

# INDWELLING SIN



JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

# INDWELLING SIN

The nature, power, deceit, and prevalence  
of the remainders of indwelling sin in believers  
Together with the ways of its working and means  
of prevention opened, evinced, and applied  
With a resolution of various cases  
of conscience pertaining to it

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me  
from the body of this death? I thank God  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

—Romans 7:24-25

John Owen

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# INDWELLING SIN

## Preface

That the doctrine of original sin is one of the fundamental truths of our Christian profession has always been owned in the church of God. It is a special part of that peculiar possession of truth which they enjoy, whose religion towards God is built upon and consistent with divine revelation. As the world by its wisdom never knew God aright, so the wise men of the world were always utterly ignorant of this inbred evil in themselves and others. With us, as Christians, the doctrine and conviction of original sin lie in the very foundation of all wherein we have to do with God: in reference to our pleasing Him here, or obtaining the enjoyment of Him hereafter.

It is also known what influence the doctrine of original sin has on the great truths concerning the person of Christ, His mediation,<sup>1</sup> the fruits and effects of it, with all the benefits of which we are made partakers thereby. Without a supposition of the doctrine of original sin, not any of these great truths can be truly known or savingly believed. For this cause, many holy and learned men have extensively dealt with the doctrine of sin, both of old and in recent days. Some have labored in the discovery of its nature, some of its guilt and demerit. By these, the truth concerning it also has been cleared from the opposition made to it in both past and present ages.

By most, these things have been considered in their full extent and breadth with respect to all men by nature, and with the state and condition of them who are wholly under the power and guilt of sin. Many also have shown clearly how men are disabled and incapacitated by indwelling sin to give the obedience required by the Law or the

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<sup>1</sup> **mediation** – Christ’s work as a go-between to reconcile God and man. “It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest, and king; head and saviour of the church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.” (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1) See also Free Grace Broadcaster 183, *Christ the Mediator*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

gospel, so as to free themselves from the curse of the Law, or to make themselves partakers of the blessing of the gospel. Moreover, it also has been fully taught and confirmed that there are remainders of indwelling sin abiding in believers after their regeneration<sup>2</sup> and conversion to God (as the Scripture abundantly testifies). It has also been taught how they are pardoned from the guilt of it, and by what means the power of it is weakened in them. All these things, I say, have been largely dealt with, to the great benefit and edification of the church.

Therefore, in what we have now in design, we take them all for granted, and endeavor only further to carry on the discovery of sin in its actings and oppositions to the Law and grace of God in believers. Neither do I intend the discussing of anything that has been argued about it. I shall present the following in a way suited to the capacity of the most common and weakest of those concerned: what the Scripture plainly reveals and teaches concerning indwelling sin, what believers evidently<sup>3</sup> find by experience in themselves, and what they may learn from the examples and acknowledgments of others.

Many things seem to render the handling of indwelling sin at this season necessary. We see the effects and fruits of it in the apostasies<sup>4</sup> and backslidings of many, the scandalous sins and errors of some, and the course and lives of the most. This seems to call for a due consideration of it. Besides, how great of a concern to believers is a full and clear acquaintance with the power of this indwelling sin (the matter designed to be opened) will appear as we proceed—in order to stir them up to watchfulness and diligence, to faith and prayer, and to call them to repentance, humility, and self-abasement.

These, in general, are the results aimed at in the following discourse, which, being at first composed and delivered for the use and benefit of a few, is now by the providence of God made public. If the reader receives any advantage by these weak endeavors, let him know that it is his duty both to give glory unto God and to help them by his prayers who in many temptations and afflictions are willing to labor in the vineyard of the Lord, unto which work they are called.

—*John Owen, 1668*

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<sup>2</sup> **regeneration** – God’s act of creating spiritual life in a sinner by the Holy Spirit’s power; the new birth. See *Regeneration* by A. W. Pink, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>3</sup> **evidently** – plainly.

<sup>4</sup> **apostasies** – abandoning or falling away from the faith one had professed.



## Chapter 1

# ROMANS 7:21 EXPLAINED

*Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it,  
but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that,  
when I would do good, evil is present with me.*

—Romans 7:20-21

### 1. The Words Themselves

It is of indwelling sin—in its remains in persons after their conversion to God, with its power, efficacy,<sup>1</sup> and effects—that we intend to treat. This also is the great design of the apostle to show and prove in chapter seven of The Epistle to the Romans. Many, indeed, are the disputes about the principal scope of the apostle in that chapter, and in what state is the person described in it—under the law or under grace.<sup>2</sup> I shall not at present enter into that dispute, but take for granted that which may be clearly shown and undeniably proved: namely, that it is the condition of a regenerate<sup>3</sup> person with respect to the remaining power of indwelling sin, which is there proposed and exemplified by and in the person of the apostle himself. Therefore, the foundation of what we have to offer about this subject shall be laid in that discourse of his. I shall not proceed in an exposition of his revelation of this truth as it lies in its own context, but only make use of what is delivered by him as occasion shall offer itself.

Here first occurs that which he affirms in verse 21: “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” There are four things observable in these words.

First, the *name* he gives to indwelling sin, by which he expresses its power and effectiveness: it is “a *law*,” for that which he terms a law in this verse, he calls in the foregoing, “sin that dwelleth in me.”

Secondly, the *way* in which he came to the discovery of this law. He found it not absolutely and in its own nature, but in himself: “*I find a law.*”

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<sup>1</sup> **efficacy** – capacity or power to produce a desired effect; effectiveness.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Christian in Romans 7* by A. W. Pink (1886-1952), available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>3</sup> **regenerate** – those having new spiritual life by the power of the Holy Spirit; those who are “born again” (Joh 3:3).

Thirdly, the *frame* of his soul and inward man with this law of sin, and under its discovery: “I *would* do good.”

Fourthly, the *state* and activity of this law when the soul is in that frame when it would do good: it “*is present* with me.” For what aims and purposes, we shall show afterward.

#### a. “A law”

The first thing observable is the title here used by the apostle. He calls indwelling sin “a law.” It is a law. A law is taken either properly for a directive rule, or improperly for an operative effective principle that seems to have the force of a law.

In its first sense, a law is a moral rule that directs and commands, and in various ways moves and regulates the mind and will as to the things that it requires or forbids. This is evidently the general nature and work of a law. Some things it commands, some things it forbids, with rewards and penalties that move and impel men to do the one and avoid the other.

Therefore, in a secondary sense, an inward principle that moves and inclines constantly to any actions is called a “law.” The principle that is in the nature of everything, moving and carrying it towards its own end and rest, is called the “law of nature.” In this respect, every inward principle that inclines and urges to operations or actions suitable to itself is a law. In the same way, the powerful and effective working of the Spirit and grace of Christ in the hearts of believers is called “the law of the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2). For this reason, the apostle here calls indwelling sin “a law.” It is a powerful and effective indwelling principle, inclining and pressing to actions agreeable and suitable to its own nature.

This, and no other, is the intention of the apostle in this expression. The term *a law* may also sometimes intend a state and condition. If so used here, the meaning of the words should be, “I find that this is my condition, this is the state of things with me, that when I would do good, evil is present with me,” which makes no great alteration to the principal intention in verse 21. Yet in verse 21, properly, it can denote nothing but the chief subject treated of. This is because, although the name of “a law” is variously used by the apostle in this chapter, yet when it relates to sin, it is nowhere applied by him to the condition of the person, but only to express either the nature or the power of sin itself.

So it is in 7:23, “I see another law in my members, warring against the *law of my mind*, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” That which he here calls the “law of my mind,” from the principal subject and seat of it, is in itself no other but the “law of the Spirit of life [that is] in Christ Jesus” (8:2)—that is, the effective power of the Spirit of grace, as was said.

But the “law,” as applied to sin, has a double sense. In the first part of verse 23, “I see another law in my members,” it denotes the being and nature of sin. Then in the latter part of the verse, “bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my mem-

bers,” it signifies its power and effectiveness. And both these are comprised in the same name, singly used: “a law” (7:21). Now, we observe from this term “a law” when attributed to sin, that *there is an exceeding force and power in the remainders of indwelling sin in believers, with a constant working towards evil.*

Thus it is in believers: it is a law even in them, though not *to* them. Though its rule be broken, its strength weakened and impaired, its root mortified, yet it is a law still of great force and effectiveness. There, where it is least felt, it is most powerful. Carnal<sup>4</sup> men, in reference to spiritual and moral duties, are nothing but this law of sin. They do nothing but from it and by it. It is in them a ruling and prevailing principle of all moral actions, with reference to a supernatural and eternal end. I shall not consider this law of sin in them in whom it has most power, but in them in whom its power is chiefly discovered and discerned, that is, in believers. I shall consider it in those without Christ only for the further conviction and display of sin in the believer (ch. 16).

### b. “I find”

Secondly, the apostle proposes the way by which he discovered this law in himself: “I find then [or, therefore] a law.” He found it. It had been told him there was such a law; it had been preached to him. This convinced him that there *was* a law of sin. But it is one thing for a man to know in general that there is a law of sin; another thing for a man to have an experience of the power of this law of sin *in himself*. It is preached to all; all men that own the Scripture acknowledge it as being declared therein. However, they are but few who know it in themselves; we should otherwise have more complaints of it than we have, and more contendings against it, and less fruits of it in the world. But this is that which the apostle affirms: not that the doctrine of it had been preached to him, but that he found it by experience in himself: “I find a law”—that is, “I have experience of its power and effectiveness.” For a man to find his sickness and danger thereon from its effects is another thing than to hear a discourse about a disease from its causes. This experience is the great preservative of all divine truth in the soul. This it is to know a thing indeed, in reality, to know it for ourselves: when, as we are taught it from the Word, we find it so *in ourselves*.

Therefore, we observe, secondly: *believers have experience of the power and effectiveness of indwelling sin.* They find it in themselves; they find it as a law. It has a self-evidencing power to them who are alive to discern it. They who do not find its power are under its dominion.<sup>5</sup> Whosoever contends against it shall know and find that it is present with them, that it is powerful in them. He shall find the stream to be strong who swims against it, but he who rolls along with it will be insensible of it.

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<sup>4</sup> **carnal** – fleshly as opposed to spiritual; unsaved.

<sup>5</sup> **dominion** – rule.

### c. “Would do good”

Thirdly, the general frame of believers, notwithstanding the inhabitation of this law of sin, is here also expressed: they “would do good” (Rom 7:21). This law is “present.” The habitual inclination of their will is toward good. The law in them is not a law to them as it is to unbelievers. They are not wholly subject to its power nor morally subject to its commands. Grace has the sovereignty<sup>6</sup> in their souls; this gives them a will unto good. They “would do good”—that is, always and constantly.

“Whosoever is born of God *doth not commit sin*” (1Jo 3:9). To “commit sin” is to make a trade of sin, to make it a man’s business to sin. So it is said a believer “doth not commit sin” and instead does “that which is good” (Rom 7:18). To will to do good is to have the habitual bent and inclination of the will set on that which is good—that is, morally and spiritually good, which is the proper subject treated of. From this is our third observation: *there is kept up in believers, through grace, a constant and ordinarily prevailing will of doing good, notwithstanding the power and effectiveness of indwelling sin to the contrary.*

This distinguishes believers, in their worst condition, from unbelievers in their best. The will in unbelievers is under the power of the law of sin. The opposition they make to sin, either in the root or branches of it, is from their light<sup>7</sup> and their consciences. The actual will of sinning in them is never taken away. Take away all other considerations and hindrances (of which we shall treat afterward), and they would sin willingly always. Their faint endeavors to answer their convictions are far from a “will of doing that which is good.” They will plead, indeed, that they would leave their sins if they could. And they would eagerly do better than they do. But it is the working of their light and convictions, not any spiritual inclination of their wills, which they intend by that expression.

Where there is a will of doing good, there is a choice of that which is good for its own excellence’s sake—because it is desirable and suitable to the soul, and therefore to be preferred before that which is contrary. Now, this is not in any unbelievers. They do not, they cannot, so choose that which is spiritually good, nor is it so excellent or suitable to any principle that is in them. For them, it is only that they have some desires to attain the goal to which that which is good leads, and to avoid the evil to which the neglect of it tends. These vague desires are for the most part so weak and idle in many of them, that they do not lead them to any strenuous endeavors. Witness the luxury, sloth, worldliness, and security that the generality of men are drowned in. But in be-

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<sup>6</sup> **sovereignty** – God’s kingly authority; His rule is absolute and joined to almighty power, such that His decrees always come to pass (Dan 4:35; Eph 1:11). See *The Sovereignty of God* by A. W. Pink (1886-1952) and *The Sovereignty of God in Providence* by John Reisinger; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>7</sup> **light** – understanding.

lievers there is a will of doing good, an habitual disposition and inclination in their wills to that which is spiritually good.

Where this will to do good is, it is accompanied with answerable effects. The will is the principle of our moral actions. And therefore, the general course of our actings will be suited to the prevailing disposition of our own wills. Good things will proceed from the good treasures of the heart (Mat 12:35). Nor can this disposition be evidenced to be in any but by its fruits. A will of doing good, without doing good, is but pretended.

#### **d. “When”**

Fourthly, there is yet another thing remaining in these words of the apostle, arising from the respect that the presence of sin has to the time and season of duty: “*When I would do good,*” he says, “evil is present with me.”

##### **1). *Its time and season***

There are two things to be considered in the will of doing good that is in believers.

*a). There is its habitual residence* in them. They have always an habitual inclination of will to that which is good. And this habitual preparation for good is always present with them. The apostle expresses it thus: “to will is present with me” (7:18).

*b). There are special times and seasons* for the exercise of that principle. There is a “when I would do good”—a season in which this or that good, this or that duty, is to be performed and accomplished in a manner suited to the habitual preparation and inclination of the will.

##### **2). *Indwelling sin’s opposition***

There are two things in indwelling sin that are opposed to these two.

*a). It is opposed to the gracious principle* residing in the will, inclining to that which is spiritually good; this is because it is a law, a contrary principle, inclining to evil, with a dislike of that which is good.

*b). It is opposed to the second, or the actual willing of this or that good* in particular. To this “when I would do good” is opposed the presence of this law: “evil is present with me”—that is, evil is at hand and ready to oppose the actual accomplishment of the good aimed at.

Therefore, fourthly, *indwelling sin is effectually operative in rebelling and inclining to evil, when the will of doing good is in a particular manner active and inclining to obedience.*

## **2. Our Resultant Condition**

### **a. Required wisdom**

“When I would do good, evil is present with me.” This is the description of him who is a believer and a sinner, because everyone who is the former is the latter also. These are the contrary principles and the contrary operations that are in him. The principles

are a) a will of doing good on the one hand, from grace, and b) a law of sin on the other. Their adverse actings and operations are implied in these expressions: “when I would do good” and “evil is present with me.” These both are expressed more fully by the apostle: “For the flesh lusteth<sup>8</sup> against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17).

Here lie the springs<sup>9</sup> of the whole course of our obedience. An acquaintance with these several principles and their actings is the principal part of our wisdom. They are upon this matter, next to the free grace of God in our justification by the blood of Christ, the only things in which the glory of God and our own souls are concerned. These are the springs of our holiness and our sins, of our joys and troubles, of our refreshments and sorrows. It is, then, all our concern to be thoroughly acquainted with these things, who intend to walk with God and to glorify Him in this world.

Therefore, we may see what wisdom is required in the guiding and management of our hearts and ways before God. Where the subjects of a ruler are in feuds and oppositions one against another, unless great wisdom be used in the government of the whole, all things will quickly be ruinous in that state. There are these contrary principles in the hearts of believers, and if they labor not to be spiritually wise, how shall they be able to steer the right course?

Many men live in the dark to themselves all their days; whatever else they know, they know not themselves. They know their outward estates, how rich they are. And they are careful to examine the condition of their bodies as to health and sickness. But as to their inward man and their principles as to God and eternity, they know little or nothing of themselves. Indeed, few labor to grow wise in this matter; few study themselves as they ought. Few are acquainted with the evils of their own hearts as they ought—on which yet depends the whole course of their obedience, and consequently of their eternal condition. This, therefore, is our wisdom. It is a needful wisdom if we have any design to please God or to avoid that which is a provocation to the eyes of His glory.

### **b. Diligence and watchfulness**

We also shall find in our inquiry into this, what diligence and watchfulness is required for Christian behavior. There is a constant enemy of it in everyone’s own heart. What an enemy he is, we shall show later—for this is our design: to discover him to the uttermost. In the meantime, we may well bewail the woeful sloth and negligence that is in most people, even in professing believers. They live and walk as though they intend-

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<sup>8</sup> **lusteth** – has strong, eager desires. While often used of evil, fleshly desire, it can be used of good desire, as in the last part of this verse.

<sup>9</sup> **springs** – sources.

ed to go to heaven hood-winked and asleep, as though they had no enemy to deal with. Their mistake and folly, therefore, will be fully laid open as we proceed.

That which I shall principally fix upon from this place of the apostle, in reference to our present design, is that which was first laid down: namely, that there is an exceeding efficacy and power in the remainder of indwelling sin in believers, with a constant inclination and working towards evil.

Awake, therefore, all of you in whose hearts is anything of the ways of God! Your enemy is not only upon you, as on Samson of old (Jdg 16:20-21), but is *in* you also. He is at work by all ways of force and craft, as we shall see. Would you not dishonor God and His gospel;

- would you not scandalize the saints and ways of God;
- would you not wound your consciences and endanger your souls;
- would you not grieve the good and holy Spirit of God, the author of all your comforts;
- would you keep your garments undefiled, and escape the woeful temptations and pollutions of the days in which we live;
- would you be preserved from the number of the apostates in these latter days?

—then awake to the consideration of this cursed enemy, which is the spring of all these and innumerable other evils, as also of the ruin of all the souls that perish in this world!

## Chapter 2

# A “LAW OF SIN”

*I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me...bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*

—Romans 7:21, 23

That which we have proposed for consideration is the power and effectiveness of indwelling sin. The ways in which this may be proven are many. I shall begin with the title given to it in the place before mentioned: it is a law. “I find a law,” says the apostle. It is because of its power and effectiveness that it is so called. So is also the principle of grace in believers termed the “law of the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2), as we observed before, which is the exceeding greatness of God’s power in them (Eph 1:19). Where there is a law, there is power.

We shall, therefore, show both what belongs to indwelling sin as it is a law in general, and also what is peculiar or proper in it as being such a law as we have described.

### 1. A Law: General Considerations

There are in general two things attending every law as such.

#### a. Dominion

*“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof..For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”*

—Romans 6:12, 14

First, dominion. “The law *hath dominion* over a man as long as he liveth” (Rom 7:1)—that is, it lords it over a man. Where any law takes place, it has dominion. It is properly the act of a superior, and it belongs to its nature to exact obedience by way of dominion.

Now, there is a twofold dominion, as there is a twofold law. There is a *moral, authoritative dominion* over a man, and there is a *real effective dominion* in a man. The first is an effect of the law of God, the latter of the law of sin. The law of sin has not in itself a moral dominion. It has not a rightful dominion or authority over any man, but it has



that which is equivalent to it. Therefore, it is said to “reign” as a king (Rom 6:12), and to have dominion over you—that is, to lord it over (6:14), as a law in general is said to have (7:1).

However, because sin has lost its complete dominion in reference to believers, of whom alone we speak, I shall not insist upon it in this utmost extent of its power. But even in believers, it is a law still, though not a law *unto* them; as was said, it is a law *in* them. And though it has not a complete and, as it were, a rightful dominion over them, yet it will have a domination as to some things in them. It is still a law, and that in them, so that all its actings are the actings of a law. It acts with power, though it has lost its complete power of ruling in them. Though it is weakened, yet its nature is not changed. It is a law still, and therefore powerful. And as its particular workings, which we shall consider later, are the ground of this term *a law*, so the term itself teaches us in general what we are to expect from it, and what endeavors it will use for dominion, to which it has been accustomed.

### **b. Power**

Secondly, a law, as a law, has a power to provoke those who are subject to it to the things that it requires. A law has rewards and punishments accompanying it. These secretly prevail on them to whom they are proposed, even though the things commanded are not much desirable. Generally, all laws have their power on the minds of men from the rewards and punishments that are attached to them. Nor is this “law of sin” without this spring of power: it has its rewards and punishments. The pleasures of sin are the rewards of sin, rewards that most men lose their souls to obtain.

By this, the law of sin contended in Moses against the law of grace: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season...for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Heb 11:25-26). The contest was in his mind between the law of sin and the law of grace.

The motive on the part of the law of sin by which it sought to draw him over, and wherewith it prevails on the most, was the reward that it proposed to him; namely, that he should have the present enjoyment of the pleasures of sin. By this it contended against the reward attached to the law of grace, called “the recompence of reward.” By its sorry reward, the law of sin keeps the world in obedience to its commands. Experience shows us of what power it is to influence the minds of men.

This law of sin also has punishments with which it threatens men who labor to cast off its yoke. Whatever evil, trouble, or danger in the world attends gospel obedience—whatever hardship or violence is to be inflicted upon the sensual part of our natures in a strict course of mortification<sup>1</sup>—sin makes use of, as if they were punishments attend-

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<sup>1</sup> **mortification** – putting sin to death. See *Mortification of Sin* by Owen, and Free Grace Broadcaster 201, *Mortification*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

ing the neglect of its commands. By these it prevails on the "fearful," who shall have no share in eternal life (Rev 21:8).

It is hard to say by which of these—its pretended rewards or pretended punishments—the law of sin most prevails, or in which of them its greatest strength lies. By its rewards, it entices men to sins of commission, as they are called, in ways and actions tending to the satisfaction of its lusts. By its punishments, it induces men to the omitting of duties—a course tending to no less a destructive result than the former.

It is not evident by which of these the law of sin has its greatest success in and upon the souls of men. That is because they are seldom or never separated, but equally take place in the same persons. But this is certain, that by offers and promises of the pleasures of sin on the one hand, and by threats of the deprivation of all sensual satisfaction and the infliction of temporal evils on the other, it has an exceeding effectiveness on the minds of men, oftentimes on believers themselves. Unless a man be prepared to reject the reasonings that will offer themselves from the one and the other of these, there is no standing before the power of this law of sin.

The world falls before the reasonings of this law of sin every day. With what deceit and violence they are urged and imposed on the minds of men, we shall declare later—as also what advantages these reasonings have to prevail upon them. Look on the majority of men and you shall find them wholly at sin's disposal by these means. Do the profits and pleasures of sin lie before them? Then nothing can withhold them from reaching after them. Do difficulties and inconveniences attend the duties of the gospel? Then they will have nothing to do with them. And so they are wholly given up to the rule and dominion of this law of sin.

Thus we have in general this light into the power and effectiveness of indwelling sin from the general nature of a law, whereof it is partaker.

## **2. A Law: Particular Considerations**

### **a. An inbred law**

We may consider, next, what kind of law in particular the law of sin is, which will further evidence its power, about which we are inquiring. It is not an outward, written, commanding, directing law, but an inbred, working, impelling, urging law. A law *proposed* to us is not to be compared for efficacy to a law *inbred* in us. Adam had a law of sin proposed to him in his temptation (Gen 3), but because he had no law of sin inbred and working in him, he might have withstood it. An inbred law is necessarily effective.

Let us take an example from the Law which is contrary to this law of sin. The Law of God was at first inbred and natural to man; it was created together with his faculties, and was their moral uprightness, both in being and operation, in reference to his purpose of living unto God and glorifying Him. Therefore, it had a special power in the whole soul to enable it to all obedience, and to make all obedience easy and pleasant.

Such is the power of an inbred law. And though this Law, as to the rule and dominion of it, is now by nature cast out of the soul (Rom 6:10-11); yet the remaining sparks of it, because they are inbred, are very powerful and effective—as the apostle declares (Rom 2:14-15). Later, God renews this Law and writes it in tables of stone (Exo 20).

But what is the efficacy of this Law? Will it now, as it is external and proposed to men, enable them to perform the things that it exacts and requires? Not at all. God knew it would not, unless it were turned to an internal law again—that is, until, from a moral outward rule, it be turned into an inward real principle. Therefore, God makes His Law internal again, and implants it on the heart as it was at first, when He intends to give it power to produce obedience in His people. “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts” (Jer 31:31-33).

This is that which God fixes on, as it were, upon a demonstration of the insufficiency of an outward law leading men to obedience. It is as if He were to say, “The written law will not do it; mercies and deliverances from distress will not effect it; trials and afflictions will not accomplish it. Then,” the Lord says, “I will take another course: I will turn the written law into an internal living principle in their hearts; and that will have such an efficacy as shall assuredly make them my people, and keep them so.”

Now, such also is this law of sin. It is an indwelling law: “it is...sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom 7:17), “sin that dwelleth in me” (v. 20), it “is present with me” (v. 21), it “is in my members” (v. 23). Yea, it is so far in a man as in some sense it is said to be the man himself: “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (v. 18). The flesh, which is the seat and throne of this law—yea, which indeed *is* this law—is in some sense the man himself, as grace also is the new man.

### **b. Various advantages**

Now, from this consideration of the law of sin, that it is an indwelling law inclining and moving to sin as an inward habit or principle, we can see how it has various advantages that increase its strength and further its power.

#### *1). Always abiding*

The law of sin always abides in the soul; it is never absent. The apostle twice uses the expression, “It dwelleth in me.” There is its constant residence and habitation. If it came upon the soul only at certain seasons, much obedience might be perfectly accomplished in its absence. The gates might be sometimes closed against it so that it is not able to return—in the same way that citizens sometimes deal with usurping tyrants whom they shut out of a city. If this were the case, the soul might be able to fortify itself against sin. However, the soul is sin’s home; there it dwells and is no wanderer. Wherever you are, whatever you are about, this law of sin is always in you—in the best that you do and in the worst.

Men little consider what a dangerous companion is always at home with them. When they are in company, when alone, by night or by day, all is the same: sin is with them. There is a living coal continually in their houses that, if it is not looked to, will set

them on fire, and it might consume them. Oh, the woeful security of poor souls! How little do most men think of this inbred enemy that is never away from home! How little, for the most part, does the watchfulness of any professors answer the danger of their state and condition!

### 2). *For every purpose*

The law of sin is always ready to apply itself to every end and purpose that it serves. The apostle says in effect, This law of sin not only dwells in me, "but when I would do good, [it] is *present with me*" (Rom 7:21). There is somewhat more in that expression than mere indwelling. A stranger may dwell in a house and yet not be always meddling with what the good-man of the house has to do. But this law so dwells in us as that it will be present with us in everything we do. Yea, often when with most earnestness we desire to be rid of it, with most violence it will put itself upon us: "When I would do good, [it] is present with me." Would you pray, would you hear the preaching of the Word, would you give alms, would you meditate, would you be in any duty acting faith on God and love towards Him, would you work righteousness, would you resist temptations? If so, this troublesome, perplexing indweller still will put itself upon you, more or less, and be present with you—so that you cannot perfectly and completely accomplish the thing that is good, as our apostle speaks (7:18).

By hearkening to their temptations, sometimes men stir up, excite, and provoke their lusts; and no wonder if then they find them present and active. But it also will be so when, with all our endeavors, we labor to be free from them. This law of sin "dwelleth" in us—that is, it adheres, as a depraved principle, to our minds in darkness and vanity, to our affections in sensuality, to our wills in a loathing of that which is good. By some, more, or all of these, it is continually putting itself upon us—in inclinations, motions, or suggestions to evil—when we would be most gladly rid of it.

### 3). *With ease*

The law of sin being an indwelling law, it applies itself to its work with great facility and easiness, like "the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb 12:1). It has a great facility and easiness in the application of itself to its work: it needs no doors to be opened to it; it needs no tools to work by. The soul cannot apply itself to any duty of a man but it must use those faculties in which this law resides. Is the understanding or the mind to be applied to anything? There this law of sin is, in ignorance, darkness, vanity, folly, and madness. Is the will to be engaged? There it is also, in spiritual deadness, stubbornness, and the roots of obstinacy. Are the heart and affections to be set to work? There it is, in inclinations to the world and present things, and in sensuality, with proneness to all manner of defilements.

Therefore, it is easy for this law of sin to creep into all that we do, to hinder all that is good, and to further all sin and wickedness. It has an intimacy, an inwardness with the soul; and therefore, in all that we do, it easily besets us. It possesses those very faculties of the soul by which we must do what we do—whatever it be, good or evil.

Now, the law of sin has all these advantages because it is a law, an indwelling law, which shows its power and efficacy. It is always resident in the soul; it puts itself upon all its actings, and that with ease and facility.

### **c. Finding this law**

This is the “law of sin” which the apostle affirms that he found in himself. This is the title that he gives to the powerful and effectual remainder of indwelling sin even in believers. We have these general evidences of indwelling sin’s power from the title “law” given to it. Many there are in the world who have not found this law in themselves. Whatever they have been taught in the Word, they have not a spiritual sense and experience of the power of indwelling sin. This is because they are wholly under the dominion of it. They find not that there is darkness and folly in their minds, because they are darkness itself—and darkness will discover nothing. They find not deadness and an indisposition in their hearts and wills to God, because they are dead wholly in trespasses and sins. They are at peace with their lusts by being in bondage to them!

This is the state of most men in the world, which makes them woefully despise all their eternal concerns. Why is it that men follow and pursue the world with so much greediness; that they neglect heaven, life, and immortality for it every day? Why is it that some pursue their sensuality with delight? They will drink and revel, and have their sports, let others say what they please. Why is it that so many live so unprofitably under the Word, that they understand so little of what is spoken to them, that they practice less of what they understand, and will by no means be stirred up to answer the mind of God in His calls to them? All these things proceed from this law of sin and the power of it, which rules and bears sway in men. But we do not treat particularly such persons at present.

From what has been spoken, it will follow that, if there be such a law of sin in believers, it is doubtless their duty to find it out, to find it so to be. The more they are aware of its power, the less they will feel its effects. It will not at all advantage a man to have a wasting fever and not to discover it, or a fire lying secretly in his house and not to know it. So much as men find of this law in them, so much they will abhor it and themselves, and no more. Proportional also to their discovery of it will be their earnestness for grace, nor will it rise higher. All watchfulness and diligence in obedience will be answerable also thereto.

Upon this one hinge of finding out and experiencing the power and the efficacy of this law of sin, turns the whole course of our lives. Ignorance of it breeds senselessness, carelessness, sloth, security, and pride, all which the Lord’s soul abhors. Eruptions into great, open, conscience-wasting, scandalous sins are from a lack of a due spiritual consideration of this law.

Inquire, then, how it is with your souls. What do you find of this law? What experience have you of its power and efficacy? Do you find it dwelling in you, always present with you, exciting itself, or putting forth its poison with facility and ease at all times, in

all your duties "when you would do good"? What humiliation, what self-abasement, what intensesness in prayer, what diligence, what watchfulness does this call for at your hands! What spiritual wisdom do you stand in need of! What supplies of grace, what assistance of the Holy Ghost will be there also discovered! I fear we have in few of us a diligence proportional to our danger.

## Chapter 3

# INDWELLING SIN IN THE HEART

Having shown the remainders of indwelling sin in believers to be a law, and discussed the power it has in general because it is a law, we shall now proceed to give particular instances of its efficacy and advantages from some things that relate to it as such. And these are three:

- I. Its seat and subject* (this chapter)
- II. Its natural properties* (ch. 4)
- III. Its operations and manner* (ch. 5 through 12)—  
to which principally we aim and shall attend.

### 1. The Heart

For the seat and subject of this law of sin, the Scripture everywhere assigns it to be the heart. There indwelling sin keeps its special residence. It has invaded and possessed the throne of God Himself: “Madness is in their heart while they live” (Ecc 9:3). This is their madness, or the root of all that madness which appears in their lives. “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Mat 15:19). There are many outward temptations and provocations that fall upon men, which excite and stir them up to these evils; but these only open the vessel, as it were, and let out what is laid up and stored in it. The root, rise, and stirring of all these things is in the heart. Temptations and occasions put nothing into a man, but only draw out what was in him before.

From this is that summary description of the whole work and effect of this law of sin: “Every imagination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5; 8:21). The whole work of the law of sin, from its first rise, its first coining of actual sin, is here described. Its seat, its work-house, is said to be the heart. Therefore, it is called by our Savior “the evil treasure of his heart”: “An evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil” (Luk 6:45). This treasure is the prevailing principle of moral actions that is in men.

In like manner, in the beginning of the verse, our Savior calls grace “the good treasure of [the] heart” of a good man, from which that which is good proceeds. It is a principle constantly and abundantly inciting and stirring up to, and consequently bringing forth, actions conformable and like itself—of the same kind and nature with itself.

It is also called a “treasure” for its abundance. It will never be exhausted. It is not wasted by men’s spending on it. Yea, the more lavish men are of this stock, the more they draw out of this treasure, the more it grows and abounds! As men do not spend their grace, but increase it by its exercise, no more do they their indwelling sin. The more men exercise their grace in duties of obedience, the more it is strengthened and increased. And the more men exert and put forth the fruits of their lust, the more is that enraged and increased in them. Their lust feeds on itself, swallows up its own poison, and grows thereby. The more men sin, the more are they inclined to sin.

It is from the deceitfulness of this law of sin, whereof we shall speak afterward at large (ch. 8), that men persuade themselves, by this or some other particular sin, that they shall so satisfy their lusts that they shall need to sin no more. Every sin increases the principle and fortifies the habit of sinning. It is an evil treasure that increases by doing evil. And where does this treasure lie? It is in the heart. There it is laid up; there it is kept in safety. All the men in the world, all the angels in heaven, cannot dispossess a man of this treasure, because it is so safely stored in the heart.

The heart in the Scripture is variously used: sometimes for the mind and understanding, sometimes for the will, sometimes for the affections, sometimes for the conscience, and sometimes for the whole soul. Generally, it denotes the whole soul of man and all the faculties of it, not absolutely, but as they are all one principle of moral operations, as they all concur in our doing good or evil—the *mind*, as it inquires, discerns and judges what is to be done and what refused; the *will*, as it chooses, or refuses and avoids; the *affections*, as they like or dislike, cleave to or turn from, that which is proposed to them; the *conscience*, as it warns and determines. These are all together called the heart. It is in this sense we say that the seat and subject of this law of sin is the heart of man.

## 2. Manner of Performance

We may add that the Scripture, speaking of the heart as the principle of men’s good or evil actions, does usually imply together with it two things belonging to the manner of the action’s performance.

*a. A suitableness and pleasingness* to the soul in the things that are done. When men take delight and are pleased with what they do, they are said to do it “heartily,” with their whole hearts. Thus, when God Himself blesses His people in love and delight, He says He does it “with my whole heart and with my whole soul” (Jer 32:41).

*b. Resolution and constancy* in such actions. And this also is denoted in the figure of speech used before of a “treasure,” from which men do constantly take out the things that they either stand in need of or intend to use.

This is the subject, the seat, the dwelling-place of this law of sin: the heart. It is the entire principle of moral operations, of doing good or evil, as out of it proceed good or evil. Here dwells our enemy. This is the fortress, the citadel of this tyrant, where it



maintains a rebellion against God all our days. Sometimes it has more strength and consequently more success, sometimes less of the one and of the other. But it is always in rebellion while we live.

### 3. Increasing the Power of Sin

We may now consider one or two properties of the heart as the seat of indwelling sin, that exceedingly contribute to the strength and power of sin. It is like an enemy in war, whose strength and power lie not only in his numbers and force of men or arms, but also in the unconquerable fortresses that he possesses. Such is the heart to this enemy of God and our souls. This will appear from the properties of it, of which one or two shall be mentioned.

#### a. Unsearchable

The heart is unsearchable: “Who can know...the heart?...I the Lord search the heart” (Jer 17:9-10). The heart of man is exposed to God only; therefore He reserves the honor of searching the heart to Himself alone. His ability to search the heart fully declares Him to be God as much as any other glorious attribute of His nature. We know not the hearts of one another; we know not our own hearts as we ought. Some may know their own hearts as to their general bent and disposition, whether it be good or bad, sincere and sound, or corrupt and naught.<sup>1</sup> But no one knows all the secret intrigues, the windings and turnings, the actings and repulses of his own heart.

Has anyone the perfect measure of his own light and darkness? Upon the proposal of an endless variety of objects for its exercise, can anyone know what acts of choosing or turning away his will will bring forth? Can anyone traverse the various changes in his affections? Do the secret springs of acting and refusing in the soul lie before the eyes of any man? Does anyone know what will be the motions of the mind or will in such and such circumstances, such a suiting of objects, such a pretension of reasonings, such an appearance of things desirable? All in heaven and earth—but the infinite, all-seeing God—are utterly ignorant of these things. In this unsearchable heart dwells the law of sin. And much of its security, and consequently of its strength, lies in this: that it is past our finding out. We fight with an enemy whose secret strength we cannot discover, whom we cannot follow into its retirements.

Therefore, often, when we are ready to think sin quite ruined, after a while we find it was but out of sight. In an unsearchable heart, it has hideouts and retreats where we cannot pursue it. The soul may persuade itself all is well, when sin may be safe in the hidden darkness of the mind—which it is impossible that he should look into, for whatever makes something able to be seen is light. The soul may suppose the will of sinning is utterly taken away, when yet there is an unsearchable reserve for a more

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<sup>1</sup> **naught** – worthless.

suitable object, a more vigorous temptation, than at present it is tried with. Has a man had a contest with any lust, and a blessed victory over it by the Holy Ghost as to that present trial? When he thinks it is utterly expelled, he ere long finds that it was but retired out of sight. It can lie so close in the mind's darkness, in the will's indisposition, in the disorder and carnality of the affections, that no eye can discover it. The best of our wisdom is but to watch its first appearances, to catch its first under-earth heavings and workings, and to set ourselves in opposition to them.

This is because we cannot follow it into the secret corners of the heart. It is true, there is yet a relief in this case: that He to Whom the work of destroying the law of sin and body of death in us is principally committed—namely, the Holy Ghost—comes with His axe to the very root. Neither is there anything in an unsearchable heart that is not “naked and opened...unto him” (Heb 4:13). But we, in a way of duty, may see what an enemy we have to deal with.

## **b. Deceitful**

### ***1). The advantage of deceitfulness***

As indwelling sin is unsearchable, so it is deceitful, as in the place above mentioned: “The heart is deceitful above all things,” incomparably so (Jer 17:9). There is great deceit in the dealings of men in the world: great deceit in their counsels and contrivances in reference to their affairs, private and public; great deceit in their words and actings. The world is full of deceit and fraud. But all this is nothing to the deceit that is in man's heart towards *himself*—for that is the meaning of the expression in this place, not towards others.

Now, incomparable deceitfulness, added to unsearchableness, gives a great addition and increase of strength to the law of sin upon the account of its seat and subject. I speak not yet of the deceitfulness of sin itself, but the deceitfulness of the heart where it is seated. “There are seven abominations in [the] heart” (Pro 26:25)—that is, not only many, but an absolute complete number, as seven denotes. And, they are such abominations as consist in deceitfulness. Therefore, the caution foregoing implies, “Trust him not,” for it is only deceit that should make us not to trust in that degree and measure of which the object is capable.

### ***2). How the heart is deceitful***

This deceitfulness of the heart, by which it is exceedingly advantaged in its harboring of sin, lies chiefly in these two things.

#### ***a). Contradictions***

The deceitfulness of the heart lies in its abounding in contradictions, so that it is not to be found and dealt with according to any constant rule and way of procedure.

There are some men that have much of this in their conduct, from their natural constitution or from other causes. They seem to be made up of contradictions: sometimes to be very wise in their affairs, sometimes very foolish; very open, and very re-

served; very moldable, and very obstinate; very easy to be entreated, and very revengeful—all to a remarkable degree. This is generally accounted a bad character, and is seldom found but when it proceeds from some notable predominant lust. But in general, in respect of moral good or evil, duty or sin, it is so with the heart of every man: flaming hot, and cold as a metal key; weak, and yet stubborn; obstinate, and moldable. The frame of the heart is ready to contradict itself every moment.

Now, you might think you are completely characterized by a particular frame, a particular way. Soon, it is quite otherwise, so that no one knows what to expect from it. The rise of this is the disorder that is brought upon all the heart's faculties by *sin*. God created all these faculties in a perfect harmony and union. The mind and reason were in perfect subjection and subordination to God and His will. The will answered,<sup>2</sup> in its choice of good, the discovery made of it by the mind. The affections constantly and evenly followed the understanding and will. The mind's subjection to God was the spring of the orderly and harmonious motion of the soul and all the wheels in it.

However, the heart being disturbed by sin, the rest of the faculties now move cross and contrary one to another. The will chooses not the good that the mind discovers. The affections delight not in that which the will chooses; but they are all ajar and interfere, cross and rebel against each other. This we have got by our falling away from God. Therefore, sometimes the will leads and the judgment follows. Yea, the affections, which should be subservient to all, commonly get the sovereignty and draw the whole soul captive after them.

Therefore it is, as I said, that the heart is made up of so many contradictions in its actings. Sometimes the mind retains its sovereignty, the affections are in subjection, and the will is ready for its duty. This puts a good face upon things. Immediately, the rebellion of the affections or the obstinacy of the will takes place and prevails, and the whole scene is changed. This, I say, makes the heart deceitful above all things: it agrees not at all in itself, is not consistent with itself, has no order that it is consistent with, and is under no certain conduct that is stable. Instead, if I may so say, it has a rotation in itself, where often the feet lead and guide the whole!

*b). Full promises*

The heart's deceit lies in its full promisings upon the first appearance of things, and this also proceeds from the same principle with the former. Sometimes the affections are touched and wrought upon. The whole heart appears in a fair frame, and all promises to be well. Within a while, the whole frame is changed: the mind was not at all affected or turned, the affections a little acted their parts and are gone off, and all the fair promises of the heart are departed with them.

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<sup>2</sup> **answered** – responded in a suitable way.

### **c. Summary**

Now, add this deceitfulness to the unsearchableness before mentioned, and we shall find that at least the difficulty of dealing effectively with sin in its seat and throne will be exceedingly increased. A deceiving and a deceived heart, who can deal with it?—especially considering that the heart employs all its deceits in the service of sin; it contributes them all to its furtherance. All the disorder that is in the heart, all its false promises and fair appearances, promote the interest and advantages of sin. Therefore, God cautions the people to look to it, lest their own hearts should entice and deceive them.

Who can mention the treacheries and deceits that lie in the heart of man? It is not for nothing that the Holy Ghost so expresses it: “The heart is deceitful above all things”—uncertain in what it does and false in what it promises. And moreover it is due to this cause, among others, that—in pursuing our war against sin—we have not only the old work to go over and over, but new work still while we live in this world. We have still new stratagems and wiles to deal with, as the manner will be where unsearchableness and deceitfulness are to be contended with.

## **4. Other Properties**

There are many other properties of this seat and subject of the law of sin that might be insisted on to the same aim and purpose, but that would divert us too far from our particular design, and therefore I shall pass these over with some few considerations.

### **a. Never ending**

First, never let us reckon that our work in contending against sin, in crucifying, mortifying, and subduing it, is at an end. The place of its habitation is unsearchable. When we may think that we have thoroughly won the field, there is still some reserve remaining that we saw not, that we knew not of. Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory; in the same way, many have been spiritually wounded after great successes against this enemy. David was so: his great surprise into sin was after a long profession, many experiences of God, and watchful keeping himself from his iniquity.

And due to this, in part, it has come to pass that the profession of many has declined in their old age or riper time (which must more distinctly be spoken about later). They have given up the work of mortifying sin before their work was at an end. There is no way for us to pursue sin in its unsearchable habitation but by being endless in our pursuit. And that command of the apostle which we have on this account, is as necessary for them to observe who are towards the end of their race, as those that are but at the beginning of it: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth” (Col 3:5)—be always doing it while you live in this world.

It is true, great ground is obtained when the work is vigorously and constantly carried on. Sin is much weakened, so that the soul presses forwards towards perfection—but yet the work must be endless while we are in this world. If we give over, we shall quickly see this enemy exerting itself with new strength and vigor. We may have been ready to say that there was an end of sin, that it was dead and gone forever—perhaps under some great affliction, or it may be in some notable enjoyment of God, in the sense of the sweetness of blessed communion with Christ. But have we not found the contrary by experience? Has it not showed that it was only retired into some unsearchable recesses of the heart, as to its in-being and nature, though it may be greatly weakened in its power? Let us, then, reckon on it, that there is no way to have our work done but by always doing of it. He who dies fighting in this warfare dies assuredly a conqueror.

### **b. Constant**

Secondly, has indwelling sin its residence in that which is various, inconsistent, and deceitful above all things? This calls for constant watchfulness against it. An open enemy that deals by violence only, always gives some rest. You know where to have him and what he is doing, so that sometimes you may sleep quietly without fear. But against adversaries that deal by deceit and treachery (which are long swords and reach the greatest distance), nothing will give security but constant watchfulness. It is impossible we should in this case be too jealous, doubtful, suspicious, or watchful. The heart has a thousand wiles and deceits; and if we are in the least off from our watch, we may be sure to be surprised. Therefore those repeated commands and cautions are given for watching,<sup>3</sup> for being circumspect,<sup>4</sup> diligent, careful, and the like. There is no living for them who have to deal with an enemy deceitful above all things unless they persist in such a frame.

All cautions that are given in this case are necessary, especially that of, “Remember not to believe [your own heart]!” Does the heart promise fair? Rest not on it, but say to the Lord Christ, “Lord, do Thou undertake for me.” Does the sun shine fair in the morning? Reckon not therefore on a fair day: the clouds may arise and fall. Though the morning give a fair appearance of serenity and peace, turbulent affections may arise and cloud the soul with sin and darkness.

### **c. Commit it to God**

Thirdly then, commit the whole matter with all care and diligence to Him Who can search the heart to the uttermost, and knows how to prevent all its treacheries and deceits. In the things before mentioned lies our duty, but here lies our safety. There is no treacherous corner in our hearts but He can search it to the uttermost. There is no de-

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<sup>3</sup> See *Temptation* by John Owen, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>4</sup> **circumspect** – careful to consider all circumstances and possible consequences; prudent.

ceit in them but He can disappoint it. David takes this course (Psa 139). After he had set forth the omnipresence of God and His omniscience<sup>5</sup> (139:1-10), he makes improvement of it: “Search me, O God, and...try me” (139:23). [This is] as if he had said, “It is but a little that I know of my deceitful heart, only I would be sincere; I would not have reserves for sin retained therein. Therefore, Thou—Who are present with my heart, Who knows my thoughts long before—undertake this work, perform it thoroughly, for Thou alone art able so to do.”

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<sup>5</sup> **omnipresence** – God’s attribute of being everywhere present.

**omniscience** – God’s attribute of knowing everything: past, present, and future.

## Chapter 4

# ENMITY AGAINST GOD

*The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*

—Romans 8:7

There are yet other arguments for the evidencing of the power and strength of indwelling sin (from which it is termed a “law”) that we must mention, according to the order in which we laid them down before.

We are considering three particular instances of indwelling sin’s power from some things that relate to it as such.

*I. Its seat and subject* (ch. 3)

*II. Its natural properties* (this chapter)

*III. Its operations and manner* (ch. 5 through 12)<sup>1</sup>

We have seen the seat and subject of this law of sin, which is the heart (ch. 3). In the next place we might take a view of its nature in general, which also will manifest its power and efficacy (II).

This I shall not enlarge upon, it not being my business to declare the nature of indwelling sin—it already has been done by others. I shall therefore, in reference to our special design in hand, only consider one property of it that belongs to its nature, and this always, wherever it is. This property is expressed by the apostle, “the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). That which is here called “the carnal mind” is in the Greek “the wisdom of the flesh,” and is the same as “the law of sin” which we insist on.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Enmity

### a. The nature of enmity

And what does the apostle say about this “wisdom of the flesh”? Why, it is “enmity against God”! It is not only an enemy. If it were just an enemy, then some reconcilia-

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is copied from chapter three and inserted here by the editors as an aid to the reader.

<sup>2</sup> **insist on** – discuss.

tion to God possibly might be made. But it is enmity<sup>3</sup> itself, and so not capable of accepting any terms of peace. Enemies may be reconciled, but enmity cannot; yea, the only way to reconcile enemies is to destroy the enmity. So the apostle in another case tells us, “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God” (Rom 5:10)—that is, a work achieved and brought about by the blood of Christ, the reconciling of the greatest enemies. But when he comes to speak of enmity, there is no way for it but it must be abolished and destroyed: “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity” (Eph 2:15). There is no way to deal with any enmity whatever, but by its abolishment or destruction.

And this also lies in it as it is enmity: that every part and parcel of it, if we may so speak—the least degree of it that can possibly remain in anyone while and where there is anything of its nature—is enmity still. It may not be so effective and powerful in operation as where it has more life and vigor, but it is enmity still. As every drop of poison is poison and will infect, and every spark of fire is fire and will burn, so is everything of the law of sin—the last and the least of it. It is enmity, it will poison, it will burn. That which is anything in the abstract is still so while it has any being at all.

Our apostle, who may well be supposed to have made as great a progress in the subduing of the law of sin as anyone on the earth, yet cries out after all for deliverance as from an irreconcilable enemy (Rom 7:24). The most unadorned acting, the most imperceptible working of it, is the acting and working of enmity. Mortification reduces its force but does not change its nature. Grace changes the nature of man, but nothing can change the nature of sin. Whatever effect is wrought *upon* sin, there is no effect wrought *in* it—it is enmity still, sin still.

This then, by sin, is our state and condition. “God is love” (1Jo 4:8). He is so in Himself, eternally excellent and desirable above all. He is so to us, in the blood of His Son and in all the inexpressible fruits of it by which we are what we are, and in which all our future hopes and expectations are wrapped up. Against this God we carry about us an enmity all our days—an enmity that has this from its nature, that it is incapable of cure or reconciliation. Destroyed it may be—it shall be—but cured it cannot be.

If a man has an enemy to deal with who is too mighty for him, as David had with Saul, he may take the course that David did—to consider what it is that provoked his enemy against him—and so address himself to remove the cause and make up his peace. “If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering: but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the Lord” (1Sa 26:19). Come it from God or man, there is yet hope of peace. But when a man has enmity itself to deal with, nothing is to be expected but continual fighting, to the destruction of the one side or other. If enmity is not overcome and destroyed, it will overcome and destroy the soul.

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<sup>3</sup> **enmity** – hostility.



## **b. No compromise**

In this lies no small part of indwelling sin's power, which we are inquiring after: it can admit of no terms of peace, of no compromise. There may be a compromise where there is no reconciliation; there may be a truce where there is no peace. But with this enemy we can obtain neither the one nor the other. It is never quiet, as conqueror or conquered, which was the only kind of enemy that the famous warrior complained about of old. It is in vain for a man to have any expectation of rest from his lust but by its death, of absolute freedom from lust but by his own death.

Some, in the uproar of their corruptions, seek for quietness by laboring to satisfy them, making "provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof," as the apostle speaks (Rom 13:14). This is to attempt to reduce fire by adding wood and oil. As all the fuel in the world, all the fabric of the creation that is combustible, being cast into the fire, will not at all satisfy it but increase it, so is it with satisfaction given to sin by sinning: it only inflames and increases. If a man will part with some of his goods unto an enemy, it may satisfy him; but enmity will have all, and is not one whit the more satisfied than if he had received nothing at all—like the lean cattle that were never the less hungry after having devoured the fat (Gen 41:20). You cannot bargain with the fire to take but so much of your houses; you have no way of escape but to quench it.

It is in this case as it is in the contest between a wise man and a fool: "Whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest" (Pro 29:9). Whatever frame or temper he is in, his unceasing folly makes him troublesome. It is so with this indwelling sin: if it violently roars, as it will do on provocations and temptations, it will be outrageous in the soul; or if it seems to be pleased and contented, to be satisfied—it is all as one and the same. There is no peace, no rest to be had with it or by it.

Had it, then, been of any other nature, some other way might have been fixed on; but seeing it consists in enmity, all the relief the soul has must lie in its ruin.

## **2. "Enmity against God"**

### **a. Opposition**

Secondly, it is not only said to be "enmity," but it is said to be "enmity against God." It has chosen a great enemy indeed. It is in various places proposed as our enemy, "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1Pe 2:11). Fleshly lusts are enemies to the soul (that is, to ourselves). Sometimes indwelling sin is proposed as an enemy to the Spirit that is in us: "The flesh lusteth [that is, fights] against the Spirit" (Gal 5:17). It fights against the Spirit, or the spiritual principle that is in us, to conquer it. It fights against our souls to destroy them. It has special aims and designs against our souls and against the principle of grace that is in us. But its proper formal object is God: it is "enmity against God." It is its work to oppose grace; and it is a consequent of its work to oppose our souls, which follows upon what it does more than what it intends. But its nature and formal design is to oppose God—God as the lawgiver, God as

holy, God as the author of the gospel, a way of salvation by grace and not by works. This is the direct object of the law of sin.

Why does it oppose duty, so that the good we would do we do not, either as to matter or manner? Why does it render the soul carnal, indisposed, unbelieving, unspiritual, weary, wandering? It is because of its enmity to God, Whom the soul aims to have communion with in duty. It has, as it were, that command from Satan which the Assyrians had from their king: "Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel" (1Ki 22:31). It is neither the small nor the great that sin sets itself against, but God Himself, the King of Israel. There lies the secret formal reason of all its opposition to good: even because it relates to God.

If a road, a trade, a way of duties is set up where communion with God is not aimed at, but only the duty itself—as is the manner of men in most of their superstitious worship—the opposition that will lie against it from the law of sin will be very weak, easy, and gentle. The Syrians assaulted Jehoshaphat because he showed himself as a king, but when they found that it was not Ahab, they turned back from pursuing of him (1Ki 22:30-33). In the same way, because there is a show and appearance of the worship of God, sin may make headway against it at first, but when the duty cries out in the heart that indeed God is not there, sin turns away to seek out its proper enemy elsewhere, even God Himself. Thus many poor creatures spend their days in dismal, tiring superstitions, without any great reluctance from within, when others cannot be suffered freely to watch with Christ in a spiritual manner one hour.

It is no wonder that men fight with carnal weapons for their superstitious worship without, when they have no fighting against it within. This is because God is not in it, and the law of sin makes not opposition to any one duty, but instead is opposed to God in every duty. This is our state and condition: all the opposition that arises in us to anything that is spiritually good—whether it be from darkness in the mind, opposition in the will, or sloth in the affections—all the secret arguings and reasonings that are in the soul in pursuit of them, the direct object of them is God Himself. The enmity lies against Him. This consideration surely should influence us to a perpetual, constant watchfulness over ourselves.

It is thus also in respect of all propensity to sin, as well as opposition to God. It is God Himself that is aimed at. It is true: the pleasures, the wages of sin, do greatly influence the sensual, carnal affections of men. But it is the holiness and authority of God that sin itself rises up against. It hates the yoke of the Lord. "Thou hast been weary of me" (Isa 43:22), God says to sinners—and that during their performance of an abundance of duties. Every act of sin is a fruit of being weary of God. Thus Job tells us what lies at the bottom in the heart of sinners: "They say unto God, Depart from us" (Job 21:14)—it is enmity against Him and antipathy to Him. Here lies the formal nature of every sin: it is an opposition to God, a casting off His yoke, a breaking off the dependence that the creature ought to have on the Creator. And the apostle gives the reason why he affirms "the carnal mind is enmity against God": namely, because "it is not sub-

ject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). It never is, nor will, nor can be subject to God, its whole nature consisting in an opposition to Him. The soul in which it is may be subject to the Law of God; but this law of sin sets up in disagreement to it, and will not be in subjection.

### **b. Accompanying qualities**

To show a little further the power of this law of sin from this property of its nature, that it is enmity against God, one or two inseparable adjuncts<sup>4</sup> of it may be considered, which will further prove it.

#### **1). Universal enmity**

This enmity is universal. Some contentions are bound to particular concerns: this is about one thing, and that about another. It is not so here. This enmity is absolute and universal, as are all enmities that are grounded in the nature of the things themselves. Such enmity is against the whole kind of that which is its object. Such is this enmity, because a) it is universal to all of God, and b) it is universal in all of the soul.

##### *a). Against all of God*

The enmity of indwelling sin is universally against all of God. If there were anything of God—His nature, properties, His mind or will, His Law or gospel; any duty of obedience to Him, of communion with Him—that sin had not an enmity against, the soul might have a constant shelter and retreat within itself, by applying itself to that of God (to that of duty towards Him, to that of communion with Him) which sin would make no opposition against. But the enmity lies against God, and all of God, and everything in or by which we have to do with Him. It is not subject to the Law, nor any part or parcel, word or tittle<sup>5</sup> of the Law.

Whatever is opposite to anything, as such, is opposite to all of it. Sin is enmity to God as God, and therefore to all of God. Not His goodness, not His holiness, not His mercy, not His grace, not His promises—there is not anything of Him that sin does not make head against. Nor is there any duty, private or public, in the heart or in external works, that sin does not oppose.

And the nearer (if I may so say) anything is to God, the greater is its enmity to it. The more of spirituality and holiness is in anything, the greater is its enmity. That which has most of God has most of its opposition. Concerning them in whom this law of sin is most predominant, God says, “Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof” (Pro 1:25). Not this or that part of God’s counsel, mind, or will is opposed, but all His counsel—whatever He calls for or guides to, in every particular of it—all is set at nought, and nothing of His reproof attended to.

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<sup>4</sup> **adjuncts** – accompanying or supplementary qualities.

<sup>5</sup> **tittle** – minute detail.

A man might not think it strange that sin should maintain an enmity against God in His Law, which comes to judge and condemn sin. But sin raises a greater enmity against God in His gospel, in which He tenders mercy and pardon as a deliverance from sin. Sin does this merely because more of the glorious properties of God's nature, more of His excellences and condescension, are manifested in the gospel than in the Law.

*b). In all the soul*

The enmity of sin is also universal in all of the soul. Would this law of sin have contented itself to have subdued any one faculty<sup>6</sup> of the soul—would it have left any one at liberty, any one affection free from its yoke and bondage—it might possibly have been with more ease opposed or subdued. But when Christ comes with His spiritual power upon the soul to conquer it for Himself, He has no quiet landing-place. He can set foot on no ground but what He must fight for and conquer. Not the mind, not an affection, not the will, but all is secured against Him. And when grace has made its entrance, yet sin will dwell in all its coasts. Were anything in the soul at perfect freedom and liberty, there a stand might be made to drive it from all the rest of its holds; but it is universal and wars in the whole soul. The mind has its own darkness and vanity to wrestle with; the will its own stubbornness, obstinacy, and perverseness; every affection its own stubbornness and aversion to God, and its sensuality, to deal with—so that one cannot yield relief to another as they ought. They have, as it were, their hands full at home.

Thus it is that our knowledge is imperfect, our obedience weak, love not unmixed, fear not pure, delight not free and noble. But I must not insist on these particulars, or I could abundantly show how diffused this principle of enmity against God is through the whole soul.

**2). Constant enmity**

To this might be added the constancy of sin. It is constant to itself; it wavers not. It has no thoughts of yielding or giving over, notwithstanding the powerful opposition that is made to it both by the Law and the gospel (as shall be shown later).

**3. Summary**

This, then, is a third evidence of the power of sin,<sup>7</sup> taken from its nature and properties, in which I have fixed on but one instance for its illustration: namely, that it is “enmity against God,” and that universal and constant. Should we enter upon a full description of it, it would require more space and time than we have allotted to this whole subject. What has been delivered might give us a little sense of it, if it be the will of God and stir us up to watchfulness.

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<sup>6</sup> **faculty** – ability.

<sup>7</sup> The first evidence was described in chapter 2: indwelling sin has the properties of a law. The second evidence was described in chapter 3: indwelling sin resides in the heart.

What can be of a more sad consideration than that we should carry about us constantly that which is enmity against God, and that not in this or that particular, but in all that He is and in all in which He has revealed Himself? I cannot say it is well with them who find it not. It is well with them, indeed, in whom it is weakened, and the power of it lessened. However, for those who say sin is not in them, they do but deceive themselves, and there is no truth in them (1Jo 1:8).

## Chapter 5

# AVERSION TO GOD

We are considering three particular instances of indwelling sin's power and advantages from some things that relate to it as such:

- I. *Its seat and subject* (ch. 3)
- II. *Its natural properties* (ch. 4)
- III. *Its operations and manner* (ch. 5 through 8)—  
which principally we aim at and shall attend to.<sup>1</sup>

We have considered somewhat of the nature of indwelling sin, not absolutely, but in reference to the discovery of its power. But this more clearly evidences itself in its actings and operations (III), which we will now consider in this and the following chapters.

Power is an act of life, and operation is the only discoverer of life. We know not that anything lives but by the effects and works of life. Great and strong operations discover a powerful and vigorous life. Such are the operations of this law of sin, which are all demonstrations of its power.

That which we have declared concerning its nature is that it consists in enmity. Now, there are two general heads of the working or operation of enmity: first, aversion<sup>2</sup> (this chapter); secondly, opposition (chapters 6 through 8).

Regarding *aversion*, our Savior—describing the enmity that was between Himself and the teachers of the Jews by the effects of it—says in the prophet, “My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me” (Zec 11:8). Where there is mutual enmity, there is mutual aversion, loathing, and abomination. So it was between the Jews and the Samaritans; they were enemies and abhorred one another (Joh 4:9).

*Opposition*, or contending against one another, is the next product of enmity. “He was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them” (Isa 63:10), speaking of God towards the people. Where there is enmity, there will be fighting. It is the proper and natural product of it.

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is copied from chapter three and inserted here by the editors as an aid to the reader.

<sup>2</sup> **aversion** – originally “aversation”: turning away; antipathy.

Now, both these effects, aversion and opposition, are found in this law of sin. We shall consider aversion now, and opposition in the next chapters.

## 1. Expressions of Aversion

### a. Lukewarmness

There is in sin an aversion to God and everything of God, as we have in part discovered in handling the enmity itself, and so shall not need much to insist upon it again. All indisposition to duty in which communion with God is to be obtained; all weariness of duty; all carnality or formality to duty—it all springs from this root. The wise man cautions us against this evil: “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God” (Ecc 5:1)—that is as if to say, “Have you any spiritual duty to perform, and do you aim to commune with God? Look to yourself, take care of your affections, for they will be gadding<sup>3</sup> and wandering, and that from their aversion to what you are preparing to do.”

There is not any good that we would do wherein we may not find this aversion exercising itself. “When I would do good, evil is present with me” (Rom 7:21)—that is, “At any time, at all times, when I would do anything that is spiritually good, sin is present to hinder me, to obstruct me in my duty. Because sin abhors and loathes the thing that I aim to do, it will keep me off from it if it be possible.” In them in whom it prevails, it comes at length to that frame which is expressed: “they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness” (Eze 33:31). Sin will allow an outward, bodily presence unto the worship of God (in which it is not concerned), but it keeps the heart quite away.

### b. False liberty

It may be some will pretend that they do not find this lukewarmness in themselves, but instead they believe that they have freedom and liberty in all the duties of obedience to which they attend. But I fear this pretended liberty will be found, upon examination, to arise from one or both of the following causes.

First, this false liberty may stem from *ignorance* of the true state and condition of their own souls, of their inward man and its actings towards God. They do not know how it is with them, and therefore are not to be believed in what they report. They are in the dark, and know neither what they do nor where they are going. It is like the Pharisee who knew little of this matter, which made him boast of his duties to God (Luk 18:11-12).

Or, secondly, it may be that whatever duties of worship or obedience such persons perform, they may, through *lack of faith* and an interest in Christ, have no communion with them. If so, sin will make but little opposition to them in them.

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<sup>3</sup> **gadding** – leaving the true path in search of pleasure.

We speak of them whose hearts are exercised with these things. Under their complaints of them, and groanings for deliverance from them, others may cry out to them, “Stand off, we are holier than you!” If this happens, then they are willing to bear their condition, as knowing that their way may be safe though it be troublesome. They are willing to see their own dangers so that they may avoid the ruin into which others fall.

## 2. Private Duties and Special Public Duties

Let us, then, consider a little this aversion in such acts of obedience in which there is no concern but that of God and the soul. In public duties there may be a mixture of other considerations: they may be so influenced by custom and necessity that a right judgment cannot from them be made of this matter. But let us take into consideration the duties of retirement,<sup>4</sup> such as private prayer, meditation, and the like; or else extraordinary duties, or duties to be performed in an extraordinary manner.

### a. In the affections and in the mind

In such private or extraordinary duties, this aversion and loathing of God often will make itself known in the *affections*. A secret striving will be in them about close and cordial dealing with God, unless the hand of God in His Spirit is high and strong upon his soul. Even when convictions, sense of duty, dear and real esteem of God and communion with Him, have carried the soul into its closet, yet if there be not the vigor and power of a spiritual life constantly at work, there will be a secret loathness in them to duty. Yea, sometimes there will be a violent inclination to the contrary, so that the soul had rather do anything, embrace any diversion—though it wound itself by it—than vigorously apply itself to that which the inward man breathes after. It is weary before it begins and says, “When will the work be over?” Here God and the soul are directly concerned; and it is a great conquest to do what we would do, though we come exceedingly short of what we should do.

This aversion to God in private or extraordinary duties discovers itself also in the *mind*. When we address ourselves to God in Christ, we are, as Job speaks, to “fill our mouths with arguments” (Job 23:4)—so that we may be able to plead with Him as He calls upon us to do: “Put me in remembrance: let us plead together” (Isa 43:26). In this manner, the church is called upon to take unto itself words or arguments in going to God (Hos 14:2). The sum is that the mind should be furnished with the considerations that are prevailing with God, and be in readiness to plead them and to manage them in the most spiritual manner, to the best advantage.

Now, we encounter difficulty to get the mind into such a frame as to lay out itself to the utmost in this work—to be clear, steady, and constant in its duty; to draw out and make use of its stores of promises and experiences. It starts, wanders, and flags, all

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<sup>4</sup> **retirement** – seclusion; getting alone.



from this secret aversion to communion with God, which proceeds from the law of indwelling sin. Some complain that they can make no work of meditation. They cannot bend their minds to it. I confess there may be a great cause of this in their lack of a right understanding of the duty itself and of the ways of managing the soul in it (which therefore I shall speak a little about in chapter 9). Yet this secret enmity also has its hand in the loss they are experiencing, and that both in their minds and in their affections.

### **b. Private duties**

Others are forced to live in such family and public duties, that they find little benefit and success in private. Here has been the beginning of the apostasy<sup>5</sup> of many professors, and the source of many foolish, sensual opinions. In their minds and affections, men find this aversion to closeness and constancy in private spiritual duties. They do not know how to conquer and prevail against these difficulties through Him Who enables us. Therefore, they have at first been subdued to a neglect of such duties: first partial, then total. Then, having lost all conscience of them, they have had a door opened to all sin and licentiousness,<sup>6</sup> and so to a full and utter apostasy.

I am persuaded there are very few who apostatize from a longstanding profession, such as our days abound with, except they began the folly of backsliding through one of two causes. The first cause could be some great and *notorious sin* that blooded their consciences, tainted their affections, and intercepted all delight of having anything more to do with God. The second possible cause of their apostasy is a course of *neglect in private duties*, arising from a weariness of contending against that powerful aversion in themselves to those duties. And this also, through the craft of Satan, has developed into many foolish and sensual opinions of living unto God without any duties of communion. And we find that, after men have for a while choked and blinded their consciences with this pretense, cursed wickedness or sensuality has been the end of their folly. The reason of all this is that the giving way to the law of sin in the least thing is the giving of strength to it. To let it alone is to let it grow; not to conquer it is to be conquered by it.

### **c. Special public duties**

As it is in private duties, so it is also in public duties that have anything extraordinary in them. What strivings, strugglings, and pleadings are there in the heart about them, especially against the spirituality of them! Yea, in and under such public duties, will not the mind and affections sometimes be entangled with things uncouth, new, and strange to them, such as a man would not stoop to take into his thoughts at the time of the least serious business? But if the least liberty or advantage be given to in-

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<sup>5</sup> **apostasy** – state of abandoning the faith one had earlier professed.

<sup>6</sup> **licentiousness** – disregard for morality; preoccupation with lustful desires.

dwelling sin, if it be not perpetually watched over, it will work to a strange and unexpected result.

In summary, let the soul unclasp any duty whatever, private or public, anything that is called good—let a man divest such a duty of all outward respects that secretly infiltrate themselves into the mind and give it some apathy in what it is about, but do not render it acceptable to God—and he shall assuredly find somewhat of the power and some of the effects of this aversion. It begins in loathness and indisposition; goes on with entangling the mind and affections with other things; and will end, if not prevented, in weariness of God, which He complains of in His people (Isa 43:22). They ceased from duty because they were “weary of God.”

### **3. Contending with Aversion**

Aversion to God is of so great importance to professors in their walking with God, we must not pass over it without some directions for their contending against it and opposition to it. Only this must be premised: that I am not giving directions for the mortifying of indwelling sin in general—which is to be done alone by the Spirit of Christ, by virtue of our union with Him (Rom 8:13). Instead, I am giving directions only for our particular duty with reference to this special evil or effect of indwelling sin: aversion toward God. In this single case, the wisdom of faith seems to call for these directions, which will be our way and course in our process upon the consideration of other of its effects.

#### **a. Constantly keep the soul in holiness**

The great means to prevent the fruits and effects of this aversion toward God is the constant keeping of the soul in a universally holy frame. As this weakens the whole law of sin, so also it weakens answerably all its properties, and particularly this aversion. It is this frame only that will enable us to say with the psalmist, “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed” (Psa 57:7). It is utterly impossible to keep the heart in a prevailing holy frame in any one duty, unless it be so in and to all and every duty. If sin-entanglements get hold in any one thing, they will put themselves upon the soul in everything.

A constant, even frame and temper in all duties, in all ways, is the only preservative for any one way. Let not him who is neglectful in public, persuade himself that all will be clear and easy in private, or on the contrary. There is a harmony in obedience: break but one part and you interrupt the whole. Our wounds in particular arise generally from negligence as to the whole course—so David informs us, “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments” (Psa 119:6). A universal respect to all God’s commandments is the only preservative from shame. Nothing have we more reason to be ashamed of than the shameful failures of our hearts in point of duty—which are from the principle before mentioned.

### **b. Prevent the beginnings**

Labor to prevent the very beginnings of the workings of this aversion to God. Let grace be beforehand with it in every duty. We are directed to “watch unto prayer” (1Pe 4:7); and as it is unto prayer, so unto every duty. Let us consider and take care that we be not hindered from within nor from without as to a due performance of every duty. Watch against temptations, to oppose them. Watch against the aversion that is in sin, to prevent it. As we are not to give place to Satan, no more are we to sin. If it is not prevented in its first attempts, it will prevail. My meaning is: Whatever good we have to do, as the apostle speaks (Rom 7:21), and find evil present with us, we must prevent its negotiating with the soul, its cleverly asserting its poison into the mind and affections. Do this by a vigorous, holy, and violent stirring up of the grace or graces that are to be acted and set at work peculiarly in that duty. Let Jacob come first into the world; or, if prevented by the violence of Esau, let him lay hold on his heel, to overthrow him and obtain the birthright (Gen 25:26). Upon the very first motion of Peter to our Savior, crying in effect, “Master, spare Thyself,” Christ immediately replies, “Get thee behind me, Satan” (Mat 16:22-23). So ought we to say, “Get thee gone, thou law of sin, thou present evil”; and thus it may be of the same use to us. Get, then, grace up early unto duty, and be early in the rebukes of sin.

### **c. Never faint**

Though sin does its worst, yet be sure it never prevails to a conquest. Be sure you are not wearied out by its extreme persistence, nor driven from your hold by its insistence. Do not faint by its opposition. Take the apostle’s advice, “We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful” (Heb 6:11-12). Still hold out in the same diligence.

There are many ways by which men are driven from a constant holy performance of duties; all of them are dangerous, if not destructive, to the soul. Some are diverted by business, some by company, some by the power of temptations, some discouraged by their own darkness. But none are so dangerous as this: when the soul gives over in part or in whole, when it is wearied by the aversion of sin to holy duties, or to communion with God in such duties. This may indicate the soul has given up of itself to the power of sin; which, unless the Lord break the snare of Satan therein, will assuredly prove ruinous.

Our Savior’s instruction is that we “ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luk 18:1). Opposition will arise, with none so bitter and keen as that from our own hearts. If we faint, we perish. Take heed “lest ye be wearied,” said the apostle, “and faint in your minds” (Heb 12:3). Such a fainting as is attended with weariness, and that with giving place to the aversion working in our hearts, is to be avoided if we would not perish. The caution is the same with that of the same apostle, “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer” (Rom 12:12); and in general with, “Let not sin

therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:12).

To cease from duty, in part or in whole, upon sin’s aversion to its spirituality, is to give sin the rule and to obey it in its lusts. Yield not to it, then, but hold out the conflict. Wait on God, and ye shall prevail: “They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa 40:31). That which is now so difficult will increase in difficulty if we give way to it; but if we abide in our station, we shall prevail. The mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

#### **d. Be humbled for it**

Carry about a constant, humbling sense of this close aversion to spirituality that yet lies in our nature. If men find the efficacy of it, what should, what consideration can, be more powerful to bring them to humble walking with God? God has made many discoveries of Himself to men. They have received many kindnesses from Him. He has done good and not evil to them in all things. After all this, there is yet still abiding in many such a heart of unkindness and unbelief as to have an aversion to communion with God. How ought the thoughts of this cast us into the dust to fill us with shame and self-abhorrence all our days!

What have we found in God, in any of our approaches or addresses to Him, that it should be thus with us? What iniquity have we found in Him? Has He been a wilderness to us or a land of darkness? Did we ever lose anything by drawing near to Him? Nay, has not in Him lain all the rest and peace that we have obtained? Is not He the fountain and spring of all our mercies, of all our desirable things? Has He not bid us welcome at our coming? Have we not received from Him more than heart can conceive or tongue express? What ails our foolish and wretched hearts, then, to harbor such a cursed secret dislike of Him and His ways? Let us be ashamed and astonished at the consideration of it, and walk in an humbling sense of it all our days. Let us carry it about with us in the most secret of our thoughts. As this is a duty that in itself is acceptable to God, Who delights to dwell with them that are of a humble and contrite spirit, so it is of exceeding efficacy to the weakening of the evil we treat of.

#### **e. Notice the beauty of spiritual things**

Labor to possess the mind with the beauty and excellence of spiritual things, so that they may be presented lovely and desirable to the soul; and this cursed aversion of sin will be weakened. It is an innate acknowledged principle that the soul of man will not keep up cheerfully to the worship of God unless such worship has a discovery of beauty and comeliness in it.

Therefore, when men lost all spiritual sense and savor of the things of God, to supply the lack in their own souls, they invented outwardly pretentious and gorgeous ways of worship: in images, paintings, pictures, and I know not what carnal ornaments—which they have called the “beauty of holiness” (1Ch 16:29)! What this demonstrated, howev-

er, is that the mind of man must see a beauty, a desirableness, in the things of God's worship, or it will not delight in it—aversion will prevail instead. Let, then, the soul labor to acquaint itself with the spiritual beauty of obedience, of communion with God, and of all duties of direct approach to Him, so that it may be full of delight in them.

It is not my present work to discover the heads and springs of the beauty and desirableness that is in spiritual duties—in their relation to God, the eternal spring of all beauty; to Christ, the love, desire, and hope of all nations; or to the Spirit, the great beautifier of souls, rendering them by His grace all glorious within. Nor is it my present work to discover the beauty of spiritual duties in their suitability to the souls of men, as to their actings towards their last end, in the righteousness and holiness of the rule governing how they are to be performed. But I say only at present, in general, that to acquaint the soul thoroughly with these things is an important way of weakening the aversion spoken of.

## Chapter 6

# OPPOSITION TO GOD BY FORCE

We are considering three particular instances of indwelling sin's power and advantages from some things that relate to it as such.

- I. *Its seat and subject* (ch. 3)
- II. *Its natural properties* (ch. 4)
- III. *Its operations and manner* (ch. 5 through 12)
  1. *Aversion to God*
  2. *Opposition to God*<sup>1</sup>

The nature of indwelling sin more clearly evidences itself in its actings, operations, and manner (III). Of this, we first are considering the enmity of indwelling sin towards God. How this enmity works by way of *aversion* has been declared in the previous chapter, as also the means that the soul is to use for preventing its effects and prevalence.<sup>2</sup>

The second way whereby enmity exerts itself is *opposition*. Enmity will oppose and contend with what it is at enmity with. Things natural and moral work this way also: as light and darkness, heat and cold oppose each other, so do virtue and vice. So is it with sin and grace. The apostle says, "These are contrary the one to the other" (Gal 5:17)—that is, they are placed and set in mutual opposition, and that continually and constantly, as we shall see.

Now, there are two ways by which enemies manage an opposition: first, by force; and, secondly, by fraud and deceit. In this way, when the Egyptians became enemies to the children of Israel and managed an enmity against them, Pharaoh said, "Let us deal *wisely* with them"—that is, cunningly and subtly (Exo 1:10). And so Stephen, with respect to this same word, expressed it by "the same dealt subtilly" (Act 7:19)—that is, he used all manner of fraudulent trickery. To this deceit, they added force in their grievous oppressions. This is the way and manner of things where there is a prevailing enmity. And both force and deceit are made use of by the law of sin in its enmity against God and our souls.

I shall begin with the law of sin's actings in a way of force, in an open downright opposition to God and His Law, or opposition to the good that a believing soul would do

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is copied from chapter three and inserted here by the editors as an aid to the reader.

<sup>2</sup> **prevalence** – predominance.

in obedience to God and His Law. In this whole matter we must be careful to steer our course aright, taking the Scripture for our guide, with spiritual reason and experience for our companions—for there are many dangerous shoals in our course that must diligently be avoided, so that none who consider these things be troubled without cause or comforted without a just foundation.

In this first way by which this sin exerts its enmity in opposition—namely, by force or strength—there are four things expressing four distinct degrees in its progress and procedure in the pursuit of its enmity.

1. Its general inclination: it “lusteth” (Gal 5:17).
2. Its particular way of contending against the soul: it fights or wars (Rom 7:23; Jam 4:1; 1Pe 2:11).
3. Its success in this contest: it brings the soul “into captivity to the law of sin” (Rom 7:23).
4. Its growth and rage upon success: it comes up to “madness,” as an enraged enemy will do (Ecc 9:3).

All of these we must speak to in order. The first two will be considered here.

## 1. Lusting

First, in general, indwelling sin is said to “lust”: “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit” (Gal 5:17). This word *lust* expresses the general nature of the opposition that the law of sin makes against God and the rule of His Spirit or grace in them who believe. Therefore, general lusting expresses the least degree of this opposition to God. When it does anything, it lusts; just as burning is the general acting of fire; whatever else it does, it also burns. When fire does anything, it burns; and when the law of sin does anything, it lusts.

Therefore, all the actings of this law of sin are called “the lusts of the flesh”: “Ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16); “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14). These lusts of the flesh are those by which men act their sensuality in riot, drunkenness, uncleanness, and the like. But they are not these only; they comprehend all the actings of the law of sin in all the faculties and affections of the soul. Thus, we have mention of the desires, wills, and “lusts...of the mind” as well as of the “flesh” (Eph 2:3). The mind, the most spiritual part of the soul, has its lusts, no less than the sensual appetite, which seems sometimes more properly to be called the “flesh.”

In the products of these lusts, there is “filthiness of the spirit” as well as of the “flesh” (2Co 7:1)—that is, of the mind and understanding, as well as of the appetite and affections, and the body, which attends their service. Our holiness consists in the blamelessness of *all* these: “The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Th 5:23).

By the “flesh” in this matter is intended the whole old man, or the law of sin: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Joh 3:6)—that is, it is all so, and nothing else. Whatever remains of the old nature in the new man is flesh still. And this flesh lusts; this law of sin does so, which is the general basis and foundation of all its opposition to God. And this it does in two ways.

### **a. Readiness to sin**

#### **1). *Habitual tendency to evil***

The flesh lusts by way of a hidden, close tendency to all evil. This lies in it habitually. While a man is in the state of nature, fully under the power and dominion of this law of sin, it is said that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). It can frame, fashion, produce, or act nothing but what is evil, because this habitual propensity to evil that is in the law of sin is absolutely predominant in such a one. It is in the heart like a poison that has nothing to relieve its venomous qualities, and so infects whatever it touches. Where the power and dominion of it is broken, yet in its own nature it has still an habitual tendency to that which is evil—in which its lusting consists.

But here we must distinguish between the habitual frame of the heart, and the natural propensity or habitual inclination of the law of sin in the heart. The habitual inclination of the heart is denominated from the principle that bears chief or sovereign rule in it; and therefore, in believers, it is to good, to God, to holiness, to obedience—the heart is not habitually inclined to evil by the remainders of indwelling sin. But this sin in the heart has a constant, habitual propensity to evil in itself, or its own nature. This the apostle intends by its being present with us: it “is present with me,” always and for its own end, which is to lust unto sin.

It is with indwelling sin as with a river. While the springs and fountains of it are open and waters are continually supplied to its streams, if you set a dam before it, it causes the river to rise and swell until it bears down all or overflows the banks about it. Let these waters be dried up in some good measure in their springs, and the remainder may be coerced and restrained. But still, as long as there is any running water, it will constantly press upon what stands before it, according to its weight and strength, because it is its nature to do so. And if by any means it makes a passage through the barrier, it will proceed through it. So is it with indwelling sin. While the springs and fountains of it are open, in vain is it for men to set a dam before it by their convictions, resolutions, vows, and promises. These may check it for a while, but it will increase, rise high, and rage at one time or another, until it bears down all those convictions and resolutions—or makes itself an underground passage by some secret lust, which shall give a full vent to it. But now, suppose that the springs of it are much dried up by regenerating grace, the streams or actings of it reduced by holiness; yet while anything remains of it, it will be pressing constantly to have vent, to press forward into actual sin—and this is its lusting.



## 2). *Discovering this habitual tendency*

Lust's habitual tendency toward evil is discovered in two ways.

### a). *Unexpected surprises*

First, [it is discovered] in its unexpected surprises of the soul into foolish, sinful figments and imaginations, which it did not look for, nor was any occasion administered to them. It is with indwelling sin as it is with the contrasting principle of sanctifying grace. Grace gives the soul, if I may so say, many a blessed surprise. It often engenders and brings forth a holy, spiritual frame in the heart and mind, when we have had no previous rational considerations to work them to it. This shows it to be an habitual principle prevailing in the mind; so it is, "*Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib*"<sup>3</sup> (Song 6:12)—that is, free, willing, and ready for communion with Christ. As if to say, "I knew not. It was done by the power of the Spirit of grace, so that I took no notice of it, as it were, until it was done." The frequent actings of grace in this manner, exciting acts of faith, love, and satisfaction in God, are evidences of much strength and prevalence of it in the soul.

And thus it is also with indwelling sin. Ere the soul is aware—without any provocation or temptation, when it knows not—it is cast into a vain and foolish frame. Sin produces its figments secretly in the heart, and prevents the mind's consideration of what it is about. I mean in this those first acts of the soul: these are thus far involuntary, as that they have not the actual consent of the will to them, but are voluntary only as far as sin has its residence in the will. These surprises, if the soul is not awake to take speedy care for the prevention of their tendency, often set all on fire, as it were, and engage the mind and affections into actual sin.

With grace, we are often, before we are aware, "made as the chariots of a willing people," and are far engaged in heavenly-mindedness and communion with Christ, making speed in it as in a chariot. In the same way, by sin are we often, before we are aware, carried into diseased affections, foolish imaginations, and pleasing delightfulness in things that are not good or profitable. Therefore is that caution of the apostle, "If a man be *overtaken* in a fault" (Gal 6:1)—that is, if a man be surprised at unawares with a fault or in a transgression.

I doubt not but the subtlety of Satan and the power of temptation are here taken into consideration by the apostle, which causes him to express a man's falling into sin by "if a man be *overtaken*," that is, surprised. So this working of indwelling sin also has its part in the surprise, and that in the chiefest place, without which nothing else could surprise us. This is so because, without indwelling sin's help, whatever comes from without, from Satan or the world, must admit of some negotiation in the mind before it is received. But it is from within, from ourselves, that we are surprised. By this we

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<sup>3</sup> **Amminadib** – *Hebrew*: my willing, ready people.

are disappointed and brought to do that which we would not, and hindered from the doing of that which we would.

Therefore often when the soul is doing, as it were, quite another thing, engaged quite upon another design, sin starts that which carries the soul away into evil and sinful things in the heart or imaginations. Yea, to manifest its power, when the soul is seriously engaged in the mortification of any sin, sometimes indwelling sin will, by one means or other, lead the soul away into flirting with that very sin whose ruin the soul is seeking and whose mortification it is engaged in! But, as there is in this operation of the law of sin a special enticing or entangling, we shall speak to it fully later.

Now, these surprises can be from nothing but a habitual tendency to evil in the principle from which they proceed; not an habitual inclination to actual sin in the mind or heart, but a habitual tendency to evil in the sin that is in the mind or heart. This hinders the soul with its figments. How much communion with God is hereby prevented, how many meditations are disturbed, how much the minds and consciences of men have been defiled by this acting of sin, some may have observed. I know no greater burden in the life of a believer than these involuntary surprises of soul—involuntary, I say, as to the actual consent of the will, but not so in respect of the corruption that is in the will and is the principle of them. And it is in respect to these that the apostle makes his complaint: “With the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom 7:24-25).

*b). Readiness to be tempted*

This habitual inclination toward evil shows itself in the soul’s readiness and promptness, without dispute or altercation, to join and close with every temptation by which it may possibly be excited. We know it is in the nature of fire to burn, because it immediately lays hold on whatever is combustible. In the same way, let any temptation whatever be proposed to a man—its suitableness to his corruptions or manner of its proposal making it a temptation—immediately he has not only to do with the temptation as outwardly proposed, but also he has to deal with his own heart about it. Without further consideration or debate, the temptation has got a friend in him. Not a moment’s space is given between the proposal and the necessity for the soul to look to its enemy within. This also argues a constant, habitual propensity to evil.

Our Savior said of the assaults and temptations of Satan, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing [that is, no part] in me” (Joh 14:30). He had more temptations—intensively and extensively; in number, quality, and fierceness; from Satan and the world—than ever had any of the sons of men. Yet in all of them, Christ had to deal only with that which came from without. His holy heart had nothing like to them, suited to them, or ready to entertain them: “The prince of this world...hath nothing in me.” So it was with Adam. When a temptation came upon him, he had only the outward proposal to look to. All was well within until the outward temptation took place and prevailed.

With us it is not so. In a city that is at unity in itself, compact and entire, without divisions and parties,<sup>4</sup> if an enemy approaches it, the rulers and inhabitants have no thoughts at all but only how they may oppose the enemy without and resist him in his approaches. But if the city be divided in itself, if there be factions and traitors within, the very first thing they do is to look to the enemies at home, the traitors within, to cut off the head of Sheba, if they will be safe (2Sa 20:22). All was well within Adam when Satan came, so that he had nothing to do but to look to his assaults and approaches. But now after the Fall, on the access of any temptation, the soul is instantly to look inward, where it shall find this traitor at work, closing with the baits of Satan, and stealing away the heart. This it always does, which proves a habitual inclination. David says, “I am ready to halt” (Psa 38:17)—that is, ready for stumbling; as if to say, “I am prepared and disposed to hallucination, as when ‘my foot slippeth’ into sin” (v. 16), as he expounds the meaning of that phrase.

There was from indwelling sin a continual disposition in him to be slipping, stumbling, halting,<sup>5</sup> on every occasion or temptation. There is no temptation proposed to the soul—nothing so vain, foolish, ridiculous, or fond; nothing so vile and abominable; nothing so atheistic or detestable—but something in this law of sin is ready to respond positively to it before it can be decried by grace.

This is the first thing in this lusting of the law of sin: it consists in its habitual propensity to evil, manifesting itself by the involuntary surprises of the soul to sin; and its readiness, without dispute or consideration, to join in all temptations whatever.

### **b. Actual pressing after sin**

The flesh’s lusting consists in its actual pressing after that which is evil, and actual opposition to that which is good. The former section showed its constant readiness to this work; this section treats of the work itself. Indwelling sin is not only ready, but for the most part always engaged. “The flesh lusteth,” says the Holy Ghost (Gal 5:17). It does so continually. It stirs in the soul by one act or other constantly, almost as the blood in the veins.

The apostle calls this lust’s “tempting”: “Every man is tempted...of his own lust” (Jam 1:14). Now, what is it to be tempted? It is to have something proposed to a man’s consideration that is sin to him if he closes with it. This is sin’s trade: “the flesh lusteth.” It is raising up in the heart, and proposing to the mind and affections, that which is evil; testing, as it were, whether the soul will close with its suggestions, or how far the soul will carry on its suggestions, even when the temptation does not wholly prevail.

Now, when such a temptation comes from without, it is to the soul an indifferent thing, neither good nor evil, unless it be consented to; but the very proposal from with-

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<sup>4</sup> **parties** – groups united around a particular ideology or purpose.

<sup>5</sup> **halting** – limping.

in, it being the soul's own act, is its sin. And this is the work of the law of sin: it is restlessly and continually raising up and proposing innumerable various forms and appearances of evil, in this or that kind, indeed in every kind in which the nature of man is capable to exercise corruption. It hatches and proposes something or other to the soul, in matter, manner, or circumstance—inordinate,<sup>6</sup> unspiritual, unanswerable to the rule.

This power of sin to beget figments and ideas of actual evil in the heart, the apostle may have respect to: “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1Th 5:22)—that is, keep yourselves from every figment or idea of sin *in the heart*; for the Greek word there used does not anywhere signify an outward form or appearance: neither is it the “appearance” of evil that is intended, but an evil idea or thought. This lusting of sin is that which the prophet expresses in wicked men, in whom the law of sin is predominant: “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isa 57:20). This is a figure of speech that is most lively—expressing the lustings of the law of sin, restlessly and continually bubbling up in the heart, with wicked, foolish, and filthy imaginations and desires.

This, then, is the first thing in the opposition that this enmity makes to God—namely, in its general inclination, it “lusteth.”

## 2. Fighting

Secondly, there is indwelling sin's particular way of contending: it fights or wars—that is, it acts with strength and violence as men do in war. First it lusts, stirring and moving inordinate figments in the mind, desires in the appetite and the affections, proposing them to the will. But indwelling sin does not rest there, it cannot rest. It urges, presses, and pursues its proposals with earnestness, strength, and vigor—fighting, contending, and warring to obtain its aim and purpose. Would indwelling sin merely stir up and propose things to the soul, and immediately acquiesce in the sentence and judgment of the mind—that the thing is evil, against God and His will, and not further to be insisted on—much sin might be prevented that is now produced. But it rests not here: it proceeds to carry on its design, and that with earnestness and contention. By this means wicked men inflame themselves (Isa 57:5). They are self-inflamers (as the word *inflame* signifies) to sin. Every spark of sin is cherished in them until it grows into a flame. And so it will do in others where it is so cherished.

Now, this fighting or warring of sin consists in two things: a) in its rebellion against grace, or the law of the mind; and b) in its assaulting the soul, contending for rule and sovereignty over it.

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<sup>6</sup> **inordinate** – excessive.

### a. Rebelling against grace

The first is expressed by the apostle: “I see,” he says, “another law...warring [that is, rebelling] against the law of my mind” (Rom 7:23). There are, it seems, two laws in us: the “law of sin,” or of the flesh; and the “law of the mind,” or of grace. But contrary laws cannot both obtain sovereign power over the same person at the same time. The sovereign power in believers is in the hand of the law of grace. The apostle declares it to be so: “I delight in the law of God in the inward man” (7:22). Obedience to this law is performed with delight and satisfaction in the inward man, because its authority is lawful and good. This is also more expressly stated: “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14).

Now, to war against a law that has a just sovereignty is to rebel. This is signified by the Greek word translated “warring”: it is to rebel (and ought to have been so translated): “Rebelling against the law of my mind” (7:23). This rebellion consists in a stubborn, obstinate opposition to the commands and directions of the law of grace. Does the “law of the mind” command anything as duty? Does it severely rise up against anything that is evil? When the lusting of the law of sin rises up to this degree, it contends against obedience with all its might. The result of this, as the apostle tells us, is the doing of that which we would not, and the not doing of that which we would (7:15-16).

From this place, we may gather a notable instance of the power of sin in its rebellion. The law of grace prevails upon the will, so that it would do that which is good: “To will is present with me” (7:18); “when I would do good” (v. 21); and again, “the good that I would” (v. 19). And it prevails upon the understanding, so that it approves or disapproves according to the dictates of the law of grace: “I consent unto the law that it is good” (v. 16). The judgment of the will always lies on the side of grace.

Grace also prevails on the affections: “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (7:22). Now, if it be so that grace has the sovereign power in the understanding, will, and affections, why is it that it does not always prevail—that we always do not do that which we would, and always abstain from that which we would not? Is it not strange that a man should not do that which he chooses, wills, likes, and delights in? Is there anything more required to enable us unto that which is good? The law of grace does, as much as can be expected from it, all that which in itself is abundantly sufficient for the perfecting of all holiness in the fear of the Lord. But here lies the difficulty: in the entangling opposition that is made by the rebellion of this “law of sin.”

Neither is it expressible with what vigor and variety sin acts itself in this matter. Sometimes it proposes diversions, sometimes it causes weariness, sometimes it finds out difficulties, sometimes it stirs up contrary affections, sometimes it begets prejudices, and one way or other entangles the soul. The result is that indwelling sin never suffers grace to have an absolute and complete success in any duty. “How to *perform* that which is good I find not” (7:18). The Greek word translated “perform” signifies, “I find not the way perfectly to work out, or accomplish, that which is good.” We do not find it because of this opposition and resistance made by the law of sin.

Now, this rebellion appears in two things: 1) in the opposition that it makes to the general purpose and course of the soul, and 2) in the opposition it makes to particular duties.

**1). *Opposition to the general course of the soul***

This rebellion appears in the opposition it makes to the general purpose and course of the soul. There is none in whom is the Spirit of Christ, who is His, but it is his general design and purpose to walk in a universal conformity to Him in all things. Even from the inward frame of the heart, to the whole compass of his outward actions, so it is with him. This God requires in His covenant: “Walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Gen 17:1). Accordingly, his design is to walk before God; and his frame is sincerity and uprightness therein. This is called cleaving to the Lord with *purpose of heart* (Act 11:23)—that is, in all things. And this is not to be done with slothful, dead, ineffectual purpose, but such as is operative and sets the whole soul at work in pursuit of it.

This the apostle sets forth in Philippians 3:12-14:

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I *follow after*, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and *reaching forth* unto those things which are before, I *press* toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

He uses three words excellently expressing the soul’s universal pursuit of this purpose of heart in cleaving unto God. *First* he says, “I follow after” (v. 12)—the word here signifies properly to persecute, and we know with what earnestness and diligence it is usually done. *Secondly*, “reaching forth” (v. 13)—that is, reaching with great intension of spirit and affections. It is a great and constant endeavor that is expressed in that word. *Thirdly*, “I press toward the mark” (v. 14)—that is, even as men that are running for a prize. All three words set forth the vigor, earnestness, diligence, and constancy that is used in the pursuit of this purpose. The nature of the principle of grace requires this in those who have grace.

But yet we see what failings—yes, failings—attend their pursuit of this course. The frame of the heart is changed, the heart is stolen away, the affections entangled, eruptions of unbelief and distempered passions discovered, carnal wisdom with all its attendants are set at work—all contrary to the general principle and purpose of the soul. And all this is from the rebellion of this law of sin, stirring up and provoking the heart to disobedience.

The prophet gives this character of hypocrites, “Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty” (Hos 10:2). Now, though this be wholly so in respect of the mind and judgment only in hypocrites, yet it is partially so in the best, in the sense described. They have a division, not of the heart, but *in* the heart; and therefore it is that they are so often found faulty. So says the apostle, “So that ye *cannot do* the things that ye

would” (Gal 5:17). We cannot accomplish the design of close walking according to the law of grace, because of the opposition and rebellion of this law of sin in our hearts.

## **2). Opposition to particular duties**

Indwelling sin rebels also in respect to particular duties. It raises a combustion in the soul against the particular commands and designs of the law of grace. “Ye cannot do the *things that ye would*” (Gal 5:17)—that is, “The duties which you judge to be required of you, which you approve and delight in in the inward man, you cannot do them as you would.”

Take prayer as an example. A man addresses himself to that duty; he would not only perform it, but he would perform it in that manner which the nature of the duty and his own condition require. He would be “praying...in the Spirit,” fervently, “with groanings which cannot be uttered”; in faith, with love and delight, pouring forth his soul unto the Lord (Eph 6:18; Jam 5:15-16; Rom 8:26). This he aims at.

Now, often he shall find a rebellion, a fighting of the law of sin, in this matter. He who thought to do all things shall find difficulty to get anything done. I do not say that it is thus always, but it is so when sin “wars and rebels,” which expresses special actings of its power. Poor creatures often meet with woeful entanglements upon this account. Instead of the free, enlarged communion with God that they aim for, the best that their souls arrive at is but to go away mourning for their folly, deadness, and indisposition. In a word, there is no command of the law of grace that is known, liked, and approved by the soul but, when it comes to be observed, this law of sin one way or other makes head and rebels against it. And this is the first way of its fighting.

## **b. Assaulting the soul**

Indwelling sin not only rebels and resists, but it assaults the soul. It sets upon the law of the mind and grace. This is the second part of its warring: “fleshly lusts...war against the soul” (1Pe 2:11); “your lusts that war in your members” (Jam 4:1). Peter shows what they oppose and fight against (namely, the “soul” and the law of grace therein); James shows what they fight with or by (namely, the “members,” or the corruption that is in our mortal bodies). The Greek word translated in these verses as “war” means to assault or war for a superiority. It takes the part of an assailant as well as of a resister. It makes attempts for rule and sovereignty, as well as opposes the rule of grace.

Now, all war and fighting has somewhat of violence in it. There is therefore some violence in the acting of sin that the Scripture calls “fighting and warring.” And this assailing power of sin, as distinguished from its rebelling (before treated of), consists in the following things.

### **1). Stirring up to sin**

All indwelling sin’s positive actings in stirring up to commit sin belong to this head. Often, by the vanity of the mind, the sensuality of the affections, or the folly of the imaginations, it sets upon the soul when the law of grace is not actively on duty; so that in

this it does not rebel but assault. This is what causes the apostle to cry out, “Who shall deliver me from [it]?” (Rom 7:24)—that is, “Who shall rescue me out of its hand?” (as the Greek word signifies). When *we pursue* an enemy and he resists us, we do not cry out “Who shall deliver us?”—for we are the assailants. Rather, “Who shall rescue me?” is the cry of one who is set upon by an enemy. So it is here: a man is assaulted by his “own lust,” as James speaks (Jam 1:14). By the wayside, in his employment, or under a duty, sin sets upon the soul with vain imaginations, foolish desires, and would willingly employ the soul to make provision for its satisfaction. Against this the apostle cautions us, “Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14)—that is, “Do not accomplish the providence or projection of the flesh for its own satisfaction.”

## **2). *Persistence and urgency***

Indwelling sin’s persistence and urgency seem to be noted in this expression of its “warring.” Enemies in war are restless, pressing, and persistent; so is the law of sin. Does it set upon the soul? Cast off its motions, and it returns again. Rebuke them by the power of grace. They withdraw for a while, and return again. Set before them the cross of Christ. They do as those that came to take Him: at the sight of Him, they went backwards and fell to the ground, but they arose again and laid hands on Him (Joh 18:6-13). Sin gives place for a season, but returns and presses on the soul again. Remind this warring lust of the love of God in Christ; though it be stricken, yet it does not surrender. Present hell-fire to it; it rushes into the midst of those flames. Reproach it with its folly and madness; it knows no shame, but presses on still. Let the thoughts of the mind strive to fly from it; it follows as on the wings of the wind. By this persistence, indwelling sin wearies and wears out the soul. And if the great remedy comes not timely (Rom 8:3), it prevails to a conquest.

There is nothing more marvelous nor dreadful in the working of sin than this persistence. The soul knows not what to make of it. It dislikes, abhors, abominates the evil it tends to. It despises the thoughts of it and hates them as hell. Yet the soul is by itself imposed on with them, as if it were another person, an express enemy got within him. All this the apostle discovers: “What I hate, that do I” (Rom 7:15). It is not of outward actions that he treats, but the inward risings of the mind. “I hate” them, he says—that is, “I abominate them.” But why, then, will he have anything more to do with them? If he hates them, and abhors himself for them, then let them alone—have no more to do with them, and so end the matter. Alas! He says, “It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (7:17)—that is, “I have one within me that is my enemy, that with endless, restless persistence puts these things upon me, even the things that I hate and abominate. I cannot be rid of them, I am weary of myself, I cannot fly from them. ‘O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?’” (7:24).

I do not say that this is the ordinary condition of believers, but so it is often when this law of sin rises up to war and fighting. It is not so with them in respect to particular sins (this or that sin, outward sins, sins of life and conduct); but yet in respect of



vanity of mind, inward and spiritual distempers, it is often so. Some, I know, pretend to great perfection; but I am resolved to believe the apostle before them all and everyone.

### **3). *Entangling the affections***

Indwelling sin carries on its war by entangling the affections and drawing them into a combined effort against the mind. Let grace be enthroned in the mind and judgment, yet if the law of sin lays hold upon and entangles the affections, it has gotten a fortress from which it continually assaults the soul. Therefore, the great duty of mortification is chiefly directed to take place upon the affections.

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5). The “members which are upon the earth” are our affections, for sin is not seated in the outward part of the body—in particular, not covetousness, which is there enumerated as among our members that are on the earth which are to be mortified.<sup>7</sup> Yea, after grace has taken possession of the soul, the affections become the principal seat of the remainders of indwelling sin. Therefore, Paul says that this law is “in my members” (Rom 7:23); and James that it “wars in your members” (Jam 4:1)—that is, in our affections. There is no right estimate to be taken of the work of mortification but by the affections. We may every day see persons of very outstanding light that yet visibly have unmortified hearts and behavior. Their affections have not been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20).

Now, then, when this law of sin can possess any affection, whatever it be—of love, delight, fear—it will make from it and by it fearful assaults upon the soul. For instance, has it got the love of anyone entangled with the world or the things of it—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life (1Jo 2:16)?—how will it take advantage on every occasion to break in upon the soul! It shall do nothing, attempt nothing, be in no place or company, perform no duty, private or public, but sin will have one blow or other at it. It will be, in one way or other, soliciting for itself.

### **c. Responding with self-abasement**

This is the sum of what we shall say about this acting of the law of sin in a way of fighting and warring against our souls, which is so often mentioned in the Scripture. A due consideration of it is of no small advantage to us, especially to bring us to self-abasement, to teach us to walk humbly and mournfully before God. There are two things that are suited to humble the souls of men. They are, first, a due consideration of God, and then of themselves—of God in His greatness, glory, holiness, power, majesty, and authority; [and] of ourselves in our low, degraded, and sinful condition.

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<sup>7</sup> We are commanded to mortify our members; if these represented the outward physical body, then the biblical command would mean to hurt or kill ourselves, which cannot be. See also Free Grace Broadcaster 167, *Covetousness*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Now, of all things in our condition, there is nothing so suited to this purpose as that which lies before us: namely, the vile remainders of enmity against God that are yet in our hearts and natures. It is no small evidence of a gracious soul when it is willing to search itself in this matter and to be helped therein from a word of truth; when it is willing that the Word should dive into the secret parts of the heart, and rip open whatever of evil and corruption lies in them. The prophet says of Ephraim, he “loveth to tread out the corn” (Hos 10:11)—that is, he loved to work when he might eat, to have always the corn before him. But God, says he, would cause him also to “plow,” a labor no less needful, though at present not so delightful.

Most men love to hear of the doctrine of grace, of the pardon of sin, of God’s free love for His people, and suppose they find food therein; however, it is evident that they grow and thrive in the life and notion of them. But to be breaking up the fallow ground<sup>8</sup> of their hearts (Jer 4:3), to be inquiring after the weeds and briers that grow in them, they delight not so much—though this be no less necessary than the other. This path is not so beaten as that of grace, nor so trod in, though it is the only way to come to a true knowledge of grace itself.

It may be that some who are wise and grown in other truths, may yet be so little skilled in searching their own hearts that they may be slow in the perception and understanding of these things. But this sloth and neglect are to be shaken off if we have any regard to our own souls. Many false hypocrites have deceived themselves, as well as others, because they thought the doctrine of the gospel pleased them, and therefore supposed they believed it. It is more than probable that they might be delivered from their soul-ruining deceits if they would diligently apply themselves to this search of their own hearts.

Would other professors walk with so much boldness and security as some do, if they considered aright what a deadly, watchful enemy they continually carry about with them and in them? Would they so much indulge, as they do, carnal joys and pleasures, or pursue their perishing affairs with so much delight and greediness as they do? It were to be wished that we would all apply our hearts more to this work, even to come to a true understanding of the nature, power, and subtlety of this our adversary, so that our souls may be humbled.

Our souls need to be humbled in several areas.

1). *In walking with God.* His delight is with the humble and contrite ones, those that tremble at His Word, the mourners in Zion. Such are we only when we have a due sense of our own vile condition.<sup>9</sup> This will produce reverence for God, a sense of our

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<sup>8</sup> **fallow ground** – neglected, unplowed land.

<sup>9</sup> See “Vile!” by A. W. Pink (1886-1952), available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

distance from Him, admiration of His grace and condescension,<sup>10</sup> and a due valuation of mercy—far above those light, verbal, airy attainments of which some have boasted.

2). *In walking with others.* This lays in provision to prevent those great evils of judging, spiritual unmercifulness, and harsh censuring, which I have observed to have been pretended by many who, at the same time (as afterward has appeared), have been guilty of greater or worse crimes than those that they have raved against in others. This, I say, will lead us to meekness, compassion, readiness to forgive and pass by offenses; even when we shall “consider” what is our state, as the apostle plainly declares (Gal 6:1).

The man that understands the evil of his own heart, how vile it is, is the only useful, fruitful, and solid believing and obedient person. Others are fit only to delude themselves, to disquiet families, churches, and all relations whatever. Let us, then, consider our hearts wisely, and then go and see if we can be proud of our gifts, our graces, our valuation and esteem among professors, or our enjoyments. Let us go then and judge, condemn, or reproach others that have been tempted. We shall find a great inconsistency in these things.

Many things of the like nature might be here added upon the consideration of this woeful effect of indwelling sin. The way of opposing and defeating its design in this shall be considered later.

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<sup>10</sup> **condescension** – stooping to consider unworthy sinners.

## Chapter 7

# THE CAPTIVATING POWER OF SIN

We are considering three particular instances of indwelling sin's power and advantages from some things that relate to it as such.

- I. *Its seat and subject* (ch. 3)
- II. *Its natural properties* (ch. 4)
- III. *Its operations and manner*
  - A. *Aversion to God* (ch. 5)
  - B. *Opposition to God*
    1. *By force*
      - a. *By lusting* (ch. 6)
      - b. *By fighting* (ch. 6)
      - c. *By capturing the soul* (ch. 7)
      - d. *By "madness"* (ch. 7)
    2. *By deceit* (ch. 8)

Indwelling sin opposes God by force and by deceit. We are considering how it works by force in four ways. We considered its lusting and outright fighting and warring in chapter 6. In this chapter we shall consider how it works to capture the soul, and how it works by rage and madness.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Capturing the Soul

*But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.—Romans 7:23*

The third thing assigned to this law of sin in its opposition by force to God and the law of His grace, is that it leads the soul captive: "I see another law [that is, the law of sin]...bringing me into captivity" (Rom 7:23). This is the utmost height in Romans 7 to which the apostle carries the opposition and warring of the remainders of indwelling sin. He closes the consideration of it with a complaint of the state and condition of be-

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<sup>1</sup> These opening paragraphs are copied from chapters three and six. This expansion is inserted here by the editors as an aid to the reader.

lievers as a result of it, and an earnest prayer for deliverance from it: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (7:24). What is contained in this expression and intended by it shall be declared in the ensuing observations.

### **a. Successful**

Romans 7:23 does not directly express the power and actings of the law of sin, but its success in and upon its actings. Yet success is the greatest evidence of power, and leading captive in war is the height of success. None can aim at greater success than to lead their enemies captive. It is a peculiar expression in the Scripture of great success. So the Lord Christ, on His victory over Satan, is said to have “led captivity captive” (Eph 4:8)—that is, to conquer him who had conquered and prevailed upon others. And this He did when “through death he [destroyed] him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). Here, then, we discover a great prevalence and power of sin in its warring against the soul. It so wars as to “lead captive,” which, had it not great power, it could not do—especially against the resistance of the soul that is included in this expression.

### **b. Captive to the law of sin**

#### **1). Being “captive”**

It is said that indwelling sin leads the soul captive “to the law of sin”—not to this or that sin, particular sin, or actual sin, but to the “law of sin.” God, for the most part, orders things and gives out such supplies of grace to believers so that they shall not be made a prey to this or that particular sin. He ensures that sin should not prevail in them and compel them to serve it in its lusts. He ensures that sin should not have dominion over them, so that they should be captives and slaves to it (Rom 6:14).

This is that which David prays so earnestly against: “Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright” (Psa 19:12-13). He supposes the continuance of the law of sin in him (v. 12), which will bring forth errors of life and secret sins—against which he finds relief in pardoning and cleansing mercy, for which he prays. “This,” he says in effect, “will be my condition. But for sins of pride and boldness—such as all sins are that get dominion in a man, that make a captive of a man—may the Lord restrain thy servant from them.” For what sin so ever gets such power in a man, be it in its own nature small or great, it becomes in him a sin of boldness, pride, and presumption. This is because these things are not reckoned from the nature or kind of the sin, but from its prevalence and habit, in which its pride, boldness, and contempt of God consists.

To the same purpose, if I am not mistaken, prays Jabez: “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest *keep me from evil*, that it may not grieve me!” (1Ch 4:10). The holy man took

occasion from his own name to pray against sin, that it might not be a grief and sorrow to him by its power and prevalence.

I confess it may come to this sometimes with a believer that, for a season, he may be led captive by some particular sin. It may have so much prevalence in him as to have power over him. So it seems to have been with David when he lay so long in his sin without repentance. It seems plainly so with those in Isaiah 57:17-18, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly<sup>2</sup> in the way of his heart." They continued under the power of their covetousness, so that no dealings of God with them, for so long a time, could reclaim them.<sup>3</sup>

However, for the most part when any lust or sin so prevails, it is from the advantage and furtherance that it has got by some powerful temptation of Satan. He has poisoned it, inflamed it, and entangled the soul. Of this the apostle, speaking of such as through sin were fallen off from their holiness, says, "That they may recover themselves from the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2Ti 2:26). Though it were their own lusts that they served, yet they were brought into bondage to it by being entangled in some snare of Satan. Therefore, they are said to be "taken alive" in a snare, as a poor beast in a trap.

## **2). *When Satan is the cause***

Here, by the way, we may a little inquire whether the prevailing power of a particular sin in anyone is from itself, or from the influence of temptation upon it. Concerning this, at present, let us make only these two observations.

### *a). Where no advantage in one's nature*

Much of the prevalence of sin upon the soul is certainly from Satan when the perplexing and captivating sin has no peculiar footing nor advantage in the nature, constitution, or condition of the sinner. When any lust grows high and prevailing more than others upon its own account, it is from the peculiar advantage that it has in the natural constitution, or the station or condition of the person in the world. Otherwise, the law of sin gives an equal propensity to all evil, an equal vigor to every lust. Therefore, when it cannot be discerned that the captivating sin is peculiarly fixed in the nature of the sinner, or is advantaged from his education or employment in the world, the prevalence of it is peculiarly from Satan. He has got to the root of it, and has given it poison and strength. Perhaps that which may seem to the soul to be the corrupt lusting of the heart, is nothing but Satan's imposing his suggestions on the imagination. If, then, a man finds a persistent rage from any corruption that is not evidently seated in his nature, let him fly by faith to the cross of Christ, for the devil is nigh at hand.

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<sup>2</sup> **frowardly** – perversely; backsliding.

<sup>3</sup> Not that God did not have the ability to turn them to Himself, but that God's regenerating work of the Holy Spirit would have been necessary to cause these sinners to respond favorably to the external means He had sent to deal with them.

*b). Where no advantage to the flesh*

When a lust prevails to captivate the soul and brings no advantage to the flesh, it is from Satan. All that the law of sin does of itself is to serve the providence of the flesh (Rom 13:14), and the flesh must bring to itself some of the profits and pleasures that are its object. Now, if the prevailing sin does not so act in itself, if it be more spiritual and inward, it is much from Satan by the imagination, more than the corruption of the heart itself. But this by the way.

I say, then, that the apostle treats not here of our being captivated to this or that sin, but to the law of sin; that is, we are compelled to bear its presence and burden whether we will or not. Sometimes the soul thinks or hopes that it may through grace be utterly freed from this troublesome inmate. Upon some sweet enjoyment of God, some full supply of grace, some return from wandering, some deep affliction, some thorough humiliation, the poor soul begins to hope that it shall now be freed from the law of sin; but after a while, it perceives that it is quite otherwise. Sin acts again, makes good its old station; and the soul finds that, whether it will or not, it must bear its yoke. This makes it sigh and cry out for deliverance.

**c. Contrary to the will**

This “leading captive” argues a prevalence against the resistance or contrary actings of the will. This is implied plainly in this expression, namely, that the will opposes and tries to make headway, as it were, against the working of sin. This the apostle declares in those expressions that he uses (Rom 7:15, 19-20). In this consists the lusting of “the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal 5:17); that is, the contending of grace to expel and subdue it. The spiritual habits of grace that are in the will do so resist and act against being led captive. The excitation of those habits by the Spirit are directed to the same purpose.

This leading captive is contrary, I say, to the inclinations and actings of the renewed will. No man is made a captive but against his will. Captivity is misery and trouble, and no man willingly puts himself into trouble. Men choose it in its causes, and in the ways and means leading to it, but not in itself.<sup>4</sup> So the prophet informs us: “Ephraim is,” not willingly, “oppressed and broken in judgment”—that was his misery and trouble; but he “willingly walked after the commandment” of the idolatrous kings, which brought him to it (Hos 5:11). Whatever consent, then, the soul may give to sin, which is the means of this captivity, it gives none to the captivity itself—such captivity is against the will wholly.

**d. Observations**

From this we may observe the following.

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<sup>4</sup> **Men choose it in its causes...but not in itself** – That is, men do not directly choose captivity, but they do so in effect when they choose the benefit they expect from particular sins that ultimately bring them to captivity.

1). *The power of sin is great*, which is what we are demonstrating. This appears in its prevalence to captivity against the actings and contendings of the will for liberty from it. Had it no opposition made to it—or were its adversary weak, negligent, or slothful—it were no great evidence of its power that it made captives. But its prevailing against diligence, activity, watchfulness, and the constant resistance of the will—this proves its power.

2). *This leading captive implies many particular successes*. Had it not success in particular, it could not be said at all to lead captive. Rebel it might, assail it might; but it cannot be said to lead captive without some successes in its warring.

There are several degrees of the success of the law of sin in the soul. Sometimes it carries the person to outward actual sin, which is its utmost aim. Sometimes it obtains the consent of the will, but is cast out by grace and proceeds no further. Sometimes it wearies and entangles the soul so that the soul turns aside, as it were, and leaves contending—which is a success also. One or more, or all of these, must be so where captivity takes place. The apostle ascribes such a kind of course to covetousness (1Ti 6:9-10).

3.) *This leading captive shows this condition to be miserable* and wretched. To be thus yoked and dealt with—against the judgment of the mind, the choice and consent of the will, its utmost strivings and contendings—how sad is it! When the neck is sore and tender with former pressures, to be compelled to bear the yoke again—this pierces, this grieves, this even breaks the heart. When the soul is principled by grace to a loathing of sin and every evil way, to a hatred of the least discrepancy between itself and the holy will of God, then to be imposed on by this law of sin—with all that enmity and folly, that deadness and filth with which it is attended—what more dreadful condition?

All captivity is dreadful in its own nature. But the greatest aggravation of it is from the condition of the tyrant to whom anyone is captured. Now, what can be worse than this law of sin? Thus the apostle, having once mentioned this captivity, cries out as one quite weary and ready to faint (Rom 7:24).

4). *This condition is peculiar to believers*. Unregenerate men are not said to be led captive to the law of sin. They may, indeed, be led captive to this or that particular sin or corruption; that is, they may be forced to serve it against the power of their convictions. They may be convinced of the evil of it—as an adulterer of his uncleanness, or a drunkard of his abomination—and may make some resolutions against it. Yet their lust is too hard for them. They cannot cease to sin, and so are made captives or slaves to this or that particular sin.

However, they cannot be said to be led captive to the law of sin, and that because they are willingly subject to it. It has, as it were, a rightful dominion over them and they do not oppose it. They only oppose it when it has eruptions to the disturbance of their consciences; and then the opposition they make to it is not from their wills, but is the mere acting of an affrighted conscience and a convinced mind. They do not regard the nature of sin, but its guilt and consequences. To be brought into captivity is that which falls upon a man *against his will*.



This is all that shall be spoken about this degree of the actings of the power of sin, which shows itself in its success.

## 2. Rage and Madness

The fourth and last degree of the opposition made by the law of sin to God and the law of His will and grace, is in its rage and madness. There is madness in its nature: “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart” (Ecc 9:3). The evil that the heart of man is full of by nature is that indwelling sin of which we speak. And this is so in their heart: it rises up to “madness.” The Holy Ghost expresses this rage of sin by an appropriate figure of speech, which He uses in various places, as Jeremiah 2:23-24 and Hosea 8:9. This madness makes men as “a wild ass...traversing her ways,” which “snuffeth up the wind” and runs wherever her mind or lust leads her. And He says of idolaters, enraged with their lusts, that they are “mad upon their idols” (Jer 50:38).

We may a little consider what lies in this rage and madness of indwelling sin, and how it rises up to such madness.

### a. Its nature

For the nature of such madness, it seems to consist in a violent, heady, stubborn pressing to evil or sin. Violence and persistence are in it. It is the tearing and torturing of the soul by any sin, to force its consent and to obtain satisfaction. It rises up in the heart, is denied by the law of grace, and rebuked. It returns and exerts its poison again; the soul is startled, and casts it off. It returns again with new violence and persistence. The soul cries out for help and deliverance, looks round about to all springs of gospel grace and relief, trembles at the furious assaults of sin, and casts itself into the arms of Christ for deliverance. And if the soul is not able to take this last course, it is foiled and hurried up and down through the mire and filth of foolish imaginations, corrupt and hurtful lusts that rend and tear it, as if they would devour its whole spiritual life and power (1Ti 6:9-10; 2Pe 2:14).

It was not much otherwise with the Israelites, whom we mentioned before (Isa 57:17). They had an inflamed, enraged lust working in them, even “covetousness,” or the love of this world. With such lust, men “pierce themselves through with many sorrows,” as the apostle speaks (1Ti 6:10). God is angry with them, and discovers His wrath by all the ways and means that it was possible for them to be made aware of it. He was “wroth, and smote” them (Isa 57:17). But, though this may have staggered them a little, yet they “went on.” God is angry and hides Himself from them—that is, deserts them as to His gracious, assisting, comforting presence. Does this bring the desired result? No; they go on stubbornly still, as men mad on their covetousness.

Nothing can put a stop to their raging lusts. This is plain madness and fury. We need not seek far for examples. We see men mad on their lusts every day. Their lusts do not rage so much in them, as they rage in the *pursuit* of them, which is the worst kind of

madness. Are those greedy pursuits of things in the world—which we see some men engaged in though they have other pretenses<sup>5</sup>—indeed anything else but plain madness in the pursuit of their lusts? God, Who searches the hearts of men, knows that the most of things that are done with other pretenses in the world, are nothing but the actings of men who are mad and furious in the pursuit of their lusts.

### **b. Its double advantage**

Sin ordinarily does not arise to this height of rage and madness but when it has got a double advantage.

1). *Some great temptation.* Sin arises to this height of madness when it is provoked, enraged, and heightened by some great temptation. Though it is a poison in itself, yet, being inbred in nature, it grows not violently outrageous without the contribution of some new poison of Satan in it, by a suitable temptation. It was the advantage that Satan got against David, by a suitable temptation, that raised his lust to that rage and madness which it went forth to in the business of Bathsheba and Uriah (2Sa 11). Though sin is always a fire in the bones, yet it flames not unless Satan comes with his bellows<sup>6</sup> to blow it up. Let anyone in whom the law of sin arises to this height of rage seriously consider, and he may find out where the devil stands and has a part in this business.

2). *Some former reception or dominance.* Sin arises to this height of madness when it is advantaged by some former reception and prevalence. Sin grows not to this height at its first assault. Had it not been allowed to make its entrance, had there not been some yielding in the soul, this would not have come about. The great wisdom and security of the soul in dealing with indwelling sin is to put a violent stop to its beginnings, its first motions and actings. Venture all on the first attempt. Die rather than yield one step to it. If—through the deceit of sin, the negligence of the soul, or its carnal confidence to give bounds to lust's actings at other seasons—it makes any entrance into the soul and finds any reception, then it gets strength and power, and insensibly arises to the frame under consideration. You would never have had the experience of the fury of sin, if you had not been content with some of its dalliance.<sup>7</sup> Had you not brought up this servant, this slave, delicately, it would not have now presumed beyond a son.<sup>8</sup>

Now, when the law of sin in any particular has got this double advantage (the furtherance of a vigorous temptation and some prevalence formerly obtained) by which it is let into the strengths of the soul, it often rises up to this frame we speak of.

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<sup>5</sup> **pretenses** – pretended reasons or excuses.

<sup>6</sup> **bellows** – instrument for producing a strong current of air to help start a fire.

<sup>7</sup> **dalliance** – acts of fondness; flirtation.

<sup>8</sup> **servant...beyond a son** – What began as a lowly servant, now is more bold than a privileged son (Pro 29:21).

### **c. Accompaniments**

We may see what accompanies this rage and madness, what are the properties of it, and what effects it produces.

#### **1). Casting off the rule of grace**

There is in this madness the casting off, for a time at least, of the yoke, rule, and government of the Spirit and law of grace. Where grace has the dominion, it will never utterly be expelled from its throne. It will still keep its right and sovereignty; but its influences may be intercepted for a season, and its government be suspended, by the power of sin. Can we think that the law of grace had any actual influence of rule on the heart of David when, upon the provocation received from Nabal, he was so hurried with the desire of self-revenge that he cried, “Gird ye on every man his sword,” to his companions, and resolved not to leave alive one man of his whole household (1Sa 25:13, 34). Or was Asa in any better frame when he smote the prophet who spoke to him in the name of the Lord and put him in prison (2Ch 16:7-10)?

Sin, in this case, is like an untamed horse that, having first cast off his rider, runs away with fierceness and rage. It first casts off a present sense of the yoke of Christ and the law of His grace, and then hurries the soul at its pleasure. Let us a little consider how this is done.

The seat and residence of grace is in the whole soul. It is in the inner man; it is in the mind, the will, and the affections. The whole soul is renewed by it into the image of God (Eph 4:23-24), and the whole man is a “new creature” (2Co 5:17). In all these, grace exerts its power and effectiveness. Its rule or dominion is the pursuit of its effective working in all the faculties of the soul, as they are one united principle of moral and spiritual operations. So, then, the interrupting of grace’s exercise—of its rule and power—by the law of sin, must consist in its contrary acting in the faculties and affections of the soul by which grace would otherwise exert its power and effectiveness.

And the law of sin does this. It darkens the mind: partly through innumerable vain prejudices and false reasonings (as we shall see when we come to consider its deceitfulness); and partly through the steaming of the affections, heated with the harmful lusts that have laid hold on them. Thus, the saving light that is in the mind is clouded and stifled, so that it cannot put forth its transforming power to change the soul into the likeness of Christ, which is its proper work (Rom 12:2).

The habitual inclination of the will to obedience, which is the next way of working of the law of grace, is first weakened, then cast aside and rendered useless, by the continual solicitations of sin and temptation. The will first lets go its hold, and disputes whether it shall yield or not, and at last gives up itself to its adversary. And for the affections, the beginning of this evil is commonly in them. They cross one another and torture the soul with their sudden and powerful violence. By this way the law of sin intercepts the rule of the law of grace, even by imposing upon it in the whole seat of its government.

When this is done, it is sad work that sin will make in the soul. The apostle warns believers to take heed of this: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:12). Look to it that it get not the dominion, that it usurp not rule—no, not for a moment. It will labor to intrude itself to the throne. Watch against it, or a woeful state and condition lies at the door.

This, then, accompanies this rage and madness of the law of sin: it casts off, during its prevalence, the rule of the law of grace wholly. The law of grace speaks in the soul, but is not heard. It commands the contrary, but is not obeyed. Grace cries out, “Do not this abominable thing that the Lord hates” (Deu 12:31), but is not regarded—that is, not so far as to be able a) to put a present stop to the rage of sin; and b) to recover its own rule, which God in His own time restores to it by the power of His Spirit dwelling in us.

## **2). *Contempt of danger***

This madness or rage caused by indwelling sin is accompanied with fearlessness and contempt of danger. It takes away the power of consideration, and all the influence that consideration ought to have upon the soul. Hence,<sup>9</sup> sinners that are wholly under the power of this rage are said, for their utter ruin, to “run” upon God and “the thick bosses of his bucklers,”<sup>10</sup> by which He is armed (Job 15:26). They despise the utmost that He can do to them, being secretly resolved to accomplish their lusts, though it cost them their souls.

Some few considerations will make this more clear.

### *a). God obstructs*

Often when the soul is broken loose from the power of renewing grace, God deals with it by “preventing grace” to keep sin within bounds. In this way, the Lord declares that He will deal with Israel: “Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths” (Hos 2:6). That is, “Seeing that you have rejected Me, I will take another course with you. I will lay obstacles before you, so that you shall not be able to pass on to where the fury of your lusts would drive you.” He will put before them external things which shall obstruct them in their progress.

### *b). Obstruction by rational considerations*

These hindrances that God lays in the way of sinners are of two sorts (as shall be declared more fully later).

By rational considerations, I mean those taken from the consequence of the sin and evil that the soul is solicited to and perplexed with. Such is the fear of death, judgment, and hell—falling into the hands of the living God, Who is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29). While a man is under the power of the law of the Spirit of life, the “love of Christ constraineth” him (2Co 5:14). The principle for his doing good and abstaining

<sup>9</sup> **Hence** – for this reason.

<sup>10</sup> **bosses...bucklers** – *bosses*: knob-like ornamental studs on a shield; *buckler*: large shield.

from evil is “faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), accompanied with a following of Christ because of the sweet savor of His name.

But now, when this blessed, easy yoke is for a season cast off, as was shown before, God sets a hedge of terror before the soul, reminds it of death and judgment to come, flashes the flames of hell-fire in the face, and fills the soul with consideration of all the evil consequence of sin—in order to deter it from its purpose. To this end, He makes use of all threatenings recorded in the Law and the gospel. To this head also may be referred all the considerations that may be taken from things temporal, such as shame, reproach, scandal, punishments, and the like. By the consideration of these things, I say, God sets a hedge before them.

*c). Obstruction by providential dispensations*

Providential dispensations<sup>11</sup> are used by the Lord to the same purpose, and these are of two sorts.

*First, God uses providential acts such as are suited to work upon the soul, and to cause it to desist and give over in its lustings and pursuit of sin. Such are afflictions and mercies: God says, I was “wroth, and smote” them (Isa 57:17). That is, “I testified my dislike of their ways by sending them afflictions” (so also in Hosea 2:9-12). God chastens men with pains on their bodies, as He says in Job, to “withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man” (Job 33:17-19). That is, to turn them from their sinful purposes and to hide sin from them. And He has other ways to come to them and touch them, as in their reputations, relations, estates, and desirable things. Or else He heaps mercies on them, that they may consider Whom they are rebelling against. Perhaps remarkable distinguishing mercies are made their portion for many days.*

*Secondly, God uses providential acts such as actually hinder the soul from pursuing sin, though it be resolved to do so. (We must consider later the various ways by which God does this.)*

*d). Summary*

These are the ways, I say, by which the soul is dealt with, when the law of indwelling sin has cast off for a season the influencing power of the law of grace. When lust rises up to rage or madness, it will also despise all these, even the rod and Him Who has appointed it. It will rush on shame, reproaches, wrath, and whatever may fall upon it. Though these obstructions are presented to sin, it will be bold against them all. Rage and madness are fearless. And this indwelling sin does in two ways:

*First, indwelling sin possesses the mind, so that sin does not suffer the consideration of these obstructions to dwell upon the mind, but renders the thoughts of them slight and vanishing. If the mind forces itself to a contemplation of them, yet sin interposes between the mind and the affections, so that they shall not be influenced by God’s obstructions in any proportion to what is required. The soul in such a condition will be*

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<sup>11</sup> **dispensations** – divine acts and dealings.

able to take such things into contemplation, and yet not at all be moved by them. And where the consideration of God's obstructions prevails for a season, yet it is insensibly taken off from the heart again.

*Secondly, by secret stubborn resolves* to venture all upon the way it is in.

And this is the second branch of this evidence of the power of sin, taken from the opposition that it makes to the law of grace by the way of force, strength, and violence (the discussion of which began in chapter 6). The consideration of its deceit now follows.

## Chapter 8

# THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN

*Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away  
of his own lust, and enticed.*

—James 1:14

We are considering three particular instances of indwelling sin's power and advantages from some things that relate to it as such.

- I. Its seat and subject* (ch. 3)
- II. Its natural properties* (ch. 4)
- III. Its operations and manner*
  - A. Aversion to God* (ch. 5)
  - B. Opposition to God*
    - 1. By force* (ch. 6 and 7)
    - 2. By deceit* (ch. 8)

Indwelling sin opposes God by force and by deceit. We considered the first part of its opposition in chapters 6 and 7: its working by force.<sup>1</sup>

The second part of the evidence of the power of sin, from its manner of operation, is taken from its deceitfulness. In its opposition to God, indwelling sin adds deceit to power. The power of deceit must be great. It is carefully to be watched against by all who value their souls. It is to be watched against especially where power and deceit are combined, advantaged, and assisted by all the ways and means before mentioned.

Before we come to show in what the nature of this deceitfulness of sin consists and how it prevails thereby, some testimonies shall be briefly given to the thing itself, and some light regarding the general nature of it.

### 1. Testimonies from Scripture

That sin, indwelling sin, is deceitful, we have the express testimony of the Holy Ghost: “exhort one another...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13). That is, “Take heed that you be not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Deceitful it is; take heed of it, watch against it, or it will produce its utmost effect

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<sup>1</sup> These opening paragraphs are copied from chapters three and six. This expansion is inserted here by the editors as an aid to the reader.

in hardening of the heart against God. It is on the account of sin that the heart is said to be “deceitful above all things” (Jer 17:9). Take a man in other things, as Job speaks: though he “would be wise,” he is “like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12)—that is, a poor, vain, empty nothing. But consider his heart on the account of this law of sin: it is crafty and deceitful above all things. “They are wise to do evil,” says the prophet, “but to do good they have no knowledge” (Jer 4:22).

To the same purpose speaks the apostle, “The old man...is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22). Every lust, which is a branch of this law of sin, is deceitful; and where there is poison in every stream, the fountain must necessarily be corrupt. No particular lust has any deceit in it, but only what is communicated to it from this fountain of all actual lust, this law of sin.

The coming of the “man of sin” is said to be in and with the “deceivableness of unrighteousness” (2Th 2:3, 10). Unrighteousness is a thing generally decried and evil spoken of among men, so that it is not easy to conceive how any man should prevail himself of a reputation by it. But there is a deceitfulness in it, by which the minds of men are turned aside from a due consideration of it (as we shall show later). Thus the apostle gives the account concerning those who are under the power of sin: that they are “deceived” (Ti 3:3). The life of evil men is nothing but “deceiving, and being deceived” (2Ti 3:13).

Therefore, we have sufficient testimony given to this qualification of the enemy with whom we have to deal. He is deceitful. Deceit puts the mind of man to a loss in dealing with an adversary. He knows he can have no security against one that is deceitful but only in standing upon his guard and defense all his days.

## **2. Deceit as the Source of Sin**

Further to show the strength and advantage that sin has by its deceit, we may observe that the Scripture for the most part places deceit as the head and spring of every sin, even as though there were no sin followed after, but where deceit went before. “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1Ti 2:13-14). The reason the apostle gives why Adam, though he was first formed, was not first in the transgression, is because he was not first deceived. The woman, though made last, was first in the sin, because she was first deceived. Even that first sin began in deceit; until the mind was deceived, the soul was safe.

Eve, therefore, did truly express the matter, though she did not do it to a good end: “The serpent beguiled [that is, deceived] me,” she said, “and I did eat” (Gen 3:13). She thought to lessen her own crime by charging the serpent, and this was a new fruit of the sin she had cast herself into. But the matter of the fact was true: she was beguiled before she ate; deceit went before the transgression.

The apostle shows that sin and Satan still take the same course. “I fear,” he says, “lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled [that is, deceived] Eve through his subtilty,



so your minds should be corrupted” (2Co 11:3). There is the same way of working to actual sin as there was of old: deceiving goes before, and the actual accomplishment of sin follows after.

Hence, all the great works that the devil does in the world, to stir men up to an opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ and His kingdom, he does them by deceit: “The devil, which *deceiveth* the whole world” (Rev 12:9; see also 20:10). It is utterly impossible that men should be prevailed on to abide in his service, acting his designs to their eternal and sometimes [also] their temporal ruin, were they not exceedingly deceived.

Thus are those many cautions given to us to take heed that we be not deceived, if we would take heed that we do not sin (Eph 5:6; 1Co 6:9; 15:33; Gal 6:7; Luk 21:8). From all such testimonies, we may learn the influence that deceit has toward sin, and consequently the advantage that the law of sin has to put forth its power by its deceitfulness. Where it prevails to deceive, it fails not to bring forth its fruit.

The ground of this efficacy of sin by deceit is taken from the faculty of the soul affected with it. Deceit properly affects the mind; it is the mind that is deceived. When sin attempts any other way of entrance into the soul, as for example by the affections, the mind—retaining its right and sovereignty—is able to give check and control to it. But where the mind is tainted, the prevalence of sin must be great, for the mind or understanding is the leading faculty of the soul. What the mind fixes on, the will and affections rush after, being capable of no consideration but what the mind presents to them. Hence it is that, though the entanglement of the affections to sin is often most troublesome, yet the deceit of the mind is always most dangerous, and that because of the place which the mind possesses in the soul toward all the soul’s operations. Its office is to guide, direct, choose, and lead; and “if...the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Mat 6:23).

### 3. The Nature of Deceit

The strength and advantage that sin has by its deceit will further appear if we consider the nature of deceit in general. It consists in presenting to the soul, or mind, things otherwise than they are, either in their nature, causes, effects, or present relation to the soul. This is the general nature of deceit, and it prevails many ways. It hides what ought to be seen and considered, conceals circumstances and consequences, and presents what is not or things as they are not, as we shall show in particular later.

It was shown before that Satan “beguiled” and deceived our first parents. That is the term which the Holy Ghost gives to his temptation and seduction. How he deceived them, the Scripture relates in Genesis 3:4-5.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

He did it by representing things otherwise than they were. The fruit was desirable; that was apparent to the eye. Hence Satan takes advantage secretly to insinuate<sup>2</sup> that it was merely a lessening of their happiness that God aimed at in forbidding them to eat of it. He hides from them that it was for the test of their obedience; and that certain, though not immediate, ruin would follow on the eating of it. He only proposed the present advantage of knowledge, and so presents to them the whole case quite otherwise than indeed it was.

This is the nature of deceit. It is a representation of a matter under disguise, hiding that which is undesirable, proposing that which indeed is not in it, so that the mind may make a false judgment of it. In this same way, Jacob deceived Isaac by his brother's clothing and the skins on his hands and neck (Gen 27:23).

Again, deceit has advantage by that way of management which is inseparable from it. It is always carried on by degrees, little by little, so that the whole of the design and aim in hand is not discovered at once. So dealt Satan in that great deceit before mentioned: he proceeds in it by steps and degrees. First, he answers an objection and tells them they shall not die; then he proposes to them the good of knowledge and their being like to God by such knowledge. To hide and conceal his aims, to proceed by steps and degrees, to make use of what is obtained, and from it to press on to further effects, is the true nature of deceit.

Stephen tells us that the king of Egypt “dealt subtilly,” or deceitfully, with their kindred (Act 7:19). How he did it we may see in Exodus 1. He did not at first fall to killing and slaying them, but says, “Come, let us deal wisely” (1:10), beginning to oppress them. This brings forth their bondage (1:11). Having got this ground to make them slaves, he proceeds to destroy their children (1:16). He fell not on them all at once, but by degrees.

This may suffice to show in general that sin is deceitful, and the advantages that it has by such deceit.

## 4. The Way of Deceit

### a. James 1:14-15

*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.—James 1:14-15*

For the way, manner, and progress of sin in working by deceit, we have it fully expressed in James 1:14-15. This point, declaring the whole of what we aim at in this matter, must be particularly insisted on.

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<sup>2</sup> **insinuate** – suggest slyly.

In the above verse, the apostle shows that men are willing to drive the old trade that our first parents set up with at the entrance of sin;<sup>3</sup> namely, of excusing themselves in their sins and casting the occasion and blame of them on others: “The woman whom thou gavest me, she gave me of the tree” and “the serpent beguiled me” (Gen 3:9-13). It is not, say they, from themselves—their own nature and inclinations, their own designs—that they have committed such and such evils, but merely from their temptations. And if they know not where to assign the evil of those temptations, they will lay them on God Himself rather than go without an excuse for their guilt.

The apostle rebukes this evil in the hearts of men, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (Jam 1:13). And to show the justness of this reproof, in the words mentioned he discovers the true causes of the rise and whole progress of sin, stating that the whole guilt of it lies upon the sinner, and that the whole punishment of it, if not graciously prevented,<sup>4</sup> will be his lot also.

We have in these words, therefore, the whole progress of lust or indwelling sin—by the way of subtlety, fraud, and deceit—expressed and limited by the Holy Ghost. From this we shall show the particular ways and means by which it puts forth its power and efficacy in the hearts of men by deceitfulness and subtlety.

We may observe the following in the words.

*First*, we have here the utmost result aimed at in all the actings of sin, or the tendency of it in its own nature, and that is death: “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jam 1:15), the everlasting death of the sinner. Pretend what it will, this is the result it aims at and tends to. Hiding of aims and designs is the principal property of deceit, and sin does this to the uttermost. Other things innumerable it pleads, but not once does it declare that it aims at the death, the everlasting death, of the soul. A fixed understanding of this design of every sin is a blessed means to prevent its prevalence in its way of deceit, or “beguiling.”

*Secondly*, the general way of sin’s acting towards its goal of death is by temptation: “Every man is tempted...of his own lust” (Jam 1:14). I purpose not to speak in general of the nature of temptations—it does not belong to our present purpose (and besides, I have done it elsewhere).<sup>5</sup> It may suffice at present to observe that the life of temptation lies in deceit; so that, in the business of sin, to be effectively tempted and to be beguiled (or deceived) are the same. Thus it was in the first temptation. It is everywhere called the serpent’s beguiling or deceiving, as was shown before: “The serpent beguiled Eve” (2Co 11:3)—that is, the devil prevailed by his temptations upon her. Therefore, every

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<sup>3</sup> **at the entrance of sin** – at the Fall.

<sup>4</sup> **graciously prevented** – by the Holy Spirit graciously applying the benefits of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, where He bore the just punishment for the sins of His people (1Ti 1:15).

<sup>5</sup> See *Temptation* by John Owen, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

man is tempted—that is, every man is beguiled or deceived—by his own lust, or indwelling sin (which we have often declared to be the same).

### b. Deceit's degrees

The degrees by which sin proceeds in this work of tempting or deceiving are five. (We showed before that this belongs to the nature of deceit, that it works by degrees, making its advantage by one step to gain another.)

The first of these consists in drawing off or drawing away: “Every man is tempted when he is *drawn away* of his own lust” (Jam 1:14) [remainder of chapter 8, and also chapters 9 and 10].

The second is in enticing: “And *enticed*” (1:14) [ch. 11].

The third is in conception of sin: “When lust hath *conceived*” (1:15). When the heart is enticed, then lust conceives in it [ch. 12].

The fourth is the bringing forth of sin in its actual accomplishment: “When lust hath conceived, it *bringeth forth sin*” (1:15). In all of which there is a subtle allusion to an adulterous deviation from conjugal<sup>6</sup> duties, and conceiving or bringing forth children of whoredom and fornication [ch. 14 and 15].

The fifth is the finishing of sin, the completing of it, the filling up of the measure of it, by which the result originally designed by lust is achieved: “Sin, when it is finished, *bringeth forth death*” (1:15). As lust conceived naturally and necessarily brings forth sin, so sin finished procures unfailingly eternal death.

The first of these relates to the mind, which is drawn off or drawn away by the deceit of sin. The second to the affections; they are enticed or entangled. The third to the will, wherein sin is conceived—the consent of the will being the formal conception of actual sin. The fourth relates to the behaviors in which sin is brought forth; it exerts itself in the lives and courses of men. The fifth respects a stubborn course in sinning that finishes, consummates, and shuts up the whole work of sin, and after which ensues death or eternal ruin.

I shall principally consider the first three, in which lies the main strength of the deceit of sin. This is because in believers, whose state and condition is principally proposed to consideration, God is pleased, for the most part, graciously to prevent the fourth instance, the bringing forth of actual sins in their conduct. Also, God is pleased to prevent always and wholly the last instance, their being stubborn in a course of sin to the finishing of it. What ways God in His grace and faithfulness makes use of to stifle the conceptions of sin in the womb, and to hinder its actual production in the lives of men, must be spoken about later. The first three instances, then, we shall insist upon fully, as those in which lie the principal concern of believers in this matter.

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<sup>6</sup> **conjugal** – relating to marriage; here, the marriage of the believer to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, in the New Covenant.

### c. Sin “drawing away” the mind

The first thing that sin is said to do,<sup>7</sup> in its working in a way of deceit, is to draw away or to draw off. A man is said to be drawn off—or “drawn away” and diverted—from attending to the course of obedience and holiness, which he is bound with diligence to attend to, in opposition to sin and the law thereof.

Now, this effect of the deceit of sin works on the mind. The mind or understanding, as we have shown, is the guiding, conducting faculty of the soul. It goes before in discerning, judging, and determining, in order to make the way of moral actions fair and smooth to the will and affections. The mind is to the soul what Moses told his father-in-law: that he might be as “eyes” to guide the people in the wilderness (Num 10:31), and keep them from wandering in that desolate place. The mind is the eye of the soul, without whose guidance the will and affections would wander perpetually in the wilderness of this world, according as any object offered or presented itself to them with an apparent present good.

The first thing, therefore, that sin aims at, in its deceitful working, is to draw off and divert the mind from the discharge of its duty.

There are two things that belong to the duty of the mind in the special office that it has in and about the obedience God requires:

- to keep itself and the whole soul in such a frame and posture as may render it ready to do all duties of obedience, and watchful against all enticements to the conception of sin;
- in particular, carefully to attend to all particular actions that they be performed as God requires—for matter, manner, time, and season agreeably to His will—and also for preventing all particular tenders<sup>8</sup> of sin in things forbidden.

In these two things consists the whole duty of the mind of a believer. From both of them, indwelling sin endeavors to divert it and draw it off.

The first of these is the duty of the mind in reference to the general frame and course of the whole soul. Of this first duty, two things may be considered: that it is founded in a due, constant consideration:

- of ourselves, of sin and its vileness (next section 5); and
- of God, of His grace and goodness (section 6).

For both these, sin labors to draw the mind off from attending to those special duties that are suited for preparation to resist the working of the law of sin (chapter 9).

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<sup>7</sup> The first instance, to draw off the mind, is considered in the remainder of this chapter and chapters 9 and 10.

<sup>8</sup> **tenders** – offers.

## 5. “Drawn Away” from Considering the Danger of Sin

### a. Explanation

Sin endeavors to draw the mind off from a due consideration, apprehension, and sensibleness of its own vileness, and the danger with which it is attended. This we will discuss first. A due, constant consideration of sin—in its nature, in all its aggravating circumstances, in its aim and tendency, especially as represented in the blood and cross of Christ—ought always to abide with us.

“Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast *forsaken* the Lord thy God” (Jer 2:19). Every sin is a forsaking of the Lord our God. If the heart knows not, if it considers not, that sin is an evil and bitter thing—evil in itself, bitter in its effects, fruit, and event<sup>9</sup>—it will never be secured against it.

Besides, that frame of heart which is most accepted with God in any sinner is the humble, contrite, self-abasing frame:

Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isa 57:15).

This is suitable for a sinner; no garment sits so decently about him. “Be clothed with humility,” says the apostle (1Pe 5:5). It is that which becomes us, and it is the only safe frame. He who walks humbly, walks safely.

This is the design of Peter’s advice, “Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1Pe 1:17). After he himself had erred by another frame of mind (that is, his denial of the Lord, Mar 14:72), he gives this advice to all believers. He does not advise them about a bondage, a slavish fear, disquieting and perplexing the soul. Rather, he exhorts them to such a fear as may keep men constantly calling upon the Father with reference to the final judgment, that they may be preserved from sin, of which they were in so great danger. “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.” This is the humble frame of soul.

And how is this obtained? How is this preserved? Not otherwise but by a constant, deep apprehension of the evil, vileness, and danger of sin. So was it worked, so was it kept up, in the approved publican. “God be merciful,” he said, “to me a sinner” (Luk 18:13). A sense of sin kept him humble, and humility made way for his access to a testimony of the pardon of sin.

This, through grace, is the great preservative from sin, as we have an example in the account of Joseph. Upon the urgency of his great temptation, he recoils immediately into this frame of spirit: “How,” he says, “can I do this great wickedness, and sin against

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<sup>9</sup> **event** – result.

God?” (Gen 39:9). A constant, steady sense of the evil of sin gives him such preservation, that he ventures liberty and life in opposition to it. To fear sin is to fear the Lord—the holy man tells us that they are the same: “The *fear of the Lord*, that is wisdom; and to *depart from evil* is understanding” (Job 28:28).

Therefore, in the first place and in general, this is what the law of sin puts forth its deceit about: namely, to draw the mind from this frame, which is the strongest fortress for the soul’s defense and security. It labors to divert the mind from a due apprehension of the vileness, abomination, and danger of sin. Sin secretly and insensibly introduces lessening, excusing, underestimating thoughts of its vileness; or it draws the mind off from pondering on it, from being conversant about it in its thoughts as much as it ought and formerly has been. After the heart of a man has been made tender, soft, and deeply sensible of sin—through the Word, Spirit, and grace of Christ—if the mind comes (on any account, or by any means whatever) to have less, fewer, slighter, or less affecting thoughts of or about sin’s vileness, then the mind of that man has been drawn away by the deceitfulness of sin.

## **b. Two ways of drawing off the mind**

There are two ways, among others, by which the law of sin endeavors deceitfully to draw off the mind from this duty (to be aware always of the vileness of sin) and the frame that goes with it.

### **1). Abuse of gospel grace**

The law of sin draws off the mind from awareness of its vileness by a horrible abuse of gospel grace. There is in the gospel a remedy provided against the whole evil of sin: the filth and the guilt of it, with all its dangerous consequences. It is the doctrine of the deliverance of the souls of men from sin and death, a discovery of the gracious will of God towards sinners by Jesus Christ.

Now, what is the genuine tendency of this doctrine of grace, of this discovery of grace; and how are we to use it and apply it? This the apostle declares,

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Ti 2:11-12).

This it teaches; this we ought to learn of it and by it. Thus, universal holiness is called a “conversation [that] becometh the gospel” (Phi 1:27). Holiness is suitable to the gospel as that which is answerable to its purpose, aim, and design—as that which it requires and which should be its practical result. Accordingly, the gospel produces this effect where the word of it is received and preserved in a saving light (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:20-24).

But in this the deceit of sin inserts itself: it separates the doctrine of grace from the use and purpose of it. Sin keeps the mind upon the concept of grace, and thus intercepts grace’s influences toward its proper application. From the doctrine of the assured pardon of sin, this deceit introduces a carelessness toward sin. God in Christ makes the

proposition, and Satan and sin make the conclusion. The deceitfulness of sin is apt to plead a carelessness toward itself, based on the grace of God by which sin is pardoned. Therefore, the apostle declares in his reproof and detestation of such a conclusion: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid” (Rom 6:1-2). That is, “Men’s deceitful hearts are apt to make that conclusion; but far be it from us that we should receive it in any way.” Yet, some have evidently carried that deceit to their own eternal ruin, as Jude declares: “Ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness”<sup>10</sup> (Jude 1:4). We have had dreadful instances of this in the days of temptation in which we have lived.

Indeed, in opposition to this deceit lies much of the wisdom of faith and the power of gospel grace. The mind can be fully possessed with, and cast habitually and firmly into, the mold of the ideas and doctrine of gospel truth about the full and free forgiveness of all sins in the blood of Christ. When this is the case, then to be able to keep the heart always in a deep, humbling sense of sin, abhorrence of it, and self-abasement for it, is a great effect of gospel wisdom and grace. This is the trial and touchstone of gospel light: if the mind keeps the heart sensible of sin, humble, lowly, and broken on that account; if it teaches us to water a free pardon with tears, to detest falsely forgiven sin, to watch diligently for the ruin of that which we are yet assured shall never ruin us—then our thoughts are from above and of the Spirit of grace. If our “wisdom” secretly and insensibly makes men loose and slight in their thoughts about sin, it is adulterate,<sup>11</sup> selfish, and false. If it will be all, and answer all ends, then it is nothing.

Therefore, it comes to pass that sometimes we see men walking in a bondage-frame of spirit all their days, low in their light and in their apprehensions of grace; so that it is hard to discern which covenant they belong to in their principles: whether they are under the law or under grace.<sup>12</sup> Yet they may walk with a more conscientious tenderness of sinning than many who are advanced to higher degrees of light and knowledge than they. The saving light of the gospel is the only principle of saving holiness and obedience; but, through the deceitfulness of sin, it is variously abused to indulge the soul in various neglects of duties, and to draw off the mind from a due consideration of the nature, deserved punishment, and danger of sin. This is done in several ways.

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<sup>10</sup> **lasciviousness** – strong lust or sexual desires.

<sup>11</sup> **adulterate** – made impure by admixture.

<sup>12</sup> **covenant of law** – covenant God established with Adam in the Garden of Eden before his fall into sin. It established man’s obligation to obey God with the penalty of death for disobedience (Gen 2:16-17). See *The Covenants: Of Works and of Grace* by Walter Chantry, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

**covenant of grace** – God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the benefit of which is applied to all who believe in Him (Gen 3:15; Gen 12:1-3; 2Sa 7:5-17; Jer 31:31-34; Gal 3).



*a). By familiar, frequent need*

First, the soul, having frequent need of relief by gospel grace against a sense of the guilt of sin and accusation of the law, comes at length to make it a common and ordinary thing, and such as may be slightly performed. Having found a good medicine for its wounds, and such as it has had experience of its effectiveness, it comes to apply it slightly, and rather skims over than actually cure its sores. A little less earnestness, a little less diligence, serves sin every time—until the soul, it may be, begins to secure itself of pardon in course. This tends directly to draw off the mind from its constant and universal watchfulness against sin. He whose light has made his way of access plain for the obtaining of pardon, if he be not very watchful, he is far more apt to become overly formal and careless in his work than he who, by reason of mists and darkness, beats about to find the right way to the throne of grace. This is as a man who has often travelled a road, passes on without regard or inquiry; but he who is a stranger to it, observing all turnings and inquiring of all passengers, secures his journey beyond the other.

*b). By extending boundaries*

Secondly, the deceitfulness of sin takes advantage from the doctrine of grace, by many ways and means, to extend the boundaries of the soul's liberty beyond what God has assigned to it. Some have never thought themselves free from a legal, bondage frame until they have been brought into the confines of sensuality, or even into the depths of it. How often will sin plead, "This strictness, this exactness, this carefulness is in no way needful. Relief is provided in the gospel against such things! Would you live as though there were no need of the gospel? As though pardon of sin were to no purpose?" But concerning these pleas of sin on the basis of gospel grace, we shall have occasion to speak more in particular (in section 6).

*c). By excuses*

Thirdly, in times of temptation, this deceitfulness of sin will argue for sin expressly from gospel grace; at least it will plead for the following two things.

(1). *That there is not need of such a tenacious, severe contending* against it as the principle of the new creature is fixed on. If it cannot divert the soul or mind wholly from opposing temptations, yet it will endeavor to draw them off as to the manner of their opposition. They need not use that diligence which at first the soul thinks necessary.

(2). *It will be proposing relief from the result of sin*, that it shall not result in the ruin or destruction of the soul because it is (or will or may be) pardoned by the grace of the gospel. And this is true. Gospel grace is the great and only relief of the soul against sin, when it already has contracted guilt from sin committed. This is the blessed and only remedy for a guilty soul. But when it is pleaded and remembered by the deceitfulness of sin in compliance with temptation to sin, then it is poison. Poison is mixed in every drop of this balm—to the danger, if not the death, of the soul.

This is the first way by which the deceitfulness of sin draws off the mind from a due attendance to the sense of its vileness that alone is able to keep it in the humble, self-abased frame which is acceptable with God. It makes the mind careless, as though its work were needless because of the abounding of grace. This is like a soldier's neglect of his station, trusting to reinforcements, which are provided, indeed, only in case of his keeping his own proper place.

## **2). *Life condition***

In this matter of drawing off the mind from a due sense of sin, sin takes advantage to work by its deceit from the state and condition of men in the world. I shall give only one instance of its procedure in this kind. Men, in their younger days, naturally have their affections more quick, vigorous, and active, more sensibly working in them, than later in life. They do, as to their sensible working and operation, naturally decay, and many things happen to men in their lives that take the edge and keenness off of their affections. But as men lose in their affections, if they are not besotted<sup>13</sup> in sensuality or by the corruptions that are in the world through lust, they grow and improve in their understandings, resolutions, and judgments.

Therefore, if what formerly had a place in their affections does not find a place in their minds and judgments, it will have no place in them at all. Thus, men have no regard for—yea, they utterly despise—those things that their affections held with delight and greediness in their childhood. But if such are things that by any means come to be fixed in their minds and judgments, they continue with a high esteem for them, and cleave as close to them as they did when their affections were more vigorous—only, as it were, they have changed their seat in the soul.

It is like this in things spiritual. The first and chief seat of the sensibleness of sin is in the affections. As affections in natural youth are great and large, so are they spiritually in spiritual youth: "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals" (Jer 2:2). Besides, such persons are newly come off from their convictions in which they have been cut to the heart and so made tender. Whatever touches a wound is thoroughly felt; so is the guilt of sin before the wound given by conviction is thoroughly cured. But now, when affections begin to decay naturally, they begin to decay also as to their sensible actings and motions in things spiritual. Although they improve in grace, yet they may decay in sense. At least, spiritual sense does not have its root in the affections, but only by way of communication.

Now, in these decays, if the soul does not take care to fix a deep sense of sin on the mind and judgment, thereby perpetually to affect the heart and affections, the sense of sin will decay. And here the deceit of the law of sin interposes itself.<sup>14</sup> It allows a sense

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<sup>13</sup> **besotted** – stupefied, as with liquor; made foolish.

<sup>14</sup> **interposes itself** – inserts or introduces itself.

of sin to decay in the affections, and diverts the mind from receiving a due, constant, fixed consideration of it.

We may consider this a little in persons who never make progress in the ways of God beyond conviction of sin. How sensible of sin will they be for a season! How will they then mourn and weep under a sense of the guilt of it! How will they cordially and heartily resolve against it! Affections are vigorous, and, as it were, bear rule in their souls. But they are like an herb that will flourish for a day or two with watering, although it has no root. This is because the more experience these men have had of sin, the less they are afraid of it after a while—as the wise man implies (Ecc 8:11). At length they come to be the greatest outward despisers of sin in the world. There is no sinner like him who has sinned away his convictions of sin. What is the reason of this? A sense of sin was in their convictions, but fixed in their affections. As the affections decayed in them, they took no care to have this sense of sin deeply and graciously fixed in their minds. The deceitfulness of sin deprived them of this and so ruined their souls.

In some measure it is so with believers. If, as the sensibleness of the affections decay; if, as they grow heavy and obtuse, great wisdom and grace is not used to fix a due sense of sin in the mind and judgment—which may provoke, excite, enliven, and stir up the affections every day—great decays will follow. At first, sorrow, trouble, grief, and fear affected the mind, and would give it no rest. If the mind does not affect the heart afterward with sorrow and grief, the whole will be cast out, and the soul will be in danger of becoming hardened.

These are some of the ways by which the deceit of sin diverts the mind from the first part of its safe preserving frame: it draws it off from its constant watchfulness against sin and all the effects of it.

## 6. “Drawn Away” from Considering God and His Grace

The second part of this general duty of the mind is to keep the soul in a constant, holy consideration of God and His grace. Clearly, this lies at the spring-head of gospel obedience. The way by which sin draws off the mind from this part of its duty is sufficiently open and known, though not sufficiently watched against.

### a. Instead of earthly things

Now, the Scripture everywhere declares this to be the filling of the *minds* of men with earthly things. Scripture places this in direct opposition to that heavenly frame of the mind which is the spring of gospel obedience: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2)—that is, set your minds. It is as if he had said, “You cannot be set or fixed on both together (things above and on the earth), so as principally and chiefly to mind them both.”

And the *affections* to the one and the other, proceeding from these different principles of minding the one and the other, are opposed as directly inconsistent: “Love not

the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man *love the world*, the *love of the Father* is not in him” (1Jo 2:15).

And, *actions* in a course suitable to these affections are proposed also as contrary: “Ye cannot *serve* God and mammon” (Mat 6:24). These are two masters whom no man can serve at the same time to the satisfaction of both.

Every inordinate minding of earthly things, then, is opposed to that frame in which our minds ought to be fixed on God and His grace in a course of gospel obedience.

### **b. How this deceitfulness works**

There are several ways by which the deceitfulness of sin draws off the mind in this particular; but the chief of them is by pressing these things on the mind under the notion of things lawful and, it may be, necessary. Thus, all those who excuse themselves in the parable from coming in to the marriage-feast of the gospel (Luk 14:16-24) did it on account of their being engaged in their lawful callings—one about his farm; another his oxen, the means whereby he ploughed in this world. By this plea were the minds of men drawn off from the frame of heavenliness that is required for our walking with God. The rules of not loving the world, or using it as if we used it not, are thus neglected.

It is not my present business to declare what wisdom, what watchfulness, what serious frequent trial and examination of ourselves is required to keep our hearts and minds in a heavenly frame during the use and pursuit of earthly things. But this is evident: that the device by which the deceit of sin draws off and turns aside the mind in this matter is the pretense of the lawfulness of things about which it would have it exercise itself. Against this, very few are armed with sufficient diligence, wisdom, and skill.

This is the first and most general attempt that indwelling sin makes upon the soul by deceit: it draws away the mind from a diligent attention to the evil of sin, and [from] a due and constant consideration of God and His grace.

## Chapter 9

# NEGLECT OF SPECIAL DUTIES

We are considering three particular instances of indwelling sin's power and advantages from some things that relate to it as such.

*I. Its seat and subject* (ch. 3)

*II. Its natural properties* (ch. 4)

*III. Its operations and manner*

*A. Aversion to God* (ch. 5)

*B. Opposition to God*

*1. By force* (ch. 6 and 7)

*2. By deceit*

*a. Against the general work of a holy frame of mind* (ch. 8)

*b. Against special duties* (ch. 9)

Indwelling sin opposes God by force and by deceit. We began consideration of its working by deceit in chapter 8, and this in its general workings to keep the soul from considering both the mind's vileness, and God and His grace.<sup>1</sup> How sin, by its deceit, endeavors to draw off the mind from attending to the holy frame for walking with God in which the soul ought to be preserved, therefore has been declared.

We proceed now to show how sin by its deceit does the same work in reference to those special duties by which the designs, workings, and prevalence of it may in a special manner be opposed and prevented.

### **1. Introduction**

Sin, indeed, maintains an enmity against all duties of obedience, or rather against God in them. "When I would do good," says the apostle, "evil is present with me" (Rom 7:21)—that is, "Whenever I would do good, or whatsoever good I would do (that is, spiritually good, good in reference to God), sin is present with me to hinder me from the good, to oppose me in it." On the other side, all duties of obedience lie directly against the actings of the law of sin; for as the flesh in all its actings lusts against the Spirit, so the Spirit in all its actings lusts against the flesh. And therefore, *every* duty

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<sup>1</sup> These opening paragraphs to this point are copied from chapters three and six. This expansion is inserted here by the editors as an aid to the reader.

performed in the strength and grace of the Spirit is contrary to the law of sin: “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body [that is, the flesh acting upon the law of sin]” (Rom 8:13). Actings of the Spirit of grace in duties do this work. The Spirit and the law of sin are contrary.

Yet, there are some duties that, in their own nature and by God’s appointment, have a peculiar influence to the weakening and subduing of the whole law of sin in its very principles and chief strengths. These the mind of a believer ought principally to attend to in his whole course; and from these sin in its deceit endeavors principally to draw off the mind. In diseases of the body, they say that some remedies have a specific quality against distempers. In like manner in this disease of the soul, there are some duties that have a special virtue against this sinful distemper.

I shall not insist on many of these remedies, but instance only two duties that seem to me to be of this nature—namely, that by God’s designation they have a special tendency towards the ruin of the law of sin. Then we shall show the ways, methods, and means that the law of sin uses to divert the mind from a due attendance to them.

### **a. Prayer and meditation**

Now, these duties are, first, *prayer*, especially private prayer; and secondly, *meditation*. I put them together because they much agree in their general nature and purpose, differing only in the manner of their performance.

By meditation, I mean meditating upon what respect and suitableness there is between the Word and our own hearts to this end: that our hearts may be brought to a more exact conformity to the Word. It is our pondering on the truth as it is in Jesus (Eph 4:21) that finds out the image and representation of the Word in our own hearts. Therefore, meditation has the same intent with prayer, which is to bring our souls into a frame in all things answering the mind and will of God. They are as the blood and spirits<sup>2</sup> in the veins, which have the same life, motion, and use.

Now, I have declared meditation to be of great power for controlling the actings of the law of sin. But persons are generally at a great loss in this duty of meditation. Therefore, I shall in our discourse give briefly two or three rules for the directing of believers to a right performance of this great duty. They are those that follow.

### **b. Rules for meditation**

1). *Meditate on God with God*; that is, when we would undertake thoughts and meditations of God—His excellencies, His properties, His glory, His majesty, His love, His goodness—let it be done in a way of speaking to God in a deep humiliation and lowering of our souls before Him. This will fix the mind, and draw it forth from one thing to

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<sup>2</sup> **spirits** – Medical science in the 17<sup>th</sup> century understood a principle of sensation and voluntary motion to exist in living bodies, which was referred to as “spirits,” answering to nerve fluid, nerve force, or nervous action. It can represent life, vigor, or energy.

another to give glory to God in a due manner. It will affect the soul until it be brought into that holy admiration of God and delight in Him which is acceptable to Him. My meaning is that meditation be done in a way of prayer and praise—a speaking unto God.

2). *Meditate on the Word in the Word.* In the reading of the Word, consider in the particular passages the sense we insist upon—looking to God for help, guidance, and direction in the discovery of His mind and will therein. Then, labor to have our hearts affected with it.

3). *Meditate frequently.* What we come short of in evenness and constancy in our thoughts in these things, let it be made up in frequency. Some are discouraged because their minds do not regularly supply them with thoughts to carry on their meditations, through the weakness or imperfection of their thoughts. Let this be supplied by frequent returns of the mind to the subject proposed to be meditated upon, whereby new senses will still be supplied to it. But this mention of rules for meditation is outside of our main purpose.

We have only chosen prayer and meditation for examples, not excluding some others from the same place, office, and usefulness. These duties of prayer and meditation, then, among others, make a special opposition to the very being and life of indwelling sin, or rather, faith in them does so. These duties are perpetually designing sin's utter ruin. In the pursuit of our present purpose, I shall therefore do these two things: *First*, show the suitableness and usefulness of this duty—or these duties of prayer and meditation (as I shall handle them jointly)—to the ruining of sin (in section 2 following). *Secondly*, show the means by which the deceitfulness of sin endeavors to draw off the mind from a due attendance to them (in section 3).

## 2. Prayer and Meditation's Usefulness to Resist Sin

For the first, the usefulness of prayer and meditation to resist and ruin sin, observe the following.

### a. Consider everything about sin

It is the proper work of the soul in this duty to consider all the secret workings and actings of sin: what advantages it has gotten, what temptations it is in conjunction with, what harm it has already done, and what it is yet further ready to do. Therefore, David gives the title to one of his prayers: "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord" (Psa 102). In this duty, I speak of prayer that is attended with a due consideration of all the needs, difficulties, and emergencies of the soul. Without this, prayer is not prayer; that is, whatever show or appearance of that duty it has, it is in no way useful either to the glory of God or the good of the souls of men. It is a cloud "without water" (Jude 1:12), driven by the wind of the breath of men.

Nor was there ever found a more present and effective poison for souls than the binding of them to a *constant form* and usage of (I know not what) words in their prayers and supplications that they themselves do not understand. Bind men so in their trades or in their businesses in this world, and they will quickly find the effect of it. By this means are they disenabled from any due consideration of what at present is good for them or evil to them—without which, to what use can prayer serve, but to mock God and delude men’s own souls?

But in this kind of prayer that we insist on, the Spirit of God falls in to give us His assistance, and that in this very matter of discovering the most secret actings and workings of the law of sin: “the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26)—that is, He discovers our deficiencies to us, and wherein chiefly we stand in need of help and relief. We find it by daily experience that believers are led through prayer into such discoveries and convictions of the secret deceitful work of sin in their hearts as no [mental] considerations could ever have led them into. When David was designing the confession of his actual sin, in his prayer he had his wound searched by the skillful hand of the Spirit of God. And by this he had a discovery made to him of the root of all his failures: in his original corruption, he “was shapen in iniquity” (Psa 51:5).

The Spirit in this duty is as the candle of the Lord to the soul, enabling it to search all the inward parts of the belly. It gives a holy, spiritual light into the mind, enabling it to search the deep and dark recesses of the heart, to find out the subtle and deceitful schemes, products, and imaginations of the law of sin therein. Whatever concept there is of it, whatever power and prevalence in it, it is laid hand on, apprehended, brought into the presence of God, judged, condemned, and bewailed.

What can possibly be more effective for the law of sin’s ruin and destruction?—for, together with its discovery, application is made to all that relief which in Jesus Christ is provided against it, all ways and means by which it may be ruined. Therefore, it is the duty of the mind to “watch unto prayer” (1Pe 4:7), to attend diligently to the estate of our souls, and to deal fervently and effectively with God about it. The like also may be said of meditation, wisely managed to its proper end.

### **b. Detest the vileness of sin**

In this duty of prayer (and meditation), there is wrought upon the heart a deep, full sense of the vileness of sin, with a constant renewed detestation of it; which, if anything, undoubtedly tends to its ruin. This is one design of prayer, one purpose of the soul in it: namely, to draw forth sin, to set it in order, to present it to the soul in its vileness, abomination, and aggravating circumstances; so that it may be loathed, abhorred, and cast away as a filthy thing (Isa 30:22). He who pleads with God for sin’s remission, pleads also with his own heart for sin’s detestation (Hos 14:3). In this, sin also is judged in the name of God; for the soul in its confession subscribes to God’s detestation of it and the sentence of His Law against it.



There is, indeed, a course of these duties that convicted persons give themselves up to as a mere hiding-place for their lusts. They cannot sin quietly unless they perform duty constantly. But the prayer we speak of is a thing of another nature, a thing that will allow no mixing with sin, much less will serve the ends of the deceit of sin as does outward formal prayer. True prayer will not be bribed into a secret compliance with any of the enemies of God or the soul, no, not for a moment. Therefore, often in this duty the heart is raised to the most sincere, effective sense of sin and detestation of it that the soul ever obtains in its whole course of obedience. This clearly tends also to the weakening and ruin of the law of sin.

### **c. Obtain strength against sin**

Prayer is the way appointed and blessed of God to obtain strength and power against sin: "If any of you lack...let him ask of God" (Jam 1:5). Prayer is the way of obtaining from God by Christ a supply of all our needs and assistance against all opposition, especially that which is made against us by sin. This, I suppose, need not be insisted on; it is, in principle and practice, clear to every believer. In this we call on Christ, and the Lord Jesus comes to our assistance with suitable "help in time of need" (Heb 4:16).

### **d. Practice faith**

Faith in prayer counters all the workings of the deceit of sin. This is because the soul therein constantly engages itself unto God to oppose all sin whatsoever: "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments" (Psa 119:106). This is the language of every gracious soul in its addresses to God. The inmost parts of it engage themselves to God, to cleave to Him in all things and to oppose sin in all things. He who cannot do this cannot pray. To pray with any other frame is but to flatter God with our lips, which He abhors.

This exceedingly helps a believer in pursuing sin to its ruin in the following ways.

1). *Finding secret lusts.* If there be any secret lust that lies lurking in the heart, one will find sin either rising up against this engagement of prayer, or using its trickery to secure itself from prayer. By this, sin is discovered, and the conviction of the heart concerning its evil furthered and strengthened. Sin makes the most certain discovery of itself, and never more evidently than when it is most severely pursued. Lusts in men are compared to hurtful beasts (Isa 11:4-6), or men themselves are such because of their lusts. Now, such beasts hide themselves in their dens; and never discover themselves so much, at least in their proper nature and rage, as when they are most earnestly pursued. So it is with sin and corruption in the heart.

2). *Awakening against strong sins.* If any sin be prevalent in the soul, it will weaken prayer, and take it off from this constant engagement with God. Sin will breed an insincerity regarding prayer, a slightness in it. Now, when this is observed, it will exceedingly awaken a gracious soul, and stir it up to look about itself. A causeless weariness and indisposition of the body is looked on as the sign of an approaching fever or some dangerous distemper, which stirs up men to use a timely and vigorous prevention so

that they are not seized upon by it. It is the same in this case. When the soul of a believer finds in itself an indisposition to make fervent, sincere engagements of universal holiness to God, it knows that there is some prevalent distemper in it, finds the place of it, and sets itself against it.

3). *Providing confidence of victory.* While the soul can thus constantly engage itself to God, it is certain that sin can rise to no ruinous prevalence. It is a conquest over sin, a most considerable conquest, when the soul fully and clearly, without any secret reserve, comes off with readiness and resolution in such an engagement (Psa 18:23). Upon such a success, it may triumph in the grace of God and have good hope, through faith, that it shall have a final conquest. What it so resolves shall be done; it has decreed a thing, and it shall be established. This tends to the disappointment, yea, to the ruin of the law of sin.

4). *Supporting watchfulness.* If the heart is not deceived by cursed hypocrisy, this engagement by prayer unto God will greatly influence it to a peculiar diligence and watchfulness against all sin. There is no greater evidence of hypocrisy than to have the heart say, like the whorish woman, "I have paid my vows, now I may take myself to my sin" (Pro 7:14); or to be negligent about sin, as being satisfied that it has prayed against it. It is different in a gracious soul. Sense and conscience of engagements made to God against sin make the soul universally watchful against all its motions and operations.

On these and various other accounts, faith in this duty exerts itself peculiarly to the weakening of the power and stopping of the progress of the law of sin. If, then, the mind be diligent in its watch and charge to preserve the soul from the power of sin, it will carefully attend to this duty of prayer and the due performance of it, which is of such singular advantage to its aim and purpose.

### **3. How Sin Works against Prayer**

Now, when sin is resisted by prayer, it puts forth its deceit in its own defense. It labors to divert and draw off the mind from attending to prayer and similar duties. There are, among others, three ways and means by which sin attempts to accomplish its design.

#### **a. Weariness of the flesh**

Indwelling sin makes advantage of its weariness to the flesh. There is an aversion, as has been declared, in the law of sin toward all direct communion with God. Now, this duty of prayer is direct communion with God. There is nothing that accompanies it by which the carnal part of the soul may be gratified or satisfied, as there may be somewhat of that nature in most public duties, in those that a man can do beyond pure acts of faith and love.

Since, then, there is no relief or advantage coming in by prayer but what is purely spiritual, prayer becomes wearisome and burdensome to flesh and blood. It is like traveling alone without companion or diversion, which makes the way seem long, but yet

brings the passenger with most speed to his journey's end. So our Savior declares when expecting that His disciples, according to their duty and present distress, should have been engaged in this work of prayer, yet found them fast asleep. "The spirit," He says, "indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mat 26:41). Out of that weakness grows their indisposition to and weariness of their duty. In the same way, God complains of His people: "Thou hast been weary of me" (Isa 43:22).

It may come at length to that height which is mentioned: "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal 1:13). The Jews supposed that it was the language of men when they brought their offerings or sacrifices on their shoulders, which they pretended wearied them, and they panted and blew as men ready to faint under them, when they brought only the torn, the lame, and the sick. But this duty is often the same to the flesh. The deceitfulness of sin makes use of this to draw the heart by insensible degrees from a constant attendance to prayer. It puts in for the relief of the weak and weary flesh.

There is a cooperation between spiritual flesh and natural flesh in this matter. They help one another. An aversion to this duty is the effect of their cooperation. So it was in the spouse (Song 5:2-8). She was asleep, drowsing in her spiritual condition, and pleads her natural unfitness to rouse herself from that state. If the mind be not diligently watchful to prevent suggestions from the flesh,

- if it dwell not constantly on those considerations that evidence an attendance to this duty to be indispensable,
- if it stir not up the principle of grace in the heart to retain its rule and sovereignty, and not to be dallied with by foolish pretenses

—then the mind will be drawn away from this duty of prayer, which is the effect sin aims at.

### **b. Corrupt reasonings**

The deceitfulness of sin makes use of corrupt reasonings, taken from the pressing and urging occasions of life. "If we," it says in the heart, "attend strictly to all spiritual duties, we would neglect our principal vocations and be useless to ourselves and others in the world." On this general account, particular businesses dispossess particular duties from their due place and time. Men have not leisure to glorify God and save their own souls. It is certain that God gives us time enough for all that He requires of us of any kind in this world. No duties need to jostle one another constantly; special occasions must be determined according to special circumstances.

However, if in anything we take more upon us than we have time in which to perform it well, without robbing God of that which is due to Him and our own souls, to this God does not call us; in this He does not bless us. It is more tolerable that our duties of holiness and regard to God should intrude on the duties of our callings and employments in this world than on the contrary; and yet, neither does God require this at our hands in an ordinary manner or course. How little, then, will He bear with that

which evidently is so much worse upon all accounts whatever! Yet, through the deceitfulness of sin, the souls of men thus are beguiled. By several degrees, they are at length driven from their duty.

### **c. Compensation from other duties**

The law of sin deals with the mind to draw it off from its attendance to this duty of prayer, by an offer of compensation to be made by other duties; as Saul thought to compensate his disobedience by sacrifice (1Sa 15:22). “May not the same duty of prayer suffice when performed in public or in the family?” And if the soul be so foolish as not to answer, “These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Luk 11:42), it may be ensnared and deceived.

Besides a command to do it—namely, that we should personally “watch unto prayer” (1Pe 4:7)—there are, as has been declared, various advantages in private prayer so performed against the deceit and power of sin, which it has not in the more public attendance to it. By this exchange that sin offers to the soul by corrupt reasonings, it strives to deprive the soul of these advantages.

### **d. Deferred obedience**

I may add here that which has a place in all the workings of sin by deceit: namely, its feeding the soul with promises and purposes of a more diligent attendance to this duty of prayer when occasions will permit. By this means, it brings the soul to say to its convictions of duty, as Felix did to Paul, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Act 24:25). By this means, the present season and time, which alone is ours, is often lost irrecoverably.

*Summary.* These are some of the ways and means by which the deceit of sin endeavors to draw off the mind from its due attendance to this duty of prayer, which is so peculiarly suited to prevent sin’s progress and prevalence, and which aims so directly and immediately at its ruin. I might instance also other duties of the like tendency, but this may suffice to discover the nature of this part of the deceit of sin.

This is the first way, then, by which indwelling sin makes way for the further entangling of the affections and the conception of sin. When sin has wrought this effect on anyone, he is said to be “drawn away,” to be diverted from what in his mind he ought constantly to attend to in his walking before the Lord.

## **4. How Failure Begins**

This will instruct us to see and discern where lies the beginning of our decline and failings in the ways of God, and that either as to our general course or as to our attendance to special duties. This is of great importance and concern to us. When the beginnings and occasions of a sickness or distemper of body are known, it is a great advantage to direct in and to the cure of it. God, to recall Zion to Himself, shows her

where was the “beginning of [her] sin” (Mic 1:13). Now, for the most part, this is the beginning of sin to us: even the drawing off the mind from a due attendance to all things related to the discharge of its duty. The principal care and charge of the soul lies on the mind. If the mind fails in its duty, the whole is betrayed—either as to its general frame or as to particular sins. The failing of the mind is like the failing of the watchman in Ezekiel: the whole is lost by his neglect (Eze 3:17-21).

### **a. Examine motives for duty**

Therefore, in that self-scrutiny and search to which we are called, we are most diligently to inquire after these beginnings of the failure of the mind to attend to spiritual duties. God does not look at what duties we perform as to their number and tale, or as to their nature merely, but whether we do them with the intention of mind and spirit that He requires. Many men *perform duties* in a road or course, and do not, as it were, so much as think of them. Their minds are filled with other things, even though duty takes up so much of their time. This is but an endeavor to mock God and deceive their own souls.

Would you, therefore, take the true measure of yourselves, consider how it is with you as to the *duty of your minds* that we have inquired after. Consider whether, by any of the deceits mentioned, you have not been diverted and drawn away; and if there be any decays upon you in any kind, you will find that *there* has been the beginning of those deceits. By one way or other, your minds have been made heedless, regardless, slothful, and uncertain—being beguiled and drawn off from their duty.

### **b. Guard diligently**

Consider the charge, “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23-27). May not such a soul say, “If I had attended more diligently; if I had considered more wisely the vile nature of sin; if I had not suffered my mind to be possessed with vain hopes and foolish imaginations by a cursed abuse of gospel grace; if I had not permitted it to be filled with the things of the world, and to become negligent in attending to special duties—then I had not at this day been thus sick, weak, thriftless, wounded, decayed, and defiled. My careless, deceived mind has been the beginning of sin and transgression in my soul.”

This discovery will direct the soul to a suitable way for its healing and recovery, which will never be effected by a multiplying of particular duties, but only by a restoring of the mind (Psa 23:3).

### **c. A steadfast mind**

This, therefore, also appears to be the great means of preserving our souls, both as to their general frame and particular duties, according to the mind and will of God; namely, to endeavor after a sound and steadfast mind. It is a notable grace to have “the spirit of...power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2Ti 1:7). A sound mind is a stable, solid, resolved mind in the things of God; not easily moved, diverted, changed; not drawn

aside. It is a mind not apt to hearken after corrupt reasonings, vain insinuations, or pretenses to draw it off from its duty.

This is that to which the apostle exhorts believers: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1Co 15:58). The steadfastness of our minds abiding in their duty is the cause of all our unmovableness and fruitfulness in obedience. For this reason, Peter tells us that those who are by any means led away or enticed, “fall from [their] own stedfastness” (2Pe 3:17). The great blame that is laid upon backsliders is that they are not steadfast: “Their heart was not...stedfast” (Psa 78:37). If the soul be safe unless the mind be drawn off from its duty, the soundness and steadfastness of the mind is its great preservative.

There are three parts of this steadfastness of the mind: *first*, a full purpose of cleaving to God in all things; *secondly*, a daily renovation and quickening of the heart to discharge this purpose; *thirdly*, resolutions against all dalliances or discussions about negligence in that discharge—which are not here to be spoken about.

## Chapter 10

# NEGLECT OF PARTICULAR DUTIES

We are considering three particular instances of indwelling sin's power and advantages from some things that relate to it as such.

*I. Its seat and subject* (ch. 3)

*II. Its natural properties* (ch. 4)

*III. Its operations and manner*

*A. Aversion to God* (ch. 5)

*B. Opposition to God*

*1. By force* (ch. 6 and 7)

*2. By deceit*

*a. Against general work of a holy frame of mind* (ch. 8)

*b. Against special duties* (prayer and meditation, ch. 9)<sup>1</sup>

*c. Deceit of the mind: how this works* (ch. 10)

### 1. Deceit of the Mind

*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away  
of his own lust, and enticed.—James 1:14*

We have not as yet brought to a conclusion the first way of the working of the deceit of sin; namely, in its drawing away of the mind from the discharge of its duty, which we will here insist on the longer for a double reason.

#### a. The mind's importance

The first reason to consider further how the deceit of sin draws away the mind from its duty, is because of the mind's importance. If the mind be drawn off—if it be tainted, weakened, or turned aside from a due and strict attendance to its charge and office<sup>2</sup>—the whole soul, will, and affections are certainly entangled and drawn into sin (as has

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<sup>1</sup> This opening paragraph is copied from chapters three and six. This expansion is inserted here by the editors as an aid to the reader.

<sup>2</sup> **office** – duty.

been declared in part and will later further appear). This, therefore, we ought to heed diligently, which is the design of the apostle's exhortation:

Therefore we ought to give the *more earnest heed* to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (Heb 2:1).

It is a failure of our minds by the deceitfulness of sin—in losing the life, power, sense, and impression of the Word—which he cautions us against. And there is no way to prevent it but by giving the most “earnest heed to the things which we have heard,” which expresses the whole duty of our minds in attending to obedience.

### **b. The mind's spirituality**

The second reason to consider further how the deceit of sin draws away the mind from its duty is because the workings of the mind are spiritual and therefore hidden. They are such as the conscience is not affected with, unless it clearly is enlightened, and duly excited and stirred up so as to take due notice of them. Conscience is not apt to react to the mind's failures, as it does principally to the acts of the whole soul. When the affections are entangled with sin (which we shall discuss in the next chapter), or when the will begins to conceive sin by the will's express consent, conscience is apt to make an uproar in the soul. Conscience will give sin no rest or quiet until the soul is reclaimed, or itself be one way or other bribed or corrupted.

But since these neglects of the mind are spiritual, they are seldom noticed without very diligent attendance. In the Scriptures, our minds are often called our “spirits,” such as “whom I serve with my spirit” (Rom 1:9). Our minds are distinguished from the soul, which principally indicates the affections: “Sanctify you wholly...your whole spirit and soul” (1Th 5:23)—that is, your mind and affections. It is true, where the word *spirit* is used to express spiritual gifts, it is, as to those gifts, opposed to our “understanding.” Our “understanding” is taken in 1 Corinthians 14:15 for the first act of the mind in a rational perception of things. But as “spirit” is applied to any faculty of our souls, it is the mind that it expresses.

The mind, then, being our spirit, the actings of it are secret and hidden, and not to be discovered without spiritual wisdom and diligence. Let us not suppose, then, that we dwell too long on this consideration, which is of so great importance to us. The workings of the mind are so hidden that we are apt to be very insensible of them. Therefore, our carefulness in this matter is one of the best evidences that we have of our sincerity. Let us not, then, be like a man that is driven by sense, who complains of a cut finger but not of a decay of spirits tending to death!

Therefore, as to this heading in our discourse, the deceit of sin as it works on the mind, there remains the consideration of the charge of the mind in reference to particular duties and sins. In the consideration of it, we shall do these two things: show what is required in the mind of a believer in reference to particular duties (sections 2 and 3); and then declare the way of the working of the deceit of sin, to draw it off from its at-



tendance to those duties (section 4). The like also shall be done with respect to particular sins and their avoidance.

## 2. Attend in Every Duty

For the right performance of any duty, it is not enough that the thing required be itself performed, but that it be universally squared and fitted to the rule<sup>3</sup> of the duty. Herein lies the great duty of the mind: namely, to attend to the rule of duties, and to take care that all the interests of such duties be ordered by such care. Our progress in obedience is our edification, or building up. Now, it is but a very little furtherance to a building that a man bring wood and stones, and heap them up together without order. If we intend to build, they must be hewed and squared, and fitted by line and rule. Nor is it to any advantage for our edification in faith and obedience that we multiply duties if we heap them upon one another, if we do not order and dispose of them according to rule.

Therefore, God expressly rejects a multitude of duties when they are not performed completely in accordance with the rule. “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices?” (Isa 1:11), and “They are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them” (1:14). Therefore, all acceptable obedience is called a proceeding according to rule: “As many as walk according to this rule” (Gal 6:16)—that is, it is a canonical<sup>4</sup> or regular obedience. As letters in the alphabet heaped together signify nothing unless they are disposed into their proper order, no more do our duties without this disposal.

That duties be ordered according to rule is the great duty of the mind, and to which it is to attend with all diligence: “see then that ye walk circumspectly” (Eph 5:15)—that is, exactly, accurately, and diligently in all things; take heed to the rule of what you do. We walk in duties, but we do it circumspectly in this attention of the mind.

There are some special things in every duty to which the rule directs that the mind is to attend, as follows.

### a. Complete

As to the *matter* of the duty, it must be full and complete. Under the Law, no beast was allowed to be a sacrifice that had any member missing, any defect of parts. Such were rejected, as well as those that were lame or blind. Duties must be complete as to the parts, in the matter of them. There may be such a part of the price kept back as may make the tendering of all the residue unacceptable. Saul sparing Agag and the fattest of the cattle rendered the destroying of all the rest useless. Thus the whole duty is rendered ineffective when men will give alms, or perform other services, but not to the proportion that the rule requires, and which the mind might discover by diligent attention to it.

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<sup>3</sup> **rule** – principles and purpose for a duty that guide and give meaning to its performance.

<sup>4</sup> **canonical** – following the approved order; according to rule.

### **b. By faith**

As to the *principle* of duty, it is to be done in faith, and therein by actually deriving strength from Christ, without Whom we can do nothing (Joh 15:5). It is not enough that the person be a believer (though that is necessary to every good work, Eph 2:10), but also that faith be peculiarly acted in every duty that we do. This is because our whole obedience is the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5, Greek; Rom 16:26)—that is, the obedience which the doctrine of faith requires, and which the grace of faith bears or brings forth. Therefore, Christ is expressly said to be “our life” (Col 3:4)—that is, the spring, author, and cause of our spiritual life.

Now, as in natural life, no vital act can be performed but by the actual operation of the principle of life itself; so, in spiritual life, no spiritually vital act—that is, no duty acceptable to God—can be performed but by the actual working of Christ, Who is our life. And this is no other way derived to us but by faith. Therefore the apostle says, “Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God” (Gal 2:20). Not only was Christ his life, a living principle to him, but he led a life—that is, he discharged vital actions in all duties of holiness and obedience—by the faith of the Son of God, or in Him, deriving supplies of grace and strength from Him by faith.

This, therefore, ought a believer diligently to attend to; namely, that everything he does unto God be done in the strength of Christ. What this faith and strength consists in ought diligently to be inquired into by all who intend to walk with God.

### **c. Manner of performance**

In this respect unto rule, the *manner* of the performance of every duty is to be regarded. Now, there are two things in the manner of the performance of any duty that a believer, who is trusted with spiritual light, ought to attend to.

1). A believer’s performance of any duty should be done in the way and by the means that God has prescribed with respect to the outward manner of its performance. And this is especially to be regarded in duties of the worship of God, because the matter and outward manner of worship both equally fall under His command. If this is not regarded, the whole duty is spoiled. I speak not of them who suffer themselves to be deluded by the deceitfulness of sin, who utterly disregard the rule of the Word in such things and who worship God according to their own imaginations. But I speak of them principally who—although they in general profess to do nothing but what God requires and as He requires it—yet do not diligently attend to the rule, to make the authority of God to be the sole cause and reason both of what they do and of the manner of the performance of it. This is the reason that God so often calls on His people to consider diligently and wisely that they may do all according as He has commanded.

2). The affections of the heart and mind in duties belong to the performance of them in the inward manner. The prescriptions and commands of God for attending to this are innumerable, and the lack hereof renders every duty an abomination to Him. A sac-

rifice without a heart, without salt, without fire—of what value is it? In the same way, duties without spiritual affections are of no value. In this is the mind to keep the charge of God, to see that the heart which He requires is offered to Him. We find, also, that God requires special affections to accompany special duties—“He that giveth...with cheerfulness” (Rom 12:8)—which, if they are not attended to, the whole is lost.

#### **d. Aims**

The mind is to attend to the *aims* of duties, and therein principally to this aim: the glory of God in Christ. Sin and self will impose several other purposes on our duties. With especially two, sin will press hard upon us: first, satisfaction of our convictions and consciences; secondly, the praise of men, for self-righteousness and ostentation.<sup>5</sup> These two are the main goals of men who are fallen off from God in all moral duties whatsoever. In their sins, they endeavor to satisfy their lusts; in their duties, their conviction and pride. These the mind of a believer is diligently to watch against, and to keep up in all a single eye to the glory of God, as that which answers the great and general rule of all our obedience: “Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). These, I say, and the like things that are commonly spoken about them, is the mind of a believer obliged to attend to diligently and constantly, with respect to all the particular duties of our walking before God.

Here, then, lies no small part of the deceit of sin: namely, to draw the mind off from this watch, to bring a carelessness upon it, that it shall not in these things keep the watch and charge of the Lord. And if sin can do so—and thereby strip our duties of all their excellencies that lie in these aspects of duty that the mind is to attend to—then sin will not much trouble itself nor us about the duties themselves. And this it attempts in the following ways.

##### **1). Content with generalities**

Indwelling sin brings a carelessness to the mind in its watch toward spiritual duties. It does this, first, by persuading the mind to content itself with generalities, and to take it off from attending to things in particular instances. For example, sin would persuade the soul to rest satisfied in a general aim of doing things to the glory of God, without considering how every particular duty may have that tendency. Thus Saul thought that he had fulfilled his own duty, and done the will of God, and sought His glory in his war against Amalek (1Sa 15)—when in actuality, for lack of attendance to every particular duty in that service, he had dishonored God and ruined himself and his posterity.

Men also may persuade themselves that they have a general design for the glory of God, when they have no active principle in particular duties tending at all that way. If the soul contents itself with a general notion of doing so, instead of fixing the mind by faith on particularly advancing the glory of God in a duty, then the mind is already di-

<sup>5</sup> **ostentation** – display intended to attract notice or admiration.

verted and drawn off from its charge by the deceitfulness of sin. If a man be traveling in a journey, it is not only required of him that he bend his course that way and so go on; but if he does not attend to every turning and other occurrences in his way, he may wander and never come to his journey's end.

If we suppose that in general we aim at the glory of God, as we all profess to do, yet if we do not attend to it distinctly upon every duty that occurs in our way, we shall never attain the result aimed at. And he who satisfies himself with this general purpose, without acting upon it in every special duty, will not long retain that purpose either. It works the same on the mind in reference to the principle of our duties, as it does unto the result. The principle of our duties is that they be done in faith, in the strength of Christ. Now, some men content themselves that they are believers, that they have faith. However, they do not labor in every particular duty to act faith, to lead their spiritual lives—in all the acts of them—by the faith of the Son of God. When they thus do not labor, then the mind is drawn off from its duty. It is in *particular* actions that we express and exercise our faith and obedience. What we are in particular actions, that we are, and no more.

## **2). Content with performance**

Indwelling sin draws off the mind from the duties before mentioned, secondly, by introducing a secret contentment into it from the duty itself performed, as to the matter of it. This is a fair discharge of a natural conscience. If the duty be performed, then conscience and conviction will be satisfied—even though as to the manner of its performance it comes short almost in all things of the rule! This was the case for Saul, upon his expedition against Amalek, when he cries to Samuel, “Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord” (1Sa 15:13). He satisfied himself, even though he had not attended as he ought to the whole will of God in that matter.

And thus was it with those in the book of Isaiah, “Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest [that is, regardest] it not?” (Isa 58:3). They had pleased themselves in the performance of their duties, and expected that God also should be pleased with them. But He shows them at large how they had failed, and *that* so far as to render what they had done an abomination. The like charge God expresses against them in Isaiah 48:1-2. This the deceitfulness of sin endeavors to draw the mind to: namely, to focus on the outward performance of the duty itself. Men say to themselves, in effect, “You ought to pray, and [indeed] you have prayed; you ought to give alms, and you [indeed] have given alms. Quiet, then, yourself in what you have done, and go on to do the like.” If sin so prevails, then the mind is discharged from further attendance and watching to duty, which leaves the soul on the borders of many evils. The reason for this danger follows.

### 3). Customariness

When indwelling sin prevails on the mind to cause it to focus only on the outward aspect of duty, customariness<sup>6</sup> in all duties will quickly ensue, which is the height of sin's drawing off the mind from duty. Men's minds may be drawn from all duties in the midst of the most abundant performance of them. This is because the mind, in and under the performance of duty, may be subject to a habitual diversion from its charge and watch unto the rule. What is done with such an attitude is not done to God. In backsliding Israel, none of their sacrifices were to God, although they professed that they were all so (Amo 5:25-26). They did not attend to His worship in faith and to His glory, and He despised all their duties (*see also* Hosea 10:1).

This is the great reason why professors thrive so little under the performance of a multitude of duties. They do not attend to them in a due manner, their minds being drawn off from their circumspect watch. Therefore, these professors have little or no communion with God in their duties, which is the purpose for which the duties are designed, and by which alone they become useful and profitable. In this manner are many duties of worship and obedience performed by a woeful generation of hypocrites, formalists, and unholy persons, without either life or light in themselves, or acceptance with God. Their minds are wholly estranged from a due attendance to what they do, by the power and deceitfulness of sin.

## 3. Attend in Every Sin

As the mind is to be watchful in respect of duties, so also it is in respect of sins. There are various things in and about every sin that the mind of a believer, by virtue of its office and duty, is obliged to attend to diligently for the preservation of the soul from it. These are things that God has appointed and sanctified to give effective rebukes and checks to the whole working of the law of sin, and such as are—in the law of grace, under which we are—exceedingly suited and fitted to that purpose. The deceit of sin endeavors by all means to draw off the mind from a due consideration of and attention to these. Some few of them we shall a little reflect upon.

### a. God's sovereignty

The first and most general thing that the mind is to give attention to in respect of sins is the sovereignty of God, the great Lawgiver, by Whom sin is forbidden. This Joseph fixed on in his great temptation: "How...can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9). There was in it a great evil, a great ingratitude against man, which he also pleads and insists on (39:8). But that which fixed his heart and resolution against it, was the formality of it: that it was sin against God, by Whom it was severely forbidden.

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<sup>6</sup> **customariness** – routineness from familiarity.

Therefore, the apostle informs us that in our dealing in anything that is against the Law, our respect is still to be to the Lawgiver and His sovereignty: "If thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy" (Jam 4:11-12). Consider this always: there is one Lawgiver, holy, righteous, and armed with sovereign power and authority. He is able to save and destroy. Thus sin is called a rebellion, a casting off His yoke, a despising of Him, and that in His sovereignty as the great Lawgiver.

This ought the mind always practically to attend to in all the lustings, actings, and suggestions of the law of sin, especially when advantaged by any suitable or vigorous temptation. We should say to ourselves, "It is God that has forbidden this thing; the great Lawgiver, under Whose absolute sovereignty I am, in dependence on Whom I live, and by Whom I am to be disposed of as to my present and eternal condition." This Eve fixed on at the beginning of her temptation: "God hath said, Ye shall not eat of" the tree (Gen 3:3). However, she kept not her ground. She abode not by that consideration, but suffered her mind to be diverted from it by the subtlety of Satan, which was the entrance of her transgression. So it is to us all in our deviations from obedience.

### **b. Sin's punishment**

The deceit of sin, of every sin, and the punishment appointed to it in the Law, is another thing that the mind ought actually to attend to, in reference to every particular evil. The diversions from this, with which the minds of men have been doctrinally and practically attended, have been an inlet into all manner of abominations. Job professes another frame in himself, "Destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure" (Job 31:23). He had mentioned many evils in the foregoing verses, and pleads his innocence from them—although they were, on the account of his greatness and power, such as he could have committed easily without fear of danger from men. Here he gives the reason that prevailed with him so carefully to abstain from them: "Destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure." It is as if he were to say, "I considered that God had appointed death and destruction for the punishment of sin, and that such was His greatness, highness, and power, that He could inflict it to the uttermost, in such a way as no creature is able to abide or to avoid."

In the same way, the apostle directs believers always to consider that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). This is because God has said, "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense" (10:30). He is a sin-avenging God, Who will by no means acquit the guilty. It is thus in the declaration of His gracious name, infinitely full of encouragements to poor sinners in Christ, when He adds at the end that He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34:7). This is so that He may keep upon the minds of them whom He pardons a due sense of the punishment that is due to every sin from His vindictive justice. So the apostle would remind us that even "our

God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). That is, that we should consider His holiness and vindictive<sup>7</sup> justice, in which He appoints a suitable payment for sin.

God reckons men’s breaking through this consideration as the height of the aggravation of their sins: “Knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Rom 1:32). What hope is there for such persons? There is, indeed, relief against this consideration for humbled souls who believe in the blood of Christ; but this relief is not to take off the mind from it, because it is appointed of God to be a restraint from sin.

Both these considerations, even the sovereignty of God and the punishment of sin, are put together by our Savior: “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat 10:28).

### c. God’s love

The consideration of all the love and kindness of God, against Whom every sin is committed, is another thing to which the mind ought diligently to attend. This is a powerful consideration if rightly and graciously managed in the soul. This Moses presses on the people,

Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy Father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee? (Deu 32:6).

That is, “Is this a repayment for eternal love and all the fruits of it? for the love and care of a Father, of a Redeemer, of Whom we have been made partakers?”

It is the same consideration that the apostle manages to this purpose,

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2Co 7:1).

The receiving of the promises ought to be effective to stir us up to all holiness, so to work and effect<sup>8</sup> an abstinence from all sin. And what promises are these? Namely, that God “will be a Father unto [us and] receive us” (2Co 6:17-7:2), which comprises the whole of all the love of God towards us here and to eternity. If there be any spiritual ingenuity<sup>9</sup> in the soul, while the mind is attentive to this consideration, there can be no prevailing attempt made upon it by the power of sin.

Now, there are two parts of this consideration.

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<sup>7</sup> **vindictive** – punitive; retributive.

<sup>8</sup> **effect** – achieve.

<sup>9</sup> **ingenuity** – fair-mindedness; virtue.

### **1). General love to all believers**

The first consideration of the love of God to assist the mind in resisting sin is that which is general in it, that which is common to all believers. This is managed to this purpose in 1 John 3:1-3:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

“Consider,” he says in effect, “the love of God, and the privileges that we enjoy by it: ‘Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.’ Adoption is a special fruit of it, and how great a privilege is this! Such love it is, and such are the fruits of it, that the world knows nothing of the blessed condition that we obtain and enjoy thereby: ‘The world knoweth us not.’ Nay, it is such love, and so unspeakably blessed and glorious are the effects of it, that we ourselves are not able to comprehend them.”

What use, then, ought we to make of this contemplation of the excellent, unspeakable love of God? Why, he says, “Every man that hath this hope...*purifieth* himself.” Every man who has been made partaker of this love, and thereupon a hope of the full enjoyment of the fruits of it, of being made like to God in glory, “*purifieth* himself”—that is, in an abstinence from all and every sin, as the words that follow this verse declare more fully.

### **2). Special mercies**

The love of God to assist the mind to resist sin is to be considered regarding the peculiar mercies and fruits of love of which everyone’s soul has been made partaker. There is no believer but, besides the love and mercy that he has in common with all his brethren, has also in the lot of his inheritance some special mercies that are his personally. He has some joy that “a stranger doth not intermeddle with” (Pro 14:10), particular applications of covenant love and mercy to his soul.

Now, these are all provisions laid in by God so that they may be borne in mind against an hour of temptation, so that the consideration of them may preserve the soul from the attempts of sin. Their neglect is a high aggravation of our provocations against God. It is charged as the great evil of Solomon that he had sinned against special mercies, special intimations of love: he sinned after God “had appeared unto him twice” (1Ki 11:9). God required that he should have borne in mind that special favor and have made it an argument against sin. But Solomon neglected that favor, and therefore is burdened with this sore rebuke. Indeed, all special mercies, all special tokens and pledges of love, are utterly lost and misspent upon us if they are not applied in our lives for this purpose.



God's love, then, is another thing that it is the duty of the mind greatly to attend to, and to use to effectively oppose every attempt that is made on the soul by the law of sin.

#### **d. Christ's mediation**

The considerations that arise from the blood and mediation of Christ are of the same importance. The apostle declares this to be so:

For the love of Christ constraineth<sup>10</sup> us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again (2Co 5:14-15).

There is a constraining power in this consideration. It is great, forcible, and effective if duly attended to. But I must not here in particular insist upon these things.

#### **e. The inhabitation of the Spirit**

Neither shall I speak of the inhabitation of the Spirit, which is the greatest privilege that we are made partakers of in this world. The due consideration how He is grieved by sin; how His dwelling-place is defiled thereby; how His comforts are forfeited, lost, and despised by it—might also be insisted on. But the instances already given are sufficient to our purpose.

*Summary.* Herein lies the duty of the mind in reference to particular sins and temptations. It is diligently and carefully to attend to these things. It is to dwell constantly upon the consideration of them. It is to have them in a continual readiness to oppose all the lustings, actings, warrings, attempts, and rage of sin.

In reference to this, sin in a special manner puts forth and acts its deceit. It labors by all means to draw off the mind from its due attendance to these things, to deprive the soul of this great preservative and antidote against sin's poison. It endeavors to cause the soul to satisfy itself with general undigested notions about sin, that it may have nothing in particular to rely on in its own defense against sin's attempts and temptations.

### **4. How Sin Deceives the Mind**

The ways by which sin attempts to draw off the mind from its due attention to spiritual duties and sin's danger also briefly may be considered.

#### **a. Mental sloth**

It is from the deceit of sin that the mind is spiritually slothful,<sup>11</sup> by which it becomes negligent of this duty. The principal discharge of the mind's trust in this matter is expressed by "watching," which is the great caution that the Lord Jesus gave to His disci-

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<sup>10</sup> **constraineth** – compels.

<sup>11</sup> See *The Heavenly Footman* by John Bunyan (1628-1688), available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

ples in reference to all their dangers from sin and Satan. “I say unto all, Watch” (Mar 13:37). That is, use your utmost diligence and carefulness so that you are not surprised and entangled with temptations. It is also called “consideration”: “Consider your ways” and “Consider your latter end”—the lack of which God complains of in His people (Hag 1:5; Deu 32:29).

Now, that which is contrary to these indispensable conditions of our preservation is spiritual slothfulness, as the apostle declares: “And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful” (Heb 6:11-12). If we show not diligence, we are slothful and in danger of coming short of inheriting the promises. See 2 Peter 1:5-11:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge [etc.]...For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

All this the mind is turned from, if once, by the deceit of sin, it is made slothful.

Now, this sloth consists in four things.

1). *Inadvertence*.<sup>12</sup> Sloth does not set itself to consider and attend to its special concerns. The apostle, persuading the Hebrews with all earnestness to attend diligently, to consider carefully, that they may not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, gives this reason of their danger: that they were “dull of hearing” (Heb 5:11)—that is, that they were slothful and did not attend to the things of their duty. A secret carelessness is apt to creep upon the soul, and it does not set itself to a diligent marking how things go with it, and what is continually required of it.

2). *An unwillingness to be stirred up to its duty*. “A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again” (Pro 19:24). There is an unwillingness in sloth to take any notice of warnings, calls, excitations, or stirrings up by the Word, Spirit, judgments, or anything that God makes use of to call the mind to a due consideration of the condition of the soul. This is a perfect evidence that the mind is made slothful by the deceit of sin: when special calls and warnings, whether in a suitable word or a pressing judgment, cannot prevail with it to pull its hand out of its bosom—that is, to set about the special duties to which it is called.

3). *Weak and ineffectual attempts to recover itself to its duty*. “As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed” (Pro 26:14). In the turning of a door upon its hinges, there is some motion but no progress. It moves up and down, but

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<sup>12</sup> **inadvertence** – inattention; negligence.

is still in the place and posture that it was. So is it with the spiritually slothful man on his bed or in his security. He makes some motions or faint endeavors towards a discharge of his duty, but does not go on. Where he was one day, there he is the next; yea, there where he was one year, he is the next. His endeavors are faint, cold, and vanishing. He gets no ground by them, but is always beginning and never finishing his work.

4). *Heartlessness upon apprehension of difficulties and discouragements.* “The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets” (Pro 22:13). Every difficulty deters him from duty. He thinks it impossible for him to attain to that accuracy, exactness, and perfection which he is in this matter to press after. He therefore contents himself in his old coldness and negligence, rather than to run the hazard of a universal carefulness. Now, if the deceit of sin has once drawn away the mind into this frame, it lays it open to every temptation and incursion of sin. The spouse in the Song of Solomon seems to have been overtaken with this distemper (Song 5:2-3), and this puts her on various excuses why she cannot attend to the call of Christ, and apply herself to her duty in walking with Him.

## **b. Surprises**

Indwelling sin draws away the mind from its watch and duty in reference to sin by surprises. It joins with some urging temptation, and surprises the mind into thoughts quite of another nature than those that it ought to insist on in its own defense. So it seems to have been with Peter: his carnal fear—closing with the temptation in which Satan sought to winnow him—filled his mind with so many thoughts about his own imminent danger, that he could not take into consideration the love and warning of Christ (Mat 26:34), nor the evil to which his temptation led him, nor anything that he ought to have insisted on for his preservation. Therefore, he wept bitterly upon a review of his folly in neglecting those thoughts of God and the love of Christ which, through the assistance of the Holy Ghost, might have kept him from his scandalous fall.

This is the common way of the working of the deceit of sin to particular evils: it lays hold on the mind suddenly with thoughtfulness about the present sin, possesses it, and takes it up. The result is that it does not recover itself at all to the considerations mentioned; or, if any thoughts of them are suggested, the mind is so prepossessed and filled that they make no impression on the soul or make no abode in it. Thus, doubtless, was David surprised in the entrance of his great sin (2Sa 11:2). Sin and temptation did so possess and fill his mind with the present object of his lust that he utterly forgot, as it were, those considerations which he had formerly made use of when he so diligently kept himself from his iniquity (Psa 101:2-3, etc.).

Here, therefore, lies the great wisdom of the soul: in rejecting the very first motions of sin, because by engaging with them the mind may be drawn off from attending to its preservatives, and so the whole rush into evil.

### **c. Frequency and persistence**

Indwelling sin draws away the mind by frequency and long continuance of its solicitations, which at last makes a conquest of the mind. This does not happen without an open neglect of the soul, a lack of stirring up itself to give an effective rebuke to sin, in the strength and by the grace of Christ, which would have prevented its success. But of this more shall be spoken later.

## **5. Summary**

This is the first way whereby the law of sin acts its deceit against the soul: it draws off the mind from attendance to its charge and office, both in respect of duty and sin.<sup>13</sup> So far as this is done, the person is said to be “drawn away” or drawn off—he is “tempted.” Every man is tempted when he is thus drawn away by his own lust, or the deceit of sin dwelling in him.

The whole effect of this working of the deceitfulness of sin may be reduced to the following three points.

- The remission of a universally watchful frame of spirit to every duty, and against all, even the most hidden and secret, actings of sin.
- The omission of peculiar attending to such duties as have a special respect to the weakening and ruin of the whole law of sin, and the prevention of its deceitfulness.
- Spiritual sloth, as to a diligent regard to all the special concerns of duties and sins.

When these three things—with their branches mentioned, less or more—are brought in or upon the soul, or so far as they are so, then so far is a man drawn off by his own lust or the deceit of sin.

There is no need of adding here any directions for the prevention of this evil. They have sufficiently been laid down in our passage through the consideration both of the duty of the mind and of the deceit of sin.

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<sup>13</sup> The discussion of this first way of the law of sin’s working was begun in chapter 8.

## Chapter 11

# ENTANGLING THE AFFECTIONS

*Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.*

—James 1:14-15

We began considering the deceitfulness of indwelling sin in chapter 8. We are now considering more in depth three ways in which the deceitfulness of sin works: 1) “drawing away” the mind (ch. 10); 2) “enticing” the affections (considered here); and 3) the actual “conceptions” of the sin itself (ch. 12).<sup>1</sup>

The second thing, then, ascribed in the words of the apostle to the deceitful working of sin is its “enticing.” A man is “drawn away...and *enticed*,” and this seems particularly to respect the affections, as drawing away does the mind. The mind is drawn away from duty, and [then] the affections are enticed to sin. From the prevalence hereof a man is said to be “enticed,” or entangled as with a bait—so the word implies, for there is an allusion in it to the bait with which a fish is taken on the hook, and which holds him to his destruction. Concerning this effect of the deceit of sin, we shall briefly show two things: 1) What it is to be enticed, or to be entangled with the bait of sin, to have the affections tainted with an inclination to it; and when they are so; and 2) What course sin takes, and in what way it proceeds, so to entice, ensnare, or entangle the soul.

## 1. What It Is To Be Enticed

### a. Frequent imaginations

The affections are certainly entangled when they stir up frequent imaginations about the proposed object to which this deceit of sin leads and entices. When sin prevails and the affections are gone fully after it, it fills the imagination with the object, possessing the imagination with images, likenesses, and appearances of the object continually. Such persons “devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds,” which they also “practice” when they are able, when “it is in the power of their hand” (Mic 2:1). As Peter tells

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is inserted by the editors as an aid to the reader. See ch. 8 section 4b.

us in particular, that “they have eyes full of an adulteress,<sup>2</sup> and that cannot cease from sin” (2Pe 2:14)—that is, their imaginations are possessed with a continual representation of the object of their lusts. And it is so in part where the affections are in part entangled with sin and begin to turn aside to it.

John tells us that the things that are “in the world” are “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1Jo 2:16). The lust of the eyes is that which by them is conveyed to the soul. Now, it is not the bodily sense of seeing that is intended, but the fixing of the imagination from that sense on such things. This is called the “eyes” because thereby things are constantly represented to the mind and soul, as outward objects are to the inward sense by the eyes—and often the outward sight of the eyes is the occasion of these imaginations. So Achan declares how sin prevailed with him (Jos 7:21). First, he saw the wedge of gold and Babylonish garment, and then he coveted them. He rolled them—the pleasures, the profit of them—in his imagination, and then fixed his heart upon the obtaining of them.

Now, the heart may have a settled, fixed detestation of sin; but yet, if a man finds that the imagination of the mind is frequently solicited by sin and exercised about it, such a one may know that his affections are secretly enticed and entangled.

### **b. Secret delights**

This entanglement is heightened when the imagination can prevail with the mind to lodge vain thoughts in it with secret delight and pleasure. This is termed by casuists,<sup>3</sup> *Cogitatio morosa cum delectatione*—that is, an abiding thought with delight, which towards forbidden objects is in all cases actually sinful.

This may be when the consent of the will to sin is not obtained—when the soul would not for the world do the thing—yet thoughts begin to lodge in the mind about it. This “lodging of vain thoughts” in the heart, the prophet complains of as a thing greatly sinful and to be abhorred (Jer 4:14). All these thoughts are messengers that carry sin to and fro between the imagination and the affections—and still increase it, inflaming the imagination, and more and more entangling the affections. Achan thinks upon the golden wedge; this makes him like it and love it. By the loving of it, his thoughts are infected, and return to the imagination of its worth and goodly show. And so, little by little, the soul is inflamed to sin. Here, if the will parts with its sovereignty,<sup>4</sup> sin is actually conceived.

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<sup>2</sup> Marginal reading in the Authorized Version. In early editions of the King James Version, the translators gave alternate readings in marginal notes.

<sup>3</sup> **casuists** – those who apply rules and principles to questions of conscience, right and wrong.

<sup>4</sup> **parts with its sovereignty** – gives up its freedom to exercise its rightful rule.

### **c. Readiness to accept excuses**

Inclinations to sin, or readiness to accept excuses for sinning or the reliefs that are offered for sin when committed, show that the affections are entangled with it. We have shown, and shall yet further evidence, that it is a great part of the deceit of sin to offer lessening and excusing thoughts of sin to the mind. Its language in a deceived heart is, “Is it not a little one?” (Gen 19:20), or “There is mercy provided,” or “It shall be in due time relinquished and given over.”

Now, when there is a readiness in the soul to hearken to and receive such secret insinuations arising from this deceit, in reference to any sin or unapprovable course, it is an evidence that the affections are enticed. When the soul is willing, as it were, to be tempted, to be courted by sin, to hearken to its dalliances and solicitations, it has lost of its conjugal affections to Christ and is entangled. This is to “look...upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright” (Pro 23:31). That is, to have a pleasing contemplation on the invitations of sin, whose goal the wise man gives us: “at the last it biteth like a serpent” (23:32). When the deceit of sin has prevailed thus far on any person, then he is enticed or entangled. The will is not yet come to the actual conception of this or that sin by its consent, but the whole soul is in a near inclination to it.

I could give many other instances as tokens and evidences of this entanglement, but these may suffice to show what we intend by it.

## **2. How Indwelling Sin Entangles the Affections**

Our next inquiry is how, or by what means, the deceit of sin proceeds thus to entice and entangle the affections. And two or three of its baits are revealed in this.

### **a. Drawing off the mind from watchfulness**

The deceit of indwelling sin makes use of its former success on the mind in drawing it off from its watch and circumspection.<sup>5</sup> Says the wise man, “Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird” (Pro 1:17)—or “before the eyes of everything that has a wing,” as in the original Hebrew. If the bird has eyes open to discern the snare, and a wing to carry itself away, it will not be caught. In vain would the deceit of sin spread its snares and nets for the entanglement of the soul while the eyes of the mind are intent upon what it does, and so stir up the wings of its will and affections to carry it away and avoid the sin. But if the eyes be put out or diverted, the wings are of very little use for escape. This is one of the ways that is used by them who take birds or fowls in their nets. They have false lights or shows of things, to divert the sight of their prey; and when that is done, they take the season to cast their nets upon them. The deceit of sin works in this same way: it first draws off and diverts the mind by false reasonings and

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<sup>5</sup> **circumspection** – taking heed of circumstances and their consequences; prudence.

pretenses, as has been shown, and then it casts its net upon the affections for their entanglement.

### **b. Proposing sin as desirable**

Taking advantage of such seasons, indwelling sin proposes a specific sin as desirable, as exceeding satisfactory to the corrupt part of our affections. It gilds over<sup>6</sup> the object by a thousand pretenses that it presents to corrupt lustings. This is the laying of a bait that the apostle in this verse evidently alludes to: “drawn away of his own lust, and *enticed*” (Jam 1:14)—that is, “baited.” A bait is something desirable and suitable that is proposed to the hungry creature for its satisfaction. It is by all the crafty skills of the hunter rendered desirable and suitable. Thus is sin presented by the help of the imagination to the soul—that is, sinful and inordinate objects, which the affections cleave to, are so presented.

The apostle tells us that there are “pleasures of sin” (Heb 11:25); which, unless they are despised, as they were by Moses, there is no escaping of sin itself. Thus, they who live in sin are said to “live in pleasure” (Jam 5:5). Now, this pleasure of sin consists in its suitability to give satisfaction to the flesh, to lust, to corrupt affections. Hence is that caution: “Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14). Do not suffer your minds, thoughts, or affections to fix upon sinful objects, suited to give satisfaction to the lusts of the flesh, to nourish and cherish them thereby. To which purpose he speaks again, “Ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). Bring not in the pleasures of sin, to give them satisfaction. When men are under the power of sin, they are said to be “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph 2:3).

Thus, therefore, the deceit of sin (which is now set at some liberty by the carelessness of the mind) endeavors to entangle the affections by proposing to them, through the assistance of the imagination, that suitability which is in it to the satisfaction of its corrupt lusts. It presents its “wine sparkling in the cup,” the beauty of the adulteress, the riches of the world, to sensual and covetous persons—and somewhat in the like kind, in some degrees, to believers themselves. When, therefore, I say, sin would entangle the soul, it prevails with the imagination to solicit the heart, by representing this false-painted beauty or pretended satisfactoriness of sin. Then if Satan, with any peculiar temptation, fall in to its assistance, it often inflames all the affections, and puts the whole soul into disorder.

### **c. Hiding the danger of sin**

The deceit of indwelling sin hides the danger that attends sin. It covers it as the hook is covered with the bait, or as the net is spread over the meat for the fowl to be taken. It is not possible, indeed, that sin should utterly deprive the soul of the knowledge of the

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<sup>6</sup> **gilds over** – covers an object with a thin layer of gold to make it seem attractive.



danger of it. Sin cannot dispossess the soul of its notion or persuasion that “the wages of sin is death,” and that it is the “judgment of God, that they which commit [sin] are worthy of death” (Rom 6:23; 1:32). But this is what indwelling sin will do: it will so take up and possess the mind and affections with the baits and desirableness of sin, that it shall divert them from an actual and practical contemplation of the danger of it.

What Satan did in and by his first temptation, indwelling sin does ever since. At first Eve guards herself with calling to mind the danger of sin: “Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (Gen 3:3). But so soon as Satan had filled her mind with the beauty and usefulness of the fruit to make one wise, how quickly did she lay aside her practical prevalent consideration of the danger of eating it and the curse due it—or else she relieves herself with a vain hope and pretense that this should not be because the serpent told her so!

So was David beguiled in his great transgression by the deceit of sin. His lust being pleased and satisfied, the consideration of the guilt and danger of his transgression was taken away—and therefore he is said to have “despised...the Lord” (2Sa 12:9), in that he considered not the evil that was in his heart, and the danger that attended it in the threatening of the Law.

Now sin, when it presses upon the soul to this purpose, will use a thousand wiles to hide from the soul the terror of the Lord, the end of transgressions, and especially of that peculiar folly to which it solicits the mind. Hopes of pardon shall be used to hide it; future repentance shall hide it; present persistence of lust shall hide it; occasions and opportunities shall hide it; surprises shall hide it; excusing sin shall hide it; balancing of duties against it shall hide it; fixing the imagination on present objects shall hide it; and desperate resolutions to venture the uttermost for the enjoyment of lust in its pleasures and profits shall hide it. A thousand wiles it has, which cannot be recounted.

#### **d. Reasoning perversely**

Having prevailed thus far, gilding over the pleasures of sin, hiding its end and demerit, indwelling sin proceeds to raise perverse reasonings in the mind in order to fix the mind on the sin proposed, so that that sin may be conceived and brought forth—the affections being already prevailed upon. We shall speak in the next chapter of its progress.

### **3. Directions for Reducing the Enticement of the Affections**

Here we may remain a little, as formerly, to give some few directions for the prevention of this woeful work of the deceitfulness of sin. Would we not be enticed or entangled? Would we not be disposed to the conception of sin? Would we be turned out of the road and way that goes down to death? Then let us take heed of our affections. The affections are of so great concern in the whole course of our obedience that they are commonly in the Scripture called by the name of the “heart,” as the principal thing that God requires in our walking before Him.

This is not to be attended to slightly. Says the wise man, “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23)—or, as in the original Hebrew, “keep your heart above or before all other keepings.” That is to say in effect,

Before every watch, keep your heart.<sup>7</sup> You have many keepings that you watch to: you watch to keep your lives, to keep your estates, to keep your reputations, to keep up your families. But above all these keepings, prefer that, attend to that of the heart, of your affections, that they be not entangled with sin.

There is no safety without it. Save all other things and lose the heart, and all is lost—lost unto all eternity.

You will say, then, “What shall we do, or how shall we observe this duty?”

### **a. Look to the object of your affections**

#### ***1). On things above***

This advice, in general, the apostle gives in this very case in Colossians 3. His advice in the beginning of that chapter is to direct us to the mortification of sin, in which he expressly engages: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth” (3:5). That is, prevent the working and deceit of sin which wars in your members. To prepare us, to enable us to this, he gives us that great direction: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (3:2). Fix your affections upon heavenly things; this will enable you to mortify sin. Fill them with the things that are above, let them be exercised with them, and so enjoy the chiefest place in them. They are above, blessed and suitable objects, suitable for and answering to our affections. These include God Himself in His beauty and glory; the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is “the chiefest of ten thousand...altogether lovely” (Song 5:10, 16); grace and glory; the mysteries revealed in the gospel; and the blessedness promised by it.

Were our affections filled, taken up, and possessed with these things—as it is our duty that they should be, and it is our happiness when they are—what access could sin, with its painted pleasures, with its sugared poisons, with its envenomed baits, have to our souls? How we would loathe all its proposals, and say unto them, “Get ye hence as an abominable thing!” For what are the vain, transitory pleasures of sin, in comparison of the exceeding recompense of reward that is proposed to us? The apostle presses this argument in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.

#### ***2). The cross of Christ***

As to the object of your affections, in a special manner let it be the cross of Christ, which has exceeding power towards the disappointment of the whole work of indwelling sin. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal 6:14). The cross of

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<sup>7</sup> See “The Heart of the Saints” and *Guarding the Heart* by A. W. Pink (1886-1952); both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Christ, the apostle gloried and rejoiced in; this his heart was set upon. And these were the effects of it: it crucified the world unto him, made it a dead and undesirable thing. The baits and pleasures of sin all come from the world and the things that are in the world—namely, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1Jo 2:16). These are the things that are in the world; from these sin takes all its baits by which it entices and entangles our souls.

If the heart be filled with the cross of Christ, it casts death and undesirableness on all the world’s things; it leaves no seeming beauty in them, no appearing pleasure or comeliness. Again, the apostle says in effect, “It crucifies me to the world; and makes my heart, my affections, and my desires dead to any of these things.” It roots up corrupt lusts and affections, and leaves no principle to go forth and make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Labor, therefore, to fill your hearts with the cross of Christ. Consider the sorrows He underwent, the curse He bore, the blood He shed, the cries He put forth, the love that was in all this to your souls, and the mystery of the grace of God therein. Meditate on the vileness, demerit, and punishment of sin as represented in the cross, the blood, and the death of Christ. Is Christ crucified for sin, and shall not our hearts be crucified with Him unto sin? Shall we receive that, or hearken to its dalliances, which wounded, which pierced, which slew our dear Lord Jesus? God forbid! Fill your affections with the cross of Christ [so] that there may be no room for sin. The world once put Him out of the house into a stable, when He came to save us; let Him now turn the world out of doors, when He is come to sanctify us.

### **b. Look to the vigor of your affections**

Look to the vigor of your affections towards heavenly things. If they are not constantly attended, excited, directed, and warned, they are apt to decay, and sin lies in wait to take every advantage against them. Many complaints we have in the Scripture of those who lost their first love by suffering their affections to decay. This should make us jealous over our own hearts, lest we also should be overtaken with the like backsliding frame. Therefore, be jealous over your affections. Often strictly examine them and call them to account. Supply to them due considerations for their exciting and stirring up to duty.

## Chapter 12

# THE CONCEPTION OF SIN

*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.*

—James 1:14-15

### 1. Consent of the Will

The first thing in the words of the apostle ascribed to the deceitful working of indwelling sin is its “drawing away” the mind (chapters 8-10). The second thing is sin’s “enticing,” and this seems particularly to respect the affections (ch. 11). The mind is drawn away from duty, and the affections are enticed unto sin.<sup>1</sup>

The third success of the deceit of indwelling sin in its progressive work is the conception of actual sin.<sup>2</sup> When it has 1) drawn the mind off from its duty and 2) entangled the affections, it proceeds to 3) conceive sin in order to bring it forth: “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin” (Jam 1:15).

Now, the conception of sin, in order for its perpetration, can be nothing but through the consent of the will. This is because, as sin cannot be committed without the consent of the will, so where the will has consented to sin, there is nothing *in the soul* to hinder sin’s actual accomplishment. God does, indeed, by various ways and means, frustrate the bringing forth of these adulterate conceptions, causing them to melt away in the womb, or one way or other prove abortive—so that not the least part of that sin is committed which is willed or conceived. Yet there is nothing in the soul itself that remains to give check to sin when once the will has given its consent. Often, when a cloud is full of rain and ready to fall, a wind comes and drives it away; and when the will is ready to bring forth its sin, God diverts it by one wind or other. But yet the cloud was as full of rain as if it had fallen, and the soul as full of sin as if it had been committed.

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is inserted by the editors as an aid to the reader.

<sup>2</sup> Owen introduced these three major parts of his discourse in chapter 8 section 4b, and refers to them at the end of this chapter and at the beginning of chapter 14.

### **a. Observations about consent of the will**

This conceiving of lust or sin, then, is its success in obtaining the consent of the will to sin's solicitations. By this the soul is deflowered of its chastity towards God in Christ, as the apostle implies in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

To clear up this matter we must observe the following.

#### **1). Principle of obedience**

We observe that the will is the principle, the next seat and cause, of obedience and disobedience. Moral actions to us or in us are good or evil to the degree that they partake of the consent of the will. He spoke truth of old who said, "Every sin is so voluntary, that if it be not voluntary it is not sin."<sup>3</sup> It is most true of actual sins. The formality of their iniquity arises from the acts of the will in them and concerning them—I mean, as to the persons that commit them. (Otherwise, in itself, the formal reason of sin is its departure from the Law of God: "sin is the transgression of the law," 1Jo 3:4.)

#### **2). Consent of the will**

There is a twofold consent of the will to sin.

##### *a). Prevailing consent in unbelievers*

The first consent of the will to sin is that which is full, absolute, complete, and upon deliberation—a prevailing consent. The convictions of the mind are conquered, and no principle of grace is in the will to weaken it. With this consent, the soul goes into sin as a ship before the wind with all its sails displayed, without any check or stop. It rushes into sin like the horse into the battle. By this, as the apostle speaks, men "have given themselves over unto [sin]...with greediness" (Eph 4:19). Thus was Ahab's will in the murdering of Naboth: he did it upon deliberation, by contrivance, and with a full consent. The doing of it gave him such satisfaction as that it cured his malady, the distemper of his mind. This is the consent of the will that is acted in the finishing and completing of sin in unregenerate persons. It is not required to the single bringing forth of any sin about which we speak.

##### *b). Secret resistance to consent in believers*

There is a consent of the will that is attended with a secret resistance and choice to the contrary. Thus was Peter's will in the denying of his Master: his will was in it or he had not done it. It was a voluntary action, that which he chose to do at that season. Sin

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<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will*, 3.17.49. Augustine (AD 354-430) was Bishop of Hippo and an early church theologian, known by many as the father of orthodox theology. He was born in Tagaste, North Africa.

had not been brought forth if it had not been thus conceived. But yet, at that very time, there was resident in his will a contrary principle of love to Christ, yea, and faith in Him that failed not utterly. The power of his love was intercepted, and its operations actually suspended, through the violent urging of the temptation that he was under. But yet his love for Christ was in his will, and thus weakened his consent to sin. Though his will consented to this sin, it was not done with self-pleasing, which such full acts of the will produce.

### **3). *No total consent of the will in believers***

Although there may be a predominant consent in the will, which may suffice for the conception of particular sins, yet there cannot be an absolute, total, full consent of the will of a believer to any sin. This is for the following reasons.

#### *a). Principle of grace fixed on good*

There is in the believer's will a principle fixed on good, on all good: he "would do good" (Rom 7:21). The principle of grace in the will inclines him to all good. And this, in general, is prevalent against the principle of sin, so that the will is denominated from thence. Grace, not sin, has the rule and dominion in the will of every believer. Now, the consent to sin in the will—which is contrary to the inclination and generally prevailing principle in the same will—is not, and cannot be, total, absolute, and complete.

#### *b). Secret reluctance to sin*

There is not only a general, ruling, prevailing principle in the will against sin, but there is also a secret reluctance in it against its own act in consenting to sin. It is true, the soul is not sensible sometimes of this reluctance, because the present consent carries away the prevailing act of the will, and takes away the sense of the lusting<sup>4</sup> of the Spirit against sin—or reluctance of the principle of grace in the will. But the general rule holds in all things at all times: "The Spirit [lusteth] against the flesh" (Gal 5:17). It does so actually, though not always to the same degree nor with the same success. The prevalence of the contrary principle in this or that particular act does not disprove it.

It is so also on the other side. There is no acting of grace in the will but sin lusts against it. Although that lusting is not made sensible in the soul because of the prevalence of the contrary acting of grace, yet it is enough to keep grace's actions from reaching their perfection. So is it in this resistance of grace against the acting of sin in the soul: though the soul in its operations may not be aware of it, yet it is enough to keep the sinful act from being full and complete. Much of spiritual wisdom lies in discerning aright between the spiritual resistance of the principle of grace in the will against the conception of sin, and the rebukes that are given the soul by conscience upon conviction for actual sinning.

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<sup>4</sup> **lusting** – passionate purpose.

#### **4). Repeated consent**

Observe that repeated acts of the consent of the will to sin may lead to a disposition in the will to the like acts, that may bring the will to an inclination and readiness to consent to sin upon easy solicitations—which is a condition of soul that is dangerous and greatly to be watched against.

#### **5). Virtual consent**

This consent of the will, which we have thus described, may be considered two ways: first, as it is exercised about the circumstances, causes, means, and inducements to sin, and secondly, as it respects this or that actual sin (considered in the next section 1b).

In the first sense, there is a virtual consent of the will to sin in every inattention to the prevention of it, in every neglect of duty that makes way for it, in every hearkening to any temptation leading towards it—in a word, in all the diversions of the mind from its duty and entanglements of the affections by sin before mentioned. This is because, where there is no act of the will, formally or virtually, there is no sin.

However, this is not that which we now speak of. Rather, we speak in particular of the consent of the will to this or that actual sin, so far as that sin either is committed or is prevented by other ways and means not of our present consideration. In this consists the conceiving of sin.

### **b. How the deceit of sin procures consent of the will**

These things being supposed, that which in the next place we are to consider is the way in which the deceit of sin proceeds to procure the consent of the will, and so to conceive actual sin in the soul.

#### **1). Observations about procuring the consent of the will**

To this purpose observe the following.

*a). Observe that the will is a rational appetite:* rational as guided by the mind, and an appetite as excited by the affections. Therefore, in its operation or actings, the will has respect to and is influenced by both.

*b).* The will chooses nothing, consents to nothing, but as it has *an appearance of good*, of some present good. It cannot consent to anything under the notion or apprehension of its being evil in any kind. “Good” is the will’s natural and necessary object, and therefore whatever is proposed to it for its consent must be proposed under an appearance of being either good in itself, or good at present to the soul, or good in its circumstances.

We may see, therefore, the reason why the conception of sin is here placed as a consequence of the mind’s being drawn away and the affections being entangled. Both these have an influence upon the consent of the will, and by that the conception of this or that actual sin.

## 2). *Corrupted reasonings to gain the will's consent*

Our way, therefore, is made here somewhat plain. We have seen at large how the mind is drawn away by the deceit of sin and how the affections are entangled. That which remains is but the proper effect of these things. For the discovery of this, we must consider some of the special deceits—corrupt and fallacious reasonings—before mentioned, and then show their prevalence on the will to a consent to sin.

### a). *Grace falsely exalted in pardon*

#### (1). *The nature of this deceit*

The will is imposed upon by the corrupt reasoning that grace is exalted in a pardon, and that mercy is provided for sinners. This, as has been shown, first deceives the mind, and that opens the way to the will's consent by removing a sight of an evil to which the will has an aversion. In carnal hearts, this prevails so far as to make them think that their liberty consists in being “servants of corruption” (2Pe 2:19). The poison of this often taints and weakens the minds of believers themselves. Thus we are so cautioned against it in the Scripture.

Therefore, to what has been spoken before about the use and abuse of the doctrine of the grace of the gospel, we shall add some few other considerations, and fix on one place of Scripture that will give light to it.

There is a twofold mystery of grace: of walking with God and of coming to God. The great design of sin is to change the doctrine and mystery of grace in reference to these two things. Sin does this by applying those considerations to the one which are proper to the other. By this each part is hindered, and the influence of the doctrine of grace for their furtherance is defeated.

*“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<sup>5</sup> for our sins” (1Jo 2:1-2).*

Here is the whole design and use of the gospel briefly expressed. “These things,” he says, “write I unto you.” What things were these? Those mentioned in chapter 1 verse 2: “The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.” That is, the things concerning the person and mediation of Christ, and that pardon, forgiveness, and expiation<sup>6</sup> from sin is to be attained by the blood of Christ (1:7).

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<sup>5</sup> **propitiation** – “Propitiation has reference to the wrath or displeasure of God. To propitiate is to satisfy the divine justice and thus to appease His wrath. In the biblical usage of the term, the justice of God is satisfied by the propitiatory sacrifice.” (Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 382)

<sup>6</sup> **expiation** – “Expiation has reference to the guilt of sin. To expiate is to remove or cover the guilt of sin.” (Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 382)



But to what end and purpose does he write these things to them? What do they teach? What do they tend to? The answer: a universal abstinence from sin. "I write unto you," he says, "that ye *sin not*." This is the proper, only, and genuine purpose of the doctrine of the gospel.

But to abstain from all sin is not our condition in this world: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1:8). What, then, shall be done in this case? In supposition that we have sinned, is there no relief provided for our souls and consciences in the gospel? Yes; says he, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." There is full relief in the propitiation and intercession of Christ for us.

This is the order and method of the doctrine of the gospel, and of the application of it to our own souls: *first* to keep us from sin, and *then* to relieve us against sin. But here enters the deceit of sin, and puts this "new wine into old bottles," whereby the bottles are broken and the wine perishes as to our benefit from it. It changes this method and order of the application of gospel truths. It takes up the last first, and that excludes the use of the first utterly. "If any man sin, there is pardon provided," is all the gospel that sin would willingly suffer to abide on the minds of men.

When we would come to God by believing, indwelling sin would be pressing the former part: of being free from sin. But the gospel principally proposes the latter part, or the pardon of sin, for our encouragement.

When we have come to God and now should walk with Him, indwelling sin will have only the latter part proposed: that there is pardon of sin. But the gospel principally proposes the former part, of keeping ourselves from sin—the grace of God, which brings salvation, having appeared to us to that end and purpose.

(2). *How it acts in this case*

Now, the mind being entangled with this deceit—drawn off from its watch by it, diverted from the true ends of the gospel—indwelling sin imposes this deceit upon the will in several ways to obtain its consent.

(a).

*Suddenly*

First, by a sudden surprise in case of temptation. Temptation is the representation of a thing as a present good, a particular good, which is in fact a real evil, a general evil. Now, when a temptation falls on the soul armed with opportunity and provocation, the principle of grace in the will rises up with a rejection and detestation of it. But on a sudden,

- the mind being deceived by sin,
- sin breaks in upon the will with a corrupt, fallacious reasoning from gospel grace and mercy,
- which first staggers, then lessens the will's opposition, and

- then causes it to cast the scale of its consent on the side of temptation, presenting evil as a present good, and finally
- sin is conceived in the sight of God, though it is never committed.

Thus is the seed of God sacrificed to Moloch, and the weapons of Christ abused to the service of the devil!

(b).

*Insensibly*

Secondly, indwelling sin imposes this deceit upon the will insensibly. It introduces the poison of this corrupt reasoning little by little, until it has greatly prevailed. The whole effect of the doctrine of the gospel in holiness and obedience consists in the soul's being cast into the frame and mold of the gospel (Rom 6:17-18). In the same way, the whole of the apostasy from the gospel is principally the casting of the soul into the mold of this false reasoning, so that sin may be indulged upon the account of grace and pardon.

By this the soul is gratified in sloth and negligence, and taken off from its care as to particular duties and avoidance of particular sins. It works the soul insensibly off from the mystery of the law of grace, which is

- to look for salvation as if we had never performed any duty, being (after we have done all) only unprofitable servants, with a resting on sovereign mercy through the blood of Christ, and
- [at the same time] to attend to duties with all diligence as if we expected no mercy—that is, with no less care, though with more liberty and freedom.

This the deceitfulness of sin endeavors by all means to work the soul from. And thus, the deceitfulness of sin corrupts the will when its consent is required to particular sins.

*b). False benefits of sin proposed*

The deceived mind imposes on the will to obtain its consent to sin, by proposing to it the advantages that may accrue and arise from sin—which is one medium by which the mind also is drawn away. It renders that which is absolutely evil as appearing good at present. So was it with Eve. Laying aside all considerations of the law, covenant, and threats of God, she all at once reflects upon the advantages, pleasures, and benefits that she could obtain by her sin, and reckons them up to solicit the consent of her will. “It is,” she says to herself, “good for food...pleasant to the eyes...and to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). What should she do, then, but eat it? Her will consented, and she acted accordingly. Pleas for obedience are laid out of the way, and only the pleasures of sin are taken under consideration.

So says Ahab in effect, “Naboth's vineyard is near my house, and I may make it a garden of herbs; therefore I must have it” (1Ki 21). A deceived mind imposed these considerations on his will, until it made him stubbornly pursue his covetousness through perjury and murder, to the utter ruin of himself and his family. Thus is the

guilt and tendency of sin hid under the cover of advantages and pleasures, and so sin is conceived or resolved on in the soul.

### **c. How the affections influence the consent of the will**

As when the mind is drawn away, so it is when the affections are enticed and entangled: the conception of sin in the soul is greatly furthered by the consent of the will. The affections do this in two ways.

#### **1). Surprises**

The affections greatly further the consent of the will in the conception of sin in the soul by some hasty impulse and surprise. Being themselves stirred up, incited, and drawn forth by some violent provocation or suitable temptation, they put the whole soul into a combustion, as it were, and draw the will into a consent to what they are provoked to and entangled with. So was the case of David in the matter of Nabal. A violent provocation from the extreme unworthy action of that foolish churl<sup>7</sup> stirs him up to wrath and revenge (1Sa 25:13). He resolves upon it to destroy a whole family, the innocent with the guilty (25:33-34). Self-revenge and murder were for the season conceived, resolved, and consented to, until God graciously took him off his entangled, provoked affections, which had surprised his will to consent to the conception of many bloody sins. The case was the same with Asa in his anger when he smote the prophet; and with Peter in his fear when he denied his Master.

Let the soul that would take heed of conceiving sin, take heed of entangled affections—for sin may be suddenly conceived. The prevalent consent of the will may be suddenly obtained. This gives the soul a fixed guilt, though the sin itself is never actually brought forth.

#### **2). Frequent solicitations**

Enticed affections procure the consent of the will by frequent solicitations, whereby they gain ground on it without being noticed and enthrone themselves. Take an instance in the sons of Jacob (Gen 37:4). They hate their brother because their father loved him. Their affections being enticed, many new occasions occur to entangle them further, such as his dreams and the like. This lay rankling in their hearts, and never ceased soliciting their wills until they resolved upon his death. The unlawfulness, the unnaturalness of the action, the grief of their aged father, the guilt of their own souls, are all laid aside. The hatred and envy that they had conceived against him ceased not until they had got the consent of their wills to his ruin. This gradual progress of the prevalence of corrupt affections to solicit the soul to sin the wise man excellently describes in Proverbs 23:31-35.

This is the common way of sin's proceeding in the destruction of souls that seem to have made some good engagements in the ways of God. When sin has entangled the

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<sup>7</sup> **churl** – rude, difficult person.

affections with one temptation, and brought the will to some liking of it, then presently comes another temptation, either to the neglect of some duty or to the refusal of more light. Commonly, that by which men fall away utterly from God is not that with which they are first entangled.

This may briefly suffice for the third progressive act of the deceit of indwelling sin: it obtains the will's consent to its conception.<sup>8</sup> By this means are multitudes of sins conceived in the heart that very little less defile the soul, or cause it to contract very little less guilt, than if they were actually committed.

## 2. Sin's Deceitful Actings

To what has been spoken concerning the deceitfulness of indwelling sin in general, which greatly evidences its power and effectiveness, I shall add one or two particular ways of its deceitful actings as a close to this chapter. These consist of a) advantages that sin makes use of, and b) means of relieving itself against the pursuit that is made after it by the Word and Spirit for its ruin. One head only of each sort we shall here name.

### a. Advantages sin uses

Indwelling sin makes great advantage of the darkness of the mind to work out its design and intentions. The shades of a mind that is totally dark—that is, utterly devoid of saving grace—are the proper working-place of sin. Thus the effects of sin are called the “works of darkness” because they spring from such a mind (Eph 5:11; Rom 13:12). Sin works and brings forth by the help of such a mind. The working of lust under the shelter of a dark mind is, as it were, the upper region of hell, for it lies at the next door to it for filth, horror, and confusion.

Now, there is a partial darkness abiding still in believers: they “know [but] in part” (1Co 13:12). Though there is in them all a principle of saving light—the Day-star is risen in their hearts (2Pe 1:19)—yet all the shades of darkness are not utterly expelled out of them in this life. There are two parts, or principal effects, of the remaining darkness that is in believers. 1) The first part of a believer's darkness is ignorance or an uncertainty of the will of God—either *juris* or *facti*:<sup>9</sup> of the rule and law in general, or how the particular fact that lies before the mind is related to the law. 2) The second part of a believer's darkness is in actual error and mistakes: taking that for truth which is falsehood, and that for light which is darkness. Now, the law of sin makes great advantage of both these for the exerting of its power in the soul.

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<sup>8</sup> The first three acts of the deceit of indwelling sin are 1) the drawing away of the mind (ch. 8-10); 2) enticing of the affections (ch. 11); and 3) obtaining the consent of the will (ch. 12). The fourth act is discussed in chapter 14.

<sup>9</sup> *juris* or *facti* – Latin: *juris* - by the rules and laws of a matter; *facti* - by the facts of a matter.

### **1). Ignorance of the will of God**

Is there a remaining ignorance of anything of the will of God? If so, sin will be sure to make use of it and improve it to the uttermost. Though Abimelech were not a believer, yet he was a person that had a moral integrity with him in his ways and actions. He declares himself to have had this in a solemn appeal to God, the searcher of all hearts, even in that in which he erred (Gen 20:5). Yet he was ignorant that fornication was a sin, or so great a sin as that it was not fitting for a morally honest man to defile himself with it. Therefore lust hurries him into that intention of evil in reference to Sarah, as we have it there related. God complains that His people “are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6). Being ignorant of the mind and will of God, they rushed into evil at every command of the law of sin.

Be it as to any duty to be performed, or as to any sin to be committed, if there is in it darkness or ignorance of the mind about them, sin will not lose its advantage. Many a man, being ignorant of the duty incumbent on him for the instruction of his family, casting the whole weight of it upon the public teaching, is, by the deceitfulness of sin, brought into an habitual sloth and negligence of duty. To the degree to which there is much ignorance of the will of God and duty, to that degree there is much advantage given to the law of sin.

Therefore, we may see what is that true knowledge which is acceptable with God. How exactly does many a poor soul, who is low as to notional<sup>10</sup> knowledge, yet walk with God? It seems they actually know so much [of the ways of God], as sin has not on that account much advantage against them. Others, however, who are high in their notions, give advantage to their lusts even by their ignorance, though they know it not.

### **2). Error**

Error is a worse part or effect of the mind’s darkness, and gives great advantage to the law of sin. There is, indeed, ignorance in every error, but there is not error in all ignorance—and so they must be distinguished. I shall need to exemplify this but with one consideration, and that is of men who, being zealous for some error, do seek to suppress and persecute the truth. Indwelling sin desires no greater advantage. How it does, every day and every hour, pour forth wrath, revilings, and hard speeches; breathe revenge, murder, and desolation—under the name perhaps of zeal! On this account we may see poor creatures pleasing themselves every day, as if they bragged of their excellence when they are foaming out their own shame.

Under their real darkness and pretended zeal, sin sits securely, and fills pulpits, houses, prayers, and streets with as bitter fruits of envy, malice, wrath, hatred, evil surmises, and false speakings—as full as they can hold. The common issue with such poor creatures is that the holy, blessed, meek Spirit of God withdraws from them, and leaves them visibly and openly to that evil, froward, wrathful, and worldly spirit which

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<sup>10</sup> **notional** – speculative; theoretical.

the law of sin has cherished and heightened in them. Sin dwells not anywhere more secure than in such a frame.

Thus, I say, sin in particular lays hold of advantages to practice upon with its deceitfulness, and therein also to exert its power in the soul. This single instance of sin's using the darkness of the mind to its own ends is a sufficient evidence of this.

### **b. Alleviation of sin's own guilt**

Indwelling sin uses means of relieving itself against the pursuit that is made after it in the heart by the Word and Spirit of grace. One of its wiles, in the way of example, I shall name in this kind: the alleviation of its own guilt. It pleads for itself that it is not so bad, so filthy, so fatal as is pretended. It proceeds in this course of extenuation in two ways.

1). *Not as bad as it seems.* Sin proceeds absolutely. Many secret pleas it will have that the evil which it intends is not so harmful as conscience is persuaded that it is, and therefore the action may be ventured on without ruin. These considerations it will strongly urge when it is at work in a way of surprise, when the soul has no leisure or liberty to weigh its suggestions in the balance of the sanctuary.<sup>11</sup> Not seldom is the will imposed on in this way, and advantages gotten for sin to shift itself out from under the sword of the Spirit. We say to ourselves in effect, "It is such that it may be let alone, or suffered to die of itself, which probably within a while it will do. There is no need of that violence which in mortification is to be offered. There is time enough to deal with such a matter of no greater importance later"—with other pleas like those before mentioned.

2). *Not as bad as others.* Sin proceeds comparatively. This is a large field for its deceit and subtlety to lurk in. We say to ourselves in effect, "Though it is an evil indeed to be relinquished, and the soul is to be made watchful against it, yet it is not of that magnitude and degree as we may see in the lives of others, even saints of God, much less such as some saints of old have fallen into."

By these and the like pretenses, I say, indwelling sin seeks to evade and keep its abode in the soul when we attempt to pursue it to destruction. And with all this, yet how little a portion of its deceitfulness is it that we have declared!

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<sup>11</sup> **the balance of the sanctuary** – the accurate official scales used in the Temple for exchanging money, which came to be the standard for calibrating other scales used in trade. "To weigh...in the balance of the sanctuary" is to consider carefully according to God's absolute standards found in His Word.

## Chapter 13

# HOW GOD OBSTRUCTS SIN

*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

—James 1:14-15

Before we proceed to the remaining evidences of the power and efficacy of the law of sin, we shall take occasion from what has been delivered to divert to one consideration that offers itself from the Scripture that was made the foundation of our discourse on the general deceitfulness of sin; namely, James 1:14. The apostle tells us that “when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin”—seeming to imply that whatever sin is conceived, it is also brought forth.

Now, placing the “conception” of sin, as we have done, in the consent of the will to it; and reckoning, as we ought, the “bringing forth” of sin to consist of its actual commission, we know that these do not necessarily follow one another. There is a world of sin conceived in the womb of the wills and hearts of men that is never brought forth. Our present business, then, shall be to inquire how this comes to pass. I answer, then, in the following.

That sinful action is not brought forth is no thanks to indwelling sin or the law of sin. What indwelling sin conceives, it would bring forth if it could; and that it does not is for the most part but a small lessening of its guilt. A determinate will to commit a sin is actual sin. There is nothing lacking on sin’s part that every conceived sin is not actually accomplished. The obstacle to its coming forth, and the prevention of it, lies on another hand.

There are two things that are necessary in the person who has conceived sin, for bringing forth that sin: first, power; secondly, continuance in the will of sinning until it be perpetrated and committed. Where these two are, actual sin will unavoidably be brought forth. It is evident, therefore, that that which hinders conceived sin from being brought forth must affect either the power or the will of the sinner. Therefore, this must be from God. And He has two ways of doing it: 1) by His *providence*, by which He obstructs the power of sinning; and 2) by His *grace*, by which He diverts or changes the will of sinning.

I do not mention these ways of God’s dispensations as distinct, as though the one of them were always without the other; for there is much of grace in providential admin-

istrations, and much of the wisdom of providence seen in the actings of grace. But I place them separate from each other because they appear most obvious therein: providence, in outward acts respecting the power of the creature; and grace, common or special, in internal efficacy respecting His will.

We shall begin with the first.

## 1. Providence

### a. How providence works

When sin is conceived, the Lord obstructs its production by His providence, in taking away or cutting short the power that is absolutely necessary for bringing it forth or accomplishing it. This occurs as follows.

#### 1). *Cutting life short*

##### a). *In unbelievers*

Life is the foundation of all power, the principle of operation. When life ceases, all power ceases with it. Even God Himself, to show the everlasting stability of His own power, gives Himself the title of “the living God” (Hos 1:10). Now, He frequently prevents the power of executing sin actually by cutting short and taking away the lives of them that have conceived it. Thus God dealt with the army of Sennacherib when, according as he had purposed, so he threatened that “the Lord should [not] deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand” (2Ki 18:35). God threatens to cut short his power, so that he should not execute his intention (19:28). This God performs accordingly by taking away the lives of Sennacherib’s soldiers (19:35), without whom it was impossible that his conceived sin should be brought forth.

Moses excellently sets forth in the case of Pharaoh this providential dealing in the obstruction of conceived sin:

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters (Exo 15:9-10).

Sin’s conception is fully expressed, and as full a prevention is added to it.

In like manner, God dealt with the companies of fifties and their captains who came to apprehend Elijah (2Ki 1:9-12). Fire came down from heaven and consumed them when they were ready to have taken him. And various other instances of the like nature might be recorded.

That which is of universal concern we have in that great providential alteration of the worldwide flood, which put a period to the lives of men. Men living hundreds of years had a long season to bring forth the sins they had conceived. Thereupon, the earth was filled with violence, injustice, and robbery, and “all flesh had corrupted his way” (Gen 6:12-13). To prevent the corresponding flood of sin, God shortens the course



of the pilgrimage of men in the earth and reduces their lives to a much shorter measure.<sup>1</sup>

Besides this general law, God daily cuts off persons who had conceived much mischief and violence in their hearts, and thus prevents the execution of it: “Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days” (Psa 55:23). They have yet much work to do, might they have but space given them to execute the bloody and sinful purposes of their minds. The psalmist tells us, “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psa 146:4)—that is, he had many contrivances about sin, but now they are all cut off. So also in the following:

Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God (Ecc 8:12-13).

Howsoever long a wicked man lives, yet he dies by the judicial<sup>2</sup> hand of God, and shall not abide to do all the evil he had conceived.

*b). In believers*

But now, seeing we have granted that even believers themselves may conceive sin through the power and the deceitfulness of it, it may be inquired whether God ever thus prevents sin’s production and accomplishment in them by cutting off and taking away their lives, so that they shall not be able to perform it. I answer as follows.

*(1). Not judicially*

God does not judicially cut off and take away the life of any of His for this end and purpose, that He may thereby prevent the execution or bringing forth of any particular sin that a person had conceived, and which, without that taking away, he would have perpetrated. The reasons God does not do this are as follows.

*(a).*

*Contrary to God’s purpose*

This is directly contrary to the very declared purpose of the patience of God towards believers: “The Lord is...longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2Pe 3:9). This is the very end of the longsuffering of God towards believers: that before they depart from this life they may come to the sense, acknowledgment, and repentance of every known sin. This is the constant and unchangeable rule of God’s patience in the covenant of grace, which is so far from being in them an encouragement to sin, that it is a motive to universal watchfulness against it. It is of the same nature with all gospel grace and of mercy in the blood of

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this shortening of lifespan see *Evolution or Creation?*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>2</sup> **judicial** – pertaining to the administration of justice.

Christ. Now, this act of God we are speaking about (the taking of a believer's life to prevent sin) would lie in a direct contradiction to the longsuffering of God.

(b).

*Cannot be lost forever*

This also flows from the former: that whereas any sin conceived in the heart contains the whole nature of sin as if it were actually committed (as our Savior fully declares in Matthew 5:21-37); and whereas to be cut off under the guilt of sin to prevent its further progress, argues a continuance in the purpose of the sin without repentance—it therefore cannot be but they must perish forever who are thus judicially cut off. But God deals not so with His own; He casts not off the people whom He did foreknow (Eph 1:3-12; Rom 8:29). Thus David prays for the patience of God before mentioned, that it might not be so with him: “O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more” (Psa 39:13).

(2). *Merciful prevention of guilt*

However, there are some cases in which God may and does take away the lives of His own, to prevent the guilt that otherwise they would be involved in, as follows.

(a). *In the coming of some great temptation and trial upon the world.* God knows that such and such of His would not be able to withstand such a great temptation and hold out against it, but would dishonor Him and defile themselves. He therefore may, and doubtless often does, take them out of the world to take them out of the way of it. “The righteous is taken away from the evil to come” (Isa 57:1)—not only the evil of punishment and judgment, but the evil of temptations and trials, which often proves much the worse of the two. Thus a captain in war will call off a soldier from his watch and guard, when he knows that he is not able, through some infirmity, to bear the stress and force of the enemy that is coming upon him.

(b). *In case of their engagement in any way not acceptable to Him,* through ignorance or not knowing of His mind and will. This seems to have been the case of Josiah (2Ch 35:20-24). And, doubtless, the Lord often proceeds thus with His own. When any of His own are engaged in ways that please Him not, through the darkness and ignorance of their minds, He calls them off from their station and employment and takes them to Himself, where they shall err and mistake no more, so that they may not proceed to further evil or mischief.

Therefore, in ordinary cases, God has other ways of diverting His own from sin than by killing them, as we shall see.

**2). Removing the power to sin**

a). *How God does it*

God providentially hinders the bringing forth of conceived sin by taking away and cutting short the power of them that had conceived it. Though their lives continue, they shall not have the power needed for them to execute what they had intended or to bring forth what they had conceived. Of this we also have various instances.

This was the case with the builders of Babel (Gen 11). Whatever it was at which they aimed in particular, it was in the pursuit of a design of apostasy from God. One thing required to accomplish what they aimed at was the oneness of their language; so God says, “they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do” (11:6)—that is, if things proceed ordinarily they will accomplish their wicked design. What course does God now take to prevent their conceived sin? Does He bring a flood upon them to destroy them, as in the old world some time before? Does He send His angel to cut them off, like the army of Sennacherib afterward? Does He by any means take away their lives? No, their lives are continued, but He “confounds their language,” so that they cannot go on with their work (11:7). He takes away that wherein their power consisted.

In like manner, He proceeded with the Sodomites (Gen 19:11). They were engaged in and set upon the pursuit of their filthy lusts. God smites them with blindness, so that they could not find the door where they thought to have used violence to achieve their desires. Their lives were continued, and their will of sinning; but their power is cut short. His dealing with Jeroboam was of the same nature (1Ki 13:4). He stretched out his hand to lay hold of the prophet, and it withered and became useless.

This is an important way of the effectual acting of God’s providence in the world for the stopping of the flood of sin that would overflow all the earth were every channel of it opened. He cuts men short of their moral power whereby they should effect it. Many a wretch, who has conceived mischief against the church of God, by this means has been divested of his power by which he thought to accomplish it. Some have their bodies smitten with diseases so that they can no more serve their lusts, nor accompany them in the perpetrating of folly. Some are deprived of the instruments by which they would work.

There has been, for many days, sin enough conceived to root out the generation of the righteous from the face of the earth—had men strength and ability to their will—did God not cut off and shorten their power and the days of their prevalence. “They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep” (Psa 64:6). All things are in a readiness; the design is well laid; their counsels are deep and secret. What now shall hinder them from doing whatever they have imagined to do? “God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves” (64:7-8). God meets with them and brings them down, so that they shall not be able to accomplish their design.

This way of God’s preventing sin seems to be, at least ordinarily, peculiar to the men of the world. God deals thus with them every day, and leaves them to waste away in their sins. They go all their days big with the iniquity they have conceived, and are greatly burdened that they cannot be delivered of it. The prophet tells us that they “devise iniquity [and] practise it, because it is in the power of their hand” (Mic 2:1). If they have power for it, they will accomplish it: “To their power [they] shed blood” (Eze

22:6). This is the measure of their sinning, even their power. They do no more evil, they commit no more sin, than they can. Their whole restraint lies in being cut short in power in one kind or another. Their bodies will not serve them for their planned uncleannesses, nor their hands for their revenge and theft, nor their instruments for persecution. But they go burdened with conceived sin, and are disquieted and tortured by it all their days. And thus they become in themselves, as well as to others, a “troubled sea, when it cannot rest” (Isa 57:20).

*b). Direct intervention*

It may be also—in some cases, under some violent temptations, or in mistakes—that God may thus prevent the accomplishment of conceived sin by His own intervention. There seems to be an instance of it in His dealing with Jehoshaphat (1Ki 22:48-49), who had designed, against the mind of God, to join in affinity with Ahab, and to send his ships with him to Tarshish. But God breaks his ships by a storm, so that he could not accomplish what he had designed.

But in God’s dealing with His people in this way, there is a difference from His same acts towards others. This is because of the following.

1). *God’s direct intervention is only in cases of extraordinary temptation.* When, through the violence of temptation and craft of Satan, they are hurried from under the conduct of the law of grace, God one way or other takes away their power, or may do so, that they shall not be able to execute what they had designed. But this is an ordinary way of dealing with wicked men. This hook of God is upon them in the whole course of their lives; and they struggle with it, being “as a wild bull in a net” (Isa 51:20). God’s net is upon them, and they are filled with fury that they cannot do all the wickedness that they would.

2). *God does not intervene in order to leave them to wrestle with sin,* and to attempt other ways of sin’s accomplishment, upon the failure of that in which they were engaged. Instead, by their disappointment, He awakens them to think of their condition and what they are doing, and so consumes sin in its conception by the ways that shall afterward be insisted on. Some men’s deprivation of power for the committing of conceived, planned sin has been sanctified to the changing of their hearts from all dalliances with that or other sins.

**3). Raising an opposing power**

God providentially hinders the bringing forth of conceived sin by an external, opposing, hindering power to sinners. He leaves them their lives, and leaves them power to do what they intend; but He also raises up an opposite power to coerce, forbid, and restrain them. We have an instance of this in Saul (1Sa 14:45). Saul had sworn that Jonathan should be put to death; and, as far as appears, would have gone on resolutely to have slain him. God stirs up the spirit of the people; they oppose the wrath and fury of Saul, and Jonathan is delivered. So also when King Uzziah would have in his own per-

son offered incense contrary to the Law (2Ch 26:16-20), eighty men of the priests resisted him and drove him out of the Temple.

To this head are to be referred all the assistances in which God stirs up deliverance for His people against the fury of persecutors. He raises up saviors or deliverers “on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau” (Oba 1:21). In the same way, the dragon, and those acting under him and spirited by him, were in a furious endeavor for the destruction of the church (Rev 12:13-16). God stirs up the earth to her assistance, even men of the world not engaged with others in the design of Satan; and by that opposition, He hinders them from the execution of their designed rage.

Of this nature seems to be that dealing of God with His own people (Hos 2:6-7). They were in the pursuit of their iniquities, following after their lovers. God leaves them for a while to act in the folly of their spirits. But He sets a hedge and a wall before them, that they shall not be able to fulfil their designs and lusts.

#### **4). *Removing the objects of sin***

God prevents the accomplishment of conceived sin by removing or taking away the objects on whom, or about whom, the sin conceived was to be committed. Acts 12:1-11 yields us a notable instance of this issue of providence. When the day was coming in which Herod thought to have slain Peter, who was shut up in prison, God sends and takes him away from their rage and lying in wait (Act 12:6-7). So also was our Savior Himself taken away from the murderous rage of the Jews before His hour was come (Joh 8:59; 10:39). Both primitive and latter times are full of stories to this purpose. Prison doors have been opened, and poor creatures appointed to die have been frequently rescued from the jaws of death. In the world itself, among the adulterers and adulteresses thereof, the sin of the one is often hindered and stifled by the taking away of the other. So wings were given to the woman to carry her into the wilderness, and to disappoint the world in the execution of their rage (Rev 12:14).

#### **5). *Diversion of thoughts of sin***

God providentially hinders the bringing forth of sin by some eminent diversions of the thoughts of men who had conceived sin. The brethren of Joseph cast him into a pit with an intent to famish him there (Gen 37:24). While they were, as it seems, pleasing themselves with what they had done, God orders a company of merchants to come by, and diverts their thoughts with that new idea: from the killing to the selling of their brother (37:25-27)—and how far therein they were subservient to the infinitely wise counsel of God we know. Also, Saul was in the pursuit of David, and was even ready to prevail against him to his destruction. But God stirs up the Philistines to invade the land, which both diverted Saul’s thoughts and drew the course of his actings another way (1Sa 23:27).

These are some of the ways by which God is pleased to hinder the bringing forth of conceived sin, by opposing Himself and His providence against the power of the sinning creature.

## **b. Advantages of God's providence**

We may a little, in our passage, take a brief view of the great advantages to faith and the church of God that may be found in this matter.

### **1). Providence blocking sin's outbreak**

This may give us a little insight into the ever-to-be-adored providence of God, by these and the like ways in great variety obstructing the breaking forth of sin in the world. It is He Who makes those dams and shuts up those flood-gates of corrupted nature, so that it shall not break forth in a deluge of filthy abominations to overwhelm the creation with confusion and disorder. As it was of old, so it is at this day: "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5).

That all the earth is not in all places filled with violence, as it was of old, is merely from the mighty hand of God working effectually for the obstructing of sin. It is from this alone that the highways, streets, and fields are not all filled with violence, blood, robbery, uncleanness, and every villainy that the heart of man can conceive. Oh, the infinite beauty of divine wisdom and providence in the government of the world—for the preservation of it daily requires no less power and wisdom than did its first making!

### **2). Providence stopping sin's progress**

If we will look to our own affairs, they will in a special manner enforce us to adore the wisdom and power of the providence of God in stopping the progress of conceived sin. It is from this alone that we are at peace in our houses, at rest in our beds, or have any quiet in our enjoyments. Whose person would not be defiled or destroyed? Whose habitation would not be ruined? Whose blood, almost, would not be shed, if wicked men had power to perpetrate all their conceived sin? It may be that the ruin of some of us has been conceived a thousand times! To this providence of obstructing sin, we are in debt for our lives, our families, our estates, our liberties, for whatsoever is or may be dear to us. May we not say sometimes with the psalmist, "My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Psa 57:4).

And how is the deliverance of men contrived from such persons? "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions" (Psa 58:6). He keeps this fire from burning, or quenches it when it is ready to break out into a flame. He breaks their spears and arrows, so that sometimes we are not so much as wounded by them. Some He cuts off and destroys; some He cuts short in their power; some He deprives of the instruments by which alone they can work. Some He prevents of their desired opportunities, or diverts by other objects for their lusts. Some He often causes them to spend among themselves, one upon another.

We may say, therefore, with the psalmist, "O Lord, how manifold<sup>3</sup> are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches" (Psa 104:24). We may

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<sup>3</sup> **manifold** – numerous; varied.

say with the prophet, “Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein” (Hos 14:9).

### **c. Providence and the wicked**

#### ***1). Miserable condition of the wicked***

If these and the like are the ways by which God prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin in wicked men, we may learn from this how miserable their condition is, and in what perpetual torment, for the most part, they spend their days. They “are like the troubled sea,” says the Lord, “when it cannot rest” (Isa 57:20). As they endeavor that others may have no peace, so it is certain that they themselves have not any. The principle of sin is not impaired nor weakened in them; the will of sinning is not taken away. They have a womb of sin that is able to conceive monsters every moment. Yea, for the most part, they are forging and framing folly all the day long. One lust or other they are contriving how to satisfy. All that stand before them they are either devouring by malice and revenge, or corrupting by uncleanness, or trampling on by ambition, or swallowing down by covetousness.

Many of their follies and mischiefs they bring to the very birth and are in pain to be delivered; but God every day fills them with disappointment and shuts up the womb of sin. Some are filled with hatred of God’s people all their days, and never once have an opportunity to exercise it. So David describes them, “They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city” (Psa 59:6). They go up and down and “belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips” (59:7); and yet they are not able to accomplish their designs.

What tortures do such poor creatures live in! Envy, malice, wrath, and revenge devour their hearts by not getting vent. And when God has exercised the other acts of His wise providence in cutting short their power, or setting a greater power in opposition to them when nothing else will do, He cuts them off in their sins and to the grave they go, full of purposes of iniquity. Others are no less hurried and diverted by the power of other lusts that they are not able to satisfy. This is the sore travail they are exercised with all their days: if they accomplish their designs, they are more wicked and hellish than before; and if they do not, they are filled with vexation and discontent.

This is the portion of them who know not the Lord nor the power of His grace. Envy not their condition. Notwithstanding their outward, glittering show, their hearts are full of anxiety, trouble, and sorrow.

#### ***2). If the wicked seem to succeed***

Do we see sometimes the flood-gates of men’s lusts and rage set open against the church and its interests, and do they seem to prevail, and power is for a season on their side? Let not the saints of God despond. He has unspeakably various and effective ways for the stifling of their conceptions, to give them dry breasts and a miscarrying womb. He can stop their fury when He pleases. “Surely,” says the psalmist, “the wrath of man

shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psa 76:10). When so much of their wrath is let out as shall exalt His praise, He can, when He pleases, set up a power greater than the combined strength of all sinning creatures, and restrain the remainder of the wrath that they had conceived. “He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth” (76:12). Some He will cut off and destroy, some He will terrify and affright, and of all He will prevent their rage. He can knock them on the head, or break out their teeth, or chain up their wrath—and who can oppose Him?

#### **d. Knowing God as the source of preservation**

Those who have received benefit by any of the ways mentioned may know to Whom they owe their preservation, and not look on it as a common thing. When you have conceived sin, has God weakened your power for sin, or denied you opportunity, or taken away the object of your lusts, or diverted your thoughts by new providences? Then know assuredly that you have received mercy by it. Though God does not deal these providences always in service to the covenant of grace, yet there is always mercy in them, always a call in them to consider the Author of them. Had not God thus dealt with you, it may be this day you had been a terror to yourselves, a shame to your relations, and under the punishment due to some notorious sins that you had conceived.

Besides, there is commonly an additional guilt in sin brought forth, above what is in the mere conception of it. It may be others would have been ruined by it here in this world, or drawn into a partnership in sin by it, and so have been eternally ruined by it—all which are prevented by these providences. Eternity will witness that there is a singularity of mercy in them. Do not look, then, on any such things as common accidents. The hand of God is in them all, and that is a merciful hand if it is not despised. Even if it is despised, yet God does good to others by it. The world is the better for it, and you are not so wicked as you would be.

#### **e. Use of human government**

We may see in this also the great use of human government in the world, that great appointment of God (Rom 13). Among other things, it peculiarly serves this holy providence in obstructing the bringing forth of conceived sin—namely, by the terror of him who bears the sword. God fixes that on the hearts of evil men, which He expresses,

If thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Rom 13:4).

God fixes this on the hearts of men; and by the dread and terror of it, He closes the womb of sin, so that it shall not bring forth. When there was no king in Israel, none to put to rebuke, and none of whom evil men were afraid, there was made woeful work and havoc among the children of men in the world. We may see this in the last chapters of the book of Judges (Jdg 21:25). The greatest mercies and blessings that in this world we are made partakers of—next to those of the gospel and the covenant of grace—come to us through this channel and conduit. And, indeed, this of which we



have been speaking is the proper work of human government—namely, to serve the providence of God in obstructing the bringing forth of conceived sin.

These, then, are some of the ways by which God providentially prevents the bringing forth of sin, by setting obstacles in opposition to the power of the sinner. And yet, by them sin is not consumed, but only shut up in the womb. Men are not burdened *for* it, but *with* it; not laden in their hearts and consciences with its guilt, but perplexed with its power, which they are not able to exert and satisfy.

## 2. Grace

The second way yet remaining for consideration, by which God prevents the production of conceived sin, is His working on the will of the sinner so that sin is consumed away in the womb.

There are two ways in general by which God thus prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin by working on the will of the sinner. They are a) by restraining grace; and b) by renewing (saving) grace. He does it sometimes the one way and sometimes the other. The first of these is common to regenerate and unregenerate persons, the latter is peculiar to believers. God does it variously by them both as to particulars. We shall begin with the first of them.

### a. Restraining grace

God prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin by working on the will of the sinner in the way of restraining grace. He does this by some arrow of particular conviction, fixed in the heart and conscience of the sinner, in reference to the particular sin that he had conceived. This staggers and changes the mind as to the particular sin intended, and causes the hands to hang down and the weapons of lust to fall out of them. By this, conceived sin proves abortive. How God does this work—by what direct touches, strokes, blows, and rebukes of His Spirit; by what reasonings, arguments, and commotions of men’s own consciences—is not for us thoroughly to find out. It is done, as was said, in unspeakable variety, and the works of God are past finding out. But as to what light may be given to it from Scripture instances, after we have shown the general way of God’s procedure, it shall be insisted on.

#### 1). *Scripture examples*

God dealt this way in the case of Esau and Jacob. Esau had long conceived his brother’s death; he comforted himself with the thoughts of it and resolutions about it (Gen 27:41), as is the manner of reckless sinners. On his first opportunity, he comes forth to execute his intended rage, and Jacob concludes that he would “smite the mother with the children” (Gen 32:11). An opportunity is presented to this wicked and profane person to bring forth that sin which had lain in his heart now twenty years, and he has full power in his hand to perform his purpose. In the midst of this posture of things, God comes in upon his heart with some secret and effectual working of His Spirit and pow-

er, changes him from his purpose, causes his conceived sin to melt away, so that he with embraces falls upon the neck of him whom he thought to have slain (Gen 33:4).

Of the same nature, though the way of it was peculiar, was His dealing with Laban the Syrian in reference to the same Jacob (Gen 31:24). By a dream, a vision in the night, God hinders him from so much as speaking roughly to him. It was with him as in Micah 2:1. He had “devised” evil on his bed. And when he thought to have practiced it in the morning, God interposed in a dream and “hides” his intended sin from him (as He speaks in Job 33:15-17).

To the same purpose is that of the psalmist concerning the people of God, “He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives” (Psa 106:46). Men usually deal in rigor with those whom they have taken captive in war. It was the way of old to rule captives with force and cruelty. Here God turns and changes their hearts, not in general to Himself, but to this particular of respect to His people.

In this general way, God every day prevents the bringing forth of a world of sin. He sharpens arrows of conviction upon the spirits of men as to the particular that they are engaged in. Their hearts are not changed as to sin, but their minds are altered as to this or that sin. They break, it may be, the vessel they had fashioned, and go to work upon some other.

## **2). How God uses restraining grace**

Now, that we may see a little into the ways by which God accomplishes this work, we must premise the ensuing considerations.

### *a). God's use of reasoning*

#### *(1). How God uses reasoning*

The general medium wherein the matter of restraining grace consists, by which God thus prevents the bringing forth of sin, lies in certain arguments and reasonings presented to the mind of the sinner, by which he is induced to desert his purpose, to change and alter his mind, as to the sin he had conceived. Reasons against it are presented to him that prevail on him to relinquish his design and give over his purpose. This is the general way of the working of restraining grace. It is by arguments and reasonings rising up against the perpetration of conceived sin.

#### *(2). Reasoning insufficient if opportunity exists*

However, no arguments or reasonings as such, materially considered, are sufficient to stop or hinder any purpose of sinning—or to cause conceived sin to prove abortive—if the sinner has power and opportunity to bring it forth. Such reasonings are not in themselves, and on their own account, restraining grace; for if they were, the administration and communication of grace, as grace, were left to every man who is able to give advice against sin. Nothing is nor can be called grace, though common and such as may perish, but with respect to its peculiar relation to God.

God, by the power of His Spirit, making arguments and reasons effective and prevailing, turns that to be grace (I mean of this kind) which in itself and in its own nature

was bare reason. The power of the Spirit that the Lord puts forth in these persuasions and motives is that which we call restraining grace.

*b). The arguments God uses*

These things being premised, we shall now consider some of the arguments God uses for hindering conceived sin from breaking out.

*(1). Difficulty of the sin*

God stops many men in their ways upon the conception of sin, by an argument taken from the difficulty, if not impossibility, of doing what they aim at. They have a mind to it, but God sets a hedge and a wall before them, so that they will judge it to be so hard and difficult to accomplish what they intend, that it is better for them to let it alone and give over.

Thus Herod would have put John the Baptist to death upon the first provocation, but he feared the multitude because they accounted John as a prophet (Mat 14:5). He had conceived his murder, and was free to bring it to pass. God raised this consideration in his heart, "If I kill him, the people will be in an uproar. He has a great party among them, and sedition will arise that may cost me my life or kingdom." He feared the multitude, and dared not perform the wickedness he had conceived because of the difficulty he foresaw he should be entangled with. And God made the argument effective for the season; for otherwise we know that men will venture the utmost hazards for the satisfaction of their lusts, as Herod also did afterward.

The Pharisees were in the very same state and condition. They desired to decry the ministry of John, but dared not for fear of a tumult among the people (Mat 21:26), seeing the people looked on John as a prophet. By the same argument, the Pharisees were deterred from killing our Savior (21:46), Who had highly provoked them by a parable setting out their deserved and approaching destruction.

Thus God overawes the hearts of innumerable persons in the world every day, and causes them to desist from attempting to bring forth the sins that they had conceived. They shall be sure to meet with difficulties; yea, it is likely, if they should attempt the sins they have in mind, it would prove impossible for them to accomplish. We owe much of our quiet in this world to the effectiveness given by the Holy Ghost to this consideration in the hearts of men. Adulteries, robberies, and murders are prevented and stifled by it. Men would engage in them daily, but they judge it impossible to fulfil what they aim at.

*(2). Consequences of the sin*

God prevents the breaking out of conceived sin by an argument taken from the inconveniences, evils, and troubles that will fall upon men in the pursuit of sin. If they follow sin, this or that inconvenience will ensue—that is, this trouble, this evil, temporal or eternal.

This argument, as managed by the Spirit of God, is the great engine<sup>4</sup> in His hand by which He casts up banks<sup>5</sup> to give a boundary to the lusts of men, so that they break not out to the confusion of all the order and beauty that yet remains in the works of His hands. Paul gives us the general thrust of this argument,

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another (Rom 2:14-15).

If any men in the world may be thought to be given up to pursue and fulfil all the sins that their lusts can conceive, it is those that have not the Law, to whom the written Law of God does not denounce the evil that attends it. “But though they have it not,” the apostle says in effect, “they show forth the work of it. They do many things that the Law requires, and forbear or abstain from many things that it forbids, and so show forth its work and power.”

But why do they do so? Because their thoughts accuse or excuse them. It is from the consideration and arguings that they have within themselves about sin and its consequences, which prevail upon them to abstain from many things that their hearts would otherwise carry them out to. Conscience is a man’s prejudging of himself with respect to the future judgment of God. Thus Felix was staggered in his pursuit of sin, when he trembled at Paul’s preaching of righteousness and judgment to come (Act 24:25). In the same way, Job tells us that the consideration of punishment from God has a strong influence on the minds of men to keep them from sin (Job 31:1-4). How the Lord makes use of this consideration, even towards His own when they have broken the cords of His love and cast off the rule of His grace for a season, I have before declared.

### *(3). Unprofitableness of the sin*

God does this same work by making an effective argument from the unprofitableness of the thing in which men are engaged. By this were the brethren of Joseph stayed from slaying him: “What profit is it,” they say, “if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?” (Gen 37:26-27). “We shall get nothing by it; it will bring in no advantage or satisfaction to us.” God’s ways of obstructing conceived sin through these kinds of arguments are so many and varied that it is impossible to list them all. There is nothing present or to come, nothing belonging to this life or another, nothing desirable or undesirable, nothing good or evil—but, at one time or another, an argument may be taken from it for the obstructing of sin.

### *(4). Praiseworthiness of restraint*

God accomplishes this “constraining of sin through restraining grace” by arguments taken from what is good and honest, what is comely, praiseworthy, and acceptable to

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<sup>4</sup> **engine** – mechanical device or tool.

<sup>5</sup> **casts up banks** – raises levees or high mounds on either side of a river to control its flood waters.

Himself. This is the great road in which He walks with the saints under their temptations or in their conceptions of sin. He effectively recovers in their minds a consideration of all those springs and motives to obedience that are discovered and proposed in the gospel—some at one time, some at another.

He reminds them of His own love, mercy, and kindness—His eternal love, with the fruits of it, of which they have been made partakers. He reminds them of the blood of His Son, His cross, sufferings, tremendous undertaking in the work of mediation, and the concerns of His heart, love, honor, and name in their obedience. He reminds them of the love of the Spirit, with all His consolations of which they have been made partakers, and privileges with which they have been entrusted by Him. He reminds them of the gospel, the glory and beauty of it, as it is revealed to their souls. He reminds them of the excellence and beauty of obedience; of their performance of that duty they owe to God; of that peace, quietness, and serenity of mind that they have enjoyed therein.

On the other side, He reminds them of their being a provocation by sin to the eyes of His glory, saying into their hearts, “Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate” (Jer 44:4). He reminds them of their wounding the Lord Jesus Christ and putting Him to shame; of their grieving the Holy Spirit, by Whom they are sealed to the day of redemption; of their defiling His dwelling-place. He reminds them of the reproach, dishonor, and scandal that they bring on the gospel and their profession of it. He reminds them of the terrors, darkness, wounds, and lack of peace that they may bring upon their own souls.

From these and the like considerations, God puts a stop to the law of sin in the heart, so that it shall not go on to bring forth the evil that it has conceived. I could give instances in argument of all these several kinds recorded in the Scripture, but it would be too long a work for us, who are now engaged in a design of another nature—yet one or two examples may be mentioned. Joseph resists his first temptation on one of these accounts: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9). The evil of sinning against God, his God, that consideration alone detains him from the least inclination to his temptation—as if he were to say, “It is sin against God, to Whom I owe all obedience; the God of my life and of all my mercies. I will not do it!” The argument by which Abigail prevailed on David to withhold him from self-revenge and murder was of the same nature (1Sa 25:31), and he acknowledges that it was from the Lord (25:32). I shall add no more, for all the scriptural motives that we have to duty—made effective by grace—are instances of this way of God’s procedure.

*c). God’s direct working*

Sometimes, I confess, God secretly works to stop the progress of sin in the hearts of men by His own finger, without the use and means of such arguments as those insisted on. So He tells Abimelech, “I also withheld thee from sinning against me” (Gen 20:6). Now, this could not have been done by any of the arguments that we have insisted on, because Abimelech did not know that the thing he intended was sin; and therefore he

pleads that in the “integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands” he did it (20:5). God turned around his will and thoughts, so that he should not accomplish his intention; but by what ways or means is not revealed.

Nor is it evident what course God took in the change of Esau’s heart when he came out against his brother to destroy him (Gen 33:4). It is not known whether God stirred up in him a fresh spring of natural affection, or caused him to consider what grief by this means he should bring to his aged father, who loved him so tenderly; or whether, being now grown great and wealthy, he more and more disregarded the matter of the difference between him and his brother and therefore utterly slighted it. It may be God did it by a direct, powerful act of His Spirit upon his heart, without any actual intervening of these or any of the like considerations.

Now, though the things mentioned are in themselves at other times feeble and weak, yet when they are managed by the Spirit of God to such an end and purpose, they certainly become effective and are the matter of His restraining grace.

## **b. Saving grace**

God prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin by real spiritual saving grace, and that either in the first conversion of sinners or in the following supplies of it.

### **1). In men’s first conversion**

This is one part of the mystery of His grace and love. He meets men sometimes, in their highest resolutions for sin, with the highest power of His grace. By this He demonstrates the power of His own grace, and gives the soul a further experience of the law of sin, when the soul takes such a farewell of the law of sin as to be changed in the midst of the soul’s resolutions to serve sin’s lusts. By this God melts down the lusts of men and causes them to wither at the root, so that they shall no more strive to bring forth what they have conceived, but be filled instead with shame and sorrow at their conception.

We have in Paul an example and instance of this proceeding of God for the use and instruction of all generations. His heart was full of wickedness, blasphemy, and persecution; his conception of these had developed into rage and madness, with a full purpose of exercising them all to the utmost—so the story relates it (Act 9), and so he himself declares the state to have been with him (Act 26:9-11; 1Ti 1:13). In the midst of all this violent pursuit of sin, a voice from heaven shuts up the womb and dries the breasts of it—and he cries, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Act 9:6).

Paul also seems to imply that this is the way of God’s procedure with others, even to meet them with His converting grace in the height of their sin and folly; for he himself, he says, was a pattern of God’s dealing with others. As God dealt with him, so would He also with some such-like sinners: “For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1Ti 1:16).

We have quite a few examples of it in our own days. Various persons—on set purpose going to this or that place to deride and scoff at the preaching of the Word—have been met with in the very place in which they designed to serve their lusts and Satan, and have been cast down at the foot of God. This way of God’s dealing with sinners is set forth more fully in Job 33:15-18. Dionysius the Areopagite is another instance of this work of God’s grace and love. Paul is dragged, either by him or before him, to plead for his life, as “a setter forth of strange gods” (Act 17:18), which at Athens was punished by the law with death. In the midst of this frame of spirit, God meets with Dionysius by converting grace, sin withers in the womb, and he cleaves to Paul and his doctrine (17:19-34). We have God’s similar acting towards Israel (Hos 11:7-10).

But there is no need to insist on more instances of this observation. God is pleased to leave no generation unconvinced of this truth, if they do but attend to their own experiences and the examples of this work of His mercy among them. Every day, one or other is taken in the fullness of the purpose of his heart to go on in sin, in this or that sin, and is stopped in his course by the power of converting grace.

## **2). In further supplies**

To prevent the outbreak of sin in believers, God’s common way of dealing with them is by the renewed communication of the same saving grace—that is, special assisting grace. That believers also, through the deceitfulness of sin, may be carried on to the conceiving of this or that sin, was before declared. God puts a stop to their progress, or rather to the prevalence of the law of sin in them, and that by giving to them special assistances needful for their preservation and deliverance. As David says of himself, “My feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped” (Psa 73:2). He was at the very brink of unbelieving, despairing thoughts and conclusions about God’s providence in the government of the world—from which he was recovered, as he afterwards declares (73:17, 23). It is this way with many a believer. They are often at the very brink, at the very door, of some folly or iniquity, when God puts in by the power of actual assisting grace and recovers them to an obedient frame of heart again.

This is a peculiar work of Christ, in which He manifests and exerts His faithfulness towards His own. “He is able to succour<sup>6</sup> them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18). It is not an absolute power, but a power clothed with mercy that is intended—such a power as is put forth from a sense of the suffering of poor believers under their temptations. And how does He exercise this merciful ability towards us? He gives forth, and we find in Him “grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16)—that is, seasonable help and assistance for our deliverance when we are ready to be overpowered by sin and temptation. When lust has conceived and is ready to bring forth, when the soul lies at the brink of some iniquity, He gives seasonable help, relief, deliverance, and safety.

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<sup>6</sup> **succour** – assist.

Here lies a great part of the care and faithfulness of Christ towards His poor saints. He will not suffer them to be worried with the power of sin, nor to be carried into ways that shall dishonor the gospel or fill them with shame and reproach—and so render them useless in the world. Instead, He steps in with the saving relief and assistance of His grace, stops the course of sin, and makes them in Himself more than conquerors (Rom 8:37).

This assistance lies under the promise,

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1Co 10:13).

Temptation shall try us; it is for our good. Many holy ends the Lord achieves and brings about by it. But when we are tried to the utmost of our ability, so that one assault more would overbear us, then a way of escape is provided.

As this may be done several ways, as I have elsewhere declared, so this which we are now upon is one of the most eminent: namely, by supplies of grace to enable the soul to bear up, resist, and conquer the outbreak of sin. When once God begins to deal in this way of love with a soul, He will not cease to add one supply after another, until the whole work of His grace and faithfulness is accomplished. We have an example of this in Isaiah 57:17-18. There poor sinners are so far captivated to the power of their lusts, that the first and second dealings of God with them are not effective for their delivery—yet, He will not give them over. He is in the pursuit of a design of love towards them, and so ceases not until they *are* recovered.

*Summary.* These are the general heads of the second way by which God hinders the bringing forth of conceived sin—namely, by working on the will of the sinner. He does it either by common convictions or special grace, so that of their own accord they shall let go of the purpose and will of sinning to which they are risen. This is no small way of His providing for His own glory and the honor of His gospel in the world, whose professors would stain the whole beauty of it were they left to themselves to bring forth all the evil that is conceived in their hearts.

### **3). By afflictions**

Besides these general ways, there is one yet more special, that at once works upon both the power and will of the sinner to block conceived sin from breaking out, and this is the way of afflictions—concerning which one word shall close this part of our discourse. Afflictions, I say, work by both these ways in reference to conceived sin.

They work *providentially* on the power of the creature. When a man has conceived a sin, and is in full purpose of the pursuit of it, God oftentimes sends a sickness and weakens his strength. Or, a loss cuts him short in his plenty, and so takes him off from the pursuit of his lusts, though it may be his heart is not weaned from them. His power is weakened, and he cannot do the evil he would. In this sense it belongs to the first way of God's stopping the production of sin: providence.



Great afflictions also work sometimes in the second way of God's stopping the production of sin: *grace*. These afflictions work not from their own nature, immediately and directly, but from the gracious purpose and intention of Him that sends them. He includes grace and power with the afflictions He sends. He includes love and kindness, which shall effectively take off the heart and mind from sin. "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Psa 119:67). In this way, because of the predominance of renewing and assisting grace, they belong to the latter means of preventing sin.

These are some of the ways by which it pleases God to put a stop to the progress of sin, both in believers and unbelievers, which we have discussed in this chapter. If we would endeavor further to search out His ways unto perfection, yet we must still conclude that it is but a little portion that we know of Him.

## Chapter 14

# EFFECTS OF ACTUAL SIN

*When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin,  
when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

—James 1:15

We are now to proceed to other evidences of that sad truth we are demonstrating. But having passed through the main of our work, I shall be more brief in the management of the arguments that remain.

That which in the next place may be fixed upon, then, is the actual breaking forth of sin—the demonstration that this law of indwelling sin has in all ages given of its power and effectiveness by the woeful fruits which it has brought forth, even in believers themselves. Now, these are of two sorts: 1) the great actual eruptions of sin in their lives; and 2) their habitual declensions<sup>1</sup> from the frames, state, and condition of obedience and communion with God that they had obtained. Both of these are laid to the account of this law of sin by the rule of James before unfolded: “when lust hath conceived, *it bringeth forth sin*” (Jam 1:15). Both actual eruptions of sin and habitual declensions into sin belong to the fourth head of its progress,<sup>2</sup> and are convincing evidences of its power and effectiveness.

### 1. Fearful Eruptions

Consider the fearful eruptions of actual sin that have been in the lives of believers, and we shall find our position regarding indwelling sin evidenced. Should I go through at large with this consideration, I must recount all the sad and scandalous failings of the saints that are left on record in the holy Scripture. However, the particulars of them are known to all so that I shall not need to mention them, nor the many aggravations with which they are attended in their circumstances. We may mention only some

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<sup>1</sup> **declensions** – decline; falling away from the standard.

<sup>2</sup> The four parts of Owen’s presentation regarding the progress of sin are the

1) drawing away of the mind (ch. 8-10),

2) enticing of the affections (ch. 11),

3) obtaining the consent of the will (ch. 12).

4) actual display: forceful eruptions of sin and men’s habitual declensions into sin (ch. 14).

few things about the failings of the saints as recorded in Scripture, which are useful to our present consideration.

### **a. Spiritually mature**

Most of the failings recorded in Scripture were not of the lowest form or ordinary sort of believers, but of men that were distinguished on account of their walking with God in their generation. Such were Noah, Lot, David, Hezekiah, and others. They were not men of an ordinary size, but spiritually head and shoulders above their brethren, in profession, yea, in real holiness. Surely it must be a mighty power that could hurry such giants in the ways of God into such abominable sins as they fell into. An ordinary force could never have turned them out of the course of their obedience. It was a poison that no athletic constitution of spiritual health, no antidote, could withstand.

### **b. Experienced**

These very men fell not into their great sins at the beginning of their profession, when they had had but little experience of the goodness of God, of the sweetness and pleasantness of obedience, or of the power and craft of sin, its impulses, solicitations, and surprises. Rather, they fell after a long course of walking with God and acquaintance with all these things, together with innumerable motives to watchfulness. Noah, according to the lives of men in those days of the world, had walked uprightly with God some hundreds of years before he was so surprised as he was (Gen 9:20-23). Righteous Lot seems to have been towards the end of his days before he defiled himself with the abominations recorded (Gen 19:33-36). David, in a short life, had as much experience of grace and sin—and as much close, spiritual communion with God—as ever had any of the sons of men, before he was cast to the ground by this law of sin (2Sa 11:4). So was it with Hezekiah in his degree, which was not at all the least (2Ki 20:12-18).

Now, for sin to set upon such persons—so well acquainted with its power and deceit, so armed and provided against it, who had been conquerors over it for so many years—and to prevail against them, it argues a power and efficacy too mighty for everything but the Spirit of the Almighty to withstand. Who can look to have a greater stock of inherent grace than those men had; to have more experience of God and the excellency of His ways, the sweetness of His love and of communion with Him, than they had? Who has either better ability to oppose sin with, or more obligation to do so, than they? Yet we see how fearfully they were prevailed against.

### **c. Recently blessed**

As if God had permitted their falls on set purpose so that we might learn to be wary of this powerful enemy, they, all of them, fell out when they had newly received great and stupendous mercies from the hand of God—which ought to have been strong obligations to diligence and to watchfulness in close obedience.

Noah was but newly come forth from that world of waters in which he saw the ungodly world perishing for their sins, and himself preserved by that astonishing miracle

which all ages must admire.<sup>3</sup> While the world's desolation was an hourly reminder to him of his strange preservation by the direct care and hand of God, he falls into drunkenness.

Lot had newly seen that which everyone who thinks on it cannot but tremble. He saw, as one speaks, "hell coming out of heaven" upon unclean sinners—the greatest evidence, except the cross of Christ, that God ever gave in His providence of the judgment to come. He saw himself and his children delivered by the special care and miraculous hand of God; and yet, while these strange mercies were fresh upon him, he fell into drunkenness and incest.

David was delivered out of all his troubles and had the necks of his enemies given him round about. But he makes use of his peace from a world of trials and troubles to contrive murder and adultery. After Hezekiah's great and miraculous deliverance, he falls immediately into his carnal pride and boasting.

I say, their falls in such seasons seem to be permitted on set purpose to instruct us all in the truth that we have in hand. This is so that no persons—in no seasons, with whatever resources of grace—can promise themselves security from sin's prevalence in any other way than by keeping close constantly to Him Who has supplies to give out that are above its reach and efficacy.

I think this should make us look about us. Are we better than Noah, who had the testimony from God that he was "a just man and perfect in his generations" and "walked with God" (Gen 6:9)? Are we better than Lot, who "vexed his righteous soul...with [the] unlawful evil deeds" of ungodly men, and is therefore commended by the Holy Ghost (2Pe 2:8)? Are we more holy, wise, and watchful than David, who obtained this testimony: that he was "a man after [God's] own heart" (Act 13:22)? Or are we better than Hezekiah, who appealed to God Himself that he had served Him uprightly with a "perfect heart" (2Ki 20:3)? Yet we see what prevalence this law of sin wrought in and over them.

There is no end of the like examples. They are all set up as buoys to discover to us the sands, the shelves, the rocks, whereupon they made their shipwreck, to their hazard, danger, and loss. Yea, they would have done so to their ruin, had not God been pleased in His faithfulness graciously to prevent it.

These fearful eruptions of sin in the godly are the first part of this evidence of the power of sin from its effects.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Understanding the Times* by Ken Ham, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

## 2. Habitual Declensions

### a. Common among professors

Indwelling sin manifests its power in the habitual declensions from zeal and holiness—from the frames, state, and condition of obedience and communion with God unto which they had attained—which are found in many believers. Promises of growth and improvement are many and precious, the means excellent and effective, the benefits great and unspeakable. Yet it often falls out that, instead of these blessings, decays and declensions are found in professors; yea, even in and upon many of the saints of God.

Now, as these declensions must be principally and chiefly from the strength and efficacy of indwelling sin, and is therefore a great evidence of sin's power, I shall first prove the observation itself to be true—namely, that some of the saints themselves often so decline from the growth and improvement in faith, grace, and holiness that might justly be expected from them. Then I will show that the cause of this evil lies in that which we are addressing. That it is the cause of total apostasy in unsound professors shall be declared thereafter (ch. 16).

But this is a greater work that we have in hand. The prevailing upon true believers to a sinful declension and gradual apostasy requires a putting forth of more strength and efficacy than the prevailing upon unsound professors to total apostasy—just as the wind, which will blow down to the ground a dead tree that has no root, will scarcely shake or bow a living, well-rooted tree.

Yet, such prevailing upon believers to gradual apostasy sin will do. There is mention made in the Scripture of “the first ways of David,” and they are commended above his latter (2Ch 17:3). The last ways even of David were tainted with the power of indwelling sin. Though we have mention only of the actual eruption of sin, yet that uncleanness and pride which was working in him in his numbering of the people were certainly rooted in a declension from his first frame (2Sa 24:2). Those rushes<sup>4</sup> did not grow without mire. David would not have done so in his younger days, when he followed God in the wilderness of temptations and trials, full of faith, love, humility, brokenness of heart, zeal, and tender affection to all the ordinances of God—all of which were obvious in him. But his strength is impaired by the power and deceitfulness of sin, his locks cut,<sup>5</sup> and he becomes a prey to vile lusts and temptations.

We have a notable instance in most of the churches that our Savior awakens to the consideration of their condition in the Revelation. We may single out one of them. There were many good things in the church of Ephesus, for which it is greatly commended (Rev 2:2-3); but yet it is charged with a decay, a declension, a gradual falling

<sup>4</sup> **rushes** – plants that require muddy, shallow water to grow.

<sup>5</sup> **locks cut** – David's loss of spiritual power is compared to Samson's loss of physical power (Jdg 16:19).

away from God and into apostasy: “Thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (2:4-5). There was a decay—both inward (in the frame of heart) as to faith and love, and outward as to obedience and works—in comparison to what they had formerly, by the testimony of Christ Himself.

The same also might be shown concerning the rest of those churches, only one or two of them excepted. Five of them are charged with decays and declensions. Hence there is mention in the Scripture of the “kindness of thy youth”; of the “love of thine espousals,” with great commendation (Jer 2:2-3); of our “first faith” (1Ti 5:12); of “the beginning of our confidence” (Heb 3:14). And cautions are given that “we lose not those things which we have wrought” (2Jo 1:8).

But what need we look back or search for instances to confirm the truth of this observation? A habitual declension from first engagements unto God—from first attainments of communion with God, from first strictness in duties of obedience—is ordinary and common among professors.

### **b. Common among the best**

Might we take a general view of the professors in those nations among whom the lot of the best of us will be found to fall—in part or in whole, in somewhat or in all—we might be plentifully convinced of the truth that the power of indwelling sin is demonstrated in habitual declensions from God.

#### **1). *Zeal for God***

Is their zeal for God as warm, living, vigorous, effective, and attentive as it was in their first giving themselves to God? Or rather, is there not in the place of it a common, slight, selfish frame of spirit come upon most professors? Iniquity has abounded and their love has waxed cold (Mat 24:12). Was it not of old a burden to their spirits to hear the name, ways, and worship of God blasphemed and profaned? Could they not have said with the psalmist, “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (Psa 119:136)? Were not their souls keenly attentive to the interest of Christ in the world, like Eli’s about the ark (1Sa 4:13)? Did they not contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and every parcel of it, especially in which the grace of God and the glory of the gospel were concerned? Did they not labor to judge and condemn the world by a holy and separated lifestyle?

And now do most professors abide in this frame? Have they grown and made improvement in it? Or is there not a coldness and indifference grown upon the spirits of many in this thing? Yea, do not many despise all these things, and look upon their own former zeal as folly? May we not see many who have formerly been of esteem in ways of profession, become daily a scorn and reproach through their failures to the men of the world, and that justly? Is it not with them as it was of old with the daughters of Zion when God judged them for their sins and wantonness (Isa 3:24)? Has not the world and self utterly ruined their profession? Are they not careless of the things in which for-

merly they have declared a singular concern? Yea, are not some come—partly on one pretense, partly on another—to an open enmity to and hatred of the ways of God? They please them no more, but are evil in their eyes.

But let us not mention such open apostates any further, whose hypocrisy the Lord Jesus Christ shortly will judge. Instead, let us ask: How is it with the best? Are not almost all men grown cold and slack as to these things? Are they not less concerned in them than formerly? Are they not grown weary and selfish in their religion; and so, if things are indifferent or well at home, they scarce care how things go abroad in the world? At least, do they not prefer their ease, credit, safety, and secular advantages before these things?—which is a frame that Christ abhors, and declares that those in whom it prevails are none of His.

Some, indeed, seem to retain a good zeal for truth. But where they make the fairest appearance, there will they be found to be most abominable. They cry out against errors—not for truth’s sake, but for selfish or sectarian interests. Let a man be in their group and promote their interest—even if he is very corrupt in his judgment, he is embraced by them and, it may be, admired. This is not zeal for God, but for a man’s self. It is not, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up,” but, “Master...we forbid him, because he followeth not us” (Psa 69:9; Mar 9:38). Doubtless, it were better for men never to pretend to any zeal at all, than to substitute such wrathful selfishness in the place of it.

### **2). *Delight in worship***

Is men’s delight in the ordinances and worship of God the same as in former days? Do they find the same sweetness and relish in them as they have done of old? How precious has the Word been to them formerly! What joy and delight have they had in attending to it! How would they have run and gone to have been made partakers of it, where it was dispensed in its power and purity and in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit! Did they not call the Sabbath their delight (Isa 58:13), and was not the approach of it a real joy to their souls? Did they not long after the converse and communion of saints, and could they not undergo many perils for the attainment of it?

And does this frame still abide on them? Are there not decays and declensions to be found among them? May it not be said, “Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not” (Hos 7:9)? Yea, are not men ready to say with them of old, “What a weariness is it” (Mal 1:13)? It is even a burden and a weariness to be tied up to the observation of all these ordinances. What need we be at all so strict in the observation of the Sabbath? What need we hear so often? What need this distinction in hearing? Insensibly, a great disrespect—yea, even a contempt of the pleasant and excellent ways of Christ and His gospel—is fallen upon many professors.

### **3). *Obedience to duties***

May not the power of indwelling sin to cause habitual declensions be further seen by an inquiry into the universal course of obedience and the performance of duties that

men have been engaged in? Does the same conscientious awareness of sinning abide in many as was in days of old, the same exact performance of private duties, the same love to the brethren, the same readiness for the cross, the same humility of mind and spirit, the same self-denial? The steam of men's lusts with which the air is tainted will not suffer us so to say.

We need, then, go no further than this wretched generation in which we live to prove the truth that the power of indwelling sin is seen in habitual declensions from God. May the Lord give repentance before it is too late!

### **3. Sin's Power in Overcoming the Saints' Provisions**

Now, all these declensions, all these decays, that are found in some professors, they all proceed from this root and cause—they are all the product of indwelling sin, and all clearly display the exceeding power and efficacy of it. For the proof of this, I shall not need to go further than the general rule that we have already considered from James 1:14-15: namely, that lust (indwelling sin) is the cause of all actual sin and all habitual declensions in believers. This is what the apostle intends in that place to teach and declare.

I shall, therefore, handle these two things: first, I will show that this proves a great efficacy and power in sin (the remainder of this chapter); and secondly, I will declare the ways and means by which it brings forth or brings about this cursed effect (ch. 15). All this is in design of our general aim: calling upon and cautioning believers to avoid and oppose sin.

Sin appears to be a work of great power and efficacy from the provision that is made against it, which indwelling sin prevails over. There is in the covenant of grace plentiful provision made, not only for the preventing of declensions and decays in believers, but also for their continual carrying on towards perfection.

#### **a. The Word**

The Word itself and all the ordinances of the gospel are appointed and given to us for this purpose, as in Ephesians 4:11-15.

<sup>11</sup>And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; <sup>12</sup>For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: <sup>13</sup>Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: <sup>14</sup>That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; <sup>15</sup>But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

That which is the purpose of giving gospel offices to the churches is the purpose also of giving all the ordinances to be administered by them: they are given “for the work of the ministry”—that is, for the administration of the ordinances of the gospel. Now,



what are these ends? They are all for the preventing of decays and declensions in the saints, all for the carrying them on to perfection—as it is said in verse 12. In general, the Word is for the “perfecting of the saints” through carrying on the work of grace in them, and the work of holiness and obedience by them. And, the Word is for the edifying of the body of Christ, their building up in an increase of faith and love, even of every true member of the mystical body.

But how far is the Word appointed thus to carry the saints on, thus to build them up? Has it bounds fixed to its work? Does it carry them so far and then leave them? “No,” says the apostle in effect in verse 13. The dealings of the Word of the gospel, and the ordinances thereof, are designed for our help, assistance, and furtherance until the whole work of faith and obedience is completed. It is appointed to perfect and complete the faith, knowledge, and growth in grace and holiness that is allotted to us in this world.

But what if oppositions and temptations lie in the way by Satan and his instruments working with great subtlety and deceit? Why, these ordinances are designed for our safeguarding and deliverance from all their attempts and assaults so that, being preserved in the use of them and “speaking the truth in love,” we may “grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (vv. 14-15). This is, in general, the use of all gospel ordinances, the chief and main end for which they were given and appointed of God: namely, to preserve believers from all decays of faith and obedience, and to carry them on still towards perfection.

These are means that God, the good husbandman, makes use of to cause the vine to thrive and bring forth fruit. I also could show the same to be the special end of them distinctly. Briefly, the Word is milk and strong meat for the nourishing and strengthening of all sorts and all degrees of believers. It has both seed and water in it, and fertilizer with it, to make them fruitful. The ordinance of the Lord’s Supper is appointed purposefully for the strengthening of our faith, in the remembrance of the death of the Lord, and the exercise of love one towards another. The communion of saints is for edifying each other in faith, love, and obedience.

### **b. Use of means**

There is that which adds weight to this consideration of means. God suffers us not to be unmindful of this assistance He has afforded us, but is continually calling upon us to make use of the means appointed for the attaining of the end proposed. He shows them to us, as the angel showed the water-spring to Hagar (Gen 21:14-19). Commands, exhortations, promises, and threatenings are multiplied to this purpose. They are summed up in Hebrews 2:1, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” God is continually saying to us, in effect, “Why will ye die? Why will ye wither and decay? Come to the pastures provided for you, and your souls shall live!”

If we see a lamb run from the fold into the wilderness, we wonder not if it be torn and rent of wild beasts. If we see a sheep leaving its green pastures and watercourses to abide in dry barren heaths, then we count it no marvel nor inquire further if we see him lean and ready to perish. But if we find lambs wounded in the fold, we wonder at the boldness and rage of the beasts of prey that dare set upon them there. If we see sheep pining in full pastures, we judge them to be diseased and unsound.

It is indeed no marvel that poor creatures who forsake their own mercies and run away from the pasture and fold of Christ in His ordinances are rent and torn with divers lusts and do pine away with hunger and famine. But to see men living under and enjoying all the means of spiritual thriving, yet to decay—not to be fat and flourishing, but rather daily to pine and wither—this argues some secret powerful distemper, whose poisonous and harmful qualities hinder the virtue and efficacy of the means they enjoy. This is indwelling sin. It is so incredibly powerful, so effectively poisonous, that it can bring leanness on the souls of men in the midst of all precious means of growth and flourishing. It may well make us tremble to see men living under and in the use of the means of the gospel—preaching, praying, administration of sacraments—and yet growing colder every day than others in zeal for God, growing more selfish and worldly, even habitually declining as to the degrees of holiness to which they had attained before.

### **c. Continual supplies of grace**

Together with the provision of outward means of spiritual growth or improvement, there are also supplies of grace continually afforded the saints from their Head, Christ. He is the Head of all the saints; and He is a living Head—and such a living Head as that He tells us: “Because I live, ye shall live also” (Joh 14:19). He communicates of spiritual life to all that are His. In Him is the fountain of our life, which is therefore said to be “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3).

This life He gives to His saints by quickening them by His Spirit (Rom 8:11), and He continues it by the supplies of living grace that He communicates to them. From these two, His quickening of us and His continually giving out supplies of life to us, He is said to *live* in us. Paul said: “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20). “The spiritual life that I have is not my own. It was brought forth not from myself; it is maintained not by myself, but it is merely and solely the work of Christ. Therefore, it is not I who lives, but He lives in me—the whole of my life being from Him alone.”

Neither does this living Head communicate only a bare life to believers that they should merely live and no more—a poor, weak, dying life, as it were. But He gives out sufficiently to afford them a strong, vigorous, thriving, flourishing life. He comes not only that His sheep “might have life,” but that “they may have it more abundantly” (Joh 10:10)—that is, in a plentiful manner, so that they may flourish, be fat and fruitful.

Thus it is with the whole body of Christ, and every member of it, by which it grows up

into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph 4:15-16).

The result of all communications of grace and supplies of life from this living and blessed Head is the increase of the whole body and every member of it and the edifying of itself in love. His treasures of grace are unsearchable; His stores inexhaustible; His life, the fountain of ours, full and eternal; His heart bounteous and large; His hand open and liberal—so that there is no doubt but that He communicates supplies of grace abundantly to all His saints for their increase in holiness.

Why, then, is it that they do not all flourish and thrive accordingly? As you may see it often in a natural body, so it is here. Though the seat and rise of the blood and spirits in head and heart be excellently good and sound, yet there may be a withering member in the body. Something intercepts the influences of life to it, so that though the heart and head perform their role in giving of supplies no less to that than they do to any other member, yet all the effect produced is merely to keep it from utter perishing—it grows weak and decays every day. The withering and decaying of any member in Christ's mystical body is not for lack of His communication of grace for an abundant life, but from the powerful interception that is made against the effectiveness of it by the interposition and opposition of indwelling sin.

Therefore, where lust grows strong, a great deal of grace will but keep the soul alive, and not give it any prevailing fruitfulness at all. Often, Christ gives very much grace where not many of its effects appear. It spends its strength and power in withstanding the continual assaults of violent corruptions and lusts, so that it cannot put forth its proper virtue towards further fruitfulness. A virtuous medicine is able both to check vicious<sup>6</sup> and deadly humors<sup>7</sup> and to comfort, refresh, and strengthen nature. But if the evil humor be strong and greatly prevailing, the medicine spends its whole strength and virtue in the subduing and correcting of it. Thus it contributes much less to the relief of nature, than it would otherwise if it met not with such opposition. So is it with the eye-salve and the healing grace that we have abundantly from the wings of the Sun of Righteousness (Mal 4:2). It is forced often to put forth its virtue to oppose and contend against, and in any measure subdue, prevailing lusts and corruptions.

It is from this that the soul does not receive the strengthening to duties and fruitfulness that otherwise it might receive by such grace. How sound, healthy, and flourishing, how fruitful and exemplary in holiness, might many a soul be by and with the grace that is continually communicated to it from Christ, which now, by reason of the power of indwelling sin, is only weak, withering, and useless!

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<sup>6</sup> **vicious** – harmful.

<sup>7</sup> **humors** – According to medical thought at the time of writing, humors were fluids circulating through the body to which could be attributed health, illness, and fever.

And this, if anything, is a notable evidence of the power of indwelling sin. It is able to give such a stop and check to the mighty and effective power of grace, so that— notwithstanding the blessed and continual supplies that we receive from our Head— yet many believers do decline and decay, and that habitually, from what they had attained, their last ways not answering their first. This makes the vineyard in the “very fruitful hill” to bring forth so many wild grapes. This makes so many trees barren in fertile fields.

#### **d. Special comforts**

Continual supplies of grace, according to the terms of the new covenant, constantly are communicated to believers, which keeps them so they thirst no more as to a total poverty. Besides this, there is a readiness in the Lord Christ to give special assistance to the souls of His own, according as their occasions shall require. The apostle tells us that He is “a merciful and faithful high priest” and “able [that is, ready, prepared, and willing] to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:17-18). We are on that account invited to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16)—that is, grace sufficient, seasonable, and suitable to any special trial or temptation with which we may be exercised.

Our merciful High Priest is ready to give out this special seasonable grace over and above those continual communications of supplies of the Spirit that we mentioned before. Besides the never-failing springs of ordinary covenant grace, He has also peculiar refreshing showers for times of drought. This is exceedingly to the advantage of the saints for their preservation and growth in grace. And there may be added very many more of the like nature.

But now, I say, notwithstanding all these and others remaining of the like importance, such is the power and efficacy of indwelling sin—so great its deceitfulness and restlessness, so many its wiles and temptations—it often falls out that many of them for whose growth and improvement all this provision is made do yet, as was shown, go back and decline, even as to their course of walking with God. Samson’s strength fully evidenced itself when he broke seven new withes<sup>8</sup> and seven new cords with which he was bound, as if they were as burning tow<sup>9</sup> and as thread (Isa 1:32; Jdg 16:12). The deadly humor in the body, which is so stubborn as that no use of the most potent remedies can prevail against it, ought to be regarded. Such is this indwelling sin if not watched over. It breaks all the cords made to bind it; it blunts the instruments appointed to root it up; it resists all healing medicines, though most potent. It is, therefore, assuredly of exceeding power.

Besides, from the love and the command of God, believers have innumerable obligations upon them to grow in grace, to press forward towards perfection. And they have

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<sup>8</sup> **withes** – twisted cords; tough, flexible twigs used for binding, often of willow.

<sup>9</sup> **tow** – flax or hemp fiber prepared for spinning.

abundant means provided for them to do so. Their doing so is a matter of the greatest advantage, profit, sweetness, and contentment to them in the world. It is the burden, the trouble of their souls, that they do not do so—that they are not more holy, zealous, useful, and fruitful. They desire to grow in grace above life itself. They know it is their duty to watch against this enemy of indwelling sin, to fight against it, to pray against it; and so they do. They more desire its destruction than the enjoyment of all this world and all that it can afford. And yet, notwithstanding all this, such is the subtlety, fraud, violence, fury, urgency, and importunity of this adversary, that it frequently prevails to bring them into the woeful condition mentioned.

Therefore, it is with believers sometimes as it is with men in some places at sea. They have a good and fair gale of wind, it may be, all night long; they ply their tackling, attend diligently their business, and, it may be, take great care to consider how they proceed in their voyage. In the morning or after a season, coming to measure what way they have made and what progress they have had, they find that they are much backward of what they were instead of getting one step forward. Falling into a swift tide or current against them, it has frustrated all their labors and rendered the wind in their sails almost useless. They have borne up somewhat against the stream by their labors, but have made no progress.

So is it with believers. They have a good gale of supplies of the Spirit from above. They attend duties diligently, pray constantly, hear attentively, and omit nothing that may carry them on their voyage towards eternity. But after a while they come to consider seriously what progress they have made by the examination of their hearts and ways. When they do so, they find that all their assistance and duties have not been able to bear them up against some strong tide or current of indwelling sin. Indeed, their service has kept them [so] that they have not been driven and split on rocks and shelves: it has preserved them from gross, scandalous sins. But yet they have lost in their spiritual frame, or gone backwards, and are entangled under many woeful decays—which is a notable evidence of the life of sin about which we are treating.

Now, the goal of our discovering this power of sin is that we may be careful to prevent it in its operation. Of all the effects it produces, there is none more dangerous or destructive than what we have last emphasized: that indwelling sin prevails upon many professors to an habitual declension from their former ways and attainments, notwithstanding all the sweetness and excellence that their souls have found in such ways. Therefore, as was said, I shall in the next place consider by what ways and means, and through what assistance, indwelling sin usually prevails in the habitual declensions from grace. This is so that we may the better be instructed to watch against it.

## Chapter 15

# HABITUAL DECAYS IN GRACE

We have considered that indwelling sin is the cause of all actual sin and all habitual declensions in believers (Jam 1:14-15). I have first shown that this proves the great power of indwelling sin (section three of the prior chapter). Now, secondly, we shall declare its ways and means. All this is in design of our general aim in calling upon and cautioning believers to avoid and oppose sin.<sup>1</sup>

Many are the ways and means by which indwelling sin prevails on believers to habitual declensions and decays in the degrees of grace and holiness. We shall name a few.

### **1. Spiritual Springs Bearing Up Believers**

Upon the first conversion and calling of sinners to God and Christ, they have usually many fresh springs breaking forth in their souls, and refreshing showers coming upon them, that bear them up to a high rate of faith, love, holiness, fruitfulness, and obedience. This is just as a land-flood when many lesser streams run into a river: it swells over its bounds and rolls on with a more than ordinary fulness. Now, if these springs be not kept open, if they prevail not for the continuance of these showers, they necessarily must decay and go backwards.

#### **a. Spiritual springs**

We shall name one or two of these springs.

##### ***1). Pardoning mercy***

They have a fresh, vigorous sense of pardoning mercy. According as this is in the soul, so will be its love and delight in God, so will be its obedience. As is the sense of gospel pardon, so will be the life of gospel love. "I say unto thee," says our Savior of the poor woman, "Her sins, which were many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luk 7:47). Her great love was an evidence of great forgiveness and of her great sense of it—for our Savior is not rendering a reason for her forgiveness, as though it were because of her love; but a reason for her love, that it was because of her forgiveness. In the foregoing parable, from verse 40 and onwards, Christ convinced the Pharisee with whom He had to do, that he to whom

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is adapted from chapter 14 section 3, and inserted by the editors as an aid to the reader.

most was forgiven would love most (v. 43). He then gives an account of the great love of the woman, springing from the sense she had of the great forgiveness that she had so freely received.

Thus sinners at their first conversion are very sensible of great forgiveness; “of whom I am chief” lies next to their heart (1Ti 1:15). This greatly subdues their hearts and spirits to all in God and quickens them to all obedience—even that such poor cursed sinners as they were should so freely be delivered and pardoned. The love of God and of Christ in their forgiveness highly conquers and constrains them to make it their business to live unto God.

## **2). *Sweet savor of spiritual things***

The fresh taste they have had of spiritual things keeps up such a savor and relish of them in their souls as that worldly satisfactions, whereby men are drawn off from closely walking with God, are rendered sapless and undesirable to them. Having tasted of the wine of the gospel, they desire no other—for they say, “This is best” (see John 2:10). So was it with the apostles upon that option offered them as to a departure from Christ, when many false professors went into apostasy: “Will ye also go away?” (Joh 6:67). They answer by Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (v. 68). They had such a fresh savor and relish of the doctrine of the gospel and the grace of Christ upon their souls, that they can entertain no thoughts of declining from it.

Consider a man who has been long kept in a dungeon. When he is brought forth suddenly into the light of the sun, he finds much pleasure and satisfaction in the beauties of the old creation. This is so much so, that he thinks he can never be weary of it, nor shall ever be contented on any account to be under darkness again. So it is with souls when first translated into the marvelous light of Christ to behold the beauties of the new creation. They see a new glory in Him that has quite reduced the desirableness of all earthly diversions. And they see a new guilt and filth in sin, which gives them an utter abhorrence of its old delights and pleasures.

Now, while these and the like springs are kept open in the souls of converted sinners, they constrain them to a vigorous, active holiness. They can never do enough for God. This is so much so, that their zeal as saints often causes some blots on their prudence as men—as might be instanced in many of the martyrs of old.

This, then, is at least one way by which indwelling sin prepares men for decays and declensions in grace and obedience: it endeavors to stop or taint these springs of spiritual refreshment.

### **b. How indwelling sin stops these springs**

There are several ways by which indwelling sin endeavors to stop these springs of spiritual refreshment.

**1). Sloth**

Indwelling sin works by sloth and negligence. It prevails in the soul to neglect the stirring up of continual thoughts about the things that so powerfully influence it to strict and fruitful obedience. If care be not taken—if diligence and watchfulness be not used, and all means that are appointed of God to keep a quick and living sense of them upon the soul—they will dry up and decay. Consequently, the obedience that should spring from those means of grace will dry up also. Isaac dug wells, but the Philistines stopped them, and his flocks had no benefit by them (Gen 26:18). Let the heart little use gracious, soul-affecting thoughts of the love of God, the cross of Christ, the greatness and excellency of gospel mercy, and the beauties of holiness; then they will quickly be as much estranged to a man as he can be to them. He who shuts his eyes for a season in the sun can see nothing at all when he opens them again.

So much as a man loses of faith towards these things, so much will they lose of power towards him. They can do little or nothing upon him because of his unbelief, which formerly were so exceedingly effective towards him. So was it with the spouse (Song 5:2). Christ calls to her with a marvelously loving and gracious invitation to communion with Himself (v. 1). She, who had formerly been ravished at the first hearing of that joyful sound, being now under the power of sloth and carnal ease, returns a sorry excusing answer to His call, which ended in her own notable loss and sorrow.

Indwelling sin, I say, prevails by spiritual sloth upon the souls of men to an inattention to the motions of God's Spirit in their former apprehensions of divine love. It also prevails by a negligence of stirring up continual thoughts of faith about divine love. When these happen, decay grows unawares upon the whole soul. Thus God often complains that His people had "forgotten" Him<sup>2</sup>—that is, they grew unmindful of His love and grace, which was the beginning of their apostasy.

**2). Formality**

Indwelling sin works by unframing the soul, so that it has formal, weary, powerless thoughts of those things that should prevail with it to diligence in thankful obedience. The apostle cautions us that, in dealing with God, we should use reverence and godly fear because of His purity, holiness, and majesty (Heb 12:28-29).

The Lord Himself spoke about this in the destruction of Nadab and Abihu: "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me" (Lev 10:3)—that is, He will be dealt with in an awe-filled, holy, reverent manner. So are we to deal with all the things of God in or by which we have communion with Him. The soul is to have a great reverence of God in them. When men begin to take them into slight or common thoughts, not using and improving them to the utmost for the purposes to which they are appointed, they lose all their beauty, glory, and power towards them.

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<sup>2</sup> See Isa 17:10; Jer 2:32; 3:21; 13:25; 18:15; 23:27; Eze 22:12; 23:35; Hos 8:14; 13:6.



When we have anything to do in which faith or love towards God is to be exercised, we must do it with all our hearts, with all our minds, strength, and souls—not slightly and routinely, which God abhors. He does not only require that we bear His love and grace in remembrance, but that, as much as it lies in us, we do it according to their worth and excellence. It was the sin of Hezekiah that he “rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him” (2Ch 32:25).

Therefore, when we consider gospel truths, the uttermost endeavor of the soul ought to be that we may be “changed into the same image” or likeness (2Co 3:18)—that is, that the gospel truths may have their full power and effect on us. Otherwise, James tells us what our “beholding” the glory of the Lord “in a glass”—that is, reading or hearing the mind of God in Christ revealed in the gospel—comes to: it is but “like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was” (Jam 1:23-24). It makes no impression upon him and begets no idea or image of his likeness in his imagination. This is because he does it only slightly and with a passing glance. So is it with men that will indeed think of gospel truths but in a slight manner—without endeavoring with all their hearts, minds, and strength to have them engrafted upon their souls and all their effects produced in them.

Now, this is the way of sinners in their first interactions with God. Whenever they think of pardoning mercy, they labor to affect their whole souls with it, and stir up themselves to suitable affections and returns of constant obedience. Whenever they think of the excellence of Christ and spiritual things, now newly discovered to them in a saving light, they press with all their might after a further, fuller enjoyment of them. This keeps them humble and holy. This makes them thankful and fruitful.

Now, if the utmost diligence and carefulness be not used to improve and grow in this wisdom, to keep up this frame, then indwelling sin, working by the vanity of the minds of men, will insensibly bring them to content themselves with slight and rare thoughts of these things—without a diligent, persistent endeavor to give them their due improvement upon the soul. As men decay in this, so will they assuredly decay and decline in the power of holiness and close walking with God. The springs being stopped or tainted, the streams will not run so swiftly, at least not so sweetly, as formerly.

Some, by this means, under an uninterrupted profession, insensibly wither almost into nothing. They talk of religion and spiritual things as much as ever they did in their lives, and perform duties with as much constancy as ever they did; but yet they have poor, lean, starving souls as to any real and effectual communion with God. By the power and subtlety of indwelling sin, they have grown formal and learned to deal with spiritual things in an outward manner—whereby they have lost all their life, vigor, savor, and efficacy towards them. Be always serious in spiritual things if ever you intend to be bettered by them.

**3). *Foolish opinions corrupting the simplicity of the gospel***

Indwelling sin often prevails to the stopping of these springs of gospel obedience by false and foolish opinions corrupting the simplicity of the gospel. False opinions are the work of the flesh. They mostly proceed from the vanity and darkness of the minds of men, with a mixture more or less of corrupt affections. The apostle was jealous over his Corinthians in this matter. He was afraid “lest by any means” their minds “should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2Co 11:2-3). He knew that this would be attended by a decay and declension in faith, love, and obedience.

Thus matters in this case often fall out. Some men have received a sweet taste of the love of God in Christ, of the excellence of pardoning mercy, and have walked humbly with God for many years in the faith and apprehension of the truth. We have seen some of these who have been corrupted in their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ by false and foolish opinions. They have despised all their own experiences, and rejected all the power of truth for the furtherance of their obedience. Thus John cautions the elect lady and her children to take heed that they are not seduced, lest they should “lose...those things which [they] have wrought” (2Jo 1:8)—that is, lest they should themselves cast away all their former obedience as lost and as a thing of no value.

We have innumerable instances of this in the days in which we live. There are many who, not many years since, put an unspeakable value on the pardon of sin in the blood of Christ. They delighted in gospel discoveries of spiritual things, and walked in obedience to God on the account of them. Yet they were beguiled and turned aside from the truth as it is in Jesus, and came to despise these springs of their own former obedience!

As this is done grossly and openly in some, so there are more secret and more plausible insinuations of corrupt opinions tainting the springs and fountains of gospel obedience, and gaining ground on them through the vanity of men’s minds—which is a principal part of indwelling sin. Such are all those that tend to downplay special grace in its freedom and power, and instead tend to the advancement of the wills and endeavors of men in their spiritual power and ability. They are works of the flesh. Howsoever some may pretend a usefulness in them to the promotion of holiness, they will be found to taint the springs of true evangelical obedience, insensibly to turn the heart from God, and to bring the whole soul into spiritual decay.

This is one way by which indwelling sin produces this harmful effect of drawing men off from the power, purity, and fruitfulness attending their first conversion and engagements to God. It brings them into habitual declension of their holiness and grace, at least to some degree. There is not anything we ought to be more watchful against if we intend to deal effectively with this powerful and subtle enemy. It is no small part of the wisdom of faith to observe whether gospel truths continue to have the same savor to and efficacy upon the soul as formerly they have had, and whether an endeavor is maintained to improve them continually as at the first. A commandment that is always practiced is always new, as John speaks of the commandment to love (2Jo 1:5). For him who really improves gospel truths, though he hears them a thousand times, they will

be always new and fresh to him, because they put him on newness of practice; when to another, who grows common under them, they are burdensome and common to him, and he even loathes the manna to which he is so accustomed.

## **2. Lack of Watchfulness against the Enemy**

### **a. How the enemy works**

Indwelling sin brings men into habitual declension by taking men off from their watch against the returns of Satan. When our Lord Christ comes first to take possession of any soul for Himself, He binds that strong man and spoils his goods; He deprives him of all his power, dominion, and interest. Satan being thus dispossessed and frustrated in his hopes and expectations, leaves the soul, as finding it newly mortified to his baits. So he left our Savior upon his first fruitless attempts. But it is said he left Him only “for a season” (Luk 4:13). He intended to return again when he could see his advantage.

So it is with believers also. Being cast out from his interest in them, the devil leaves them for a season, at least comparatively. Freed from his assaults and perplexing temptations, they proceed vigorously in the course of their obedience and so flourish in the ways of God. But this does not hold. Satan returns again, and if the soul stands not continually upon its guard against him, he will quickly get such advantages as shall put a notable interruption upon that man’s fruitfulness and obedience. Thus some—after they have spent some time, it may be some years, in cheerful, exemplary walking with God—have, upon Satan’s return, consumed all their latter days in wrestling with perplexing temptations by which he has entangled them.

Others plainly have fallen under the power of Satan’s assaults. It is like a man who for a while lived usefully among his neighbors, did good, and communicated according to his ability—distributing to the poor and helping all around about him. At length, falling into the hands of vexatious, wrangling, and oppressive men, he is forced to spend his whole time and revenue in defending himself against them at law, and so becomes useless in the place where he lives. So is it with many a believer after he has walked in a fruitful course of obedience, to the glory of God and edification of the church of Christ. He is then freshly set upon by the return of Satan in one way or other, and has enough to do all the remainder of his life to keep himself alive. In the meantime, as to many graces, he woefully is decaying and going backward.

Now, this also, though Satan has a hand in it, is from indwelling sin. I mean that the spiritual success he once had is noticed by Satan. This encourages the devil to make a return, and gives entrance to his temptations. You know how it is with them out of whom he is cast only by gospel conviction: after he has wandered and waited a while, he says he will return to the house from where he was ejected (Luk 11:24-26). And what is the result? Carnal lusts have prevailed over the man’s convictions and made his soul fit to entertain returning devils. It is so as to the measure of prevalence that Satan

obtains against believers, by advantages given to him by sin's disposing the soul to be exposed to his temptations.

### **b. How indwelling sin works to invite Satan's return**

Now, the way and means by which indwelling sin gives advantage to Satan for his return are all those ways that dispose them toward a declension, which shall afterward be mentioned. Satan is a diligent, watchful, and crafty adversary; he will neglect no opportunity, no advantage that is offered to him. In whatever way our spiritual strength is impaired by sin or our lusts press upon us, Satan falls in with that weakness and works toward that ruin—so that all the actings of the law of sin are subservient to this aim of Satan. I shall therefore at present mention several that seem principally to invite Satan to attempt a return.

#### ***1). Entangling with the world***

Indwelling sin entangles the soul in the things of the world, all of which are so many agents for Satan. When Pharaoh had let the people go, he heard after a while that they were entangled in the wilderness, and supposed that he would therefore now overtake them and destroy them. This stirs him up to pursue after them. Satan—finding those from whom he has been cast out entangled in the things of the world (by which he is sure to gain an easy access to them)—is encouraged to attempt upon them afresh, as the spider is encouraged to come down upon the strongest fly that is entangled in his web. This is because Satan, by his temptations, comes only to impel them to that by which their own lusts are inclined, by adding poison to their lusts, and by pointing to the objects of them.

Often by this advantage, he gets so in upon the souls of men that they are never well free of him while they live. And as men's worldly diversions increase, so do their entanglements from Satan. When they have more to do in the world than they can well manage, they shall have more to do from Satan than they can well withstand. When men are made spiritually faint by dealing in and with the world, Satan sets on them, as Amalek did on the faint and weak of the people that came out of Egypt (Exo 17:8).

#### ***2). Neglecting watchfulness***

Indwelling sin produces this effect by making the soul negligent and taking it off from its watch. We have before showed at large that it is one main part of the effective deceitfulness of indwelling sin to make the soul careless, to turn it off from the diligent, watchful attendance to its duty that is required. Now, there is not anything more strictly joined to a lack of diligence and watchfulness than the returning assaults of Satan: "Be sober, be vigilant." And why so? "Because your adversary the devil...walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1Pe 5:8). Unless you are exceedingly watchful, at one time or other he will surprise you. All the injunctions of our blessed Savior to "watch" are still with reference to Satan and his temptations.

Now, when the soul is made careless and heedless—forgetting what an enemy it has to deal with, or is lifted up with the successes it has newly obtained against him—then

is Satan's time to attempt a reentrance of his old habitation. Even if he cannot obtain this reentrance, yet he makes their lives uncomfortable to themselves and unfruitful to others, in weakening their root and withering their fruit through his poisonous temptations. Satan comes down upon our duties of obedience as the fowls upon Abraham's sacrifice (Gen 15:11); so that if we watch not, as Abraham did, to drive them away, Satan will devour them—for by resistance he is overcome and put to flight (Jam 4:7).

### **3). *Evil examples***

Indwelling sin takes advantage to put forth its efficacy and deceit to withdraw men from their original zeal and holiness, from their first faith, love, and works, by the evil examples of professors among whom they live. When men first engage into the ways of God, they have a reverent esteem of those whom they believe to have been made partakers of that mercy before themselves. These they love and honor, as it is their duty (Joh 13:34). But after a while, they find many of them walking in many things unevenly, crookedly, and not unlike the men of the world. Here sin is not lacking in its advantage. Insensibly, it prevails with earnest men to a compliance with the poor examples. "This way, this course of walking, does well enough with others; why may it not do so with us also?" Such is the inward thought of many, which works effectively in them. And so, through the craft of sin, the generation of professors corrupt one another.

This is as a stream that arises from a clear spring or a fountain. While it runs in its own peculiar channel and keeps its water unmixed, it preserves its purity and cleanness. But when it falls in its course with other streams that are murky and foul, though running the same way with it, it becomes muddy and discolored also. So it is in this spiritual case. Believers come forth from the spring of the new birth with some purity and cleanness; this for a while they keep in the course of their private walking with God. But they sometimes fall into society with others whose profession flows and runs the same way with theirs, even towards heaven, but yet are muddied and stained with sin and the world. Now, when this happens, they often are corrupted with them and by them, and so decline from their first purity, faith, and holiness.

Now, lest this may have been the case of any who shall read this discourse, I shall add some few cautions that are necessary to preserve men from this infection.

#### *a). Hypocrites*

In the body of professors, there is a great number of hypocrites. Though we cannot say of this or that man that he is so, yet that there are some is most certain. Our Savior has told us that it will be so to the end of the world. Not all who have oil in their lamps have it in their vessels (Mat 25:3). Let men take heed how they give themselves up to conformity with those professors they meet with, lest, instead of saints and the best of men, they sometimes propose for their example hypocrites, which are the worst. If they do this, then when they think they are like to them who bear the image of God, instead they conform themselves to those who bear the image of Satan.

*b). Present temptations*

You know not what may be the present temptation of those whose ways you observe. It may be they are under some peculiar desertion from God, and so are withering for a season until He sends them some refreshing showers from above. It may be they are entangled with some special corruptions, which is their burden that you know not of. It is folly and presumption for any voluntarily to fall into such a frame as others are cast into by the power of their temptations, or to think that will suffice in them which they see to suffice in others whose distempers they know not.

He who knows such or such a person to be a living man and of a healthy constitution, if he sees him go crawling up and down about his affairs—feeble and weak, sometimes falling, sometimes standing, and making small progress in anything—will he think it sufficient for himself to do so also? Will he not inquire whether the person he sees has not lately fallen into some distemper or sickness that has weakened him and brought him into that condition? Assuredly he will so do.

Take heed, Christians. Many of the professors with whom you converse are sick and wounded. The wounds of some of them do stink and are corrupt because of their folly. If you have any spiritual health, do not think their weak and uneven walking will be accepted at your hands. Much less think it will be well for you to become sick and wounded also.

*c). Appearances*

Remember also that for many of the best Christians, the worst only is known and seen. Many who keep up precious communion with God, by their natural tempers of freedom or passion, yet often do not carry so glorious appearances as others who perhaps come short of them in grace and the power of godliness. In respect of their outward conduct it may seem they are scarcely saved, when in respect of their faith and love they may be quite advanced. They may, as the King's daughter, be all glorious within, though their clothes be not always of wrought gold. Take heed, then, that you be not infected with their worst, when you are not able, it may be, to imitate them in their best.

**4). *Secretly cherishing a lust***

To return to our main consideration, indwelling sin works to invite Satan to return by cherishing some secret particular lust in the heart. This the soul contends against faintly. It contends against it with sincerity; it cannot but do so. But it does not make thorough work to mortify the lust vigorously by the strength and power of grace. Now, where it is thus with a soul, an habitual declension as to holiness will assuredly ensue.

David shows us how, in his first days, he kept his heart close to God: "I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity" (Psa 18:23). His great care was avoiding any one lust to prevail in him or upon him, which might be called his "iniquity" in a peculiar manner. The same course steered Paul also. He was in danger to be lifted up in pride by his spiritual revelations and enjoyments. This makes him "keep

under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1Co 9:27), so that no carnal reasonings or vain imagination might take place in him.

But where indwelling sin has provoked, irritated, and given strength to a special lust, it proves assuredly a principal means of a general declension. A physical infirmity and weakness in any one vital part will make the whole body sickly. In like manner, the weakness in any one grace, which a perplexing lust brings with it, make the whole soul weak and spiritually sickly. It every way weakens spiritual strength. It weakens confidence in God in faith and prayer. Where a galling and unmortified lust lies in the heart, the knees will be feeble and the hands will hang down in dealing with God (Heb 12:12). This unmortified lust will take such hold upon the soul that it shall not be “able to look up” (Psa 40:12). Such lust darkens the mind by innumerable foolish imaginations, which it stirs up to make provision for itself. It galls the conscience with those spots and stains that, in and by its actings, it brings upon the soul. It contends in the will for rule and dominion.

An active, stirring corruption desires to have the commanding power in the soul, and it is ever and anon ready to take the throne. It disturbs the thoughts. It sometimes even will frighten the soul from dealing with it by meditation. Corrupt affections are entangled by such lust, so that grace might lose ground instead of prevailing. These corrupt desires often break out into scandalous sins—as they did in David and Hezekiah—and load the sinner with sorrow and discouragement.

By these and the like means, indwelling sin becomes to the soul like a moth in a garment, to eat up and devour the strongest threads of it; so that though the whole hang loose together, it is easily torn to pieces. Though such a soul keeps up a fair profession for a season, yet his strength is secretly devoured, and every temptation tears and rends his conscience at pleasure.

It becomes with such men as it is with some who have for many years been of a sound, strong, athletic constitution. Some secret, chronic disease seizes on them. For a season they take no notice of it; or if they do, they think they shall do well enough with it, and easily shake it off when they have a little leisure to attend to it. But for the present, as Samson with his locks cut (Jdg 16:20), they think they will do as at other times.

Sometimes, it may be, they complain that they are not well, they know not what ails them, and they may rise violently in an opposition to their distemper. But after a while struggling in vain, the vigor of their spirits and strength failing them, they are forced to yield to the power of an illness—and now all they can do is little enough to keep them alive.

It is just so with men brought into spiritual decay by any secret perplexing corruption. It may be they have had a vigorous principle of obedience and holiness. Indwelling sin, watching its opportunities by some temptation or other, has kindled and inflamed some particular lust in them. For a while, it may be, they take little notice of it. Sometimes they complain, but think they will do as in former times until, being insensibly

weakened in their spiritual strength, they have work enough to do in keeping alive what remains and is ready to die (Rev 3:2; Hos 5:13).

I shall not add anything here as to the prevention of this advantage of indwelling sin, having elsewhere treated of it peculiarly and apart.<sup>3</sup>

### **5). *Neglecting prayer***

It works by negligence of private communion with God in prayer and meditation. I have showed before how indwelling sin puts forth its deceitfulness in diverting the soul from watchfulness in and unto these duties. Here, if it prevails, it will not fail to produce an habitual declension in the whole course of obedience. All neglect of private duties is principled by a weariness of God, as He complains: “Thou hast not called upon me...thou hast been weary of me” (Isa 43:22). Neglect of prayer proceeds from weariness; and where there is weariness, there will be withdrawing from that whereof we are weary.

Now, God alone being the fountain and spring of spiritual life, if there be a weariness of Him and withdrawing from Him, it is impossible but that a decay in the life will ensue. Indeed, what men are in these duties (I mean as to faith and love in them), that they are, and no more. Here lies the root of their obedience; and if this fail, all fruit will quickly fail.

You may sometimes see a tree flourishing with leaves and fruit, goodly and pleasant. After a while the leaves begin to decay, the fruit to wither, the whole to droop. Its root should draw in moisture and fatness from the earth to supply the body and branches with sap and juice for growth and fruit. But search, and you shall find that the root has received a wound, is in some way perished, and does not perform its duty. Though the branches are flourishing a while with what they had received, they must decay because their sustenance has been intercepted.

So it is here. These duties of private communion with God are the means of receiving supplies of spiritual strength from Him—of sap and fatness from Christ, the vine and olive. While they receive such supplies, the conversation and course of obedience flourishes and is fruitful: all outward duties are cheerfully and regularly performed. Yet there may be a wound, a defect, a failing in that which should first take in the spiritual root moisture (which should be communicated to the whole). When this happens, the rest may for a season maintain their station and appearance. But after a while, profession will wither, fruits will decay, and the whole be ready to die.

Hence our Savior lets us know that what a man is in secret in these private duties, *that* he is in the eyes of God, and no more (Mat 6:6). One reason for this (among others) is because they have a more vigorous acting of unmixed grace than any other duties whatever. In all or most particular duties—besides the influence that they may

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<sup>3</sup> See *Temptation*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



have from carnal respects, which are many and the ways of their insinuation<sup>4</sup> subtle and imperceptible—there is an alloy<sup>5</sup> of gifts that sometimes even devours the pure gold of grace, which should be the chief and principal in them. In these there is direct communion between God and that which is of Himself in the soul. If once sin, by its deceits and treacheries, prevails to take off the soul from diligent attendance to communion with God and constancy in these duties, it will not fail to effect a declining in the whole of a man's obedience. It has made its entrance and will assuredly make good its progress.

### **6). Lacking application**

Growing in notions of truth without answerable practice is another thing that indwelling sin makes use of to bring the souls of believers into decay. The apostle tell us that “knowledge puffeth up” (1Co 8:1). If it be alone, not improved in practice, it swells men beyond a due proportion. Like a man who has a dropsy,<sup>6</sup> we are not to expect that he has strength in his bigness; like trees that are continually running up a head,<sup>7</sup> which keeps them from bearing fruit.

Men grow to entertain and receive evangelical truths in a new and more glorious light, or more clear discovery than formerly, or new manifestations of truth that they knew not before. Sometimes they please themselves in so doing, *without diligent endeavors* to have the power of those truths and ideas upon their hearts, and their souls made conformable to them. In this case, they generally learn to treat with the same indifference all truths formerly known, which were previously inlaid in their hearts with more effectiveness and power. This lack of diligent effort to apply truth has proved, if not the ruin, yet the great impairing of many in these days of light in which we live. By this means, from humble, close walking, many have withered into an empty, barren, talking profession. Almost all things have in a short season become alike to them, whether things have been true or false. They might be debating and disputing about them, yet all is well.

Lack of diligent application of truth is food for sin. Sin hatches and increases this indifference, and is increased by it. It is a notable way for the vanity that is in the mind to exert itself without a rebuke from conscience. While men are talking, writing, studying about religion, and hearing preaching (it may be with great delight, as those in Ezekiel 33:32), conscience—unless thoroughly awake and careful, and furnished with spiritual wisdom and care—will be very well pacified, and enter no rebukes or pleas against the way that the soul is in. Yet, all this may be nothing but the acting of the natural vanity that lies in the mind, and is a principal part of the sin we treat of.

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<sup>4</sup> **insinuation** – subtle introduction in a covert, indirect way.

<sup>5</sup> **alloy** – mixture of metals.

<sup>6</sup> **dropsy** – bodily swelling caused by unnatural collection of water in the body.

<sup>7</sup> **running up a head** – shooting up rapidly mainly at the top.

This is generally so when men content themselves, as was said, with ideas of truth without laboring after an experience of the power of them in their hearts and the bringing forth the fruit of them in their lives—on which a decay necessarily ensues.

### **7). *Growing in carnal wisdom***

Growth in carnal wisdom is another help to sin in producing this sad effect, where Satan is invited to encourage habitual declension from walking with God. “Thy wisdom and thy knowledge,” says the prophet, “it hath perverted thee” (Isa 47:10). So much as carnal wisdom increases, so much does faith decay. The proper work of carnal wisdom is to teach a man to trust in himself; but the proper work of faith is to trust wholly in Another. Therefore, carnal wisdom labors to destroy the whole work of faith, by causing the soul to return to a deceiving fullness of its own.

We have woeful examples of the prevalence of this principle of declension in the days in which we live. How many a poor, humble, broken-hearted creature, who followed after God in simplicity and integrity of spirit, have we seen, through the observation of the ways and walking of others, and closing with<sup>8</sup> the temptations to craft and subtlety which opportunities in the world have administered unto them, come to be dipped in a worldly carnal frame, and utterly to wither in their profession! Many are so stained by this that they are not known to be the men they were.

### **8). *Lacking repentance***

Some great sin lying long in the heart and conscience unrepented of—or not repented of as it ought and as the matter requires—furthers indwelling sin in this work toward a habitual spiritual declension. The great turn of the life of David, from which his first ways carried the reputation, was in harboring his great sin in his conscience without suitable repentance. It was otherwise, we know, with Peter; and he had another result. A great sin will certainly give a great turn to the life of a professor. If it is well cured in the blood of Christ, with the humiliation that the gospel requires, it often proves a means of more watchfulness, fruitfulness, humility, and contentment, than ever before the soul obtained. If it is neglected, then it certainly hardens the heart, weakens spiritual strength, and enfeebles the soul, discouraging it from all communion with God—and is a notable principle of a general decay.

So David complains, “My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness” (Psa 38:5). His present distemper was not so much from his sin as his folly, not so much from the wounds he had received as from his neglect to make a timely application for their cure. It is like a broken bone that, being well set, leaves the place stronger than before; but if otherwise, it makes the man a cripple all his days.

These things we do but briefly name. Various other advantages might also be given of the like nature, which sin uses to produce this habitual declension from spiritual things. But these may suffice for our present purpose. Whatever indwelling sin uses,

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<sup>8</sup> **closing with** – giving in to.

the habitual declension is still a principle. This is no small demonstration of its efficacy and power.

## Chapter 16

# THE POWER OF SIN SHOWN IN THE UNREGENERATE

### 1. Introduction

We are treating of the power and effectiveness of indwelling sin as it remains in several degrees in believers. Now, I have shown elsewhere that the nature and all the natural properties of indwelling sin still remain in believers. Therefore, though we cannot prove directly what is the strength of sin in believers from what its power is in unbelievers (those in whom it is only checked and not at all weakened), yet we may—from an observation in unbelievers—caution believers about the real power of the mortal enemy with whom they have to do.

When a plague violently rages in a city, it destroys multitudes. When there is an infection of the same kind in another city, it may not arise to the height and fury of the first because of the correction it meets with from a better air and remedies used. However, a man may demonstrate to the inhabitants of the second city the force and danger of that infection among them by the effects that it has and does produce among others in the first city, who have not the benefit of the preventives and preservatives that the second enjoys. This will teach the second city's residents both to value the means of their preservation and to be the more watchful against the power of the infection that is among them.

It is so in this case. Believers may be taught what is the power and effectiveness of that plague of sin that is in and among them by the effects the same plague produces in and among others, the unregenerate—who have not those corrections of its poison and those preservatives from death with which the Lord Jesus Christ has furnished believers.

Having then fixed on the demonstration of the power of sin from the effects it produces, and having given a double instance of this in believers themselves, I shall now further evidence the same truth, or pursue the same evidence of it, by showing somewhat of the power that sin acts in the unregenerate—who do not have the remedies against it that believers are furnished with.

I shall not handle the whole power of sin in unregenerate persons (which is a very large field and not the business I have in hand), but only—by some few instances of its effects in them—show believers what they have to deal with.

## 2. Offers of Violence

### a. How this works

The power of indwelling sin appears in the violence it offers to the nature of men, compelling them into sins fully contrary to all the principles of the reasonable nature with which they are endued from God. Every creature of God has in its creation a law of operation implanted in it, which is the rule of all that proceeds from it, of all that it does of its own accord. So the fire ascends upwards, bodies that are weighty and heavy descend, and the water flows—each according to the principles of their nature, which give them the law of their operation. That which hinders them in their operation is force and violence, as that which hinders a stone from descending or the fire from going upwards. That which forces them to move contrary to the law of their nature (as a stone to go upwards or the fire to descend) is in its kind the greatest violence, of which the degrees are endless. For example, that which could take a great millstone and fling it upwards into the air all would acknowledge to be a matter of wonderful force, power, and effectiveness.

Man also has his law of operation and working created together with him. This may be considered in either of two ways: first, as it is common to him with other creatures; or secondly, as peculiar, with reference to that special purpose for which he was made. Some things are, I say, in this law of nature common to man with other creatures: as to nourish their young, to live quietly with them of the same kind and race, or to seek and follow after that which is good for them in that state and condition in which they are created. These are things which all brute living creatures have in the law of their nature, as man also has.

But now, besides these things—man being created in a special manner to give glory to God by rational and moral obedience, and so to obtain a reward in the enjoyment of Him—there are many things in the law of his creation that are peculiar to him. These include loving God above all, seeking the enjoyment of Him as his chiefest good and last end, inquiring after His mind and will, yielding obedience, and the like. All of these things also are part of the law of his nature.

Now, these two things (what man has in common with all living creatures and what man has peculiarly from God) are inseparable. Man cannot perform the actions of the law of his nature that are common to him with other creatures, merely from the principles of his nature, without the law of his dependence upon God (and doing all things in obedience to Him) passing on such actions also. He can never be considered as a mere creature, but as a creature made for the glory of God by rational, moral obedience. Man's obedience is rational, because chosen by him, and performed with reason; and moral, because regulated by a law that reason attends to.

For instance, it is common to man with other creatures to take care for the nourishing of his children, the young and helpless ones who receive their being by him. There

is implanted in him, in the principles of his nature, created together with them, a love and care for them. So is it with other living creatures.

Now, other creatures answer this instinct and inclination, and are not hardened against their young (as is the foolish ostrich, into whom God has not implanted this natural wisdom; Job 39:16-17)—they fully answer the law of their creation. With man it is not so. It is not enough for him to answer the instinct and secret impulse and inclination of his nature and kind, as in the nourishing of his children. Instead, he must also do it in subjection to God, obey Him in it, and do it to His glory. The law of moral obedience has passed over all his whole being and all his operations. In these things lie, as it were, the whole of a man: namely, the things which are implanted in his nature as a creature, common to him with all other living creatures; seconded by the command or will of God, as he is a creature capable of yielding moral obedience and doing all things for God's glory.

Therefore, to drive a man to transgress this law of his nature is not only like throwing millstones upward, driving beasts from taking care of their young, or taking from cattle of the same kind the herding of themselves in quietness. It is also to cast off what lies in him, his fundamental dependence on God, as a creature made to yield Him obedience. That, then, which shall drive and compel a man to transgress this law of his nature, must necessarily be esteemed of great force and efficacy.

## **b. Examples**

Now, this is frequently done by indwelling sin in persons unregenerate. Let us take some few instances.

### ***1). Abortion and child sacrifice***

There is nothing that is more deeply inlaid in the principles of the natures of all living creatures, and so of man himself, than a love and care for the preservation and nourishing of their young. Many brute creatures will die for their young. Some feed them with their own flesh and blood. All deprive themselves of that food which nature directs them to as their best, to impart it to their young, and act in their young's behalf to the utmost of their power.

Now, such is the effectiveness, power, and force of indwelling sin in man (an infection that the nature of other creatures knows nothing of), that in many it prevails to stop this fountain, to beat back the stream of natural affections, to root up the principles of the law of nature, and to drive them to a neglect and a destruction of the fruit of their own loins. Paul tells us of the ancient Gentiles, that they were "without natural affection" (Rom 1:31). That which he aims at is the barbarous custom among the Romans, who often destroyed their own children from the womb, in order to spare themselves the trouble of their education, and to be at liberty to satisfy their lusts. To that extreme, the strength of sin prevailed to obliterate the law of nature for parental love, and to repel the force and power of it.

Examples of this are common in all nations. Among ourselves, women murder their own children through the deceitful reasoning of sin. In this, indwelling sin turns the strong current of nature, darkens all the light of God in the soul, and controls all natural principles—even while influenced with the power of the command and will of God. But this evil has, through the efficacy of sin, received a fearful aggravation: men have not only slain, but cruelly sacrificed their children to satisfy their lusts. The apostle reckons idolatry—and so, consequently, all superstition—among the works of the flesh (Gal 5:20), which is the fruit and product of indwelling sin.

Now, it is from this that men have offered that horrid and unspeakable violence to the law of nature mentioned. The psalmist tells us this in Psalm 106:37-38, and the same is again mentioned in Ezekiel 16:20-21, and in various other places. The whole manner of that abomination I have elsewhere declared.<sup>1</sup> For the present, it may suffice to mention that they took their children and burnt them to ashes in a soft fire. The wicked priests who assisted in the sacrifice afforded them this relief: they made a noise and clamor so that the vile wretches might not hear the woeful moans and cries of their poor, dying, tormented infants.

I suppose in this case we need no further evidence. Naturalists can give no rational account; they can only admire the secret force of the little fish that, they say, will stop a ship in full sail in the midst of the sea. And we must acknowledge that it is beyond our power to give an account of that secret force and unsearchable deceit which is in that inbred traitor, sin. It can not only stop the course of nature, when all the sails of it, which carry it forward, are so filled as they are in that of affections to children, but also drive it backward with such a violence and force as to cause men so to deal with their own children as a good man would not be hired, with any reward, to deal with his dog. It is to the advantage of the best to know and consider that *they carry that about them and in them, which in others has produced these effects.*

## **2). Murder and immorality**

The like may be spoken of all other sins against the prime dictates of the law of nature that mankind is or has been stained and defamed with: murder of parents and children, of wives and husbands, sodomy, incest, and the like enormities. In all these, sin prevails in men against the whole law of their being and dependence upon God.

Why should I reckon up the murders of Cain and Abel, the treason of Judas, together with their aggravations? Why should I remind of the filth and villainy of Nero, in whom sin seemed to design an instance of what it could debase the nature of man unto? In a word, all the studied, premeditated perjuries; all the designed, bloody revenges; all the filth and uncleanness; all the enmity to God and His ways that are in the world—are fruit growing from this root alone: the violence that indwelling sin offers to man's nature to overthrow the principles God instilled in it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Works*, John Owen, "A Dissertation on Divine Justice," chapter iv., vol. x.

### 3. Unbelief

Indwelling sin evidences its efficacy by keeping men off from believing under the preaching of the gospel. This evidence must be clarified a little more.

#### a. Few believe

Under the preaching of the gospel, there are but few who believe. So the preachers of the gospel complain: “Who hath believed our report?” (Isa 53:1), which the apostle interprets as the fewness of believers (Joh 12:38). Our Savior, Christ Himself, tells us that “many are called”—that is, the Word is preached to many—“but few are chosen” (Mat 22:14), and so the church complains of its number (Mic 7:1). Few there are who enter the narrow gate (Mat 7:14); daily experience confirms this woeful observation. How many villages, parishes, yea, towns, may we go to where the gospel, it may be, has been preached many years, and perhaps scarce meet in them a true believer—one who shows forth the death of Christ in his conduct! In the best places, and most notable for profession, are not such persons like the berries after the shaking of an olive tree: two or three in the top of the utmost boughs, and four or five in the highest branches?

#### b. Powerful motives to believe

There is proposed to men in the preaching of the gospel as motives for believing, everything together that separately prevails with men to do whatever else they do in their lives. Whatever anyone does (when he is thinking about what he is doing), he does it either because it is reasonable and good for him to do so, or profitable and advantageous, or pleasant, or lastly, necessary for the avoidance of evil. Whatever, I say, men do (when thinking about it), whether it be good or evil, whether it be in the works of this life or in things that lead to another, they do it from one or other of the reasons or motives mentioned.

God knows that often such motives are very weak and common, by which men are prevailed upon elsewhere. How often will men, for a very little pleasure, a very little profit, be induced to do that which shall embitter their lives and damn their souls. And by contrast, what industry will they use to avoid that which they apprehend as evil or grievous to them! Any one of these is enough to oil the wheels of men’s utmost endeavors, and set men at work to the purpose.

#### c. Wonderful good news

But now, all these things center in the proposal of the gospel and the command of believing—and every one of them is of a kind that the whole world can propose nothing like it, as follows.

1). *Most reasonable.* The gospel is the most reasonable thing that can be proposed to the understanding of a man. It tells him that he, through his own fault, has lost the way of bringing glory to God and saving his own soul (for which purposes he was made) that he was first placed in. It tells him that he should accept and embrace that other blessed, easy, safe, excellent way for the attaining of the ends mentioned. It tells



him that God—in infinite grace, love, mercy, wisdom, and righteousness—has designed this gospel and proposed it to him.

2). *Most profitable.* It is the most profitable thing to which a man can possibly be invited—if there be any profit or benefit, any advantage, in the forgiveness of sins, in the love and favor of God, in a blessed immortality, and in eternal glory!

3). *Most pleasant.* It is most pleasant also. Surely it is a pleasant thing to be brought out of darkness into light, out of a dungeon to a throne, from captivity (and slavery to Satan and cursed lusts) to the glorious liberty of the children of God, with a thousand heavenly sweetnesses not now to be mentioned.

4). *Most necessary.* It is surely necessary, and that not only from the command of God, Who has the supreme authority over us, but also indispensably so for the avoidance of eternal ruin of body and soul (Mar 16:16). It is constantly proposed under terms such as: “Believe, or you perish under the weight of the wrath of the great God, and that forevermore!”

All these considerations are preached to men and pressed on them in the name of the great God, from day to day and from one year to another. Yet, as was before observed, there are very few who set their hearts to them so as to embrace that to which they lead. Tell men ten thousand times that trusting Christ is wisdom, yea, riches; that all their profit lies in it; and that they will assuredly and eternally perish, it may be, within a few hours, if they receive not the gospel. Assure them that it is their only interest and concern. Let them know that God Himself speaks all this to them—yet it is all the same to them! They do not regard it, do not set their hearts to it. Instead they plainly say, as it were, “We will have nothing to do with these things” (*see* Luke 19:14). They will rather perish in their lusts than accept of mercy.

#### **d. Hindrances**

It is indwelling sin that both disables and hinders men from believing, and that alone. Blindness of mind, stubbornness of the will, sensuality of the affections—all concur to keep poor perishing souls at a distance from Christ. Men are made blind by sin and cannot see His excellencies. Men are made obstinate by sin and will not lay hold of His righteousness. Men are made senseless by sin and take no notice of their own eternal interests.

Now, certainly, that which can prevail with men who are wise, sober, and prudent in other things, to neglect and despise the love of God, the blood of Christ, the eternal welfare of their own souls, upon weak and worthless pretenses—must be acknowledged to have an astonishing force and efficacy accompanying it.

Whose heart, who has once heard of the ways of God, can but bleed to see poor souls eternally perishing, even under a thousand gracious invitations to accept mercy and pardon in the blood of Christ? And can we but be astonished at the power of that principle by which they run headlong to their own destruction? Yet, all this befalls such men from the power and deceit of sin that dwells in them.

## 4. Apostasy

<sup>18</sup>For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. <sup>19</sup>While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in age. <sup>20</sup>For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. <sup>21</sup>For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.—2 Peter 2:18-21

The power of indwelling sin is evident in men's total apostasies. Many are not really converted and yet are much wrought upon by the Word. The apostle tells us that they do "clean escape from them who live in error" (2Pe 2:18). They separate themselves from idolatry and false worship, owning and professing the truth. They also escape the "pollutions of the world" (2:20), even "the corruption that is in the world through lust," as he expresses it (1:4). These are those filthy, corrupt, and unclean ways that the men of the world, in the pursuit of their lusts, walk and live in. These they escape from, by the amendment of their lives and ordering of their conduct according to the convictions that they have from the Word. Peter tells us that all this is brought about "through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2:20)—that is, by the preaching of the gospel. They are so far wrought upon as to forsake all ways of false worship, to profess the truth, to reform their lives, and to walk answerable to the convictions that are upon them.

By this means, they gain the reputation of professors: they each have "a name" to live (Rev 3:1), and are made "partakers" of some or all of those privileges of the gospel that are numbered by the apostle (Heb 6:4-5).

It is not my present business to show how far or wherein a man may be effectually wrought upon by the Word and yet not be really wrought over to close with Christ, or what may be the utmost bounds and limits of a common work of grace<sup>2</sup> upon unregenerate men. It is on all hands confessed that it may be carried on so far that it is very difficult to discern between its effects and productions and those of that grace which is special and saving.

But now, notwithstanding all this, we see many of these professors daily fall off from God, utterly and wickedly. Some fall into debauchery and uncleanness, some to worldliness and covetousness. Some fall to be persecutors of the saints—but all fall to the destruction of their own souls. The apostle declares how this comes about in that place

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<sup>2</sup> **common work of grace** – God's dealings with and call to all men to repent and seek Him. This is distinguished from saving grace, where the Holy Spirit gives one a new heart through regeneration (the "new birth," John 3) and faith to repent and believe the gospel.

mentioned: they are, he says, “entangled again” (2Pe 2:20). To entice and entangle, as I have showed before from James 1:14-15, is the proper work of indwelling sin. It is that alone which entangles the soul, as the apostle speaks (2Pe 2:18, 20). They are allured from their whole profession into cursed apostasy through the lusts of the flesh.

Indwelling sin, then, prevails upon them, through its deceit and power, to an utter relinquishment of their profession and their whole engagement to God.

This proves the greatness of its strength and efficacy in several ways.

#### **a. With respect to the Word**

The strength of indwelling sin is proven great in that it gives stop or control<sup>3</sup> to that exceeding greatness of power which is put forth in their conviction and reformation through the Word. We see it by experience that men are not easily wrought upon by the Word. The most of men can live under the preaching of it all the days of their lives, and continue as senseless and stupid as the seats they sit on or the flint in the rock of stone. Mighty difficulties and prejudices must be conquered, great strokes must be given to the conscience, before conviction can be brought about. It is as the stopping of a river in its course and turning its streams another way; the hindering of a stone in its falling downwards; or the turning away of the wild ass when furiously set to pursue his way, as the prophet speaks (Jer 2:24).

To turn men from their corrupt ways, sins, and pleasures;

- to make them pray, fast, hear, and do many things willingly and gladly contrary to the principle of the flesh, which is secretly predominant in them;
- to cause them to profess Christ and the gospel, perhaps under some trials and reproaches;
- to give them light to see into various mysteries;
- to give them gifts for the discharge of various duties;
- to make dead, blind, senseless men to walk, talk, and do all the outward offices and duties of living and healthy men, with the like attending of conviction and reformation;

—these are the effects and products of mighty power and strength.

Indeed, the power that the Holy Ghost puts forth by the Word is inexpressible. This power is demonstrated in the staggering and conviction of sinners, the wakening of their consciences, the enlightening of their minds, the changing of their affections, the awing of their hearts, the reforming of their lives, and the compelling of them to duties.

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<sup>3</sup> The author does not mean to say that indwelling sin can thwart the purposes of the sovereign God. Rather, his point is that without God’s saving grace, indwelling sin works in the rebellious and dark human will to choose for darkness when exposed to God’s light.

But now, check and control is given to all these by indwelling sin. It prevails against this whole work of the Spirit by the Word, with all the advantages of providential acts of God in afflictions and mercies with which it is attended. When sin is once enraged, all these things become but like the withes and cords wherewith Samson was bound before his head was shaven. Cry but to it, “The Philistines are upon you; there is a subtle, a suitable temptation: now show your strength and power”—and all these things become like flax that has touched the fire. Conscience is stifled, reputation in the church of God despised, light supplanted, the impressions of the Word cast off, convictions digested, heaven and hell are despised. Sin makes its way through all, and utterly turns the soul from the good and right ways of God.

Sometimes indwelling sin does this subtly, by imperceptible degrees, taking off all force of former impressions from the Spirit and the Word, tarnishing conscience by degrees, hardening the heart, and making sensual the affections by various workings—so that the poor backslider in heart scarce knows what he is doing until he is come to the very bottom of all impiety, profaneness, and enmity against God. On the other hand, sometimes sin suddenly and at once—falling in conjunction with some vigorous temptation—plunges the soul into a course of alienation from God and the profession of His ways.

### **b. From hopes of heaven**

Indwelling sin takes them off from those hopes of heaven that they had attained upon their convictions, obedience, and temporary faith or believing. There is a general hope of heaven (or at least of the escaping of hell), of an untroublesome immortality, in the most foolish and stupid souls in the world who, either by tradition or instruction from the Word, are persuaded that there is another state of things to come after this life. But sin is, in unconvinced or unenlightened persons, a dull, senseless, unaffecting thing: it has no other hold upon them, nor power in them, but only to keep them free from the trouble and perplexity of contrary thoughts and apprehensions.

The matter is otherwise with them who, by the Word, are so wrought upon as we have before declared. Their hope of heaven and a blessed immortality is often accompanied with great joys and exultations, and is a relief to them under and against the worst of their fears and trials. Their hope is such as they would not part with for all the world. Upon all occasions, they retreat in their minds to it for comfort and relief.

Now, they are prevailed upon to forego all this by the power of sin. Let heaven go if it will, even a blessed immortality with the enjoyment of God Himself; sin must be served, and provision made to fulfil the lusts thereof.

In the things of this world, a man might have a hope of a large inheritance, of a kingdom, in which he is satisfied that it will not fail him. He would think that in the end he shall surely enjoy it, and lead a happy and a glorious life in the possession of it many days. However, another might go to him and tell him, “It is true, the kingdom you look for is an ample and honourable dominion, full of all good things desirable.

And, you may attain it. But come, cast away all hopes and expectations of it, and come join with me in the service and slavery of such or such an oppressing tyrant.” Now, you will easily grant the second man must have some strange bewitching power with the heir that should prevail with someone in his right mind to follow his advice.

Yet thus it is, and much more so, in the case we have in hand. Sin itself cannot deny but that the kingdom of heaven, which the soul is in hope and expectation of, is glorious and excellent, nor does it go about to convince him that his thoughts of it are vain and such as will deceive him. Instead, sin plainly prevails with him to cast away his hopes, to despise his kingdom of which he was in expectation—and that upon no other motive but that he may serve some worldly, cruel, or filthy and sensual lust. Certainly, here lies a secret efficacy whose depths cannot be fathomed!

### **c. From their own experience**

The apostle manifests the power of the entanglements of sin in and upon apostates, in that it turns them off from the way of righteousness after they have known it (2Pe 2:21). It will be found at the last day an evil and bitter thing that men live all their days in the service of sin, self, and the world, refusing to make any trial of the ways of God to which they are invited. Though they have no experience of the excellence, beauty, pleasantness, and safety of God’s ways; yet, having evidence brought to them from God Himself that His ways are so, the refusal of them will, I say, be bitterness in the latter end.

But their condition is yet far worse who, as the apostle speaks, having “known the way of righteousness,” are by the power of indwelling sin “turned from the holy commandment” (2:21). To leave God for the devil, after a man has made some trial of Him and His service;

- to leave heaven for hell, after a man has had some cheering, refreshing thoughts of it;
- to leave the fellowship of the saints for an ale-house or a brothel-house, after a man has been admitted into their communion and tasted of the pleasantness of it;
- to leave walking in pure, clear, straight paths, to wallow in mire, draughts, and filth;

—this will be for a lamentation. Yet this is what sin prevails on apostates unto. And this is against all their light, conviction, experiences, professions, engagements, or whatever may be strong upon them to keep them up to the known ways of righteousness.

### **d. In a total renunciation**

Indwelling sin proves its strength in them by prevailing with them to a total renunciation of God as revealed in Christ, and of the power of all gospel truth, in the sin against the Holy Ghost (Mat 12:31). I do not determine precisely now what is the sin

against the Holy Ghost, nor of what it consists. There are different apprehensions of it. All agree in this: that by it an end is put to all dealings between God and man in a way of grace. It is a sin unto death (1Jo 5:16). And to this does the hardness and blindness of many men's hearts bring them: they are by such hardness at length set out of the reach of mercy. They choose to have no more to do with God, and God swears that "they shall not enter into my rest" (Heb 3:11). In this way, sin brings forth death. A man by indwelling sin is brought to renounce the end for which he was made, willfully to reject the means of his coming to the enjoyment of God, to provoke Him to His face, and so to perish in his rebellion.

*Summary.* I have not mentioned these things as though I hoped by them to set out the full power of indwelling sin in unregenerate men; only by a few instances I thought to give a glimpse of it. He that would have a fuller view of it had need only to open his eyes, to take a little view of the wickedness that reigns, yea, rages all over the world. Let him consider the prevailing flood of the things mentioned by Paul to be "the works [that is, fruits] of the flesh" (Gal 5:19-21) among the sons of men—in all places, nations, cities, towns, and parishes. Then let him add to it but this one consideration: that the world—which is full of the steam, filth, and blood of these abominations as to their outward actings—is a pleasant garden, a paradise, compared to the heart of man in which they are all conceived. Hourly, millions of vile abominations, being stifled in the womb by some of the ways before asserted, are never able to come forth to light. Let a man, I say, using God's Law for his light and rule, take this course and, if he have any spiritual discerning, he may quickly attain satisfaction in this matter.

And I showed in the entrance of this discourse, how this consideration of the effects of indwelling sin upon the unregenerate fully confirms the truth proposed: indwelling sin is so powerful and dangerous, that believers *must* therefore watch and oppose it.

## Chapter 17

# THE POWER OF SIN SHOWN IN THE LAW

*I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known  
lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

—Romans 7:7

Now we will consider three last evidences of the power of sin in order to convince believers of the danger of it, so that they will be watchful against it and oppose it.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Sin's Resistance to the Law

The measure of the strength of any person or defended city may be well taken from the opposition that they are able to withstand and not be prevailed against. If we hear of a city that has endured a long siege from a powerful enemy and yet is not taken or conquered—whose walls have endured great batteries and are not demolished—though we have never seen the place, yet we conclude it strong if not impregnable. This consideration will also evidence the power and strength of indwelling sin. It is able to hold out against very strong opposition that is made to it; and not only to live, but also to secure its reign and dominion.

I shall instance only the opposition that is made to it by the Law. This opposition is often great and terrible, but always fruitless. All the Law's assaults are borne by indwelling sin, and it is not prevailed against.

There are various things in which the Law opposes itself to sin and the power of it.

#### a. Discovery of sin

The Law discovers sin. Sin in the soul is like a secret feverish distemper in the body. Its being unknown and unperceived is one great means of its prevalence. Sin in the soul is like traitors in a civil state: while they lie hidden, they vigorously carry on their design. The greatest part of men in the world know nothing of this sickness, yea, death of their souls. Though they have been taught somewhat of the doctrine of it, yet they know nothing of its power. They know it not so as to deal with it as their mortal enemy.

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is added by the editors as an aid to the reader.

This is just as a man, whatever he is told, he cannot be said to know that he has a deadly fever, if he loves his life and yet does not set himself to stop the fever's progress.

This, then, the Law does: it discovers this enemy. It convinces the soul that there is such a traitor harboring in its bosom.

I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet (Rom 7:7).

"I had not known sin"—that is, not known it fully, clearly, distinctly. Conscience will create somewhat of an uproar about it; but a man cannot know it clearly and distinctly from conscience alone. It gives a man such a sight of it as the blind man in the gospel had upon the first touch of his eyes: he saw "men as trees, walking" (Mar 18:24)—that is, he saw obscurely, with confusion.

But when the Law comes, it gives the soul a distinct sight of this indwelling sin. Again, "I had not known it"—that is, the depths of it, the root, the habitual inclination of my nature to sin, which is here called "lust," as it is in James 1:14. "I had not known it," or not known it to be sin, "but by the law." This, then, the Law does: it draws out this traitor from secret lurking places, the intimate recesses of the soul. A man, when the Law comes, is no more ignorant of his enemy, indwelling sin. If he will now perish by sin, it is openly and knowingly. He cannot but say that the Law warned him of sin, discovered it to him, yea, and raised an assembly of various affections about it in the soul—as an officer does who discovers a thief or robber, calling out for assistance to apprehend him.

### **b. Discovery of sin's danger**

The Law not only discovers sin, but discovers it to be a very bad inmate, dangerous, yea, destructive to the soul.

Was then that which is good [that is, the Law] made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that *it might appear sin*, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful (Rom 7:13).

There are many things in this verse in which we are not at present concerned. That which I aim at is only making sin evident by the Law: it "appears to be sin." And, making sin evident in its own colors, it appears to be exceedingly sinful. The Law gives the soul to know the filth and guilt of this indwelling sin: how great they are, how vile it is—what an abomination, what an enmity to God, and how hated by Him. Whatever thoughts the soul had of sin before, it shall never again look upon sin as a small matter by which it is greatly surprised.

A man who finds himself somewhat ill sends for a physician of skill. When the doctor comes, the man requires his judgment about the illness. The doctor, considering his condition, tells him: "Alas! I am sorry for you. The case is far otherwise with you than you imagine. Your disease is mortal; and it has proceeded so far, infecting the whole mass of your blood, that I doubt, unless the most effective remedies be used, you will live but a very few hours."



So it is in this case. A man may have some trouble in his mind and conscience about indwelling sin. He finds all not so well as it should be with him, more from the effects of sin and its continual eruptions than the nature of it—which effects he hopes to wrestle with. But now, when the Law comes, it lets the soul know that its disease is deadly and mortal, that the sin is exceeding sinful, as being the root and cause of all his alienation from God. In this way, also, the Law proceeds against sin.

### **c. Judging each person**

The Law judges the person. It lets the sinner plainly know what he is to expect on the account of this sin. This is the Law's proper work; its discovering property is but preparative to its judging. The Law is itself when it is in the throne. Here it minces not the matter with sinners, as we use<sup>2</sup> to do one with another, but tells him plainly: "Thou art the man' (2Sa 12:7) in whom this exceeding sinful sin dwells, and you must answer for the guilt of it." And this, I think, if anything, should rouse up a man to set himself in opposition to sin, yea, utterly to destroy it. The Law lets him know that, on the account of this sin, he is liable to the curse and wrath of the great God against him. Yea, the Law pronounces the sentence of everlasting condemnation upon him on that account. "Abide in this state and perish," is its language. It leaves not the soul without this warning in this world, and will leave it without excuse on that account in the world to come.

### **d. Disquieting the soul**

The Law so follows on its sentence that it disquiets and affrights the soul, and suffers it not to enjoy the least rest or quietness in harboring its sinful inmate. Whenever the soul has indulged to sin's commands, made provision for it, immediately the Law flies upon it with the wrath and terror of the Lord, and makes it quake and tremble. The soul shall have no rest, but is like a poor beast that has a deadly arrow sticking in its sides: it makes him restless wherever it is and whatever it does.

### **e. Slaying the soul**

The Law stays not here, but it also slays the soul: "when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom 7:9). By the Law's conviction of the nature, power, and deserving of this indwelling sin, it deprives him in whom it is of all the life of self-righteousness and hope with which he formerly sustained himself. The Law leaves him as a poor, dead, helpless, hopeless creature. And all this is in the pursuit of the opposition that the Law makes against this sin.

May we not now expect that the power of sin will be quelled and its strength broken, that it will die away before these strokes of the Law of God? But the truth is, such is sin's power and strength that it is quite otherwise. Like him whom the poets imagined to be born of the earth, when one thought to slay him by casting him on the ground,

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<sup>2</sup> use – are accustomed.

but by every fall he recovered new strength and was more vigorous than formerly,<sup>3</sup> so is it with all the falls and repulses that are given to indwelling sin by the Law. This is a result from the following.

### **1). *Sin not conquered***

Indwelling sin is not conquered by the Law. A conquest infers two things in respect of the conquered: first, loss of dominion; and secondly, loss of strength. Whenever anyone is conquered, he is despoiled of both these; he loses both his authority and his power. So the strong man armed, being prevailed against, he is bound and his goods are spoiled (Luk 11:21-22).

But neither of these befalls indwelling sin by the assaults of the Law. It loses not one bit of its dominion or strength by all the blows that are given to it. The Law cannot do this thing: it cannot deprive sin of its power and dominion (Rom 8:3), for he that is *under the Law is also under sin*—that is, whatever power the Law gets upon the conscience of a man, so that he fears to sin lest the sentence and curse of the Law should befall him, yet sin still reigns and rules in his heart. Therefore the apostle says, “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). This implies plainly that, though a person is in ever so much subjection to the authority of the Law, yet that will not exempt and acquit him from the dominion of sin.

Yea, the Law, by all its work upon the soul, instead of freeing and acquitting it from the reign of sin and bondage to it, does incidentally greatly increase the soul’s misery and bondage—as the sentence of the judge on the bench against a malefactor adds to his misery. The soul is under the dominion of sin and, it may be, abides in its woeful condition in much security, fearing neither sin nor judgment. In this condition, the Law sets upon him by all the ways before mentioned, and brings him into great trouble and perplexity, fear and terror—but delivers him not at all.

It is with the soul as it was with the Israelites when Moses had delivered his message to Pharaoh: they were so far from getting liberty by it that their bondage was increased, and they found “that they were in [a very] evil case” (Exo 5:19). Yea, and we shall see that sin does like Pharaoh. Finding its rule disturbed, sin grows more outrageously oppressive and doubles the bondage of their souls. This is not, then, the work of the Law: to destroy sin or deprive it of that dominion which it has by nature. Nor does sin, by all these strokes of the Law, lose anything of its strength. It continues both its authority and its force; it is neither destroyed nor weakened.

### **2). *Sin enraged***

Indwelling sin is so far from being conquered by the Law that it is only enraged. The whole work of the Law only provokes and enrages sin, and causes it, as it has oppor-

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<sup>3</sup> From Greek mythology: Antaeus, son of Poseidon and Gaia, who was later killed in mid-air by Hercules, who had discovered Antaeus’s secret.

tunity, to put out its strength with more power, vigor, and force than formerly. This the apostle shows at large in Romans 7:9-13.

#### **f. Ineffective against sin**

But you will say, “Do we not see it by experience that many are wrought upon by the preaching of the Law to a relinquishing of many sins and to an improvement of their lives, and to a great contending against the eruptions of those other corruptions that they cannot yet mortify? It cannot be denied but that great is the power and efficacy of the Law when preached and applied to the conscience in a due manner.” I answer as follows.

##### **1). *Not designed to subdue sin***

It is acknowledged that the power of the Law of God is very great and effective. Great are the effects that are wrought by it, and it shall surely accomplish every purpose for which it is appointed by God. But yet the subduing of sin is none of the work of the Law. It is not designed by God for that purpose. Therefore, it is no dishonor if it cannot do that which is not its proper work (Rom 8:3).

##### **2). *No effect to subdue sin***

Whatever effects the law has upon some, yet in the most we see that such is the power and prevalence of sin, that the Law makes no impression at all upon them. Can you not see everywhere men living many years in congregations where the Law is powerfully preached and applied to the consciences as to all the ends and purposes for which the Lord is pleased to make use of it—and not once be moved by it? These receive no more impression from the stroke of it than blows with a straw would give to a stone. They are neither convinced by it, nor terrified, nor awed, nor instructed; but continue deaf, ignorant, senseless, and secure—as if they had never been told of the guilt of sin or terror of the Lord. Congregations are full of such as these. They each proclaim the triumphing power of sin over the dealings of the Law.

##### **3). *Effects from the Spirit, not the Law***

When any of the effects mentioned are wrought, it is not from the power of the letter of the Law, but from the actual efficacy of the Spirit of God putting forth His virtue and power for that end and purpose. We do not deny that the Spirit of the Lord is able to restrain and quell the power of lust when He pleases. (We have formerly considered some ways by which He is pleased to do so.)

##### **4). *Effects of the Law***

Notwithstanding all that may be observed of the power of the Law upon the souls of men, yet it is most evident that lust is not conquered, nor subdued, nor mortified by it; as follows.

##### **a). *Sin repelled only for a season***

Though the course of sin may be repelled for a season by the actings of the Law, yet the spring and fountain of sin is not dried up thereby. Though sin withdraws and hides

itself for a season, it is but to shift out of a storm and then to return again, as I have shown elsewhere. This is like a traveler who meets with a violent storm of thunder and rain in his way, and immediately turns out of his way to some house or tree for his shelter. But this does not cause him to give up his journey: as soon as the storm is over, he returns to his way and progress again.

So it is with men in bondage to sin: they are in a course of pursuing their lusts. The Law meets with them in a storm of thunder and lightning from heaven, and terrifies and hinders them in their way. This turns them for a season out of their course. They will run to prayer or try to improve their lives to get some shelter from the storm of wrath that is feared coming upon their consciences. But is their course stopped? Are their principles altered? Not at all! As soon as the storm is over, so that they begin to wear out the sense and the terror that was upon them, they return to their former course in the service of sin again. This was the state with Pharaoh once and again during the ten plagues (Exo 7:1-11:1).

*b). Sin only diverted*

In such seasons, sin is not conquered but diverted. When it seems to fall under the power of the Law, indeed it is only turned into a new channel; it is not dried up. If you go and set a dam against the streams of a river, so that you suffer no water to pass in the old course and channel, it will then break out in another way and turn all its streams in a new course. When you thus dam up the old channel, you will not say you have dried up that river—though some that come and look into the old channel may think, perhaps, that the waters are utterly gone.

So is it in this case. The streams of sin, it may be, run in open sensuality and profaneness, in drunkenness and viciousness. The preaching of the Law sets a dam against these courses. Conscience is terrified, and the man dares not walk in the ways in which he has been formerly engaged. His companions in sin, not finding him in his old ways, begin to laugh at him, as one that is converted and growing more precise. Other professors begin to be persuaded that the work of God is upon his heart, because they see his old streams dried up.

But if there has been only a work of the Law upon him, there is indeed a dam put to his course; but the spring of sin is not dried up, the streams of it are only turned another way. It may be the man is fallen upon other more secret or more “spiritual” sins. Or, if he is beat from them also, the whole strength of lust and sin will take up its residence in self-righteousness, and pour out by it filthy streams just as in other ways.

Thus, notwithstanding the whole work of the Law upon the souls of men, indwelling sin will keep alive in them still. This is another evidence of its great power and strength.

## 2. Great Efforts to Subdue Sin

I shall yet touch upon some other evidences of the same truth that I have under consideration, the power of sin, in order to convince believers to be watchful against and oppose sin. But I shall be brief in them.

### a. Why men make great efforts

In the next place, then, the great but fruitless endeavors of men ignorant of the righteousness of Christ for the subduing and mortifying of sin do evidence the great strength and power of sin.

Men who have no strength against sin may yet be made sensible of the strength of sin. The way by which, for the most part, they come to that knowledge is by some previous sense they have of the guilt of sin. This men have by the light of their consciences; they cannot avoid it. This is not a thing in their choice. Whether they will or no, they cannot but know sin to be evil, and such an evil that renders them liable to the judgment of God. This galls the minds and consciences of some so far as that they are kept in awe, and dare not sin as they would. Being awed with a sense of the guilt of sin and the terror of the Lord, men begin to endeavor to abstain from sin, at least from such sins as they have been most terrified about.

While they have this design in hand, the strength and power of sin begins to discover itself to them. They begin to find that there is something in them that is not in their own power. This is because, notwithstanding their resolutions and purposes, they sin still—and that in such a manner that their consciences inform them that they must therefore perish eternally. This puts them on self-endeavors to suppress the eruption of sin, because they cannot be quiet unless they do so, nor have any rest or peace within.

Now, being ignorant of that only way by which sin is to be mortified—that is, by the Spirit of Christ—they fix on many ways in their own strength to suppress sin, if not to slay it. Being ignorant of the only way by which consciences burdened with the guilt of sin may be pacified—that is, by the blood of Christ—they endeavor, by many other ways, to accomplish that result in vain. Their efforts are in vain because no man, by any self-endeavors, can obtain peace with God.

### b. How men try to suppress the power of sin

We must look into some of the ways by which men endeavor to suppress the power of sin, which casts them into an unquiet condition and makes them aware of their insufficiency to accomplish that result.

#### 1). Vows

##### a). *How vows work*

They will promise and bind themselves by vows from those sins to which they have been most susceptible, and so have been most perplexed with. The psalmist shows this to be one great device by which false and hypocritical persons endeavor to deliver

themselves out of trouble and perplexity. They make promises to God, which He calls “flattering” Him with the mouth (Psa 78:36).

So it is in this case. Being freshly galled with the guilt of any sin in which they may have been frequently overtaken by the power of their temptations, they vow and promise that they will not commit that sin again (at least for some such space of time as they will limit). This course of proceeding is prescribed to them by some who pretend to direct their consciences in this duty. Conscience of this now makes them watch over themselves as to the outward act of the sin that they are galled with. Thus, this has one of two effects: either they abstain from it for the time they have prefixed, or they do not.

*(1). If they do not follow their vow*

They seldom abstain from their sin, especially if it is a sin that has a peculiar root in their nature and constitution, and is improved by custom into a habit. If they do not abstain from the sin, then, when any suitable temptation is presented to them, their sin is increased. And with it their terror is increased, and they are woefully discouraged in making any opposition to sin! Therefore, for the most part, after one or two vain attempts—or perhaps more, knowing no other way to mortify sin but this of vowing against it, and keeping of that vow in their own strength—they give over all contests, and become wholly the servants of sin, being bounded only by outward considerations without any serious endeavors for a recovery.

*(2). If they do follow their vow*

Or, secondly, suppose that they have success in their resolutions and do abstain from actual sins during their appointed season. Commonly, one of these two things ensues: either they think that they have well discharged their duty, and so they may now, at least for a season, indulge a little their corruptions and lusts. Thus they are entangled again in the same snares of sin as formerly! Or else, they reckon that their vow and promise has preserved them, and so sacrifice to their own devices, setting up a righteousness of their own—which is against the grace of God. This is so far from weakening indwelling sin that it strengthens it in the root and principle, so that hereafter it may reign in the soul in security. At the most, the best success that can be imagined from this way of dealing with sin is but the restraining of some outward eruptions of it, which tends nothing to the weakening of its power.

*b). The result of vows*

Therefore such persons, by all their endeavors, are very far from being freed from the inward toiling, burning, disquieting, and perplexing power of sin. And this is the state of most men that are kept in bondage under the power of conviction. Hell, death, and the wrath of God are continually presented to their consciences. This makes them labor with all their strength against the sin that most enrages their consciences and most increases their fears. That is, they labor against the actual eruption of that sin. This is because, for the most part, while they are freed from the eruptions of the sin, they think they are safe—even though in the meantime sin lies agitating and defiling in the

heart continually. As with running sores, outward repelling medicines may skin them over and hinder their corruption from coming forth, but the result is that they cause the infection to fester inwardly—and so prove, though it may be not so bothersome and offensive as they were before, yet far more dangerous.

So it is with this repelling of the power of corruption by men's vows and promises against it. External eruptions are, it may be, restrained for a season, but the inward root and principle is not weakened in the least. Most commonly, this is the result of this way: sin, having gotten more strength, and being enraged by its restraint, breaks all its bounds, and captivates the soul to all filthy abominations. This is the principle, as was observed before, of most of the visible apostasies that we have in the world (2Pe 2:19-20).

Because of the detestable, fierce, poisonous nature of this indwelling sin, the Holy Ghost compares sinners to lions, bears, and asps (Isa 11:6-9). Now, this is the excellence of gospel grace: it changes the nature and inward principles of these otherwise passionate and untamed beasts, making the wolf as the kid, the lion as the lamb, and the bear as the cow. When this is accomplished, they may safely be trusted in: "a little child shall lead them." But these self-endeavors do not at all change the nature, but only restrain their outward violence. He that takes a lion or a wolf and shuts him up from ravening, while yet his inward violence remains, may well expect that at one time or other they will break their bonds and fall to their former ways of brute force and violence. Shutting them up does not, as we see, change their natures, but only restrain their rage from doing open spoil. So it is in this case: it is grace alone that changes the heart and takes away the poison and fierceness that is in them by nature. Men's self-endeavors only limit such poisons from some outward eruptions.

The first way men attempt to suppress the power of sin, then, is through bare vows and promises, with some watchfulness to observe them in a rational use of ordinary means.

## **2). *Extraordinary attempts to mortify sin***

However, beyond vows and promises, men have put themselves on extraordinary ways of mortifying sin, and some yet do so. This is the foundation of all that has a show of wisdom and religion in the Papacy. Their hours of prayer and fastings; their shutting off and cloistering themselves in monasteries and nunneries; their pilgrimages, penances, and self-torturing discipline—spring all from this root.

I shall not speak of the innumerable evils that have attended these self-invented ways of mortification, and how all of them have been turned into means, occasions, and advantages of sinning. Nor will I speak of the horrible hypocrisy that evidently cleaves to most of their observers. Nor will I speak of the superstition that gives life to them all, being a thing riveted in the natures of some of their constitutions, or fixed on others by habitual prejudices, and the same by others taken up for secular advantages.

But I will consider the best that can be made of it, and it will be found to be a self-invented design of men who are ignorant of the righteousness of God, to attempt to give a check to this power of indwelling sin of which we speak. It is almost incredible what fearful self-wounds and horrible sufferings this design has carried men into. Undoubtedly, their blind zeal and superstition will rise in judgment, and will condemn the horrible sloth and negligence of most to whom the Lord has granted the saving light of the gospel.

But what is the end of these things? The apostle, in brief, gives us an account in Romans 9:31-32.

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone (Rom 9:31-32).

They attain not the righteousness aimed at; they come not up to a conformity to the Law. Sin is not mortified, no, nor the power of it weakened. But what sin loses in sensual, in carnal pleasures, it takes up with great advantage in blindness, darkness, superstition, self-righteousness, soul-pride, and contempt of the gospel and the righteousness of it. Sin reigns no less in them than in the most profligate sinners in the world!

### **3. Sin's Life in the Soul**

The strength, efficacy, and power of this law of sin may be further evidenced from its life and in-being in the soul—notwithstanding the wound that is given to it in the first conversion of the soul to God—and in the continual opposition that is made to it by grace. But this is the subject and design of another endeavor.

### **4. Conclusion**

It may now be expected that we should here add the special uses of all this discovery that has been made of the power, deceit, prevalence, and success of indwelling sin, this great adversary of our souls. But as for what concerns that humility, self-abasement, watchfulness, diligence, and application to the Lord Christ for relief, which will become<sup>4</sup> those who find in themselves by experience the power of this law of sin, these have been occasionally mentioned and taught through the whole preceding discourse.

Therefore, for what concerns the actual mortification of it, I shall only recommend another small treatise to the reader for his direction, which was written long ago to that purpose.<sup>5</sup> I suppose he may do well to consider it together with this, if he finds these things to be his concern.

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<sup>4</sup> **become** – be suitable for.

<sup>5</sup> *Mortification of Sin* by John Owen; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



*To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty,  
dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

—Jude 1:25



*Thus the author ends this great and important work on indwelling sin. Let all God's people take to heart their danger from it, and become more watchful to oppose it daily, in order to glorify God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

*"The more believers are aware of indwelling sin's power, the less they will feel its effects."*

*"Temptations and occasions put nothing into a man, but only draw out what was in him before."*

*"The great wisdom and security of the soul in dealing with indwelling sin is to put a violent stop to its beginnings, its first motions and actings."*

*"To let indwelling sin alone is to let it grow; not to conquer it is to be conquered by it."*

*"Where indwelling sin prevails to deceive, it fails not to bring forth its fruit."*

*"He who dies fighting in this warfare, dies assuredly a conqueror."*

*"He who pleads with God for sin's remission pleads also with his own heart for sin's detestation."*

*"Be always serious in spiritual things if ever you intend to be bettered by them."*

*"What a man is in secret in private duties, that he is in the eyes of God, and no more."*

# Questions for Study and Discussion

## Chapter

1. Why is indwelling sin termed to be a “law”?
2. What do we know about indwelling sin from its being a law?
3.
  - a. What is the significance that the heart is the seat of indwelling sin?
  - b. How does indwelling sin work in the mind, will, and emotions?
  - c. What properties does indwelling sin gain from being in the heart?
4. What is enmity? What is “enmity against God”?
5.
  - a. How does aversion to God show itself?
  - b. How must we contend against aversion to God?
6. How does indwelling sin
  - a. Work through lust?
  - b. Rebel against grace?
  - c. Assault the soul?
7.
  - a. How does indwelling sin capture the soul?
  - b. What are the effects of being so captured?
8.
  - a. Describe the nature of deceit.
  - b. How does deception work?
  - c. How is the mind “drawn away” from God?
9. Describe how prayer and meditation help in resisting sin.
10. What are we to attend to
  - a. In every duty?
  - b. In every sin?
11.
  - a. How does indwelling sin entangle the affections?
  - b. How must we resist the entangling of the affections?
12. How does sin gain the consent of the will?
13. How does God work to obstruct sin before it breaks out?
14. Describe the effects of sin when it breaks out.
15. How does indwelling sin work to create habitual sinning?
16. How does sin work in the unregenerate to show its power?
17. How does sin’s resistance to the Law show its power?
18. In this book, what does the author aim to convince believers to do?

Please also see these two complimentary titles by  
John Owen, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

***Mortification of Sin*** is the classic work by John Owen that challenges every believer to apply biblical truth to experience the mortification of sin by the Holy Spirit. To do so, the Christian must learn to recognize the activity and deception of indwelling sin. He must lean upon the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work of mortification. His whole life and comfort in Christ depends on his engaging in this work daily and continually. In two excellent chapters, Owen explains common misconceptions about mortification, and what it actually is. Mortification requires both faith and whole-hearted diligence. The believer is warned about his danger when he allows himself to entertain even small habitual sins. Then Owen challenges all believers to enter the fight at the first sign of sin, to lean upon Christ and the perfect work of the Holy Spirit. “You must be always killing sin, or it will be killing you!”

***Temptation*** is John Owen’s biblical warning to Christians for avoiding the many significant harms of temptation. It is the second of his three books dealing with sin: *Mortification of Sin*, *Temptation*, and *Indwelling Sin*. In *Temptation*, Owen presents one of the most thorough treatments of our part in sanctification (“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation,” Mat 26:41) and Christ’s part (“I will keep thee from the hour of temptation,” Rev 3:10). Owen shows successively what temptation is, what it is to “enter into temptation,” the power of temptation, marks of having fallen into temptation, the role of prayer, how we must “watch,” what it is to “keep the word of Christ’s patience,” and motives for watching against temptation.