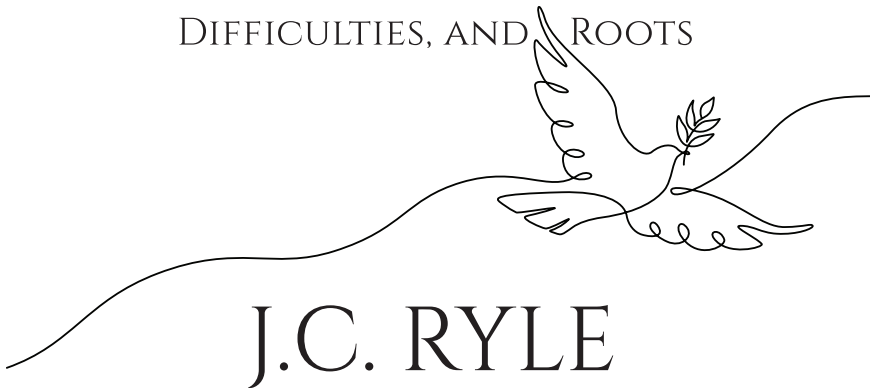


HOLINESS

HOLINESS

ITS NATURE, HINDRANCES,
DIFFICULTIES, AND ROOTS



J.C. RYLE



Generations
PASSING ON THE FAITH

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FOREWORD

One of the most encouraging and hopeful signs I have observed for many a long day in evangelical circles has been a renewed and increasing interest in the writings of Bishop J. C. Ryle.

In his day he was famous, outstanding and beloved as a champion and exponent of the evangelical and reformed faith. For some reason or other, however, his name and his works are not familiar to modern evangelicals. His books are, I believe, all out of print in this country and very difficult to obtain secondhand.

The differing fates suffered in this respect by Bishop Ryle and his near contemporary, Bishop Moule, have always been to me a matter of great interest. But Bishop Ryle is being rediscovered, and there is a new call for the republication of his works.

All who have ever read him will be grateful for this new edition of his great book on holiness. I shall never forget the satisfaction, spiritual and mental, with which I read it some twenty years ago after having stumbled across it in a second-hand book shop.

It really needs no preface or word of introduction. All I will do is to urge all readers to read the Bishop's own Introduction. It is invaluable as it provides the setting in which he felt impelled to write the book.

The characteristics of Bishop Ryle's method and style are obvious. He is preeminently and always scriptural and expository. He never starts with a theory into which he tries to fit various Scriptures. He always starts with the Word and expounds it. It is exposition at its very best and highest. It is always clear and logical and invariably leads to a clear enunciation of doctrine. It is strong and virile and entirely free from the sentimentality that is often described as "devotional."

The Bishop had drunk deeply from the wells of the great classical Puritan writers of the seventeenth century. Indeed, it would be but accurate to say that his books are a distillation of true Puritan theology presented in a highly readable and modern form.

Ryle, like his great masters, has no easy way to holiness to offer us, and no "patent" method by which it can be attained; but he invariably produces that "hunger and thirst after righteousness" which is the only indispensable

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condition to being “filled” (Matt. 5:6). May this book be widely read, that God’s name be increasingly honored and glorified.

—*D. M. Lloyd-Jones, Westminster Chapel, London.*

INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE

The twenty chapters contained in this volume are a humble contribution to a cause which is exciting much interest in the present day—I mean the cause of scriptural holiness. It is a cause which everyone who loves Christ, and desires to advance His kingdom in the world, should endeavor to help forward. Everyone can do something, and I wish to add my mite.

The reader will find little that is directly controversial in these papers. I have carefully abstained from naming modern teachers and modern books. I have been content to give the result of my own study of the Bible, my own private meditations, my own prayers for light, and my own reading of old divines. If in anything I am still in error, I hope I shall be shown it before I leave the world. We all see in part, and have a treasure in earthen vessels. I trust I am willing to learn.

THE NEED FOR A HOLY LIFE

I have had a deep conviction for many years that practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians in this country. Politics, or controversy, or party-spirit,¹ or worldliness, have eaten out the heart of lively piety in too many of us. The subject of personal godliness has fallen sadly into the background. The standard of living has become painfully low in many quarters. The immense importance of adorning “the doctrine of God our Saviour” (Tit. 2:10), and making it lovely and beautiful by our daily habits and tempers, has been far too much overlooked. Worldly people sometimes complain with reason that “religious” persons, so-called, are not so amiable and unselfish and good-natured as others who make no profession of religion. Yet sanctification, in its place and proportion, is quite as important as justification. Sound protestant and evangelical doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life. It is worse than useless: it does positive harm. It is despised by keen-sighted and shrewd men of the world, as an unreal and hollow thing,

¹ party-spirit—factious contention; disunity based on perceived differences.

and brings religion into contempt. It is my firm impression that we want a thorough revival about scriptural holiness, and I am deeply thankful that attention is being directed to the point.

THE CONFUSION

It is, however, of great importance that the whole subject should be placed on right foundations, and that the movement about it should not be damaged by crude, disproportioned, and one-sided statements. If such statements abound, we must not be surprised. Satan knows well the power of true holiness, and the immense injury which increased attention to it will do to his kingdom. It is his interest, therefore, to promote strife and controversy about this part of God's truth. Just as in time past he has succeeded in mystifying and confusing men's minds about *justification*, so he is laboring in the present day to make men darken counsel by words without knowledge about *sanctification*. May the Lord rebuke him! I cannot, however, give up the hope that good will be brought out of evil, discussion will elicit truth, and variety of opinion will lead us all to search the Scriptures more, to pray more, and to become more diligent in trying to find out what is "the mind of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:27).

I now feel it a duty, in sending forth this volume, to offer a few introductory hints to those whose attention is specially directed to the subject of sanctification in the present day. I know that I do so at the risk of seeming presumptuous, and possibly of giving offense. But something must be ventured in the interests of God's truth. I shall therefore put my hints into the form of questions, and I shall request my readers to take them as "Cautions for the Times" on the subject of holiness.

THE QUESTIONS

1. I ask, in the first place, ***whether it is wise to speak of faith as the one thing needful, and the only thing required, as many seem to do nowadays in handling the doctrine of sanctification?*** Is it wise to proclaim in so bald, naked, and unqualified a way as many do, that the holiness of converted people is by faith only, and not at all by personal exertion? Is it according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.

That faith in Christ is the root of all holiness...

- that the first step towards a holy life is to believe on Christ,
- that until we believe we have not a jot of holiness,

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- that union with Christ by faith is the secret of both beginning to be holy and continuing holy,
- that the life that we live in the flesh we must live by the faith of the Son of God,
- that faith purifies the heart,
- that faith is the victory which overcomes the world,
- that by faith “the elders obtained a good report” (Heb. 11:2)

All these are truths which no well-instructed Christian will ever think of denying. But surely the Scriptures teach us that in following holiness the true Christian needs personal exertion and work as well as faith. The very same apostle who says in one place, “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God,” says in another place, I fight, I run, “I keep under my body”; and in other places, “Let us cleanse ourselves...let us labour...let us lay aside every weight” (Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 9:26-27; 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 4:11; 12:1).

Moreover, the Scriptures nowhere teach us that faith *sanctifies* us in the same sense, and in the same manner, that faith *justifies* us! Justifying faith is a grace that “worketh not,” but simply trusts, rests, and leans on Christ (Rom. 4:5). Sanctifying faith is a grace of which the very life is action: it “worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), and, like a main-spring, moves the whole inward man. After all, the precise phrase “sanctified by faith” is only found once in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus said to Saul, “I send thee...that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:17-18). Yet even there I agree with Alford, that “*by faith*” belongs to the whole sentence, and must not be tied to the word “sanctified.” The true sense is, “that by faith in me they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified.” (Compare Acts 26:18 with 20:32.)

As to the phrase “holiness by faith,” I find it nowhere in the New Testament. Without controversy, in the matter of our justification before God, faith in Christ is the one thing needful. All that simply believe are justified. Righteousness is imputed “to him that worketh not, but believeth” (Rom. 4:5). It is thoroughly scriptural and right to say “faith alone justifies.” But it is not equally scriptural and right to say “faith alone sanctifies.” The saying requires very large qualification. Let one fact suffice. We are frequently told that a man is “justified by faith without the deeds of the law,” by Paul (Rom. 3:28). But not once are we told that we are sanctified

by faith without the deeds of the law. On the contrary, we are expressly told by James that the faith whereby we are *visibly and demonstratively* justified before man, is a faith which “if it hath not works, is dead, being alone”² (Jam. 2:17). I may be told, in reply, that no one of course means to disparage “works” as an essential part of a holy life. It would be well, however, to make this more plain than many seem to make it in these days.

2. I ask, in the second place, *whether it is wise to make so little as some appear to do, comparatively, of the many practical exhortations to holiness in daily life which are to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the latter part of most of St. Paul’s epistles?* Is it according to the proportion of God’s Word? I doubt it.

That a life of daily self-consecration and daily communion with God should be aimed at by everyone who professes to be a believer; that we should strive to attain the habit of going to the Lord Jesus Christ with everything we find a burden, whether great or small, and casting it upon Him—all this, I repeat, no well-taught child of God will dream of disputing. But surely the New Testament teaches us that we want something more than *generalities* about holy living, which often prick no conscience and give no offense. The *details* and particular ingredients of which holiness is composed in daily life, ought to be fully set forth and pressed on believers by all who profess to handle the subject. True holiness does not consist merely of believing and feeling, but of doing and bearing, and a practical exhibition of active and passive grace. Our tongues, our tempers, our natural passions and inclinations—our conduct as parents and children, masters and servants, husbands and wives, rulers and subjects—our dress, our employment of time, our behavior in business, our demeanor in sickness and health, in riches and in poverty—all these are matters which are fully treated by inspired writers.

They are not content with a general statement of what we should believe and feel, and how we are to have the roots of holiness planted in our hearts. They dig down lower. They go into particulars. They specify minutely what a holy man ought to do and be in his own family, and by his own fireside, if he abides in Christ. I doubt whether this sort of teaching is

2 There is a double justification by God: the one authoritative, the other declarative or demonstrative. The first is St. Paul’s scope, when he speaks of justification by faith without the deeds of the law. The second is St. James’ scope, when he speaks of justification by works. —Thomas Goodwin, *Gospel Holiness, Works*, vol. 7, p. 181.

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sufficiently attended to in the movement of the present day. When people talk of having received “such a blessing,” and of having found “the higher life,” after hearing some earnest advocate of “holiness by faith and self-consecration,” while their families and friends see no improvement and no increased sanctity in their daily tempers and behavior, immense harm is done to the cause of Christ. True holiness, we surely ought to remember, does not consist merely of inward sensations and impressions. It is much more than tears, and sighs, and bodily excitement, and a quickened pulse, and a passionate feeling of attachment to our own favorite preachers and our own religious party, and a readiness to quarrel with everyone who does not agree with us. It is something of the image of Christ, which can be seen and observed by others in our private life, habits, character, and doings (Rom. 8:29).

3. I ask, in the third place, *whether it is wise to use vague language about perfection, and to press on Christians a standard of holiness as attainable in this world, for which there is no warrant to be shown either in Scripture or experience?* I doubt it.

That believers are exhorted to perfect “holiness in the fear of God”—to “go on unto perfection,” to “be perfect”—no careful reader of his Bible will ever think of denying (2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 6:1; 2 Cor. 13:11). But I have yet to learn that there is a single passage in Scripture which teaches that a literal perfection, a complete and entire freedom from sin, in thought or word or deed, is attainable, or ever has been attained, by any child of Adam in this world. A comparative perfection, a perfection in knowledge, an all-round consistency in every relation of life, a thorough soundness in every point of doctrine—this may be seen occasionally in some of God’s believing people. But as to an absolute literal perfection, the most eminent saints of God in every age have always been the very last to lay claim to it! On the contrary, they have always had the deepest sense of their own utter unworthiness and imperfection. The more spiritual light they have enjoyed, the more they have seen their own countless defects and shortcomings. The more grace they have had, the more they have been “clothed with humility” (1Pet. 5:5).

What saint can be named in God’s Word, of whose life many details are recorded, who was literally and absolutely perfect? Which of them all, when writing about himself, ever talks of feeling free from imperfection? On the contrary, men like David and St. Paul, and St. John declare in the strongest

language that they feel in their own hearts weakness and sin. The holiest men of modern times have always been remarkable for deep humility. Have we ever seen holier men than the martyred John Bradford, or Hooker, or Ussher, or Baxter (1615-1691), or Rutherford (1600-1661), or M'Cheyne (1813-1843)? Yet no one can read the writings and letters of these men without seeing that they felt themselves "debtors to mercy and grace" every day, and the very last thing they ever laid claim to was perfection!

In face of such facts as these, I must protest against the language used in many quarters, in these last days, about perfection. I must think that those who use it either know very little of the nature of sin, or of the attributes of God, or of their own hearts, or of the Bible, or of the meaning of words. When a professing Christian coolly tells me that he has got beyond such hymns as "Just As I Am," and that they are below his present experience, though they suited him when he first took up religion, I must think his soul is in a very unhealthy state! When a man can talk coolly of the possibility of "living without sin" while in the body, and can actually say that he has "never had an evil thought for three months," I can only say that in my opinion he is a very ignorant Christian! I protest against such teaching as this. It not only does no good, but does immense harm. It disgusts and alienates from religion far-seeing men of the world, who know it is incorrect and untrue. It depresses some of the best of God's children, who feel they never can attain to "perfection" of this kind. It puffs up many weak brethren, who fancy they are something when they are nothing. In short, it is a dangerous delusion.

4. In the fourth place, *is it wise to assert so positively and violently, as many do, that the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans does not describe the experience of the advanced saint, but the experience of the unregenerate man, or of the weak and unestablished believer?* I doubt it.

I admit fully that the point has been a disputed one for eighteen centuries, in fact ever since the days of St. Paul. I admit fully that eminent Christians like John and Charles Wesley, and Fletcher, a hundred years ago, to say nothing of some able writers of our own time, maintain firmly that Paul was not describing his own present experience when he wrote this seventh chapter. I admit fully that many cannot see what I and many others do see: viz., that Paul says nothing in this chapter which does not precisely tally with the recorded experience of the most eminent saints in every age, and that he does say several things which no unregenerate man or weak

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believer would ever think of saying, and cannot say. So, at any rate, it appears to me. But I will not enter into any detailed discussion of the chapter.³

What I do lay stress upon is the broad fact that the best commentators in every era of the church have almost invariably applied the seventh chapter of Romans to advanced believers. The commentators who do not take this view have been, with a few bright exceptions, the Romanists, the Socinians, and the Arminians. Against them is arrayed the judgment of almost all the Reformers, almost all the Puritans, and the best modern evangelical divines. I shall be told, of course, that no man is infallible, that the Reformers, Puritans, and modern divines I refer to may have been entirely mistaken, and the Romanists, Socinians, and Arminians may have been quite right! Our Lord has taught us, no doubt, to call no man master (Matt. 23:10). But while I ask no man to call the Reformers and Puritans “masters,” I do ask people to read what they say on this subject, and answer their arguments, if they can. This has not been done yet! To say, as some do, that they do not want human “dogmas” and “doctrines,” is no reply at all. The whole point at issue is, “What is the meaning of a passage of Scripture? How is the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans to be interpreted? What is the true sense of its words?” At any rate let us remember that there is a great fact which cannot be got over. On one side stand the opinions and interpretation of Reformers and Puritans, and on the other the opinions and interpretations of Romanists, Socinians, and Arminians. Let that be distinctly understood.

In the face of such a fact as this I must enter my protest against the sneering, taunting, contemptuous language which has been frequently used of late by some of the advocates of what I must call the Arminian view of the seventh of Romans, in speaking of the opinions of their opponents. To say the least, such language is unseemly, and only defeats its own end. A cause which is defended by such language is deservedly suspicious. Truth needs no such weapons. If we cannot agree with men, we need not speak of their views with discourtesy and contempt. An opinion which is backed and supported by such men as the best Reformers and Puritans may not carry conviction to all minds in this century, but at any rate it would be well to speak of it with respect.

3 Those who care to go into the subject will find it fully discussed in the commentaries of Willet, Elton, Chalmers, Robert Haldane, Owen on *Indwelling Sin*, and in the work of Stafford on the seventh chapter of Romans.

5. In the fifth place, *is it wise to use the language which is often used in the present day about the doctrine of "Christ in us"?* I doubt it. Is not this doctrine often exalted to a position which it does not occupy in Scripture? I am afraid that it is.

That the true believer is one with Christ, and Christ in him, no careful reader of the New Testament will think of denying for a moment. There is, no doubt, a mystical union between Christ and the believer. With Him we died, with Him we were buried, with Him we rose again, with Him we sit in heavenly places. We have five plain texts where we are distinctly taught that Christ is "in us" (Rom. 8:9-10; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col. 3:11).

But we must be careful that we understand what we mean by the expression. That Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, and carries on His inward work by His Spirit, is clear and plain. But if we mean to say that beside, and over, and above this there is some mysterious indwelling of Christ in a believer, we must be careful what we are about. Unless we take care, we shall find ourselves ignoring the work of the Holy Ghost. We shall be forgetting that in the divine economy of man's salvation, election is the special work of God the Father—atonement, mediation, and intercession, the special work of God the Son—and sanctification, the special work of God the Holy Ghost. We shall be forgetting that our Lord said, when He went away, that He would send us another Comforter, who should abide with us forever, and, as it were, take His place (John 14:16). In short, under the idea that we are honoring Christ, we shall find that we are dishonoring His special and peculiar gift—the Holy Ghost. Christ, no doubt, as God, is everywhere—in our hearts, in heaven, in the place where two or three are met together in His name. But we really must remember that Christ, as our risen Head and High Priest, is *especially* at God's right hand interceding for us until He comes the second time; and that Christ carries on His work in the hearts of His people by the special work of His Spirit, whom He promised to send when He left the world (John 15:26). A comparison of the ninth and tenth verses of the eighth chapter of Romans seems to me to show this plainly. It convinces me that "Christ in us" means Christ in us by his Spirit. Above all, the words of St. John are most distinct and express: "Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (1 John 3:24).

In saying all this, I hope no one will misunderstand me. I do not say that the expression, "Christ in us" is unscriptural. But I do say that I see great danger of giving an extravagant and unscriptural importance to the idea contained in the expression; and I do fear that many use it nowadays

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without exactly knowing what they mean, and unwittingly, perhaps, dishonor the mighty work of the Holy Ghost. If any readers think that I am needlessly scrupulous about the point, I recommend to their notice a curious book by Samuel Rutherford (author of the well-known letters), called *The Spiritual Antichrist*. They will there see that two centuries ago the wildest heresies arose out of an extravagant teaching of this very doctrine of the “indwelling of Christ” in believers. They will find that Saltmarsh, and Dell, and Towne, and other false teachers, against whom good Samuel Rutherford contended, began with strange notions of “Christ in us,” and then proceeded to build on the doctrine antinomianism and fanaticism of the worst description and vilest tendency. They maintained that the separate, personal life of the believer was so completely gone, that it was *Christ living in him* who repented, and believed, and acted!

The root of this huge error was a forced and unscriptural interpretation of such texts as “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20). And the natural result of it was that many of the unhappy followers of this school came to the comfortable conclusion that believers were not responsible, whatever they might do! Believers, forsooth, were dead and buried; and only Christ lived in them, and *undertook* everything for them! The ultimate consequence was that some thought they might sit still in a carnal security, their personal accountableness being entirely gone, and might commit any kind of sin without fear! Let us never forget that truth, distorted and exaggerated, can become the mother of the most dangerous heresies. When we speak of Christ being in us, let us take care to explain what we mean. I fear some neglect this in the present day.

6. In the sixth place, ***is it wise to draw such a deep, wide, and distinct line of separation between conversion and consecration, or the higher life, so called, as many do draw in the present day?*** Is this according to the proportion of God’s Word? I doubt it.

There is, unquestionably, nothing new in this teaching. It is well known that Romish writers often maintain that the church is divided into three classes—sinners, penitents, and saints. The modern teachers of this day who tell us that professing Christians are of three sorts—the unconverted, the converted, and the partakers of the “higher life” of complete consecration—appear to me to occupy very much the same ground! But whether the idea be old or new, Romish or English, I am utterly unable to see that it has any warrant of Scripture. The Word of God always speaks of two great

divisions of mankind, and two only. It speaks of the *living* and the *dead in sin*, the believer and the unbeliever, the converted and the unconverted, the travelers in the narrow way and the travelers in the broad, the wise and the foolish, the children of God and the children of the devil. *Within* each of these two great classes there are, doubtless, various measures of sin and of grace; but it is only the difference between the higher and lower end of an inclined plane. *Between* these two great classes there is an enormous gulf; they are as distinct as life and death, light and darkness, heaven and hell. But of a division into three classes the Word of God says nothing at all! I question the wisdom of making new-fangled divisions which the Bible has not made, and thoroughly dislike the notion of a “second conversion.”

That there is a vast difference between one degree of grace and another—that spiritual life admits of growth, and that believers should be continually urged on every account to grow in grace—all this I fully concede. But the theory of a sudden, mysterious transition of a believer into a state of blessedness and *entire consecration*, at one mighty bound, I cannot receive. It appears to me to be a manmade invention; and I do not see a single plain text to prove it in Scripture. Gradual growth in grace, growth in knowledge, growth in faith, growth in love, growth in holiness, growth in humility, growth in spiritual-mindedness—all this I see clearly taught and urged in Scripture, and clearly exemplified in the lives of many of God’s saints. But sudden, instantaneous leaps from *conversion* to *consecration* I fail to see in the Bible.

I doubt, indeed, whether we have any warrant for saying that a man can possibly be *converted* without being consecrated to God! More consecrated he doubtless can be, and will be as his grace increases; but if he was not consecrated to God in the very day that he was converted and born again, I do not know what conversion means. Are not men in danger of undervaluing and underrating the immense blessedness of conversion? Are they not, when they urge on believers the “higher life” as a second conversion, underrating the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of that great first change which Scripture calls the new birth, the new creation, the spiritual resurrection? I may be mistaken. But I have sometimes thought, while reading the strong language used by many about “consecration,” in the last few years, that those who use it must have had previously a singularly low and inadequate view of “conversion,” if indeed they knew anything about conversion at all. In short, I have almost suspected that when they were *consecrated*, they were in reality *converted* for the first time!

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I frankly confess I prefer the old paths. I think it wiser and safer to press on all converted people the possibility of continual *growth* in grace, and the absolute necessity of going forward, increasing more and more, and every year dedicating and consecrating themselves more, in spirit, soul, and body, to Christ. By all means let us teach that there is more holiness to be attained, and more of heaven to be enjoyed upon earth than most believers now experience. But I decline to tell any converted man that he needs a *second conversion*, and that he may some day or other pass by one enormous step into a state of entire *consecration*. I decline to teach it, because I cannot see any warrant for such teaching in Scripture. I decline to teach it, because I think the tendency of the doctrine is thoroughly mischievous, depressing the humble-minded and meek, and puffing up the shallow, the ignorant, and the self-conceited, to a most dangerous extent.

7. In the seventh and last place, ***is it wise to teach believers that they ought not to think so much of fighting and struggling against sin, but ought rather to “yield themselves to God,” and be passive in the hands of Christ?*** Is this according to the proportion of God’s Word? I doubt it.

It is a simple fact that the expression “yield yourselves” is only to be found in one place in the New Testament, as a duty urged upon believers. That place is in the sixth chapter of Romans, and there within six verses the expression occurs five times (Rom. 6:13-19). But even there the word will not bear the sense of “placing ourselves passively in the hands of another.” Any Greek student can tell us that the sense is rather that of actively “presenting” ourselves for use, employment, and service (see Rom. 12:1). The expression therefore stands alone. But, on the other hand, it would not be difficult to point out at least twenty-five or thirty distinct passages in the epistles where believers are plainly taught to use active personal exertion, and are addressed as responsible for doing energetically what Christ would have them do. They are not told to “yield themselves” up as passive agents and sit still, but to arise and work. A holy violence, a conflict, a warfare, a fight, a soldier’s life, a wrestling, are spoken of as characteristic of the true Christian. The account of “the armour of God” in the sixth chapter of Ephesians, one might think, settles the question.⁴

4 Old Richard Sibbes’ (1577-1635) sermon on “Victorious Violence” deserves the attention of all who have his works (Vol. 7, p. 30).

Again, it would be easy to show that the doctrine of sanctification without personal exertion, by simply “yielding ourselves to God,” is precisely the doctrine of the antinomian fanatics in the seventeenth century (to whom I have referred already, described in Rutherford’s *Spiritual Antichrist*), and that the tendency of it is evil in the extreme. Again, it would be easy to show that the doctrine is utterly subversive of the whole teaching of such tried and approved books as *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and that if we receive it we cannot do better than put Bunyan’s old book in the fire! If Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress* simply *yielded himself to God*, and never fought, or struggled, or wrestled, I have read the famous allegory in vain. But the plain truth is, that men will persist in confounding two things that differ, justification and sanctification:

- In *justification* the word to be addressed to man is “believe—only believe”;
- In *sanctification* the word must be “watch, pray, and fight.”

What God has divided let us not mingle and confuse.

THE TRAVESTY

I leave the subject of my introduction here, and hasten to a conclusion. I confess that I lay down my pen with feelings of sorrow and anxiety. There is much in the attitude of professing Christians in this day which fills me with concern, and makes me full of fear for the future.

There is an amazing ignorance of Scripture among many, and a consequent want of established, solid religion. In no other way can I account for the ease with which people are, like children, “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). There is an Athenian love of novelty abroad, and a morbid distaste for anything old and regular, and in the beaten path of our forefathers. Thousands will crowd to hear a new voice and a new doctrine, without considering for a moment whether what they hear is true. There is an incessant craving after any teaching which is sensational, and exciting, and rousing to the feelings. There is an unhealthy appetite for a sort of spasmodic and hysterical Christianity. The religious life of many is little better than spiritual dram-drinking; and the “meek and quiet spirit,” which St. Peter commends, is clean forgotten (1Pet. 3:4). Crowds, and crying, and hot rooms, and high-flown singing, and an incessant rousing of the emotions, are the only things which many care for. Inability to distinguish differences in doctrine is spreading far

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and wide, and so long as the preacher is “clever” and “earnest,” hundreds seem to think it must be all right, and call you dreadfully “narrow and uncharitable” if you hint that he is unsound! Moody and Haweis, Dean Stanley and Canon Liddon, Mackonochie and Pearsall Smith, all seem to be alike in the eyes of such people. All this is sad, very sad. But if, in addition to this, the true-hearted advocates of increased holiness are going to fall out by the way and misunderstand one another, it will be sadder still. We shall indeed be in evil plight.

THE SOLUTION

For myself, I am aware that I am no longer a young minister. My mind perhaps stiffens, and I cannot easily receive any new doctrine. “The old is better.” I suppose I belong to the old school of evangelical theology, and I am therefore content with such teaching about sanctification as I find in the *Life of Faith* of Sibbes and of Manton, and in *The Life, Walk, and Triumph of Faith* of William Romaine. But I must express a hope that my younger brethren who have taken up *new* views of holiness will beware of multiplying needless divisions. Do they think that a higher standard of Christian living is needed in the present day? So do I. Do they think that clearer, stronger, fuller teaching about holiness is needed? So do I. Do they think that Christ ought to be more exalted as the root and author of sanctification as well as justification? So do I. Do they think that believers should be urged more and more to live by faith? So do I. Do they think that a very close walk with God should be more pressed on believers as the secret of happiness and usefulness? So do I. In all these things we agree. But if they want to go further, then I ask them to take care where they tread, and to explain very clearly and distinctly what they mean.

Finally, I must deprecate, and I do it in love, the use of uncouth and new-fangled terms and phrases in teaching sanctification. I plead that a movement in favor of holiness cannot be advanced by new-coined phraseology, or by disproportioned and one-sided statements, or by overstraining and isolating particular texts, or by exalting one truth at the expense of another, or by allegorizing and accommodating texts (squeezing out of them meanings which the Holy Ghost never put in them), or by speaking contemptuously and bitterly of those who do not entirely see things with our eyes, and do not work exactly in our ways. These things do not make for peace; they rather repel many and keep them at a distance. The cause of true sanctification is not helped, but hindered, by such weapons

Holiness

as these. A movement in aid of holiness which produces strife and dispute among God's children is somewhat suspicious. For Christ's sake, and in the name of truth and charity, let us endeavor to follow after peace as well as holiness. What...God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9).

It is my heart's desire and prayer to God daily that personal holiness may increase greatly among professing Christians in England. But I trust that all who endeavor to promote it will adhere closely to the proportion of Scripture, will carefully distinguish things that differ, and will separate "the precious from the vile" (Jer. 15:19).

CHAPTER I

SIN

“Sin is the transgression of the law.”

1 John 3:4

KNOWLEDGE OF SIN IS FUNDAMENTAL

He that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of sin. He must dig down very low if he would build high. A mistake here is most mischievous. Wrong views about holiness are generally traceable to wrong views about human corruption. I make no apology for beginning this volume about holiness by making some plain statements about sin.

The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, sanctification, are “words and names” which convey no meaning to the mind (Acts 18:15). The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes anyone a new creature in Christ, is to send light into his heart, and show him that he is a guilty sinner. The material creation in Genesis began with light, and so also does the spiritual creation. God shines into our hearts by the work of the Holy Ghost, and then spiritual life begins (2 Cor. 4:6). Dim or indistinct views of sin are the origin of most of the errors, heresies, and false doctrines of the present day. If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul’s disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies. I believe that one of the chief wants of the church in the nineteenth century has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.

I. DEFINITION OF SIN

I shall begin the subject by supplying some *definition of sin*. We are all of course familiar with the terms “sin” and “sinners.” We talk frequently of “sin” being in the world, and of men committing “sins.” But what do we mean by these terms and phrases? Do we really know? I fear there is much mental confusion and haziness on this point. Let me try, as briefly as possible, to supply an answer.

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I say, then, that “sin,” speaking generally, is, as the Ninth Article¹ of the Church of England declares, “the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone (*quam longissime* is the Latin) from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always against the spirit; and, therefore, in every person born into the world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation.” Sin, in short, is *that vast moral disease which affects the whole human race*, of every rank, and class, and name, and nation, and people, and tongue; a disease from which there never was but one born of woman that was free. Need I say that One was Christ Jesus the Lord?

I say, furthermore, that “a sin,” to speak more particularly, consists in *doing, saying, thinking, or imagining anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and Law of God*. “Sin,” in short, as the Scripture saith, is “the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). The slightest outward or inward departure from absolute mathematical parallelism with God’s revealed will and character constitute a sin and at once makes us guilty in God’s sight.

Of course, I need not tell anyone who reads his Bible with attention that a man may break God’s Law in heart and thought, when there is no overt and visible act of wickedness. Our Lord has settled that point beyond dispute in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-28). Even a poet of our own has said, “A man may smile and smile, and be a villain.”

Again, I need not tell a careful student of the New Testament that there are sins of *omission* as well as *commission*, and that we sin, as our prayer book justly reminds us, by “leaving undone the things we ought to do,” as really as by “doing the things we ought not to do.” The solemn words of our Master in the Gospel of Matthew place this point also beyond dispute. It is there written, “Depart... ye cursed, into everlasting fire... For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink” (Matt. 25:41-42). It was a deep and thoughtful saying of holy Archbishop Ussher, just before he died: “Lord, forgive me all my sins, and specially my sins of omission.”

But I do think it necessary in these times to remind my readers that a man may commit sin and yet be ignorant of it, and fancy himself innocent

1 The confession of faith of the Church of England is called the Thirty-nine Articles. It was compiled in 1563 and reflects the teachings of the Protestant Reformation.

when he is guilty. I fail to see any scriptural warrant for the modern assertion that “sin is not sin to us until we discern it and are conscious of it.” On the contrary, in the 4th and 5th chapters of that unduly neglected book, Leviticus, and in the 15th of Numbers, I find Israel distinctly taught that there were sins of ignorance which rendered people unclean, and needed atonement (Lev. 4:1-35; 5:14-19; Num. 15:25-29). And I find our Lord expressly teaching that the servant who knew not his master’s will and did it not, was not excused on account of his ignorance, but was beaten or punished (Luke 12:48). We shall do well to remember, that when we make the measure of our sinfulness to be our own miserably imperfect knowledge and consciousness, we are on very dangerous ground. A deeper study of Leviticus might do us much good.

II. ORIGIN AND SOURCE OF SIN

Concerning the *origin and source* of this vast moral disease called “sin,” I must say something. I fear the views of many professing Christians on this point are sadly defective and unsound. I dare not pass it by. Let us, then, have it fixed down in our minds that the sinfulness of man does not begin from without, but from within. It is not the result of bad training in early years.

It is not picked up from bad companions and bad examples, as some weak Christians are too fond of saying. No! It is a family disease, which we all inherit from our first parents, Adam and Eve, and with which we are born. Created “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27), innocent and righteous at first, our parents fell from original righteousness and became sinful and corrupt. And from that day to this all men and women are born in the image of fallen Adam and Eve, and inherit a heart and nature inclined to evil. “By one man sin entered into the world... That which is born of the flesh is flesh... [We are] by nature the children of wrath... The carnal mind is enmity against God... Out of the heart [naturally, as out of a fountain]... proceed evil thoughts, adulteries,” and the like (Rom. 5:12; John 3:6; Eph. 2:3; Rom. 8:7; Mark 7:21).

The fairest babe that has entered life this year, and become the sunbeam of a family, is not, as its mother perhaps fondly calls it, a little “angel,” or a little “innocent,” but a little “sinner.” Alas! As it lies smiling and crowing in its cradle, that little creature carries in its heart the seeds of every kind of wickedness! Only watch it carefully, as it grows in stature and its mind develops, and you will soon detect in it an incessant tendency to that which

is selfish and bad, and a backwardness to that which is good. You will see in it the buds and germs of deceit, evil temper, selfishness, self-will, obstinacy, greediness, envy, jealousy, passion—which, if indulged and let alone, will shoot up with painful rapidity. Who taught the child these things? Where did he learn them? The Bible alone can answer these questions!

Of all the foolish things that parents say about their children, there is none worse than the common saying, “My son has a good heart at the bottom. He is not what he ought to be; but he has fallen into bad hands. Public schools are bad places. The tutors neglect the boys. Yet he has a good heart at the bottom.” The truth, unhappily, is diametrically the other way. The first cause of all sin lies in the natural corruption of the boy’s own heart, and not in the school.

III. EXTENT OF SIN

Concerning the *extent* of this vast moral disease of man called sin, let us beware that we make no mistake. The only safe ground is that which is laid for us in Scripture. “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart” is by nature evil, and that continually (Gen. 6:5). “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). Sin is a disease which pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, the will, are all more or less infected. Even the conscience is so blinded that it cannot be depended on as a sure guide, and is as likely to lead men wrong as right, unless it is enlightened by the Holy Ghost. In short, “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness” about us (Isa. 1:6). The disease may be veiled under a thin covering of courtesy, politeness, good manners, and outward decorum; but it lies deep down in the constitution.

I admit fully that man has many grand and noble faculties left about him, and that in arts and sciences and literature he shows immense capacity. But the fact still remains that in spiritual things he is utterly “dead,” and has no natural knowledge, or love, or fear of God. His best things are so interwoven and intermingled with corruption that the contrast only brings out into sharper relief the truth and extent of the fall. That one and the same creature should be in some things...

- so high and in others so low,
- so great and yet so little,
- so noble and yet so mean,

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- so grand in his conception and execution of material things, and yet so groveling and debased in his affections,
- able to plan and erect buildings like those of Carnac and Luxor in Egypt, and the Parthenon at Athens, and yet worship vile gods and goddesses, and birds, and beasts, and creeping things,
- able to produce tragedies like those of Sophocles, and histories like that of Thucydides, and yet be a slave to abominable vices like those described in the first chapter of Romans.

All this is a sore puzzle to those who sneer at “God’s Word written,” and scoff at us as Bibliolaters.

But it is a knot that we can untie with the Bible in our hands. We can acknowledge that man has all the marks of a majestic temple about him, a temple in which God once dwelt, but a temple which is now in utter ruins—a temple in which a shattered window here, and a doorway there, and a column there, still give some faint idea of the magnificence of the original design, but a temple which from end to end has lost its glory and fallen from its high estate. And we say that nothing solves the complicated problem of man’s condition but the “doctrine of original or birth sin” and the crushing effects of the fall.

Let us remember, besides this, that every part of the world bears testimony to the fact that sin is the universal disease of all mankind. Search the globe from east to west and from pole to pole, search every nation of every clime in the four quarters of the earth, search every rank and class in our own country from the highest to the lowest—and under every circumstance and condition, the report will be always the same. The remotest islands in the Pacific Ocean, completely separate from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, beyond the reach alike of Oriental luxury and Western arts and literature—*islands inhabited by people ignorant of books, money, steam, and gunpowder—uncontaminated by the vices of modern civilization—in these very islands have always been found, when first discovered, the abode of the vilest forms of lust, cruelty, deceit, and superstition. If the inhabitants have known nothing else, they have always known how to sin! Everywhere the human heart is naturally “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). For my part, I know no stronger proof of the inspiration of Genesis and the Mosaic account of the origin of man, than the power, extent, and universality of sin. Grant that mankind have all sprung from one pair, and that this pair fell (as Genesis 3 tells us), and the*

state of human nature everywhere is easily accounted for. Deny it, as many do, and you are at once involved in inexplicable difficulties. In a word, the uniformity and universality of human corruption supply one of the most unanswerable instances of the enormous “difficulties of infidelity.”

Sin in the life of the believer

After all, I am convinced that the greatest proof of the extent and power of sin is the pertinacity with which it cleaves to man even after he is converted and has become the subject of the Holy Ghost’s operations. To use the language of the Ninth Article, “this infection of nature doth remain... even in them that are regenerate.” So deeply planted are the roots of human corruption, that even after we are born again, renewed, washed, sanctified, justified, and made living members of Christ, these roots remain alive in the bottom of our hearts, and, like the leprosy in the walls of the house, we never get rid of them until the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved. Sin, no doubt, in the believer’s heart, has no longer dominion. It is checked, controlled, mortified, and crucified by the expulsive power of the new principle of grace.

The life of a believer is a life of victory, and not of failure. But the very struggles which go on within his bosom, the fight that he finds it needful to fight daily, the watchful jealousy which he is obliged to exercise over his inner man, the contest between the flesh and the spirit, the inward “groanings” which no one knows but he who has experienced them all—all testify to the same great truth, all show the enormous power and vitality of sin. Mighty indeed must that foe be who even when crucified is still alive! Happy is that believer who understands it, and while he rejoices in Christ Jesus has “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3); and while he says, “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory” (1 Cor. 15:57), never forgets to watch and pray lest he fall into temptation!

IV. OFFENSIVENESS OF SIN

Concerning the *guilt, vileness, and offensiveness* of sin in the sight of God, my words shall be few. I say “few” advisedly. I do not think, in the nature of things, that mortal man can at all realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the sight of that holy and perfect One with Whom we have to do. On the one hand, God is that eternal Being Who chargeth His angels with folly, and in Whose sight the very “heavens are not clean.” He is One Who reads thoughts and motives as well as actions, and requires “truth in the inward parts” (Job 4:18; 15:15; Ps. 51:6).

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We, on the other hand—poor blind creatures, here today and gone tomorrow, born in sin, surrounded by sinners, living in a constant atmosphere of weakness, infirmity, and imperfection—can form none but the most inadequate conceptions of the hideousness of evil. We have no line to fathom it, and no measure by which to gauge it. The blind man can see no difference between a masterpiece of Titian or Raphael, and the Queen's Head on a village signboard. The deaf man cannot distinguish between a penny whistle and a cathedral organ. The very animals whose smell is most offensive to us have no idea that they are offensive, and are not offensive to one another. And man, fallen man, I believe, can have no just idea what a vile thing sin is in the sight of that God Whose handiwork is absolutely perfect—perfect whether we look through telescope or microscope—perfect in the formation of a mighty planet like Jupiter, with his satellites, keeping time to a second as he rolls round the sun—perfect in the formation of the smallest insect that crawls over a foot of ground.

But let us nevertheless settle it firmly in our minds...

- that sin is the abominable thing that God hateth (Jer. 44:4);
- that God “is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13);
- that the least transgression of God's Law makes us “guilty of all” (Jas. 2:10);
- that “the soul that sinneth... shall die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20);
- that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23);
- that “God shall judge the secrets of men” (Rom. 2:16);
- that there is a worm that never dies, and a fire that is not quenched (Mark 9:44);
- that “the wicked shall be turned into hell” (Ps. 9:17), and “shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46); and
- that nothing that defiles shall in any wise enter heaven (Rev. 21:27).

These are indeed tremendous words, when we consider that they are written in the Book of a most merciful God!

No proof of the fullness of sin, after all, is so overwhelming and unanswerable as the cross and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the whole doctrine of His substitution and atonement. Terribly black must that guilt be for which nothing but the blood of the Son of God could make satisfaction. Heavy must that weight of human sin be which made

Jesus groan and sweat drops of blood in agony at Gethsemane, and cry at Golgotha, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). Nothing, I am convinced, will astonish us so much, when we awake in the resurrection day, as the view we shall have of sin, and the retrospect we shall take of our own countless shortcomings and defects. Never till the hour when Christ comes the second time shall we fully realize the “sinfulness of sin.” Well might George Whitefield say, “The anthem in heaven will be, ‘What hath God wrought!’”

V. DECEITFULNESS OF SIN

One point only remains to be considered on the subject of sin, which I dare not pass over. That point is its *deceitfulness*. It is a point of most serious importance, and I venture to think it does not receive the attention which it deserves. You may see this deceitfulness in the incredible proneness of men to regard sin as less sinful and dangerous than it is in the sight of God; and in their readiness to extenuate² it, make excuses for it, and minimize its guilt. “It is but a little one! God is merciful! God is not extreme to mark what is done amiss! We mean well! One cannot be so particular! Where is the mighty harm? We only do as others!” Who is not familiar with this kind of language?

You may see it in the long string of smooth words and phrases which men have coined in order to designate things which God calls downright wicked and ruinous to the soul. What do such expressions as “fast,” “gay,” “wild,” “unsteady,” “thoughtless,” “loose” mean? They show that men try to cheat themselves into the belief that sin is not quite so sinful as God says it is, and that they are not so bad as they really are. You may see it in the tendency even of believers to indulge their children in questionable practices, and to blind their own eyes to the inevitable result of the love of money, of tampering with temptation, and sanctioning a low standard of family religion.

I fear we do not sufficiently realize the extreme subtlety of our soul’s disease. We are too apt to forget that temptation to sin will rarely present itself to us in its true colors, saying, “I am your deadly enemy, and I want to ruin you forever in hell.” Oh, no! Sin comes to us, like Judas, with a kiss; and like Joab, with an outstretched hand and flattering words. The

2 extenuate—to attempt to lessen magnitude or seriousness by providing partial excuses; to belittle.

forbidden fruit seemed good and desirable to Eve; yet it cast her out of Eden. The walking idly on his palace roof seemed harmless enough to David; yet it ended in adultery and murder. Sin rarely seems sin at first beginnings. Let us then watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. We may give wickedness smooth names, but we cannot alter its nature and character in the sight of God. Let us remember St. Paul's words: "Exhort one another daily... lest any... be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). It is a wise prayer in our Litany, "From the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, good Lord, deliver us."

Self-abasement

And now, before I go further, let me briefly mention two thoughts which appear to me to rise with irresistible force out of the subject. On the one hand, I ask my readers to observe what deep reasons we all have for *humiliation* and *self-abasement*. Let us sit down before the picture of sin displayed to us in the Bible, and consider what guilty, vile, corrupt creatures we all are in the sight of God. What need we all have of that entire change of heart called regeneration, new birth, or conversion! What a mass of infirmity and imperfection cleaves to the very best of us at our very best! What a solemn thought it is, that without holiness "no man shall see the Lord!" (Heb. 12:14) What cause we have to cry with the publican, every night in our lives, when we think of our sins of omission as well as commission, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13) How admirably suited are the general and Communion confessions of the Prayer Book to the actual condition of all professing Christians! How well that language suits God's children which the Prayer Book puts in the mouth of every churchman before he goes up to the Communion table, "The remembrance of our misdoings is grievous unto us; the burden is intolerable: Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past." How true it is that the holiest saint is in himself a miserable sinner, and a debtor to mercy and grace to the last moment of his existence!

With my whole heart I subscribe to that passage in Hooker's "Sermon on Justification," which begins, "Let the holiest and best things we do be considered. We are never better affected unto God than when we pray; yet when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted! How little reverence do we show unto the grand majesty of God unto whom we speak! How little remorse of our own miseries! How little taste of the sweet

influence of His tender mercies do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if in saying, ‘Call upon me’ (Ps. 50:15), He had set us a very burdensome task? What I say may seem somewhat extreme; therefore, let everyone judge, even as his own heart shall tell him, and not otherwise; I will but only make a demand! If God should yield unto us, not as unto Abraham (if fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yea, or if ten good persons could be found in a city, for their sakes this city should not be destroyed), but rather if He should make us an offer thus large: 1) search all the generations of men since the fall of our father Adam; 2) find one man that hath done one action which hath passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all; and 3) for that one man’s only action neither man nor angel should feel the torments which are prepared for both. Do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be found to be among the sons of men? The best things which we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned.”³

That witness is true. For my part I am persuaded the more light we have, the more we see our own sinfulness; the nearer we get to heaven, the more we are clothed with humility. In every age of the church you will find it true, if you will study biographies, that the most eminent saints—men like Bradford, Rutherford, and M’Cheyne—have always been the humblest men.

Be thankful for grace

On the other hand, I ask my readers to observe how *deeply thankful* we ought to be for the glorious gospel of the grace of God. There is a remedy revealed for man’s need, as wide and broad and deep as man’s disease. We need not be afraid to look at sin, and study its nature, origin, power, extent, and vileness, if we only look at the same time at the almighty medicine provided for us in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Though sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. Yes...

- in the everlasting Covenant of Redemption,⁴ and in the Mediator of that covenant, Jesus Christ the righteous, perfect God and perfect Man in one Person;

3 Thomas Hooker (1586-1647), *Learned Discourse of Justification*.

4 Covenant of Redemption—term used by some to describe the eternal purpose of redemption: God the Father purposed to give a people and a kingdom to His Son, and God the Son agreed to accomplish this purpose by His life, death, and resurrection.

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- in the work that He did by dying for our sins and rising again for our justification, and in the offices that He fills as our Priest, Substitute, Physician, Shepherd, and Advocate;
- in the precious blood He shed which can cleanse from all sin in the everlasting righteousness that He brought in;
- in the perpetual intercession that He carries on as our Representative at God's right hand;
- in His power to save to the uttermost the chief of sinners, His willingness to receive and pardon the vilest, His readiness to bear with the weakest;
- in the grace of the Holy Spirit which He plants in the hearts of all His people, renewing, sanctifying, and causing old things to pass away and all things to become new...
- in all this, and oh what a brief sketch it is!—in all this, I say, there is a full, perfect, and complete medicine for the hideous disease of sin. Awful as the right view of sin undoubtedly is, no one need faint and despair, if he will take a right view of Jesus Christ at the same time. No wonder that old Flavel ends many a chapter of his admirable *Fountain of Life* with the touching words, "Blessed be God for Jesus Christ."

Practical Application

In bringing this mighty subject to a close, I feel that I have only touched the surface of it. It is one which cannot be thoroughly handled in a paper like this. He that would see it treated fully and exhaustively must turn to such masters of experimental theology as Owen, Burgess, Manton, Charnock, and the other giants of the Puritan school. On subjects like this there are no writers to be compared to the Puritans. It only remains for me to point out some practical issues to which the whole doctrine of sin may be profitably turned in the present day.

(a) I say, then, in the first place, that a scriptural view of sin is one of the ***best antidotes to that vague, dim, misty, hazy kind of theology*** which is so painfully current in the present age. It is vain to shut our eyes to the fact that there is a vast quantity of so-called Christianity nowadays which you cannot declare positively unsound, but which, nevertheless, is not full measure, good weight, and sixteen ounces to the pound. It is a Christianity in which there is undeniably "something about Christ, and something

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about grace, and something about faith, and something about repentance, and something about holiness”; but it is not the real thing as it is in the Bible. Things are out of place, and out of proportion.

As old Latimer would have said, it is a kind of “mingle-mangle,” and does no good. It neither exercises influence on daily conduct, nor comforts in life, nor gives peace in death. Those who hold it often awake too late to find that they have got nothing solid under their feet. Now I believe the likeliest way to cure this defective kind of religion is to bring forward more prominently the old scriptural truth about the sinfulness of sin. People will never set their faces decidedly towards heaven and live like pilgrims, until they really feel that they are in danger of hell. Let us all try to revive the old teaching about sin, in nurseries, in schools, in training colleges, in universities. Let us not forget that “the law is good, if a man use it lawfully,” and that “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (1 Tim. 1:8; Rom. 3:20; 7:7). Let us bring the Law to the front and press it on men’s attention. Let us expound and beat out the Ten Commandments, and show the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of their requirements. This is the way of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. We cannot do better than follow His plan. We may depend upon it, men will never come to Jesus, and stay with Jesus, and live for Jesus, unless they really know why they are to come, and what is their need!

Those whom the Spirit draws to Jesus are those whom the Spirit has convinced of sin. Without thorough conviction of sin, men may seem to come to Jesus and follow Him for a season, but they will soon fall away and return to the world.

(b) Next, a scriptural view of sin is one of the **best tests of the extravagantly broad and liberal theology** which is so much in vogue today. The tendency of modern thought is to reject creeds and every kind of bounds in religion. It is thought grand and wise to condemn no opinion whatsoever, and to pronounce all earnest and clever teachers to be trustworthy, however heterogeneous and mutually destructive their opinions may be. Everything forsooth is true, and nothing is false! Everybody is right, and nobody is wrong! Everybody is likely to be saved, and nobody is to be lost! The atonement and substitution of Christ, the personality of the devil, the miraculous element in Scripture, the reality and eternity of future punishment, all these mighty foundation-stones are coolly tossed overboard, like lumber, in order to lighten the ship of Christianity, and

Chapter I: Sin

enable it to keep pace with modern science. Stand up for these great verities, and you are called narrow, old-fashioned, and a theological fossil! Quote a text, and you are told that all truth is not confined to the pages of an ancient Jewish book, and that free inquiry has found out many things since the book was completed.

Now, I know nothing so likely to counteract this modern plague as constant statements about the nature, reality, vileness, power, and guilt of sin. We must charge home into the consciences of these men of broad views, and demand a plain answer to some plain questions. We must ask them to lay their hands on their hearts, and tell us whether their favorite opinions comfort them in the day of sickness, in the hour of death, by the bedside of dying parents, by the grave of beloved wife or child. We must ask them whether a vague *earnestness*, without definite doctrine, gives them peace at seasons like these. We must challenge them to tell us whether they do not sometimes feel a gnawing “something” within, which all the free inquiry and philosophy and science in the world cannot satisfy. And then we must tell them that this gnawing “something” is the sense of sin, guilt, and corruption, which they are leaving out in their calculations. And, above all, we must tell them that nothing will ever make them feel rest, but submission to the old doctrines of man’s ruin and Christ’s redemption, and simple child-like faith in Jesus.

(c) In the next place, a right view of sin is the ***best antidote to that sensuous, ceremonial, formal kind of Christianity***, which has swept over us like a flood in the last twenty-five years, and carried away so many before it. I can well believe that there is much that is attractive in this system of religion to a certain mindset, so long as the conscience is not fully enlightened. But when that wonderful part of our constitution called conscience is really awake and alive, I find it hard to believe that a sensuous, ceremonial Christianity will thoroughly satisfy us. A little child is easily quieted and amused with gaudy toys and rattles, so long as it is not hungry; but once let it feel the cravings of nature within, and we know that nothing will satisfy it but *food*. Just so it is with man in the matter of his soul. Music, flowers, candles, incense, banners, processions, beautiful vestments, confessionals, and man-made ceremonies of a semi-Romish character may do well enough for him under certain conditions. But once let him “awake... and arise from the dead” (Eph. 5:14), and he will not rest content with these things. They will seem to him mere solemn triflings, and a waste of time.

Once let him see his *sin*, and he must see his *Savior*. He feels stricken with a deadly disease, and nothing will satisfy him but the great Physician. He hungers and thirsts, and he must have nothing less than the bread of life. I may seem bold in what I am about to say; but I fearlessly venture the assertion, that four-fifths of the semi-Romanism of the last quarter of a century would never have existed if English people had been taught more fully and dearly the nature, vileness, and sinfulness of sin.

(d) In the next place, a right view of sin is one of the *best antidotes to the overstrained theories of perfection*, of which we hear so much in these times. I shall say but little about this, and in saying it I trust I shall not give offense. If those who press on us perfection mean nothing more than an all-round consistency, and a careful attention to all the graces which make up the Christian character, reason would that we should not only bear with them, but agree with them entirely. By all means, let us aim high. But if men really mean to tell us that here in this world a believer can attain to entire freedom from sin, live for years in unbroken and uninterrupted communion with God, and feel for months together not so much as one evil thought, I must honestly say that such an opinion appears to me very unscriptural.

I go even further. I say that the opinion is very dangerous to him that holds it, and very likely to depress, discourage, and keep back inquirers after salvation. I cannot find the slightest warrant in God's Word for expecting such perfection as this while we are in the body. I believe the words of our Fifteenth Article are strictly true—that "Christ alone is without sin; and that all we, the rest, though baptized and born again in Christ, offend in many things; and if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." To use the language of our first homily, "There be imperfections in our best works: we do not love God so much as we are bound to do, with all our hearts, mind, and power; we do not fear God so much as we ought to do; we do not pray to God but with many and great imperfections. We give, forgive, believe, live, and hope imperfectly; we speak, think, and do imperfectly; we fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh imperfectly. Let us, therefore, not be ashamed to confess plainly our state of imperfections." Once more, I repeat what I have said: the best preservative against this temporary delusion about perfection which clouds some minds—for such I hope I may call it—is a clear, full, distinct understanding of the nature, sinfulness, and deceitfulness of sin.

(e) In the last place, a scriptural view of sin will prove an admirable *antidote to the low views of personal holiness* which are so painfully prevalent in these last days of the church. This is a very painful and delicate subject, I know; but I dare not turn away from it. It has long been my sorrowful conviction that the standard of daily life among professing Christians in this country has been gradually falling. I am afraid that Christ-like charity, kindness, good-temper, unselfishness, meekness, gentleness, good-nature, self-denial, zeal to do good, and separation from the world are far less appreciated than they ought to be and than they used to be in the days of our fathers.

Into the causes of this state of things I cannot pretend to enter fully, and can only suggest conjectures for consideration. It may be that a certain profession of religion has become so fashionable and comparatively easy in the present age, that the streams which were once narrow and deep have become wide and shallow, and what we have gained in outward show we have lost in quality. It may be that the vast increase of wealth in the last twenty-five years has insensibly introduced a plague of worldliness, and self-indulgence, and love of ease into social life. What were once called luxuries are now comforts and necessaries, and self-denial and enduring hardness are consequently little known. It may be that the enormous amount of controversy which marks this age has insensibly dried up our spiritual life. We have too often been content with zeal for orthodoxy, and have neglected the sober realities of daily practical godliness. Be the causes what they may, I must declare my own belief that the result remains. There has been of late years a lower standard of personal holiness among believers than there used to be in the days of our fathers. The whole result is that *the Spirit is grieved!* The matter calls for much humiliation and searching of heart.

Remedies

As to the best remedy for the state of things I have mentioned, I shall venture to give an opinion. Other schools of thought in the churches must judge for themselves. The cure for evangelical churchmen, I am convinced, is to be found in a clearer apprehension of the *nature and sinfulness of sin*. We need not go back to Egypt, and borrow semi-Romish practices in order to revive our spiritual life. We need not restore the confessional, or return to monasticism or asceticism. Nothing of the kind! We must simply repent and do our first works. We must return to first principles. We must go back

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to “the old paths” (Jer. 6:16). We must sit down humbly in the presence of God, look the whole subject in the face, examine clearly what the Lord Jesus calls sin, and what the Lord Jesus calls doing His will.

We must then try to realize that it is *terribly possible* to live a careless, easy-going, half-worldly life, and yet at the same time to maintain evangelical principles and call ourselves evangelical people! Once let us see that sin is far viler, and far nearer to us, and sticks more closely to us than we supposed, and we shall be led, I trust and believe, to get nearer to Christ. Once drawn nearer to Christ, we shall drink more deeply out of His fullness, and learn more thoroughly to live the life of faith in Him, as St. Paul did. Once taught to live the life of faith in Jesus, and abiding in Him, we shall bear more fruit, shall find ourselves more strong for duty, more patient in trial, more watchful over our poor, weak hearts, and more like our Master in all our little daily ways. Just in proportion as we realize how much Christ has done for us, shall we labor to do much for Christ. Much forgiven, we shall love much. In short, as the Apostle says, “With open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image... even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Whatever some may please to think or say, there can be no doubt that an increased feeling about holiness is one of the signs of the times. Conferences for the promotion of “spiritual life” are becoming common in the present day. The subject of “spiritual life” finds a place on Congress platforms almost every year. It has awakened an amount of interest throughout the land, for which we ought to be thankful. Any movement, based on sound principles, which helps to deepen our spiritual life and increase our personal holiness, will be a real blessing to the church. It will do much to draw us together and heal our unhappy divisions. It may bring down some fresh outpouring of the grace of the Spirit, and be “life from the dead” in these later times (Rom. 11:15). But sure I am, as I said in the beginning of this paper, we must begin low, if we would build high. I am convinced that the first step towards attaining a higher standard of holiness is to realize more fully the amazing sinfulness of sin.