

## J. C. Ryle Tracts

Some of these rare, short “Helmingham Series” tracts, (J. C. Ryle had been once a Rector at Helmingham, Suffolk), have come into my possession, and I offer you these exactly word for word as they were published when J. C. Ryle was Bishop of the new diocese of Liverpool. (Ev. Tracts’ editor.)

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READER,

I dare be sure this paper will be read by someone who feels that his sins are not yet forgiven. Reader, are you that man?

My heart’s desire and prayer to God is that you may seek forgiveness without delay. There is forgiveness in Jesus Christ for every one that is willing to receive it. There is every encouragement that your soul can need, to confess your sins and lay hold on this forgiveness this very day.

Reader, listen to me while I try to exhibit to you the treasure of Gospel forgiveness. I cannot describe its fulness as I ought. Its riches are indeed unsearchable (Eph. iii. 8). But if you will turn away from it you shall not be able to say in the day judgment, you did not at all know what it was.

Consider, then, for one thing, that the forgiveness set before you is a great and broad forgiveness. Hear what the Prince of Peace Himself declares: “All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme” (Mark iii. 28); “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall become as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah i. 18). Yes! though your trespasses be more in number than the hairs of your head, the stars in heaven, the leaves of the forest, the blades of grass, the grains of sand on the sea shore, still they can all be pardoned. As

the waters of Noah's flood covered over and hid the tops of the highest hills, so can the blood of Jesus cover over and hide your mightiest sins. "His blood cleanseth from all sin" (1 John i. 7). Though to you they seem written with the point of a diamond, they can all be effaced from the book of God's remembrance by that precious blood. Paul names a long list of abominations which the Corinthians had committed, and then says: "Such were some of' you: but ye are washed" (1 Cor. vi. 11).

Furthermore, it is a *full and complete forgiveness*. It is not like David's pardon to Absalom,—a permission to return home, but not a full restoration to favour (2 Sam. xiv. 24). It is not, as some fancy, a mere letting off, and letting alone. It is a pardon so complete, that he who has it is reckoned as righteous as if he had never sinned at all. His iniquities are blotted out. They are removed from him as far as the east from the west (Psalm ciii. 12). There remains no condemnation for him. The Father sees him joined to Christ, and is well pleased. The Son beholds him clothed with 'His own righteousness, and says, "Thou art all fair, . . . there is no spot in thee" (Cant. iv. 7). Blessed be God that it is so. I verily believe if the best of us all had only one blot left for himself to wipe out, he would miss eternal life. If the holiest child of Adam were in heaven all but his little finger, and to get in depended on himself, I am sure he would never enter the kingdom. If Noah, Daniel, and Job had had but one day's sin to wash away, they would never have been saved. Praised be God that in the matter of our pardon there is nothing left for man to do. Jesus does all, and man has only to hold out an empty hand and to receive.

Furthermore, it is a *free and unconditional forgiveness*. It is not burdened with an "if," like Solomon's pardon to Adonijah: "If he will show himself a worthy man (1 Kings i. 52). Nor yet are you obliged to carry a price in your hand, or bring a character with you to prove yourself deserving of mercy. Jesus requires but one character, and that is that you should feel yourself a sinful, bad man. He invites you to "buy wine and milk without money and without price," and declares, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Isaiah lv. 1; Rev xxii. 17) 'Like David in the cave of Adullam, He receives everyone that feels in distress and a debtor, and rejects none (1 Sam. xxii. 2). Are you a sinner? Do you want a Saviour? Then come to Jesus just as you are, and your soul shall live.

Again, it is an *offered forgiveness* I have read of earthly kings who knew not how to show mercy,—of Henry the Eighth of England, who spared neither man nor woman; of James the Fifth of Scotland, who would never show favour to a Douglas. The King of kings is not like them. He calls on man to come to Him, and be pardoned. "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men" (Prov. viii. 4). "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" (Isaiah iv. 1) "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (John vii. 37). "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). Oh, reader, it ought to be a great comfort to you and me to hear of any pardon at all; but to hear Jesus Himself inviting us,

to see Jesus Himself holding out His hand to us,—the Saviour seeking the sinner before the sinner seeks the Saviour,—this is encouragement, this is strong consolation indeed!

Again, it is a *willing forgiveness*. I have heard of pardons granted in reply to long entreaty, and wrung out by much importunity. King Edward the Third of England would not spare the citizens of Calais till they came to him with halters round their necks, and his own Queen interceded for them on her knees. But Jesus is “good and ready to forgive” (Psalm lxxxvi. 5). He delighteth in mercy (Micah vii. 18) Judgment is His strange work. He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter iii. 9). He would fain have all men saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. ii. 4) He wept over unbelieving Jerusalem. “As I live;” He says, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways: why will ye die?” (Ezek. xxxiii. 11). Ah, reader, you and I may well come boldly to the throne of grace! He who sits there is far more willing and ready to give mercy than you and I are to receive it.

Besides this, it is a *tried forgiveness*. Thousands and tens of thousands have sought for pardon at the mercy-seat of Christ, and not one has ever returned to say that he sought in vain; sinners of every name and nation,—sinners of every sort and description, have knocked at the door of the fold, and none have ever been refused admission. Zacchæus the extortioner, Magdalene the harlot, Saul the persecutor, Peter the denier of his Lord, the Jews who crucified the Prince of Life, the idolatrous Athenians, the adulterous Corinthians, the ignorant Africans, the bloodthirsty New Zealanders,—all have ventured their souls on Christ’s promises of pardon, and none have ever found them fail. Ah, reader, if the way I set before you were a new and untravelled way, you might well feel faint-hearted! But it is not so. It is an old path. It is a path worn by the feet of many pilgrims, and a path in which the footsteps are all one way. The treasury of Christ’s mercies has never been found empty. The well of living waters has never proved dry.

Beside this, it is a *present forgiveness*. All that believe in Jesus are at once justified from all things (Acts xiii. 38). The very day the younger son returned to his father’s house he was clothed with the best robe, had the ring put on his hand, and shoes on his feet (Luke xv.). The very day Zacchæus received Jesus he heard these comfortable words “This day is salvation come to this house” (Luke xix. 9). The very day that David said, “I have sinned against the Lord,” he was told by Nathan, “The Lord hath also put away thy sin” (2 Sam. xii. 13). The very day you first flee to Christ, your sins are all removed. Your pardon is not a thing far away, to be obtained only after many years. It is nigh at hand. It is close to you, within your reach, all ready to be bestowed. Believe, and that very moment it is your own. “He that believeth is not condemned” (John iii. 18). It is not said, “he shall not be,” or “will not be,” but “*is not.*” From the time of his believing, condemnation is gone. “He that believeth hath everlasting life” (John iii. 36). It is not said, “he shall have,” or “will have,” it is “*hath*” It is his own as surely as if he was in heaven, though not so evidently

so to his own eyes. Ah, reader, you must not think forgiveness will be nearer to a believer in the day of judgment than it was in the hour he first believed! His complete salvation from the power of sin is every year nearer and nearer to him; but as to his forgiveness and justification, it is a finished work from the very minute he first commits himself to Christ.

Last, and best of all, it is an *everlasting forgiveness*. It is not like Shimei's pardon, a pardon that may sometime be revoked and taken away (1 Kings ii. 9). Once justified you are justified forever. Once written down in the book of life, your name shall never be blotted out. The sins of God's children are said to be cast into the depths of the sea,—to be sought for and not found,—to be remembered no more,—to be cast behind God's back (Mic. vii. 19; Jer. 1. 20; xxxi. 34; Isaiah xxxviii. 17). Some people fancy they may be justified one year and condemned another,—children of adoption at one time and strangers by and by,—heirs of the kingdom in the beginning of their days, and yet servants of the devil in their end. I cannot find this in the Bible. As the New Zealander told the Romish priest, "I do not see it in the Book." It seems to me to overturn the good news of the Gospel altogether, and to tear up its comforts by the roots. I believe the salvation Jesus offers is an everlasting salvation, and a pardon once sealed with His blood shall never be reversed.

Reader, I have set before you the nature of the forgiveness offered to you. I have told you but little of it, for my words are weaker than my will. The half of it remains untold. The greatness of it is far more than any report of mine. But I think I have said enough to show you it is worth the seeking, and I can wish you nothing better than that you may strive to make it your own.