

You will observe that the text presents us with what, at first sight, seems to be a strange connection, linking the forgiveness with the fear of God. It tells us that there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared. It would appear to us much more natural that it should have associated love with forgiveness, and told us that there is forgiveness with God that He may be loved. But when we look a little more closely at the announcement we can hardly fail to discern that the connection is well-founded, for the divine forgiveness proceeds upon grounds that make just as direct and as strong an appeal to the fear that is implanted as to the love that has a place in our bosoms. In truth, when we come to examine the announcement more carefully, we find ourselves carried forward to a fuller view of the Gospel economy, to a more appreciating understanding of God's plan of salvation, to a more just conception of the nature of forgiveness, as well as of the grounds upon which it is extended to the guilty—conducted in fact to such a view of the nature and character of Him who holds out for our acceptance the vast boon of forgiveness as tends most powerfully to evoke our fear as well as our love; for, in the very act in which He repeals the sentence of guilt that is recorded against us, in the very act in which, approaching us more closely, in the outgoings of His love, He restores us to His favor and fellowship, He is seen to be as holy and just as He is compassionate and forgiving. We must never forget that the act of which we are speaking proceeds upon the ground of justice as well as of mercy; it is a purchased blessing—the blood of Jesus Christ, our adorable Redeemer, was shed to provide it for us. And so, we are told that we are justified, that is, forgiven and restored to the divine favor, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—that we have redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness, cancelling the record of our guilt, erasing the sentence of our condemnation, putting us in the irrevocable possession of the divine benediction, opening to us the gates of glory, comes to us then, but we must not forget that it comes to us in all the grandeur and glory of a present and inalienable possession through the channel of a Saviour's blood, and a Saviour's righteousness. Had there been no divine interposition in our favor, had we been left to ourselves, abandoned to our own resources, our hearts never would have felt the joy of its announcement, our lives never would have been sweetened by the consciousness of its enjoyment, nor our last hours cheered by the assurance of its possession. To appease the wrath and satisfy the justice of Him whose law we cannot but feel in the deep consciousness of our bosoms we have broken times and ways without number. It lies far beyond the reach of our possible achievements. To win our way to the divine forgiveness lies far beyond the measure of our strength, for the way is beset with obstacles that it is impossible for us to remove. But what we could not do, Jesus, our Goel—our Kinsman-Redeemer—has done for us. Is sin an evil of such magnitude that it cannot be allowed to go unpunished? Come with me, to the cross, by brethren, and let us try to find an answer to this question. Is the justice of God, is the law of God in which His justice finds a visible embodiment—are these so rigid—so inflexible in their demands that they will never give way in the least iota of their claims? Come with me, I say again, to the cross, and let us try to find an answer to this question also. And now that we are gathered together under the shadow of Calvary, and are witnesses of the mysterious spectacle the cross presents, let me ask you, Who is He who hangs in bleeding agony upon that accursed tree? It is God's eternal Son, the co-equal and co-eternal partner of His ever-lasting throne. How came He to be there and in that condition, the pure and spotless one, in whom the God of this world had no part, and in whose lips there was no guile? It was love to us that brought Him there, and placed Him in that condition. Far away back in a past eternity, ere the foundations of the earth were laid, or man had a place on its surface, His love was fixed upon us, and in the exceeding greatness of the love He bore us from eternity, He is now there, our elder brother, our Kinsman-Redeemer, bearing our guilt, and paying its penalty—executing the task that in the counsels of eternity He undertook to accomplish,—effecting the work of our redemption. If any where sin could have been overlooked, if any where the justice of God could have abated its claims, or the law of God withdrawn its demands, it surely must have been when the Saviour was led to Calvary, when He who was the Father's only-begotten Son, stood before Him, on His shoulders bearing our iniquities, and ready to die for us. When Abraham stretched forth his hand to take the knife to slay his son, the Almighty spared him and by an angel sent him the welcome message, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad," but there is no sparing for His own Son. No Heavenly messenger is sent to tell Him that His prayer has been heard, and that the cup of suffering is to pass from Him. That cup He must drink to the very dregs. It was not that the Father did not love His Son. O no, He loved Him with a love of which we can form no adequate conception, and perhaps never more than at that moment when that Son stood forth, ready to expiate our guilt by the shedding of His blood. It was that He loved the world yet

more, even the world in its guilty and perishing condition. When the question was to be determined whether our fallen race should be left to perish, or the Son of His love should die, He did not spare even Him, but rather than that we should be left to perish, delivered Him up for us all. And now, in the light that streams down upon us from the cross, how vividly does every attitude of the divine nature stand out to our view. What an overwhelming demonstration is laid before us of the justice of the divine character as well as of the holiness of the divine nature, of the evil of sin, as well as of the abhorrence with which God regards it. If we look around us; if we take but a passing survey of the misery and wretchedness that everywhere strows the paths of human life; if we extend our survey for a moment into the unseen and invisible, and take a glance at the yet deeper misery and wretchedness that throws an endless gloom over that place where God for ever forgets to be gracious—if, rising from such a survey, we recall to our remembrance that sin is the one prolific source of all the unutterable woe that has disclosed itself to our view, we cannot but be penetrated by a profound sense of the demerit of it. And yet the feeling must become more profound still when we look to Calvary. There we see, as we can see no where else, what an accursed thing sin is, if no blood can expiate its guilt, no death procure its pardon, but the blood, the death of Him who was God manifest in the flesh. There we see as we see no where else, that sin is that abominable thing that God hates, and learn as we learn no where else, to stand in awe of Him who, in the sacrifice that was offered there, gives an exceedingly impressive confirmation of the announcement of His word that He will by no means clear the guilty. Thus it is that standing at the foot of the cross, we learn that God is faithful and just, as well as compassionate and loving, as inflexible in the purpose to punish as He is unfailling in the readiness to pardon the guilty, in a world just whilst He justifies the ungodly. Thus it is that standing at the foot of the cross, and surrounded by scenes more appalling than the thunders that rolled over Sinai of old, and the lightnings that played around its summit, we find ourselves conducted to the fullest recognition of the announcement of the text that there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared—regarded with a holy reverential, restraining fear.

We have dwelt at all the greater length upon the connection that justly and properly exists between the forgiveness and the fear of God, because we regard it as a subject of vast practical importance—We are convinced that no greater hindrance to an earnest seeking after, and a diligent pursuit of the way of life exists than the loose and unscriptural views of the divine nature and character that are so widely prevalent, and that are finding, I fear very much, an extensive currency in the theology of our times, and the preaching of our pulpits. It is true that the mercy of God cannot be too highly magnified, but it is also true that it may be grossly perverted, that such views of it may be entertained as may reflect the highest dishonor on the divine character, and prove most injurious to the souls of men. If we imagine that God is too merciful to punish the guilty, that sin as we may, it will in the end be well with us—if we do what is essentially the same—if we live in fancied security, in the vain supposition that we have little or nothing to fear—that whatever may be the tenor of our lives, mercy will at last find us out, and make it all right for us—in indulging in such an imagination, we may fancy that we are honoring God, but we are really reflecting the highest dishonor upon His name, making Him in truth the greatest patron of sin in the universe. But this is not all. In indulging in such an imagination, we are doing the greatest possible injury to ourselves. We are cherishing a false security and a false peace. We are shutting our eyes to our true character and condition, imagining that we are rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, whilst all the while we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. It is to be regretted that there is much in the current theology and preaching of our times that lends encouragement to so delusive an imagination. The love of God is so prominently presented that His justice is kept out of sight, His goodness and compassion so conspicuously exhibited that His hatred of sin is concealed from the view, the claims of His law, and the threatenings of His word so little insisted upon that the penalty of transgression is seldom urged, the depravity of our nature, and the demerit of sin either so thoroughly ignored or so imperfectly represented that the need of deliverance is hardly ever felt. Thus it is that sinners, instead of being stirred up to a startling apprehension of the peril of their condition are lulled into a fatal security. Thus it is that, whilst standing on the very edge of a lost eternity, they are encouraged to indulge in the vain expectation of a blessed hereafter. Such persons demand more faithful treatment. The Gospel should be preached to them fully and truthfully. In particular, their guilt and the danger that accompanies it should be fully, clearly set before them, and if happily their eyes are opened to see the peril of their condition, they should be conducted to the cross, urged to look to Him who there became a sin-offering for them, and to see in His blood shed there the expiation of their guilt, and the ground of forgiveness. And if happily, they have gone to the cross and gathered up the blessings that there only are to be found, they should be encouraged to pay frequent visits to the same hallowed spot ever after. For as there only can they find shelter from the wrath of the Almighty, there only can they find strength for His service—strength in the fear and love of a true Jehovah, the God of their salvation, which blended and combined into a mutually co-operating force will mightily invigorate them for the journey that lies before them, and carry them onward with growing ardour, till they find themselves before the eternal throne, and learn to know better than ever, as they mingle with the redeemed, cast their crowns before the throne, and worship Him who sitteth thereon, that there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared.