

JOHN OWEN
THE NATURE, POWER, DECEIT, AND
PREVALENCE
OF THE
**REMAINDERS OF INDWELLING
SIN IN BELIEVERS**

1667

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” —Rom 7:24, 25

With an Introductory Essay
by Dr. Thomas Chalmers
from the 1825 Glasgow edition of this work

from
THE WORKS OF JOHN OWEN
EDITED BY
WILLIAM H. GOOLD

VOLUME 6

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Editor's Note

While this is a restatement and simplification of Owen's original work; it is *not* a paraphrase or a condensed version. The old English wording has been updated, so that "thee" and "thou" are now "you" and "yours." Owen's wordiness is made economical. The difficult structure and syntax are simplified. Obscure passages have been reworded as necessary to clarify his ideas – which other modernizations have perhaps left undone. Rarely-used words have been replaced with simpler ones as well. Sentences have been shortened, and in many cases split into several sentences for clarity. Parallelism has been employed to maintain rhythm and clarity. Unreferenced pronouns and "understood" words are made explicit. The passive voice has been changed to active in most cases. Again, this is not a synopsis, but the entire treatise presented in the original work. As a result, the expository style remains.

The old King James passages of Scripture are often been employed but modernized. This was to ensure that Owen's rendering of the biblical text would be largely maintained, as well as the scriptural basis for his statements. Where Owen cites the Greek, it has been footnoted and Anglicized, along with bracketed Strong's numbers [NT:xxxx]. Many referenced but unquoted verses are fully quoted in footnotes for your convenience; many remaining verses that had no reference are now referenced in the body of the text using ^{superscripts}.

Note: A number of Scripture references were added by editor William Goold in 1853; Owen simply quoted the bible verses. Goold also moved some verses from the body of the text into footnotes. Those verses have been restored to the body as constituting part of Owen's arguments, proved by Scripture. I felt this was necessary because of today's widespread unfamiliarity with the content of the bible. It also relieves the reader from constantly checking the footnotes.

My purpose is to preserve Owen's original text as much as possible, but more importantly, to make his teaching and wisdom more accessible to a modern audience. It would be a shame if that modern audience did not benefit from his labors because the language was too complex or arcane to comprehend. This book is an exceptional help in understanding the incessant conflict in our hearts and minds between the law of sin (which has an accomplice in our flesh), and the law of grace (which operates through the Spirit). These two laws are ever at work in the believer, operating against each other. That makes it necessary to fight the good fight *of faith* day by day.

And so I hope the restatement of this helpful work reveals the depth and seriousness of the war that began at our conversion between the flesh and the Spirit. In taking this to heart, may the outcome be a life of increasing godliness in those who have taken up their cross to follow after Christ. He is always at work in his people, so we are always to be at work in him, to God's glory.

Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; (Rom 1:5-6 ^{NKJ})

William H. Gross
www.onthewing.org

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PREFATORY NOTE.

While the Government was enforcing stringent measures against Nonconformity, dissenting ministers, if they ventured to preach the gospel of salvation, became liable to the penalties of the Conventicle or Five-mile Act. When Owen himself, on a visit to some old friends at Oxford, narrowly escaped arrest and imprisonment, he did not abandon himself to inactivity. Rather, he employed the leisure of the concealment into which the rigour of the times had driven him, in the preparation of some of his most valuable works. In one year (1668), the two treatises which conclude this volume were published,¹ together with the first volume of his colossal and elaborate work, the “Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews.”

His treatise on Indwelling Sin has always ranked high among the productions of our author. The opinion which Dr Chalmers entertained of it will be seen in the “Life of Owen,” vol. 1, p. 84. That such a work should have been prepared under the gloom of public trials, and the hardship of personal exposure to civil penalties, evinces not merely great industry, but a strength of religious principle with which no outward commotions were permitted to intermeddle. Temptations were strong at that time to merge all duty into a secular struggle for the rights of conscience and liberty of worship. Owen issued various tracts which had some share in securing these blessings for his country. But he was intent, with engrossing zeal, on the advancement of vital piety; and his treatise on Indwelling Sin is a specimen of the discourses which he preached whenever a safe opportunity occurred. It is avowedly designed for believers, to aid and guide them in the exercise of self-examination. There is uncommon subtlety of moral analysis in many of its statements — an exposure (irksome it may be thought, in its fullness and variety) of the manifold deceitfulness of the human heart. A question may even be raised, if it is altogether a healthy process for the mind to be conducted through this laborious and acute unveiling of the hidden mysteries of sin; and if it may not tend to exclude from view the objective truths of the Word. But the process is in itself supremely necessary — essential to the life of faith and the growth of holiness; and we can be safer with no guide than with Owen.

The reader is never allowed to lose sight of the fact, amid the most searching investigation into human motives, that our acceptance with God cannot depend on the results of any scrutiny into our internal condition; and that the guilt of all lurking corruption which we may detect, is remitted only by the blood of the cross.

The basis of the treatise is taken from Rom 7:21.² After a brief explanation of the passage, he considers indwelling sin under the light and character of “a law” — the seat and subject of this law is the heart — its general nature is enmity against God — its actings and operations are first, in withdrawing the mind from what is good; secondly, in exciting positive opposition to God; thirdly, ensnaring the soul into captivity; and lastly, filling it with insensate hatred for the principles and claims of holiness. The power of indwelling sin is next illustrated from its deceitfulness, chap. 8: a lengthened exposition follows, of three stages along which indwelling sin may beguile us; first, when the mind is withdrawn from a course of obedience and holiness; secondly, when the affections are enticed and ensnared: and, lastly, when actual sin is conceived and committed. With chap. 14 a new demonstration begins of the power of indwelling sin, as exhibited first, in the lives of Christians; and secondly, in unregenerate persons; in the last

¹ That is, this particular treatise, and *A Practical Exposition Upon Psalm 130*.

² **Rom 7:21** I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

chapter, evidence to the same effect is adduced from the resistance which sin offers to the authority of the moral law, and from the fruitless and unavailing endeavors of men in their own strength to subdue and mortify it. As to the way in which it is really to be mortified, the author refers to his treatise on the “Mortification of Sin.” — ED.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

by **Dr. Thomas Chalmers**

*from the 1825 Glasgow edition of this work
Modernized and annotated*

WE hold it of prime importance, in the business of practical Christianity, that we understand well the kind of work which is put into our hands, both that we may go rightly about it, and also that we may have the comfort of judging whether it is actually making progress under our exertions. A mistake on this point may lead us perhaps to waste our efforts on that which is impracticable. And when these efforts of course turn out to be fruitless, it may lead us to abandon our spirits to utter despondency. And thus, to use the language of the Apostle Paul, running uncertainly, and fighting as one that beats the air, we may spend our days strangers alike to peace and to progressive holiness.

Now we regard the doctrine which forms the main topic of the following admirable treatise of DR. OWEN, "ON INDWELLING SIN IN BELIEVERS," as one of those subjects. A right understanding of it has no small degree of influence on the believer's peace and progress in the divine life. And it is most important to attend to the Apostle's reasoning in his exposition on this subject, in which he not only illustrates the general truth of the matter, but states his own experiential finding. And we regard certain of the terms which he employs in his exposition, as big with significance. "Do not let sin," says the Apostle, "reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts." Rom 6.12 Now we cannot fail to perceive how widely diverse the injunction of the Apostle would have been if instead of saying, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies," he had said, "Let sin be rooted out of your mortal bodies;" or if instead of saying, "Do not obey its lusts," he had bid us to *eradicate* them. It would surely have been a far more enviable state to have no inclination to evil at all, than to be oppressed with constantly putting forth such an inclination, and to barely keep it in check under the power of some opposing principle. If we could attain the higher state on this side of time, we would become on earth, what angels are in heaven, whose every desire runs in the pure current of love and loyalty to a God of holiness. But if we are doomed to the lower state during all the days of our abode in the world, then are we given to understand that the life of a Christian is a life of vigilant and unremitting warfare which consists in the struggle of two adverse elements, and the habitual prevalence of one of them. In us and closely around us, there is a besetting enemy who will not quit his hold of us, till death paralyzes his grasp, and so he lets us go. And we shall not be conclusively delivered from this sore conflict of the Spirit lusting against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit, till our present tainted materialism is utterly taken down. The emancipated soul will not have free and unconfined scope for its heavenly affections, until it has burst its way from the prison-hold of its earthly tabernacle.

Now, this view of the matter gives us a different conception of our appointed task from what may often be imagined. Sin, it would appear, is not to be exterminated from our mortal bodies; it is only to be kept at bay. It is not to be destroyed in respect to its presence, but it is to be repressed in its prevalence and power. It will ever dwell, it would appear, in our present framework; but though it dwells, it may not have dominion. If we try, then, to

banish it, and are defeated in this effort, we may in heartless despair give up the cause of our sanctification, and thus throw away at once both our peace and our holiness. But do let us try to *dethrone* it, even though we cannot cast it out. And succeeding in this effort, while we mourn its hateful company, we may keep it under the control of strictest guardianship. And we may also calmly look onward to the hour of death as the hour of release from a burden that will at least adhere to us all our days, but may not overwhelm us.

We see then the difference between a saint in heaven, and a saint on earth. The former in heaven may abandon himself to such feelings and such movements as come at his pleasure — for he has no other pleasure than to do the will of God, and to rejoice in the contemplation of his unspotted glory. The latter on earth cannot with safety so abandon himself. It is true that there is an ingredient of his nature, now under an advancing process of regeneration, which is altogether on the side of *godliness*. And if this ingredient were left unresisted by any opposing influence, he might be spared all the agonies of dissolution, and set himself down at once among the choirs and the companies of paradise. But there is another ingredient of his nature, still under an unfinished process of regeneration, which is altogether on the side of *ungodliness*. And if this were left without the control of his new and better principle, sin would catch the defenceless moment, and regain the ascendance from which she had been dispossessed.¹ Now it is Death which comes in as the deliverer. It is death which removes the incumbrance. It is death which overthrows and grinds to powder that corrupt fabric on the walls of which were inscribed the foul marks of leprosy, and the inmost materials of which were pervaded with an infection that, it seems, only the sepulchral process of a resolution into dust, and a resurrection into another and glorified body, can clear completely and conclusively away. It is death that conducts us from the state of a saint on earth, to the state of a saint in heaven. But not till we are so conducted, are we safe to abandon ourselves for a single instant to the spontaneity of our own inclinations.

If such is our actual condition on earth, and we then go to sleep, or play among its besetting dangers, then we are liable to utterly mistake our real circumstances in the world; we will not judge correctly what we have to do, and the attitude we ought to stand in. We will lay ourselves open to the assaults of a near and lurking enemy. And we will be exposed to the most humiliating overthrows and oppressive visitations of remorse and wretchedness. Never think of the post that we occupy as anything other than the post of armour and watchfulness. Do not falsely imagine that there is only one spiritual ingredient in our nature, which is altogether on the side of holiness — instead of two ingredients, of which the other is still alive and on the side of sin. Never let down the guardianship, the jealousy, the lowliness of mind, and the prayers for help from on high, which such a state of things so urgently and so imperiously demands.

We think it of very capital importance for us to know that the body with which we are burdened, and must carry about with us, is a vile body; that the nature which we received at first, and from which we shall not be delivered on this side of the grave, is a corrupt nature; that all which is in us, and about us, and that is apart from the new spirit infused through the belief of the Gospel, is in a state of aversion to the will of God; that what may be denoted by the single word *carnality*, is of perpetual residence with us while on earth; and that our

¹ Dispost: to eject from a post; to displace.

distinct concern is, while it resides with us, that it shall not reign over us. It is ever present with its suggestions; and this we cannot help. But it should not prevail with its suggestions; and *this* we may help by the aids and expedients provided for the regeneration of a polluted world. We shall feel with our latest breath, the motions of the flesh. And these motions, if not sins, are at least sinful tendencies which, if yielded to, would terminate in sins.

Now, our business is not to extirpate these tendencies, but to make our stand against them. It is not to root out those elements of moral evil which the body of a good man has before death, and doesn't have after its resurrection. Our business is to stifle, and to keep them down by that force with which the new creature in Jesus Christ is armed for the great battle, on the outcome of which hangs his eternity. We cannot obtain such a victory that we will never feel the motions of the flesh; but we may obtain such a victory that we will not walk after the flesh. The enemy is not so killed that we are delivered from his *presence*; but by an unremitting strenuousness on our part, we may keep him so chained that we will be delivered from his *power*. Such is the contest, and such is the result of the contest, if it is a successful one. But we ought to be told that it is a vain hope, while we live in the world, to look for the extermination of the sinful principle. It ever stirs and actuates within us; and there is not one hour of the day in which it does not give signs that it is still alive. Even though it is cast down from its ascendancy, it is not destroyed in its existence. Forewarned is forearmed. And it is right to be informed that near us, and within us, there is at all times an insidious foe against whom we cannot guard too vigilantly, and against whom we cannot pray too fervently and too unremittingly.

The time is coming when, without the felt counteraction of any adverse and opposing tendency, we will expatiate¹ in freedom over the realms of ethereal purity and love. The time is also coming when the chrysalis will burst with unfettered wing from the prison in which it is now held, and where, we do not doubt, it is aspiring and growing into a fitness for traversing at large the field of light and air that is above it. The Christian on earth so aspires and so grows. But Christian though he is, the heaviness of a gross and tainted materialism is upon him, which must be broken down before his spiritual tendencies can expand into their full and final development. Meanwhile, there is the compression upon him of downward, and earthward, and carnal tendencies, which will never be removed till he dies; but which he must resist so that they will not reign over him. There are lusts which he cannot eradicate, but which he must not obey. And while he deplores in humility and shame, the conscious symptoms within him of a nature that is thus degraded, it is his business — by the energies and resources of the new nature — to so starve, weaken, and mortify the old, that it may linger into decay while he lives; ^{Rom 8.13} and when he dies, it may receive the stroke of its full annihilation.

This representation of a believer's state on earth is in accordance with Scripture. We find the apostle stating that the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and this is in such a way, too, that the man cannot do what he would do. He would serve God more perfectly. He would render him an offering untinged by the frailty of his fallen nature. He would rise to the seraphic love of the upper paradise, and gladly be able to consecrate to the Eternal, the homage of a heart so pure that no earthly feculence will be felt adhering to it.

¹ Expatiate: to discourse about something in great detail, clarifying its meaning or effects.

But all this he *cannot* do — and why not? Because of a drag that keeps him, with all his soaring aspirations, among the dust of a perishable world. There is a counterpoise of secularity within him that at least damps and represses the sacredness; and it is well that it does not predominate over it. This secularity belongs to the old nature. It is so very corrupt that Paul says of it — “In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells no good thing.” Rom 7.18

There is a law, then, which wars against the law of our mind, even while that mind is delighting inwardly in the law of God.^{Rom 7.22-23} The conflict is so exceedingly severe, that even those who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while waiting for the redemption of the body,^{Rom 8.23} and for a translation into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Burdened with the mass of a rebellious nature, the apostle exclaims, “O wretched man that I am! who will deliver me from the body of this death?”^{Rom 7.24} Even grace, it would appear, does not deliver from the residence of sin; for Paul complains most emphatically about his vile body. We have no doubt that he would have so stigmatized it to the last half hour of his existence in the world. But grace still does *something*. It delivers us from the *reign* of sin, so that we do not obey its motions, even though vexed and annoyed with the feeling of them. And accordingly, from the exclamation, “O wretched man!” he passes in a moment to the grateful exclamation of, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord,”^{Rom 7.25} in whom we walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.^{Rom 8.1}

From such a representation as given by the apostle about Indwelling Sin, we may deduce some distinct practical lessons, which may be of use to the believer.

FIRST, we think it is conducive to the peace of a believer, that he is made aware of what he has to expect about the presence of corruption during his stay in this the land of immature virtue, and where the holiness of the new-born creature has to struggle its way through all those adverse elements, which nothing but death will utterly remove from him. This must serve to allay the disturbance of his spirit when pierced and humbled under the consciousness of an evil desire and wicked principle still lurking within him, announcing themselves to still be alive by the instigations which they are ever prompting, and the thoughts which they are ever suggesting to the inner man. It is his business to resist the instigations, and to turn away from the thoughts. Thus the old nature may be kept in practical check, even though its being is not exterminated. Yet the very occurrence of a sinful desire or an impure feeling, harasses a delicate conscience. For no such occurrence happens to an angel, or to the spirit of a just man made perfect in heaven. On earth, he may be led to suspect his interest in the promises of Christ, when he is made to perceive that there is still so much in him of what is uncongenial to godliness. It may therefore quiet him to be told that he is neither an angel nor a glorified saint; and that there is a distinction between the saint who is struggling at his appointed warfare below, and the saint who is resting and rejoicing in the full triumph of his victory above. The distinction announces itself just by the very intimations which so perplex and grieve him — just by the felt nearness of that corrupt propensity which is the plague of his heart. It is his bound duty to keep his guard against this, and with his new-born sensibilities on the side of holiness, he will detest and mourn over it. But he is not to be overwhelmed in despair on account of it, as if some strange thing had happened to him, or as if any temptation had come his way, which was not common to all his brethren who are in the world.

SECONDLY, this view of the matter not only serves to uphold the peace of a believer, but it is also conducive to his progress in holiness. For it leads to a most wholesome distrust of himself under the consciousness that there is still a part about him that is most alive to sin. If this part is not watched, and guarded, and kept under severe and painful restraint, it will be wholly given over to it. Here there is a striking accord between the theoretical view which the Bible gives of our nature, and the practical habit it labours to impress upon all who partake of it. An angel, perhaps, does not need to be warned against exposing himself to temptation; for there may be no ingredient in his constitution that can be at all affected by it. But it is not so with man, compounded as he is, and as his constitution is made up here of two great departments: one which is continually prone to evil; and the other in which lie all those principles and powers whose office it is to extinguish this proneness — if not utterly, at least to repress its outbreaks. In these circumstances, it is positively *not* for man to thrust himself into a scene of temptation. And when the alternative is at his own will — whether he will shun the encounter, or risk it — his business is to shun it. The whole of Scripture is on the side of cautiousness, rather than of confidence in this matter. We may be assured that it is our part, *in every case*, to expose nothing, and to risk nothing, unless there is a call of duty which is tantamount to a call of providence. When we have brought on the trial ourselves, we have no warrant to hope for a successful outcome. God will grant help and support against the onsets which temptation makes upon us, but he does not engage himself to stand by us in the presumptuous onsets which we make upon temptation. We better consult the mediocrity of our powers, and better suit our habits to the real condition of our ruined and adulterated nature, when we keep our determined distance from every allurements, as far as it lies in us — when we restrain with all our might our tendencies to evil within, from coming into contact with the excitements to evil that are without — when we make a covenant with our eyes to turn them away from the sight of vanity. Whether the provocation is to anger, or evil speaking, or intemperance, or any wayward and vicious indulgence whatsoever, let us be assured that we cannot be too prompt in our alarms, or too early in our measures, whether of prevention or resistance. In every instance where we have it in our power, and no dereliction of duty is implied by it, it is our wise and salutary part, not to most resolutely *face* the provocative, but to most resolutely *flee* from it.

THIRDLY, this view of the matter not only leads us to withdraw the vicious and wrong part of our constitution from every encounter with temptation that can possibly be shunned — it also leads us to such measures as may recruit and strengthen the gracious or good part of our constitution for every such encounter that *cannot* be shunned. For, in spite of all our prudence, we will have many such encounters in the world. Temptation will come to our door, even though we never move a single unguarded footstep towards temptation. And then we should ask, “What is the armour of resistance? What is the best method to uphold the predominance of the good principle over the evil one?” We would say in answer: a fresh commitment of ourselves in faith and in prayer to Him who first put the good principle into our hearts — another act of resorting to the fulness that is in Christ Jesus — a new application for strength from the Lord our sanctifier, to meet this new occasion for strength which he himself has permitted to come into our way, and to cross the path of our history in the world. The humility which leads us to flee whenever we can, and to pray when flight is impossible — *this* is the very habit of the soul which removes it from the first set of

temptations, and will most effectually strengthen it against the second. God refuses grace to the proud man who depends on his own capabilities. God gives grace in abundant measure for all his necessities, to the humble man who in himself has no other feeling than that of utter emptiness. And thus it is, that by proceeding as he should, on the consideration that there is a part of his nature belonging properly and originally to himself, which he must keep at an assiduous distance from every excitement to evil; and then proceeding as he should on the consideration that there is a part of his nature derived by grace from heaven, and nourished by constant supplies from that same quarter — thus it is, we say, that his knowledge of his own constitution, as we have endeavoured to unfold it, has a direct tendency both to deepen the humility of the believer, and to exalt and perfect his holiness.

It is this state of composition in everyone who has been born of the Spirit, between the old man and the new creature,¹ which explains the mystery of a Christian being more *humble*, as he becomes more *holy* — of his growing, at one and the same time, in dissatisfaction with himself, and in those deeds of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ — of his being both more feelingly alive to the corruption that is in him from one part of his nature, and more fruitfully abundant in all those virtues which have their soil and nutriment from the other part of his nature. This holds out the palpable exhibition of one who is evidently rising in positive excellence, and yet just as evidently sinking into a profounder self-abasement than before — as if it required a much deeper foundation to uphold the ascending superstructure. The truth is that, wherever there is any real growth of morality, there must be a growth of moral *sensibility* along with it. And in proportion to this sensibility, there will be the annoyance that is felt, and the touching grief and humility with which the heart is visited on every fresh evolution of that depraved nature, which is only subordinated, but not yet extinguished and done away. Hence the lack of sympathy, and the lack of understanding, between the children of this world and the children of light — and the misinterpretation that is sometimes given to the pains, perplexities, and mental disquietudes which the latter experience — and the puzzling appearance of inconsistency which is held out by the emotions and exercises of a real Christian. He is *troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in his body* ^{2Cor 4.8-10} — dying to earthly honours and earthly gratifications, while the life of Jesus is becoming manifest in his mortal flesh.

And it is for the purpose of administering comfort, and inculcating watchfulness, and conducing to the believer's growth in holiness, that we would introduce to the notice of our readers the following admirable and instructive treatise of Dr. Owen, “ON THE NATURE, POWER, DECEIT, AND PREVALENCE OF INDWELLING SIN IN BELIEVERS.” The writings of this venerable and much-admired Author form a rich spiritual treasury, suited to the varied needs and conditions of almost every class of men. But perhaps there is no treatise of this learned and pious Author that is more fitted to be useful to the Christian disciple, than the one we have now ventured to recommend. And we regard it all the more valuable, because the main topic on which he expatiates is, we fear, not rightly understood by many — or at least it is not sufficiently heeded — even though it is one of no little import to the Christian.

¹ Rom 6.6; Eph 4.20-24; Col 3.9-10.

Thinking as we do, that it possesses a most intimate and decided bearing on the peace and sanctification of the believer, we count it most important to be instructed in the nature and prevalence of Indwelling Sin, and in the means for keeping its operations in check. This instruction is by one who had reached such lofty attainments in holiness, and whose profound and experiential acquaintance with the spiritual life so well fitted him for expounding its nature and operations. He is skilful in detecting and exposing the lurking places of Indwelling Sin, and in revealing those avenues by which it makes its inroads on the heart; and at which the believer should post himself in most vigilant guardianship. Dr. Owen unceasingly reminds the believer of the urgencies of business, and the companies of this world, which form the ensnaring and besetting enemies of the Christian from without. These are aided by treacherous enemies within — the darkness and vanity of the mind; the proneness of the heart to take up with the perishable interests of time; and the natural deadness of the affections toward spiritual things — which betray him into the power of those other insidious enemies. Amidst all these, it is his only wisdom and safety to keep his spirit unremittingly in a jealous and wakeful posture of defence.

Against enemies which work by treachery and deceit, incessant watchfulness is our only security. And we don't know a more valuable portion of this excellent treatise than that in which its spiritually-minded Author guards the believer against carelessness and sloth. These relax his watchfulness, and insensibly betray him into an indifference to spiritual things, and a remissness in those exercises which are necessary to sustain the renewed spirit against the earthly and downward tendencies of his nature. By carelessness in the cultivation of prayer and private meditation, and of all those expedients which divine wisdom has provided for the nourishment of the spiritual life, the believer is at risk of a declension in religion, of losing a relish for divine things, of neglecting to cultivate close communion with God, and of provoking his heavenly Father to withdraw the light of his reconciled countenance. Amidst this desertion of light and comfort, he is in danger of God, in whom he delighted, becoming a wilderness to him. This desertion, by desolating his own heart, and divesting himself of the spiritual exercises of the comfort and delight he used to experience in them, will inevitably render God a weariness to him. He will become indisposed to all those Christian exercises which are necessary to nourish and sustain the life of godliness in his soul. *The Christian cannot be stationary.* He must either be in an advancing career¹ of holiness, or in a retrograde process of backsliding. To those who have either slackened their progress, or are falling from their steadfastness, this treatise may prove a faithful monitor to apprise them of their danger. It forcibly reminds them that they are in the enemies' country; that the Christian life is a state of incessant warfare; that they must manfully and unremittingly fight their way to the heavenly rest, ever girded for the conflict. They must press onwards to the triumphs of their final victory with the most assiduous diligence, strengthening the things that remain, and being ready to die — never resting satisfied with present attainments, ever keeping in remembrance that only the one who endures to the end will be saved.^{Mat 10.22} "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."^{Rev 2.10}

¹ Career: to rush headlong, at full speed.

But while this Treatise is well-fitted to administer both comfort and admonition to the believer, it is no less fitted to awaken the ungodly to a sense of their fearful condition, those in whom sin holds its prevailing and undisturbed ascendance. “When the strong man, armed, keeps his palace, all is in peace.” ^{Luk 11.21} So too, while sin holds its possession undisturbed, the ungodly are in peace, even though they are enemies to God in their hearts, and live in utter forgetfulness of Him. It is a certain indication of spiritual death, when there are no strugglings of the renewed heart with the sin that reigns in their mortal bodies. It is a sure symptom that there is no principle of grace in the soul, when they do not feel the warring of the Spirit against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit. Such a deadly repose of the inner man ought to force across their minds the troubling conviction that they have not yet passed from death unto life. This is a transition which must be made before they can see the kingdom of God.

Those who have made this transition, and have the principles of a new life implanted in their souls, will feel the force and significance of the Apostle's declaration when he speaks of “crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts;” ^{Gal 5.24} and of the severe conflict which they have to maintain with “principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness;” ^{Eph 6.12} and the risk they are exposed to from the “adversary, who goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;” ^{1Pet 5.8} and above all, the danger to be apprehended from the most treacherous and deceitful of all their enemies: an evil heart of unbelief, which is constantly leading them to depart from the living God.

But those who experience no pain from the crucifixion of the flesh, nor any harassing warfare with their spiritual enemies, nor any sense of alarm from the wiles of the adversary, nor any fear of being betrayed by their own deceitful hearts — I say, if they feel none of these plagues and annoyances which the believer (who has acquired a new nature) experiences in the divine life — then they have the most satisfactory demonstrations that no principle of grace has been infused into their souls; that the god of this world holds his exclusive and undisturbed empire over their hearts; and that they still remain among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But we must restrain ourselves on these fertile topics, leaving it to our readers to gather from this instructive Treatise the many salutary lessons and admonitions which it is fitted to communicate. We will conclude our remarks with the practical exhortation of the Apostle. *Let sin reside as it may, it must not be permitted to reign.* Sin may be put up with as a most offensive and unpleasant inmate in the house; but let him be curbed and guarded, and not one item of authority be conceded to him. It is enough that one has to bear his hateful presence, but his tyranny is not to be tolerated. Against this there is ever to be upheld a manful and strenuous, and persevering resistance. He may distress us, but he is not to influence us. There will be a constant prompting on his part to that which is evil — but the evil thing is not to be done, and the desire which incites us to that thing is not to be obeyed. This is the strong and visible line of demarcation between the *wilful sinner* and the *aspiring saint*. Both of them have vile bodies charged with the elements of corruption, and impregnated with a moral virus, the working of which is towards sin and ungodliness. Both have one and the same constitutional tendency. But while the one *follows* that tendency, the other *resists* it. As the fruit of that resistance, though not freed from its detested presence,

the saint is at least emancipated from its domineering power. It lives in the house, but it is not the master of the house. It is so starved and buffeted there, and subjected to such perpetual thwarting and mortification of every sort, that it gradually languishes. It becomes weaker, and at length, as with the life of the natural body, it utterly expires. The soul which acquiesced in its dominion has been sowing all along to the flesh, and from the flesh it shall reap corruption. The soul that struggled against its dominion, and refused compliance with it, has mortified the deeds of the body through the Spirit, and it shall live. All along it has been sowing to the Spirit, and from the Spirit it shall reap life everlasting.

T. C.

St. Andrews, July. 1825.

PREFACE.

It has been always owned in the church of God that the doctrine of original sin is one of the fundamental truths of our Christian profession; and it is an especial part of that particular possession of truth which those enjoy, whose religion towards God is built upon and resolved into divine revelation. Just as the world never knew God correctly by its wisdom, so its wise men were always utterly ignorant of this inbred evil in themselves and others. With us, the doctrine and conviction of this truth lie in the very foundation of all those things in which we have to deal with God, whether in reference to our pleasing him here, or obtaining the enjoyment of him hereafter. It is also known what influence this truth has upon the great truths concerning the person of Christ, his mediation, the fruits and effects of it, along with all the benefits that we are made partakers of by it. Without a supposition of original sin, none of them can be truly known or savingly believed.

For this reason, it has been largely addressed by many holy and learned men, both of old and of latter days. Some have labored in the discovery of its nature, others in the discovery of its guilt and demerit — by whom also, the truth concerning it has been vindicated from the opposition made to it in past and present ages. These things have been considered by most in their full extent and latitude: with respect to all men by nature, and with the estate and condition of those who are wholly under the power and guilt of it. It has also been fully evinced ¹ by many, how men are thereby disabled and incapacitated in themselves to answer the obedience required either in the law or the gospel, so as to free themselves from the curse of the one, or to make themselves partakers of the blessing of the other. Moreover, it has been fully taught and confirmed that there are remainders of original sin abiding in believers *after* their regeneration and conversion to God — as the Scripture abundantly testifies; also how the guilt of it is pardoned for them, and by what means its power is weakened in them. All these things, I say, have been largely addressed, to the great benefit and edification of the church.

In what we now design, we therefore take all this for granted; and we endeavor only to further carry on the discovery of its actings and oppositions to the law and grace of God in believers. Nor do I intend discussing anything that has been controverted ² about it. What the Scripture plainly reveals and teaches concerning it — what believers find evidently by their own experience, and what they may learn from the examples and acknowledgments of others — will be represented in a way suited to the capacity of the lowliest and weakest believer who is concerned about it. Many things seem to render handling it not unnecessary in these times. Its effects and fruits, which we see in the apostasies and backslidings of many, the scandalous sins and miscarriages of some, and the course and lives of most, seem to call for its due consideration. Besides, it will appear in our progress, how great concern it is to believers to have a full and clear acquaintance with the power of this indwelling sin (the matter designed to be opened), 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, were the ends aimed at in the ensuing discourse, which was at first composed and delivered

¹ Evince: to show or demonstrate clearly; to manifest, make known, or give expression to.

² That is, nothing that should be controversial or disputable.

for the use and benefit of a few; but it is now made public by the providence of God. And if the reader receives any advantage by these weak endeavors, let him know that it is his duty to give glory to God; and by his prayers, to help those — in their many temptations and afflictions — who are willing to labor in the vineyard of the Lord, a work to which they are called.

CHAPTER 1.

The Nature of indwelling sin in believers, as treated by the apostle in Rom 7:21; Illustrated.

We intend to address indwelling sin and its remainders in believers after their conversion to God, along with its power, efficacy, and effects. This is also the great design of the apostle in chap. 7 of the Epistle to the Romans: to manifest and evince these things. Many, indeed, are the contests about the principal scope of the apostle in that chapter, and in what state the person is under the law or under grace, whose condition he describes there. I will not at present enter into that dispute, but take for granted what may be undeniably proved and evinced — namely, that it is the condition of a regenerate person, with respect to the remaining power of indwelling sin which is proposed and exemplified there, by and in the person of the apostle himself. In that discourse of his, therefore, the foundation will be laid for what we have to offer on this subject. Not that I will 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 offers itself. And 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 label he gives to indwelling sin, whereby he expresses its power and efficacy: it is “a law;” for what he terms “a law” in *this* verse, he calls in the foregoing, “sin that dwells in him.”

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

Thirdly, the frame of his soul and inward man with this law of sin, and under its discovery: “he *would* do good.”¹

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

The **First** thing observable is the *designation* used here by the apostle: he calls indwelling sin “a law.” *It is a law.*

A law is taken either properly as a *directive rule*, or improperly as an *operative effective principle* which *seems* to have the force of a law. In its **FIRST SENSE**, it is a moral rule which directs and commands, and in various ways moves and regulates, the mind and the will to do the things which it requires or forbids. This is obviously 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. Hence, in a **SECONDARY SENSE**, an inward principle that constantly moves and inclines someone toward any actions, is called *a law*. The principle that is in the *nature* of a thing, 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 something to operate or act in a way suitable to itself, is a law:

¹ That is, he *wills* to do good; and yet he does not.

Rom 8:2, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."

The powerful and effectual working of the Spirit and grace of Christ in the hearts of believers is called "The law of the Spirit of life." And for this reason, the apostle here calls indwelling sin *a law*. It is a powerful and effectual indwelling principle, inclining and pressing toward actions that are agreeable and suitable to its own nature. This, and no other, is the intention of the apostle in this expression. That term, "a law," may sometimes mean a *state* and *condition* — and if used here in this way, the meaning of the words would 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;' this makes no great alteration in the principal intent of the passage. Yet, properly, it can denote nothing here but the chief subject addressed. For even though the term "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 it is used only to express either the *nature* or the *power* of sin itself. So,

Rom. 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."

What he calls here *the law of his mind*, from the principal subject and seat of it, is in itself none other than the "law of the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus," Rom. 8:2; or it is the effectual power of the Spirit of grace, as was said. But "the law," as applied to *sin*, has a double sense: for as it is used in the first place, "I see *a law* in my members," it denotes the *being* and *nature* of sin; and in the latter place, "Leading into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members," it signifies sin's *power* and *efficacy*. Both of these are comprised in the same name, singly used:

Rom. 7:20, "Now if I do what I would not, it is no more I that do it, but *sin* that dwells in me."

Now, what we observe from this name or term "law," as it is attributed to sin, is this: that there is an exceeding efficacy and power in the remainders of indwelling sin in believers, with a constant working towards evil.

This is how it is in believers: it is a law *in them*, even though it is not a law *to them*. Though its rule is broken, its strength is weakened and impaired, and its root is mortified, yet it is a law that still has great force and efficacy in them. There, where it is *least* felt, it is *most* powerful. Carnal men, in reference to their spiritual and moral duties, are *nothing but* this law; they do nothing unless it is from it, and by it. In them, it is a ruling and prevailing principle of all *moral* actions, with reference to a supernatural and eternal end. I will not consider it in those in whom it has the most power, but only in those in whom its power is chiefly discovered and discerned — that is, in *believers*; in the others, it is only considered to further convict them of it, and manifest it.

Secondly, the apostle proposes the way by which he discovered this law in himself: "I find then (or therefore), a law." ¹ He *found* it. It had been told to him that 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

¹ Εὕρισκω ἕρα τὸν νόμον, *heurisko ara tou nomos* [NT:2147, 686, 3551]

experience the power of this law of sin in himself. It is preached to all; all men admit that the Scriptures acknowledge it, that it is declared in them; but there are few who know it in themselves. We would otherwise have more complaints of it than we have, and more contentions against it, and less fruits of it in the world. But this is what the apostle affirms – not that the *doctrine* of it had been preached to him, but that he found it *in himself* by experience. “I find a law;” – “I have experienced its power and efficacy.” For a man to find his sickness, and the danger thus arising from its effects, is different than hearing a discourse about a disease arising from its causes. And *this experience is the great preservative of all divine truth in the soul*. This is what it means to know a thing indeed, and in reality – to know it for ourselves – when, as we are taught it from the word, so we find it in ourselves.

Hence we observe further, that believers experience the power and efficacy of indwelling sin. They *find* it in themselves; they *find* it as a law. It has a self-evidencing efficacy to those who are *alive* to discern it. Those who *do not find* its power, are under its dominion. Whoever contends against it, will know and find that it is present with them, that it is powerful in them. The one who swims against the current will find the *stream* is strong; but the one who floats along with it, will be insensible of it.

Thirdly, the general frame of believers, notwithstanding the indwelling of this law of sin, is also expressed here. They “*would do good*.” This law is “present:”¹ The habitual inclination of their will is to good. The law *in them* is not a law *to them* as it is to unbelievers. They are not wholly susceptible to its power, nor morally to its commands. Grace has sovereignty in their souls: this gives them a will to do good. They “*would do good*,” that is, always and constantly. In 1Joh 3:9, “To *commit sin*,”² is to make a trade of sin, to make it a man’s *business* to sin. So it is said that a believer “does not *commit sin*,” and so he wills “to do what is good.”³ To *will* to do so is to have the *habitual* bent and inclination of the will, set on what is good – that is, morally and spiritually good – which is the proper subject addressed here.

From this comes our third observation: There is, through grace kept up in believers, a constant and ordinarily prevailing will to do good, notwithstanding the power and efficacy of indwelling sin to the contrary.

This, in their worst condition, distinguishes believers from unbelievers at their best. The will in unbelievers is under the power of the law of sin. The opposition they make to sin, either in its root or branches, is from their light and their consciences; the will to sin in them is never taken away. Take away all other considerations and hinderances, which we will address afterward, and they would sin willingly always. Their faint endeavors to answer their convictions are far from a will to do what is good. They will plead, indeed, that they would leave their sins if they could, and they would gladly do better than they do. But it is the working of their *light* and *convictions*, and not any spiritual inclination of their *wills*, which they intend by that expression: for where there is a will to do good, there is a choice of

¹ Θέλονται ἔμοι ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν *thelonti emoi poiein to kalon* [NT:2309,1698,4160,2570]

² Ποιεῖν ἁ ἡμαρτίαν *poiein hamartian* [NT:4160,266]

³ ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν, *poiein to kalon* [NT :4160,2570]

what is good for the sake of its own excellence — because it is desirable and suitable to the soul — and therefore it is to be preferred before what 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; they only have some desires to attain that end to which a good leads, and to avoid that evil which its neglect tends toward. And these desires are also, for the most part, so weak and languid in many of them, that they do not make any considerable endeavors towards them. Witness the luxury, sloth, worldliness, and security that most men are drowned in.

But in believers there is a will to do good, a habitual disposition and inclination in their wills toward what is spiritually good; and where this is found, it is accompanied by corresponding effects. The will is the principle of our moral actions; and therefore the general course of our actions will be suited to its prevailing disposition. Good things proceed from the good treasures of the heart.¹ Nor can this disposition be evidenced by anything except its fruits. A will to do good, without doing good, is but pretended.

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

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

1. There is its habitual residence in them. They always have a habitual inclination of will to what is good. And this habitual preparation for good is always present with them, as the apostle expresses it in Rom. 7.18.²
2. There are special times and seasons for the exercise of that principle. There is “*when* I would do good,” — a season in which this or that good, this or that duty, is to be performed and accomplished suitably to the habitual preparation and inclination of the will.

To these two, are opposed two other things in indwelling sin. To the gracious principle residing in the will (inclining to what is spiritually good), is opposed *a law*, that is, a *contrary principle*, inclining to evil, along with an aversion to what is good. To the second, or the actual willing of this or that good in particular (“When I would do good”) is opposed the presence of this law: “Evil is present with me,”³ — evil is at hand, and ready to oppose the actual accomplishment of the good aimed at. This is why indwelling sin is effectually operative in rebelling and inclining to evil, when the will to do good is, in a particular manner, active and inclining to obedience.

And this is the description of someone who is a believer and a sinner, as every one who is a believer is also a sinner. These are the contrary principles, and the contrary operations, that are in the believer. The principles are, on the one hand, a will to do good proceeding from grace, and on the other hand, a law of sin. Their adverse actings and operations are

¹ **Luk 6:45** A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good;

² **Rom 7:18** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. [i.e., *good is known, even if not in the flesh, but not how to do it.*]

³ Ἐμὲ τὸ κακὸν παράκειται *Emoi to kakon parakeitai* [NT: 1698,2556,3873]

insinuated in these expressions: “When I would do good, evil is present with me.” And these both are more fully expressed by the apostle in Gal 5:17, “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary to one another; so that I cannot do the things that I would.”

And here lie the springs of the whole course of our obedience. An acquaintance with these several principles and their actings is the principal part of our wisdom. As to their matter, next to the free grace of God in our justification by the blood of Christ, they are 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, the concern of all those who intend to walk with God and to glorify him in this world, to be thoroughly acquainted with these things.

And hence we may see what wisdom is required in guiding and managing our hearts and ways before God. Where the subjects of a ruler are in feuds and oppositions against one another, unless great wisdom is 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 do not labor to be spiritually wise, how will they be able to steer their course correctly? Many men live in the dark as to themselves all their days; whatever else they know, they don't know themselves. They know their outward estates, how rich they are, and they are careful to examine the condition of their bodies as to their 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 should; few are acquainted with the evils of their own hearts as they should — yet the whole course of their obedience, and consequently of their eternal condition, depends on these. This, therefore, is our wisdom; and it is a necessary wisdom if we have any design to please God, or to avoid what is a provocation to the eyes of his glory.

We will also find in our inquiry into this, what diligence and watchfulness is required for a Christian conversation.¹ There is a constant enemy to it in everyone's own heart; and we will later show what an enemy it is, for it is our design to reveal him to the uttermost. In the meantime, we may well bewail the woeful sloth and negligence that is in most people, even in professors of Christ. They live and walk as though they intended to go to heaven hood-winked and asleep — as though they had no enemy to deal with. Their mistake and folly will therefore be fully laid open in our progress.

What I will principally fix upon, in reference to our present design from this verse of the apostle, is what 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, but he is in you also. He is at work by all ways of force and craft, as we will 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

¹ Conversation: the conduct of our life in public; our way of life.

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 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, and also the ruin of all the souls that perish in this world!

CHAPTER 2.

Indwelling sin is a law — In what sense it is called a law — What kind of law it is — An inward effective principle called a law — The power of sin evinced from that.

What we have proposed for consideration is the power and efficacy of indwelling sin. The ways by which it may be proved are many. I will begin with the term used in the verse mentioned before. It is *a law*. “I find a law,” says the apostle. It is because of its power and efficacy that it is called a law. So too, the principle of grace in believers is a law: “*the law of the Spirit of life*,” Rom 8:2, as we observed before — “which is the exceeding greatness of *the power of God in them*,” Eph 1:19. *Where there is a law, there is power.*

We will therefore show both what belongs to it as a law, in general, and also what is particular or proper in it, being the sort of law we have described.

There are in general two things attending every law as such: — *dominion* and *efficacy*.

First, dominion.

Rom 7:1, “The law has dominion over a man while he lives.”¹

That is, “It lords it over a man.” Where any law is in effect, it has dominion.² It is properly the act of a superior, and its nature is to exact obedience by way of dominion. Now, there is a twofold dominion, just 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 affection for the law of God; the latter for the law of sin. The law of sin doesn’t have, in itself, moral dominion — it doesn’t have rightful dominion or authority over any man. But it does have what is equivalent to it, and for which it is said “to reign as a king,”³ Rom 6:12, and to lord it over,⁴ or “have dominion,” verse 14, just as a law in general is said to have (chap. 7:1). But because it has lost its complete dominion in reference to believers, of whom alone we speak, I will not insist on this utmost extent of its power. But even in believers, it is still a law, even though it is not a law *to them* — yet, as was said, it is a law *in them*. And though it doesn’t have a complete, and as it were, *rightful* dominion over them, yet it will have domination over some things in them. It is still a law, and it is a law *in them*; so that all its actings are the actings of a law — that is, *it acts with power*, even though it has lost its complete power of ruling in them. Even though it is weakened, its nature is not thawed. It is still a law, and therefore it is powerful. And because its particular workings (which we will consider afterward) are the ground of this appellation, so the term itself teaches us in general what we are to expect from it, and what endeavors it will use for dominion — a dominion to which it has been accustomed.⁵

¹ νόμος Κυριεύει τοῦ ἀνθρώπου — *nomos Kurieuei tou anthruou* [NT:3551,2961,444], or *anthropa* (man).

² κυριεύει *kurieuei* [NT:2961]

³ βασιλεύειν, *basileuein* [NT:936]

⁴ κυριεύειν *kurieuein* [NT:2961]

⁵ That is, the power of sin is broken, but the habit (the *custom*) of sin remains.

Secondly, a law, as a law, has an **efficacy** to provoke those who are opposed to it, to do the things it requires. A law has rewards and punishments accompanying it. These secretly prevail on those to whom they are proposed, even though the things commanded are not very desirable. Generally, all laws have their efficacy on the minds of men, from the rewards and punishments that are annexed to them. Nor is *this* law without this spring of power: it has its rewards and punishments. The *pleasures* of sin are the *rewards* of sin; a reward that most men lose their souls to obtain. By this means, the law of sin contended in Moses against the law of grace.

Heb 11:25, 26, “He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he looked to the recompense of reward.”

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, with which it sought to draw him over, and with which it prevails on most, was the reward that it proposed to him — namely, that he would have the present enjoyment of the pleasures of sin. By this, it contended against the reward annexed to the law of grace, called “the recompense of reward.”

By this sorry reward, this law keeps the world in obedience to its commands; and experience shows us what power it has to influence the minds of men. It also has punishments that it threatens men with 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 offered to the sensual part of our natures in a strict course of mortification — sin makes use of, as if they were punishments attending the neglect of its commands. By these it prevails on the “fearful,” who will have no share in eternal life, Rev 21:8.¹ And it is hard to say by which of these — whether its pretended rewards or pretended punishments — it 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 satisfy its lusts. By its punishments it induces men to omit their duties; a course tending no less to a pernicious event than the former. By which of these the law of sin has its greatest success in and upon the souls of men, is not evident; and that is because they are seldom if ever separated, but equally act on the same persons. But this is certain: that by tenders and promises of the pleasures of sin on the one hand, and by threats of the deprivation of all sensual contentment and the infliction of temporal evils on the other, it has an exceeding efficacy on the minds of men, and often on believers. Unless a man is prepared to reject the reasonings that offer themselves from the one and the other of these, there is no standing before the power of the law. The world falls before them every day. Afterward we will declare with what deceit and violence they are urged and imposed on the minds of men; and also what advantages they have to prevail upon them. Look at men in general, and you will find them wholly at sin’s disposal by these means. Do the profits and pleasures of sin lie before them? — Nothing can keep them from reaching after them. Do difficulties and inconveniences attend the duties of the gospel? — They will have nothing to do with them; and so they are wholly given up to the rule and dominion of this law.

¹ **Rev 21:8** But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

And so we have this light,¹ *in general*, as to the power and efficacy of indwelling sin, from the general nature of a law, of which it partakes.

NEXT we may consider what kind of law *in particular* it is; which will further evidence its power which we are inquiring about. 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; but because he had no law of sin inbred and working in him, he might have withstood it. An inbred law must necessarily be effectual. Let us take an example from that law which is contrary to this law of sin. The law of God was at first inbred and natural to man; it was co-created with his faculties, and it was their rectitude, both in its being and operation, in reference to his end of living to God and glorifying him. Hence it had an especial power in the whole soul to enable it for all obedience, yes, and to make all obedience easy and pleasant. *Such is the power of an inbred law.* And though this law, as to its rule and dominion, is now by nature cast out of the soul, its remaining sparks, because they are inbred, are very powerful and effectual; as the apostle declares, Rom 2:14-15.² Afterward God renews this law, and writes it in tablets of stone. 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 is turned into an inward real principle.

Which is why God makes his law internal again, and implants it in the heart as it was at first, when he intends to give it power to produce obedience in his people:

Jer 31:31-33, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.”

This is what God fixes on, as it were: a discovery of the insufficiency of an outward law leading men to obedience. ‘The written law,’ he says, ‘will not do it; mercies and deliverances from distress will not effect it; trials and afflictions will not accomplish it. Then,’ says the Lord, ‘I will take another course: I will turn the written law into an internal living principle in their hearts; *that* will have such an efficacy that it will assuredly make them my people, and keep them so.’

Now, such is this law of sin: it is an indwelling law. Rom 7:17, “It is sin that dwells in me;” verse 20, “Sin that dwells in me;” verse 21, “It is present with me;” verse 23, “It is in my members;” — indeed, it is so far in a man, that in some sense it is said to be the man himself; verse 18, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing.” The flesh, which is the seat and throne of this law, yes, which indeed *is* this law, is in some sense the man himself, just as grace is also the *new man*. Now, from this consideration — that it is an indwelling law inclining and moving us toward sin, just as an inward habit or principle does — it has various advantages that increase its strength and further its power; such as,

¹ That is, insight.

² **Rom 2:14** for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*)...

1. *It always abides in the soul* — it is never absent. The apostle twice uses that expression, “*It dwells 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; yes, and just as they deal with usurping tyrants whom they intend to thrust out of a city, the gates might be shut against it sometimes, so that it might not return — the soul might fortify itself against it. But the soul is its home; there it dwells, and it 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 one*: sin is with them. There is a living coal continually in their houses; which, if it is not looked after, will set them on fire, and maybe consume them. Oh, the woeful security of poor souls! How little do most men think about this inbred enemy that is never away from home! How little, for the most part, does the watchfulness of any professor correspond to the danger of his state and condition!

2. *It is always ready to apply itself to every end and purpose which it serves.* “It not only dwells in me,” says the apostle, “but when I would do good, it is present with me.” There is something more in that expression than mere indwelling. An inmate may dwell in a house, and yet not always meddle with what the good man of the house is doing (so we may keep to the allusion of indwelling, used by the apostle). But it is so with *this* law: it so dwells in us, that it is present with us in everything we do; yes, oftentimes when, with the most earnestness, we desire to be rid of it, it will push itself upon us with the most force: “When I would do good, it is present with me.” ^{Rom 7:21}

Would you pray; would you hear; would you give alms; would you meditate; would you in any duty act out your faith in God and love towards him; would you work righteousness; would you resist temptations — *if so*, this troublesome, perplexing indweller will still more or less force itself upon you, and be present with you, so that you cannot perfectly and completely accomplish the thing that is good, as our apostle speaks of it in verse 18.¹ Sometimes men, *by hearkening to their temptations*, stir up, excite, and provoke their lusts; no wonder then, that they find them present and active. But it will be so when we labor with all our endeavors *to be free from them*. This law of sin “dwells” in us. That is, it adheres to us as a depraved principle: to our minds in darkness and vanity; to our affections in sensuality; to our wills in a loathing of and aversion to what is good; and by some, more, or all of these, is continually forcing itself upon us, in inclinations, motions, or suggestions to evil, when we would most gladly be rid of it.

3. It being an indwelling law, *it applies itself to its work with great facility and easiness*, like “the sin that so easily besets us,” Heb 12:1. It has a great facility and easiness in applying itself to its work; it needs no doors to be opened to it; it needs no engines to work by. The soul cannot apply itself to any duty of a man, unless it is by exercising those faculties in which this law has its residence. Is the understanding or the mind to be applied to anything? — there it 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

¹ **Rom 7:18** ...for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good, I do not find. **Rom 7:21** I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

and affections to be set to work? — there it is: in inclinations to the world and present things, and to sensuality, with proneness to all manner of defilements. Hence it is easy for it to insinuate itself into all that we do, and 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 is, good or evil. Now, it has all these advantages because it is a law, an indwelling law, which manifests its power and efficacy. It is always resident in the soul; it enforces itself upon all its actings, and it does that with easiness and facility.

This is that law which the apostle affirms that he found in himself; this is that title which he gives to the powerful and effectual remainder of indwelling sin even in believers; and from that appellation, we have these general evidences of its power. There are many in the world who do not find this law in them — who, whatever they have been taught in the word, do not have a spiritual sense and experience of the power of indwelling sin; and that is because they are wholly under its dominion. They do not find that there is darkness and folly in their minds, because they are darkness itself, and darkness will discover nothing. They do not find deadness and an indisposition in their hearts and wills to God, because they are wholly dead in trespasses and sins. They are at peace with their lusts, by being in bondage to them. And 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, and 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 that they will by no means be stirred up to respond to the mind of God in his calls to them? *It is all from this law of sin*, and the power of it that rules and bears sway in men, that all these things proceed. But it is not about such persons that we particularly speak at present.

From what has been said, it will ensue that, if there is such a law in believers, it is doubtless their duty to find it out, and find it to be so.

The more they *find its power*, the less they will *feel its effects*. It will not at all advantage a man to have a hectic distemper and not discover it — or have a fire burning secretly in his house, and not know it. As much as men find of this law in them, they will abhor it and themselves, and no more. Also proportionate to their discovery of this law, will be their earnestness for grace — nor will it rise any higher than that. All watchfulness and diligence in obedience will correspond to it also. On this one hinge — 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 of which the Lord's soul abhors. Eruptions into great, open, conscience-destroying, scandalous sins, are from 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 do you have of its power and efficacy? Do you find that it dwells in you, that it is always present with you, exciting itself, spreading 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, this calls for at your hands! What spiritual wisdom you stand in need of! What supplies of grace, what assistance of the Holy Ghost will also be discovered from this! I fear that few of us have a diligence that is proportionate to our danger.

CHAPTER 3.

The seat or subject of the law of sin is the heart — What is meant by that— Properties of the heart as possessed by sin: unsearchable and deceitful — What that deceit arises from — Improvement of these considerations.

HAVING manifested indwelling sin, treating the remainders of it in believers as a law, and having evinced in general its power from that law, we will now proceed to give particular instances of its efficacy and advantages from some things that generally relate to it as such. And there are three of these: —

FIRST, Its seat and subject;

SECONDLY, Its natural properties (Chap. 4); and,

THIRDLY, Its operations and manner (Chap. 5); this is principally what we will aim at and attend to.

FIRST, For the seat and subject of this law of sin, the Scripture everywhere assigns it to the heart. Indwelling sin keeps its special residence there. It has invaded and possessed the throne of God himself:

Ecc 9:3, “Madness is in the heart of men while they live.”

This is their madness, or the root of all that madness which appears in their lives.

Mat 15:19, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies,” etc.

There are many outward temptations and provocations that befall men, which excite and stir them up to these evils; but they merely 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 comes that summary description of the whole work and effect of this law of sin: “Every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart is only evil continually.”¹ The whole work of the law of sin, from its first rise, to its first coining of actual sin, is described here; and its seat, its work-house, is said to be the heart. And so it is called by our Saviour *the evil treasure of the heart*:

Luke 6:45, “An evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, brings forth evil things.”

This treasure is the prevailing principle of moral actions in men. So, in the beginning of the verse, our Saviour 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, and consequently producing actions that are like and conformable to it, of the same kind and nature as itself. And it is also called a treasure for its *abundance*. It will never be exhausted; it is not wasted by men’s spending it; indeed, the more lavish men are with this stock — the more they draw out of this treasure — the more it grows and abounds! Just as

¹ Gen 6:5. Also, **Gen 8:21** Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although **the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.**”

men do not spend their grace, but increase it by its exercise, no more do they spend 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 that lust is engrafted and increased in them — it feeds on itself, swallows up its own poison, and grows by it. The more men sin, the more they are inclined to sin. It is from the deceitfulness of this law of sin (which we will speak of at large afterward) that men persuade themselves that by this or that particular sin, they will so satisfy their lusts that they will 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. It is so safely stored in the heart, that all the men in the world, and all the angels in heaven, cannot dispossess a man of this treasure.

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, sometimes for the whole soul. Generally it denotes the whole soul of man, and all its faculties — 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 is to be refused; the will, as it chooses, or as it refuses and avoids; the affections, as they like or dislike, cling to or have an aversion to what is proposed to them; the conscience, as it warns and determines — all these together, are called the heart. And it is in this sense that we say the seat and subject of this law of sin is the heart of man. Only, we may add that the Scripture, speaking of the heart as the principle of men's good or evil actions, usually insinuates with it two things belonging to the *manner* of their performance:

1. A *suitableness and pleasingness to the soul* in the things that are done. When men take delight and are pleased in and 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 his whole heart, and with his whole soul,” Jer 32:41.

2. *Resolution and constancy in such actions*. And this is also denoted in the metaphorical expression used before of a *treasure*, from which men constantly take out the things which either they stand in need of, or intend to use.

This is the subject, the seat, the dwelling-place of this law of sin: the *heart* — as it is the entire principle of moral operations, of doing good or evil, as out of it proceeds good or evil. Here in the heart dwells our enemy; this is the fort, 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 it has less strength and less success; but while we live, it is always in rebellion.

That we may, in passing, take a little view of the strength and power of sin from this seat and subject of it, we will consider one or two properties of the heart that exceedingly contribute to it. 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 forts that he possesses. And such is the heart to this enemy of God and our souls. This will appear from its properties, of which one or two will be mentioned.

1. The heart is unsearchable: Jer 17:9, 10, “Who can know the heart? I the LORD search it.” The heart of man is pervious¹ only to God; hence he takes the honor of searching the heart as unique to himself: it as fully declares him to be God, as any other glorious attribute of his nature. We don’t know the hearts of one another; we don’t know our *own* hearts as we should. There are many who don’t know their hearts as to their general bent and disposition, whether it is good or bad, sincere and sound, or corrupt and naughty; but no one knows all the secret intrigues, windings and turnings, actings and aversions of his own heart. Has anyone the perfect measure of his own light and darkness? Can anyone know what actings of choosing or aversion his own will might produce, when an endless variety of objects are proposed to it for its exercise? Can anyone traverse the various changings of his afflictions? Do the secret springs of acting and of refusing in the soul, lie before the eyes of any man? Does anyone know what will be the motions of the mind or of the will in such and such conjunctions of things, in such a suiting of objects, in such a pretension of reasonings, in such an appearance of desirable things? All in heaven and earth are utterly ignorant of these things, except the infinite and all-seeing God. 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, and whom we cannot follow into its retirements. Hence, often, when we think sin is quite ruined, we find after a while that it was only out of sight. It has coverts and retreats in an unsearchable heart, where we cannot pursue it. The soul may persuade itself that all is well, when sin may be safe in the hidden darkness of the mind, where it is impossible for the soul to look into — for what makes sin manifest is light. It may suppose the will of sinning is utterly taken away, when there is yet an unsearchable reserve for a more suitable object, a more vigorous temptation than it has yet tried. Has a man had a contest with any lust, and a blessed victory over it by the Holy Ghost (as to that present trial) such that when he thinks it is utterly expelled, he finds before long that it had only 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 for its first appearance, to catch its first under-earth heavings and workings, and to set ourselves in opposition to them; for we cannot follow it into the secret corners of the heart. It is true, there is still relief in this case — namely, the one to whom is principally committed the work of destroying the law of sin and the body of death in us: the Holy Ghost. He comes with his axe to the very root;² nor is there anything in an unsearchable heart that is not “naked and open to him,” Heb 4:13. But we, in a way of duty, may see from this what an enemy we have to deal with.

2. Just as the heart is unsearchable, so it is deceitful, as in the passage mentioned above: “It is deceitful above all things,” — *incomparably* so. There is great deceit in the dealings of men in the world — in their counsels and contrivances; in reference to their affairs, both private and public; in their words and actings — the world is *full* of deceit and fraud. But all this is nothing compared to the deceit that is in a man’s heart towards *himself*,

¹ Allowing passage or entrance.

² **Mat 3:10** “And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

and not towards others; for *that* is the meaning of the expression in this place. Now, incomparable deceitfulness, added to unsearchableness, gives a great addition and increase of strength to the law of sin, on account of its seat and subject. I do not yet speak of the deceitfulness of sin itself, but of the deceitfulness of the heart where it is seated. Pro 26:25, “There are seven abominations in the heart;” that is, not only many, but an absolute and complete number, as seven denotes. And they are abominations that consist in deceitfulness — so that the foregoing caution insinuates, ‘Do not trust him.’ For it is only deceit that would make us not trust in that degree and measure which the object of our search is capable of.

Now, this deceitfulness of the heart, by which it has an exceeding advantage in harboring sin, lies chiefly in these two things: —

(1.) *That it abounds 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 who, from a natural constitution or other causes, have much of this in their conversation. They seem to be made up of contradictions; sometimes they are very wise in their affairs, sometimes very foolish; very open, and very reserved; very facile, and very obstinate; very easy to be entreated, and very revengeful — all in a remarkable height. This is generally considered a bad character, and it is seldom found except when it proceeds from some notable and predominant lust. But, in general, in respect to moral good or evil, duty or sin, it is so with the heart of *every* man — it is flaming hot, and key cold; weak, and yet stubborn; obstinate, and facile. The frame of the heart is ready to contradict itself at every moment. Now you would think you had such a frame or such a way entirely; but shortly it is quite otherwise: so that none know what to expect from it. The rise of this is the disorder that is brought upon *all* the faculties by sin. God created them all in a perfect harmony and union. The mind and reason were in perfect subjection and subordination to God and his will; the will corresponded in its choice of good, to the discovery made of good by the mind; the affections constantly and evenly followed the understanding and the 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.

The heart being disturbed by sin, the rest of the faculties act cross and contrary to one another. The will does not choose the good which the mind discovers; the affections do not delight in what the will chooses; but they all jar and interfere with, cross and rebel against each other. This we have gotten by falling from God. Hence sometimes the will leads, and the judgment follows. Indeed, the affections — which should serve the rest — commonly get sovereignty, and draw the whole soul captive after them. And this is why it is, as I said, that the heart is made up of so many contradictions in its actings. Sometimes the mind retains its sovereignty, and the affections are in subjection, and the will is ready for its duty. This puts a good face on things. But immediately the rebellion of the affections, or the obstinacy of the will, arise and prevail, and the whole scene is changed. This, I say, is what makes the heart deceitful above all things: it does not agree at all in itself; it is not constant to itself; there is no order to which it is constant; it has no certain conduct that is stable. Rather, if I may so say, it has a rotation in itself, where oftentimes the feet lead and guide the whole.

(2.) Its deceit lies in *its full promises at the first appearance of things*;¹ and this proceeds from the same principle as the former. Sometimes the affections are touched and worked on; the whole heart appears in a fair frame; it promises all will be well. Within a short while, the whole frame is changed; the mind was not at all affected or turned; the affections acted their parts a little, but now have departed, and all the fair promises of the heart depart with them. Now add to this deceitfulness the unsearchableness mentioned before, and we will find at least, that the difficulty of dealing effectually with sin *in its seat and throne*, has exceedingly increased. Who can deal with a deceiving and a deceived heart? — especially considering that the heart employs all its deceits to the service of sin — contributes them all to its furtherance. All the disorder that is in the heart, all of its false promises and fair appearances, promote the interest and advantages of sin. Hence God cautions the people to look to it, lest “*their own hearts entice and deceive them.*” Deu 11.16

Who can mention the treacheries and deceits that lie in the heart of man? It is not for nothing that the Holy Ghost says, “It is deceitful above all things,” Jer 17.9 — it is uncertain in what it does, and false in what it promises. Moreover, this is why (among other causes), in the pursuit of our war against sin, we not only have the old work to do over and over, but still new work while we live in this world, still new stratagems and wiles to deal with, as the manner will be wherever unsearchableness and deceitfulness are to be contended with.

There are many other properties of this seat and subject of the law of sin which might be insisted on, to the same end and purpose; but that would too far divert us from our particular design. And therefore I will pass these over with a few considerations: —

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; and when we think we have thoroughly won the field, there is still some reserve remaining that we did not see, that we did not know of. Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory; and many believers have been spiritually wounded after great successes against this enemy. David was so wounded. His great surprise entry into sin was after a long profession, manifold experiences of God, and watchfully keeping himself from his iniquity. And hence it has come to pass in part, that the profession of many has declined in their old age, or at a riper time (this must be more distinctly addressed afterward). They have abandoned 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, except by being endless in our pursuit. And on this account, that command of the apostle which we have in Col 3:5, is as necessary for those to observe who are towards the end of their race, as it is for those who are only at the beginning: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth;” always be 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 forward towards perfection: yet the work must be endless — I mean, while we are in this world. If we give up, we will quickly see this enemy exerting itself with new strength and vigor. It may be under some great affliction, in some eminent enjoyment of God, or in the sense of the sweetness of blessed communion with Christ, that we have been ready to say there was an

¹ That is, it promises more at the start, than it delivers at the end.

end of sin, that it was dead and gone forever. But have we not found it to be the contrary by experience?

Hasn't it been obvious that it was only retired into some unsearchable recesses of the heart, as to its in-being and nature, though maybe greatly weakened in its power? Let us then reckon on it: that there is no way to have our work done, except by always doing it; *he who dies fighting in this warfare, dies assuredly a conqueror.*

Secondly, Does it have its residence in what is various, inconstant, and deceitful above all things? Then this calls for perpetual watchfulness against it. An open enemy that deals only by violence, always gives some respite. 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 that reach at the greatest distance) nothing will give security except perpetual watchfulness. It is impossible for us in this case to be too jealous, doubtful, suspicious, or watchful. The heart has a thousand wiles and deceits; and if we are the least off our watch, we may be sure to be surprised. Hence those reiterated commands and cautions are given for watching, for being circumspect, diligent, careful, and the like. There is no living for those who have to deal with an enemy that is deceitful above all things, unless they persist in such a frame. All cautions that are given in this case are necessary, especially this —“Remember not to believe.” Does the heart promise fair? — then do not rest on it, but say to the Lord Christ, “Lord, you undertake for me.” Does the sun shine fair in the morning? — do not reckon therefore on a fair day; the clouds may arise and fall. Though the morning gives a fair appearance of serenity and peace, turbulent affections may arise and cloud the soul with sin and darkness.

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. Our duty lies in the things mentioned before; but *here* lies our safety. There is no treacherous corner in our hearts that he cannot search to the uttermost. There is no deceit in them that he cannot disappoint. David takes this course in Psalm 139. After he sets forth the omnipresence of God and his omniscience, verses 1-10, he expands on it: verse 23, “Search me, O God, and try me” —as if he had said, ‘I know but little of my deceitful heart; only, I would be sincere. I would not have reserves for sin retained in it. Therefore You who are present with my heart, who know my thoughts long before I do, undertake this work; perform it thoroughly; for you alone are able to do so.’

There are still other arguments for evidencing the power and strength of indwelling sin, from which it is termed a “law,” but which we must take notice of according to the order in which we laid them down.

CHAPTER 4.

Indwelling sin is enmity against God —Its power comes from this — It allows no peace or rest — It is against God himself — It acts in aversion to God, with a propensity to evil — It is universal — To all of God — In all of the soul — Constantly.

SECONDLY, its *natural properties*. We have seen the seat and subject of this law of sin. In the next place we might take a view of its nature in general, which also will manifest its power and efficacy; but I will not enlarge upon this. It is not my business to declare the nature of indwelling sin: it has also been done by others.

Therefore, *first*, in reference to our special design in hand, I will only consider *one property* of it that *always* belongs to its nature, *wherever* it is. And this is what is expressed by the apostle,

Rom 8:7, “For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace; Because the carnal mind is ENMITY against God.”

What is called here *carnally minded*, or “the wisdom of the flesh,”¹ is the same as “the law of sin” which we insist on. And what does he say about it? Why, it is “enmity against *God*.”² It is not only an enemy — for then possibly some reconciliation might be made of it to God — but it is enmity itself; and so it is not capable of accepting any terms of peace. *Enemies may be reconciled, but enmity cannot*; indeed, the only way to reconcile enemies is to destroy the enmity. So the apostle in another case tells us, Rom 5:10, “We, who were enemies, are reconciled to God.” That is, it is a work compassed 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: Eph 2:15, “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity.” There is no way to deal with any enmity whatsoever, except by its abolition 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 still enmity. It may not be so effectual and powerful in operation as it is where it has more life and vigor, but it is enmity still. Just as every drop of poison is poison, and it will infect, and just as every spark of fire is fire, and will burn; so is everything of the law of sin, whether the last or least of it — it is *enmity*, it will *poison*, it will *burn*. That which is anything in the abstract, is still that thing while it has any being at all.

Our apostle, who may well be supposed to have made as great a progress in subduing sin as any on earth, yet cries out for deliverance, as from an irreconcilable enemy. Rom 7:24, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” The meanest acting, the meanest and most imperceptible working of it, is the acting and working of enmity. Mortification abates its force, but it does not change its nature. Grace changes the nature of man, but nothing can change the nature of sin. Whatever effect is wrought *on* it, there is no effect wrought *in* it, such that it is not still enmity, still sin. This then is our sinful state and

¹ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός, *phronema tes sarkos* [NT:5427,4561]

² ἔχθρα εἰς Θεόν, *exthra eis Theon* [NT:2189,1519,2316]

condition: — “God is love,” 1Joh 4:8. He is so in himself, eternally excellent, and desirable above all. He is so to us; he is so in the blood of his Son, and in all the inexpressible fruits of that blood by which we are what we are, and in which all our future hopes and expectations are wrapped. Against this God, we carry about with us an enmity all our days; an enmity that has *this* from its nature: that it is incapable of cure or reconciliation. It may be destroyed, it shall be; but it cannot be cured. If a man has an enemy to deal with that is too mighty for him, as David had with Saul, he may take the course that David did — he considered what it is that provoked his enemy against him, and so he addressed himself to remove that cause, and make his peace:

1Sam 26:19, “If the LORD has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering: but if they are the children of men, may they be cursed before the LORD.”

Whether it comes 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 party. If it is not overcome and destroyed, it will overcome and destroy the soul.

And in this lies no small part of its power, which we are inquiring after — it can allow no terms of peace, of any composition. There may be a composition 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, conquering nor conquered — which was the only kind of enemy the famous warrior of old complained about.¹ It is in vain for a man to have any expectation of rest from his lust except by its death; of absolute freedom except by his own death. Some, in the agitating of their corruptions, seek quietness by laboring to satisfy them, “making provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts,” as the apostle says in Rom 13:14. This is to quench fire by wood and oil. Just as all the fuel in the world, all the fabric of the creation that is combustible, being cast into the fire, it will not at all satisfy it, but increase it; so it is with satisfaction given to sin by sinning — it only inflames and increases. If a man will part with some of his goods to an enemy, it may satisfy him; but enmity will have *all* his goods, and it is not one whit more satisfied than if he had received nothing at all — like the lean cattle that were never less hungry for having devoured the fat.² You cannot bargain with fire to take only so much of your houses; you have no other way than to quench it. This case is like the contest between a wise man and a fool: Pro 29:9, “Whether he rages or laughs, there is no rest.” Whatever frame or temper he is in, his importunate folly makes him troublesome. It is the same with this indwelling sin. If it violently agitates (as it will at provocations and temptations), then it will be outrageous in the soul; or if it seems to be pleased and contented — to be satisfied — it is all the same: there is no peace, no rest to be had *with* it or *by* it. If it had been of any other nature, then, some other way might have been fixed on; but seeing that it consists in enmity, all the relief the soul has, lies in its ruin.

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 proposed as our enemy in various places: 1Pet 2:11, “Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;” they are enemies to the soul, that is,

¹ NET **Jdg 1:19** The LORD was with Judah. They conquered the hill country, but they could not conquer the people living in the coastal plain, because they had chariots with iron-rimmed wheels.

² Gen 41:20-21.

to ourselves. Sometimes they are an enemy to the Spirit that is in us: “The flesh lusts” or 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 ends and designs against our souls, and against the principle of grace that is in us; but its proper and formal object is *God*: it is “enmity against God.” Its work is to oppose grace; it is a consequent of its work to oppose our souls, which follows upon what it *does*, more than what it intends to do; 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 our duty so that the good we would do, we do not do, either as to its matter or manner? Why does it render the soul carnal, indisposed, unbelieving, unspiritual, weary, and wandering?

It is because of its enmity to God, whom the soul aims to have communion with in its duty. It has, as it were, that command from Satan which the Assyrians had from their king:

1Kng 22:31, “Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the King of Israel.”

It is neither great nor small, but God himself, the King of Israel, that sin sets itself against. There lies the secret and formal reason for all its opposition to good — because it relates to God. If a road, trade, or a way of duties were set up, where communion with God is not the aim, but only the duty itself — which is the way 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. Or as with the Assyrians, they assaulted Jehoshaphat because he showed that he was a king; but when they found that it was not king Ahab, they turned back from pursuing him.¹ So too, because there is a show and an appearance of the worship of God, sin may make headway against it at first; but when duty cries out in the heart that indeed God is not there, sin turns away to seek its proper enemy elsewhere,² even God himself. Hence many poor creatures spend their days in dismal, tiring superstitions, without any great resistance from within; while others cannot be troubled to freely watch with Christ one hour in a spiritual manner. It is no wonder that men fight with carnal weapons for their superstitious worship without, when they are not fighting against it within. For God is not in it; and the law of sin does not oppose any duty, unless it is to oppose 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 arises from darkness in the mind, or aversion in the will, or sloth in the affections — all the secret arguings and reasonings that are in the soul who is in pursuit of what is spiritually good, have God himself as their direct object. The enmity lies against *him*; this consideration should surely influence us to a perpetual, constant watchfulness over ourselves.

¹ **2Ch 18:29-32** And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I will disguise myself and go into battle; but you put on your robes.” So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle. ³⁰ Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots who *were* with him, saying, “Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel.” ³¹ So it was, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, “It is the king of Israel!” Therefore they surrounded him to attack; but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him, and God diverted them from him. ³² For so it was, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him.

² That is, there is no battle to be fought: the person offers no resistance, or has left the field of battle altogether.

It is this way also in respect to all propensity for sin, as well as aversion from God. It is God himself that is aimed at. It is true, the pleasures, the wages of sin, 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*. “You have been weary of me,” says God to sinners; and he says 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 to God, Depart from us;” — it is enmity against him and aversion to him. Here lies the formal nature of every sin: — it is an opposition to God, a casting off of his yoke, a breaking off of the dependence which the creature ought to have on the Creator. And the apostle, in Rom 8:7, gives the reason why he affirms that “the carnal mind is enmity against God,” — namely, “because it is not subject to the will of God, nor indeed can it be.” It never is, nor will it be, nor can it be subject to God, because its whole nature consists in opposition to him. The soul in which a carnal mind is found, may be subject to the law of God; but this law of sin sets itself up in contrariety to it, and it will not be in subjection to it.

To distinguish 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 of its inseparable adjuncts may be considered, which will further evince it: —

1. *It is universal*. Some contentions are bound to some particular concerns: *this* is about one thing, *that* is about another. It is not so here: the 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 what is its object. And such is *this* enmity: for,

- (1.) It is universal to all of God; and,
- (2.) It is universal in all of the soul.

(1.) It is *universal to all of God*. If there were anything of God which sin did not have enmity against — whether his nature, his properties, his mind or will, his law or gospel, any duty of obedience to him, or duty of communion with him — then the soul might have a constant shelter and retreat within itself, by applying itself to that aspect of God, to that duty towards him, to that communion with him, for sin would make no opposition against it. But the enmity lies against *God*, and *all* of God, and everything in which or by which we deal with him. It is not subject to the law, nor any part or parcel, word or tittle of the law. Whatever is opposite to anything as it is in itself, it 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 nothing of him which sin does not seek to make headway against; nor is there any duty, private or public, in the heart or in external works, which sin does not oppose. And the nearer (if I may say so) anything is to God, the greater is sin’s enmity towards it. The more of spirituality and holiness that is in anything, the greater is sin’s enmity. What has most of God has most of sin’s opposition. Concerning those in whom this law of sin is most predominant, God says,

Pro 1:25, “You have ignored all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof.”

It is not this or that part of God’s counsel, his mind, or his will that is opposed, but *all* of his counsel; whatever he calls for or guides us to, in every particular of it, *all* is ignored, and *none* of his reproof is attended to. A man would think that it is not very strange that

sin should maintain enmity against God in his law, which comes to judge it, to condemn it; but it raises a greater enmity against him in his gospel, in which he tenders mercy and pardon as a deliverance from sin; and that is merely because more of the glorious properties of God's nature, more of his excellencies and condescension, are manifested in the gospel than in the reproof.

(2.) It is *universal in all of the soul*. If this law of sin would have contented itself to subdue any one faculty of the soul — if it would it have left any one faculty at liberty, any one affection free from its yoke and bondage — it might possibly have been opposed or subdued with more ease. But when Christ comes with his spiritual power upon the soul, to conquer it for himself, he has no quiet landing-place. He sets foot on no ground that must not be fought for and conquered. Not the mind, not an affection, not the will — but *all* is secured against him. And when grace has made its entrance, sin still dwells in all its coasts. If anything in the soul were at perfect freedom and liberty, a stand might be made there to drive sin from the rest of its holds; but sin is *universal*, and it wars in the *whole* soul. The mind has its own darkness and vanity to wrestle with; the will has its own stubbornness, obstinacy, and perverseness; every affection has its own frowardness and aversion to God, and its sensuality to deal with — so that one cannot yield relief to another as it should; they all have their hands full at home, as it were. Hence it is that our knowledge is imperfect, our obedience is weak, our love is not unmixed, our fear is not pure, our delight is 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 throughout the soul.

2. To this might be added its *constancy*. It is constant unto itself; it does not waver; it has no thoughts of yielding or giving up, notwithstanding the powerful opposition that is made to it both by the law and gospel — as will be shown afterward.

This, then, is a third evidence of the POWER of sin, taken from its nature and properties, in which I fixed on only one instance for its illustration — namely, that it is “enmity against God,” and that is both *universal* and *constant*. If we were to enter into 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 that is the will of God), and stir us up to watchfulness. What can be a more sad consideration than this: that we should constantly carry about with us what is enmity against God — and not enmity in this or that *particular* aspect of him, but in *all* that he is, and in *all* in that he has revealed of himself? I cannot say it is good for those who do not find it. It is good for those, indeed, in whom it is *weakened*, and its power *abated*. Yet, for those who say sin is not in them, they only deceive themselves, and there is no truth in them.^{1Joh 1.10}

CHAPTER 5.

The nature of sin further revealed as it is enmity against God — Its aversion to all good is opened — The means to prevent its effects prescribed.

THIRDLY. WE have considered something of the nature of indwelling sin, not *absolutely*, but in reference to the discovery of its power; but this power more clearly evidences itself in its *actings and operations*. Power is an act of life, and operation is the only discoverer of life. We don't know that anything lives except by the effects and works of life. And great and strong operations reveal a powerful and vigorous life. Such are the operations of this law of sin, which are all demonstrations of its power.

What 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*; secondly, *Opposition*.

First, *Aversion*. Our Saviour described the effects of the enmity that existed between himself and the teachers of the Jews; he 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 they abhorred one another, as in John 4:9.¹

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

Now, both these effects are found in this law of sin: —

First, for *aversion*. There is an aversion in it to God and to every thing of God, as we discovered in part in handling enmity itself; and so we will not need to insist much on it again. All indisposition to duty (in which communion with God is to be obtained); all weariness of duty; all carnality, or formality in duty — springs from this root. The wise man cautions us against this evil: Ecc 5:1, "Keep your foot when you go to the house of God;" — Do you have any spiritual duty to perform, and do you intend to attain any communion with God? Then look to yourself, take care of your affections; they will be gadding² and wandering, and that is from their aversion to what you have in hand. There is no good that we would do, in which we may not find this aversion exercising itself. "When I would do good, evil is present with me;" — 'At any time, at all times, when I would do anything that is spiritually good, evil is present — that is, present to hinder me, to obstruct me in my duty; because it abhors and loathes the thing which I have in hand, it will keep me away from it if possible.' In those in whom it prevails, it comes at length to that frame which is expressed in

¹ **Joh 4:9** Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

² Wandering aimlessly in search of pleasure.

Eze 33:31.¹ It will allow an outward, bodily presence for the worship of God, in which it is not concerned; but it keeps the heart quite away.

It may be that some will pretend they do not find it so in *themselves*, but they have *freedom* and *liberty* in and for all the duties of obedience that they attend to. But I fear this pretended liberty will be found, upon examination, to arise from one or both of these causes: —

First, *Ignorance* of the true state and condition of their own souls, of their inward man and its actings towards God. They don't know how it is with their souls; and therefore they 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 himself.^{Luk 18.11}

Or secondly, it may be that whatever duties of worship or obedience such persons perform, through *lack of faith* and any interest in Christ, they may have no communion with them; and if so, sin will make but little opposition to them in these things. We speak of those whose hearts are exercised with these things. And if under their complaints about them, and groanings for deliverance from them, others cry out to them, "Stand off, for we are holier than you," they are willing to bear their condition (knowing that their way may be safe, even though troublesome), and they are willing to see their own dangers, that they may avoid the ruin which others fall into.

Let us then consider a little this aversion to those acts of obedience in which there is no concern except for 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 be made about this matter from these duties.

But let us take into consideration the duties of retirement, such as private prayer and meditation and the like; or else extraordinary duties, or duties that are to be performed in an extraordinary manner: —

1. In these, this *aversion* and loathing will oftentimes reveal itself 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, a sense of duty, dear and real esteem for God and communion with him, have carried the soul into its closet, if there is not the vigor and power of a spiritual life constantly at work, then there will be a secret loathness in them toward their duty. Indeed, sometimes there will be a violent inclination to the contrary; so that the soul would rather do *any* thing, embrace *any* diversion, even though it wounds itself by that, than to vigorously apply itself to what it breathes after in the inward man. It is weary before it begins, and it says, "When will the work be over?" Here God and the soul are immediately concerned; and it is a great conquest to do what we *would* do, though we come exceedingly short of what we *should* do.

¹ **Eze 33:31** "So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, *but* their hearts pursue their *own* gain. Also, **Isa 29:13** Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men;

2. It reveals itself in the *mind* also. When we address ourselves to God in Christ, we are, as Job puts it, to “fill our mouths with arguments,” Job 23:4, so that we may be able to plead with him as he calls us to do: Isa 43:26, “Put me in remembrance; let us plead together.” This is why the church is called upon, in going to God –

Hos 14:2, “Take words with you, And return to the LORD. Say to Him, Take away all iniquity; Receive *us* graciously, For we will render the calves [*the sacrifices*] of our lips.”

The sum is this: that the mind should be furnished with the considerations that prevail with God, and be ready to plead them, and to manage them in the most spiritual manner, to the best advantage. Now, is there no difficulty in getting the mind into such a frame as to lay itself out to the utmost in this work? to be clear, steady, and constant in its duty? to draw out and make use of its stores and furniture of promises and experiences? It starts, wanders, flags – all 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 for this in their lack of a right understanding of the duty itself, and of the ways of managing the soul in it; therefore I will speak a little to that afterward: yet this secret enmity also has its hand in the loss they are at, and *that* is both in their minds and in their affections.

Others are forced to live in family and public duties, because they find such little benefit and success in private. And here has been the beginning of the apostasy of many professors, and the source of many foolish, sensual opinions. Finding this aversion in their minds and affections from closeness and constancy in private spiritual duties, and not knowing how to conquer and prevail against these difficulties through Him who enables us, they have at first been subdued to neglect them; partial at first, then total – until, having lost all conscience about them, they have opened a door to all sin and licentiousness, and so to a full and utter apostasy. I am persuaded that there are very few who apostatize from a profession of any length, as our days abound with. Rather, their door of entrance into the folly of backsliding was some *great and notorious sin* that bloodied their consciences, tainted their affections, and intercepted all delight from having anything more to do with God. Or else it was a course of neglect in *private duties*, arising from weariness in contending against that powerful aversion to them which they found in themselves. And this also, through the craft of Satan, has been improved into many foolish and sensual opinions about living to God without, and above, any duties of communion. And we find that after men have choked and blinded their consciences for a while with this pretense, cursed wickedness or sensuality has been the end of their folly. And the reason for all this is that,

- *giving way to the law of sin in the least, is giving strength to it.*
- *to let it alone, is to let it grow;*
- *not to conquer it, is to be conquered by it.*

As it is in respect to *private*, so it is also in respect to *public* duties which have anything extraordinary in them. What strivings, strugglings, and pleadings there are in the heart about them, especially against their spirituality! Indeed, in and under these aversions, are the mind and affections not sometimes entangled with things that are uncouth, new, and strange to them, things which, even during the least serious business, a man would not

stoop to take into his thoughts? But if the least looseness, liberty, or advantage is given to indwelling sin, if it is not perpetually watched over, it will work toward a strange and unexpected effect. In brief, let the soul uncliothe any duty whatsoever, private or public, anything that is called good — let a man divest the duty of all outward respects, which secretly insinuate themselves into the mind, and give the mind some complacency in what it is about, but do not render it acceptable to God — and he will assuredly find something of the power, and some of the effects, of this aversion. It begins in loathness and indisposition; it goes on with entangling the mind and affections with other things; and if it is not prevented, it will end in weariness about God, which He complains about in His people — Isa 43:22 “But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of Me, O Israel!” They ceased from their duty because they were “weary of God.”

But because this instance is of great importance to professors in their walking with God, we must not pass it over without intimating some directions for them in contending against and opposing it. Only this must be premised: I am not giving directions for mortifying indwelling sin in general — which is to be done by the Spirit of Christ alone, by virtue of our union with him —

Rom 8:13 "But if you, *through the Spirit*, mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live;"

— but only our particular duty with reference to this especial *evil* or *effect* of indwelling sin which we have insisted on a little; or what, in this single case, the wisdom of faith seems to direct to and call for. This will be our way and course in our process of considering its other effects.

1. The great means to prevent the fruits and effects of this aversion, is to constantly keep the soul in a universally holy frame. As this weakens the whole law of sin, so it correspondingly weakens all its properties, and particularly this aversion. It is this frame only that will enable us to say with the Psalmist, Psa 57:7, “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed.” It is utterly impossible to keep the heart in a prevailing holy frame in any *one* duty, unless it is holy in and toward all and *every* duty. If sin-entanglements get hold in any *one* thing, they will take advantage of the soul in *every* thing. A constant, even frame and temper in *all* duties, in *all* ways, is the only preservative for any *one* way. Do not let someone who is neglectful in public, persuade himself that all will be clear and easy in private, nor the contrary. There is a harmony in obedience: if you break just one part, you interrupt the whole. Our wounds in particular arise generally from negligence as to the whole course of obedience; so David informs us,

Psa 119:6, “Then I will not be ashamed, when I respect all your commandments.”

A universal respect for all God’s commandments is the only preservative from shame; and we have reason to be ashamed of nothing, more than of the shameful miscarriages of our hearts in point of duty, which arise from the principle mentioned before.

2. Labor to prevent the very *beginnings* of the workings of this aversion; let grace go before it in every duty. We are directed, 1Pet 4:7, to “watch to prayer;” and as it is to prayer, so it is to every duty — that is, consider and take care that we are not hindered from within or without as to its due performance. Watch against temptations, to oppose them; watch against the aversion that is in sin, to prevent it. Just as we are not to give way to Satan, we

are to sin no more. If it is not prevented in its first attempts, it will prevail. My meaning is this: Whatever good we have to do, as the apostle puts it,^{Rom 7.21} and find evil present with us (as we *will* find it present), prevent its parleying with the soul — its insinuating poison into the mind and affections — by a vigorous, holy, violent stirring up of the grace or graces that are to be acted out and set to work in that duty particularly. Let Jacob come first into the world; or if he is prevented by the violence of Esau, then let him lay hold on his heel to overthrow him, and to obtain the birthright. Upon the very first motion of Peter to our Saviour, crying, “Master, spare yourself,” Jesus immediately replies, “Get behind me, Satan.” So *we* ought to say, “Begone you law of sin, you present evil;” and if we do, it may have the same use to us. Get grace up, then, in time for duty; and be early in the rebukes of sin.

3. Though it does its worst, be sure it never prevails to the point of conquest. Be sure you are not wearied out by its tenacity, nor driven from your hold by its importunity; do not faint by its opposition. Take the apostle’s advice,

Heb 6:11, 12 “We desire that every one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end: that you not be slothful.”

Continue to hold out with 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 pernicious¹ to the soul. Some are diverted by business, some by company, some by the power of temptations; some are discouraged by their own darkness. But none is so dangerous as this: when the soul gives up in part or in whole, wearied by the aversion of sin *to* holiness, or to communion with God *in* holiness. This would argue for the soul’s surrender to the power of sin. Unless the Lord breaks the snare of Satan in this, it will assuredly prove ruinous. Our Saviour’s instruction is that “we always ought to pray, and not faint,” Luke 18:1. Opposition will arise — but none is so bitter and keen as that from our own hearts; if we faint, we perish. “Take heed lest you be wearied,” says the apostle, “and faint in your minds,” Heb 12:3. Such fainting is attended with a weariness, and that is attended with giving way to the aversion that is working in our hearts. This is to be avoided, if we would not perish. The caution is the same as the apostle’s:

Rom 12:12, “Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing constant in prayer;”

And in general, it is the same caution given in Rom. 6:12,

“Do not let sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.”

To cease from duty, in part or in whole, because of the aversion of sin to its spirituality, is to give sin the rule, and to obey it in its lusts. Do not yield to it then, but hold out in the conflict; wait on God and you *shall* prevail:

Isa 40:31, “Those who 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.”

¹ Exceedingly harmful; they work or spread in a hidden and injurious way, like a disease.

What is now so difficult will only *increase* in difficulty if we give way to it; but if we abide in our station, we will prevail. The mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

4. Carry around a constant, humbling *sense* of this close aversion to spirituality that still lies in our nature. If men find its efficacy, what consideration should, or *can*, be more powerful to bring them to walk humbly with God? After all the revelations that God has made of himself to them, and all the kindnesses they have received from him, and his doing them good and not evil in all things, that there should be such a heart of unkindness, and such unbelief still abiding in us, as to have an aversion to communion with him — how the very thought of that ought to throw us facedown into the dust, and fill us with shame and self-aborrence all our days! What have we found in God, in *any* of our approaches or addresses to him, that it should be this way with us? What iniquity have we found in him?

Has he been a wilderness to us, or a land of darkness? ^{Jer 2:31} Did we ever lose anything by drawing near to him? No! Has there not lain in this, all the rest and peace which we have obtained? Is he not 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 considering it, and walk in a humbling sense of it all our days. Let us carry it about with us in the most secret place in our thoughts. And just as this is a duty that, in itself, is acceptable to God, who delights to dwell with those who are of a humble and contrite spirit, so it is exceedingly efficacious to weaken the evil we are speaking of.

5. 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 by it. It is an innate acknowledged principle that the soul of man will not keep up cheerfully the worship of God, unless it discovers a beauty and attractiveness in it. Hence, when men had lost all spiritual sense and savor of the things of God, to supply the lack that was in their own souls, they invented outwardly pompous and gorgeous ways of worship, in images, paintings, pictures, and I know not what carnal ornaments; things they have called “The beauties of holiness!” This much, however, was discovered in this: 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. Let then the soul labor to acquaint itself with the spiritual beauty of obedience, of communion with God, and of all duties of immediate approach to him, so that it may be rife with delight in them.

It is not my present work to reveal the heads and springs of that beauty and desirability which is to be found in spiritual duties, in their relation to God, the eternal spring of all beauty — in relation to Christ, the love, desire, and hope of all nations — in relation to the Spirit, the great beautifier of souls, rendering them all glorious within by his grace — in their suitability to the souls of men, as to their being set towards their ultimate design — in the rectitude and holiness of the rule, to be observed when they are to be performed. But at present I will only say, in general, that to acquaint the soul thoroughly with these things, is an eminent way of weakening the aversion spoken of.

CHAPTER 6.

The work of this enmity against God, by opposition — First, It lusts — What the lusting of sin consists of — It surprises the soul — Our readiness to close with temptations — Secondly, Its fighting and warring — 1. In rebellion against the law of grace — 2. In assaulting the soul.

It has been declared how this enmity works by *aversion*; and also the means that the soul is to use to prevent its effects and prevalence. The second way by which it exerts itself is *opposition*. Enmity will oppose and contend with whatever it is at enmity with. This is so in things that are natural, and things that are moral: just as light opposes darkness, and heat opposes cold, so virtue and vice oppose each other. So it is with sin and grace. The apostle says, “These are contrary to one another,” Gal 5:17;¹ — They are placed and set in mutual opposition, and that opposition is continual and constant,² as we will see.

Now, there are two ways by which enemies manage their opposition — first by *force*; and secondly, by *fraud and deceit*. So when the Egyptians became enemies to the children of Israel, and managed their enmity against them, Exo 1:10, Pharaoh says, “Let us deal wisely with this people,” or rather, “let us deal cunningly and subtly;” for this is how Stephen describes the event with respect to this word “wisely,” Acts 7:19;³ he uses *katasophizomai* ⁴ — *i.e.*, Pharaoh used “all manner of fraudulent sophistry.” And to this *deceit*, the Egyptians added *force* in their grievous oppressions. This is the way and manner of things where there is a prevailing enmity; and both these are made use of by the law of sin in its enmity against God and our souls.

I will begin with the first, *by force*, or enmity’s acting, as it were, in downright open opposition to God and his law, or to the good that a believing soul would do in obedience to God and his law. And in this whole matter we must be careful to steer our course rightly, taking the Scripture as our guide, with spiritual reason and experience as our companions. For there are many shelves ⁵ in our course which must diligently be avoided, so that none who consider these things are 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 so many distinct degrees in its progress and procedure in pursuit of its enmity: —

¹ Ἀλλήλοις ἀντίκειται. *allelois antikeitai* [NT:240,480]

² That is, ongoing and fixed.

³ **Act 7:19** This man dealt treacherously [*katasophizomai*] with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.

⁴ κατασοφισάμενος, *katasophizamenos* [NT:2686]

⁵ A projecting ridge on a mountain or submerged under water.

First, Its general inclination: it “lusts,” Gal 5:17.¹

Secondly, Its particular way of contending: it “fights or wars,” Rom 7:23; Jas 4:1; 1Pet 2:11.²

Thirdly, Its success in this contest: it “brings the soul into captivity to the law of sin,” Rom 7:23.

Fourthly, Its growth and rage upon success: it comes to “madness,” as an enraged enemy will do, Ecc 9:3.³

All of which we must address in order.

FIRST, In general sin is said to *lust*: Gal 5:17, “The flesh lusts against the Spirit.” This word expresses the general nature of that opposition which the law of sin makes against God and the rule of his Spirit, or against grace in those who believe; and therefore, the least degree of that opposition is expressed by this. When sin does anything, it *lusts* — burning is the general acting of fire: whatever else it does, fire also burns. When fire does anything, it burns; and when the law of sin does anything, it lusts.

Hence, all the actings of this law of sin are called “The lusts of the flesh:” Gal 5:16, “You shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh;” Rom 13:14, “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” Nor are these lusts of the flesh only those by which men act out their sensuality in riot, drunkenness, uncleanness, and the like; but they comprehend all the actings of the law of sin whatsoever, in all the faculties and affections of the soul. Thus, in Eph 2:3 are mentioned the desires, or wills, or “lusts of the mind,” as well as of the “flesh.” The mind, the most spiritual part of the soul, has its lusts, no less than the sensual appetite has them, which is sometimes more properly called the “flesh.” And in the products of these lusts, there are “defilements of the spirit” as well as of the “flesh,”⁴ — that is, defilements of the mind and understanding, as well of the appetite and affections, and of the body that attends to their service.

And our holiness consists in the blamelessness of all these:

1Thes 5:23, “The 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.”

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

¹ **Gal 5:17** For the flesh LUSTS against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh;

² **Rom 7:23** 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. **Jas 4:1** Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that WAR in your members? **1Pet 2:11** Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which WAR against the soul,

³ **Ecc 9:3** Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; MADNESS *is* in their hearts while they live;

⁴ **2Cor 7:1** Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

1. In a hidden, close *propensity* 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 figment of his heart is evil, and that is continually,” Gen 6:5. It can frame, fashion, produce, or act out nothing except what is evil; because this habitual propensity to evil that is in the law of sin, is absolutely predominant in such a person. It is in the heart like poison that has nothing to allay its venomous qualities; and so it infects whatever it touches. And where the power and dominion of sin is broken, yet in its own nature it still has a habitual propensity to what is evil, and this is what its lusting consists of.

But here we must distinguish between the *habitual* FRAME of the heart, and the *natural propensity or the habitual inclination of the LAW OF SIN in the heart*. The habitual inclination of the heart is designated by the principle that bears chief or sovereign rule in it; and therefore in believers, it is an inclination to good, to God, to holiness, and 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 in its own nature*.¹ This is what the apostle intends by evil being *present* with us: “It is present with me;” Rom 7:21 that is, always present, and for its own end, which is to lust after sin.

Indwelling sin is like a river. While its springs and fountains are open, and waters are continually supplied to its streams, set a dam before it, and it causes the river to rise and swell until it crushes all before it, or it overflows its banks. Let these waters be abated, 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 whatever 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, so it will proceed.

So is it with indwelling sin: while its springs and fountains are open, it is in vain for men to set a dam before it by their convictions, resolutions, vows, and promises. They may check it for a while; but it will increase, rise high, and rage at one time or another, until it crushes all those convictions and resolutions, or makes itself an underground passage by some secret lust, that will give full vent to it. But now, suppose that its springs are greatly dried up by regenerating grace, that its streams or actings are abated by holiness — yet, while anything still remains of it, it will constantly press to vent itself, to press forward into actual sin; and *this* is its lusting.

And this *habitual propensity* in it is revealed in two ways: —

(1.) In its *unexpected surprisals* ² of the soul into foolish, sinful figments and imaginations which it did not look for, nor was any occasion given for them. It is with indwelling sin as it is with the contrary principle of sanctifying grace. Grace gives the soul, if I may say so, many a blessed surprisal. It oftentimes ingenerates and produces a holy, spiritual frame in the heart and mind, when we had no previous rational considerations to work them into it. And this manifests itself as a habitual principle prevailing in the mind: so we read, Song 6:12, “Before I was ever aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib;” that is,

¹ Rom 7:17 But now, *it* is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

² In a military sense: a surprise attack or ambush that shocks and stuns the victim.

free, willing, and ready for communion with Christ.¹ “I did not know;” 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 that it has great strength and prevalence in the soul.

And thus it is with indwelling sin also; before the soul is aware, without any provocation or temptation, when it does not know, it is thrown 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 by this, those *actus primo primi*, those first acts of the soul which are thus far involuntary, such that they do not have the actual consent of the will to them, but are voluntary as far as sin has its residence in the will. And these surprisals, if the soul is not awake to take speedy care to prevent their tendency, oftentimes set everything on fire, as it were, and engage the mind and affections into actual sin. For just as by grace we are oftentimes, before we are aware, “made like 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; so by sin we are oftentimes, before we are aware, carried into distempered affections, foolish imaginations, and pleasing delightfulness in things that are not good or profitable. From this comes that caution of the apostle,

Gal 6:1 — “If a man is surprised unawares ² with a fault, or in a transgression.”

I have no doubt that the subtlety of Satan and the power of temptation are taken into consideration here by the apostle, which causes him to express a man’s falling into sin by *prolephthe* ³ — by surprise — “if he is surprised.” So this working of indwelling sin is to be considered in this surprise also; and that is in the inmost place, without which nothing else could surprise us. For without its help, whatever comes from *without* — from Satan or the world — must allow for some parley in the mind before it is received; but it is from *within*, from ourselves, that we are surprised. Hereby are we disappointed and worked over into doing what we would *not* do, and hindered from doing what we *would* do.

This is why, when the soul is oftentimes doing quite another thing, as it were, and engaged in quite another design, sin starts in the heart or imagination, what carries it away into what is evil and sinful. Indeed, to display its power, when the soul is seriously engaged in the mortification of any sin, it will sometimes, by one means or other, lead it away into a dalliance with the very sin whose ruin the soul is seeking, and whose mortification it is engaged in! But because there is a special enticing or entangling in this operation of the law of sin, we will speak to that fully afterward.

Now, these surprisals can be from nothing else than a habitual propensity to evil in the *principle* from which they proceed — not a habitual *inclination* to actual sin in the mind or heart, but a habitual propensity to evil in the sin that is [acting] in the mind or heart. This precedes the soul with its intents.⁴ Some may have observed how much our

¹ לֹא יָדַעְתִּי — *Lo’yada’ti* [OT:03045,08804]

² Ἐάν προληφθῆ *ean prolephthe* [NT:1437,4301]

³ προληφθῆ *prolephthe* [NT:4301]

⁴ Originally, “This prevents the soul with its figments.” — *prevent* in Middle English can mean *precede*. Figments are thoughts; but in this context, what the soul thinks to do, what it *would do*, is thwarted by indwelling sin.

communion with God is prevented, how many meditations are disturbed, and how much the minds and consciences of men have been defiled, by this *acting of sin*. I know of no greater burden in the life of a believer than these involuntary surprisals of soul; *involuntary*, I say, as to the actual *consent* of the will; but not involuntary in respect to that corruption which is *in* the will, and which is the *principle* preceding them. It is in respect to these surprisals that the apostle makes his complaint in Rom 7:24.¹

(2.) This *habitual inclination* manifests itself in its readiness and promptness, without dispute or altercation, to join and close with every temptation by which it may possibly be excited. As we know, it is in the nature of fire to burn, because it immediately lays hold on whatever is combustible. Let any temptation whatsoever be proposed to a man — if it is suitable to what makes it a temptation to his corruptions, in its matter, or in the manner of its proposal — immediately he not only has to deal with the temptation as outwardly proposed, but also with his own heart about it. Without further consideration or debate, the temptation already has a friend within him. Not a moment's space is given between the proposal, and the necessity that is incumbent on the soul, to look for its enemy *within*. And this also argues for a constant, habitual propensity to evil.

Our Saviour said of the assaults and temptations of Satan, “The prince of this world comes, but he has no part in me,” John 14:30. He had more temptations, intensively and extensively, in number, quality, and fierceness — from Satan and the world — than any of the sons of men ever had. Yet in all of them, he only had to deal with that which came from without. His holy heart had nothing like them, suited to them, or ready to entertain them: “The prince of this world had nothing in him.” So it was with Adam. When a temptation befell him, he had only the outward proposal to look at — all was well within, until the outward temptation took place and prevailed.

With us it is not so. In a city that is united in itself, compact and entire, without divisions and parties, if an enemy approaches around it, the rulers and inhabitants have no other thoughts than how they may oppose the enemy without, and resist him in his approaches. But if the city is *divided* in itself, if there are factions and traitors within, the very first thing they do if they would be safe, is to look for the enemies at home, the traitors within — to cut off the head of Sheba.²Sam 20:22 All was well with Adam within doors when Satan came; so that he had nothing to do but to look for his assaults and approaches. But *now*, upon the access of any temptation, the soul is instantly to look inside where it will find this traitor at work, coming with the baits of Satan, and stealing away the heart. This it always does, which evinces a habitual inclination.

In Psa 38:17,² David says, “I am ready to halt,” or ready for halting:³ “I am prepared and disposed to hallucination, to my foot slipping into sin,” verse 16, as he expounds the meaning of that phrase,

¹ Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

² Psa 38:17-18 “For I *am* ready to halt [*or fall*], and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.”

³ כִּי־אֲנִי לְצַלֵּעַ נָכוֹן — *ki-'ani letsela' nakon* [OT:03559,08737,06761]

Psa 73.2, 3, “But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well near slipped. For I *was* envious of the foolish [*boastful*], When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”¹

From indwelling sin there was a continual disposition in him to be slipping, stumbling, or halting, on every occasion or temptation. There is nothing so vain, foolish, ridiculous, absurd, nothing so vile and abominable, nothing so atheistic or execrable, that if proposed to the soul by temptation, this law of sin is not ready to respond to it before it is decried by grace. And 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 surprisals of the soul to sin, and its readiness, without dispute or consideration, to join in all temptations whatsoever.

2. Its lusting consists in its *actual pressing* after that which is evil, and *actual opposition* to that which is good. The former instance showed its constant readiness to this work; this addresses the work itself. It is not only ready, but for the most part it is always engaged. “It lusts,” says the Holy Ghost. It does so continually. It stirs in the soul by one act or another constantly, almost like the spirits in the blood, or the blood in the veins. The apostle calls this, lust’s tempting:

Jas 1:14, “Every man is tempted by his own lust.”

Now, what does it mean to be tempted? It is to have something proposed to a man’s consideration which, if he embraces it, it is evil; it is sin to him. This is sin’s trade: “It lusts.”² It is raising up in the heart, and proposing to the mind and affections, that which is evil; it is testing, as it were, whether the soul will accept its suggestions, or how far it will carry them on, even if it does not wholly prevail. Now, when such a temptation comes from without, it is an indifferent thing to the soul — it is neither good nor evil — unless it is consented to; but the very proposal from *within*, being the soul’s own act, is its sin. And this is the work of the law of sin — to restlessly and continually raise up and propose countless and varying forms and appearances of evil, of this or that kind, indeed of *every* kind that the nature of man is capable of exercising corruption in. It hatches and proposes to the soul something or other, in matter, or manner, or circumstance, that is inordinate, unspiritual, and unresponsive to the rule. And the apostle may be speaking to this power of sin to produce figments and ideas of actual evil in the heart here:

¹Thes 5:22, “Abstain from all appearance of evil.”³

Keep yourselves from every figment or idea of sin in the heart. For the word used there, *eidous*, nowhere signifies an outward form or appearance; nor is it the appearance of evil; but it is an evil idea or figment that is intended. And this lusting of sin is that which the prophet expresses in wicked men, in whom the law of sin is predominant:

Isa 57:20, “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt;”

¹ In Psalm 38.17-18, we may fall into snares set for us by others; and in this Psalm, we may fall into snares set for us in our own hearts by indwelling sin.

² Επιθυμεί *epithumei* [NT:1937]

³ Από παντός εἶδους πονηροῦ ἀπέχεσθε *apo pantos eidous ponerou apexesthe* [NT:575, 3956, 1491, 4191, 567]

This is a most lively similitude; it expresses the lustings of the law of sin, which restlessly and continually bubble 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 “lusts.”

SECONDLY, there is its 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* , and desires in the appetite and in the affections, proposing them to the will. But it does not rest there; it *cannot* rest. It urges, presses, and pursues its proposals with earnestness, strength, and vigor — fighting, and contending, and warring to obtain its end and purpose. If it would merely stir up and propose things to the soul, and then immediately acquiesce in the sentence and judgment of the mind — that the thing is evil; that it is against God and his will; and that it is not to be insisted on any further — then much sin might be prevented that is now produced. But it does not rest here; it proceeds to carry on its design, and it does that with earnestness and contention. By this means wicked men inflame themselves: Isa 57:5, “Inflaming yourselves with idols.” They are self-inflamers (as the word 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: —

1. In *its rebellion* against grace, or the law of the mind.
2. In *its assaulting* the soul, contending for rule and sovereignty over it.

1. The first is expressed by the apostle in Rom 7:23: “I find,” he says, “another law rebelling against the law of my mind.”¹ There are, it seems, *two laws* in us — the law of the flesh, or of *sin* ; 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; so the apostle declares in verse 22, “I delight in the law of God in the inward man.” Obedience to this law is performed with delight and satisfaction in the inward man, because its authority is lawful and good. It is even more expressly stated in Rom 6:14, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace.”

Now, to war against the law that has a just sovereignty, is to rebel; and so *antistrateuesthai* ² signifies; it is to rebel, and should have been translated, “Rebelling against the law of my mind.” And 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 effect of this, as the apostle tells us, is “doing what we would not, and not doing what we would,” Rom 7:15, 16. And we may gather a notable instance of the power of sin in its rebellion, from this passage. The law of grace prevails upon the *will* , so that it would do what is good: “To will is present with me,” verse 18; “When I would do good,” verse 21; and again, verse 19, “And I would not do evil.” And it prevails upon the *understanding* , so that it approves or disapproves, according

¹ ἀντιστρατευόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοός μου, *antistrateuomenon to nomo tou noos mou* [NT:497, 3551, 3563]

² ἀντιστρατεύεσθαι *antistrateuesthai* [NT:497]

to the dictates of the law of grace: Verse 16, “I consent to the law, that it is good;” and verse 15.¹ The judgment always lies on the side of grace. It prevails also on the *affections*: Verse 22, “I delight in the law of God in the inward man.”

Now if this is so — that grace has sovereign power in the understanding, will, and affections — then why is it that it does not always prevail, that we do not always do what we would, and abstain from what we would not do? Is it not *strange* that a man should not do what he chooses, wills, likes, and delights in? Is there any thing more required to enable us to do what is good? As much as can be expected from it, the law of grace does all that which, in itself, is abundantly sufficient for “perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.”^{2Cor 7.1} But here lies the difficulty, in the entangling opposition that is made by the rebellion of this “law of sin.” Nor can it be expressed with what vigor and variety sin acts in this matter. Sometimes it proposes diversions; sometimes it causes weariness; sometimes it discovers difficulties; sometimes it stirs up contrary affections; sometimes it begets prejudices; and one way or another, it entangles the soul. So that it never allows grace to have an absolute and complete success in *any* duty. Verse 18 — “For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I do not find.” I do not find the way to perfectly work out or accomplish that which is good;² so the word signifies; and that is from this opposition and resistance which is 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.
- (2.) In the opposition that it makes to particular duties.

(1.) In the opposition it makes to the general purpose and course of the soul. There is none in whom the Spirit of Christ is found, who is His, for whom it is not Christ’s general design and purpose, to walk in a universal conformity to him in all things. From the inward frame of the heart to the whole compass of his outward actions, so it is with him. This is what God requires in his covenant:

Gen 17:1, “Walk before me, and be perfect.”

Accordingly, his design is to walk before God; and his frame is sincerity and uprightness in this. This is called, “Clinging to the Lord with purpose of heart,” Acts 11:23 — that is, in *all* things; and that is not with a slothful, dead, ineffectual purpose, but one that is operative, and sets the whole soul at work in pursuit of it. The apostle sets this forth when he says,

Phi 3:12-14, “Not as though I had already attained, nor were already perfect; but I follow after, that I may apprehend that for which I am also apprehended by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

He uses three phrases excellently expressing the soul’s universal pursuit of this purpose of heart in clinging to God:

¹ **Rom 7:15** “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.”

² τὸ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐκ εὐ ἵρίσκω *To katergazesthai to kalon ouk heurisko* [NT:2716, 2570, 3756, 2147]

First, he says in verse 12 — “I follow after,”¹ I prosecute (the word *dioko* signifies properly to persecute); and we know with what earnestness and diligence it is usually done.

Secondly — “I reach forward,”² reaching with great intension of spirit and affections. It is a great and constant endeavor that is expressed in that word.

Thirdly — we say, “I press towards the mark;”³ that is, like men who are running for a prize. All of them display the vigor, earnestness, diligence, and constancy that is used in the pursuit of this purpose.

And the nature of the *principle of grace* requires this in those in whom it operates. Yet we see with what failings — yes failings — their pursuit of this course is attended. The frame of the heart is *changed* — the heart is stolen away; the affections are entangled; eruptions of unbelief and distempered passions are revealed; carnal wisdom, with all that attends it, is set to work — all of this is *contrary* to the general principle and purpose of the soul. And all of this is from the rebellion of this *law of sin*, stirring up and provoking the heart to disobedience. The prophet gives us this characteristic of hypocrites:

Hos 10:2, “*Their heart is divided; therefore they will be found faulty.*”

Now, though this is wholly so in respect to the mind and judgment in hypocrites only, yet it is partially so in the best of believers, in the sense described. They have a division, not *of* the heart, but *in* the heart; and this is why they are so often found faulty. So says the apostle,

Gal 5:17. “So that we cannot do the things that we would.”

We cannot accomplish the design of close walking⁴ according to the law of grace, because of the contrariety and rebellion of this law of sin [at work in us].

(2.) It also rebels in respect to *particular duties*. It creates a combustion in the soul against the particular commands and designs of the law of grace. “You cannot do the things that you would;” that is, “The duties which you judge are incumbent on you, those which you approve and delight in (in the inward man), you cannot do as you would.”

Take an instance in prayer. 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 “pray in the spirit,”^{Eph 6.18} fervently,^{Jas 5.16} “with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered;”^{Rom 8.26} in faith, with love and delight, pouring forth his soul unto the Lord. *This is what he aims at.*

Now, oftentimes he finds rebellion in this matter — there is a fight with the law of sin. He will find it difficult to get anything done, though he thought to “do all things.”^{Phi 4.13} I do

¹ Διώκω, *dioko* [NT:1377] – to pursue, harass, or persecute.

² Επεκτείνωμαι, *epkteinomai* [NT1901] – to stretch out towards.

³ Κατὰ σκοπόν διώκω, *kata skopon dioko* [NT:2596, 4649, 1377]

⁴ This term simply means walking close to God in faithful obedience (Gen 5.24; 6.9; Psa 23.4; Mat 16.24).

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!

E'en though it be a cross that raises me,

Still all my song shall be, nearer, my God, to Thee. (*Sarah Adams, 1841*)

not say it is always this way, but it is when sin “wars and rebels;” this expresses an especial acting out of its power. Poor creatures oftentimes meet with woeful entanglements on this account. Instead of that free, enlarged communion with God that they *aim at*, the best that their souls can attain, 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, when it comes to be observed, that this law of sin will not, one way or another, make headway and rebel against it.

And this is the first way by which it fights.

2. It 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: 1Pet 2:11, “They fight,” or war, “against the soul;”¹ Jas 4:1, “They fight,” or war, “in your members.”² Peter shows what they oppose and fight against — namely, the “soul” and the law of grace in it; James shows what they fight with or by — namely, the “members,” or the corruption that is in our mortal bodies. The Greek word *antistrateuesthai*³ is to rebel against a superior; *strateuesthai*⁴ is to assault or war for superiority. It takes the part of an *assailant* as well as a *resister*. It attempts to gain rule and sovereignty for itself, as well as to oppose the rule of grace. Now, all war and fighting has something of violence in it; and therefore there is some violence in that acting of sin which the Scripture calls “fighting and warring.” And this assailing efficacy of sin, as distinguished from its rebelling, which was addressed before, consists in the following things: —

(1.) All its *positive actings*, in stirring us up to sin, belong to this head. Oftentimes, by the vanity of the mind, the sensuality of the affections, or the folly of the imaginations, it sets upon the soul then — when the law of grace is not actually putting it on duty — so that it does not rebel in this, but it assaults. Hence the apostle cries out, Rom 7:24, “Who will deliver me from it?” Who will rescue me out of its hand? as the word signifies. When we pursue an enemy, and he resists us, we do not cry out, “Who will deliver us?” for *we* are the assailants. But, “Who will rescue me?” is the cry of someone who is attacked by an enemy. So it is here: a man is assaulted by his “own lust,” as James puts it. Along the way, in his employment, under a duty, sin sets upon the soul with vain imaginations and foolish desires; it would willingly employ the soul to make provision for its satisfaction. This is what the apostle cautions us against in Rom 13:14.⁵ Do not accomplish the providence or projection of the flesh, for its own satisfaction.⁶

(2.) Its *importunity* and urgency seems to be noted in this expression “warring.” Enemies in war are restless, pressing, and importunate; so is the law of sin. Does it attack the soul? — Throw off its motions; it will return again. Rebuke them by the power of grace; they withdraw for a while, and then return again. Set before them the cross of Christ; they do

¹ Στρατεύονται κατὰ τῆ ψυχῆς *strateuontai kata to psuches* [NT:4754, 2596, 5590]

² Στρατεύονται ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ὑ ἡμῶν, *strateuontai en tois melesin humon* [NT:4754, 3196, 5216]

³ Ἀντιστρατεύεσθαι *antistrateuesthai* [NT:497]

⁴ στρατεύεσθαι *strateuesthai* [NT:4754]

⁵ **Rom 13:14** But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

⁶ Τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιείσθε εἰς ἐπιθυμίας *tes sarkos pronoian me poeisthe eis epithumias* [NT:4561, 4307, 1519, 1939]

like those who came to take him [in the Garden] ^{Joh 18.6} — at the sight of him they drew back and fell to the ground; but they arose again and laid hands on him — sin gives way for a season, but it returns and presses on the soul again. Remind it of the love of God in Christ; even though it is stricken, it will not give up. 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 flee from it; it follows as if on the wings of the wind.

And by this importunity it wearies and wears out the soul; if the great remedy does not come quickly, it prevails to a conquest: "For if you live after the flesh, you shall die; but if, through the Spirit, you mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live," Rom 8:13. There is nothing more marvellous or dreadful in the working of sin, than this importunity. The soul does not know what to make of it; it dislikes, abhors, and abominates the evil that it tends toward; it despises thoughts of it, it hates them like hell; and yet evil, by itself, is imposed on them, as if it were another person — as if an express enemy had gotten within him. The apostle reveals all this in Rom 7:15: "The things that I do I hate." It is not the outward actions, but the inward risings of the mind that he addresses. "I *hate* them," he says; "I abominate them." But why then would he have anything more to do with them? If he hates them, and abhors himself for them, then leave them alone; have nothing more to do with them, and so end the matter. But Alas! he says in verse 17, "It is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me;" — I have someone within me that is my enemy, who with endless, restless importunity puts these things upon me, even the things that I hate and abominate. I cannot get rid of them; I am weary of myself; I cannot flee from them. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" ^{Rom 7.24} I do not say this is the ordinary condition of believers, but it is often this way when this law of sin rises up to war and fighting. It is not this way with believers in respect to particular sins — this or that sin, outward sins, sins of life and conversation — but it is often this way in respect to their vanity of mind, to their inward and spiritual distempers. Some, I know, pretend to great perfection; but I am resolved to believe the apostle before them; all and every one of them.

(3.) It carries on its war by *entangling the affections*, and drawing them into a combination against the mind. Let grace be enthroned in the mind and judgment; yet if the law of sin lays hold of and entangles the affections, any of them, then it has gotten a fort from where it continually assaults the soul. Hence the great duty of mortification is chiefly directed at the affections:

Col 3:5, "Mortify therefore your members which are on the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

The "members that are on the earth" are our *affections*: for sin is not seated in the outward part of the body. In particular, "covetousness" is not, which is enumerated among our members on the earth that are to be mortified. Indeed, after grace has taken possession of the soul, the affections become the principal seat of the remainders of sin. And therefore Paul says that this law is "in our members," Rom 7:23; and James says that it "wars in our members," Jas 4:1 — that is, it wars in our affections. And there is no estimate to be rightly taken of the work of mortification, except by the affections. Every day we may see persons of very eminent light, who still have visibly unmortified hearts

and conversations; their affections have not been crucified with Christ. Now then, when this law of sin can possess any affection, whatever it is — love, delight, fear — it will make *from* it and *by* it, fearful assaults upon the soul. For instance, if it has gotten the love of anyone entangled with the world, or with the things of the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life;” ^{1Joh 2.16} — how it will take advantage on every occasion to assault the soul! The soul does nothing, attempts nothing, in no place or company — it performs no duty, private or public — that sin will not have one blow or other at it. In one way or another, it will be soliciting for itself.¹

This is the sum of what we will offer as to this acting of the law of sin — by way of fighting and warring against our souls — which is so often mentioned in the Scripture. And 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, and they are, first, a due consideration of God, and then a due consideration of ourselves — of God, in his greatness, glory, holiness, power, majesty, and authority; of ourselves, in our mean, abject, and sinful condition. Now, of all things in our condition, there is nothing so well suited to this end and purpose as that which lies before us: namely, the vile remainders of enmity against God which are still in our hearts and natures. And it is no small evidence of a gracious soul, when it is willing to search itself in this matter, and to be helped in it from a word of truth; when it is willing to have the word dive into the secret parts of the heart, and rip open whatever there is of evil and corruption that lies in it.

The prophet says of Ephraim, Hos 10:11, “He loved to tread out the corn;” he loved to work when he might eat, to always have the corn before him: but God, he says, would “cause him to plough;” a labor no less necessary, even though at present it is not so delightful. Most men love to hear of the doctrine of grace, of the pardon of sin, of free love; and they suppose they find food in it; however, it is evident that they grow and thrive in the life and *notion* of them. But they do not delight so much in breaking up the fallow ground of their hearts, to inquire after the weeds and briars that grow in them, even though this is no less necessary than the other. This path is not so beaten as that of grace, nor is it so trod in, even though it is the only way to come to a true knowledge of grace itself.

It may be that some, who are wise and have 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 is to be shaken off if we have any regard for our own souls. It is more than probable that many a false hypocrite, who deceived himself as well as others because he thought the doctrine of the gospel *pleased* him, and therefore he supposed he *believed* it, might be delivered from his soul-ruining deceits, if he would only diligently apply himself to this search of his own heart.

Or, would other professors walk with so much boldness and security (as some do), if they rightly considered what a deadly watchful enemy they continually carry about *with* them and *in* them? Would they indulge so much as they do in carnal joys and pleasures, or pursue their perishing affairs with so much delight and greediness as they do? It should be wished

¹ That is, it will importune to have us satisfy the lusts of our flesh.

that we would *all* apply our hearts more to this work, so as to come to a true understanding of the nature, power, and subtlety of our adversary, so that our souls may be humbled; and that would be —

1. *In walking with God.* His delight is with the humble and contrite ones, those who tremble at his word, the mourners in Zion; and we are such only when we have a due sense of our own vile condition. This will beget reverence of God, a sense of our distance from him, admiration of his grace and condescension, a due valuation of mercy that is far above those light, verbal, airy *attainments* that some have boasted of.

2. *In walking with others.* It lays in provision to prevent those great evils of judging, of spiritual unmercifulness, of harsh censuring, which I have observed are pretended by many who, at the same time (as it afterward appeared) have been guilty of greater or worse crimes than those whom they have raged against in others.

This, I say, will lead us to meekness, compassion, readiness to forgive, and to pass by offenses — as the Apostle plainly declares, "considering yourself, lest you also be tempted," Gal 6:1.¹ The man who 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 whatsoever. 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 other professors, and our enjoyments; let us go then and judge, condemn, and reproach others who have been tempted — and we shall find a great inconsistency in these things.

Many things of a similar nature might be added here upon the consideration of this woeful effect of indwelling sin. The way to oppose and defeat its design in this will be considered afterward.

¹ **Gal 6:1** Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

CHAPTER 7.

The captivating power of indwelling sin, what it consists of — The prevalence of sin, from itself, from temptation — The rage and madness that is in sin.

The THIRD thing assigned to this law of sin, in its opposition to God and the law of his grace, is that *it leads the soul captive*:

Rom 7:23, “I find a law leading me captive to the law of sin.”

The law of sin is captivating. In that verse is the utmost height to which the apostle carries the opposition and warring of the remainders of indwelling sin. He closes its consideration with a complaint about the state and condition of believers by it, and an earnest prayer for deliverance from it: Rom 7.24, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” What this expression contains and intends by it, will be declared in the ensuing observations: —

1. It is not directly the *power* and actings of the law of sin that are expressed here, but its *success* in and upon its actings. 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; and it is a specific expression in the Scripture of great success. So the Lord Christ, on his victory over Satan, is said to “lead captivity captive,” Eph 4:8; that is, to conquer the one who had conquered and prevailed over others. And he did this when, Heb 2:14, “by death he destroyed the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Here then is revealed a great prevalence and power of sin in its warring against the soul. It wars so as to “lead captive;” if it did not have greater power, it could not do this, especially against that resistance of the soul which is included in this expression.

2. It is said that it leads the soul captive “to the law of sin;” Rom 7.23 — not to this or that sin, not to a particular or actual sin, but to the “law of sin.” God, for the most part, orders things so, and gives out such supplies of grace to believers, that they will not be made prey to this or that particular sin — that it should prevail in them and compel them to serve it in its lusts — that it should have dominion over them — that they should be captives and slaves to it. This is what David prays so earnestly against:

Psa 19:12, 13, “Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; do not let them have dominion over me: then I will be upright.”

He assumes the law of sin continues in him, verse 12, which will produce errors of life and secret sins. He finds relief against these in pardoning and cleansing mercy, which he prays for. “This,” he says, “will be my condition. But as for sins of pride and boldness, as are all sins that get dominion in a man and make him captive, may the Lord restrain your servant from them.” For whatever sin gets such power in a man, whether it is small or great in its own nature, it becomes in that person a sin of boldness, pride, and presumption. For these things are not reckoned from the nature or kind of the sin, but from its prevalence and habit. It is in this that its pride, boldness, and contempt of God consists. If I am not mistaken, Jabez prays to the same purpose:

1Chr 4:10, “Oh that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from evil, so that it may not grieve me!”

This holy man took occasion from his own name¹ to pray against sin, so that it might not be a grief and sorrow to him by its power and prevalence. I confess, sometimes it may come to this 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; and this was plainly so in these verses:

Isa 57:17, 18, “For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry, and struck him: I hid myself, and was angry, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him.”

They continued under the power of their covetousness, so that no dealings of God with them, for so long a time, could reclaim them. But, for the most part, when any lust or sin so prevails, it is from the advantage and furtherance it has gotten by some powerful temptation of Satan.

He has poisoned, inflamed, and entangled the soul. So the apostle, speaking of those who had fallen away from their holiness, through sin, says,

2Tim 2:26, “They were in the snare of the devil, being taken captive by him at his will.”

Though it was their own lusts that they served, yet they were brought into bondage to it by being entangled in some snare of Satan; and from this they are said to be “taken alive,” like a poor beast in a snare.

And here, by the way, we may inquire a little, whether the prevailing power of a particular sin in anyone is from the sin itself, or from the influence of temptation upon it; concerning this, for the moment I will make only these two observations: —

(1.) Much of the *prevalence* of sin upon the soul is certainly from Satan, when the perplexing and captivating sin has no particular footing or advantage in the nature, constitution, or condition of the sinner. When any lust grows high, and prevails more than others on its own account, it is from the particular advantage that it has in the natural constitution, or in the station or condition in the world that this person has. For otherwise, the law of sin gives an equal propensity to all evil, and an equal vigor to every lust. Therefore, when it cannot be discerned that the captivating sin is particularly fixed in the nature of the sinner, or that it is advantaged from his education or employment in the world, its prevalence is specifically from Satan. He has gotten to the root of that sin, and has given it poison and strength. Indeed, sometimes what may seem to the soul to be the corrupt lusting of the heart, is perhaps nothing but Satan’s imposing his suggestions on the imagination. Then, if a man finds an importunate rage from any corruption that is not evidently seated in his nature, let him (as the Papists say) cross himself — or flee by faith to the cross of Christ — for the devil is near at hand.

¹ Jabez means “pain,” sorrow, or trouble, 1Chr 4.9.

(2.) When a lust is prevalent to the point of *captivity*, where it brings no advantage to the flesh, it is from Satan. All that the law of sin does by itself, is to serve the provision of the flesh, Rom 13:14; it must bring to it something of the profits and pleasures that are its object. Now, if the prevailing sin does not do so in itself — if it is more spiritual and inward — then it is much more from Satan by way of the imagination, than it is from the corruption of the heart itself. But this is incidental.

I say then, that the apostle does not address here 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 would or not. Sometimes the soul thinks or hopes that through grace, it may 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 will now be freed from the law of sin. But after a while, it perceives that it is quite otherwise. Sin acts again, and makes good its old station; and the soul finds that, whether it would or not, it must bear its yoke. This makes it sigh and cry out for deliverance.

3. This *leading captive* argues for a prevalence against the *reluctant* or contrary actings of the will. This is intimated plainly in this expression — namely, that the will opposes and makes headway, as it were, against the working of sin. The apostle declares this in these expressions:

Rom 7:19, 20, “For the good that I would *do*, I do not do; but the evil which I would not *do*, that I do. Now if I do what I would not *do*, it is no more I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.”

And this is what the lusting of the Spirit against the flesh consists in;^{Gal 5:17} that is, in grace contending to expel and subdue sin. The spiritual habits of grace that are in the will, resist and act against sin in this way; and 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 except against his will. Captivity is misery and trouble, and no man willingly puts himself into trouble. Men choose captivity in its causes, and in the ways and means leading to it, but not in itself. So the prophet informs us in Hos 5:11, “Ephraim was,” 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. Whatever consent the soul may give to sin then — which is the means of this captivity — it gives no consent to the captivity itself; *that* is wholly against the will. Hence these things follow: —

(1.) That *the power of sin is great* — which is what we are demonstrating; and this appears in its prevalence to captivity against the actings and contendings of the will for liberty from sin. If it had no opposition to it, or its adversary were weak, negligent, and slothful, then making captives would be no great evidence of its power; but its prevailing against diligence, activity, watchfulness, and the constant reluctance of the will — *this* evinces its efficacy.

(2.) This *leading captive* intimates that there are *manifold and particular successes*. If it did not have any particular success, it could not be said to *lead captive* at all. It might

rebel, it might *assail*; but without some successes, it cannot be said to *lead captive*. And 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 sin's utmost aim; sometimes it obtains the consent of the will, but it is thrown out by grace, and it proceeds no further; sometimes it wearies and entangles the soul that it turns aside, as it were, and leaves it contending — which is a success also. One or more, or all of these, must exist where there is captivity. The apostle ascribes this kind of course to covetousness, 1Tim 6:9, 10.¹

(3.) This *leading captive* manifests that this condition is *miserable and wretched*. How sad it is to be thus yoked and dealt with: against the judgment of the mind, against the choice and consent of the will, against its utmost strivings and contendings! To be compelled to bear the yoke again, when the neck is still sore and tender from former pressures — this pierces, this grieves, this even breaks the heart. When the soul is principled by grace to loathe sin and every evil way, to hate the least discrepancy between itself and the holy will of God, and then it is imposed on by this law of sin, with all that enmity and folly, that deadness and filth with which it is attended — what could be a more dreadful condition? All captivity is dreadful in its own nature; but its greatest aggravation comes from the sort of tyrant that has captivated a person. Now, what can be a worse tyrant than this law of sin? Hence the apostle, having mentioned this captivity, cries out as one who is quite weary and ready to faint, Rom 7:23, 24.

(4.) This condition is *specific 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 are convinced of the evil of it — an adulterer is convinced of his uncleanness, a drunkard of his abomination — and maybe they make some resolutions against it; but their lust is too hard for them. They *cannot* cease to sin, and so they are made captives or slaves to this or that particular sin. But they cannot be said to be led captive to *the law of sin*. And that is because they are willingly subject to it. It has, as it were, a rightful dominion over them, and they do not oppose it, except when it has eruptions that disturb their consciences. And then the opposition they make to it is not from their wills, but it is the mere acting of a frightened conscience and a convinced mind. They do not regard the *nature* of sin, but only its guilt and consequences. But to be brought into captivity is what befalls a man against his will.

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

4. The fourth and last degree of the opposition made by the law of sin to God, and to the law of his will and grace, is in its *rage and madness*. There is madness in its nature:

Ecc 9:3, “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart.”

The evil that the heart of man is full of by nature, is that indwelling sin of which we speak; and this is so much in their heart, that it rises up to madness. The Holy Ghost expresses this

¹ **1Tim 6:9** But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

rage of sin by a fit similitude, which he uses in various places such as Jer 2:24; Hos 8:9.¹ It makes men like “a wild ass;” “she traverses her ways,” and “sniffs at the wind,” and runs wherever her mind or lust leads her. And he says of idolaters who are enraged with their lusts, that they are “mad with their idols,” Jer 50:38.² We may consider a little what lies in this madness and rage of sin, and how it rises up to it: —

1. For the nature of it, it seems to consist in a violent, heady, pertinacious pressing toward evil or sin. Violence, importunity, and pertinacity³ 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 then rebuked — it returns and exerts its poison again; the soul is startled, throws it off — it returns again with *new* violence and importunity; the soul cries out for help and deliverance, looks round about to all springs of gospel grace and relief; it trembles at the furious assaults of sin, and it throws itself into the arms of Christ for deliverance. And if it is not able to take that course, it is foiled and hurried up and down through the mire and filth of foolish imaginations, corrupt and nauseous lusts, which rend and tear it, as if they would devour its whole spiritual life and power. See 1Tim 6:9, 10; 2Pet 2:14.⁴

It was not much different with those whom we instanced before, Isa 57:17.⁵ They had an inflamed, enraged lust working in them, even “covetousness,” or the love of this world; by which (as the apostle puts it) men “pierce themselves through with many sorrows.” God is angry with them, and reveals his wrath by all the ways and means that it was possible for them to be made sensible of it. He was “angry, and struck them;” but even though this may have staggered them a little, yet they “went on.” He is angry, and “hides himself” from them — he deserts them as to his gracious, assisting, comforting presence. Does this work the effect? No; they still go on frowardly, like men who are mad on their covetousness. Nothing can put a stop to their raging lusts. This is plain madness and fury. We need not look far for instances. We see men mad upon their lusts every day; and (which is the worst kind of madness) their lusts do not rage so much *in* them, as they rage in the *pursuit* of them. Are those greedy pursuits of *things in the world* — which we see some men engaged in, though they have other pretences for them — anything other than plain madness in the pursuit of *their own lusts*? God, who searches the hearts of men, knows that most things done in the world with other pretences, are nothing but the actions of men who are mad, and furious in the pursuit of their own lusts.

2. Sin does not arise to this height ordinarily, but only when it has a double advantage: —

¹ **Jer 2:24** A wild donkey used to the wilderness, *That* sniffs at the wind in her desire; In her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; In her month they will find her. **Hos 8:9** For they have gone up to Assyria, *Like* a wild donkey alone by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers.

² **Jer 50:38** A drought is against her waters, and they will be dried up. For it is the land of carved images, And they are insane with *their* idols.

³ Holding tenaciously to a purpose, belief, opinion, or course of action.

⁴ **2Pet 2:14** having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, *and are* accursed children.

⁵ **Isa 57:17** For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, And he went on backsliding in the way of his heart.

(1.) That it is provoked, enraged, and heightened by some great *temptation*. Though it is a poison in itself, yet being inbred in nature, it does not grow violently outrageous without some new poison of Satan contributed to it in 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 in which it went forth to the business of Bathsheba and Uriah. Though sin is always a fire in the bones, it does not burst into flame unless Satan comes with his bellows to blow it up. And 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 contributes to the business.

(2.) It must be advantaged by some *former* entertainment and prevalence. Sin does not grow to this height at its first assault. If it had not been allowed to make its entrance, if there had 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 forceful stop to its beginnings, its first motions and actings. Risk it all on the first attempt. Die rather than yield one step to it. If it makes any entrance into the soul, and is entertained at all — whether through the deceit of sin, or the negligence of the soul, or the soul's fleshly confidence that it can set bounds on lust's actings at other times — then indwelling sin gains strength and power, and will insensibly arise to the frame under consideration. You have never experienced the fury of sin if you have not been content with some of its dalliance. If you had not brought up this servant, this slave, so delicately, it would not have presumed now to be above a son.¹ Now, once the law of sin in any particular has gotten this double advantage — the furtherance of a vigorous temptation, and some prevalence that was previously obtained, and by which it is let into the strengths of the soul — it often rises up to this frame of which we speak.

3. We may see what *accompanies* this rage and madness, what its properties are, and what effects it produces: —

(1.) There is in it the throwing 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 be utterly expelled from its throne; it will still keep its right and sovereignty. But its influences may for a season be intercepted, and its government suspended by the power of sin. Can we think that the law of grace had any actual ruling influence on David's heart when, upon being provoked by Nabal, he was so hurried with the desire for self-revenge that he cried, "Strap on your swords," to his companions, and he resolved not to leave one man alive of Nabal's whole household? (1Sam 25:34); or that Asa was in any better frame when he struck the prophet and put him in prison, who spoke to him in the name of the Lord? Sin in this case is like an untamed horse which, having thrown off its rider, runs away with fierceness and rage. Sin first throws off a present sense of the yoke of Christ and the law of his grace, and then it hurries the soul at its pleasure. Let us consider a little how this is done.

¹ **Gen 21:9-10** And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son (*namely* with Isaac)."

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: for the whole soul is renewed by grace into the image of God, Eph 4:23, 24,¹ and the whole man is a “new creature,” 2Cor 5:17.² And in all these grace exerts its power and efficacy. Its rule or dominion is the pursuit of its effectual working in all the faculties of the soul, as they are one united principle of moral and spiritual operations. So then, interrupting the exercise of grace’s rule and power, by the law of sin, must consist in its contrary acting in and upon the faculties and affections of the soul, on which and by which grace *should* exert its power and efficacy. And the law of sin *does* this. It darkens the mind, partly through countless vain prejudices and false reasonings (as we will see when we consider its deceitfulness), and partly through steaming the affections, heated with the nauseous lusts that have laid hold on them. Hence that saving light which 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 revealed to it, which is its proper work, Rom 12:2.³

The habitual inclination of the will to obedience, which is the next way that the law of grace works, is first weakened, and then tossed aside and rendered useless, by the continual solicitations of sin and temptation; so that the will first lets go of its hold, and argues whether it will yield or not, and at last it surrenders itself to its adversary. And as for the affections, the beginning of this evil is commonly found in them. They conflict with one another, and torture the soul with their impetuous violence. By this, the rule of the law of grace is intercepted by the law of sin: by imposing on it in the whole seat of its government. When this is done, sin will make sad work in the soul. The apostle warns believers to take heed of it in Rom 6:12, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” Set to it that it does not get dominion, that it does not usurp rule, not even 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 wholly throws off the rule of the law of grace during its prevalence. Grace speaks in the soul, but it is not heard; it commands the contrary, but it is not obeyed; it cries out, “Do not do this abominable thing which the Lord hates,” but it is not regarded — that is, not so as to be able to put a quick stop to the rage of sin, and to recover its own rule, which God restores to it in his own time by the power of his Spirit dwelling in us.

(2.) *Madness* or rage is accompanied with *fearlessness* and contempt for danger. It takes away the power of consideration, and all that influence that it ought to have on the soul. Hence sinners who are wholly under the power of this rage are said to “run at God, and the thick bosses of his buckler,” Job 15:26 — that in which God is armed for their utter ruin. They despise the worst that he can do to them, being secretly resolved to

¹ **Eph 4:23-24** and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

² **2Co 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he* is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

³ **Rom 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

accomplish their lusts, even though it costs them their souls. A few considerations will further clear this up for us:

[1.] Often, when the soul has broken loose from the power of *renewing* grace, to keep it within bounds, God deals with it by a *preventing* grace. So the Lord declares that he will deal with Israel — Seeing that you have rejected me, I will take another course with you. I will lay obstacles before you that you will not be able to pass by, to where the fury of your lusts would drive you.¹ He will oppose them from without, using that which will obstruct them in their progress.

[2.] These hinderances that God lays in the way of sinners, as will be declared at large afterward, are of two sorts: —

1st. *Rational considerations*, taken from the consequence of the sin and evil that the soul is solicited to and perplexed with. Such are the fear of death, judgment, and hell — falling into the hands of the living God, who is a consuming fire. While a man is under the power of the law of the Spirit of life, the “love of Christ constrains him,” 2Cor 5:14. The principle of his doing good and abstaining from evil is faith working by love, accompanied by following Christ because of the sweet savor of his name. But now, when this blessed, easy yoke is thrown off for a season, so that, as manifested 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, 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 the threatenings recorded in the law and gospel. To this subject also may be referred all the considerations that may be taken from temporal things, such as shame, reproach, scandal, punishments, and the like. By the consideration of these things, I say, God sets a hedge before them.

2dly. *Providential dispensations*, used by the Lord to the same purpose; and these are of two sorts: —

(1st.) Those which are suited to work on the soul, and cause it to desist and give up its lustings and pursuit of sin. Such are afflictions and mercies: “I was angry, and I struck them,” Isa 57:17 — I testified my dislike of their ways by afflictions.² God chastens men with pains on their bodies, he says in Job, to turn them from their purpose, and to hide sin from them, Job 33:17-19.³ And he has other ways to come to them and touch them, such as in their reputations, relations, estates, and desirable things; or else he heaps mercies upon them, so that they may consider whom they

¹ **Hos 2:6** "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, And wall her in, So that she cannot find her paths.

² **Hos 2:9, 11, 12** "Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time And My new wine in its season, And will take back My wool and My linen, *Given* to cover her nakedness... ¹¹ I will also cause all her mirth to cease, Her feast days, Her New Moons, Her Sabbaths-- All her appointed feasts. ¹² "And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, Of which she has said, 'These *are* my wages that my lovers have given me.' So I will make them a forest, And the beasts of the field shall eat them.

³ **Job 33:17** In order to turn man *from his* deed, And conceal pride from man, ¹⁸ He keeps back his soul from the Pit, And his life from perishing by the sword. ¹⁹ "Man is also chastened with pain on his bed, And with strong *pain* in many of his bones,

are rebelling against. It may be that notable distinguishing mercies are made their portion for many days.

(2dly.) Those which *actually hinder* the soul from pursuing sin, though it is resolved to do so. The various ways by which God does this must be considered afterward.

These are the ways, I say, by which the soul is dealt with, before the law of indwelling sin has thrown off for a season the influencing power of the law of grace. But now, when lust rises up to rage or madness, it will also condemn all these, even the rod, and the One who has appointed it. It will rush at shame, reproaches, wrath, and whatever may befall it; that is, even though these are presented to it, it will risk them all. Rage and madness is fearless. And it does this in two ways: —

[1st.] It *possesses the mind*, so that it does not allow the mind to dwell upon the consideration of these things, but renders thoughts of them slight and evanescent;¹ or if the mind does force itself to contemplate them, sin interposes itself between the mind and the affections, so that they will not be influenced by it in any proportion to what is required. The soul in such a condition will be able to take such things into contemplation, and not at all be moved by them; and where they do prevail for a season, they are insensibly worked from the heart again.

[2dly.] By secret *stubborn resolves* to risk all on the way in which it is located.

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, as it were, by force, strength, and violence. The consideration of its deceit now follows.

¹ That is, frivolous and vanishing like a vapor.

CHAPTER 8.

Indwelling sin is proved powerful from its deceit — Proved to be deceitful — The general nature of deceit — Jas 1:14, opened — How the mind is drawn from its duty by the deceitfulness of sin — The principal duties of the mind in our obedience — The ways and means by which it is turned from it.

The SECOND part of the evidence of the power of sin, from its manner of operation, is taken from its *deceitfulness*. In its working, it adds *deceit* to *power*. The efficacy of that must necessarily be great. And so this is to be carefully watched against by all those who value their souls: where power and deceit are combined, especially advantaged and assisted by all the ways and means insisted on before.

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

We have the express testimony of the Holy Ghost that sin, *indwelling sin*, is deceitful, such as Heb 3:13, "Take heed that you are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." It is deceitful; take heed of it, watch against it, or it will produce its utmost effect in hardening the heart against God. It is on account of sin that the heart is said to be "deceitful above all things," Jer 17:9. Take a man in other things and, as Job puts it, though he "would be wise and crafty, he is like the wild ass's colt," Job 11:12 — a poor, vain, empty nothing; but consider his heart on 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. The apostle speaks to the same purpose in Eph 4:22, "The old man is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." 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, except what is communicated to it from this fountain of all actual lust, this *law of sin*. And the coming of the "man of sin" is said to be in and with the "deception of unrighteousness," 2Thes 2:9, 10.

Unrighteousness is a thing generally decried and said to be evil among men; so that it is not easy to conceive why any man would avail for himself a reputation by it. But there is a deceivableness in it, by which the minds of men are turned aside from a due consideration of it, as we will show afterward. And thus the apostle gives an account of those who are under the power of sin, saying they are "deceived," Titus 3:3. And the life of evil men is nothing but "deceiving, and being deceived," 2Tim 3:13. So we have sufficient testimony given as to this qualification of the enemy with whom we deal: he is *deceitful*. Consideration of this, of all things, puts the mind of man at a loss in dealing with such an adversary. He knows he can have no security against one who is deceitful, except by standing on his own guard and defense all his days.

To further manifest the strength and advantage that sin has by its deceit, we may observe that the Scripture places it for the most part as the head and spring of every sin, as though

there were no sin followed after except where deceit went before it. So it is in 1Tim 2:13, 14.¹ The reason the apostle gives as to 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, yet being first deceived, was first in the sin. Even that first sin began in deceit; and until the mind was deceived, the soul was safe. Eve therefore truly expressed the matter in Gen 3:13, even though she did not say it for a good end. “The serpent beguiled me,” she says, “and I ate.” She thought to extenuate her own crime by charging the serpent; and this was a new fruit of the sin she had thrown herself into. But the matter of fact was true — she was beguiled before she ate; deceit went before the transgression. And the apostle shows that sin and Satan still take the same course, 2Cor 11:3.² Essentially he says, “There is still the same way of working towards actual sin as there was of old: beguiling, *deceiving* goes before it; and sin, that is, its actual accomplishment, follows after.” Hence, all the great works that the devil does in the world, to stir men up to oppose the Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom, he does by deceit: Rev 12:9, “The devil, who deceives the whole world.” It would be utterly impossible that men should be prevailed on to abide in Satan’s service, acting out his designs to their eternal, and sometimes their temporal ruin, if they were not exceedingly deceived.³

This is why those manifold cautions are given to us: if we would not *sin*, then take heed that we are not *deceived*. “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience,” Eph 5:6. “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that he shall also reap,” Gal 6:7.⁴ From all these testimonies we may learn the influence that deceit has in sin, and consequently the advantage that the law of sin has to exercise its power by deceitfulness. Where it prevails to deceive, it does not fail to produce its fruit.

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

¹ **1Tim 2:13** For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

² **2Cor 11:3** But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

³ **Rev 20:10** The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

⁴ See also, **1Cor 6:9** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites; **1Cor 15:33** Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” **Luk 21:8** And He said: “Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and, ‘The time has drawn near.’ Therefore do not go after them.

And this will further appear if we consider *the nature of deceit in general*. It consists in presenting to the soul (or mind), things otherwise than as they are, either in their nature, causes, effects, or present respect to the soul. This is the general nature of deceit; and it prevails in many ways. It *hides* what ought to be seen and considered; conceals circumstances and consequences; it presents what is not,¹ or things as they are not,² as we will show afterward in particular.

It was shown before that Satan “beguiled” and “deceived” our first parents; the Holy Ghost gives that term to Satan’s temptation and seduction. And the Scripture relates how he deceived them, in Gen 3:4, 5.³ He did it by representing things as otherwise than they really were. The fruit was *desirable*; that was apparent to the eye. Hence Satan takes advantage to secretly insinuate that in forbidding them to eat the fruit, God’s aim was merely to curtail their happiness. To test their obedience, he hides from them that certain though not immediate ruin would ensue upon eating it; he proposes only the present advantage of knowledge; and so he presents the whole case quite otherwise to them than indeed it was. This is the nature of deceit: it is a representation of a matter under a disguise — hiding what is undesirable, and proposing what indeed is not in it — so that the mind may make a false judgment about it. So Jacob deceived Isaac by wearing his brother’s clothing, and putting the skins on his hands and neck.^{Gen 27.11-19}

Again; deceit gains an 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 design and aim is not revealed at once. So Satan dealt in that great deceit mentioned before; he proceeds in it by steps and degrees, First, he removes an objection, and tells them they *shall not die*; then he proposes the *good of knowledge* to them, and of being *like God* by doing it. To hide and conceal ends, to proceed by steps and degrees, to make use of what is obtained, and from there to press on to further effects, is the true nature of deceit. Stephen tells us the king of Egypt “dealt subtly,” or deceitfully, “with their kindred,” Acts 7:19. He did not at first fall to killing and slaying them, but it says, Exo 1:10, “Come, let us deal shrewdly;” beginning to oppress them. This results in their bondage, verse 11. Having gotten this ground to make them slaves, he then proceeds to destroy their children, verse 16. He did not fall on them all at once, but by degrees. And this may suffice to show in general that sin is deceitful, and to show the advantages that it gains by it. For the way, manner, and progress of sin, in working by deceit, is fully expressed by the apostle James:

Jas 1:14, 15, “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.”

This passage, declaring the whole of what we aim at in this matter, must be particularly insisted on. In this verse, James manifests that men are willing to drive the old trade which our first parents set up at the entrance of sin; namely, excusing themselves in their sins, and casting the occasion and blame for them on others. It is not, they say, from themselves, from

¹ That is, fictions.

² That is, falsehoods.

³ **Gen 3:4** Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

their own nature and inclinations, from their own designs, that they committed such evils, but merely from their *temptations*. And if they don't know where to fix the evil of those temptations, they will lay them on God himself,¹ rather than go without an excuse or extenuation of their guilt.

James rebukes this evil in the hearts of men: verse 13, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does he tempt any man." And to show the justness of this reproof, he reveals in these words the true causes of the rise and the whole progress of sin, manifesting that the whole guilt of it lies upon the sinner; and that the whole punishment of it, if not graciously prevented, will also be his lot.

We therefore have in these words, as was said, the whole progress of lust or indwelling sin, by way of subtlety, fraud, and deceit, expressed and delimited by the Holy Ghost. And from this we will manifest the particular ways and means by which it puts forth its power and efficacy in the hearts of men by deceitfulness and subtlety; and we may observe in these words —

First, the utmost end aimed at in all the actings of sin, or its tendency in its own nature, and that is *death*: "Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death," the everlasting death of the sinner; pretend however it will, this is the end it aims at and tends to. Hiding ends and designs is the principal property of deceit. Sin does this to the uttermost; it pleads countless other things, but not once does it declare that it aims at the death, the everlasting death of the soul. And a fixed apprehension of this end of every sin is a blessed means to prevent its prevalence in its way of deceit or beguiling.

Secondly, the general way of its acting towards that end is by *temptation*: "Every man is tempted by his own lust." I do not intend to speak in general about the nature of temptations, because it does not belong to our present purpose; and besides, I have done it elsewhere.² It may suffice at present to observe that the life of temptation lies in deceit; so that, in the business of sin, to be effectually tempted, or to be beguiled or deceived, are the same thing. Thus it was in the first temptation. It is everywhere called the serpent's beguiling or deceiving, as manifested before: "The serpent beguiled Eve;" that is, he prevailed upon her by his temptations. So that every 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 thing.

There are five degrees by which sin proceeds in this work of tempting or deceiving; for we showed before that this belongs to the nature of deceit, that it works by degrees, gaining its advantage by one step, in order to gain another.

The **FIRST** of these consists in drawing off or *drawing away*: "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust."

The **SECOND** is in *enticing*: "And is enticed."

The **THIRD** in the *conception* of sin: "When lust has conceived." When the heart is enticed, then lust conceives in it.

¹ **Gen 3:12** Then the man said, "The woman whom **You gave to be with me**, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

² See Owen's treatise *Of Temptation*.

The FOURTH is *birthing sin* in its actual accomplishment: “When lust has conceived it gives birth to sin.” In all of which there is a secret allusion to an adulterous deviation from conjugal duties, and conceiving or giving birth to children of whoredom and fornication.

The FIFTH is *finishing sin*, completing it, filling up the measure of it,^{1Thes 2.16} by which the end originally designed by lust is brought about: “Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death,” Just as lust in the act of conceiving, naturally and necessarily brings forth sin, so sin being finished, infallibly procures eternal death.

The first of these relates to the *mind*; it is drawn off or drawn away by the deceit of sin. The second relates to the *affections*; they are enticed or entangled. The third relates to the *will*, in which sin is conceived; the consent of the will is the formal conception of actual sin. The fourth relates to the *conduct* in which sin is brought forth; it exerts itself in the lives and courses of men. The fifth respects *an obdurate course* in sinning, that finishes, consummates, and encloses the whole work of sin, upon which death or eternal ruin ensues.

I will principally consider the first three (mind, affections, and will), in which the main strength of the deceit of sin lies; and that is because in believers, whose state and condition is principally proposed for consideration, God is, for the most part, pleased to graciously prevent the fourth instance (bringing forth actual sins in their conduct); and to prevent the last always and wholly (being obdurate in finishing a course of sin). What ways God makes use of in his grace and faithfulness to stifle the conceptions of sin in the womb, and to hinder its actual production in the lives of men, must be spoken to afterward.

The first three instances we will insist on fully, then, as those in which the principal concern of believers lies in this matter.

The first thing which sin is said to do, working by way of deceit, is to draw away or draw off; this is why a man is said to be drawn off, or “drawn away” and diverted: namely, from attending to that course of obedience and holiness which — in opposition to sin and its law — he is bound to attend to with diligence.

Now, this effect of the deceit of sin is worked upon the mind. The mind or understanding, as we have shown, is the guiding, the conducting faculty of the soul. It goes before — in discerning, judging, and determining — to make the way of moral actions fair and smooth to the will and the affections. The mind is to the soul, what Moses told his father-in-law he might be to the people in the wilderness: “eyes to guide them,” 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 perpetually wander in the wilderness of this world, led by any object with an apparent present good,¹ as it offered or presented itself to them.

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

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

¹ That is, with an apparent short-term benefit, regardless of long-term consequences.

1. To keep itself and the whole soul in such a frame and posture, that it may render it ready for all duties of obedience, and watchful against all enticements to conceive sin.
2. In particular, to carefully attend to all particular actions, so that they are performed as God requires — that their matter, manner, time and season, are agreeable to his will; and also for obviating ¹ all particular tenders of sin in forbidden things (chap. 9).

The whole duty of the mind of a believer consists in these two things. And so indwelling sin endeavors to divert the mind and draw it away from both of them.

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

- (1.) of ourselves — of sin and its vileness; and
- (2.) of God — of his grace and goodness. Sin labors to draw the mind away from both of these.

Secondly, in attending to those *duties* which are suited to obviate the working of the law of sin in a special manner. ²

(1.) Sin endeavors to draw the mind away from a due consideration, apprehension, and sensibility of its own *vileness*, and the danger which attends it. A due and constant consideration of sin, in its nature, in all its aggravating circumstances, in its end and tendency, especially as represented in the blood and cross of Christ, should always abide with us:

Jer 2:19, “Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that you have forsaken the LORD your God.”

Every sin is a forsaking of the Lord our God. If the heart does not know, if it does not consider, that it is an evil thing and bitter — evil in itself, and bitter in its effects, fruit, and event — it will never be secured against it. Besides, that frame of heart which is most accepted by God in any sinner, is the humble, contrite, and self-abasing frame:

Isa 57:15, “Thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits 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 spirit of the contrite ones.”

See also Luke 18:13, 14.³ This becomes a sinner; no garment sits so decently about him as this. “Be clothed with humility,” says the apostle, 1Pet 5:5. It is what becomes us, and it is the only safe frame. He that walks humbly, walks safely. This is the intent of Peter’s advice, 1Pet 1:17, “Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.” He gives this advice to all believers after he himself had miscarried by another frame of mind. It is not a bondage, servile fear, disquieting and perplexing the soul. Rather it is such a fear as may keep men constantly

¹ Preventing them from “conceiving” and thus producing fruit.

² See chapter 9.

³ **Luk 18:13** “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ ¹⁴ “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

calling upon the Father with reference to the final judgment, so that they may be preserved from sin, by which they were in so great a danger:

1Pet 1:17, “If you call on the Father, who without respect to persons judges 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? In no other way than by a constant, deep apprehension of the evil, vileness, and danger of sin. So it was worked, so it was kept up, in the approved publican. “God be merciful,” he says, “to me a sinner.” ^{Luk 18.13} A sense of sin¹ kept him humble; and humility made way for his access to a testimony of the pardon of sin.

And this is the great *preservative* from sin through grace, as we have an example in the instance of Joseph, Gen 39:9. Upon the urging of his great temptation, he recoils immediately into this frame of spirit. He says, “How can I do this thing, and sin against God?” A constant, steady sense of the evil of sin gives him such preservation, that he risks liberty and life in opposition to it. To fear sin is to fear the Lord; so the holy man tells us that they are the same:

Job 28:28, “The fear of the Lord is wisdom; and departing from evil is understanding.”

This therefore, in the first place and in general, is what the law of sin puts forth its deceit about — namely, to draw the mind away from this frame, which is the strongest fort of the soul’s defense and security. It labors to divert the mind from a due apprehension of the vileness, abomination, and danger of sin. It either secretly and insensibly insinuates in the mind, lessening, excusing, and extenuating thoughts about sin; or else it draws the mind away from pondering the danger of sin, from being conversant about it in its thoughts as much as it should be, and has been formerly. And if, after the heart of a man has been made tender, soft, and deeply sensible of sin, through the word, Spirit, and grace of Christ — it has less, fewer, slighter, or less affecting thoughts of or about the danger of sin, on any account or by any means whatsoever, — the mind of that man has been drawn away by the deceitfulness of sin.

There are two ways, among others, by which the law of sin endeavors deceitfully to draw the mind away from this duty, and the frame that ensues from it: —

[1.] It does it by a horrible *abuse of gospel grace*. The gospel provides a remedy against the whole evil of sin, the filth, the guilt of it, with all its dangerous consequents. It is the doctrine of the deliverance of the souls of men from sin and death — it is a revelation of the gracious will of God towards sinners by Jesus Christ. What now is the genuine tendency of this doctrine, of this revelation of grace; and what should we use and employ it for? The apostle declares this,

Titus 2:11, 12, “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

¹ Not a sense of the *meaning* of sin *per se*, but a sensibility (an awareness) of the *evil* and the *danger* of sin.

This is what the gospel teaches; this is what we ought to learn from it and by it. Hence universal holiness is called “conduct that becomes the gospel,” Phi 1:27. It becomes the gospel, as that which corresponds to its end, aim, and design — as that which it requires, and which it ought to be improved toward. And accordingly it produces this effect where the word of the gospel is received and preserved in a saving light:

Eph 4:20 But you have not so learned Christ, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: ²² that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.¹

But the deceit of sin interposes itself in this: — It separates the doctrine of grace, from the use and the end of that doctrine. It stays on its *notions*, but it intercepts its influences in its proper *application*. From the doctrine of the assured *pardon* of sin, it insinuates a *disregard* of sin.² God in Christ makes the proposition to pardon, and Satan and sin make the conclusion to disregard; for the deceitfulness of sin is apt to plead for a disregard of sin, from the very grace of God by which it is pardoned. The apostle declares his reproof and detestation of such an insinuation:

Rom 6:1, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.”

Men’s deceitful hearts, he is saying, are apt to draw that conclusion; but far be it from us to entertain that at all. Yet some have evidently improved that deceit to their own eternal ruin. Jude declares, verse 4, “Ungodly men turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.” And we have had dreadful instances of it in the days of temptation in which we have lived.

Indeed, in opposition to this deceit lies much of the *wisdom* of faith, and *power* of gospel grace. When the mind is fully possessed with, and cast habitually and firmly into the mould of the notion and doctrine of gospel truth (about the full and free forgiveness of all sins in the blood of Christ), then it is a great effect of gospel wisdom and grace to always be able to keep the heart in a deep, humbling sense of sin, in an abhorrence of it, and self-abasement for it. This is the test and touchstone of gospel light: — if it 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 forgiven sin, and to watch diligently for the ruin of what we are still assured will never ruin us — then it is divine, it is from above, of the Spirit of grace. But if it secretly and insensibly makes men loose and slight in their thoughts about sin ³ — then it is adulterated, selfish, and false. If it would be all, and answer all ends, then it is nothing.

¹ Also, **Rom 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

² **Rom 3:20-21** Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed; **Rom 3:31** Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

³ That is, they think of their sin as unimportant, minor, or trivial.

Hence it comes to pass that sometimes we see men walking in a *bondage-frame of spirit* all their days, low in their light, little 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. Yet they may walk with a more conscientious tenderness about sinning than many who are advanced into higher degrees of light and knowledge than they are. It is not that the saving light of the gospel is somehow *not* the only principle of saving holiness and obedience; but that, through the deceitfulness of sin, the gospel is variously abused to countenance the soul in its manifold neglect of its duties. And it is used to draw the mind away from a due consideration of the nature, deservings, and danger of sin. And this is done in several ways: –

1st. Having a frequent need for relief by gospel grace, against a sense of the guilt of sin and the accusation of the law, the soul comes at length to make gospel grace *a common and ordinary thing*, such that it may be slightly performed. Having found a good medicine for its wounds, and having experienced its efficacy, it comes to apply it slightly, and skins over rather than cures its sores. A little less earnestness, a little less diligence, serves every time, until the soul perhaps begins to convince itself of pardon in its course; and this tends directly to draw the mind away from its constant and universal watchfulness against sin. Someone whose light has made plain the way of access to obtain pardon, if he is not very watchful, is far more apt to become overly formal and careless in his work, than someone who, because of mists and darkness, beats about to find his way rightly to the throne of grace – a man who has often traveled a road, passes on it without regard or inquiry. But someone who is a stranger to it, by observing all its turns and asking all travellers, secures his journey beyond the other.

2dly. The deceitfulness of sin takes advantage of the *doctrine of grace* (by many ways and means) to extend the bounds of the soul's liberty beyond what God has assigned to it. Some never thought they were free from a legal, bondage frame until they had been brought into the *confines* of sensuality, and for some, into the *depths* of it. How often sin pleads, "This strictness, this exactness, this solicitude is in no way necessary; relief is provided in the gospel against such things! Wouldn't you rather live as though there were no need for the gospel, and as though pardon of sin served no purpose?" But we will have occasion later to speak more in particular concerning these pleas of sin from gospel grace.

3dly. In times of temptation, this deceitfulness of sin argues expressly *for sin*, from gospel grace; it will plead for at least these two things: –

(1st.) That there is no need for such a tenacious, severe contending against sin, as that principle which the new creature is fixed on. If it cannot wholly divert the soul or mind from attending to temptations in order to *oppose* them, it will endeavor to draw them away as to the manner in which they are *attended*: they need not use that diligence which the soul at first apprehends is necessary.

(2dly.) It will offer relief as to the event of sin: that it will not turn to the ruin or destruction of the soul because it is, will be, or may be pardoned by the grace of the gospel. And this is true; this is the great and only relief for the soul against sin, the guilt of which the soul has already contracted— it is the blessed and *only* remedy for a guilty soul. But when this is pleaded and remembered by the deceitfulness of sin, to have us

comply with a temptation to sin, then it is *poison*; poison is mixed in every drop of this balsam, to the danger, if not the death, of the soul.

And this is the first way by which the deceitfulness of sin draws the mind away from a due attendance to that sense of its vileness which alone is able to keep it in that humble, self-abased frame that is acceptable with God. It makes the mind careless, as though its work were unnecessary because of the abounding of grace. This is a soldier's neglect of his station — trusting to a reserve¹ that is provided only in case he keeps his own proper place.

[2.] Sin takes advantage to work by its deceit, in this matter of drawing the mind away from a due sense of sin, and from the state and condition of men in the world. I will give only one instance of its procedure in this kind. Men, in their younger days, naturally have affections that are quicker, more vigorous and active, and more sensibly at work in them, than afterward. As to their sensible working and operation, they naturally decay; and many things befall men in their lives that take off the edge and keenness of them. But as men lose in their affections, they grow and improve in their understandings, resolutions, and judgments — if they are not made drunk with sensuality, or by the corruptions that are in the world through lust. This is why, if what formerly had room in their affections does not find room in their minds and judgments, they will utterly lose them: they have no more room left in their souls for them. Thus men have no regard for (indeed, they utterly despise) those things which their affections were set on with delight and greediness in their childhood. But if they are things that by some means come to be fixed in their minds and judgments, they continue to have a high esteem for them, and cling to them as closely as they did when their affections were more vigorous; they have only changed their *seat* in the soul as it were. It is this way in spiritual things.

The first and greatest seat of the sensibility of sin is in the *affections*. Just as in natural youth these affections are great and large, so in spiritual youth our spiritual affections are great and large:

Jer 2:2, “I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals.”

Besides, such [young believers] have newly come off their convictions, in which they have been cut to the heart, so they have been made tender. Whatever touches a wound is thoroughly felt; so the guilt of sin is felt before the wound given by conviction is thoroughly cured. But now, when affections begin to decay naturally, they also begin to decay as to their sensible actings and motions in spiritual things. Although believers improve in grace, yet they may decay in sense. At least, spiritual sense is not in them radically, 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, and thereby to perpetually affect the heart and affections, it will decay.

And here the deceit of the law of sin interposes itself. It allows a sense of sin to decay in the affections, and it diverts the mind from entertaining a due, constant, and fixed consideration of it. We may consider this a little in persons who never make progress in the ways of God beyond conviction. How sensible of sin they will be for a season! How

¹ Armed forces that are not on active duty, but can be called upon in an emergency.

they will then mourn and weep under a sense of the guilt of it! How they will cordially and heartily resolve against it! Affections are vigorous and they rule in their souls, as it were. But they are like an herb that will flourish for a day or two with watering, even though it has no root. For a while after, we see that these men, the more experience they have had of sin, the less they are afraid of it, as the wise man intimates:

Ecc 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

And at length they come to be the greatest disdainers of sin in the world. There is no sinner like one who has sinned away his convictions of sin. What is the reason for this? The sense of sin was in their *convictions*, fixed on their *affections*. As it decayed in them, they took no care to have it deeply and graciously fixed on their minds. The deceitfulness of sin deprived them of this, and so it ruined their souls. In some measure, this is true with believers. If the sensibility of the affections decays, if they grow heavy and obtuse, and great wisdom and grace are not used to fix a due sense of sin upon the mind and judgment — a sense which may provoke, excite, enliven, and stir up the affections every day — then great decays will ensue. At first, sorrow, trouble, grief, and fear affected the mind, and would give it no rest. But afterward, if the mind does not affect the heart with sorrow and grief over sin, the whole of it will be cast out, and the soul will be in danger of being 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, or by which sin draws the mind away from its constant watchfulness against sin and all its effects.

(2.) 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. This evidently lies at the spring-head of gospel obedience. The way by which sin draws the mind away from this part of its duty, is open and sufficiently known, even though it is not sufficiently watched against. Now, the Scripture everywhere declares that this is filling the minds of men with earthly things. It places this in direct opposition to that heavenly frame of the mind which is the spring of gospel obedience:

Col 3:2, “Set your affections,” or set your minds, “on things above, not on things on the earth;”

It is as if he had said, “You cannot be set or fixed on both heavenly and earthly things together, so as to principally and chiefly mind them both.” And the affections toward one and the other, proceeding from these different principles of *minding* one and the other, are opposed — they are directly inconsistent:

1Joh 2:15, “Do not love the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

And acting in a way that is suitable to these earthly affections is also proposed as contrary: “You cannot serve both 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.

There are several ways by which the deceitfulness of sin draws away the mind in this particular; but the primary one is by pressing these things on the mind under the notion of them being lawful things, and maybe necessary things. So all those who excuse themselves in the parable from coming to the marriage-feast of the gospel, did it on account of their being engaged in their lawful callings — one about his farm, another about his oxen, the means by which he ploughed in this world. By this plea, the minds of men were drawn away from that frame of heavenliness which is required for walking with God; and the rules of not loving the world, or using it as if we did not use it,¹ are hereby neglected.

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

And this is the first and most general attempt that indwelling sin makes upon the soul *by deceit* — it draws the mind away from a diligent attention to its course in a due sense of the evil of sin, and a due and constant consideration of God and his grace.

¹ **Joh 17:16** “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

CHAPTER 9.

The deceit of sin in drawing the mind away from a due attendance to especial duties of obedience, instanced in meditation and prayer.

It has been declared how sin endeavors by its deceit to draw the mind away from attending to that holy frame in walking with God in which the soul ought to be preserved.

We now proceed to show how it does the same work in reference to those *especial duties* by which the designs, workings, and prevalence of sin may in an especial manner be obviated and prevented. Sin, indeed, maintains an enmity against all duties of obedience, or rather all duties with God in them. “When I would do good,” says the apostle, “evil is present with me;” — Whenever I would do good, or whatever good I would do (that is, spiritually good, good in reference to God), sin is present with me to hinder me from it, to oppose me in it. And 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 performed in the strength and grace of the Spirit is contrary to the law of sin: Rom 8:13, “If you, by the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the flesh.” The actings of the Spirit of grace in spiritual duties, does this work.

These two are contrary. Yet there are some duties which, in their own nature and by God’s appointment, have a particular influence in weakening and subduing the whole law of sin in its very principles and greatest strengths; and the mind of a believer should principally attend to these, in his whole course; and sin in its deceit endeavors principally to draw the mind away from these. As in diseases of the body, some remedies, they say, have a specific quality against distempers, so too in this disease of the soul, there are some duties that have an especial virtue against this sinful distemper. I will not insist on many of them, but instance only two, which 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. And then we will show the ways, methods, and means which the law of sin uses to divert the mind from a due attendance to them. 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 end, differing only in the manner of their performance. For by meditation I mean meditating on what respect and suitableness there is between the *word* and our own *hearts*. That is to this end: that they may be brought to a more exact conformity. Meditating is pondering on the truth as it is in Jesus, to discover the image and representation of truth in our own hearts. And so it has the same intent as prayer, which is to bring our souls into a frame that in all things corresponds to the mind and will of God. They are like the blood and spirits in the veins: they have the same life, motion, and use. Yet, because believers are generally at a great loss in this duty of meditation, and having declared it to be so efficacious for controlling the actings of the law of sin, I will in our passage briefly give two or three rules for directing believers to a right performance of this great duty; and they are these: —

1. *Meditate about 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 abasement of our souls before him. This will fix the mind, and draw it forth from one thing to another, to give glory to God in a due manner; and it will affect the soul until it is brought into that holy admiration of God and delight in him, which is acceptable to him. My meaning is that it should be done in a way of *prayer* and *praise* — of speaking to God.

2. *Meditate on the word, in the word*; that is, in reading it, consider the sense in the particular passages we insist upon, looking to God for help, guidance, and direction, in the revelation of his mind and will in it, and then labor to have our hearts affected with it.

3. What we come short of in evenness and constancy in our thoughts of these things, let it be made up for in *frequency*. Some are discouraged because their minds, through the weakness or imperfection of their inventions, do not regularly supply them with thoughts to carry on their meditations. Let this be supplied by frequently returning the mind to the subject proposed to be meditated upon, by which new senses will still be supplied to it. But this is incidental.¹

I say, these duties, among others (for we have only chosen them for an instance, not excluding some others from the same place, office, and usefulness with them), make an especial opposition to the very being and life of indwelling sin, or rather *faith* in them does so. They are perpetually designing its utter ruin. I will, therefore, upon this instance, and in the pursuit of our present purpose, do these two things: —

(1.) Show the suitableness and usefulness of this duty, or these duties (as I will handle them jointly), to ruining sin.

(2.) Show the means by which the deceitfulness of sin endeavors to draw the mind away from a due attendance to them.

(1.) For the first, observe —

[1.] That 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 still further ready to do. Hence David gives that title to one of his prayers:

Psa 102, “A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the LORD.”

I speak of that prayer which is attended with a due consideration of all the wants, straits, 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, driven by the wind of the breath of men. Nor was there ever discovered, any more present and effectual poison for souls, than binding them to a constant form and usage of words in their prayers and supplications, which they themselves do not understand. Bind men this way in their

¹ Originally, “by the way”.

trades, or in their businesses in this world, and they will quickly find its effect. By this means they are disabled from any due consideration of what, at present, is good for them, or evil to them. Without this, what use can prayer serve, except to mock God and delude men's own souls? But in this kind of prayer which we insist on, the Spirit of God falls in to give us his assistance, and that is in this very matter of finding out and discovering the most secret actings and workings of the law of sin:

Rom 8:26, "We don't know what we should pray for as we should, but he helps our infirmities;"

He reveals our wants to us, and what primarily we stand in need of for help and relief.

And we find by daily experience that, in prayer, believers are led into such discoveries and convictions of the secret, deceitful work of sin in their hearts, that no considerations could ever have led them into. So David, in Psalm 51, intending the confession of his actual sin, having his wound in his prayer searched by the skillful hand of the Spirit of God, he had a revelation made to him about the root of all his miscarriages, in his original corruption, verse 5.¹ The Spirit in this duty is like 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 machinations, figments, and imaginations of the law of sin in it. Whatever notion there is of it, whatever power and prevalence there is in it, it is laid hold of, apprehended, brought into the presence of God, judged, condemned, and bewailed. And what can possibly be more effectual for its ruin and destruction? For together with its discovery, application is made for all that relief which, in Jesus Christ, is provided against it: all the ways and means by which it may be ruined. Hence, it is the duty of the mind to "watch unto prayer," 1Pet 4:7, to attend diligently to the estate of our souls, and to deal fervently and effectually with God about it. The same also may be said of meditation, wisely managed to its proper end.

[2.] In this duty there is worked upon the heart a deep, full sense of the vileness of sin, with a constant renewed detestation of it. This, if anything, undoubtedly tends to sin's ruin. This is one design of prayer, one end of the soul in it — namely, to draw out sin, to set it in order, to present it to itself in its vileness, abomination, and aggravating circumstances, so that it may be loathed, abhorred, and thrown away as a filthy thing.² The one that pleads with God for sin's remission, also pleads with his own heart for its detestation.³ In this, sin is also judged in the name of God; for the soul in its confession subscribes to God's detestation of sin, and to the sentence of his law against it. There is, indeed, a course of these duties which some convinced persons surrender themselves to as a mere cover for their lusts; they cannot sin quietly unless they perform this duty constantly. But that prayer we speak of is a thing of quite another nature, a thing that will allow no intermixing with sin; much less will it serve the ends of sin's deceit, as the

¹ **Psa 51:5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

² **Isa 30:22** You will also defile the covering of your graven images of silver, And the ornament of your molded images of gold. You will throw them away as an unclean thing; You will say to them, "Get away!"

³ **Hos 14:2** Take words with you, And return to the LORD. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.

other merely formal prayer does. It will not be bribed into a secret compliance with any of the enemies of God, or of the soul; no, not for a moment. And this is why, oftentimes in this duty, the heart is raised to the most sincere, effectual sense of sin, and detestation of it, that the soul ever obtains in its whole course of obedience. And this evidently also tends to the weakening and ruin of the law of sin.

[3.] This is the way appointed and blessed by God to obtain strength and power against sin: Jas 1:5, “Does any man lack? Let him ask of God.” Prayer is the way to obtain from God, by Christ, a supply of all our wants, assistance against all opposition, especially that opposition which is made against us by sin. I suppose this need not be insisted on; it is clear to every believer, in its notion and practice. It is that in which we call upon the Lord Jesus, and upon which he comes to our aid with suitable “help in time of need,” Heb 4:16.

[4.] Faith in prayer *countermines* all the workings of the deceit of sin; and that is because the soul in prayer, constantly engages itself to God to oppose all sin whatsoever:

Psa 119:106, “I have sworn, and I will perform it: I will keep your righteous judgments.”

This is the language of every gracious soul in its addresses to God: the inmost parts of the soul engage themselves to God, to cling to him in all things, and to oppose sin in all things. The one who cannot do this, cannot pray. To pray with any other frame, is to flatter God with our lips, which he abhors. And this exceedingly helps a believer in pursuing sin to its ruin; for —

1st. If there is any secret lust that lies lurking in the heart, he will find it either rising up against this engagement, or using its artifices to secure itself from it. And it is discovered by this, and the conviction of the heart concerning sin’s evil is furthered and strengthened. Sin makes the most certain revelation of itself; and this is never more evident than when it is most severely pursued. Lusts in men are compared to hurtful and loathsome beasts; or men themselves are so because of their lusts. Now, such beasts keep to their dens and coverts; they never reveal themselves as much in their proper nature and rage, as they do when they are most earnestly pursued. And so it is with sin and corruption in the heart.

2dly. If any sin is prevalent in the soul, it will weaken it, and take it from the universality of this engagement to God; it will breed disloyalty in it, a slightness in it. Now, when this is observed, it will awaken a gracious soul, and stir it up to look about it. Spontaneous lethargy, or a causeless weariness and indisposition of the body, is looked at as the sign of an approaching fever or of some dangerous distemper. It stirs men up to use a timely and vigorous prevention so they are not seized by it. *So it is in this case:* when the soul of a believer finds that it is indisposed to engage itself in fervent, sincere, and universal holiness to God, it knows that there is some prevalent distemper in it — and so it finds the location of it, and sets itself against it.

3dly. While the soul can thus constantly engage itself to God, it is certain that sin can rise to no ruinous prevalence. Yes, it is a conquest over sin — a most considerable conquest — when the soul fully and clearly, without any secret reserve, comes to such an

engagement with alacrity and resolve, as in Psa 18:23, “I was also upright before Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity.” And it may upon such a success, triumph in the grace of God, and have good hope, through faith, that it will have a final conquest, and what it so resolves shall be done; that it has decreed a thing, and so it shall be established. And this tends to disappoint, yes, to ruin the law of sin.

4thly. If the heart is not deceived by cursed hypocrisy, this engagement to God will greatly influence it to a particular diligence and watchfulness against all sin. There is no greater evidence of hypocrisy than to have the heart be like the whorish woman in Pro 7:14-21 who said, “I have paid my vows, now I may enjoy my sin;” or to be negligent about sin, being satisfied that it has been prayed against. But it is otherwise in a *gracious* soul. Sense and conscience about engagements against sin — made to God — make it universally watchful against all its motions and operations. On these and various other accounts, faith exerts itself in this duty to particularly weaken the power and stop the progress of the law of sin.

If the mind is diligent in its watch and charge to preserve the soul from the efficacy of sin, then it will carefully attend to this duty of prayer and its due performance, which is of such a singular advantage to its end and purpose. Here, therefore —

(2.) Sin puts forth its deceit in its own defense. It labors to divert and draw the mind away from attending to this and similar duties. And there are, among others, three engines, three *ways and means*, by which the deceit of sin attempts to accomplish its design: —

[1.] It takes advantage of its weariness to the flesh. There is an *aversion* in the law of sin, as was declared, to all immediate communion with God. Now, *this* duty is such an aversion. There is nothing that accompanies it by which the carnal part of the soul may be gratified or satisfied — as there may be something of that fleshly nature in most public duties, in most things that a man can do beyond pure acts of faith and love. There being no relief or advantage coming in by prayer, except what is purely spiritual, this duty then becomes wearisome, burdensome to flesh and blood. It is like travelling alone without a companion or diversion, which makes the way seem long; but it brings the traveller to his journey’s end with the most speed. So our Saviour declares when, expecting that his disciples should have been engaged in this work, according to their duty and present distress, he found them fast asleep: Mat 26:41, “The spirit,” he says, “indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;” and out of that weakness grows their indisposition to and weariness of their duty. So God complains about his people in Isa 43:22, “You have been weary of me.” And it may come at length to that height which is mentioned in Mal 1:13, “You have said, Behold, what a weariness it is! and you have sniffed at it, says the LORD of hosts.”

The Jews suppose 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 puffed as men ready to faint under them — when they brought only the torn, and the lame, and the sick. But this duty is oftentimes rendered to the flesh. And the deceitfulness of sin makes use of this to draw the heart by insensible degrees from a constant attendance to it. It puts in for the relief of the weak and weary flesh. There is a compliance between *spiritual flesh* and *natural flesh* in this matter — they help one

another; and an aversion to this duty is the effect of their compliance. So it was in the spouse, in Song 5:2, 8. She was asleep, drowsing in her *spiritual condition*, and pleaded her *natural unfitness* to rouse herself from that state. If the mind is not diligently watchful to prevent insinuations from this — if it does not constantly dwell on those considerations which evidence an attendance to this duty, as being indispensable — if it does not stir up the principle of grace in the heart to retain its rule and sovereignty, and not be dallied with by foolish pretences — then it will be drawn away, which is the effect aimed at by indwelling sin.

[2.] The deceitfulness of sin makes use of corrupt reasonings, taken from the pressing and urging *occasions of life*. “If we were to attend strictly to all duties of this kind,” says sin in the heart, “we would neglect our principal work, and be useless to ourselves and others in the world.” And on this general ground, particular businesses deprive particular duties from their due place and time. Men do not have the leisure needed to glorify God and save their own souls. It is certain that God gives us time enough for all that he requires of us in any kind of work in this world. No duties need to jostle one another, I mean not constantly. Special occasions must be determined according to special circumstances. If we undertake anything that takes more time than we have to perform it well, or if it robs God of what is due him, or our own souls, God does not call us to that, nor will he bless us in it. It is more tolerable that our duties of holiness and regard to God should entrench on the duties of our callings and employments in this world, than the contrary; and yet neither does God require this at our hands, in an ordinary manner or course of life. How little, then, will he bear with what evidently is so much worse on all accounts! Yet through the deceitfulness of sin, the souls of men are thus beguiled. They are at length driven from their duty by several degrees.

[3.] Sin deals with the mind, to draw it away from attending to this duty, by tendering a *compensation* to be made in and by other duties; just as Saul thought to compensate his disobedience by sacrifice.^{1Sam 15:14-15} “*May not the same duty, performed in public or in the family, suffice?*” And if the soul is so foolish as not to answer, “*Those things should be done, and this is not to be left undone,*” it may be ensnared and deceived. For besides a command to do this — namely, that we should personally “watch unto prayer” — there are, as declared, various advantages in this duty when it is performed *against* the deceit and efficacy of sin; but in the more public attendance to prayer, it doesn’t have this advantage. Sin strives to deprive the soul of these advantages by this exchange which it tenders to the soul by its corrupt reasonings.

[4.] I may add here something which plays a part in all the workings of sin by deceit — namely, it feeds the soul with promises and purposes of a more diligent attendance to this duty when occasions will permit. By this means, it brings the soul to say to its convictions of duty, as Felix said to Paul, “Go your way for the time being; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you.”^{Act 24:25} And by this means the present season and time, which alone is ours, is often lost irrecoverably.

These are some of the ways and means by which the deceit of sin endeavors to draw the mind away from its due attendance to this duty, which is so specially suited to prevent its progress and prevalence, and which aims so directly and immediately at its ruin. I might

also give instances of a similar tendency in other duties; but this may suffice to reveal the nature of this part of the deceit of sin. And this is the first way by which it makes way for further entangling 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 should constantly attend to in his walking before the Lord.

And this will instruct us to see and discern where the beginning of our declensions and failings in the ways of God lies; and that is either as to our general course, or as to our attendance to especial duties. This is of great importance and concern to us. When the beginnings and occasions of a sickness or distemper of the body are known, it is a great advantage to direct the person in and towards its cure. To recall Zion to himself, God shows her where the “beginning of her sin” was, Micah 1:13.¹ Now, this is what for the most part is the beginning of sin for us, even drawing the mind away from a due attendance in all things to the discharge of its duty. The principal care and charge of the soul lies on the mind; and if that fails in its duty, the whole is betrayed, either as to its general frame, or as to particular miscarriages. The failing of the mind is like the failing of the watchman in Ezekiel: the whole is lost by his neglect.

Therefore, in that self-scrutiny and search which we are called to, we are most diligently to inquire after this. God does not look at what duties we perform — as to their number and tally, or their nature alone — but whether we do them with that intension of mind and spirit which he requires. Many men perform duties in a road or course of habit, and do not, as it were, so much as think of them. Their minds are filled with other things; only duty takes up so much of their time. This is but an endeavor to mock God and deceive their own souls. Therefore, if you would take the true measure of yourselves, consider how it is with you as to the duty of your minds which we have inquired after. Consider whether, by any of the deceits mentioned, you have not been diverted and drawn away; and if there are any decays upon you of any kind, you will find that their beginning has been *there*. By one way or another, your minds have been made heedless, regardless, slothful, and uncertain, being beguiled and drawn away from their duty. Consider the charge in Pro 4:23, “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it are the issues of life.” 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 allowed 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 especial duties — I would not this day have been so sick, weak, thriftless, wounded, decayed, and defiled. My careless, my *deceived* mind, has been the beginning of sin and transgression to my soul.’ And this discovery will direct the soul to a suitable way for its healing and recovery. This will never be effected by multiplying particular duties, but by restoring the mind.

And hence this 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 signal grace to have “the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind,” 2Tim 1:7 — a stable, solid, resolved mind in the things of

¹ **Mic 1:13** O inhabitant of Lachish, Harness the chariot to the swift steeds (She *was* the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion), For the transgressions of Israel were found in you.

God, not easily moved, diverted, changed, not drawn aside; a mind not apt to hearken after corrupt reasonings, vain insinuations, or pretences to draw it away from its duty. This is what the apostle exhorts believers to:

1Cor 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

The steadfastness of our minds, abiding in their duty, is the cause of all our unmovableness and fruitfulness in obedience; and so Peter tells us that those who are by any means led away or enticed, “they fall from their own steadfastness,” 2Pet 3:17. And the great blame that is laid upon backsliders is that they are not steadfast: Psa 78:37, “Their heart was not steadfast.” For if the soul is safe, unless the mind is drawn away from its duty, the soundness and steadfastness of the mind is its great preservative. And there are three parts of this steadfastness of the mind: — First, A full purpose to cling to God in all things; secondly, A daily renovation and quickening of the heart to discharge this purpose; thirdly, Resolutions against all dalliances or parleys about negligences in that discharge — which will not be spoken to here.

CHAPTER 10.

The deceit of sin, in drawing the mind away from its attendance to particular duties, further revealed — Several things required in the mind of believers with respect to particular duties of obedience — The actings of sin, in a way of deceit, to divert the mind from them.

WE have not as yet brought to issue the *first* way of the working of the deceit of sin — namely, in DRAWING THE MIND AWAY from the discharge of its duty. We insist on this longer on a double account: —

First, Because of its importance and concern. If the mind is drawn away, if it is tainted, weakened, and turned aside from a due and strict attendance to its charge and office, the whole soul, will, and affections are certainly entangled and drawn into sin — as declared in part, and as it will further appear afterward. Therefore we ought to give diligent heed to this, which is the design of this exhortation of the apostle:

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

He cautions us against a failure of our minds, by the deceitfulness of sin, in losing the life, the power, the sense, and the impress of the word of God. And there is no way to prevent it except by giving the most “earnest heed to the things which we have heard.” This expresses the whole duty of our minds in attending to obedience.

Secondly, Because the actings and workings of the mind are spiritual, the conscience is not affected by them unless it is clearly enlightened, duly excited, and so stirred up as to take due notice of them. Conscience is not apt to react to the mind’s failures, unless principally respecting the acts of the whole soul. When the affections are entangled with sin (more of this afterward), or when the will begins to conceive sin by its express consent, conscience is apt to make an uproar in the soul. It will give it no rest or quiet until the soul is reclaimed, or until one way or another, the conscience is bribed or debauched. But because these neglects of the mind are spiritual, they are seldom taken notice of, without very diligent attendance.

In the Scriptures, our minds are often called our *spirits*, as in Rom 1:9, “Whom I serve with my spirit.” And they are distinguished from the soul, which principally means the affections as used in 1Thes 5:23: May God sanctify you wholly... “your whole spirit and soul,” — that is, your *mind* and *affections*. It is true that where “spirit” is used to express spiritual gifts, those gifts are opposed to our “understanding,” as in 1Cor 14:15.¹ There it is taken for the first act of the mind in a rational perception of things; but as that word “spirit” is applied to any faculty of our souls, it is the *mind* that it expresses. This then being our spirit, its actings 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 such great importance to us, and yet so hidden, and which we are apt to be very insensible of; and yet our carefulness in this matter is one of the best evidences that we have of our sincerity. Let

¹ **1Cor 14:15** What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

us not then be like a man who is sensible, and complains of a cut finger, but is not sensible of a decay of his spirits tending to death. There remains, therefore, as to this topic of our discourse, the consideration of the charge of the mind in reference to particular duties and sins. In considering this, we will do these two things:

1. Show what is required in the mind of a believer in reference to particular duties.
2. Declare the way that the deceit of sin works to draw the mind away from attending to these duties. The same will also be done with respect to particular sins and their avoidance: —

1. For the right performance of any duty, it is not enough that the duty required is actually performed, but that it is universally squared and fitted to its rule. The great duty of the mind lies in this: namely, to attend to the *rule* of duties, and to take care that all the concerns of these duties are ordered by it. Our progress in obedience is our edification, or building. Now, it furthers the construction of a building very little, that a man brings wood and stones, and heaps them up without any order. They must be hewn and squared, and fitted by line and rule, if we intend to build. Nor is it to any advantage to our edification in faith and obedience if we multiply our duties, and heap them one upon another, if we do not also order and dispose them according to rule. And therefore God expressly rejects a multitude of duties, when they are not universally suited to the rule:

Isa 1:11, 14 “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices? — They are a trouble to me; I am weary of bearing them.”

And therefore all acceptable obedience is called “proceeding according to rule,” Gal 6:16;¹ it is a canonical or regular obedience. Letters in the alphabet heaped together signify nothing, unless they are disposed into their proper order. Nor do our duties signify anything without this disposal. It is the great duty of the mind to dispose them so, and it is to attend to this with all diligence: Eph 5:15, “Walk circumspectly” — walk exactly, accurately; that is, walk diligently in all things; take heed to the *rule* of what you do. We walk in duties, but we walk circumspectly in this attention of the mind.

(1.) There are some special things which the rule directs us to, that the mind is to attend to in every duty. Such as —

[1.] As to the *matter* of it, that it be full and complete. Under the law no beast was allowed to be a sacrifice if it had any member missing, or any defect in its parts. Such were rejected, as well as those that were lame or blind. Duties must be complete as to the parts and the matter of them. If a part of the required price is kept back, it may make tendering all the remainder of the price unacceptable. Saul, in sparing Agag and the fattest of the cattle, rendered the destruction of all the rest useless. Thus when men will give alms, or perform other services, but not in the proportion that the rule requires, and which the mind might discover by diligent attention, the whole duty is vitiated.²

[2.] As to the *principle* of it — namely, that it be done in faith; and in this, done by an actual derivation of strength from Christ, without whom we “can do nothing,” John 15:5.

¹ Gal 6:16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

² *Vitiated*: rendered ineffective; made corrupt or imperfect (marred).

It is not enough that the person is a believer, even though that is necessary “to every good work,” Eph 2:10; but it is also necessary that faith be particularly exercised in every duty that we do; for our whole obedience is the “obedience of faith,” Rom 1:5 — that is, obedience is what the doctrine of faith requires, and which the grace of faith bears or brings forth. So Christ is expressly said to be “our life,” Col 3:4, our spiritual life; that is, the spring, author, and cause of it. Now, as in natural life, no vital act can be performed except by the actual operation of the principle of life itself, so in spiritual life, no spiritually vital act — that is, no duty that is acceptable to God — can be performed except by the actual working of Christ, who is our life. And this is derived to us in no other way than by faith; this is why the apostle says,

Gal 2:20, “Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.”

Not only was Christ his life, a living principle to him, but he *led* a life — that is, he discharged vital actions in all the 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. Therefore, a believer ought to diligently attend to this — namely, that everything he does to God is done in the strength of Christ. What that consists in ought to be diligently inquired into by all those who intend to walk with God.

[3.] In this respect to 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 which a believer, who is trusted with spiritual light, ought to attend to: —

1st. That it 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, the matter and outward manner of which equally fall under his command. If this is not regarded, the whole duty is vitiated. I do not speak of those who allow themselves to be deluded by the deceitfulness of sin, who utterly disregard the rule of the word in such things, and worship God according to their own imaginations. Rather, I principally speak of those who, although in general they profess to do nothing except *what* God requires, *as* he requires it, yet they do not diligently attend to the rule— they do not make the authority of God the sole cause of and reason for *what* they do, and the *manner* of performing it. And this is the reason why God so often calls on his people to consider diligently and wisely, so that they may do all according to his command.

2dly. The affections of the heart and mind in duties, belong to their performance in the inward manner. The prescriptions and commands of God for attendance to this are innumerable, and the lack of it renders every duty an abomination to him. A sacrifice made without a heart, without salt, without fire — of what value is it? No more are duties valuable without spiritual affections. And in this, the mind is to keep the charge of God — to see that the heart which he requires is tendered to him. And we find also that God requires *especial* affections, to accompany *special* duties: “He that gives, [do it] with cheerfulness;” Rom 12:8 if these are not attended to, the whole is lost.

[4.] The mind is to attend to the *ends* of duties, and principally the end is the glory of God in Christ. Sin and self will impose several other ends on our duties: it will especially press hard two upon us— FIRST, *Satisfaction of our convictions* and consciences; SECONDLY, *The praise of men*; for self-righteousness and ostentation are the main ends of men who have fallen off from God in all their moral duties. In their sins they endeavor to satisfy their lusts; in their duties, they endeavor to satisfy their conviction and pride. The mind of a believer is to diligently watch against these, and to keep a single eye to the glory of God in all things, because that is the great and general rule of all our obedience: “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” ^{1Cor 10:31} The mind of a believer is obliged to attend diligently and constantly to these and similar things, I say, which are commonly spoken to, 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 away from this watch, to bring an inadvertency¹ upon it, so that it will not keep the watch and charge of the Lord in these things. And if it can do so, and thereby strip our duties of all their excellences (which lie in these concerns about them that the mind is to attend to), then it will not trouble itself much, or us, about the duties themselves. It attempts this in several ways:

1st. By persuading the mind to content itself with *generalities*, and keep it from attending to things in *particular* instances. For example, it 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 actually have that tendency. Thus Saul thought he had fulfilled his own duty, and had done the will of God, and sought God’s glory in his war against Amalek; when, for lack of attending to every particular duty in that service, he dishonored God, and ruined himself and his posterity. Men may persuade themselves that they have a general design for the glory of God, when they have no active principle in particular duties that tend that way at all. If instead of fixing the mind by faith, on particularly advancing the glory of God in a duty, the soul contents itself with a *general notion* of doing so, then the mind has already been diverted and drawn away from its charge, by the deceitfulness of sin.

If a man is travelling on a journey, it is not only required of him that he bend his course that way in general, and so go on: he must also attend to every turning, and to other occurrences in his way, or else he may wander and never come to his journey’s end. So too, if we suppose that in general we aim at the glory of God, as we all profess to do, yet we do not distinctly attend to his glory in every duty that occurs on our way, we will never attain the end aimed at. Someone who satisfies himself with this *general* purpose, without acting on it in every *special* duty, will not long retain that purpose either. It does the same work on the mind, in reference to the *principle* of our duties, as it does to the *end* of our duties. Their principle is that they must be done *in faith*, in the strength of Christ. But if men content themselves that they are believers, and that they have faith, but they do not labor in every particular duty to exercise their faith, to lead their spiritual lives, in all their acts, by the faith of the Son of God — then the mind is drawn

¹ The trait of forgetting or ignoring your responsibilities.

away from its duty. It is particular actions in which we express and exercise our faith and obedience: what we are in *them*, is what we are, and no more.

2dly. It draws the mind away from the duties mentioned before, by insinuating a secret *contentment* into it from performing the duty itself, as to its *matter*. This is a fair discharge of a natural conscience. If the duty is performed, even though the *manner* of its performance comes short in almost all things of the rule, then conscience and conviction will be satisfied. Saul, upon his expedition against Amalek, cries to Samuel, “Come in, you blessed of the Lord; I have done the commandment of the Lord.” He satisfied *himself*, even though he had not attended as he should have to the whole will of God in that matter. And thus it was with those in Isa 58:3, “Why have we fasted,” they say, “and you do not regard it?” They had pleased *themselves* in the performance of their duties, and expected that God would also be pleased with them. But he shows them at large how they had failed, and that was so far as to render what they had done an abomination to him. God expresses the same charge against them —

Isa 48:1 “Hear this, O house of Jacob, Who are called by the name of Israel, And have come forth from the waters of Judah; Who swear by the name of the LORD, And make mention of the God of Israel, *But* not in truth or in righteousness;”

The deceitfulness of sin endeavors to draw the mind to this — namely, to take up in the performance, only the duty itself: ‘You *should* pray, and you *have* prayed; you *should* give alms, and you *have* given alms; so then, quiet yourself in what you have done, and continue to do the same.’ If the deceit of sin prevails in this, the mind is discharged from further attending and watching to its duty; this leaves the soul on the edge of many evils; for —

3dly. From this, *habit* in all duties will quickly ensue, which is the height of sin’s drawing the mind away from duty: for men’s minds may be drawn from all duties, in the midst of the most abundant performance of them. In and under these *duties*, the mind may be subject to habitual diversion from its charge and watch to the *rule*. What is done with such a frame *is not done to God*, Amos 5:25.¹ None of their sacrifices were to God, even though they professed that they were. But they did not attend to his worship *in faith*, and *to his glory*; and so he despised all their duties. “Israel is an empty vine; he brings forth fruit for himself,” Hos 10:1.² 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 are drawn away from their circumspect watch; and so they have little or no communion with God in them, which is the end for which they are designed, and by which alone they become useful and profitable to themselves. And in this manner many duties of worship and obedience are performed by a woeful generation of hypocrites, formalists, and profane persons. Without either life or light in

¹ **Amo 5:25-26** “Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings In the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? ²⁶ You **also** carried Sikkuth your king And Chiun, your idols, The star of your gods, Which you made for yourselves.

² **Hos 10:1, 2** Israel empties *his* vine; He brings forth fruit **for himself**. According to the multitude of his fruit He has increased the altars; According to the bounty of his land They have embellished *his sacred* pillars. ² **Their heart is divided**; Now they are held guilty. He will break down their altars; He will ruin their *sacred* pillars.

themselves, or acceptance with God, their minds are wholly estranged by the power and deceitfulness of sin, from a due attendance to what they do.

2. As it is in respect to duties, so it is also in respect to *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 diligently attend to, to preserve the soul from sin. They are things which God has appointed and sanctified to give effectual rebukes and checks to the whole working of the law of sin. And they are things which, in the law of grace which we are under, are exceedingly suited and fitted to that purpose. The deceit of sin endeavors by all means to draw the mind away from a due consideration of, and attendance to these things.

We will reflect a little upon a few of them: —

(1.) The first and most general is the *sovereignty* of God, the great lawgiver, by whom sin is forbidden. Joseph fixed on this in his great temptation:

Gen 39:9, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

There was a great evil in it, a great ingratitude against man, which he also pleads and insists upon in verses 8, 9.¹ But what fixed his heart and resolution against it, was its formality: that it was sin against God, by whom it was severely forbidden. So 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:

Jas 4:11, 12, “If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.”

Consider this always: that there is one lawgiver, holy, righteous, armed with sovereign power and authority; he is able to save and destroy. Hence sin is called rebellion, casting off his yoke, despising him; and that despising is in his sovereignty as the great lawgiver. The mind should always attend to this practically, in all the lustings, actings, and suggestions of the law of sin. This is especially so when advantaged by any suitable or vigorous temptation: “It is *God that has forbidden this thing*; the great lawgiver, whose absolute sovereignty I am under. I live in dependence on him, and I am to be disposed of by him as to my present and eternal condition.” Eve fixed on this at the beginning of her temptation, Gen 3:3: “God has said, we must not eat of this tree.” But she did not keep her ground; she did not abide by that consideration; she allowed her mind to be diverted from it by the subtlety of Satan, which was the entrance of her transgression: and so it is for us all in our deviations from obedience.

(2.) The *deceit* of sin, of every sin, as to the punishment appointed to it in the Law, is another thing that the mind should actually attend to, in reference to every particular evil. The diversions from this, which the minds of men have been doctrinally and practically attended with, have been an inlet into all manner of abominations. Job professes another frame in himself,

¹ **Gen 39:8-9** But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. ⁹ “*There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife.*

Job 31:23, “Destruction from God was a terror to me, and because of his highness, I could not endure.”

He had mentioned many evils in the foregoing verses, and he pleads his innocence from them, even though they were such that, because of Job’s greatness and power, he could have committed easily without fear of danger from men. Here he gives the reason that prevailed with him to so carefully abstain from them: “Destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure.” “I considered,” he says in effect, “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 that no creature is able to abide or avoid.” So the apostle directs believers to always consider what a “fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God,” Heb 10:31; and that because he has said, “Vengeance is mine, I will recompense,” verse 30. He is a sin-avenging God, who will by no means acquit the guilty. As in the declaration of his gracious name, infinitely full of encouragements to poor sinners in Christ, he adds in the close that “he will by no means clear the guilty,” Exo 34:7 — that he may keep upon the minds of those whom he pardons a due sense of the punishment due for every sin, from his vindictive justice. And so the apostle would have us mind that even “our God is a consuming fire,” Heb 12:29; that is, that we should consider his holiness and vindictive justice, appointing to sin a fit recompense of reward. And men’s breaking through this consideration, he reckons as the height of the aggravation of their sins:

Rom 1:32, “They knew that it is the judgment of God, that those who commit such things were worthy of death; yet they continued to do them.”

What hope is there for such persons? There is, indeed, relief against this consideration for humbled believing souls in the blood of Christ; but this relief is not to take the mind away from it, as it is appointed by God to be a restraint from sin. And both these considerations, even the sovereignty of God and the punishment of sin, are put together by our Saviour:

Mat 10:28, “Do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

(3.) The consideration of all the love and kindness of God, against whom every sin is committed, is another thing that the mind ought to diligently attend to; and this is a prevailing consideration if it is rightly and graciously managed in the soul. Moses presses this on the people:

Deu 32:6 “Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? Is he not your Father that bought you? Has he not made you, and established you?”

Is this a repayment for eternal love, and all its fruits? for the love and care of a Father, of a Redeemer, that we have been made partakers of? And it is the same consideration which the apostle manages to this purpose:

2Cor 7:1 “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.”

Receiving the promises ought to be effectual, so as to stir us up to all holiness, to work and effect abstinence from all sin. And what promises *are* these? Namely, that “God will be a

Father to us, and receive us,” chap. 6:17, 18; this comprises the whole of the love of God towards us here and to eternity. If there is any spiritual ingenuity 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 to this consideration: —

[1.] That which is general and common to all believers. This is managed to this purpose,

1Joh 3:1-3, “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure.”

“Consider,” he says, “the love of God, and the privileges that we enjoy by it: ‘Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.’ Adoption is an especial fruit of that love, and how great a privilege this is! It is such love, and such are its fruits, that the world knows nothing of the blessed condition which we obtain and enjoy by it: “The world does not know us.” No indeed, for it is such love, and its effects are so unspeakably blessed and glorious, that we ourselves are not able to comprehend them. What use, then, should we make of this contemplation of the excellent, unspeakable love of God? Why, says he, “Everyone who has this hope purifies himself.” Every man who has been made partaker of this love, and with that has a hope of the full enjoyment of its fruits, of being made like God in glory, “purifies himself,” — that is, in abstaining from all and every sin, as it is declared at large in the subsequent words.

[2.] It is to be considered as to such *particular mercies* and fruits of love as every one’s soul has been made partaker of. There is no believer who, besides the love and mercy which he has in common with all his brethren, does not also have in the lot of his inheritance, some inclusions — some especial mercies — in which he has a singular propriety;¹ he has some joy which no stranger may share, Pro 14:10 ² — he has 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. Neglecting them is a high aggravation of our provocations. In 1Kng 11:9, it is charged as the great evil of Solomon, that he had sinned against special mercies, especial intimations of love — he sinned after God had “appeared to him twice.” God required that he should have borne in mind *that* especial favor, and made it an argument against sin; but he *neglected* it, and he is burdened with this sore rebuke. Indeed, all especial mercies, all especial tokens and pledges of love, are utterly lost and misspent on us, if they are not improved to this end. This then is another thing that it is the duty of the mind to greatly attend to, and to effectually set in opposition to every attempt made on the soul by the law of sin.

¹ That is, a unique proprietary right that belongs only to a child of God.

² **Pro 14:10** The heart knows its own bitterness, And a stranger does not share its joy.

(4.) The considerations that arise from the blood and mediation of Christ have the same importance. So the apostle declares,

2Cor 5:14, 15, “For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that if one died for all, then all were dead: and that he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them, and rose again.”

There is a constraining efficacy in this consideration; it is great, forcible, and effectual, if it is duly attended to. But I must not in particular insist on these things here;—

(5.) Nor will I speak of the *inhabitation of the Spirit* — 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 by it; how his comforts are forfeited, lost, and despised by it — these might also be insisted on: but the instances passed through are sufficient for our purpose.

Now, the duty of the mind in reference to particular sins and temptations lies in this: — It is to diligently and carefully attend to these things; it is to dwell constantly upon the consideration of them; it is to have them in continual readiness to set in opposition to all the lustings, actings, warrings, attempts, and rages of sin.

In reference to this, sin presents and acts out its deceit in an especial manner. It labors by all means to draw the mind away from its due attendance to these things — to deprive the soul of this great preservative and antidote against its poison. It endeavors to cause the soul to satisfy itself with general undigested notions about sin, so that it may have nothing in particular to resort to in its own defense against sin’s attempts and temptations. And the ways by which it does this may also be briefly considered: —

[1.] It is from the deceit of sin that the mind is *spiritually slothful*, and whereby it becomes negligent in this duty. The principal discharge of its trust in this matter is expressed by *watching*; which is the great caution that the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples in reference to all their dangers from sin and Satan: Mark 13:37, “I say to all, *Watch*,” that is, “Use your utmost diligence and circumspection, so that you will not be surprised and entangled with temptations.” It is called also *consideration*: “Consider your ways,” — “Consider your latter end;”¹ the lack of which God complains about in his people in Deu 32:29.² Now, what is contrary to these indispensable conditions of our preservation, is spiritual slothfulness, as the apostle declares,

Heb 6:11, 12, “And we desire that every one of you shows the same diligence to the full assurance of hope, to the end that you will not be slothful.”

If we do not show diligence, we are slothful, and in danger of coming short of inheriting the promises. See what Peter says:

2Pet 1:5-11, “And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; to virtue knowledge,” etc. “For if these things are in you, and abound, they make you such that you will neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ That is, what this sin leads to in time.

² Deu 32:29 Oh, that they were wise, *that* they understood this, *That* they would consider their latter end!

But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off; he has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, rather give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things you will never fall: for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly,¹ into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

The mind is turned from all this, once it is made slothful by the deceit of sin. Now, this sloth consists in four things: —

1st. Inadvertency.² It does not set itself to consider and attend to its special concerns. The apostle persuades the Hebrews with all earnestness to attend diligently, to consider carefully, so that they may not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. He gives this reason for their danger: that they were “dull of hearing,” chap. 5:11; that is, they were slothful, and did not attend to the things of their duty. A secret *disregard* is apt to creep in upon the soul; it does not set itself to diligently mark how things are going with it, and what is continually incumbent upon it.

2dly. An unwillingness to be stirred up to its duty.

Pro 19:24, “A slothful man hides his hand in his pocket,³ and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.”

There is an unwillingness in sloth to take any notice of warnings, calls, excitations, or stirrings by the word, Spirit, judgments, or anything that God makes use of to call the mind to duly consider the condition of the soul. And this is a perfect evidence that the mind has been made slothful by the deceit of sin: when especial calls and warnings, whether in a suitable word or a pressing judgment, cannot prevail with the mind to pull its hand out of its pocket; that is, to set about the special duties that it is called to.

3dly. Weak and ineffectual attempts to recover itself to its duty.

Pro 26:14, “As the door turns upon its hinges, so the slothful man turns upon his bed.”

There is some motion in a door turning upon its hinges, but no progress. It moves up and down, but it remains in the place and posture it was in before. So it is with the spiritually slothful man on his bed, or in his security. He makes some motions or faint endeavors to discharge his duty, but he does not go on. Where he was one day, there he is the next; indeed, where he was one *year*, there he is the next. His endeavors are faint, cold, and evanid;⁴ he gains no ground by them, but is always beginning and never finishing his work.

4thly. Heartlessness upon the apprehensions of difficulties and discouragements.

Pro 22:13, “The slothful man says, There is a lion outside, I will be slain in the streets.”

¹ “An abundant supply of grace and strength shall be freely afforded, to carry you through all the duties and trials of life; and when that shall be ended, an admission will be granted.” John Gill – *Commentary*.

² The trait of forgetting or ignoring your responsibilities.

³ Originally, “bosom”: the breast pocket.

⁴ Fleeting.

Every difficulty deters him from his duty. He thinks it is impossible for him to attain to that accuracy, exactness, and perfection which he is to press after in this matter; and therefore he contents himself in his old coldness, in his negligence, rather than run the risk of a universal circumspection. Now, once the deceit of sin has drawn the mind away into this frame, it lays it open to every temptation and incursion of sin. The spouse in the Canticles seems to have been overtaken with this distemper, Song 5:2, 3;¹ and this prompts various excuses why she cannot attend to the call of Christ, and apply herself to her duty in walking with him.

[2.] The deceit of sin draws the mind away from its watch and duty in reference to sin by *surprisals*. It falls in conjunction with some urging temptation, and it surprises the mind into thoughts of quite another nature than those which it ought to insist upon 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,^{Luk 22:31} 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, nor the evil to which his temptation led him, nor anything that he should have insisted on for his preservation. Therefore he “wept bitterly” upon reviewing 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.

And this indeed is the common way that the deceit of sin works as to particular evils: — It lays hold on the mind suddenly with thoughts about the present sin, possesses it, and takes it up. So that either it does not return at all to the considerations mentioned; or else, if any thoughts of them are suggested, the mind is so prepossessed and filled, that they make no impression on the soul, or they do not abide in it. Thus David was doubtless surprised in the entrance of his great sin. Sin and temptation so possessed and filled 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. Therefore the great wisdom of the soul in *rejecting* the very first motions of sin, lies in this: if it parleys with them, the mind may be drawn away from attending to what preserves it, and thus rush wholly into evil.

[3.] It draws away the mind *by the frequency and long continuance* of its solicitations, making at last a conquest of it, as it were. And this does not happen without an open neglect of the soul, in failing to stir itself up to give an effectual rebuke to sin, in the strength and by the grace of Christ — which would have prevented its prevalence. But more will be spoken of this afterwards.

And this is the first way by which the law of sin acts its deceit against the soul: — It draws the mind away from attending to its charge and office, both in respect to its duty and to sin. And to the extent that 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 by the deceit of sin dwelling in him. And the whole effect of this working of the deceitfulness of sin may be reduced to these three headings: —

¹ Song 5:2 THE SHULAMITE I sleep, but my heart is awake; *It is* the voice of my beloved! He knocks, *saying*, “Open for me, my sister, my love, My dove, my perfect one; For my head is covered with dew, My locks with the drops of the night.” ³ I have taken off my robe; How can I put it on *again*? I have washed my feet; How can I defile them?

1. The *remission of a universally watchful frame of spirit* to every duty, and against all actings of sin, even the most hidden and secret.
2. The *omission, of particularly attending to* those duties which have an especial respect to the weakening and ruin of the whole law of sin, and obviating its deceitfulness.
3. *Spiritual sloth* as to a diligent regard for all the especial concerns of duties and sins.

To the extent that these three things, along with their branches mentioned, are brought about in or upon the soul, that is the extent to which a man is drawn away by his own lust or the deceit of sin.

There is no need to add here any directions for the prevention of this evil; they have been sufficiently laid down in our passage through the consideration of both the *duty of the mind*, and of the *deceit of sin*.

CHAPTER 11.

The working of sin by deceit to entangle the affections — The ways by which it is done — Means of their prevention.

The SECOND thing in the words of the apostle ascribed 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 respects the mind. The mind is drawn away from duty, and the affections are enticed to sin. From the prevalence of this, a man is said to be “*enticed*,” or entangled as with a bait. So the word imports, for there is an allusion in it to the bait with which a fish is taken on the hook which holds him to his destruction. And concerning this effect of the deceit of sin, we will briefly show two things:

1. *What it means 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 enticed.
 2. *What course sin takes*, and in what way it proceeds to thus entice, ensnare, or entangle the soul: —
1. For the first —

(1.) The affections are certainly entangled when *they stir up frequent imaginations* about the proposed object which this deceit of sin leads and entices towards. When sin prevails, and the affections have fully gone after it, it fills the imagination with it, possessing it with images, likenesses, appearances of it 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,” Micah 2:1. As in particular, Peter tells us that “they have eyes full of an adulteress,¹ and they cannot cease from sin,” 2Pet 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,” 1Joh 2:16. The lust of the eyes is that which is conveyed by them to the soul. Now, it is not the bodily sense of seeing that is intended, but fixing the imagination on seeing such things. And this is called the “eyes,” because things are constantly represented to the mind and soul by it, just as outward objects are represented to the inward sense by the eyes. And oftentimes the outward sight of the eyes is the occasion for these imaginations.

So Achan declares how sin prevailed with him, Joshua 7:21. First, he saw the wedge of gold and Babylonish garment, and then he *coveted* them. He rolled them in his imagination, the pleasures and the profit of them, and then he fixed his heart on obtaining them. Now the heart may have a settled, fixed detestation of sin; yet if a man finds that the imagination of the mind is frequently solicited by it and exercised about it, he may know that his affections are secretly enticed and entangled.

¹ Marginal reading in the authorized version. — ED.

(2.) This entanglement is heightened when the imagination can prevail with the mind to lodge vain thoughts in it, with secret delight and *complacency*. This is termed by casuists, *Cogitatio morosa cum delectatione* — an abiding thought with delight, which if it is towards forbidden objects, then in all cases it is actually sinful. And yet 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 which thoughts yet begin to lodge in the mind about it. The prophet complains of this “lodging of vain thoughts” in the heart as a thing that is greatly sinful, and to be abhorred:

Jer 4:14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your vain [*or evil*] thoughts lodge within you?

All these thoughts are messengers that carry sin to and fro between the imagination and the affections, and increase it still, inflaming the imagination, and more and more entangling the affections. Achan thinks about the golden wedge, and this makes him like it and love it; by loving it, his thoughts are infected, and they return to the imagination its worth and goodly appearance; and so little by little the soul is inflamed to sin. And here, if the will parts with its sovereignty, sin is actually conceived.

(3.) Inclinations or readiness to attend to *extenuations of sin*, or the reliefs that are tendered against sin when it is committed, manifest the affections that are entangled with it. We have shown, and will yet further evidence, that it is a great part of the deceit of sin, to tender lessening and extenuating thoughts of sin to the mind. Its language in a deceived heart is this: “Is it not a little sin?” or “There is mercy provided;” or “In due time it will be relinquished and given up.” Now, when the soul is ready to hearken to and entertain such secret insinuations arising from this deceit, in reference to any sin or unapprovable course, it is 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 some of its conjugal affections for Christ, and it is entangled. This is “looking on the wine when it is red, when it gives its color in the cup, when it moves itself aright,” Pro 23:31 — a pleasing contemplation on the invitations of sin, whose end the wise man gives us in verse 32.¹ When the deceit of sin has prevailed thus far in any person, then he is enticed or entangled. The will has 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: these may suffice to manifest what we intend by it.

2. Our next inquiry is, *How*, or by what means, the deceit of sin thus proceeds to entice and entangle the affections? Two or three of its baits are manifest in this: —

(1.) It makes use of its former prevalence upon the mind in drawing it away from its watch and circumspection. The wise man says, Pro 1:17, “Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird;” or “before the eyes of everything that has a wing,” as in the original. If it has eyes open to discern the snare, and a wing to carry it away, it will not be caught. In vain the deceit of sin would 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

¹ Pro 23:32 At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper.

and affections to carry it away and avoid it. But if the eyes are put out or diverted, the wings are of very little use for escape; and therefore this is one of the ways which is used by those who take birds or fowls in their nets. They have false lights, or they display things, to divert the sight of their prey; and when that is done, they take the time to cast their nets on them. So does the deceit of sin; it first draws away and diverts the mind by false reasonings and pretences, as was shown, and then it casts its net upon the affections for their entanglement.

(2.) Taking advantage of such times, it proposes sin as desirable, as exceedingly satisfactory to the corrupt part of our affections. It gilds over the object by a thousand pretences, which it presents to our corrupt lustings. This is laying bait, which the apostle in this verse evidently alludes to. Bait is something desirable and suitable, that is proposed to the hungry creature for its satisfaction; and by all its artifices, it is rendered desirable and suitable. Thus sin is presented to the soul by the help of the imagination; that is, sinful and inordinate objects, which the affections cling 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 sin itself. Hence those who live in sin are said to “live in pleasure,” Jas 5:5. Now, this pleasure of sin consists in its suitability to give satisfaction to the flesh, to lust, to corrupt affections. Hence we have that caution in Rom 13:14, “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts;” that is, do not allow your minds, thoughts, or affections to fix on sinful objects, suited to satisfy the lusts of the flesh, to nourish and cherish them by it. He speaks to this purpose again in Gal 5:16: “Do not fulfil the lust of the flesh;” — “Do not bring in the pleasures of sin, to satisfy them.” When men are under the power of sin, they are said to “fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind.”¹ Thus, therefore, the deceit of sin endeavors to entangle the affections by proposing to them, through the assistance of the imagination, that suitability which is in it to satisfy its corrupt lusts, which are now set at some liberty by the inadvertency of the mind. It presents its “wine sparkling in the cup,”² 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 I therefore say that 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. And then if Satan, with any particular temptation, falls in to its assistance, it oftentimes inflames *all* the affections, and puts the *whole* soul into disorder.

(3.) It *hides the danger* that attends sin; it covers it like the hook is covered with the bait, or the net is spread over with meat for the fowl to take. It is not, indeed, possible that sin should utterly deprive the soul of the knowledge of its danger. It cannot dispossess it of its notion or persuasion that “the wages of sin is death,” and that it is the “judgment of God that those who commit sin are worthy of death.” But it will do this: — it will so take up and possess the mind and affections with the baits and desirableness of sin, that it diverts them from an actual and practical contemplation of its danger. What Satan did in and by

¹ **Eph 2:3** among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

² **Pro 23:31-32** Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, *When* it swirls around smoothly;

³² At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper.

his first temptation, sin has done ever since. At first Eve guards herself with calling to mind the danger of sin: “If we eat or touch it we shall die,” Gen 3:3. But as soon as Satan had filled her mind with the beauty and usefulness of the fruit to make one wise, how quickly she laid aside her practical prevalent consideration of the danger of eating it, and the curse due to it; or else she relieves herself with a vain hope and pretense that it should not be, because the serpent told her so! So David was beguiled by the deceit of sin in his great transgression. 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,” 2Sam 12:9, in that he did not consider the evil that was in his heart, and the danger that attended it in the threatening or commination¹ 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 consequence of transgressions, and especially of that peculiar folly to which it solicits the mind. *Hopes of pardon* will be used to hide it; and *future repentance* will hide it; and the *present importunity* of lust will hide it; *occasions and opportunities* will hide it; *surprisals* will hide it; the *extenuation*² of sin will hide it; *balancing duties* against it will hide it; *fixing the imagination* on present objects will hide it; *desperate resolutions* to risk the worst to enjoy lust in its pleasures and profits will hide it. It has a thousand wiles, which cannot be recounted.

(4.) Having prevailed thus far, gilding over the pleasures of sin, hiding its end and demerits, deceit proceeds to raise perverse reasonings in the mind, to fix it on the sin that is proposed, so that it may be conceived and brought forth, the affections already being prevailed upon; we will speak of this under the next heading of its progress.

Here we may stay a little, as formerly, to give a few directions for obviating 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 the way which goes down to death? — then let us take heed of our affections. These are of such a great concern in the whole course of our obedience, that Scripture commonly calls them “the heart,” as the principal thing which God requires in our walking before him. And this is not to be slightly attended to. In Pro 4:23, the wise man says, “Keep your heart with all diligence;” or, as in the original, “above” or “before all keepings;” — *Before every watch, keep your heart*. You have many keepings that you watch for: watch to keep your lives, to keep your estates, to keep your reputations, to keep up your families. “But,” he says, “*above all these things, prefer that keeping which attends to the heart, to your affections, so they are not entangled with sin.*” There is no safety without it. Save all other things, yet lose the heart, and *all* is lost — lost to all eternity. You will say, then, “What shall we do, or how shall we observe this duty?”

1. Keep your affections as to their *object*.

(1.) In *general*. In Colossians 3, the apostle gives general advice as to this very case. His advice in the beginning of that chapter is to direct us to the mortification of sin, which he

¹ *Commination*: a threat of divine punishment or vengeance.

² *Extenuation*: a partial excuse to mitigate censure; an attempt to represent an offense as less serious than it appears by showing mitigating circumstances.

expressly engages in verse 5: “Mortify therefore your members which are on the earth;” — “Prevent the working and deceit of sin which wars in your members.” And to prepare us, to enable us for this, he gives us that great direction in verse 2: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Fix your affections on *heavenly* things; this will enable you to mortify sin; fill the affections with things that are above; let them be exercised with them, and enjoy the highest place in the affections. They are above: blessed and suitable objects, fit for and answering to our affections — God himself, in his beauty and glory; the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “altogether lovely, the chief of ten thousand;” grace and glory; the mysteries revealed in the gospel; the blessedness promised by it.

If our affections were filled, taken up, and possessed with *these* things — as it is our duty to make them, and as 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 to them, “*Get away* from here, as an abominable thing!” For what are the vain, transitory pleasures of sin, in comparison to the exceeding recompense of the reward which is proposed to us? This is the argument the apostle presses in 2Cor 4:17, 18.¹

(2.) As for the object of your affections, in an *especial way*, let it be the cross of Christ, which has an exceeding efficacy towards disappointing the whole work of indwelling sin:

Gal 6:14, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Paul gloried and rejoiced in the cross of Christ; his heart was set upon this; and these were the effects of the cross: — it crucified the world to him; it made the world a dead and undesirable thing. The baits and pleasures of sin are taken, *all of them*, out of the world, and out of the things that are *in* the world — namely, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” These are the things that are in the world, and it is from these that sin takes all its baits by which it entices and entangles our souls. If the heart is filled with the cross of Christ, it puts undesirableness and death upon them all; it leaves no seeming beauty, no apparent pleasure or attractiveness in them. Again, he is saying, “It crucifies me to the world; it makes my heart, my affections, my desires, dead to any of these things.” It roots up corrupt lusts and affections; it leaves no principle to go out and make provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. 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 made, the love for your souls that was in all this, and the mystery of the grace of God in it. Meditate on the vileness, the demerit, and punishment of sin as represented in the cross — the blood, and the death of Christ. Will Christ be crucified for sin, and our hearts not be crucified to sin with him? Will we entertain it, 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 has come to sanctify us.

¹ **2Cor 4:17** For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

2. Look to the *vigor of the affections* towards heavenly things. If they are not constantly attended to, excited, directed, and warned, then they are apt to decay, and sin lies in wait to take every advantage against them. We have many complaints in the Scripture about those who lost their first love, in allowing their affections to decay. And this should make us jealous over our own hearts, lest we also be overtaken with the same backsliding frame. Therefore be jealous over the affections; often and strictly examine them, and call them to account; supply them with due considerations to excite and stir them up to duty.

CHAPTER 12.

The conception of sin through its deceit — What it consists in — The consent of the will to sin — The nature of it — The ways and means by which it is obtained — Other advantages made use of by the deceit of sin — Ignorance — Error.

The THIRD success of the deceit of sin in its progressive work is the CONCEPTION of actual sin. When it has drawn the mind away from its duty, and entangled the affections, it proceeds to conceive sin in order to bring forth sin: “Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin.” Now, the conception of sin, in order for its perpetration, can be nothing but the consent of the will; for just as sin cannot be committed without the consent of the will, so where the will has consented to it, there is nothing in the soul to hinder its actual accomplishment. God indeed, by various ways and means, frustrates bringing forth these adulterate conceptions, causing them to melt away in the womb, or in one way or another aborting them, 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 check it 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 another: yet the cloud was as full of rain as if it had fallen, and the soul was as full of sin as if it had been committed.

This conceiving of lust or sin, is its prevalence in obtaining the consent of the will to its solicitations. And hereby the soul is deflowered of its chastity towards God in Christ, as the apostle intimates:

2Cor 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 subtlety, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

To clear up this matter we must observe —

1. That *the will* is the principle, the next seat and cause, of *obedience* and *disobedience*. Moral actions are unto us, or in us, so far as good or evil partake of the consent of the will. He spoke truth who said of old, “Every sin is so voluntary, that if it is not voluntary, it is not sin.”¹ It is most true of actual sins. The formality of their iniquity arises from the acts of the

¹ “Now if I do what I *will* not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who *wills* to do good.” (Rom 7:20-21) That is, Paul says he sins against his own will to do good. Was it therefore *not* sin under this reasoning that if it isn’t voluntary, it isn’t sin? Some reconcile this seeming excuse for sin, by concluding that Paul describes his life *apart from Christ* in 7.21; while Romans chapter 8 describes his life *in Christ*, being led by the Spirit. Others point to verse 7.25, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin;” they conclude that this unwilling sin is indeed his life in Christ, and it simply means that when he sins, he serves the law of sin; and when he does not sin, he serves the law of God (the law of grace), just as Owen described it in chapters 2 and 6. There Owen points out that sin’s dominion and power are broken in the believer. Therefore, he concludes here, if its dominion is broken, and a believer sins, it can only be done willfully. Perhaps he saw a distinction between *willfully*, and *willingly*. If a man cannot act apart from the will, then even if a person acts under compulsion, he would be committing a willful act. How can that be? By way of explanation, Owen will now present the “twofold consent of the will.” — WHG

will in them and concerning them — I mean, as to the persons that commit the sins; otherwise, in itself, the formal reason for sin is its aberration from the law of God.

2. There is a twofold consent of the will to sin: —

(1.) That which is *full, absolute*, complete, and upon deliberation — a prevailing consent; the convictions of the mind are conquered, and there is no principle of grace in the will to weaken it. With this consent, the soul goes into sin as a ship goes before the wind: with all its sails displayed, without any check or stop. It rushes into sin like the horse into battle. Thereby men, as the apostle puts it, “give themselves over to sin with greediness,” Eph 4:19. Thus Ahab’s will was displayed in murdering Naboth. He did it upon deliberation, by contrivance, with full consent. Doing it gave him such satisfaction that it cured his malady or distemper of mind. This is that consent of the will which is exercised in finishing and completing sin in unregenerate persons; it is not required for the single bringing forth of sin which we speak of.

(2.) There is a consent of the will which is attended with a *secret reluctance*, and a volition to the contrary. Thus was Peter’s will in denying his Master. His will was in it, or he would not have done it. It was a voluntary action, which he chose to do at that time. Sin would not have been brought forth if it had not been thus conceived. Yet, at this very time, there was resident in his will a contrary principle of love to Christ, yes, and faith in him, which did not utterly fail. Its efficacy was intercepted, and its operations were suspended, actually, through the violent urging of the temptation that he was under. Yet reluctance was in his will, and it weakened his consent to sin. Though his will consented, it was not done with that self-pleasing which full acts of the will would produce.¹

3. Even though there may be a *predominant consent in the will*, which may suffice to conceive particular sins, there cannot be an absolute, total, full consent of the will of a believer to any sin; for —

(1.) In his will there is a principle that is fixed on good, on *all good*: Rom 7:21, “He would do good.” The principle of grace in the will inclines him to all good. This is generally prevalent against the principle of sin, so that the will is denominated from there. Grace has the rule and dominion, and not sin, in the will of every believer. Now, that 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.

(2.) 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 of the Spirit, or the reluctance of the principle of grace in the will. But the general rule holds in all things at all times: Gal 5:17, “The Spirit lusts against the flesh.” It does so actually, though not always to the same degree, nor with the same success; and the prevalence of the contrary principle in this or that particular act does not disprove it. It is also true on the other side. There is no acting of grace in the will that sin does not lust against it; even though that

¹ **Luk 22:61-62** “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” ⁶² So Peter went out and **wept bitterly**.”

lusting is not made sensible in the soul, because of the prevalence of the contrary acting of grace, yet it is enough to keep those actings from perfection in their kind. So it is in this reluctance of grace against the acting of sin in the soul; though it is not sensible in its operations, yet it is enough to keep that act from being full and complete. And much of spiritual wisdom lies in discerning rightly between the spiritual reluctance of the principle of grace in the will against sin, and the rebukes that are given the soul by conscience upon its conviction for sin.

4. Observe that reiterated, repeated acts of the consent of the will to sin may beget a disposition and inclination to similar acts, that may bring the will to a *proneness and readiness* to consent to sin upon easy solicitations. This is a condition of soul that is dangerous, and greatly to be watched against.
5. This consent of the will, which we have thus described, may be considered two ways: —
 - (1.) As it is exercised about the circumstances, causes, means, and inducements to sin.
 - (2.) As it respects this or that actual sin.

In the first sense, there is a virtual consent of the will to sin in every inadvertence to prevent it, in every neglect of duty that makes way for it, and 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, mentioned before. For where there is no act of the will, *formally* or *virtually*, there is no sin. But this is not what we are now speaking of; and in particular, the consent of the will to this or that actual sin, so far as that sin is either committed, or prevented by other ways and means, is not our present consideration.

This is what the *conceiving* of sin consists in. These things being supposed, what we consider next is the *way* in which the deceit of sin proceeds to procure the consent of the will, and so conceive actual sin in the soul. To this purpose observe: —

1. That the *will is a rational appetite* — it is rational as guided by the mind, and has an appetite as it is excited by the affections; and so in its operation or actings, it has respect to both, and is influenced by both.
2. It chooses nothing, consents to nothing, except *sub ratione boni*, — as it has an *appearance of good*, some present good. It cannot consent to anything under the notion or apprehension of its being evil in any kind. Good is its natural and necessary object; and therefore, whatever is proposed to it for its *consent*, must be proposed to it under an appearance of being either good in itself, or good to the soul at present, or good as it is in the circumstances;¹ so that —
3. We may see from this, the reason why the conception of sin is here placed as a consequent of the mind's being drawn away, and the affections being entangled. Both of these have an influence in the consent of the will, and thereby in the conception of this or that actual sin. Our way, therefore, is made somewhat plain here. We have seen at large how the mind is drawn away by the deceit of sin, and how the affections are entangled by it.

¹ Originally, “so circumstantiate” — giving circumstantial evidence that it is good.

What remains is just the proper *effect* of these things. To discover them, we must give instances of some of the special deceits — the corrupt and fallacious reasonings mentioned before — and then show their prevalence on the will to consent to sin: —

(1.) The will is imposed upon by that corrupt reasoning, that *grace is exalted in a pardon*, and that *mercy is provided for sinners*. This first, as shown, deceives the mind; and that opens the way to the will's consent by removing a sight of its evil, which the will has an aversion to. And this, in carnal hearts, prevails so far as to make them think that their liberty consists in being “servants of corruption,” 2Pet 2:19.¹ And the poison of it oftentimes taints and vitiates the minds of believers themselves; this is why we are so cautioned against it in the Scripture.

We will therefore add a few other considerations to what has been said before, as to the use and abuse of the doctrine of the grace of the gospel, 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*. And the great design of sin is to change the doctrine and the mystery of grace in reference to these things. That is done by applying those considerations to the one, which are proper to the other. By this means, each part is hindered; and the influence of the doctrine of grace on them, for their furtherance, is defeated. See:

1Joh 2:1, 2, “These things I write to you, that you do not sin. And if any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins.”

Here is the whole design and use of the gospel briefly expressed. “These things,” he says, “I write to you.” What *things* were these? Those mentioned in chap. 1 verse 2: “The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show to you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us” — that is, the things concerning the person and mediation of Christ — and in verse 7,² that pardon, forgiveness, and expiation from sin which is to be attained by the blood of Christ. But to what end and purpose does he write these things to them? What do they teach, and what do they tend towards? A universal abstinence from sin: “I write to you,” he says, “that you do not sin.” This is the only proper, genuine end of the doctrine of the gospel. But to abstain from all sin is not our condition in this world. Verse 8:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

What, then, shall be done in *this* case? In supposing sin, that we *have* sinned, is there no relief provided for our souls and consciences in the gospel? *Yes*; he says,

“If any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins.”

¹ **2Pe 2:18-19** For when they speak great swelling *words* of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹ While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. *Also, Rom 6:1* What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live in it any longer?

² **1Jo 1:7** But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

There is full relief in the propitiation and intercession of Christ for us. This is the order and the method of the doctrine of the gospel, and of its application 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 it puts this “new wine into old bottles,” by which 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 utterly excludes the use of the first. “If any man sins, there is pardon provided;” this is all the gospel that sin would willingly allow to abide in the minds of men. When we would come to God by *believing*, it would press the former part of being *free* from sin — when indeed the gospel principally proposes the latter, the *pardon* of sin, for our encouragement. And when we have come to God, and should walk with him, sin will have only the latter proposed, that there is *pardon* of sin, when the gospel principally proposes the former, of *keeping* ourselves from sin. The grace of God bringing salvation, has appeared to us for that end and purpose.

Now, the mind being entangled with this deceit — drawn away from its watch by it, diverted from the true ends of the gospel — it imposes on the will in several ways, to obtain its consent: —

[1.] By a sudden *surprisal* in case of temptation. Temptation is the representation of a thing as a present good, a particular good, which is rather a real evil, a general evil. Now, when a temptation, armed with opportunity and provocation, befalls the soul, the principle of grace in the will rises up with a rejection and detestation of it. But all of a sudden, the mind being deceived by sin, breaks in upon the will with a corrupt, fallacious reasoning from gospel grace and mercy, which first staggers, and then abates the will’s opposition. And then it causes the will to tip the scale, by giving its consent on the side of temptation, presenting evil as a present good — and sin in the sight of God is thus conceived, even if it is never committed. Thus the seed of God is sacrificed to Moloch, and the weapons of Christ are abused to serve the devil.

[2.] It does this *imperceptibly*. It insinuates the poison of this corrupt reasoning little by little, until it has greatly prevailed. Just as 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 that doctrine,¹ so the whole of the apostasy from the gospel, is principally casting the soul into the frame and mould of this false reasoning — so that sin may be indulged on account of grace and pardon. By this false reasoning, the soul is gratified in sloth and negligence, and it is taken away from its care as to particular duties and avoidance of particular sins. It works the soul imperceptibly away from the mystery of the law of grace — to look for salvation as if we had never performed any duty, being unprofitable servants after we have done all;^{Luk 17.10} resting on sovereign mercy through the blood of Christ, and attending to our duties with all diligence as if we looked for no mercy; that is, with no less care, though with more liberty and freedom. This is what the deceitfulness of sin endeavors by all means to work the soul away from; and thereby it debauches the will when its consent is required for particular sins.

¹ “But God be thanked that you were the servants of sin: but you have obeyed from the heart that **form of doctrine** which was delivered to you.” (Rom 6.17)

(2.) The deceived mind imposes on the will, to obtain its consent to sin, by proposing to it the advantages that may accrue and arise by it; which is one medium by which it is also drawn away itself. It renders what is *absolutely evil*, into a present *apparent good*. So it was with Eve, Genesis 3. Laying aside all considerations of the law, covenant, and threats of God, she all at once reflects upon the advantages, pleasures, and benefits which she would obtain by her sin, and she counts them up to solicit the consent of her will. “It is,” she says, “good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise.” What should she do, then, but eat it? Her will consented, and she did so accordingly. Pleas for obedience are laid aside, and only the pleasures of sin are taken into consideration. So Ahab says in 1Kng 21.2; “Naboth’s vineyard is near my house, and I may make it a garden of herbs; therefore I must have it.” A deceived mind imposed these considerations on his will, until it made him obstinate in the pursuit of his covetousness through perjury and murder, to the utter ruin of himself and his family. Thus the guilt and tendency of sin is hidden under the cover of advantages and pleasures, and so it is conceived or resolved in the soul.

Just as the mind being withdrawn greatly furthers the conception of sin in the soul by the consent of the will, so too, the affections being enticed and entangled furthers its conception; they do this two ways: —

[1.] By some *hasty impulse and surprisal*: the affections being stirred up, incited, and drawn out by some violent provocation or suitable temptation, they combust the whole soul, as it were, and draw the will into consenting 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 carriage of that foolish churl,¹ stirs David up to wrath and revenge, 1Sam 25:13.² He resolves to destroy a whole family, the innocent with the guilty, verses 33, 34.³ Self-revenge and murder were, for the time, conceived, resolved, and consented to, until God graciously took David off it. His entangled, provoked affections surprised his will to consent to the conception of many bloody sins. The case was the same with Asa in his anger, when he struck the prophet;⁴ and with Peter in his fear, when he denied his Master. Let the soul who would take heed of conceiving sin, take heed of entangled affections; for sin may be suddenly conceived, and the prevalent consent of the will may be suddenly obtained. This gives the soul a fixed guilt, even if the sin itself is never actually brought forth.

¹ A selfish person who is unwilling to give or spend.

² **1Sa 25:10-13** Then Nabal answered David’s servants, and said, “Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. ¹¹ “Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give *it* to men when I do not know where they *are* from?” ¹² So David’s young men turned on their heels and went back; and they came and told him all these words. ¹³ Then David said to his men, “Every man gird on his sword.” So every man girded on his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David, and two hundred stayed with the supplies.

³ **1Sa 25:33-34** “And blessed is your advice and blessed *are* you [Abigail], because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand. ³⁴ “For indeed, *as* the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hastened and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!”

⁴ **2Chr 16:10** Then Asa was angry with the seer [Hanani], and put him in prison [in stocks], for *he was* enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed *some* of the people at that time.

[2.] Enticed affections procure the consent of the will by *frequent solicitations*, by which they imperceptibly gain ground on it, and enthrone themselves. Take the instance of the sons of Jacob,

Gen 37:4. “And when [Joseph’s] brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.”

They hate their brother, because their father loved him. Their affections being enticed, many new occasions arise to entangle them further, such as his dreams and the like. This rankling lay 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. That hatred and envy that they conceived against him did not cease until they had gotten the consent of their wills to Joseph’s ruin. In Pro 23:31-35,¹ the wise man excellently describes this gradual progress of the prevalence of corrupt affections, to solicit the soul to sin.

This is the usual way that sin proceeds in the destruction of those souls who seem to have made some good engagements in the ways of God: — when it has entangled them with one temptation, and brought their will to some liking of it, which presently becomes another temptation, either to neglect some duty or to refuse more light. What usually leads men to utterly fall away from God is not what they are first entangled with.

This may briefly suffice for the third progressive act of the deceit of sin. It obtains the will’s consent to its conception; and by this means, multitudes of sins are conceived in the heart which no less defile the soul, or cause it to contract no less guilt, than if they were actually committed.

As a close to this discourse, I will add to what has already been said concerning the deceitfulness of indwelling sin in general, one or two particular ways of its deceitful actings which greatly evidence its power and efficacy. These consist in the advantages and means it makes use of to be relieved of the argument made against it by the Word and Spirit for its ruin. We will here name only one heading for each sort: —

1. It takes great advantage of the *darkness of the mind*, to work out its design and intents. The shades of a mind that is totally dark — that is, utterly devoid of saving grace — are the proper workplace of sin. Hence, its effects are called the “works of darkness,” Eph 5:11, Rom 13:12, as springing from it. Sin works and brings forth by the help of a darkened mind. The working of lust under the cover of a darkened mind is, as it were, the upper region of hell; for it lies next door to it in its filth, horror, and confusion.

Now, there is a partial darkness still abiding in believers; they “know but in part,” 1Cor 13:12. Even though there is a principle of saving light in them all — the day-star has risen in their hearts — yet all the shades of darkness are not utterly expelled from them in this life.

¹ NLT Pro 23:29-35 Who has anguish? Who has sorrow? Who is always fighting? Who is always complaining? Who has unnecessary bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? ³⁰ It is the one who spends long hours in the taverns, trying out new drinks. ³¹ Don’t gaze at the wine, seeing how red it is, how it sparkles in the cup, how smoothly it goes down. ³² For in the end it bites like a poisonous snake; it stings like a viper. ³³ You will see hallucinations, and you will say crazy things. ³⁴ You will stagger like a sailor tossed at sea, clinging to a swaying mast. ³⁵ And you will say, “They hit me, but I didn’t feel it. I didn’t even know it when they beat me up. When will I wake up so I can look for another drink?”

And there are two parts, or principal effects as it were, of this remaining darkness in believers: —

- (1.) *Ignorance* (or nescience) of the will of God, either *juris* or *facti*,¹ of the rule and law in general; or of the reference of the particular fact that lies before the mind, as to the law.
- (2.) Positive *error* and mistakes — that is, taking falsehood for truth, and darkness for light.

Now, the law of sin takes great advantage of both of these, to exert its power in the soul.

(1.) *Ignorance*. If there is a remaining ignorance of anything about the will of God, sin will be sure to make use of it, and employ that ignorance to the utmost. Though Abimelech was not a believer, he had moral integrity in his ways and actions; he declares so in a solemn appeal to God, the searcher of all hearts, even in those things in which he miscarried, Gen 20:5.² But being ignorant that fornication was a sin, or that it was so great a sin that it was not becoming for a morally honest man to defile himself with it, lust hurries Abimelech into that intention of evil in reference to Sarah, as we have it related there.

God complains that his people “perished 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. Whether it concerns any duty to be performed, or any sin to be committed, if there is darkness or ignorance in the mind about these things, sin will not lose its advantage. Many a man — being ignorant of the duty incumbent on him to instruct his own family, and throwing the whole weight of it onto public teaching — is brought into habitual sloth and negligence of his duty, by the deceitfulness of sin. However much ignorance there is of the will of God and duty, that much advantage is given to the law of sin. From this we may see what that true knowledge is, which is acceptable with God. How exactly many a poor soul, who is low as to his conceptual knowledge of sin, may yet walk with God! It seems they know enough, that sin doesn’t have much advantage against them on that account; yet others, high in their concepts of sin, give their lusts an advantage by their ignorance, though they don’t know they are ignorant.³

(2.) *Error* is a worse part or effect of the mind’s darkness, and it gives great advantage to the law of sin. There is, indeed, ignorance in *every* error, but there isn’t error in *all* ignorance; and so they may be distinguished. I need only exemplify this with one consideration, and that is of men who, being zealous for some error, seek to suppress and persecute the truth. Indwelling sin desires no greater advantage than this. How it will, every day, every hour, pour out wrath, revilings, and hard speeches — breathe revenge, murder, and desolation — under the name perhaps of zeal! On this account, we may see poor creatures every day who are pleased with themselves, as if boasting in their excellence, when in fact they are foaming out their own shame. Under their real darkness and pretended zeal, sin sits securely; it fills pulpits, houses, prayers, and streets with bitter

¹ That is, actually or practically.

² **Gen 20:5** “Did [Abraham] not say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And [Sarah], even she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.”

³ In other words, the one who is “ignorant” has a practical knowledge of sin, when he isn’t misled by the deceit of sin; but the other who is “knowledgeable,” has a practical ignorance of sin, when he doesn’t see the deceit at work.

fruits of envy, malice, wrath, hatred, evil surmisings, and false speech, full as they can hold. The usual result with such poor creatures is that the holy, blessed, meek Spirit of God withdraws from them, visibly and openly leaving them to that evil, froward, wrathful, worldly spirit, which the law of sin has cherished and heightened in them. Sin dwells nowhere more securely, than in such a frame. Thus, I say, in particular it lays hold of any advantage to practice its deceitfulness; and in this it also exerts its power in the soul. This single instance of employing the darkness of the mind to its own ends, is a sufficient evidence of it.

2. There is another means indwelling sin uses to relieve itself against the pursuit made of it in the heart by the Word and Spirit of grace. I will name, for instance, one of its wiles, and that is *the alleviation of its own guilt*. It pleads for itself that it is not so bad, so filthy, or so fatal as it is pretended; and it proceeds in this course of extenuation in two ways: —

(1.) *Absolutely*. It will have many secret pleas that the evil which it tends towards is not as pernicious as the conscience is persuaded it is; it may be risked without ruin. It will strongly urge these considerations when it is at work by way of a surprisal, when the soul has no leisure or liberty to weigh its suggestions in the balance of the sanctuary; and not seldom, the will is imposed on by this, and advantages are gained to get itself out from under the sword of the Spirit: — “It’s not so bad that it can’t be let alone, or allowed to die by itself, which it will probably do in a while; there is no need for that forcefulness which is offered in mortification; there is time enough later on to deal with a matter of no greater importance than this;” and it makes other pleas like those mentioned before.

(2.) *Comparatively*; and this is a large field for its deceit and subtlety to lurk in: — “Though it is an evil that is indeed to be relinquished, and the soul is to watch against it, it is not of that magnitude and degree which we see in the lives of others, even in saints of God, much less those which some saints of old had fallen into.” By these and similar pretences, I say, it seeks to evade and keep its abode in the soul when it is pursued to destruction. And how small a portion of its deceitfulness we have declared!

CHAPTER 13.

Several ways by which the bringing forth of conceived Sin is obstructed.

BEFORE we proceed to the remaining evidences of the power and efficacy of the law of sin, we will take occasion from what has been delivered, to divert to one consideration that offers itself from that Scripture which was made the basis and foundation for our discourse of the general deceitfulness of sin, namely, Jas 1:15.¹ The apostle tells us that “lust conceiving, brings forth sin.” This seems to intimate that whatever sin is conceived, that is what is brought forth. Now, placing the conception of sin, as we have done, in the consent of the will to it, and reckoning, as we should, that bringing forth sin consists 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, will be to inquire why that comes to pass. I answer, then —

1. That this is not so, is no thanks to sin or the law of sin. What it conceives, it *would* bring forth; the fact that it *does* not, is for the most part, just a small abatement of its guilt. A *determinate will* to actually sin, is actual sin.² There is nothing lacking on sin’s part that every conceived sin is not actually accomplished. The obstacle and prevention lies on another hand.

2. There are two things that are necessary in the creature who has *conceived* sin, to *bring it forth* — first, *Power*; secondly, *Continuance in the will to sin*, until it is perpetrated and committed. Where these two are found, actual sin will unavoidably ensue. It is evident, therefore, that what hinders conceived sin from being brought forth, must affect either the power or the will of the sinner. This must be from God; and he has two ways of doing it:

- (1.) By his providence, whereby he obstructs the POWER to sin.
- (2.) By his grace, whereby he diverts or changes the WILL to sin.

I don’t mention these ways of God’s dispensations distinctly, as though one of them were always without the other; for there is much of grace in providential administrations, and there is much of the wisdom of providence seen in the dispensations of grace. But I distinguish them, because they appear most eminent in it. Providence is most eminent in outward acts respecting the power of the creature; grace, whether common or special, is most eminent in internal efficacy respecting his will. We will begin with the first: —

(1.) When sin is conceived, the Lord obstructs its production by his providence, in taking away or cutting short that POWER which is absolutely necessary to bring forth or accomplish it; as —

[1.] *Life* is the foundation of all power, the principle of operation; when that ceases, all power ceases with it. Even God himself, to evince the everlasting stability of his own power, gives himself the title of “The living God.” Now, he frequently obviates the power

¹ **Jas 1:15** Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

² **Mat 5:28** “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

to actually execute sin by cutting short and taking away the lives of those who have conceived it. Thus he dealt with the army of Sennacherib when, just as he purposed, so he threatened that “the LORD would not deliver Jerusalem out of his hand,” 2Kng 18:35.¹ God threatens to cut short his power, so that he would not execute his intent, chap. 19:28;² and he accordingly performs this, by taking away the lives of his soldiers, verse 35,³ without whom it was impossible for Sennacherib’s conceived sin to be brought forth.

Moses excellently sets forth this providential dispensation in the obstruction of conceived sin, in the case of Pharaoh:

Exo 15:9, 10, “The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust will be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. You blew with your wind, and the sea covered them: they sank like lead, in the mighty waters.”

Sin’s conception is fully expressed, and just as full a prevention is annexed to it. In the same way, he dealt with the companies of fifties and their captains who came to apprehend Elijah, 2Kng 1:9-12. Fire came down from heaven and consumed them when they were ready to take him. And various other instances of the same nature might be recalled. We have what is of universal concern in that great providential alteration which put a period to the lives of men. Men living hundreds of years had a long season in which to bring forth the sins they conceived; therefore the earth was filled with violence, injustice, and rapine,⁴ and “all flesh corrupted their way,” Gen 6:12, 13.⁵ To prevent a similar inundation of sin, God shortens the course of the pilgrimage of men on the earth, and reduces their lives to a much shorter measure.

Besides this general law, God daily cuts off persons who had conceived much mischief and violence in their hearts, and thus He prevents its execution: “Blood-thirsty and deceitful men do not live out half their days.” Psa 55:23 They would still have much work to do, if only they had space given to them to execute the bloody and sinful purposes of their minds. The psalmist tells us,

Psa 146:4, “In the day that the breath of man goes forth, his thoughts perish:”

He had many schemes about sin, but now they are all cut off. So also,

Ecc 8:12, 13, “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before him. But

¹ **2Kngs 18:35** ‘Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?’”

² **2Kngs 19:28** Because your rage against Me and your tumult Have come up to My ears, Therefore I will put My hook in your nose And My bridle in your lips, And I will turn you back By the way which you came.

³ **2Kngs 19:35** And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when *people* arose early in the morning, there were the corpses-- all dead.

⁴ *Rapine* - despoiling a country through warfare, theft, plundering, destroying, and stripping the land.

⁵ **Gen 6:12** So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. ¹³ And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

it will not be well with the wicked, nor will he prolong his days, which are like a shadow; because he does not fear before God.”

However long a wicked man lives, yet he dies judicially, and he will not remain to do the evil he had conceived.

But now, seeing that 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 obviates its production and accomplishment in *them*, by cutting off and taking away their lives, so they will not be able to perform it. I answer —

1st. That God does not *judicially* cut off and take away the life of any of his own for this end and purpose: that he may thereby prevent the execution or bringing forth of any particular sin that he conceived, and which he would have perpetrated without taking it away; for —

(1st.) This is directly contrary to the very declared end of *the patience of God* towards them, 2Pet 3:9.¹ This is the very end of the longsuffering of God towards believers: that before they depart from here, 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; it is so far from being an encouragement to sin, that it is a motive for universal watchfulness against it — it's of the same nature as all gospel grace, and of mercy in the blood of Christ. Now, this dispensation which we speak of, would lie in direct contradiction to that.

(2dly.) This also flows from the former: that whereas conceived sin contains the whole nature of it, as our Saviour declares at large in Matthew 5 — and being cut off under the guilt of sin in order to prevent its further progress, argues for a continuance in the purpose of it without repentance — it can only be that those who are *judicially* cut off this way must perish forever. But God does not deal so with his own; he does not throw away the people whom he foreknew.^{Rom 8.29} And this is why David prays for the patience of God mentioned before, that it might not be so with him: Psa 39:13, “O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go from here, and am no more.” Yet —

2dly. There are some cases in which God may and does take away *the lives of his own*, to prevent the guilt they would otherwise be involved in; such as —

(1st.) In the approach of some great temptation and trial upon the world. God knowing that particular ones of his would not be able to withstand it and hold out against it, but would dishonor him and defile themselves, he may, and doubtless often does, take them out of the world, to take them out of its way: Isa 57:1, “The righteous is taken away from the evil to come;” — 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 may call a soldier away from his watch and guard when he knows that he isn't able, through some infirmity, to bear the stress and force of the enemy that is coming upon him.

¹ **2Pet 3:9** The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

(2dly.) In case they are engaged in any way that is not acceptable to him, through ignorance or not knowing his mind and will. This seems to have been the case of Josiah. And, doubtless, the Lord oftentimes proceeds this way with his own. When any of his own are engaged in ways that do not please him, through the darkness and ignorance of their minds — so that they may not proceed to further evil or mischief — he calls them away from their station and employment, and takes them to himself; there they will err and mistake no more. But, in ordinary cases, God has other ways to divert his own from sin than by killing them, as we will see afterward.

[2.] God providentially hinders bringing forth conceived sin, by taking away and *cutting short the power* of those who conceived it. So that, even though their lives continue, they won't have the power that makes it possible for them to execute what they had intended, or to bring forth what they had conceived. We also have various instances of this. This was the case with the builders of Babel in Genesis 11. Whatever they aimed at in particular, it was done in pursuit of a design of apostasy from God. One thing requisite to accomplishing what they aimed at, was the oneness of their language; so God says,

Gen 11:6, "They all have one language; and this is what they begin to do: now nothing that they have imagined to do will be restrained from them."

In an ordinary way they will accomplish their wicked design. What course does God now take to obviate 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 they cannot go on with their work, verse 7 — he takes away what their power consisted in. He proceeded in like manner with the Sodomites, Gen 19:11. They were engaged in, and set upon the pursuit of, their filthy lusts. God strikes them with blindness, so they could not find the door, where they thought to use violence to compass their ends. Their lives were continued, and their will to sin; but their power was cut short and abridged. His dealing with Jeroboam, 1Kng 13:4, was of the same nature. He stretched out his hand to lay hold of the prophet, and it withered and became useless. This is an eminent way of the effectual acting of God's providence in the world, for stopping that inundation of sin which would overflow all the earth if every womb of it were opened. He cuts men short of their moral power, by which they would effect it. By this means, many a wretch who has conceived mischief against the church of God, has been divested of his power by which he thought to accomplish it. Some have their bodies struck with diseases so they can no longer serve their lusts, or accompany them in perpetrating their folly; some are deprived of the instruments by which they would work. There has been for many days, enough sin conceived to root out the generation of the righteous from the face of the earth — if men had the strength and ability to do their will — if God had not cut off and shortened their power, and the days of their prevalence.

Psa 64:6, "They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep."

All things are in readiness; the design is well laid; their counsels are deep and secret; what now will hinder them from doing whatever they have imagined to do?

Psa 64:7, 8, “But God will shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they will be wounded. So they will trip over their own tongue, to fall upon themselves.”

God meets with them, and brings them down, so they will not be able to accomplish their design. And this way of God’s preventing sin seems to be, at least ordinarily, specific to the men of the world; God deals this way with them every day, and leaves them to pine away in their sins. They go all their days filled with the iniquity they have conceived, and so greatly burdened that they cannot be delivered from it. The prophet tells us they practice the iniquity they had conceived, “because it is in the power of their hand. If they have power for it, they will accomplish it,” Micah 2:1.¹ “They use their power to shed blood,” Eze 22:6. This is the measure of their sinning: their power. Many of them do no more evil, and commit no more sin, than they can. Their whole restraint lies in being cut short in power, in one way or another. Their bodies will not serve them for their contrived uncleannesses, nor their hands for their revenge and rapine, nor their instruments for persecution; but they go burdened with their conceived sin, and are disquieted and tortured by it all their days. This is why they become, in themselves as well as to others, “a troubled sea that cannot rest,” Isa 57:20.

It may also be, in some cases — under some violent temptations, or in some mistakes — that God may thus obviate the accomplishment of conceived sin in his own people. There seems to be an instance of it in dealing with Jehoshaphat. He had designed, against the mind of God, to unite with Ahab, and send his ships with him to Tarshish; but God breaks apart his ships by a wind, so he could not accomplish what he designed. But in God’s dealing with his own in this way, there is a difference from the same dispensation towards others; for —

1st. It is only so in cases of *extraordinary temptation*. When, through the violence of temptation and the craft of Satan, they are hurried out from under the conduct of the law of grace, God one way or another takes away their power, or may do so, that they will not be able to execute what they 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 “like 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 they would.

2dly. God does not do it to leave them to wrestle with sin, and to attempt other ways to accomplish it upon failing in what they were engaged in; but by their disappointment, he awakens them to think about their condition and what they are doing, and so he *consumes sin in the womb* by the ways that will be insisted on afterward. Some men’s deprivation of power for committing conceived, contrived sin has been sanctified to the point of changing their hearts from all dalliances with that or other sins.

¹ Owen offers an expanded translation found in the HCSB: **Mic 2:1** Woe to those who dream up wickedness and prepare evil plans on their beds! At morning light they accomplish it because the power is in their hands.

[3.] God *providentially* hinders the bringing forth of conceived sin by opposing an *external hindering power* to sinners. He leaves them their lives, and he leaves them power to do what they intend; only he raises up an *opposite* power to coerce, forbid, and restrain them.

We have an instance of this in 1Sam 14:45. Saul had sworn that Jonathan would be put to death; and as far as it appears, he went on resolutely to have slain him. God stirs up the spirit of the people; they oppose themselves to the wrath and fury of Saul, and Jonathan is delivered.

So also in 2Chr 26:16-20, when king Uzziah would have offered incense himself, contrary to the law, eighty men of the priests resisted him, and drove him out of the temple. And to this heading are to be referred all the assistance which God stirs up to deliver his people against the fury of persecutors. He raises up saviours or deliverers on mount Zion, “to judge Mount Edom.”

So in Rev 12:16, the dragon, and those acting under him and spirited by him, were in a furious endeavor to destroy the church; God stirs up the earth to the Church’s assistance, even men of the world who are not engaged with others in the design of Satan. And by their opposition, he hinders them from executing their designed rage.

God’s dealing with his own people in Hos 2:6-7, seems to be of this nature. They were in 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, so they will not be able to fulfill their designs and lusts.

[4.] God obviates 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 signal instance of this issue of providence. When the day was coming in which Herod thought to slay Peter, who was then shut up in prison, God sends for and takes him away from their rage, and from their lying in wait. So also our Saviour was taken away from the murderous rage of the Jews before his hour had come, John 8:59, John 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 its men, adulterers and adulteresses, the sin of one is often hindered and stifled by taking away 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.] God does this by some eminent *diversions* of the thoughts of men who had conceived sin. In Gen 37:24, Joseph’s brothers threw him into a pit, with the intent to starve him there. While they were, it seems, pleasing themselves with what they had done, God orders a company of merchants to come by; with that new object, he diverts their thoughts from *killing* their brother, to *selling* him, verses 25-27. We know how far they were subservient in this to the infinitely wise counsel of God. Thus also, when Saul was in pursuit of David and was even ready to prevail against him to his destruction,

God stirs up the Philistines to invade the land, which both diverted Saul's thoughts, and drew the course of his actions another way, 1Sam 23:27.¹

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 to the power of the sinning creature. And we may, in our passage, take a brief view of the great advantages to faith and the church of God which may be found in this matter; such as —

1st. This may give us a little insight into the ever-to-be-adored providence of God, by these and similar ways, in great variety, obstructing the breaking forth of sin in the world. It is God who makes those dams, and shuts up those flood-gates of corrupted nature, so that it will 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:

Gen 6:5, "Every thought and imagination of the heart of man is evil, and that continually."

The fact that the entire earth is not filled with violence, as it was of old, is merely from the mighty hand of God working effectually to obstruct sin. It is from this alone that the highways, streets, and fields are not all filled with violence, blood, rapine, uncleanness, and every villainy that the heart of man can conceive. Oh, the infinite beauty of divine wisdom and providence in God's governance of the world! For its conservation takes no less power and wisdom daily, than the first making of the world required.

2dly. If we will look to our own concerns, they will in a special way force us to adore the wisdom and efficacy of the providence of God in stopping the progress of conceived sin. The fact that we are at peace in our houses, at rest in our beds, that we have any quiet in our enjoyments, is from this alone. 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 the power to perpetrate all their conceived sin? It may be that the ruin of some of us has been conceived a thousand times. We are obliged to this providence of obstructing sin, for our lives, our families, our estates, our liberties, for whatever is or may be dear to us; for may we not say sometimes, with the psalmist,

Psa 57:4. "My soul is among lions: and I lie even among those who are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword?"

And how is the deliverance of men contrived from such persons?

Psa 58:6, "God breaks their teeth in their mouths, even the great teeth of the young lions."

He keeps this fire from burning, or quenches it when it is ready to burst into flame. He breaks their spears and arrows, so that sometimes we aren't 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 their desired opportunities, or he diverts them by providing other objects for their lusts; and oftentimes he causes

¹ **1Sam 23:27** But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hasten and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!"

them to spend them among themselves, upon one another. We may say, therefore, with the psalmist,

Psa 104:24 “O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all: the earth is full of your riches;”

And with the prophet we may say,

Hos 14:9, “Who is wise, and will understand these things? Who is prudent, and would know them? All the ways of the LORD are right, and the just walk in them: but transgressors fall in them.”

3dly. If these and their like are the ways by which God obviates bringing forth 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 a troubled sea,” says the Lord, “that cannot rest.” ^{Isa 57:20} As they endeavor that others may have no peace, so it is certain that they themselves do not have any; the principle of sin is not impaired or weakened in them; the will to sin is not taken away. They have a womb of sin that is able to conceive monsters every moment. Indeed, for the most part they are forging and framing folly all day long. They are contriving how to satisfy one lust or another. They are either devouring by malice and revenge, or vitiating by uncleanness, or trampling on by ambition, or swallowing by covetousness, all who stand before them. Many of their follies and mischiefs they bring to the verge of birth, and are in pain to be delivered; but every day God 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,

Psa 59:6,7 “They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go all around the city. They belch with their mouth: swords are in their lips.”

And yet they are not able to accomplish their designs. What tortures such poor creatures live in! Envy, malice, wrath, 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 opposing a greater power to them — when nothing else will do — he cuts them off in their sins, and they go to the grave, full of their purposes of iniquity. Others are no less hurried and diverted by the power of their lusts, which they are not able to satisfy.

This is the sore travail that 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 accomplish them, they are filled with vexation and discontentment. This is the portion of those who do not know the Lord or the power of his grace. Do not envy their condition. Notwithstanding their outward, glittering show, their hearts are full of anxiety, trouble, and sorrow.

4thly. Do we sometimes see the floodgates of men’s lusts and rage set open against the church and its interest, and does prevalence attend them, and is power on their side for a season? Do not let the saints of God despond. He has unspeakably various and effectual ways to stifle 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

you: the remainder of wrath you shall restrain,” Psa 76:10 — only as much of their wrath is let out as will 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 conceived. Psa 76:12, “He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth.” Some he will cut off and destroy, some he will terrify and frighten, and prevent the rage of all. He can knock them on the head, or break out their teeth, or chain up their wrath. And who can oppose him? ^{Job 11.10}

5thly. Those who have benefited by any of the ways mentioned may know to whom they owe their preservation, and not look at it as a common thing. When you have conceived sin, has God weakened your power to sin, or denied you the 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 that. Though God does not always deal with these providences in subservience to the covenant of grace, yet there is always mercy in them, always a call in them to consider their author. If God had not thus dealt with you, it may be that this day you would have been a terror to yourselves, a shame to your relations, and under the punishment due to some notorious sins which you conceived. Besides, there is usually an *additional guilt* in sin that is brought forth, above what there is in the mere conception of it. It may be that others would have been ruined by it here, or drawn into a partnership in sin by it, and thus have been eternally ruined by it. All of this was prevented by these providences; and eternity will witness that there is a singular mercy in them. Don’t look at such things, then, as common accidents; the hand of God is in them all, and that is a merciful hand if not despised. If it is, God yet does good to others by it: the world is the better for it; and you are not as wicked as you would be.

6thly. We may also see from this the great use of *magistracy* in the world, that great appointment of God. Among other things, it is specifically subservient to this holy providence, in obstructing the bringing forth of conceived sin — namely, by the terror of the one that bears the sword. God fixes that on the hearts of evil men, which he expresses here:

Rom 13:4, “If you do what is evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon those who do evil.”

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 will not bring forth. When there was no king in Israel, none to put to rebuke, and none whom evil men were afraid of, there was woeful work and havoc among the children of men made in the world, as we may see in the last chapters of the book of Judges. The greatest mercies and blessings that we are made partakers of in this world, next to those of the gospel and covenant of grace, come to us through this channel and conduit. And, indeed, this which we have been speaking about is the proper work of magistracy — namely, to be subservient to 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 opposing obstacles to the power of the sinner. And [yet] sin is not consumed by them, but only sealed in the womb. Men are not burdened *for* it, but *with* it; they are 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.) The way that still remains for our consideration — by which God obviates the production of conceived sin — is his working on the WILL of the sinner, so as to make sin be consumed in the womb. There are two ways in general by which God thus prevents bringing forth conceived sin, by working on the will of the sinner; and they are —

[1.] By *restraining* grace;

[2.] By *renewing* grace.

He does it sometimes one way, and sometimes the other. The first of these is common to regenerate and unregenerate persons; the latter is specific to believers. God does it variously, as to their particulars, by them both. We will begin with the first of them: —

[1.] God does this by way of restraining grace, by *some arrow of particular conviction*, fixed in the heart and conscience of the sinner, in reference to the particular sin which he had conceived. This staggers and changes the mind as to the particular sin intended; it causes the hands to hang down and the weapons of lust to fall out of them. Hereby *conceived* sin proves to be abortive. How God does this work — by what immediate touches, strokes, blows, and rebukes of his Spirit; by what reasonings, arguments, and commotions of men’s own consciences — is not for us to find out thoroughly. It is done, as said, in unspeakable variety; and the works of God are past finding out. But it will be insisted on as to what light may be given to it from Scripture instances, after we have manifested the general way of God’s procedure.

Thus God dealt in the case of Esau and Jacob. Esau had long conceived his brother’s death; he comforted himself with thoughts of it, and resolutions about it, Gen 27:41,¹ which is the way of profligate sinners. At his first opportunity, he comes forth to execute his intended rage, and Jacob concludes he would “attack the mother with the children,” Gen 32:11.² An opportunity is presented to this wicked and profane person to bring forth that sin that had now lain in his heart for twenty years; 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 power, changes him from his purpose, and causes his conceived sin to melt away, so that he falls with embraces upon the neck of the one whom he thought to slay.³

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 31:24.⁴ By a dream, a vision in the night, God keeps Laban from so much as speaking roughly to him. It was with him as in Micah

¹ **Gen 27:41** So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, “The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”

² **Gen 32:11** “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me *and* the mother with the children.

³ **Gen 33:4** But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

⁴ **Gen 31:24** But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, “Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.”

2:1: he had devised evil on his bed; and when he thought to practice it in the morning, God interposed in a dream, and hides sin from him,¹ as he says here:

Job 33:15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, When deep sleep falls upon men, While slumbering on their beds, ¹⁶ Then He opens the ears of men, And seals their instruction. ¹⁷ That he may withdraw man *from his* purpose, And hide pride from man.”

To the same purpose is that saying of the psalmist concerning the people of God:

Psa 106:46, “He made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captives.”

Men usually deal rigorously 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 as to himself, but in this particular: with respect to his people. And by this way in general, God every day prevents the bringing forth of a world of sin. He sharpens arrows of conviction on the spirits of men as to the particular they are engaged in. Their hearts are not changed as to sin, but their minds are altered as to this or that particular sin. They may then break the vessel they fashioned, and set to work on some other vessel. Now, so that we may see a little into the ways by which God accomplishes this work, we must premise the ensuing considerations: —

1st. That the general *medium* in which the matter of restraining grace consists, and 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, which prevail upon him to relinquish his design and give up his purpose. This is the general way that restraining grace works — it is by arguments and reasonings rising up against the perpetration of conceived sin.

2dly. That 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 the power and the opportunity to bring it forth. They are not in themselves, and on their own account, restraining grace. For if they were, the administration and communication of grace, as grace, would be left to every man who is able to give advice against sin. Nothing is or can be called grace, though common and perishable, apart from its peculiar relation to God.² God, by the power of his Spirit, in making arguments and reasons effectual and prevailing, turns a thing of this kind to grace, which in itself, and in its own nature, was bare reason. That *efficacy of the Spirit* which the Lord puts forth in these persuasions and motives, is what we call *restraining grace*. These things being premised, we will now consider some of the arguments we find that he has made use of to this end and purpose: —

(1st.) God stops many men in their ways, upon the conceiving of sin, by an argument taken from the *difficulty*, if not the impossibility, of doing what they aim at. They have

¹ **Mic 2:1** Woe to those who devise iniquity, And work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, Because it is in the power of their hand.

² Common and temporary things, like arguments, are only “grace” when they are empowered or made effectual by God through His Spirit. It is His *relation* to them, *using* them to attain his will, that makes them grace.

a mind to do 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 up. Thus Herod would have put John Baptist to death at the first provocation, but he feared the multitude, because they considered him a prophet, Mat 14:5. Herod had conceived John's murder, and was free to execute it. But God raised this consideration in his heart: "If I kill him, the people will riot; 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 execute the wickedness he had conceived, because of the difficulty he foresaw he would be entangled with. And God made the argument effectual for the time being; for otherwise we know that men will risk the utmost hazards to satisfy their lusts, as Herod did afterward.

The Pharisees were in the very same state and condition, Mat 21:26. They would have decried the ministry of John, but dared not for fear of the people; and, verse 46 of the same chapter, by the same argument, they were deterred from killing our Saviour, who had highly provoked them by a parable depicting their deserved and approaching destruction. They dared not do it for fear of unrest among the people, seeing that they looked at him as a prophet. 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 which they conceived. Difficulties they are sure to meet with, indeed, that are likely if they attempt it, would make it impossible for them to accomplish their sin.

We owe much of our quiet in this world to the efficacy given to this consideration in the hearts of men by the Holy Ghost; adulteries, rapines, murders, are obviated and stifled by it. Men would engage in them daily, except that they judge it impossible for them to fulfill what they aim at.

(2dly.) God does it by an argument taken *ab incommodo* — from the *inconveniences*, evils, and troubles that will befall men in the pursuit of sin. If they follow it, this or that inconvenience will ensue — this trouble, this evil, temporal or eternal. And this argument, as managed by the Spirit of God, is the great engine in his hand by which he throws up banks and gives bounds to the lusts of men, so that they do not break out to the confusion of all that order and beauty which yet remains in the works of his hands. Paul gives us the general import of this argument,

Rom 2:14, 15, "For when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these who do not have the law, are a law to themselves: who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another."

If any men in the world may be thought to be given up to pursue and fulfill all the sins that their lusts can conceive, it is those who do not have the law, to whom the written law of God does not denounce the evil that attends it. "But though they do not have it," says the apostle, "they show its work; they do many things which it requires, and forbear or abstain from many things that it forbids; and so they show its work and efficacy." But why is it that they do so? Why, their thoughts accuse or excuse them. It is from the consideration and arguings that they have within themselves about sin and its consequents, which prevail upon them to abstain from many things that their

hearts would carry them to; for 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 of the judgment to come, Acts 24:25.¹ So too, 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 31:1-3.² How the Lord makes use of that consideration, even towards his own, when they have broken the cords of his love and thrown off the rule of his grace for a time, I have declared before.

(3dly.) God does this same work by making effectual an argument *ab inutili* — from the *unprofitableness* of the thing that men are engaged in. Joseph's brothers were stayed by this from slaying him: Gen 37:26, 27, "What profit is it," they say, "if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?" — we will get nothing by it; it will bring in no advantage or satisfaction to us. And the categories of this way by which God obstructs conceived sin, or the springs of these kinds of arguments, are so many and various, that it is impossible to insist particularly on them. There is nothing present or to come, nothing belonging to this life or another, nothing desirable or undesirable, nothing good or evil, that at one time or another, an argument may not be taken from it to obstruct sin.

(4thly.) God accomplishes this work by arguments taken *ab honesto* — from what is *good* and *honest*, what is pleasing, praiseworthy, and acceptable to himself. This is the great road in which he walks with the saints under their temptations, or in their conceptions of sin. He effectually restores to their minds a consideration of all those springs and motives to obedience which are revealed 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 its fruits, which they themselves have been made partakers of. 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, which they have been made partakers of, and the privileges which they have been intrusted with 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 attractiveness of obedience — of their performance of that duty which they owe to God — of that peace, quietness, and serenity of mind that they have enjoyed in it.

On the other side, he reminds them that *sin is a provocation* to the eyes of his glory, saying in their hearts, "Do not do that abominable thing which my soul hates." 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 which they bring upon the gospel and its profession. He reminds them of the

¹ **Act 24:25** Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

² **Job 31:1** "I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman? ² For what is the allotment of God from above, And the inheritance of the Almighty from on high? ³ Is it not destruction for the wicked, And disaster for the workers of iniquity?"

terrors, darkness, wounds, and lack of peace that they may bring upon their own souls. From these and similar considerations, God puts a stop to the law of sin in the heart, so that it will not go on to bring forth the evil which it conceived.

I could give instances of all these several kinds recorded in the Scripture, but it would be too long a work for us — we are now engaged in a design of another nature. But one or two examples may be mentioned. Joseph resists his first temptation on one of these accounts: Gen 39:9, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” — the evil of sinning against God, *his* God. That consideration alone detains him from the least inclination to this temptation. ‘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 with David to keep him from self-revenge and murder, was of the same nature; and he acknowledges that it was from the Lord.¹ I will add no more; for all the Scripture motives which we have to do our duty, made effectual by grace, are instances of this way of God’s proceeding.

Sometimes, I confess, God secretly works the hearts of men by his own finger — without the use and means of such arguments as those insisted on — to stop the progress of sin. So he tells Abimelech, Gen 20:6, “I have withheld you from sinning against me.” Now, this could not be done by any of the arguments which we insisted on, because Abimelech did not know that the thing he intended was sin; and therefore he pleads that he did it in the “integrity of his heart and innocence of his hands”, verse 5. God turned around his will and thoughts, so that he would not accomplish his intention; but by what ways or means God did so is not revealed. Nor is it evident what course he took in changing 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 he would bring to his aged father by this means, who loved him so tenderly; or whether, having now grown great and wealthy, he more and more ignored the differences between him and his brother, and so he utterly slighted it. It may be that God did it by an immediate, powerful act of his Spirit upon his heart, without any actual intervening of these or any like considerations. Now, though the things mentioned are feeble and weak in themselves, and weak at other times, yet when they are managed by the Spirit of God to such an end and purpose, they certainly become effectual, and they are the matter of his preventing grace.

[2.] God prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin by *real spiritual saving grace*, and that is either in the first conversion of sinners, or in the subsequent supplies of it: —

1st. This is one part of the mystery of his grace and love. He sometimes meets men, in their highest resolutions for sin, with the highest efficacy of his grace. By this, God manifests 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 sin as to be changed in the midst of its resolutions to serve its lusts. By this, God melts down the lusts of men, causing them to wither at the root, so that they will no longer strive to bring forth what they have

¹ **1Sam 25:31, 32** “that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. But when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant.” Then David said to Abigail: “Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!”

conceived, but instead be filled with shame and sorrow at their conception. We have an example and instance in Paul of this sort of proceeding of God, for the use and instruction of all generations. Paul's heart was full of wickedness, blasphemy, and persecution. His conceiving of them had come to rage and madness, and a full purpose to exercise them all to the utmost: so the story is related in Acts 9. Paul himself declares it was so with him, Acts 26:9-12, 1Tim 1:13. In the midst of all this violent pursuit of sin, a voice from heaven shuts up the womb and dries its breasts, and he cries, "Lord, what will you have me do?" Acts 9:6. He seems to intimate that this is the way God proceeds with others, even to meet them with his converting grace at the height of their sin and folly. For Paul himself, he says, was a pattern of God's dealing with others — as God dealt with him, so would he also do with like sinners:

1Tim 1:16 "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering, as a pattern to those who would hereafter believe in him to life everlasting."

And there are not a few examples of it in our own days. Various persons who were going to this or that place, with a set purpose to deride and scoff at the dispensation of the word, have been met with in the very place in which they intended to serve their lusts and Satan, and have been thrown down at the foot of God. This way of God's dealing with sinners is set forth at large in Job 33:15-18.¹ 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 proclaimer of strange gods," which at Athens was death by the law. In the midst of this frame of spirit, God meets with Dionysius by converting grace; sin withers in the womb, and he clings to Paul and his doctrine, Acts 17:18-34. We have a similar dispensation towards Israel in Hos 11:7-10.²

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 only attend to their own experiences and the examples of this work of his mercy among them. Every day, one person 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.

2dly. God does it by *renewed communications* of the same grace; that is, by *special assisting grace*. This is his common way of dealing with believers in this case, who through the deceitfulness of sin, may be carried on to conceiving this or that sin, as declared before. God puts a stop to their progress, or rather to the prevalence of the law of sin in them; and that is done by giving them special assistances necessary for their preservation and deliverance. As David says of himself in Psa 73:2, "His feet were almost

¹ Job 33:15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, When deep sleep falls upon men, While slumbering on their beds, ¹⁶ Then He opens the ears of men, And seals their instruction. ¹⁷ In order to turn man *from his* deed, And conceal pride from man, ¹⁸ He keeps back his soul from the Pit, And his life from perishing by the sword.

² Hos 11:7-10 My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, None at all exalt *Him*. ⁸ "How can I give you up, Ephraim? *How* can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? *How* can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. ⁹ I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I *am* God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror. ¹⁰ "They shall walk after the LORD. He will roar like a lion. When He roars, Then *His* sons shall come trembling from the west;

gone, his steps had well-near slipped” — 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. So it is with many a believer: he is oftentimes at the very brink, at the very door of some folly or iniquity, when God provides the efficacy of actually assisting grace, and recovers them to an obedient frame of heart again.

And this is a peculiar work of Christ, in which he manifests and exerts his faithfulness towards his own: Heb 2:18, “He is able to help those who are tempted.” What is intended is not an absolute power, but a power clothed with mercy — that is, such a power as is exerted from a sense of the suffering of poor believers under their temptations. And how does he exercise this merciful ability towards us? Heb 4:16, he gives out, and we find in him, “grace to help in time of need,” — timely 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 out timely help, relief, deliverance, and safety. Here lies a great part of the care and faithfulness of Christ towards his poor saints. He will not allow them to be torn with the power of sin, nor be carried to ways that will dishonor the gospel, or fill them with shame and reproach, and thus render them useless in the world. Rather, 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. And this assistance lies under this promise:

1Cor 10:13, “No temptation has taken you except such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able; but with the temptation, he will also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it,”

Temptation will test us — it is for our good; the Lord compasses and brings about many holy ends by it. But when we are tried to the utmost of our ability, so that one assault more would overbear us, a way of escape is provided. This may be done several ways, as I declared elsewhere; and this one that we are now focused on is one of the most eminent — namely, by supplies of grace to enable the soul to bear up, resist, and conquer. Once God begins to deal with a soul in this way of love, 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 Isa 57:17, 18.¹ Poor sinners there are so far captivated by the power of their lusts, that the first and second dealings of God with them are not effectual for their delivery. But he will not surrender them; he is in the pursuit of a design of love towards them, and so he does not cease until they are recovered.

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 by special grace, so that of their own accord, they will let go of the purpose and will of sinning that they have risen to. And this is no lowly way to provide for his own glory, and the honor of his gospel in the world — whose professors

¹ Isa 57:17-18 For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, And he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. ¹⁸ I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, And restore comforts to him And to his mourners.

would stain the whole beauty of it if they were left to themselves to bring forth all the evil conceived in their hearts.

3dly. Besides these general ways, there is one still more special way, that at once works both on the power and will of the sinner, and this is the way of *afflictions*; concerning this, one word will close this 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 to pursue it, God oftentimes sends a sickness and abates his strength; or a loss cuts him short in his plenty, and so it takes him away from the pursuit of his lusts, even though it may be that his heart is not weaned from them. His power is weakened, and he cannot do the evil he would do. In this sense, it belongs to the first way of God's obviating the production of sin. Great afflictions sometimes do not work immediately and directly from their own nature, but from the gracious purpose and intent of the one who sends them. He insinuates into the dispensation of them, that grace and power, that love and kindness, which will effectually take the heart and mind away from sin: Psa 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept your word." And 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 we will instance at present, in which it pleases God to put a stop to the progress of sin, both in believers and unbelievers. And if we endeavored further to search out his ways to perfection, we must still conclude that it is but a "little portion which we know of him." ^{Job 26.14}

CHAPTER 14.

The power of sin further demonstrated by the effects it has had in the lives of professors — First, in actual sins — Secondly, in habitual declines.

WE now proceed to other evidences of that sad truth which we are demonstrating. But having passed through the main part of our work, I will be more brief in managing the arguments that remain.

What may then be fixed upon in the next place, is the demonstration which this law of sin has given in all ages, of its power and efficacy, by the woeful fruits that it has brought forth, even in believers themselves. Now, these fruits are of two sorts: —

1. The great *actual eruptions* of sin in their lives;
2. Their *habitual declensions* from the frames, state, and condition of obedience and communion with God, which they had obtained;

— both of these, by the rule of James unfolded before, are to be laid to the account of this law of sin; they belong to the fourth head of its progress;¹ and both are convincing evidences of its power and efficacy.

1. Consider the fearful *eruptions* of actual sin that have been in the lives of believers, and we will find our position evidenced. If I were to 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. But their particulars are known to all, so I won't need to mention them, nor the many aggravations that they are attended with in their circumstances. Only a few things may be remarked that tend to render our present consideration of them useful; such as —

- (1.) Most of them, compared to other men, were not the *lowest form or ordinary sort* of believers, but men who had a particular eminence on account of walking with God in their generation.

Such were Noah, Lot, David, Hezekiah, and others. They were not men of an ordinary size, but higher than their brethren, head and shoulders above them in their profession, and indeed, in real holiness. Surely it must have had a mighty efficacy if it could hurry such giants in the ways of God, into such abominable sins as they fell into. An ordinary engine could never have turned them away from the course of their obedience. It was a poison that no athletic constitution of spiritual health, no antidote, could withstand.

- (2.) And these very men did not fall into their great sins at the *beginning of their profession*, when they had but little experience of the goodness of God, of the sweetness and pleasantness of obedience, of the power and craft of sin, of its impulsions, solicitations, and surprisals — but after a long course of walking with God, and after acquaintance with all these things, together with innumerable motives for 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, Genesis 9.¹ Righteous

¹ Chap. 8 — The fourth is *birthing sin* in its actual accomplishment: “When lust has conceived it gives birth to sin.”

Lot seems to have been upright towards the end of his days, before he defiled himself with the abominations recorded.² David, in a short life, had as much experience of grace and sin, and as much close, spiritual communion with God, as any of the sons of men ever had, before he was thrown to the ground by this law of sin.³ So was it with Hezekiah in his degree, which was not the least.⁴ Now, to attack 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, argues for a power and efficacy too mighty for anything 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 excellence of his ways, the sweetness of his love and of communion with him, than they had? Who has either better equipping to oppose sin with, or more obligation to do so, than they did? And yet we see how fearfully they were prevailed against.

(3.) As if God had permitted their falls on set purpose, so that we might learn to be wary of this powerful enemy, all of them fell when they had newly received *great and stupendous mercies* from the hand of God, that should have been strong obligations to diligence and watchfulness in close obedience.

Noah had only newly come out of that *world of waters*, in which he saw the ungodly world perishing for their sins; and he himself was preserved by that astonishing miracle which all ages must admire. While the world’s desolation was an hourly remembrance to him of his strange preservation by the immediate care and hand of God, he falls into *drunkenness*. Lot had newly seen what everyone who thinks about it cannot help but tremble at. He saw, as someone said, “*hell coming out of heaven*” upon unclean sinners.

¹ **Gen 9:7-11** And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it.” ⁸ Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: ⁹ “And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, ¹⁰ “and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. ¹¹ “Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” **Gen 9:20-21** And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. ²¹ Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent.

² **Gen 19:35-38** Then they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. ³⁶ Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. ³⁷ The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. ³⁸ And the younger, she also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the people of Ammon to this day.

³ **2Sa 11:2-5** Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king’s house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. ³ So David sent and inquired about the woman. And *someone* said, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” ⁴ Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. ⁵ And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, “I am with child.” **2Sa 11:14-15** In the morning it happened that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die.”

⁴ **2Ki 20:12-17** At that time Berodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. ¹³ And Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all the house of his treasures-- the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory-- all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them. ¹⁴ Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?” So Hezekiah said, “They came from a far country, from Babylon.” ¹⁵ And he said, “What have they seen in your house?” So Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.” ¹⁶ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁷ ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the LORD.

Except for the cross of Christ, it was the greatest evidence that God, in his providence, ever gave of the judgment to come. Lot 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 round about given to him; and yet he makes use of his peace from a world of trials and troubles to contrive *murder and adultery*. It was immediately after Hezekiah’s great and miraculous deliverance,^{Isa 38.5} that he falls into his *carnal pride and boasting*. I say, their falls in such seasons seem to be permitted on purpose to instruct us all in the truth that we have in hand; so that no persons, at no times, with whatever furnishings of grace they may have, 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 around us. Are we better than Noah, who had that testimony from God, that he was “a perfect man in his generations,” and “walked with God?”^{Gen 6.9} Are we better than Lot, whose “righteous soul was vexed with the evil deeds of ungodly men,”^{2Pet 2.7} and is therefore commended by the Holy Ghost? 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 better than Hezekiah, who appealed to God himself, that he had served him uprightly, and with a perfect heart?^{Isa 38.3} Yet we see what prevalence this law of sin worked in and over those men. There is no end of like examples. They are all set up as buoys to reveal to us the sands, the shelves, the rocks, upon which they made their shipwreck,^{1Tim 1.19} to their hazard, danger, loss — yes, and would have done so to their ruin, if God had not been pleased in his faithfulness to graciously prevent it.

This is the first part of this evidence of the power of sin: from its *effects*.

2. It manifests its power in *the habitual declensions* from zeal and holiness, from the frames, state, and condition of obedience and communion with God to which they had attained, and which are found in many believers. Promises of growth and improvement are many and precious; the means are excellent and effectual; the benefits are great and unspeakable; and yet it often falls out that instead of these, decays and declensions are found in professors, indeed, in and upon many of the saints of God. Now, whereas this must principally and chiefly be from the strength and efficacy of indwelling sin, and is therefore a great evidence of it, I will evince:

- (1) first, that the observation itself is true: namely, that some of the saints themselves oftentimes decline from that growth and improvement in faith, grace, and holiness which might be justly expected from them;
- (2) then I will show that the cause of this evil lies in what we are treating;
- (3) and after, it will be declared that this is the cause of total apostasy in unsound professors.

But this is a greater work which we have in hand. Prevailing upon true believers to a sinful declension and gradual apostasy, takes more strength and efficacy than prevailing upon unsound professors to total apostasy — just as the wind which blows down a *dead tree* with

no root in the ground, will scarcely shake or bend a *living, well-rooted tree*. But this it *will* do.

Mention is made in the Scripture of “the first ways of David,” and they are commended above his latter ways, 2Chr 17:3.¹ 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 were working in him in numbering the people, were certainly rooted in a declension from his first frame. ²Sam 24.10 Those rushes 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, tender affection for all the ordinances of God; all of which were eminent in him. But, like Samson, his strength is impaired by the efficacy and deceitfulness of sin; his locks were cut, and he becomes a prey to vile lusts and temptations.

We have a notable instance in the Revelation, in most of the churches that our Saviour awakens to consider their condition. We may single out one of them. There were many good things in the church of Ephesus, Rev 2:2, 3, for which it is greatly commended; yet it is charged with a decay, a declension, a gradual falling off and apostasy:

Rev 2.4-5, “You have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works.”

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 thing might also be shown concerning the rest of those churches, with 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 youth,” of the “love of espousals,” with great commendation, Jer 2:2, 3; of our “first faith,” 1Tim 5:12; of “the beginning of our confidence,” Heb 3:14. And cautions are given that we “do not lose the things that we have worked,” 2Joh 1.8. But what need do we have to look back or search for instances to confirm the truth of this observation? Habitual declension from first engagements to God, from the first attainments of communion with God, from the first strictness in duties of obedience, is ordinary and common among professors of Christ.

To this purpose, we might take a general view of the professors in these nations — among whom the lot of the best of us will be found to fall, in part or in whole, in some thing or in all things — and we might be plentifully convinced of the truth of this observation: —

(1.) Is their *zeal* for God as warm, living, vigorous, effectual, or solicitous, as it was upon first giving themselves to God? Or rather, is there not a common, slight, selfish frame of spirit that has come in its place upon most professors? Iniquity has abounded, and their love has grown cold. Was it not of old a burden to their spirits to hear the name, and ways, and worship of God blasphemed and profaned? Could they not have said with the psalmist in Psa 119:136, “Rivers of waters run down our eyes, because men do not keep your law?” Were not their souls solicitous about the interest of Christ in the world, like Eli’s interest

¹ ^{KJV} **2Chr 17:3** And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; — *This verse can mean “as it was in the days of David”* [^{NKJ} “**former** ways, of David”], or it can mean “David’s **first** ways,” i.e., as David was in his youth, before Bathsheba. — WHG.

about the ark? ^{1Sam 4.13} Did they not contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and every parcel of it, especially those in which the grace of God and the glory of the gospel was especially concerned? Did they not labor to judge and condemn the world by a *holy* and *separate* conduct? And do most professors now abide in this frame? Have they grown and improved in it? Or is there not a coldness and indifference that has grown on the spirits of many in this thing? Indeed, do not many despise all these things, and look at their own former zeal as folly? May we not see many, formerly esteemed in their ways of profession, who have daily become a scorn and reproach through their miscarriages, and justly so, to the men of the world? Is it not with them as it was of old with the daughters of Zion, in Isa 3:24,¹ when God judged them for their sins and wantonness? Has not the world and self, utterly ruined their profession? Are they not without regard for the things in which they formerly declared a singular concern? Yes, have not some — partly on one pretense, partly on another — come to an open enmity toward, and hatred of, the ways of God? They please them no more, but are evil in their eyes.

But not to mention such open apostates any further (whose hypocrisy the Lord Jesus Christ will shortly judge), how is it with the best? Have not almost all men grown cold and slack as to these things? Are they not less concerned in them than they were formerly? Have they not grown weary and selfish in their religion; and so things are indifferent at home, and they scarcely care how they go abroad in the world? At least, do they not prefer their ease, credit, safety, and secular advantages before these things? — this is a frame that Christ abhors, and he declares that those in whom it prevails are none of his.² Some, indeed, seem to retain a good zeal for truth; but in what they make the fairest appearance, they will be found to be most abominable. They cry out against errors — not for truth, but for party’s sake and interest’s sake. Let a man be in their party and promote their interest, however corrupt his judgment may be, and he is embraced, and maybe even admired. This is not zeal for *God*, but for a man’s *self*. It is not, “The zeal of your house has eaten me up,” ^{Psa 69.9} but, “Master, forbid them, because they do not follow with us.” ^{Luk 9.49} It would doubtless be better for men never to pretend to any zeal at all, than to substitute such wrathful selfishness in its place.

(2.) 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 did of old? How precious the word had been to them formerly! What joy and delight they had in attendance to it! How they would have run and gone to partake of it, wherever it was dispensed in its power and purity, in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit! Did they not call the Sabbath their delight, and was not its approach a real joy to their souls? Did they not long after the converse and communion of saints, and could they not undergo manifold perils to attain it? And does this frame still abide upon them? Are there not decays and declensions to be found among them? May it not be said, “*Grey hairs are here and there upon them, and they do not perceive it?*” ^{Hos 7.9} Yes, are not men ready to say with those of old, “What a weariness it is!” Mal 1:13. It is even a burden and a weariness to be tied to the observation of all these

¹ **Isa 3:24** And so it shall be: Instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench; Instead of a sash, a rope; Instead of well-set hair, baldness; Instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth; And branding instead of beauty.

² **Rom 8:9** But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His [^{KJV} “none of his”]. Also, **Joh 13:8** “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”

ordinances. What need do we have to be at all so strict in the observation of the Sabbath? What need do we have to hear so often? What need is there for this distinction in hearing? Insensibly, a great disrespect has fallen upon many professors — yes, even a contempt for the pleasant and excellent ways of Christ and his gospel.

(3.) May not the same conviction be further carried on by an inquiry *into the universal course of obedience* and the performance of duties that men have been engaged in? Is there the same *conscientious tenderness against sinning* abiding in many, as it did in days of old — the same exact performance of private duties, the same love toward 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 allow us to say so.

We need, then, go no further than this wretched generation in which we live, to evince the truth of the observation laid down as the foundation of the instance insisted on. May the Lord grant repentance before it is too late! ^{2Tim 2.25}

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 evince the exceeding power and efficacy of it. For the proof of this, I will not need to go further than the general rule we have already considered out of James — namely, that lust or indwelling sin is the cause of all actual sin, and all habitual declensions in believers. This is what the apostle intends to teach and declare in that place. I will therefore handle these two things, and *First*, show that this evinces *a great efficacy and power* in sin; and *Secondly*, declare the ways and means by which it *brings forth* or brings about this cursed effect — all in design of our general end in calling upon and cautioning believers to avoid it, and to oppose it.

1. It appears to be a work of *great power and efficacy* from the provision that is made against it, and yet which it prevails over. There is plentiful provision made in the covenant of grace, not only to prevent declensions and decays in believers, but also for their continual carrying on towards perfection; such as —

(1.) The *word* itself, and all the ordinances of the gospel, are appointed and given to us for this end, Eph 4:11-15.¹ That which is the end of giving gospel *officers* to the church is the end also of giving all the *ordinances* to be administered by them; for they are given “for the work of the ministry,” — that is, for the administration of the ordinances of the gospel. Now, what is or what are these ends? They are *all* for preventing decays and declensions in the saints, *all* for carrying them on to perfection; so it is said in verse 12. In general, it is for “perfecting the saints,” carrying on the work of grace in them, and the work of holiness and obedience by them; or it is for edifying 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 are

¹ **Eph 4:11** And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.

they thus appointed to carry them on, thus to build them up? Does it have bounds fixed to its work? Does it carry them only so far, and then leave them? No, says the apostle:

Eph 4:13, “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

The dispensation of the word of the gospel, and the ordinances of it, is designed for our help, assistance, and furtherance, *until the whole work of faith and obedience is consummate*. It is appointed to perfect and complete that faith, knowledge, and growth in grace and holiness, which is allotted to us in this world.

But what and if oppositions and temptations lie in the way: Satan and his instruments working with great subtlety and deceit? Why, verse 14 says that these ordinances are designed for our safeguarding and deliverance from all their attempts and assaults, so that being preserved in the use of them, or “speaking the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things who is the head, even Christ Jesus.” This in general — the use of all gospel ordinances — is the chief and main end for which they were given and appointed by God — namely, to preserve believers from all decays of faith and obedience, and to carry them on still towards perfection. These are means which God, the good husbandman, makes use of to cause the vine to thrive and bring forth fruit.

And I could also manifest that they are the especial end of them, distinctly. Briefly, the word is milk and strong meat, for nourishing and strengthening 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 supper is appointed on purpose to strengthen our faith, in the remembrance of the death of the Lord, and in the exercise of love towards one another. The communion of the saints is for edifying each other in faith, love, and obedience.

(2.) There is something which adds weight to this consideration. God does not allow us to be *unmindful* of this assistance he has afforded us, but is continually calling on us to make use of the means appointed to attain the end proposed. He shows them to us, just as the angel showed the water-spring to Hagar. His commands, exhortations, promises, and threatenings, are multiplied to this purpose; see them summed up in Heb 2:1.¹ He is continually saying to us, “Why will you starve, why will you wither and decay? Come to the pastures provided for you, and your souls shall live.”² If we see a lamb run from the fold into the wilderness, we are not surprised if it is torn and rent by wild beasts. If we see a sheep leaving its *green pastures* and watercourses, to abide in dry barren heaths, we do not consider it a 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 to attack them there. If we see sheep pining *in full pastures*, we judge they are diseased and unsound. It is indeed no marvel that poor creatures who forsake

¹ **Heb 2:1** Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

² **Isa 49:8-10** Thus says the LORD: “In an acceptable time I have heard You, And in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You As a covenant to the people, To restore the earth, To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages; ⁹ That You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth,’ To those who *are* in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’ “They shall feed along the roads, And their pastures *shall be* on all desolate heights. ¹⁰ They shall neither hunger nor thirst, Neither heat nor sun shall strike them; For He who has mercy on them will lead them, Even by the springs of water He will guide them.

their own mercies, and run away from the pasture and fold of Christ in his ordinances, are torn and rent with diverse lusts, and pine away with hunger and famine. But to see men living under and enjoying all the means of spiritual thriving, and yet for them to decay, and not be fat and flourishing, but rather pine and wither daily — this argues for some secret powerful distemper, whose poisonous and noxious qualities hinder the virtue and efficacy of the means they enjoy.

This is indwelling sin. It is so terrifically powerful, so effectually poisonous, that it can bring leanness upon 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, the administration of sacraments — and yet every day they grow colder than others in their zeal for God; they grow more selfish and worldly, and even habitually decline in the degrees of holiness to which they had attained.

(3.) Together with the dispensation of the *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 that he tells us that “because he lives we also shall live,” John 14:19. He communicates spiritual life to all that are His. In him is the fountain of our life; which is therefore said to be “hidden with him in God,” Col 3:3. And he gives this life to his saints by quickening them by his Spirit, Rom 8:11; and he continues giving it to them by the supplies of living grace which 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: Gal 2:20, “I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me;” — “The spiritual life which I have is not mine own; it was not educed¹ from myself, nor is it maintained by myself, but it is merely and solely the work of Christ — so that it is not I that live, but he lives in me, the whole of my life being from him alone.”

Nor does this living head communicate only a bare life to believers, that they should merely live and no more,² a poor, weak, dying life, as it were; but he gives out sufficiently to afford them a strong, vigorous, thriving, flourishing life. John 10:10: He comes not only that his sheep “may have life,” but that “they may have it more abundantly;” that is, in a plentiful manner, so they may flourish, be fat and fruitful. Thus is it with the whole body of Christ, and every member of it.

Eph 4:15, 16, that “we should... grow 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 supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love.”

The end 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 are inexhaustible; his life, the fountain of ours, is full and eternal; his heart is bounteous and large; his hand is open and liberal — so that there is no doubt that he abundantly communicates to all his saints,

¹ Derived, developed, or evolved from.

² Christ did not give us life merely for us to survive, but to thrive.

supplies of grace for their increase in holiness. Why then is it that they do not all flourish and thrive accordingly? As you may see it oftentimes happens in a natural body, so is it here. Even though the seat and rise of the blood and spirits in head and heart are excellently good and sound, yet there may be a withering member in the body. Something intercepts the influences of life to it, so that even though the heart and head perform their orifice,¹ in giving of supplies no less to that member than they do to any other member, yet the total effect produced is merely to keep it from utterly 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 of its efficacy, by the interposition and opposition of indwelling sin. This is why it is that where lust grows strong, a great deal of grace will only keep the soul alive, and not give it any eminence in fruitfulness at all. Oftentimes 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.

It is like a virtuous medicine that is fit both to check vicious and noxious diseases, and to comfort, refresh, and strengthen our nature. If the evil disease is strong and greatly prevailing, the medicine spends its whole strength and virtue in subduing and correcting it, thus contributing much less to the relief of our nature than it would do, if it had not met with such opposition. So it is with eye-salve and healing grace which we have abundantly from the wings of the Sun of Righteousness.² It is oftentimes forced to exert its virtue to oppose and contend against, and in some measure subdue, prevailing lusts and corruptions. This is why the soul does not receive that strengthening for duties and fruitfulness which it might otherwise receive from such grace. How sound, healthy, and flourishing, how fruitful and exemplary in holiness might many a soul be, by and with the grace continually communicated to it from Christ. But by reason of the power of indwelling sin, the soul may not be dead, but it is weak, withering, and useless! And this, if anything, is a notable evidence of the efficacy of indwelling sin: that it is able to put such a stop and check to the mighty and effectual power of grace. So that, notwithstanding the blessed and continual supplies that we receive from our Head, many believers yet decline and decay — and do it habitually, compared to what they attained to, their last ways not corresponding to their first. This makes the vineyard in the “very fruitful hill” *Isa 5:1* produce so many wild grapes, and makes so many trees barren in fertile fields. *Isa 10:18*

(4.) Besides the *continual supplies of grace* that are constantly communicated to believers according to the tenure of the covenant — which keeps them so that they thirst no more, that is, to total indigence — there is, moreover, *a readiness in* the Lord Christ to yield particular help to his souls, as their occasions require. The apostle tells us that he is “a merciful High Priest,” and “able” (that is, ready, prepared, and willing) “to help those who are tempted,” *Heb 2:18*; and on that account, we are invited to “come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” — that is, grace that is sufficient, timely, and suitable to any especial trial or temptation that we

¹ That is, they make their way through the opening in the veins and arteries.

² *Rev 3:18*; *Mal 4:2*.

may be exercised with. Our merciful High Priest is ready to give out this especial timely grace over and above those constant communications of supplies of the Spirit which we mentioned before.

Besides the never-failing springs of ordinary covenant grace, he also has particular refreshing showers for times of drought; and this is exceedingly to the advantage of the saints for their preservation and growth in grace; and very many more of like nature may be added. But now, I say, notwithstanding all these, and the remainder of like importance, such is the power and efficacy of indwelling sin, so great is its deceitfulness and restlessness, so many are its wiles and temptations, that it often occurs that many believers, for whose growth and improvement all this provision is made, yet go backward and decline, as was shown, even as to their course of walking with God. Samson’s strength fully evidenced itself when he broke *seven new strands* and *seven new cords* with which he was bound, like burning twine and thread. The noxious disease in the body which is so stubborn that no use of the most sovereign remedies can prevail against it, ought to be regarded. Such is this indwelling sin if it is 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, however sovereign; and it is therefore assuredly of exceeding efficacy.

Besides this, believers have *innumerable obligations* upon them, from the love of God — from the *command* of God — to grow in grace, to press forward towards perfection, because they have abundant means provided for them to do so. And 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 so do; that they are not more holy, more zealous, useful, or fruitful; that they do not desire it above life itself. They know it is their duty to watch against this enemy, to fight against it, to pray against it; and so they do. They more desire this enemy’s destruction than the enjoyment of this entire world and all it can afford them. And yet, notwithstanding all this, such is the subtlety, and fraud, and violence, and fury, and urgency, and importunity of this adversary, that it frequently prevails to bring them into the woeful condition mentioned.

This is why it is with believers sometimes, as it is with men in some places at sea. It may be that they have a good and fair gale of wind all night long; they ply their tackling, attend diligently their business, and perhaps take great contentment to consider how they proceed in their voyage. In the morning, or after a time, coming to measure what way they have made, and what progress they have had, they find that they are far behind where they were, instead of getting one step forward. Falling into a swift tide or a current that goes 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, but they have made no progress. So is it with believers. They have a good gale of supplies of the Spirit from above; they attend to their duties diligently, pray constantly, hear attentively, and omit nothing that may carry them on their voyage towards eternity. But after a while, coming seriously to consider, by the examination of their hearts and ways, what progress they have made, 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. It has kept them, indeed, from being driven and split on rocks and shelves — it has preserved them from gross, scandalous sins. Yet

they have lost in their spiritual frame, or they have gone backwards, and are entangled under many woeful decays. This is a notable evidence of the life of sin, about which we are treating.

Now, because the purpose of our discovering *this power of sin* is that we may be careful to obviate and prevent it in its operation; and because of all the effects it produces, there is none more dangerous or pernicious than what we last insisted on — namely, that it prevails on many professors to a habitual declension from their former ways and attainments, notwithstanding all the sweetness and excellence which their souls have found in them.

I will therefore, as said, next consider by what ways and means, and through what assistance, it usually prevails in this way, so that we may be better instructed to watch against it.

CHAPTER 15.

Decays in the degrees of grace, which are caused by indwelling sin — The ways by which indwelling sin prevails to this purpose.

What now comes under consideration are the ways and means by which indwelling sin prevails on believers to habitual declensions and decays in their degrees of grace and holiness; and they are many: —

(1.) Upon the *first conversion* and calling of sinners to God and Christ, they usually have many fresh springs breaking forth in their souls and refreshing showers coming upon them, which bear them up to a high rate of faith, love, holiness, fruitfulness, and obedience. It is like a flood over the land when many lesser streams run into a river, causing it to swell over its bounds, and roll on with more than ordinary fulness. Now, if these [spiritual] springs are not kept open, if they do not prevail for the continuance of these showers, they must necessarily decay and go backwards. We will name one or two of them: —

[1.] These believers have a *fresh, vigorous sense of pardoning mercy*. As this sense is in the soul, so will be its love and delight in God, so will be its obedience. As, I say, the sense of gospel pardon is, so will be the life of gospel love. Luke 7:47, “I say to you,” says our Saviour of the poor woman, “her sins, which were many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” Her great love was an evidence of great forgiveness, and her great sense of it: for our Saviour is not rendering a reason for her forgiveness, as though it were for her love; rather, her love was because of her forgiveness. In the foregoing parable (verse 40 onwards), having convinced the Pharisee with whom he dealt, that the one to whom the most was forgiven would love the most (verse 43), he then gives an account of the great love of the woman, springing from the sense she had of the great forgiveness which she had so freely received. Thus sinners at their first conversion are very sensible of great forgiveness; “Of whom I am chief,” ^{1Tim 1.15} lies next their heart. 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 to God.

[2.] The *fresh taste they have had of spiritual things* keeps up such a savor and relish of them in their souls, that worldly contentments — by which men are drawn away from close 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.” So it was with the apostles, at that option offered them to depart from Christ, upon the apostasy of many false professors: “Will you also go away?” John 6:67. They answer by Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life,” verse 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. Like a man who has long been kept in a dungeon, if brought forth suddenly into the light of the sun, he finds so much pleasure and contentment in it, in the beauties of the old creation, that he thinks he can never be weary of it, nor will ever be content to be under darkness again on any account. So it is

with souls when they are first translated into the marvellous light of Christ, to behold the beauties of the new creation. They see a new glory in him that has quite sullied the desirableness of all earthly diversions. And they see a new guilt and filth in sin, that gives them an utter abhorrence of its old delights and pleasures; and so of other things.

Now, while these and similar 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; so that oftentimes their zeal as saints does not allow them to escape without some blots on their prudence as men, as might be instanced in many of the martyrs of old.

This, then, is the first, or 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. And there are several ways by which it brings this to pass: —

1st. It works by *sloth* and *negligence*. It prevails in the soul to neglect stirring up continual thoughts of or about the things that so powerfully influence it to strict and fruitful obedience. If care is not taken, if diligence and watchfulness are not used, and all the means appointed by God to keep a quick and living sense of them upon the soul, then they will dry up and decay; and, consequently, that obedience which should spring from them will dry up also. Isaac *dug wells*, but the Philistines *stopped them*, and his flocks had no benefit by them. Let the heart be ever so little disused to 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, and they will just as quickly be estranged to a man, as he can be to them. The one who shuts his eyes for a season in the sun, can see nothing at all when he opens them again. As much as a man loses of faith towards these things, that much will they lose power towards him. Those things which formerly were so exceedingly effectual towards him, can do little or nothing upon him because of his *unbelief*.

So it was with the spouse in the Song of Solomon, Song 5:2; Christ calls to her, verse 1, with a marvellous loving and gracious invitation to communion with himself. She who had formerly been ravished at first hearing that joyful sound, now being under the power of sloth and carnal ease, returns a sorry excuse of an answer to his call, which ended in her own signal loss and sorrow. Indwelling sin, I say, prevails by spiritual sloth upon the souls of men to an inadvertency¹ of the motions of God's Spirit in their former apprehensions of divine love. And by negligence in stirring up continual thoughts of faith about it, a decay grows imperceptibly upon the whole soul. Thus God often complains that his people had "forgotten him;" that is, they grew unmindful of his love and grace — which was the beginning of their apostasy.

2dly. By *unframing the soul*,² so that it has formal, weary, powerless thoughts about those things which 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

¹ The trait of forgetting or ignoring your responsibilities.

² The frame of our mind and heart, as Owen uses it, is a biblical and doctrinal system of assumptions and standards, drawn from the Gospel and the Law, that sanction our behavior and give it meaning. It is the framework of thoughts, attitudes, and motivations for all we think and do. Therefore, "unframing the soul" dismantles that framework.

God’s purity, holiness, and majesty, Heb 12:28, 29.¹ This is what the Lord himself said in the destruction of Nadab and Abihu: “I will be sanctified in those who come near me,” Lev 10:3. He will be dealt with in an awe-filled, holy, reverent manner. So we are to deal with all the things of God, in which or by which we have communion with him. The soul is to have great reverence of God in them. When men begin to take them lightly or with common thoughts, not using and improving them to the utmost for the ends to which they are appointed, these things lose all their beauty, and glory, and power towards such men. 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 perfunctorily, which God abhors. He not only requires that we bear his love and grace in remembrance, but that, as much as it lies in us, we do it according to the worth and excellence of them.

It was the sin of Hezekiah that he “did not render back according to the benefits done to him,” 2Chr 32:25. So too, when we consider gospel truths, the utmost endeavor of our soul ought to be, that we may be “changed into the same image” or likeness of those truths, 2Cor 3:18;² that is, that they may have their full power and effect upon us. If we do not, James tells us what “beholding the glory of the Lord in a mirror” will come to (mentioned there by the Apostle) – that is, reading or hearing the mind of God in Christ revealed in the gospel:

Jas 1:23, 24, “It is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholds himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what manner of man he was.”

It will make no impression on us, generate no idea or image of his likeness in our imagination, because we behold only slightly, with a passing glance. So it is with men who will indeed think of gospel truths, but do so in a slight manner, without endeavoring with all their hearts, minds, and strength, to have those truths ingrafted upon their souls, and to have all the effects of those truths produced in them. Now, this is the way of sinners in their first engagements to God. They never think of pardoning mercy, without laboring to affect their whole souls with it, and stir themselves up to suitable affections and responses of constant obedience. They do not think of the excellence of Christ and of spiritual things – now newly revealed to them in a saving light – without pressing with all their might after a further, a fuller enjoyment of them. This keeps them humble and holy; this makes them thankful and fruitful. But now, if the utmost diligence and carefulness are 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 imperceptibly bring them to content themselves with slight and rare thoughts of these things – without a diligent, sedulous³ endeavor to give them their due improvement upon the soul. As men decay in this, so they will assuredly decay and decline in the power of holiness and of close walking with God.

¹ **Heb 12:28** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.

² **2Cor 3:18** But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

³ Marked by care and persistent effort.

The springs being stopped or tainted, the streams will not run as swiftly, or at least not as sweetly, as they did formerly. Some by this means, despite an uninterrupted profession, insensibly wither into almost nothing. They talk about religion and spiritual things as much as they ever did in their lives, and they perform duties with as much constancy as they ever did; 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 a surface manner — by which they have lost all their life, vigor, savor, and efficacy towards them. Always be serious in spiritual things if you ever intend to be bettered by them.

3dly. Indwelling sin oftentimes prevails to stop 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 their minds, 2Cor 11:2, 3, “should by any means be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” — which he knew would be attended by a decay and declension in faith, love, and obedience. And this is how matters in this case often fall out. We have seen some who, after they have received a sweet taste of the love of God in Christ, of the excellency of pardoning mercy, and have walked humbly with God for many years in the faith and apprehension of the truth — by the corruption of their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ, and by false and foolish opinions — they have despised all their own experiences, and rejected all the efficacy of truth, as to furthering their obedience.

Hence John cautions the elect lady and her children to take heed that they not be seduced, lest they “lose the things they had wrought,” 2Joh 1:8 — lest they cast away all their former obedience as lost, and a thing of no value. We have innumerable instances of this in the days in which we live. How many there are who not many years ago, put an unspeakable value on the pardon of sin in the blood of Christ — who delighted in gospel revelations of spiritual things, and walked in obedience to God on account of them. And yet, being beguiled and turned aside from the truth as it is in Jesus, they now despise these springs of their own former obedience! And just as this is done grossly and openly in some, so there are more in whom secret and more plausible insinuations of corrupt opinions taint the springs and fountains of gospel obedience. Through the vanity of men’s minds (which is a principal part of indwelling sin), these gain ground in them. Such are all those who tend to minimize *special grace* in its freedom and efficacy, and to advance the wills or the endeavors of men in their spiritual power and ability. These are works of the *flesh*; and however some may pretend there is usefulness in them to promote holiness, they will be found to taint the springs of true evangelical obedience, insensibly turning the heart from God, and bringing the whole soul into spiritual decay.

And this is one way by which indwelling sin produces this pernicious effect of drawing men away from the power, purity, and fruitfulness that attended their first conversion and engagements to God, bringing them into habitual declension, at least as to the degrees, of their holiness and grace. There is nothing we should be more watchful against, if we intend to effectually deal 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 and efficacy upon the soul as they had formerly; and whether an endeavor is maintained to improve them continually as we did at first. *A commandment that is always practiced is always new*, as John speaks of that commandment of love. To the one who really improves gospel truths, even though he hears them a thousand times, they will always be new and fresh to him, because they push him to new practice; when to another who grows common under them, they are burdensome and common to him — he even loathes the manna that he is so accustomed to.

(2.) Indwelling sin does this *by taking men away 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, finding it newly mortified to his baits. So he left our Saviour upon his first fruitless attempts. But it is said that he left him only “for a season,” Luke 4:13. He intended to return again, when he sees his advantage.

So it is with believers also. Being thrown out from his interest in them, Satan 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 they flourish in the ways of God. But this does not hold — Satan returns again; and if the soul does not stand continually on its guard against him, Satan will quickly get such advantages as to put a notable interruption in the believer’s fruitfulness and obedience. This is why, after spending some time (maybe years) in cheerful and exemplary walking with God, some have consumed all their latter days in wrestling with perplexing temptations which Satan entangled them with upon his return. Others have plainly *fallen* under the power of his assaults. It is like a man who has lived usefully for a while among his neighbors, doing good and communicating according to his ability, distributing to the poor, and helping all around him — until at length, falling into the hands of vexatious, wrangling, and oppressive men, he is forced to spend his whole time and revenue defending himself against them at law. And so he 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 the edification of the church of Christ, he is freshly attacked by the return of Satan in one way or another. He has enough to do during the remainder of his life to keep himself alive; in the meantime, as to many of the graces, he is woefully decaying and going backward in them. Now, though Satan has a hand in it, this also is from indwelling sin; I mean, the success which Satan obtains in his undertaking, encourages him; it makes way for his return, and it gives entrance to his temptations. You know how it is with those whom Satan is cast out of only by a gospel conviction. After he has wandered and waited a while, he says he will return to his house from which he was ejected.¹ And what is the result?

¹ Luk 11.24 – The metaphor is given by Christ to show that he does not work *by* the power of Satan, but *against* it. This is proof that “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (v. 20). Owen’s point is not that we can lose our salvation, but that when “one stronger than Satan comes upon him, and overcomes him,” that overwhelming strength of Christ is kept in force by *exercising faith* in Christ, by constantly using the means of grace given to each believer, to work out his salvation in fear and trembling (Phi 2.12). But the law of sin is at work in the believer to oppose and undermine those means, allowing Satan to exert his influence unopposed, tempting the believer to sin, and to doubt his salvation.

Carnal lusts have prevailed over the man's convictions, and made his soul fit to entertain returning devils. It is according to the measure of prevalence that Satan obtains against believers, from any advantages given to him by sin's disposing the soul to the liableness of his temptations.

Now, the way and means by which indwelling sin gives advantage to Satan for his return are all those which dispose them toward a declension, which will be mentioned afterward. Satan is a diligent, watchful, and crafty adversary; he will neglect no opportunity, no advantage that is offered to him. In whatever way then, our spiritual strength is impaired by sin, or whichever way our lusts press, Satan falls in with that weakness and presses towards that ruin; so that all the actings of the law of sin are subservient to this end of Satan. I will therefore mention at present only one or two that seem principally to invite Satan to attempt a return: —

[1.] It *entangles the soul in the things of the world*, all of which are so many purveyors for Satan. When Pharaoh let the people go, he heard after a while that they were entangled in the wilderness. He supposes therefore that he will now overtake and destroy them; this stirs him up to pursue them. Satan, upon finding that those whom he has been cast out from, are now entangled in the things of the world — and by which he is sure to find easy access to them — is encouraged to tempt them afresh, as the spider comes down upon the strongest fly entangled in his web. For Satan uses his temptations only to impel men to what they are already inclined by their own lusts — by adding poison to their lusts, and pointing to the objects of their lusts. And oftentimes by this advantage, he gets so in upon the souls of men, that they are never fully free of him while they live. And as men's diversions increase from the world, so do their entanglements from Satan. When they have more to do in the world than they can well manage, they will have more to deal with from Satan than they can well withstand. When men are made spiritually faint, by dealing in and with the world, Satan sets upon them, as Amalek set upon the faint and weak people that came out of Egypt.^{Exo 17.8}

[2.] It produces this effect by *making the soul negligent*, and taking it away from its watch. We showed before at large, that it is one main part of the effectual deceitfulness of indwelling sin to make the soul inadvertent, to turn it away from its diligent, watchful attendance to its required duty. Now, there is nothing in reference to which diligence and watchfulness are more strictly enjoined than the recurring assaults of Satan: 1Pet 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant." And why so? "Because of your adversary the devil." Unless you are exceedingly watchful, at one time or other he will surprise you; and all the injunctions of our blessed Saviour to watch are still with reference to Satan and his temptations. Now, when the soul is made careless and inadvertent, forgetting what an enemy it is dealing with, or when the soul is lifted up with the successes it has newly obtained against him, then it is Satan's time to attempt re-entrance to his old habitation. If he cannot obtain it, he will still make their lives uncomfortable to themselves and unfruitful to others, in weakening their root and withering their fruit through his poisonous temptations. He comes down upon our duties of obedience like the fowls came down upon Abraham's sacrifice — so that if we do not watch to drive them away, as he did (for Satan is overcome and put to flight by resistance, Jas 4.7), he will devour them.

[3.] Indwelling sin takes advantage to exert its efficacy and deceit, in order to withdraw men from their primitive zeal and holiness — from their first faith, love, and works — *by the evil examples of professors* among whom they live. When men first engage the ways of God, they have a reverent esteem for those whom they believe to have been made partakers of that mercy before themselves; these they love and honor, as it is their duty. 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 as to its advantage. Imperceptibly it prevails with men to comply with them. “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, and it works effectually in them. And so, through the craft of sin, the generation of professors corrupt one another. A stream that arises from a clear spring or a fountain, while it runs in its own particular channel and keeps its water unmixed, preserves its purity and cleanness. But when its course falls in with other streams that are turbid and foul, even though running the same way with it, it becomes muddy and discolored also; so it is in this case. Believers come forth from the spring of the new birth with some purity and cleanness; and they keep this for a while in the course of their private walking with God. But when they sometimes fall into society with others whose profession flows and runs the same way with theirs, even towards heaven, yet are muddied and sullied with sin and the world, they are often corrupted *with them* and *by them*; and so they decline from their first purity, faith, and holiness.

Now, lest this may have been the case of anyone who reads this discourse, I will add a few cautions that are necessary to preserve men from this infection: —

1st. In the body of professors there are a great number of *hypocrites*. Though we cannot say that this man or that is such, yet it is most certain that some are. Our Saviour has told us that it will be so to the end of the world. All those who have oil in their lamps do not have it in their vessels. Let men take heed how they conform themselves to the professors they meet with, lest instead of saints and the best of men, they sometimes propose hypocrites for their example, which are the worst: when they think they are becoming like those who bear *the image of God*, they may instead conform themselves to those who bear *the image of Satan*.

2dly. You do not know what may be *the present temptation* of those whose ways you observe. It may be that they are under some particular desertion from God, and so they are withering for a season, until he sends them some refreshing showers from above. It may be that they are entangled with some special corruptions, which is their burden that you know nothing of. And so, for anyone to voluntarily fall into such a frame as others are thrown into by the power of their temptations, or to think that what they see suffices in others (whose distempers they do not know) will suffice in themselves, is folly and presumption. Someone that knows a person who is vibrant and of a healthy constitution, if he sees him 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 as well? 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. Take heed, Christians: many of the

professors with whom you converse, are sick and wounded — the wounds of some of them stink and are corrupt because of their folly. If you have any spiritual health, do not think that their weak and uneven walking will be accepted at your hands — much less that it will be well for you to become sick and wounded also.

3dly. Remember that only *the worst* is known and seen of many of *the best Christians*. Many who keep up precious communion with God oftentimes, by their *natural tempers* of freedom or passion, do not carry so glorious an appearance as others who perhaps come short of them in grace, and in the power of godliness. In respect to their outward conduct, it may seem that they are scarcely saved; when in respect to their faith and love they may be eminent. Like the King's daughter, they may be all glorious within, even though their clothes are not always of wrought gold.^{Psa 45:13} Take heed then, that you are not infected with their worst, when you are perhaps not able to imitate them in their best.

But to return,

[4.] Sin does this work by cherishing some *secret particular lust in the heart*. The soul contends against this only faintly. It contends against it on account of sincerity; it cannot help but do so: but it does not make a thorough work of it, vigorously mortifying it by the strength and power of grace. Now, where it is this way with a soul, a habitual declension as to holiness will assuredly ensue. David shows us how, in his first days, he kept his heart close to God:

Psa 18:23, “I was upright before him, and I kept myself from my iniquity.”

His great care was not to let any one lust prevail in him or upon him, that might be called his iniquity in a special manner. The same course also steered Paul, 1Cor 9:27.¹ He was in danger of being lifted up by his spiritual revelations and enjoyments. This makes him “keep his body in subjection,” 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 assuredly proves to be a principal means of a general declension. For just as an infirmity and weakness in any one vital part of the body will consume the whole body, so weakness in any one grace — which a perplexing lust brings with it — will consume the soul. In every way, it weakens spiritual strength. It weakens confidence in God in faith and prayer. The knees will be feeble and the hands will hang down in dealing with God,² where a galling and unmortified lust lies in the heart. It will take such hold upon the soul that it will not be “able to look up,” Psa 40:12. It 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 which, in and by its actings, it brings upon the soul. It contends in the will for rule and dominion. An active, stirring corruption seeks the commanding power in the soul, and it is ever ready to take the throne. It disturbs the thoughts, and it will sometimes even frighten the soul from dealing with it by meditation, lest corrupt affections being entangled by such lust, grace loses ground instead of prevailing against it.

¹ **1Cor 9:27** But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

² Heb 12.12.

It oftentimes breaks out into scandalous sins, as it did in David and Hezekiah; and it loads the sinner with sorrow and discouragement.

By these and like means, it becomes to the soul like a moth in a garment, eating up and devouring its strongest threads, so that even though the whole hangs loosely together, it is easily torn to pieces. Though the soul with whom it is this way, keeps up a fair profession for a time, yet his strength is secretly devoured — every temptation tears and rends his conscience at its pleasure.

With such men, it becomes as it is with some who have for many years been of a sound, strong, and athletic constitution. Some secret, hectic distemper seizes them. For a season they take no notice of it, or if they do, they think they will do well enough with it, and easily shake it off when they have a little leisure to attend to it. But for the present, they think, as Samson did with his locks cut, that they can still do as they did at other times. They may sometimes complain that they are not well; they do not know precisely what ails them, and they may rise violently in opposition to their distemper. Yet after a while, struggling in vain, with the vigor of their spirits and strength failing them, they are forced to yield to the power of a consumption.¹ And now all they can do is barely enough to keep them alive.

It is so with men who are brought into spiritual decay by any secret perplexing corruption. It may be that they had a vigorous principle of obedience and holiness. But indwelling sin, watching for its opportunities, by some temptation or other has kindled and inflamed some particular lust in them. For a while, it may be that they take little notice of it. Sometimes they complain; but they think they can still do as well as they did in former times until, being insensibly weakened in their spiritual strength, they have work enough to do, just to keep alive what remains of it, and is about to die, Hos 5:13.² I will not add anything here as to the prevention and obviating of this advantage of indwelling sin, having specifically and separately addressed it elsewhere.

[5.] It works by *negligence in private communion with God, in prayer and meditation*. I have shown before how indwelling sin exercises its deceitfulness in diverting the soul from watchfulness in and to these duties. Here, if it prevails, it will not fail to produce a habitual declension in the whole course of obedience. All neglect of private duties is principled by a weariness of God, as He complains of: —

Isa 43:22, “You have not called upon me; you have been weary of me.”

Neglect of invocation proceeds from weariness; and where there is weariness, there will be a withdrawing from what we are weary of. Now, God alone being the fountain and spring of spiritual life, if there is a weariness of him and a withdrawing from him, then it is impossible that there will not ensue a decay in the life. Indeed, what men are *in these duties* (I mean as to faith and love in them), they are *that*, and nothing more. Here lies the root of their obedience; and if this fails, all fruit will quickly fail.

¹ A consuming disease that wastes the body, like tuberculosis.

² **Hos 5:13** “When Ephraim saw his sickness, And Judah saw his wound, Then Ephraim went to Assyria And sent to King Jareb; Yet he cannot cure you, Nor heal you of your wound.

You may sometimes see a tree flourishing with leaves and fruit, goodly and pleasant. After a while the leaves begin to decay, the fruit begins to wither, the whole tree begins to droop. Search, and you will find that the root — by which it should draw in moisture and fatness from the earth to supply the body and branches with sap and juice for growth and fruit — has received a wound. It is in some way perished, and it does not perform its duty; so that though the branches are flourishing a while with what they had received, their sustenance now being intercepted, they must decay.

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 do so, the conduct and course of obedience flourishes and it is fruitful — all outward duties are cheerfully and regularly performed. But if there is a wound, a defect, a failing, in what should first take in the spiritual radical moisture that should be communicated to the whole, the rest may maintain their station and appearance for a season, but after a while, the profession will wither, fruits will decay, and the whole will be ready to die. Hence our Saviour lets us know, what a man is in secret, in these private duties, *that* is what he is in the eyes of God, and no more.¹ And one reason, among others, is because they have a more vigorous acting of *unmixed grace* than any other duties whatsoever. In all or most particular duties, besides the influence they may have from carnal respects (which are many), and the ways of their insinuation being subtle and imperceptible, there is also an *alloy of gifts*,² which sometimes devours even the pure gold of grace, which should be the chief and principal gift in them. In these duties, there is immediate intercourse between God and what is of God in the soul. Once sin, by its deceits and treacheries, prevails to take the soul away from *diligent attendance* to communion with God, and constancy in these duties, sin will not fail to effect a decline in the whole of a man's obedience. It has made its entrance, and it will assuredly make good its progress.

[6.] Growing *in notions of truth without corresponding practice* is another thing that indwelling sin makes use of to bring the souls of believers to decay. The apostle tells us that “knowledge puffs up,” 1Cor 8:1. If it is alone, and not improved in practice, it swells men disproportionately. Like a man who has dropsy,³ we are not to expect that he has strength in proportion to his size — like trees that are continually headed, which keeps them from bearing fruit.⁴ Once men have attained this ability to entertain and receive evangelical truths in a new and more glorious light, or gain a clearer revelation than formerly, or new manifestations of truth which they did not know before, and *please themselves* in doing so — but do so without diligent endeavors to have the power of those truths and notions impressed on their hearts, and to have their souls conformed to them — they generally learn to so dispose⁵ of all truths formerly known, truths which were

¹ **Mat 6:6** “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

² A mixture that usually reduces the value of the combined elements.

³ Swelling from excessive accumulation of watery fluid in cells, tissues, or serous cavities.

⁴ Fruit trees grow fruit from the tips of their branches. A “heading cut” removes part of a shoot or limb, which deprives that limb of a growing tip. A heading cut forces a limb to generate new growing tips in the form of new shoots. It shortens the limbs, but the newly generated growth will have little or no fruit on it.

⁵ By “so dispose,” Owen refers back to using whatever knowledge they have to puff themselves up, rather than putting it into practice. The truth of God is turned into verbal and intellectual sport for personal amusement.

sometimes inlaid in their hearts with more efficacy and power. This has proved, if not the ruin, the great impairing of many in these days of light in which we live.

By this means many have withered from a humble, close walking with God, into an empty, barren, *talking* profession. Almost all things have in a short season become alike to them. Whether true or false, all is well so long as they might be debating and disputing about them. This is food for sin; it hatches and increases it, and it is increased by it. It is a notable way for the vanity that is in the mind to exert itself, without a rebuke from the conscience. Men may be talking, and writing, and studying about religion, and hearing preaching with great delight, as they did in Eze 33:32.¹ And their conscience will be very well pacified. Unless it is thoroughly awake and circumspect, and furnished with spiritual wisdom and care, it will enter no rebukes or pleas against the way that the soul is behaving. Yet all this may be nothing but the acting of that natural vanity which lies in the mind, and which is a principal part of the sin we are addressing. Generally this is so when men content themselves, as was said, with the *notions* of truth, without laboring to experience the *power* of them in their hearts, and bringing forth the fruit of them in their lives – upon which decay must necessarily ensue.

[7.] *Growth in carnal wisdom* is another help to sin in producing this sad effect. “Your wisdom and your knowledge,” says the prophet, “have perverted you,” Isa 47:10.² To the extent that carnal wisdom increases, faith decays. The proper work of carnal wisdom is to teach a man to trust to and in himself; the proper work of faith is to trust wholly in another. So carnal wisdom labors to destroy the whole work of faith, by causing the soul to return into 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, brokenhearted creature we have seen, who followed after God in simplicity and integrity of spirit, and yet through observing the ways and walks of others, and by yielding to the temptations to craft and subtlety which opportunities in the world have administered to them, they have come to be dipped in a worldly, carnal frame, and utterly wither in their profession! Many are so sullied by this that they are not known to be the men they were.

[8.] *Some great sin, lying long in the heart and conscience, is unrepented of, or it is not repented of as it should be* and as the matter requires – this furthers indwelling sin in this work. 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 with Peter, we know, 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 that humiliation which the gospel requires, it often proves to be a means of more watchfulness, fruitfulness, humility, and contentment, than the soul ever obtained before. If it is neglected, it certainly hardens the heart, weakens spiritual strength, enfeebles the soul, and discourages it from all communion with God. It is a notable principle of a general decay. So David complains in Psa 38:5, “My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my

¹ **Eze 33:32** “Indeed you *are* to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.

² **Isa 47:10** “For you have trusted in your wickedness; You have said, ‘No one sees me’; Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you; And you have said in your heart, ‘I am, and *there is no one else besides me.*’

foolishness.” 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 which, being well set, leaves the place stronger than before. If it is otherwise, it makes the man a cripple all his days.

These things we but briefly name, and various other advantages of like nature that sin makes use of to produce this effect, might also be instanced; but these may suffice for our present purpose. Whatever it uses, sin itself is still the principle; and this is no small demonstration of its efficacy and power.

CHAPTER 16.

The strength of indwelling sin manifested from its power and effects in unregenerate persons.

We are addressing the power and efficacy of indwelling sin, as it remains in several degrees in believers. Now, I have elsewhere shown that the nature and all the natural properties of it still remain in them. Therefore, we cannot prove directly what the strength of sin is in *them*, as distinct from what its power is in those in whom it is only checked and not at all weakened. Yet, from an observation of it, we may caution *believers* of the real power of that mortal enemy with whom they have to deal.

Say the plague violently rages in one city, destroying multitudes; and there is in another city an infection of the same kind, which does not yet rise to that height and fury there, by reason of the *correction* that it meets with from *better air and the remedies used*. Yet a man may demonstrate to the inhabitants, the force and danger of the infection that has gotten in among them, by the effects that it has and produces among the others who do not have the benefit of the preventives and preservatives which they enjoy. This will teach them to both value the means of their preservation, and to be all 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 efficacy of that plague of sin which is in and among them, by the effects which the same plague produces in and among others who do not have those corrections of its poison, and those preservatives from death which the Lord Jesus Christ has furnished them with.

Having then fixed on the demonstration of the power of sin from the effects it produces, and having given a double instance of it in believers themselves, I will now further evidence the same truth or pursue the same evidence of it, by showing something of the power that acts in those who are unregenerate, and thus do not have the remedies against it which believers are furnished with.

I will 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 I will only intimate to believers, by a few instances of its effects in them, as I said, what they have to deal with: —

1. It appears in the *violence* it offers to the nature of men, compelling them to sins that are 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 fire ascends upwards; bodies that are weighty and heavy will descend; the water flows — each according to the principles of its nature, which gives them the law of their operation. What hinders them in their operation is force and violence — that is what keeps a stone from descending or the fire from going upwards. Whatever forces them to move contrary to the law of their nature, such as making a stone go upwards or causing fire to descend, is in its kind the greatest violence, of which the degrees are endless. Now, all would acknowledge that what could take a great millstone and fling it upwards into the air, would be a matter of awful force, power, and efficacy.

Man also has his law of operation and working, co-created with him. And this may be considered two ways — either as it is common to him along with other creatures; or as it is *peculiar* to him, with reference to that special end for which he was made. Some things, I say, in this law of *nature* are *common to man and other creatures* — such as to nourish their young, to live quietly with those of the same kind and race as them — to seek and follow after what 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, and man also has.

But now, besides these things, man being created in an especial 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 — such as to *love God above all*, to seek the enjoyment of God as man’s chief good and last end, to inquire after God’s mind and will, and to yield obedience and the like; all of which are part of the law of his nature.

Now, these things are not distinguished so, as though a man might perform the actions of the law of his nature, which are common to him and other creatures, merely from *the principles of his nature*, as they do. But the law of his dependence upon God, and doing all things in obedience to God, also applies to all of them.¹ Man can never be considered as a *mere creature*, but as a creature made for the glory of God by rational, moral obedience. It is *rational*, because obedience is chosen by man, and performed with reason; and it is *moral*, because he is regulated by a law to which his reason attends.

For instance, it is common to man with other creatures *to take care for nourishing his children*, of the young, helpless ones that receive their being by him. There is implanted in him, in the principles of his nature, co-created with them, a love and care for them. So it is with other living creatures. Now, let other creatures answer this instinct and inclination, and not be hardened against them like the foolish ostrich, into whom God has not implanted this natural wisdom (Job 39:13-17),² and they fully answer the law of their creation. But 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 nourishing his children; but he must also do it *in subjection to God*, and obey him in it, and do it *to God’s glory* — the law of moral obedience encompasses his whole being and all his operations. In these things lie, as it were, the whole of a man: namely, in the things which are implanted in his nature as a creature, things which are common to all other living creatures, and seconded by the command or will of God, as he is a creature capable of yielding moral obedience and of doing all things for God’s glory.

That then which drives and compels a man to transgress this law of his nature must necessarily be esteemed of great force and efficacy. For it is not only like throwing

¹ That is, all creatures are dependent on and obedient to God *in their nature*: they do what they were created to do. Creatures do it by what we call “instinct”, while man does it by choice. It is assumed, therefore, that man may act contrary to his nature, contrary to the *law* of his nature, and thus contrary to *God* — this is sin at work in him.

² **Job 39:13-17** “The wings of the ostrich wave proudly, But are her wings and pinions *like the* kindly stork’s? ¹⁴ For she leaves her eggs on the ground, And warms them in the dust; ¹⁵ She forgets that a foot may crush them, Or that a wild beast may break them. ¹⁶ She treats her young harshly, as though *they were* not hers; Her labor is in vain, without concern, ¹⁷ Because God deprived her of wisdom, And did not endow her with understanding.

millstones upward, or driving beasts from taking care of their young, or taking from kindred cattle the instinct to herd themselves quietly, but far more — to throw off what lies in him: his fundamental dependence on God, as a creature made to yield obedience to Him.

Now, this is frequently done by indwelling sin in unregenerate persons. Let us take a few instances: —

(1.) 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 a care for the preservation and nourishing of their young. Many brute creatures will die for them; some feed them with their own flesh and blood; all deprive themselves of that food which nature directs them to as their best, and they impart it to their young, and act in their behalf to the utmost of their power.

Now, such is the efficacy, power, and force of indwelling sin in man — which is an infection that the nature of other creatures knows nothing about. In many, it prevails to stop up 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, a *destruction* of the fruit of their own loins. Paul tells us of the old Gentiles that they were *astorgoi*,¹ Rom 1:31, “without natural affection.” What he aims at is that barbarous custom among the Romans who often — to spare themselves the trouble of educating their children and to be at liberty to satisfy their own lusts — *destroyed their own children from the womb*. That is how far the strength of sin prevailed to obliterate the law of nature, and to repel the force and power of it.

Examples of this [depraved] nature are common in all nations: among ourselves, of *women murdering their own children* through the deceitful reasoning of sin. And in this, sin turns aside the strong current of nature, darkens all the light of God in the soul, controls all our natural principles that are influenced with the power of the command and will of God.

Yet through the efficacy of sin, this evil has received a fearful aggravation. Men have not only slain but cruelly sacrificed their children to satisfy their lusts. The apostle reckons idolatry, and consequently all superstition, among “the works of the flesh,” Gal 5:20;² that is, among 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. So the psalmist tells us,

Psa 106:37, 38. Indeed, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood.

The same is mentioned again in various other places of Scripture. I have declared elsewhere the whole manner of that abomination. For the present it may suffice to intimate that they took their children and burnt them to ashes in a soft fire. The wicked

¹ ἄστοργοι, *astorgoi* [NT:794]

² Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies...

priests that assisted in the sacrifice afforded them this relief: that they made a noise and clamor so that the vile wretches might not hear the woeful moans and cries of the poor, dying, tormented infants. I suppose in this case we need no further evidence. Naturalists can give no rational account for this; they can only admire the secret force of that little fish which, 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 that is in that inbred traitor, sin, that can not only stop the course of nature — when all its sails that carry it forward, are so filled as they are with affections for their children — but also drive it backward. And do so with such a violence and force as to cause men to deal with their own children in a way that a good man could not be paid to deal with his dog. It may not be to the disadvantage of the best believer to know and consider that they carry around with them, and in them, that which in others has produced these effects.¹

(2.) The same may be said 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 like enormities. In all of 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, along with their aggravations; or remind us of the filth and villainy of Nero, in whom sin seemed to design an instance of how far it could debase the nature of man! 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 is in the world — is fruit growing *from this root alone*.

2. It evidences sin's efficacy in keeping men away from believing under the dispensation of the gospel. This evidence must be illustrated a little further: —

(1.) Under the dispensation of the gospel, there are but *few who believe*. So the preachers of the gospel complain, “Who has believed our report?” (Isa 53:1) which the apostle interprets to be about the paucity of believers, John 12:38. Our Saviour, Christ himself, tells us that “many are called,” — the word is preached to many — “but few are chosen.” And so the church complains of its number,

Mic 7:1 “Woe is me! For I am like those who have gathered summer fruits, like the grape gleanings of the vintage; *There is no cluster to eat*; my soul desired the first-ripe fruit.

There are few who enter the narrow gate; daily experience confirms this woeful observation. How many villages, parishes, indeed towns, may we go to where the gospel has been preached, it may be, for many years and perhaps scarcely meet a true believer in them, one who displays the death of Christ in his conversation! In the best places, most eminent for their profession, are not such persons like *the berries under the shaking of an olive-tree* — two or three in the top of the uppermost boughs, and four or five in the highest branches? ^{Isa 17:6}

(2.) In preaching the gospel, there is proposed to men, as *motives for believing*, every thing in conjunction that *severally* prevails with men to do whatever else they do in their

¹ See his work entitled, “A Dissertation on Divine Justice,” *Works of John Owen*, vol. 10, chap. 4.

lives. Whatever anyone does with consideration, he does it either because it is *reasonable* and good for him, or *profitable* and advantageous, or *pleasant*, or lastly, *necessary* to avoid evil. I say, whatever men do with consideration, whether it is good or evil, whether it is in the works of this life or in things that lead to another life, they do it from one or another of the reasons or motives mentioned. And God knows, the men who are prevailed upon are often very poor and lowly in their kind. How often will men, for very *little pleasure*, or very *little profit*, be induced to do what will embitter their lives and damn their souls. And what industry they will use to avoid what they apprehend will be 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.

But now, all these things center in the proposal of the gospel, and in *the command to believe*; and every one of them is of such a kind that the whole world can propose nothing like it: —

[1.] It is the most *reasonable* thing that can be proposed to the understanding of a man, that through his own default, he has lost that way of bringing glory to God and saving his own soul (for which ends he was made) which he was first placed in; and that he should accept and embrace that other blessed, easy, safe, and excellent way to attain the ends mentioned, which God, in His infinite grace, love, mercy, wisdom, and righteousness, has revealed and proposes to him. And —

[2.] It is the most *profitable* thing that a man can possibly be invited to, if there is any profit or benefit, any advantage to be had in the forgiveness of sins, in the love and favor of God, in a blessed immortality, and in eternal glory. And —

[3.] It is most *pleasant also*. Surely it is a pleasant thing to be brought out of darkness into light — out of a dungeon onto 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 to be mentioned now. And —

[4.] It is surely *necessary*; and that is not only from the command of God, who has the supreme authority over us, but also indispensably so, to avoid the eternal ruin of body and soul.¹ It is constantly proposed under these terms: “Believe, or you will perish under the weight of the wrath of the great God, and that is forevermore.”

But notwithstanding that all these considerations are preached to men, and pressed upon them in the name of the great God, from day to day and from one year to another, there are very few (as observed before) who so set their hearts to them, as to embrace what they lead to. Tell men ten thousand times that this is wisdom, indeed *riches*; tell them that all their profit lies in it, that they will assuredly and eternally perish, maybe within a few hours, if they do not receive 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, or set their hearts to it, but plainly say, as it were, “We will have nothing to do with these things.” They would rather perish in their lusts than accept mercy.

¹ **Mat 10:28** “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

(3.) It is *indwelling sin* that both disables and hinders men from believing, and indwelling sin 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; they are obstinate, and will not lay hold of his righteousness; they are senseless, and will take no notice of their own eternal concerns.

Now, certainly whatever can prevail with men who are wise, and 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 pretences, must be acknowledged to have an astonishing force and efficacy accompanying it.

Whose heart, once he has heard of the ways of God, can help but bleed to see poor souls eternally perishing under a thousand gracious invitations to accept of mercy and pardon in the blood of Christ? And can we help but be astonished at the power of that principle from which they run headlong to their own destruction? And yet all this befalls them from the power and deceit of sin that dwells in them.

3. It is evident in their *total apostasies*. Many men not really converted, are greatly worked upon by the word. The apostle tells us that they “clean escape from those who live in error,” 2Pet 2:18. They separate themselves from idolatry and false worship, owning and professing the truth. And they also escape the “pollutions of the world,” verse 20; ¹ that is, “the corruption that is in the world through lust” as he expresses it in chap. 1:4 – those filthy, corrupt, and unclean ways which the men of the world walk and live in, in the pursuit of their lusts. These they escape from, in the amendment of their lives and the ordering of their conduct according to the convictions which they have from the word. For so he tells us, that all this is brought about “through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” – that is, by the preaching of the gospel. They are so far worked upon as to forsake all the ways of false worship, to profess the truth, to reform their lives, and to walk in a manner corresponding to their convictions.

By this means, they gain the reputation of professors: “They have a name to live,” Rev 3:1; and they are made “partakers” of some or all of those privileges of the gospel that are enumerated by the apostle in Heb 6:4, 5.²

It is not my present business to show how far or in what things a man may be *effectually worked* upon by the word, and yet not *really be worked* over so as to close with Christ; or what may be the utmost bounds and limits of a *common work* of grace upon unregenerate men. It is confessed by all that it may be carried on so far, that it is very difficult to discern between the effects and productions of *common grace*, and those produced by *special* and *saving grace*.

¹ **2Pet 2:18** For when they speak great swelling *words* of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹ While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. ²⁰ 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 in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.

² **Heb 6:4** For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come...

But now, notwithstanding all this, we daily see many of these men fall away from God, utterly and wickedly; some into debauchery and uncleanness, some into worldliness and covetousness, some to be persecutors of the saints — all to the perdition of their own souls. How this comes about is declared by the apostle in the same passage. “They are,” he says, “entangled again.” To entice and entangle, as I have shown before from Jas 1:14, 15,¹ is the proper work of indwelling sin; it is that alone which entangles the soul, as the apostle says in 2Pet 2:18, 20. They are allured from their whole profession, into cursed apostasy, through the lusts of the flesh.

It prevails upon them, through its deceit and power, to utterly relinquish their profession and their whole engagement to God. And in several ways this evinces the greatness of sin’s strength and efficacy: —

(1.) *In that it stops or gives control to that exceeding greatness of power which is put forth in the word, in their conviction and reformation.* We see it by experience that men are not easily worked upon by the word. Most men can live under the dispensation of the word all the days of their lives, and continue as senseless and stupid as the seats they sit upon, or the flinty rock of stone.² Mighty difficulties and prejudices must be conquered, great strokes must be given to the conscience, before this can be brought about. It is like stopping a river in its course, and turning its streams another way; or like keeping a stone from falling downwards; or turning away the wild ass when it is furiously set to pursue its way, as the prophet puts it in Jer 2:24.³ To turn men from their corrupt ways, sins, and pleasures; to make them willingly and gladly pray, fast, hear, and do many things that are contrary to the principle of flesh which is secretly predominant in them; to cause them to profess Christ and the gospel, maybe under some trials and reproaches; to give them light to see into various mysteries, and gifts to discharge their sundry duties; to make dead, blind, senseless men to walk, and talk, and do all the outward offices and duties of living and healthy men, with like attendance to 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 — in staggering and convicting sinners, in awakening their consciences, enlightening their minds, changing their affections, awing their hearts, reforming their lives, and compelling them to duties — is inexpressible.

But now there is a check and control 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 dispensations, in our afflictions and mercies which attend it. Once sin is enraged, all these things become like the withes and cords with which Samson was bound before his head was shaven. But cry to the soul, “The Philistines are upon you! — there is a subtle, a suitable temptation upon you; now show your strength and efficacy!” — and all these things become like tow that has fed the fire. Conscience is stifled, reputation in the church of God is despised, light is supplanted, the impressions of the word are cast off,

¹ **Jas 1:14** But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

² **Psa 114:8** Who turned the rock *into* a pool of water, The flint into a fountain of waters (re Deu 8.15).

³ **Jer 2:24** A wild donkey used to the wilderness, *That* sniffs at the wind in her desire; In her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; In her month they will find her.

convictions are digested, heaven and hell are despised — sin makes its way through it all, and utterly turns the soul from the good and right ways of God. Sometimes it does this subtly, by *imperceptible degrees*, taking away all the force of former impressions from the Spirit by the word, sullyng the conscience by degrees, hardening the heart, and making sensual the affections by various workings. So that the poor backslider in heart scarcely knows what he is doing, until he has come to the very bottom of all impiety, profaneness, and enmity against God. Sometimes, falling in conjunction with some vigorous temptation, it suddenly and at once plunges the soul into a course of alienation from God and from the profession of his ways.

(2.) *It takes them away from those hopes of heaven which they had attained upon their convictions, obedience, and temporary faith or believing.* There is a general hope of heaven, or at least of escaping hell, of an untroubled immortality, in the most sottish and stupid souls in the world. Either by tradition or instruction from the word, they are persuaded that there is another state of things to come after this life; but in unconvinced, unenlightened persons, it is a dull, senseless, unaffecting thing. It has no other hold on them nor power in them except to keep them free from the trouble and perplexity of contrary thoughts and apprehensions. The matter is otherwise with those who are so worked upon by the word, as we declared before, that their hope of heaven and of a blessed immortality, is often accompanied with great joys and exultations; and it is a relief to them under and against the worst of their fears and trials. It is such that they would not part with it for all the world; and on all occasions they retreat to it in their minds for comfort and relief.

Now, by the power of sin, they are prevailed with to forego all this. Let heaven go if it will; let a blessed immortality go, with the enjoyment of God himself — for sin must be served, and provision must be made to fulfill its lusts.

Say a man, in the things of this world, had such a hope of a large inheritance and a kingdom, that he is satisfied it will not fail him, but that in the end he will surely enjoy it, and he will lead a happy and glorious life in the possession of it for many days. If someone were then to go and tell him, “It is true, the kingdom you look for is an ample and honorable dominion, full of all good and desirable things, and you may attain it; but come, throw away all hopes and expectations of it, and join with me in the service and slavery of an oppressing tyrant;” — you would easily grant that he must have some strange bewitching power over him, if this were to prevail with a man in his wits, to follow such advice.

Yet thus it is, and much more so, in the case we have in hand. Sin itself cannot deny that the kingdom of heaven, which the soul is in hope and expectation of, is glorious and excellent; nor does it try to convince him that his thoughts of that kingdom are vain and will deceive him. But it plainly prevails with him to throw away his hopes, and to despise his kingdom that he was in expectation of. And it does that upon no other motive than that he may serve some worldly, cruel, or filthy and sensual lust. Certainly, here lies a secret efficacy, whose depths cannot be fathomed.

(3.) *The apostle manifests the power of the entanglements of sin in and upon apostates, in that it turns them away from the way of righteousness after they have known it, 2Pet*

2:21.¹ It will be found at the last day an evil thing and bitter, that men live all their days in the service of sin, self, and the world, refusing to test any of the ways of God, to which they are invited. Though they have no personal experience of their excellence, beauty, pleasantness, or safety — yet having evidence brought to them from God himself that they are so — their refusal of them will, I say, be bitterness in the end. But their condition is still far worse for those who, as the apostle says, “having known the way of righteousness,” are by the power of indwelling sin “turned aside from the holy commandment.” It will be for a lamentation to leave God for the devil, after a man has experienced God 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, after a man has been admitted to the saints’ communion, and tasted of its pleasantness — to leave walking in pure, clear, straight paths, to wallow in mire, muck,² and filth. And yet sin prevails upon apostates to do this; and do it against all their light, conviction, experiences, professions, engagements, or whatever else may be strong upon them to sustain them in the known ways of righteousness.

(4.) It evinces its strength in them by prevailing with them to *totally renounce God* as revealed in Christ, and the power of all gospel truth, in *the sin against the Holy Ghost*.^{Mat 12:31} I will not now precisely determine what the sin against the Holy Ghost is, nor what it consists in; there are different apprehensions of it. But all agree in *this*: that by this sin, an end is put to *all dealings between God and man in a way of grace*. It is a “sin unto death.”^{1Joh 5:16} And the hardness and blindness of many men’s hearts brings them to this; by these they are at length set out of the reach of mercy. They choose to have no more to do with God; and God swears they shall never enter into his rest:^{Psa 95:11} and so sin brings forth death.^{Jas 1:15} By this a man is brought to renounce the end for which he was made, to wilfully reject the means of coming to the enjoyment of God, to provoke Him to his face,^{Isa 65:3} and so to perish in his rebellion.^{Psa 2:12}

I have not mentioned these things as though I hoped to fully set out by them the power of indwelling sin in unregenerate men. I thought only to give a glimpse of it by a few instances. One who would have a fuller view of it, need only open his eyes to take a little view of that wickedness which reigns, indeed rages, the world over. Let him consider the prevailing flood of the things mentioned by Paul as “the fruits of the flesh,” Gal 5:19-21³ — that is, among the sons of men, in all places, nations, cities, towns, and parishes. And then let him add to those 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. And hourly there are millions

¹ **2Pe 2:20-22** 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 in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹ For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²² But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

² Originally, “draughts,” a 17th c. term for a privy, latrine, cesspool.

³ **Gal 5:19** Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

more vile abominations which, being stifled in the womb by some of the ways insisted on before, they are never able to bring forth to light. I say, let a man — using the law for his light and rule — take this course; and if he has any spiritual discernment, he may quickly be satisfied in this matter.

And I showed at the entrance of this discourse how this consideration fully confirms the truth proposed.

CHAPTER 17.

The strength of sin evidenced by its resistance to the power of 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 potent enemy, and yet it is not taken or conquered, whose walls have endured great batteries and are not demolished, even though we have never seen the place, we may conclude that it is strong, if not impregnable.

And this consideration will also evidence the power and strength of indwelling sin. It is able to hold out, and not only to live, but also to secure its reign and *dominion*,¹ against very strong opposition that is made to it.

I will instance only *the opposition that is made to it by the law*, which is often great and terrible, but always fruitless. All its assaults are borne by it, and sin is not prevailed against. There are various things in which the law opposes itself to sin and its power; such as —

1. *It reveals it.* Sin in the soul is like a secret hectic sickness in the body — its being unknown and unperceived is one great means of its prevalence — it is like traitors in a civil state: while they lie hidden, they vigorously carry on their design. Most men in the world know nothing of this sickness, indeed, *death* of their souls. Though they have been taught something about the *doctrine* of it, they know nothing about its *power*. They do not know it so as to deal with it as their mortal enemy — just as a man who loves his life, whatever he is told, cannot be said to *know* that he has a hectic fever, if he does not set himself to stop its progress.

This then, is what the law does — it *reveals* this enemy; it convinces the soul that there is such a traitor harboring in its bosom. Rom 7:7, “I would not have known sin, except by the law: for I would not have known lust, unless the law had said, You shall not covet.” “I would not have known it;” that is, fully, clearly, and distinctly. Conscience will somewhat agitate about it; but a man cannot know it clearly and distinctly from that. The law gives a man such a sight of sin as the blind man in the gospel gained upon the first touch of his eyes: “He saw men like trees walking,” — obscurely, confusedly.^{Mar 8.24} But when the law comes, that gives the soul a *distinct sight of this indwelling sin*. Again, “I would not have known it;” that is, the depths of it, the root of it, the habitual inclination of my nature to sin, which is here called “lust,” as it is in Jas 1:14. “I would not have known it,” or not known it to be sin, “except by the law.” This, then, is what the law does: it draws out this traitor from its secret lurking places, from the intimate recesses of the soul. A man, when the law comes, is no longer ignorant of his enemy. If he now perishes by him, it is openly and knowingly. He can only say that the law warned him about his enemy, that it revealed his enemy to him, yes, and raised an assembly of various affections about him in the soul — just as an officer who discovers a thief or robber, calls for assistance to apprehend him.

2. The law not only reveals sin, but reveals it to be a very *bad inmate*, dangerous, yes, pernicious to the soul:

¹ Owen argues at the start of chapter 2 that the dominion of sin is broken in the believer, even though its presence remains. See the distinctions he makes there, to better understand what he means here by the *dominion* of sin.

Rom 7:13, “Was that then, which is good,” — that is, the law — “made death to me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, so that sin by the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.”

There are many things in this verse which we are not at present concerned: I only aim at the manifestation of sin by the law — it *appears to be sin*; and the manifestation of it in its own colors, appears to be *exceedingly sinful*. The law lets the soul 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, how hated by him. The soul will never more look at it as a *small matter*, whatever thoughts it had of it before, by which it is greatly surprised.

A man who finds himself somewhat sickly, will send for a skillful physician. When he comes, the man requires his judgment about his sickness. The physician, considering his condition, tells him, “Alas! I am sorry for you; the case is far worse for you than you imagine. Your disease is mortal, and it has proceeded so far, pressing upon your spirits and infecting the whole mass of your blood, that unless the most effectual remedies are used, I doubt 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 that all is not so well as it should be with him, more from the effects of sin and its continual eruptions than from the nature of it, which he hopes to wrestle with. But now, when the law comes, it lets the soul know that its disease is deadly and mortal — that it is exceedingly sinful, being the root and cause of all his alienation from God. And thus also, the law proceeds against it [to convict it].

3. The law *judges the person*, or it lets the sinner plainly know what he is to expect on account of this sin. This is the law’s proper work; its revealing property is only preparative to its judging. The law is itself when it is in the throne. Here it does not mince the matter with sinners, as we usually do with one another, but it tells him plainly, “You are the man’ ^{2Sam 12.7} in whom this exceedingly sinful sin dwells, and you must answer for the guilt of it.” This, I think, if anything, should rouse a man to set himself in opposition to it; yes, to utterly destroy it. The law lets him know that on account of this sin, he is subject to the curse and wrath of the great God against him. Indeed, it pronounces the sentence of everlasting condemnation upon him on that account. “Abide in this state and perish,” is its language. It does not leave the soul without this *warning* in this world, and that will leave it without *excuse* on that account in the world to come.

4. The law so follows on its sentence, that it *disquiets and frightens the soul*, and does not allow it to enjoy the least rest or quietness in harboring its sinful inmate. Whenever the soul has indulged its commands, and made provision for it, the law immediately flies upon it with the wrath and terror of the Lord, and makes it quake and tremble. The soul will have no rest, but is like a poor beast that has a deadly arrow sticking in its side, that makes it restless wherever it is and whatever it does.

5. The law does not stay here, but it also *slays the soul*: Rom 7:9 “For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died;” that is, by the soul’s conviction of the nature, power, and deserving of this indwelling sin, the law deprives the one in whom sin is found, of all that life of self-righteousness and hope which he formerly sustained himself with — it leaves him as a poor, dead, helpless, and hopeless creature. And all this is in pursuit of that opposition it makes against this sin. May we not expect that now

sin’s power will be quelled and its strength broken — that it will die away under these strokes of the law of God? But the truth is, such is its power and strength, that it is quite otherwise. Like the one whom the poets pretend to be born of the earth, when one thought to slay him by throwing him to the ground, by every fall he recovered new strength, and was more vigorous than before.¹ So is it with all the falls and repulses that are given to indwelling sin by the law: for —

(1.) It is not *conquered*. A conquest infers two things in respect to the conquered — first, *loss of dominion*; and, secondly, *loss of strength*. Whenever anyone is conquered, he is stripped of both these; he loses both his authority and his power. So the armed strong man, being prevailed against, is bound and his goods are taken.^{Mat 12.29} But now, neither of these befalls indwelling sin by the assaults of the law. It does not lose one jot of its dominion or strength by all the blows that are given to it. The law cannot do this thing: Rom 8:3; “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh” — it cannot deprive sin of its power and dominion, for one that “is under the law is also under sin.” That is, whatever power the law has upon the conscience of a man, so that he fears to sin lest the sentence and curse of it befalls him, sin still reigns and rules in his heart. Therefore the apostle says,

Rom 6:14, “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace;”

This plainly intimates that however much a person is in subjection to the authority of the law, that will not exempt and acquit him from the dominion of sin. Indeed, by all its work on the soul, the law incidentally increases the soul’s misery and bondage greatly, instead of freeing and acquitting it from the reign and bondage of sin — just as the judge’s sentence 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. The law setting upon him in this condition, by all the ways mentioned before, brings him into great trouble and perplexity, fear and terror; but it does not deliver him at all.

So 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. Yes, and we will see that sin does like Pharaoh: finding that its rule is disturbed, it 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, by all these strokes of the law, does sin lose any of its strength. It continues both its authority and its force; it is neither destroyed nor weakened. Indeed —

(2.) It is so far from being conquered, that it is only enraged. The whole work of the law only provokes and enrages sin, and causes it, as it has opportunity, to exert its strength with more power, vigor, and force than formerly. The apostle shows this at large:

¹ Greek mythology; Antaeus was the son of Poseidon and Gaia. He was strong only as long as he touched his mother earth; but once lifted into the air, he became as weak as other men. Antaeus challenged Hercules to a wrestling match to the death; Hercules discovered the secret of Antaeus’ power: holding him aloft, he crushed him in a bearhug.

Rom 7:9-13 I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which *was ordained* to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slayed *me*. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Was then that which is good made death to me? God forbid! But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, so that sin, by the commandment, might become exceedingly sinful.

But you will say, “Do we not see by experience, that many are worked upon by the preaching of the law to relinquish many sins and amend their lives, and to greatly contend against the eruptions of those other corruptions which they cannot yet mortify? And it cannot be denied that the power and efficacy of the law is great when preached and applied to the conscience in a due manner.” I answer —

[1.] It is acknowledged that the power of the law of God is very great and effectual. Great are the effects wrought by it, and it shall surely accomplish every end for which it is appointed by God.^{Isa 55.11} Yet *subduing* sin is none of its work — it is not designed by God for that purpose; and therefore it is no dishonor if it cannot do what is not its proper work, Rom 8:3.

[2.] Whatever effects it has on *some*, we see that in *most*, such is the power and prevalence of sin, that it makes no impression on them at all. May 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 yet they are not once moved by it? They receive no more impression from its strikes than blows with a straw would give to an adamant? ¹ They are not convinced by it, nor terrified, nor awed, nor instructed; but they continue deaf, ignorant, senseless, and secure, as if they had never been told of the guilt of sin or the terror of the Lord. Congregations are full of these, who proclaim the triumphing power of sin over the dispensation of the law.

[3.] 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. And 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 previously considered some ways by which he is pleased so to do. But —

[4.] Notwithstanding all that may be observed of the power of the law upon the souls of men, it is yet most evident that lust is not *conquered*, not subdued, nor mortified by the law; for —

1st. Though the *course* of sin may be repelled for a season by the dispensation of the law, yet the spring and fountain of it is not dried up by it. Though sin withdraws and hides itself for a season, it is, as I have shown elsewhere, but to shift out of a storm, and then to return again. A traveler meeting with a violent storm of thunder and rain on his way, may immediately turn out of his way to some house or tree for his shelter; yet this

¹ An adamant is a very hard rock, diamond-like.

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 who are 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, terrifies and hinders them on their way. This turns them for a season out of their course. They run to prayer or amend their life for some shelter from the storm of wrath which 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, they begin to wear down that 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 time and again.

2dly. 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 allow no water to pass in the old course and channel, it breaks out another way, and turns all its streams in a new course. You would not say that you have dried up that river, even though some who come and look into the old channel may think, perhaps, that the waters are utterly gone. So it is 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 — the conscience is terrified, and the man does not dare to walk in the ways in which he was formerly engaged. His companions in sin, not finding him in his old ways, begin to laugh at him, as one who is converted and growing precise.¹ Professors themselves 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 only been a work of the law upon him, there is a dam put to his course, but the spring of sin is not dried up; its streams have only been turned another way. It may be that the man has fallen upon other more secret or more spiritual sins; or if he is beaten away from them also, the whole strength of lust and sin will take up its residence in self-righteousness, and thereby pour out streams that are as filthy as any other way whatsoever. So that, 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.

I will still touch on some other evidences of the same truth that I have under consideration; but I will be brief in them. In the next place then,

1. The *great endeavors of men, ignorant of the righteousness of Christ for subduing and mortifying sin*, which are all fruitless endeavors, 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 that they had of the *guilt* of sin. Men have this by the light of their consciences; they cannot avoid it. This is not a thing in their choice — whether they will or not. They cannot help but know that sin is evil, and it is such an evil that it 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,

¹ Precise: *pedantic*, overly concerned with rules; proper or “straight-laced.”

men begin to endeavor to *abstain from sin*, at least from those sins which they have been most terrified about. While they have this design in hand, the strength and power of sin begins to reveal itself to them. They begin to find that there is something in them that is not in their own power. For notwithstanding their resolutions and purposes, they still sin; and they so sin, or sin 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 do they 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 it, if not to slay it. This is because, 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 end in vain. For no man, by any self-endeavors, can obtain peace with God.

We must look into some of the ways by which they endeavor to suppress the power of sin (which throws them into an unquiet condition), and their insufficiency for that end:

(1.) First, they will promise and bind themselves by *vows* from those sins which they have been most liable to, and so have been most perplexed with. The psalmist shows that this is one great engine by which false and hypocritical persons endeavor to extricate and deliver themselves from trouble and perplexity. They make promises to God which he calls “flattering him with their lips.”¹ So it is in this case. Being freshly galled with the guilt of any sin that, by the power of their temptations, they may have been frequently overtaken in, they vow and promise that (at least for some *limited space of time*) they will not commit that sin again. And this course of proceeding is prescribed to them by some who pretend to direct their consciences in this duty. Their conscience² now makes them watch over themselves as to the *outward* act of the sin that they are galled with.

And so it has one of these two effects: either they abstain from it for the time they have set, or they do not. If they do not, as they seldom do — especially if it is a sin that has a particular root in their nature and constitution, and is ingrained by custom into a habit — then if any suitable temptation is presented to them, their sin is increased, and with it, their terror. They are woefully discouraged in making any opposition to sin. And therefore, for the most part, after one or two vain attempts or maybe more, knowing no other way to mortify sin than this vowing against it, and keeping that vow in their own strength, they give up all contests. They wholly become the servants of sin, being bounded only by outward considerations, without any serious endeavors for a recovery.

Or, secondly, suppose that they have success in their resolutions, and abstain from actual sins for their appointed season. Commonly, one of these two things ensues: either they think that they have *well discharged their duty*, and so they may indulge their corruptions and lusts a little now, at least for a season; and so 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 they *sacrifice to their own net and drag*, setting up a righteousness of their own against the grace of God. This is so far from weakening indwelling sin, that instead it

¹ Goold substituted “flattering him with the mouth.” (Psa 78:36). But Isa 29.13 is as likely, “these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me;”

² That is, a feeling of shame when something immoral is done.

strengthens sin in its root and principle, so that it may hereafter reign in the soul in security. Or, at most, the best success that can be imagined for this way of dealing with sin, is only to *restrain* some outward eruptions of it – which does not at all tend to weaken its power. Therefore such persons, by all their endeavors, are very far from being freed from the inward toiling, burning, disquieting, perplexing power of sin.

And this is the state of most men who 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 that thing in sin which most enrages their consciences and most increases their fears – that is, the actual eruption of sin. Because, for the most part, while they are freed from that eruption, they believe they are safe; though in the meantime, sin lies agitating in and defiling the heart continually. As with running sores, outward repelling medicines may skin them over, and hinder their corruption from coming forth, but the result of such medicines is that they cause the sores to fester inwardly. And so, though maybe less stinking and offensive than before, they prove to be far more dangerous. So is it with this repelling of the power of corruption by men’s vows and promises against it – external eruptions may be restrained for a season, but the inward root and principle is not weakened in the least. And most commonly this is the result of this way of dealing with it: that sin, having gotten more strength, and being enraged by its restraint, breaks all its bounds, and captivates the soul to commit all kinds of filthy abominations. This is the principle, as observed before, of most of the visible apostasies which we have in the world:

2Pet 2:19, While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.
²⁰ 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 in them, and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.

The Holy Ghost compares sinners to lions, bears, and asps, because of the odious, fierce, and poisonous nature of this indwelling sin.¹ Now, this is the excellency of gospel grace: that it changes the nature and inward principles of these otherwise passionate and untamed beasts, making the wolf like the kid, the lion like the lamb, and the bear like the cow, Isa 11.6-9.² When this is effected, they may safely be trusted in – “a little child may lead them.” But these self-endeavors do not at all change the nature, but only restrain their outward violence. The man who takes a lion or a wolf and keeps him from ravaging, while the creature’s inward violence yet remains, the man may well expect that at one time or another they will break their bonds, and fall back into their former ways of rapine and violence. However, shutting them up does not, as we see, change their natures, but only restrains their rage from open destruction. So it is in this case: it is grace alone that

¹ Pro 28.15; Rom 3.13; Rev 13.2.

² **Isa 11:6-9** "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. ⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

changes the heart and takes away that poison and fierceness that is in them by nature; men’s self-endeavors only coerce them as to some of their outward eruptions But —

(2.) Beyond bare *vows* and *promises* — along with some watchfulness to observe themselves in a rational use of ordinary means — men have put (and some still put) themselves onto *extraordinary ways* of mortifying sin. This is the foundation of all that has a show of wisdom¹ and religion in the Papacy: their hours of prayer and fastings; their confining and cloistering of themselves; their pilgrimages, penances, and self-torturing discipline — all spring from this root. I will 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 to sin; nor of the horrible hypocrisy which evidently clings to most of their observers; nor of that superstition which gives life to them all, being a thing that is riveted in the natures of some; and their constitutions, fixed on others by inveterate prejudices, and which is taken up by others for secular advantages.

Rather, I will suppose 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 check this power of indwelling sin of which we speak. It is almost incredible what fearful self-macerations and horrible sufferings this design has carried men to. And undoubtedly their blind zeal and superstition will rise in judgment and condemn the horrible sloth and negligence of most of those to whom the Lord has granted the saving light of the gospel. But what is the end of these things? The apostle gives us a brief account in Rom 9:31, 32. They do not attain the righteousness aimed at; they do not come to a conformity to the law: sin is not mortified, nor is its power weakened. But what sin loses in sensual, carnal pleasures, it makes up with great advantage in blindness, darkness, superstition, self-righteousness, and soul-pride; in contempt for the gospel and its righteousness; and it reigns no less in believers than in the most profligate sinners in the world.

2. Lastly, 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 at the soul’s initial conversion to God; and the continual opposition that is made to it by grace. But this is the subject and design of another endeavor.

It may now be expected that we would add here the special uses of all this discovery that has been made of the *power, deceit, prevalence, and success* of 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 becomes those who find, by experience, that the power of this law of sin is at work in them — these have been occasionally mentioned and inculcated through the whole preceding discourse. As for what concerns the actual *mortification* of it, I will only recommend to the reader, for his direction, another small treatise written long ago for that purpose.² I suppose he may do well to consider it together with this one, if he finds these things are a concern for him.

¹ **Col 2:23** These things indeed have an appearance [*a show*] of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body [i.e., *asceticism*], *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

² Referring to Owen’s work, *The Mortification of Sin*.

Chap. 17 – Sin’s Strength Evidenced by its Resistance the Law.

*“To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty,
dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”¹*

FINIS.

¹ Rom 16.27.