

The Remission of Sins.

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Before his death Jesus told his disciples what the priests and rulers would do to him, but the disciples could not understand his words. Now, after they had been verified, after Christ had been rejected, condemned, scourged, crucified, buried, and had risen from the dead on the third day, the disciples believed. They had gained a valuable experience. All the sophistry and reasoning of the scribes and Pharisees could not now turn them from Christ. They could say, as did Paul, "I know whom I have believed." Their faith in Christ was rewarded by a most remarkable experience. They saw their beloved Master. They heard his voice as he opened to them the Scriptures; and from this they obtained much knowledge.

The lessons given by Christ to his disciples after his resurrection were with reference to the Old Testament Scriptures. He could now explain to them the prophecies concerning himself. They were surprised that they had not discerned the meaning of the inspired record of Christ's work and the reception that would be given him by the Jewish dignitaries. While the poor heard him gladly, those to whom had been committed the sacred oracles closed the eyes of their understanding, that they might not see Christ. And by misapplying the Scriptures, substituting their own traditions and fables for truth, and upholding their words as the commandments of God, they so bewildered the minds of the people that they could not see Christ.

Christ rebuked these false teachers. "In vain they do worship me," he said, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." This is the work of many of the teachers of this time. They make void the law of God by teaching the commandments of men. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God," Christ said to the teachers of his day; and his words apply to all who claim to know the truth, yet who make void the law of God by their traditions.

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side." He gave them evidence that he was the same Jesus who had been crucified. "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye

the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Thus the disciples received their commission. They were to teach and to preach in Christ's name. The instruction given them had in it the vital, spiritual breath that is in Christ. He alone could give them the oil which they must have in order to work successfully. Christ's likeness must appear in them. They could be successful only as they studied their Master's character and followed his example.

The Holy Spirit is the breath of life in the soul. The breathing of Christ upon his disciples was the breath of true spiritual life. The disciples were to interpret this as imbuing them with the attributes of their Saviour, that in purity, faith, and obedience, they might exalt the law, and make it honorable. God's law is the expression of his character. By obedience to its requirements we meet God's standard of character. Thus the disciples were to witness for Christ.

The impartation of the Spirit was the impartation of the very life of Christ, which was to qualify the disciples for their mission. Without this qualification their work could not be accomplished. Thus they were to fulfil the official duties connected with the church. But the Holy Spirit was not yet fully manifested, because Christ had not yet been glorified. The more abundant impartation of the Holy Spirit did not take place till after Christ's ascension.

"Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." The lesson here given to the disciples means that wise men, truly taught of God, possessing the inward working of the Holy Spirit, are to act as representative men, samples of the whole body of believers. These are to show themselves capable of preserving due order in the church; and the Holy Spirit will convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. But the remission of sins is to be understood as the prerogative of God alone. The warnings in the seventh chapter of Matthew forbid men to pronounce judgment on their fellow men. God has not given his servants power to cast down or to destroy. The apostles were unable to remove the guilt from any soul. They were to give the message from God: It is written -- the Lord has said -- thus and thus in regard to lying, Sabbath-breaking, bearing false witness, stealing, idolatry.

Christ has given rules for the guidance of his church. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee," he said, "go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say

unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Remitting sins or retaining applies to the church in her organized capacity. God has given directions to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. Censure is to be given. This censure is to be removed when the one in error repents and confesses his sin. This solemn commission is given to men who have in them the breath of the Holy Spirit, in whose lives the Christ-life is manifested. They are to be men who have spiritual eyesight, who can discern spiritual things, whose actions in dealing with the members of the church are such as can receive the indorsement of the great Head of the church. If this is not so, in their human judgment they will censure those who should be commended, and sustain those who are controlled by a power from beneath.

The gospel commission is to be carried out by men who know the inward working of the Spirit of God, who have the attributes of Christ. Christ's breath is breathed upon them, and he says to them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." All who are thus inspired by God have a work to do for the churches. As Christ's representatives, the ministers of the grace of God, they may say to others, It is written, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is remission of sins in accordance with the word of God.

In all labor with the members of the church, every eye is to be directed to Christ. Those in the wrong are to confess their sins to the sin-pardoning Saviour; and the servants of the Lord Jesus are not to strive, but to minister in word and doctrine. The shepherds are to take a kindly interest in the flock of the Lord's pasture. They are to present the grace of Christ, comforting the erring by speaking of the divine tenderness of the Saviour, encouraging those who have fallen to repent and believe in him who alone can pardon transgression.

Let the tenderness of Christ find a place in the hearts of his ministers. Watch for souls as they that must give an account. Watch constantly, vigilantly, and pray earnestly. Faithfully warn every soul that is in danger. Encourage the sinner to go to Christ. If he repents of his sin, he will find abundant pardon. He has assurance that his sins will be remitted; for thus it is written. Bear in mind that first the Lord gave his disciples the Holy Spirit. Those today who would do the work of the disciples must receive the presence of the Holy Spirit, and work under its influence.

Remission of sins can be obtained only through the merits of Christ. On no man, priest or pope, but on God alone, rests the power to forgive sins. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. . . . But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." This is the message that is to be borne. On this basis

Christians are free. Give encouragement of sins remitted. "If we walk in the light, as he in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."