sin have dominion over us. We must strive and struggle against it and we shall do so, for He who has pardoned us will also sanctify us. He who has delivered us from death by sin will also deliver us from the death of sin and will present us to Himself “a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

Brothers and Sisters, do not let me, for a moment, take away from you the joy of perfect pardon which is already yours if you have believed in Jesus Christ. Your sins, which were many, are all forgiven. Let no doubt upon that point come into your mind! Poor troubled Sinner, do not be distressed as though you could not find immediate pardon through Jesus Christ, for you can. If you believe in Him, your sins are forgiven you for His sake. But I am sure that if you are in a right state of heart, you do not need to have pardon and yet be allowed to live in sin. You could not be content, even if the Lord were to forgive you all your sins, if He did not also change your nature and deliver you from the power of sin. That these two things are to be had in Jesus Christ, let us firmly believe—and for the realization of these two things, let us earnestly pray and thrive! And may God graciously give them to us all, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: HOSEA 14.

Verse 1. *O Israel, return unto the LORD your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity.* Come back, poor wanderer! My Brother or my Sister, if your heart has grown cold toward your Lord and Master, return to Him this very hour! This message comes from God, Himself, through His servant the Prophet, “O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity.”

2. *Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.* As if He feared that we could not find suitable words to speak to Him, He puts the right words into our mouths! Our Heavenly Father is so anxious to bring back His children when they wander from Him that He actually makes the prayer with which they may come back to Him—“Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render to You the praise which is Your due, which shall come from our hearts, and which our lips shall express.” If there are any of you here who have grieved your Heavenly Father by growing cold at heart, I do trust that the spirit of God will sweetly draw you back to your old standing and to something higher and nearer to God than even that was!

3. *Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, you are our gods. For in You the fatherless finds mercy.* If you expect the Lord to smile upon you, you must have done with all your idols! You must put away all your false confidences and those other sinful things in which you have found even a little joy, and you must come back to your Father, throwing away those rivals which have been set up in your heart and asking Him to give you Grace to live henceforth for Him alone.

4. *I will heal their backsliding.* “Nobody else can do it, but I can, and I will. I will not chide them anymore, I will not keep them at a distance from Me as unworthy to draw near to Me, but, ‘I will heal their backslidings.’”

4. *I will love them freely.* That is a grand sentence! God could not love us anyway else, for what price could you and I bring with which to purchase His love? And if His love were not free, it could never come to such unworthy ones as we are—“I will love them freely.”

4, 5. *For My anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel.* You know that in the East the dew is a great fertilizer, even more so than it is here. When a plot of ground is all browned by the hot sun, the dew makes it green and fruitful again. So God says, “I will be as the dew unto Israel.”

5. *He shall grow as the lily.* That is, upwards, bearing his flowers as near Heaven as he can—not groveling as he once did. He shall grow rapidly, as the daffodil lily does, which seems to start up, in the East, after a shower of rain and

come to maturity at once! Lord, grant that we may bring forth lilies of Grace all of a sudden! May there be in us the beauty of holy Christian love which shall come all at once! “He shall grow as the lily.”

5. *And cast forth his root as Lebanon.* There will be rapid growth, but sure growth. The lily has frail beauty, but Lebanon has the permanent lasting cedar—and God can make the graces of His people to be as enduring as they are beautiful!

6, 7. *His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return.* His children, who were led into mischief by bad example, shall be drawn back again.

7-9. *They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From Me is your fruit found. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? Prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them but the transgressors shall fall therein.*

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

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