

Scripture Queries and Answers.

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<02:031>

Q. Why may not a believer use the prayer, "Be not angry with us for ever?" Is not God displeased, or angry with us, when we sin? Must we not, in this case, seek to be forgiven? And is not God displeased with us until we have sought His forgiveness? E. J.

A. The first point that requires to be noticed is, that the word of God expressly declares the believer in Christ to be free from condemnation. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8: 1). Nor is this their *present* privilege alone; its *continuance* is pledged to them by the same word. "He that heareth my words, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, *and shall not come* into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life" (John 5: 24). Besides, the state of the believer in this respect is contrasted in scripture with that of the unbeliever. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3: 36). If then that which distinguishes the one class from the other be, that the wrath of God abides on the unbeliever, while from the believer it has passed away, how evident that no believer can intelligently use the prayer, "Be not angry with us for ever."

<02:032>

As to the remaining queries, it is of all-importance to distinguish between the natural relation we all sustain to God, as creatures, and those new, blessed relations to Him on which we enter, the moment it can be truly said of us that we are believers in Christ. As creatures, we are responsible to God, the holy, righteous Judge of all. As fallen creatures, we are utterly and hopelessly condemned. "Enter not into judgement with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. 143: 2). Such was the confession of the psalmist, prior to the accomplishment of redemption, and the full triumph of grace in the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord. It was because of our total inability to stand thus in judgement before God that Christ took our place, and bare our sins in his own body on the tree. If grace has drawn our hearts to that blessed Saviour, we have God's word to assure us that in *His* death on the cross, *our* whole standing as condemned, sinful creatures before God came to an end. Believing in Him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1: 7). The believer is himself a justified, accepted person. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3: 24). "Accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1: 6). The believer enters thus, the moment he is a believer, on entirely new relations to God. He is no longer condemned and under wrath, but a pardoned, justified, accepted person, through the boundless grace of God, and the infinite efficacy of Christ's precious work. He is adopted, moreover, into God's family;

yea, born of God, and thus really His child. He is one with Christ, as a member of His body, — "for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph. 5: 30).

Standing in these new relations to God, it is, no doubt, possible for the believer to fail in the service and obedience suited thereto. It is even possible that through want of practical dependence on God, and watchfulness against the enemy, he may fall into sin. He may thus need His Father's forgiveness, or need mercy of " the Lord" — the Lord Jesus Christ. But in neither case does his sin need forgiveness *in any such sense* as he himself once needed it; in order to his becoming a child of God, and a member of Christ. The forgiveness and justification which attend my introduction to God's family are bestowed once and for ever; and the relations to God into which I am thus brought, are as unchanging as Himself. But if, being God's child, I am against my Father, his fatherly government extends to such a case, and I may have to suffer the present chastenings of His hand. "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1: 17). But how wide the contrast between the chastenings of the Father, which flow from love, and are sent in order "that we may be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12: 10), and that "wrath" or "anger;" which rests upon unbelievers, and from which we are once and finally delivered, when the eye rests in faith on Christ and on His precious blood!

It is to this state of things, moreover, that the advocacy and priesthood of Christ apply. Nor is it the object of these blessed provisions of grace to turn to us the heart of our God and Father, as though our sins and failings had alienated us from that heart of love. "My little children, 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." (1 John 2: 1, 2.) Our Father would have us so occupied with the revelation of Himself in Christ, the Son of His love, as to be kept from sinning. But if, to our shame and sorrow, we do sin, it is not that He ceases to be our Father, or that we need a new justification. We have an advocate *with the Father*, even Jesus Christ, who, on the ground of His accomplished righteousness, and of His having been the propitiation for our sins, pleads for us, and obtains those supplies of grace by which our souls, humbled and restored, again enjoy the undimmed brightness of our Father's countenance, the unchanged sweetness of our Father's love.

There could scarcely be a more specific answer to the queries before us than is afforded by the words of the apostle in Rom. 8 where, having considered every aspect in which the subject of the believer's safety and blessedness could be regarded, he triumphantly asks, "What shall we then say to these things? if God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us?" - W.T.