

RANSOM OR PARDON – WHICH?

The failure to discern the distinction between ransom and pardon has led to considerable confusion of thought on the subject. Christian people of general intelligence will quote texts relative to our being ransomed from the tomb, redeemed from death, bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ, etc., and in the same breath they speak of the Father's gracious pardon of all offences. Seemingly few think, though many must know, that pardon and ransom express exactly opposite thoughts.

Webster defines **Ransom** to mean – "to redeem from captivity, or to forfeit by paying an equivalent."

His definition of **Redeem** is – "to purchase back, to regain possession of, by payment of a stipulated price."

His definition of **Pardon** is – "to remit the penalty, or to suffer to pass without punishment – to refrain from exacting a penalty."

The most ordinary thinker must see that these words are as opposite in meaning as could be, and that both could not be true of the same thing. If Jesus did **redeem** or **ransom** us by paying an equivalent for us, thus purchasing our release from death, then our Father did not **pardon** us. That is, he did not suffer our sins to pass without punishment; but as the Scriptures declare, he laid upon Jesus (who became our **willing** substitute) the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:6). Hence God did not pardon (remit the penalty); for "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." – 1 Cor. 15:3.

The principal cause of the difficulty arises from the fact that the terms **forgive** and **pardon** have come to be used interchangeably, and are commonly understood as synonymous, while the strict or primary meanings of the words do not admit of this loose interpretation.

Webster's primary definition of *forgive* is – "to give away, to make over, to resign, to cease to feel resentment against, or, to cease to impute, to remit. Webster also gives as a secondary meaning of forgiveness, the generally accepted sense, *pardon*. But note the difference in the primary meaning of the words: Pardon refrains from exacting a penalty, while forgiveness signifies much less, viz., that harmony is restored as a result of some settlement, or that the claim is made over to some one else.

Thus we see that the word *pardon* does not represent Jehovah's course in dealing [R1058 : page 6] with the sinner, but that, while he has not pardoned us, he has *forgiven* us, according to the above primary definition of the word. That is to say, God has "*ceased to impute*" sin to those sinners who have laid hold of Christ as their substitute or redeemer – "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [satisfaction] for *our* sins" – believers' sins. And not for ours only [who *now* accept] but also [for all who shall at any time accept] for the sins of the whole world, [who sooner or later shall all come to the knowledge and opportunity to believe and accept].

There was a sin-penalty upon the race [death] which must be paid, and by paying this penalty for the race, our Lord Jesus *bought* all with his own precious blood [life shed, – death]. Thus the claims of God's justice against the race were resigned or *set over to* the purchaser, and he may do what he will with his own. He could let all be in death as when he bought them, or he has full right to restore any or all as he may please. But so far as the Father is concerned, the Adamic sin is *forgiven* and all claims under it are set over to the Redeemer, the Purchaser, our Lord Jesus; as it is written, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed [or transferred] all judgment unto the Son." – John 5:22.

Thus we see too, that when "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son," it was because he forgave us, *i.e., ceased to resent our sins*, because our ransom price had been paid, as provided by

himself, who so loved us that he gave his Son to redeem us. Thus, too, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, *not imputing* their trespasses *unto them*" (but unto his beloved Son, who freely gave himself as our substitute). The sins were imputed to mankind until Jesus died; then God *forgave, i.e.*, ceased to impute *to us* what had been paid by our Redeemer or Substitute.

Mark clearly, that God did not PARDON, *i.e., refrain from exacting the penalty,*" but "laid upon him [our Redeemer] the iniquity of us all." (Isa. 53:6.) He bore [the penalty of] our sins in his own body on the tree. (1 Pet. 2:24.) And thus we see, how God forgave us freely *for Christ's sake* – because he paid the penalty which was the full satisfaction of justice.

Let it not be presumed that God *compelled* the just one to die for the unjust. Justice could not inflict the punishment of the guilty upon the innocent unless the innocent one *freely gave himself* as a substitute for the guilty. This Jesus did. The Scriptures declare that he laid down his life of himself; not for fear of divine wrath; not because compelled; but for the joy that was set before him (the joy of redeeming and restoring mankind, and of bringing many sons to glory) he endured the cross. – Heb. 12:2.

Now notice that the Greek words – *apoluo, aphiemi* and *aphesis* – translated forgiveness, forgiven and forgive in, the New Testament, have the same significance as the corresponding English words: or, as given by Young – "To let go, to send away." Mark well, the meaning is not as some seem to infer – to send away *without an equivalent*, as the English word *pardon* would imply. It is not that God will let the sinner go unconditionally; but as Scripturally declared, God will let go the prisoners out of the pit (out of death), because he has found *a ransom*. (Job 33:24) Yes, the man Christ Jesus *gave himself* a ransom (a *corresponding* price) for all. (1 Tim. 2:6.) Therefore all that are in their graves (prisoners in the pit) shall hear his voice and come forth,

in due time – when the Redeemer shall "take to himself his great power and reign."

Though the word *pardon* does not occur in the New Testament, a Greek word of nearly the same meaning does occur – *karazomai*. It signifies, *to forgive freely*. We will give some illustrations of the use of this word, from which it will be seen that it does not oppose but confirms the statement that our Father does not pardon, or *unconditionally* set sinners free from sin's penalty. The words forgive and forgave as translated from the word *karazomai* occur in all only twelve times, as follows: – "*Forgiving* one another... even as Christ *forgave* you" (Col. 3:13); "When they had nothing to pay he frankly *forgave* them both;" "He to whom he *forgave* most." (Luke 7:42,43.) Here are four instances in which free forgiveness, or *pardon* is meant. But notice, it is not Jehovah, but Christ and the disciples who do the *free forgiving*. Jesus was in the very act of paying the ransom price of Simon, Mary and others, and realizing that justice would be satisfied by his act, he, as the purchaser, could freely forgive them. The very object of his purchasing sinners was, that he might *freely* release them from sin's condemnation. Here we see that had our Lord Jesus been unwilling to *pardon* those whom he had purchased with his own blood, had he still held against them the wages of Adam's sin, his sacrifice would have been *valueless* to them; it would have left all as they were – cursed – condemned. On the other hand, had the Father *pardoned* us, Christ's death would have been useless, valueless, as it would have accomplished nothing.

We wish that all our readers might hereafter be able to appreciate clearly the difference between *pardon* and *forgiveness, i.e.*, reconciliation toward us based on our redemption through the precious blood of Christ. – Col. 1:14.

All will admit that God is just; and if so, he did not inflict too severe a penalty on man when he deprived him of life. [R1059 : page 6] Now if that penalty was just six thousand years ago, it is still a just

penalty, and will be just for all coming time. If the penalty was too severe and God *pardons* the sinner (releases him from further continuance of the penalty) it proves either that God was at first unjust, or is so now. If it was right six thousand years ago to deprive mankind of life because of sin, it would always be wrong to restore the life unless the pronounced penalty were justly cancelled by the payment of an equivalent price. And this could only be accomplished by the willing sacrifice of another being *of the same kind*, whose right to life was unforfeited, giving himself as a substitute or ransom.

It is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. Therefore none of the condemned race have a right to life; and God could not justly give pardon and life to those whom he had justly condemned. To do so would be to make mercy and love override justice, and such a conflict is not supposable in God's attributes. If the love and mercy of God would benefit men they must act in harmony with justice. And thus it was: Love provided the ransom (1 John 4:10) and will use the same one (Christ,) as its agent in blessing the world.

"Forever firm God's justice stands
As mountains their foundations keep."

This very principle of justice which underlies all of our Father's doings, is the ground of our strong confidence in all his promises. The Scriptures declare that he is the same yesterday, to-day and forever, that with him is no variableness neither shadow of turning. (James 1:17). If he were so changeable as to condemn the race to death in Adam's day, and six thousand years after revoke his own decision, what assurance could we have that in six thousand years more – or less, he might not change again, and remand us to the prison house of death by revoking the pardon of some or of all? As a race of sinners we have no foundation whatever for hope of a future everlasting life except in the fact that Christ died for us, and thus satisfied the claims of justice against us.

So then, so far as Jehovah is concerned, we are *forgiven* through his own provision, – through Christ. And so far as our relationship to the Lord Jesus, who *bought* us, is concerned, he freely *pardons* all who would come unto the Father by him. And so far as we are concerned, the results attained by God's plan are most favorable – to us it amounts to the same as though the Father had *pardoned* us unconditionally and without a ransom, except that a knowledge of the *fact* enables us to reason with God, and to see how though our sins were as scarlet, we are made whiter than snow, and how God is just while justifying and releasing us. Thus we have a *sure* foundation for faith and trust.

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