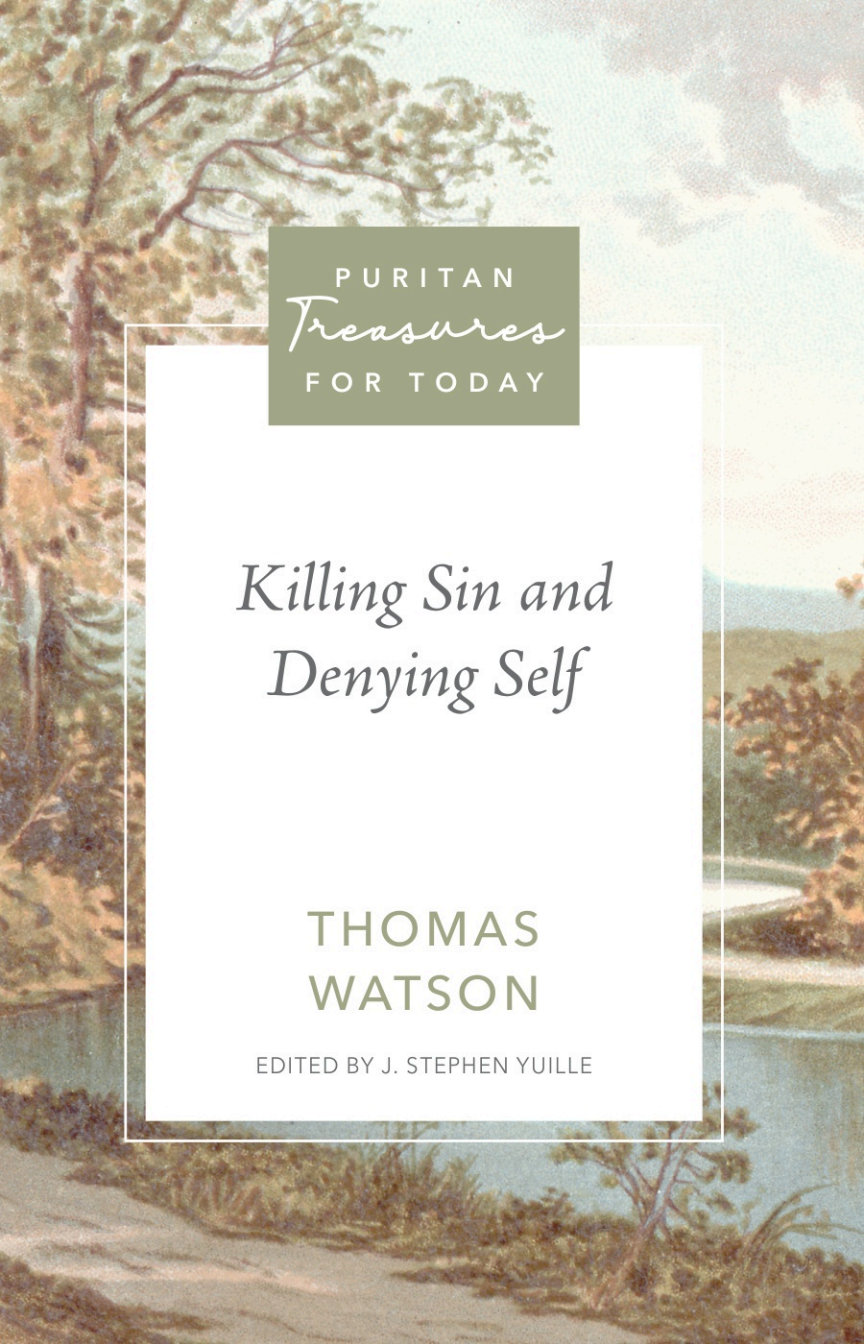




PURITAN
Treasures
FOR TODAY

*Killing Sin and
Denying Self*

THOMAS
WATSON

EDITED BY J. STEPHEN YUILLE

*How shall we who died to sin
live any longer in it?*

ROMANS 6:2

We all have the same problem: sin. In this book, Thomas Watson puts our sin on full display not to leave us wallowing in despair but to heighten our appreciation of God's matchless grace. He begins by tracing the miserable consequences of Adam's sin and the pervasive grip it has on our lives to this day. He goes on to detail the ways and reasons sin brings us so low and the proper ways to respond. He concludes by walking us through the duty of denying sinful self-absorption. Watson helps us understand how sin causes us to fall short of God's best for us and points us to the remedy in Christ.

"In an age when sin is minimized and self-promotion is rampant, it is challenging to follow the command of Christ to turn from sin and self. In this brief work, Puritan Thomas Watson shows that true gospel freedom is found in a better sight of sin's ugliness so the contrasting beauty of Christ might be gloriously embraced in a denial of self and a pursuit of following Him."

Keith Palmer, *senior associate pastor of Grace Bible Church, Granbury, Texas*

THOMAS WATSON (ca. 1620–1686) graduated from Cambridge University and became one of the leading Puritan ministers of London.



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Killing Sin and Denying Self

Killing Sin and Denying Self

Thomas Watson

Edited and abridged by
J. Stephen Yuille

Puritan Treasures for Today
Series editor: J. Stephen Yuille



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Killing Sin and Denying Self

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Preface

Why would anyone want to read a book about sin? Would our time not be better spent thinking about more encouraging things? This is a legitimate question. In short, spending time unmasking the seriousness of sin is important because it helps us see other things with far greater clarity.

I remember wandering through a busy shopping mall many years ago, perusing the various jewelry stores in search of an engagement ring for the woman who would one day be my wife. All the stores had the same marketing approach. The diamond rings were displayed against a dark velvet backdrop. Why? The contrast was designed to heighten the diamond's brilliance. A sight of sin's true malignity is beneficial because of what it accentuates—namely, the glory of God's grace in Christ.

O Jesus, full of truth and grace,
More full of grace than I of sin,

Yet once again I seek Thy face,
Open Thine arms and take me in.¹

In the Savior's arms we find light instead of darkness, life instead of death, justification instead of condemnation, freedom instead of bondage, hope instead of despair, forgiveness instead of judgment. We find that "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Rom. 5:20).

In this book, Thomas Watson puts our sin on full display, not to leave us wallowing in despair but to heighten our appreciation of God's matchless grace. It is divided into three main sections, each with a particular emphasis.

Understanding Sin

The first section contains chapters 21–24 of Watson's *A Body of Practical Divinity*.² Here he demonstrates that sin is a disease, corrupting every word, thought, and deed. "Like poison," says Watson, "original sin has diffused itself into all the parts and powers of our soul" (p. 19).³ Think for a moment of a gently flowing stream. The sand and pebbles are clearly visible through the cool, clear water.

1. Charles Wesley, "Weary of Wandering from My God," stanza 2.

2. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, in *The Works of Thomas Watson*, vols. 1–7 (Reformation Heritage Books, 2026), 2:193–226.

3. The parenthetical page numbers in the preface are references to this present edition of the work.

It is beautiful. But three miles upstream is a herd of cows standing in the water, expelling their excrement at will. Another mile farther upstream is a factory, dumping pollutants into the water. Where you are standing, the water looks clean, smells clean, and tastes clean. Guess what? It is filthy. That is us. The fountain is polluted:

They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one
(Rom. 3:12)

The term *unprofitable* (or *worthless*) literally means *spoiled*. Paul is saying we are like food that is rotting in the open sun. It is no longer good for anything but to be discarded. Watson provides a framework for understanding the true nature of sin through four considerations.

First, consider sin's origin: "He who sins is of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Sin has blotted God's image and stained the beautiful brightness of the soul. It has stamped the devil's image on us. When we sin, we align ourselves with him in his rebellion against God.

Second, consider sin's nature. Scripture compares it to the venom of snakes and the stench of open graves. It is not merely a defection from God's will but a pollution of all that He has made. Paul calls it "all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). It opposes God. "If the

sinner had his way," says Watson, "God would no longer be God" (p. 5). We not only forget God's countless mercies but abuse them by turning them into instruments of rebellion. Unsurprisingly, sin stirs God's anger. As Watson puts it, "Sin is the object of God's antipathy" (p. 7).

Third, consider sin's cost. Christ's active obedience was not enough to make atonement for sin; He had to suffer on the cross. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Watson gets to the heart of the matter: "The evil of sin is not so much seen in that thousands are damned for it but that Christ died for it" (p. 8).

Fourth, consider sin's effect. Its consequences touch every part of human existence. It has stripped us of our original honor. God made us in His image, but sin has debased us. Sin robs our soul of peace, creating fears and torments (1 John 4:18). It produces all temporal evils—illness, bereavement, opposition, depression, poverty, shame. Ultimately, sin leads to final damnation—the "second death" (Rev. 20:14).

Such a sight of sin makes us cry out with Job, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). But we do not stay there. This sight of sin causes us to admire God's matchless grace, esteem Christ's infinite merit, and marvel at God's willingness to forgive us for Christ's sake. It causes us to sing,

I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene,

And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean.⁴

Christ did not please Himself but gave Himself for sinners—for our eternal good. Sin had marred us beyond recognition, bringing us under divine condemnation. But Christ mercifully came to bear our sin and shame. The exchange is perfect and complete. He was humiliated that we might be exalted, condemned that we might be justified, rejected that we might be accepted.

This truth should overwhelm us with awe and wonder. Nothing provides greater encouragement to approach God than knowing He has shown His abundant grace, mercy, and love in Christ. He has demonstrated His unwavering purpose to save all who believe in Christ. We should stand in daily admiration and adoration of such wondrous love.

The Mischief of Sin

The second section contains Watson's *The Mischief of Sin*.⁵ In painstaking detail, he unpacks the myriad consequences of sin in this life and in the life to come. But this is not why sin is so evil. As Watson demonstrates, what makes our sin so heinous is not primarily what it does to others or the damage it causes in our own lives.

4. Charles H. Gabriel, "My Savior's Love," stanza 1.

5. Thomas Watson, *The Mischief of Sin*, in *Works*, 7:351–401.

It is far more fundamental than that. Sin is so serious because it is against a God who is so great. It carries an infinite demerit because it is an affront to an infinite God. Watson declares, “The sinner does all that he can to eradicate God. He wishes there were no God.... If he could, a wicked man would not only unthrone God but undo God. God would no longer be God” (p. 62).

Watson argues that, because of the corruption of his nature, Adam could not transmit a perfect nature to his descendants. Instead, he transmitted the corrupt nature acquired by the fall. As a result, all of us are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). In a word, sin has dominion over us. At times this dominion is obvious, meaning some of us live with the visible effects and consequences of sin. It takes a toll on our bodies, families, and communities. At times, however, sin’s dominion is not so obvious. It is secret and hidden. But we must make no mistake here—it is just as real, just as powerful, and just as wicked.

We try to hide what we are under a veneer of respectability, but there are times when what is hidden comes into view in fits of rage, lust, and envy. These moments show us who we really are. Our efforts to compensate with our works, activities, traditions, and disciplines are futile. They merely serve to feed the root of our sin—self-centeredness and self-righteousness. “Pride runs in the blood,” declares Watson (p. 70). This is our condition before a holy God: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God” (Isa. 59:2).

Recognizing that sin is exceedingly sinful makes the gospel shine even brighter. When we grasp the great evil that lurks in the smallest sin, God's grace appears truly magnificent. "Sin brings a man low," says Watson, "but grace lifts him high. Sin tumbles him in the ditch, but grace sets him on the throne" (p. 84). If we celebrate the removal of physical disease, how much more should we rejoice in the removal of sin? "As far as the east is from the west, so far has [God] removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12). It raises the obvious question: How far is the east from the west? If I were to plant a stake in the ground, start traveling east, circumnavigate the globe, and end up back at the stake, I would still be traveling east. I would never reach the west. The distance between the two is incalculable.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!⁶

The Duty of Self-Denial

The third section contains Watson's *The Duty of Self-Denial*.⁷ We live in a bizarre age in which many of us view ourselves as the protagonist in our life narrative. It

6. Horatio Spafford, "It Is Well with My Soul," stanza 3.

7. Thomas Watson, *The Duty of Self-Denial*, in *Works*, 1:99–132.

is a sad commentary that so many people are now more concerned about capturing their lives in images (selfies) to be displayed on social media than in living their lives. It is a symptom of a deeply entrenched problem—one that has plagued every generation.

Christ has His finger on the pulse when He proclaims, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). The disciples had witnessed crucifixion countless times—their countrymen hanging on crosses, roadways lined with the dead and dying, condemned men carrying their instruments of death to the appointed place of execution. How would they have interpreted Christ’s command to follow Him? In simple terms: They must esteem Him so highly that they would willingly lose everything.

Christ reinforces His invitation with a powerful incentive: “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (Luke 9:24). In effect, Christ places the world and the gospel in the balance. Which do you think is of greater worth?

Watson states, “Self-denial is the foundation of godliness. If this is not well laid, the whole building will fall” (p. 108). Self-conceit is nothing less than idolatry, a form of self-worship, meaning it is antithetical to the gospel. Therefore, we must deny it. We must reject self-autonomy, self-righteousness, self-confidence, and self-conceit. As Watson explains, the practice of self-denial touches

every area of our lives. We deny our appetites because we are more likely to be “hurt by excess in lawful things than by meddling with unlawful things” (p. 121). We deny our comforts, remembering that “all vices grow in an idle and untilled heart” (p. 122). We deny our passions, lest we be carried away “as a chariot with wild horses” (p. 123). We deny our aims, recognizing that “a good aim will not make a bad action good, but a bad aim will make a good action bad” (p. 127). Above all else, we deny our lives.

This is the narrow gate that leads to the narrow way (Matt. 7:13–14). We deny ourselves because we can be saved no other way. Watson issues a sobering warning: “If the world is not denied, Christ cannot be loved. If self-righteousness is not denied, Christ cannot be trusted. If self-will is not denied, Christ cannot be obeyed.... Self is an idol, and it is hard to sacrifice this idol. But it must be done” (pp. 133–134). How?

We must be convinced of Christ’s incomparable excellence. Scripture compares Him to a head of gold for riches (Song 5:11), to the rose of Sharon for perfume (Song 2:1), to a bright morning star for beauty (Rev. 22:16). “Christ is all that God can require for satisfaction, or we can desire for salvation,” declares Watson (p. 139). He is fully adequate to meet our deepest needs. He has eye salve to anoint us and white garments to clothe us (Rev. 3:18). He has precious blood to redeem and cleanse us (1 Peter 1:19). Truly, He is better than life, wealth, family, possessions, and heaven itself.

When our hearts are ignited with love for Christ, we willingly surrender everything for Him. “Love to God devours self-love,” says Watson (p. 140). We become like wax before the hot sun. We become what God wants us to be. In a word, we deny self. This is our calling—not self-improvement, self-realization, or self-fulfillment, but self-denial. In losing ourselves, we gain everything—Christ.

Conclusion

As you read *Killing Sin and Denying Self*, keep your eyes fixed on Christ at all times. Consider Him in the garden of Gethsemane. As the cross loomed before Him, the burden was so heavy that He crumpled to the ground, sweating great drops of blood. He cried out in terrible agony as He considered the sheer horror of bearing our sin and suffering God’s wrath.

Consider Christ’s arrest and trial. The sovereign Creator of the universe was judged and condemned by wicked men. Amazingly, He did not answer a single charge. We see Him clothed in purple and crowned with thorns. He was mocked, ridiculed, and scourged. He was stripped naked to bear the shame of all our sins.

Consider Christ suffering on the cross. Darkness enveloped Him as He endured the torments of hell. He drew His final breath, bowed His head, and died. The spear was thrust into His side, and water and blood poured forth. We stand amazed at the unfathomable

depth of His love in shedding His blood to satisfy God's offended justice, thereby securing His boundless mercy.

When we see our sin in this way, we truly see its vileness, wretchedness, and wickedness in the light of God's lovingkindness in Christ. As we hold up our lives to the penetrating light of God's Word, our sin becomes clearly visible. As Paul declares, "All things that are exposed are made manifest by the light" (Eph. 5:13). This sight of sin's true character provides the necessary incentive to deal with it decisively and violently. We cannot remain indifferent. The horror of our rebellion against divine love compels us to action, driving us to the cross, where we discover God's forgiveness of our sin and His power to put it to death.

J. Stephen Yuille
Fort Worth, Texas

Understanding Sin

CHAPTER 1

A Definition of Sin

What is sin? It is any lack of conformity to—or transgression of—God’s law. In a word, “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). The term *transgress* means to go beyond one’s bounds. The purpose of God’s law is to keep us within the bounds of our duty. To sin is to go beyond those bounds.

Paul says that God’s law is “holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12). It is holy because there is nothing impure in it. It is just because there is nothing unfit in it. It is good because there is nothing harmful in it. Clearly, there is no reason to break this law—no more than for a cow grazing in an abundant pasture to break over the hedge into a barren shrubland or swampy marsh.

Sin is a heinous and terrible thing. The Scripture calls it the “accursed thing” (Josh. 7:13). It is compared to the venom of serpents and the stench of sepulchres. Paul says that sin is “exceedingly sinful” (Rom. 7:13). The devil paints over sin with brilliant colors, such as profit and pleasure, so that it looks desirable. But when

we peel away the paint, we see its ugliness. We are inclined to have trivial thoughts of sin, and we tend to speak of sin, as Lot spoke of the city of Zoar, "Is it not a little one?" (Gen. 19:20). But when we take time to consider the following facts, we see how great an evil sin is.

Sin is evil in its origin. Sin fetches its pedigree from hell. "He who sins is of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Satan was the first to commit sin and the first to tempt to sin. Sin is the devil's firstborn.

Sin is evil in its nature. This is evident in many ways. First, sin defiles a person. It is not only a defection but a pollution. It is to the soul as rust is to gold and as a blemish is to beauty. It makes the soul red with guilt and dirty with filth. Joshua's filthy garments in which he stood before the angel were a type and picture of sin (Zech. 3:3). Sin has blotted God's image and stained the beautiful brightness of the soul. Sin makes God loathe a sinner (Zech. 11:8), and when a sinner sees his sin, he loathes himself (Ezek. 20:43). Sin drops poison into our holy things and infects our prayers. The high priest was to make atonement for sin on the altar to typify that our holiest services need Christ to atone for them (Ex. 29:36). Duties of religion in themselves are good, but sin corrupts them, as the purest water is polluted running through muddy ground. Under the law, if a leper touched the altar, the altar did not cleanse him, but he defiled the altar. Paul calls sin "all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). Sin stamps the devil's image on a

person. It turns a person into a devil. "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70).

Second, sin grieves God's Spirit. "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30). Because the Holy Spirit is God, He cannot be subject to any passion. The expression *grieve* is spoken metaphorically. Sin is said to grieve the Holy Spirit because it is an injury offered to Him. He takes it unkindly and (as it were) lays it to heart. The Holy Spirit descended in the likeness of a dove, and sin causes this blessed dove to mourn. Is it not a sad thing to grieve our Comforter?

Third, sin is an act of rebellion. It is willfully walking "contrary" to God (Lev. 26:27). A sinner tramples upon God's law and crosses His will. He does all he can to offend and spite God. The heart of a rebel resides in every sin. "But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her" (Jer. 44:17). Sin strikes at God. It would not only dethrone God, but ungod Him. If the sinner had his way, God would no longer be God.

Fourth, sin is an act of unkindness. God feeds the sinner, keeps evil from him, and showers him with mercy. The sinner not only forgets God's mercies but also abuses them. He is like Absalom, who, as soon as David had kissed him and received him into favor, plotted treason against him (2 Sam. 15:10). He is like the mule who kicks her young after she has given it milk. "Is this your loyalty

to your friend?" (2 Sam. 16:17). God may say to the sinner, "I have given health, strength, and estate to you. Yet you return evil for good. You wound Me with My own mercies. Is this your loyalty to your friend? Did I give life to you, that you might sin? Did I give wages to you, that you might serve the devil?"

Fifth, sin is a disease. "The whole head is sick" (Isa. 1:5). Some people are sick with pride, others with lust, others with envy. Sin has distempered the mind, creating leprosy in the head and poisoning the entire person. It is with a sinner as with a sick patient; his appetite is distempered, and the sweetest things taste bitter to him. The Word is "sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Ps. 19:10), but it tastes bitter to sinners, who "put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20). This is a disease, and nothing can cure this disease but the blood of the Great Physician.

Sixth, sin is irrational. It makes a person act not only wickedly but foolishly. It is absurd to prefer the lesser instead of the greater, the pleasures of life instead of the rivers of eternal pleasure at God's right hand. Is it not irrational to lose heaven to satisfy or indulge a lust? When lust or rash anger burns in the soul, Satan warms himself at this fire. People's sins feed the devil.

Seventh, sin is painful. It costs people much labor to pursue their sins. How do they tire themselves in doing the devil's drudgery? "They weary themselves to commit iniquity" (Jer. 9:5). Chrysostom says, "Virtue is easier

than vice.”¹ It is more painful for some people to follow their sins than for others to worship their God. The sinner travails with his sin and brings it forth in sorrow. It is called “serving various lusts and pleasures” (Titus 3:3). Many people go to hell in the sweat of their brow.

Eighth, sin is the object of God’s antipathy. He does not hate a person because he is poor or despised in the world. You do not hate your friend because he is sick. But that which draws forth the keenness of God’s hatred is sin. “Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!” (Jer. 44:4). Surely, if the sinner dies under God’s hatred, he cannot be admitted into the celestial mansions. Will God live with those whom He hates? God will never lay a viper in His bosom. Until sin is removed, there is no coming to where God is.

Sin is evil in its cost. Sin required God’s blood to expiate it (Acts 20:28). Augustine exhorts, “Oh, man, consider the greatness of your sin according to the greatness of the price paid for it!”² All the princes on earth or angels

1. John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407) served as Archbishop of Constantinople. He is known for his preaching and his Divine Liturgy. Along with Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Athanasius of Alexandria, he is regarded as one of the four great church fathers in the Greek church.

2. Augustine (354–430) was the Bishop of Hippo Regius. He is one of the most influential figures in the history of Western civilization, and he is regarded as one of the most important church fathers in the Latin church.

in heaven could not satisfy for sin. Only Christ could do so. His active obedience was not enough to make atonement, but He had to suffer on the cross. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Oh, what a cursed thing is sin that Christ should die for it! The evil of sin is not so much seen in that thousands are damned for it but that Christ died for it.

Sin is evil in its effect. The consequences of sin are manifold. First, sin degrades us of our honor. God made us in His image, a little lower than the angels (Ps. 8:5), but sin has debased us. Before Adam sinned, he was like a herald with the king's coat of arms on him. But this coat has been pulled off. Sin has plucked off our coat of innocence, and now it has debased us and turned our glory into shame.

Second, sin disquiets the peace of the soul. Whatever defiles, disturbs. As poison tortures the stomach and corrupts the blood, so sin does the same to the soul. "There is no peace...for the wicked" (Isa. 57:21). Sin breeds a trembling heart. It creates fears, and there is torment in fear (1 John 4:18). Sin makes sad convulsions in the conscience. Judas was so terrified with guilt and horror that he hanged himself to quiet his conscience (Matt. 27:5).

Third, sin produces all temporal evil. It is the Trojan horse; it has sword, famine, and pestilence in its belly. Sin is a coal that not only blackens but burns. Sin creates all our troubles. It puts gravel in our bread and

wormwood in our cup. Sin rots our name, consumes our estate, and buries our relations. Sin shoots the flying roll of God's curses into families and kingdoms (Zech. 5:4).

Fourth, sin (when there is no repentance) brings final damnation. Corruptions that breed in people's souls are the cause of their damnation. Without repentance, sin brings the "second death" (Rev. 20:14). Sin's pleasure will turn into sorrow in the end. Sin brings God's wrath, and what buckets of water can quench that fire? "'Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched'" (Mark 9:44).

Our response. When we see how evil sin is, how can we love it? "How long will you love worthlessness?" (Ps. 4:2). Sin is a meal that people cannot forbear, even though it makes them sick. It is a great pity that so sweet an affection as love should be poured out on so filthy a thing as sin! Sin brings a sting in the conscience and a curse in the estate, yet people love it. A sinner is the greatest self-denier; for his sin he will deny himself a part in heaven!

We must do anything rather than sin. We should hate it. There is greater evil in the least sin than in the greatest bodily evils that can befall us. There is greater evil in a drop of sin than in a sea of affliction. Affliction is like a tear in a garment, while sin pricks at the heart. There is some good in affliction (Ps. 119:71). God's purpose in affliction is not to consume but to refine. But there is no good in sin. It is the quintessence of evil. Sin is worse than hell, for the pains of hell are only a burden

to the creature, but sin is a burden to God. "Behold, I am weighed down by you, as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down" (Amos 2:13).

Is sin so great an evil? Then how thankful should we be to God if He has taken away our sin! "I have removed your iniquity from you" (Zech. 3:4). If you had a disease in your body, how thankful would you be to have it taken away? How much more to have sin taken away! God takes away the guilt of sin by His pardoning grace, and the power of sin by His mortifying grace. We should so be thankful that God has changed our nature by engrafting us into Christ so that we partake of the sweetness of that olive. We should be thankful that sin, though it still lives in us, does not reign over us.

CHAPTER 2

Adam's Sin

Having considered what sin is, we turn our attention to where it came from. Our first parents (Adam and Eve) fell from the state of innocence in which they were created by eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6).

Their fall. “God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes” (Eccl. 7:29). Adam was perfectly holy. He had rectitude of mind, and he had liberty of will to do good. But he “sought out many schemes.” He did not continue in his royal majesty. He had a power not to fall, and his free will was a sufficient shield to repel temptation. The devil could not have forced Adam unless he had given his consent. Satan was only a suitor to woo, not a king to compel. But Adam gave away his power, and he suffered himself to be lured into sin. He was lord of the world (Gen. 1:28), but he lost all of it at one throw. As soon as he sinned, he forfeited paradise.

Here we learn several lessons. First, we see the weakness of human nature. In a state of innocence, Adam quickly defected from God. He soon lost the robe of

innocence and the glory of paradise. If human nature was so weak when it was at its best, what is it now that it is at its worst? If Adam did not stand when he was perfectly righteous, how can we stand when sin has cut off our original righteousness? If Adam sinned himself out of paradise, how quickly will we sin ourselves into hell if we are not kept by a greater power than our own? But God puts us underneath His everlasting arms (Deut. 33:17).

Second, we learn how sad it is for a person to be left to himself. Being left to himself, Adam fell. Oh, then, what will become of us! How soon will we fall if God leaves us to ourselves! A person without God's grace is like a ship in a storm without a captain or anchor; he is ready to dash upon every rock. We must pray, "Lord, do not leave me to myself! If Adam, who had strength, fell so soon, how soon will I fall, seeing as I have no strength!" We must ask God to fulfill His promise: "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

The cause of their fall. Our first parents fell from the state of innocence by eating the forbidden fruit. This was a heinous act. Adam had noble and excellent endowments. He was illuminated with knowledge and blessed with holiness. He knew his duty, and it was as easy for him to obey God's command as to know it. He might have chosen not to sin, yet he willfully ate the forbidden fruit. What made Adam's sin so great? It was against an infinite God. Many sins are twisted together into this one act.

The first sin is unbelief. Our first parents did not believe that God spoke the truth. God said, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). But they did not believe that they would die. They could not be persuaded that such fair fruit had death at the door. By their unbelief they made God a liar. Even worse, they believed the devil rather than God.

The second sin is ingratitude. This is the epitome of all sin. Adam's sin was committed in paradise. God had enriched him with a variety of mercies. Adam had God's image stamped on him. God had made him lord of the world, and He had given him all the trees of the garden (except one) to eat. And yet, Adam took from that very tree! This was extraordinary ingratitude. When Adam's eyes were opened, and he saw what he had done, he was ashamed. Rightly so! How could he look God in the face without blushing?

Discontent is the third sin. If he had not been discontented, he would never have sought to alter his condition. One would think Adam had enough in paradise. He differed only a little from the angels. He had the robe of innocence to clothe him and the glory of paradise to crown him. But he was not content. He wanted more. He wanted to be above the ordinary rank of a creature. How wide was Adam's heart that a whole world could not fill it?

Fourth, we have pride. Adam wanted to be like God. He, who was fashioned from dust, aspired to be like his

Creator. Satan promised, "You will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). And Adam hoped it would be so. He believed that the Tree of Knowledge would anoint his eyes and make him omniscient. By climbing too high, he fell to great depths.

The fifth sin is disobedience. God told Adam not to eat of the tree. But Adam would eat of it, even if it cost him his life. Disobedience is a sin against justice. It is only fair that we should serve God, from whom we have our existence. God gave Adam his allowance, and it was just that Adam should give God his allegiance. This means his disobedience was against justice. How could God endure to see His laws trampled before His face? This made Him place a flaming sword at the entrance to the garden.

The sixth sin is curiosity. Adam meddled with something that did not belong to him and was well above him. God smote the men of Beth Shemesh for merely looking into the ark (1 Sam. 6:19). Adam wanted to pry into God's secrets and taste what was forbidden.

Wantonness is the seventh. Though Adam could eat from any of the other trees, he craved the forbidden tree. We see this same wantonness in the Israelites. God sent them manna (angels' food), but they had a hankering for quails. It was not enough for God to supply their needs unless He satisfied their lusts. Adam had food not only for necessity but for delight. Yet his wanton appetite lusted after forbidden fruit.

The eighth sin is sacrilege. The Tree of Knowledge did not belong to Adam, yet he took from it and robbed God of His due. To steal fruit from that tree, which God had peculiarly reserved for Himself, was a sacrilege of double theft.

The ninth sin is murder. Adam was a public person, and all his posterity were included in him. By sinning, he would have destroyed his posterity all at once if God's grace had not interposed. If Abel's blood cried loudly in God's ears (Gen. 4:10), how loudly did the blood of all Adam's posterity cry against him for vengeance!

Finally, the tenth sin is presumption. Adam presumed upon God's mercy. He blessed himself, thinking that he would have peace. Though he transgressed, he assumed that he would not die, but that God would reverse His decree rather than punish him. It was high presumption.

What a heinous sin was Adam's breach of covenant! It has corrupted human nature. How rank is that poison, one drop of which can poison a whole ocean! How deadly is Adam's sin! It poisoned all humanity and brought a curse upon us. And that is our condition until the curse is taken away by Him who became "a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13).

CHAPTER 3

The Nature of Original Sin

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Adam was a representative person. As he stood, we stood. As he fell, we fell. He was the head of mankind, and being guilty, we are guilty. Augustine says, “All of us sinned in Adam because we were part of Adam.”

If all mankind fell with Adam when he fell, then why did not all the angels fall when one angel fell? The case is not the same. The angels had no relation to one another. But it is otherwise with us, for we were in Adam’s loins. As a child is a branch of the parent, we are part of Adam, and therefore, when he sinned, we sinned. Not only is the guilt of Adam’s sin imputed to us, but the depravity and corruption of his nature that is derived to us as poison is carried from the fountain to the container. This is what we call original sin. “In sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). Adam’s leprosy clings to us as Naaman’s leprosy clung to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27).

Original sin is called “the old man” (Eph. 4:22). It is not described as such because it is weak like an old man, but because of its longevity and deformity. In old age, the fair blossoms of beauty fall. So, original sin is the old man because it has withered our beauty and made us deformed in God’s eye.

Original sin is also called “the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25). In other words, it has the power of a law. A law binds us to allegiance. We must do what sin will have us do, because the love of sin draws us and the law of sin forces us. In original sin there is something taken away and something added. (1) What is taken away. We have lost that excellent frame of soul we once had. Sin has cut the lock of original purity where our strength lay. (2) What is added. Original sin has defiled and contaminated human nature. It has poisoned the spring of our nature. It has turned beauty into leprosy and turned the brightness of our souls into darkness.

Original sin has become inherent to us. By nature, we cannot but sin. Even if there were no devil to tempt us, no bad examples to influence us, we could not forbear sinning because there is an innate principle in us (2 Peter 2:14).

First, there is an aversion from good. We have a desire to be happy, yet we oppose that which would promote our happiness. We are disgusted by holiness. We hate to be reformed. Since we fell from God, we have no mind to return to Him.

Second, there is an inclination to evil. Our own experience tells us that the natural bias of the soul tends to that which is bad. People drink iniquity like water (Job 15:16). As a person who thirsts for drink and is not satisfied, so we have a kind of drought in us—we thirst for sin. “They weary themselves to commit iniquity” (Jer. 9:5). Though God has set so many flaming swords in the way to stop people in their sin, they continue in it. This shows what a strong appetite we have for the forbidden fruit.

CHAPTER 4

The Extent of Original Sin

Like poison, original sin has diffused itself into all the parts and powers of our soul. “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints” (Isa. 1:5). We are like a sick patient who has no healthy part—his liver is infected, his feet are gangrened, and his lungs are diseased. Our souls are thus infected until Christ (who has made medicine out of His blood) cures us.

First, original sin has depraved the mind. In the creation, “darkness was on the face of the deep” (Gen. 1:2). So, darkness is on the face of our understanding. As there is salt in every drop of sea and bitterness in every branch of wormwood, so there is sin in every faculty. The mind is darkened; we know little of God. Ever since Adam ate of the Tree of Knowledge and his eyes were opened, we lost our eyesight. Besides ignorance in the mind, there is error and falsehood. We do not judge rightly of things; we put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter (Isa. 5:20). Besides this, there is much pride, prejudice, and carnal reasoning. “How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?” (Jer. 4:14).

Second, original sin has defiled the heart. The heart is “desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). In the heart are legions of lust, infidelity, hypocrisy, and sinful longing. It boils like the sea with passion and revenge. “Madness is in their hearts while they live” (Eccl. 9:3). The heart is the devil’s shop, where all mischief is framed.

Third, original sin has defiled the will. Stubbornness is the seat of rebellion. The sinner crosses God’s will to fulfill his own. There is a rooted enmity in the will against holiness. It is like an iron sinew; it refuses to bend to God. Where is the freedom of the will when it is so full not only of indisposition but of opposition to what is spiritual?

Fourth, original sin has defiled the affections. As the strings of a violin, they are out of tune. These are the lesser wheels that are strongly carried by the will, the master wheel. Our affections are misplaced, set on wrong objects. Our love is set on sin and our joy on the creature. Our affections are like a sick person’s appetite; he desires things that are noxious and hurtful for him. He calls for wine in a fever. So, we have impure lusts instead of holy longings.

Thus, original sin cleaves to us. We cannot get rid of it. Paul shook off the viper from his hand (Acts 28:5–6), but we cannot shake off this inbred corruption. It may be compared to a wild fig tree growing on a wall. Though its roots are pulled up, some of its limbs have entered the joints in the stonework. They continue to sprout, and they will do so until the wall is pulled down. Original sin comes not as a lodger but as a dweller (Rom. 7:17).

CHAPTER 5

The Effect of Original Sin

Original sin impacts us in numerous ways. First, it impedes and hinders us in the exercises of God's worship. What is the cause of all the dullness and deadness in religion? Original sin. It rocks us asleep in duty. "The good that I will to do, I do not do" (Rom. 7:19). Sin is compared to a weight (Heb. 12:1). A man who has weights tied to his legs cannot run fast.

Second, original sin often runs like a spring underground and then breaks forth unexpectedly. Christian, if God were to leave you, you would not believe the evil in your heart that would break forth suddenly. The sea may be calm and look clear, but when the wind blows, how it rages and foams! Likewise, your heart may seem good, but when temptation blows, original sin will show itself, making you foam with lust and passion. Who would have thought to have found adultery in David and drunkenness in Noah? If God leaves a person to himself, how suddenly and scandalously may original sin break forth in the holiest men alive!

Third, original sin mixes itself with our duties and our graces.

Our duties. We cannot do any holy action without sinning, as lacking a principle of original righteousness. Whatever the leper touched became unclean. If he touched the altar, the altar did not sanctify him, but he polluted the altar. Such a leprosy is original sin. It defiles our prayers and tears so that we cannot write without smudging. I am not saying that the holy duties and good works of the regenerate are sins. That would be a reproach to the Spirit of Christ by whom these things are performed. My point is that the best works of the godly have sin cleaving to them. Only Christ's blood makes atonement for our holy things.

Our graces. There is always some unbelief mixed with faith, lukewarmness with zeal, and pride with humility. As bad lungs cause asthma or shortness of breath, so original corruption, having infected our heart, causes our graces to breathe faintly.

Fourth, original sin is an active principle within us. It does not lie still but is ever exciting and stirring us up to evil. "The evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Rom. 7:19). Why? Original sin irritated and stirred Paul up to it. It is like quicksilver, always in motion. When we are asleep, sin is awake in the fancy. Original sin sets the head to plot evil and the hands to perform it. It has in it the principle of movement, not rest. It is like the pulse, always beating.

Fifth, original sin is the cause of all actual sins. It is the fuel of sins, the womb in which all sins are conceived. Hence come murders, adulteries, and rapines. It is the Trojan horse out of which a whole army of impieties spring forth. Though actual sins may be more scandalous, original sin is more heinous, because the cause is more heinous than the effect.

Sixth, original sin is not perfectly cured in this life. Though grace subdues sin, it does not wholly remove it. Though we are like Christ, having the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit, we are still unlike Him, having the remainders of the flesh. There are two nations in the womb (Gen. 25:23). Though the Holy Spirit is weakening and hewing down sin in the godly, the stump of original sin is still left. It is a sea that will not, in this life, be dried up. But why does God leave original corruption in us after regeneration? He could free us from it if He pleased. (1) He does so to show the power of His grace in the weakest believer. Grace will prevail against a torrent of corruption. Why is this? The corruption is ours, but the grace is God's. (2) He does so to make us long after heaven, where there will be no sin to defile and no devil to tempt. We will never again complain of an aching head or an unbelieving heart.

CHAPTER 6

Lessons

Given all that has been said about original sin, how should we respond?

First, let us resist those who deny that original sin is propagated to us and that it is inherent to us so long as we live here. There are those who hold to sinless perfection. But they are both proud and ignorant. We see the seeds of original sin remaining in the best. There is not a just man who sins not (Eccl. 7:20). Paul complained of a “body of death” (Rom. 7:24). Though grace purifies human nature, it does not perfect it. How then are we to understand Paul when he says that our “old man was crucified with [Christ]” (Rom. 6:6) and that we are “dead indeed to sin” (v. 11)? (1) We are dead to sin spiritually. We are dead as to its guilt and power. The love of sin is crucified. (2) We are dead to sin legally. As a person sentenced to death is dead in law, so we are legally dead to sin. A sentence of death has gone out against sin. It will die and drop into the grave. But at present, sin has its life lengthened out. Nothing but the death

of the body can completely free us from the body of this death.

Second, let us be deeply humbled for original sin. It cleaves to us as a disease. It is an active principle in us stirring us up to evil. Original sin is worse than all actual sin, as the fountain is more than the stream. Some people think [that], so long as they are civil, they are well enough. No! Human nature is poisoned. A river may have fair streams but vermin at the bottom. You carry a hell about you. You can do nothing without defiling it. Your heart, like muddy ground, defiles the purest water that runs through it. Though you are regenerate, there is much of the old man in the new man. Oh, how original sin should humble us! This is one reason God has left original sin in us. He would have it as a thorn in our side to humble us. God leaves original sin to pull down the plumes of pride.

Third, let us look daily to heaven for help, seeking Christ's blood to wash away the guilt of sin and His Spirit to mortify the power of sin. We must pray for further degrees of grace. Though grace cannot make sin cease to be, it can make sin cease to reign. Though grace cannot expel sin, it can repel it. We take comfort in the fact that where grace makes a combat with sin, death will make a conquest.

Fourth, let us walk with continual jealousy and watchfulness over our hearts. The sin of our nature is like a sleeping lion; the least thing that awakens it makes

it rage. The sin of our nature, though it seems quiet and lies as fire hidden under the embers, if it is a little stirred by a temptation, how quickly it flames into scandalous evil! Therefore, we must always walk watchfully. "I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:37). A wandering heart needs a watchful eye.

CHAPTER 7

The Power of Satan

Adam left an unhappy portion to his posterity: sin and misery. We have considered the first of these: original sin. Now, we turn our attention to the second: the misery of sinners. In the first, we see man offending. In the second, we see him suffering.

The misery ensuing from original sin is twofold. The first is that something is taken away. By original sin, we have lost communion with God. Adam was God's familiar, His favorite. But sin has put us all out of favor. When we lost God's image, we lost His acquaintance. God's banishing Adam out of paradise showed typologically how sin has banished us out of God's love and favor. The second misery is that something is added. We are (1) under the power of Satan, (2) children of God's wrath, (3) subject to all the miseries of this life, and (4) exposed to hell and damnation. In this chapter, we will consider the first of these.

Satan is called "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). Before the fall, man was a free citizen. Now

he is a slave. Before, he was a king on the throne. Now he is in chains. And to whom is man enslaved? To one who hates him. This was an aggravation of Israel's servitude: "Those who hated them ruled over them" (Ps. 106:41). By sin we are enslaved to Satan, who hates us and writes all his laws in blood. Before conversion, sinners are under Satan's command, as the donkey is at the command of the driver. A sinner does all the devil's drudgery. No sooner does Satan tempt but the sinner obeys. As the ship is at the command of the captain, and he steers it wherever he will, so the sinner is at the command of Satan that he may steer him wherever he will. He always steers the ship into hell's mouth. The devil rules all the powers and faculties of a sinner.

First, he rules the understanding. He blinds people with ignorance, and then he rules them, as the Philistines first put out Samson's eyes and then bound him (Judg. 16:21). Satan can do whatever he wants with an ignorant person who does not see the error of his way. The devil can lead him into any sin. You may lead a blind man anywhere.

Second, Satan rules the will. Though he cannot force the will, he can draw it by temptation. "The desires of your father you want to do" (John 8:44). The devil has our hearts, and we will obey him. When the devil spurs a sinner by temptation, he will go over hedge and ditch to break all God's laws that he may obey Satan. Where, then, is free will when Satan has such power over the

will? "The desires of your father you want to do." There is not a member of the body that is not at the devil's service—the head to plot sin, the hands to work it, and the feet to run his errands. Satan is the worst tyrant. Other tyrants rule over the body, but Satan rules over the conscience. Other tyrants have some pity on their slaves. Though slaves work in the galley ship, tyrants give them food and let them have hours for rest. But Satan is a merciless tyrant. He lets sinners have no rest.

How should we respond? First, we should see our misery by original sin. Satan is said to work effectually in the children of disobedience. What a sad plague is this, for a sinner to be at the will of the devil! If a slave is commanded to dig in the mines, hew in the quarries, or tug at the oar, he must do it. He dares not refuse. If the devil bids a man to lie or deceive, he does not refuse. And what is worse is that people are enslaved and willingly obey this tyrant, while other slaves are forced against their will. "The children of Israel groaned because of the bondage" (Ex. 2:23). But sinners are willing to be slaves. They will not take their freedom. They kiss their chains.

Second, we should labor to get out of the deplorable condition into which sin has plunged us. If any of your children were slaves, you would give great sums of money to purchase their freedom. Your souls are enslaved, and will you not labor to be set free? The gospel proclaims a jubilee to captives. Sin binds people, but

the gospel frees them. The aim of Paul's preaching was to turn people "from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). The gospel-star leads you to Christ, and if you get Christ, then you are made free from Satan's tyranny. "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). You hope to be kings to reign in heaven, and will you let Satan reign in you now? We must never assume we will be kings when we die if we are slaves while we live. The crown of glory is for conquerors, not captives. Oh, we must get out from under Satan's jurisdiction, and file off the chains of our sin by repentance!

CHAPTER 8

The Wrath of God

The second misery is that we are heirs of God's wrath (Eph. 2:3). We are exposed to God's displeasure. God was once a friend, but sin broke the knot of friendship. Now God's smile is turned into a frown. We have become children of wrath. And who knows the power of God's wrath (Ps. 90:11)? "The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion" (Prov. 19:12). How did Haman's heart tremble when the king rose up from the banquet in wrath (Est. 7:7)! But God's wrath is infinite. All other wrath is but a spark to a flame.

Wrath in God is not a passion, as it is in us. It is an act of God's holy will, whereby He abhors sin and decrees to punish it. This wrath is dismal.

First, while children of wrath, we have nothing to do with any of God's promises. They are as the Tree of Life, bearing several sorts of fruit, but we have no right to pluck one leaf. We are "strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12). The promises are as a sealed fountain. While we are in the state of nature, we

see nothing but the flaming sword. As the apostle says, there remains nothing but “a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27).

Second, while children of wrath, we are heirs to all God’s curses (Gal. 3:10). How can the sinner eat and drink in that condition? The sword of God’s wrath hangs every moment over a sinner’s head. We read of a flying scroll written with curses (Zech. 5:2). There is a scroll written with curses that goes out against every person who lives and dies in sin. God’s curse blasts wherever it goes—a curse on the sinner’s name, on his soul, on his estate and posterity, and on the ordinances. How sad would it be if all a person ate turned to poison! Yet, the sinner eats and drinks his own damnation at God’s table. That is how it is before conversion. As the love of God makes every bitter thing sweet, so the curse of God makes every sweet thing bitter.

Here we see our misery by the fall. We are “children of wrath.” Should we rest in this state? If a person falls under the king’s displeasure, will he not labor to ingratiate himself into his favor? Oh, let us flee from the wrath of God! And where should we fly but to Christ? There is no one else to shield us from the wrath of God. He alone delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10).

CHAPTER 9

The Troubles of Life

The third misery is that we are subject to all outward troubles. These are the bitter fruits of original sin. The sin of Adam has subjected creation to “futility” (Rom. 8:20). Is it not a part of the creature’s vanity that all the comforts here below will not fill the heart any more than the mariner’s breath can fill the sails of a ship? “In his self-sufficiency he will be in distress” (Job 20:22). Something is always lacking, and a person always wants more. The heart is always thirsty yet never satisfied. Solomon looked upon all the creatures and saw nothing but froth. “All is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). It is a vexing vanity—not only emptiness, but bitterness. Our life is labor and sorrow. We come into the world with a cry and go out with a groan (Ps. 90:10). Some people have said that they would not live the life they have lived over again because their life has had more water in it than wine, more water of tears than wine of joy. “What is long life but long suffering,” says Augustine. “Man is born to trouble” (Job 5:7). Everyone is not born an heir to land, but he is born an

heir to trouble. We do not finish our troubles in this life but change them. Trouble is the vermin bred out of the putrid matter of sin. From where are all our fears but from sin? There is torment in fear (1 John 4:18). Fear is the malaria of the soul. It sets it a shaking. Some people fear wants, others fear alarms, and others fear loss of relations. If we rejoice, it is with trembling.

From where comes all our disappointments but from sin? Wherever we look for comfort, there is a cross. Wherever we expect honey, we taste bitterness. Why is the earth filled with violence, that "the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?" (Hab. 1:13). Why is there so much dishonesty in dealing, so much falseness in friendship, such much tension in relations? Why do children prove disobedient? Those who should be a staff to their parents in their old age are a sword to pierce their hearts. Why all the mutinies and divisions in a country? "And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands" (2 Chron. 15:5). All this is but the sour core in that apple that our first parents ate, namely, the fruit of original sin.

All the deformities and diseases of the body are from sin. There never would have been a stone in the kidneys if there had not been first a stone in the heart. The death of the body is the fruit and result of original sin. "Sin entered the world, and death through sin"

(Rom. 5:12). Adam was made immortal conditionally. Certainly, if Adam had not eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, he would not have died (Gen. 2:17). But sin dug Adam's grave. Death is terrible to human nature. Oh, here we see the misery ensuing upon original sin! Sin dissolves the harmony of the body. It pulls this frame into pieces.

CHAPTER 10

The Second Death

The fourth misery awaits those who refuse to repent—hell and damnation. “This is the second death” (Rev. 20:14). It includes the punishment of loss. The soul is banished from the beatific presence of God, in whose presence is fullness of joy (Ps. 16:11). It also includes punishment of sense. The sinner feels the scalding vials of God’s wrath. It is penetrating and abiding (John 3:36). It is “reserved” for sinners (2 Peter 2:17).

When God’s anger is kindled but a little and a spark or two of it flies into a person’s conscience in this life, it is terrible. What, then, will it be like when God stirs up all His anger? The worm and the fire are in hell (Mark 9:44). Hell is the very accent and emphasis of misery. It is judgment without mercy. Oh, what flames of wrath, what seas of vengeance, what rivers of brimstone are poured out upon the damned! What is all other fire to this but painted fire? To bear it will be intolerable, to avoid it will be impossible! These hell-torments are forever; they have no period put to them. “Men will seek

death and will not find it" (Rev. 9:6). The breath of the Lord kindles that fire, and where will we find engines or buckets to quench it? "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night" (Rev. 14:11). We can thank original sin for it all!

What sad thoughts should we have of original sin! It has created so many miseries. What honey can be extracted from this lion? What grapes can be gathered from this thorn? It sets heaven and earth against us. While we choose this bramble to rule, fire comes out of the bramble to devour us.

How thankful we should be for Christ, who has freed us from that misery to which sin has exposed us! "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). Sin has brought trouble and a curse into the world, but Christ has sanctified the trouble and removed the curse. He has not only freed believers from misery but purchased for us a crown of glory and immortality. "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

The Mischief of Sin

CHAPTER 11

Introduction

The excess of impiety, which has broken down the banks of common civility and modesty, leads me to the ensuing subject. The spirits of men are leavened with atheism, and their lives are stained with debauchery. The floods of sin have risen to a deluge. There is a generation among us who work against religion. They are so immensely profane that they esteem the Bible as a fable and would jeer all holiness out of the world. “The prince of the power of the air...now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). In our Savior’s time, many people’s bodies were possessed by demons, but now their souls are possessed. One is possessed by a blasphemous demon, another by a spiteful demon, another by a drunken demon. This is one of the great signs of the approach of the last day: “Lawlessness will abound” (Matt. 24:12). People’s lusts will grow fierce and insatiable.

Oh, how dreadful will be the effects of sin. As Scripture says, they “were brought low for their iniquity” (Ps. 106:43). Whoever follows their sin is sure to be brought

low. What did Achan obtain from his wedge of gold? It separated his soul from God. What did Judas obtain from his betrayal? He purchased the gallows. What did King Ahaz obtain by worshipping the gods of Damascus? "They were the ruin of him and of all Israel" (2 Chron. 28:23). Sin is amusing at first but tragic at last. We may fitly apply Solomon's words to sin: "She has cast down many wounded" (Prov. 7:26).

Oh, what a harvest of souls will the devil glean! "Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure" (Isa. 5:14). It is compelled to make room for its guests. It is a cause of sorrow to think that the dragon should have so many followers and the Lamb so few. Cyprian¹ imagines the devil's insulting claim: "I never died for my followers as Christ died for His. I never promised them so great a reward as Christ promised His. Yet, I have a greater number of followers than Christ does, and my followers risk more for me than His do for Him." Some sin out of ignorance, but most do so out of choice. They know that the fruit is forbidden, but they lust after it, even though "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

My design is to call sinners to return from the hot

1. Cyprian (ca. 210–258) the Bishop of Carthage. He played a crucial role in the theological and organizational development of the early church. He was martyred during the persecution of Christians by Roman Emperor Valerian.

pursuit of their transgressions. If they refuse to heed all admonitions and instead run counter to the Word and prostitute themselves to their sordid lusts, their blood will be upon their heads. All that remains is for God to say, "Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish" (Zech. 11:9).

I pray God will bless these meditations to you and make them operative in your heart.

CHAPTER 12

Sin Humbles

Martin Luther calls the book of Psalms “a little Bible.” The psalms make sweeter music than David’s harp ever did. They are suited to the Christian’s every condition, and they serve for illumination and consolation. In Psalm 106, David sets down the people’s sins: “We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly” (v. 6). The examples of fathers are not always to be followed. They may err. David also makes mention of their particular sins.

The first is their forgetfulness. “They soon forgot [God’s] works” (v. 13). We might translate it: “They made haste to forget His works.” God performed a wondrous miracle for them by drowning their enemies in the Red Sea (v. 11). They were the recipients of His mercies. But we are quick to forget our sins and God’s goodness. We deal with God’s mercies as we do with flowers. When they are fresh, we smell them and hold them close. But after a while, we throw them away and forget all about them.

The second sin is their greed. They “lusted exceedingly in the wilderness” (v. 14). They were weary of the provision that God sent them miraculously from heaven. They grew petty and wept for meat. They were not content that God should meet their needs. They wanted Him to satisfy their lusts too. “And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul” (v. 15). In other words, He sent a plague by which they languished.

The third sin is their idolatry. “They made a calf in Horeb, and worshiped the molded image” (v. 19). The Bible calls idols “an abomination” (Hos. 9:10). It was for this reason that God disowned them as His people. He declares to Moses, “your people...have corrupted themselves” (Ex. 32:7). Formerly, He had called them His people, but now He refers to them as Moses’s people.

The fourth sin is their infidelity. “They did not believe His word, but complained in their tents” (Ps. 106:24–25). They did not think that God would subdue their enemies and bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey. Their unbelief gave rise to murmuring. They wished they had made their graves in Egypt (Ex. 16:3). When people begin to distrust God’s promise, they quarrel with His providence. When faith weakens, passions strengthen.

For these sins, God stretched out His hand against them. They “were brought low for their iniquity” (Ps. 106:43). That is to say, they were humbled.

The main lesson is this: Sin brings a person low. God “casts the wicked down to the ground” (Ps. 147:6). Sin also brings families low. Eli’s sons sinned grievously, and he failed to discipline them. God declares, “Behold, the days are coming that I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father’s house, so that there will not be an old man in your house” (1 Sam. 2:31). Sin also brings kingdoms low. Saul violates God’s command by sparing Agag and keeping the spoils of the conflict with the Amalekites. Samuel proclaims, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today” (1 Sam. 15:28).

But our chief concern is that sin brings a person low. “You shall come down lower and lower” (Deut. 28:43). I will explain and illustrate this truth by showing how and why sin brings a person low.

CHAPTER 13

Sin Humbles in This Life: Part 1

Sin brings people low in many ways. We will consider three in this chapter and six in the next.

First, sin brings people low in God's esteem. Sinners set a high price on themselves, but God has low thoughts of them and looks at them with a dreadful eye. "And in his place shall arise a vile person, to whom they will not give the honor of royalty" (Dan. 11:21). Of whom was this spoken? Antiochus Epiphanes. He was a king, and his name signifies *illustrious*. Some people worshipped him. But in God's account, he was "a vile person." Speaking of the wicked, the psalmist says, "They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt" (Ps. 14:3). In the Hebrew, it is, "They have become a stench." This shows us how low sinners have fallen in God's account. God compares them to "chaff" and "dross" (Pss. 1:4; 119:119). He compares them to a pot boiling with scum (Ezek. 24:6); a dog, which is unclean under the law (2 Peter 2:22); and a serpent, which is a cursed creature (Gen. 3:14; Matt. 23:33).

Sinners are worse than serpents, for God has put the venom into a serpent, but the devil has put wickedness into the hearts of sinners. "Why has Satan filled your heart?" (Acts 5:3).

There is a story from long ago of a woman who always used a flattering mirror to look at herself. One day, by chance, she saw her face in a true mirror, and it drove her mad. A sinner thinks well of himself while looking at himself in the flattering mirror of presumption. But if he knew how disfigured he truly was in God's sight, he would abhor himself in the dust.

Second, sin brings people low in their intellect. It has eclipsed our rational part. Darkness is now upon the face of this deep. Since the fall, the lamp of reason has burned dim. "For we know in part" (1 Cor. 13:9). There are many knots in nature that are difficult to untie. "By what way is light diffused, or the east wind scattered over the earth?" (Job 38:24). How do the bones grow in the womb (Eccl. 11:5)? Many of these are paradoxes that we do not understand. The "key of knowledge" was lost at the Tree of Knowledge (Luke 11:52).

This is especially true in sacred matters. We are enveloped in ignorance. A sword is against our right eye (Zech. 11:17). How much of the sea can a nutshell hold? How much of God can our intellect contain? "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7). Who can fully comprehend the mystery of the Trinity? Who can fathom

the mystery of the hypostatic union? And how must we seek saving and heart-transforming knowledge until God's Spirit lights our lamp (1 Cor. 2:14)?

Third, sin brings people low in affliction (Ps. 107:39). Adam's sin brought him low. It banished him from paradise. "In those days the LORD began to cut off parts of Israel" (2 Kings 10:32). Sin makes God cut people short in their spiritual and civil liberties. Sin is the womb of sorrow and the grave of comfort. Sin turns the body into a hospital; it causes fever and ulcers. Sin buries the name, consumes the estate, and pulls away near relations as limbs from our bodies. Sin is the Trojan horse from which a whole troop of afflictions comes. Sin drowned the old world, destroyed Sodom, and made Zion captive in Babylon. "Jerusalem has sinned gravely, therefore she has become vile" (Lam. 1:8). Sin closed off God's compassion. "You have slain them in the day of Your anger, You have slaughtered and not pitied" (Lam. 2:21). Israel sinned and refused to repent, and God killed and did not pity. Sin is the great humbler. Did not David's sin bring him low? "There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin" (Ps. 38:3). Did not Manasseh's sin bring him low? It changed his royal crown into chains (2 Chron. 33:11). Because Nebuchadnezzar sinned, God caused him to live like an animal (Dan. 4:33).

Sin is like the Egyptian reed, too feeble to support us but sharp enough to wound us. "The people of Noph

and Tahpanhes have broken the crown of your head" (Jer. 2:16). The Egyptians were not warlike but weak, yet even they were too hard for Israel, and they made a spoil of her. "Have you not brought this on yourself, in that you have forsaken the LORD your God when He led you in the way?" (v. 17). Is it not your sin that has brought you low?

Not only does sin bring people low in affliction, but it also embitters affliction. Sin puts teeth into the cross. Guilt makes affliction heavy. A little water is heavy in a leaden vessel, and a little affliction is heavy in a guilty conscience.

CHAPTER 14

Sin Humbles in This Life: Part 2

In the previous chapter, we considered three ways in which sin brings people low. Here we will examine six more.

First, sin brings people low in melancholy. This is a dark humor seated in the brain. Some people have strange and dismal thoughts, imagining that their bodies are made of glass and that if anyone touches them, they will break. Melancholy clothes the mind in gloom. It puts a Christian so out of tune that he is unfit for praise or prayer. When wet, the strings of a lute will not sound. The same is true of those who are under the power of melancholy. They cannot sing and make melody in their heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19). When the mind is troubled, it is unfit to work. Melancholy disturbs reason and weakens faith. Satan targets this state of mind. He bathes himself in it with delight. Through the black spectacles of melancholy, everything appears black. When a Christian looks at sin, he says, "This monster will devour me." When he looks at ordinances,

he says, "These will only increase my guilt." When he looks at affliction, he says, "This gulf will swallow me up." Melancholy creates fears in the mind. It excites jealousies and misapprehensions. "There they are in great fear where no fear was" (Ps. 53:5).

Second, sin brings people low in spiritual plagues. It leads many people to a seared conscience. "For the LORD has poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes" (Isa. 29:10). People are brought low, indeed, when the sound of Aaron's bell will not awaken them. No sermon will stir them. They are like the blacksmith's dog, which can sleep near the anvil when all the sparks fly about. Conscience is in a lethargy. Once a person's speech is gone and his feeling is lost, he is getting close to death. Likewise, once the checks of conscience cease, and a person is no longer sensible of their sin or God's wrath, he is past all hope of recovery. You might as well ring the bell announcing his death. Some people are brought low in this way to the threshold of damnation.

Third, sin brings people low in temptation. Paul began to be proud, and "a messenger of Satan" was sent to "buffet" him (2 Cor. 12:7). Some people think it was a visible apparition of Satan, tempting him to sin. Others believe that the devil assaulted Paul's faith, making him think he was a hypocrite. Satan laid the temptation to blow up the fort of his grace. And this temptation was so sore that he called it "a thorn in the flesh" (v. 7). It

caused him great anguish. The godly often fall into such temptations. They are tempted to question the truth of God's promises or the truth of their own graces. Sometimes, they are tempted to blaspheme, sometimes to harm themselves. In this way, they are brought low. They are almost gone, and the devil nibbles at their heel, but God wards off the blow from their head.

Fourth, sin brings people low in desertion. This is an abyss, indeed. "You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths" (Ps. 88:6). Desertion is a short hell. "My beloved had turned away and was gone" (Song 5:6). Christ knocked, but the spouse was unwilling to rise from her bed of sloth and open to him. As a result, Christ was gone. When the devil finds a person sleeping, he enters. But when Christ finds him sleeping, He is gone. If this Sun of Righteousness withdraws His golden beams from the soul, darkness follows. Desertion is God's arrow shot into the soul. "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me; my spirit drinks in their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me" (Job 6:4). In their wars, the Scythians used to dip their arrows in the blood and gall of snakes so that their venomous heat might torture the enemy even more. So, the Lord shot His poisoned arrow of desertion at Job. His spirit lay bleeding under the wounds. The Scripture describes God as a light and fire. The deserted soul feels the fire but does not see the light. It is so dreadful that the most tormenting pains are but a pleasure in

comparison. All the delights under the sun will give no comfort in this condition. Worldly things can no more relieve a troubled mind than a silken stocking can ease a broken leg. "I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught" (Ps. 88:15). It is said that Martin Luther, in a time of desertion, was like a dying man. He had no blood in his face or words in his mouth. His body seemed dead.

Fifth, sin brings people low in despair. This is a gulf into which only reprobates fall. "And they said, 'That is hopeless!'" (Jer. 18:12). Despair is a millstone tied around the soul that sinks it in perdition. Despair looks on God not as a father, but as a judge. It refuses the remedy. Other sins need Christ, but despair rejects Him. It closes Christ's wounds so that no blood will come out to heal. This is the voice of despair: "My sin is greater than God's mercy can pardon." It makes the wound broader than the bandage. Despair is an affront to God. It is sacrilege. It robs Him of His crown jewels: His power, goodness, and truth. Satan triumphs when he sees the honor of God's attributes laid in the dust by despair. Despair casts away the anchor of hope, and then the soul sinks. What will a ship do in a storm without an anchor? Despair locks people up in impenitence. I have read of a man who died in despair. He made his will as follows: "I yield my goods to the king, my body to the grave, and my soul to the devil." "Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth" (Isa. 38:18). Those who go down into this pit of despair cannot hope for the

truth of God's promise. Such despair grows into horror and raging.

Sixth, sin brings people without repentance into the bottomless pit, and there they are brought low indeed. Sin draws hell at the heels of death. Theologians think the punishment of loss is the worst part of hell, that is, being separated from the beatific vision of God, in whose presence is fullness of joy (Ps. 16:11). The punishment of sense is bad enough. Then wrath will come upon sinners "to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16).

CHAPTER 15

Sin Humbles After This Life

When God's anger is kindled but a little, and a spark of it flies into a person's conscience in this life, it is terrible. But what will it be like when He stirs up all His wrath (Ps. 78:38)? Consider the following.

First, the torments of hell are numerous. We seldom suffer more than one bodily sickness at a time. But in hell, there is a diversity of torments. There is darkness (Jude v. 13). There are bonds and chains (2 Peter 2:4). The binding of the wicked in chains notes that they cannot move from place to place, which might have alleviated their misery a little. They will be tied to the stake, never to stir. Here the wicked can go from one sin to another, but in hell they cannot move from one place to another. Another torment of hell is that "their worm does not die" (Mark 9:44). This is a self-accusing mind. It is torturing, like a poisonous worm gnawing at a person's heart. Those who would not hear the voice of conscience here will be made to feel the worm of conscience in hell.

Second, the torments of hell are severe. It is described as "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). Fire is the most torturing element. Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace was but painted fire compared to this. It is also described as "the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). The language suggests (as it were) that God has been sitting down and devising this torment. The rich man in the parable of Lazarus cries out, "I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:24).

Third, the torments of hell are total. They include both body and soul. That body that was so tender and delicate that it could not bear heat or cold will suffer. The eyes will be tormented with the sight of demons, the ears with the hideous shrieks of the damned, and the tongue that was fired with passion will now have fire enough. "Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue" (Luke 16:24). In addition, all the powers of the soul will be tormented. The mind will apprehend divine displeasure. The memory will remember what mercies have been abused, what means of grace have been slighted, and what heaven has been forfeited. The conscience will be tormented with self-accusations. The sinner will arraign himself for stifling and resisting the motions of the blessed Holy Spirit.

Fourth, the torments of hell are eternal. Scripture asserts that whoever is not purged from sin by Christ's blood will lie under God's wrath for eternity (1 John

1:7). "The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever" (Rev. 14:11). The word "forever" burns hotter than the fire. At death, all our worldly sorrows die, but the torments of hell are as long-lived as eternity. "In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them" (Rev. 9:6). They will be always dying, but never dead. Here the wicked thought that saying a prayer and keeping the Lord's Day were too long (Amos 8:5). But how long will it be to lie in hell forever? There will be no way back.

Fifth, the torments of hell are constant. In other words, they are without intermission. A person in pain does not feel it while he is asleep. But there is no sleeping in hell. What would the damned give for one hour of sleep? There is no rest in the next life (Rev. 4:8). In outward pain, there is some abatement; the burning fit is sometimes off, and the sick patient is more at ease than he was. But the damned soul never says, "I have more ease." Those infernal pains are always acute and sharp; there are no cooling fits in those inflammations.

Sixth, the torments of hell are maddening. The wicked will see the godly advanced to a kingdom, while they themselves are devoted to misery. "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28). Sinners will see those whom they hated and scorned set at Christ's right hand and crowned with glory, while they

are cast out to the demons. The ungodly will see those whom they censured and persecuted sitting as their judges and joining with Christ in condemning them. How this will aggravate their misery and make them gnash their teeth in envy! "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2).

Seventh, the torments of hell are merciless. The wicked will have no one to sympathize with them in hell. It is some comfort to have friends console us in our suffering, but no one will show any compassion to the damned. Mercy will not pity them. Mercy abused turns to fury. God the Father will not pity them; He will laugh at them (Prov. 1:26). Christ will not pity them; they slighted His blood, and now His blood cries against them. The angels will not pity them; they delight to see God's justice glorified. The saints will not pity them. "The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance" (Ps. 58:10). Their closest relations on earth will not pity them. The father will not pity his child, nor the wife her husband. The reason is because the glorified saints have their wills made perfectly subject to God's will, and when they see that His will is done, they rejoice, even if it is in the damning of their closest relations.

Does not sin bring people low when it brings them to hell? They "have gone down to hell with their weapons of war; they have laid their swords under their heads, but their iniquities will be on their bones" (Ezek. 32:27).

CHAPTER 16

Why Sin Humbles

Having considered how sin brings people low, I will now show you why.

First, sin brings people low because it is a disease. Consider a man with the healthiest constitution and the brightest complexion. If sickness gets into him, it brings his body low. Beauty withers, and the silver cord begins to be loosed. It is the same with the soul. Our soul was once of a dazzling brightness—the mind was heavenly, the will was crowned with liberty, and the affections burned in love for God. But sin entered like a disease, and it brought us low (Isa. 1:6). Our soul has fallen from its pristine dignity. It has lost its noble and sublime operations, and now it lies exposed (without grace) to the second death.

Second, sin brings people low because it enters a contest with God. The sinner tramples upon God's law and crosses His will. If God is of one mind, the sinner is of another. The sinner does all he can to spite God. "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name

of the LORD, we will not listen to you! But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven" (Jer. 44:16–17). The same Hebrew word for *sin* signifies *rebellion*. Will God endure being confronted by proud dust? God will never let His own creatures rise up in arms against Him. He will pull down sinners and bring them low. "With the devious You will show Yourself shrewd" (Ps. 18:26). The Hebrew literally states, "You will wrestle." If God wrestles with the sinner, He will certainly throw him to the ground. When the angel wrestled with Jacob, He merely touched the hollow of his thigh (Gen. 32:25). But when God wrestles with a sinner, He will "tear open their rib cage" (Hos. 13:8). The author of the book of Hebrews says that it is good to fall into God's hands when He is a friend but terrible to fall into His hands when He is an enemy (Heb. 10:31).

Third, sin brings people low because it labors to bring God low. It is true that God cannot lose any of His essential glory. He is so high that no strength of mortals can reach Him. Yet a wicked man does what lies within him to bring God low. (1) He has low thoughts of God. He slights God's sovereignty, questions His truth, and looks upon all His promises as a forged deed. The sinner, therefore, is said to despise God (Num. 11:20). (2) He lessens God in the thoughts of others. They say, "The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land" (Ezek. 8:12). They think that if they can hide themselves from the eyes

of others, then God will take no notice of sin. They do not need to trouble themselves, because God does not see them. He "has forsaken the land." They say, "'The LORD will not do good, nor will He do evil'" (Zeph. 1:12). They think that anyone who serves God must not look for a reward, and anyone who does not serve Him need not fear punishment. They say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them.... Where is the God of justice?" (Mal. 2:17). Here they blemish God's holiness. In effect, they say, "God is not so holy. He bears as much favor to the wicked as to the good. Where is the God of judgment?" Truly, they tax God's justice. It is as if they had said, "God does not order things right. He does not weigh matters impartially in an equal balance. Where is the God of judgment?" This is how a sinner eclipses the glory of God and labors to bring Him low in the thoughts of others.

Besides all that, the sinner does all that he can to eradicate God. He wishes there were no God. He says, "Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease" (Isa. 30:11). If he could, a wicked man would not only unthrone God but undo God. God would no longer be God. If a sinner is so impious as to endeavor to bring God low, it is no wonder that God brings him low! "I will dig your grave, for you are vile" (Nah. 1:14). "'Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,' says the LORD" (Obad. v. 4).

Fourth, sin brings people low because God has an antipathy against it. He does not hate a man because he is poor or despised. You do not hate your friend because he is sick. That which draws forth God's hatred is sin. "Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!" (Jer. 44:4). Whoever embraces that which God hates will be undone in the end. The cherishing of sin makes God's "fury" show in His "face" (Ezek. 38:18). When His wrath is kindled, it burns to the lowest hell. The psalmist asks, "Who can stand before His cold?" (Ps. 147:17). We might ask, Who can stand before His heat, or "everlasting burnings" (Isa. 33:14)?

Fifth, sin brings people low because it exposes them to God's curse. "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: 'Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country'" (Deut. 28:15-16). The curse of God haunts the sinner wherever he goes. If he is in the city, it spoils his trade. If he is in the country, it destroys his crop. God's curse drops poison into everything. It is moths in the wardrobe, disease among the cattle, and rot among the sheep. When Christ cursed the fig tree, it withered right away (Matt. 21:19). Men's curses are insignificant; they shoot without bullets. But he whom God curses is cursed (Num. 22:6). God's curse kills. "Those cursed by Him

shall be cut off" (Ps. 37:22). If all God's curses are leveled against the sinner, then he must be brought low.

God does not punish people or nations without a cause. A father might chastise his son out of anger when there is no cause, but God never punishes without a just cause. He does not punish merely to show His sovereignty or because He takes pleasure in bringing His creatures low. "He does not afflict willingly" (Lam. 3:33). The Hebrew literally means, "He does not punish from the heart." There is always a cause. In the case of the Israelites, they were brought low because of their iniquity. "Like keepers of a field they are against her all around, because she has been rebellious against Me," says the LORD" (Jer. 4:17). Jerusalem was so besieged with enemies that there was no escape. "Your ways and your doings have procured these things for you. This is your wickedness" (v. 18). "Why do you cry about your affliction? Your sorrow is incurable. Because of the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins have increased, I have done these things to you" (Jer. 30:15). They sharpened the sword that wounded them. They twisted together the cords that pinched them. They can thank their sin for all of it. There is always a cause why God brings someone low. There is no reason why God should love us, but there are many reasons why He should punish us.

CHAPTER 17

The Evil of Sin

“You have stumbled because of your iniquity” (Hos. 14:1). Sin lays people low in the grave and (without repentance) in hell too. It is the gall in our cup and the gravel in our bread (Prov. 20:17). Sin and punishment are linked together with unbreakable chains. Sin is a coal that not only blackens but also burns. Sin runs men into the briars. “Among the bushes they brayed” (Job 30:7). Sin conjures up all the winds; it raises all the crosses that befall us and all the storms in our conscience. Sin first tempts and then damns—it is first a fox and then a lion (Luke 16:24). Sin does to a person as Jael did to Sisera. She gave him milk, and then she brought him low. “She stretched her hand to the tent peg, her right hand to the workmen’s hammer; she pounded Sisera, she pierced his head, she split and struck through his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still” (Judg. 5:26–27). Sin first brings its pleasures with delight and charms the senses, and then it comes with its nail and hammer. Sin does to the sinner as Absalom did to Amnon. When Amnon’s

heart was merry with wine, Absalom killed him (2 Sam. 13:28). Sin's last act is always tragic.

How evil a thing is sin that it not only brings a people low, but it makes God bring them low. "I will cause My fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged" (Ezek. 5:13). God takes no delight in punishing. "His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel" (Judg. 10:16). He is like a father who, with tears, chastises his child. But God was so provoked that He causes His "fury to rest upon them," and He is "avenged." O, what a cursed thing is sin that it makes a merciful God seek vengeance in the destruction of His own creature!

We have little cause to wonder why sinners are brought low. As Peter says, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you" (1 Peter 4:12). A sick person may as well wonder why he is in pain as a sinful person wonder why he is afflicted. Do not the clouds cause thunder? Is it any wonder that our sins, ascending like clouds, provoke God's thundering voice? Sin is a debt (Matt. 18:24). Is it any wonder that a person who is in debt is arrested? People should never wonder that God arrests them with His judgments when they are so deeply in debt. Sin is walking contrary to God. If people walk contrary to God, is it any wonder that He walks contrary to them? "If you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on

you seven times more plagues, according to your sins" (Lev. 26:21).

Oh, sinner, do not wonder why it is so bad with you, but wonder why it is not worse! Are you in the depth of affliction? It is a wonder that you are not in the depth of hell. If Christ was brought low, is it any wonder that you are brought low? Christ was brought low in poverty; the manger was His cradle, and the cobwebs were His curtains. He was brought low in temptation; so soon as He was out of the water of baptism, He was in the fire of temptation (Matt. 4:1). He was brought low in His agonies; He sweat blood in the garden and shed blood on the cross. If Christ, who knew no sin, was brought low, do you wonder that you, who are so full of sin, are brought low? "Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" (Lam. 3:39). You are a sinner, and do you wonder or murmur that you are afflicted? Sin does as naturally draw punishment to itself as a magnet draws iron.

CHAPTER 18

The Humbling of a Nation

They “were brought low for their iniquity” (Ps. 106:43). We see this text fulfilled in our day. Sin has brought our nation low. We are falling, if not outright dying. We do not lack for sin. There is a spirit of wickedness in the land. Ours are “mighty sins” (Amos 5:12). We have many Sodoms among us. By our impiety and blasphemy, we have sounded a trumpet of rebellion against heaven. If our sins were engraved on our foreheads, we would be ashamed to look up. People invent new sins. They are “inventors of evil things” (Rom. 1:30). Some invent new errors, while others invent new snares. This age exceeds former ages in sinning. Sin is an old trade, but people are more skilled in the trade and have grown more expert in sin than those who are now dead. In former times people were blunderers at sin compared to what they are now. They are cunning at self-damnation. “They are wise to do evil” (Jer. 4:22). They sin with “greediness” (Eph. 4:19). They drink iniquity like water (Job 15:16). They have

grown rampant in wickedness, having laid aside the veil of modesty. "The unjust knows no shame" (Zeph. 3:5).

Because sin is so high, it will bring us low. While the body is feverish, it cannot thrive. Our society is in the burning fever of sin, and thus it must be brought low. Wars. Fires. Diseases. These have broken out among us. Our splendor and magnificence have been brought low and laid in the ashes.

"Sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). There was a time when God made the sheaves of other nations bow down to our sheaf (Gen. 37:7). But our fame and renown have been eclipsed. "I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways" (Mal. 2:9). Trading has been brought low. Many people's estates have been boiled to nothing. Their gourd is withered, and their container of oil fails. "I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty" (Ruth 1:21). Sin has brought other nations low, and do we think we will escape? "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23). As a bloodhound, it pursues us.

CHAPTER 19

Pride

What sins have brought this nation so low? The first is pride. “A man’s pride will bring him low” (Prov. 29:23). Pride runs in the blood. Our first parents aspired to be like God. They did not content themselves with knowing God, but they would know as God. Augustine calls pride “the mother of all sin.” The Persian kings commanded that their image be worshipped by all who entered Babylon. The Roman emperors required that they be adored as gods. Pride sullies our virtues and poisons our mercies. The higher we lift ourselves in pride, the lower God casts us down. “The LORD will destroy the house of the proud” (Prov. 15:25). There are two kinds of pride.

First, there is spiritual pride. Some people take pride in their gifts. God enriches us with gifts suitable to the places to which He calls us. But pride fumes from the heart to the head, and it makes people giddy. Herod was proud of his public speech, and he assumed the glory for himself. His pride brought him low, and he was eaten by worms (Acts 12:23).

Others take pride in their duties. This worm breeds in sweet fruit. "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:12). They have said so many prayers and heard so many sermons that they think they have made amends to God. They assume He is beholden to them. They believe that God will accept them for their religious performances. What is this but pride? Is not this to make a Christ of our duties? The devil destroys some people by making them neglect duty, and he destroys others by making them idolize duty. The infirmity that humbles me is far better than the duty that makes me proud.

Still others take pride in their graces. This is strange. Grace is given to the humble, and so why would anyone be proud of grace? But pride does not arise from the grace in us, but from the corruption. It arises not from the strength of holiness but from the weakness of unholiness.

There are two occasions when even Christians may be guilty of being proud of their graces. (1) When they place too much stress on their grace. Peter says, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble" (Matt. 26:33). Here was a twofold pride: He thought he had more grace than the rest of the apostles, and he placed such weight on his grace that he set his hope on it. He leaned more on his grace than on Christ. (2) When they slight others whom they view as inferior in grace. Instead of the strong bearing with

the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1), they are ready to despise the weak. Our Savior saw this pride breeding in His own disciples. Therefore, He cautioned them, "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matt. 18:10).

Second, there is a carnal pride. I call it carnal because it is conversant about carnal objects. Some people are proud of their bodies. Pride is seen in long and tedious dressings. People spend that time between the comb and the mirror which they should spend in prayer and holy meditation. Pride is seen in the painting of the face, overlaying God's work with the devil's colors. Pride is seen in the strange fashions with which some people dress (or rather disguise) themselves. They clothe their body like a rainbow with diverse colors. Adam was ashamed of his nakedness. These people should be ashamed of their clothing. Those who are gaudily attired tempt the devil to fall in love with them. Others are proud of their estates. Riches are fuel for pride. "Your heart is lifted up because of your riches" (Ezek. 28:5). People's hearts rise with their estates as the boats on the River Thames rise higher with the tide.

Now, all this pride will bring a person low. For this sin, God strikes many with turmoil and so levels the mountain of pride. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Where pride leads the way, destruction brings up the rear.

CHAPTER 20

Carelessness

Another sin that has brought this nation low is carelessness, as seen in our neglect of five things.

Neglecting the Sabbath. God gave the Sabbath as a “sign” to distinguish His people from the profane (Ex. 31:17). The early Christians used to ask one another, “Have you kept the Lord’s Day?” They would answer, “I am a Christian. I dare not omit the celebration of this day.” God has commanded the observance of the Lord’s Day under a penalty. He has enclosed this day for Himself. He has set a hedge about it. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8).

But the Lord’s Day has become common. This blessed day, which was instituted purposely for communion with God, has become a day of wandering. People frequent the fields and taverns more than the assemblies of God’s people. “Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night” (Jer. 9:1). That we might weep to see people pollute what God has consecrated! If they are to engage

in recreation, they choose the Lord's Day. If they are to make feasts or pay visits, they choose this day. They call the Sabbath a delight in a profane sense (Isa. 58:13). Sabbath-breaking is sacrilege. It is robbing God of His due. They take time that should be dedicated wholly to the Lord and spend it in the service of the devil and their lusts. Has not this sin brought us low? God threatens, "If you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day... then I will kindle a fire...and it shall not be quenched" (Jer. 17:27).

Neglecting the home. Family worship has been brought low. There is no reading of Scripture. People often spend more time with a deck of cards than the Bible. There is no praying. It is a characteristic of a reprobate that he does "not call on the LORD" (Ps. 14:4). The atheist ensures that his prayer never turns into sin because he never prays at all. The Greeks sought counsel from their pretend gods through their oracles, the Persians through their magi, the Gauls through their druids, and the Romans through their priests. Will all these pray, and Christians will not? By the instinct of nature, creatures cry to God (Ps. 147:9). Keys that are often used are bright. But if they are laid aside and never used, they grow rusty. It is the same with people's hearts. If they are not accustomed to family prayer, they will be rusted over with sin.

For this neglect, God has brought us low. How can we expect to receive a blessing from God if we never ask for it? Do we expect God to do more for us than He

did for His own Son? "In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, [He] was heard because of His godly fear" (Heb. 5:7).

Neglecting the covenant. "They did not keep the covenant of God, they refused to walk in His law.... He made a path for His anger; He did not spare their soul from death, but gave their life over to the plague" (Ps. 78:10, 50). Does not the poisonous weed of covenant violation grow in our soil? Did we not make a vow in baptism to fight under Christ's banner against the world, the flesh, and the devil? Did we not solemnly covenant to be the Lord's people, to shine in holiness, to seek an exemplary reformation? "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deut. 5:29). We have much conforming, but where is the reforming? Do we not oppose Christ in His kingly office? This is the great controversy: Who will reign, sin or Christ? Because of our neglect, we may fear lest God makes good on His warning, "I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant" (Lev. 26:25).

Neglecting the gospel. Israel despised the manna. "Our soul loathes this worthless bread" (Num. 21:5). Are we sick with Israel's disease? Does the Bread of Life make us nauseous? The gospel is the visible token of God's

presence. It is the sacred conduit pipe that empties the golden oil of mercy into us. It is the glass in which we see the face of Christ. It is the celestial banquet with which God cheers and refreshes the souls of His people (Isa. 25:6). But people with itching ears know not whom to hear. Has not our curiosity brought us to scarcity? God had no better way to raise the price of the gospel than by abating the plenty. God has brought us low by suffering so many hundreds of lights to be put under a bushel all at once. The ancient Egyptian priests told the people that, when an eclipse occurred, the gods were angry, and that great miseries would follow. What sad catastrophes have ensued from this spiritual eclipse is not unknown!

Neglecting the means. We have experienced a barrenness under the means of grace. "Israel empties his vine; he brings forth fruit for himself" (Hos. 10:1). We have had much pruning and dressing. The silver drops of heaven have fallen on us, but we have not brought forth the fruits of humility and repentance. We can discourse about religion, but this is only to bring forth leaves, not fruit. Non-proficiency has laid us low, and we may fear it will lay us waste. God may pull up the hedge and let in a wild boar. What man will sow seed in the barren ground? If God sees no good return, the next word will be, "Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?" (Luke 13:7).

CHAPTER 21

Covetousness, Uncleanness, and Bitterness

Here we will consider three additional sins that have brought this nation low.

The first is covetousness. When people's spirits are low, and they lick the dust with the serpent, God lays them in the dust. "For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him" (Isa. 57:17). Covetousness is the swelling of the soul. People are set on the world when God is plucking it from them. Covetousness is a key that opens the door to further wickedness. "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). A covetous person will not hold back from any sin. It led Absalom to attempt to dethrone his father. It led Ahab to have Naboth stoned to death. And how is a person the better for all his wealth at death? "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (vv. 7–8). When the rich miser dies,

what scrambling is there? His friends are scrambling for his goods, the worms are scrambling for his body, and the demons are scrambling for his soul. This sin is most uncomely in those who profess better. They claim to live by faith, and yet they are as worldly and griping as others. These are spots on the face of religion. "Do you seek great things for yourself?" (Jer. 45:5). God has brought us low because of this sin. He has made our fig tree wither and allowed the worm to eat our vine.

The second sin is uncleanness. The adulterer's heart is a Mount Etna burning with lust. Adultery is the shipwreck of chastity, the murder of conscience. It was said of Rome of old that it had become a brothel. I wish it might not be so in many parts of this land. (1) Adultery is a brutish sin. "They were like well-fed lusty stallions; every one neighed after his neighbor's wife" (Jer. 5:8). (2) It is a branded sin. Not only does it stigmatize people's names (Prov. 6:33), but also God makes them carry the marks of this sin in their bodies. (3) It is a costly sin. "By means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread" (Prov. 6:26). (4) It is a confounding sin. It comes joyfully but departs sorrowfully. The adulterer hastens his own death. The Romans used to convene their funerals at the gate of Venus's temple to signify that lust ends in death. The adulterer takes a shortcut to hell. "For a harlot is a deep pit, and a seductress is a narrow well" (Prov. 23:27). Creatures void of reason will rise in judgment against such as these. The turtledove is

a symbol of chastity. The stork comes into no nest but its own, and if any stork leaves its mate and joins with another, all the rest fall upon it and pluck its feathers. God will chiefly punish "those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness" (2 Peter 2:10). This sin has brought us low. The fire of lust has kindled the fire of God's anger.

The third sin is bitterness. There is much unbrotherly animosity. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand" (Matt. 12:25). What seeds of dissension are sown among us! We have crumbled into parties. One is for Paul, and another for Apollos, but I fear few are for Christ. Our divisions have given much advantage to the adversary. When a breach is made in the wall of a castle, the enemy enters. If the enemy enters, it will be at our breaches. These divisions have cut the lock where our strength lay. Cut off the top of the beech tree, and the whole body of the tree withers. Divisions have taken away unity and amity. The top of the beech tree has been cut off, and it has made us wither.

These are the sins that have brought us low.

CHAPTER 22

The Folly of Sinners

If sin brings a person low, then what madness it is for anyone to be in love with sin! Oh, the foolishness of those who take “pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2:12)! The devil can so cook and prepare sin that it pleases the sinner’s appetite. But hear what Job says: “Though evil is sweet in his mouth, and he hides it under his tongue, though he spares it and does not forsake it, but still keeps it in his mouth, yet his food in his stomach turns sour; it becomes cobra venom within him” (Job 20:12–14). Sin brings a person low. Who would love such an enemy? The forbidden fruit is sauced with bitter herbs. Sin is a serpent by the way it bites (Gen. 49:17). When you are about to commit sin, say to your soul, “If you will have the sweet of sin, you must have the curse with it.” It will bring you low. To love sin is to love a disease. A sinner is perfectly distracted. Solomon speaks of a generation, “Madness is in their hearts while they live” (Eccl. 9:3). It is true of those who love sin. Sin puts a worm into conscience and a thorn into death. That people should love

sin is madness in their hearts! There is no creature that willingly destroys itself except for man. Oh, remember that saying of Augustine: "The pleasure of sin is soon gone, but the sting remains."

We see what little cause we have to envy sinners. "Do not envy the oppressor, and choose none of his ways" (Prov. 3:31). People are high in worldly grandeur. God has given them large estates, and they sin with their estates. But even if they build among the stars, God brings them down. "I turned you to ashes upon the earth" (Ezek. 28:18). Who would envy their greatness? Their sins will bring them low. "Their foot shall slip in due time" (Deut. 32:35). There is a story of a Roman soldier who was condemned to die for breaking his rank to steal a bunch of grapes. As he was going to his execution, some of the soldiers envied him for eating the grapes while they had none. He said to them, "Do you envy me for my grapes? I must pay dear for them." So, the wicked must pay dear for what they have.

The prosperity of the wicked is a great temptation to the godly. The psalmist stumbled at it. "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. 73:2-3). We are ready to murmur when we see ourselves low, and we are ready to envy when we see the wicked high. Sinners live in a serene climate, under a perpetual calm. "They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men.... Their eyes

bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish" (Ps. 73:5, 7). This prosperous state of the wicked is a matter of pity rather than envy. Their sins will bring them low. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Isa. 14:12). It is spoken of Babylon, "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans!... Take the millstones and grind meal" (Isa. 47:1-2). So, God will say to the wicked, "Come down from all your pomp and glory, sit in the dust, sit among the damned, and there grind at the mill!" God will proportion torment to all the pleasure the wicked have enjoyed. "In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow" (Rev. 18:7).

If God brings His own people low for sin, then how low will He bring the wicked? David went down into the deep waters (Ps. 69:2), and Jonah went down to "the moorings of the mountains" (Jonah 2:6). If so, what a gulf of misery will swallow up the wicked! God's people do not allow themselves to live in sin (Rom. 6:2). They tremble at it, they hate it, yet they suffer. If those who blush at their failings are brought low, what will become of those who boast of their scandals? If this is done to the green tree, what will be done to the dry tree? If the godly lie down amid affliction, the wicked will lie among the devils. If judgment begins at the house of God, "what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of

God" (1 Peter 4:17)? If God mingles His people's cup with wormwood, He will mingle the sinner's cup with fire and brimstone (Ps. 11:6). If God threshes the wheat, He will burn the chaff. If He afflicts those whom He loves, how severe will He be against those whom He hates? They will feel "the second death" (Rev. 21:8).

CHAPTER 23

The Beauty of Grace

We see the great difference between sin and grace. Sin brings a man low, but grace lifts him high. Sin tumbles him in the ditch, but grace sets him on the throne. "I will set him on high, because he has known My name" (Ps. 91:14). Grace raises a person in four ways.

First, grace raises a person's desire. His designs are high. He does not look at things that are seen (2 Cor. 4:18). His eye is above the stars. He aims at the enjoyment of God. A carnal mind is much taken with the things of this world, but a saint passes by them with holy contempt. His business is with God. "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). A Christian aspires after the things within the veil. His ambition is the favor of God. He looks no lower than a crown. He is in the heights, and he trades among the angels.

Second, grace raises a person's reputation. It embalms his name. "By [faith] the elders obtained a good testimony" (Heb. 11:2). How renowned were the godly

patriarchs for their holiness! Moses for his meekness, Job for his patience, Phinehas for his zeal. What a fresh perfume does their name send forth to this day! A good name is a saint's heir. It lives after he is dead.

Third, grace raises a person's worth. The righteous person is more excellent than his neighbor (Proverbs 12). A Christian is in God's eye as the flower of the rose in spring, as the fat of the peace offering, as the precious stones on Aaron's breastplate. Grace has an internal worth and is of great value. It does not only make a person's name shine, but it puts real worth into him. He is more excellent than his neighbor. A heart full of love for God is precious. It is God's delight (Isa. 62:4). It is the apple of His eye. It is His jewel. It is His garden of spices. It is His lesser heaven where He dwells. "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit" (Isa. 57:15).

Fourth, grace raises a person's privilege. It advances him into the heavenly family. By grace, he is born of God (1 John 3:1). He is a prince in all the earth (Ps. 45:16), though in this world he is like a prince in disguise. He is "the highest of the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:27). In short, grace lifts a person up where Christ is, far above all heavens (Eph. 4:10). And grace also raises a nation. "Righteousness exalts a nation" (Prov. 14:34).

CHAPTER 24

Fearing Sin

Since sin brings a person low, we see how foolish it is to commit sin to avoid trouble. “Take heed, do not turn to iniquity, for you have chosen this rather than affliction” (Job 36:21). This was a false charge against Job, but many may be indicted of such folly. They choose iniquity rather than affliction. To avoid poverty, they will lie and deceive. To avoid prison, they will comply against their conscience. What carelessness is this when sin draws such dark shadows after it and brings misery upon all its heirs and successors! By committing sin to avoid trouble, we meet with greater trouble.

To save himself from suffering, Origen sprinkled incense before an idol.¹ Later, when preaching, he stumbled upon this text, “What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you

1. Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–253) was a Christian scholar who produced hundreds of works on Scripture, theology, and philosophy.

hate instruction and cast My words behind you?" (Ps. 50:16–17). At the sight of this Scripture, he began weeping, and he was so stricken with grief that he was unable to speak a word to the people. He came down from the pulpit. Oh, what unparalleled folly it is to choose sin rather than affliction. Affliction is like a tear in the coat, and sin is like a tear in the body. He who saves himself from trouble and commits sin is like one who lets his body be torn to save his mantle. Affliction has a promise made to it, "You will save the humble people; but Your eyes are on the haughty, that You may bring them down" (2 Sam. 22:28). But no promise is made to sin.

Surely, then, those who choose sin rather than suffering choose a greater evil to avoid a lesser evil. They choose to run to the paw of a lion to avoid the sting of a gnat.

Let us fear to come anywhere near sin. It will bring us into affliction or worse. Its foul face may offend, but its breath kills. Oh, that we were as wise for our souls as we are for our bodies! How afraid are we of that food that we know will make us sick! Sin will put our conscience into a shaking fit, and are we not afraid to touch this forbidden fruit? "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9).

When the empress threatened to banish Chrysostom, he responded, "Tell her that I fear nothing but sin." It was a saying of Anselm² that if hell were on one side

2. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) was a medieval philosopher,

and sin were on the other, he would leap into hell rather than willingly commit sin. Love will quickly become unrestrained if it is not poised with holy fear. There is no better curb or antidote against sin than fear. "And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously" (Deut. 17:13). If we could see hellfire in every sin, it would make us fear to commit it. The fiercest creatures dread fire. When Moses's rod was turned into a serpent, he was afraid and fled from it. Sin will prove a stinging serpent. Oh, run from it! Most people are like the Leviathan, "made without fear" (Job 41:33). They play beside the hole of the venomous snake. Sinners never fear until they feel. Nothing will convince them but fire and brimstone.

theologian, and Benedictine monk. He was also Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109. He is known for his philosophical contributions to understanding the nature of God and the relationship between faith and reason.

CHAPTER 25

Exercising Wisdom

Sin brings a person low. Thus, we should behave wisely when we are brought low under God's afflicting hand. When our condition is low, our passions must not be high. Impatience is not the way to get out of trouble but to go lower into trouble. Oh, do not utter a murmuring word against God! Murmuring is the scum that boils up from a discontented heart. "I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did it" (Ps. 39:9). David's ear was open to hear the voice of the rod, but his mouth was not open in complaining. Christian, you should not complain of anyone but yourself. Your own sin has brought you low.

Here is what we must do when we are brought low. First, let us search for the sin that is the cause of our trouble. "Show me why You contend with me" (Job 10:2). What sin has provoked God to bring you low? "Let us search out and examine our ways" (Lam. 3:40). When the people of Israel were defeated in battle, they searched for the cause. At last, they discovered that Achan had

troubled them, and they stoned him to death (Josh. 7:18–25). So, let us search for the Achan that has troubled us. Perhaps our sin was censoriousness; we have been quick to judge and slander others, and now we lie under an evil tongue and have false reports raised against us. Perhaps our sin was pride, and God has sent poverty as a thorn to humble us. Perhaps our sin was negligence in holy duties; we had forgotten our first love and were ready to fall into slumbering fits, and God has sent a sharp cross to awaken us out of our security. We may oftentimes read our sin in our punishment. Oh, let us say as Job, “If I have done iniquity, I will do no more” (Job 34:32).

Second, when we are brought low, let us justify God. He is just, not only when He punishes the guilty but also when He afflicts the righteous. Let us take heed of entertaining hard thoughts of God as if He had dealt too severely with us and had put too much bitterness in our cup. Let us vindicate God and say, “The LORD is righteous in all His ways” (Ps. 145:17). Let us speak well of God. We may have many afflictions, but we never have one drop of injustice. “Clouds and darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne” (Ps. 97:2).

Third, when we are brought low in affliction, let us bring ourselves low in humiliation. “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God” (1 Peter 5:6). When we are in the valley of tears, we must be in the valley of humility. “Remember my affliction and roaming, the

wormwood and the gall. My soul still remembers and sinks within me" (Lam. 3:19–20). If our condition is low, then it is time to have our hearts lie low.

Fourth, when we are brought low in affliction, let us be low upon our knees in prayer. "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD" (Ps. 130:1). "Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us! Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us, for we have been brought very low" (Ps. 79:8). Jacob never prayed so fervently as when he was in fear of his life. He oiled the key to prayer with tears. "He wept, and sought favor from Him" (Hos. 12:4). One reason why God lets us be brought low is to heighten a spirit of prayer.

But what should we pray for in affliction? Let us pray that all our hell may be here on earth. Pilate said concerning Christ, "I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go" (Luke 23:22). So, let us pray that God, when He chastises us, will let us go, that He will free us from hell and damnation. Let us pray for the sanctification of affliction rather than its removal. Let us pray that the rod may be a divine pencil to draw God's image livelier upon our souls (Heb. 12:10), that affliction may be a furnace to refine us, not consume us. Let us pray that, if God corrects us, it may not be in anger (Ps. 6:1), that we may taste the honey of His love at the end of the rod. Let it be our prayer that God will lay no more upon us than He will enable us to bear (1 Cor. 10:13), that if the burden is heavier, our shoulders may be stronger.

Fifth, when we are brought low in affliction, let our faith be high. Let us believe that God intends us no hurt. Though He casts us into the deep, He will not drown us. Let us believe that He is still our Father. He afflicts us with as much mercy as He gives Christ to us. By His rod of discipline, He fits us for the inheritance (Col. 1:12). Oh, let this star of faith appear in the dark night of affliction! Jonah's faith was never more in heaven than when he lay in the belly of hell (Jonah 2:2).

CHAPTER 26

Welcoming Affliction

Sin brings a person low. Thus, we should labor to be bettered by the experience. Pick some good out of the cross. Get some honey out of this lion (Judg. 14:9). The wicked are worse for affliction. Weeds stamped in a mortar are more unsavory. “Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the LORD” (2 Chron. 28:22). But let us labor to be made better by affliction. Christ learned obedience by what He suffered (Heb. 5:8). If we are brought low in affliction and derive no good from it, then the affliction is lost. How are we bettered by affliction?

First, our eyes are opened. We are not only chastened but taught (Ps. 94:12). Wormwood is bitter to the taste, but it is good to clear the eyesight. Our spiritual eyesight is cleared when we see two things. (1) God’s holiness. He hates sin. He will not suffer evil in His children to go unpunished. If they make light of sin, He will make their chain heavy (Lam. 3:2). (2) Our sinfulness. We see more of our hearts than we did before. We

see that earthliness, impatience, and distrust of God that we did not discover before. We never thought we had such a flux of corruption or that there had been so much of the old man in the new. Sin lays hidden in the heart. But the fire of affliction makes the scum of sin boil up. When our eyesight is thus cleared, and both the rod and the lamp go together, we are bettered by affliction.

Second, our hearts are softened. Affliction is God's furnace, in which He melts His gold. "I will refine them and try them" (Jer. 9:7). We are bettered by affliction when our eyes are more watery, our thoughts are more serious, and our consciences are more tender—when we can say as Job, "God made my heart weak" (Job 23:16). This melting of the heart, by which we are fitted to receive the impression of the Holy Spirit, is a blessed sign we are bettered by affliction.

Third, our wills are subdued. "I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against Him" (Mic. 7:9). Why does God bring us low if not to tame our cursed hearts? A wicked person is a beast of war. When he is brought low, he quarrels with God. Therefore, he is compared to an antelope in a net (Isa. 51:20). If you go to touch him, he frets and tears. So, when God rubs a wicked man by affliction, he frets and tears himself with vexation. "They will be enraged and curse their king and their God" (Isa. 8:21). But when our spirits are calmed, and we are brought to a sweet submission to God's will,

we accept the punishment (Lev. 26:41). In patience we possess our souls (Luke 21:19). We say as Eli, "It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him" (1 Sam. 3:18). I know this trial is in mercy. God will afflict me rather than lose me. Let Him hedge me with thorns if He will plant me with flowers. "Let Him do what seems good to Him." Now, we are bettered by the affliction.

Fourth, our sin is purged out. "This is all the fruit of taking away his sin" (Isa. 27:9). Our hearts are sinful, our gold is mixed with dross, our stars with clouds. When affliction consumes pride, formality, and hypocrisy, when God's lance lets out our spiritual corruption, then we are bettered by affliction.

Fifth, our hearts are severed from the world. Many who have escaped the rocks of scandalous sins have been cast away upon the golden sands. Has not the love of the world become almost an epidemic disease? If God bestows a plentiful estate on people, they are likely to make an idol of it. Therefore, God is forced to take out of their hand that which kept Him out of their heart. When He afflicts in that which we love most, He hits us in the apple of our eye, and our hearts grow more dead to the world and adoring to Christ. When God has been withering our gourd and our affections begin to wither, when He has been digging about our root and we are more loosened from the earth, then we are bettered by affliction.

Sixth, our appetite for Scripture is increased. Perhaps in health and prosperity, we seldom read the Bible. If

we do read it, it is in a dull and cursory manner. By embittering the creature, God makes us run to His promise, so that we can say with David, "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103). Solomon says, "Truly the light is sweet" (Eccl. 11:7). But we can say, "Truly God's Word is sweet." We have tasted Christ in a promise, and the Word has caused an exuberance of joy (Ps. 19:8). This is the manna on which we love to feed. Every leaf of Scripture drops myrrh, and each is a rich cordial that cheers our spirits. When it is thus, we are bettered by our trials (Ps. 119:50).

Seventh, our title to heaven is confirmed. In prosperity, we are more careless in getting (at least, in clearing) our spiritual title. People would be upset if the evidence of their ownership of their land was no better than their evidence for heaven. For many, their evidence for glory is either forged or blotted. They are unable to read any discriminating work of God's Spirit in themselves. They are pendulous, hanging in doubtful suspense, not knowing whether they have grace or not. When we are brought low in affliction and fall to the work of self-examination, we see how matters stand between God and our souls. We turn over every leaf of the book of conscience. We make a critical examination of our hearts. After a thorough survey, we say that we know "the grace of God in truth" (Col. 1:6). We say that we have received the holy anointing (1 John 2:27). Certainly, this is to be bettered by affliction.

Eighth, we grow more fruitful in grace. A Christian should be like the olive tree, "Lovely and of Good Fruit" (Jer. 11:16). A good Christian has the fruits of grace wrapped up in the leaves of his profession. After pruning, what fruits have we produced? Obedience, love, self-denial, meekness, heavenly-mindedness, longing to be with Christ? If the sharp frost of affliction has brought on the spring flowers of grace, which the apostle calls "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11), then we are bettered by affliction. A fruitful heart is better than a full crop.

Ninth, we are compassionate to those who are in a suffering condition. Having suffered, Christ can "sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb. 4:15). Having felt hunger and cold, He knows how to pity us. Before drinking from the bitter cup, we are ready to despise others rather than pity them. "Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorn of those who are at ease, with the contempt of the proud" (Ps. 123:4). But when we have been under the plow, we can sympathize with our suffering brethren, and we can weep with those who weep. This is a sign we are bettered by the affliction.

CHAPTER 27

Blessing God

“The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). Many people can bless God when He is giving. But Job blesses Him when He takes away. This is excellent, to praise God when we are not only upon the mountain of prosperity but in the valley of adversity. “When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD” (Deut. 8:10). But it is a greater matter, when we are empty and in need, to bless Him. “In everything give thanks” (1 Thess. 5:18).

But why should we bless God in affliction? We are to bless God because it is no worse with us. He might have put more gall in our cup (Ezra 9:14). We are to bless God because He chooses to correct us in the world rather than condemn us with the world (1 Cor. 11:32), He makes affliction a means to prevent sin, He proportions our strength to our trials, and He gives us support in our trouble (Ps. 112:4). Though He does not break our yoke, He lines our yoke with inward peace and makes it soft and pleasant. We are to bless God because

He deals with us as children, setting His seal of affliction on us and so marking us as His own. We are to bless God because Christ has taken the sting out of the cross and there is a hope of better things laid up for us in heaven (Col. 1:5).

When we break forth in holy gratitude and triumph in affliction, it shows that “the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon [us]” (1 Peter 4:14).

To bless God in heaven when He crowns us with glory is no wonder, but to bless God when He corrects us, to bless Him in a prison, to give thanks on a sickbed, not only to kiss the rod but to bless the hand that holds it, here is the sun in its zenith. This speaks of a high degree of grace indeed, and it does adorn our sufferings.

If we can find these sweet fruits of the cross, we may assure ourselves that the affliction is sanctified. We may say as David, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted” (Ps. 119:71). And then, God will throw away the rod and make us glad after the days of our mourning. “I will lay to rest My fury toward you, and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more” (Ezek. 16:42).

CHAPTER 28

Hating Sin

Since sin brings us low, let us labor to bring our sin low. Let all our spite be aimed at it. Let us pursue it with holy malice. Sin has brought us to the dust, and it would bring us lower into the abyss of hell. Let us, therefore, shed its blood. “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5).

We are inclined to plead for sin: “Is it not a little one?” Who would plead for someone who seeks his life? We are ready to say to the minister concerning sin, as David said to Joab concerning Absalom, “Deal gently...with the young man” (2 Sam. 18:5). “Deal gently with my sins. Oh, be not too sharp in your reproofs!” Why? Does not sin seek to take away your crown of glory, as Absalom sought to take away his father’s crown? Would it not bring you low? If, therefore, you are wise, spare it not. Do with your sin as Joab did with Absalom. He took three spears in his hand and thrust them through Absalom’s heart (2 Sam. 18:14). So, take these three spears—the Word of God,

prayer, and mortification—and strike through the heart of your lusts so that they die.

The Philistines brought Samson low and put out his eyes. He never rested until he was avenged. “And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it” (Judg. 16:30). Samson died. But we live by the death of our enemies. Oh, that every day, some member of the old man would fall off! What is the end of all Christian duties, praying and hearing, if not to weaken and mortify lust? Sin will plead for a reprieve, but you must show it no mercy. Saul spared Agag, and it cost him the kingdom. If you spare sin, you will lose the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER 29

Cherishing Glory

Since sin brings us low, let us make ourselves weary of living in this world. While we live here, we sin, and sin brings us low. This should make us long to be rid of our past and cry out, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove to fly away and be at rest!" Then we will shake off those vipers that leap upon us. Death is ours (1 Cor. 3:22). At death, we will have an eternal jubilee and be free of all encumbrances.

Sin will be no more. Death smites a believer as the angel smote Peter on his side and made his chains fall off (Acts 12:7). So, death smites a believer and makes the chains of his sins fall off.

Trouble will be no more. This lower region is full of storms. Troubles and vexations are some of the thorns with which the earth is cursed. But in the grave, a believer has his discharge. "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest" (Job 3:17). God will shortly "wipe away every tear" (Rev. 7:17). This should

make us “desire to depart” (Phil. 1:23). When we are with Christ, we will never again be brought low.

Oh, the felicity of glorified saints! They have a full-eyed vision of God. And those refulgent beams of glory are darted from His blessed face, delighting and ravishing their hearts with ineffable joy. After death, the saints will be forever nourished with the aromatics and perfumes of their Savior’s love.

The Duty of Self-Denial

CHAPTER 30

Introduction

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Word is compared to a lamp for its illuminating quality (Ps. 119:105) and to refined silver for its enriching quality (Ps. 12:6).

Among other parts of sacred Scripture, this is not the least: “Then He said to them all, if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). These words drop from the lips of Christ, the Oracle of Truth. In the preceding verse, our Savior foretells of His passion: “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” Christ’s suffering is set down in two expressions. (1) He must be rejected. He is “the stone which the builders rejected” (Ps. 118:22). (2) He must be killed. He who gave life to others must first die.

As Christ thus denied Himself for us, so we must deny ourselves for Him. He says to us all: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself." Self-denial is the foundation of godliness. If this is not well laid, the building will fall.

Let me begin by explaining the words.

"Then He said to them all." Self-denial is universal. It concerns all. It respects both ministers and their people. Christ spoke these words to His apostles as well as to the rest of His hearers.

"If anyone desires to come after Me." We are to follow Him as a soldier follows his general if we are to arrive at that place of glory where He has gone.

"Let him deny himself." We are to lay aside (or reject) ourselves. Self-denial is a kind of self-annihilation.

Christ's words contain two parts. (1) A supposition: "If anyone desires to come after Me." (2) An injunction: "Let him deny himself." It carries in it the force of a command. It is as if a king should say, "Let it be enacted!"

Now, here is the doctrine I want to consider: A Christian must be a self-denier. He must deny his carnal self, which is as near to him as himself. It is as the apple of his eye. This carnal self consists of five parts.

CHAPTER 31

Self-Reliance

The first part is self-reliance. Some people exalt their reason, making it the rule and standard of faith. It is common to hear people say, "What reason finds absurd must be false." But the knowledge that there is a God, and that He is to be worshipped, is a law written in the heart of man (Rom. 1:18–20). It is, therefore, agreeable to reason. But God's nature is such a secret that reason can no more find it out than the Philistines could solve Samson's riddle (Judg. 14:14). "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7). These "deep things" include both doctrines and duties.

Doctrines. First, can you discover the doctrine of the Trinity? The well is too deep, and who can fathom it with the plumb line of reason? The persons in the Trinity are distinguished but not divided. They are three

subsistences, but one essence. The Trinity is purely an object of faith. Some truths in religion are demonstrable by reason; for example, we should flee from vice, and we should do to others as we would have them do to us. But the Trinity of persons in the unity of essence is a divine revelation, and we must assent to it by faith. Those brilliant philosophers who could discourse about the magnitude and influence of the stars, the nature of plants and minerals, could not by their deepest investigation find out the mystery of the Trinity. This is wholly supernatural and must be adored with humble faith.

Second, the doctrine of the incarnation. That a virgin should conceive! That He who is eternal should be born! That He who rules the stars should feed from His mother's breasts! That there should be two natures yet one person! That the divine nature should not be transfused into the human nature, yet the human nature should be assumed into the person of the Son of God, so that the human nature is not God yet one with God! Here reason must be denied.

Third, the doctrine of the resurrection. The dead body may crumble into a thousand fractions, and its ashes may be scattered in the air, yet it will rise again. This is above reason to imagine. The Epicureans and Stoics derided Paul when he preached to them of the resurrection (Acts 17:32). Here, reason must be taken captive. "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice" (John 5:28).

The chemist can, out of several metals mingled together, extract the one from the other—the silver from the gold, the tin from the silver—and can reduce every metal to its own species. So, when our bodies are mixed with other substances, the wise God can make a sudden extraction and clothe every soul with its own body. If the same body did not rise, it would be a creation rather than a resurrection. Why would anyone think it incredible that God should raise the dead (Acts 26:8)? God can do it because of His power (Matt. 22:29). And He cannot but do it because of His truth.

These doctrines of faith do not oppose reason but transcend it.

Duties. Carnal reason quarrels with many duties in religion.

God says that it is a person's glory "to overlook a transgression" (Prov. 19:11). But carnal reason says, "No, it is cowardice." The heathens thought it gallantry of spirit to avenge injuries.

God says that the paths of holiness are strewn with roses. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17). But carnal reason says, "No, the way of holiness is severe. It requires me to crucify my delights and drown my mirth in tears."

God says that religion is rewarding. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). This contentment arises from God's favor. "Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor" (Prov. 3:16). The

way to be prosperous is to be pious. But carnal reason says, "No, if I follow the trade of religion, I will break."

When it comes to the duties of religion, carnal reason must be denied. Those who will go no further than reason will come well short of heaven.

Conclusion. A Christian must deny all self-reliance and self-confidence. Self-confidence indicates folly. Peter relied too much on his own strength. "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble" (Matt. 26:33). But how soon was his confidence shaken and blown down with the breath of a maid! "He denied with an oath, 'I do not know the Man!'" (Matt. 26:72). Peter's denial of Christ was for lack of denying himself. Self-jealousy is good. "Do not be haughty, but fear" (Rom. 11:20). The trembling reed often stands when the confident cedar falls. He who knows the fierceness of a trial and the falseness of his heart will fear.

How many professors of religion have shone as stars in the church's hemisphere yet proved to be falling stars? Judas was one of them. We must deny self-confidence. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). It is just with God that he who trusts in himself will be left to himself.

Being weak, the vine twists around the elm to support it. A Christian, being conscious of his own foolishness, twists by faith around Christ. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

CHAPTER 32

Self-Righteousness

The second part of the carnal self is self-righteousness. The will is the great wheel in the soul that moves all the affections. In innocence, it was regular. It echoed God's will. But since the fall, though it retains its freedom in moral actions, it is depraved in spiritual actions. "If the will could cease from sinning," says Bernard, "there would be no hell."¹ The greatest wound has fallen upon the will. Thunder and lightning cause the point of the needle in the mariner's compass to stand wrong. Human nature, being corrupted by sin, causes the will to point wrong. It inclines to evil. There is in the will not only impotence but obstinance. "You always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51).

We must deny our will and submit it to God's will. If a crooked stick is set on level ground, we do not attempt

1. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) was an abbot and cofounder of the Knights Templar. He is perhaps best known for his commentary on the Song of Solomon.

to bring the ground even with the stick; rather, we make the stick even with the ground. Likewise, God's will is not to be conformed to ours, but our will, being crooked, must be conformed to God's will. We pray, "Your will be done" (Matt. 6:10). The way to have our will is to deny it.

Related to this, a Christian must deny his duties and his good works. His desire is to "gain Christ and be found in Him, not having [his] own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phil. 3:8-9). The spider weaves a web out of her own bowels. A hypocrite would spin a web of salvation out of his own righteousness. But Paul, like the bee, sucked salvation from the flower of Christ's righteousness. "All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). Our best duties are tainted with sin. When we put gold in the fire, dross comes out. Our most golden services are mixed with unbelief. By pouring sweet odors into the prayers of the saints (Rev. 8:3), the angel shows that they are unsavory and require Christ's sweet odors to perfume them.

This shows us that our duty is to trust in Christ's righteousness for salvation. Noah's dove made use of her wings to fly but trusted the ark for safety.

If we must deny our holy things in point of justification, then much more our external civility. A stake may be finely painted, but it has no root. A person may be painted with civility, but he has no root of grace. A civil person is washed, not changed. The life may be civil

when the heart is wicked, as the sea may be calm when its water is salty. The Pharisee could say that he was not an adulterer (Luke 18:11), but could he say that he was not proud? The civilized person may have a secret antipathy against goodness. He may hate grace as much as vice. Civility is but a cracked tile to heaven. A piece of brass may shine, but without the king's image, it will not be accepted as money. A person may shine with moral virtues, but without the image of God consisting in holiness, he will not stand at the day of judgment. Morality is good, but God will say, "One thing you lack" (Mark 10:21). Civility is a good Jacob's staff for use in walking among men, but it is a bad Jacob's ladder for use in climbing up to heaven.

CHAPTER 33

Self-Conceit

The third part is self-conceit. “Should a man full of talk be vindicated?” (Job 11:2). In the Hebrew, it is literally, “Should an empty (or hollow) man be vindicated?” Man is a proud piece of flesh. He is inclined to have a high opinion of himself.

“But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great” (Acts 8:9). Those who view themselves in the flattering mirror of self-love appear bigger in their own eyes than they are. They think their spark is a sun and their drop is an ocean. They are highly conceited of their intelligence, humor, and abilities, and they are ready to despise others (Luke 18:9).

We must deny self-conceit. “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). That we may deny all high and

haughty thoughts of ourselves, we should consider the following.

First, self-conceit is no small sin. Chrysostom calls it "the mother of hell." It is a kind of idolatry, a self-worshipping.

Second, self-conceit forgets that every noble endowment is borrowed. All our gifts, abilities, and strengths are borrowed from heaven. Would a wise man be proud of a jewel that is lent? "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). The moon has no cause to be conceited of her light, for which she is beholden to the sun.

Third, self-conceit forgets that all acuteness of wit or wisdom of judgment come far short. We come far short of the knowledge that Adam had in innocence. He was the oracle of wisdom. He could unlock nature's dark cabinet and discover those secrets that escape us. Adam had a full inspection into the causes of things. He was a kind of earthly angel. But how far short do we come of him! Our knowledge is checkered with ignorance. There are many hard knots in nature that cannot easily be untied. He who sees most clearly has mist before his eyes. By eating the Tree of Knowledge, we lost the key to knowledge.

We come far short of the knowledge that Satan has. We read of Satan's "depths" (Rev. 2:24) and "devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). Satan is an intelligent spirit. Though he has lost his holiness, he has not lost his knowledge. Though he has lost his breastplate, he has not lost his headpiece.

He has enough intelligence to deceive the nations (Rev. 20:3). His understanding is nimble, and compared to ours, it is like the swift flight of an eagle rather than the slow motion of a snail. Why, then, should we be puffed up with conceit regarding our knowledge?

We come far short of the knowledge of those who are perfected in glory. He who is taller than a dwarf may be shorter than a giant. Those who excel others in natural abilities are of a lower stature than the glorified saints. "We see in a mirror, dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12). But the saints in heaven have a full-eyed vision of God. Their light, which burned here like fire when it is smothered, is now blown up into a pure flame. A glorified infant knows more than the most profound teachers on earth. In heaven, all shadows fly away because the Sun of Righteousness arises with His illustrious beams. This may pull down the plumes of self-conceit.

Fourth, self-conceit forgets that our dark side is broader than our light side. Our ignorance is far more than our knowledge. Our knowledge is but as the light of a torch, while our ignorance is as the darkest night. "How small a whisper we hear of Him!" (Job 26:14). To think that we can comprehend God is to hold the ocean in our hand. The greatest part of our knowledge is not so much as the least part of our ignorance. This should demolish all high imaginations. We have no reason to be conceited on account of our knowledge. Instead, we should be humbled for what we lack.

Fifth, self-conceit ignores the hell of sin that we carry with us. Sin is the “accursed” thing (Josh. 7:1). It is the quintessence of evil. It is like a stain to beauty. What if we have knowledge? Sin eclipses it. Our knowledge does not so much adorn us as sin does debase us.

Sixth, self-conceit is contrary to God’s grace. Grace can never thrive where pride grows. As a body cannot thrive if diseased, so the soul cannot thrive if it is swelled with pride and conceit. A proud head makes a barren heart.

Seventh, self-conceit is odious, and it lessens any worth in a person. It is like a cloud in a diamond. The more one values himself, the less God and angels value him. Let a person be eminent, if he is self-conceited, he is loved by no one. He is like a physician who has the plague. Though he may be admired for his skill, no one wants to come near him.

Eighth, self-conceit is the way to ruin. God often allows them to fall into some great sin. Peter was well conceited of himself, as if he had more grace than all the other apostles. But the Lord let him fall. Peter denied Christ with an oath (Matt. 26:74). He called down a curse on himself. The Lord sometimes lets conceited persons fall. “The doves,” says Pliny, “take pride in their feathers and in their flying high. But they soar so high that they are an easy prey to the hawk.”¹ So, when peo-

1. Gaius Plinius Secundus (ca. 23–79) was a Roman commander,

ple fly high in self-conceit, they become a prey to the prince of the air.

Let all this make us deny ourselves. Let it kill the worm of self-conceit. If we are proud of our knowledge, the devil cares not how much we know. Let Paul be our pattern. Though he was the chief of the apostles, he calls himself “less than the least of all the saints” (Eph. 3:8). He considered himself to be “nothing” (2 Cor. 12:11). This illustrious apostle, a star of the first magnitude, did shrink into nothing in his own eyes. It is excellent to be like Moses, whose face had a luster on it but “did not know that the skin of his face shone” (Ex. 34:29).

author, scientist, and naturalist. He is best known for his *Natural History*, a thirty-seven-volume work.

CHAPTER 34

Self-Indulgence

The fourth part is self-indulgence. We must give careful attention to our appetites, vices, passions, and lusts.

Appetites. The sensitive appetite is sick with bulimia. It cries, "Give and Give!" (Prov. 30:15). This is in marked contrast to Paul, who disciplined his body (1 Cor. 9:27). More people are hurt by excess in lawful things than by meddling with unlawful things, just as more people are killed by wine than by poison. Many people make their belly their god (Phil. 3:19), and they pour drink offerings to this god. They are devoted to sensuality. Excess in food and drink clouds the mind, chokes good affections, and provokes lust. The rankest weeds grow out of the fattest soil. Intemperance shortens life, as too much oil extinguishes the lamp. Many people dig their own graves with their teeth. Christ cautioned His disciples, "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly" (Luke 21:34). Seneca could say that

“he was born to higher things than to be a slave to his body.”¹ What a shame it is that the soul, that princely thing that sways the scepter of reason and is akin to the angels, should be enslaved to the brutish part! We must deny the sinful cravings of the flesh. God has given us a conscience to be a golden bridle to check the inordinacy of the appetite.

Vices. “The complacency of fools will destroy them” (Prov. 1:32). The flesh is full of sloth and effeminateness. It is reluctant to take pains for heaven. “A lazy man buries his hand in the bowl, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again” (Prov. 19:24). He is hesitant to pluck it out, even to lay hold on a crown. Weeds and vermin grow in untilled ground, and all vices grow in an idle and untilled heart. How can those who never sow any seed expect to reap a harvest of glory? Is Satan so busy in his diocese (1 Peter 5:8), and are Christians idle? Oh, deny your ease! We must force our way to paradise. Let us shake off sloth, as Paul did the viper (Acts 28:5). We must never think that we can be brought to heaven sleeping, like the passengers on a ship are brought to their port. “Arise and begin working” (1 Chron. 22:16). God makes no difference between the slothful servant and the wicked (Matt. 25:26). Such as idle away the day of grace and fold their hands in sleep when they should be

1. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4 BC–AD 65) was a prominent Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman.

working out their salvation will be condemned to a perpetual exile in hell.

Passions. “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (James 1:26). Every member of the body is infected with sin, as every branch of wormwood is bitter. But the tongue is “full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). Augustine compares the tongue to a furnace, and far too often hot sparks of anger fly out of it. The Holy Spirit once descended in “divided tongues, as of fire” (Acts 2:3). But James speaks of a tongue that is set on fire by hell (James 3:6). Some people cannot rule their own spirit; they are carried away with their passions as a chariot with wild horses. Jerome says, “Many people who will not get drunk with wine will get drunk with rash anger.”²

“Anger rests in the bosom of fools” (Eccl. 7:9). Anger may be in a wise man, but it rests in a fool. I know there is such a thing as holy anger against sin, but the fury of passion is the scum that boils up from an unsavory heart. Passion disturbs reason, and it unfits a person for holy duties. Hot passions make cold prayers.

Oh, Christian, deny yourself! Pray that God will “keep watch over the door of [your] lips” (Ps. 141:3). Labor to quench the fire of wrath with a flood of tears. Grace

2. Jerome (ca. 342–420) was an early Christian theologian and historian. He is best known for his Latin translation of the Bible.

does to the passions as Christ did to the sea when it was stormy. He said, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm" (Mark 4:39). Grace turns the fierceness of the lion into the meekness of the dove.

Lusts. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11–12). The Scripture bids us deny ungodly lusts. A Christian must deny his malice, revenge, covetousness, uncleanness, superstition, and heterodoxy. A man may go to hell for a drunken opinion as well as for a drunken life. Let me specifically mention two sins that a Christian must deny.

The first is the sin of rash censuring. "Do not speak evil of one another" (James 4:11). Some people make it a part of their religion to criticize others. You will hear them say, "That person is proud, divisive, hypocritical." But "who are you to judge another?" (v. 12). Augustine would not endure anyone who would detract from someone else's good name. The root of censoriousness is pride. A person thinks that by taking from another's reputation he will add something to his own. He would raise himself upon the ruins of another's fame. But is it not a sin to murder a man in his name? Such critics can spy all faults but their own (Jer. 8:6).

Oh, Christian, look inward! If you were to spend more time viewing your blemishes in the mirror of God's Word, you would not be so ready to throw the stone of

censure at others. We must deny this sin of rash censuring or attacking with the tongue (Jer. 18:18). If you speak reproachfully of your brother without a cause, the time may come when he will be accepted and you rejected. He will be found to be gold, and you will be "rejected silver" (Jer. 6:30).

Second, a Christian must deny his master sin. "I kept myself from my iniquity" (Ps. 18:23). As there is one master bee in the hive, so there is one master sin in the heart. It must be denied. The devil can hold a man fast by one sin, as the jailor can hold the prisoner fast by one chain. One sin is enough to stop the current of mercy. One sin may damn as well as many sins, as one millstone is enough to sink a person into the sea. If there is any lust that we cannot deny, it will be a bitter root, of either scandal or apostasy.

CHAPTER 35

Self-Seeking

The fifth part is self-seeking. A Christian must not look askance in religion and aim at himself more than God.

First, he must not aim at self-enriching. Some people espouse the gospel only for gain. They court this queen not for her beauty, but for her jewels. They regard not the fire of the altar but the gold of the altar. They “suppose that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Tim. 6:5). Judas preached and performed miracles, but his eye was chiefly on the money bag. How many ministers pile benefice upon benefice, minding the fleece more than the flock! Dumb dogs are greedy dogs (Isa. 56:10–11). They make use of the ministry only as a net to catch preferment. This is to be profane in sacred things. It is sordid and unworthy of a Christian to make religion submit to secular interest.

Second, a Christian must not aim at self-applause. The Pharisees were guilty of this. They prayed and gave alms that they might be seen by others (Matt. 6). The oil of vainglory fed their lamp. “Assuredly, I say to you, they

have their reward," declares Christ (v. 5). In every man there is by nature a desire for the glory and applause of the world. Martin Luther confessed that, though he was never tempted with covetousness, he was sometimes tempted with vainglory. Christ's own disciples argued over who would be the greatest (Mark 9:34). Oh, this devil of vainglory! The moth breeds in the finest cloth, and self-seeking breeds in the best duties. Sinister aims corrupt religion. A good aim will not make a bad action good, but a bad aim will make a good action bad.

Those are to blame who take the praise to themselves when they have done any glorious service in the church. There was a professor who, in several lectures, proved strenuously that Christ was God. Hearing the applause, he cried out, "Oh, Jesus, You are beholden to me for Your divinity this day!" Immediately, he was struck with such foolishness and forgetfulness that he could not even utter the Lord's Prayer. Let this cause trembling and humility in Christians. Many ships, having escaped the rocks, have been cast upon the sands. Many who have escaped the rocks of gross scandals have been cast upon the sands of self-seeking.

To have esteem in God's church is a blessing. "By [faith] the elders obtained a good testimony" (Heb. 11:2). Much of the honor of religion depends on the credit of those who profess it. But when self-applause is the only thing we want, honor becomes sin. Popular acclamation is a golden arrow that glistens in the eye

but wounds to the heart. How many have been blown to hell with the breath of popular applause!

Oh, let us deny and abhor this vainglorious humor! We have a famous example in John the Baptist, who sought to exalt Christ and humble himself. "He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me" (John 1:15). It is as if he had said, "I am but the herald, 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness'" (cf. Matt. 3:3). But Christ, who comes after me, is the prince. I am but the morning star, and He is the sun. I baptize only with water, but He baptizes with the Holy Spirit." Thus, he sets the crown of honor upon Christ's head.

When Joab had taken Rabbah, he did not claim the praise for himself, but he sent for David, that he might carry away the glory of the victory (2 Sam. 12:27). So, when any eminent service has been done, the glory should be given to Christ and His grace. It is better that God should approve than that the world should applaud. If we are faithful, we will have enough honor in heaven. Let this be our chief aim in duty, that we may grow more in love with God, and be made more like Him, and have more communion with Him, and bring more revenues of honor to Him. Let our aim be "that in all things God may be glorified" (1 Peter 4:11). We should not only advance but also design God's glory. As all the rivers run into the sea, so all our actions must run into God, the infinite ocean.

CHAPTER 36

Life

In addition to our carnal self (the five parts mentioned above), we must deny our own life. "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26–27).

A willingness to deny the world. When family relations come in competition with or stand in opposition to Christ, we must hate them. When our friends would prove snares and hinder us from doing our duty, we must either leap over them or tread on them. Here, hatred of our own is godliness toward God. Jerome says, "If my wife or my mother should persuade me to deny Christ, I would break from them and fly to the cross." When Peter would be a tempter, Christ said, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Matt. 16:23).

A Christian must also deny his estate for Christ. A carnal heart will commend Christ and profess

Him but will part with nothing for Him. The young man in the gospel was Christ's hearer but not His follower. He claimed the heavenly but sought the earthly. Christ said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). But he went away sorrowful. When riches are joined with a bad heart, they do much hurt. The world lay closer to the young man's heart than Christ did.

Many heathens have denied the world. Will not Christians do much more? Let the wedge of gold be denied for the pearl of price. "See, we have left all and followed You" (Matt. 19:27). A true saint esteems the gleanings of Christ to be better than the world's vintage. "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

A willingness to carry the cross. "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27). Suffering for Christ must be free and spontaneous. Those who suffer unwillingly bear the cross. Those who suffer willingly take up the cross. Christ shows us His cross. If we will not have Him on these terms, the match is not likely to go on. Sufferings will abide with us. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Some people think of reigning with Christ without suffering for Him. Joseph dreamed of his advancement but not of his imprisonment. The flesh cries out, "The cross is uneasy!" But life must be denied, even hated, for Christ. "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). Love to Christ must outweigh life. "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Rev. 12:11). Paul carried the image of Christ in his heart as a saint, the message of Christ in his mouth as a minister, and the marks of Christ in his body as a martyr (Gal. 6:17). The early Christians snatched up torments like crowns, and they were content to shed their blood for Christ, knowing that they should exchange their blood for white robes.

The prophet Isaiah was killed with a saw, Jeremiah with stones, Amos with an iron bar. Luke was hanged on an olive tree. I have read of a church father who was carried to a place where there was a cross on one side and an idol on the other. He was forced to choose between bowing to the idol or suffering on the cross. He chose the latter. I have also read of a young woman who was condemned to the fire. Her tormentors offered her life and estate if she would bow down to an image. She answered, "Let life and money go! Welcome Christ!" Though not every Christian is a martyr, all are prepared to suffer if

God calls. Martin Luther said that he would rather be a martyr than a monarch.

Let us, then, take up the cross! Can wicked people be content to suffer for their lusts, and will we not suffer for Christ? We are to look on our sufferings as a badge of honor. When we are reproached for Christ, "the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon [us]" (1 Peter 4:14). How much more when we die for Him!

Our sufferings for Christ propagate religion. Paul's imprisonment led to "the furtherance of the gospel" (Phil. 1:12). Many in the early church were converted to the faith by beholding the heroic patience and courage of Christians in their sufferings. The cross leads to the crown. "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12). Who would not be willing to venture on the seas, though rough and tempestuous, if he were sure to be crowned as soon as he came ashore? "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Persecutors may take our goods from us, but not our God. They may take our liberty, but not our freedom of conscience. They may take our head, but not our crown (Rev. 2:10).

Those who cannot deny their life for Christ will deny Christ. And those who are ashamed of Christ, of them Christ will be ashamed. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

CHAPTER 37

The Need for Self-Denial

The main reason why we must deny ourselves is that we can be saved no other way. A town or castle may have several ways leading to it, but there is only one way that leads to the celestial paradise, and that is self-denial. Without self-denial, we can never come up to Christ's terms. If the world is not denied, Christ cannot be loved. If self-righteousness is not denied, Christ cannot be trusted. If self-will is not denied, Christ cannot be obeyed. Therefore, self-denial is necessary.

From all that has been said, we see how hard it is to be a Christian. If being a Christian were nothing more than putting on the mantle of profession, it would be easy. Even Satan can transform into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). But a person must deny himself. This self-emptying or self-annihilation is the straight gate through which a Christian must enter the kingdom of God. He is to deny not only those things that are outside him (his worldly profits) but those things that are inside him (his sin and self-righteousness). Self is an

idol, and it is hard to sacrifice this idol. But it must be done. Either the carnal self must be denied, or the natural self will be damned.

This justly condemns those who live in contradiction to Scripture. Instead of denying themselves, they let go of the reins and give themselves to all manner of pleasure and licentiousness. "The heart of fools is in the house of mirth" (Eccl. 7:4). Such are those who do not mortify but gratify the flesh. They "lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on [their] couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall." They "sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments and invent for [themselves] musical instruments like David." They "drink wine from bowls" (Amos 6:4–6). Pleasure enchants people's minds and transforms them into beasts. Are there not many who consume their hours in plays and brothels? It is as if God had made them like the Leviathan, to play in the water (Ps. 104:26). How their countenance will change when God says, "Give an account of your stewardship" (Luke 16:2).

These sensualists live as if there were no world to come. They pamper their bodies but starve their souls. It is as if one should feed his slave but starve his wife. I have heard of an herb-like balm that, if a man eats too much of it, he will die laughing. Such an herb is pleasure. If we feed immoderately on it, we will go laughing to hell. Oh, how many, while they are hunting after worldly pleasures, lose blessedness! There is a

sad cup brewing that will spoil the sinner's mirth. "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down" (Ps. 75:8). This wine is the wrath of God, and it is mixed. The worm and the fire help to mix the cup. God will proportion a sinner's torment to his pleasure. "In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow" (Rev. 18:7).

CHAPTER 38

The Call to Self-Denial

I lament the lack of self-denial in our day. Oh, self-denial, where have you gone? We live in a knowing age, yet few people know how to deny themselves. Selfishness is the reigning sin in the world. This makes the times dangerous. "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves" (2 Tim. 3:1–2). Self-love may have various actions brought against it. It is an enemy to the public. "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" (James 4:1). What about robbery and bribery? Oppression and evasion? They come from those selfish lusts that people cannot conquer. Self-denial is found in so few. It is a rare herb that grows in very few places. "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). We might very well ask, "Will He find self-denial on the earth?" Self-denial is gone on a long journey, and who can tell when it will return?

Oh, Christian, practice this momentous duty of self-denial! Man lost himself in the garden by self-exaltation,

and now he must recover himself by self-denial. Consider these reasons for pursuing self-denial.

First, it is just. How did Christ deny Himself for us? He eclipsed His glory. He "made Himself of no reputation" (Phil. 2:7). What wonderful self-denial was it for Christ to leave His Father's bosom and become man! For Christ to be made flesh was more than for all the angels to be made worms. Christ denied His name and renown. He despised "the shame" (Heb. 12:2). He denied worldly grandeur and riches. "For [our] sakes He became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). The manger was His cradle, the cobwebs His curtains. He denied his life. He "became obedient to the point of death" (Phil. 2:8). It is but just that we should deny ourselves for Christ.

Second, self-denial is a sign of a sincere Christian. Hypocrites may have great knowledge and make fair pretenses, but it is only the sincere saint who can deny himself and lay his life at Christ's feet. This was the touchstone of Moses's sincerity. He denied the pleasures of Egypt and chose affliction over iniquity (Heb. 11:25). I have read of a holy man who was once tempted by Satan. Satan said to him, "Why do you take all these pains? You do not do anything more than I do. You are not a drunkard or adulterer. Nor am I. You watch. I never sleep. You fast. I never eat. What do you more than I?" The man responded, "I tell you, Satan, that I give myself to prayer, nay, even more, I deny myself." Then the devil said, "You go beyond me, for I exalt myself." And so, he vanished.

Third, self-denial is reasonable. If self is an enemy, then it is wisdom to oppose it. There is reasonableness in all God's commands. Why would He have us deny fleshly lusts but because they "war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11)? Why would He have us deny pride but because it is poisonous? "Pride goes before destruction" (Prov. 16:18). Where pride leads the vanguard, destruction brings up the rear. God would have us deny nothing for Him but that which will damn us if we keep it.

Fourth, self-denial will be abundantly compensated. "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Matt. 19:29). If we deny our name and reputation for Christ, God will give us inward peace. There is hundredfold in this life. And He will honor us before the angels. I cannot tell what that amounts to. If we deny our estate to keep our conscience, God will give us a kingdom (Luke 12:32). Those who part with a flower to get a jewel lose nothing. We may lose all we have for Christ yet lose nothing by Him.

CHAPTER 39

The Way to Self-Denial

To make progress in self-denial, we must observe the following.

First, we must be convinced of Christ's incomparable excellence. He has equality and consubstantiality with God the Father (Col. 2:9). He is the quintessence of goodness. He is compared to a head of gold for riches (Song 5:11), to the rose of Sharon for perfume (Song 2:1), to a bright morning star for beauty (Rev. 22:16). Christ is all that God can require for satisfaction or we can desire for salvation. He is fully commensurate to our wants. He has ointment to anoint us, raiment to cover us, and His blood to heal us. We will never deny ourselves for Christ until we see the glory and beauty in Him. Christ is all marrow and sweetness. He is better than life, estate, and heaven.

Second, we must endeavor after a vital principle of grace. Grace does what flesh and blood cannot. Grace teaches us the art of self-denial, which cannot be done by strength of nature. We must labor for three graces.

Humility. A proud person admires himself; therefore, he cannot deny himself. A humble person lays his mouth in the dust. He has lower thoughts of himself than others can have of him. He renounces himself. He opens to God, as the flower to the sun. He will do what God will have him do. He will be what God will have him be. He is like melting wax. God may set what stamp and impression He will on him. The humble man is a self-denier.

Love. Who will not deny himself for a friend whom he loves? He will part with anything he has. He will please him whom he loves, though it is to his own loss. When our hearts are fired with love to Christ, we will stick at nothing for His sake. Love to God devours self-love.

Faith. Abraham was a great self-denier. He left his kindred and country, and he would travel to any place where God would have him. Why was this? It was from his faith. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8). When we believe Christ is ours, and heaven is ours, we will relinquish anything for Christ's sake. The stronger a Christian's faith is, the more eminent will his self-denial be.

Third, we must pray for self-denial. Prayer sets God to work (Ps. 10:17). Let this be your grand request: a self-denying frame of heart. Self-denial does not grow in nature. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to plant this heavenly flower in your soul. Pray as follows: "Lord,

whatever You deny me, do not deny me self-denial. Let me suffer any other loss, even the comforts of the Spirit, but do not deny me self-denial." It is possible to go to heaven without comfort, but it is impossible to go to heaven without self-denial.

