

Essay II.

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? Know you not, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin (Romans 6:1-7).

Looking at Romans 6:1, I believe that translators and commentators alike have generally mistaken the meaning of the apostle. Our version (and all the others agree with it) appears to suppose that the apostle is meeting an objection that might naturally be made, to the moral tendency of his doctrine. He has just given a magnificent view of the riches of divine grace, and he supposes that someone might say, "But surely this theology leads to indulgence in sin? If our own merit has nothing to do with our forgiveness, why not go our merry way relying simply on the merits of Christ?" Doubtless, this is an important point in Christian theology, but if we look closely at the answer which is contained in the following six verses, we shall, I think, come to a different conclusion. We shall see that the apostle meant something different in the first verse, than that which our version has attributed to him.

The moral tendency of the doctrine of grace would have been his theme, if he had intended to answer the objection that is supposed. But, instead of this, we find in these verses a direct and explicit assertion of the substitution of Christ in the place of the guilty, and of their virtual participation (in consequence of this substitution) in all that he has done, or is doing, as their representative. Allow me to give a translation, perhaps a little free, but one I am sure can be well defended, of the verses that follow:

Not so: how shall we who have already died under the condemnation of sin, continue under it, now that we are restored to life? (And we have in truth virtually both suffered death, and been restored to life,) for, do you not know, that as many of us as were baptized into the doctrine of Christ Jesus, were baptized into the doctrine that he died as the representative of sinners? We were thus virtually buried with him according to our baptismal acknowledgment of the nature of his death; and then as Christ was raised from the dead by the power of the Father, we also walk in a life newly bestowed. For if we have been connected with him by being ranked under his death (or by virtual participation in his death) we shall also be ranked

under his resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man was crucified in him as our representative, so that that part of us which was subject to condemnation, has already suffered it, and thus we continue no longer under condemnation, for he who has suffered the penalty of death, has exhausted the condemnation (Romans 6:2-7).

These verses offer absolutely no solution, for the difficulty supposed to be stated in the first verse. Their single object is to show that condemnation is perfectly exhausted and finished by the representative sacrifice of Christ. One would be led to infer from this, that the question in the first verse refers not to the principle of sin, but to the continuing in a state of condemnation, which gives to hamartia the same significance in this passage, which it evidently bears throughout the preceding chapter. And so I am convinced the true reading is Shall we continue not in sin but in a state of condemnation? Yet how is this to be reconciled with the last clause in the question, "that grace may abound?" I think that both clauses have been wrongly translated. Observe that the word here translated "abound" is not pleonazo but perisseuo. This is of importance, as I hope to prove to you.

In the preceding chapter, the apostle had been explaining the nature of the analogy between Christ and Adam, as the representative heads of their respective families. He had been speaking of the universality of the sentence of death which has fallen upon the descendants of Adam, in consequence of their federal connection with him, as a parallel to the universal restoration that is derived through Christ. Here then was one great restoration, opposed to one great forfeiture, both of them occurring independently of the deserving of those who were the subjects of them. But then, in Romans 5:20, the apostle says that a change was produced on this state of things by the introduction of the principle of law into the world. When men learned that they were bound to fulfill certain duties in the various relations in which they stood towards God, and towards man, they found that they sometimes sinned against these duties, and their consciences condemned them. They realized they had forfeited their own innocence, independent altogether of that original forfeiture that fell on the whole race, as a consequence of Adam's sin.

Thus, by the introduction of law, instead of there being one crime extending over all, there followed as many crimes as there were individuals who had broken the law. Every man had crimes peculiar to himself, distinct from that great forfeiture under which he lay in common with all mankind. This increase of the number of forfeitures is expressed by the word pleonazo not perisseuo. These words are used antithetically in the original, but translated by the same word, abound in our version.

But law entered to the effect of increasing the number of forfeitures, but where the condemnation was thus multiplied, grace abounded over them all.

Perisseuo relates to number and variety; pleonazo relates to quantity and extension. In Romans 5:20, perisseuo is the word used to express the extension of grace - it is one great grace extending over many forfeitures.

Well, now look at Romans 6:1 and apply these remarks. The original word here translated abound, is not perisseuo, but pleonazo. It ought, therefore, according to this theory; to be translated multiplied. It refers to an increase of the number of acts of grace, and not to the extension of the one great act over all forfeitures. I think that the meaning is that the one great restoration through Christ, met and remedied the one great forfeiture through Adam.

But after he had spoken of the personal forfeiture that each individual has incurred for himself, he realized that his readers might think that some personal manifestation of pardon was necessary, for each individual to propitiate God, before he was warranted in approaching God. Well, says the apostle, what shall we say? The one great forfeiture was no doubt remedied by the one great atonement, but will this one general restoration also meet and remedy the multiplied and varied personal forfeitures, of individual sinners? As long as there was only one forfeiture, it seemed reasonable that one restoration should suffice; but now that the forfeitures have been multiplied, may we not expect that there will need to be a corresponding increase in the number of acts of atonement?

Shall we continue under condemnation until grace be also multiplied, until the acts of atonement equal the number of the forfeitures? Not so; how shall we, who have already died under the sentence of sin, yet continue under it, now that we are restored to life?

The fact then that we have already died under sin and now live, demonstrates that the sentence is exhausted and of course is no longer in force. The apostle then gives an exposition of the representative character of Christ in relation to men, as a proof of the fact. They acknowledged, when they professed themselves Christians at baptism, that his death was instead of theirs, and that his resurrection involved them. He takes their own baptismal acknowledgment of the vicarious death and resurrection of Christ, as a proof to them that the one atonement was as much a remedy for the multiplied personal forfeitures, as for the one general forfeiture. All had already been done, in the way of atonement, that ever was to be done, or that ever needed to be done. The access to God propitiated was open. The blood that had been shed cleans from all sin. To every individual of the apostate family it was said, "Return unto me, for I have redeemed you." The pardon was universal and unconditional for the proclamation was: "peace on earth and goodwill towards men."

It revealed: "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses." Further the Son of God had been made: "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world." The pardon proclaimed in the gospel is a declaration on the part of God, to each and every individual sinner in the whole world, that his holy compassion embraces them and the blood of Jesus Christ has atoned for their sins. This is the declaration of God, and he makes it the ground of his urgent invitation to sinners to return to him and walk with him.

This return to God, and walking with God, constitutes the wellbeing of the person, and without this the declarations of God's love are useless to the person. God so loved the world (the whole world - all the race of Adam), enough to give his only begotten Son for them; but only those who believe this love, who receive it into their hearts, are saved by it. The love of God abiding in the heart, and governing the will of the person is salvation. There is no other salvation possible. Indeed when the pardon that proclaims God's love remains on the outside of the heart, and does not enter in, it produces no salvation. The pardon therefore is not so much a particular act, as a manifestation of God opening his inviting arms of love to perishing sinners, and urging them to come to him that they may have life. There is no more exclusion; all are urged to come.

The light of the glory of God transforms those who do come. His powerful Spirit is given to those who do come. Eternal life, holiness, happiness, and the heaven of the creature consists in his likeness. The validity of the pardon does not depend on man's believing it or not. The pardon remains always the same and the access always remains open. The invitation is always urgent; but those who do not come in are not transformed.

This passage of Scripture, taken in the sense that I have attributed to it, appears to me most valuable. It lays the ax at the root of the whole idea of supererogation, whether called works or faith. It condemns that theological paradigm in which faith, as an act of man's mind, occupies the place that the atonement of Christ holds in Scripture. According to much religious instruction among many truly serious people, pardon is represented as so dependent on faith, that it is apt to be mistaken for its reward. Further some teachers fear that this may be offering heaven on too easy terms, so they attach conditions to their definition of faith. Sometimes it seems as if they attach the whole Christian character, in order to make it more worthy of such a reward. If they would only distinguish in their theologies between pardon and salvation (the one being the spiritual medicine, the other the spiritual cure), they would find themselves unembarrassed in declaring both the freeness of the gospel, and the necessity of conformity to the law. For what is the freeness of the gospel in

their theology, but substituting faith as the ground of a sinner's hope in the place of obedience, which is called the legal system?

When a man looks into his own mind, to discover faith there as a ground of his hope before God, he is wandering just as far from the gospel as the man who is counting his good deeds, for the same purpose. He actually almost certainly has less peace than the man who counts his good deeds, because good deeds are a more concrete test to rely on, than faith which is a state of mind, and thus much less susceptible to definite proof. Then when the spirit is depressed, and is most anxious to find evidence of faith, faith will often seem to vanish.

Sanctification is the true meaning of salvation, and it is produced by faith in the atonement. The atonement is itself the pardon, and it is unaffected by man's belief, or unbelief. Some theologians have endeavored to get rid of the difficulties by supposing that the gospel consists of a testimony and a promise - a testimony that Christ died for sin, and a promise that those who believe in this testimony will be pardoned. But this is still making pardon the reward of faith. It appears to me that the testimony of the Bible is that sinners are pardoned for Christ's sake. The promise is that those who through this living way approach God, will be sanctified, and conformed in the spirit of their minds, to the will of God; and this is heaven and salvation.

The natural effect of sin was exclusion from the favorable presence of God but the gospel cancels this exclusion, by declaring peace on earth, and goodwill towards men. On the great Day of Atonement in the Jewish Church the doors of the tabernacle were shut, until the blood was sprinkled. The people were excluded from the emblems of the divine presence; this was to represent the plight of sinners. As soon, however, as the blood of the victim was sprinkled, the doors were opened, and the people were invited to enter. The exclusion was over. A Jew might, even after the opening of the doors, have remained outside. He would thus have missed those favors, which God has promised to those who seek his face. But this exclusion was not judicial; it was voluntary. He could thus harm his own soul but he was not being given a punishment. The transforming of his mind, according to the will of God, depended on his spiritual communion with God. He excluded himself from the appointed way of obtaining this communion, but his refusal to enter did not shut the door, nor cancel the invitation, nor reverse the pardon. The pardon, though it did not bring him into the presence of God, nor subject him to the sanctifying influence of that presence, did not cease for that reason to be a pardon. He made no use of it, but he might have made use of it. He was pardoned, but not saved. Entrance into the tabernacle was a picture of spiritual communion with God. The blood was sprinkled, and the doors were opened, but he slighted the privilege, and thus resisted the

purifying influence of the divine presence. He was spiritually in a worse condition than he was before, but still the door was open, and the blood retained its power, and the pardon continued in force.

Nothing but spiritual communion with God, the God of holy love, can sanctify the soul. Nothing but a conviction of God's kindly attitude towards sinners, will ever lead a sinner into the presence of God. Conscience declares condemnation, acting the part of the cherubim, who kept man back from the tree of life and forbade that spiritual communion, which is the only remedy for fallen nature. The apostle therefore is most explicit, as well as most urgent, in declaring the truth that all is already done by way of atonement, which guilt on the one side, or unlimited mercy on the other side, can require. No obstacle whatever remains between God and man. The blood of the everlasting covenant that effectually cleans from all sin, has been shed and sprinkled; the doors that barred the favorable presence of God have been thrown wide open. God is seated on a throne of mercy, waiting to hear and answer prayer, inviting us to come in, and enjoy spiritual communion with him, as his sons and daughters.

Why trust this invitation? Can it be any thing else than the validity of the invitation itself? Surely not. If the invitation is a good and true invitation, our belief cannot make it better or truer, and if it is a false invitation, our belief cannot make it good or true. The Bible says that the door is open, let us then enter.

There are many, however, who are perplexed by doubt. They are afraid that they do not have enough faith in Christ, to warrant their going confidently to God, in his name. I would answer them, in the words of the apostle: "Shall we continue under the sentence of exclusion from the divine presence, until a special atonement has been made for each of us?" Is the one great atonement insufficient? What do you wait for? There remains no farther sacrifice for sin. When you read that men are saved by faith, it does not mean that they are pardoned on account of their faith, or by their faith. No, it means that they are pardoned already, before they even thought of it. The sentence of exclusion has been reversed; and the belief of this kindness will and ought to carry them directly, in hope and gratitude, into the presence of that kind Father, who is waiting to be gracious, and to treat them as his children.

The reversal of the sentence of exclusion, that is pardon or forgiveness, is universal. Those who do not feel the preciousness of this restoration, and who are not touched by the holy love that planned and executed it, obtain, of course, no benefit from it. Their untreated corruption is their great evil. The good news of propitiation was made known to them, simply for the purpose of healing their corruption, but they

have neglected the remedy, and the cure is not effected. Such persons are still diseased and miserable, enemies to God, and to their own souls. But yet, in spite of all this, the door continues open for them, and the invitation continues urgent. The spiritual medicine that is offered to them in the pardon still retains all its healing power. They will not come that they might be healed.

I have sometimes been led to think, that justification often is used in Scriptures to mean, not pardon, but a sense of pardon, and for that reason it is often wrongly made conditional on faith. It is not a pardon simply, but a pardon known and believed, that will give peace. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Yet though our belief of the pardon gives us peace, it does not make the pardon one iota better than it was before. This sense of pardon, however, is the only thing that can lead us into the presence of God, with childlike confidence. It is the only thing that can enable us to look at the justice and holiness of God without dislike and fear. It is the only thing that can produce holy gratitude; and the greatness of the gratitude, will be in proportion to the sense entertained of the greatness of the pardon.

The two debtors mentioned in the concluding passage of Luke 7 were both forgiven, but the one had the sense of a great forgiveness, the other of a small one. Their gratitude was in direct proportion to their sense of forgiveness. Let us suppose that both owed five thousand dollars, and that both were freely forgiven. One knew the amount of his debt, while the other did not know that he was a debtor at all. The one would feel gratitude for the forgiveness while the other would have no sense of forgiveness at all, and therefore no gratitude. I believe all are in this state, all are forgiven, but only those who know something of the amount of their debt value the ransom, by which they were redeemed.

Those who remain ignorant of having incurred condemnation cannot appreciate the love that pities them, and therefore they do not love God. Yet heaven, happiness, and salvation are all summed up in holy love - and it was to produce holy love that the atonement of Christ was proclaimed. If the proclamation has not produced holy love, it has produced neither heaven nor happiness, nor salvation. We also need knowledge of God's law in order to appreciate the value of our redemption. We cannot love much, until we know that we are forgiven much, and we cannot know that we are forgiven much, until we know what the law of God requires of us.

It may appear to some, at first sight, that this teaching is calculated to give false peace and produce complacency. This apprehension is unfounded. The two great commandments to love God and our neighbor describe heaven, as well as obedience. Opposition to them in the heart is hell, as well as disobedience. On these two

commandments hang all the law and the prophets, and the gospel too. The law and the prophets, and the gospel, have been sent for the purpose of writing these two commandments on our hearts. Until they are written there, heaven is not there, nor salvation. Do we love God? Do our thoughts, our desires, our words, our actions, refer to him and tend to him? Do we love our neighbor for the sake of him who has made him, and redeemed him, and commanded us to love him? If we do, we are in possession of salvation, and if we do not, conscience must declare that we are not in possession of salvation. Oh! What a continual call is here to the blood of sprinkling, both to satisfy the conscience, and to excite the heart. This alone will calm agitation, passions, apprehensions, and give renewed confidence in the willingness and faithfulness of God, to freely give us his living Spirit to sanctify us. He will do for us exceedingly above all that we can ask or think.

The gospel explains that great commandment, and it contains the dynamics by which it can be obeyed. Who, it may be asked, is this God whom we are commanded to love? It is the God who so hated sin, and so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to the death, to condemn sin and to save the world. This is the God whom we are called on thus to love. Sin was branded with blood to remove every obstacle that barred the approach of the sinner to God, or of God to the sinner. This act gave a pledge and a specimen of the richness and the holiness of divine love. The revelation of this love is the instrument by which the Spirit of God writes the law upon the heart, in fulfillment of the promise made in Jeremiah 31:33. It was given that men might see God as he is, and learn to love him, as he ought to be loved.

An unholy god may be approached familiarly, and even perhaps in some degree be loved by an impenitent sinner; but the God who so loved the world as to give his Son to expiate sin, is a holy God. He has no pleasure in wickedness. Only those who love purity can love him.

The law is thus preached in perfect harmony with the unconditional freedom of the gospel. The fulfillment of the law is not the way to heaven; it is itself heaven. "God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him." It is not a condition of salvation; it is itself salvation. The law contains the description of spiritual health; it is the description of a character capable of spiritual enjoyment. This character must be obtained before heaven is obtained in its true meaning. The revelation of God's holy love in Christ received into the heart is the seed of this character. It must be sown by the Spirit, and watered by the Spirit. He will certainly give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him, and everyone is urged to ask without delay.

When eternity is before us, and near us, shall we wait for a better reason than the blood of Christ, or a stronger assurance than the promise of God? Shall we continue under the sentence of exclusion from God's presence until some change occurs in our own mind in addition to the atonement of Christ? No, all the satisfaction for sin that the justice of God requires has been made already. The way is open, and the voice of God assures all who come that they shall not be cast out. As for a change in our minds, that must follow our taking the medicine; it cannot precede it.

One objection that may be leveled at this view of forgiveness is that it is opposed to all the scriptural examples of prayer, which contain petitions for the pardon of sin. If sin is already pardoned, what is the use, or meaning, of continuing to ask for pardon day by day, or indeed at all? I think that the pardon that is asked for is a sense of pardon, a sense of the divine nearness and love, and not a repeal of the sentence of exclusion; that I believe to be contained in the universal proclamation of Christ to the world. It is hardly conceivable that a spirit that ventures to address God as, "Our Father" can be asking for the repeal of a sentence of everlasting banishment. The asking and giving of pardon forms part of the richness of any loving parent/child relationship. "And if we know that he hears us, we know that we have the petitions which we ask," says the beloved disciple. These prayers are expressions of humility, and confidence, and do not come from denunciations of wrath. The very moment that a person understands that God so loved sinners as to give his Son for them to take away their condemnation, he must and will have confidence that now there is no condemnation, no exclusion, and he can approach God with confidence. But though he does approach with confidence, he will still confess his sin, and ask pardon for his sin. Yet he will do so with the very feelings which filled the poor prodigal's heart when he made his confession, his father's arms around him, aware of his father's words of peace welcoming him home.

The natural effect of every sin is to banish man from the presence of God; a sense of exclusion, more or less strong, must accompany every sin. The only remedy here, the only answer to conscience, is the testimony of God that a victim has been slain whose blood cleans from all sin. The returning sinner shall always be well received; the sense of pardon, however, is necessarily connected with a present conviction of the truth of that testimony. When the heart is wandering from God, it is wandering also from believing that testimony; so a sentiment of exclusion accompanies the sense of sin. However a renewed sense of pardon is always accompanied by a renewed conviction of the holiness and the mercy of God, which counteracts the danger of false peace. We do not honor God, or care for our own spiritual progress, by continuing outside the gate of the tabernacle, doubting the sincerity of God's unconditional invitation. How shall we, who have in the person of our representative paid the penalty, still continue under it? How shall we, who are partakers in the life of that great one over whom death no longer has dominion, still lie under the terror of condemnation? No, let us rather join in that song which

Isaiah's heaven-touched ear heard, though far away, "Oh Lord, I will praise you. Though you were angry with me, your anger is turned away, and you have comforted me."

A universal amnesty is the subject of the divine testimony. A sense of pardon, or justification, belongs to those who believe the testimony. The use of this sense of pardon is to write the love and law of God upon the heart. If this is not the result it has failed, for that love and that law are salvation. Pardon belongs to man as a sinner, entirely irrespective of all the varieties of human character. Heaven, on the contrary, consists in character. This appears to me to be the scriptural doctrine of justification by faith, and up to this point all is intelligible. A sinner is by judicial sentence excluded from the favorable presence of God, and he is spiritually diseased because of his distance from God. The universal repeal of the sentence of exclusion, on the ground of the death of Christ as the substitute of sinners, is the message conveyed from God to man, through the gospel. But although the exclusion is done away with, people still want to keep at a distance from God. Until they know who God is, and that God will make them welcome, they continue at a distance from God. They need him but they remain unsaved. It is faith in the atonement, and in what it signifies, that heals the spiritual disease and saves the soul. The hindrance then is not in the pardon, but in the belief of the pardon.

All are pardoned, but believers are a little flock. Why is this? This is the great mystery in religion. Here we pass into the infinite, and are at a loss. One is taken and another left. One heart is made to hear the voice of God, and learns from that teaching voice what flesh and blood cannot reveal. Another reads the Bible and hears sermons, and goes through the forms of prayer, and seems even to wish and intend to be religious, and yet he continues a stranger to spiritual communion with God. What is the meaning of this? God is the great king in all the earth. He does what seems good to him. Though he has promised the Holy Spirit to those who ask him, even the very disposition to ask is his own gift. The language of the Bible, in inviting sinners to God is so free that we must either suppose that there is a deception in the Bible, or we must believe that every person has the power of coming to God, if he so chooses. Let us bow before him whose thoughts, although above our thoughts, and whose ways, although above our ways, are yet thoughts and ways of everlasting love towards our fallen race. We are of yesterday and know nothing. Let us look to him and he will save us. The way is open.