

INDWELLING SIN

BY

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Edited and put into easier English

By Geoffrey Stonier

**THE NATURE, POWER, DECEIT,
AND PREVALENCE
OF THE
REMNANTS OF INDWELLING
SIN IN BELIEVERS,
TOGETHER WITH
THE WAY INDWELLING SIN
WORKS,
AND THE MEANS OF PREVENTING
IT,

DESCRIBED AND APPLIED
WITH

A DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS
CASES OF CONSCIENCE IN THIS
MATTER**

'Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!' (Rom. 7:24-25)

All Bible quotations are from the AV (King James' Version)

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PREFACE BY THE ORIGINAL EDITOR, DR. WILLIAM HENRY GOOLD

While the Government was enforcing stringent measures against Nonconformity, while dissenting ministers, if they ventured to preach the gospel of salvation, became liable to the penalties of the Conventicle or Five-mile Act, and when Owen himself, on a visit to some old friends at Oxford narrowly escaped arrest and imprisonment, our author did not abandon himself to inactivity, but employed the leisure of his concealment into which the rigour of the times had driven him by preparing some of his most valuable works. In one year alone (1608), the two treatises which conclude this volume were published, 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 can 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, shows clearly not merely great industry, but strength of religious principle with which no outward commotions were allowed to interfere. 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 he preached whenever a safe opportunity occurred.

The book 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 great 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 the view the objective truths of the Word. But the process is in itself supremely needed — essential to the life of faith and the growth of holiness; and with no guide are we safer than with Owen. The reader is never suffered 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 Romans 7:21. 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 being the heart — its nature generally, as enmity against God — its acting and operations: **first**, in withdrawing the mind from what is good; **secondly**, exciting a positive opposition to God; **thirdly**, ensnaring the soul into captivity; and **fourthly** and lastly, filling it with unfeeling hatred to the principles and claims of holiness.

The power of indwelling sin is next illustrated from its deceitfulness as found in Rom. 8:4, and a lengthy 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;

second, when the affections are enticed and ensnared: and **third** and last, when actual sin is conceived and committed.

In chapter 14, a new demonstration begins of the power of indwelling sin, as exhibited, **first**, in the lives of Christians; and, **second**, in the unregenerate. In the last chapter, evidence to the same effect is proved from the resistance that sin offers to the authority of the moral law, and from the fruitless and unavailing endeavours 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 us to his treatise on the *Mortification of Sin*.

PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

That the doctrine of original sin is one of the fundamental truths of our Christian profession has always been professed in the Church of God; and a special part it is of that unique possession of truth which they enjoy whose religion towards God is built on, and resolved by, divine revelation. As the world by its wisdom never knew God rightly, so the wise men of it were always utterly ignorant of this inbred evil in themselves and others. With us, the doctrine and conviction of it lies in the very foundation of all with which we have to do with God, with reference to our pleasing him here, or obtaining the enjoyment of him hereafter. It is also known what influence it has upon the great truths concerning the Person of Christ, his mediation, the fruits and effects of it, with all the benefits that come when we are made partakers of it. Without a supposition of it, not any of them can be truly known or savingly believed.

This cause has been taken up by many holy and learned men, both in olden and later days. Some have laboured in the discovery of its nature, some of its guilt and demerit; by whom also the truth concerning it has been defended against the opposition made to it in past and present ages. By most, these things have been considered in their full extent and scope with respect to all men by nature, with the estate and condition of those that are wholly under the power and guilt of it. How, then, men are unable 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, has been by many also fully discussed. Moreover, that there are remnants of it abiding in believers after their regeneration and conversion to God, (as Scripture abundantly testifies), has been fully taught and confirmed; as also how the guilt arising from it is pardoned to them, and by what means the power of it is weakened in them. All these things, I say, have been largely written about, to the great benefit and edification of the Church. In furthering the purpose of this book, I therefore take them all for granted, and endeavour only to carry on the discovery of it in its acting and opposition to the law and grace of God in believers. Neither do I intend to discuss anything that has been put forward controversially for argument. What Scripture plainly reveals and teaches concerning indwelling sin — what believers evidently discover by experience in themselves — what they may learn from the examples and acknowledgment of others will be represented in a way suited to the capacity of the lowliest and weakest that is concerned about it. And many things seem to render the handling of it at this time to be necessary. The effects and fruits of it, which we see in the apostasy and backsliding of many, the scandalous sins and misbehaviour of some, and the course and lives of the majority, seem to call for a due consideration of it. Besides, how greatly needed is a full and clear acquaintance with the power of this indwelling sin (the very subject of this book) for believers, to stir them up to watchfulness and diligence, to faith and will become apparent as we make progress.

These, in general, were the ends aimed at in my ensuing discourse, which, being at first composed and delivered for the use and benefit of a few, is now, by the providence of God, made public. And if the reader is to benefit by these weak endeavours, let him know that it is his duty, so as to give glory to God, to help others by his prayers who, in many temptations and afflictions, are willing to labour in the vineyard of the Lord, and do the work to which they are called.

CHAPTER 1

Indwelling sin in believers is explained by the Apostle in Rom. 7:21, together with other verses in that chapter, and from elsewhere

It is indwelling sin in all its power, strength, and effects that I intend to deal with, and its remnants in believers after their conversion to God. This was also the great intention of the Apostle in his letter to the Romans, chapter 7. Many indeed are the disputes concerning the main scope of the Apostle in that chapter, and in what state that person is – whether under law or under grace. I will not now enter into that dispute, but take it for granted as undoubtedly proved that described there is the condition of a person that is born again (regenerate) with respect to the remaining power of indwelling sin – that is, of the Apostle himself. In this chapter, then, we discover a foundation for what we have to offer on this subject. Not that I will give a detailed exposition of this revelation of truth within its own context, but will make use only of what is stated there as occasion demands.

Let us consider what 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 to notice in these words:

Firstly, the name he gives to indwelling sin by which he expresses its power and effects. It is “a law”. For what he terms “a law” in this verse, he also calls “sin that dwelleth in me” in verse 20.

Secondly, the way he came to discover this law; not absolutely, and from a study of its nature, but in himself — “I find then a law”.

Thirdly, the disposition of his soul and inner man to this “law of sin”; and his discovery as a Christian, that he wills to do good when evil is present with him.

To will to do something good is to have the habitual bent and inclination of the will set on that which is good — what is morally and spiritually good, which is the proper subject dealt with here: thus this then is our third observation.

There is, and there is through grace, kept up in believers a constant and ordinarily prevailing will of doing good, despite the power and efficacy of indwelling sin to the contrary. This, in their worst condition, distinguishes them 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 the root or branches of it, is from their light and their consciences; the will of sinning in them is never taken away. Take away all other considerations and hindrances, which we will deal with later, and they would sin always willingly. Their faint endeavours to answer their convictions are far from a will of doing what is good. They plead, indeed, that they would leave their sins if they could, and they desire to do better than they do.

But it is the working of their light and convictions, not any spiritual inclination of their wills, which they intend by that expression: for where there is a will of doing good, there is a choice of that which is good for its own excellent sake, because it is desirable and suitable to the soul, and therefore to be preferred before anything that is contrary.

Now, this is not found in unbelievers. They do not, they cannot, so choose that which is spiritually good, nor is it so excellent or suitable to any principle that lies within them; only they have some desires to attain that end to which that which is good leads, and to avoid that evil which the neglect of it tends to. And these also are for the most part so weak and languid in many of them that they do not include them in any wish-list of things to do. Witness that luxury, sloth, worldliness and security that the generality of men are drowning in. But, in believers, there is a will to do good, a habitual disposition and inclination in their wills to what is spiritually good; and where this exists, it is accompanied with answerable effects. The will is the principle of our moral actions; and so to its prevailing disposition will the general course of our actions be suited. Good things proceed from the good treasure of the heart. (See Mt. 12:35; Lk. 6:45) Nor can this disposition be found in any except by its fruit. A will of doing good without doing good is just a pretence.

Fourthly, the state and activity of this law whenever the soul desires to do “good” — when “evil is present with me.” For what purpose, we will show later. The first thing to notice is the compulsion of what the Apostle calls the law of indwelling sin. It is indeed a law, a law that is taken either as a prescriptive rule, or as an effective ruling principle that appears to have the force of a law. In its first sense, it is a moral rule that directs and commands, and, in different ways, moves and regulates the mind and will in some things it requires or forbids. This is obviously the general nature and work of a law. Some things it commands, some things it forbids, with subsequent rewards and punishments, compelling us to do the first, and avoid the second.

Subsequently, in its secondary sense, this law is an inward principle, always moving and inclining us towards certain actions. The principle that resides in the whole of nature, moving and carrying it towards its own aim and end is called the law of nature. By analogy, every inner principle, whatever it is, that inclines and encourages us in our actions is itself a law. In Rom. 8:2, the powerful and effective working of the Spirit and grace of Christ in the hearts of believers is called “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. And, for that reason, the Apostle calls indwelling sin “a law”. It is a powerful and effective indwelling principle, inclining and urging us to do things that are agreeable and suitable to its own nature. This, and for no other reason, is the intention of the Apostle in using the expression; for although the term “a law” may sometimes intend a state and condition, yet, properly, it can denote nothing here but the main subject I am dealing with — the presence of indwelling sin.

Thus if it is used in this way, the meaning of the words should be, “I find that this is my present condition, this is my true state, that when I would do good, evil is present with me.” For although the word “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 believer, but is only used to express the nature or power of sin. Consider the words of verse 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 my mind” is undoubtedly none other but the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2), or the effective power of the Spirit of grace. But “the law”, as applied to sin, has a double meaning. When he says “I find then another law in my members” (23), he is referring to the being and nature of sin. When he goes on to say — “...bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members”, he is indicating

the power and effectiveness of sin. And both these meanings are implied in the use of the word “law” in Rom. 7:21.

Now, what we notice about this name (or term) “law” when it is attributed to sin is that there is a great power and strength in the remnants of indwelling sin in believers that works continually towards evil. There is a law in believers, yet it is not of them. Though its rule is broken, its strength weakened and impaired, and its root is being mortified (put to death), yet it remains a law that has great force and power. Where it is least felt, it is at its most powerful. Worldly men, when we speak of spiritual and moral duties, find themselves controlled by this law; they do nothing except from it and by it. It is within them a ruling and prevailing principle in all moral actions, and has reference to a supernatural and eternal end. I will not consider the law of indwelling sin in relation to those over whom it exercises the most power, but in relation to believers in whom its power is recognised and known.

Firstly, the Apostle describes how he discovered this law in himself — “I find then (or, therefore) a law”. (21) He *found* it. He had been told that there was such a law, for it had been preached to him. This convinced him that there was such a law of sin. But it was one thing to know in general that there was a law of sin, but it was another for him to experience the power of this law of sin in himself. This subject may be preached to all, and all that know the Scriptures acknowledge it, for it is described there. But there are few that recognise its working in themselves, else we would have more complaints about it than we do, and more struggling against it, and less evidence of it in the world. But this is what the Apostle affirms, not that the doctrine of indwelling sin had been preached to him, but that he had found it by experience in himself. “I find then a law” — I have experienced its power and strength. For a man to discover how sick he is, and the danger of its results, is quite a different thing from hearing about it in a lecture about the disease and its causes. And this experience is a confirmation of all divine truth in the soul. To know a thing truly is to know it for ourselves. The Word tells us here in Rom. 7 that this law of sin is found within ourselves.

Secondly, believers experience the power and strength of indwelling sin. They find it within themselves, and they find it to be a law. It produces its self-evidencing power within those who are on the watch for it. Those who know nothing of its power are completely under its dominion. Whosoever contends against it soon discovers that it is present as a great powerful force. He will find the stream to be strongest when he tries to swim against it, though whoever swims along with it is not aware of it at all.

Thirdly, the general disposition of believers, despite the indwelling of this law of sin, is also expressed here in verse 21 — “When I would do good”. There is a prevailing law that is “present” with them giving them a habitual inclination and desire to do “good”. This law within them is not the same law as it is in unbelievers. Believers are not averse to its power, nor do they find its commands morally repugnant. Grace has the sovereignty in their souls, and it is grace that gives them the “will to do good”. They “would do good” constantly. We find in 1 Jn. 3:9 the phrase “...doth not commit sin”, indicating that a believer does not make a trade of sin, and make it his business. Thus it is rightly said that a believer “doth not commit sin”, but “would do good”. This willingness to do good means to have a habitual inclination of the will to do what is good — things that are morally and spiritually good.

This, then, is the subject I am concentrating on; and that brings us to our next proposition.

Our **third** proposition states that through the work of grace in believers there is a constant and natural prevailing desire “to do good”), despite the power and strength of indwelling sin working to the contrary. This is the worst of their condition, and it distinguishes them from unbelievers in the worst of their condition. The will in unbelievers is completely under the power of the law of sin. The feeble opposition they make to sin, either in its root or branches, comes from the light of their consciences; but the will to sin in them is never taken away. Remove all other considerations and hindrances (which I will describe later), and they will sin willingly all the time. Their faint attempts to answer their convictions are far from a desire “to do good”. They plead, indeed, that they would leave their sins if they could, and they desire to do better in the future. But it is the working of their light and convictions, not any spiritual inclination of their wills that makes them say so. For when we speak of a will “to do good”, we suggest that there is a choice of doing good for its own sake because it is desirable and good for the soul, and is thus to be preferred to its opposite. Now, this is a state not found in unbelievers. They do not, they cannot, make a choice of doing what is spiritually good, nor is it desirable by any principle that lies within them. They have some desire to attain that end that doing good leads to, and to avoid that evil to which the neglect of doing “good” tends. And this desire is, for the most part, so weak and feeble in many of them that they put very little effort into it. Witness the luxury, sloth, worldliness, and security that most people are drowning in.

In believers, however, there is a real will to do good, a habitual disposition and inclination in their wills to do what is spiritually good. Wherever this occurs, it produces some excellent results. The will is the principle of our moral actions; so to this prevailing disposition, the general course of the actions of believers is peculiarly suited. Good things come from the good treasures of the heart. There is no stronger evidence of this prevailing disposition than its fruits. A will to “do good”, without doing good, is a pretence. (See Mt. 7:15-23)

The **fourth**, and last proposition, is this: that there remains (in the words of the Apostle) the presence of sin whenever a believer desires to do his duty — “... evil is present with me”. (21)

There are two things to be considered concerning the will “to do good” in believers:

1. It has a permanent base within them. They always desire to do what is good. And this preparation “to do good” is always present with them, as the Apostle says — “...for to will is present with me”. (18)

2. There are special times and seasons to exercise this good spiritual principle, a time when this or that good, or this or that duty, should be performed and accomplished due to the usual preparedness and inclination of the will. There are two things to which indwelling sin is opposed:

(1) To the gracious principle residing in the will, inclining us to do what is spiritually good. Sin is an opposing principle, inclined to evil, with an aversion to what is good.

(2) To the actual willing of this or that particular good — “...the one who wills to do good” — there is an opposition that comes in the form of another law — “Evil is present with me”. Evil is at hand, and is ready to oppose the actual fulfilment of the “good” aimed for.

Indwelling sin is most operational in its rebellion and inclination towards evil when the will to do “good” is specially active and inclined to obedience. And this sums up the battle that is going on in every believer who is also a sinner, when everyone who is the former is also the latter.

These, then, are the opposing principles, and opposing operators, in every believer. The principles are these: a will to do good on the one hand due to grace, and a law of sin on the other hand. The battle lines are drawn up in the expression “...evil is present with me” (the one who “would do good”). (21) And both these principles are further described in detail by the Apostle in Gal. 5:17 —

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that you would”.

Here is the main spring of the whole course of our obedience. In any acquaintance with these two principles and their actions you will find most of our wisdom. This teaching is next to the free grace of God in our justification through the blood of Christ, the only things with which the glory of God and our own souls are concerned. Here is the spring of our holiness and our sins, of our joys and troubles, of our refreshments and our sorrows. It is, then, our duty to get thoroughly acquainted with these things if we are to walk with God and glorify him in this world.

Hence, we see that great wisdom is required in the guiding and management of our hearts and ways before God. When the subjects of a country are caught up in civil war, unless the government exercises much wisdom in all things, the state will quickly fall into ruin. There are two opposing principles in the hearts of believers. And unless believers become spiritually wise, how will they be able to steer a straight course? Many people live in the dark about themselves all their days. Whatever else they know, they do not know themselves. They know their estates, how much money they have, and the condition of their bodies regarding their health and sickness. All these things they go into; but as for their inward nature, and the principles that relate to God and eternity, they know little or nothing. Indeed, too few labour at acquiring wisdom in this matter, and too few know themselves as they ought. Too few are acquainted with the evils of their own hearts as they should, and too few consider the demands of their obedience. Yet their eternal condition depends on this knowledge. This, then, is our wisdom; and it is a needed wisdom if we desire to please God, or avoid what is a provocation before the eyes of his glory.

We will also discover in our inquiry what diligence and watchfulness is required after conversion. There is a constant enemy in everyone’s heart; and what an enemy! We will see later how to expose him to the full. In the meantime, we rightly bewail the sad laziness and negligence that is found in most of those who profess the faith. They live and walk as though they intend to go to heaven, hoodwinked and asleep, as though they had no enemy to deal with. Their mistakes and foolishness will be fully shown as

we progress. What I concentrate on, with reference to what the Apostle has said in this matter, is this —

There is a great power and force in the remnants of indwelling sin in believers, constantly inclining them to work and move towards evil.

Awake, then, all of you in whose hearts abide little of the ways of God! Your enemy is not only upon you, as he was on Samson of old, but he is in you also. He is at work, using all the wiles of his force and craft that he can muster, as we shall see. Do you desire not to dishonour God and his gospel? Do you desire not to scandalise the saints and the ways of God? Do you desire not to wound your consciences and endanger your souls? Do you desire not to grieve the good and Holy Spirit of God, the author of all your comfort? Do you desire to keep your garments undefiled, and escape the terrible temptations and pollutions of the days in which we live? Do you wish to be excluded from the number of apostates in these latter days? Awake, then, and face this cursed enemy, the spring of all these and uncountable other evils, leading to the ruin of all the souls that are perishing in this world!

CHAPTER 2

Indwelling sin is a law — The sort of law it is — An inward principle that affects the heart — The power of sin is proved by experience

What we are discussing here is the power and strength of indwelling sin. The ways in which we can prove it are legion. I begin with its name in Scripture where it is described as “a law”. Says the Apostle, “I find then a law”. It is because of its power and strength that it is called “a law”. Yet we must not forget the principle of grace in believers which is called the “law of the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2), and which is also found in these words — “the exceeding greatness of his [God’s] power towards us-ward who believe”. (Eph. 1:19) So, where there is a law, there exists also a great power. Therefore, we shall see what its general characteristics are, and also what is special about it as a specific law.

In general, there are two characteristics for every law:

Firstly, it has *dominion* — “...the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth.” (Rom. 7:1); in other words, “It acts as lord over a man.” Where any law is in operation, it (*kurieuei*) = has dominion). It is properly the act of a superior, and it has in its nature the power to demand obedience by virtue of its dominion. Now, there is a twofold dominion, just as there is a twofold law. There is its moral, authoritative dominion over a man, and it has a real effective dominion in a man. The first relates to the law of God, the latter to the law of sin. The law of sin does not rightfully have moral dominion. It does not have a rightful dominion or authority over anyone; but it has taken what is equivalent to it. Therefore, it is said (*basileuein* = “to reign as a king”, Rom. 6:12), and exerts (*kurieuein* = “dominion” or “lordship”, Rom. 7:1), as any law does. But because it has lost complete dominion with regard to believers, of whom alone we speak, I will not say anything here about the full extent of its power. Yet, even in them, it is still a law, though not a law to them, as I said, but a law in them. And although it does not have a total, and, as it might be said, a rightful dominion over them in some things, it still exerts a domination of them. It is still a law in them, so that all its actions are the actions of a law. That is, it acts with power, though it has lost its complete power of ruling in them. Though it is weakened, its nature has not been destroyed. It is still a law, and is therefore powerful. And as its particular working (which we will consider later) stems from its name, so the use of the term teaches us in general what we should expect from it, and what effort it makes to continue its usual dominion.

Secondly, a law, as any law, has the power to compel those who hate it into doing what it demands. A law has rewards and punishments that accompany it which secretly prevail in those to whom they are proposed, although the things commanded might not be desirable. Generally, all laws have power over the minds of men due to the rewards and punishments that accompany them. Now, the law of sin is not short of this source of power, for it too has its rewards and punishments. The pleasures of sin are the rewards of sin, a reward that most men are prepared to lose their souls for. We have an example of this when the law of sin contended in Moses against the law of grace. He chose —

“...rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the

treasures in Egypt; for he had respect to the recompense of the reward.” (Heb. 11:25-26)

There was a contest in his mind between the law of sin and the law of grace. The motive on the part of the law of sin, by which it sought to win him over, and which prevails in most people, was the reward that it offered him, namely, that he could have the present enjoyment of the pleasures of sin. In this, it contended against the reward that comes with the law of grace, which reward is called here “greater riches”.

By a sad reward, the law of sin keeps the world obedient to its commands; and experience reveals to us its power in influencing the minds of men. It also has punishments with which to threaten those who want to cast off its yoke, by bringing evils, troubles, and dangers in the world to those who obey the gospel. Whatever hardships or violence are offered to the sensual part of our natures in the process of mortification, sin stresses the punishments that come by neglecting its commands. By these, it threatens the “fearful” who have no share in life eternal. (See Rev. 21:8) And it is hard to say by which of these — its pretended rewards, or its pretended punishments — it gains the most power, and in which of them lies its greatest strength.

With its rewards, it seduces men into sins of commission (as they are often called), into ways and actions that tend toward the satisfaction of its lusts. By its punishments, it induces men to fail in their duties, a course no less damaging than the former. By whatever means the law of sin has its greatest success upon and within the souls of men, it is hard to say, for they are seldom or never separated, and they are equally urgent within the same person. But this is certain, that by its promises of the pleasures of sin on the one hand, or by threats of the deprivation of all sensual pleasures and the infliction of bad things on the other, it exercises great power over the minds of men, and often over believers themselves. Unless a man is prepared to reject the reasons that present themselves from the one or other of these, there is no standing up to the power of the law of sin. The world falls before them every day. With what deceit and violence they are urged and impressed on the minds of men, we will see later, and also the advantages they take in dominating them. Look at most men, and you will find them totally at sin’s disposal by these means. Are the profits and pleasures of sin set before them? Nothing can stop them from grasping for them. Do difficulties and inconveniences appear when the gospel is preached? They will have nothing to do with Christ, for they are completely given up to the rule and dominion of this law. This, then, gives us an insight into the power and strength of indwelling sin as a natural law.

Next, we consider what kind of law the law of sin is, thus providing further evidence of the power of sin we are investigating. It is not an outward, written, commanding, directing law, but an indwelling, working, impelling, urging law. A law set before us is not half as powerful as 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 could have withstood it. Yes, an inbred law is bound to be powerful.

Let us take an example from the law of God that is the opposite of this law of sin. The law of God was at first inbred, and was natural to mankind. It was imbedded in the faculties of men, and was their guide both in being and in acting with reference to their living for God, and their glorifying of him. Hence, it had a special power over the whole soul to enable it to be completely obedient to God; yes, and it made obedience easy

and pleasant. Such is the power of an inbred law. And although this law, as to its rule and dominion, has now by nature been cast out of the souls of sinful men, yet its remaining sparks, because they are inbred, are very strong and powerful, as the Apostle declares in Rom. 2:14-15 —

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another”

After man’s “fall” into sin, God renewed this law, and wrote it on tablets of stone. But where now is the power of this law? As it is external and is demanded of men, is it able to command them to perform the things that it demands and requires? Not at all! God knew it would fail unless it became an internal law again; that is, until it was turned from a moral external rule into an inward real principle. With the New Covenant, God makes his law internal again, and implants it in the heart as it was at first. From that base, he intends to give it power to produce obedience in his people — “I will make a new covenant...I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts”. (Jer. 31:31-33) This is how we learn God’s holy ways, and of the insufficiency of an external Law in leading men to obedience. The written law 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; and it will have such power that it will surely make them my people, and keep them secure.”

Now, let us consider this law of sin. It is an indwelling law, as is seen in Rom. 7:17. “It is sin that dwelleth in me” (20-21), and is “present with me” (23), and “is in my members”. Indeed, it is so far into a man, that, in some sense, it is the man himself — “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.” (18) The flesh, which is the seat and throne of this law — indeed, which is this law — is, in some sense, the man himself, as grace also is the new man.

Now, from this consideration of it, that it is an indwelling law, inclining and moving to sin as an inward habit or principle, it possesses many ways of increasing its strength and furthering its power:

1. It always abides in the soul, and is never absent. The Apostle twice uses the expression “sin that dwelleth in me”. There it has its constant residence and home. If it came to the soul only at certain times, we might be able to perfectly accomplish much obedience in its absence. Indeed, as they deal with a usurping tyrant whom they intend to thrust out of the city, and shut the gates against him to prevent his return, so the soul must fortify itself against sin. But the soul is its home; there it dwells and never leaves. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, this law of sin is always in you, in the best that you can do, and in the worst. Few consider what a dangerous companion is always at home with them. When they are in company, when alone, by day or by night — all is one — sin is with them. There is a living coal continually on fire in their house, which, unless carefully watched, will set fire to the house and consume them. Oh, the insecurity of our poor souls! How little we think of this inbred enemy that never strays from its home! How little, for the most part, is the watchfulness of those that profess the faith enough to combat the danger of their dire condition!

2. It is always ready to apply itself to every action that serves its end. “It not only dwells in me”, says the Apostle, “but when I would do good, it is present with me.” There is a deeper meaning in that expression than a mere indwelling. Any lodger may dwell in a house, and yet not be always meddling in the affairs of the owner of the house (an illustration in keeping with the word “indwelling”, the word used by the Apostle). But it is so with this law, for it dwells in us, and is present with us in everything we do. Indeed, whenever we most earnestly desire to be rid of it, its sets upon us with ferocious violence — “...evil is present with me, the person who would do good.” (21) You pray, you listen to the preaching of the Word, you give to charity, you meditate, you desire to be faithful to God and love him, you do righteousness deeds, and you resist temptation. And what do you find? This troublesome, perplexing indweller is present in you, and will attack you all the more so that you cannot do what is “good” perfectly and completely. This is what the Apostle means in verse 18. Sometimes, by listening to their temptations, men stir up, excite, and provoke their lusts. No wonder, then, that they discover that their evil desires are ever present and active. But it is particularly so when we try to be rid of them. This law of sin “dwells” in us — that is, as a depraved principle it appeals to our minds in all their darkness and vanity, and to our feelings in all their sensuality, and to our wills, causing them to loathe what is “good”. Worse still, it is always putting itself upon us in our inclinations and in our feelings with suggestions of evil, at the time when we would most pleased to be rid of it.

3. Being an indwelling law, it applies itself to its work with great eagerness and ease as “the sin which doth so easily beset us”. (Heb. 12:1) It displays a great eagerness to apply itself to its work. It needs no doors to be opened to it, and no instruments to work for it. No soul can apply itself to any duty without exercising those faculties in which this law dwells. Must the understanding or the mind be applied to anything? Then there appears this law, in all its ignorance, darkness, vanity, foolishness and madness. Must the will be appealed to? Then there appears this law also, in the spiritual deadness, the stubbornness, and the root of obstinacy. Must the heart and emotions be set to work? Then there it is, with an inclination to the world and things of the present, and to sensuality with all manner of defilements. Hence, it is easy for the law of sin to insinuate itself into all that we do, to hinder all that is good, and to further all sins and wickedness. It has an intimacy with the soul; and so it easily ensnares us in all that we do. It has hold of those very faculties of the soul with which we desire to do something, whatever that might be — whether for good or evil. Now, all these advantages that it possesses stem from the fact that it is a law, an indwelling law, that is revealing its power and strength. It is always resident in the soul, controlling our every action with eagerness and ease.

This, then, is the law that the Apostle finds in himself. This is the name that he gives to this powerful and strong remnant of indwelling sin found in all believers. We must follow in the Apostle’ footsteps. There are many in the world who cannot see this law at work within them — those who, whatever they are taught in the Word, do not have a spiritual sense and experience of the power of indwelling sin, Thus they are wholly under its power. They have not found, as the Apostle did, that there is a darkness and foolishness in their minds because they are darkness, and darkness can discover nothing. They do not find in their hearts and wills a spiritual deadness and an aversion to God because they are dead in their trespasses and sins. They are at peace with their lusts by being in bondage to them. And this is the state of most people in the world, sadly making them despise all eternal concerns. Why is it that they follow and

pursue the world with so much zest, and so neglect heaven and life and immortality every day? Why is it that some pursue their worldly pleasures with delight? They drink and party, and have their sports, whatever anyone else might say. Why is it that so few live profitably under the Word, understanding little of what is said to them, practising even less what they do understand, and are never stirred up to respond to the mind of God in his appeals to them? It all comes from this law of sin, and its power that rules and holds sway in men. However, it is not unbelievers that we are dealing with in this book.

From what we have learnt already, it follows that if there is such a law of sin in believers, it is undoubtedly our duty to search it out. The more we discover its power, the less we will feel its effects. For example, it is no advantage to have a severe fever and not be aware of it, like a fire burning secretly in our house and not knowing it. The more we uncover this law of sin in us, the more we come to hate it (and ourselves). Proportionately, also, the more we find it out, the more earnestly we long for grace. All watchfulness and diligence in obedience hangs upon this discovery. On this one hinge — the discovery and experiencing of the power and strength of this law of sin — turns the whole course of our lives. Ignorance breeds stupidity, carelessness, laziness, false-security and pride — all of which the Lord abhors. Falling into great, open, conscience-searing and scandalous sins is all due to our need of a serious spiritual consideration of this law of sin. Inquire, then, how it is with your soul.

What have you discovered about this law? What experience do you have of its power and strength? Do you find it dwelling in you, ever present with you, exciting itself, and pouring out its poison with eagerness and ease at all times? Do you discover it in all your duties — in the one who “would do good”? What humiliation, what self-abasement, what intensity in prayer, what diligence, what watchfulness, this demands from your hands! What spiritual wisdom you need! What supplies of grace, what assistance of the Holy Spirit, must be found! I fear that few possess a watchfulness that is proportional to the danger.

CHAPTER 3

The seat or subject of the law of sin is found in the heart — What this means — Two properties of the heart when possessed by sin: unsearchable and deceitful — Where deceit originates — What to do about it

Having looked at the law of indwelling sin, and, in particular, its remnants in the believer, we are now convinced of its power and strength. We now proceed to consider particular examples of its power, and the advantages it has in its own nature. These are our three headings:

- A. Its seat and subject.
- B. Its natural properties.
- C. Its way of working — a major part of our investigation.

A. The seat and subject of this law of sin

Everywhere, the Scriptures consign it to the heart. It is there that indwelling sin has its special residence. It has invaded and possessed the very throne of God himself — “Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.” (Eccl. 9:3) This is their madness, and the root of all that madness in their lives.

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” (Mt. 15:19)

There are many outward temptations and provocations that excite us, and stir us to do these evils; but open up the vessel, as it were, and you will let out what is already stored up there. The root, rising, and stirring of these things is found in the heart. Temptations put nothing into a man, but only draw out what is already there. Hence, we have that summary and description of the whole working and results of this law of sin in Gen. 6:5 — “...every intent of the thoughts of his [man’s] heart was only evil continually”. See also Gen. 8:21.

The whole work of the law of sin, from its rising and its first coining of actual sin, is found here. And its seat, its workbench, is in the heart. Our Saviour calls it “the evil treasure of the heart” (Lk. 6:45) — “...an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth evil things.” This “treasure” is the prevailing evil principle of moral action in men. In contrast, at the beginning of the verse, our Saviour calls grace “the good treasure of his heart”, the prevailing principle in a good man, from which all that is “good” comes. “Treasure” is a principle constantly and abundantly exciting and stirring us up, consequently bringing forth actions conformable with its own nature.

It is also called a “treasure” because of its abundance. It is never exhausted, and is never wasted by spending it. Indeed, the more lavish we are with it, the more it increases! As men never run out of grace, but increase it by calling on it, so it is with indwelling sin. The more they exercise their grace in duties of obedience, the more grace is strengthened and increased; and, on the other side, the more men work at producing the fruits of their lust, the more indwelling sin becomes excited and

increases in them, feeding upon itself, swallowing its own poison, and growing stronger. The more men sin, the more they are inclined to sin. It is from the deceitfulness of this law of sin, considered later in more detail, that men persuade themselves that by this or that particular sin they will so satisfy their lusts that they will not feel the need to sin anymore. Every sin increases the principle of sin, and strengthens the habit of sinning. It is an evil treasure that increases with the doing of evil.

And where do we find this treasure? It is found in the heart, there laid up and kept securely. All the men in the world, all the angels in heaven, cannot dispossess a man of this treasure; so safely is it stored in the heart.

The “heart” in Scripture is used in various ways: sometimes for the mind and understanding, sometimes for the will, sometimes for the emotions, sometimes for the conscience, sometimes for the whole soul. Generally, it means the soul of man in all its faculties, not absolutely, but in every action involving moral decisions, and thus concurring in our doing good or evil. The “mind” inquires, discerns, and judges what is to be done and what is to be refused. The “will” chooses or refuses or avoids. The “emotions” like or dislike, long for, or have an aversion from, what is proposed to them. The “conscience” warns and determines. All these things together are called the “heart”. And, in this sense, we can say that the seat and subject of the law of sin is the heart of man.

We must also add that the Scripture, speaking of the heart as the principle of men’s good or evil actions, is usually connected with two other things that belong to its performance:

1. Whatever seems suitable and pleasing to the soul in the things that are done. When men take delight in, and are pleased with, what they do, they are said to do it heartily — that is, with their whole heart. Thus, when God himself blesses his people in love and delight, he says that he does it “with all my heart and with all my soul.” (Jer. 32:41)
2. Resolution and constancy in such actions. And this is also implied in the metaphor of “treasure”, from where men constantly take out the things they want or need or intend to use.

This, then, is the subject, the seat, and the dwelling place of this law of sin — the “heart”, which is the entire principle of moral action for doing good or evil. Here dwells our enemy; this is the fort, the citadel, of this tyrant, where it maintains its rebellion against God all our days. Sometimes it gains in strength, and is consequently more successful, sometimes it loses its strength, and is less successful. But it is always in rebellion as long as we live.

While we see in our passage in Rom. 7 a little of the strength and power of sin from its seat and subject, we should also consider one or two properties of the heart that greatly add to its success. It is like an enemy in war whose strength lies not only in his numbers and force of men or arms, but also in the unconquerable fortresses he possesses. And such is the heart to this enemy of God and our souls, as we shall see with the mention of two of them:

1. It is *unsearchable* — “...who can know it [the heart]? I, the Lord, search the heart”. (Jer. 17:9-10) The heart of man is impervious to all but God; hence he takes the honour of being alone in searching the heart and in fully declaring himself to be God; for this is another glorious attribute of his nature. We do not know the hearts of one another, and we do not know our own hearts as we should. Many there are who know the general bent and disposition of their own hearts, whether they are good or evil, sincere and sound, corrupt and evil; but no one knows all the secret intrigues, twists and turns, promptings and aversions of his own heart. Does anyone have a perfect measure of his own light and darkness? Can anyone know what prompting or aversion his will exercises, as an endless variety of actions propose themselves to it?

Can anyone understand the various waverings of his heart in times of affliction? Are the secret springs of his actions and refusals open to the soul of any man? Can anyone predict the decisions of his mind and will in certain circumstances, and how he reasons about, and reacts to, things desirable? All in heaven and earth, except the infinite all-seeing God, are utterly ignorant of these things. In this unsearchable heart dwells the law of sin; and much of its security, and, consequently, its strength, lies in the fact that it is past finding out. We struggle with an enemy whose secret strength we cannot fathom, nor can we trace it back to its secret den where it lurks. Hence, often enough, when we are ready to think that sin has been quite destroyed, after a while, we discover that it has only gone out of sight. It has bolt-holes and retreats in the unsearchable heart where we cannot follow. The soul may persuade itself that all is well when sin is safely hidden away in the darkness of the mind, but it is impossible to find it out; only light can do that.

You may think that the will of sinning has been taken away; but suddenly, it blazes up again from some unsearchable reserve whenever a vigorous temptation presents itself. Have you struggled with a lust, and gained a blessed victory over it with the help of the Holy Spirit in your present trial? You think it has been expelled; but what you find is that it has only retired out of sight. It lurks in the darkness of the mind, in the indisposition of the will, in the disorder and worldliness of our feelings, so that no eye can uncover it. The best of our wisdom is to watch out for its first appearance, catch it in its first underground convulsions and workings, and set ourselves up in opposition to it. To follow it into the secret corners of the heart, that we cannot do. It is true that relief is at hand — namely, he to whom the work of destroying the law of sin and the body of death in us, the Holy Spirit who comes with his axe to the very root. (Mt. 3:10; Lk 3:9) Everything in our unsearchable heart is “naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.” (Heb. 4:13) But we, who dutifully struggle with sin, must know that we have a formidable enemy to deal with.

2. The heart is *deceitful* — “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9) — incomparably so. There is great deceit in the dealings of men in the world; great deceit in their counsel and advice in reference to their affairs, whether private and public; great deceit in their words and actions. The world is full of deceit and fraud. But all this is nothing compared with the deceit that is found in a man’s heart towards himself; for that is the true meaning of the expression in this verse. Now, its incomparable deceit added to its unsearchableness provides the law of sin with a great advantage. I am not speaking of the deceitfulness of sin itself, but the deceitfulness of the heart where it dwells. “For there are seven abominations in his heart” (Prov. 26:25) — that is, not only many, but an absolutely complete number, as “seven” would

indicate. Such seven abominations are found together with the deceitfulness of sin; so he issues this warning — “Do not believe him”. It is deceit that causes us to draw back from trusting the heart. Now, this deceitfulness of the heart, which is its greatest advantage, results from the harbouring of sin.

(1) It abounds in contradictions so that it is impossible to deal with it rationally. Some men are contrary by nature, some because of the way they live. They are full of contradictions. Sometimes they appear to be very wise in their affairs, sometimes very stupid; sometimes very open, and sometimes very reserved; sometimes very easy-going, and sometimes very obstinate; sometimes very easy to appeal to, and sometimes very vengeful — all to a remarkable degree. Contrariness is generally counted as a bad thing, and it actually comes from a notable predominant lust. In respect of moral good or evil, duty or sin, contrariness is the hallmark of every heart — flaming hot, then freezing cold; weak, and then stubborn; obstinate, and then easy-going.

The heart of man is ready to contradict itself at any time. Now, you would think that knowing this about the heart you could get it under control; but it is quite otherwise, for no one knows what to expect from it. The result is disorder in all the faculties of the heart due to sin. God created them originally in perfect harmony and unity. The mind and reason were in perfect subjection and subordination to God and his will. The will answered in its choice of good; the mind approved; the emotions constantly and loyally followed the understanding and the will. The mind’s subjection to God is the mainspring of order and harmony for all the wheels of the soul. When the mind is disturbed by sin, the rest of the faculties act contrary to one another. They will no longer chose the good that the mind has discovered; the feelings no longer delight in what the will chooses. They all jar and interfere with one another. This came about after our falling away from God. Hence, sometimes the will leads, and judgement follows. Often enough, the feelings, that should follow the others, gets the sovereignty, and makes the whole soul captive to them. And hence it is, as I have already said, that the heart is full of many contradictions in its actions. Sometimes, the mind retains its sovereignty, and the affections are in subjection, and the will is ready for duty. This puts a good face on things. Then immediately the rebellion of the feelings, or the obstinacy of the will, takes over, and the whole scene is changed. This, I say, makes the heart deceitful above all things. It has no agreement in itself, is not constant to itself, is inconstant at the best of times and is unstable in conduct. But, if I may so say, it is a law to itself when often the feet lead and guide the body.

(2) Its deceit lies in the promises it makes at the first appearance of things; and this is true also concerning the first principle. Sometimes the emotions are touched and appealed to so that the whole heart promises to be happy, and all will be well. After a time, the whole thing is turned round. The mind, it appears, was not at all affected or touched; the emotions acted their part, but have now changed, and all the fair promises of the heart have gone by the way. Now, add this deceitfulness to the unsearchableness we mentioned previously, and we find that the difficulty of dealing effectively with sin in its seat and throne is greatly increased. Who can bear a deceiving and a deceived heart? Especially when we consider that the heart employs all its deceits in the service of sin, and contributes to its furtherance. All the disorder that is in the heart, all its false promises and fair appearances, only serve to promote the interests and advantages of sin.

Hence, God cautions his people to be on their guard lest their own hearts seduce and deceive them. Who can plumb the treacheries and deceits that lie in the heart of man? It is not for nothing that the Holy Spirit speaks of it as “deceitful above all things” — uncertain in what it does, and false in what it promises. Moreover, it works like this that, in the pursuit of our war against sin, we have not only the old work to go over and over, but we become involved in new work while we still live on in this world. There are always new strategies and deceits to deal with, as we would expect where the unsearchableness and deceitfulness of the law of sin are concerned.

There are many other properties of this seat and subject of the law of sin that could be mentioned, but that would divert us from our particular design. So I pass them over with a few remarks:

Firstly, never reckon that your work in struggling with sin, in crucifying and mortifying and subduing it, will ever come to an end. The place of its habitation is unsearchable; and when you think that you have thoroughly won the field, there will still be some reserve remaining that you did not reckon on. Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory, and many have been spiritually wounded after great successes against this ancient enemy. David was one of them. The temptation that surprised him into sin came after a long walk with God, and many deep experiences of him, and a careful keeping of himself from iniquity. And so it is that the profession of many has declined in their older age or riper years. They stopped mortifying their sin before the work came to an end. This is a point I will take up later.

There is no way for us to chase sin into its unsearchable lair except by pursuing it relentlessly. And that command of the Apostle is as necessary for those that are near the end of their race as those that are at its beginning — “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth”. (Colossians 3:5) Be at this work constantly as long as you live in this world. It is true that great ground is gained when the work is vigorously and constantly carried on. Sin is much weakened, and the soul presses on toward perfection. But the work is endless; I mean while we are in this world. If we stop, we will quickly see this enemy returning with new strength and vigour. The soul may be under some great affliction, yet continue in the sweet enjoyment of God, in consciousness of the sweetness of blessed communion with Christ. Then we might reach the conclusion that here is an end of sin, and that it is dead and gone forever. But do we not find the opposite in our experience? Do we not know that it has only retired into some unsearchable recess of the heart for the present, somewhat weakened in its power? Let us, then, reckon on this, that there is no way to do our work unless we are always doing it. And he who dies fighting in this warfare certainly dies a conqueror.

Secondly, does it not make its residence in what is unstable, inconstant and deceitful above all things? This calls for a perpetual watch against it. An open enemy that deals only in violence may give the other side some respite. You know where he is, and what he is doing, so that you may sleep quietly and without fear. But against adversaries that deal by deceit and treachery (long swords can stab at a distance) nothing will give us security except constant watchfulness. We can never be too jealous, too doubtful, too suspicious, or too watchful. The heart has a thousand wiles and deceits; and if we once let our guard down, we will be sure to be surprised. That is why we have so many repeated commands and cautions given to watch, to be circumspect, to be diligent,

and to be careful. There is no peace for those who have to deal with an enemy that is “deceitful above all things” unless they persist in such a frame of mind. All warnings given in this case are necessary, especially this one — “Remember not to believe your faculties”. Does the heart make fair promises? Do not rely on them, but say to the Lord Jesus Christ, “Lord, undertake for me.” Does the sun shine fair in the morning? Do not reckon on a fair day for clouds may cover the sky. Though our spiritual morning may present a fair appearance of serenity and peace, turbulent feelings can arise to cloud the soul with sin and darkness.

Thirdly, commit the whole matter with care and diligence to him who searches the heart to its depths, and knows how to frustrate its treacheries and deceits. In the firing line, we learn to do our duty; and here lies our safety. There is no treacherous corner of our heart that he cannot search out, and there is no deceit there that he cannot expose. This course David took, as he describes in Ps. 139. After he outlines the omnipresence (all-presence) and omniscience (all-knowledge) of God (1-10), he prays thus — “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (23-24). It is as if he were saying, “I know little of my deceitful heart, only I wish to be sincere. I will have no reserves of sin remaining there. Therefore, You, who are present in my heart, and know my thoughts long before, undertake this work, and perform it thoroughly; for You alone are able to do it.”

There are still other proofs for the power and strength of indwelling sin as a “law”, so we will continue the discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Indwelling sin is an enemy of God — It has great power — It allows no peace or rest — It sets itself up against God — It has an aversion to God and a propensity to evil — It is totally against all that is of God in the soul — Its enmity is constant

In the last chapter, we looked at the seat of the law of sin. Now we go on to view its nature, which also reveals its power and strength. But I will not say too much about this, as it is not my task here to expound in detail the nature of indwelling sin. In any case, this subject has been dealt with adequately by others writers. I will consider, therefore, only those matters that relate to the nature of indwelling sin wherever it is discovered. And this comes out in the words of the Apostle — "...the carnal mind is enmity against God". (Rom. 8:7)

The connection between "wisdom" and "flesh" is found in Col. 2:23. There we find it equivalent to "the law of sin", a very important point to make. And what does he say about it? Indeed, it is "enmity against God"). It is not only an enemy — for, in that case, there might be the possibility of reconciling it with God — but it is *enmity* itself, and so is not capable of accepting any peace terms. Enemies may be reconciled, but enmity cannot; indeed, the only way to reconcile enemies is to destroy the enmity. That is what the Apostle means when he tells us — "We, who were enemies, are reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10), a work compassed and brought about by the blood of Christ, thereby reconciling the greatest of enemies. But when he comes to speak of enmity itself, there is no way of dealing with it except by abolishing it and destroying it — "...having abolished in his flesh the enmity". (Eph. 2:15)

And this we must say about enmity, that every part and parcel of it, the least degree of it that can possibly remain in anyone, remains the same in its nature and enmity. Indwelling sin may not be so strong and powerful in operation as the time when it had more life and vigour, but it is enmity still. As every drop of poison remains poison and will infect, and as every spark of fire is fire and will burn, so is every part of the law of sin, the last and the least of it. It is always enmity, and it will poison and burn. While any little remnant remains, it is always the same in essence. Our Apostle, who could be considered to have made greater progress in subduing sin than anyone on earth, yet, after all, cried out for deliverance as if from an irreconcilable enemy — "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24)

Firstly, the least of its actions, the most imperceptible of its workings, are the actions and working of enmity. Mortification can abate in its force, but it cannot change its nature. Grace changes the nature of man, but nothing can change the nature of sin. Whatever is done to sin, nothing happens to change it, for it remains enmity still. This, then, is our state and condition. Consider the nature of God — "God is love". (1 Jn. 4:8) He is ever 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 its wonderful fruits. It is because of his love that we are what we are, and in which all our future hopes and expectations are wrapped up. Yet against God we carry within us an enmity all our days, an enmity that has this in its nature, that it is incapable of cure or reconciliation. Destroyed it may be, and it will be, but cured it cannot be. If a man has an enemy that is too strong for him,

as David did with Saul, he could go in the same way as he did. Consider what it is that provokes this enemy against him, and so work hard to remove the cause, and thus make peace —

“If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering: but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the Lord.” (1 Sam. 26:19)

With earthly enemies, whether dealt with by God or man, there is always hope of peace. But when a man has enmity itself to deal with, nothing can be expected except continual fighting until the destruction of one party. If it is not overcome and destroyed, it will overcome and destroy the soul; and that is why it is so powerful. It can admit of no terms of peace or reconciliation. There may be peace where there is no reconciliation, such as exists when a truce is declared. But, with this enemy, we can obtain neither the one nor the other. It is never quiet for it is never conquered; and that is what Paul was complaining about. It is in vain for a man to expect any rest from his lusts until he is dead. Some, in the turmoil of their corruptions, seek for peace by giving in to them. But the Apostle commands — “...make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts”. (Rom. 13:14)

You cannot put out a fire with wood and oil! Not all the fuel in the world, not all the fabric of the creation that is combustible, can satisfy the fire of indwelling sin, but rather it increases it. To satisfy sin by sinning is useless, for it only inflames and increases it. If a man gives part of his goods to an enemy, it may satisfy him; but enmity cries out for everything, and is no more satisfied than if it had received nothing at all — like the lean cattle that were always hungry, even after devouring the plump cattle. (See Gen. 41) You cannot bargain with a fire to take only so much of your house; you can do nothing but extinguish it. It is like a contest between a wise man and a fool — “...whether [the fool] rage or laugh, there is no peace.” (Prov. 29:9) Whatever mood he is in, he will always be troublesome. It is like that with indwelling sin. Whether it becomes violent, as it does in temptation, it will act outrageously in the soul; or whether it seems to be pleased or content or satisfied, it is all one, for there is no peace to be had with it or by it. If it had another kind of nature, some way might be found to pacify it; but, seeing it consists of enmity, all the relief the soul has is in its ruin.

Secondly, indwelling sin is not only said to be “enmity”, but “enmity against God”. What a great Enemy it has chosen to war against! It is described in the Bible many times as our enemy — “...abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). If it is an enemy of the soul, it must be our enemy. Sometimes it is described as an enemy to the Spirit who is in us —

“For the flesh lusts (or, fights) against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another”. (Gal. 5:17)

It fights against the Spirit (or the spiritual principle in us), to conquer it. It fights against our souls to destroy them. It has special designs on our souls, and wars against the principle of grace that is in us. But its chief object is God: it is “enmity against God”. It works to oppose grace; so, consequently, it opposes our souls, something more than it intends. But its main desire is to oppose God — God the Lawgiver, God the Holy One, God the author of the gospel, and the way of salvation by grace, not by works. This is the target of the law of sin. Why then does it oppose duty, so that the “good”

we wish to do we neglect? Why does it make the soul worldly, indisposed, unbelieving, unspiritual, weary, and erring? It is because of its enmity against God, the One whom the soul desires to have fellowship with. It has as it were, from Satan, the same command the Assyrians had from their king —

“Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel.” (1 Kings 22:31)

It is no small thing for sin to range itself, not against the King of Israel, but against God himself, the King of Israel. There lies the secret why it is opposed to all that is good — because the good comes from God. When an easy road, a business, a set of formal rules is set up, where true communion with God is not aimed at — as is the way of men in most of their superstitious worship — opposition from the law of sin will be very weak, easy, and gentle. When the Assyrians mistakenly assaulted Jehoshaphat, and found that it was not Ahab, they turned away from pursuing him. So it is that whenever there is a show and appearance of the worship of God, sin may oppose it at first, but when duty cries out in the heart that God is not there, sin turns away to seek out its proper enemy elsewhere. Hence, many poor creatures spend their days in sad, wearisome superstitions without any show of reluctance from within, but it will not allow us to watch with Christ in a spiritual way for one hour. It is no wonder that men fight with worldly weapons to defend their external superstitious worship when they find no opposition within against it; for God is not there, and the law of sin makes no opposition to anything where God is not present.

This, then, is our state and condition. All opposition that arises from us to anything that is spiritually good, whether from the darkness of the mind, or from the aversion of the will, or from apathy in the feelings, puts up many an argument before the soul against pursuing after the good, for it hates God. The enmity is against him. This consideration should surely encourage us to a watch constantly and carefully over ourselves.

Indwelling sin behaves in such a way as to encourage anything that is the least bit sinful, and it also displays an aversion to God. It is God himself who is the object of its hate. It is true that the pleasures and the wages of sin greatly influence the sensual, worldly feelings of men; but it is the holiness and authority of God that excites sin to rise up, for it hates the yoke of the Lord. “You have been weary of me” (Is. 43:22), says God to sinners; and that in the midst of their many religious duties. Every act of sin is a fruit of being weary of God. Job tells us what lies at the bottom of the heart of sinners — “Yet they say to God, ‘Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of your ways.’” (Job 21:14; 22:17) Here is the ground-swell of sin’s enmity to him, and its aversion to him. Here lies the real nature of every sin — opposition to God, a casting away of his yoke, and a breaking off from the dependence every creature ought to have on the Creator. And the Apostle gives us the reason — “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7) — namely, “for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be.” It never is, nor ever will, nor ever can be, made subject to God, for its whole nature consists in opposition to him. The soul where it dwells may be subject to the law of God, but the law of sin sets itself up in opposition to it, and refuses to be in subjection.

To go a little further into the power and strength of this law of sin from this property of its nature — its enmity to God — we must consider one or two things:

1. It is universal. Some people like to split things up, and say, “This is about one thing, and that is about another.” It is not so here; the enmity is absolute and universal, as are all enmities grounded in the nature of the thing itself. Such enmity is against anything that is connected with the thing it hates. So it is with the enmity of indwelling sin, for:

- (1) It is universally against all that is of God.
- (2) It is universal in every part of the soul.

(1) It is universally against all that is of God. When there is something of God — his nature, his attributes, his mind or his will, or his law or gospel — or any obedience due to him such as communion with him, in our actions, then we might find a shelter and hiding place against the enmity of sin. But the enmity is directed at God, and all of God, and everything to do with God. It is not subject to the God’s law, nor any part or parcel, word or stroke, of it. It opposes anything that is of God. Sin is enmity to God, and therefore to all of God; not only his goodness, not only his holiness, not only his mercy, not only his grace, not only his promises. There is nothing of God that it does not oppose, not excluding any private or public duty in the heart. And the nearer (if I may say so) anything is to God, the greater is the enmity sin displays. The more of spirituality and holiness is in anything, the greater is the enmity of sin. Whatever has most of God in it has most of its opposition. Concerning those in whom this law is foremost, God says —

“Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof”. (Prov. 1:25)

It is not this or that part of God’s counsel, his mind, or his will, that sin opposes, but all of his counsel. Whatever he calls for, or guides to, to every particular, indwelling sin is opposed. No one should think it very strange that sin maintains an enmity against God’s law, for it comes to judge it and condemn it. But it maintains a greater enmity against him in his gospel, where he offers mercy and pardon as a deliverance from sin, only because more of the glorious properties of God’s nature, more of his excellence and condescension, is revealed there than in anything else.

(2) It is universal in *all* of the soul. If the law of sin had contented itself with subduing just one faculty of the soul — if it had left just one at liberty, any one emotion free from its yoke and bondage — it might possibly have been more easily opposed or subdued. But when Christ comes into the soul with his spiritual power to conquer it for himself, he finds no quiet landing-place. He can set foot on no ground except what he must fight for and conquer. Not the mind, not the emotions, not the will, everything is secured against him. And when grace makes its entrance, sin still dwells in all its coastlands. If anything in the soul were given perfect freedom and liberty, there a stand might be made to drive it out from all the rest of its strongholds. But it is universal, and it makes war in the whole soul. The mind has its own darkness and self-esteem to wrestle with, and the will its own obstinacy and perverseness. Each feeling has its own troublesome aversion to God, and also its sensuality to deal with, so that full relief cannot be found. We have, as it were, our hands full at home. Hence it is that our knowledge is imperfect, our obedience weak, our love perverse, our godly fear impure, and our

delight not free and noble. But I must not go on, for I could give abundant evidence how diffused this principle of enmity against God is throughout the whole soul.

(3) We must add to this the constancy of indwelling sin. It is constant to itself, it never wavers, and it never thinks of yielding or giving up, despite the powerful opposition that comes to it in the law and gospel, as we will see later.

This, then, is the third evidence of the power of sin from its nature and properties, using just one example — namely that it is “enmity against God”, and is therefore universal and constant. If we went into a full description of this, it would require more space and time than is available for the whole subject. However, what I have said so far should give you an idea of its menace, and stir us up to watchfulness. What is more sorrowful than the thought that we carry about us constantly what is enmity against God, and that not in this or that particular, but in all that God is, and in all in which he has revealed himself? I cannot say that all is well with those who have not yet discovered this state of affairs. It is well indeed for those in whom indwelling sin has been weakened and its power diminished. But whenever certain ones say that indwelling sin is not in them, they are only deceiving themselves, and “there is no truth in them.” (1 Jn. 1:8)

CHAPTER 5

A further exposure of sin as enmity against God — Its aversion to what is good — Some ways of preventing the effects of indwelling sin

Having considered something of the nature of indwelling sin with reference to its power, we now move on to its actions and operations. Power is an act of life, and operation is the presence of life. We can only know if a thing is alive by its effects and actions. Strong and powerful operations indicate a powerful and vigorous life. Such are the operations of this law of sin, which demonstrate its power. We have already said this about its nature: that it consists of enmity. Now, there are two ways in which this enmity manifests itself:

- (1) Firstly, in its aversion,
- (2) Secondly, in its opposition.

Concerning its aversion, our Saviour, describing the enmity that existed between himself and the teachers of the Jews, might have pointed to the prophet, who declared, “I dismissed the shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.” (Zech. 11:8) Where there is mutual enmity, there is mutual aversion, loathing, and abhorrence. So it was with the Jews and the Samaritans — they were enemies, and hated each another. (Jn. 4:9) Concerning its opposition, or contending with one another, this also is a product of enmity. “But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; so he turned himself against them as an enemy, and he fought against them.” (Is. 63:10) Here, Isaiah is speaking of God and his people. Now, where there is enmity, there is fighting, which is the natural result of it. Both these effects are found in this law of sin.

1. Firstly, then, its *aversion*. There is an aversion in indwelling sin to God and anything to do with God, as we saw when we were considering the enmity itself; so we do not need to add more here. All reluctance to duty relating to our communion with God, all weariness in that duty, all worldliness or formality connected with the performance of duty, spring from this source. The wise man warns us against this evil — “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.” (Eccl. 5:1) Effectively, he meant, “Have you any spiritual duty to perform, and do you wish to have communion with God? Look to yourself, and take care of your feelings; for they will wander about because of their aversion to what your mind has decided to do.”

There is no good that we would do where we do not meet with this aversion exerting itself — “...evil is present with me, the one who would do good.” (Rom. 7:21) Paul is saying in effect, “At any time, at all times, whenever I want to do anything that is spiritually “good”, there sin is, hindering me and obstructing me from doing my duty. It hates and loathes any “good” that I would do, and it keeps me from doing it whenever possible.” In those in whom it prevails, we come at last to that state described in Ezek. 33:31-32 —

“And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth

they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.”

Indwelling sin permits an external, bodily presence in the worship of God, for it is not concerned with that, but it keeps the heart away from it. Some pretend that they do not find this condition in themselves, and have freedom to attend all the duties of obedience that are required. But I fear that this pretended liberty is found, on examination, to arise from one or both of these causes:

Firstly, an ignorance of the true state and condition of their souls and their inner man in their actions toward God. They do not know their true state, and, therefore, should not be believed in what they are reporting. They are in the dark, and know neither what they are doing nor where they are heading. It is like the Pharisee in the Temple who knew so little in this matter, and boasted of his duties towards God —

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”
(Lk. 18:10-14)

Secondly, it may be that whatever duties of worship or obedience they perform through lack of faith and an interest in Christ they have no real communion with God. If that is so, then sin puts up little opposition to their duties. Now, I am writing to those whose hearts are exercised by these things. So if, while you complain and groan for deliverance from sin, and, in contrast, others cry out, “Stand away, we are holier than thou!” (Is. 65:5), you must be willing to bear with your condition, knowing that your salvation is secure, though the way is difficult. And being willing to see your own dangers, you will avoid the ruin into which others fall.

Let us now consider this aversion in such acts of obedience that relate to God and the soul. In public duties, there may be other considerations to take into account, and they may be so influenced by custom and usage that a true judgement of them cannot be relied on. But let us look at private duties such as prayer and meditation, and such like, or else extraordinary duties, or duties to be performed in an extraordinary manner.

(1) It is in the feelings that aversion and loathing often manifest themselves at first. A secret conflict in them arises concerning our close and gracious dealing with God, unless the hand of God by his Spirit works strongly in our soul. Even when conviction, a sense of duty, a dear and real esteem of God and communion with him, hurries the soul into the closet for prayer, yet, if there is no regular vigorous power at work in the spiritual life, a secret aversion will appear even in the very duty. Indeed, sometimes there is a violent disinclination so that the soul would do anything, and look for any diversion, rather than apply itself to whatever the inner man thirsts for. It becomes weary before it starts, and complains (in my own words), “When will this work be over?”

At this point, God and the soul are immediately alerted, and a great victory is longed for in order that we might do what we wish, though we fall very short at that moment.

(2) It is found in the mind also. When we address ourselves to God through Christ, we must do as Job says — “I would put my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.” (23:4) We must be able to plead with him, as he is pleased that we should. We are encouraged from these words of the prophet, where the Lord says — “Put me in remembrance; let us contend together; state your case”. (Is. 43:26) That is why the Church is called upon to come to God with words and arguments — “Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, ‘Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously’: so will we render the calves of our lips.” (Hos. 14:2)

To sum up, let your mind be filled with those considerations that prevail with God, and be ready to plead them, using them in the most spiritual manner, and to the best advantage. Now, do you find it difficult to get into such a frame of mind? Are you clear, steady, and constant in your duty? Can you draw out and make use of the store of promises and experiences in your mind? The mind begins, then wanders, then flags — all due to this secret aversion to communion with God proceeding from the law of indwelling sin. Some complain that they find meditation hard work — they cannot bend their minds to it. I confess that the main cause of this lies in a lack of understanding of the duty, and how the soul is managed. I will, therefore, speak about this matter later. This secret enmity lies at the root of our failure in both our minds and our feelings.

Others are forced to live with family and public duties, which bring them little benefit and success in private ones. And here begins the apostasy of many who profess the faith, and is the source of many foolish and worldly opinions. As they become aware that this aversion in their minds and hearts is constant in their private spiritual duties; and not knowing how to conquer their difficulties with the help of God, they are forced to neglect them — at first, partially, then totally. Next, they lose all sensitivity, and open the door to many sins and lusts, and then proceed to a full and final apostasy. I am aware there are many who have fallen away from the faith — and there are many of them in these days — whose entrance into the foolish sin of backsliding came about in two ways. **Firstly**, through some gross and notorious sin that blunted their consciences, tainted their feelings, and took away all delight in the thought of having anything more to do with God. **Secondly**, through the neglect of private duties, resulting from an utter weariness of fighting against the powerful aversion that they discover within themselves. And this, through the wiles of Satan, produces many foolish and worldly opinions of living for God without performing any duties that have to do with communion with him. And we find that after men have, for a while, choked and blinded their consciences with this lie, they then fall into cursed wickedness or worldliness or foolishness. The reason for this is that, giving quarter to the law of sin in the least degree, they strengthen it. To leave it alone is to let it grow; to fail to conquer it is to be conquered by it.

As it is with private duties, so it is with public duties. What strivings, strugglings and pleadings arise in the heart concerning their spiritual nature! Indeed, to tell you the truth, the mind and heart become entangled in things that are new and strange to them, such that at better times they would hardly give a second thought to. But give indwelling sin the smallest advantage, and if it is not carefully watched, it will bring you to peculiar and unexpected ends. Briefly, then, do not let your soul neglect any duty,

whether private or public, that is called good. Do not carelessly give entry to anything that secretly insinuates itself into your mind, lulling it into a false sense of security, causing you to neglect the things of God. Then you will discover something of the power, and some of the effects, of this aversion. It begins with a feeling of unwillingness and indisposition then goes on by entangling the mind and heart in other things, and ends, if not prevented, with a weariness of God. This was God's complaint concerning his people — "But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel." (Is. 43:22) They ceased from duty because they were weary of God.

Now, this subject of aversion is so important for professing Christians in their walk with God that we must not pass it over without giving some directions as to how to struggle against it and oppose it. You realise that I am not giving directions on how to mortify indwelling sin — a work done alone by the Spirit of Christ by virtue of our union with him — "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. 8:13-14) But I will say something about our particular duty in dealing effectively with this special evil effect of indwelling sin, where we need the wisdom of faith.

(a) The greatest way of preventing the fruits and effects of this aversion is to keep the soul in a good and holy condition. This will weaken the whole law of sin in all its properties, and particularly in the case of aversion. It is this condition alone that enables us to say with the Psalmist — "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast". (Ps. 57:7) It is impossible to keep the heart in a constant holy condition in any one duty unless it is so in every duty. Once sin-entanglements get a hold in any one thing, they will intrude in the soul in everything. A constant fulfilment of all duties is the only way. Let not him who neglects public duties think that all is well in his private ones. On the contrary! There is a unity in obedience; break one part, and you will affect the whole. Our wounds come from a neglect of the whole, as David informs us —

"Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."
(Ps. 119:6)

A universal respect for all of God's commands is the only way to avoid shame, for there is nothing that makes us more ashamed than the shocking failures of our hearts in connection with our spiritual duties.

(b) Work hard to prevent the very beginning of this aversion. Let grace go before in every duty. We are directed to "be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." (1 Pet. 4:7) As it is with prayer, so it is with every duty. So watch, and take care that you are not hindered from within or without in the fulfilment of this duty. Watch out for temptations, and oppose them. Watch out for the aversion that comes from sin, and thus catch it in time. As we should not give place to Satan, so it is with sin. If it is not caught at its first attempt, it will prevail. This is my advice: whatever good you would do, as the Apostle says, you will find evil present with you. So do not allow it to parley with the soul, and insinuate its poison into the mind and heart, but combat it with a vigorous, holy, stirring up of the grace that comes with the performance of that duty. Let Jacob come first into the world, or, if prevented by the passage of Esau, let him take hold on his brother's heel to overthrow him, and obtain the birthright. When Peter

cried out to the Saviour, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee", he immediately replied, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (Mt. 16:22-23) We must do the same, and say, "Get along, you law of sin, you present evil!" And it will have the same effect for us. Bring grace, then, into your duty, and be quick to rebuke sin.

2. Concerning the *opposition* of indwelling sin, though it may do its worst, you may be sure that sin, in its opposition to spiritual things in a believer, will never prevail to a conquest. Make sure that it does not tire you out by its persistence, or drive you away from your duty by its determination. Do not faint at its show of opposition. Take the Apostle's advice —

"We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful". (Heb. 6:11-12)

Hold out, using the same diligence. There are many ways in which men are driven away from a constant holy performance of their duties, and all of them dangerous, if not damaging, to the soul. Some come by way of business, others from company, others from the power of temptation, and yet others from the discouragement of the strength of sin. But there is nothing more dangerous than this: when the soul gives up partly or fully through weariness from the aversion of sin to communion with God. This is arguing that the soul in giving itself up to the power of sin, unless the Lord breaks this snare of Satan, it will bring us to our ruin. Our Saviour's instruction is this: "...men always ought to pray and not lose heart". (Lk 18:1)

Opposition will arise against us, and there is nothing so bitter and keen as that from our own hearts. If we lose heart, we will perish. The Apostle declares, "...lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls". (Heb. 12:3) Such discouragement comes with weariness in fighting the aversion that is at work in our hearts. It must be avoided if we would not perish. The caution is found also in Rom. 12:12 — "...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer"; and, in relation to sin, in Rom. 6:12 —

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

To cease from duty, in part or in whole, through the aversion of sin to anything spiritual, is to give sin the rule, and obey its evil desires. Do not give in, but hold on during the conflict. Wait on God and you will prevail —

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (Is. 40:31)

Now, whatever proves difficult at this moment will increase in difficulty if we give way to it. But if we remain firm, we will prevail. The mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

The application of these truths concerning indwelling sin in us is as follows:

(1) Carry within you a constant, humbling sense of this deadly aversion to spirituality that remains in our nature. When men discover its power, what greater argument is there for walking humbly with God? After all that God has revealed to us — his kindness granted to us, and his doing good and not evil for us in all things — can a heart of unkindness and unbelief still remain in us causing us to feel aversion to communion with him? Should not the thought of it cast us down to the dust! What shame and self-abhorrence we should feel all our days! What have we found in God, whenever we came near him, that we should treat him like this? What iniquity did we find in him? Has he been in a wilderness away from us, or gone into a land of darkness? Did we ever lose anything by drawing near to him? Indeed not! Is it not here that we find our rest and peace? Is not he the spring and fountain of all our mercies, and of all desirable things? Does he not bid us welcome when we come to him? Have we not received from him more than heart can conceive or tongue express?

(a) What ails, then, our foolish and wretched hearts, to harbour such a cursed and hidden dislike of him and his ways? Let us be ashamed and astonished that this should be, and walk humbly all our days. Let us carry this thought about with us in the most private of our thoughts. And as this is a duty in itself, acceptable to God who delights to dwell with those that have a humble and contrite spirit, so it has great power in weakening the evil of indwelling sin.

(b) Work hard to set your minds on the beauty and excellence of spiritual things, and present them as lovely and desirable to your soul. Then you will find that this cursed aversion of sin will become weakened. It goes without saying that the soul of man will never be drawn cheerfully to the worship of God unless there is a beauty and attraction in the duty. Hence, when people lose all spiritual sense and savour of the things of God, to supply this need of their souls, they invent outward pomp and show in their worship. Let us forsake beautiful images, paintings, pictures, and I know not what by way of vestments and ornaments and things they call “the beauties of holiness”!

Therefore, the mind of man must see a beauty, something desirable, in the worship of God, or it will not delight in it, and aversion will win. So let the soul labour to acquaint itself with the spiritual beauty of obedience, of communion with God, and of all duties connected with its fellowship with him. Let us revel with delight in them. It is not my present task to speak of the origins of that beauty and desirability be found in spiritual duties connected with our relationship with God. Nor will I stop to write of the eternal spring of all beauty, Jesus Christ the love, desire, and hope of all nations. Not do I have the space to write in this book of the Holy Spirit, that great beautifier of souls, rendering us by his grace all glorious within, and making our souls acceptable to God in truth and holy worship. But what I will do here is to acquaint the soul thoroughly with such things that in a wonderful way will weaken our aversion due to sin.

CHAPTER 6

How this enmity against God puts up such a great opposition — First, it lusts — What is the lust of sin? — How it surprises the soul into giving way to temptation — Second, it fights and wars in its rebellion against the law of grace, and in its assaults on the soul

We have already considered how this enmity produces an aversion to spiritual things, as also ways in which the soul can limit its long-term and short-term effects.

We have been discussing the **second** way in which indwelling sin exerts itself in opposition. Here are some further thoughts. Enmity will oppose and contend with anything with which it is at enmity. That is true of things both natural and moral. As light is to darkness, and heat is to cold, so virtue and vice are opposed to each other. It is so with sin and grace, as the Apostle says — “These are contrary to one another”, **Allh>loiv ajnti>keitai** (allélois antikeitai) . (Gal. 5:17) They are in a position of mutual opposition — and that constantly and continually. Now, there are two ways in which enemies face the opposition — firstly, by force, and, secondly, by fraud and deceit. When the Egyptians became enemies of the children of Israel, and were in contention with them, Pharaoh said — “... come, let us deal wisely (or rather, cunningly and subtly) with them”. (Ex. 1:10) As Stephen said: “This man [Pharaoh] dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers” with “all manner of fraudulent sophistry.” (Acts 7:19) And to this deceit, he added force to his grievous oppression.

This is the way of it wherever there is a prevailing enmity; and both methods are used by the law of sin in its enmity against God and our souls. I begin with the first method: its actions by way of force, in open, downright, opposition to God and his Law, or the good that a believing soul would do in obedient response to God and his Law. In this whole matter, we must be careful to steer the right course, taking Scripture as our guide, and spiritual reason and experience as our fellow travellers. There are many rocky shelves on our course that should be diligently avoided, so that no one considering these things should be troubled without cause, or comforted without a sure foundation.

So this is the first way in which indwelling sin expresses its enmity in opposition by force or strength. There are four things that reveal the many degrees of its progress and procedure in its enmity:

First, its general inclination — it “lusteth”. (Gal. 5:17)

Second, its particular way of contending — it “fights” or “wars”. (Rom. 7:23; Jas. 4:1; 1 Pet. 2:11)

Third, its success in war — it “brings the soul into captivity to the law of sin”. (Rom. 7:23)

Fourth, its growth, and rage in success — it becomes “mad” like an enraged enemy. “This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there

is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.” (Eccl. 9:3)

1. Firstly, generally, it is said to lust — “...the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh”. (Gal. 5:17) This word describes the nature of the opposition the law of sin puts up against God, and the rule of his Spirit or grace in those who believe. Even the least degree of that opposition is included here. When it does anything, it “lusteth”. Just as burning is the general action of fire, whatever else it does, it burns, so the law of sin, when it does anything, it “lusteth”. Hence, all the actions of the law of sin are called “the lusts of the flesh”. Gal. 5:16 states — “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” Rom. 13:14 says — “...make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil lusts thereof.” Nor should we think that these lusts of the flesh are those only in which men act out their sensuality in riots, drunkenness, uncleanness, and so on. But they take in all the actions of the law of sin in all the faculties and feelings of the soul. Thus, in Eph. 2:3, we have mention of the desires, the will, or the “lusts of the mind”, as well as those of the “flesh”. The mind, the most spiritual part of the soul, has its own lusts no less than those of the sensual appetite, which might properly be called the “flesh”. And, as a result of these lusts, there are “defilements of the spirit” as well as of the “flesh”. (See 2 Cor. 7:1) That includes the mind and understanding, as well as the appetite and feelings, not forgetting the body that does their bidding.

At the centre of this storm is our aim to be holy —

“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.” (1 Thess. 5:23)

Yes, the word “flesh” indicates the whole of the old man, or the law of sin, as in Jn. 3:6 — “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” That is, it is all “flesh”, and nothing else; and whatever remains of the old nature in the new man is still “flesh”. And this flesh lusts because the law of sin does — a law that is at the root of all opposition to God. This opposition comes out in two ways:

(1) In a secret inclination to all evil, and is always. While a man remains in his natural state, fully under the power and dominion of this law of sin, the Bible says - “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”. (Gen. 6:5) It can think, fashion, find, and produce only what is evil because this habitual predisposition to evil that comes from the law of sin which is in control of him absolutely. In the heart, it acts like a poison without any remedy to counteract its venom. It is like a contagious disease that infects whatever it touches. And wherever its power and dominion is broken, it still keeps its own nature, and retains a habitual inclination to evil, when it is said to “lust”.

However, we must distinguish between the habitual frame of the heart and the natural propensity (or, habitual inclination) of the law of sin in the heart. This habitual inclination of the heart is governed by any principle that gains sovereign rule over it. In the believer, it is towards good, towards God, and towards holiness and obedience. His heart is not habitually inclined to evil by the remnants of indwelling sin that remain;

but this law of sin in his heart displays a constant, habitual inclination to evil in and of itself. This, the Apostle meant when he said that it was present with him — “...evil is present with me” (Rom. 7:21); that is, always, and for its own end, which is to lust after sin. Indwelling sin is like a river. While its springs and fountains remain open, and water continually flows into its streams, if you build a dam, it will rise and grow until it overflows the banks around it. But when the waters dry up to some degree in the springs, then what remains can be more easily managed and restrained. But while there is any running water, it will exert pressure on whatever impedes its progress because it is in its nature to do so. Wherever it finds a place to flow, it will flow. So it is with indwelling sin. While its springs and fountains remain open, it is silly for men to build against it a dam of convictions, resolutions, vows, and promises. This may check it for a while, but the flood will increase, rise higher, and rage on at one time or another until it bears down on all those convictions and resolutions, or finds an underground passage in some secret lust that will give it free reign. But now, suppose that its springs have greatly dried up through regenerating grace, with its streams abated by holiness, yet, while anything remains of it, it will go on demanding to gain free passage, and press forward to actual sin. This is the nature of its lusting.

This habitual predisposition is seen in two ways:

(a) In an unexpected surprising of the soul into foolish and sinful thoughts, things the soul is not prepared for. As with indwelling sin, so it is with the opposite principle of sanctifying grace. This gives the soul, if I may say so, many a blessed surprise! It often generates a holy, spiritual frame in the heart and mind when we had no reason to expect it. And this again proves that our actions spring from a habitual principle prevailing in the mind. See Song 6:12 — ““Or ever I was aware, my soul made me as the chariots of Ammi-nadib [my noble people].” That is, we are set free, and are ready and willing for communion with Christ. “I was not aware” — a phrase often used in the Old Testament in connection with something surprising. (See Num. 22:34; 2 Sam. 22:44; Job 29:16, 42:3) The awareness of the Christian coincides with the powerful work of the Spirit of grace. It is as if he is saying, “I took no notice of it, as it were, until it happened.” The frequent actions of grace, and the exciting acts of faith, love, and contentment in God, are all evidence of the great strength and prevalence of grace in the soul. And the same is also true of indwelling sin. Before the soul is aware, and at a time when it is not prepared, and without any provocation or temptation, it falls into vain and foolish thoughts.

Sin fashions its fancies secretly in the heart, and prevents the mind detecting what it is doing. I mean here, those “very first actions of the soul”, which are so far involuntary, as they have not yet received the actual consent of the will. They are voluntary because sin has not yet taken up residence in the will. As for surprises, if the soul is not awake to take speedy action and prevent this tendency, a fire will break out, igniting and drawing the mind and heart into actual sin. By grace, before we become aware of it, we are “made as the chariots of my noble [or, willing] people” (a literal meaning of the Hebrew Ammi Nadab), and are engaged in heavenly-mindedness and communion with Christ, making great speed as if in a chariot. It is also the case with sin. Before we know it, we are seduced into evil feelings, foolish thoughts, and a delightful prospect of things that are not good or profitable for us. That is the reason for this warning by the Apostle — “...if a man is overtaken in any trespass ...” (Gal. 6:1) I have no doubt that the Apostle had in mind here the wiles of Satan and the power of

temptation, both of which cause a man to fall into sin — “...If a man be surprised at unawares with a fault, or in a transgression...” So we should never be surprised at the secret working of indwelling sin. Whatever comes from outside, whether from Satan, or from the world, we engage the mind before we receive it, so that it may not surprise us. But if it comes from within ourselves, then we are surprised! Then comes disappointment when we do what we do not want to do, and are hindered in doing what we want to do. (See Rom. 7:21)

Hence it is, then, that when the soul is doing something quite different, engaged in some other purpose, sin begins something in the heart or mind that carries it into what is evil and sinful. Indeed, sometimes it will reveal its power when the soul is seriously engaged in the mortification of any sin. Indwelling sin will, one way or another, lead it away and cause it to fall into that very sin whose ruin it is seeking, and whose mortification it is engaged in! This power of the law of sin to entice and entangle is a subject we will deal with more fully later on.

Now, these unpleasant surprises come from nothing but the habitual inclination to evil due to the principle from where they come. They do not come from a habitual inclination to actual sin in the mind or heart, but from a habitual propensity to evil in the indwelling sin that lurks in the mind or heart. This holds back the soul with holy desires. How it prevents wonderful communion with God! How it disturbs many meditations! How much the minds and consciences of men are defiled by the actions of indwelling sin! I know no greater burden in the life of a believer than these involuntary surprises of the soul. I use the word “involuntary” in connection with the actual consent of the will, but not in respect of that corruption which is in the will, and is a corrupting principle within. It is in respect of these things that the Apostle makes this complaint — “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. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:25)

(b) This habitual inclination reveals itself in its readiness and promptness, and without dispute or question, its response to every temptation that stimulates it. As we know, it is in the nature of fire to burn because it immediately sets light to anything nearby that is combustible. Let any temptation whatever be presented to a man, the suitability of which appeals to his corruptions, immediately, he will not only agree with the temptation as proposed, but his heart will also concur. And without any further consideration or debate, he will make a friend of that temptation. Not a moment should pass between the proposal and the need for the soul to look for the enemy within. And this assumes a constant, habitual inclination to evil. Our Saviour said of the assaults and temptations of Satan — “...for the prince of this world cometh, and he hath no part in me.” (Jn. 14:30) He had more temptations, intensively and extensively, from Satan and the world, than any man. Yet, in all of them, he had only to deal with those that came from the outside. His holy heart had nothing like them within; they did not suit his heart, nor was it ready to entertain them. The ruler of this world had nothing in him.

So it was with Adam at the beginning. When temptation came to him, he had only the outward proposal to consider. All was well within until the outward temptation was listened to and prevailed. With us, it is not so. When a city that is at harmony within itself, united, without any divisions or parties, when an enemy approaches, the rulers

and citizens have no thought at all but only how they might oppose the enemy outside and resist him at his first approach. But if the city is divided in itself, if there are factions and traitors within, the very first thing they must do is to look for the enemies at home, the traitors within, and cut off the head of Sheba to be safe. (See 2 Sam. 20:22) All was well with Adam within doors when Satan came, so that he had nothing to do but consider his assaults and approaches. But now, at the coming of any temptation, the soul must instantly look within where it will find a traitor at work that loves the baits of Satan, and steals away the heart. It does this every time, because it has a habitual inclination. In Ps. 38:17, David says — “I am ready to halt”; and in verse 16 — “Lest when my foot slips...” In other words, “I am prepared and disposed to hallucination, to the slipping of my foot into sin.” Due to indwelling sin, there was a continual disposition within him to slip, stumble, and fall on every occasion he was tempted. There is nothing so vain, foolish, or ridiculous; nothing so vile and abominable; nothing so atheistic or abominable that is proposed to the soul by way of temptation that does not appeal to the law of sin before it is put down by grace.

So this is the first thing we notice about the lust of the law of sin — it consists of an habitual inclination to evil, revealing itself in the involuntary surprises of the soul to sin, and its readiness, without dispute or consideration, to respond to all temptations whatever they are, and whenever they come.

(2) The lusting of indwelling sin consists in its actual pressing after whatever is evil, and in its actual opposition to what is good. The former instance shows its eagerness for this work; yet it is not only ready, but mainly it is always engaged in it. “It lusteth”, says the Holy Spirit, and it does so continually. It is always stirring in the soul through one act or another, almost like the life in the blood, or the blood in the veins. Thus, James calls it the power to tempt — “Every man is tempted of his own lust when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” (Jas. 1:14) Now, what does it mean to be tempted? It is to have something evil brought before to our notice which, if we agree to, it becomes sin to us. This is sin’s trade — “It lusteth”. It rises up in the heart, and proposes to the mind and feelings what is evil; and it tries, as it were, to get the soul to fall in with its suggestions and see how far it can carry them out, even though it may not wholly succeed.

Now, when a temptation comes from outside to the soul, it is a neutral thing, neither good nor evil until it gains consent. But the very proposal from within, coming as an act of the soul, is a sin. And this is the work of the law of sin — it is restlessly and relentlessly raising up and proposing any number of forms and appearances of evil of this or that kind, indeed of every kind with which the fallen nature of man is capable of being corrupted. Somehow or other, in whatever manner or circumstance, lavish in promises, unspiritual, unanswerable to any law but its own, it plots and puts its proposals to the soul. And this power of sin that puts ideas into our mind, and actual evil into our heart, is implied by the Apostle when he commands — “Keep yourselves from every figment or idea of sin in the heart” (1 Thess. 5:22); that is, “Keep yourselves from every shred or idea of sin in the heart”. The word “figment” nowhere means an outward form or appearance. Neither is it the appearance of evil, but is an evil idea or figment in the heart and mind. This lusting of sin is what the prophet saw in wicked men in whom [Israel] this law was predominant —

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

Here is a vivid illustration expressing the lusting of the law of sin, forever bubbling up in the heart with wicked, foolish, and filthy thoughts and desires.

This, then, is the first thing we see in the opposition this enmity offers to God — namely, its general inclination when it “lusteth”.

2. Secondly, we note its particular way of contending — it fights or wars. It acts with the same strength and violence that men do in war. Foremost of all, it lusts, stirring up all kinds of frenzied ideas in the mind, together with desires in the appetite and the feelings, and proposing them to the will. But it does not rest there, for it cannot rest. It urges, it presses, it pursues its proposals with earnestness, strength, and vigour, fighting and contending and warring to achieve its purpose. Would that it merely stirred up and proposed things to the soul, and immediately accepted the sentence and judgement of the mind! For the mind will tell us that the thing is evil, against God, and against his will. In that case, much sin might be prevented from coming to fruit. But it does not rest here, as I have already said; it proceeds to carry forward its purpose, and that with earnestness and effort. By this means, wicked men “inflare themselves”. (See Is. 57:5) They are “self-inflamers”, as the word implies, with regard to sin. Every spark of sin is cherished in them until it bursts into flame. This it does anywhere it is cherished.

Now, this fighting (or warring) of sin consists of two things:

- (1)** In its rebellion against grace, which Paul calls “the law of the mind”;
- (2)** In its assault on the soul, struggling for rule and sovereignty there.

(1) The first, then, is its rebellion, expressed by the Apostle in this way — “I find another law rebelling against the law of my mind”. (Rom. 7:23) There are, it seems, two laws within us — the “law of the flesh”, or of sin; and the “law of the mind”, or of grace. But contrary laws cannot both have sovereign power over the same person at the same time. The sovereign power in believers is in the hand of the law of grace, as the Apostle declares in verse 22 — “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.” Obedience to this law is performed with delight and pleasure in the inner man because its authority is lawful and good. It is brought out even more in Rom. 6:14 — “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law but under grace.” Now, to wage war against the law that has rightful sovereignty is to rebel; and so “to war against” means “to rebel” (as it ought to be translated) — “...rebellious against the law of my mind.” And this rebellion consists of a stubborn, obstinate opposition to the commands and directions of the law of grace.

Can the “law of the mind” command anything as a duty? Does it react violently to anything that is evil? While the lusting of the law of sin reaches its height, it will contend against obedience with all its strength. The result, as the Apostle tells us, is — “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.” (Rom. 7:15-16) We have a notable example of the power of sin in the rebellion that is recorded in this passage. The law of grace prevails upon the will so that it wants to do what is good —

“...for to will is present with me” (18), and “when I would do good...” (21), and, “...and I would not do evil” (19). Grace prevails on the understanding so that it approves or disapproves according to the dictates of the law of grace — “I consent unto the law that it is good”. (15-16) Judgement always lies on the side of grace. It also prevails in our heart — “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.” (22)

Now, if it is true that grace has sovereign power in the understanding, will and heart of a believer, why is it that it does not always prevail, and that we do not always do what we wish and abstain from what we do not want to do? Do you not think it strange that a man should not do what he chooses, wills, likes, and delights in? Is anything more required from us to enable us to do what is good? The law of grace does everything — at least, as much as can be expected from it — and is perfectly sufficient for the perfecting of all holiness in the fear of the Lord. But here lies the difficulty: the entangling opposition from the rebellion of this “law of sin.” It is impossible to fully express the vigour and variety of action that sin displays in this matter. Sometimes, it puts up diversions, sometimes it causes weariness, sometimes it points to difficulties, sometimes it stirs up adverse feelings, and sometimes it generates prejudices. Consequently, in one way or another, it so entangles the soul that it never allows grace to have absolute and complete success in any duty. In effect, Paul is saying, “I cannot find the perfect way to work out, or accomplish, what is good.”) (18) From this, then, we discover the opposition and resistance that comes from the law of sin.

Now, this rebellion appears in two ways:

- (a) In the opposition it offers to the general purpose and course of the soul;
- (b) In the opposition it offers to particular duties.

(a) Let us consider the opposition that sin makes to the general purpose and course of the soul. There is no one in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells that does not belong to him. It is therefore God’s design and purpose that he should walk in conformity to him in all things, from the inward disposition of the heart to the whole of his outward actions. This is what God required in his covenant with Abram — “I am Almighty God; walk before me and be thou blameless.” (Gen. 17:1) Accordingly, God’s purpose was that he should walk before him in all sincerity and uprightness. This is called “...cleaving unto the Lord with purpose of heart” (Acts 11:23) — that means, in all things; not with a lazy, dead, ineffective purpose, but with vigour, setting the whole soul in pursuit of it. This, the Apostle declares in Phil. 3:12-14 —

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

He uses three words here that wonderfully describe the soul’s universal pursuit of this purpose of heart as it lays hold of God:

Firstly, “I follow after”). (12) The word means a “relay” in a race, which means pursuing with earnestness and diligence.

Secondly, “reaching forth”), which means reaching forward with great intensity of spirit and feeling. It is a word that expresses constant effort.

Thirdly, “I press towards the mark”, like athletes running for the prize.

All three words say something about the vigour, earnestness, diligence, and constancy applied to the pursuit of this prize. And this is what is required of those in whom resides the principle of grace. Yet we see with what failings — indeed, our failings — the pursuit of this course involves. The feelings of the heart are quite stolen away and become entangled when unbelief rears its head, ugly passions are discovered, and worldly wisdom with all its retinue is put to work. All these things are contrary to the general principle and purpose of the soul. And all this springs from the rebellion of this law of sin, stirring up and provoking the heart to disobedience. The prophet described hypocrites in this way — “Their heart is divided; therefore shall they be found faulty.” (Hos. 10:2) Now, although this is wholly true in the mind and judgement of hypocrites only, sadly it is partially true in the best of believers. They have a division, not of the heart, but in the heart; and that is why they are often found to be guilty. Thus the Apostle declares — “...so that we cannot do the things that we would.” (Gal. 5:17) They cannot accomplish the purpose of a close walk with God according to the law of grace because of the rebellion of this law of sin within.

(b) Indwelling sin also rebels against particular duties. It raises a storm in the soul against the commands and aims of the law of grace. “We cannot do the things that we would.” That means that “the duties we believe we should follow, which gain our approval, and in which we delight in the inward man, we cannot perform as we wish.” Take the example of prayer. A man sets out to perform that duty. He would not only pray, but he would pray in a way that suits his duty and his own condition. He would “pray in the spirit” fervently (1 Cor. 14:14-15), “with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:27), in faith and love and delight, pouring out his soul to the Lord. This is what he desires.

Instead, he finds a rebellion within, a struggle with the law of sin. He finds it difficult to pray, and so get anything done that he wants. I do not say that it is always so, but it is true when sin “wars” and “rebels”. This is a proof of its great power and strength. What sad hindrances poor creatures meet with on this account! Instead of that free, unbounded communion with God that they desire, the best their souls can do is to go away mourning for their foolishness, deadness, and indisposition. In a word, there is no command under the law of grace that is not known, loved, and approved by the soul; but when it comes to the observance of duty, this law of sin, one way or another, meets it head-on, and rebels against it. And this is the first way that it fights.

(2) The law of sin not only rebels and resists, but it assaults the soul. It resists the law of the mind and the law of grace. This is the second part of its warring — “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11), and “your desires for pleasure war in your members”, Jas. 4:1. Peter shows what they oppose and war against, namely, the soul and the law of grace at work within, and James, what they wage war with — namely, the members, or the corruption that is in our mortal bodies. The phrase “war against” means to rebel against a superior. The word “fight” means an assault or act of war in order to gain superiority. Sin plays the part of an assailant as well as a resister. It attempts to rule and act as sovereign, as well as oppose the

rule of grace. Now, all war and fighting has some violence in it; and so there is violence in the actions of sin, which the Scripture calls “fighting” and “warring”. And this power of sin, as distinguished from its rebellion, consists of the following things:

(a) All its positive actions in stirring us up to sin. Often, through the vanity of the mind, or the sensuality of the heart, or the foolishness of the imaginations, sin assaults the soul when the law of grace is not actually calling it to perform some duty. So it is not so much rebelling, but assaulting. Thus the Apostle cried out — “Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24) “Who will rescue me out of its clutches?” is the meaning of this question. When we pursue an enemy, and he resists us, we do not cry out, “Who will deliver us?” for we are the assailants. “Who will deliver me?” is the cry of someone who has been set upon by an enemy. So it is here also. A man is assaulted by his “own lust” as James says. By the wayside, at his place of employment, or in following a duty, it is then that sin attacks the soul with stupid thoughts and foolish desires, and willingly employs the soul in providing for its satisfaction. This, the Apostle warns us against — “Do not accomplish the providence or projection of the flesh for its own satisfaction.” See also Rom. 13:16.

(b) An urgent demand seems to be implied in the expression “warring”. Enemies in war are restless, pressing, and unrelenting; so it is with the law of sin. Does it attack the soul? Then resist its actions. Then it comes back. So rebuke it by the power of grace. It then withdraws for a while, but it will return. So set before it the cross of Christ. It will do as the soldiers did when they came to arrest Christ; at the sight of him, they fell back on to the ground. But they rose again and laid hands on him. Yes, sin gives way for the moment, but, on its return, it will attack the soul again. Remind it of the love of God in Christ. Though it is stricken, it will not give up. Present it with hell-fire, and it will rush into the midst of the flames. Reproach it for its foolishness and madness, and it will know no shame, but will press on. Let the thoughts of the mind strive to flee from sin. It will follow as on the wings of the wind. And by its persistence it wearies and wears out the soul. If the great remedy of Rom. 8:3 is not applied in time, it will go on to conquer.

There is nothing more marvellous or dreadful in the works of sin than its persistence. The soul does not know what to make of it. It dislikes, hates, and abominates the evil it tends toward, and it despises the very thought of it. It hates it as it does hell. Yet on it comes, imposing itself on the soul as if it were another person, a secret enemy within. All this the Apostle expresses in Rom. 7:15-17 — “...the things that I do, that I hate.” It is not his outward actions, but the inward workings of his mind that he fears. “I hate them”, he says. “I abominate them.” So why does he have anything more to do with them? If he so hates them, and so hates himself for them, why does he not leave them alone and have nothing to do with them, and so end the matter? “Alas!” he says, “It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” (Rom. 7:17) He is saying, “I have one within me that is my enemy. It is endless, restless, relentless, forever setting sinful things before me, even things I hate and abominate. I cannot be rid of it, and I weary of myself. I cannot flee from it.” He cries out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?” (24)

I do not say that this is the normal condition of believers, but it is often so when the law of sin rises up to war and fight. It is not so with respect to particular sins — this or that sin, outward sins, sins of living — but is so with respect to the vanity of the mind,

and inward and spiritual difficulties. Some, I know, pretend to perfection. But I would rather believe the Apostle than they.

It carries on its war by entangling the feelings, and drawing them into conflict with the mind. Let grace be enthroned in the mind and judgement, but once the law of sin makes at bid for power, and entangles the feelings, it has a fortress from which to direct continual assaults on the soul. Hence, the great duty of mortification is mostly directed towards the affections —

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” (Colossians 3:5)

“Members which are upon the earth” refers to the feelings of the heart; for, in the outward part of the body, sin does not have its seat. “Covetousness” mentioned here is specially singled out for mortification. Indeed, after grace has taken possession of the soul, the feelings become the main base for the remnants of sin. Paul says that this law “is in my members” (Rom. 7:23), and James, that it “wars in our members” (Jas. 4:1). This all takes place in the heart, and no estimate can be made of the importance of the work of mortification there. Every day, we take special note of those who have high reputations, but it is obvious that they possess an unmortified heart and way of life, for their feelings have not yet been crucified with Christ.

Now, when this law of sin possesses our feelings, whether it is through love, delight, or fear, it will use them to make fearful assaults on the soul. For instance, it will make use of the love of anyone entangled in the world or in worldly things — “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” (1 Jn. 2:16) Notice how it takes advantage on every occasion to assault the soul! There is nothing — not a single action, not a single place or company, not a single performance of any duty, whether private or public — that sin will not attack in one way or another, and turn it to its own advantage.

This, then, is a summary of biblical teaching concerning the actions of the law of sin as it fights and wars against our souls. A careful consideration of it will be a great advantage to us, especially in bringing us low, and teaching us to walk humbly with repentance before God.

There are two things designed to humble the souls of men: **firstly**, a due consideration of God, and **secondly**, a consideration of ourselves.

Concerning God, we need to dwell on his greatness, his glory, his holiness, his power, his majesty, and his authority. Concerning ourselves, we need to acknowledge our sad, poor, and sinful state. Now, of all the things that affect our condition, there is nothing so likely to disturb us as the vile remnants of enmity against God that still dwell in our hearts and natures. There is no greater evidence of God’s grace working in a soul than when the soul is willing to search itself in this matter, and open itself up to the Word of truth. Are we willing for the Word to dive into the secret recesses of our heart and expose whatever evil and corruption can be found there? The prophet said of Ephraim — “He loved to thresh grain”. (Hos. 10:11) He loved to work so that he might eat, and have corn always in store. But God would cause Ephraim to “plough”,

a work no less needful, though not so attractive. Most men love to hear of the doctrines of grace — of pardon for sin, and of God's free love — and think that they will find food there. It is true that they grow and thrive on them. But to break up the fallow ground of their hearts, to seek to uproot the weeds and briars that grow there, they do not find so attractive, though this work is no less necessary than the former. This path is not so well beaten as that of practical grace, nor so well-travelled, though it is the only way to come to a true knowledge of grace itself.

It may be that some who are wise and well versed in other truths may still have little skill in searching their own hearts, and are slow in their perception and understanding of these things. But this slowness and neglect must be shaken off if we are to care for our souls. It is more than probable that many a hypocrite deceives himself as well as others by believing in the delightful doctrines of grace, supposing that it will deliver him from sin. Oh, not at all! They must diligently apply themselves to searching their hearts. Or I might say that other believers walk with boldness and security, but they should consider carefully what a deadly, watchful, enemy they are always carrying about with them and in them. Do they indulge themselves in many worldly joys and pleasures, or pursue their passing affairs with great delight and greediness? Would that they applied their hearts more to this work, and come to a better understanding of the nature, power, and subtlety of their adversary, that their souls might be humbled in their walk with God, and their behaviour improved towards others!

In the believer's walk with God, the Lord delights in his humble and repentant children, who tremble at his word, and mourn in Zion. He will only be like this when he has a true sense of his vile condition. This will generate a true reverence for God, a sense of distance from him, an admiration of his grace and condescension, and a proper evaluation of his mercy — all far above those shallow, verbal, airy attainments that some boast of.

In our walk before others, humility provides a means of preventing those great evils of judging, spiritual superiority, and harsh censuring that I have observed in those, who, as it turned out, were guilty of greater faults than those they were criticising in others. The way of humility, I say, leads to meekness, compassion, a readiness to forgive, and a frame of mind that is ready to pass over offences because we know the true state of our hearts as the Apostle plainly declares in Gal. 6:1 — “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Those that understand the evil of their hearts, and how vile they are, are useful, fruitful, stable, believing and obedient Christians. Others are fit only to delude themselves, while they disrupt family and church life. Let us, then, examine our hearts wisely, and see if we have any grounds for pride in our gifts, our graces, our values, our esteem among believers, and our enjoyments. Let us cease judging, condemning, and reproaching others who have been tempted; otherwise we will find great inconsistency in these things.

Many other similar things of like nature could be added here, as we consider the sad effects of indwelling sin. However, we must now go on to think of ways by which we might oppose and defeat it.

CHAPTER 7

The captivating power of indwelling sin — What it consists of — The prevalence of sin — When does it come from itself and when does it come from temptation? — The rage and madness of sin

The **third** thing we assign to the law of sin is its opposition to God and his law of grace, and its bringing the soul into captivity. “I find a law leading me captive (captivating me) unto the law of sin which is in my members.” (Rom. 7:23) Here is the highest point the Apostle concedes for the opposition and warring of the remnants of indwelling sin. He closes with a complaint of the consequent state and condition of believers, and an earnest prayer for deliverance from it — “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (24) What this expression means is seen in the following observations:

1. It is not directly the power and actions of the law of sin that are expressed here, but the success in its actions. Yes, “success” is the greatest evidence of its power, and “leading captive” in war is the height of its success. None could aim for greater success than to lead the enemy “captive”, a special word in the Bible to express great success. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ, after his victory over Satan, is said to “lead captivity captive” (Eph. 4:8) — that is, to conquer him who had conquered and prevailed over others. And this he did when “... through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”. (Heb. 2:14) Here, then, is shown the great power and prevalence of sin in its warfare against the soul. It wars so as to “lead captive”, which it would not be able to do if it did not have great power, especially in the resistance of the soul that is implied in this expression.

2. It leads the soul captive “to the law of sin” — not in this or that sin, not a particular sin, not an actual sin, but the law of sin. On his part, God has ordered things so as to provide such supplies of grace to believers that will prevent them from falling prey to this or that particular sin, that it might not prevail over them, and compel them to serve it with its lusts. Grace prevents sin from having dominion over them, and taking them as captives and slaves. This is what David prayed so earnestly against —

“Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright.”
(Ps. 19:12-13)

He presupposed the continuing of the law of sin in him (12), which would produce faults in his life and secret sins. His relief lay in God’s pardoning and cleansing mercy; and for that he prays. “This”, he says, “is my condition. But for sins of pride and boldness, and any other sins that gain dominion in a man and take him captive, may the Lord restrain your servant from committing them.” For whenever a sin gets power over a man, whether the sin is small or great, or whether it is a sin of boldness, pride, or presumption, these things are not reckoned from the nature of the sin, but from its prevalence and constancy. That is where pride, boldness, and contempt of God are found. For this reason, if I am not mistaken, Jabez prayed —

“Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! (1 Chron. 4:10)

This holy man took occasion from the meaning of his own name (Jabez = pain) to pray against sin, that it might not be a grief and sorrow to the Lord and to others in its power and prevalence.

I confess that sometimes it comes to this with a believer that, for a time, he may be led captive by some particular sin. It has prevailed in him so long that it gains power over him. This is what happened to David when he lived long in his sin but did not repent of it. It was plainly so with those who are described in Is. 57:17-18 —

“For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly 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 over a long period of time could reclaim them. So we see that when any lust or sin prevails, its cause is advanced by some powerful temptation of Satan. He poisons it, inflames it, and entangles the soul. Thus the Apostle speaks of these things, and describes sin as having taken them away from their holiness —

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

Though they served their own lusts, they came into the bondage of the devil by being entangled in one of his snares. Therefore, they are described as having been “taken captive” like a poor beast in its toil.

By the way, we must now inquire whether the prevailing power of any particular sin comes from itself or from the influence of the temptation that calls it forth. Let these two observations be enough:

(a) Much of the prevailing of sin in the soul is most certainly from Satan whenever a perplexing and captivating sin has no particular foothold or advantage from the nature, constitution, or condition of the sinner. When any evil desire prevails and prospers above others, it gains a special advantage in invading the natural constitution, or the condition of the Christian. Otherwise, the law of sin would produce an equal propensity to all evil, and an equal vigour in every lust. When it cannot be proved that the captivating sin is particularly fixed in the nature of the sinner, or that it gained its advantage from his education or employment in the world, its prevalence must, therefore, be from Satan. He has reached out to touch the root, and fed it poison, and given it strength. Indeed, sometimes, what may appear to the soul to come from the corrupt lusting of the heart, in fact, is due to Satan fixing his suggestions on the mind and imagination. If, then, a man discovers a raging corruption that evidently does not come from his own nature, let him do, as the Papists say, as it were, and cross himself, and flee by faith to the cross of Christ, for the devil is close at hand.

(b) When a lust prevails, taking the believer captive, but when it brings no advantage to the flesh, it must have come from Satan. All that the law of sin does is to serve the flesh (see Rom. 13:14); and it must suggest something of the profits and pleasures to be gained. Now, if prevailing sin does not act in this way, but seems more spiritual and inward, it is more likely to come from Satan acting in the mind rather than from the corruption of the heart itself.

I maintain, then, that the Apostle is not speaking here of our being “made captive” to this or that sin, but to the law of sin. That is, we are compelled to admit its presence and burden, whether we want to or not. Sometimes, the soul thinks or hopes that through grace it will be utterly free from this unruly tenant. After some sweet enjoyment of God, after some wonderful experience of grace after backsliding, or after experiencing some deep affliction, or after some humiliation, the poor soul begins to hope that it will now be free from the law of sin. But, after a while, it sees that it is not so. Sin stirs again, trying to gain its old foothold. The soul then finds that whether it will or not, it must bear its yoke. This makes it sigh, and cry out for deliverance.

3. The phrase “leading captive” implies a victory over the reluctance or contrary actions of the will. This is evident in the expression — namely, that the will opposes, and makes headway against, the working of indwelling sin. This, the Apostle declares in some of his expressions in this chapter. (See 7:15, 19-20) And there is also in this lusting of “the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17), when there comes the struggle of grace to subdue and expel it. The spiritual habits of grace in the will resist, and act against, sin; and the encouragement of those actions by the Spirit are directed toward the same end. This “leading captive” is contrary, I repeat, to the inclinations and actions of the renewed will. No believer can be taken captive against his will. Captivity is misery and trouble, and no one will willingly put himself into this kind of trouble. Men choose it not because of its causes, and the ways and means that lead to it, but because of its end. This is what the prophet tells us in Hos. 5:11 — “Ephraim was” not willingly “oppressed and broken in judgement” — a reference to his misery and trouble — but because “he willingly walked by human precepts” of the idolatrous kings that brought about his final state. So then, whatever consent the soul gives to sin leading to his captivity, it gives no consent to the captivity itself. That would be totally against the will. Hence, we deduce these three things:

(1) That the power of sin is great — something we have already proved. This appears in its tendency to take captive, despite the actions and struggles of the will to be free of it. If no opposition were made to it, or its adversary were weak, negligent and lazy, then there would be no great evidence of its power to take captive. But its prevailing against diligence, activity, watchfulness, and the constant opposition of the will, proves its great power.

(2) This “leading captive” implies many successes. If it were not particularly successful, it could not be said to “lead captive”. It might rebel, it might make attacks, but it cannot be said to “lead captive” without attendant success. And there are several degrees of success for the law of sin in the soul. Sometimes it causes someone to commit an outward sin, which is its final goal. Sometimes it gains the consent of the will, but is cast out by grace, and gets no further. Sometimes it tires in trying to entangle the soul so that it turns away, as it were, and leaves off the struggle, which is a kind of success also. One or more, or all of them together, must prevail, if captivity is to take place.

This is exactly what the Apostle says with regard to covetousness in 1 Tim. 6:9-10 — “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

(3) This “leading captive” is evident by the miserable and wretched state of the believer. To be yoked with sin against the judgement of the mind and the choice and consent of the will, with so much striving and struggling, how sad that condition is! When the neck is sore and tender, and under great pressure, when it is compelled to bear the yoke of sin again, it pierces, grieves, and even breaks the heart. By grace, the soul is brought to loathe sin and every evil way, and to hate even the least difference between itself and the holy will of God. But to be forced by this law of sin to produce enmity and folly and deadness and filth, what a fearful state to be in! Everyone hates captivity, and particularly those who are taken captive by this tyrant of sin. Now, what can be worse than this law of sin? That is why the Apostle, having mentioned this captivity, cries out in protest as one who is weary and worn out. (See Rom. 7:24)

4. This state is only found in believers. The unregenerate are not made captive to the law of sin. They may, indeed, be made captive to this or that particular sin or corruption. They may be forced to serve it against the strength of their convictions when convinced of the evil of it, like an adulterer of his immorality and a drunkard of his abomination — and possibly make some resolutions against it — but their lust is too hard for them. They cannot stop sinning, and so are made captives or slaves to this or that sin. However, they cannot be said to be led captive to the law of sin because they are willingly subject to it. It has a rightful dominion over them, and they oppose it only when it touches their consciences. The opposition they make to it does not come from their wills, but is the mere reaction of a frightened conscience and a convicted mind. They have no regard for the nature of sin, only for its guilt and consequences. But true captivity means that a man is forced into it against his will.

The **fourth** thing we assign to the law of sin, and the last degree of its opposition to God, and the law of the will, and the law of grace, are seen in its rage and madness. Believe me, there is madness in its nature — “Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live”. (Eccles. 9:3) The evil that lies in the heart of man is that of indwelling sin; and this lies deep within the heart where its madness rises. The Holy Spirit expresses this rage of sin by using several suitable illustrations, such as Jer. 2:23-24, 50:38, and Hos. 8:9. Its rage causes men to behave like “a wild ass loose in her ways”, like “a wild donkey” when “she snuffeth up the wind in her desire”, and runs where her mind follows her sexual instincts, and “like the rams before the flocks”. And then it is said of idolaters that are enraged with their lusts, that they are “mad upon their idols”. Let us now consider of what this madness consists— this rage of sin — and how it arises:

1. Regarding its nature, it seems to consist of a violent, headstrong, pressing in of evil or sin. Violence and unceasing demands form part of it. It tears and tortures the soul with any sin to force its consent and obtain satisfaction. It rises up in the heart, is denied by the law of grace, and is rebuked. Then back it comes, injecting its poison again. The soul is startled, and casts it off. Then it returns with renewed violence and demands. The soul cries out for help and deliverance, looking around to all the springs

of gospel grace for relief, trembling at the furious assaults of sin, and casting itself into the arms of Christ for deliverance. And, if it is unable to find relief, it becomes frustrated, and hurries up and down through the mire and filth of foolish thoughts and corrupt and evil lusts, all of which tear at the soul as though they would swallow whole its spiritual life and power. (See 1 Tim. 6:9, 10; 2 Pet. 2:14) It was much the same with those we mentioned earlier in Is. 57:17. Within them, a flaming and enraged lust was working — that is, “covetousness”, or a love of the world. By this, as the Apostle declares, men “pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (1 Tim. 6:10) God was angry with them, and warned them of his wrath by all ways and means possible. As Isaiah reports — “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.” Though God may have staggered them a little, they “went on backsliding”. He was angry, and hid himself from them. He left them, insofar as he withdrew his gracious, assisting, comforting presence.

Did the threat of his anger put a stop to this work? Not at all, for they still went on, as men mad in their covetousness. Nothing could put a stop to their raging lusts. They were mad for their sin. We need not look any further for more examples. We see men go mad with their lusts every day; and, what is the worst kind of madness, their lusts do not rage so much in them as they rage in the pursuit of them. Are not these greedy pursuits of worldly things in men, though they put up excuses for them, nothing else but plain madness in pursuit of their lusts? God, who searches the hearts of men, knows that their excuses are nothing but a cover for the actions of men mad with fury in pursuing their lusts.

2. Sin usually reaches this height when it takes advantage of the following:

(1) When it is provoked, enraged, and enhanced by some great temptation. Though it is a poison in itself, yet, being inbred in nature, it will not grow violent without the injection of some new poison from Satan during the temptation. This was the advantage that Satan took with David, raising a suitable temptation that excited his lust to rage and madness bringing about the business with Bathsheba and Uriah. (See 2 Samuel 11) Though sin is always a fire in the bones, it does not burst into flame until Satan comes with his bellows and puffs it up. Let us all, in which the law of sin comes to this height of rage, take warning, and discover what part the devil is playing in this business.

(2) When it looks for an advantage in some former temptation. Sin will not come to its height at the first assault. Had it been checked at its first entrance, and had there not been some yielding in the soul, this would never have happened. The great wisdom and security of the soul in dealing with indwelling sin is to put a violent end to it at its beginning, at its first entrance and action. Venture all on that first attempt. Be prepared to die first rather than yield one inch to it. Through the deceit of sin or the negligence of the soul or by providing sin with a false confidence by giving permission for lust to act at various times, sin finds an entrance into the soul. And, finding little opposition there, it gains in strength and power, and ignites a fire within. You would never have had the experience of the fury of sin if you had not been content to listen to its seductive voice. If you had not brought up this servant, this slave, delicately, it would not have presumed beyond a son!

Now, when the law of sin gains this double advantage — the furthering of a vigorous temptation, and some earlier victory — it would not have gained strength in the soul, and risen up with power.

3. We now look at what accompanies this rage and madness, what are its properties, and what are the effects it produces.

(1) There is the possibility of casting off, for a time at least, the yoke, rule, and government of the Holy Spirit and law of grace. Where grace has the dominion, it can never be utterly expelled from its throne, for it will never give up its right and sovereignty. But its influence may for a time be overcome, and its government suspended, by the power of sin. Do you think that the law of grace had any actual influence on the heart of David when, at the provocation that he received from Nabal, he became so obsessed with his desire for revenge that he cried out, “May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, If I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light.” (1 Sam. 25:34). Was Asa in any better frame of mind when confronted by the prophet who spoke to him in the name of the Lord? “Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this.” (2 Chron. 16:10) Sin, in these cases, was like an untamed horse, which, having first thrown his rider, runs away with ferocity and rage. Sin first casts off for the present the yoke of Christ and the law of his grace, and then vexes the soul at its pleasure.

Let us now look at how this is done. The seat and residence of grace is the whole soul. It is in the inner man in the mind, the will, and the heart. The whole soul is “a new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph. 4:23-24). It has been renewed by grace in the image of God. The whole man is, then, a “new creation”. (2 Cor. 5:17) And within this sphere it exerts its power and force. The rule or dominion of grace consists of the pursuit of its effective working in all the faculties of the soul as one united principle of moral and spiritual operation. So, then, the interruption of its exercise, of its rule and power, by the law of sin, must be in opposition to the faculties and feelings of the soul where grace exerts its power. Sin does this; it darkens the mind partly through innumerable stupid prejudice and false reasoning (as we shall see when we come to consider its deceit), and partly through the boiling over of the feelings, heated up by filthy lusts that have obsessed them. It is then that the saving light that is in the mind becomes clouded and stifled, unable to pour out its transforming power to change the soul into the likeness of Christ, which is its proper work. (Rom. 12:2)

The usual inclination of the will to obedience, which is the next thing that the law of grace aims for, is first weakened, then cast aside, and finally rendered useless by the continual urging of sin and temptation. At last, the will lets go its hold, and begins to dispute whether it should yield or not, and, at last, gives itself up to the enemy. As for the heart, that is where evil usually begins. Feelings contradict one another and torture the soul with their impetuous violence. In this way, the rule of the law of grace is interrupted by the law of sin imposing on it at the seat of government. When all is done, this is a sad work that sin does in the soul. The Apostle warns believers to take heed — “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” (Rom. 6:12) Look to it that it does not get the dominion, and that it does not become a usurper and ruler — no, not for a moment! It works hard to take the throne. Watch out for it, for a sad condition lies at your door! This, then, accompanies the rage

and madness of the law of sin. It casts out the rule of the law of grace during its upstart reign. Grace speaks to the soul but it is not heard. It commands to the contrary, but is not obeyed. It cries out, "Do not do this abominable thing that the Lord hates", but is disregarded. It is unable to stop the rage of sin at present, and recover its own rule. But God, in his own time, will restore its dominion by the power of his Spirit dwelling in us.

(2) Madness and rage are accompanied with fearlessness, and contempt of danger. It takes away the power of reason, and all the influence it should have on the soul. Hence, a sinner that is wholly under the power of this rage is said to be like one who "stretches out his hand against the Almighty, running stubbornly against him with his strong embossed shield." (Job 15:25-26) The disarming of this part of the armour is designed to utterly ruin us. The Christian soldier despises his equipment, being secretly resolved to accomplish his lusts, even though it may cost him dear.

A few further remarks will make this clearer:

[1] Often, when the soul has broken loose from the power of renewing grace, God deals with it in his grace by keeping it within bounds. That is what the Lord, in effect, said to Israel — "Seeing that you reject me, I will take another course with you. I will put obstacles before you so that you will not be able to achieve the object of your furious lusts."

He proposed to them what would obstruct their progress —

"Seeing thou hast rejected me, I will take another course with thee. I will lay obstacles before thee that thou shalt not be able to pass on whither the fury of thy lusts would drive thee." (Hos. 2:6)

[2] The obstacles that God puts in the way of sinners, as we shall see, are of two kinds:

First, a rational consideration is made of the consequence of the sin and evil that the soul is urged to commit. These may be fear of death, judgement and hell, and a falling into the hands of the living God who is "a consuming fire". (Heb. 12:29) While a man is under the power of the law of the Spirit of life, "the love of Christ constraineth him". (2 Cor. 5:14). The principle of doing good and abstaining from evil is faith working in love, accompanied by following Christ because of the sweet savour of his name. Now, when this blessed and easy yoke has been, for a time, cast away, God puts a hedge of terror around the soul. He reminds it of death and judgement to come, and flashes the flames of hell-fire in its face, filling it with thoughts of all the evil consequence of sin. These things deter it from its purpose. So, to this end, he makes use of all the threats recorded in the Law and in the gospel. I might add to these things all the considerations that can be taken from things temporal, such as shame, reproach, scandal, punishment, and so forth. These are the thoughts God uses in putting a hedge around them.

Second, the Lord uses dispensations of providence for the same purpose, and they are of two kinds:

(a) There are those things that work on the soul, causing it to desist from its lusting and pursuit of sin. These are afflictions and mercies — “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry.” (Is. 7:15-16) Take note of the severe words of Hos. 2:9-15 —

“Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, ‘These are my rewards that my lovers have given me’: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord. Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.”

God chastises men by bringing pain to their bodies as he says in the book of Job — “...in order to turn man from his deed, and conceal pride from man, he keeps back his soul from the Pit”. (Job 33:17-19) And, in other ways, he comes and touches them as to their good names, their families, their estates, and other desirable things. Or else he heaps mercies on them that they might consider again the One against whom they are rebelling. It may be that special mercies will come to them for many days.

(b) There are those things that actually hinder the soul from pursuing sin, though it is obsessed with doing so. The various ways in which they do this we will consider later.

These, then, are the ways in which the soul is dealt with, when the law of indwelling sin has cast off for a time the influence and power of the law of grace. But now, when lust is at the height of its rage or madness, the soul will disregard all these things, and, in particular, the rod, and even the One who appointed it. It will rush on, despite the shame, despite reproaches, despite God’s anger, and whatever else. Wherever God’s grace appears, sin will attack it; its rage and madness are fearless. How does indwelling sin work so effectively? It works in two ways:

First, sin possesses the mind, not allowing it to think about the consequences, and then disarms its thoughts by making them slight and fleeting. However, if the mind forces itself to think of spiritual things, sin influences the feelings so that they should not be touched by the mind to any great extent. The soul will then be able to continue with its meditations, but not be moved by them at all. When the thoughts of the mind prevail for a time, it makes no difference, for they are divorced from the heart.

Second, sin decides secretly and stubbornly to finish what it has begun to the bitter end.

This, then, is the **second** proof for the power of sin, as seen in its opposition to the law of grace with force, strength and violence. We now go on to consider its deceit.

CHAPTER 8

Indwelling sin is seen to be powerful in its deceit — It is proved to be deceitful — The nature of its deceit — A consideration of Jas. 1:14 — How the mind is drawn away from its duty by the deceit of sin — The main duties of the mind concerning obedience — The ways and means by which it is seduced.

This **second** part of the evidence of the power of sin in the way it works involves its deceit. While it is at work, it adds deceit to its power. The effect is truly astonishing, and must be carefully watched for by those who value their souls. With power and deceit combined, this provides sin with another advantage, rendering it assistance by adding to all the ways and means we have already mentioned.

Before we say something about the nature of the deceit of sin, and how it prevails, let us consider some testimonies about this, and shed some light on its general nature. That indwelling sin is deceitful we have the express testimony of the Holy Spirit in such a verse as Heb. 3:13 — “Take heed that ye be not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” It is indeed deceitful, so take heed and watch out for it, or it will have its way in hardening your heart against God, the most terrible of its effects. It is on account of sin that the heart is “deceitful above all things”. (Jer. 17:9) Job speaks of man in this way — “For an empty-headed man will be wise, when a wild donkey’s colt is born a man.” (Job 11:12) He is a poor, vain, empty nothing. But think of his heart on account of the law of sin — it is crafty and deceitful above all things. “For my children are foolish, they have not known me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.” (Jer. 4:22) In the same way, the Apostle says — “...that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph. 4:22-24) Every lust that is a branch of this law of sin is deceitful; and where poison is found in every stream, the fountain must be contaminated. No particular lust has any deceit in it, but its source is this fountain of all actual lust, the law of sin.

2 Thess. 2:9-10 states that the coming of “the lawless one” is closely connected with “...him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish”. Righteousness is usually disregarded, and there are few to speak up for it. It is not easy to imagine how anyone could get himself a spiritual reputation without it. But there is a deceit in this by which men’s minds are averse to a close consideration of righteousness (as we shall see later). The Apostle speaks of those who are under the power of sin as “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures”. (Tit. 3:3) And the life of evil men is nothing but “deceiving and being deceived”. (2 Timothy 3:13) So, then, we have sufficient testimony concerning this qualification of the enemy of ours — he is *deceitful!* This makes it difficult for men’s minds to grapple with the adversary. He knows that we can have no security against one who is deceitful except by standing guard and putting up a defence all our days.

Furthermore, to assess the strength and advantage that sin has by its deceit, we may observe that Scripture usually places it at the head and spring of every sin, so that there is no sin that does not have deceit going before it — “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” (1 Tim. 2:13-14) The reason the Apostle ventured why Adam was not first in the transgression when he was first formed was because he had not yet been deceived. The woman, though made second, was the first to be deceived, and was the first to sin. That first sin began in deceit, so t until her mind was deceived, her soul was safe. Eve, then, was right when she said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” (Gen. 3:13) She thought she could cover up her sin by accusing the serpent; and this was a new fruit of the sin she had fallen into. But what she said was, in fact, true — she was deceived before she came to eat. Deceit went before the transgression, and the Apostle shows that sin and Satan take the same course —

“There is the same way of working towards actual sin as was of old: beguiling, deceiving goes before; and sin, that is, the actual accomplishment of it, followeth after.” (2 Cor. 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.

Here was the way sin worked at the beginning; and so it is now. Deception came first and sin followed. Hence, all the great works that the devil accomplishes in the world, stirring men up to oppose the Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom, he does by deceit — “...that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceiveth the whole world”. (Rev. 12:9) Without deceit, the devil would never prevail on anyone to remain in his service when it leads to his eternal death, and, sometimes, his earthly ruin. (See Rev. 20:10) That is why we have so many warnings to take care and not be deceived by sin. (See Eph. 5:6; 1 Cor. 6:9, 15:33; Gal. 6:7; Lk. 21:8) From all these biblical testimonies, we learn of the power of sin and its deceit, and, consequently its great advantage. Where it prevails by deceit, it never fails to produce its evil fruit.

The power of sin through deceit is found in the faculty of the soul that is most affected by it. Deceit affects the *mind*; it is the mind that first becomes deceived. When sin attempts any other entrance into the soul such as through the feelings, the mind, retaining its authority and sovereignty, is able to check and control it. But where the mind is corrupted, sin will prevail, for the mind (or understanding) is the leading faculty of the soul, and whatever that faculty is fixed on, the will and affections follow, not being capable of rational thought, and governed only by what is put before them. It is true that the entanglement of the feelings by sin is often the most troublesome, yet the deceit of the mind is always most dangerous because of the position it holds in the soul. Its work is to guide, direct, choose, and lead; and “...if therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Mt. 6:23)

We must add some further things as we consider the nature of the deceit of indwelling sin. It represents to the soul or mind things that are really different to what they are, either in their nature, their causes, their effects, or their present relationship with the soul. This is the nature of deceit, and it prevails in many ways. It hides what should be seen and considered, it conceals circumstances and consequences, and presents what is not so, or things as they are not, as we discover later. We noticed earlier that

Satan “deceived” our first parents. That is the term the Holy Spirit gave to the diabolical temptation and seduction. And how he deceived them we find in Gen. 3:4-5. He did it by presenting things other than what they were. The fruit was desirable; that was obvious to the eye. Hence, Satan took advantage by insinuating secretly that it was merely a postponement of the happiness that God was aiming at when he forbade them to eat of it. We know that this was a test of their obedience and that certain, but not immediate, ruin would follow their eating of it. This, the devil concealed from them. He only proposed the present advantage of knowledge, and so presented to them the whole case in a totally different light.

This is the nature of the deceit. It is the representation of something underhand, keeping back what is undesirable, and proposing something that is indeed not there, so that the mind might make a false judgement. That is how Jacob deceived Isaac by using his brother’s clothes, and putting hairy skins on his hands and neck. (Gen. 27) It teaches us that deceit gains the advantage in a way that is natural to it. It is always carried on by degrees, little by little, so that its ultimate purpose and aim are not at first brought into the open. That is how Satan worked in the great deceit we have just mentioned. He proceeded in little steps, and by degrees. He first removed an obvious objection by telling them that they would not die. Then he proposed that knowledge would be good for them. Finally, he suggested that that they would be like God. To conceal his true purpose, he proceeded by little steps and degrees to build on what he had gained, and then pressed on to the next result. This is the true nature of deceit. Stephen tells us that the king of Egypt “dealt treacherously with our people”. (Acts 7:19) How he did this, we need to read in Ex. 1. He did not at first openly kill them, but said — “...come, let us deal wisely with them” (10), and then began to oppress them. This brought them into bondage (11). Having got this far in making them slaves, he proceeded to destroy their children (16). Notice that he did not fall on them all at once but by degrees. And this example is sufficient to show how sin is deceitful, and the advantage it takes of any situation.

If we need to know the way and manner and progress of sin in working by deceit, we have it fully expressed in Jas. 1:14-15. “There is,” says he, “the same way of working towards actual sin as of old: beguiling, deceiving goes before; and sin, that is, the actual accomplishment of it, follows” —

“Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

This sums up precisely what we are aiming to expose in this matter. In these two verses, James shows that men are willing to take up the old trade that our first parents set up at the beginning, namely, that of excusing themselves in their sins and putting the blame on others. They blame everything except themselves! They should look to their own nature and inclinations, and their own schemes, and admit that they committed such evils from their temptations. And if they do not know where to find the origin of those temptations, they blame God himself, rather than admit their own guilt. This evil in the hearts of men, James rebukes —

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” (13)

And to show the justice of this reproof implied in the words just quoted, he exposes the true cause of the rise and progress of sin, showing that its guilt lies in the sinner, and that the punishment of it, if not graciously prevented, will be his lot also.

We have here, in the words of the Holy Spirit, the whole progress of the lust of indwelling sin through subtlety, fraud, and deceit. Now, we will take a look at the particular ways and means by which it exerts its power and force in the hearts of men by deceit.

Firstly, the ultimate purpose of sin, or its natural tendency, is death — “...sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death”; that is, the everlasting death of a sinner. Conceal what it may, this is what sin is aiming at. The obscuring of its purpose and schemes is the main property of deceit, and sin does it to perfection. It may plead many things, but not once will it declare that it aims at the death — the everlasting death — of the soul. An exact knowledge of this end of every sin is a wonderful means of stopping it exercising its power by way of deceit and seduction.

Secondly, the normal way it acts to achieve its end is by temptation — “Every man is tempted of his own lust.” I do not propose to go into detail here on the nature of temptation, for it does not suit our present purpose; and, in any case, I have done this in another book entitled *Temptation: the nature and power of it, the danger of entering into it, and the means of preventing that danger with a resolution of different cases relating to it*. For now, it should be sufficient to observe that the life of temptation thrives in deceit. In the business of sin, to be effectively tempted and enticed (or, deceived) are the same thing. This is how it was at the first temptation. It is everywhere called the serpent’s enticement or deception — “The serpent deceived Eve”, that is, it prevailed over her through its temptations. Now, everyone is tempted — that is, everyone is enticed or deceived — by his own lust, or indwelling sin, which is the same thing.

The degrees by which sin proceeds in the work of tempting or deceiving are five in number. We showed earlier that this is a part of the nature of deceit, and that it works by degrees, taking advantage one small step at a time to gain the next.

The **first** of these is drawing off or drawing away — “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust.”

The **second** is in enticing — “And is enticed”.

The **third** is in the conception of sin — “When lust hath conceived”. When the heart is enticed, lust is conceived there.

The **fourth** is in the bringing forth of sin to its actual accomplishment — “When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin”. In this, there is an implied reference to an adulterous relationship away from the true marriage partner, and the conceiving or bringing forth of children by fornication.

The **fifth** is in the completing of it, the filling up of its measure when the end originally purposed by lust arrives — “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”. As lust conceiving naturally gives birth to sin, so sin, fulfilled infallibly, brings eternal death.

The first degree relates to the mind when it is drawn off or drawn away by the deceit of sin. The second degree relates to the feelings, when they are enticed or entangled. The third degree relates to the will, where sin is conceived; the consent of the will setting the scene for the actual conception of sin. The fourth degree relates to the way of life when sin is brought to birth; it exerts itself in the lives and actions of men. The fifth degree produces a stubbornness in sinning, that comes to a head, finishes, and confirms the whole work of sin, with death and eternal ruin following hard on its heels.

I would like to concentrate mainly on the first three, where the main strength of the deceit of sin in believers can be found. God is often pleased, in his grace, to prevent the fourth instance of the bringing forth of actual sins in the life; and the last cannot refer to believers, for we are speaking of an obstinate desire to bring forth sin with its dire and eternal consequences. We will describe later the ways that God, in his grace and faithfulness, uses to stifle the conceptions of sin in the womb and hinder its actual production in the lives of men. The first three degrees, then, we will now describe fully, for they relate directly to believers.

The first degree of deceit

1. The first thing that sin does in its deceit is to draw away or to draw off. This means that a man is drawn away and diverted from pursuing a course of obedience and holiness that he should follow, which is in opposition to sin and the law of sin. Now, it is the mind that is affected most by this aspect of the deceit of sin. The mind or understanding, as we have shown, is the guiding, leading faculty of the soul. It goes first in discerning, judging, determining, and proposing correct moral actions to the will and the heart. Moses told his father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us, and we will treat you well; for the Lord has promised good things to Israel...Please do not leave, inasmuch you know how we are to camp in the wilderness, and you can be our eyes." (Num. 10:29-31) Jethro would be like the soul of the people in the wilderness, with eyes to guide them, to keep them from wandering in that desolate place. So it is with the mind, which is the eye of the soul, without whose guidance the will and heart would perpetually wander in the wilderness of this world, following whatever seemed good to them. The first thing, therefore, that sin aims to do in its deceitful working is to draw away and divert the mind from following its duty.

There are two things about obedience that belong to the duty of the mind in the things that God requires:

1. To keep itself ready, together with the whole soul, to be obedient and watchful against all enticements to conceive sin.

2. To attend carefully, in particular, to all actions, that they may be performed as God requires as to their content, their execution, and their time, and that they may be conformed to his will. It must also anticipate all tendencies of sin to do anything forbidden. In these two things, lies the whole duty of the mind of a believer; and, from both of them, indwelling sin attempts to divert it and draw it away.

(1) The first of these is the duty of the mind with reference to the whole soul; and there are two important things to be considered here:

- (a) Ourselves, our sin and its vileness.
- (b) God, and his grace and goodness.

From both of these things, sin tries to draw us away.

(2) In attending to those duties that are suited to hinder the working of the law of sin in a unique way.

(a) It tries to draw the mind away from a proper consideration, knowledge, and sensitivity of the vileness of sin, and the danger it brings with it. This is very important. A careful consideration of sin in its nature, its aggression, and its aim and tendency, in the light of the blood and cross of Christ, ought always to be with us —

“Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.” (Jer. 2:19)

Every sin is a forsaking of the Lord our God. If the heart does not know this, and if it does not consider carefully that sin is an evil and a bitter thing — evil in itself, and bitter in its effects, fruit and results — it will never be safe from it. The frame of the heart of any sinner that is most acceptable to God is a humble, contrite and self-abasing one.

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

See also Lk. 18:13-14 regarding the repentant tax collector. This spirit is excellent for a sinner; no garment so decently adorns him. Says the Apostle, “...be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble”. (1 Pet. 5:5) This should also adorn us, and is the only safe course. The one who walks humbly walks safely.

Here is a practical summary of this teaching — “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear”. (1 Pet. 1:17) As Peter made such a grievous mistake, he is passing on his advice to all believers. This is not an overwhelming servile fear, upsetting and perplexing the soul, but one that keeps us constantly calling on the Father in the light of the final judgement. And this should preserve us from sin. This implies a humble state of the soul. But how is this obtained? And how is it kept up? In no other way, than by a constant, deep apprehension of the evil, vileness, and danger of sin. This was found in the publican while he prayed, and of which Jesus approved. His prayer was a simple one — “God be merciful to me a sinner!” (Lk. 18:13) A sense of sin kept him humble, and humility made it possible for him to be given a pardon for sin.

This is the great preservative from sin through grace. We have an example in the life of Joseph, recorded in Gen. 39:9. When caught up in the urgency of his great temptation, he recoiled immediately in horror, and exclaimed, “How then can I do this

great wickedness, and sin against God?” An abiding sense of the evil of sin preserved him; so much so, that he risked his life and liberty in opposing it. To fear sin is to fear the Lord. That holy man Job tells us that they are, in fact, the same thing —

“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” (Job 28:28)

This, then, in the first place, is the way the law of sin works its deceit; namely, to draw the mind away from the Lord, who is a strong fortress for the soul’s defence and security. Sin also labours to divert the mind from a due grasp of the vileness, abomination, and danger of sin. It secretly and slowly insinuates, lessens, excuses, and justifies any thoughts about it; or it draws the mind away from pondering the subject, and becoming thoroughly knowledgeable of its past and present work. Once, the heart of a believer was tender, soft, and deeply sensitive to sin through the Word, the Spirit, and the grace of Christ. Then sin attempted in some way or other to make the heart have fewer, slighter, or less stirring thoughts about these wonderful things. And that is how the mind is drawn away by the deceit of sin. There are several ways in which the law of sin tries in its deceit to draw away the mind from this duty. The most important is also its most powerful weapon — a horrible abuse of gospel grace.

In the gospel, there is a remedy for the whole evil of sin, its filth, its guilt, and all its dangerous results. This is the doctrine of the deliverance of the souls of men from sin and death — an unfolding of the gracious will of God towards sinners in Jesus Christ. What is the genuine tendency of this doctrine, this discovery of grace? And how may we make the best use of it? You will find the answer in Tit. 2:11 —

“The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

This teaches us that we ought to learn from this verse and act accordingly. Hence, universal holiness is called “conduct worthy of the gospel of Christ”. (Phil. 1:27) It is a good thing to consider what is suitable for this end, and how it may be made useful.

Accordingly, it produces this effect: that the Word is received and seen in a saving light. (See Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:20-24) But it is just at this point that the deceit of sin interferes. It separates between the doctrine of grace, and the use and purpose of it. It makes the thoughts complacent concerning grace, and intercepts its influences in a proper application. From the doctrine of the assured pardon of sin, it insinuates a disregard of sin. God in Christ makes the proposition, but Satan and sin make the conclusion. The deceit of sin pleads for a disregard of sin; but, concerning the grace of God by which sin is pardoned, the Apostle issues a reproof and detestation of such an attitude — “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:1-2) Paul is saying here, “Men’s deceitful hearts are liable to draw such a conclusion; but, may it be far from us that we should give it any ground!” It is sadly true that some have listened to this deceit to their own eternal ruin. Jude declares — “Certain men have crept in unnoticed ...ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into licentiousness”. (Verse 4) We have some dreadful instances of this in these our days of temptation!

Indeed, in opposing this deceit, we will discover the wisdom of faith, and the power of gospel grace. The mind must be fully knowledgeable of, and motivated by, the gospel truth concerning the full and free forgiveness of all sin through the blood of Christ. Then, the heart will be in a good position to keep itself in a deep, humbling sense of sin, in an abhorrence of sin, and in a deep self-abasement because of sin. This is one of the great effects of gospel wisdom and grace. Here is the test and touchstone of gospel light. Does it keep the heart sensitive to sin, humble, and broken on that account? Does it teach us how to water a free pardon with our tears, and then detest the sin that has been forgiven? Does it work carefully for the ruin of what we are assured will never ruin us? Such teaching is divine, from above, and of the Spirit of grace. Supposing sin is secretly and slowly making us careless and slight in our consideration of itself, then it is self-serving and false. If it comes in any way from the deceit of sin, it must be shunned. That is why we see men walking in spiritual bondage all their days, low in light, and slight in their understanding of grace. So much so, that it is hard to make out which covenant they are under — whether under the Law, or under grace. Yet they walk with a fear of sinning more than many who are advanced in higher degrees of light and knowledge than they are. This is not a denial of the uniqueness of the saving light of the gospel in producing holiness and obedience. Through the deceitfulness of sin, gospel grace is abused in various ways, causing the soul to neglect its duties, and drawing the mind away from considering the nature, results, and danger of sin. This is done in several ways:

Firstly, the soul, finding that it needs frequent relief by gospel grace against a sense of the guilt of sin and the accusations of the law, comes round at last to make it a common thing, and so does it automatically. Having discovered a good medicine for its wounds, and having experienced its curative power, the soul comes to apply it lightly, skinning over, rather than curing its sores. A little less earnestness, a little less diligence, serves every time until the soul, perhaps, begins to take pardon for granted. And this results in drawing the mind away from its constant and universal watch against sin. Those of us whose light has given us access to God's pardon, may become careless, and most likely become formal and careless in our profession of faith. This is in contrast with those who, by reason of mists and darkness, strain to find their way to the throne of grace. It is like a man who, travelling a road regularly, journeys on without a care in the world, compared with another who, being a stranger to the way, looks around, and makes inquiries of all the passengers, and so becomes surer of his destination than the former.

Secondly, the deceitfulness of sin takes advantage of the doctrine of grace in many ways, particularly by extending the bounds of the soul's liberty beyond what God has promised. Some have never thought themselves free from legal bondage until they have been brought into the ecstasy of freedom or into depths of despair. How often sin pleads, "This strictness, this exactness, this scrupulous behaviour is unnecessary, for relief for such things is at hand in the gospel! Can you live as though there is no need of the gospel, and as if the pardon of sin is of no account?" Concerning these pleas of sin from gospel grace, we will consider them in greater detail later.

Thirdly, in times of temptation, the deceit of sin argues expressly for sin from gospel grace; at least, it will plead these two things:

[1] There is no need to contend against sin as energetically as the principle of the new creation within us. If sin cannot divert the soul or mind from looking out for temptations and opposing them, it will try to draw them away from being too serious. It will persuade the soul that it does not need to be so diligent.

[2] It will offer relief in the event of sin by suggesting that it will not ruin or destroy the soul because sin is easily pardoned by the grace of the gospel. And this is true! This is indeed the great and only relief of the soul against sin and its resulting guilt. It is the blessed and only remedy for a guilty soul. But when it is pleaded by the deceit of sin, it makes us indifferent to temptation and sin and its poison. Thus poison is mixed into every drop of this balm, to the danger, if not the death, of the soul.

This, then, is the first way by which the deceit of sin draws away the mind from the vileness of sin, which alone is able to keep it in a humble, self-abasing attitude that is acceptable to God. It makes the mind careless, as though its diligence were unnecessary because of grace abounding. This is like a soldier who neglects his post, trusting in his past honourable record. Indeed, sin takes advantage by working deceitfully in this matter of drawing away the mind from a proper sense of sin. I will give just one example in the way it works. In their younger days, men possessed feelings that were stronger, vigorous, active, and sensitive than of late. These feelings became weaker with age, and many things happen in their lives that take away their edge and keenness. But as they learn to take control of their feelings (if they are not overcome by sensuality, or by the corruptions that are in the world through lust) they grow and improve in their understanding, resolution and judgement. Hence, whatever lodges in their feelings, is not allowed a place in their mind and judgement, and is thrown out; for there is no place in the soul for them.

That is why men have no respect for — indeed, utterly despise — those things that their feelings used to pounce on with delight and greed in their childhood. But there may be things that, in some way or another, become fixed in their minds and judgements which they go on esteeming highly, and love them as they did when their feelings were more vigorous. As it is in the natural realm, so it is in spiritual things. The place that is sensitive to sin is in the feelings. As these in youthful years were keen, so they are in spiritual youth — “I remember the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals.” (Jer. 2:2) Besides, such people have only recently been under deep conviction when they were cut to the heart and made tender. Whatever touches a wound is immediately detected; so too the guilt of sin, after conviction, is first thoroughly cured. But now, as natural feelings die down, so too do spiritual things. Although they may improve in grace, they may decline in consciousness, for the spiritual sense is not very deeply rooted.

Now, in times of spiritual decline, if the soul does not carefully impress a deep sense of sin on the mind and judgement, thereby deeply affecting the heart and the feelings, it will decline spiritually. And, at this point, the deceit of the law of sin interferes, causing a sense of sin to decline in the feelings, diverting the mind away from thinking about it. This is observed in those who never make progress in the ways of God after their conversion. How sensitive to sin they are for a time! How they mourn and weep with feelings of guilt! How happily and heartily they decide to have nothing more to do with it! Feelings are vigorous, and, as it were, rule in their souls. But they are like a plant that flourishes for a day or two with watering, although it has no root. After a while, we

see that these men, the more experienced they become in sin the less they are afraid of it, as the wise man remarks in Eccles. 8:11 — “Because 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.” At the end, they come to be known as the greatest despisers of sin in the world. There is no sinner like the one who has sinned away his conviction of sin. What is the reason for this? A sense of sin once took deep hold in their convictions, and was fixed in their feelings. As it declined, they took no care in fixing it by grace deep in their mind. This, the deceit of sin stole away from them, and thus ruined their souls. In some measure, it is so with all believers. As their spiritual feelings decline, growing heavy and listless, they fail to fix a proper sense of sin and judgement in the mind, when normally grace and wisdom would provoke, excite, enliven, and stir up their feelings every day. The result is that a spiritual decline sets in. At first, sorrow, trouble, grief, and fear, overcame the mind, and gave it no rest. But later, if the mind no longer brings the heart into sorrow and grief, the cause is lost, and the soul is in danger of being hardened.

(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 in which sin draws away the mind from this part of its duty is open and known sufficiently, though not sufficiently watched against. Now, this the Scripture everywhere declares to be the filling of the minds of men with earthly things. This it puts in direct opposition to that heavenly frame of the mind which is the spring of gospel obedience. “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossians 3:2); as if he had said, “On both together you cannot be set or fixed, so as principally and chiefly to mind them both.” And the affections to the one and the other, proceeding from these different principles of minding the one and the other, are opposed, and are directly inconsistent —

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

These, then, are some of the ways in which the deceit of sin diverts the mind from the first part of its duty, or draws it away from its constant watchfulness against sin and its results.

Our Lord showed how opposite these two principles are — “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (Mt. 6:24) It is impossible to serve two masters at the same time, and to the satisfaction of both. Every strong “minding” of earthly things is opposed to that frame of mind whereby we fix our thoughts on God and his grace, leading to gospel obedience.

There are several ways in which the deceit of sin draws the mind away in this case, but the main one is by impressing these things on the mind with the idea that sinful things are all right, perhaps necessary. So it was in the parable of the Great Supper, that all those who excused themselves from attending the marriage-feast of the gospel did so because they were engaged in their rightful business — one with his farm, another with his oxen, and another with his new wife. (Lk. 14:16-20) With all kinds of excuses, our minds are drawn away from those heavenly things that are necessary for our walk with God. And the rules of not loving the world, or disregarding it, are

forgotten. What wisdom, what watchfulness, what serious and frequent examination of our souls, is required to keep our hearts and minds in a heavenly frame! It is evident that the engine by which the deceit of sin draws away and turns aside the mind in this matter is the pretence of the lawfulness of certain things that should to be examined very carefully. There are far too few who arm themselves with such diligence, wisdom, and skill.

This, then, is the first assault that indwelling sin makes on the soul by deceit — it draws away the mind from giving close attention to the detection of sin in all its evil forms, and a proper and constant consideration of God and his grace.

CHAPTER 9

The deceit of sin is shown in its drawing away the mind from a careful observance of the duties of *meditation* and *prayer*

I have already shown how sin, in all its deceit, attempts to draw away the mind from the holy duty of walking with God, for this is the way the soul is preserved. We now go on to show that it is the same for those special duties by which the design, working, and prevalence of indwelling sin is frustrated and stopped. Sin, indeed, keeps up its enmity against all the duties of obedience, and particularly anything to do with obedience to God, and fellowship with him. "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." (Rom. 7:21) It means that "Whenever I would do good, or whatever good I should do (that is, spiritually good with reference to God), sin remains in me to hinder me from doing good, and opposes me in doing good." On the other hand, all duties of obedience defend us against the actions of the law of sin; for as the flesh, in all its acts, lusts against the Spirit, so the Spirit, in all his acts, lusts against the flesh. Thus every duty performed in the strength and grace of the Spirit is contrary to the law of sin. Paul writes — "...but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom. 8:13) It is the Spirit of grace in our obedient duties who does this work. So the Spirit and the flesh are opposing principles.

Yet there are some duties which, by their very nature, and by God's appointment, have a special influence in weakening and subduing the whole law of sin in its nature and main strength. These, the mind of a believer ought to concentrate on; and, from these things, the deceit of sin will try to draw away the mind. As in the case of some diseases of the body, some remedies (it is said) have a curative power against them; so it is with the disease of the soul; there are some duties that have a curative power against any inflammation of sin. I shall not give you many examples, just two that seem to me to be suitable — namely, that by God's grace they have a special tendency to ruin the law of sin. And then we will look at some ways, methods, and means that the law of sin employs to divert the mind from a careful observance of these two duties.

Now, these two duties are as follows: **firstly**, *prayer*, especially private prayer; **secondly**, *meditation*. I link them together because they are similar in nature and purpose, differing only in their performance. By meditation, I mean thinking deeply about how to relate practically the Word of God to our own hearts, and how our hearts may be brought into conformity to God's will. It is our pondering on "the truth [as it] is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21) that we discover how it is with our hearts. It is the same for prayer, which brings our souls to know the mind and will of God. These two duties are like blood and spirit to the veins, having the same life, purpose, and use.

However, because so few of us are able to excel in the duty of meditation, and despite my having declared its great power in controlling the actions of the law of sin, I give briefly two or three rules to help believers perform this great duty:

1. Meditate on God in the presence of God. That is, when you meditate on God — his excellence, his attributes, his glory, his majesty, his love, and his goodness. Note the opening words of Ps. 102:1 — "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord. Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry

come unto thee.” Let it be done by coming to God with a deep humility and abasement of your soul before him. This will concentrate the mind, and draw it out from one thing to another by giving glory to God in a fit manner, and affect the soul until it is brought into a holy admiration of God, and a delight in him that is acceptable to him. I mean, that speaking to God is best done in prayer and praise.

2. Meditate on the Word as you read the Word. That is, look for the sense of the passage you are reading, all the while looking to God for help, guidance, and direction so that you may discover his mind and will in it, and then go on to move your heart with the power of the Word.

3. When you come short in thinking about these things, make up the deficiency by being more constant. You may have become discouraged because your minds do not supply you with enough thoughts to carry on our meditations. Remedy this by fixing your mind frequently on spiritual things that are worthy of meditation.

However, this is only by the way. These two duties among many others (for we have only chosen them as examples) put up a special opposition to the very being and life of indwelling sin through the faith that is contained in them. They are forever working towards the utter ruin of sin. Let me, then, do two things:

(1) Show the suitability and usefulness of these two duties for the ruining of sin.

(2) Show the means by which the deceit of sin tries to draw away the mind from carefully scrutinising them.

(1) As for the first, notice this:

[1] It is the proper work of the soul to seek out the secret working and actions of sin, and ask such questions as these: “What advantages does sin have? What temptations does it use? What harm can it do us? What further harm is it ready to do?” I speak of prayer that touches on all the needs, difficulties, and emergencies of the soul. Without this, prayer is not prayer; it is just an outward show of duty, and is in no way useful either in bringing glory to God or good to the souls of men. It is like a cloud without water, driven by the wind and breath of men. There is no greater poison for the souls of men than binding them to repeat over and over a form of words in their prayers and supplications, words that they do not really understand. If you bind men to their monotonous trade or business in this world, they soon discover its deadly effect. And by such prayers, they will never know what is good or bad for them. These prayers can only serve to mock God and delude men’s souls.

The Spirit of God responds to sincere prayer by giving us his assistance, and particularly in exposing the most secret actions and working of the law of sin — “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Rom. 8:26) He reveals to us our present weakness, and where we need help and relief. And we will find in our daily experience that it is in prayer that we are brought to the discovery and conviction of the secret, deceitful work of sin in our hearts, which nothing else can do.

In Ps. 51, David, while confessing his sin and having his wound probed by the skilful hand of the Spirit of God, discovered in prayer the root of all his evil and corruption —

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. (4-6)

The Spirit acts as the light of the Lord to the soul, enabling it to search out all its inner recesses. It shines a holy, spiritual light on the mind, enabling it to search the deep and dark parts of the heart to find out the subtle and deceitful schemes and intrigues of the law of sin. Whatever secrecy it seeks, whatever power and prevalence it has, indwelling sin is exposed, arrested, and brought into the presence of God where it is judged, condemned, and wept over. And what can possibly be more effective for its ruin and destruction? For, after it is discovered, prayer is shown to be all the relief that is provided by Jesus Christ, so that by all means sin may be ruined. Hence, it is the duty of the mind to “...be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” (1 Pet. 4:7) We should attend diligently to the state of our souls, and ask God fervently and effectively to deal with it. The same can also be said of meditation, which, when wisely managed, has the same effect.

[2] During prayer, there enters into the heart a deep sense of the vileness of sin, with a renewed detestation of it. And this in itself undoubtedly leads to the ruination of sin. This is one of the purposes of prayer — namely, to draw out sin, get it in the open, and see it in all its vileness, abomination and contradiction, in order that it may be loathed, abhorred, and cast away as a filthy thing — “Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, ‘Get thee hence.’” (Is. 30:22) Whoever pleads with God for the forgiveness of his sins also pleads with his own heart to detest sin. “Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ‘Ye are our gods’: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. (Hos. 14:3) It is in prayer, also, that sin is judged in the name of God; for, by confession, the soul agrees with God’s detestation of sin and the sentence of his Law against it. There are some that pay lip service to this duty, particularly when under conviction of sin, but only to cover up their lusts. While they are sinning quietly, they perform their outward confession perfectly. But the prayer we are speaking about is something altogether different, a thing that allows no room for sin, much less serve the ends of its deceit. This, unfortunate, is what formal prayer does. But true prayer cannot be bribed into a secret alliance with sin. In prayer, the heart arrives at a most sincere sense of sin and a loathing of it. And this obviously tends toward 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 — “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” (Jas. 1:5) Prayer is the way to obtain from God through Christ a supply for all our needs, and aid against all opposition, especially by sin. I suppose I hardly need to repeat this, for this truth is made known to every believer. When we call, the Lord Jesus comes to our aid with his “help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16)

[4] Faith in prayer undermines all the works of the deceit of sin; and when the praying soul constantly calls on God to oppose sin in any form, it is able to promise to God — “I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.” (Ps. 119:106) This is the language of every gracious soul who addresses God. His innermost being becomes one with God, clings to him in all things, and opposes sin. The soul that cannot do this does not know how to pray. To pray in any other way is to flatter God with our lips, and he hates that. But true prayer is a wonderful help to any believer in the pursuing of sin to its ruin for the following reasons:

Firstly, if there is any lust lurking secretly in his heart, it will either rise up against him during prayer, or use its cunning to conceal itself from him. Yet it can be exposed, and the conviction of the heart concerning its evil will be deepened and strengthened. Sin can be exposed, and never more evidently than when it is most remorselessly pursued in prayer. Lusts in men are compared with harmful and horrible beasts. Some men behave like brute beasts because of their lusts. In contrast, we see how the Lord tames the brute beasts —

“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” (Isaiah 11:4-6).

Now, wild beasts when in danger take themselves to their dens to hide. But when they are fiercely pursued, they will turn and reveal their true nature and ferocity. And so it is with sin and corruption in the heart.

Secondly, if any sin prevails in the soul, prayer will weaken it and pluck it out as the soul enjoys communion with God. The soul will draw back from it, and count it as of no account. Now, when this happens, a gracious soul is awakened and stirs itself to look around. A sudden weakness or an unusual weariness or an indisposition of the body is seen as the sign of an approaching fever or some dangerous sickness, and will stir us up to take precautions. It is so in this case. When the soul of a believer finds within itself a reluctance to make fervent, sincere prayers to a holy God, it knows that there is something wrong, and looks for a remedy.

Thirdly, while the soul is constantly engaged with God, sin cannot prevail. Indeed, this communion with God leads to a considerable conquest over sin, a situation referred to in Ps. 18:23 — “I was also blameless before him, and I kept myself from iniquity.” And with such a success, the soul will triumph in the grace of God, and have good hope that, through faith, it will finally conquer, and what it desires will come to pass. And this tends to frustrate, indeed, ruin the law of sin.

Fourthly, if the heart is not to be deceived by hypocritical sin, this communion with God will greatly influence our diligence and watchfulness against sin. There is no greater example of hypocrisy than that found in the heart of the immoral woman described in Prov. 7:14 —

“She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner. So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves.”

She is saying, in effect, “I have paid my religious vows, so now I can go on with my sin, or not worry my conscience with sin because I have prayed about it!” It is not so with a soul in whom there is a work of grace. A close and conscientious communion with God makes us very watchful against all the workings and operations of sin. Therefore, on this account, faith in prayer works effectively in weakening the power of the law of sin and stopping its progress. If the mind is diligent in its desire to preserve the soul from the power of sin, it will certainly take care of the problem with faithful prayer.

At this point, the law of sin will react like this:

Indwelling sin will employ its deceit in defending itself. It works to divert and draw away the mind from attending to prayer and similar duties. And there are, among others, four engines (ways and means) by which it seeks to accomplish its end.

(1) It will take advantage of its ability to weary the flesh. There is an aversion there, as I have already said, in the law of sin to immediate communion with God. Now, this is so with prayer. There is nothing in faithful prayer by which the worldly part of the soul can be gratified or satisfied as there is in most public duties, for it involves both faith and love. As faithful prayer is a spiritual exercise, it becomes burdensome to flesh and blood. It is like travelling alone without a friend or a diversion, making the journey seem very long; but, with a friend, the passenger comes to his journey’s end much quicker.

Our Saviour expected to find his disciples in prayer during his distress in the garden, but, instead, he found them fast asleep. He said — “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Mt. 26:41) And out of that weakness, their indisposition to pray, and their weariness in their duty, grew. God complained of his people — “And you have been weary of me, O Israel.” (Is. 43:22) And it reached this height —

“Ye have said, ‘Behold, what a weariness is it!’ and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts.” (Malachi 1:13)

The Jews pretended that it was their offerings or sacrifices, which they carried on their shoulders, that wearied them, and they panted and blew like men ready to faint away. In fact, they were bringing to the altar only the mutilated, the lame, and the sick animals. This is how faithful prayer sees the works of the flesh. And this is what the deceit of sin makes use of in drawing the heart gradually away from prayer. It cries out for the relief of the weak and weary flesh. There is in this matter a contrast between

spiritual flesh and natural flesh — but when joined together, they produce an aversion to this spiritual duty.

This is how it was with the spouse in Song 5:2, 8 —

“I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night...I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.”

She was asleep, drowsing in her spiritual condition, and she pleaded for her natural unfitness to rouse herself from that state. The mind must be careful to prevent this condition. It must be convinced that prayer is indispensable. It must be willing to stir up the principle of grace in the heart to exert its rule and sovereignty and not to be dulled by foolish pretence. If it does not do these things, it will find itself drawn away by indwelling sin.

(2) The deceit of sin makes use of corrupt reasoning based on the urgent duties of life. It reasons in the heart, “Should we attend strictly to all duties of this kind, and neglect important business in the world, and find ourselves of no use to ourselves and others?” In this way, the affairs of this life take the place of spiritual duties. Men reason that they do not have the time to glorify God and save their own souls. It is certain that God gives us enough time for all that he requires of us in this world. No duties need to encroach on our time unduly. Special occasions should be decided on according to special circumstances. But if we take on more business than we have time to spare, and rob God of what is due to him and our souls, we can be sure that this is not what God calls us to do, and he will not bless us. It is better to follow our duties of holiness and godliness, and set aside the duties of our daily employment. Yet God does not intend us to find a conflict of interest in the normal course of events.

So this is how the deceit of sin entices the souls of men to leave off from faithful prayer.

(2) It deals with the mind by drawing it away from this duty by promising it compensation in other things, just as Saul covered his disobedience with sacrifice. (See 1 Samuel 13:9-15) The inner voice of sin whispers, “Will not the same duty performed in public or in the family be enough?” And if the soul is as stupid not to reply, “All these things must be done, and this particular duty should not be left undone”, it will be ensnared and deceived. Besides the command to watchfulness and prayer, there are, as I said, many advantages in faithful prayer that act against the deceit and power of sin, which is not true of external and formal things. Indwelling sin strives to deceive the soul in this exchange with false and corrupt reasoning.

(3) I must add, finally, one more thing concerning the deceit of sin — namely, that it feeds the soul with a promise of a greater attention to this duty when occasion permits. By this means, it induces the soul to say, as Felix did to Paul, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” (Acts 24:25) And, by this means, the present time, which alone is ours, is lost forever.

These, then, are some of the engines (ways and means) by which the deceit of sin tries to draw the mind away from prayer, a duty that is specially fitted to hinder its

progress and power, and which aims directly and immediately at its ruin. This is also true of other spiritual duties, but this one is sufficient to expose the nature of the deceit of sin. And this is the first way in which it attempts to entangle the affections. When sin has this effect on a believer, he is said to be “drawn away”, diverted from what in his mind he ought constantly to attend to in his walk with the Lord. And this teaches us to discern where begins the start of our spiritual decline in the ways of God. This is of great importance, and should be of deep concern to us. When a sickness or fever first manifests itself, we cast around desperately for a cure. God, in order to call Zion back to himself, showed her this — “O thou inhabitant of Lachish, bind the chariot to the swift beast: she is the beginning of the sin to the daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in thee.” (Micah 1:13)

Now, the beginning of our sin is the drawing away of the mind from proper attention to the duty of prayer. The care and charge of the soul falls on the mind; and if it fails in its duty, the whole man is betrayed into falling into sin. The failure of the mind is like the failing of the watchman in Ezekiel; the nation was lost by his neglect. (See Ezek. 33:2-11) This, therefore, brings us back to the need for self-examination, and a careful consideration of that to which we are called. God does not keep score of our duties, or take note of the intention of the mind and spirit to do what he requires. Many perform their duties automatically, hardly giving them a thought, their minds full of other things. This is a mockery of God and a deception of their own souls.

Would you not take the true measure of yourselves, and consider how it is with your mind and soul? Consider whether you have been diverted and drawn away by any of the deceits I have mentioned. If you are to find any spiritual decline in yourself, you will find that it begins here. In one way or other, your minds have been made careless, lazy, and uncertain because you have been enticed and drawn away from the duty of prayer. Consider the exhortation found in Prov. 4:23, 25-27 — “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life... Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.” Should not a soul exclaim, “If I had had only taken more care! If only I had behaved more wisely concerning the horrible nature of sin! If only I had not allowed my mind to be filled with vain hopes and foolish thoughts through a vile abuse of gospel grace! If only I had not permitted my mind to be filled with worldly things and become negligent in attending to prayer! Then I would not this day be sick, weak, wounded, and defiled! My careless and deceived mind is the beginning of sin and transgression in my soul.” This admission is sufficient to direct the soul to look for a means of healing and recovery. This comes not by performing a multitude of particular duties, but by a restoring of the soul and mind. (Ps. 23:3) Here is the great means of preserving our souls according to the mind and will of God — namely, to have a sound and steadfast mind. It is a great grace to know “the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Tim. 1:7) How good it is to possess a stable, sound, and resolute mind concerning the things of God, not easily moved, diverted, changed, or drawn aside, a mind not likely to listen to corrupt thoughts, deceitful insinuations, or strategies to draw it away from its duty.

This is what the Apostle exhorts believers to do —

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

Being steadfast in our mind is the cause of all our immovableness and fruitfulness in obedience. Peter tells us — “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 3:17) And the great guilt that backsliders feel is from this: they are not steadfast, as the psalmist declares — “For their heart was not steadfast with him, nor were they faithful in his covenant.” (Ps. 78:37) For the soul to be secure, and for the mind not to be drawn away from its duty, the soundness and steadfastness of the mind is a great preservative.

There are three parts to this steadfastness of mind: **firstly**, a strong desire to please God in all things; **secondly**, a daily renewal of the heart to fulfil this purpose; and **thirdly**, a resolution to reject everything that hinders that end. This is a subject I will leave till later.

CHAPTER 10

Further comments on the deceit of sin in drawing away the mind from spiritual duties — Several things are required of the mind of believers with regard to obedience — The actions of sin in diverting the mind from spiritual duties through deceit

We have not yet concluded the first way in which sin works in all its deceit — namely, in its drawing the mind away from its duty. I add a few more ways, and for two reasons:

Firstly, because it is of great importance. If the mind is drawn away, it becomes tainted, weakened, and turned aside from a strict performance of its charge and office, the whole soul and will and heart will certainly become entangled and drawn into sin. This then should put us on the alert, as we read in the Apostle's exhortation —

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

It is the failure of our minds through the deceit of sin that he is warning against here, for it leads to loss of spiritual life, power, sensitivity, and the impression of the Word. There is no way to prevent this except by giving the most “earnest heed to the things we have heard”; and this involves the whole duty of our minds in obedience.

Secondly, because the actions and working of the mind are spiritual, they need enlightening like the conscience. Although these actions cause much stir and ado, the unenlightened conscience is not sensitive enough to take proper notice of them. Conscience does not usually reflect on the mind's failures to indicate the state of the whole soul. When the feelings become entangled in sin, or the will is reluctant to give its consent, it is at that point that the conscience either tends to cause uproar in the soul, giving it no rest until the soul is reclaimed, or, it descends to being bribed or corrupted. We also add that a neglect of the mind (which is spiritual in nature) is due to a lack of spirituality. Our mind is often called our spirit in the Scriptures, such as, “...whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel” (Rom. 1:9), and must be distinguished from the soul, which includes the feelings. “May the God of peace...sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless”. (1 Thess. 5:23) There we have mention of both the mind and the feelings. It is also true to say that the word “spirit” is sometimes used to express spiritual gifts that act through the faculty of the soul, and are then recognised by our “understanding”. (See 1 Cor. 14:15)

Concerning the spirit, its actions are secret and hidden, and cannot be exposed without spiritual wisdom and diligence. Let us not dwell on this subject too long, although it is of importance to us for it deals with hidden matters that are rarely considered. Yet our carefulness in such matters is the best evidence we have of our sincerity. Let us not, then, be like a man who has cut his finger, but takes no precautions concerning further infection that could very well lead to his death.

We now consider the mind with reference to particular duties and sins; and while we do this, we will do two things:

1. We will show what is required of the mind of a believer with regard to particular duties.
2. We will consider the way the deceit of sin acts to distract the mind from obedience.

This will include particular sins, and tell us how to avoid them.

1. In order to do our duty properly, it is not enough to perform what is required, but to recognise that our duty is part of a universal rule. Here lies the great duty of the mind — namely, obedience to the rule of duties, taking care that all of them follow this rule. Our progress in obedience is an indication of our edification (our up-building). Now, it is not enough to bring wood and stone and leave them in great heaps of builders' materials. They must be cut and squared and fitted according to a rule. It is not the number of duties we perform that builds us up in the faith. They just lie in a heap unless they conform to a rule. Did not God expressly reject a multitude of duties when they did not come under his rule — “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me?” (Is. 1:11), and then in verse 14 — “They are a trouble to me, I am weary of bearing them.” All acceptable obedience must be according to God's rule — “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” (Gal. 6:16) This means that they must be conformed to God's authority by way of regular obedience. When letters of the alphabet lie about in a heap, they make no sense unless they are put in their proper order. It is also true with our duties. The great duty of the mind is to make sure that we “walk circumspectly” (Eph. 5:15), meaning, performing them exactly with due care and attention. Therefore, we must take heed to this rule in all that we do. We walk in duties, but we must walk circumspectly, with the full attention of the mind.

(1) There are some things that this rule directs our mind to consider. For example:

[1] As to the matter of our duties, they should be whole and complete. Under the Law, no animals could be used as sacrifices if they were missing a limb, or if they were defective in some way. These were rejected, as well as those that were lame or blind. Duties must be complete regarding their fulfilment. Even keeping back part of the stock would have made the sacrifices unacceptable. When Saul spared Agag and the fattest of the cattle, he made the rest useless. (See 1 Sam. 15) Thus, when men give to charity, or perform other services, but not according to the proportion that the rule dictates, and which the mind knows and accepts, the whole duty becomes invalid.

[2] As to the principle of it — namely, that it should be done in faith, and in the strength of Christ (Jn. 15:5), without whom we can do nothing. It is not enough that the person should be a believer, although that is necessary for every good work (Eph. 2:10), but also faith should be present in every duty that he performs; for the whole obedience is the “obedience to the faith”. (Rom. 1:5) This is what the doctrine of faith requires, and this is what the grace of faith bears and brings forth. Christ is expressly declared to be “our life” (Colossians 3:4) — our spiritual life — the spring, author, and cause of it. Now, as in nature when no act can be performed except without the actual operation of the principle of life itself, so, in the spiritual life, nothing is performed unless it is a spiritually vital act. That is, no duty is acceptable to God unless it is performed in the power of

Christ who is our life. And this can in no other way come from us except by faith. As the Apostle said —

“Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God. (Gal. 2:20)

Not only was Christ his life, a living principle within him, but he led his life, and discharged all his vital actions, by way of the duties of holiness and obedience, and with faith in him. In the actual performance of those duties, he derives supplies of grace and strength from Christ all the time. This, therefore, a believer should attend to diligently; namely, that everything he does for God is done in the strength of Christ. This is the spiritual walk of every believer.

[3] While we are considering the question of rule, the manner of the performance of every duty should be taken into account. Now, there are two things about this that a believer who is entrusted with spiritual light ought to be careful with:

Firstly, that every duty is performed in the way, and through the means, that God has commanded with regard to its outward performance. This should be taken into account when performing duties to do with the worship of God. The content and outward performance of this duty falls under God’s command. If this is not understood and followed, the whole duty is useless. I am not directing my remarks to those who are deluded by the deceit of sin, or who utterly disregard the rule of the Word in such things, and worship God as they see fit. I am speaking to those who, though they generally profess to do what God requires, and as he requires, do not take sufficient care with the performance of duties, and do not make the authority of God the sole cause and reason for their performance. And this is the reason why God often calls on his people to consider carefully and wisely how to do what he has commanded.

Secondly, the desires of the heart and mind depend on the inward performance of these duties. The prescriptions and commands of God in these matters are countless, and every omission renders each duty an abomination to him. A sacrifice without heart, without salt, without fire, of what value is it? Every duty touches the heart and mind. And where is our resolution to keep the charge of God, and keeps our heart centred on God? We also discover that God requires special feelings for special duties — “...he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Rom. 12:8) If this does not receive our attention, all is lost.

[4] The mind must also attend to the purpose of our duties, the most important aspect of which is bringing glory to God in Christ. Now, several other ends are attached to our duties by sin, in fact, two to be precise — firstly, self-satisfaction with regard to our consciences, and secondly, the praise of men. Self-righteousness and self-display are two sins always found in those who have fallen away from God in their spiritual duties. In their sins, they try to satisfy their lusts, and in their duties, their self-deceit and pride. These, the mind of a believer should guard against, and keep a single eye to the glory of God in all things that are covered by the rule of obedience — “Therefore...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor. 10:31) These, and similar things, I say, should occupy the mind of every believer in everything to do with his walk with God.

Here lies the deceit of sin — namely, to draw the mind away from its watch before the Lord, and to cause us go astray. Thus it attempts to strip our duties of all nobility by persuading our mind not to worry too much about the duties themselves. This it does in several ways:

Firstly, by persuading the mind to be content with generalities, and diverting it from attending to anything in particular. For example, it tries to persuade the soul to accept the general aim of doing things to the glory of God without considering how to do it in every duty. Thus King Saul thought that he had fulfilled his duty, and done the will of God, and sought his glory in his war against Amalek, when, for lack of care in his every duty, he dishonoured God and ruined himself and his family. Men may persuade themselves that they are aiming for the glory of God without applying this principle to particular duties. But, the soul, instead of fixing the mind on faithfully advancing the glory of God in each duty, contents itself with the general idea of doing so. Thus, the mind is drawn away from its duty by the deceit of sin. When a man is travelling, he will take note of his journey by consulting a map as he proceeds, looking for every turning, and taking note of certain landmarks along the way. Otherwise, he may wander, and never come to his journey's end. We assume that in general we aim for the glory of God, and that is what we all profess to do. Yet, unless we take special care of every duty as we journey on in our lives, we will never attain this aim. One that is satisfied with a general purpose, without taking action in every special duty, will certainly not achieve this purpose. Sin also works in the mind with reference to the spiritual nature of our duties, as it does with regard to their end. The spiritual principle at work in believers is that everything should be done in faith and in the strength of Christ. But when men assume they are believers, and that they have true faith, but do not act in every duty by faith, and do not live by faith in the Son of God, their minds are soon drawn away from duty. Spiritual actions are those in which we express and exercise our faith and obedience. What we are in them, that we are, and no more.

Secondly, indwelling sin draws away the mind from the two duties we have already mentioned by insinuating a secret satisfaction into them when the duty has been performed. This is a fair description of the natural conscience. When the duty is performed, although it may fall short in almost all things concerning God's rule, conscience and conviction will be satisfied. Saul, in his expedition against Amalek, cried out to Samuel, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord." (1 Sam. 15:13) Saul had satisfied himself concerning his duties, although he had not been as careful as he should in fulfilling the whole will of God in the matter. And was it not so when Israel complained to the Lord, "Wherefore have we fasted", say they, 'and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?' Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours." (Is. 58:3) They were pleased with the performance of their duties, and expected God to be pleased with them, but he showed them how they had failed, and described their works as an abomination. The same charge against them is found in Is. 48:1-2 — "Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness. For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; the Lord of hosts is his name." The deceit of sin tries to draw the mind into concentrating on the performance of the duty itself. Those that are deceived say in their satisfaction, "We ought to pray, and we will pray; we ought to give alms, and we

will give alms. We have done well, and we will go on to do other duties.” When such an attitude prevails, the mind discharges itself from any obligation to perform further duties, leaving the soul on the brink of many evils.

Thirdly, duties soon become customary, which is the height of indwelling sin when it draws the mind away from duty. Men’s minds may be drawn away even when the duties are being performed; for while they are being performed, the mind is diverted away from its charge and watchfulness. Whatever is done in such a frame of mind is not done for God. Amos 5:25 reveals that none of their sacrifices were for God, although they declared that it was so — “Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.” They did not worship in faith and for God’s glory; so God despised all their works. See also Hos. 10:1 — “Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images. Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty”. Here is the main reason why those who profess the faith accomplish so little as they perform their duties. They do not attend to them in a spiritual way for their minds are drawn away from a careful watch. They have little or no communion with God, the very purpose of their creation, and which is so profitable to them. And, in this way, the many duties of worship and obedience are performed by a sorry generation of hypocrites, formalists, and worldly people who have no life or light in them, who are rejected by God. Their minds become wholly diverted from giving proper attention to their duties through the power and deceit of sin.

(3) As it is with duties, so it is with their sins. There are certain things concerning every sin that the mind of a believer should carefully examine for the preservation of the soul. Now, God has appointed and sanctified certain things to effectively rebuke and check the deceitful works of the law of sin. This comes about by the law of grace. Sin responds by deceitfully trying to draw away the mind from a proper examination of sins. Here are a few things to reflect on:

The first and most obvious is the sovereignty of God. He is the great Lawgiver who forbids all sin. This is what Joseph remembered in his great temptation — “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9) What Potiphar’s wife demanded of him was a great sin, and also a great sign of ingratitude against his master; and that is what he pleaded. (Read verses 8-9) But the overriding argument that hardened his heart against it was that it was a sin against God who expressly forbade it. The Apostle informs us that in our dealing with anything that is against God’s Law, we should always be looking toward our Lawgiver and Sovereign Lord —

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

Always bear this in mind: there is one Lawgiver who is holy and righteous, armed with sovereign power and authority. He is able to save and to destroy. Hence sin is called “a rebellion against”, or a “casting off his yoke”, or a “despising of” his sovereignty and his Law. This, the mind should remember in every kind of lust, action, and suggestion of the law of sin, especially when caught up in some vigorous and urgent temptation.

The argument runs like this: “It is God who has forbidden this thing, who is the great Lawgiver, under whose absolute sovereignty I serve in complete dependence on him, and by whose disposition my present state and eternal condition is fixed.” Eve mentioned this at the beginning of her temptation — “God hath said, ‘Ye shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” (Gen. 3:3) But she did not stand her ground. Instead, she abandoned the command, and allowed her mind to be diverted from it by the subtlety of Satan, and so fell into sin. So it is with us whenever we disobey God.

(2) These two things — the deceit that is found in every sin, and the punishment that comes with the breaking of the Law — the mind should consider carefully with reference to every evil act. A diversion from this doctrinal and practical teaching opens the way to all kinds of abominations. Job professed that this was in his mind —

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

Job continues with a list of many evils, but pleads his innocence of them all, although they were of a sort that, on account of his fame and power, he could have easily committed without fear of punishment by men. The reason that caused him to abstain from them was, in effect, that he considered that God had appointed death and destruction for the punishment of sin. And such was God’s greatness, majesty and power that he could insist on the highest sentence and no one would contradict him. The Apostle says the same thing, directing believers to consider that “it is a “fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Heb. 10:31). In the previous verse, he pointed to God who declares, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay”. (30) We have a sin-avenging God who will by no means acquit the guilty. Despite the declaration of God’s gracious name, and his many encouragements to poor sinners in Christ, he adds in closing — “The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (30-31) At the making of the new tablets on which were written the Commandments, Moses declared — “... by no means clearing the guilty”. (Ex. 34:7) In the minds of those he has pardoned, he has put a due sense of the punishment that comes from his righteous justice for every sin. And so the Apostle reminds us that “...our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb. 12:29) We should consider his holiness and righteous judgement, for he has appointed a sure recompense and reward for sin. When men forget this, they arrive at the height of their sins —

“... who, knowing the righteous judgement of God, that those who practise such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practise them.” (Rom. 1:32)

What hope is there for them? There is relief for humble believing souls in the blood of Christ. But this relief should not take our minds off the sovereignty of God as a restraint for sin. Both of these considerations — the sovereignty of God and the punishment of sin — are brought together in our Saviour’s words —

“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Mt. 10:28)

(3) A consideration of all the love and kindness of God, against whom every sin is committed, is another thing that the mind ought to dwell on. Indeed, this is the

strongest reason, if rightly and graciously brought home to the soul. Moses impressed this on the people —

“Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Is not he thy Father that bought thee? Hath he not made thee, and established thee?” (Deut. 32:6)

In other words: “Is this a true response to eternal love and all its fruits, for the love and care of our Father and Redeemer of whom we have been made partakers?” Does not the Apostle say the same thing in 2 Cor. 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.”

Having received the promises, should this not effectively stir us up to holiness so that we will to work hard to abstain from sin. And what are these promises? Namely, “I [God] will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters” (2 Cor. 6:17-18), a promise that takes in the whole of God’s love towards us both here and in eternity. If there is any spiritual integrity in the soul, while the mind remains attentive to this truth, there will be no successful attempt on it by the power of sin. Now, there are two things to consider here:

[1] What is stated in general is true for all believers. The Apostle John declares:

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (1 Jn. 3:1-3)

“Consider”, he is saying, “the love of God, and the privileges because of us” — “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God.” *Adoption* is an outstanding fruit of God’s love; and how great a privilege it is! Such love we have, and such fruits we enjoy, things the world knows nothing about! What a blessed condition we enjoy through it! “The world does not know us.” Indeed, it is such a love, and so unspeakably blessed and glorious in its effects that we cannot comprehend them fully. What use, then, ought we to make of this contemplation of the excellent, unspeakable love of God? “Why”, says John, “everyone who hath this hope in him purifieth himself.” Everyone who has been made a partaker of this love, and longs for a full enjoyment of its fruit and being made like God in his glory, “purifies himself” — that is, abstains from all and every sin.

[2] Regarding special mercies as fruits of God’s love, every believer shares in them. There is no believer who knows of God’ love and mercy who does not share this experience with his brothers. Yet he has also inherited a special mercy that brings him great joy, and in which no stranger shares — “Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour. The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.” (Prov. 14:9-10) These verses point to a particular application of covenant love and mercy to the soul. Now, these mercies provided by God should be kept in mind during times of temptation, for a consideration of them will

keep the soul secure during the assaults of sin. Their neglect is a terrible mistake. In 1 Kings 11:9, it was reckoned to be a great evil of Solomon that he sinned against special mercies, especially God's love and favour. "So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice." God required him to bear in mind his special favour, and made it an argument against sin. But Solomon neglected it, and received a severe rebuke. Indeed, all God's special mercies, all his special tokens and pledges of love, are completely lost and misspent on us if they are not used rightly. This, then, is another thing that the mind should pay attention to in order to put up an effective opposition to any attempt made on the soul by the law of sin.

(4) A consideration of the blood and mediation of Christ is also very important. This is what the Apostle said —

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

There is a constraining power in this great thought; it is strong and forcible and effective if properly attended to.

(5) I have little space to speak of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit — the greatest privilege we enjoy in this world. Consider how much he is grieved by sin, how his dwelling-place is defiled by it, how his comforts are forfeited, lost, and despised by it! But it is enough for our purpose just to briefly mention it.

Now, this is the duty of the mind with reference to particular sins and temptations, It must diligently and carefully attend to these things, dwell constantly on them, and have them ready to oppose all the lusts, actions, warrings, assaults, and raging of sin. By drawing your attention to them, I am pointing out the strategy and deceit of indwelling sin. It uses all means to draw the mind away from giving due attention to these things, and depriving the soul of this great preservative and antidote against the poison of sin. It tries to fill the soul with general unquestioned ideas about itself so that it will have nothing in particular to use to defend itself against its assaults and temptations. We may look at the way in which it does this:

(1) It is from the deceit of sin that the mind becomes spiritually lazy, failing to do its duty. The main task of the mind in this matter is found in the word "watch", the very warning our Lord Jesus gave to his disciples regarding all the coming dangers from sin and Satan —

"I say unto all, 'Watch.'" (Mark 13:37)

That is, "Use your utmost diligence and circumspection, so that you will not be not surprised and entangled with temptations."

The upshot is: "Use your utmost diligence and caution, so as not to be surprised and entangled with temptation." Sometimes it is called consideration — "Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; 'Consider your ways'...Thus saith the Lord of hosts,

‘Consider your ways.’” (Haggai 1:5, 7). “Oh, that they were wise, that they would understand this, that they would consider their latter end!” (Deuteronomy 32:29) Here is something that caused God to complain of his people. Now, what is contrary to these indispensable conditions for our preservation can be described as spiritual laziness. Thus the Apostle declares —

“And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful.” (Heb. 6:11-12)

If we do not display diligence, we will become sluggish, and be in danger of coming short of inheriting the promises.

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 1:5-11)

All this, the mind is drawn away from by the deceit of sin and rendered lazy. Now, this laziness consists of four things:

Firstly, thoughtlessness. It is a failure to think through its special duties. The Apostle earnestly pleaded with the Hebrew believers to consider carefully whether they might have become hardened by the deceit of sin. They were in spiritual danger because they had become “dull of hearing” (Heb. 5:11); that is, they had become lazy, not taking their duties carefully. A hidden disregard is apt to creep into the soul, blinding it to caution and to duty.

Secondly, an unwillingness to be stirred to duty.

“A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.” (Prov. 19:24)

There is an unwillingness in sloth to take any notice of warnings, urgent calls, or the stirrings of the Word, the Holy Spirit, judgements, or anything that God uses to call the mind back to a proper view of the condition of the soul. Here is true evidence that the mind is rendered lazy by the deceit of sin. Special calls and warnings, whether by a suitable word or a pressing judgement, do not result in the pulling out of the hand from the bowl; that is, they do not succeed in recalling the special duties to the mind that need to be fulfilled.

Thirdly, feeble and ineffective attempts to return to duty.

“As a door turneth upon its hinges, so doth the slothful man upon his bed.” (Prov. 26:14)

With the turning of a door on its hinges there is some motion but no progress. It moves in and out, but stays in the same place. So it is with the spiritually lazy man in his apathy. He makes some motion or faint endeavour toward discharging his duty, but makes no progress in fulfilling it. Wherever he starts one day, there he will be on the next day. Indeed, where he was a year ago, there he will be next year. His efforts are faint, cold and passing. He makes no progress, for he is always beginning and never finishing his work.

Fourthly, cowardice in the face of alarms, difficulties and discouragements.

“The slothful man saith, ‘There is a lion without! I shall be slain in the streets!’”
(Prov. 22:13)

Any difficulty deters him from his duty. He thinks it is impossible for him to attain any accuracy, exactness, and perfection in his duty, so he contents himself with apathy, coldness and neglect rather than make an effort to avoid sin. Now, when the deceit of sin has once again drawn the mind into this state, it lays the soul open to every temptation and incoming sin. The spouse in the Song of Solomon seemed to have been overcome by this mood (see Song 5:2-3), causing her to make all kinds of excuses why she would not answer the call of her husband [Christ in the allegory], and apply herself to her duty by walking out with him — “I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, ‘Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.’ ‘I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?’”

(2) It draws away the mind by surprising it out of its watch for sin. It wavers when confronted by some urgent temptation, and is surprised into thoughts that are quite different from the ones that are part of its defence. That is how it was with Peter. His worldly fear worked with the temptation by which Satan sought to winnow him, filling his mind with many terrifying thoughts. The result was that he did not take into consideration the loving warning of Christ, or the evil that was present in the temptation, or anything to which he should have looked for his preservation. (See Lk. 22:31-32, 55-62) He should have reviewed his foolishness in neglecting those warnings, and the love of Christ that, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, would have kept him from his scandalous denials and fall. Thus he went out and wept bitterly. And this is the usual way the deceit of sin works. It lays hold on the mind suddenly, diverting it from the present sin by taking possession of it and blinding it. The mind will then either neglect all the things I have already mentioned, or, if any thought of them intrudes into the mind, it is so obsessed with the sin that it makes no impression on the soul, and allows sin to take root there. In this way, undoubtedly, David was surprised in the coming in of his great transgression. Sin and temptation so possessed and filled his mind with the present object of his lust that he utterly forgot the things he had once depended on to keep his soul from iniquity. Herein, then, lies the great wisdom of the soul in rejecting the very first appearance of sin, because, by dallying with it, the mind can be drawn away from the remedy, and so rush into evil.

(3) It draws away the mind by the frequency and length of the argument, and takes it by storm. This will happen every time when there has been an open neglect of the soul, and a failure to respond to an effective rebuke. It must flee to the grace of Christ

that will give it spiritual power over sin. All these things in the grace of God prevent sin from prevailing. But of this, more later.

So here, then, is the first way in which the law of sin acts in deceit against the soul. It draws the mind away from attending to its charge and office, both with respect to duty, and also to sin. And when this happens, we may say that a person is “drawn away” or “drawn off” and “tempted”. Everyone is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, with the deceit of sin dwelling in him. And the total effect of this working of the deceit of sin can be summarised as follows:

- 1.** A failure to exercise a watchful frame of mind and spirit in every duty and against every sin, even in its most hidden and secret actions.
- 2.** A lack of special care in giving attention to those duties that are designed to weaken and ruin the whole law of sin, and expose its deceit.
- 3.** A spiritual laziness that leaves our duties unfulfilled, and encourages sin.

As long as these three prevail in our soul, we will be driven by our own lusts or by the deceit of sin.

There is no need to add any further directions for the prevention of this evil in the mind; they have already been stated in this section.

CHAPTER 11

Sin works its deceit by entangling the feelings — How it does this — The way to prevent it

Here is the **second** thing that is ascribed to the deceitful working of sin. In the Apostle's words — it is an *enticement*. A man, when he is tempted, is said to be "drawn away by his own desires and enticed." (Jas. 1:14) And this action seems particularly applicable to the feelings as the instrument of drawing away the mind. The mind is "drawn away" from duty, and the feelings are "enticed" by sin. Whenever sin prevails, a man is "enticed", or "entangled" as the word implies. There is a reference here to the bait with which a fish is caught on the hook. Concerning the effect of the deceit of sin, we will now briefly mention two things:

1. What it is to be enticed, or entangled, with the bait of sin, and to have the feelings tainted with a pleasurable desire to sin; and the reactions of the feelings.
2. What course sin takes, and the way it proceeds in enticing, ensnaring, and entangling the soul.

1. Concerning the first on the enticement of sin:

(1) The feelings are certain entangled when they are urged on by frequent images of the proposed object to which the deceit of sin entices them. When sin prevails, and the feelings follow, it fills the mind with images, likenesses, and appearances of the desired object continually. Such people "...devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds!" They practice evil when they are able, and when "...it is in the power of their hand." (Micah 2:1) For example, Peter tells us that they have "...eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin". (2 Pet. 2:14) That is, their minds and hearts are obsessed with a continual presentation of the object of their lusts, coming to fruition when the feelings are entangled with sin and they begin to turn aside towards its fulfilment. John tells us of these lusts — "For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world." (1 Jn. 2:16) The lust of the eyes is whatever they convey to the soul. Now, it is not the bodily faculty of seeing that is meant here, but the fixing of the imagination on sinful things. And we call it "the eyes" because that is how things are constantly presented to the mind and the soul, just as outward objects are presented to the eyes. Sometimes the outward sight of the eyes becomes the occasion of sin. This is how sin prevailed with Achan. (See Josh. 7:21) First, he saw the wedge of gold and the Babylonian garment, and coveted them. Then he relished the pleasure and profit of possessing them in his imagination, and finally, he set his heart on getting them. Now, the heart may have a detestation of sin, yet, whenever anyone finds that the imagination of the mind is frequently solicited by sin, and gets in an uproar about it, he knows that his feelings are being secretly enticed and entangled.

(2) This entanglement is increased when the imagination insinuates into the mind vain thoughts that it secretly delights in. Moralists describe this as *cogitatio morosa cum delectatione* (an abiding thought with delight), which, towards forbidden objects, is actually very sinful. This can be when the consent of the will to sin has not yet been

obtained, and when the soul would not consider doing such a thing. Yet thoughts have already begun to lodge in the mind. These evil thoughts, this “lodging of vain thoughts” (Jer. 4:14) — that is in the heart — the prophet describes as something very sinful, and to be abhorred. All these thoughts are messengers that carry sin here and there between the imagination and the feelings, inflaming the imagination and entangling the feelings. Achan thought about the golden wedge, and this made him covet it and love it. By loving it, his thoughts became infected, presenting to the imagination something of the worth and value of the prize. And so, little by little, the soul became inflamed by sin. And when the will parts with its sovereignty, sin is actually conceived.

(3) A readiness to listen to the excuses of sin, or a desire to look at the reliefs for sin that are available once sin has been committed, show how much the feelings can become mixed up. We have shown — and will offer further evidence — that it is part of the plan of sin in its deceit to give excuses to lessen the thought of sin in the mind. It asks such questions as: “Is it not a little one?” or, “There is mercy provided”, or, “It can be given up in due time.” This is the language of a deceived heart. Now, when there is a willingness in the soul to listen to such whispers coming from the deceit of sin concerning any sin or action condemned by God, you will find evidence that the feelings are being enticed. When the soul is willing, as it were, to be tempted, and to be courted by sin, and to listen to its arguments, it will lose its love of Christ and become entangled. This is to “look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls round smoothly.” (Prov. 23:31) This is a picture of a pleasurable contemplation of the invitation of sin, whose end the wise man exposes here in verse 32 — “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.” When the deceit of sin prevails this far with anyone, he will be enticed and entangled. The will has not yet come to an actual agreement with sin, and given its consent, but the whole soul is nearly lost. And I could give you many more examples of this entanglement; but this is enough.

2. Our next question is: “How, or by what means, does the deceit of sin proceed to entice and entangle the feelings?” I mention two or three of its baits:

(1) It makes use of its position in the mind by drawing it away from a careful watch. The wise man says, “Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird” (Prov. 1:17), or “before the eyes of everything that has a wing”, as in the original Hebrew. If it has eyes to see the snare, and wings to carry it off, it will not get caught. And in vain does the deceit of sin spread its snares and nets to entangle the soul while the eyes of the mind are fixed on its actions, so stirring up the wings of the will and feelings to carry it away and avoid the trap. But if the eyes are clouded, or diverted, wings are of little use for an escape. One of the ways in which the fowlers get the birds into their nets is through false lights or noises to confuse their prey. And when that is done, they take the opportunity to throw their nets over them. So it is with the deceit of sin: it first draws away and diverts the mind with false reasoning and pretence, as we have shown, and then throws a net over the feelings to entangle them.

(2) Taking advantage of the occasion, it presents sin as desirable, appealing to the corrupt part of our feelings. It gilds over the object with a thousand lies, which it presents to our evil desires. This is the putting out of the bait, which is referred to as “lust” by the Apostle in 1 Jn. 2:16-17. The bait must be desirable and suitable, and is

then offered to the hungry soul for its satisfaction. This is how sin, with the help of the imagination, is presented to the soul. The Apostle calls it “the passing pleasures of sin” (Heb. 11:25), which, unless they are rejected as they were by Moses, there is no way of escaping the sin they represent. Hence, those who live in sin are said to live “on the earth in pleasure and luxury”. (Jas. 5:5) Now, this pleasure in sin depends on whether it is likely to satisfy the flesh, lusts, and corrupt feelings. We must listen to this warning — “...make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.” (Rom. 13:14) That is to say, “Do not allow your mind or thoughts or feelings to dwell on sinful things designed to satisfy the lusts of the flesh, and to nourish and cherish them.” Paul adds — “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” (Gal. 5:16) When men are under the power of sin, they are said to fulfil “the desires of the flesh and of the mind”. (Eph. 2:3) Therefore, the deceit of sin tries to entangle the feelings by proposing to them, with the help of the imagination, something that appeals to their corrupt lusts, now given some degree of liberty through the carelessness of the mind. It then presents to those who are in a sensual and covetous frame of mind its “wine sparkling in the cup” — the beauty of an adulteress, the riches of the world, and so on — even to some believers. When I say that sin tries to entangle the soul, it goes first to the mind and the imagination to seduce the heart by presenting some false-painted beauty or some pretended satisfaction of sin. Then Satan comes to its assistance with a special temptation, often inflaming the feelings and putting the whole soul into disorder.

(3) It conceals the imminent danger with sin. It covers it over as the hook is covered over with the bait, or the net spread out with corn for the birds to peck. It is not possible for sin to completely deprive the soul of the knowledge of the danger it faces. It will never forget that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), or that it is the “the righteous judgement of God, that those who practise such things [sins] are worthy of death”. (Rom. 1:32) But this is what sin does — it so takes in and possesses the mind and feelings with the baits and pleasures of sin that it diverts them from a realistic contemplation of the dangers that lie at hand. What Satan did in his first temptation, sin has continued ever since. At first, Eve armed herself by recalling the danger of sin — “If we eat or touch it, we will die”. (See Gen. 3:3) But as soon as Satan had filled her mind with the beauty and the usefulness of the fruit that would make her wise, how quickly she laid aside her practical consideration of the danger of eating it, and the curse that would follow. She relieved her conscience with the vain hope and pretence that the penalty would not come to pass because the serpent told her so! That is how David was seduced by the deceit of sin into committing his great transgression. His lust was inflamed, and a consideration of the guilt and danger of his transgression flew out of his mind. Therefore, he is said to have “despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight.” (2 Sam. 12:9) In all this, he did not consider the evil that was in his heart, and the danger that came with the breaking of the Law.

Now, sin, when it presses the soul hard, uses a thousand wiles to hide from it the terror of the Lord, the end of transgressions, and especially that peculiar foolishness into which the mind is seduced. The hope of pardon is used to cover it up, and future repentance is promised. The following things override the feelings: the present urgency of lust, the occasion and opportunity for sin, the surprise of sweet pleasure, the slightness of the sin, and the balance of duties. These fix the imagination on attaining its object, with a desperate resolution to do anything for the enjoyment of lust and pleasure. It has a thousand wiles, far more than can be counted!

(4) When indwelling sin gains a foothold in the feelings by gilding over the pleasures of sin and concealing its disastrous end, it goes on to introduce reasons into the mind in order to concentrate it on the proposed sin that it might be conceived and brought forth. We shall say more of this in the next section. Here, we offer a few directions for guarding ourselves against the horrible work of the deceit of sin. Do you wish to be enticed or entangled? Do you wish to be disposed to the conception of sin? Do you wish to turn down the way that leads to death? Then listen carefully to your feelings.

Feelings play a large part in our obedience, and are commonly given the name of “the heart” in the Bible. This is a key element in our walk with God, and is not to be taken lightly. The wise man said, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Prov. 4:23) Or, as the original has it, “keep you heart above, or before, all diligence.” It may even be used in a military sense — “Before every watch, guard your heart safely.” You have many things to watch out for — for your life, for your estate, for your reputation, and for your family. “But”, says he, “above all these things, attend to your heart and feelings that they may not get entangled with sin.” There is no security without it. If you save everything but your heart, all is lost, and lost for all eternity. You must surely respond with this question, “What shall I do, and how can I observe this duty?”

[1] Guard your feelings well.

(a) This is the advice of the Apostle in Col. 3. At the beginning of that chapter, we find a reference to the mortification of sin, which he puts in these words — “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth” (verse 5); that is, “Prevent the working and deceit of sin that wars in your members.” To prepare us for this end, Paul gives us this wonderfully helpful direction in verse 2 — “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.” Fix your feelings on heavenly things, for this will enable you to put sin to death. Bring them to nothing by the things that are above. Let these heavenly things have their effect on you, and so enjoy victory through them. They are from above, so they are blessed and able messengers fit for your feelings. And what thoughts they bring! There is God himself in all his beauty and glory; the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “the chief among ten thousand” and “altogether lovely” (Song 5:10, 16); grace and glory; and the mystery revealed in the gospel that brings so many blessings. When your feelings are full of these things — and it is your duty to make them so — they will bring you great happiness. So what access does sin, with all its painted pleasures and its sugared poisons and its venomous baits, have in your souls? How you loathe all its proposals, and say to them, “Get out, you horrible things!” For how can the empty, transitory pleasures of sin be compared with the great reward that is coming from above? This is the argument Paul presents in 2 Cor. 4:17-18 — “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

(b) As for the real object of your feelings, may it be the cross of Christ, for it has great power in frustrating the whole work of indwelling sin.

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

Paul gloried and rejoiced in the cross of Christ; his heart was set on it, and these were the effects of it — it crucified the world to him, making it a dead and undesirable thing. The baits and pleasures of sin are taken out of the world, together with the things that would spoil us in the world — namely, “...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”. (1 Jn. 2:16) These, then, are in the world, and, from them, sin throws out all its baits by which it entices and entangles your souls. If your heart is filled with the cross of Christ, it will put to death all that you find undesirable. It takes away all seeming beauty from sin so that nothing pleasurable or seductive is left. It is as if Paul were saying, “It crucifies me to the world, and makes my heart, my feelings, my desires, dead to any of these things.” It roots up corrupt lusts and feelings, and leaves no principle for it to work with in the flesh.

Work hard, then, at filling your hearts with the cross of Christ. Consider the sorrows he endured, the curse he bore, the blood he shed, the cries he uttered, the love for your souls in all of all this, and the mystery of God’s grace. Meditate on the vileness, the shame and the punishment of sin as represented in the cross, and which led to the shed blood and death of Christ. If Christ were crucified for your sins, should not your hearts be crucified with him for sin? Will you entertain sin in your hearts, or listen to its enticing words, the very sin that wounded and pierced and slew your dear Lord Jesus? God forbid! Fill up your feelings with the cross of Christ that there is no room left for sin. The world once put him out of the house and into a stable when he came to save us. Let him turn the world out of doors now that he has come to sanctify you.

[2] Look to the strength of your feelings with a view to heavenly things. If you do not give constant attention to them, and be stimulated by them, and listen to the many warnings against sin, you are liable to decline; and then sin, waiting patiently, will take every advantage to combat them. We have many complaints in the Bible from those who lost their first love by allowing their feelings to be overtaken by sin. And this should make you jealous of your own hearts, lest you too fall into spiritual backsliding. So be jealous over them. Examine them strictly, and call them to account. Ask why your feelings have become excited, and stir yourself to do your duty.

CHAPTER 12

The conception of sin by its deceit — What it consists of — The consent of the will is needed — The nature of the arrangement — The ways and means by which that consent is obtained — Other advantages that are used by the deceit of sin: *ignorance and error*

The **third** success of the deceit of sin is in its progressive work when sin is actually conceived. When it has drawn the mind away from its duty, and entangled the feelings, it proceeds to conceive sin in order to bring it forth — “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” (Jas. 1:15) Now, the conception of sin in the soul will come to nothing without the consent of the will. For without that consent, sin cannot be committed. So when the will consents to it, there is nothing in the soul to frustrate its actual accomplishment. By various ways and means, God does indeed frustrate the bringing forth of these conceptions, the result of spiritual adultery, causing them to abort in the womb so that not the least part of that sin is committed which is not willed or conceived. Yet there is nothing in the soul itself that will check sin when once the will has given its consent. When a cloud is full of rain that is ready to fall, sometimes a wind blows up to drive it away. And so it is when the will is ready to bring forth its sin, for God will divert it using one wind or other. Yet the cloud was as full of rain as if it had fallen, and the soul is as full of sin as if it had been committed. This conceiving of lust, or sin, then, depends upon its power to obtain the consent of the will to listen to its enticements. And, in this way, the soul is deflowered of its chastity towards God in Christ, as the Apostle indicates in 2 Cor. 11:2-3 — “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

To clear this matter, we notice several things:

1. The will controls the principle of obedience or disobedience. Our moral actions are good or evil in so far as they have the consent of the will. A theologian of old spoke the truth when he said, “Every sin is so voluntary that, if it is not voluntary, it is not sin.” It is certainly true of actual sins. The formal action of our iniquities arises in our will — I mean, of course, in those who commit them. Otherwise, choosing sin is a deviation from the Law of God.

2. There is a two-fold consent of the will to sin.

- (1) Consent needs to be full, absolute, complete and definite. That occurs whenever the convictions of the mind are overcome, and when there is no principle of grace in the will to weaken the sin. With the consent of the mind, the soul rushes into sin like a ship before the wind in full sail, without anything to stop it. It runs into sin like a war-horse goes into battle. That is why, as the Apostle says, men “...being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart, who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (Eph. 4:19) Thus Ahab’s will was fully committed to the murder of Naboth. He did it with due deliberation by scheming, and

with his full consent. The doing of it gave him so much satisfaction that it cured his illness and depression of mind. This has reference to that consent of the will which looks to the completion of sin in the unregenerate, and is entirely related to the bringing forth of sin that we refer to here.

(2) The consent of the will comes with a secret reluctance and aversion to spiritual things. That is how Peter became involved in the denial of his Master. His will was in it, or he would not have done it. It was a voluntary action, for it was something he chose to do at the time. Sin would not been brought forth if it had not been conceived. Yet, at that very moment, there was resident in his will a contrary principle of his love for Christ; yes, and a faith in him that did not utterly fail. The power of his will was intercepted, and its operations suspended through the violent urging of his temptation. This happened in his will, and it weakened his resolve not to sin. Though his will gave its consent, it was not done with that pleasure such acts of the will ought to produce.

3. Although there may be a prevailing consent in the will that will be sufficient for the conception of particular sins, yet there cannot be an absolute, total, and full consent of the will in a believer for any sin, for:

(1) There is in his will a principle that is fixed on the “good”, and on all that is good. “He wished to do good.” (See Rom. 7:21) The principle of grace in the will inclined him to do this. And, in general, it prevailed against the principle of sin so that his will was dominated by grace. Grace has the rule and dominion, and not sin, in the will of every believer. Now, encouragingly, the consent to sin in the will, which is contrary to the inclination and law of grace, is not, and cannot be, total, absolute, and complete.

(2) There is not only a ruling principle in the will against sin but there is also a secret reluctance there to give consent to sin. It is true that the soul is not conscious sometimes of the reluctance of grace because it has been swept away by the prevailing act of the will to desire to sin, and it loses a sense of desire for the Holy Spirit. This leads to a temporary reluctance of the will to follow the principle of grace. But the general rule holds good for all things at all times — “The Spirit lusteth against the flesh”. (Gal. 5:17) It does this most of the time, though not always to the same degree of success. And the fact that an opposite principle prevails at times in this or that particular action does not prove that the other principle is not there. It is also true from the side of grace. Whenever grace acts in the will, sin lusts against it, although that lusting may not be known by the soul because of the deceit of the opposing principle of indwelling sin. Yet it is enough to stop those sinful actions from coming to fruit. We also see it in the resistance of grace in the soul to the actions of sin. Though the soul may not be conscious of grace working, it is enough to keep that action from coming to fruition. There is much spiritual wisdom in discerning correctly between the spiritual resistance of the principle of grace in the will against sin, and the rebukes that come to the soul from the conscience under conviction of sin.

4. Notice that repeated acts of sin under the consent of the will may produce a predisposition in the will to further sinful acts that can bring it into a possibility and readiness to sin again. This is a very dangerous condition for the soul, and must be watched very carefully.

5. This consent of the will that we have just described can be considered in two ways:

(1) As it acts in relation to the circumstances, the causes, the means, and the inducements to sin.

(2) As it considers this or that actual sin.

In the first sense, there is a virtual consent of the will in every failure to prevent sin. It is also true that all neglect of duty makes sin possible, and every listening to temptation makes a way for it. In brief, as I said before, this process will include all diversions of the mind from its duty and the entanglement of the feelings by sin. Where there is no action by the will formally or virtually, there will be no sin. But I wish to go further by referring to the consent of the will in this or that sin from the point of view of sin, and how sin is prevented by God's own ordained means. This leads us to the conception of sin. Let us now consider the way in which the deceit of sin succeeds in obtaining the consent of the will, and so is able to conceive actual sin in the soul. Notice:

1. The will is a rational appetite — “rational” because it is guided by the mind, and “appetite” because it is stimulated by the feelings. So, in the operation or acting of the will, it is largely influenced by both.

2. The will can choose nothing, and consent to nothing, unless the object has “an appearance of good” — that is, it sees something “good” at the time. The will cannot consent to anything it views as being bad for the soul. “Good” is the key word; thus whatever is proposed for its consent must have the appearance of being either good in itself or good for the soul in the present circumstances.

3. We can now see the reason why the conception of sin is a consequence of the mind being drawn away, and the feelings being entangled. Both of them have a deep influence on the decisions of the will, and the conception of this or that actual sin. Our way, now, is quite straightforward. We have seen how the mind is drawn away by the deceit of sin, and how the feelings are entangled. What we are left to consider are the results of these two things. Let me give you some examples of the special deceitful and corrupt reasons we have considered before, and then see how they proceed in obtaining the consent of the will to sin.

(1) The will is deceived by corrupt reasoning. The first argument is that grace is exalted by a pardon. The second argument is that mercy is always possible for sinners. This first, as we have shown, deceives the mind, opening a way for the will's consent by concealing the evil to which it has an aversion. And this act in worldly hearts so twists their feelings that they think that their liberty consists in being “slaves of corruption”. (2 Pet. 2:19) The poison of this error often taints and corrupts the minds of believers themselves. That is why we find so many warnings against it in Scripture.

As to the use and abuse of the doctrine of the grace of the gospel, we may look to Scripture to shed more light on the subject. There is a twofold mystery of grace: that of walking with God, and that of coming to God. The great purpose of sin is to change the doctrine and mystery of grace in relation to certain facts. By applying these conclusions to the one that are also true for the other, the result is that each part is hindered, and the influence of the doctrine of grace to their blessing is defeated.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins”. (1 Jn. 2:1-2)

Here is the whole purpose and use of the gospel in a few words. “These things”, says John, “write I unto you”. What things did he have in mind? The answer is found in 1 Jn. 1: 2 —

“...for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us”.

These are things concerning the person and mediation of Christ. Then, in verse 7, we discover that forgiveness, cleansing, and the propitiation for sin is obtained through the blood of Christ.

Now, why is John writing these things to them? What do they teach, and what do they lead to? The answer is: “To a universal abstinence from sin.” He explains — “I write to you, so that you may not sin.” (2:1) This, then, is the only proper and true end of the doctrine of the gospel. But sadly, to abstain from all sin is not our lot in this world — “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1:8) What can we do in this case? In view of the fact that we do sin, is there any relief provided in the gospel for our souls and consciences? “Yes”, says John. “If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he himself is the propitiation for our sins”. (2:1-2) There is full relief for us in the propitiatory and intercessory work of Christ.

This, then, is the order and method of the doctrine of the gospel, and its application to our souls: **first**, to keep us from sin, and **second**, to relieve us in the event of sin. But here we meet the deceit of sin, which puts, as it were, this “new wine into old bottles”, so that the bottles are broken open and the wine is spilt as far as any benefit is concerned. Sin changes the method and order of the application of gospel truth. It makes the last first, and then excludes the use of the first completely. “If anyone sins, there is a pardon provided”, which is all the gospel that sin will allow to filter into our minds. When we come to God by faith, sin permits the thought that we will be free from sin, whereas the gospel proposes that there is pardon for sin for our encouragement. When we come to God and walk with him, sin proposes only the latter — that there is pardon for sin. The gospel proposes the former — that we should keep ourselves from sin — for the grace of God in salvation appeared to us for that very purpose.

Now, the mind, being entangled with sin’s deceit, it is drawn away from its watchfulness against it, and is diverted from the true purpose of the gospel. Sin has several ways of obtaining the consent of the will:

[1] The will is surprised in the case of temptation. Temptation is the representation of something good when, in fact, it is really evil. Now, when a temptation, armed with opportunity and urgency, falls on the soul, the principle of grace in the will rises up to reject and detest it. But all of a sudden, the mind is deceived by sin, and temptation breaks in on the will with all its corrupt and deceitful reasoning based on gospel grace

and mercy. This first staggers then quietens the will's opposition, and then promises it peace by giving way to the temptation. By presenting evil as "good", sin is thus conceived, though it has not yet been committed. Here, the seed of God is sacrificed to Moloch [for the two references to this pagan god, see Amos 5:26 and Acts 7:43], and the weapons of Christ are abused in the service of the devil.

[2] It influences the will unconsciously. It insinuates the poison of its corrupt reasoning little by little until it wins over the will. Now, the whole effect of the doctrine of the gospel in holiness and obedience consists in the soul being made holy and obedient within the mould of the gospel. "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Rom. 6:17) Apostasy from the gospel is mainly by casting the soul into the mould of false reasoning, that sin may safely be committed on account of grace and pardon. Thus the soul becomes complacent in its spiritual laziness and negligence, and no longer takes care in fulfilling particular duties or in avoiding particular sins. It treats the soul like a baby, weaning it away from the mystery of the law of grace, making it feel that salvation never came about. It so convinces our soul that there are no duties to perform and that we are unprofitable servants. We no longer rely on sovereign mercy through the blood of Christ. We no longer attend to duties diligently because we feel safe as far as God's mercy is concerned. Thus our sense of freedom is taken away. This is what the deceit of sin tries to do with the soul, thereby corrupting the will every time its consent is required for particular sins.

(2) The deceived mind imposes itself on the will to obtain its consent to sin by proposing to it the advantages that will come with it. Here is one way in which the mind is drawn away. It presents what is absolutely evil under the guise of appearing good (for the soul). So it was with Eve. Setting aside the law, the covenant, and the threats of God all of a sudden, she reflected on the advantages of taking the forbidden fruit, and the pleasures and blessings that would come to her through sin, and reckoned them up to obtain the consent of her will. (Gen. 3:6) What could she do, then, but eat it? "It is", thought Eve, "good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise". Her will consented, and sin resulted. Obedience was set aside, and only the pleasures of sin were considered. So it was with Ahab in 1 Kings 21. He reasoned — "Naboth's vineyard is near my house, and I will make it a garden of herbs; therefore I must have it." (See 1 Kings 21) His deceived mind imposed these thoughts on his will until it made him obsessed in his pursuit of covetousness; and this led on to perjury and murder, and the utter ruin of himself and his family. This is how guilt and corruption hide themselves under cover of the advantages and pleasures of sin. And that is how sin is conceived in the soul. As the mind is won over, so the feelings are enticed and entangled in furthering the conception of sin in the soul with the consent of the will. This they do in two ways:

[1] By some hasty impulse and surprise, being stirred up, stimulated, and drawn away by some violent provocation or urgent temptation. This sets the soul on fire, and draws the will into consenting to what needs to be done. It was certainly so in the case of David and Nabal. The violent provocation from that stupid man stirred David up to anger and feelings of revenge. (See 1 Sam. 25:13) He resolved to destroy the whole family, the innocent along with the guilty. (See verses 33-34) Self-revenge and murder were, for a time, conceived, proposed, and consented to until God graciously diverted

him from such a course through Abigail. David's entangled feelings surprised his will into consenting to the conception of many horrible sins. It was the same with Asa when he became angry, and imprisoned Hanani the prophet. (See 2 Chron. 16:7-10). It was true of Peter when he denied his Lord through fear. Let the soul take warning that it does not conceive sin only through the entanglement of its feelings, but needs the consent of the will. This brings to the soul a certain amount of guilt, even when the sin itself may not actually be brought forth.

[2] The enticed feelings secure the consent of the will by frequent seduction, so that sin might gain power without the feelings knowing about it. Take an instance with the sons of Jacob. (See Gen. 37:4) They hated their brother Joseph because their father favoured him. Their feelings were enticed, and other things entangled them further, such as his dreams and such like. This rankled in their hearts, and never ceased soliciting their wills until they decided on his death. Their unlawful and unnatural actions and the subsequent grief of their aged father, plus the guilt of their own souls, all these things were set aside. The hatred and envy that they conceived against him did not cease until they had the consent of their wills to do away with him. This gradual progression of their corrupt feelings in the soul to sin is described well by the wise man in Prov. 23:31-35 —

“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.”

And this is the way sin usually works for the destruction of souls when they seem to be doing well in their walk with God. When it has entangled them in one temptation, and brought the will round to liking it, presently, another temptation arrives, either in the neglect of some duty or a refusal of the revelation of the Word. Men never fall away from God with the first temptation in which they get entangled.

This brief introduction is sufficient to illustrate the third action of the deceit of sin. It obtains the consent of the will for the conception of sin; and, by this means, a multitude of sins are conceived in the heart that gradually defile the soul or make it feel less and less guilty, as if actual sins had not been committed.

Added to what I have already said concerning the deceit of indwelling sin as an evidence of its great power and effectiveness, I now mention one or two *special ways in which it acts deceitfully*. This consists of the advantage it makes use of in avoiding being exposed by the Word and the Spirit.

1. It takes advantage of the darkness of the mind to achieve its purpose. The shades of a mind that is totally dark — that is, utterly devoid of saving grace — is the workplace of sin. That is why its effects are called the “works of darkness”. (Eph. 5:11; Rom. 13:12) Sin works and brings forth with the help of moral darkness. The working of lust under cover of a darkened mind is, as it were, the upper region of hell, for it is next door to it for filth, horror, and confusion. Now, there is a partial darkness abiding still

in believers, for they “know in part”. (1 Cor. 13:12) Though there is within them a principle of saving light, for the “day-star” has risen in their hearts (see 2 Pet. 1:19), not all the shades of darkness are utterly expelled from their lives. And there are two main effects of the darkness that remains in believers:

(1) Ignorance of, or a resistance to, the will of God, either *juris*, connected with the law of sin in general, or *facti*, concerning the particular state of the mind with regard to the law of sin.

(2) Error and mistakes come from this, when falsehood is taken for truth, and darkness is taken for light.

Now, the law of sin takes advantage of these two things to enlarge its power in the soul:

(1) If there is any *ignorance* about anything concerning the will of God, sin is sure to make use of it for its own ends. Although Abimelech was not a believer, he was a person who had moral integrity in his ways and actions. He declared himself to be so in a solemn appeal to God, the searcher of all hearts, even when circumstances were against him — “But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, ‘Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, she is my sister? and she, even she herself said, he is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands have I done this.’ And God said unto him in a dream, ‘Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.’” (Gen. 20:4-6) But being ignorant that fornication was a sin — so great a sin, that a morally honest man would not defile himself with it — lust hurried him along the evil path towards Sarah, as we read in the story. God complained later that his people were “destroyed for lack of knowledge”. (Hos. 4:6) Being ignorant of the mind and will of God, they rushed into evil at every prompting of the law of sin. Be it any duty to be performed, or any sin to be committed, if there is any darkness or ignorance in their mind, sin will lose no time in pressing home his advantage. Many a man, being ignorant of his duty, and unable to instruct his family, and who relies entirely on public preaching, has been, through the deceitfulness of sin, brought into a slack and negligent attitude towards his duty. As much as he is ignorant of the will of God and his duty, so much will the law of sin take advantage of him. Hence we can see what is the true knowledge that God finds acceptable. How wonderful it is that many poor souls who are low in head knowledge yet walk with God! It seems that they know enough to keep the law of sin at bay, when others, high in head knowledge, give advantage to their lusts in their ignorance, although they are not aware of it.

(2) *Error* is the worst effect of the mind’s darkness, offering a great advantage to the law of sin. There is, indeed, ignorance in every error, but there is often no error in ignorance; so they must be distinguished. I could give you many example of this, but let me say that there are many who are zealous for some error, who also seek to suppress and persecute the truth. Indwelling sin could have no greater advantage. Every day, every hour, there is a pouring out of anger, mockery, hard speeches, the breath of revenge, threats of murder and destruction, all in the name of zeal! On this account, we see sinners enjoying their notoriety today, delighting in their hypocrisy as they froth out their own shame. In their darkness and pretended zeal, sin sits securely,

and fills pulpits, houses, prayer meetings, homes and streets with as many bitter fruits as it can, such as envy, malice, wrath, hatred, false charges, and evil speaking. The result is that the holy, blessed, and meek Spirit of God withdraws from them, leaving them to face evil, trouble, and wrath, with a worldly spirit that the law of sin cherishes and heightens in them. There is nowhere that sin dwells more securely than in such a state. So, I say, it takes this particular advantage to practice and fill sinners with deceit, and thus extend its power over the soul.

2. The law of sin will use anything that can afford it relief as it is pursued in the heart by the Word and by the Spirit of grace. Let me tell you of one its wiles, and that is the alleviation of its own guilt. It pleads that it is not so bad, not so filthy, and not so fatal as some make out. This excuse can be considered in two ways:

(1) Absolutely. It issues many pleas that the evil it is associated with is not as bad as the conscience urges. The course it is recommending may be taken up without ruin. It strongly recommends these considerations when it is at work in the soul by way of surprise, and when the soul has no leisure or liberty to weigh up its suggestions in the balance of the sanctuary. Often, it will impress on the will that it should free itself from the sword of the Spirit — “Come on”, it says, “leave it alone, and it will die of itself, which will probably be soon! There is no need for the violence that is advised in the work of mortification. There is time enough to deal with these matters which are of little importance later on.”

(2) Comparatively. This is a large field for its deceit and wiles to lurk in. How subtle is its speech! It argues, “It may be an evil that should be given up, and the soul should be watchful against it. Yet it is not too bad, because we see it in the lives of others, even in the saints of God today, and in some of the saints of the olden days.” By these and similar excuses, it seeks to evade the truth in order to retain its place in the soul when it is being pursued to destruction.

And how little of its deceit we have considered!

CHAPTER 13

Here are several ways in which the bringing forth of conceived sin can be frustrated

Before we go on to the remaining evidence of the tremendous power of the law of sin, let us leave to one side what we have already noted and reconsider this verse from Scripture that brings us right to the foundation of the deceit of indwelling, namely, Jas. 1:15. The Apostle tells us that "...lust conceiving bringeth forth sin"; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." This indicates that we should consider how sin is conceived, and also what it brings forth. Now, putting the conception of sin into the context of the consent of the will, and reckoning, as we ought, that the bringing forth of sin is what it is aiming at, we are glad to know that the one does not necessarily follow the another. There is a world of sin conceived in the womb of the will and heart of man that is never brought forth. Our present business, then, is to inquire how this comes to pass. Here is my answer:

1. That it is not so is no thanks to sin or the law of sin. What it conceives, it longs to bring forth; and when it does not bring forth, here is, for the most part, only a small part of its guilt. A determined will to sin is actual sin. There is nothing lacking in sin's desire to bring forth every conceived sin. But do not fear; prevention and miscarriage is at hand.

2. Two things are necessary for everyone who has conceived sin to bring it forth: first, the power, second, a continuing willingness to sin until the deed is done. Where these two exist, actual sin will inevitably result. It is evident, therefore, that what hinders conceived sin from being brought forth must touch either the power of the sinner or his will. This work comes from God, and he has appointed two ways of doing it:

- (1)** By his providence, when he obstructs the power of sinning.
- (2)** By his grace, when he diverts or changes the will in its desire to sin.

I am not presenting these two methods of God's dispensation as though they are exclusive, for there is much of grace in providence, and much of the wisdom of providence in the dispensation of grace. But I have separated them because they are both important: providence, in outward acts with respect to the power of the creation, and grace (common or special) working powerfully in the will. Let us commence with the first:

(1) When sin is conceived, the Lord obstructs its coming to birth by his providence, by taking away or cutting short the power that is absolutely necessary for it to bring forth.

[1] Life is the foundation of all power, the principle of its operation. When life ceases, all power ceases with it. Even God himself, speaking of the everlasting foundation of his own power, gives himself the title of "the living God", a title found exactly thirty times in the Bible. Now, God frequently obstructs the power of sin by cutting short and taking away the lives of those in whom it has been conceived. Thus he dealt with the army of Sennacherib after he blasphemed, declaring, "Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?" (2 Kings 18:35) God threatened to cut

short his power in order that this king would not do as he proposed. (See also 2 Kings 19:28) He did this by taking away the lives of the soldiers without whom it was impossible for his conceived sin to be brought forth. This providential dispensation in the obstruction of conceived sin Moses found in the case of Pharaoh —

“The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.” (Ex. 15:9-10)

Here, the conception of sin is fully described, and, as fully, its prevention. In the same way, God dealt with the companies of fifties and their captains, who came to arrest Elijah. (2 Kings 1:9-12) Fire came down from heaven and consumed them when they were on the brink of capturing his prophet. And I could mention many other similar incidents. Another comment I might add concerns the long period that men lived at the beginning. With hundred of years stretching ahead of them, men had ample time to bring forth the sins they had conceived. As a result, the earth was filled with violence, injustice, rape and slaughter, so that “...all flesh had corrupted his way on the earth.” (Gen. 6:12-13) To prevent such a flood of sin, God shortened the course of men’s pilgrimage on the earth by reducing the length of their lives.

Besides this general law, God frequently cuts down those who conceive great evil and violence in their hearts and prevents its execution — “Blood-thirsty and deceitful men do not live out half their days”. (Ps. 55:23) They would do much evil if they had the time to execute the bloody and sinful purposes conceived in their minds. The Psalmist tells us — “In the day that the breath of man goeth forth, his thoughts perish.” (Ps. 146:4) He has many thoughts about sin, but now he has been cut off. A further comment is found in Eccles. 8:12-13 —

“Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.”

However long a wicked man lives, he dies in due time, and does not live to see the evil he has conceived. Now, we have granted that even believers can conceive sin due to its power and deceit. Does God ever prevent its production and accomplishment in them by cutting them off and taking away their lives so that they cannot accomplish it? I answer in this way:

Firstly, that God does not judicially cut off and take away the life of any that are his. So, then, we ask why God does not act to prevent the bringing forth of any particular sin that a believer has conceived and would have produced in the ordinary way. There are two answers to this:

(a) This intervention would be contrary to the declared purpose of the patience of God towards his own. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:9) This is the very purpose of the long-suffering of God towards believers, that, before they depart hence, they may come to

their senses and acknowledge all known sin and repent of them. This is the unchanging rule of God's patience in the covenant of grace, which is far from being an encouragement to sin, and gives a motive for watching carefully for it. The covenant is part of gospel grace and mercy through the blood of Christ. Now, this dispensation of which we speak will not allow believers to be dealt with in an arbitrary fashion.

(b) This also flows from the former. Conceived sin contains the whole nature of sin, as our Saviour declares in these two examples in Mt. 5:21-30 —

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

But to be cut off under the guilt of it to prevent its further progress, implies that there will be no future repentance. God does not cut off his children judicially. He cannot cast off the people whom he foreknew — “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Rom. 8:28-29) And so David prayed for the patience of God that it might not be so with him — “O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.” (Ps. 39:13)

Secondly, there are some cases where God does take away the lives of his own in order to prevent them falling into future guilt. Here are two examples:

(a) When some great trial or temptation comes into the world, God knows that some of his own will not be able to stand and hold out against it, but may dishonour him and defile themselves. He takes them out of the world to spare them from the coming tribulation, as is said in Is. 57:1 — “...the righteous is taken away from evil to come.” That is, he is removed not only from the evil of punishment and judgement, but also from the evil of temptations and trials that often turn out to be the worst of the two. Thus, a captain in war will dismiss a soldier from guard duty when he knows that the man is not fit, through some infirmity, to stand the stress and strain of the enemy as it approaches.

(b) There is the case of those who would choose to do something unacceptable to him through ignorance, or not knowing his mind and will. This seems to have been so with King Josiah. And, without doubt, the Lord often does this. There is the case of his own when they are busily engaged in things that displease him, usually through the darkness and ignorance of their minds. In order to stop them going on to produce evil or harm, God calls them away from their station, and takes them to himself where they will sin no more. In many cases, God has no alternative but to divert his own from sin by taking away their lives, as we shall see later.

[2] God, in his providence, frustrates the bringing forth of conceived sin by taking away and cutting short the power of those who conceive it. Though they continue to live, they no longer possess that power without which it would be impossible for them to do what they intend to bring to fruition, and what they have conceived in their hearts. We have several examples of this. Such was the case with the builders of Babel. (See Gen. 11) Whatever it was that they had in mind, it was a sign of their apostasy from God. One thing that was vital for the accomplishment of their project was a single language. So God declared, "They have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, that they have imagined to do." (6) In their ordinary way, they would have accomplished their wicked plan.

Now, then, what course does God choose to frustrate their conceived sin? Does he bring them a flood to destroy them, as he did with the older world? Does he send his angel to cut them off, like the army of Sennacherib in later times? Does he take away their lives? No! Their lives continued, but he "confused their language" (7) so that they could not go on with their work. He took away a vital part of their power of communication. In the same way, he dealt with the Sodomites in Gen. 19:11. They were busy in satisfying their filthy lusts, so God struck them with blindness and they could not find the door of the house where they intended to use violence to achieve their wicked ends. Their lives continued, as also their will to sin, but their power was cut short. God's dealing with Jeroboam (see 1 Kings 13:4) followed the same pattern. The king stretched out his hand to lay hold of the prophet, but it withered and became useless. This is a powerful illustration, revealing the effective action of God's providence in the world, which stopped the flood of sin that would have overtaken us had the womb of sin been opened.

God also cuts men down in their moral power, thus frustrating them. Many a wretch that has conceived mischief against the Church of God has, by this means, been stripped of his power, so that he could no longer accomplish his plans. Some have seen their bodies struck with fearful diseases so that they could not serve their lusts, nor accomplish their foolish ends. Others have been deprived of the instruments by which they sought to do their work.

There has been, year upon year, enough sin conceived to root out the generation of the righteous from the face of the earth. Sinful men, with all their powers, and with the strength of their wills, would have prevailed had not God cut off and limited their powers and fame.

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

All things are in place; the plan is well laid, and their counsels are deep and secret. What now can hinder them from fulfilling their hearts' desire?

“But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them shall flee away.” (Ps. 64:7-8)

God meets with them, bringing them down in order to prevent them from accomplishing their plans. God deals with them in this way every day of the year, leaving them to pine away in their sins. They boast all their days of the iniquity they have conceived, and become greatly burdened when they cannot deliver. The prophet tells us that “they practice iniquity that they had conceived, because it is in the power of their hand.” (Mic. 2:1) If they have the power for it, they will try to accomplish it. The prophet declares “...to their power they shed blood”. (Ezek. 22:6) This is the measure of their sin and their power. They can no longer commit any more evil; they cannot go on in their sin. Their whole restraint lies in being cut short in their power. Their bodies no longer serve them for their desired uncleanness nor their hands for revenge and rape and plunder nor their instruments for persecution. But they go about heavily burdened with conceived sin, and are agitated and tortured by it all their days. Hence, they become to themselves, as well as to others, “...like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” (Is. 57:20)

It could be that in some cases, or during some urgent temptations, or even with mistakes, God will frustrate the bringing forth of conceived sin. There seems to be an instance of this in his dealings with Jehoshaphat who decided to make merchant ships and send them to Ophir for gold. But God broke the ships with a strong wind so that he could not accomplish his plans. (See 1 Kings 22:48) But in God's dealing with his own people, it is not the same as his dealings with others, for:

Firstly, consider cases of extraordinary temptation. If unbelievers, through the violence of temptation and the craftiness of Satan, are enticed away from the power of the law of grace, God, will, in one way or other, take away their powers so that they cannot do what they had planned. This is the normal way he deals with wicked men. God's hook is in them in their daily lives, and they struggle against it — “Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net: they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God.” (Is. 51:20) God's net falls on them so that they are filled with fury that they cannot accomplish all the wickedness they want to.

Secondly, God leaves his children to wrestle with their sins, looking for other ways to accomplish them, and all the time feeling their failure keenly. However, in their disappointment, he awakens them to thoughts of their condition, and what they are doing, and so aborts sin in the womb in a number of ways that we will look at later. Some men's lack of power to commit conceived sin has been sanctified into a change of heart, and a turning away from the seductions of sin.

[3] God providentially frustrates the bringing forth of conceived sin by opposing sinners with an external hindering power. He leaves them with their lives, and the power to do what they intend; only he raises up another power to coerce, condemn, and restrain them. We have an example of this in 1 Sam. 14:44-45. Saul swore that Jonathan would be put to death; and, as far as it appears, was determined to do this. Then God stirred

up the spirit of the people, and they protested against the wrath and fury of Saul so that Jonathan was spared. See also 2 Chron. 26:16-20 where King Uzziah personally wanted to offer the incense when this was forbidden under the Law. Eighty of the priests resisted him and drove him out of the temple.

Under this heading, we may also mention the assistance that God raised up for the deliverance of his people in the face of their persecutors. He showed his anger against the wise men of Edom in this way —

“Shall I not in that day, saith the Lord, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau? And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.” (Obad. verses 8-9)

See also Rev. 12:16, where the dragon, and those acting under his orders, tried furiously to destroy the Church. Then God came to her assistance by opening up the earth. Even men of the world, not directly connected with the designs of Satan, by their opposition, have hindered the devil’s plans. An example of this is found in Hos. 2:6-7, where God dealt with his unfaithful people. They were in pursuit of their iniquities, following after their “lovers” (idolaters). Then God left them for a time to act out their foolishness but put a hedge and a wall around them to frustrate their plans and lusts.

[4] God frustrates the accomplishment of conceived sin by removing the objects on whom, or about whom, the conceived sin was to be committed. We have in Acts 12:1-11 a striking example of this providence. The day came when Herod thought he would execute Peter who was shut up in prison, but God sent an angel to take him out of his clutches. So also our Saviour himself was taken away from the murderous rage of the Jews before his hour had come. (See Jn. 8:59 and 10:39) Both early and later history is full of similar stories. Prison doors have been opened, and poor creatures selected to die have been frequently rescued from the jaws of death. In the world, where men and women have resolved to commit adultery, the sin of the one is often hindered and stifled by the taking away of the other. In Rev. 12:14, wings were given to the woman (the Church) to carry her into the wilderness, thus disappointing the devil in the venting of his rage.

[5] God does this by a diversion of the thoughts of men who have conceived sin. In Gen. 37:24, the brothers threw Joseph into a pit with the intention of starving him to death. While they were there, pleased by what they had done, God sent a company of merchants, thus diverting their thoughts from killing their brother to selling him. (See verses 25-27) We know the outcome of the story, so we can imagine how far they were under the sovereign and infinitely wise counsel of God. Thus, also, when Saul was in pursuit of David, and was ready to destroy him, God stirred up the Philistines to invade the land, which both diverted his thoughts and made him act differently. (See 1 Sam. 23:27) These are some examples of the way in which God was pleased to hinder the bringing forth of conceived sin by opposing himself and his providence against the power of sinners.

Let us now take a brief look at the great advantages to faith and the Church that God supplies in this matter:

Firstly, it gives us a little insight into the providence of God who is ever to be adored. There are many ways, like those above, that can obstruct the breaking forth of sin into the world. It is God who makes the dams and shuts up the floodgates of corrupted nature so that it might not break out into a deluge of filthy abominations, overwhelming the creation with confusion and disorder. As it was in the days of old, so it is with the present day — “...every thought and imagination of the heart of man is evil, and that continually.” (Gen. 6:5) The fact that the earth is not everywhere filled with violence, as it was before the Flood, is due to the mighty hand of God working powerfully in obstructing sin. It is a wonder that every highway, every street, and every field is not filled with violence, blood, rape, plunder, uncleanness, and every mischief that the heart of man can conceive. Oh, the infinite beauty of divine wisdom and providence in the government of the world! The conservation of our world daily demands no less power and wisdom than at the creation.

Secondly, if we look into our own concerns, they will, in a special way, force us to adore the wisdom and power of the providence of God in hindering the progress of conceived sin. That we are at peace in our homes and at rest in our beds, and that we live a quiet life, is all down to this truth. Whose person would not be defiled or destroyed, whose house would not be ruined, and whose blood would not be shed, if wicked men had the power to bring forth all their conceived sins? Our ruin has been conceived a thousand times. We are debtors to God’s providence for obstructing the sin that would surely ruin our lives, our families, our estates, our liberties, and whatever is dear to us. We can say this, as did the Psalmist —

“My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword?” (Ps. 57:4)

And what deliverance is there?

“God breaks their teeth in their mouths, even the great teeth of the young lions.” (Ps 58:6)

He keeps this “fire” from burning, or quenches it when it is ready to break out in flames. He breaks their “spears and arrows” so that sometimes we are not even wounded by them. Some of the wicked he casts into their own pits and destroys; some he cuts short in their power; some he deprives of the instruments with which they cannot proceed; with some, he cuts off their desired opportunities, or diverts them to other objects of their lusts. Often, he causes the wicked to turn on each another. Therefore, we can say with the Psalmist —

“O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom hast thou made them all. The earth is full of your riches”. (Ps. 104:24)

With the prophet, we can declare —

“Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? Prudent, and he shall know them? All the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.” (Hosea 14:9)

Thirdly, if these, and other methods, are the ways in which God frustrates the bringing forth of conceived sin in wicked men, we see clearly how miserable their condition is, and in what perpetual torment they spend their days. They are indeed like a troubled sea so that they cannot rest. As they try to stop others from knowing peace, so it is that they themselves know no peace. The principle of indwelling sin is not impaired or weakened in them, and the will to sin is not taken away. They still have a womb of sin that is able to conceive monsters at any moment. Yes, they are forever forging and framing their foolishness all day long. They are always scheming how to satisfy one lust or other. They are either devouring with malice and revenge, or fouling with their uncleanness, or trampling others in their ambition, or swallowing up by covetousness, all that stand before them. Many of their sins and follies they bring right up to birth and are delivered of them in pain. But, every day, God fills them with disappointment, and shuts up the womb of sin. Some are full of hatred for God's people all their days, and never once receive an opportunity to express it.

This is how David describes them —

“They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. Behold, they belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips: for who, say they, doth hear?” (Psalm 59:6-7)

Yet they are not able to fulfil their plans. What tortures these poor creatures endure! Envy, malice, wrath, revenge, cut to their hearts by not getting done. And then, when God exercises his wise providence in frustrating their power, or by opposing them with a greater power, he cuts them off in their sins, and sends them to their grave full of their plans for iniquity. Others are not in such a hurry, when they are tempted by the power of lusts that they are not able to satisfy. This they feel keenly all their days. If they fulfil their plans, they become more wicked and hellish than before; and if they do not, they are filled with displeasure and discontentment. This is the lot of those who do not know the Lord, or the power of his grace. Do not envy the condition of the wicked. Despite their outward glittering show, their hearts are full of anxiety, trouble and sorrow.

Fourthly, do you see the flood-gates of men's lusts and rage bursting open against the Church and all that concerns it, and do they not prevail sometimes with might on their side? Let not the saints of God despair. The Lord has many wonderful and powerful ways to stifle the conceptions of the wicked, giving them dry breasts, and causing them to miscarry in the womb. He can stop their fury whenever he pleases. “Surely”, says the Psalmist, “the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain,” (Ps. 76:10) The greater their wrath, the more praise comes to him as he confronts it with a power greater than the combined strength of all his sinning creatures, restraining the last of the wrath they have conceived. “He shall cut off the spirit of princes; he is terrible to the kings of the earth.” (12) Some, he will cut off and destroy, and some he will terrify, thus frustrating their rage. He can knock them on the head or break their teeth or chain up their wrath. Who can oppose him?

Fifthly, those who have benefited by any of the ways already mentioned are sure to know to whom they owe their preservation, and not look upon it as unusual. When you conceive sin, God weakens your power to sin, or denies you opportunity, or takes away the object of your lusts, or diverts your thoughts to other things? Know this, that

you have surely received mercy. Though God may not work in his providence always in a way that is subservient to the covenant of grace, yet there is always mercy in it, always a hint in it of the Author himself. Had not God dealt with you in this way, it could be that by now you might had been a terror to yourselves, a shame to your family, and under punishment for some notorious sins that you had conceived. Besides, there is also an additional guilt in sin that is brought forth, even more than what we normally mean by guilt after its conception. It could be that others might have been ruined by it, or drawn into partnership with sin by it, and so brought to eternal ruin, all of which are prevented by God's providence. Eternity will bear witness that there is something really special about the mercy that is found in it. Do not look at it, then, as an accident; the hand of God is in it — and a merciful hand if it is not despised. If so, God can bring good to others by it, the world is made a better place for it, and you are not so wicked as you might have been.

Sixthly, we may see from this the great use of the magistracy in the world, which is a great appointment by God. Amongst other things, it is particularly subject to God's holy providence in obstructing the bringing forth of conceived sin through the terror of the magistrate who bears the sword. God brings terror in the hearts of evil men by it, and you will find this mentioned in Rom. 13:3-4 —

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”

By dread and terror, it closes the womb of sin to stop it bringing forth. When there was no king in Israel, and no one to rebuke the people, and no one evil men were afraid of, there was havoc among the children of men, as you will gather from the last chapters of the book of Judges. The greatest mercies and blessings in this world, next to the gospel and the covenant of grace, come to us through this channel. And, indeed, this is the proper work of the magistrates, namely, to work under the providence of God in obstructing the bringing forth of conceived sin.

These things, then, act in ways by which God in his providence prevents the bringing forth of sin by setting up obstacles in the way of sinners. However, even when in operation, sin is not consumed, but is only shut up in the womb. Men are not burdened by it, nor are their hearts and consciences stricken with its guilt; but they remain perplexed with its power, which they are not able to master or satisfy.

(2) The way in which God frustrates the production of conceived sin is by his working in the will of the sinner, so making sin melt away in the womb. There are two ways in which God prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin by working in the will of the sinner:

- [1] By restraining grace.
- [2] By renewing grace.

He sometimes does it in one way, sometimes in the other. The first of these is commonly found in both the regenerate and the unregenerate, the latter is special to

believers. There are a variety of methods in which God works in both ways. Let us start with the first one.

[1] God works through restraining grace with some arrow of particular conviction fixed in the heart and conscience of the sinner concerning a particular sin he has conceived. This staggers and changes the mind about something it has set its heart on. Consequently, his hands hang down, and his weapons of lust fall away. Here, conceived sin proves abortive. The way God accomplishes this work — with urgent touches, strokes, blows, and rebukes of his Spirit, and with reasonings, arguments, and disturbances of men’s consciences — is not for us to find out. It is done, as I said earlier, in a variety of ways; but the works of God are past finding out. (See Job 9:10; Rom. 11:33) But as for any light that may be shed on the subject, we need to go to the Scriptures, for we must say something of God’s procedures. See how God dealt with the case of Esau and Jacob. Esau had long conceived his brother’s death, comforting himself with the thought, and keeping up his resolve, as is the case of reckless sinners. (See Gen. 27:41). At the first opportunity, he came out to vent his intended rage, and Jacob concluded that he intended to “smite the mother with the children.” (Gen. 32:11) An opportunity presented itself to this wicked and ungodly man to bring forth what sin had lain in his heart for twenty years. He had the full power in his hand to fulfil his purpose. In the midst of these events, God came to his heart in secret, and, with the effective working of his Spirit and power, he diverted him from his purpose, causing his conceived sin to melt away. The result was that Esau fell on the neck of the very one he wanted to kill! In a similar instance, though the details are unique, was his dealing with Laban the Syrian with reference to his brother Jacob. (Gen. 31:24) By a dream, a vision in the night, God prevented him from speaking roughly to him. It was the same with those we read of in Mic. 2:1. Whatever evil they devised on their bed, they intended to perform it in the morning. God intervened with a dream and diverted the sin away from him. (See also Job 33:15-17)

In the same way, we read how God dealt with his people — “He made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captives.” (Ps. 106:46) Men usually deal severely with those they take captive in times of war, an old way of treating captives with harshness and cruelty. But here, God turned and changed their hearts concerning the condition of their captives. In this way, every day, God prevents the bringing forth of a world of sin. He sharpens the arrows of conviction in the spirits of men so as to heighten their condition. Their hearts are not changed as regards their sin, but their minds are altered as to this or that sin. They break, you might say, the vessel they have fashioned, and go to work on someone else!

Now that we have seen a little into the ways of God by which he accomplishes this work, we must also take into account the following considerations:

Firstly, that the medium of restraining grace by which God frustrates the bringing forth of sin lies in certain arguments and reasons put into the mind of the sinner. By these means, the sinner is induced to give up his plans, and change his mind regarding the sin he has conceived. Reasons against it are presented to him, which constrain him to give up both his plan and his purpose. This is the usual way that restraining grace works — by arguments and reasons that frustrate the producing of conceived sin.

Secondly, that no arguments or reasons in themselves are sufficient to frustrate or stop any plan to sin, or to cause conceived sin to prove abortive, while the sinner has the power and opportunity to bring it forth. The arguments are not 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 about grace, even common grace, is of any use to those who are perishing, unless it brings about a relationship with God. God, by the power of his Holy Spirit, using effective and strong arguments and reasons, makes them an act of grace when, by nature, they are just reasons. The work of the Spirit, whom the Lord sends to accompany these persuasions and motives, is in what we may call “restraining grace”.

If you accept these things as presuppositions, let us now go on to consider some of the arguments that achieve the object of frustrating conceived sin.

In the first place

God stops many men in their tracks concerning the conception of sin, with an argument taken from the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of doing what they wish. They have a mind to do it, but God sets a hedge and a wall around them so that they feel it would be too difficult to accomplish what they intend, and that it is better to let it alone. In this way, Herod would have put John the Baptist to death at the first provocation of his preaching, but he feared the crowd because they recognised him as a prophet — (See Mt. 14:5) He had conceived the murder, and was free to proceed with it. But God raised this consideration in his heart — “If I kill him, the people will raise a storm of protest. He is too well respected by the people, and their revolt will cost me my life or my kingdom.” He feared the people, and dare not go on with the wickedness he had conceived because of the difficulties he foresaw. And God pressed home this argument, which was entirely effective at that time.

We know that men will take the gravest risks for the satisfaction of their lusts, as Herod did later. The Pharisees were in the same position — “And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, ‘If we shall say, From heaven’; he will say unto us, ‘Why did ye not then believe him?’ But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, ‘We cannot tell.’ And he said unto them, ‘Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.’” (Mt. 21:24-27). For they loathed the ministry of John, but dared not say so for fear of the people. You will read in verses 45-46 of that same chapter that, under the influence of the same argument, they were deterred from killing our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who had greatly provoked them with a parable pointing out their deserts and approaching destruction — “And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.” They dared not do it for fear of a revolt among the people, seeing that John had been revered as a prophet, and the people heard Christ gladly. (Mk. 12:37) Thus God overawes the hearts of an uncountable number in the world every day, and causes them to desist from attempting to bring forth the sins they have conceived. Indeed, in the likelihood that they should make an attempt, it would prove impossible for them to accomplish it because of the difficulties. We owe much of the peace in this world to the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. Adulteries, rapes, and murders are

frustrated and stifled by it. Men would commit great sins daily but that they feel that it impossible for them to fulfil them.

In the second place

God uses an argument taken from *ab incommodo* — that is, from the inconveniences, evils, and troubles that come to men in the pursuit of sin. When they attempt what they propose, then this or that inconvenience will come in their way — this trouble, this evil, whether now or in eternity. And this argument, managed by the Spirit of God, is a great engine by which he throws up banks and constructs dams to stem the lusts of men. This prevents the disorder and confusion that would spoil the order and beauty of what yet remains as the works of God's hands. Paul outlines the argument in Rom. 2:14-15

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.”

If anyone in the world can be said to give themselves up to the pursuit and fulfilment of all the sins that their lusts can conceive, it is those that are without God's Law, and those that do not know that the Law denounces them for their evil. “But though they do not possess it”, says the Apostle, “they show the effective working of it. They do many things that it commands, and abstain from many things that it forbids, and so show its work and power.” Now, how is that so? Why, with their thoughts accusing or excusing them. It is from the reasons and arguments that they carry in their consciences about sin and its consequences. These prevail on them to abstain from many things that their hearts would carry out. Conscience is a man's pre-judging of himself with respect to his future judgement before God. Thus Felix was staggered in his pursuit of sin when he trembled at Paul's preaching of righteousness and judgement to come. (Acts 24:25) Job tells us that a consideration of punishment from God has a strong influence on the minds of men, keeping them from sin. “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid? For what portion of God is there from above? and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?” (Job 31:1-3) How the Lord makes use of this procedure with his own people, when they have broken the cords of his love, and cast off the rule of his grace for a time, I have written previously.

In the third place

God does this same work by producing an effective argument *ab inutili* — from the unprofitableness of the thing desired. In this, the brothers spared Joseph, and were kept from killing him. (See Gen. 37:26-27) “What profit is there”, they argued, “if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?” They were saying in effect, “We will gain nothing by it; it will bring us no advantage or satisfaction.” Now, the ways in which God obstructs conceived sin, and the springs of these kinds of arguments, are so many and various that it is impossible to list them. There is nothing present or to come, nothing belonging to this life or the next, nothing desirable or undesirable, nothing good or evil, that cannot, at one time or another, be used as the basis of an argument for the obstructing of sin.

In the fourth place

God accomplishes his work by arguments taken *ab honesto* — from what is good and honest, whatever is lovely, praiseworthy, and acceptable to himself. This is the high road in which he walks with the saints under temptation, or at the conceptions of their sins. He effectively brings into their mind thoughts of all those springs and motives to obedience that are found and proposed in the gospel, some at one time some at another. He reminds them of his love, mercy and kindness — his eternal love, with the fruits of which they themselves have been made partakers. He reminds them of the blood of his Son, and his cross and sufferings, and his tremendous undertaking in the work of mediation. He reminds them of the duty of their heart, in the light of his love, his honour, and his name. He reminds them of the love of the Spirit, with all the sweet consolations that they have already experienced, and the privileges that have been entrusted to them. He reminds them of the gospel, its glory and beauty, as it is revealed to their souls. He reminds them of the excellence and loveliness of obedience, and of the performance of the duties they owe to God — of that peace, quietness, and serenity of mind that they have enjoyed up to now.

On the other hand, he reminds them of the provocation by sin when they say in their hearts, “I will not do that abominable thing that my soul hates.” He reminds them of their wounding of the Lord Jesus Christ, and their putting him to shame. He reminds them of their grieving of the Holy Spirit, in whom they are sealed to the day of redemption. He reminds them of their defiling of his dwelling-place. He reminds them of the reproach, dishonour, and scandal that they bring upon the gospel and its profession. He reminds them of the terrors, darkness, wounds, and lack of peace that they bring to their own souls. From these, and similar considerations, God checks the law of sin in the heart so that it should not go on to bring forth the evil that it has conceived. I could give you many other examples recorded in the Scripture, but it would make this book too long! But one or two examples can be given. For example, Joseph resisted his first temptation with this thought — “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9) Here was the evil of sinning against God, his God — the consideration alone that exempted him from the least inclination to fall for this temptation. “It is a sin against God, to whom I owe all my obedience, the God of my life, and of all his mercies. I cannot do it.” Another argument was that which Abigail used to prevail upon David (see 1 Samuel 25:31), in order to persuade him from self-revenge and murder. It was of the same nature; and David acknowledged that it was from the Lord. (32). I will add no more; for all motives and duties in the Scripture, made effective by grace, are examples of this way of God’s working.

Sometimes, I confess, God works secretly in the hearts of men with his own finger without the use and means of such arguments as those we have been discussing in order to stop the progress of sin. Thus he told Abimelech — “I have withheld you from sinning against me”. (Gen. 20:6) Now, this could not be done by using any of the arguments mentioned earlier because Abimelech did not know that what he was planning was a sin. Therefore, he pleaded that he was doing it “in the integrity of his heart.” (5) God turned round his will and thoughts that he should not go through with his plan; but Scripture does not reveal by what ways or means. Nor do we know how God changed Esau’s heart when he came out against his brother to kill him. (See Gen. 33:4) Perhaps he stirred up in him a fresh source of natural affection, or caused him to think of the grief this action would bring to his aged father who loved him so tenderly. Perhaps, having become great and wealthy, he put aside the difference between

himself and his brother, and no longer thought it important. These things are not known. Perhaps God did it by an immediate, powerful act of his Spirit in his heart, without any other instrument. Now, although the things we have mentioned are in themselves, and at other times, weak and feeble, yet, when they are managed by the Spirit of God for such a purpose, they surely become effective and the means of his preventing grace.

[2] God frustrates the bringing forth of conceived sin by real spiritual saving grace, either in the conversion of sinners or in the supply of grace afterwards.

Firstly, we might say that this is a part of the mystery of God's grace and love. He sometimes matches men at the height of their resolution to sin with the highest efforts of his grace. In this, he manifests the power of his grace, and gives the soul a further lesson in the law of sin when it requires such an effort to be headed off from some hot lust or other. By this, he melts the lusts of men, causing them to wither at the root, so that they desist from labouring to bring forth what they have conceived. Instead, they feel shame and sorrow at their conception.

An example of this procedure by God, which is for the use and instruction of all generations, is found in Paul's life. His heart was full of wickedness, blasphemy, and persecution. The conception of these things led to rage and madness, and a willingness to give them free rein. This is what is recorded in Acts 9. Later, Paul retells the same story in Acts 26:9-12, and in 1 Tim. 1:13. In the midst of all his violent pursuit of sin, a voice from heaven shut up the womb and dried up the breasts, and Paul cried out — "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) He took it for granted that this was the way God deals with others, opposing them with his converting grace at the height of their sin and foolishness. He regards himself as a pattern for God's dealing with others. As God dealt with him, so also he does with others —

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Tim. 1:12-13, 16)

We have more than a few other examples in our own days. Many people who determined to go to this or that place, or deride and scoff at the dispensation of the Word, have been found at the very place where they planned to serve their lusts and Satan, having been cast down at the feet of God!

This method of God's dealing with sinners is also described in Job 33:15-18 — "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword." Then there is the case of Dionysius the Areopagite who provides us with another example of this work of God's

grace and love. It is said that Paul was dragged either by him or before him, to plead for his life as “a proclaimer of foreign gods”, which, at Athens, attracted the death penalty. In the midst of this situation, God met him with converting grace, his sin withered in the womb, and he adhered to Paul and his teaching. (Acts 17:18-34) A similar dispensation towards Israel is found in Hosea 11:7-10 —

“And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Lord shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west. They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the Lord.”

There is no need to add any more examples. God is pleased to leave no generation unconvinced of this truth if they would only look to their own experiences, and their find examples of his work and mercy among them. Every single day, someone or other is taken up in the fury of the purpose of his heart to go on in his sin, and is stopped in his tracks by the power of converting grace.

Secondly, God not only frustrates sin with the same grace, but with a fuller communication of it; that is, with special assisting grace. This is the normal way in which he deals with believers. We have already seen how, through the deceit of sin, they carry on to the conceiving of this or that sin. Then God puts a stop to their progress, or rather to the prevalence of the law of sin in them, by giving them special and necessary help for their preservation and deliverance. As David remarks concerning himself — “But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped; for I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” (Ps. 73:2). He was on the very brink of unbelief and despairing thoughts and conclusions about God’s providence in the government of the world. But now he has recovered, as is it with many a believer. He may be often at the very brink, at the very door, of some folly or iniquity, when God intervenes in the power of assisting grace, and brings him back to an obedient state of heart again. This is a special work of Christ, in which he reveals his faithfulness towards his own — “He is able to succor them that are tempted.” (Heb. 2:18) This is not an absolute power, but a power clothed with mercy that is intended here, such power that meets a deep sense of the suffering of poor believers under temptation. How does he exercise this merciful ability towards us? We read in Heb. 4:16 that he gives “grace to help in time of need”, timely help and assistance in our deliverance, when we are about to be overpowered by sin and temptation. When lust has conceived, and is ready to bring forth, and when the soul lies at the brink of some iniquity, Christ sends help, relief, deliverance, and safety. Here, we have to a large extent the care and faithfulness of Christ towards his poor saints. He will not allow them to be worried by the power of sin, nor be carried into ways that dishonour the gospel. He will not fill them with shame and reproach, and so render them useless in the world. He steps in with the saving relief and assistance of his grace and stops the course of sin, making his followers “more than conquerors”. (Rom. 8:37) This help is promised most faithfully.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”
(1 Cor. 10:13)

Temptations test us, but for our own good. This way, the Lord achieves many holy ends. But when we are tested to the utmost of our ability, as if the next assault might cause us to fall, a way of escape is provided. And as this can come in several different ways (as I have said elsewhere) I will mention the most important one — namely, supplies of grace that enable the soul to bear up, resist, and conquer. When once God begins to deal with a soul in love, he will not cease to add one supply after another until the whole work of his grace and faithfulness is accomplished. We find an example of this in Is. 57:17-18. There, poor sinners were so far taken captive by the power of their lusts that the first and second work of God in them was not enough to deliver them. But he did not give them up. He continued to pursue them in his love towards them, and did not stop until they were recovered.

This, then, is a description of the second way in which God frustrates the bringing forth of conceived sin; namely, by working in the will of the sinner. He does this either by a common conviction, or by a special grace, so that of their own accord sinners let go the will to sin that had taken possession of them. And this is no small thing by which he provides for his own glory and the honour of his gospel in the world, when his disciples might stain the whole beauty of it if they were left to bring forth all the evil that they conceive in their hearts.

Thirdly, besides the two ways we have discussed, there remains one more special way that immediately acts both on the power and the will of a sinner. This is the way of afflictions, a word with which we close this chapter. Afflictions, I say, work in many ways with reference to conceived sin. They work providentially on the power of the creature. When a man has conceived a sin, and is in full pursuit of it, God often sends a sickness and reduces his strength. Or he might cut him down by loss during a time of plenty, and so steer him away from pursuing his lusts, though it is still probable that his heart has not been weaned off them. His power is weakened, and he cannot do the evil that he would. In this sense, it belongs to the first way that God frustrates the producing of sin. Great afflictions work sometimes, not always immediately and directly, in conveying the gracious purpose and intention of him who sends them. He brings to the sufferer a dispensation of grace and power, of love and kindness, which will effectively divert the heart and mind away from sin — “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.” (Ps. 119:67) And in this way, because of the predominance of renewing and assisting grace, it belongs to the latter means of preventing sin.

So here are some of the ways in which it pleases God to put a stop to the progress of sin both in believers and unbelievers. If we desire to go a little further in searching out his ways to perfection, I remind you that this is only a small part of what we know of him.

CHAPTER 14

The power of sin is further proved by the effect it has in the lives of believers — firstly, in their actual sins — secondly, in their habitual backsliding

We now proceed to other evidence of the sad truth that we are about to demonstrate. Having dealt with the main part of our subject, I will try to be briefer with the remaining arguments. What we will now concentrate on is the proof that this law of sin has, throughout the ages, revealed something of its power and force in its sad fruits, even in believers. Now, there are two sorts of fruit:

1. Great actual eruptions of sin in their lives;
2. Habitual backsliding from the state and condition of obedience and communion with God that they once enjoyed.

Both of these, according to the rule laid down by the Apostle James, and which we considered earlier, are due to this law of sin, and belong to the **fourth heading of its progress**. Both of them are convincing evidences of its force and power.

1. When we think of the fearful eruptions of sin that come into the lives of believers, we have evidence enough. If I had to deal with this subject at length, I would need to recount all the sad and scandalous failings of the saints in the record of Holy Scripture. But their particulars are well known to us, so I do not need to mention them here, nor the terrible results that came with them. Only a few practical remarks need to be considered.

(1) Most of these eruptions occurred in the lives of men who were not of the lowest status, or just ordinary believers, but men who rose high in their generation and in their walk with God. Such were Noah, Lot, David, Hezekiah, and others. They were spiritual giants among men, head and shoulders above them in real holiness. And surely that reflects on the great power of indwelling sin that could hurry such men of God to the abominable sins into which they fell. An ordinary instrument could never have turned them away from the way of obedience. Here is a poison that no spiritually athletic constitution can overcome, and no antidote can withstand!

(2) These men did not fall into great sins at the beginning of their profession, when they had only a little experience of the goodness of God and of the sweetness and pleasantness of obedience, and of the power and wiles of sin with its compulsions, poisoned arguments, and surprises. But they arrived after a long course of walking with God, and an acquaintance with all these things I have been outlining, together with a desire to watch carefully. Noah, according to the lives of men in that period of world history, walked rightly with God for hundreds of years before he was surprised into sin. (See Gen. 9) Righteous Lot seems to have been approaching the end of his days when he defiled himself with the abominations recorded. David, in a short life, had as much experience of grace and sin and spiritual communion with God, perhaps more than anyone else, before he was cast to the ground by the law of sin. It was so with King Hezekiah, who was of the highest quality. Now, these people were well acquainted with the power and deceit of sin, and were well armed and well provided

against it, and had been conquerors over it for many years. For the law of sin to prevail against them indicates a force and power too mighty for anyone, but the Spirit of the Almighty, to withstand. Who could find a greater stock of inherent grace than that discovered in these men? Who had more experience of God, and the excellence of his ways, and the sweetness of his love, and communion with him, than they did? Who could be better equipped in opposing sin, or more obliged to do so, than they did? Yet we see with horror how they fell into the trap of indwelling sin.

(2) God permitted their fall for this purpose: that we might learn to be wary of this powerful enemy. All of them fell after they had received great and marvellous mercies from the hand of God, which should have drawn from them a strong obligation to diligence and watchfulness and careful obedience. Noah had just emerged from that world of water where he saw the ungodly world perishing for its sins, and he was preserved by an astonishing miracle that all the ages admire. When the world's desolation reminded him of his special preservation through the immediate care and hand of God, he fell into drunkenness. Lot had just witnessed what would make any thinking man tremble, seeing, as it were "hell coming out of heaven" upon unclean sinners, the greatest evidence, except the cross of Christ, that God ever gave of the judgement to come. He saw himself and his children delivered by the special care and miraculous hand of God. Yet, while the wonder of these marvellous mercies was still fresh in his mind, he fell into drunkenness and incest. David was delivered out of all his troubles, and saw the necks of his enemies bowed round about him. Yet he made use of his peace from a world of trials and troubles to contrive murder and adultery. Immediately after King Hezekiah's great and miraculous deliverance, he fell into wordly pride and boasting.

I conclude that their falling into sin at such a time was permitted for the express purpose of instructing us in the truth. No one, at any time, furnished with God's great grace, can promise himself any safety from indwelling sin except by keeping close to him who is able to provide the powerful remedy. Should this not make us look about us? Are we better than Noah who had a testimony from God that he was "perfect in his generations", and that he "walked with God"? (Gen. 6:9) Are we better than Lot, whose "righteous soul was vexed with the evil deeds of ungodly men" (2 Pet. 2:7), and was therefore commended by the Holy Spirit? Are we more holy, wise, and watchful than David, who obtained a good testimony in comparison with his son Solomon who was "not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David." (1 Kings 11:4, 15:3) Or are we better than Hezekiah, who appealed to God himself on the basis that he had served him uprightly and with a perfect heart? (See 2 Kings 20:3; Is. 38:3) How greatly this law of sin prevailed in and over them! And there is no end to such examples. They are like buoys in the sea to warn us of the shifting sands, the shelves, the rocks, on which many have been shipwrecked to their risk, danger, loss, and indeed, almost to their ruin, had not God been pleased in his faithfulness and grace to prevent it.

This is the first part of the evidence of the power of sin from its results.

2. Indwelling sin reveals its power in habitual backsliding from zeal and holiness, and from the state of mind and condition of obedience and communion with God that they once attained. This is true of many believers. Promises of growth and improvement are many and precious, the means are excellent and effective, and the benefits are

great and beyond words. Yet it often happens that instead we find decay and decline among those who profess the faith, indeed, in many of the saints of God. Now, although this is all down to the strength and power of indwelling sin (and that is a strong proof in itself), I put forward the following observation as true. Some of the saints often decline in the growth and improvement in their faith, grace, and holiness that might rightly be expected of them, proving that the real cause of this evil lies at the door of indwelling sin. I declare that this is often the way to sift out unsound professors when they fall into apostasy. I will say nothing more concerning this subject at this time.

The constraint on true believers to fall into sinful decline and gradual apostasy requires more strength and power than the constraint on unsound professors to total apostasy. The wind that blows down a dead tree that has no root will scarcely shake or bow a living well-rooted tree. But this is what sin can do. There is mention in the Scripture of “the first ways of David”, a commendation found in 2 Chron. 17:3. The last ways of David were tainted with the power of indwelling sin. Though we have mentioned the actual eruption of sin, yet his uncleanness and pride began when he was numbering the people. It was from that time that he declined from his former faith. Rushes cannot grow without mud. David would not have done evil in his younger days, when he followed God in the wilderness of his testing and trials, and when he was full of faith, love, humility, brokenness of heart, and a zeal and tender affection for all the ordinances of God. He was well known for all of these things. But his strength sapped away under the force and power and deceit of indwelling sin. His locks, as it were, were shorn like Samson, and he became a prey to vile lust and temptation. We have a notable instance of this in most of the churches to which our Saviour sent a warning in the book of Revelation. Let us single out one of them. There were many good things in the church of Ephesus (see Rev. 2:2-3), for which it was highly commended. Yet it was charged with spiritual decline, a gradual falling off into apostasy — “Thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.” (4-5) It had declined both inwardly in its frame of mind and heart, which affected its faith and love, and outwardly in its obedience and works compared with what it used to be like when it gave a fine testimony to Christ himself. The same can also be said of the rest of the seven churches, with one or two exceptions, for five of them are charged with spiritual decline. Hence, there is mention in the Scripture of the “kindness of youth”, and the “love of your espousals” (Jer. 2:2), a great commendation from Jeremiah, and of “their first faith” (1 Tim. 5:12), and of “the beginning of our confidence” (Heb. 3:14). We also have a warning that we “do not lose the things we have wrought”. (2 Jn. verse 8) But why do we need to look back in search of examples to confirm the truth of this observation? Unfortunately, spiritual decline from our first meeting with God, and from our first communion with God, and from the first strictness of our duties of obedience, is all too common amongst those who profess the faith.

Should we not, then, take note that it is the lot of those who profess the faith, even the very best of us, to fall into sin?

(1) Is our zeal for God as warm, vigorous, effective, and sincere as it was when we first gave ourselves to God? Or rather, has a small, selfish spirit come into us who have professed the faith from our earliest days? Does iniquity abound, and has our love grown cold? In the early days, was it not a burden on our spirits to hear the name, the ways, and the worship of God blasphemed and profaned? Did we not say like the

Psalmist — “Rivers of waters run down our eyes, because men keep not thy law?” (Ps. 119:136) Were we not concerned in our soul about the kingdom of Christ in the world, like Eli was about the ark? Did we not “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude verse 3) — and, indeed, every part of it, especially where the grace of God and the glory of the gospel is concerned? Did we not work to judge and condemn the world by living a holy and separated life? So, are the majority of believer like this today? Are they growing in their faith? Or has coldness and indifference crept into their hearts? Indeed, do we now find some that despise these things, and look on their former zeal as foolishness? Do we not see many who once were held in high esteem for their profession of Christ, who are now daily scorned and reproached because of their sins — and that quite rightly by men of the world? Are they not like those daughters of Zion in the olden days when God judged them for their sins and disobedience? (See Is. 3:24) Have they not been ruined by the world? Have they not set aside those things that once meant so much to them?

Indeed, have not some come, under one excuse or another, to an open enmity of God, and a hatred of his ways? These things no longer bring them any pleasure, but are evil in their sight. Now, if this is so with those who are now open apostates, and whose hypocrisy the Lord Jesus Christ will shortly judge, how will it be for the best of us? Have we not grown cold and slack in these things? Are we less concerned with them than we once were? Have we not grown weary and selfish in our religion? And if this is true at home, how much more will it be in the world? When at home, men prefer their ease, reputation, safety, and secular advantages — the very things Christ hates. He declares that those in whom these things prevail have no part in him. Some, indeed, seem to retain a zeal for the truth; but when once they appeared to be strong in their faith, but now, and in so many things, they are found to be abominable in God’s sight. Others may decry their errors, not for the sake of truth but for the sake of their party or their self-interest. And when a man puts party interests first in order to be admired, he is corrupt in his judgement, for it is not zeal for God but for himself. It is not, “The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up” (Ps. 69:9; Jn. 2:17), but rather “Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.” (Mark 9:38) Better if such a man had never pretended to any zeal at all than to replace it with such a party spirit.

(2) Is our delight in the ordinances and worship of God the same as it used to be? Do we find the same sweetness and relish in them as formerly? How precious the Word was to us then! What joy and delight it brought! How we went to great pains to hear it preached in all its power and purity, and in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit! Did we not call the Sabbath our delight (see Is. 58:13), and was not its observance a real joy to our souls? Did we not long for the fellowship of the saints and face many dangers to enjoy it? And is this condition still true today? Can we find no evidence of spiritual decline within us? Is it true that others say of us, “Yes, grey hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it”? (Hos. 7:9) Indeed, are we not prone to say with those of old — “Oh, what a weariness is it!” (Mal. 1:13) Is it a burden to be tied up with the observation of these ordinances? Why are we now not so strict in our observance of the Sabbath? Why do we not need to go to church so often? What is so special in hearing so many sermons? Unrecognised, but a disrespectful even a contemptuous attitude towards the pleasant and excellent ways of Christ and his gospel has fallen on many that profess the faith.

(3) With the same spirit of enquiry, let us inquire into the way of obedience, and the performance of our duties? Do we find the same conscientious horror of sinning in us as it was in earlier days, the same and exact performance of duty, the same love for the brotherhood, the same readiness to take up the cross, the same humility of mind and spirit, and the same self-denial? Indeed not! The breath of men's lust, which pollutes the air, will not allow us to reply openly and honestly to these questions.

We need, then, go no further than the wretched generation in which we live to prove the sad spiritual condition of mankind. May the Lord give us the spirit of repentance before it is too late! Now, this decline of faith and life found in some that profess the faith all proceeds from this root and cause — they are the products of indwelling sin. They prove the frightening power and strength of sin. How true is the rule set out by James, something we have already considered: namely, that lust or indwelling sin is the cause of all sin and every spiritual decline in believers. This is what the Apostle proves and what he teaches. I will therefore speak of these two things, and prove:

1. The great power and strength of indwelling sin;

2. That there are ways and means by which sin extends and maintains its grip in the soul, the curse of its effects, and the reasons why believers are exhorted to avoid and oppose it.

1. Sin works in great power and strength considering the provision that is made to oppose it. Yet it still prevails. There is in the covenant of grace plenty of provision, not only to prevent spiritual decline in believers, but to help them go on towards perfection, such as:

(1) The Word itself, and all the ordinances of the gospel that are appointed and provided for this end. (See Eph. 4:11-15) The point of giving gospel officers to the Church is the same as the giving of the ordinances which are administered by them, for they are given "for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12), that is, for the administration of the ordinances of the gospel. Now, what are these ends? They are for the prevention of spiritual decline in the saints, and to encourage them to go on to perfection. It is for the "equipping of the saints", while carrying on of the work of grace in them, and the work of holiness and obedience by them. It is for the building up of the body of Christ, with an increase of faith and love in every true member of the mystical body. But how far are they appointed to carry on this work and build them up? Are limits put on their work? Can they carry them so far, and then leave off? "No" says the Apostle in verse 13.

(2) The dispensation of the word of the gospel and its ordinances are designed to help us, and further our spiritual growth until the whole work of faith and obedience is complete. They are appointed to perfect in this world our faith, knowledge, and growth in grace and holiness. But what happens when opposition and temptation lie in the way, for Satan and his instruments work with great subtlety and deceit? Why, according to verse 15, these ordinances are designed to safeguard and deliver us from all their assaults, so that we might be preserved by the use of them — "...[that] speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him who is the head — Christ".

This will come by making use of all the gospel ordinances, the chief end of which, being given and appointed by God, is to preserve believers from any decline in faith and obedience, and to help them carry them on towards perfection. These are the means that God, the good husbandman, makes use of to cause the vine to thrive and produce fruit. I could say more on this subject; but briefly, the Word is both milk and strong meat, guaranteed to nourish and strengthen all believers. It has both seed and water in it, and enough fertiliser to make us fruitful. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper is for the strengthening of our faith as we remember the death of our Lord, and exercise love towards one another. The fellowship of the saints is designed to build us up together in faith, love, and obedience.

(3) There is something else that must be considered. God tells us not to forget the assistance he has provided for us, and he is continually calling us to make use of the means appointed for the overcoming of indwelling sin. He shows them to us, like the angel revealed the water-spring to Hagar. (See Gen. 21) His commands, exhortations, promises, threats, are all multiplied for this purpose. See them summed up in Heb. 2:1 — “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” He continually says to us, “Why will you die, why will you wither and decay? Come to the pastures provided for you and your soul will live.”

If we see a lamb run away from the fold into the wilderness, we would not be surprised to learn that it has been torn limb from limb by some wild animal. If we see a sheep leaving its green pastures and watering places to dwell in the dry barren wilderness, we would not be astonished to see it thin and ready to perish. But if we find lambs wounded in the fold, we wonder at the boldness and ferocity of the beasts of prey that dare enter it. If we see a sheep in a poor state in full pasture, we would think it diseased and sickly. Is it strange that poor sinners who forsake their own safety, and run away from the pasture and fold of Christ in his ordinances, are torn apart by various lusts and are pining away with hunger and famine? To see men living with all the means of spiritual blessing at hand, and yet falling into spiritual decline, proves that some secret, powerful disease, with poisonous and toxic qualities, is sapping the power and strength of the means they enjoy. This is indwelling sin. So powerful, so poisonous is it that it can bring leanness to the souls of men amid all the precious means of growth that God has provided. It should make us tremble to see men living with all the blessings of the gospel such as preaching, praying, the administration of the sacraments, and still find them growing colder every day in their zeal for God. They grow more selfish and worldly, and fall away from the degrees of holiness that they once enjoyed.

(4) Together with the dispensation of the external means of spiritual growth or improvement, there are also supplies of grace continually provided for the saints from their Head, who is Christ. He is their living head, who assures them that because he is alive, we shall live also. (See Jn. 11:26; Rom. 14:7) He communicates all spiritual life to those who are his. In him, is the fountain of our life, which means “...that you died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:3) This life he grants to his saints by making them alive in his Spirit (see Rom. 8:11), by whom he is continually supplying life to them in his wonderful grace.

In this twofold work (his making us alive, and his continual supplies of grace to us), he takes up residence within us — “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”. (Gal. 2:20) It means that — “The spiritual life I have now is not my own. It does not come from within me, nor is it maintained by me, but it comes solely from the work of Christ in me. So it is not I that lives, but he lives in me, the whole of my life coming from him alone.” Nor does our living Head bring us provisions that we should barely live and no more, living a life that is poor, weak, and leading on to death. No! He gives it abundantly, that we might enjoy a strong, vigorous, thriving, flourishing life. He came that his sheep “...may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (Jn. 10:10) This means a fullness of life, so that they might flourish, grow strong, and be fruitful. So it is with the whole body of Christ, and every member of it. Paul describes the secret of our stability and growth — “...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:20-22) The purpose of grace, and supplies of life from this living and blessed Head, is the building up of the whole body, and every member of it, and the edifying of it in love. His treasures of grace are unsearchable, his stores inexhaustible, his life our fountain, full and eternal, his heart bounteous and large, his hand open and liberal. There is no doubt that he grants his supplies of grace for our furtherance in holiness for the blessing of all his saints.

Why, then, is it that we do not flourish and thrive? As it is often with the natural body, so is it true with the spiritual one. Though the blood is sound, the mind sane, and the heart in good condition, a cancer may exist in the body, affecting and endangering the life of the body. Though the heart and head are working perfectly in providing nourishment to the rest of the body, yet the body is slowly perishing, growing weaker every day. The withering and decaying of any member in Christ’s mystical body is not due to lack of grace and abundant life, but from the powerful interception of indwelling sin. Hence it is that where lust grows strong, a greater amount of grace is needed to keep the soul alive. Yet not much fruit appears. Often, Christ grants a great deal of grace where not many of its effects are seen. Grace spends its strength and power in withstanding the continual assaults of violent corruption and lust so that it cannot properly expend its strength in producing fruit.

A strong medicine may be prescribed, both to check a fever, and to comfort, refresh, and strengthen the body. If the fever persists, the medicine will spend all its power and efficacy in subduing the illness, contributing much less to the relief of the body than it would do so otherwise. So is it with the eye-salve (see Rev. 3:18), and the healing grace that we have in abundance from the wings of “the Sun of Righteousness”. (Mal. 4:2) It is forced to use its healing strength in opposing our lust and corruption. The soul does not receive strength to perform its duties and produce the fruit that might otherwise be expected of it. How sound and healthy and flourishing, and how fruitful and holy, the soul might be with such grace coming from Christ! But now, by reason of the power of indwelling sin, the soul is perishing, becoming weaker, and is withering and useless.

What a proof this is of the power of indwelling sin! It can withstand the mighty and effective power of grace despite the blessed and continual supplies of grace that we receive from our Head. Too many believers are spiritually in decline. Their latter end is nothing like their beginning. Indwelling sin makes the vineyard on a “very fruitful hill”

(Is. 5:1) produce wild grapes. It also makes the trees barren although they stand in fertile fields.

(5) Besides the continual supplies of grace that come with the covenant, and are given to believers, so that in their poverty they might thirst no more, there is also a readiness in the Lord Jesus Christ to give succour to the souls that belong to him according to their circumstances. The Apostle tells us that "...we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:15-16) Our merciful High Priest is ready to grant extra supplies of grace over and above the constant supplies of the Spirit we mentioned earlier. Besides the never-failing springs of ordinary covenant grace, he provides special refreshing showers in times of drought; and this is of great advantage to the saints for their preservation and growth in grace.

Now, I say this: despite the provision of such a vital resource, the power and strength of indwelling sin often prevails. So great is its deceit and force, and so many its wiles and temptations that it often turns many for whose growth and improvement this godly provision has been made, into backsliding and spiritual decline in their walk with God. Samson's strength was fully tested when he broke the cords that bound him. Yet he was conquered by a sin that was so stubborn that no sovereign remedy could cure it. Such is this indwelling sin if it is not watched out for. It will break all the cords that bind it, it will blunt all the instruments intended to root it out, it will resist all healing remedies despite their power, and is shown to be very powerful indeed.

Besides this, believers have countless obligations to perform out of love for the commands of God — to grow in grace and press on towards perfection. Abundant means from God are provided to achieve these two objectives. When Christians take advantage of them, they will find profit, sweetness, and contentment in the world. It is a trouble to their souls when they do not do so, that they are not more holy, more zealous, more useful, and more fruitful than they should. They know it is their duty to watch against this enemy, to fight against it, to pray against it; and this they do. They desire its destruction more than the pleasures of this world and all it affords.

Yet, despite this, such is the subtlety and fraud and ferocity and advantage of this adversary, it frequently succeeds in bringing them into a sad condition. Some believers are like sailors at sea. They have a good and fair gust of wind all night. They tack to, and go about their business, and are happy to see how much progress they are making in their voyage. When morning comes, they calculate how far they have gone, and discover to their horror that they have fallen back rather than gone forward! They discover that a swift tide or current is racing against them, frustrating all their labours, and rendering the wind in their sails almost useless. They have gone with the stream, but have made no progress. So is it with believers. They have a good breeze of supplies of the Spirit from above; they attend to their duties diligently, pray constantly, listen attentively, and forget nothing that will carry them on in their voyage towards eternity. But after a while, when they come to consider and examine their hearts and ways, and the progress they have made, they find that the fair weather, and dutiful responses to it, was insufficient to bear them up against some strong tide or current of indwelling sin. They have been kept from being driven and split on the rocks or shelves, and they have been preserved from gross, scandalous sins; but they have

lost the battle for spiritual progress, and gone back, becoming entangled in a sad spiritual decline. This is a notable proof of the life of indwelling sin.

Now that we have discovered how powerful indwelling sin is, we need to take care in preventing its operations. Of all the effects that sin produces, there is none more dangerous or damaging than the last one I mentioned, namely, that it turns many who profess the faith into a spiritual decline from their former ways and progress, despite the sweetness and excellence their souls find in God's ways.

Next, I will consider the ways and means by which indwelling sin prevails; and that will help us watch out for it.

CHAPTER 15

A decline in the spiritual life is caused by indwelling sin — The ways in which sin prevails for this purpose

We now consider the ways and means by which indwelling sin prevails in believers, causing them to decline spiritually in grace and holiness. The reasons are numerous:

1. When first converted as sinners to God in Christ, believers usually find many fresh springs breaking out in their souls, and refreshing showers descending upon them. This bears them up with a wonderful sense of faith, love, holiness, fruitfulness, and obedience. As in a land-flood, when many streams run into a river, the sense of blessing swells its bounds, and rolls on with more than ordinary fullness. Now, if these springs are not kept open, if they are not supplied with frequent showers, believers will decline and backslide. Let us consider two of these blessings.

(1) They will gain a fresh and vigorous sense of pardoning mercy. As this increases in the soul, so does a love of God and a delight in him and obedience to him. The more there is of gospel pardon, the more there will be of the life of gospel love. "I say unto thee," 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 loveth little." (Lk. 7:47) Her great love was evidence of her great forgiveness and her great sense of it. Now, our Saviour was not giving a reason for her forgiveness, as though it might have been her love, but it was her love that stemmed from her forgiveness. In the story, from verse 40 and onwards, he convicted the Pharisee to whose home he had been invited that the one who experienced a great forgiveness would express the greatest love. (43) He then gave an account of the great love of the woman, which sprang from her sense of forgiveness. Thus sinners, at their conversion, are very sensible of their great forgiveness, as witness the Apostle Paul — "...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." (1 Timothy 1:15) The gospel greatly subjugates the hearts and spirits of sinners to God, and makes them alive to all obedience, that such poor cursed sinners as they should be freely delivered and pardoned. The love of God and of Christ in their forgiveness makes them more than conquers, and constrains them to make it their business to live for God.

(2) The fresh taste of spiritual things keeps them keen in their souls, so that worldly things, instead of drawing them away from a close walk with God, are made insipid and undesirable. Having tasted of the wine of the gospel, they want no other, and declare, "This is the best!" (See Jn. 2:10) So it was with the apostles when given the opportunity to depart from Christ when others were falling away. Christ asked them, "

Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.'" (Jn. 6:67-69) They took such a great delight in the doctrine of the gospel, and the grace of Christ in their souls, that they dismissed all thoughts of departing from it. Think of a prisoner who has been kept a long time in a dungeon. If he is taken out suddenly into the sunlight, he will be so overwhelmed by the beauties of the creation that he will believe that he will never grow weary of it, or tolerate the darkness again. So it is with souls when they are first brought into the

marvellous light of Christ, and see the beauties of the new creation. They see a new glory in Christ that quite debases 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, indeed, many other things. Now, while these, and similar springs, are kept open in the souls of converted sinners, they are encouraged to live a vigorous life of holiness. They can never do enough for God; so much so, that often their zeal as saints will not turn away their consciences from suffering honourably like the martyrs of old.

This, then, is the first thing that indwelling sin must attack in order to prepare us for a decline in grace and obedience — it tries to poison these springs. And there are several ways it can do it:

Firstly, it advances its cause through laziness and neglect. It prevails upon the soul to neglect those continual thoughts that so powerfully influence it towards a strict and fruitful obedience. If great care is not taken, if diligence and watchfulness are neglected, together with all the means that are appointed by God to keep the spirit lively in their souls, they will dry up and decline. Consequently, any obedience that springs up in them will achieve the same object. Isaac "...dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father" (Gen. 26:18), because "...the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham", and so the flocks received no benefit from them. Let the heart never so much as cease from thinking deeply of the grace and love of God, the cross of Christ, the greatness and wonder of gospel mercy, and the beauty of holiness. When it does, these things will quickly become as strange to them as they could ever be. The one who lives in the sun sees nothing when he retires to a darkened room. And so it is with a man who loses his faith in these things, for he will find that they have lost their hold over him. They do little or nothing to affect him because of his unbelief, these very things that used to have such a hold on him. So was it with the wife in the Song of Solomon. (See Song 5:1-2) Christ calls to her with a marvellous loving and gracious invitation to communion with himself. She who had formerly been ecstatic at the first sound of that joyful voice, but being now under the power of laziness and worldly comfort, offered a silly excuse when she heard his call, ending with her own terrible loss and sorrow. Indwelling sin, I say, makes progress using spiritual laziness in the souls of men, causing them to become unresponsive to God's Spirit in failing to recall experiences of divine love, and to neglect a deep faithful contemplation of God's love. Thus a secret decline sets in within the soul. How often did God complain that his people had "forgotten him", that is, grow forgetful of his love and grace! This is the beginning of apostasy.

Secondly, it diverts the soul so that it entertains thankless, weary, powerless thoughts concerning those things that should prevail to diligence and obedience. The Apostle cautions us that in dealing with God we should know "reverence and godly fear" because of his purity, holiness, and majesty. (Heb. 12:28-29) And this is what the Lord himself spoke concerning the destruction of Nadab and Abihu — "Then Moses said unto Aaron, 'This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" (Leviticus 10:3) He must be approached with awe in a holy, reverent attitude. Also, this is how we should deal with the things of God in which, and by which, we have communion with him. The soul must show a great reverence for God. When men begin to take spiritual things for granted, not using and improving them for the purpose for which they were appointed, then they will lose sight of all their beauty and glory and power towards them. When we do

anything in which our faith or love towards God should be exercised, we should do it with all our hearts and with all our minds and with all our strength and with all our soul; not formally and mechanically, for this God hates.

He not only requires us to keep his love and grace in mind, but that, as much as it lies within us, we should do it for the sake of their worth and excellence. The sin of Hezekiah was that he "...did not repay according to the favour shown him, for his heart was lifted up". (2 Chronicles 32:25) So, while considering gospel truth to the utmost endeavour of our souls, we should look to be "...transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18) That is, that they should made to exercise their full power and effect on us. James tells us what happens when we hear but do not do anything in response —

"It is but like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." (Jas. 1:23-24)

— that is, he reads or hears the mind of God in Christ revealed in the gospel. But instead, he sees only himself — and immediately forgets what kind of man he is. It makes no impression on him, and plants no idea or image of Christ in his imagination because he looks only casually. It is always so with those who think of gospel truth in a slight manner, without trying fully, with all their hearts, minds and strength to have them grafted into their souls, or have all their effects reproduced in them.

Now, this is what happens to some sinners after their first meeting with God. They fall away from a careful consideration of his pardoning mercy, and in applying it to their souls, thus stirring themselves up into a frame of mind and heart that brings them to constant obedience. They no longer think of the excellence of Christ and spiritual things, once newly discovered by them in a saving light when they used to press on with all their might to enjoy them greatly. This used to keep them humble and holy, making them thankful and fruitful. But now, if laziness and neglect enter in, they will no longer continue to improve and grow in spiritual wisdom, for indwelling sin works in the vanity of men's minds, which grow content with slight and casual thoughts about holy things.

As men decline spiritually, so they decline in the power of holiness and a closer walk with God. The springs being stopped or poisoned, the streams will not run so swiftly, or at least not so sweetly, as they used to. Some will slowly dry up completely. They still speak of their faith and spiritual things as much as ever, and perform their duties as often as possible; but their souls are poor, lean, and starving as to any real and effective communion with God. By the power and subtlety of indwelling sin, they have grown formal, and have learned to deal with spiritual things in an off-hand way. They have lost any life, vigour, and relish for them.

Always be serious about spiritual things if you ever intend to benefit by them.

Thirdly, indwelling sin often succeeds in stopping up the springs of gospel obedience with false and foolish opinions which corrupt the simplicity of the gospel. False opinions are the work of the flesh, coming from the vanity and darkness of men's minds, and are more or less mixed in with corrupt feelings. The Apostle was jealous

for the Corinthians in this matter. He was afraid that their minds might be drawn away from the simplicity that is in Christ (see 2 Cor. 11:2), which he knew would accompany a decline of faith, love and obedience. And, sadly, this is often the case. We have observed some that used to delight in a sweet taste of the love of God in Christ, and of the wonder of pardoning mercy, and consequently walked humbly with God for many years in the faith and knowledge of the truth. I have also seen them later on when their minds, corrupted by indwelling sin, had been turned from the simplicity that is in Christ by false and foolish opinions, and who now despise all their experiences, and reject the force of truth and obedience. Hence, John cautions the elect lady and her children to take heed that they are not enticed, lest they should “lose those things we worked for” (2 Jn. verse 8), and throw away their previous obedience as lost, and a thing of no value.

We have many examples of this today. There are some who, not many years ago, put a priceless value on the pardon of sin through the blood of Christ, and delighted in the discovery of spiritual truth in the gospel, and walked in obedience to God because of this. But now they have been seduced and turned aside from the truth as it is in Jesus, and despise the springs of their former obedience. Oh, how grossly and openly this is done! How many more corrupt opinions have poisoned the springs and fountains of gospel obedience, and won their ground through the vanity of men’s minds, the main seat of indwelling sin? Those who backslide tend to argue special grace for freedom of action, and the advancement of the will, or the works of men in the advancement of spiritual power and ability. They are indeed works of the flesh; and however hard some argue a particular use for them in the promotion of holiness, they are discovered to poison the springs of true evangelical obedience, slowly turning the heart away from God, and bringing the soul into spiritual decline.

So this is one way in which indwelling sin produces its insidious effect of drawing men away from the power, purity, and fruitfulness that attended their conversion and communion with God. The result is a tendency to decline spiritually, at least in holiness and grace. There is nothing more that we should watch out for, if we are going to deal effectively with this powerful and subtle enemy. It is no small part of the wisdom of faith to see whether gospel truths continue to have the same effect on the soul as they did at first, and whether an effort is being made to maintain and improve them. A commandment that is always practised is always new, as John said of love. And the one that really takes hold of gospel truth, though he may hear it a thousand times, will always find it new and fresh because it encourages him in the practice of his faith. To others, it grows stale, and burdensome, just as Israel found the manna loathsome after the people got used to.

3. Indwelling sin deeply affects our lives by diverting us from watching against the wiles of Satan. When our Lord Christ first came to take possession of our soul, he bound the strong man and spoiled his goods (See Mt. 12:29), depriving him of all his power, dominion, and interest. Being thus dispossessed and frustrated in his expectations, Satan leaves the soul, finding it newly fortified against his baits. That is why he left our Saviour after his first fruitless attempts in the wilderness. But the Scripture says — “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season”; that is until an opportune time. (Lk. 4:13) His intention was to return at a time that would be favourable to his cause. So is it with believers. Being dispossessed, Satan leaves them for a time, at least comparatively speaking. Freed from his assaults and

perplexing temptations, believers advance with vigour in their new obedience, and flourish in the ways of God. But this situation does not last long! Satan returns, and, unless the soul does not guard against him, he will quickly find an opportunity to interrupt their fruitfulness and obedience. Hence, some, after spending time, perhaps years, in a cheerful, honest walking with God, have, at Satan's return, spent their last days in wrestling with the fierce temptations that entangle them. Others clearly fall under the power of his assaults. Consider a man who, for a while, earned a good reputation among his neighbours by sharing what he had and helping everyone he could. At length, he fell into the hands of oppressive and powerful men, and spent his time and money in defending himself in the law courts against them. This now made him useless to his neighbours. So it is with many a believer, even after he has walked in obedience to the glory of God, and for the building up of the Church of Christ. In some way or another, Satan returns, so that he has enough to do for the rest of his life to keep himself spiritually alive. In the meantime, his many graces sadly decay and decline.

Now, all this, though Satan has a hand in it, is from indwelling sin. I refer, of course, to the success of Satan in his undertakings. This encourages him to make good his return, and succeed in his temptations. You know how it was when the evil spirit was swept out of the house by gospel conviction. After he had wandered about, and waited a while, he decided to return to the house from which he had been ejected. (See Mt. 12:43-45) And why was that? Worldly lusts had prevailed over the man's convictions, and made his soul ready for the returning evil spirits. That is how Satan gains his advantage over believers — advantages that come directly from him, with indwelling sin predisposing the soul to enter into temptation.

Now, the way and means by which indwelling sin provides an advantage to Satan on his return lead to spiritual decline. I will say more about this later. Satan is a diligent, watchful, and crafty adversary. He neglects no opportunity and no advantage that is offered to him. Whenever our spiritual strength is impaired by sin, and in whatever way our lusts pressurise us, Satan falls in with that weakness, and urges us on to ruin, so that all the actions of the law of sin become subservient to his devilish ends.

Here, I mention only one or two things that seem to invite Satan to attempt a return:

(1) When the soul becomes entangled in the things of the world, a door is opened for Satan's work. When Pharaoh let the people go, he heard after a while that they were experiencing problems in the wilderness. He took the opportunity to overtake them and try and destroy them. This news stirred him up to pursue them. When Satan finds those from whom he has been cast out entangled in the things of the world, he finds a sure and easy access to them, and is encouraged to assault them again, like a spider finding a juicy fly entangled in his web. He injects his temptations to make them satisfy their own lusts, which they are inclined to do anyway, by adding poison to them, and pointing to their advantages. He often takes advantage of the situation by taking over the souls of men so that they are never rid of him as long as they live. As men's minds and souls are diverted by the world, so their entanglements divert them to Satan. When they become too busy with worldly things, they will find that their dealings with Satan are more than they can handle. When men become spiritually weak by their dealings with the world, Satan preys on them as Amalek did on the faint and weak of Israel that came out of Egypt —

“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary”. (Deut. 25:17-18)

(2) Indwelling sin increases the weakness of the soul by making it negligent, and takes it off guard. We have already shown that it is an important part of the power and deceit of indwelling sin to make the soul negligent, and turn it away from a diligent, watchful care over its duties. Now, there is nothing more important with reference to our diligence and watchfulness when under the renewed assaults of Satan than in the words of 1 Pet. 5:8 — “Be sober, be vigilant”. And why is this so? Peter continues — “...because your adversary the devil walketh about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Unless you are especially watchful, at some time or other Satan will surprise you. And remember that all the commands of our blessed Saviour to watch are with reference to the devil and his temptations. Now, when the soul becomes careless and neglectful, and forgetful of the enemy it is dealing with, or rejoices in some small success it has just achieved, then is the time for Satan to force a re-entry into his old lair. If he cannot manage it, he makes people’s lives uncomfortable and unfruitful to others by weakening the root and withering the fruit through his poisonous temptations. He comes down on our duties of obedience like the fowls on Abraham’s sacrifice. (See Gen. 15:10-11) If you do not watch out, as Abraham did, and drive temptations away (for, by resistance, Satan is overcome and put to flight), he will devour you.

(3) Indwelling sin takes advantage of its power and deceit to draw men away from their initial zeal and holiness, from their first faith and love and works, by the bad examples of other Christians that they know. When they first came into the ways of God, they had a deep esteem for those whom they believed were partakers of the same mercy as themselves. These they loved and honoured, as if it were their duty. But after a time, they discovered that many things in them were not what they seemed, for they were involved in questionable things, not unlike men of the world. This is how sin presses its advantage. Slowly, it insinuates sinful thoughts into the mind. “This way, this course of action, works perfectly well for others, so why may it not do so with you?” Such are the inward thoughts of many, which gradually corrupt them. And so, through the craftiness of sin, one generation corrupts another. A stream, rising from a clear spring, while it runs its course and keeps its water unpolluted, keeps itself pure and clean. But when it runs into other streams that are dirty and foul, it becomes mixed and polluted. This can also be the case with us spiritually. We come from the spring of the new birth pure and clean. This keeps us up for the time we walk with God; but later, when we come into the company of others whose profession appears to run the same way, with both to heaven, we find their ways confused and polluted with sin and the world. This can lead to our souls being corrupted, and we may fall away from our former profession of faith and holiness.

Now, if this is true of someone who is reading this book, let me add a few words of warning necessary for preserving men from this infection by sin:

Firstly, in the Church, there are a great number of hypocrites. Though we cannot say this or that one is one, there are sure to be some who are. Our Saviour told us that it would be so until the end of the world. Not all that have oil in their lamps find that it

lasts. (See Mt. 25:1-13) Let us take care over the company we keep, lest, instead of saints and the best of men, we may take hypocrites as our example — and they are the worst! And when we think they bear the image of God, we are actually conforming ourselves to those that bear the image of Satan.

Secondly, we do not know the true spiritual state of those whose ways we are imitating. It may be that they are backsliders from God, and so are withering for a period until he sends them some refreshing showers from above. It may be that they have become entangled in the corruption of some sins, a burden they know nothing about. To fall into the same condition as theirs, and to come into the same temptations, and to imagine that what is good for them is good for us, is utter foolishness. If we see someone who was once full of health and vigour crawling about weak and feeble, sometimes falling, sometimes standing, and making little progress in anything, is this an excuse for imitating him? Do we not enquire if he has not recently had an accident or has fallen sick? Of course we do! Take care, Christian! Many who profess the faith, with whom you are acquainted, are sick and wounded, and the wounds of some of them fester and stink because of their foolishness. If you value your spiritual health, do not think that their weak and pitiable state is acceptable to you, much less think that it will do you no harm to become sick and wounded like them.

Thirdly, remember that for many of the best Christians, their worst side is often made known and seen. Many who keep up precious communion with God often seem to be governed by lack of self-control, and are not so attractive as Christians who perhaps fall short of them in grace and godliness. In respect to the outward life of the weaker Christians, it might seem that they are scarcely saved, but in respect of their faith and love, they are eminent. They may, like the King's daughter, be all glorious within, though their clothes are not always made of gold. (See Ps. 45:13) Take care, then, that you are not infected by the worst of them; but whenever you can, imitate the best of them.

Now, having given some advice on how to avoid this infection of sin, let us proceed.

(4) Sin succeeds in its actions by storing up some secret lust in the heart. This, the soul resists faintly. It contends against it on account of its sincerity, for it cannot do otherwise. But it does not go about the task thoroughly and vigorously enough to mortify sin by the strength and power of grace. Now then, where this state exists in the soul, a slow state of spiritual decline in holiness will set in. David shows us how, in his first days, he kept his heart close to God — “I was upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity.” (Ps. 18:23) His great concern was that not one lust should prevail in him or on him, any evil desire that he could call “my iniquity”. This is what motivated Paul. He was in danger of becoming proud because of his spiritual revelations and heavenly experiences. This forced him to “...keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27), that no worldly reasoning or vain thinking should find a place within him. But where indwelling sin provokes, irritates, and adds strength to a particular lust, it will prove beyond doubt to be the main reason for spiritual decline. Just as an infirmity and weakness in any one vital part affects the whole body, so a weakness in any one grace, opposed by a perplexing lust, will break the soul. It will, in every way, weaken spiritual strength and our confidence in God by faith and prayer. The knees will be feeble, and the hands will hang down in our dealings with God when

a bitter and unmortified lust remains in the heart. It will take such a hold that the soul will not be “able to look up”. (Ps. 40:12) Sin will darken the mind with countless foolish thoughts, which it stirs up to its own advantage. It pollutes the conscience with those spots and stains which, by its actions, have entered the soul. It battles in the will for power and dominion. An active corruption will take the power of command in the soul, and is forever looking to seize the throne. It disturbs the thoughts, and sometimes even frightens the soul away from countering it with meditation. When corrupt feelings become entangled, grace loses ground instead of prevailing. It will break out often enough in scandalous sins, as it did with David, and then Hezekiah, and bring sorrow and discouragement to the sinner.

By these and similar methods, sin comes to dwell in the soul like a moth in a garment, eating up its strongest threads so that, although the clothes hang loose on a hanger, they easily fall to pieces. The soul where indwelling sin resides may, for a time, keep up a good profession, yet its strength is secretly consumed, and every temptation tears the conscience at will. It is like an athlete who, for many years, has known a healthy, strong, constitution, but some secret disorder has taken hold of his body. For a time, he will take no notice of it, or, if he does, he thinks little of it, imagining that he can easily shake it off when he has more time to go to the doctor. But, for the present, he thinks, like Samson with the locks of his hair cut, that he can do as he did at other times. Sometimes, he complains that he is not well, but he does not know why. Suddenly, the disorder increases, and he fights against it; but, after a while, and struggling in vain, his strength fails, and he is forced to give way to the power of the illness. And now, all he can do is hardly enough to keep him alive. This is a picture of those who have been brought into a state of spiritual decline by a secret and strange corruption. It may be that they once lived a life of obedience and holiness, but indwelling sin has seized the opportunity through some temptation or other to kindle and inflame some particular lust in him. For a while, he took little notice of it. Sometimes he complained, but thought he would do as he used to do until, being gradually weakened in spiritual strength, he has a struggle to keep alive. How true are the words of the psalmist — “I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. I have been afflicted and am ready to die”. (Ps. 88:15) I shall add nothing more on the prevention of indwelling sin in this connection, having dealt with it in another place.

(5) Sin works by neglecting private communion with God in prayer and meditation. I showed earlier how indwelling sin works deceitfully in diverting the soul from taking care of these duties. Here, if it prevails, it will not fail to produce a spiritual decline in acts of obedience. All neglect of spiritual duties produces a weariness of God, as the Lord complains — “Thou hast not called upon me, thou hast been weary of me.” (Is. 43:22) A neglect of prayer comes from weariness; and where there is weariness, there will be a withdrawal from what makes one weary. Now, God alone is the fountain and spring of spiritual life, and if there is any weariness of God, and a withdrawal from him, it is inevitable that a decline in the spiritual life will follow. Indeed, whatever men are in these duties (I mean in relation to faith and love), that they are, and no more. Here is the root of their obedience; and if this fails, all fruit will quickly fail.

You can sometimes see a tree flourishing with leaves and fruit, pleasant and productive. After a while, the leaves begin to wither, the fruit fails, and the whole tree droops. Search at the root, for there you will find where it draws its moisture and

nourishment from the earth, to supply the branches with sap for its growth and fruit. Something is interfering with this process, so that, though the branches flourish for a while, the tree's food has been stopped or poisoned, leading to its decline. The duties of private communion with God are the means by which we receive supplies of spiritual strength from him — sap and nourishment from Christ, like the vine and the olive. While they continue in their duty, their life of obedience will flourish and bear fruit. All outward duties will be performed cheerfully and regularly. But if there is a stoppage, a defect, a failure to draw in the spiritual moisture that must be distributed to the whole, for a time, all will seem well; but soon faith will wither, the fruit will decay, and the whole will be ready to die.

Hence, our Saviour lets us know what sort of men we are in secret (that is, in our private duties, which are seen only by God's eye) by the fruit we bear. One reason among others why we bear defective fruit is because of the action of unmixed grace. In all or most duties, this grace, besides the influence it exerts on worldly things (which is considerable), also combats the insinuation of sin, which is subtle and secret. There is thus an alloy of gifts, which sometimes consumes the pure gold of grace that comes from God. In pure grace, there is an immediate communion between God and what is of himself in the soul. When sin, through its deceits and treachery, succeeds in diverting the soul from diligent attention to communion with God and perseverance in these duties, it will not fail to effect a decline in the whole of a man's obedience. After making its entrance, indwelling sin makes good its progress.

(6) Growing in the truth without putting it into practice is another way that indwelling sin brings the souls of believers into spiritual decline. The Apostle tells us that "... knowledge puffeth up". (1 Cor. 8:1) If it is not put into practice, and makes men proud of themselves. They are like men with heart trouble, not expected to add strength to their stature; or like trees that are continually producing leaves but bearing no fruit. When once men have arrived at this state, they are like those who delight to receive evangelical truths in a new and more glorious light, such truths they never knew before, but make no effort to apply the power of those truths to their hearts and souls and lives. This turns out, if not to be their ruin, then to the spiritual impairment of many in these days where the gospel light shines out. By this means, from a humble, close walk with God, many have withered into an empty, barren, spiritual profession. All things have, in a short time, become alike to them. This is food for sin. It incubates and hatches it, and is increased by it.

Here is a notable way for the vanity of the mind to exert itself without a rebuke from the conscience. Some men talk and write about the faith, study it carefully, and listen to good preaching (possibly with great delight, like those mentioned in Ezek. 33:32 — "And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.) Yet, unless the conscience is thoroughly awakened and furnished with spiritual wisdom and care, it will go to sleep, and will make no rebuke or enter any plea against the soul. But all this is nothing except the acting of natural vanity in the mind, and is a main part of the sin we are considering. And generally, this is so when men content themselves with the ideas of truth without looking for an experience of the power of them in their hearts, and the producing of their fruit in their lives. Spiritual decline is therefore inevitable.

(7) Growth in worldly wisdom is another assistant to sin in producing spiritual decline. “Thy wisdom and thy knowledge”, says the prophet, “it hath perverted thee.” (Is. 47:10). As much as worldly wisdom increases, so true faith dies. Its sinful work is to teach a man to trust in his own strength, and, in faith, to trust someone else. So it works to destroy true faith by causing the soul to fall into deception. We have some very sad examples of this principle of spiritual decline today. There are so many poor, humble, broken hearted creatures who once followed after God in the simplicity of their faith and with an integrity of spirit, but have now come to be filled with a worldly frame of mind, and are utterly withering away in their profession of faith. We see how this comes about as they imitate the ways of others, and fall for the subtle temptations that come from the world. So many are now polluted, and are no longer the men they used to be.

(8) Some great sin remains secretly in the heart and conscience, and has not been repented of. This furthers the work of indwelling sin. The great mistake David made in his life, despite his unblemished reputation, was in the harbouring of a great sin in his conscience and not repenting of it. It was otherwise, as you know with Peter, who did repent, and his life took another turn. A great sin will certainly produce a different outcome in the life of one who professes the faith. If it is well cleansed in the blood of Christ, accompanied with that humiliation and repentance the gospel requires, it will often prove to be a means of more watchfulness and fruitfulness and humility and hatred of sin in the soul than ever before. If it is neglected, it will certainly harden the heart, weaken spiritual strength, enfeeble the soul, discourage it in its communion with God, and become a notorious cause of spiritual decline. David complained — “My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.” (Ps. 38:5) His present condition was not so much from his sin as from his foolishness; not so much from the wound he had received, as from his neglect in treating the wound immediately. It was like a broken bone which, being well set, became stronger than before. If it was not treated immediately, it could have left him a cripple for life.

We have spoken of these things very briefly. There are many other things that indwelling sin can take advantage of, and which produce the same effects I have described. But that is enough for now. Whatever sin uses, it still remains an indwelling principle; and this is no small demonstration of its strength and power.

CHAPTER 16

The power and strength of indwelling sin is proved by its effects in the lives of those that are not born again

We have been considering the power and strength of indwelling sin as it remains to some degree in believers. I have shown that it is the nature of indwelling sin to remain there within them. I cannot measure the strength of indwelling sin, but some believers have been able to check and even weaken its grip in them. Yet I must, after observation, warn believers of the real power of this mortal enemy with whom we have to do.

If an epidemic rages in one city, killing many, but not so many in another city, we come to the conclusion that the infection in the second city has been better managed and controlled, and better preventative measures and remedies have been used. Someone might have gone to the first city and warned the inhabitants of the force and danger of the infection, and what has happened in other places that did not have the benefit of preventives and preservatives. It is so in this case. Believers should be told of the power and strength of the plague of sin that is raging among them, and the effects it has produced in those who have not applied the remedy for its poison. They should also be told of those who have been preserved from death by the things the Lord Jesus Christ has provided for us.

Having, then, proved the power of sin from its effects, and having given a twofold example of it in believers, I now go on to show something of the power of sin in the unregenerate who do not possess the remedies against it that are available to believers.

I shall not show the whole power of sin in the unregenerate, which is a very large subject and does not have a place in this book, but I will give a few examples of its effects in those that are also relevant to believers.

1. The power of sin is seen in the violence it offers to the nature of men, compelling them to commit sins that are contrary to all the principles of the rational nature that God has given them. Every creature of God has a law of operation which governs all thoughts and actions. Fire ascends upwards, heavy bodies fall, and water flows: each according to the principle of its nature and the law of its operation. The only thing that stops them operating well is force and violence, such as what prevents a stone from falling or a fire from ascending upwards. What will cause them to act contrary to the law of their nature, like a stone rising up or a fire descending, is due to other forces. Now, if a great millstone were flung upwards into the air, we would all acknowledge that it needed a force of great power and strength to do it.

Man, also, has a law of operation deep within him. This may be considered in two ways: either, as something he has in common with other creatures, or, as something unique relating to the special purpose for which he was made. Some things, according to this law of nature, are common to man and to other creatures, such as, nurturing their young, living in families of the same species, and seeking the things that are good for them which help them in their survival. These are some of the things that the animal

kingdom has in common with man as a law within their nature. Besides these things, man was created uniquely to give glory to God with rational and moral obedience, and so obtain the reward of enjoying him. There are many other things in the law of his creation that are unique to man, such as: to love God above all, to fully enjoy him as his greatest good and final end, and to inquire after his mind and will, and thus yield obedience to him. All these form part of the law of his nature.

Now, these things are not to be taken as implying that a man will perform the actions of the law of his nature just because they are the principles of his nature. He is dependent on God, and his duty is to do all things in obedience to him. He can never be considered just a mere creature, but as one created for the glory of God with the capacity for rational and moral obedience. Rational, because he has the choice of what he does, and performs with reason; moral, because his actions are regulated by a law that reason respects. For instance, it is common among men and other creatures to take care with the nurturing of their young, for children are helpless, depending entirely on their parents. There is implanted within us — as a principle of our nature, and created within us — a love and care for our offspring. Now, other creatures respond to this instinct and tendency, and do not harden themselves against it except the foolish ostrich in which God has not implanted this natural wisdom —

“Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust, And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labour is in vain without fear; because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding. (Job 39:14-17)

However, with man it is not so. It is not enough for him to follow his instincts and the secret inclination of his nature and kind, such as in the nourishing of his children. He must do so in subjection to God, and obey him, and do it for his glory. The law of moral obedience holds true over his whole being and in all his works. But in these things, as it were, lie the whole essence of a man; namely, in the things that have been implanted in his nature as a creature, and which he has in common with all other living creatures. Added to that, he is guided by the command and will of God, as he is a creature capable of moral obedience, and is able to do all things to God's glory.

Whatever, then, drives and compels a man to transgress this law of his nature is like a force that causes millstones to be thrown upward. This force also drives creatures to neglect their young and desist in bringing them up peacefully. What causes man the creature to forsake his fundamental dependence on God the Creator and yield him obedience must be a mighty force indeed!

Now, this is often the result of indwelling sin in the lives of those who are not born again. Let us take a few examples.

(1) There is nothing more deeply implanted in the principles of the natures of all living creatures, and therefore of man himself, than a love and care for the preservation and nourishing of their young. Many creatures will die for their offspring, some will feed them with their own flesh and blood, and all will deprive themselves of the food that nature demands for their survival and give it to their young to ensure their survival.

Now, concerning the strength and power of indwelling sin in man, it is an infection unknown in the nature of other creatures. In many, it is often successful in stopping up these basic instincts, and in beating back the stream of natural feelings, and in rooting up the principles of the laws of its own nature. It sometimes leads to a neglect — indeed, a destruction — of the fruit of their own wombs. Paul tells us that the ancient Gentiles were like this — “...even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without a *storge* (natural affection), implacable, unmerciful”. (Rom. 1:31) What Paul was referring to was the unnatural custom of the Romans, who often, to spare the trouble of educating their children, and to be free to pursue their own lusts, aborted their own children in the womb. The strength of sin succeeded in obliterating the law of nature and neutralising its force and strength. Examples of this kind are common in all nations. Even in our own country we have heard of women murdering their own children, the result of the deceitful reasoning of sin. In these things, sin turns round the strong current of nature, darkens the light of God in the soul, and controls all natural principles that are influenced by the power of the command and will of God. This evil, through the power of sin, is highly inflamed. Men have not only slain, but have 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); that is, as the fruit of indwelling sin. Now, this is how men have been able to offer horrible and unspeakable violence to the law of nature that we mentioned. This is what the psalmist tells us in Ps. 106:37-38 — “Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.” The same thing is found in Ezek. 16:20-21, and in many other places. For the present let me explain that these sinners took their children and burnt them to ashes in a fierce fire. The wicked priests that assisted in the sacrifice afforded them this relief, that they made a loud noise of wailing so that the vile wretches could not hear the sad moans and screams of their poor, dying, tormented infants. I suppose that in this case we need no further evidence.

Naturalists can give no reasonable explanation, but they admire the secret force of that little fish which, they say, will stop a ship in full sail in the midst of the ocean, or that small weed that will push itself through concrete. We too acknowledge that it is beyond our power to give an explanation of that secret force and unsearchable deceit that comes from that inbred traitor, sin, perverting the course of nature. Their feelings are so full of distractions, and so driven with violence and force, as to make them treat their own children in such a way that any honourable man would refuse to do to his dog. And it is no consolation to the best of men to know that they also are carrying within them the seeds that produce these evil effects in others.

(2) The same thing can be said of all the other sins that wage war against the prime dictates of the law of nature, sins that stain and defame mankind, such as the murder of parents and children and wives and husbands, homosexuality, incest, and other sexual abominations. In all these things, sin prevails in men against the whole law of their being and their dependence upon God. What! Shall I reckon up the murder of

Abel by Cain, the treason of Judas with all its repercussions, or remind you of the filth and villainy of Nero to whom pleasure was anything that would debase the nature of man? In a word: all premeditated lies, all calculated bloody revenge, all the filth and uncleanness of sexual immorality, and all enmity against God and his ways in the world, is the fruit that grows from the root of sin alone.

2. We also have proof of the power and strength of indwelling sin when we see how it keeps men from believing the gospel. This evidence must be examined further.

(1) Under the dispensation of the gospel, there are very few that believe. This is what the evangelical prophet complained of when he asked — “Who hath believed our report?” (Is. 53:1) This, the Apostle interprets as the fewness of believers in Jn. 12:38. Our Saviour, Christ himself, tells us that “many are called” — the word means “preached to” — “...but few are chosen.” (Mt. 22:14) Also, the Church complains of the smallness of its number in Mic. 7:1. How few there are that now enter the narrow gate! Our daily experience confirms this sad truth. How many villages, parishes, and towns can we go to where the gospel has been preached for many years, and yet you will hardly meet a true believer there, and one who displays the death of Christ in his life! In the highest places, and among those who are well known for their profession of the Christian religion, are not such persons rare? “Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel.” (Is. 17:6)

(2) There is set before men in the preaching of the gospel motives for believing with such urgency that they should appeal to the prevailing instinct for survival, whatever else they do. What anyone does thoughtfully, he does it either because it is reasonable and good for him, or profitable, advantageous, or pleasant for him. Lastly, it is necessary for the avoidance of evil. I affirm that men act with deliberation, whether a certain action is for good or evil. Whether it is a natural thing to do in this life, or necessary in order to achieve other things, they will act from one or other of these reasons or motives. God himself knows that often enough very poor and insignificant temptations are put before men. How often will they, for very little pleasure or very little profit, be induced to do what will embitter their lives and damn their souls! And how careful they are to avoid what they believe will be evil or injurious to them! And any one of these motives is enough to oil the wheels of men’s endeavours, and set them to work with a will.

Now, all these things depend on the proposal of the gospel and the command to believe, both of which is something that the world cannot supply.

[1] The gospel is the most reasonable thing that can be put before the understanding of a man — that he, by his own fault, has lost the ability to bring glory to God and save his own soul (for these things he was made). He must accept and embrace that other blessed, easy, safe, excellent ways to attain the ends I have mentioned, which God, in his infinite grace, love, mercy, wisdom, and righteousness, sets before him in the gospel.

[2] The gospel is the most beneficial thing that man is invited to accept. What profit or benefit is thus gained in the forgiveness of sins, in the love and favour of God, in a blessed immortality, and in eternal glory!

[3] The gospel is very pleasant. Surely it is a pleasant thing to be brought out of darkness into light, out of a dungeon and onto a throne, from captivity and slavery to Satan and cursed lust to the glorious liberty of the children of God, with a thousand heavenly delights as yet unknown.

[4] The gospel is necessary, for it comes as a command from God who has supreme authority over us. It is also indispensable if we are to avoid the eternal ruin of body and soul. (See Mk. 16:16) It comes to us in this way: "Believe or you will perish under the weight of the wrath of our great God, and that for evermore." But now, despite all these considerations that are preached to men, and urged upon them in the name of our great God from one day to another, and from one year to another, yet, as I said earlier, very few incline their hearts toward the gospel. Tell men ten thousand times that this is wisdom, indeed, riches, and that great profit lies in it, and that they will certainly and eternally perish, perhaps soon if they refuse the gospel. Assure them that it is in their interest to believe the gospel. Let them know that God himself says this to them. Yet it is all one to them, for they take no notice. Their heart is not in it, and they say plainly, "We will have nothing to do with these things." They would rather perish in their lusts than accept God's mercy.

(3) It is indwelling sin that dis-inclines men from believing the gospel. Blindness of the mind, stubbornness of the will, the sensuality of the feelings, all agree in keeping poor perishing souls at a distance from Christ. Men are made blind by sin, and are unable to see their need of salvation. They are obstinate, and will not take hold of his righteousness. They become senseless, and take no notice of their eternal loss. Now, it is true to say that whatever prevails with men when they are normally wise and serious and careful in other things must have an astonishing force and potency about it! So much so, that they neglect and despise the love of God, the blood of Christ, and the eternal welfare of their own souls, making weak and worthless excuses. Who can stand by unmoved and see poor souls eternally perishing by refusing a thousand gracious invitations to accept mercy and pardon from God through the blood of Christ? Are we not astonished at the power of the principle within sinners that causes them to run headlong to their own destruction? And yet all this comes about through the power and deceit of indwelling sin.

3. The effect of indwelling sin is also seen in the total apostasy of men. Those who need converting receive many warnings from the Word. The Apostle tells us that such make a "clean escape from them that live in error". (2 Pet. 2:18) They separate themselves from idolatry and false worship, and own and profess the truth. They also escape the "pollutions of the world" (20), that is, "the corruption that is in the world through lust", as Peter puts it (2 Pet. 1:4), that is, the filthy, corrupt, and unclean ways of men of the world in the pursuit of their lusts. They escape these things by reforming their lives according to the convicting power of the Word. This is brought about "through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ", that is, under the preaching of the gospel. They are brought to forsake all the ways of false worship, to profess the truth, to reform their lives, and to walk according to the convictions that have come to them. By this means, they gain the reputation for being true Christians.

“They have a name that they live” (Rev. 3:1), and are made “partakers” of some of the privileges of the gospel that are mentioned by the Apostle in Heb. 6:4-5.

It is not my business to show how far a man may be effectively moved by the Word and yet not be really moved to believe in Christ, or what are the furthest bounds and limits of the work of common grace in unregenerate men. It is generally acknowledged that it may be carried on so far that it is very difficult to discern between those who have been reformed under common grace, and those who are regenerate under saving grace. But despite the work of common grace, we see daily many falling away from God and becoming utterly wicked. Some fall into indulgence and uncleanness, some into worldliness and covetousness, and some have become the persecutors of the saints — all to the perdition of their own souls. How this comes about, the Apostle describes as being “entangled again”. To entice and entangle, as I have already shown from Jas. 1:14-15, is the work of indwelling sin. It is this alone that entangles the soul. (See 2 Pet. 2:18, 20) They are enticed from their profession of faith into a cursed apostasy through the lusts of the flesh. Sin prevails on them, through its deceit and power, to give up their Christian profession and their communion with God. This too proves the greatness of its strength and power.

(1) It brings to an end the exceeding great power that is sent out from the Word in bringing about their conviction and reformation of life. We know from experience that men are not easily moved by the Word of God. Most of them live under its dispensation all the days of their lives and still remain as senseless and stupid as the seats they sit on, like flint in the rocks. Great difficulties and prejudices must be conquered, and great strokes must be given to the conscience, before a change can be brought about. It is like trying to stop a river in full flood, or turning its streams in another direction. It is like stopping a boulder from falling down a mountainside in its downward plunge. It is like trying to turn a wild ass when it is stubbornly determined to go its own way, as we read earlier in Jer. 2:24.

It is impossible for a preacher to turn men from their corrupt ways and sinful pleasures, and make them pray, fast, hear, and do many other things willingly and gladly, contrary to the principle of the flesh that secretly dominates them. We do our best to bring them to a profession of Christ and the gospel when they are subject to trials and tribulations. We want to give them light that they might look into many mysteries. We pray that they will receive God’s gifts to discharge their duties. We want to make dead, blind, senseless men walk and talk and perform all the offices and duties of spiritually live and healthy men. Conviction and reformation are the effects and results of God’s mighty power and strength. Indeed, I cannot put it strongly enough, that only the Holy Spirit, using the power of the Word, can stagger and convict a sinner by awakening his conscience, enlightening his mind, changing his feelings, awing his heart, reforming his life, and giving him the ability to fulfil his duties.

But in all these things there is a check and control from indwelling sin. It set itself against the whole work of the Spirit by the Word. It binds a man in his trials and temptations even when God shows his mercy. When sin is enraged, all these things become like the cords that bound Samson before his head was shaven. Shout out, “The Philistines are upon thee” (Judg. 16:19), and sin will put out some subtle and suitable temptation. Defy indwelling sin, and you will see its strength and power; and all man’s good resolutions turn to candle wax melting in the fire. Conscience is stifled,

the reputation of the Church of God is despised, the light is dimmed, the impressions of the Word are cast away, convictions are stifled, and heaven and hell are despised. Sin will run its course and utterly turn the soul away from the good and right ways of God. Sometimes it does this craftily by slow degrees, cooling off all the force of former impressions by the Spirit with the Word, polluting the conscience, hardening the heart, and causing the feelings to be obsessed with pleasure. The poor backslider in his heart hardly knows what he is doing before he arrives at the very bottom of ungodliness, blasphemy, and enmity against God. Sometimes, sin takes advantage of some pressing temptation and suddenly plunges the soul into the way of alienation from God and a profession of his ways.

(2) It takes them away from thoughts of their hope of heaven, which they gained through their convictions, obedience, and temporary faith. They had a hope of heaven, or at least of escaping from hell, and of an untroubled immortality. Even the most dull and insensitive souls in the world, either through tradition or instruction in the Word, are persuaded that there is another state of things to come after this life. But in unconvinced, unenlightened people, it remains a dull, senseless, unmoving thing that has no other hold on them, or power in them, except to keep them free from the trouble and perplexity of pressing difficulties. How different it is in the case of true believers that are deeply moved by the Word! Their hope of heaven and a blessed immortality often comes with great joy and exultation, and it is a great relief to them in the worst of their fears and trials. Here is something they would not part with for all the world; and, on all occasions, they retreat into their minds for its comfort and relief.

Now, the unregenerate lose all these benefits through the power of sin. They will let go of heaven and blessed immortality with the enjoyment of God himself, for sin must be served, and provision made to fulfil its lusts. If a worldly man lived in hope of a large inheritance that would not fail to satisfy him, he would be sure to enjoy it. He would look forward to living a happy and glorious life when he came into possession of it. Now, someone comes along to him with this message — “It is true, the inheritance you look for is very desirable, and is full of good things. But come and cast away all hope and expectation and join me in the service and slavery of an oppressive tyrant.” If he listened to this, you might say that the messenger has some strange bewitching power over him to persuade him to follow his advice. Yet it is so, and much more, in the case of the unregenerate. Sin itself cannot deny that the kingdom of heaven, which brings hope to the soul, is glorious and excellent, nor will it agree that his thoughts of it are vain and deceptive. Yet it clearly prevails on him to cast away his hopes, to despise the kingdom of which he has so much expectation, and promises him nothing but service to some cruel, filthy and pleasurable lust. Certainly, here lies the secret power of indwelling sin whose depths cannot be fathomed.

(3) The Apostle Peter also reveals the power of the entanglements of sin in apostates in turning them away from the way of righteousness after they have come to know it — “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” (2 Pet. 2:20-21) It will be found at the last an evil and bitter thing that men live all their days in the service of sin, self, and the world, and refuse to take up the ways of God to which they were invited.

Though they had no experience of the wonder, beauty, pleasantness, and safety of God's ways, yet they received evidence from God himself that they were wonderful. So their refusal of them will, I say, be bitter at their final end. But their condition is far worse. The Apostle adds, "...having known the way of righteousness", but, because of the power of indwelling sin, they have "turned aside from the holy commandment". How can a man leave God for the devil after he has known something of him and his service? How can he leave heaven for hell after he has received cheerful and refreshing news of it? How can he exchange the fellowship of the saints for a drinking house or a brothel after he has been admitted to communion with God, and tasted its pleasant ways? We bewail those who have ceased walking in pure, clear, straight paths, to wallow in mire and filth. Yes, sin prevails upon apostates to do these things, and that against their light, convictions, experiences, professions, engagements, or whatever might have kept them in the ways of righteousness.

(4) Sin reveals its power and strength by causing them to totally renounce God as revealed in Christ, and the power of gospel truth, by committing the sin against the Holy Spirit. (Mt. 12:31-32; Mk 3:29; Lk. 12:10) I will not attempt an explanation here as to what exactly is the sin against the Holy Spirit, and what it produces. There are different views about it. But all agree that by it an end is put to all dealings between God and man in the ways of grace. It is a sin unto death. And this is what the hardness and blindness of men's hearts brings them to, for they are at length put out of the reach of God's mercy. They choose to have no more to do with God; and God swears that they will never enter into his rest. So sin brings forth death. Through indwelling sin, a man is brought to renounce the end for which he was created, and wilfully rejects the means of his coming to enjoy God. He continues to provoke God to his face, and so perishes in his rebellion.

I have not mentioned these things to set out in full the full power of indwelling sin in unregenerate men. I just give you a few examples that give us a glimpse of it. If you need a fuller view of it, you need only to open your eyes and look at the wickedness that reigns in the world, indeed, rages all over the world. Let us consider the prevailing flood mentioned by Paul as "the fruit of the flesh" in Gal. 5:19-21. We find these horrible things in the sons of men everywhere, in nations, cities, towns and villages. And then let us add this further consideration: that the world, which is full of the stream, filth, and blood of these abominations, is a pleasant garden, a paradise, compared with the heart of man in which they are all conceived! Hourly, millions of more vile abominations are being stifled in the womb by some of the ways I have mentioned earlier in this book, and never see the light of day. Let a man, I say, take God's holy Law for his light and rule, which will bring him spiritual discernment. It is then that he will quickly find satisfaction in this matter. I showed at the beginning of the book how this subject fully confirms the truth and power of indwelling sin.

CHAPTER 17

The strength of sin is proved in its resistance to the power of God's Law

The measure of the strength of any person, or a defended city, may be taken from the opposition set up to withstand the assault of an enemy and remain undefeated. When we hear of a city that has endured a long siege from a powerful enemy, and has not been taken or conquered, and whose walls have endured tremendous assaults but have not been demolished, we conclude that it is strong, if not impregnable. This is evidence of the power and strength of indwelling sin. It is able to hold out, and not only thrive, but also reign and make its dominion secure against strong opposition. I will give you two examples of the opposition that is made to it by the Law, which is often great and terrible, but always fruitless. All assaults are absorbed by it, for it cannot be overcome. There are many ways in which the Law opposes sin and its power.

1. It exposes it. Sin in the soul is like a secret virulent disease in the body. The fact that it remains unknown and undiagnosed is one of the means of its success. It is like a group of traitors in a civil state; while they remain hidden, they forward their plans successfully. Very few in the world know anything of this sickness that leads to the death of their souls. Though they have been taught something about the doctrine of it, they know nothing of its power. They do not appreciate that they are dealing with a mortal enemy. They are like a man, who, whatever he is told, cannot believe that he has caught a virulent fever when he feels well. He therefore takes no precautions against it. This, then, is what the law does: it exposes the enemy. It convinces the soul that there is a traitor being harboured in its bosom —

“I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” (Rom. 7:7)

“I had not known sin...I had not known lust...” — that is exact and distinct, in all its fullness.

Conscience sometimes kicks up a fuss about it; but no one can view it clearly and exactly from that source. Conscience gives a man a sight of like the blind man in the Gospel when our Lord first touched his eyes — “And he looked up, and said, ‘I see men as trees, walking’” (Mark 8:24) — that is, obscurely and confusedly. But when the Law comes, it gives the soul an exact view of indwelling sin. This phrase “I had not known sin” implies its depths, its root, and the inclination of our nature to sin, which is here called “lust” which, in Paul’s case, was covetousness —

“...for I had not known lust, except the law had said, ‘Thou shalt not covet.’ But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For 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 slew me.” (Rom. 7:7-11)

This, then, is what the Law does — it drags out this traitor from its secret lurking place and from the intimate recesses of the soul. When the Law comes, a man can no longer remain ignorant of the enemy. If he perishes by it, it will now be openly and knowingly. He must say that the Law has warned him of his sin, uncovered it, and caused a disturbance in his soul, as a police officer does when he discovers a thief or robber, calling out for assistance in order to arrest him.

3. The Law of God not only exposes sin, but shows it to be a very bad inmate, dangerous, indeed, pernicious to the soul. Paul makes this important point, and asks this important question, about the Law —

“Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.” (Rom. 7:13)

There are many things in this verse that are beyond the scope of this book, so we will confine ourselves to the exposure of sin by the Law. It makes “sin appear sin”. It shows it in its true colours as “exceeding sinful”. The Law reveals to the soul the filth and guilt of indwelling sin — how great it is, how vile it is, what an abomination to God it is, what enmity it displays to God, and how much it is hated by God. The soul can never see sin as a small matter, whatever it was thinking before the Law arrived.

It is rather like a man who, finding he is running a high temperature, sends for a skilled doctor because he needs him to diagnose his condition. The doctor then says to him, “I am sorry to tell you this, but it is far worse than you imagine. Your disease is fatal, and it has advanced so far that it is affecting your whole body, and it has infected your blood stream. I doubt, unless the most drastic action is taken, that you will live more than a few hours.” And so it is with our case. A man may be troubled in his mind and conscience about indwelling sin. He finds that all is not well with him, more from the results of sin and its continual eruptions than its actual nature which he hopes to overcome very soon. But now, at the coming of the Law, his soul knows that the disease is deadly and fatal, and that it is “exceedingly sinful” because it is at the root of his separation from God. The Law then takes certain measures against it.

3. The Law of God judges us, and lets us know what we should expect for harbouring indwelling sin. This is the work of the Law: it exposes sin, and prepares us for the judgement. The Law is seated supreme on its throne. It does not mince its words with sinners, as we do with one with another, but accuses them plainly, “Thou art the man” (2 Samuel 12:7) in whom this exceedingly sinful sin dwells; and you will answer for the guilt of it. And this, I think, more than anything else, rouses a man to oppose indwelling sin and utterly destroy it. The Law lets him know that, on account of his sin, the sinner is subject to the curse and wrath of God. It pronounces the sentence of everlasting condemnation on him. “Abide in this state, and you will perish”, is the language of the Law. It leaves the soul with a warning in the world, leaving it without excuse in the world to come.

4. The Law follows up its sentence by upsetting and terrifying the soul, letting it know no peace while it shelters such a sinful inmate. Whenever the soul indulges the

commands of indwelling sin, and makes provision for them, immediately, the Law lays about it with the wrath and terror of the Lord, making it quake and tremble. It gives sinners no rest, but is like a deadly arrow sticking in the side of a poor beast, making it restless wherever it is and whatever it does.

5. The law does not rest here, but goes on to slay the soul (see Rom. 7:9); that is, by convicting the soul of the nature, power, and final end of indwelling sin, it deprives him in whom it dwells of all self-righteousness and hope. It leaves him as a poor, dead, helpless, hopeless creature; and all this with his opposition to indwelling sin. Should we now expect the power of sin to be broken and its strength ruined? Should it die away before these strokes from the Law of God? The truth is, such is the power and strength of sin that it does not. It is like the one whom the poets described a man born of the earth, when someone thought to slay him by casting him to the ground. But every time he fell, he regained his strength, and became more powerful than before. So is it with all the falls and repulses that are given to indwelling sin by the Law.

(1) Sin is never conquered. A conquest demands two things of the vanquished: first, the loss of dominion, and secondly, the loss of power. Whenever anyone is conquered, he loses both of these things, both his authority and his power. So the armed strong man, being assaulted, must be bound, and his goods spoiled. (Mt 12:29; Mk. 3:27) But neither of these is true of indwelling sin under the assaults of the Law. It loses not one part of its authority or power under all the blows of the Law. That the Law cannot do these things is proved in Rom. 8:2-4 —

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

It cannot deprive sin of its power and dominion, for the one who is under the Law is also under sin. That is, whatever power the Law has over the conscience of a man, making him afraid to sin lest the sentence and curse of God should fall on him, sin still reigns and rules in his heart. Therefore, says the Apostle —

“Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” (Rom. 6:14)

This clearly implies that, though a person may never be in subjection to the authority of the Law, this does not excuse and acquit him from the dominion of sin. Indeed, the Law, in all its work in the soul, instead of freeing and acquitting it from the reign and bondage of sin, actually and incidentally increases its misery and bondage, just as the sentence of the judge on the bench adds to the misery of the criminal.

The soul is under the dominion of sin, which ensures that it lives in security, and fears neither sin nor judgement. When the Law sets upon him in this condition, it brings him great trouble and perplexity and fear and terror. But it cannot deliver him. It is with the soul as it was with the Israelites when Moses brought his message to Pharaoh. They were so far from obtaining their liberty that their bondage was increased, and “they found that they were in a very evil case” —

“Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks. And the officers of the children of Israel did see that they were in evil case, after it was said, Ye shall not minish ought from your bricks of your daily task. And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh: and they said unto them, The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us. (Ex. 5:18-21)

Indeed, we see sin behaving like Pharaoh whenever it finds its rule challenged. It becomes more outrageously oppressive, and doubles the bondage of their souls. It is not, then, the work of the Law to destroy sin, or deprive it of its dominion. Nor does it lose anything by all the strokes of the Law, or lose anything of its strength. It continues with both its authority and its power. It is neither destroyed nor weakened.

(2) It is so far from being conquered that it becomes outraged. The work of the Law only tends to provoke and enrage sin, and, given the opportunity, causes it to become more powerful and vigorous than before. This, the Apostle describes in Rom. 7:9-13. But you say, “Do we not see by experience that many are moved under the preaching of the Law to give up their sins and reform their lives, but how can they contend against the eruptions of those other corruptions when they have not yet been mortified? Yes, it cannot be denied that the power and strength of the Law is great when preached and applied to the conscience.” My answer is as follows:

[1] Indeed, we acknowledge the power and strength of the Law of God. Its effects are great, and it will accomplish every purpose for which God sent it — “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” (Is. 55:10-11) Yet the subduing of sin is not part of the work of the Law. God did not design it for that purpose, so it is no dishonour if it cannot accomplish this work. (See Rom. 8:3)

[2] Whatever effect it may have on some people, we see that in the majority, such is the power and prevalence of sin, that it makes no impression on them at all. Do you not see everywhere men going to church regularly, where the Law is preached powerfully and applied to the conscience, just as the Lord designed it to do; yet not once are they moved by it. It makes no more impression on them than the blow of a straw on a stone? They are neither convinced by it, nor terrified, nor awed, nor instructed; but they continue on their way spiritually deaf, ignorant, senseless, and secure, as if they had never been told of the guilt of sin or the terror of the Lord! Churches are full of people like that, who show in their lives the triumph of the power of sin over the dispensation of the Law.

[3] When any of the good effects we have mentioned come about, it is not from the power of the letter of the Law, but from the actual working of the Spirit of God in them, sending out his virtue and power for that purpose. We cannot deny that the Spirit of

the Lord is able to restrain and quell the power of lust whenever he pleases, and in ways that seem good to him.

[4] Despite all that we have seen of the power of the Law in the souls of men, it is evident that lust is not conquered, nor subdued, nor mortified by it for the following reasons:

Firstly, though the course of sin may be repulsed for a time by the dispensation of the Law, yet the spring and fountain of indwelling sin is not dried up. Though it withdraws and hides itself, it is, as I have shown elsewhere, like a storm that moves away, but returns later. It is like a traveller who, meeting with a violent storm of thunder and lightning immediately goes out of his way to some house or tree for shelter. But this does not make him give up his journey. As soon as the storm is over, he resumes his journey. So it is with those who are in bondage to sin. There they are, living a life where they are pursuing their lusts. Then the Law meets them with a storm of thunder and lightning from heaven, which terrifies and hinders them on their way. This makes them turn aside and run to prayer, or try and reform their lives, using these things as a shelter from the storm of wrath that so terrifies their consciences. But has this made them give up their lusts? Have their principles altered in any way? Not at all! As soon as the storm is over, and when their sense of terror has abated, they return to their former way of life in the service of sin. This was the state of Pharaoh when he opposed Israel over and over again.

Secondly, at such times, sin is not conquered but only diverted. When it seems to give way under the power of the Law, it has only turned into a new channel, and does not dry up. If you build a dam across a river, and prevent the flow going down the old channel, it will flow another way, and turn its stream into a new course. You can say that you have “dried up” the river, and some people might very well believe you when they see how dry the old channel is. So is it in the case of sin. The streams of sin used to flow out into open sensuality, profanity, drunkenness and crime. Then the preaching of the Law built a dam across this flow. Conscience was terrified, and the sinner dare hardly walk in the old ways anymore. His companions in sin, not finding him the same person, laugh at him because he has been converted and grown narrow. He begins to persuade himself that perhaps a work of God has entered his heart because his companions see that the old streams have dried up. However, if there is only a work of the Law in him, which constructed a dam across his old life, the spring of sin has not dried up. Its streams will break out in a different direction. It may be that a man will fall into some other more secret or spiritual sins. Or, if he overcomes these, the whole strength of lust and sin will take up its residence in the palace of self-righteousness, and pour out its filthy streams in that way. So, despite the work of the Law in the souls of men, indwelling sin still remains alive in them.

This is further proof of the great power and strength of indwelling sin. Let me give you some more examples, but I will be brief.

1. In the next place, the great effort ignorant men make in subduing and mortifying sin all prove fruitless, a further proof of the great strength and power of sin. Men who have no power against sin may yet come to know the power of sin. They usually come into this knowledge through a sense of the guilt of sin that originates in the light of their consciences. They cannot avoid it, and they have no choice in the matter, whether

they will or will not know it. They cannot avoid knowing that sin is evil, and that such evil makes them abominable before the judgement of God. This affects the mind and conscience as far that they are kept in awe of God, and dare not sin as they wish. Being overcome with a sense of guilt and the terror of the Lord, men begin to try and avoid sinning, at least from those sins that terrify them. While they do this, the strength and power of sin stirs in them. They begin to find that there is something within them that is outside their power; for, despite their good resolutions, they go on sinning, and in such a way that their consciences tell them they will perish eternally. This makes them determined to suppress the eruption of sin because their consciences will give them no peace until they do, nor will they have any rest or peace. Now, being ignorant of the only way to deal with sin — that is, by the Spirit of Christ — they try, in their own strength, to suppress sin, if not to slay it. Being ignorant of the only way in which consciences burdened with the guilt of sin can be eased — that is, through the blood of Christ — they try in all sorts of ways to accomplish that end, but in vain. For no one by his works can obtain peace with God. Some of the ways by which they try to suppress the power of sin put them into a turmoil, and undermine their self-sufficiency.

(1) With vows, they promise to bind themselves from those sins that have troubled them so much, and have perplexed them so long. The psalmist shows this to be a great engine by which false and hypocritical people try to deliver themselves out of their trouble and perplexity. They make promises to God, which he describes as flattering him with the mouth — “Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.” (Ps. 78:36-37) And it is so in this case. Being newly convicted with the guilt of sins — sins that have defeated them — they vow and promise that, at least for some space of time that they specify, they will not commit those sins again. Thus they direct their consciences towards this duty. This will now make them watch over themselves with regard to the outward committing of the sins that have convicted them; and it produces one of these two effects:

The first effect is that they either abstain from them for the time they specify, or they do not. They are often not able to abstain, especially when the sins are deeply rooted in their nature and constitution and have become objectionable habits. Whenever any suitable temptation is presented to them, their sins increase, and also their terror, so that they are not able to offer any opposition to it. After one or two vain attempts, it may be that, knowing no other way to mortify their sin but by taking a vow against it, and keeping that vow in their own strength, they give up the fight. They then yield themselves up entirely as servants of sin with no hope of recovery.

The second effect follows from some success in their resolutions, when they actually abstained from their sins during the period specified. Usually one of two things follow: either they think that they have discharged their duty well, and so are entitled for a time to indulge in their former corruptions and lusts, thus they become entangled again in the same snares of sin as before’ or else, they reckon that their vow and promise has saved them, and so “...they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous” (Hab. 1:16), setting up a righteousness of their own which is in opposition to the grace of God. Thus, far from weakening indwelling sin, it strengthens it at the root, and bows to its principle, so that it reigns from now on secure in the soul.

The best success that some can imagine in their dealing with indwelling sin under the Law is to restrain some of its external eruptions. Yet this does nothing to weaken its power! Therefore, despite all their best efforts, people are very far from being freed from the inward toiling and burning and disquieting and perplexing power of sin. This is the state of most people when they are kept in bondage under the power of conviction. Hell, death, and the wrath of God are continually put before their consciences. This makes them labour with all their strength against whatever sin most upsets their consciences, and most increases their fears whenever it erupts. In their own minds, whenever they appear to be free from these eruptions, they feel safe, though, in the meantime, sin continually disturbs and defiles their hearts. As with running sores, applied ointments may skin them over and stop them festering, but their true condition is that the wound is festering, proving to be in a far more dangerous condition. So is it with this repulsing of the power of corruption by applying the ointment of men's vows and promises to it. External eruptions we feel sure can be restrained for a period, but the inward root and principle is not weakened in the least. And this is the way it is with indwelling sin. Sin, having recovered its strength, and being enraged by its restraints, breaks all its bonds, and takes the soul captive with all kinds of filthy abominations. This is true, as I said before, of most outward apostasies in the world — "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." (2 Pet. 2:19-20)

The Holy Spirit compares sinners, because of their fierce, poisonous nature of indwelling sin, with lions, bears and vipers. (See Is. 11:6-9) Now, this is the wonder of gospel grace, that it changes the nature and inward principle of these otherwise violent and untamed beasts, making the wolf behave like a kid, the lion like a lamb, and the bear like a cow. When this is done, they can safely be trusted — "a little child shall lead them." (6) External restraints will not change the nature of these beasts; they only restrain their violence. Whoever takes a lion, or a wolf, and shuts him up in a cage, will find that while its natural ferocity is restrained, when it has the chance to escape, it will return to its natural violence. Shutting the beast up will not change its nature, but only restrain its nature from becoming violent and dangerous. So it is in with indwelling sin. It is grace alone that changes the heart and takes away the poison and relentless opposition that exists in man's nature from indwelling sin. The efforts of men only curb the outward eruptions of sin.

(2) Beyond vows and promises, and a universal watchfulness for sin, men have used some extraordinary ways of mortifying sin. This is the foundation of all the show of religious devotion that is found under the Papacy — hours of prayer and fasting, the cloistering of monks and nuns, pilgrimages, penances, and self-torturing discipline. All these, and many more, come under this heading. I must now conclude by speaking of the many evils that attend these self-invented methods of mortification and how they have all been turned into the means, occasions, and advantages of sin. I also mention in this connection the horrible hypocrisy that comes into the hearts of those that make use of them. There is no time to speak of the superstitions that breathe life into these things as they are fixed in the religious nature and constitution, for they are often based on deep-seated prejudices, and are often used for secular advantage. The best thing I can say of them is that they are a part of a self-invented design of men who are

ignorant of the righteousness of God. But they are useless in checking the power of indwelling sin.

It is incredible what fearful, self-inflicted, and horrible sufferings these methods bring upon men! Undoubtedly, their blind zeal and superstitious practices rise up in judgement, and condemn the prominent laziness and negligence of those to whom the Lord has granted the saving light of the gospel. But what is the end of these things? The Apostle, in brief, gives us an account in Rom. 9:31-32 —

“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone”.

“...hath not attained to the righteousness” — they sought it, but they did not come anywhere near the requirements of the Law. Sin is not mortified, and its power is not weakened. What it may lose in sensual and wordly pleasures, it gains in blindness, darkness, superstition, self-righteousness, soul-pride, and contempt of the gospel and its righteousness, and reigns in them no less than in the most reckless sinners in the world.

2. The strength, force, and power of the law of sin can be further proved from its inner life in the soul, despite the wound it sustains in the conversion of the soul to God, and in the continual opposition made to it by grace. But this is a subject for another book. It could be that you are now looking for the practical uses of all our discoveries of the power, deceit, prevalence, and success of this great adversary of our souls. We could refer to Bible teaching on humility, self-abasement, watchfulness, diligence, and the Lord Jesus Christ for relief. All these things are found in believers who take indwelling sin seriously.

“To the only God our Saviour,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Be glory, majesty, dominion and authority,
Before all time and now and forever.
Amen.” (Jude verse 25)