A GOD READY TO PARDON

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A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON
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"Thou art a God ready to pardon."
Nehemiah 9:17

WHEN a man's conscience is so awakened to the existence of sin that he cannot perceive any plea for mercy within himself, it is his wisdom to look for a plea in the nature and character of God. Now, brethren, if we search ourselves through and through, we cannot find anything in our fallen nature which can recommend us to the Most High. If we think that we have a claim upon God's goodness, we are in darkness, and deceive ourselves. When the true light comes, it reveals our bareness of all merit or excuse, and shows that there is nothing in human nature but that which provokes the Lord.

This is the fact as to our condition while we are unregenerate, and oftentimes the true believer, when darkness gathers around him, finds himself to be in much the same condition. His evidences burn dimly, the candle of the Lord seems quenched within his spirit, and worst of all, the sun of divine favor is not discernible. Then groping all around he can discover nothing in himself but that which causes him to sigh and groan, being burdened.

In such a plight he should cast overboard the great anchor of faith, and escape from himself to his God. It were well for him always to do so, but especially in the cloudy and dark day. To whom should he turn for light but to the Sun of Righteousness? Where look for grace but to the God of all grace? Where for all but to the All in all? If what *I* am makes me despair, let me consider what *God in Christ* is and I shall have hope.

That God is merciful becomes to sinners the first point upon which they can fix their hope. That the mercy of God endureth forever affords to the saints a most blessed stronghold when inward sin assails the soul. But whence do we learn this supremely consoling truth? How do we know that God is merciful? I scarcely think we should have inferred from His works the readiness of God to show mercy.

I have heard a great deal about the attributes of God in nature. I have, indeed, heard a great deal more than I have ever been able to see. To "go from nature up to nature's God" is a very common expression, but it is a very long step, mark you, from the highest Alp of nature to the footstool of the throne of God. It will be found much easier to go down from God to nature, when you once know the Lord, than ever it can be to ascend from the works to the Maker.

It is more than questionable whether the best instructed mind could have discovered much of God's moral nature from the universe around—His goodness to obedient creatures we might have gathered, but His mercy to the guilty is there but dimly revealed.

Look at this visible universe and you perceive that it is governed by certain fixed laws. If a man offends against these laws, do the laws bend, and make allowance for his mistake? Not so, they operate immutably and every violation of them is avenged. The captain makes a mistake of a few points in his steering—there is a current which he has not perceived, or perhaps his compass itself is out of gear. Anyhow, he is, without any fault on his part, drifted upon a rock.

Does the rock move, or is it softened? Or when the ship strikes is there some miracle by which the timbers are held together? Does some angelic hand undergird the ship and preserve the precious lives? No, amidst the howling of the pitiless storm, the vessel breaks up, and those who struggle best are unable to survive the fury of the sea. Is there any sign of mercy here?

Or take another case, the simple countryman, in his ignorance of the laws of electricity, is overtaken by a pelting storm, and to escape from the drenching rain he runs beneath some lofty tree to screen himself beneath its spreading branches. It is a law of nature that elevated points should attract lightning, the man does not know this, he does not intend to defy his Maker's natural law, but for all that, when the death-dealing fluid splits the tree it leaves a senseless corpse at the foot thereof.

The law does not suspend its operations though that man may be the husband upon whose life the bread of many children may depend, though he may have been one of the most guileless and prayerful of mankind, though he may have been utterly unconscious of having exposed himself to the force of a physical law of God, yet still he dies, for he has placed himself in the way of a settled law of nature and it takes its course. There is scant trace of mercy here!

Or it may be that a physician in the pursuit of discoveries which shall alleviate pain, with no ambition except to serve his fellow creatures, no mercenary motive swaying him, endeavors to penetrate into the secrets of nature and imbibes or inhales a certain noxious drug or pernicious vapor. Will the noxious drug or destructive gas stay its deadly office because of the generosity of the motive of the man who exposes himself to its influence? Ah, not so, the precious life is sacrificed, and we hear the sad news that a great physician is no more. Nature having stood fast and firm, and no mercy having been shown to the breaker of her laws.

Now, seeing that these laws move on immutably like the great wheels of a mighty machine, and he that is entangled in those wheels is ground to powder, it does seem as if we had slight evidence of the mercy of God if we look to nature alone. Certainly not enough to calm the conscience or allay the fears of the guilty.

We admit that there are some tokens for good to the offender, even in nature, for does not the Lord teach man to set up his beacons upon the headland and anchor his light ships near the sands, and has He not led us up to the formation of lifeboats whereby multitudes of lives have been saved?

In the case of death by lightning there is reason to believe that the death is more certainly painless than any other, and again, loftiness need not remain a danger, for the lightning rod has warded off the bolt of heaven from multitudes of elevated buildings.

In the case of most poisons there are antidotes which save live if they are taken speedily enough, and even the poisons themselves, in certain compounds, turn out to be healing medicines. So there are traces of the pardon of offenses in the mitigating or the removing of penalties even under the iron rule of natural law.

Never is a law changed, mark you, in nature, except in the few instances of miraculous interpositions. And in the moral universe never is a law changed at all, for heaven and earth shall pass away but not one jot or one tittle of the law shall fail. Still there are laws which counteract full frequently the roughness and the crushing power of other laws, and these, like their counterparts in the moral universe, prove that God is merciful. But all this being allowed, the light which nature affords us is, upon this subject, rather conjecture than assurance.

My brethren, let us thank God we are not left to mere guesses upon this point, we are not left to the sun and to the moon to give us light upon this matter. We have a more sure word of testimony whereunto you do well if you take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. We have this book of Holy Scripture written by the pen of the Holy Spirit, which tells us over and over again that the God whom we have offended is a God ready to pardon, a God whose mercy endureth forever.

I would call your attention to the expression, "*a God ready to pardon*," not a God who may possibly pardon, neither a God who upon strong persuasion and earnest pleading may, at length, be induced to forgive. Not one who, perchance, at some remote period after we have undergone a long purgation may manifest a mercy which is now in the background, but a God "ready to pardon"—willing and more than willing—ready, standing prepared, or to use another Scriptural expression, "waiting to be gracious." We have a God who stands like a host at a festival, which is all provided and prepared, saying, "My oxen and my fatlings are provided, all things are ready, come ye to the supper."

Not only are all things ready but God Himself is ready, His own heart and hand are ready to bestow pardon upon the guilty ones who come before Him. There is forgiveness with Him that He may be feared.

This blessed truth, in the first place, *was remarkably seen in the story of Israel*, on that we will dwell. And secondly, *it is equally true of the Lord at all times*. May the Holy Spirit in mercy lead us to feel the power of mercy while we speak thereon.

I. First then, I shall ask your attention to THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL AS SINGULARLY ILLUSTRATING THE READINESS OF GOD TO PARDON.

Brethren, the Israelites seem to have been set forward as a picture of all God's people. As the foot of the altar was made of the looking glasses of the women, the polished brass of the mirrors being melted down, so it seems to me as if Israel was intended to be a looking glass in which every one of us might look and see his own image. Full sure I am sure that when I speak of Israel you will perceive that the record speaks of you, and draws your portraits to the life.

They were, in the first place, *a people very specially favored, but they were a people as specially ungrateful*. To what other nation did God give the oracles of His truth? What other tribes did He separate unto Himself to be a people in whose midst He would show forth His glory? What other nation did He bring forth out of the house of bondage with a high hand and an outstretched arm? For what other people did He pour out of heaven the dread artillery of all His plagues, smiting their foes with judgments most terrible? For what other race did He divide the sea that He might lead them through the deep as through a wilderness? What other armies of men had food to eat which dropped from heaven? What other hosts were led and guided for forty years, and supplied without their own labor, without sowing or planting, or reaping, or gathering into barns?

Surely the Lord Himself was with them, and they were favored above all the rest of mankind. Who is like unto thee, O Israel, a people chosen of the Lord! But they were just as specially sinful. It scarcely seems to us as if any other nation ever existed who provoked the Lord so much, for they transgressed against light and love, against instruction and illumination, against wooing and warning, against entreaty and rebuke. They rebelled though they knew that they were highly favored, and were conscious that they were a distinguished and elect people.

Their iniquities were committed against a God whose hand they had seen, and whose voice they had heard, as He spoke to them from the top of Sinai. They lived amid a blaze of miracles, and walked a pathway of marvels. God was in the camp, His glory shone forth between the cherubim, and under the symbol of the fiery cloudy pillar His presence was revealed to them all. God was round about them for a wall of fire, and as the glory in their midst, and yet with the Lord before their eyes they refused to see Him, and with all His wonders before them they refused to believe.

You know, dear friends, that we are always particularly wounded by the unkindness of any to whom we have been specially attentive and generous. We complain, "It was not an enemy, for then I could have borne it, but it was you, a man, my acquaintance, my friend." Hard is it to be injured by a child for whom you have endured much self-denial, and to whom you have rendered tenderest love. "Sharper than an adder's tooth is an unthankful child."

After this fashion Israel offended, and speaking after the manner of men, the Lord felt it keenly, He was grieved at His heart because His great goodness to them had been so basely misused. He cries, "O that they had hearkened unto me," and in another place, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth, I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me." Such is the language which Scripture puts into the mouth of the Lord, and yet He forgave His provoking people times without number—was He not indeed ready to pardon?

Again, the Israelites were *absolutely dependent upon God for everything*, *and yet they were proud*. Read in the sixteenth verse, "They and our fathers dealt proudly." If any people in the world ought to have been humble, surely the Israelites were they. They had been slaves in Egypt, and lien among the pots in degraded bondage—brick makers all of them. Their backs were raw with the lash of the slave

driver, and they cried out under the sore oppression. The Lord chose them in the ignorance and debasement which always come with slavery. When He brought them out, they had no treasures but such as they had demanded of their former masters.

Their stock of food was very slender, and they had to traverse the arid wilderness. Tied up in bundles on their shoulders, they carried a little food, but that was soon spent, and every day they had to receive bread fresh from God's own ovens, while as for water they would have perished had it not been for the rock whose streams followed them all their way. They were not a people addicted to commerce, they had no opportunities for hunting, there were no means for husbandry. And therefore, if day by day the manna had not fallen, they must have utterly starved.

Yet though they were pensioners upon the daily charity of God, and were both fed and clothed by His bounty, still they were proud. I know some others who are much in the same condition, and perhaps they are proud too. Paupers and yet proud! Living on alms and yet boastful!

Ah, brethren, but this in Israel was very provoking to God, even as it is in us. Those vagrant mendicants thought themselves somewhat, so that when they were a little tried they began to murmur against Moses, and to accuse their God of bringing them out into the desert to die. They hectored it very loudly, and with a high stomach, and thought themselves hardly put upon, and would not do this, and would do that, as though they were some great ones, while all the while they were no better than so many birds of the air, which have to gather what God's generous hand is pleased to scatter for their daily food

Was He not a God ready to pardon, to have mercy upon a proud people? Is it not always very hard to forgive a haughty spirited offender? If the offender will humble himself before you there is less difficulty. But if, being absolutely dependent upon you for everything, the offender nevertheless, insults you with high words, it becomes very hard to keep your temper with him. Pride is irritating, yea, abominable. O Lord, when You did forgive the haughtiness of Your erring people, You were indeed ready to pardon.

These people, again, *deliberately rebelled*, for the sixteenth and seventeenth verses tell us they, "hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, and refused to obey." It was not that they made mistakes, it was not that they fell into errors or were misled. But they did not want to go right, and refused to know what God's will and mind were. They stopped their ears, and closed their eyes.

When they asked that the words which the Lord spake from Sinai might not be spoken to them any more, it was but natural that they should dread the terror of the trumpet sound. But deep down in their hearts there was also a distaste for a law so pure, so holy. Their hearts were set on mischief, and they were not to be led in the way of obedience.

They had a ready ear for Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who preached sedition, they were ready to be led into idolatrous ceremonies and lustful acts by Moabitish women. But before the Lord they were as bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke. Anybody and everybody they would hearken to except their God, but to Him they had such small regard that they cast His ordinances and precepts behind their backs, and sinned again and again with resolute deliberation. They often went astray though often reproved. It was not mere error and mistake, but the set and current of their heart was towards evil.

Deliberation adds greatly to the heinousness of sin, and it is a sad thing when we have to charge ourselves with this. The repetition of the same offense also shows a state of heart very near akin to determination, for it has all the appearance of a deliberate refusal to watch against temptation, and of a fixed resolve to treat the voice of God with indifference. Alas, that we should be so readily decoyed by the baits of evil, and so feebly held by the cords of goodness. Lord, when we provoke You in this way be pleased to show Yourself a God ready to pardon.

More than this, we are told that the Israelites were *unmindful of what the Lord had done for them*, "Neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them." They were by this unmindfulness, led into the great crime of unbelief.

You think, my brethren, that if you had seen the Red Sea divided and Israel's hosts led through, while Pharaoh's army was drowned, you would have trusted God all your life. "Oh," say you, "if I had been present, and really gathered the manna and eaten it, I could not, I am sure, with such a demonstration before my eyes, have ever fallen into unbelief again."

Well, I leave that question whether you would or not, having a very shrewd suspicion that your heart is by no means better than that of the ancient unbelievers. At any rate, Israel soon fell back into her chronic unbelief. Within a few days after they had seen the whole host of Pharaoh destroyed, they began to murmur against God and against Moses.

And though every day they ate the manna and drank the miraculously given water, yet continually they asked, "Is the LORD among us or not?" And they were perpetually putting questions such as made Moses demand of them, "Is the LORD's hand waxed short?" They were cankered to the heart with unbelief. For a moment they had a sort of faith, but in another moment they relapsed into infidelity.

"Now they believe His Word,
While rocks with rivers flow;
Now with their lusts provoke the Lord,
And He reduced them low."

At the slightest peril, the slightest trouble to themselves, they began to think that now they were come to a difficulty out of which the Lord could not deliver them and they cried, "Surely, He means to destroy us. He will never bring us into the promised land." Do you know any other people like this? I need to put out my hand to touch one of the same order. At any rate, since the Lord forgave His people Israel, though they angered Him with their ungenerous mistrust, we see most clearly that He is "a God ready to pardon."

Further on we read that these people *committed in spirit an act of utter apostasy*. They made unto themselves a captain to return to their bondage. They said they would go back to Egypt, since there was no hope of their ever conquering Canaan, for the Canaanites were too strong for them. What, back to slavery! Back to making bricks without straw! Leaving God and His tabernacle, and the glory of His presence. What think you would they go back for? What was the attractive bait which lured them? They would return to their taskmasters for the sake of the leeks and the garlic, and the onions, the flavor of which was still in their mouths.

Their soul lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt, and they would, to sit down by those savory cauldrons, go back to the ignoble condition of slavery again, and leave the Lord and all His guardian care, and forego the goodly land which was but a little way beyond. O foolish people!

Ah, brethren, this is madness, but alas is there not in us, even in us, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and have there not been times when we also have been tempted to return to the beggarly elements of the world, and seek content in the groveling joys of earth?

Perhaps it was worst of all that the Israelites *did actually fall into shameful idolatry*. They set up the figure of a calf to represent God. They compared their glory unto the image of an ox that eateth grass and they said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt." God was incensed at this, as well He might be, nevertheless at the entreaty of Moses He did not utterly destroy them.

Oh, brethren, it is a shameful thing when we love the creature more than the Creator, and dare to set up anything which is dear to us in JEHOVAH's place. "Little children keep yourselves from idols," but if you have had idols, and have been forgiven, then you can see in this history and in your own experience, that the Lord is ready to pardon.

For a minute I desire to show you the opposite side, namely, the divine goodness. While God forgave this people He showed His readiness to pardon in the following ways. First, *He continued while they were in all these sins to guide them both by night and by day*. The nineteenth verse says, "Yet thou

in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go."

Only think of it, that very day they made a calf, when the sun went down the fiery pillar still lit up the camp. At that very hour in which they said, "We will make to ourselves a captain, and go back to Egypt," the cloud was covering the camp and screening them from the burning heat of the sun. They sinned beneath the shade of special mercy.

Oh, if the Lord had said, "Now I will leave you, I will give you no more guidance. Since you will not follow My commandments, go which way you will," should you have wondered? If He had left them to faint in the heat of the day and grope in the darkness of the night would you have been surprised?

Ah, but let us wonder to think that the Lord has guided *us* as pilgrims through this desert land. He has still been both sun and shade to us, even to this day, notwithstanding all our sin. Had he deserted us what countless evils had befallen us. Blessed be the mercy which faileth not.

Another marvelously gracious fact was that *He continued still to teach them*. I am more surprised at this than at the other. Read the twentieth verse—"Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them." I should have thought He would have said, "Moses, take down the tabernacle, roll up the curtains, put away the ark, no more morning sacrifices, no more evening lambs. Aaron, go home, take off your breastplate and your ephod, and all your garments which were made for glory and for beauty. This people shall be taught no longer, they are incorrigible. It is in vain that I dwell among them and walk among them."

No, but still He made known His ways among them, and maintained the testimony of His servant Moses, and gave them still those matchless types which set forth so fully the way of salvation. My brethren, bless you also the Lord that though He has often smitten you, and given you the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, yet He has not taken away your teachers from you, nor quenched the light of Israel. Still does His good Spirit enlighten and instruct the people. Is He not a God ready to pardon?

Nehemiah also notices that *God did not stint them in their daily provisions*, notwithstanding their offenses. "Yes," says he, "Thou withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst." I am struck with wonder to think that God should have caused His manna still to fall. They provoked Moses and they set up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, but that very morning God's bread was in their mouths.

They came up to speak against God and against His servant, but their tongues would have been cleaving to the roof of their mouths for thirst if that very morning they had not drunk of the water which God had given them. When dependent persons will persist in disregarding our remonstrances and violating our rules, we are driven to stop the supplies.

But the Lord did not stop the supplies even in this urgent case. Would not famine and drought have brought them to their senses? If there had been no food for the women and children, and no drink for the strong men, would not that have tamed them? Even lions and savage beasts may thus be subdued. But no, their bread was given them, and their water was sure. Was He not a God ready to pardon?

One other remark here, and it is this—*He did sustain them to the end and ultimately bring them into the land of promise*. "Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing: their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. Their children also multipliedest thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers that they should go in to possess it."

Yes, and I know a people who, despite their sins, have already taken possession of many a gracious promise, so that they already dwell in the midst of covenant blessings. I know a people too who, notwithstanding their sins, shall enter into rest. "He shall surely bring them in," for He will bring His chosen into His glory, and they shall see His face with joy. Is He not a God ready to pardon?

My tale is all too long for me to tell it. I must cease from this portion of the history and ask you to meditate upon it, and as you do so to admire our pardoning God.

II. Secondly, IT IS EQUALLY TRUE THAT THE LORD AT ALL TIMES IS A GOD READY TO PARDON.

It is true of Him *by nature*, for mercy is an essential attribute of God. We must never think that our Lord Jesus died to make God merciful, on the contrary, the death of the Lord Jesus is the result of the mercy of God. When man sinned God was willing enough to pardon him, for the death of a sinner is no pleasure to Him. Judgment is His strange work. The way in which the Lord came to Adam at the first showed His mercy.

He came, if you remember, in the cool of the day—not at the instant the crime was committed. God is not in a hurry to accuse man, or to execute vengeance upon him. He therefore waited until the cool of the day. He did not address rebellious man in the language of indignation, but He kindly said, "Adam, where art thou?" And when he had questioned the guilty pair and convicted them, and the sentence was passed, it was terrible certainly, but oh, how mildly tempered. The curse was as much as possible made to fall obliquely, "cursed is the ground for thy sake."

Though the woman was made to feel great sorrows, yet those were connected with a happy event which causes the travail to be forgotten. There was tenderness in the dread utterances of an offended God, and mainly so because almost as soon as He declared that man must labor and die He promised that the "Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." Assuredly, the Lord our God is by nature very pitiful and full of compassion.

This truth is evident when we remember that God was abundantly ready to pardon, for *He Himself removed the impediment which lay in the way of forgiveness*. Being Judge of all the earth, it was essential to Him in that office that sin should never be treated as a light thing, but should be duly punished, lest others rush into it, hoping to escape judgment. For the good of all His creatures, as well as for the glory of His own character, God must not allow sin to go unpunished. The judge may be willing enough to pardon the culprit, but He is a judge, and as such he must condemn the guilty.

The readiness of God to pardon was seen in this that at His own cost He provided a way by which His mercy might be consistent with justice. From His own bosom He took His only begotten Son, His own Self, for He was one with Him, and God, in the person of His Son, suffered that which has honored justice, vindicated the law, and enabled God to be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly. Oh, as I see the adorable Father giving up His Well-beloved, to bleed and die for men, I know beyond all question that He is a God ready to pardon.

And now, *the atonement being made*, and justice being unable any longer to offer any protest to boundless mercy, *God stands ready to pardon*. By the blood of His dear Son He is able to blot out offenses. Through the sweet savor of the sacrifice of Jesus He smiles on guilty men. He delights now to blot into oblivion the transgressions of all them that seek His face.

The Lord's readiness to pardon is very conspicuous to sinners, because He sends His message of love to them while they are yet in their sins. He presents perfect pardon through Jesus Christ to them, even while they are sinners, for "Christ died for the ungodly."

I love to think that the Gospel does not address itself to those who might be supposed to have helped themselves a little out of the mire, to those who show signs of lingering goodness, but it comes to men ruined in Adam and doubly lost by their own sin, it comes to them in the abyss where sin has hurled them and lifts them up from the gates of hell.

"Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Jesus Christ's salvation is like the good Samaritan, it comes where the wounded man is and pours in its oil and wine into his bleeding wounds.

The readiness of God to pardon is to be seen in the fact that He makes no hard conditions with sinners. He does not say, "I will pardon if you suffer this or endure that penance. I will pardon if you perform this act of heroism or that deed of consecration." No, He Himself says, "Believe in the Lord

Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Receive what is freely given—that is the Gospel precept, and nothing else. Only confess your transgressions, or in other words, own your emptiness, and then trust your Savior, and you are saved.

That He is ready to forgive appears in this yet more glorious fact, that what God demands of man by the Gospel He also works in him by His Spirit. As for confession of sin, He puts the words into the sinner's mouth, repentance he works in the sinner's heart, and saving faith His own Spirit creates in the sinner's soul. Is He not ready to forgive when even what might be called the condition of pardon in one light is under another aspect a gift of free grace?

See you not His readiness to forgive when He accepts even the very lowest grade of the necessary graces? Of repentance, so long as it be sincere, He does accept a tear or a sigh. Of faith, though it is but as a grain of mustard seed, He does accept it if it be but true. And notwithstanding all the faults that are in the sinner, though his heart be neither as tender as it ought to be, nor his knowledge so clear, nor his eye of faith so bright, nor his conversion so complete as it should be, yet God looks not at any of these faultinesses except to forgive them.

The ignorance and shortcoming God winks at, and He only looks at what He can see of Christ in the sinner. The sinner's plea on his lip is, "for Jesus' sake." The sinner's hope in his heart is, "for Christ's sake"—and it is this that the Father looks at. When He sees that the poor trembling soul has embraced Jesus, His own dear Son, the Father puts the sin away at once without a word and says, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace." Oh, He is indeed a God ready to pardon.

Dear child of God, this text has a bearing upon you, and you can see it in your own self. Observe how the Lord chastens you. "Why is that?" say you. Why, because you have been offending Him. You are His child, and He is your Father, and He desires to forgive you, but there is a hindrance. Have you never felt a difficulty about expressing forgiveness to your own child when he has done wrong again and again? There is no difficulty in your heart, for you love him well, but still you do not wish him to think lightly of the fault, and you are afraid that if you at once tell him that you forgive him he may, perhaps, think that he may transgress with impunity.

Therefore you chasten him so that after the chastening has been endured it may be safe for you to pardon—I mean safe as far as he is concerned. He will not be tempted to go into the sin through the readiness with which you forgive him, for he will remember the smarts which your love inflicted. Look upon your chastening as a proof that God is ready to forgive because He executes in wisdom that discipline which is necessary for a safe forgiveness.

Think, too, how lightly He chastens.

"He will not always chide,
And when His strokes are felt,
His strokes are fewer than our crimes,
And lighter than our guilt."

That rod of His, ah, He never loves it. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. But when He does use it, how quickly He puts it up again.

Brethren, note how ready the Lord is to pardon us, for when we have sadly fallen He graciously sets us on our feet again. "He restoreth my soul." If you have wandered, like Noah's dove flying over the waste of waters, the Lord will receive you, even as Noah received the weary bird. He put out his hand at once and plucked her in unto him, into the ark, and even thus does the good Spirit pluck us in to himself.

He fills our empty spirits again, revives our dying hope, relights the candles of our joy and makes us, once again what we had been, and perhaps, more. And then He comes and restores to us His own presence, oh so soon. He says, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but in great mercy will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting mercy will I

have pity upon thee." Very loath is He to hide His face, but very swift is He to come on wings of mercy to restore joy to His mourners. Is He not ready to pardon?

I have almost done when I have answered a question on the behalf of the unconverted, and the same on behalf of the children of God. A poor seeker says to me, "You tell us God is ready to pardon, why is it, then, that I have prayed so long for mercy and have not found it?" That was a question I asked once when my prayers went up to heaven, and seemed to smite upon a dome of brass, and were reverberated in my ears.

Listen! Do you know to what God has promised to give pardon? To prayer! I think if you will read aright He promised pardon to confession, to repentance, and to faith. Have you acknowledged your iniquity? Will you renounce your sin? Have you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ? Come, will you now trust Jesus Christ? Man, you shall have pardon now.

But if your prayers are unbelieving prayers you are going the wrong way to work. You may as well hope to win heaven by your works as by your prayers, for indeed your prayers are but a kind of work—salvation is by believing, not by praying. If faith be mixed with your prayers, then will you succeed. Believing is essential, and if you believe you shall have mercy, now at once.

"Still," says another, "I have believed in Jesus Christ, and I hope I am saved from guilt, but how is it if God is ready to pardon that I am still suffering from the result of sin." This, my friend, you must bear so long as God wills it. God does not make a man healthy if he has brought his body to sickness by sin, neither does He fill a man's pocket if he has spent his money in profligacy.

This, my brother, is left to be a thorn in your side, not as a token of anger, but because you are not to be trusted with health or wealth, and God will not lead you into temptation again. Accept this from the Lord's hand as a gentle chastening.

Remember, if He save your soul it little matters about the rest, for it will be better for you to enter into life halt or maimed than to have all your limbs, and all the world, and lose your soul. Accept sickness, or whatever else comes, as the result of sin, and do not think it by any means proves that God has not pardoned you—on the contrary it may be that He loves you enough to chasten you.

A child of God now says to me, "If God is so ready to pardon, how is it I am still a sufferer, I am still poor, and so on?" Ah, my dear friend, perhaps that is not a rod at all, for remember "every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it." Not because it did not bear, but to make it bring forth more fruit. You are God's child and you have a cross to carry. Do not look at it as a token of anger. Was God angry with Simon, the Cyrenean, who carried Christ's cross after Him? No, He was conferring an honor upon him.

"Shall Simon bear the cross alone,
And all the rest go free?
No, there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me."

Take it up, for "through much tribulation" we shall "inherit the kingdom." Look at affliction in this light and you will see that there is nothing of anger in it.

"But," says one child of God, "I am under a cloud. I cannot see the face of God. Why does He hide Himself from me?" Not because He is unready to pardon, but perhaps, because you are not ready to forsake the sin which He is aiming at. Perhaps you have not searched your heart yet. There is still hidden under the camel's furniture some idol or other. Make Rachel get up, and search even in the secret places. Cry, "Wherefore dost thou contend with me?" for, if like David and Job you have to say that you are chastened every morning and plagued every evening, there is a reason for it.

If you have walked contrary to God He is walking contrary to you. Take your Achan and stone him, and then the Lord will come into the camp again. Tear down the idol and you shall have JEHOVAH's presence once more. But mark the word—whatever your experience may be, this is true—He delights in

mercy, and He is a God ready to pardon. May the Holy Spirit bless this truth to your souls, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—NEHEMIAH 9

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—907, 106 (PART II), 101

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.