

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

TOGETHER WITH THE WAYS OF ITS WORKING AND MEANS OF  
PREVENTION, OPENED, SHOWN, AND APPLIED WITH A RESOLUTION  
OF SUNDRY RELATED CASES OF CONSCIENCE

“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this  
death?

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” – Romans 7:24, 25



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## PREFATORY NOTE.

While the Government was enforcing stringent measures against Nonconformity, while dissenting ministers if they ventured to preach the gospel of salvation became liable to the penalties of the Conventicle or Five-mile Act, and when Owen himself on a visit to some old friends at Oxford narrowly escaped arrest and imprisonment, our author did not abandon himself to inactivity, but employed the leisure of the concealment into which the rigour of the times had driven him in the preparation of some of his most valuable works. In one year (1608) the two treatises which conclude this volume were published, together with the first volume of his colossal and elaborate work, the "Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews."

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

life of faith and the growth of holiness; and with no guide can we be safer than with Owen. The reader is never allowed to lose sight of the fact, amid the most searching investigation into human motives, that our acceptance with God cannot depend on the results of any scrutiny into our internal condition, and that the guilt of all lurking corruption which we may detect is remitted only by the blood of the cross.

The basis of the treatise is taken from Romans 7:21. After a brief explanation of the passage, he considers indwelling sin under the light and character of "a law;" the seat and subject of this law, the heart; its nature generally, as enmity against God; its actions and operations; first, in withdrawing the mind from what is good; secondly, exciting positive opposition to God; thirdly, ensnaring the soul into captivity; and lastly, filling it with mindless hatred to the principles and claims of holiness. The power of indwelling sin is next illustrated from its deceitfulness, chap. 8: a lengthened exposition follows, of three stages along which indwelling sin may beguile us; first, when the mind is withdrawn from a course of obedience and holiness; secondly, when the affections are enticed and ensnared: and, lastly, when actual sin is conceived and committed. With chap. 14: a new demonstration begins of the power of indwelling sin, as shown, first, in the lives of Christians; and, secondly, in unregenerate persons; in the last chapter evidence to the same effect is drawn from the resistance which sin offers to the authority of the moral law, and from the fruitless and unavailing efforts of men in their own strength to subdue and put it to death. As to the way in which it is really to be put to death, the author refers to his treatise on "Putting sin to death." - ED.

## PREFACE.

THAT the doctrine of original sin is one of the fundamental truths of our Christian faith has been always owned in the church of God; and it is a special part of that peculiar possession of truth which they have, whose religion towards God is built on and resolved into divine revelation. As the world by its wisdom never knew God aright, so its wise men were always utterly ignorant of this inbred evil. With us, the doctrine and conviction of it lie in the very foundation of all our dealings with God, in reference to pleasing him here, or enjoying him hereafter; it is also known what influence it has into the great truths concerning the person of Christ, his mediation, the fruits and effects of it, with all the benefits that it brings us. Without accepting this, none of them can be truly known or savingly believed. So it has been thoroughly dealt with by many holy and learned men over the years. Some have laboured to uncover its nature, some its guilt and demerit; its truth has been vindicated by the opposition it has faced over the centuries. These things have been fully considered, with respect to all men by nature, with the condition of those who are wholly under the power and guilt of it. They have demonstrated that men are disabled from answering the obedience required either in the law or the gospel, to free themselves from the curse of the one or to partake of the blessing of the other; also that remainders of it abide in believers after their regeneration and conversion to God, as the Scripture abundantly testifies; as also how its guilt is pardoned, and how its power is weakened in them.

We therefore take all that for granted; our task is further to uncover it in its opposition to the law and grace of God in believers. What the Scripture plainly reveals concerning it, what believers find by experience, what they may learn from the examples of others, shall be represented in a way suited to the weakest believer. The effects and fruits of it, which we see in the apostasies and backslidings of many, the scandalous sins and miscarriages of some, and the course and lives of most, seem to call for it to be considered. Besides, of how great importance a full and clear acquaintance with the power of this indwelling sin is to believers, to stir them up to watchfulness and

diligence, to faith and prayer, to call them to repentance, humility, and self-abasement, will appear as we proceed. These were my intentions. Having written this for the benefit of a few, by the providence of God it is now made public. And if the reader receives any advantage by these weak labours, let him know that it is his duty to help them by his prayers who in many temptations and afflictions are willing to labour in the vineyard of the Lord.

## CHAPTER 1.

Indwelling sin in believers considered by the apostle, Romans 7:21 -  
The place explained.

We intend to deal with indwelling sin, and the remainders of it in persons after their conversion to God, and its power. This is the great subject of the apostle in chap. 7. of the Epistle to the Romans. It is the condition of a regenerate person, regarding the remaining power of indwelling sin, which is there presented, in the person of the apostle himself.

Here he affirms, verse 21: "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me."

There are four key things in these words: -

First, The name he gives to indwelling sin, by which he expresses its power: it is "a law;" for what he terms "a law" in this verse, he calls in the foregoing, "sin that dwells in him."

Secondly, How he came to find the law in himself: "I find a law."

Thirdly, The attitude of his inward man to this law of sin, and when he becomes aware of it: "he would do good."

Fourthly, The activity of this law when the soul wants to do good: it "is present with him."

The first thing to note is the compelling here used by the apostle, he calls indwelling sin "a law."

It is a law. A law is taken either properly for a directive rule, or improperly for a principle, which seems to have the force of a law. In its first sense, it is a moral rule which directs and moves the mind and the will, concerning what it instructs. This is the general operation of a law. Some things it commands, some things it forbids, with rewards

and penalties, which move men to do the one and avoid the other. Thus, in a secondary sense, it is an inward principle that inclines to action. The principle that is in the nature of everything is called the law of nature. In this respect, every inward principle that inclines and urges to action is a law. So, Romans 8:2, the effectual working of the Spirit and grace of Christ in the hearts of believers is called "The law of the Spirit of life." And for this reason the apostle here calls indwelling sin a law. It is an indwelling principle that impels men to actions that agree with its nature. So, chap. 7:23, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." What he here calls the "law of his mind," is the "law of the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus," chap. 8:2; or the power of the Spirit of grace. But "the law," as applied to sin, has a double sense: for as, in the first place, "I see a law in my members," it denotes the being of sin; so, in the latter, "Leading into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members," it signifies its power. And both these are included in the word, "law". chap. 7:21. Now, what we note from this name of a "law" attributed to sin is, That there is great power in the remainders of indwelling sin in believers, which constantly works towards evil.

Thus it is in believers; it is a law in them, though not to them. Though its rule is broken, its strength weakened, its root put to death, it is a law still of great effect. Where it is least felt, it is most powerful. Carnal men, regarding spiritual and moral duties, are nothing but this law; all they do is from it and by it. It is in them a ruling and prevailing principle of all moral actions. I shall not consider it in them, but in those in whom its power is chiefly discerned, that is, in believers.

Secondly, The apostle states how he became aware of this law in himself: "So I find then a law." He found it. He had been told there was such a law; it had been preached to him. This convinced him that there was a law of sin. But it is one thing for a man to know in theory that there is a law of sin; another thing for a man to have an experience of the power of it in himself. It is preached to all; all who accept the Scripture acknowledge it, for it declares it. But few know it in

themselves; or we should have more complaints of it, more battles against it, and less fruits of it in the world. But the apostle affirms that he found it by experience in himself. "I find a law;" - "I have experience of its power." For a man to find his sickness, and see the danger from it, is different to hearing a lecture about a disease. And this experience is the great preservative of all divine truth in the soul. We know a thing in reality, for ourselves, when we find it in ourselves as we are taught it from the word. Hence we observe, secondly, Believers have experience of the power of indwelling sin. They find it in themselves; they find it as a law. It has an obvious power to those who are alive to discern it. Those who do not know its power are under its dominion. Whoever contend against it shall find that it is present with them, that it is powerful in them. He shall find the stream to be strong who swims against it, though he who rolls along with it be insensible of it.

Thirdly, The general frame of believers, despite the indwelling of this law of sin, is here also expressed. They "want to do good." This law is "present". The habitual inclination of their will is to good. The law in them is not a law to them, as it is to unbelievers. They are not wholly unaware of its power, nor morally of its commands. Grace is sovereign in their souls: this gives them a will to good. They "want to do good," that is, always and constantly.

1 John 3:9, "To commit sin," is to make a habit of sin, to make it a man's business to sin. So it is said a believer "does not commit sin;" and so "does what is good." To will to do so is to have the habitual inclination of the will set on what is good, - that is, morally and spiritually good.

Whence is our third observation, There is, through grace, a prevailing will in believers to do good, despite the power of indwelling sin.

This, in their worst condition, distinguishes them from unbelievers in their best. The will in unbelievers is under the power of the law of sin. The opposition they make to sin is from their light and their consciences; the will to sin is never taken away. Take away all other considerations, they would sin willingly always. Their faint labours to answer their convictions are far from a will to do good. They will

plead, indeed, that they would leave their sins if they could, and they desire to do better. But it is the working of their light and convictions, not any spiritual inclination of their wills, that they mean: for where there is a will to do good, there is a choice of what is good for its own excellency's sake. Now, this is not in unbelievers. They do not, they cannot choose what is spiritually good, nor does it correspond to any principle in them; they only want the results of good. And these desires are so weak that they do very little about them. Witness the sloth and worldliness that most men are drowned in. But in believers there is a will to do good, a habitual inclination to what is spiritually good; and it is accompanied with action. The will is the principle of our moral actions; so the general course of our actions will follow it. Good things will proceed from the good treasures of the heart. But a will to do good, without doing good, is mere pretence.

Fourthly, There is yet another thing in these words of the apostle, regarding the occasion of the season of duty: "When I will to do good," says he, "evil is present with me."

There are two things to be considered in the believers' will to do good:

1. It habitually resides in them. They have always an inclination to do what is good. And this habitual preparation for good is always present with them; as the apostle expresses it, verse 18 of this chapter.
2. There are special times and seasons for the exercise of that principle. There is a "When I would do good," - a season when this or that good is to be done in response to that will.

Two things in indwelling sin are opposed to these.

To the gracious principle residing in the will, inclining to what is spiritually good, it is opposed as a contrary principle, inclining to evil. To the second, the willing of "When I would do good," is opposed the presence of this law: "Evil is present with me," - evil is at hand, and ready to hinder the good aimed at.

So indwelling sin rebels and inclines to evil, when the will to do good

is active.

This is the description of believer and sinner, as everyone who is the former is also the latter. These are the contrary principles and the operations that are in him: "When I want to do good, evil is present with me." And these are expressed by the apostle, Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are against one another; so that I cannot do what I would."

And here lie the springs of the whole course of our obedience. An understanding of these principles is the main part of our wisdom. Next to the free grace of God in our justification by the blood of Christ, they are the only things where the glory of God and our own souls are concerned. These are the springs of our holiness and our sins, of our joys and troubles, of our refreshments and sorrows. So it is important for us all to be thoroughly acquainted with these things if we intend to walk with God and glorify him in this world.

And so we may see what wisdom is required to guide and manage our hearts and ways before God. Where the subjects of a ruler are fighting one another, unless great wisdom be used in government, all things will quickly be ruinous in that state. There are these contrary principles in the hearts of believers. And if they do not labour to be spiritually wise, how shall they be able to steer their course aright? Many men live in the dark to themselves all their days; whatever else they know, they do not know themselves. They know their outward estates, how rich they are, and they are careful to examine their bodies as to health and sickness; but as to their inward man, and their principles as to God and eternity, they know little or nothing. Indeed, few labour to grow wise in this matter, few study themselves as they ought, are acquainted with the evils of their own hearts as they ought; but the whole course of their obedience, and consequently of their eternal condition, depends on it. This is our wisdom; and it is a needful wisdom, if we have any design to please God, or to avoid what is an offence to the eyes of his glory.

We shall find, also, in our inquiry into this, what diligence and watchfulness is required to live as a Christian. There is constant heart enmity against it; and our design is to thoroughly uncover it. Most believers are slothful and negligent in this regard; they live and walk as though they intended to go to heaven blindfolded and asleep, as though they had no enemy to deal with.

What I shall principally fix on is what was first laid down, - namely, that there is great power in the remnant of indwelling sin in believers, with a constant inclination towards evil.

Awake, therefore, all of you in whose hearts is anything of the ways of God! Your enemy is not only on you, as on Samson of old, but is in you also. He is at work, by force and craft. If you do not want to dishonour God and his gospel; to scandalize the saints and ways of God; to wound your consciences and endanger your souls; to grieve the Spirit of God, the author of all your comforts; if you want to keep your garments undefiled, and escape the temptations and pollutions of the days wherein we live; to be preserved from apostasy; then awake to the consideration of this cursed enemy, which is the spring of innumerable evils, and the ruin of souls that perish!

## CHAPTER 2.

Indwelling sin a law - In what sense it is so called - What kind of law it is - An inward principle called a law - The power of sin shown.

What we shall consider is the power of indwelling sin.

It is a law. "I find a law," says the apostle. It is because of its power that it is so called. So the principle of grace in believers is the "law of the Spirit of life," Romans 8:2; the "exceeding greatness of the power of God" in them, Ephesians 1:19. Where there is a law there is power.

Two things attend every law: -

First, Dominion. Romans 7:1, "The law has dominion over a man whilst he lives:" - "It lords it over a man." Where there is law, there is dominion. It is properly the act of a superior, and it belongs to its nature to exact obedience by way of dominion.

Now, there is a twofold dominion, as there is a twofold law. There is a moral dominion over a man, and there is a real dominion in a man. The first is effected by the law of God, the latter by the law of sin. The law of sin has not in itself a rightful dominion; but it has what is equivalent to it; whence it is said, "to reign as a king," Romans 6:12, and "to lord it," or have dominion, verse 14, as a law in general is said to have, chap. 7:1. It has lost its complete dominion in believers. But even in them it is a law still. And though it have not a complete dominion, yet it will have a domination as to some things. It is still a law; so that it acts with power, though it have lost its complete power. Though it is weakened, its nature is not thawed. And as its particular workings, so the term itself teaches us what we are to expect from it, and what labours it will use for dominion.

Secondly, A law provokes those who hate it to do what it requires. A law has rewards and punishments. These secretly prevail, though the things commanded be not much desirable. All laws work on the minds of men through those rewards and punishments. The pleasures of sin are the rewards of sin; a reward that most men lose their souls to

obtain. By this the law of sin contended in Moses against the law of grace. Hebrews 11:25, 26, "He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he looked to the recompense of reward." The contest was in his mind between the law of sin and the law of grace. The motive on the part of the law of sin with which it prevails on the most, was the reward that it presented, - namely, that he should enjoy the pleasures of sin. By this it contended against the reward linked to the law of grace.

By this sorry reward this law keeps the world in obedience to its commands; and experience shows us what power it has to influence the minds of men. It has also punishments that it threatens men with who labour to cast off its yoke. Whatever trouble, or danger in the world attends gospel obedience, whatever hardship is to be offered to the sensual part of our natures in a strict course of putting sin to death, sin makes use of, as if they were punishments. By these it prevails on the "fearful," who shall have no share in life eternal, Revelation 21:8. And it is hard to say whether its pretended rewards or pretended punishments are its greatest strength.

By rewards it entices men to sins of commission, that satisfy its lusts. By punishments it induces men to omit duties. By promises of the pleasures of sin on the one hand, by threats of the deprivation of all sensual contentments and the infliction of temporal evils on the other, it has great power on the minds of men, often on believers themselves. Unless a man be prepared to reject the reasonings from these, there is no standing before the power of the law. The world falls before them every day. Look on the generality of men, and you shall find them wholly by these means at sin's disposal. Do the profits and pleasures of sin lie before them? nothing can stop them reaching after them. Do difficulties and inconveniences attend the duties of the gospel? - they will have nothing to do with them; and so are wholly given up to the dominion of this law.

And this lightwe have into the power of indwelling sin from the general nature of a law.

We may consider, next, what kind of law it is; which will farther evidence that power of it which we are considering. It is not an outward, written law, but an inbred, urging law. A law presented to us is not as powerful as a law inbred in us. Adam had a law of sin presented to him in his temptation; but because he had no law of sin inbred in him, he might have withstood it. An inbred law must be effectual. Let us take an example from that law which is contrary to this law of sin. The law of God was at first natural to man; it was created with his faculties, and was their guide, both in being and doing, in reference to living to God and glorifying him. Hence it had an especial power in the whole soul to enable it to obey, and to make all obedience easy and pleasant. Such is the power of an inbred law. And though this law, as to its rule, is now by nature cast out of the soul, yet the remaining sparks of it, because they are inbred, are very powerful; as the apostle declares, Romans 2:14, 15. Afterwards God renews this law, and writes it in tables of stone. But what is the power of this law? Will it now, as it is external and presented to men, enable them to perform the things that it requires? Not at all. God knew it would not, unless it were turned to an internal law again; an inward real principle, not merely a moral outward rule. So God makes his law internal again, and implants it on the heart as it was at first, when he intends to give it power to produce obedience in his people: Jeremiah 31:31-33, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." This is what God fixes on, on a revelation of the insufficiency of an outward law to lead men to obedience. "The written law," says he, "will not do it; deliverances from distress will not effect it; trials and afflictions will not accomplish it." "Then," says the Lord, "will I take another course: I will turn the written law into a living principle in their hearts, that will have a power that will assuredly make them my people, and keep them so." Now, such is this law of sin. It is an indwelling law: Romans 7:17, "It is sin that dwells in me;" verse 20, "Sin that dwells in me;" verse 21, "It is present with me;" verse 23, "It is in my members;" it is so far in a man, as in some sense it is said to be the man himself; verse 18, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing." The flesh, which is the seat and throne of this law, which indeed is this law, is in some sense the man himself, as

grace also is the new man. Now, from this consideration of it, that it is an indwelling law inclining to sin, as an inward principle, it has advantages that increase its strength and further its power; as,

1. It always abides in the soul. The apostle twice uses that expression, "It dwells in me." There is its constant residence. If it came on the soul only at certain times, there might be much obedience in its absence; and as they deal with usurping tyrants, whom they intend to thrust out of a city, the gates might be sometimes shut against it, that it might not return; the soul might fortify itself against it. But the soul is its home; there it dwells, and is no wanderer. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, this law of sin is always in you; in the best that you do, and in the worst. Men little consider what a dangerous companion is always at home with them. When they are in company, when alone, by night or by day, all is one, sin is with them. There is a living coal continually in their houses; which, if it is not looked to, will set them on fire, and may be consume them. Oh, the woeful security of poor souls! How little do most men think of this inbred enemy that is never from home! How little, for the most part, does the watchfulness of any professors relate to the danger of their state and condition!

2. It is always ready to apply itself. "It not only dwells in me," says the apostle, "but when I would do good, it is present with me." There is more in that expression than mere indwelling. An lodger may dwell in a house, but not be always meddling with what the man of the house has to do: but this law so dwells in us that it is with us in all we do; and when we most earnestly desire to be quit of it, it puts itself on us most strongly: "When I would do good, it is present with me." If you pray, if you give alms, if you meditate, if you in any way follow faith in God and love towards him, if you work righteousness, if you resist temptations, this troublesome lodger will still put itself on you; so that you cannot do what is good. Sometimes men provoke their lusts by following their temptations; no wonder if then they find them present and active. But it is so even when with all our efforts we labour to be free from them. This law of sin "dwells" in us; it adheres as a depraved principle, to our minds in darkness, to our affections in sensuality, to

our wills in aversion from what is good; and continually puts itself on us when we would be most gladly quit of it.

3. Being an indwelling law, it applies itself to its work with great ease, like "the sin that so easily besets us," Hebrews 12:1. It needs no doors to be opened; it needs no engines to work by. The soul cannot do anything without exercising the faculties this law resides in. Is the understanding to be applied to anything? there it is, in ignorance, vanity, folly. Is the will to be engaged? there it is, in spiritual deadness and obstinacy. Is the heart to be set on work? there it is, in inclinations to the world, and sensuality. It is easy for it to insinuate itself into all we do, and to hinder all that is good. It has an intimacy with the soul, so it easily besets us. Now, it has all these advantages since it is an indwelling law. It is always resident in the soul, it affects all its actions.

This is the law that the apostle says he found in himself; this is the name he gives to the remnant of indwelling sin in believers; and because we are believers, we also have these evidences of its power. Many in the world do not recognise this law in them. Whatever they have been taught, they do not have a spiritual sense and experience of the power of indwelling sin, because they are wholly under its dominion. They do not find darkness and folly in their minds; because they are darkness itself, and darkness reveals nothing. They do not find deadness and disobedience in their hearts and wills to God because they are dead wholly in trespasses and sins. They are at peace with their lusts, by being in bondage to them. And this is the state of most men in the world; which makes them despise all their eternal concerns. Why do men pursue the world with so much greed, that they neglect heaven, and life, and immortality for it, every day? Why do some pursue sensuality with delight? they drink and revel, and have their sports, whatever men may say. Why do so many live so unprofitably under the word, that they understand little of what is spoken to them, practise less of what they understand, and will not be stirred up to answer the mind of God in his calls to them? It is all from this law of sin and its power that rules in men.

It follows that if there is such a law in believers, it is their duty to find it out. The more they find its power, the less they will feel its effects. So much as men find of this law in them, so much they will abhor it and themselves, and be earnest for grace. All watchfulness and diligence in obedience will result from it. On this one hinge, of finding out and experiencing the power of this law of sin, turns the whole course of our lives. Ignorance of it breeds senselessness, carelessness, sloth, security, and pride; all which the Lord abhors. Eruptions into great, open, conscience-wasting, scandalous sins, are from want of a spiritual consideration of this law. Inquire, then, how it is with your souls. What do you find of this law? what experience do you have of its power? Do you find it dwelling in you, always present with you, putting forth its poison at all times, in all your duties, "when you would do good?" What humiliation, what self-abasement, what intenseness in prayer, what diligence, what watchfulness, this calls for! What spiritual wisdom you stand in need of! What supplies of grace, what assistance of the Holy Ghost, you will also find! I fear few of us have a diligence proportional to our danger.

## CHAPTER 3.

The seat or subject of the law of sin, the heart – What is meant by it - Properties of the heart as possessed by sin, unsearchable, deceitful - Where that deceit comes from.

HAVING shown that the remainders of indwelling sin in believers is a law, and demonstrated the power of it, we shall now proceed to give particular instances of its working.

FIRST, Its seat and subject;

SECONDLY, Its natural properties; and,

THIRDLY, Its operations and methods.

FIRST, For the seat and subject of this law of sin, the Scripture everywhere says it is the heart. There indwelling sin keeps its especial residence. It has invaded the throne of God himself: Ecclesiastes 9:3, "Madness is in the heart of men while they live." This is the root of all that madness which appears in their lives. Matthew 15:19,

"Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies," etc.

There are many outward temptations that befall men, which stir them up to these evils; but they only open the vessel, and let out what is stored in it. The root of all these things is in the heart. Temptations put nothing into a man, but only draw out what was in him before, Hence is that description of the effect of this law of sin, Genesis 6:5, "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually;" so also chap. 8:21. The whole work of the law of sin is here described. And its workshop, is said to be the heart; and so it is called by our Saviour "The evil treasure of the heart:" Luke 6:45, "An evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, brings forth evil things." This treasure is the prevailing principle of moral actions that is in

men. So, in the beginning of the verse, our Saviour calls grace "The good treasure of the heart" of a good man, whence what is good proceeds. It is a principle constantly inciting and stirring up to, and consequently bringing forth, actions like it, of the same nature as itself. And it is also called a treasure for its abundance. It will never be exhausted; the more lavish men are, the more they draw out of this treasure, the more it abounds! As men do not spend their grace, but increase it, by its exercise, no more do they their indwelling sin. The more men exercise their grace in duties of obedience, the more it is increased; and the more men exert the fruits of their lust, the more it is increased in them; it swallows up its own poison, and grows thereby. The more men sin, the more are they inclined to sin. It is from the deceitfulness of this law of sin that men persuade themselves that by this or that particular sin they shall so satisfy their lusts as that they shall need to sin no more. Every sin increases the principle, and fortifies the habit of sinning. It is an evil treasure, that increases by doing evil. And where does this treasure lie? It is in the heart; there it is laid up, there it is kept in safety. All the men in the world, all the angels in heaven, cannot take this treasure from a man.

The heart in the Scripture is used sometimes for the mind and understanding, sometimes for the will, sometimes for the affections, sometimes for the conscience, sometimes for the whole soul. Generally, it denotes the whole soul of man and its faculties, as they are all one principle of moral operations. The mind, as it inquires, discerns, and judges what is to be done; the will, as it chooses or refuses; the affections, as they like or dislike, cleave to or have an aversion; the conscience, as it warns and determines, - are all together called the heart. And in this sense it is that we say the seat of this law of sin is the heart of man. Only, we may add that the Scripture, speaking of the heart as the principle of men's actions, usually includes with it two things: -

1. A pleasingness to the soul in the things that are done. When men are pleased in and with what they do, they are said to do it with their whole hearts. Thus, when God blesses his people in love, he does it

"with his whole heart, and with his whole soul," Jeremiah 32:41.

2. Resolution and constancy in such actions. This is denoted in the metaphor of a treasure, from which men take out what they intend to use.

This is the dwelling-place of this law of sin, - the heart; as it is the entire principle of moral operations. Here dwells our enemy; this is the citadel of this tyrant, where it maintains a rebellion against God all our days. Sometimes it has more strength and success; sometimes less; but it is always in rebellion whilst we live.

To get an idea of the power of sin in this place, we may consider some properties of the heart that contribute to it. It is like an enemy in war, whose strength lie not only in his numbers and force of men or arms, but also in the impregnable forts he possesses. And such is the heart to this enemy of God and our souls.

1. It is unsearchable: Jeremiah 17:9, 10, "Who can know the heart? I the LORD search it." The heart of man is accessible only to God; hence he takes the honour of searching the heart to be as peculiar to himself, and as fully declaring him to be God, as any other attribute of his nature. We do not know one another's hearts; we do not know our own hearts as we ought. There are many who do not know the general disposition of their heart, whether it is good or bad, sincere or corrupt; but no one knows all the secret intrigues of his own heart. Does anyone know the perfect measure of his own light and darkness? Can any one know what actions of choosing his will will bring forth, faced with the endless variety of objects it will meet? Can any one understand his various afflictions? Does any man comprehend the secret springs of acting and refusing in the soul? Does any one know what will be the motions of the mind or will in all the circumstances of life? All in heaven and earth, except the infinite, all-seeing God, are utterly ignorant of these things. In this unsearchable heart dwells the law of sin; and much of its security, and so of its strength, lies in this, that it is past our finding out. We fight with an enemy whose secret

strength we cannot discover, whom we cannot follow into its fortresses. So often, when we think that sin is quite ruined, after a while we find it was only out of sight. Its refuge is an unsearchable heart, where we cannot pursue it. The soul may persuade itself all is well, when sin may be safe in the hidden darkness of the mind; for whatever is visible, is light. It may suppose the will to sin is utterly taken away, when yet there is an unsearchable reserve for a more vigorous temptations. Has a man had a contest with any lust, and a blessed victory over it by the Holy Ghost? When he thinks it is utterly expelled, he soon finds that it was only hidden from view. It can lie so close in the mind's darkness, in the will's weakness, in the disorder of the affections, that no eye can discern it. The best of our wisdom is to watch its first appearances, to catch its first workings, and to set ourselves in opposition to them; for we cannot follow it into the secret corners of the heart. It is true, there is yet a relief, - namely, that he to whom the work of destroying the law of sin and body of death in us is principally committed, namely, the Holy Ghost, comes with his axe to the very root; neither is there anything in an unsearchable heart that is not "naked and open to him," Hebrews 4:13; but we may thus see what an enemy we have to deal with.

2. As it is unsearchable, "It is deceitful above all things," incomparably so. There is great deceit in the dealings of men in the world; great deceit in their counsels in reference to their affairs; great deceit in their words and actions: the world is full of deceit and fraud. But all this is nothing to the deceit that is in man's heart towards himself. Now, deceitfulness added to unsearchableness gives great increase of strength to the law of sin. I speak not yet of the deceitfulness of sin itself, but the deceitfulness of the heart where it is seated. Proverbs 26:25, "There are seven abominations in the heart;" that is, not only many, but a complete number, as seven denotes. And they consist in deceitfulness; so the caution advises, "Do not trust him:" for it is only deceit that should make us not to trust in that degree and measure which the object is capable of.

Now, this deceitfulness of the heart, which makes it so able to harbour

sin, lies chiefly in these two things: -

(1.) It abounds in contradictions, so that it is not to be dealt with according to any constant rule. Some have much of this, from their natural constitution, or from other causes, in their lifestyle. They seem to be made up of contradictions; sometimes to be very wise in their affairs, sometimes very foolish; very open, and very reserved; very pliable, and very obstinate; very easy to be entreated, and very revengeful, all to a remarkable degree. This is generally accounted a bad character, and it generally proceeds from some predominant lust. But, in respect of moral good or evil, duty or sin, it is so with the heart of every man, flaming hot, and icy cold; weak, and stubborn; obstinate, and pliable. The attitude of the heart is ready to contradict itself every moment. Now you would think you had really grasped such an attitude, such a way; soon it is quite otherwise: so that none know what to expect from it. This disorder is brought on all the faculties by sin. God created them all in perfect harmony. The mind and reason were in perfect subjection to God and his will; the will answered, in its choice of good, the revelation made of it by the mind; the affections constantly followed the understanding and will. The mind's subjection to God was the spring of the harmonious motion of the soul and all the wheels in it. That being disturbed by sin, the rest of the faculties move contrary one to another. The will chooses not the good which the mind shows; the affections delight not in what the will chooses; but all rebel against each other. This is the result of our falling from God. Hence sometimes the will leads, the judgement follows. Yea, commonly the affections, that should follow, get the sovereignty, and draw the whole soul after them. And hence the heart is made up of so many contradictions. Sometimes the mind retains its sovereignty, and the affections are in subjection, and the will ready for its duty. This puts a good face on things. Immediately rebellion of the affections or obstinacy of the will takes place and prevails, and the whole scene is changed. This makes the heart deceitful above all things: it has no order that it is constant to, no stability; but turns within itself, so often the feet lead and guide the whole.

(2.) Its deceit lies in the false promises of its initial good resolutions. Sometimes the affections are touched and worked on; the whole heart appears to be good; all promises to be well. Within a while the whole picture is changed; the mind was not at all turned; the affections acted their parts a little and are gone off, and all the fair promises of the heart have gone with them. Now, add this deceitfulness to the unsearchableness before mentioned, and we shall find that the difficulty of dealing effectually with sin will be exceedingly increased. A deceiving and a deceived heart, who can deal with it? - especially considering that the heart employs all its deceits to the service of sin. All the disorder in the heart, all its false promises and fair appearances, promote the interest of sin. So God cautions the people to take heed, lest their own hearts should entice and deceive them.

Who can mention the treacheries that lie in the heart of man? It is not for nothing that the Holy Ghost expresses it, "It is deceitful above all things," - uncertain in what it does, and false in what it promises. And so it is, that, in the pursuit of our war against sin, we have not only the old work to go over and over, but new work still, new stratagems and wiles to deal with.

First, Never let us reckon that our work in contending against sin, in putting it to death, has finished. Its dwelling place is unsearchable; and when we think that we have thoroughly won the field, some reserve still remains that we did not see, that we did not know. Many conquerors have been ruined by carelessness after a victory, and many have been spiritually wounded after great successes against this enemy. David was so; his great fall into sin was after many years of godliness, manifold experiences of God, and carefully keeping himself from sin. This is one of the reasons why the faith of many declines in their old age; which we will deal with later. They have given over the work of putting sin to death before their work was at an end. There is no way for us to pursue sin in its unsearchable habitation but by being endless in our pursuit. And that command of the apostle which we have, Colossians 3:5, on this account is as necessary for those who are towards the end of their race, as those who are at the beginning: "Put

to death what is earthly in you;" be always doing it whilst you live in this world. It is true, great ground is obtained when the work is vigorously and constantly carried on; sin is much weakened, so that the soul presses forwards towards perfection: but the work must be endless whilst we are in this world. If we give over, we shall quickly see this enemy exerting itself with new strength and vigour. It may be under some great affliction, it may be in some eminent enjoyment of God, in the sense of the sweetness of blessed communion with Christ, we have been ready to say that there was an end of sin, that it was dead and gone for ever; but have we not found the contrary to be true? has it not been evident that it was only retired into some unsearchable recesses of the heart, as to its in-being and nature, though greatly weakened in its power? Let us, then, reckon on it, that there is no way to have our work done but by always doing it; and he who dies fighting in this warfare dies assuredly a conqueror.

Secondly, has it its residence in what is deceitful above all things? This calls for perpetual watchfulness. An open enemy, that deals by violence only, always gives some respite. You know where to have him and what he is doing, so as that sometimes you may sleep quietly without fear. But against adversaries that deal by deceit and treachery (which are long swords, and reach at the greatest distance) nothing will give security but perpetual watchfulness. It is impossible we should in this case be too watchful. The heart has a thousand wiles; and if we are in the least off from our watch, we will be surprised. Hence are those reiterated commands given for watching, for being diligent, careful, and the like. There is no living for those who have to deal with an enemy deceitful above all things, unless they persist in such an attitude. All cautions that are given in this case are necessary, especially that, "Remember not to believe." Does the heart promise fair? - rest not on it, but say to the Lord Christ, "Lord, undertake for me." Does the sun shine fair in the morning? - reckon not on a fair day; the clouds may arise and fall. Though the morning give a fair appearance of serenity and peace, turbulent affections may arise, and cloud the soul with sin and darkness.

Thirdly then, commit the whole matter with all diligence to Him who can search the heart, and knows how to prevent all its deceits. In the trials lies our duty, but here lies our safety. There is no treacherous corner in our hearts but he can search it; there is no deceit but he can frustrate it. This course David takes, Psalm 139. After he had set forth the omnipresence of God and his omniscience, verses 1-10, he cries out: verse 23, "Search me, O God, and try me." As if he had said, "I know little of my deceitful heart; but I would be sincere; I would not keep room for sin. So, O Lord, who are present with my heart, who know my thoughts long before, undertake this work, perform it thoroughly, for you alone are able so to do."

There are yet other arguments to show the strength of indwelling sin, whence it is termed a "law," which we must pass through.

## CHAPTER 4.

Indwelling sin is enmity against God - Its resulting power - Allows no peace nor rest - Is against God himself - Acts against God, and tendency to evil - Is universal - To all of God - In all of the soul - Constant.

SECONDLY. WE have seen the seat and subject of this law of sin. In the next place I shall consider one property of it that always belongs to its nature. And this is what is expressed by the apostle, Romans 8:7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." What is here called "the wisdom of the flesh," is the same as "the law of sin" which we insist on. And what does he say? Why, it is "enmity against God." It is not only an enemy, - for so possibly some reconciliation of it to God might be made, - but it is enmity itself, and so unable to accept terms of peace. Enemies may be reconciled, but enmity cannot; the only way to reconcile enemies is to destroy the enmity. So the apostle tells us, Romans 5:10, "We, who were enemies, are reconciled to God;" that is, a work brought about by the blood of Christ, - the reconciling of the greatest enemies. But when he comes to speak of enmity, the only way is for it to be abolished: Ephesians 2:15, "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity." There is no way to deal with enmity but by its abolition.

And as it is enmity, that if the least degree of it that can possibly be remains in any one, it is enmity still. As every drop of poison is poison, and will infect, and every spark of fire is fire, and will burn; so everything of the law of sin, the least of it, is enmity, it will poison, it will burn. Our apostle, who may well be supposed to have made as great a progress in the subduing of it as any one on earth, still cries out for deliverance, as from an irreconcilable enemy, Romans 7:24. The most imperceptible working of it, is work of enmity. Putting sin to death reduces its force, but does not change its nature. Grace changes the nature of man, but nothing can change the nature of sin. Whatever is worked on it, nothing is worked in it; it is enmity still, sin still. So this is our condition: - "God is love," 1 John 4:8. He is so in himself, eternally excellent, and desirable above all. He is so to us, he is so in

the blood of his Son and in all the inexpressible fruits of it, by which we are what we are, and where all our future hopes are wrapped up. Against this God we carry in us an enmity all our days; an enmity that is incapable by nature of cure. Destroyed it shall be, but cured it cannot be. If a man has an enemy to deal with that is too mighty for him, as David had with Saul, he do as David did, - consider what provoked his enemy against him, and so address himself to remove the cause and make up his peace: 1 Samuel 26:19,

"If the LORD has stirred you up against me, let him accept an offering: but if they are the children of men, may they be cursed before the LORD."

If it is from God or man, there is yet hope of peace. But when a man has enmity itself to deal with, nothing is to be expected but continual fighting. If it is not destroyed, it will destroy the soul.

Here lies no small part of its power; it allows no terms of peace. There may be a compromise where there is no reconciliation, - there may be a truce where there is no peace; but with this enemy we can obtain neither the one nor the other. It is never quiet, conquering nor conquered; which was the only kind of enemy that the famous warrior complained of old. It is in vain for a man to expect rest from his lust except by its death; of absolute freedom but by his own. Some, in the tumult of their corruptions, seek for quietness by labouring to satisfy them, "making provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts" as the apostle speaks, Romans 13:14. This is to put out a fire by wood and oil. As all the fuel in the world being cast into the fire, will not at all satisfy it, but increase it; so sinning will not satisfy sin, - it only inflames it. If a man parts with some of his goods to an enemy, it may satisfy him; but enmity will have all, and is not one whit the more satisfied than if he had received nothing, - like the lean cattle that were not less hungry for having devoured the fat. You cannot bargain with the fire to take only some of your houses; you must put it out. It is like the contest between a wise man and a fool: Proverbs 29:9, "Whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest." Whatever temper he be in, his folly makes him

troublesome. It is so with this indwelling sin: if it is violent, as it will be in provocations, it will be outrageous; if it seems to be contented, all is one, there is no peace, no rest to be had. If it were of any other nature, some other way might have been fixed on; but it consists in enmity, so the soul will only find relief in its ruin.

Secondly, It is not only said to be "enmity," but it is said to be "enmity against God." It has chosen a great enemy. It is described as our enemy in various places: 1 Peter 2:11, "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;" they are our enemies. Sometimes as an enemy to the Spirit that is in us: "The flesh lusts, or fights, against the Spirit, Galatians 5:17. It fights against the Spirit in us, to conquer it; it fights against our souls, to destroy them. It has special designs against our souls, and against the principle of grace that is in us; but its proper object is God: it is "enmity against God." It is its work to oppose grace; as a result it opposes our souls; but its nature is to oppose God; as the lawgiver, as holy, as the author of the gospel, of a way of salvation by grace, and not by works. Why does it oppose duty, so that the good we would do we do not? Why does it render the soul carnal, unspiritual, weary, wandering? It is because of its enmity to God, whom the soul aims to have communion with. It has that command from Satan which the Assyrians had from their king:

"Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel," 1 Kings 22:31.

It is God himself, the King of Israel, that sin sets itself against. There is reason for all its opposition; it relates to God. Is a road set up, where communion with God is not aimed at, but only the duty itself, as is the manner of men in most of their worship? the opposition against it from the law of sin will be very weak. The Assyrians, because of his show of being a king, assaulted Jehoshaphat, but when they found that it was not Ahab, they turned back from pursuing him; so when there is a show of the worship of God, sin may make head against it at first, but when the duty cries out in the heart that God is not really there, sin turns away to seek its proper enemy, God himself, elsewhere. So many

poor creatures spend their days in dismal superstitions, without any great reluctance from within, when others cannot be bothered freely to watch with Christ in a spiritual manner one hour. It is no wonder that men fight with carnal weapons for their superstitious exterior worship, when they have no interior fighting against it; for God is not in it, and the law of sin does not oppose duty, but God in every duty. This is our condition. All the opposition that arises in us to anything that is spiritually good, whether darkness in the mind, or aversion in the will, or sloth in the affections, all the secret arguings that are in the soul, the direct object of them is God himself. The enmity lies against him; which surely should influence us to constant watchfulness.

It is thus also in respect of all tendency to sin, as well as aversion from God. It is God himself that is aimed at. It is true, the pleasures, the wages of sin, greatly influence the sensual affections of men: but it is the holiness and authority of God that sin rises up against; it hates the yoke of the Lord. "You have been weary of me," says God to sinners; and that during their duties. Every act of sin results from being weary of God. Thus Job tells us what lies at the bottom in the heart of sinners: "They say to God, Depart from us;" - it is enmity against him and aversion from him. Here lies the nature of every sin: - it is opposition to God, casting off his yoke, breaking off the dependence which the creature ought to have on the Creator. And the apostle, Romans 8:7, gives the reason why he affirms "the carnal mind to be enmity against God," "because it is not subject to the will of God, nor indeed can be." It never is, nor will, nor can be subject to God; its whole nature is opposed to him. The soul may be subject to the law of God; but this law of sin sets up in opposition to it, and will not yield.

This law of sin, that is enmity against God, may be farther considered:

1. It is universal. The enmity is absolute and universal, as are all enmities that are grounded in the nature of the things themselves. Such enmity is against all aspects its object: for,

(1.) It is universal to all of God; and,

(2.) It is universal in all of the soul.

(1.) It is universal to all of God. If there were anything of God that sin had no enmity against, the soul might have a constant shelter within itself, by applying itself to duty towards him, to a communion with him, that sin would not oppose. But the enmity lies against all of God, and everything where we have to do with him. It is not subject to any part of the law. Sin is enmity to all of God. His goodness, his holiness, his mercy, his grace, his promises: it opposes it all; and all duty, private, public, in the heart, in external works. And the nearer anything is to God, the greater is its enmity to it. The more of spirituality and holiness is in anything, the greater is its enmity. Concerning them in whom this law is most predominant, God says,

"You have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof," Proverbs 1:25.

Not this or that part of God's counsel is opposed, but all his counsel; whatever he calls for is set at nought, and nothing of his reproof attended to. A man would not think strange that sin should oppose God in his law, which comes to judge it; but it raises a greater enmity against him in his gospel, where he offers mercy and pardon as a deliverance from it; because more of the glorious properties of God's nature, more of his excellency is shown there.

(2.) It is universal in all of the soul. If this law of sin had been content to subdue any one faculty of the soul, or left any one affection free from its bondage, - it might possibly have been more easily subdued. But when Christ comes with his spiritual power on the soul, to conquer it, he has no quiet landing-place. He can set foot on no ground but what he must fight for. Not the mind, not an affection, not the will, but all is secured against him. And when grace has made its entrance, yet sin will dwell in all its coasts. Were anything in the soul at perfect liberty, there a stand might be made to drive it from all the rest of its

holds; but it is universal, and wars in the whole soul. The mind has its own darkness to wrestle with, - the will its perverseness; every affection its aversion from God, and its sensuality, to deal with: so that one cannot relieve another as they ought; they have their hands full at home. Hence it is that our knowledge is imperfect, our obedience weak, love not unmixed, fear not pure, delight not free and noble.

2. Here might be added its constancy. It has no thoughts of yielding, despite the powerful opposition that is made to it both by the law and gospel.

This, then, is a third evidence of the power of sin, namely, that it is "enmity against God," universal and constant.. What can be of a more sad consideration than that we should carry about us constantly what is enmity against God, in all that he is? I cannot say it is well with those who find it not. It is well with them, indeed, in whom it is weakened, and the power of it abated; but for those who say it is not in them, they only deceive themselves, and there is no truth in them.

## CHAPTER 5.

Nature of sin farther revealed as it is enmity against God - Its aversion from all good opened - Means to prevent the effects of it prescribed.

THIRDLY. WE have considered the nature of indwelling sin in reference to its power; but it shows itself more clearly in its actions. We know that something lives by the works of life; and great actions imply a powerful life. Such are the actions of this law of sin, which all show its power.

Its nature is, that it is enmity. Now, there are two general heads of the working of enmity; Aversion and Opposition.

First, Aversion. Our Saviour, describing the enmity that was between himself and the teachers of the Jews, says in the prophet, "My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me," Zechariah 11:8. Where there is mutual enmity, there is mutual aversion. So it was between the Jews and the Samaritans, - they were enemies, and abhorred one another; as John 4:9.

Secondly, Opposition. Isaiah 63:10, "He was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them;" speaking of God towards the people. Where there is enmity, there will be fighting; it is the natural product of it. Now, both these effects are found in this law of sin: -

First, There is an aversion in it to God and everything of God. All indisposition to duty, wherein communion with God is to be obtained; all weariness of duty; all carnality, or formality to duty, - it all springs from this root. The wise man cautions us against this evil: Ecclesiastes 5:1, "Keep your foot when you go to the house of God;" - "Do you have any spiritual duty to perform, and do you design the attaining of any communion with God? look to yourself, take care of your affections; they will be wandering, due to their aversion to what you have in hand." There is not any good that we would do wherein we may not find this aversion exercising itself. "When I would do good, evil is

present with me;" - "At any time, at all times, when I would do anything that is spiritually good, it is present, - that is, to hinder me; because it loathes the thing I have in hand, it will keep me from it if it is possible." In them in whom it prevails, it comes at length to that frame which is expressed, Ezekiel 33:31. It will allow an outward presence in the worship of God, but it keeps the heart quite away.

Some may pretend they find it not so in themselves, but they have freedom and liberty in and to all the duties of obedience that they attend to. But I fear this pretended liberty will be found to arise from one or both of these causes: -First, Ignorance of the true state of their inward man and its actions towards God. They know not how it is with them, and are not to be believed. They are in the dark, and neither know what they do nor whither they are going. The Pharisee knew little of this matter; so he boasted of his duties to God. Or, whatever duties of obedience such persons perform, they may, through want of faith, have no communion with them; and if so, sin will make little opposition to them. We speak of them whose hearts are exercised with these things. And if, as they complain of them, and groan for deliverance from them, others cry out to them, "Stand off, we are holier than you," they are willing to bear their condition, knowing that their way is safe, though it be troublesome; and willing to see their own dangers, that they may avoid the ruin which others fall into.

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

1. In these, this aversion and loathing will often reveal itself in the affections. A secret striving will be in them about close dealing with God, unless the hand of God in his Spirit be strong on his soul. Even when convictions, sense of duty, dear and real esteem of God and

communion with him, have carried the soul into its closet, yet if there be not the vigour of spiritual life constantly at work, there will be a reluctance; sometimes there will be a strong urge to the contrary, so that the soul would rather do anything than vigorously apply itself to what the inward man breathes after. It is weary before it begins, and says, "When will the work be over?" Here God and the soul are immediately concerned; and it is a great conquest to do what we would, though we come exceedingly short of what we should do.

2. It shows itself in the mind also. When we address ourselves to God in Christ, we are, as Job speaks, to "fill our mouths with arguments," Job 23:4, that we may be able to plead with him, as he calls on us to do: Isaiah 43:26, "Put me in remembrance; let us plead together." So the church is called on to take to itself arguments in going to God, Hosea 14:2. The sum is, that the mind should be furnished with the considerations that are prevailing with God, and be ready to plead them, and manage them in the most spiritual manner, to the best advantage. Now, is there no difficulty to lay out itself to the utmost in this work; to be clear and constant in its duty; to make use of its stores of promises and experiences? It starts, wanders, flags, - all from this secret aversion to communion with God, which proceeds from the law of indwelling sin. Some complain that they cannot meditate, - they cannot bend their minds to it. There may be a great cause of this in their want of a right understanding of it, and of the ways of managing the soul in it; but this secret enmity has its hand in the loss they are at also, both in their minds and in their affections. Others are forced to find their life in family and public duties, they find such little success in private. This has been the beginning of the apostasy of many professors, and the source of many foolish opinions. Finding this aversion in their minds and affections from constancy in private spiritual duties, not knowing how to prevail against these difficulties through Him who enables us, they have been subdued to a neglect of them, until, having lost all conscience of them, they have had a door opened to all sin and licentiousness, and so to a full apostasy. I am convinced that very few fall away from a profession of any duration, but their door of entrance into the folly of backsliding was either some

great sin that blooded their consciences; or else it was a course of neglect in private duties, arising from a weariness of contending against that powerful aversion which they found in themselves to those duties. And this also, through the craft of Satan, has been improved into many foolish opinions of living to God without and above any duties of communion. And we find, that after men have for a while blinded their consciences with this pretence, wickedness has been the end of their folly. And the reason of all this is, that to give way to the law of sin in the least is to give strength to it. To let it alone, is to let it grow; not to conquer it, is to be conquered by it.

As it is in respect of private, so it is also in respect of public duties, that have anything extraordinary in them. What strivings, strugglings, and pleadings are there in the heart about them, especially against the spirituality of them! Yea, in and under them, will not the mind and affections sometimes be entangled with things uncouth, new, and strange to them, such as, at the time of the least serious business, a man would not deign to take into his thoughts? But if the least loose, liberty, or advantage be given to indwelling sin, if it is not perpetually watched over, it will work to a strange and unexpected issue. In brief, let the soul uncloude any duty whatever, private or public, anything that is called good, - let a man divest it of all outward respects which secretly insinuate themselves into the mind and give it some complacency in what it is about, but do not render it acceptable to God - and he shall assuredly find somewhat of the power and some of the effects of this aversion. It begins in sluggishness and indifference; goes on with entangling the mind and affections with other things; and will end, if not prevented, in weariness of God, which he complains of in his people, Isaiah 43:22. They ceased from duty because they were "weary of God."

As this is of great importance to professors in their walk with God, we must not pass it over without some directions for them in their opposition to it. I am not giving directions for the putting to death indwelling sin in general, - which is to be done alone by the Spirit of Christ, by virtue of our union with him, Romans 8:13, - but only of our

particular duty with reference to this especial evil or indwelling sin that we have insisted on, or what in this case the wisdom of faith calls for; which will be our course as we consider other effects of it.

1. The great means to prevent the effects of this aversion is constantly keeping the soul in a holy frame. This weakens the whole law of sin, and all its properties, and particularly this aversion. It is this frame only that will enable us to say with the Psalmist, Psalm 57:7, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." It is utterly impossible to keep the heart in a conquering holy frame in any one duty, unless it is so in every one. If sin's entanglements get hold in any one thing, they will put themselves on the soul in everything. A constant, even frame in all duties is the only preservative for any one way. Let not him who is careless in public persuade himself that all will be clear and easy in private. There is a harmony in obedience; break but one part, and you interrupt the whole. Our wounds in particular arise generally from negligence as to the whole course; so David informs us, Psalm 119:6,

"Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all your commandments."

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

2. Labour to prevent the beginnings of the workings of this aversion; let grace be with it in every duty. We are directed, 1 Peter 4:7, to "watch to prayer;" and as it is to prayer, so to every duty, - that is, to take care that we be not hindered from within nor from without from doing it. Watch against temptations, to oppose them; watch against the aversion that is in sin, to prevent it. As we are not to give place to Satan, no more are we to sin. If it is not prevented in its first attempts it will prevail. Whatever good we have to do, and find evil present with us (as we shall), prevent it from parleying with the soul, insinuating poison into the mind and affections, by a vigorous, holy, violent

stirring up of the graces that are to be set at work in that duty. Let Jacob come first into the world; or, if prevented by the violence of Esau, let him lay hold on his heel, to overthrow him and obtain the birthright. As soon as Peter cries to our Saviour, "Master, spare yourself," he replies, "Get behind me, Satan." So ought we to say, "Begone, you law of sin, you present evil;" and it may be of the same use to us. So get grace up to duty, and be early in the rebukes of sin.

3. Though it do its worst, never let it conquer. Be sure you are not wearied by its persistence, nor driven from your hold by its boldness; do not faint by its opposition. Take the apostle's advice, Hebrews 6:11, 12,

"We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end: that you are not slothful."

Still hold out in the same diligence. There are many ways whereby men are driven from a constant holy performance of duties, all of them dangerous, if not pernicious to the soul. Some are diverted by business, some by company, some by the power of temptations, some discouraged by their own darkness; but none so dangerous as this, when the soul gives over, as wearied by the aversion of sin to it, or to communion with God in it. This means that the soul has given itself up to the power of sin; which, unless the Lord break the snare of Satan, will prove ruinous. Our Saviour's instruction is, that "we ought always to pray, and not to faint," Luke 18:1. Opposition will arise, - none so bitter and keen as that from our own hearts; if we faint, we perish. "Take heed lest you are wearied," says the apostle, "and faint in your minds," Hebrews 12:3. Such a fainting as attended with a weariness, with giving place to the aversion working in our hearts, is to be avoided, if we would not perish. The caution is the same with that of Romans 12:12, "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer;" and with that of chap. 6:12,

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts."

To cease from duty, in part or in whole, due to the aversion of sin to its spirituality, is to give sin the rule, and to obey its lusts. Yield not, then, to it, but hold out the conflict; wait on God, and you shall prevail:  
Isaiah 40:31,

"Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

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

4. Carry about a constant, humbling sense of this close aversion to spiritualness that lies in our nature. If men become truly aware of it, what could be more powerful to bring them to walk humbly with God? That after all the revelations that God has made of himself to them, all the kindness they have received from him, his doing them good and not evil in all things, there should still be such a heart of unkindness and unbelief that it contains an aversion to communion with him, - how ought the thoughts of it to cast us into the dust! to fill us with shame and self-aborrence all our days! What have we found in God, in any of our approaches or addresses to him, that it should be thus with us? What iniquity have we found in him? has he been a wilderness to us, or a land of darkness? Did we ever lose anything by drawing nigh to him? has not all the rest and peace we have obtained lain therein? Is not he the fountain and spring of all our mercies, of all our desirable things? has he not welcomed us when we have come? Have we not received from him more than heart can conceive or tongue express?

So what ails our foolish and wretched hearts, to harbour such a cursed secret dislike of him and his ways? Let us be ashamed and astonished as we reflect on it, and walk in a humbling sense of it all our days. Let us carry it about with us in our most secret thoughts. And as this is in

itself acceptable to God, who delights to dwell with those who are of a humble and contrite spirit, so it is very effective in weakening the evil we consider.

5. Practise filling your mind with the beauty of spiritual things, so that they become desirable to the soul. It is a principle that the soul of man will not continue cheerfully in the worship of God unless it finds beauty in it. Hence, when men had lost all spiritual sense of the things of God, to supply the lack that was in their souls, they invented outwardly pompous ways of worship, in images, paintings and pictures; which they have called "The beauties of holiness!" It is clear, however, that the mind of man must see beauty in the worship, of God's or it will not delight in it. Let the soul learn to find spiritual beauty in obedience, in communion with God, and all approaches to him, that it may be filled with delight in them. Becoming familiar with the beauty of these things is an excellent way of weakening the aversion spoken of.

## CHAPTER 6.

The work of this enmity against God by way of opposition - First, It lusts - Wherein the lusting of sin consists - Its surprising of the soul - Readiness to close with temptations - Secondly, Its fighting and warring - 1. In rebellion against the law of grace - 2. In assaulting the soul.

The second way whereby it exerts itself is opposition. Enmity will oppose what it is at enmity with. As light and darkness, heat and cold, so virtue and vice oppose each other. So is it with sin and grace; says the apostle, "These are contrary one to the other," Galatians 5:17. They are constantly in mutual opposition, as we shall see.

Now, there are two ways whereby enemies manage an opposition, - first, by force; secondly, by deceit. So when the Egyptians became enemies to the children of Israel, Exodus 1:10, Pharaoh says, "Let us deal wisely," or rather cunningly, "with this people;" for so Stephen, with respect to this word, expresses it, Acts 7:19, he used "all manner of fraudulent sophistry." And to this deceit they added force in their oppressions. This is the way of things where there is enmity; and the law of sin uses both of these in its enmity against God and our souls.

I shall begin with the first, or its actions, in a way of force, in an open downright opposition to God and his law, or the good that a believing soul would do in obedience to God and his law. And in this whole matter we must be careful to steer our course aright, taking the Scripture for our guide, with spiritual reason and experience for our companions; for there are many shelves in our course which must diligently be avoided, that none who consider these things be troubled without cause, or comforted without a just foundation.

In this first way, whereby this sin exerts its enmity in opposition, - namely, by force or strength, - there are four things, expressing so many degrees in the pursuit of its enmity: -

First, Its general inclination: It "lusts," Galatians 5:17.

Secondly, Its way of contending: It "fights or wars," Romans 7:23; James 4:1; 1 Peter 2:11.

Thirdly, Its success in this contest: It "brings the soul into captivity to the law of sin," Romans 7:23.

Fourthly, Its growth and rage on success: It comes up to "madness," as an enraged enemy will do, Ecclesiastes 9:3. All which we must speak about.

First, In general it is said to lust: Galatians 5:17, "The flesh lusts against the Spirit." This word expresses the general nature of that opposition which the law of sin makes against God and the rule of his Spirit of grace in those who believe; and, therefore, the least degree of that opposition is expressed hereby. When it does anything, it lusts; as, because burning is the general acting of fire, whatever else it does, it burns. When fire does anything it burns; and when the law of sin does anything it lusts.

Hence, all the actions of this law of sin are called "The lusts of the flesh:" Galatians 5:16, "You shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh;" Romans 13:14, "Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the its lusts." Nor are these lusts of the flesh those only whereby men act their sensuality in riot, drunkenness, uncleanness, and the like; but they include all the actions of the law of sin whatever, in all the faculties and affections of the soul. Thus, Ephesians 2:3, we have mention of the desires, or wills, or "lusts of the mind," as well as of the "flesh." The mind, the most spiritual part of the soul, has its lusts, no less than the sensual appetite, which seems sometimes more properly to be called the "flesh." And in the products of these lusts there are "defilements of the spirit" as well as of the "flesh," 2 Corinthians 7:1, - that is, of the mind and understanding, as well of the appetite and affections, and the body that attends their service. And in the blamelessness of all these consists our holiness: 1 Thessalonians 5:23,

"The God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

By the "flesh" in this matter the whole old man, or the law of sin, is meant: John 3:6, "What is born of the flesh is flesh," - that is, it is all so, and nothing else; and whatever remains of the old nature in the new man is flesh still. And this flesh lusts, - this law of sin does so; which is the foundation of all its opposition to God. And this it does two ways: -

1. In a hidden, close tendency to all evil. This lies in it habitually. Whilst a man is in the state of nature, fully under the dominion of this law of sin, it is said that "every figment of his heart is evil, and that continually," Genesis 6:5. It can produce nothing but what is evil; because this habitual tendency to evil that is in the law of sin is absolutely predominant. It is in the heart like poison that has nothing to allay its venomous qualities, and so infects whatever it touches. And where its dominion is broken, yet in its own nature it has still a habitual tendency to what is evil, wherein its lusting consists.

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

Indwelling sin is like a river. Whilst its springs are open, and waters are continually supplied to its streams, set a dam before it, and it causes it to rise until it overthrows the dam or overflows its banks. If the springs are dried up, the rest may be restrained. But as long as

there is running water, it will constantly press on what stands before it, because it is its nature so to do; and if it can make a passage, it will proceed. So is it with indwelling sin; whilst its springs are open, in vain is it for men to set a dam before it by their convictions and promises. They may check it for a while, but it will increase, rise high, and rage until it overthrows all those convictions and resolutions, or makes itself an underground passage by some secret lust, that shall give a full vent to it. But suppose that its springs are dried up by regenerating grace, its streams abated by holiness; yet whilst anything remains of it, it will be pressing constantly forward to actual sin.

And this tendency is revealed two ways: -

(1.) In its unexpectedly taking the soul into foolish imaginations, which it looked not for, nor was any occasion administered to them. It is with indwelling sin as it is with the contrary principle of sanctifying grace. This gives the soul, if I may so say, many a blessed happening. It often generates a holy, spiritual frame in the heart and mind, when we have had no previous rational considerations to work them. And this manifests it to be an habitual principle prevailing in the mind: so Song of Solomon 6:12, "Before I was aware, my soul made me as the chariots of Ammi-nadib; that is, free, willing, and ready for communion with Christ. "I knew not; it was done by the power of the Spirit of grace; so that I took no notice of it, until it was done." The frequent actions of grace in this manner, exciting acts of faith, love, and complacency in God, are evidences of much strength and prevalence of it in the soul. And thus, also, is it with indwelling sin; ere the soul is aware, without any temptation, when it knows not, it is cast into a foolish frame. Sin produces its figments secretly in the heart, and prevents the mind's consideration of what it is about. I mean hereby those first acts of the soul; which are thus far involuntary, as that they have not the consent of the will to them, but are voluntary as far as sin has its residence in the will. And these events, if the soul be not awake to prevent their action, often set all on fire, and engage the mind and affections into actual sin: for as by grace we are often, ere we are aware, "made as the chariots of a willing people," and are far

engaged in heavenly-mindedness and communion with Christ, making speed in it as in a chariot; so by sin are we often, ere we are aware, carried into distempered affections, foolish imaginations, and delight in things that are not good. Hence is that caution of the apostle, Galatians 6:1, "If a man be caught in a fault, or in a transgression." I doubt not but the subtlety of Satan and the power of temptation are here taken into consideration by the apostle, which causes him to express a man's falling into sin by "if he be caught." So this working of indwelling sin also has its consideration in it, and that in the chiefest place, without which nothing else could surprise us; for without the help thereof, whatever comes from without, from Satan or the world, must have some parley in the mind before it is received, but it is from within, from ourselves, that we are surprised. Hereby are we brought to do what we would not, and hindered from doing what we would.

So when the soul is often doing quite another thing, engaged quite on another design, sin starts that in the heart or imaginations of it that carries it away into what is evil and sinful. Yea, to manifest its power, sometimes, when the soul is seriously engaged in putting any sin to death, it will, by one means or other, lead it away into a dalliance with that very sin whose ruin it is seeking, and whose death it is engaged in! But as there is in this operation of the law of sin a special enticing or entangling, we shall speak to it fully afterward. Now, these occurrences can be from nothing but an habitual tendency to evil in the principle from whence they proceed; not a habitual inclination to actual sin in the mind or heart, but an habitual tendency to evil in the sin that is in the mind or heart. This troubles the soul. How much communion with God is hereby prevented, how many meditations are disturbed, how much the minds and consciences of men have been defiled by this acting of sin, some may have observed. I know no greater burden in the life of a believer than these involuntary happenings in the soul; involuntary, as to the actual consent of the will, but not so in respect of that corruption which is in the will, and is the principle of them. And it is in respect to these that the apostle makes his complaint, Romans 7:25.

(2.) This habitual inclination manifests itself in its readiness, without dispute, to join with every temptation where it may possibly be excited. As we know it is in the nature of fire to burn, because it immediately lays hold on whatever is combustible, let any temptation be presented to a man, whose nature or manner of its proposal, makes it a temptation; he has not only to do with the temptation as presented, but also with his own heart about it. Without farther consideration, the temptation has got a friend in him. Not a moment's space is given between the proposal and the necessity to look to the enemy within. And this also argues a habitual tendency to evil. Our Saviour said of the temptations of Satan, "The prince of this world comes, and he has no part in me," John 14:30. He had more temptations, in number, quality, and fierceness, from Satan and the world, than ever had any of the sons of men; but yet in all of them he had to deal only with what came from without. His holy heart had nothing like them, suited to them, or ready to give them entertainment: "The prince of this world had nothing in him." So it was with Adam. When temptation befell him, he had only the outward proposal to look to; all was well within until the outward temptation took place and prevailed. With us it is not so. In a city that is at unity in itself, without divisions and parties, if an enemy approach about it, the rulers and inhabitants have no thoughts at all but only how they may oppose the enemy without, and resist him in his approaches. But if the city be divided in itself, if there be factions and traitors within, the very first thing they do is to look to the enemies at home, the traitors within, to cut off the head of Sheba, if they will be safe. All was well with Adam when Satan came, so that he had only to look to his approaches. But now, on the access of any temptation, the soul is instantly to look in, where it shall find this traitor at work, closing with the baits of Satan, and stealing away the heart; and this it does always, which shows an habitual inclination. Psalm 38:17, says David, "I am ready to halt," or for halting: - "I am disposed to the slipping of my foot into sin," verse 16, as he expounds the meaning of that phrase, Psalm 78:2, 3. There was from indwelling sin a continual disposition in him to be slipping, stumbling, halting, on every temptation. There is nothing so vain, foolish, ridiculous, nothing so vile and abominable,

nothing so atheistic or execrable, but, if it is presented to the soul in a way of temptation, there is that in this law of sin which is ready to answer it before it is decried by grace. And this is the first thing in this lusting of the law of sin, - it consists in its habitual tendency to evil, manifesting itself by the involuntary movings of the soul to sin, and its readiness, without consideration, to join in all temptations.

2. Its lusting consists in its pressing after what is evil, and opposition to what is good. The former instance showed its constant readiness to this work; this now deals with the work itself. It is not only ready, but for the most part always engaged. "It lusts," says the Holy Ghost. It does so continually. It stirs in the soul by one act or other constantly, almost as the spirits in the blood, or the blood in the veins. This the apostle calls its tempting: James 1:14, "Every man is tempted by his own lust." Now, what is it to be tempted? It is to have that presented to a man's consideration which, if he obeys it, it is evil, it is sin to him. This is sin's trade: - "It lusts." It is raising up in the heart, and proposing to the mind and affections, what is evil; trying, whether the soul will follow its suggestions, or how far it will carry them on, even if it does not wholly prevail. Now, when such a temptation comes from outside, it is to the soul an indifferent thing, neither good nor evil, unless it is consented to; but the very proposal from within, it being the soul's own act, is its sin. And this is the work of the law of sin, - it is continually proposing innumerable forms of evil, in every kind that the nature of man is capable of. Something or other, inordinate, unspiritual, unanswerable to the rule, it presents to the soul. And this power of sin to beget ideas of evil in the heart the apostle may refer to, 1 Thessalonians 5:22, "Keep yourselves from every idea of sin in the heart;" for the word there used does not anywhere signify outward appearance: neither is it the appearance of evil, but an evil idea that is intended. This lusting of sin is what the prophet expresses in wicked men, in whom its law is predominant: Isaiah 57:20,

"The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt;"

a similitude most lively, expressing the lustings of the law of sin, continually bubbling up in the heart, with foolish, and filthy imaginations and desires. This, then, is the first thing in the opposition that this enmity makes to God, in its general inclination, it "lusts."

Secondly, There is its particular way of contending, - it fights; that is, it acts with violence, as men do in war. First, it lusts, stirring inordinate thoughts in the mind, desires in the appetite and the affections, proposing them to the will. But it rests not there, it cannot rest; it urges its proposals with strength, and vigour, fighting to obtain its purpose. Would it merely present things to the soul, and immediately acquiesce in the judgement of the mind, that the thing is evil, against God and his will, and not farther to be insisted on, much sin might be prevented that is now produced; but it rests not here, - it proceeds to carry on its design with earnestness. By this means wicked men "inflame themselves," Isaiah 57:5. They are self-inflamers, as the word signifies, to sin; every spark of sin is cherished until it grows into a flame: and so it will do in others, where it is so cherished.

Now, this fighting of sin consists in two things: -

1. In its rebellion against grace, or the law of the mind.

2. In its assaulting the soul, contending for sovereignty over it.

1. The first is expressed by the apostle, Romans 7:23: "I find," says he, "another law, rebelling against the law of my mind." There are, it seems, two laws in us, - the "law of the flesh," or of sin; and the "law of the mind," or of grace. But contrary laws cannot both obtain sovereign power over the same person, at the same time. The sovereign power in believers is in the hand of the law of grace; so the apostle declares, verse 22, "I delight in the law of God in the inward man." Obedience to this law is performed with delight in the inward man, because its authority is lawful and good. So more expressly, chap. 6:14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace." Now, to war against the law that has a just sovereignty is

to rebel; and so ought to have been so translated, "Rebelling against the law of my mind." And this rebellion consists in a stubborn opposition to the commands of the law of grace. Does the "law of the mind" command anything as duty? Does it severely rise up against anything that is evil? When the lusting of the law of sin rises up to this degree, it contends against obedience with all its might; the effect whereof, as the apostle tells us, is "the doing what we would not, and the not doing what we would," chap. 7:15, 16. And we may gather a notable instance of the power of sin in this its rebellion from this place. The law of grace prevails on the will, so that it would do what is good: "To will is present with me," verse 18; "When I would do good," verse 21; and again, verse 19, "And I would not do evil." And it prevails on the understanding, so that it approves or disapproves, according to the dictates of the law of grace: Verse 16, "I consent to the law that it is good;" and verse 15. The judgement always lies on the side of grace. It prevails also on the affections: Verse 22, "I delight in the law of God in the inward man." Now, if this be so, that grace has the sovereign power in the understanding, will, and affections, how is it that it does not always prevail, that we do not always do what we would, and abstain from what we would not? Is it not strange that a man should not do what he chooses and delights in? Is there anything more required to enable us to what is good? The law of grace does all, as much as can be expected from it, what in itself is abundantly sufficient for the perfecting of all holiness in the fear of the Lord. But here lies the difficulty, in the opposition that is made by the rebellion of this "law of sin." Neither is it expressible with what vigour and variety sin acts in this matter. Sometimes it presents diversions, sometimes it causes weariness, sometimes it finds out difficulties, sometimes it stirs up contrary affections, sometimes it begets prejudices, and one way or other entangles the soul; so that it never allows grace to have complete success in any duty. Verse 18, "I find not the way perfectly to work out, or accomplish, what is good," so the word signifies; and that from this opposition that is made by the law of sin. Now, this rebellion appears in two things: -

(1.) In the opposition that it makes to the general purpose of the soul.

(2.) In the opposition it makes to particular duties.

(1.) In the opposition it makes to the general purpose of the soul. There is none in whom is the Spirit of Christ, that is his, but it is his general purpose to walk in conformity to him in all things. Even from the inward frame of the heart to the whole compass of his outward actions, so it is with him. This God requires in his covenant: Genesis 17:1, "Walk before me, and be perfect." Accordingly, his design is to walk before God; and his frame is sincerity and uprightness. This is called, "Cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart," Acts 11:23, - that is, in all things; and that not with a slothful purpose, but such as is operative, and sets the whole soul at work in pursuit of it. This the apostle sets forth, Philippians 3:12-14, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus ."

He uses three words excellently expressing the soul's universal pursuit of this purpose of heart in cleaving to God: First, says he, verse 12, - "I press on"; the word signifies properly to persecute, which with what earnestness it is usually done we know. Secondly, "I strain forward," reaching with great intention of spirit and affections. It is a great and constant effort that is expressed in that word. Thirdly, "I press towards the goal;" that is, even as men that are running for a prize. All set forth the vigour, earnestness, diligence, and constancy that is used in the pursuit of this purpose. And this the nature of the principle of grace requires in them in whom it is. But yet we see with what failings their pursuit of this course is attended. The frame of the heart is changed, the heart is stolen away, the affections entangled, eruptions of unbelief and passions revealed, carnal wisdom, with all that attend it, are set on work; all contrary to the general purpose of the soul. And all this is from the rebellion of this law of sin, stirring up and provoking the heart to disobedience. The prophet gives this

character of hypocrites, Hosea 10:2, "Their heart is divided; therefore shall they be found faulty." Now, though this is wholly so in respect of the mind and judgement in hypocrites only, yet it is partially so in the best, in the sense described. They have a division, not of the heart, but in the heart; and thence it is that they are so often found faulty. So says the apostle, "So that we cannot do the things that we would," Galatians 5:17. We cannot accomplish the design of close walking according to the law of grace, because of the contrariety of this law of sin.

(2.) It rebels also in respect to particular duties. It raises a combustion in the soul against the particular commands of the law of grace. "You cannot do the things that you would;" that is, "You cannot do the duties which you feel you should do, which you delight in in the inward man." Take an instance in prayer. A man addresses himself to that duty; he wants not only to do it, but he wants to do it in that manner that the nature of the duty and his own condition require. He wants to "pray in the spirit," fervently, "with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered;" in faith, with love and delight, pouring forth his soul to the Lord. This he aims at. Now, often he finds a rebellion, a fighting of the law of sin in this matter. He who thought to do all things shall find it difficult to get anything done. I do not say that it is thus always, but it is so when sin "wars and rebels;" which expresses a special acting of its power. Poor creatures often meet with woeful entanglements on this account. Instead of that free, enlarged communion with God that they aim at, the best that their souls arrive to is to go away mourning for their folly, deadness, and indisposition. In a word, any command of the law of grace that is known and approved by the soul, is rebelled against by this law of sin when it comes to be observed. And this is the first way of its fighting.

2. It does not only rebel and resist, but it assaults the soul. It sets on the law of the mind and grace; which is the second part of its warring: 1 Peter 2:11, "They fight, or war, "against the soul;" James 4:1, "They fight," or war, "in your members." Peter shows what they fight against, - namely, the "soul" and the law of grace therein; James, what they fight with or by, - namely, the "members," or the corruption that is in

our mortal bodies. One word means to rebel against a superior; the other, to assault or war for a superiority. It takes the part of an assailant as well as of a resister. It makes attempts for sovereignty, as well as opposes the rule of grace. Now, all fighting has somewhat of violence in it; and there is therefore some violence in that acting of sin which the Scripture calls "fighting and warring." And this assailing power of sin, as distinguished from its rebelling, consists in the following: -

(1.) All its positive actions in stirring up to sin belong to this. Often, by the vanity of the mind, or the sensuality of the affections, the folly of the imaginations, it sets on the soul when the law of grace is not actually putting it on duty; so that it does not rebel but assault. Hence the apostle cries out, Romans 7:24, "Who shall deliver me from it?" "Who shall rescue me out of its hand?" as the word signifies. When we pursue an enemy, and he resists us, we do not cry out, "Who shall deliver us?" for we are the assailants; but, "Who shall rescue me?" is the cry of one who is set on by an enemy. So it is here; a man is assaulted by his "own lust," as James speaks. By the wayside, in his employment, under a duty, sin sets on the soul with empty thoughts, foolish desires, and would willingly employ the soul to carry them out; which the apostle cautions us against, Romans 13:14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. "

(2.) Its boldness and urgency seems to be noted in this expression, of its warring. Enemies in war are restless and importunate; so is the law of sin. Does it set on the soul? - Cast off its motions; it returns again. Rebuke them by the power of grace; they withdraw for a while, and return. Set before them the cross of Christ; they do as those who came to take him, - at sight of him they went backwards and fell to the ground, but they arose again and laid hands on him - sin gives place for a season, but returns and presses on the soul again. Remind it of the love of God in Christ; though it is stricken, yet it gives not over. Present hell-fire to it; it rushes into the midst of those flames. Reproach it with its folly and madness; it knows no shame, but

presses on still. Let the thoughts of the mind strive to fly from it; it follows as on the wings of the wind. And by this boldness it wears out the soul; and if the great remedy, Romans 8:3, come not timely, it conquers. There is nothing more marvellous nor dreadful in the working of sin than this of its boldness. The soul knows not what to make of it; it abominates the evil it tends to; it despises the thoughts of it, hates them as hell; and yet is imposed on with them, as if it were another person, an enemy got within him. All this the apostle reveals, Romans 7:15-17: "The things that I do I hate." It is not of outward actions, but the inward risings of the mind that he treats. "I hate them," says he; "I abominate them." But why, then, will he have anything more to do with them? If he hate them, and abhor himself for them, let them alone, have no more to do with them, and so end the matter. Alas! says he, verse 17, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me;" - "I have one within me that is my enemy, that with endless, restless boldness puts these things on me, even the things that I hate. I cannot be rid of them, I am weary of myself, I cannot fly from them. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" I do not say that this is the ordinary condition of believers, but thus it is often when this law of sin rises up to fight. It is not thus with them in respect of particular sins, - this or that sin, outward sins, sins of life and lifestyle, - but yet in respect of vanity of mind, inward and spiritual distempers, it is often so. Some, I know, pretend to great perfection; but I believe the apostle before all of them.

(3.) It carries on its war by entangling the affections, and drawing them into a alliance against the mind. Even where grace is enthroned in the mind and judgement, yet if the law of sin lays hold on and entangles the affections, it has gained a fort from where it continually assaults the soul. Hence the great duty of putting to death is chiefly directed to take place on the affections: Colossians 3:5,

"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry "

The "what is earthly in you" is our affections: for sin is not seated in

the outward part of the body; in particular, not "covetousness," which is there enumerated, to be put to death among what is earthly in us. Yea, after grace has taken possession of the soul, the affections become the principal seat of the remainders of sin; - so Paul says that this law is "in our members," Romans 7:23; and James, that it "wars in our members," James 4:1, - that is, our affections. And it is impossible to put sin to death aright except in the affections. We may every day see persons of very eminent light, that yet visibly have hearts and lifestyles that have not been put to death; their affections have not been crucified with Christ. Now, then, when this law of sin can possess any affection, whatever it be, love, delight, fear, it will make from it and by it fearful assaults on the soul. For instance, has it got the love of any one entangled with the world or the things of it, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life, - how will it take advantage on every occasion to break in on the soul! It shall do nothing, attempt nothing, be in no place or company, perform no duty, private or public, but sin will have one blow or other at it; it will be one way or other soliciting for itself.

This is the sum of what we shall offer to this acting of the law of sin, in fighting against our souls, which is so often mentioned in the Scripture; and a due consideration of it is of no small advantage to us, especially to bring us to self-abasement, to teach us to walk humbly and mournfully before God. There are two things that are suited to humble the souls of men, and they are, first, a due consideration of God, and then of themselves; - of God, in his greatness, glory, holiness, power, majesty, and authority; of ourselves, in our mean, abject, and sinful condition. Now, of all things in our condition, there is nothing so suited to this end and purpose as what lies before us; namely, the vile remainders of enmity against God which are yet in our hearts and natures. And it is no small evidence of a gracious soul when it is willing to search itself in this matter, and to be helped therein from a word of truth; when it is willing that the word should dive into the secret parts of the heart, and rip open whatever of evil and corruption lies therein. The prophet says of Ephraim, Hosea 10:11, "He loved to tread out the corn;" he loved to work when he might eat, to have always the corn before him: but God, says he, would "cause him to

plough;" a labour no less needful, though at present not so delightful. Most men love to hear of the doctrine of grace, of the pardon of sin, of free love, and suppose they find food therein; however, it is evident that they grow and thrive in the life and notion of them. But to be breaking up the fallow ground of their hearts, to be inquiring after the weeds and briers that grow in them, they delight not so much, though this be no less necessary than the other. This path is not so beaten as that of grace, nor so trod in, though it is the only way to come to a true knowledge of grace itself. Some, who are wise in other truths, may be inexperienced in searching their own hearts, and slow to understand these things. But this sloth is to be shaken off, if we have any regard to our own souls. It is more than probable that many who have deceived themselves as well as others, who supposed they believed because the gospel pleased them, might be delivered from their soul-ruining deceits if they would diligently search their own hearts. Would other believers walk so boldly and securely if they considered aright what a deadly enemy they carry about with them? would they so much indulge as they do carnal pleasures, or pursue their affairs with so much delight? Would that every believer would apply their hearts more to this, and come to a true understanding of the nature, power, and subtlety of our adversary, that our souls may be humbled; -

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

2. In walking with others. It prevents those evils of judging, harsh censuring, which many commit, who have been guilty of worse crimes than those they have raved against in others. This will lead us to meekness, compassion, readiness to forgive; even when we shall consider our state, as the apostle declares, Galatians 6:1. The man who understands the evil of his own heart is the only useful and solid believer. Others are fit only to delude themselves, and upset families and churches. Let us, then, consider our hearts wisely, and then go and

see if we can be proud of our gifts, our graces, and our reputations. Let us then judge and reproach others; we shall find a great inconsistency.

## CHAPTER 7.

The captivating power of indwelling sin - The prevalence of sin, when from itself, when from temptation – The madness that is in sin.

THE third thing assigned to this law of sin in its opposition to God and the law of his grace is, that it leads the soul captive: Romans 7:23, "I find a law leading me captive to the law of sin." And this is the utmost height to which the apostle in that place carries the warring of the remainders of indwelling sin; closing with a complaint of the resulting condition of believers, and an earnest prayer for deliverance from it: Verse 24, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

1. It is not directly the power of the law of sin that is here expressed, but its success in its actions. But success is the greatest evidence of power, and leading captive in war is the height of success. None can aim at greater success than to lead their enemies captive. So the Lord Christ, on his victory over Satan, is said to "lead captivity captive," Ephesians 4:8, - that is, to conquer him who had conquered others; and this he did when "by death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," Hebrews 2:14. Here, then, a great power of sin in its warring against the soul is revealed. It so wars as to "lead captive;" which it could not do unless it had not great power, especially against that resistance of the soul.

2. It is said that it leads the soul captive "to the law of sin." God orders things so, and gives out such supplies of grace to believers, that they shall not be made a prey to particular sins, that should compel them to serve it and have dominion over them, that they should be slaves to it. This is what David prays so earnestly against: Psalm 19:12, 13,

"Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright."

He supposes the continuance of the law of sin in him, verse 12, which will bring forth errors of life and secret sins; against which he finds relief in pardoning mercy, which he prays for. "This," says he, "will be my condition. But for sins of pride, such as all sins are that get dominion in a man, the Lord restrain your servant from them." For whatever sin gets such power in a man, be it small or great, it becomes a sin of boldness and presumption; for these things are not due to the nature of the sin, but its prevalence and familiarity, which result from its pride, boldness, and contempt of God. To the same purpose, prays Jabez: 1 Chronicles 4:10,

"Oh that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!"

The holy man took occasion from his own name to pray against sin, that that might not be a grief to him by its power. It may come to this with a believer, that for a time he may be led captive by a particular sin; it may have such a rule in him that it dominates him. So it seems to have been with David, when he lay so long in his sin without repentance; and was plainly so with those in Isaiah 57:17, 18,

"For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on waywardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him."

They continued under the power of their covetousness, so that no dealings of God with them, for a long time, could reclaim them. But mostly, when any sin so prevails, it is from the advantage it has gained by some powerful temptation. He has poisoned it, inflamed it, and entangled the soul. So the apostle, speaking of those who had fallen from holiness through sin, says,

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

Though they served their own lusts, yet they were brought into bondage by being entangled in some snare of Satan; and thence they are said to be "taken alive," as a beast in a crush.

And here we may enquire whether the power of a sin is from itself, or from the influence of temptation on it.

(1.) Much of the prevalence of sin on the soul is certainly from Satan, when the captivating sin has no prior advantage in the condition of the sinner. When any lust grows more than others, on its own account, it is from the advantage that it has in the constitution, or the condition of the person in the world; for otherwise the law of sin gives an equal tendency to all evil. So when it is not clear that the sin is fixed in the nature of the sinner, or is from his education or employment, the prevalence of it is peculiarly from Satan. He has got to the root of it, and has given it strength. Perhaps, sometimes what may seem to the soul to be the corrupt lusting of the heart, is nothing but Satan's imposing his suggestions on the imagination. If a man finds a rage from any corruption that is not evidently in his nature, let him cross himself, or fly by faith to the cross of Christ, for the devil is near.

(2.) When a lust brings to captivity, but brings in no advantage to the flesh, it is from Satan. All that the law of sin does of itself is to serve the the flesh, Romans 13:14; and it must bring profit and pleasure. Now, if the prevailing sin does not so act, if it is more spiritual and inward, it is much from Satan by the imagination, more than the corruption of the heart itself. But this by the way.

I say, then, that the apostle treats not here of our being captivated to this or that sin, but to the law of sin; that is. we are compelled to bear it whether we will or no. Sometimes the soul hopes that it may through grace be utterly freed from this troublesome inmate. Upon some enjoyment of God some deep affliction, some humiliation, the poor soul begins to hope that it shall be freed from the law of sin; but after a while it perceives that it is not. Sin acts again and makes good its old station; which makes it cry out for deliverance.

3. This indicates a prevalence against the contrary actions of the will. This is intimated plainly in this expression, - namely, that the will advances against the working of sin. This the apostle declares in those expressions which he uses, chap. 7:15, 19, 20. And herein consists the "lusting of the Spirit against the flesh," Galatians 5:17; that is, the contending of grace to subdue it. The spiritual habits of grace that are in the will resist it; and the excitation of those habits by the Spirit are directed to the same purpose. This leading captive is against the renewed will. A man is taken captive against his will. Captivity is misery, and no man willingly enters it. Men choose it in its causes, and the ways that lead to it, but not in itself. So the prophet tells us, Hosea 5:11, "Ephraim was oppressed and broken in judgement," - that was his misery and trouble; but he "willingly walked after the commandment" of the idolatrous kings, who brought him there. Even if the soul consents to sin, the means of this captivity, it does not consent to the captivity itself. Hence these things follow: -

(1.) That the power of sin is great, - which is what we are showing; for it leads into captivity against the actions of the will for liberty. If it had no opposition, or that opposition was weak and slothful, it were no great evidence of its power; but its prevailing against diligence and the constant penitence of the will shows its power.

(2.) This leading captive implies many successes. Without that, it could not be said to lead captive. It might rebel and assail; but it cannot be said to lead captive without some successes. And there are several degrees of the success of the law of sin in the soul. Sometimes it carries the person to outward actual sin, which is its utmost aim; sometimes it obtains the consent of the will, but is cast out by grace, and proceeds no farther; sometimes it wearies and entangles the soul, so that it stops resisting, - which is a success also. Where captivity takes place, one or more, or all of these, must be. Such a course the apostle ascribes to covetousness, 1 Timothy 6:9, 10.

(3.) This leading captive shows it to be wretched. To be thus yoked,

against the judgement of the mind, the consent of the will, its utmost efforts, how sad is it! When the neck is sore from earlier chafing, to be compelled to bear the yoke again, this grieves, this even breaks the heart. When the soul is principled by grace to loathe sin, every evil way, to hate the least discrepancy between itself and the holy will of God, then to be imposed on by this law of sin, with all that enmity, that deadness, what more dreadful condition? All captivity is dreadful in its own nature. The greatest aggravation of it is from the condition of the tyrant to whom one is captivated. Now, what can be worse than this law of sin? Hence the apostle cries out, as one weary and ready to faint, chap. 7:24.

(4.) This condition is peculiar to believers. Unregenerate men are not said to be led captive to the law of sin. They may, indeed, be led captive to this or that particular sin, to serve it against the power of their convictions. They are convinced of the evil of it, - an adulterer of his uncleanness, a drunkard of his abomination, - and make some resolutions against it; but their lust is too hard for them, they cannot cease to sin, and so are captives to the sin. But they cannot be said to be led captive to the law of sin, because they are willing subjects. It has a rightful dominion over them, and they oppose it only when it disturbs their consciences; and then the opposition they make is not from their wills, but the mere acting of an troubled conscience and a convicted mind. They do not detest the nature of sin, but its guilt and consequences. But to be brought into captivity is what befalls a man against his will.

The fourth degree of the opposition made by the law of sin to God and the law of his will and grace, is in its rage and madness. There is madness in its nature: Ecclesiastes 9:3, "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart." The evil that the heart of man is full of by nature is that indwelling sin whereof we speak; and this is so in their heart, that it rises up to madness. The Holy Ghost expresses this rage of sin by a similitude: as Jeremiah 2:24; Hosea 8:9. It makes men as "a wild ass;" "she traverses her ways," and "snuffs up the wind," and runs whither her lust leads her. And he says of

idolaters, enraged with their lusts, that they are "mad on their idols," Jeremiah 50:38. We may consider what lies in this madness of sin: -

1. For the nature of it; it consists in a violent, determined pressing to sin. Boldness and wilfulness are in it. It is the tearing of the soul by any sin to force its consent. It rises up in the heart, is denied by the law of grace, and rebuked; - it returns and exerts its poison again; the soul is startled, casts it off; - it returns again with new violence and boldness; the soul cries out for help and deliverance, looks round for springs of gospel grace, trembles at the furious assaults of sin, and casts itself into the arms of Christ for deliverance. And if it is not able to take that course, it is hurried up and down through the mire of foolish imaginations, corrupt lusts, which rend it as if they would devour its whole spiritual life. See 1 Timothy 6:9, 10; 2 Peter 2:14. It was thus with those we referred to before, Isaiah 57:17. They had an enraged lust working in them, "covetousness," or the love of this world; by which men "pierce themselves through with many sorrows." God is angry with them, and reveals his wrath by all the means that it was possible for them to be made aware of. He was "wroth, and smote them;" but though, this staggered them a little, yet they "went on." He is angry, and "hides himself" from them, - deserts them as to his gracious presence. Does this work? No; they go on waywardly, mad on their covetousness. Nothing can stop to their raging lusts. This is madness and fury. We see men mad on their lusts every day; their lusts do not rage so much in them, as they rage in the pursuit of them. Are those greedy pursuits of things in the world, though they do not call it that, anything else but plain madness in the pursuit of their lusts? God, who searches the hearts of men, knows that most things that are done in the world, are nothing but the actions of men mad in the pursuit of their lusts, though they call them better names.

2. Sin does not usually rise this far, unless it has a double advantage: -

(1.) When it is heightened by some great temptation. Though it is a poison in itself, yet, being inbred in nature, it does not grow violently outrageous without some new poison of Satan. It was the advantage

that Satan got against David that raised his lust to madness in the business of Bathsheba and Uriah. Though sin is always a fire in the bones, it does not burst into flames unless Satan comes with his bellows to blow on it. If anyone in whom the law of sin arises to this height of rage seriously considers, he will find out where the devil stands in the business.

(2.) When it has been received and yielded to before. Sin does not grow to this height at its first assault. If it had not been allowed to enter, if there had not been some yielding in the soul, it would not have happened. The security of the soul in dealing with indwelling sin is to stop it in its first motions. Venture all on the first attempt. Die rather than yield one step to it. If, through the deceit of sin, or the negligence of the soul, or its carnal confidence to give bounds to lust's actions at other seasons, it makes any entrance into the soul, and is received, it gains strength and insensibly arises to the frame under consideration. You would never have experienced the fury of sin, if you had not been played with it first. If you had not indulged this servant, it would not have tried to be a son. Now, when the law of sin has gained this double advantage, - a vigorous temptation, and previous victories, - it often rises up to this intensity.

3. We may see what accompanies this madness, and what are the properties of it: -

(1.) The yoke, rule, and government of the Spirit and law of grace are cast off, for a time at least. Where grace has the dominion, it will never utterly be expelled from its throne; but its influences may be thwarted for a season, and its government suspended, by the power of sin. Could the law of grace been ruling the heart of David, when, on the provocation received from Nabal, he so burned with desire for revenge that he cried, "Gird on your swords," to his companions, and resolved not to leave alive one man of his whole household? 1 Samuel 25:34; or that Asa was in any better frame when he smote the prophet and put him in prison, who spake to him in the name of the Lord? Sin in this case is like an untamed horse, which, having first cast off his

rider, runs away in rage. It first casts off a sense of the yoke of Christ and the law of his grace, and then hurries the soul at its pleasure. Let us a little consider how this is done.

The residence of grace is the whole soul. It is in the inner man; it is in the mind, the will, and the affections: for the whole soul is renewed by it into the image of God, Ephesians 4:23, 24, and the whole man is a "new creature," 2 Corinthians 5:17. And in all these it exerts its power. Its dominion is the pursuit of its work in all the faculties of the soul, as they are one united principle of moral and spiritual operations. So interruption of this by the law of sin, must consist in its contrary acting in the faculties of the soul. And this it does. It darkens the mind; partly through false reasonings; and partly through the steaming of the affections, heated with the lusts that have laid hold on them. Hence that saving light that is in the mind is clouded, that it cannot put forth its power to change the soul into the likeness of Christ, which is its proper work, Romans 12:2. The habitual inclination of the will to obedience, which is the next work of the law of grace, is first weakened, then cast aside, by the continual drawing of sin; so that the will first lets go its hold, and disputes whether it shall yield or not, and at last gives up. And for the affections, commonly the beginning of this evil is in them. They cross one another, and torture the soul with their impetuous violence. In this way the rule of the law of grace is intercepted by the law of sin, by imposing on it in the whole seat of its government. When this is done, sin will make a sad work in the soul. The apostle warns believers to take heed, chap. 6:12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts." Look to it that it get not the dominion, that it does not usurp the rule even for a moment. It will seek to intrude itself to the throne; watch against it, or a woeful state and condition lies at the door. This, then, accompanies this madness of the law of sin: - During its dominance, it completely casts off the rule of the law of grace; grace speaks in the soul, but is not heard; it commands the contrary, but is not obeyed; it cries out, "Do not do this abominable thing which the Lord hates," but is not heeded, - that is, not enough to stop the rage of sin, and to recover its own rule, which God in his own time restores to it by the

power of his Spirit dwelling in us.

(2.) This madness is accompanied with a contempt of danger. It takes away the power of reflection, and all the influence that it ought to have on the soul. Hence sinners that are wholly under the power of this rage are said to "run on God, and the thick bosses of his buckler," Job 15:26; - in which he is armed for their utter ruin. They despise the utmost that he can do to them, being secretly resolved to follow their lusts, though it costs them their souls. Some considerations will make this clear to us: -

[1.] Often, when the soul is broken loose from the power of renewing grace, God deals with it, to keep it within bounds, by preventing grace. So the Lord declares that he will deal with Israel, Hosea 2:6; -

"Seeing you have rejected me, I will take another course with you. I will lay obstacles before you so that you shall not be able to go where the fury of your lusts would drive you."

He will put things in their way to obstruct them in their progress.

[2.] These hindrances that God lays in the way of sinners are of two sorts: -

1st. Rational considerations, taken from the consequence of the sin that the soul is tempted to and perplexed with. Such are the fear of death, judgement, and hell, - falling into the hands of the living God, who is a consuming fire. While a man is under the power of the law of the Spirit of life, the "love of Christ constrains him," 2 Corinthians 5:14. The principle of his doing good and abstaining from evil is faith working by love, and following Christ because of the sweetness of his name. But when this easy yoke is for a season cast off, God sets a hedge of terror before the soul, reminds it of death and judgement to come, flashes the flames of hell-fire in the face, fills the soul with an awareness of all the evil consequence of sin, to deter it from its purpose. To this end he makes use of all threatenings recorded in the

law and gospel. To this may be added considerations such as shame, reproach, scandal, punishments, and the like. By considering these things, God sets a hedge before them.

2dly. Acts of providence are used by the Lord in the same way: -

(1st.) Such as work on the soul, and to cause it to desist in its pursuit of sin. Such are afflictions and mercies: Isaiah 57:17, "I was wroth, and I smote them;" - "I testified my dislike of their ways by afflictions." So Hosea 2:9, 11, 12. God chastens men with pains on their bodies; says he in Job, "To turn them from their purpose, and to hide sin from them," Job 33:17-19. And other ways he has to come to them and touch them, as in their reputation, relations, and situations; or else he heaps mercies on them, that they may consider whom they are rebelling against. They may receive great mercies for many days.

(2dly.) Such as actually hinder the soul from pursuing sin, though it is resolved so to do.

These are the ways, whereby the soul is dealt with, afar the law of indwelling sin has cast off for a season the influencing power of the law of grace. But now, when lust rises up to madness, it will also despise all these, even the rod, and Him who has appointed it. It will rush on shame, reproaches, wrath, and whatever may befall it, although they are presented to it. Rage and madness is fearless. And it does this in two ways: -

[1st.] It possesses the mind, so that it does not let it consider these things, but makes them appear insignificant; or if the mind does make itself consider them, it makes a barrier between it and the affections, so that they shall not be influenced by it. The soul in such a condition will be able to reflect on such things, and not to be moved by them; and where they do prevail for a time, yet they are unconsciously removed from the heart again.

[2dly.] By secret stubborn resolves to risk all on following it through.

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

## CHAPTER 8.

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

THE second part of the evidence of the power of sin is taken from its deceitfulness. It adds deceit to power. The efficacy of that must be great, and all who value their souls must carefully watch against it.

Hebrews 3:13, "Take heed that you are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Deceitful it is; watch against it, or it will harden the heart against God. It is on the account of sin that the heart is said to be "deceitful above all things," Jeremiah 17:9. Take a man in other things, and, as Job speaks, though he "would be wise and crafty, he is like the wild ass's colt," Job 11:12, - a poor empty nothing; but consider his heart on the account of this law of sin, - it is crafty and deceitful above all things. "They are wise to do evil," says the prophet, "but they do not know how to do good," Jeremiah 4:22. And the apostle says, Ephesians 4:22, "The old man is corrupt according to deceitful lusts." Every lust, which is a branch of this law of sin, is deceitful; and where there is poison in every stream, the fountain must be corrupt. No particular lust has any deceit in it, except what comes to it from this fountain of all lust, this law of sin. And, 2 Thessalonians 2:10, the coming of the "man of sin" is said to be in and with the "deceitfulness of sin." Unrighteousness is generally evil spoken of amongst men, so that it is not easy to conceive how any man should want a reputation for it. But there is a deceit in it, whereby the minds of men are turned aside from duly considering it. So the account which the apostle gives concerning those who are under the power of sin is that they are "deceived," Titus 3:3. And the life of evil men is nothing but "deceiving, and being deceived," 2 Timothy 3:13. So this enemy with whom we have to deal is deceitful; which of all things perplexes a man in dealing with an adversary. He knows he can have no security against one who is deceitful, but in standing guard all

his days.

Farther, we may observe that the Scripture places it as the spring of every sin, as though no sin followed except where deceit went before. So 1 Timothy 2:13, 14. The reason the apostle gives why Adam, though he was first formed, was not first in the sin, is because he was not first deceived. The woman, though made last, yet being first deceived, was first in the sin. Even that first sin began in deceit, and until the mind was deceived the soul was safe. Eve, therefore, spoke truly, Genesis 3:13, though not to a good end. "The serpent beguiled me," says she, "and I ate." She thought to extenuate her own crime by charging the serpent; and this was a new fruit of the sin she had cast herself into. But the fact was true, - she was beguiled before she ate; deceit went before the sin. And the apostle shows that sin and Satan still take the same course, 2 Corinthians 11:3. "There is," says he, "the same way of working towards actual sin as was of old:deceiving goes before; and sin follows after." Hence, all the great works that the devil does in the world, to stir men up to an opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom, he does them by deceit: Revelation 12:9, "The devil, who deceives the whole world." It were utterly impossible men should be prevailed on to abide in his service, to their eternal, and sometimes their temporal ruin, unless they were exceedingly deceived. See also chap. 20:10.

Hence are those manifold cautions that are given us to take heed that we be not deceived, if we would take heed that we do not sin. See Ephesians 5:6; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 15:33; Galatians 6:7; Luke 21:8. From all which testimonies we may learn the influence that deceit has into sin, and consequently the advantage that the law of sin has to put forth its power by its deceitfulness. Where it deceives, it does not fail to bring forth its fruit.

The source of this power of sin by deceit derives from the faculty of the soul affected with it. Deceit properly affects the mind. When sin attempts any other way of entrance into the soul, for example by the affections, the mind, retaining its sovereignty, can control it. But

where the mind is tainted, the prevalence must be great; for the mind is the leading faculty of the soul, and what that fixes on, the will and affections rush after, being capable of nothing but what that presents to them. Hence it is, that though the entanglement of the affections to sin be often most troublesome, yet the deceit of the mind is always most dangerous. Its office is to guide, direct, choose, and lead; and "if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

And this will farther appear if we consider the nature of deceit in general. It consists in presenting to the soul, or mind, things otherwise than they are. This is the general nature of deceit, and it prevails many ways. It hides what ought to be seen, conceals consequences, presents matters as they are not. Satan "beguiled" and "deceived" our first parents; that term the Holy Ghost gives to his temptation. And how he deceived them the Scripture relates, Genesis 3:4, 5. He did it by representing things otherwise than they were. The fruit was desirable; that was apparent to the eye. Hence Satan takes advantage secretly to insinuate that it was merely an reduction of their happiness that God aimed at in forbidding them to eat it. That it was to test their obedience, that certain though not immediate ruin would follow eating it, he hides from them; he only presents the present advantage of knowledge, and so presents the whole case quite otherwise to them than it was. This is the nature of deceit. So Jacob deceived Isaac by his brother's raiment and the skins on his hands and neck.

Again; deceit has advantage by that method which is inseparable from it. It is always carried on by degrees, little by little, that the whole of the design be not at once revealed. So dealt Satan in that great deceit; he proceeds in it by degrees, First, he takes off an objection, and tells them they shall not die; then presents the good of knowledge to them, and their becoming like God. To conceal ends, to proceed by degrees, to use what is obtained, and then to press on to farther effects, is the true nature of deceit. Stephen tells us that the king of Egypt "dealt subtly," or deceitfully, "with their kindred," Acts 7:19. How he did it we may see, Exodus 1 He did not at first fall to killing them, but says,

verse 10, "Come, let us deal wisely," beginning to oppress them. This brings forth their bondage, verse 11. Having got this ground to make them slaves, he proceeds to destroy their children, verse 16. He fell not on them all at once, but by degrees. And this may suffice to show in general that sin is deceitful, and the advantages that it has thereby.

For the manner, and progress of sin in working by deceit, we have it expressed, James 1:14, 15, "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death." This place, declaring the whole of what we aim at in this matter, must be particularly insisted on.

The apostle declares that men are willing to drive the old trade, which our first parents set up, namely, of excusing their sins, and casting the blame of them on others. It is not, say they, from themselves, their own nature, their own designings, that they have committed such and such evils, but merely from their temptations; and if they know not where to fix the evil of those temptations, they will lay them on God himself, rather than go without an excuse of their guilt. The apostle rebukes this evil in the hearts of men, verse 13, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts he any man." And to show the justness of this reproof, in those words he reveals the true causes of the rise of sin, declaring that the whole guilt of it lies on the sinner, and that the whole punishment of it, if not graciously prevented, will be his lot also.

So we have in these words the whole progress of indwelling sin, by the way of subtlety and deceit, expressed and limited by the Holy Ghost. And from hence we shall show the ways it puts its power into the hearts of men by deceitfulness and subtlety; so, -

First, The utmost end aimed at in all the actions of sin, or the tendency of it in its own nature, is death: "Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death," the everlasting death of the sinner; pretend what it will, this is

the end it aims at. Hiding of designs is the principal property of deceit. This sin does to the uttermost; it pleads innumerable other things, but not once declares that it aims at the everlasting death of the soul. And an understanding of this end of every sin is a blessed means to prevent its prevalence in deceit or beguiling.

Secondly, The general way of its acting towards that end is by temptation: "Every man is tempted of his own lust." That the life of temptation lies in deceit; so that, in the business of sin, to be effectually tempted, and to be beguiled, are the same. Thus it was in the first temptation. It is everywhere called the serpent's beguiling: "The serpent beguiled Eve;" that is, prevailed by his temptations on her. So that every man is tempted, - that is, every man is beguiled, - by his own lust, or indwelling sin.

Sin proceeds in this work of tempting or deceiving in five ways; for we showed before that this belongs to the nature of deceit, that it works by degrees, making its advantage by one step to gain another.

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

The second is in enticing: "And is enticed."

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

The fourth is the bringing forth of sin in its action: "When lust has conceived it brings forth sin." In all which there is a secret allusion to an adulterous deviation from conjugal duties, and conceiving or bringing forth children of whoredom and fornication.

The fifth is the completing of sin, which brings about the result originally designed by lust: "Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death," As lust conceiving necessarily brings forth sin, so sin finished infallibly results in eternal death.

The first of these relates to the mind; that is drawn away by the deceit of sin. The second to the affection; they are enticed. The third to the will, wherein sin is conceived; the consent of the will being the conception of actual sin. The fourth to the life in which sin is brought forth; it exerts itself in the lives of men. The fifth relates to the stubbornness that finishes the whole work of sin, and results in eternal ruin.

I shall principally consider the three first, wherein the main strength of the deceit of sin lies; and that because in believers (whose condition we are considering), God is pleased, for the most part, graciously to prevent the fourth instance, the bringing forth of actual sins; and always and wholly to prevent the fifth, their stubborn continuance in a course of sin to the end. The ways God in his grace and faithfulness uses to stifle the conceptions of sin in the womb, and to hinder its actual production in the lives of men, we will consider later. The first three instances, then, we shall insist on fully, as those that principally concern believers.

The first thing which sin is said to do, working in a way of deceit, is to draw away or to draw off; whence a man is said to be drawn off, or "drawn away" and diverted from attending to that course of obedience and holiness which he is bound to attend to in opposition to sin and its law.

Now, it is the mind that this effect of the deceit of sin is worked on. The mind or understanding, as we have showed, is the guiding, conducting faculty of the soul. It goes before in discerning, judging, and determining, to make the way of moral actions fair and smooth to the will and affections. It is to the soul what Moses told his father-in-law that he might be to the people in the wilderness, as "eyes to guide them," and keep them from wandering in that desolate place. It is the eye of the soul, without whose guidance the will and affections would perpetually wander in the wilderness of this world, according as any object, appearing good, presented itself to them.

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

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

1. To keep itself and the whole soul in such an attitude as may render it ready to all duties of obedience, and watchful against all enticements to the conception of sin.

2. In particular, carefully to attend to all particular actions, that they are performed as God requires, agreeably to his will; as also for the preventing the enticements of sin. In these two things consists the whole duty of the mind of a believer; and from both of them indwelling sin works to divert it.

1. The first of these is the duty of the mind in reference to the general frame soul; two things may be considered. That it is founded in a due, constant consideration, -

(1.) Of ourselves, of sin and its vileness;

(2.) Of God's grace and goodness: and sin labours to draw it off from both of these.

2. In attending to those duties which especially prevent the working of the law of sin.

1. (1.) It attempts to draw it off from an awareness of its own vileness, and its associated danger. A constant consideration of sin, in its nature, in its circumstances, in its tendencies, especially as represented in the blood and cross of Christ, ought always to abide with us: Jeremiah 2:19,

"Know therefore and see that it is a bitter and evil thing that you have

forsaken the LORD your God."

Every sin is a forsaking of the Lord our God. If the heart does not realise that it is a bitter and evil thing, - evil in itself, bitter in its fruit - it will never be secured against it. Besides, that frame of heart which is most accepted with God in any sinner is the humble, contrite frame: Isaiah 57:15,

"Thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the spirit of the contrite."

See also Luke 18:13, 14. This befits a sinner; no garment sits so decently about him. "Be clothed with humility," says the apostle, 1 Peter 5:5. It is what befits us, and it is the only safe frame. He who walks humbly walks safely. This is the design of Peter's advice, 1 Peter 1:17, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." After that he himself had stumbled by another frame of mind, he gives this advice to all believers. It is not a servile fear, perplexing the soul, but such as may keep men constantly calling on the Father, with reference to the final judgement, that they may be preserved from sin, whereof they were in so great danger, which he advises them to: "If you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." This is the humble frame of soul And how is this obtained? how is this preserved? No otherwise but by a constant, deep awareness of the vileness, and danger of sin. So was it done, so was it kept up, in the publican who was accepted. "God be merciful," says he, "to me a sinner." "Sense of sin kept him humble, and humility made way for his access to a testimony of the pardon of sin.

And this is the great preservative through grace from sin, as we have an example in Joseph, Genesis 39:9. Upon the urgency of his great temptation, he recoils immediately into this frame of spirit. "How," says he, "can I do this thing, and sin against God?" A constant, steady

sense of the evil of sin gives him such preservation, that he ventures liberty and life in opposition to it. To fear sin is to fear the Lord; so the holy man tells us that they are the same: Job 28:28,

"The fear of the Lord is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

So in the first place, the law of sin puts forth its deceit here, - namely, to draw the mind from this frame, which is the strongest fort of the soul's defence. It labours to divert the mind from an awareness of the vileness and danger of sin. It secretly insinuates excusing thoughts of it; or it draws it off from pondering on it so much as it ought, and formerly has been. And if, after the heart of a man has, through the word, Spirit, and grace of Christ, been made tender and deeply aware of sin, it comes to have fewer, or less affecting thoughts about it, the mind of that man is drawn away by the deceitfulness of sin.

There are two ways, amongst others, whereby the law of sin attempts deceitfully to draw off the mind from this duty and frame: -

[1.] It does it by a horrible abuse of gospel grace. In the gospel a remedy is provided against the whole evil of sin, the filth, the guilt of it, with all its dangerous consequences. It is the doctrine of the deliverance of the souls of men from sin and death, - a revelation of the gracious will of God towards sinners by Jesus Christ. What, now, is the genuine tendency of this doctrine, of this revelation of grace; and what ought we to use it for? This the apostle declares, Titus 2:11, 12,

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

This it teaches; this we ought to learn of it. Hence universal holiness is called a "lifestyle that befits the gospel," Philippians 1:27. It befits it, as what is answerable to its end, aim, and design, - as what it requires, and which it ought to be improved to. And accordingly it effect where

the word of it is received and preserved in a saving light, Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:20-24. But here the deceit of sin interposes itself: - It separates between the doctrine of grace and the purpose of it. It stays with theory, and will not proceed to practice. From the doctrine of the pardon of sin, it introduces heedlessness of sin. God in Christ makes the start, and Satan and sin make the conclusion. The deceitfulness of sin is apt to plead to a heedlessness of it, from the grace of God whereby it is pardoned; so the apostle declares in his detestation of such a thought: Romans 6:1, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." "Men's deceitful hearts," says he, "are apt to make that conclusion; but far be it from us that we should receive it." But yet that some have evidently improved that deceit to their own eternal ruin, Jude declares: Verse 4, "Ungodly men, turning the grace of God into licentiousness." And we have had dreadful instances of it in the days of temptation wherein we live.

Indeed, much of the wisdom of faith and power of gospel grace is against this deceit. Its effect is to cast the mind fully and habitually into the gospel truth about the full and free forgiveness of all sins in the blood of Christ, and keep the heart always in a deep, humbling sense of sin. This is the test and mark of gospel light: - If it keeps the heart aware of sin, lowly, and broken on that account, - if it teaches us to water a free pardon with tears, to detest forgiven sin, to watch diligently for the ruin of what we are yet assured shall never ruin us, - it is divine, from above, of the Spirit of grace. If it secretly makes men casual in their thoughts about sin, it is selfish and false.

Thus we see men walking in a bondage-frame of spirit all their days, having little light, grasping little of grace; so that it is hard to discern whether covenant in their principles they belong to, - whether they are under the law or under grace; yet walk with a more conscientious tenderness of sinning than many who are advanced into higher degrees of light and knowledge than they; - not that the saving light of the gospel is not the only principle of saving holiness and obedience; but that, through the deceitfulness of sin, it is variously abused to

countenance the soul in manifold neglect of duties, and to draw off the mind from a due consideration of the nature danger of sin. And this is done several ways: -

1st. The soul, having frequent need of relief by gospel grace against a sense of the guilt of sin and accusation of the law, comes at length to make it a common thing that may be easily done. Having found a good medicine, had experience of its efficacy, it comes to apply it carelessly, and rather skins over than cures its sores, A little less earnestness, a little less diligence, serves every time, until the soul, begins to secure itself of pardon in course; and this tends directly to draw off the mind from its constant and universal watchfulness against sin. He whose light has made his way of access plain for the obtaining of pardon, if he be not very watchful, he is far more apt to become careless in his work than he who, by reason of mists and darkness, beats about to find his way aright to the throne of grace; as a man who has often travelled a road passes on without regard or inquiry, but he who is a stranger to it, observing all turnings and inquiring of all passengers, secures his journey beyond the other.

2dly. The deceitfulness of sin takes advantage from the doctrine of grace by many ways and means to extend the bounds of the soul's liberty beyond what God has assigned to it. Some have never thought themselves free from a legal, bondage frame until they have been brought into the confines of sensuality, and some into the depths of it. How often will sin plead, "This strictness, this exactness, this solicitude is no ways needful; relief is provided in the gospel against such things! Would you live as though there were no need of the gospel? as though pardon of sin were to no purpose?" But concerning these pleas of sin from gospel grace, we shall have occasion to speak more hereafter in particular.

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

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

(2dly.) It will be tendering relief as to the event of sin, - that it shall not turn to the ruin or destruction of the soul, because it is, it will, or may be, pardoned by the grace of the gospel. And this is true; this is the great and only relief of the soul against sin, the guilt whereof it has contracted already, - the blessed and only remedy for a guilty soul. But when it is pleaded by the deceitfulness of sin in compliance with temptation to sin, then it is poison; poison is mixed in every drop of this balsam, to the danger, if not death, of the soul. And this is the first way whereby the deceitfulness of sin draws off the mind from that sense of its vileness which alone is able to keep it in that humble frame that is acceptable with God. It makes the mind careless, as though its work were needless, because of the abounding of grace; which is a soldier's neglect of his station, trusting to a reserve, provided, indeed, only in case of keeping his own proper place.

[2.] Sin takes advantage to work by its deceit from the condition of men in the world. Men, in their younger days, have naturally their affections more vigorous, and active, more sensibly working in them, than afterward. They naturally decay, and many things befall men in their lives that take the edge off them. But as men lose in their affections, if they are not besotted in sensuality or by the corruptions that are in the world through lust, they improve in their understandings, resolutions, and judgements. So if what had place formerly in their affections do not take place in their minds and judgements, they utterly lose them, they have no more place in their souls. Thus men have no regard for those things which their affections were set on with delight in their childhood. But if they come to be fixed in their minds and judgements, they continue a high esteem for them, and cleave as close to them as they did before; only, they have changed their seat in the soul. It is thus in things spiritual. The chief

seat of awareness of sin is in the affections. As these are great in natural youth, so are they spiritually in spiritual youth: Jeremiah 2:2, "I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals." Such persons are newly come from their convictions, wherein they have been cut to the heart, and so made tender. Whatever touches on a wound is thoroughly felt; so does the guilt of sin before the wound given by conviction is thoroughly cured. But when affections begin to decay naturally, they begin to decay also as to their actions in things spiritual. Although they improve in grace, yet they may decay in sense. At least, spiritual sense is not radically in them, but only by way of communication. Now, in these decays, if the soul take not care to fix a deep sense of sin on the mind, to perpetually affect the heart and affections, it will decay. And here the deceit of the law of sin gets in. It allows a sense of sin to decay in the affections, and diverts the mind from a constant consideration of it. Some people never progress in the ways of God beyond conviction. How aware of sin will they be for a season! How will they then mourn under a sense of the guilt of it! How will they heartily resolve against it! Affections are vigorous, and rule in their souls. But they are like a herb that flourishes for a day or two with watering though it has no root: for, a while after, we see that the more experience these men have had of sin, the less they are afraid of it, as the wise man says, Ecclesiastes 8:11; and at length they come to be the greatest despisers of sin in the world. There is no sinner like the one who has sinned away his convictions of sin. What is the reason of this? Sense of sin was in their convictions, fixed on their affections. As it decayed in them, they took no care to have it deeply fixed on their minds. The deceitfulness of sin deprived them of this, and so ruined their souls. In some measure it is so with believers. If, as the acuteness of the affections decay, if, as they grow heavy, great wisdom and grace be not used to fix a due sense of sin on the mind and judgement, to enliven and stir up the affections every day, great decays will follow. At first sorrow, trouble, fear, affected the mind, and would give it no rest. If afterward the mind do not affect the heart with grief, the whole will be cast out, and the soul be in danger of being hardened. And these are some of the ways that the deceit of sin draws it off from its constant watchfulness against sin and its effects.

(2.) The second part of this general duty of the mind is to keep the soul to a constant considering God and his grace. This lies at the spring-head of gospel obedience. The way that sin draws the mind from this part of its duty is sufficiently known, though not sufficiently watched against. Now, everywhere the Scripture declares this to be the filling of the minds of men with earthly things. It places this in direct opposition to that heavenly frame of mind which is the spring of gospel obedience: Colossians 3:2, "Set your affection", or your minds, "on things above, not on things on the earth". As if he had said, "You cannot be set on both together, so as to mind them both." And the affections to the one and the other, proceeding from these principles of minding the one and the other, are mutually incompatible: 1 John 2:15,

"Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

And actions following these affections are presented also as contrary: "You cannot serve God and mammon." No man can satisfy these two masters at the same time. So every minding of earthly things is opposed to that frame wherein our minds ought to be fixed on God and his grace in gospel obedience.

There are several ways where the deceitfulness of sin draws off the mind; but the chief is by pressing them on the mind on the pretext that they are lawful and necessary. So all those who excuse themselves in the parable from coming to the marriage-feast of the gospel, did it because they were engaged in their lawful callings, - one his farm, another his oxen, - ploughing in this world. By this plea the minds of men were drawn off from that frame of heavenliness which is required as we walk with God; and the rules of not loving the world, or using it as if we used it not, are neglected. What wisdom, what watchfulness, what serious frequent examination of ourselves is required to keep our hearts and minds in a heavenly frame in the use of earthly things, is not my present subject. But this much is clear; the

engine that the deceit of sin uses to turn the mind aside is the pretence of the lawfulness of the things it is pre-occupied with; and very few are armed against this with sufficient diligence and wisdom. This is the most general attempt that indwelling sin makes on the soul by deceit, - it draws away the mind from a diligent attention to its course in a due sense of the evil of sin, and a due and constant consideration of God and his grace.

## CHAPTER 9.

The deceit of sin in drawing off the mind from a due attendance to duties of obedience, such as in meditation and prayer.

We have shown how sin by its deceit attempts to draw the mind from attending to that holy frame in walking with God where the soul should be kept safe.

We will now show how it does the same work in reference to those duties by which its work and victory may be prevented. Sin, indeed, maintains an enmity against God in all those duties of obedience.

"When I would do good," says the apostle, "evil is present with me;" - "Whenever I would do good, or whatever good I would do, (that is, good in reference to God), it is present with me to hinder me from it." And, on the other side, all duties of obedience lie directly against the actions of the law of sin; for as the flesh in all its actions lusts against the Spirit, so the Spirit in all its actions lusts against the flesh. So every duty performed in the strength and grace of the Spirit is contrary to the law of sin: Romans 8:13, "If you through the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh." Obeying the Spirit of grace in duties does this work. These two are contrary. But there are some duties which, in their own nature and by God's appointment, are particularly effective in weakening and subduing the whole law of sin in its principles and strengths; and the mind of a believer ought to attend to these principally. Sin in its deceit attempts to draw off the mind from these. As in diseases of the body, some remedies have a specific quality against fevers; so, in this disease of the soul, there are some duties that have specific virtue against this sinful fever. I shall give only two examples, which seem to me to be of this nature, - that by God's designation they have a special ability to ruin the law of sin. And then we shall show the ways which the law of sin uses to divert the mind from attending to them. Now, these duties are, - first, Prayer, especially private prayer; and, secondly, Meditation. I put them together, because they are similar in their general nature and purpose, differing only in the manner of their performance; for by meditation I mean meditating on what the word speaks to our hearts that they may

be brought to a more exact conformity. It is pondering on the truth as it is in Jesus, to find its expression in our hearts; so it has the same intent as prayer, which is to bring our souls into an attitude that will in all things answer the mind and will of God. They are as the blood and spirits in the veins, that have the same life and motion. But because persons are generally at a loss in how to meditate, and because it is so effective in controlling the actions of the law of sin, I shall give two or three rules to directing believers how to rightly do it;

1. Meditate on God with God; so, when we would undertake thoughts and meditations of God, his excellencies, his attributes, his glory, his majesty, his love, his goodness, let it be done in a way of speaking to God, in deep humiliation of our souls before him. This will fix the mind, and draw it from one thing to another, to give glory to God, and affect the soul until it is brought into that holy admiration of God and delight in him which is acceptable to him. So it must be done in a way of prayer and praise, - speaking to God.

2. Meditate on the word in the word; that is, in reading it, consider the sense in the passages, looking to God for help and direction, to reveal his mind and will, and then labour to have our hearts affected with it.

3. What we come short of in constancy in our thoughts, let it be made up in frequency. Some are discouraged because their minds do not regularly supply them with thoughts to carry on their meditations, through their weakness or imperfection. Let this be remedied by frequent returns of the mind to the subject, whereby new senses will be supplied to it. But this by the way.

These duties, amongst others, oppose the very being of indwelling sin, or rather faith in them does so. They are perpetually designing its ruin. So I shall now do these two things: -

(1.) Show the usefulness of these duties to the ruining of sin.

(2.) Show how deceitfulness of sin tries to draw the mind from them.

(1.) For the first, observe, -

[1.] It is the proper work of the soul to consider all the secret workings of sin, what advantages it has got, what temptations come with it, what harm it has already done, and what it is yet ready to do. Thus David gives this title to one of his prayers: Psalm 102, "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the LORD." I speak of that prayer which is attended with a consideration of all the wants of the soul. Without this, prayer is not prayer; whatever appearance of that duty it has, it is neither useful to the glory of God nor to the souls of men. It is a cloud without water, driven by the wind of the breath of men. Nor was there ever any more effectual poison for souls than binding them to a constant form of words in their prayers, which they do not understand. If you were to bind men so in their businesses in this world, and they will quickly find the effect of it. In this way they become unable to consider what is good or evil to them; without that, what is the use of prayer? It mocks God and deludes men's own souls. But in the kind of prayer we insist on, the Spirit of God comes to help us in this very matter of revealing the secret workings of the law of sin: Romans 8:26, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but he helps our infirmities;" he reveals our wants to us, where chiefly we stand in need of help. And we find by experience that in prayer believers are brought to such revelations of the secret work of sin in their hearts, as nothing else could have led them into. So David, Psalm 51, confessing his sin, having his wound searched by the skilful hand of the Spirit of God, received a revelation of the root of all his miscarriages, in his original corruption, verse 5. The Spirit in this duty is as the candle of the Lord to the soul, enabling it to search all the inward parts. It gives a holy, spiritual light to the mind, enabling it to search the dark recesses of the heart, to find out the subtle workings of the law of sin there. Whatever trace there is, whatever power and prevalence, it is arrested, brought into the presence of God, judged, condemned, mourned. And what could be more effective for its destruction? for, together with its revelation, that relief is applied which in Jesus Christ

is provided against it to ruin it. So it is the duty of the mind to "watch to prayer," 1 Peter 4:7, to attend diligently to the state of our souls, and to deal fervently with God about it. The like also may be said of meditation, wisely managed.

[2.] In this duty there is worked on the heart a deep, full sense of the vileness of sin, with a renewed detestation of it; which undoubtedly tends to its ruin. This is one design of prayer, one end of the soul in it, - to draw forth sin, to set it in order, to present it to itself in its vileness and abomination,, that it may be loathed and cast away as a filthy thing; as Isaiah 30:22. He who pleads with God for sin's remission, pleads also that he may detest it in his own heart, Hosea 14:3. Herein, also, sin is judged in the name of God; for the soul in its confession agrees with God's detestation of it, and his sentence against it. There are, indeed, duties which convicted persons give themselves to as a mere cover to their lusts; they cannot easily sin unless they perform duties constantly. But the prayer we speak of will allow no compromise with sin, much less serve its deceit, as formal prayer does. It will not be bribed into a secret compliance with any of the enemies of God or the soul for a moment. And hence it is that often in this duty the heart is raised to the most sincere, effectual sense of sin and detestation of it that the soul ever obtains. And this tends also to the weakening and ruin of the law of sin.

[3.] This is the way appointed of God to obtain power against sin: James 1:5, "does any man lack? let him ask of God." Prayer is the way of obtaining from God by Christ a supply of all our wants, assistance against all opposition, especially what is made against us by sin. This need not be insisted on; it is, in theory and practice, clear to every believer. It is that wherein we call, and on which the Lord Jesus comes in to our help with "help in time of need," Hebrews 4:16.

[4.] Faith in prayer counters all the workings of the deceit of sin; because the soul therein constantly pledges itself to God to oppose all sin: Psalm 119:106, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep your righteous judgements" This is the language of every

gracious soul in its addresses to God: the inmost parts pledge themselves to God, to cleave to him in all things, and to oppose sin in all things. He who cannot do this cannot pray. To pray with any other frame is to flatter God with our lips, which he abhors. And this greatly helps a believer in pursuing sin to its ruin; for, -

1st. If there be any secret lust lurking in the heart, he will find it either rising up against this pledging, or using deceit to protect itself from it. Thus it is revealed, and the conviction of the heart concerning its evil strengthened. Sin clearly reveals itself; and never more so than when it is most severely pursued. Lusts in men are compared to wild beasts; or men themselves are so because of their lusts, Isaiah 11:4-6. Now, such beasts take themselves to their dens, and never show themselves in their proper nature, until they are most earnestly pursued. And so it is with sin and corruption in the heart.

2dly. If any sin be prevalent in the soul, it will weaken it, and take it away from the fullness of this commitment to God; it will turn from it. Now, when this is noticed, it will exceedingly awaken a gracious soul, and stir it up. As weariness and malaise of the body is looked on as the sign of an approaching fever, which stirs up men to use a remedy, that they are not seized on by it, so is it in this case. When the soul of a believer finds in itself an unwillingness to make fervent, sincere pledges of universal holiness to God, it knows that there is some wrong, finds out what it is, and sets itself against it.

3dly. Whilst the soul can thus constantly pledge itself to God, sin can rise to no devastation. Yea, it is a most considerable conquest, when the soul fully and clearly, without any reserve, confirms such a pledge with alacrity and resolution; as Psalm 18:23. And it may then triumph in the grace of God, and be assured, through faith, that it shall finally conquer, and what it resolves shall be done; that it has decided, and it shall be done. And this tends to the ruin of the law of sin.

4thly. If the heart is not deceived by hypocrisy, this pledging to God will greatly influence it to watchfulness against sin. There is no greater

evidence of hypocrisy than to have the heart like the whorish woman, Proverbs 7:14, - to say, "I have paid my vows,' now I may take myself to my sin;" or to be negligent about sin, as being satisfied that it has prayed against it. It is otherwise in a gracious soul. Sense and conscience of pledges against sin made to God, do make it universally watchful against all its motions and operations. On these and sundry other accounts faith in this duty exerts itself peculiarly to the weakening of the power and stopping of the progress of the law of sin.

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

(2.) Sin puts forth its deceit in its own defence It labours to divert and draw off the mind from attending to this and similar duties. And there are, among others, three engines, three ways and means, whereby it attempts the accomplishment of its design: -

[1.] It makes advantage of its weariness to the flesh. There is an aversion, as has been declared, in the law of sin to all immediate communion with God. Now, this duty is such. There is nothing accompanies it whereby the carnal part of the soul may be gratified or satisfied, as there may be somewhat of that nature in most public duties, in most that a man can do beyond pure acts of faith and love. No relief or advantage, then, coming in by it but what is purely spiritual, it becomes wearisome, burdensome to flesh and blood. It is like travelling alone without companion or diversion, which makes the way seem long, but brings the passenger with most speed to his journey's end. So our Saviour declares, when, expecting his disciples, according to their duty and present distress, should have been engaged in this work, he found them fast asleep: Matthew 26:41, "The spirit," says he, "indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;" and out of that weakness grow their indisposition to and weariness of their duty. So God complains of his people: Isaiah 43:22, "Thou have been weary of me." And it may come at length to that height which is mentioned,

Malachi 1:13,

"Ye have said, Behold, what a weariness is it! and you have snuffed at it, says the LORD of hosts."

The Jews suppose that it was the language of men when they brought their offerings or sacrifices on their shoulders, which they pretended wearied them, and they puffed and panted as men ready to faint under them, when they brought only the torn, and the lame, and the sick. But so is this duty often to the flesh. And this the deceitfulness of sin makes use of to draw the heart by insensible degrees from a constant attendance to it. It puts in for the relief of the weak and weary flesh. There is a compliance between spiritual flesh and natural flesh in this matter, - they help one another; and an aversion to this duty is the effect of their compliance. So it was in the spouse, Song of Solomon 5:2, 8. She was asleep, drowsing in her spiritual condition, and pleads her natural unfitness to rouse herself from that state. If the mind be not diligently watchful to prevent insinuations from hence, - if it dwell not constantly on those considerations which evidence an attendance to this duty to be indispensable, - if it stir not up the principle of grace in the heart to retain its rule and sovereignty, and not to be dallied with by foolish pretences, - it will be drawn off; which is the effect aimed at.

[2.] The deceitfulness of sin makes use of corrupt reasonings, taken from the pressing and urging occasions of life. "Should we," says it in the heart, "attend strictly to all duties in this kind, we should neglect our principal occasions, and be useless to ourselves and others in the world." And on this general account, particular businesses dispossess particular duties from their due place and time. Men have not leisure to glorify God and save their own souls, It is certain that God gives us time enough for all that he requires of us in any kind in this world. No duties need to jostle one another, I mean constantly. Especial occasions must be determined according to especial circumstances. But if in anything we take more on us than we have time to perform it in, without robbing God of what is due to him and our own souls, God

does not call us to this or bless us in this. It is more tolerable that our duties of holiness and regard to God should impinge on the duties of our employments in this world than not; and yet neither does God require this at our hands. How little, then, will he bear with what evidently is so much worse! Through the deceitfulness of sin, the souls of men are beguiled thus. By degrees they are driven from their duty.

[3.] It seeks to draw the mind away from this duty, by suggesting other things to do that would make up for it; as Saul thought to make up for his disobedience by sacrifice. "It is not enough to do the same duty in public or in the family?" And if the soul be so foolish as not to answer, "Those things ought to be done, and this ought to be done as well," it may be deceived. For, besides the command that we should personally "watch to prayer," private prayer has power against the deceit and efficacy of sin, which public prayer has not. Sin strives to deprive the soul of this by bargaining, which its corrupt reasonings offer to it.

[4.] In all the workings of sin by deceit, it feeds the soul with promises of a more diligent attendance when time permits. By this means it brings the soul to say to its convictions, as Felix did to Paul, "Go your way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you." So often the present time, which alone is ours, is lost irrecoverably.

This is the first way it makes way to entangle the affections and a true conception of sin. When sin has had this effect on any one, he is said to be "drawn away," from what in his mind he ought constantly to attend to in his walking before the Lord.

This will help us discern where the beginning of our backsliding lies. And this is of great importance. When the beginnings of a sickness are known, it is a great advantage to the cure of it. God, to recall Zion to himself, shows her the "beginning of her sin," Micah 1:13. Now, this is what for the most part is the beginning of sin to us; drawing off the mind from discharging its duty. The principal charge of the soul lies on the mind; and if that neglects its duty, the whole is betrayed. The failing of the mind is like the failing of the watchman in Ezekiel; the

whole is lost by his neglect. So, in that self-scrutiny which we are called to, we are most diligently to inquire after it. God does not look at what duties we perform, as to their number or nature merely, but whether we do them with that intent of mind and spirit which he requires. Many men perform duties, and do not so much as think of them; their minds are filled with other things, only duty takes up so much of their time. This mocks God and deceives their own souls. So if you would truly assess yourselves, consider how it is with you as to the duty of your minds. Consider whether, by any of the deceits mentioned, you have not been diverted; and if there be any decays on you, you will find that the beginning of them was there. By one way or other your minds have been made heedless, slothful, uncertain, drawn off from their duty. Consider the charge, Proverbs 4:23, Proverbs 25-27. May not such a soul say, "If I had attended more diligently; if I had considered more wisely the vile nature of sin; if I had not allowed my mind to be possessed with vain hopes and foolish imaginations, by a cursed abuse of gospel grace; if I had not permitted it to be filled with the things of the world, and to become negligent in attending to duties, - I had not at this day been thus sick, weak, wounded, decayed, defiled. My careless deceived mind, has been the beginning of sin to my soul." And this revelation will direct the soul to a way of recovery; which will never be effected by multiplying duties, but by restoring the mind, Psalm 23:3.

This appears to be the great means of preserving our souls, as to their general frame and particular duties, according to the mind and will of God, - namely, to labour after a sound and steadfast mind. It is a signal grace to have "the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," 2 Timothy 1:7; - a stable, solid, resolved mind in the things of God, not easily moved, diverted, changed, not drawn aside; a mind not apt to hearken after corrupt reasonings, vain insinuations, or pretences to draw it off from its duty. This is what the apostle exhorts believers to: 1 Corinthians 15:58,

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

The steadfastness of our minds abiding in their duty is the cause of all our fruitfulness in obedience; and so Peter tells us that those who are led away or enticed, "they fall from their steadfastness," 2 Peter 3:17. And the great blame that is laid on backsliders is, that they are not steadfast: Psalm 78:37, "Their heart was not steadfast." For if the soul be safe, unless the mind be drawn off from its duty, the steadfastness of the mind is its great preservative. There are three parts of this steadfastness of the mind: - First, A full purpose of cleaving to God in all things; secondly, A daily quickening of the heart to a discharge of this purpose; thirdly, Resolutions against all dalliances about negligences in that discharge.

## CHAPTER 10.

The deceit of sin draws the mind away from its attendance to particular duties – What is needed in the mind of believers regarding particular duties of obedience - How sin, through deceit, diverts the mind from them.

WE have not as yet dealt with the first way of the working of the deceit of sin, - namely, that it draws away the mind from the discharge of its duty, which we must deal with for two reasons: -

First, Because of its importance. If the mind be drawn off, if it is turned aside from attendance to its office, the whole soul is drawn into sin. So we should give diligent heed to this; as the apostle says: Hebrews 2:1,

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."

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

Secondly, Because the workings of the mind are spiritual, the conscience, unless enlightened and duly stirred up, will not be alert. Conscience does not exercise reflex acts on the mind's failures. When the affections are entangled with sin, or the will begins to conceive it, conscience is apt to make an uproar in the soul, and to give it no rest until the soul be reclaimed, or itself be bribed; but these neglects of the mind, being spiritual, are seldom taken notice of. In the Scriptures our minds are often called our spirits, - as Romans 1:9, "Whom I serve with my spirit;" and are distinguished from the soul, which principally means the affections, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "Sanctify you wholly, your whole spirit and soul," - that is, your mind and affections. It is true,

where the word "spirit" is used to express spiritual gifts, it is, as to those gifts, opposed to our "understanding," 1 Corinthians 14:15, which is there taken a rational perception of things; but as that word is applied to any faculty of our souls, it is the mind that it expresses. This, then, being our spirit, its actions are hidden, and not to be revealed without spiritual wisdom and diligence. We cannot dwell too long on this, for it is of so great importance to us, and yet so hidden, and which we are apt to be unaware of; and yet our carefulness in this matter is one of the best evidences of our sincerity. Let us not, then, be like a man who complains when he has a cut finger, but not of a decay of spirits tending to death. There remains under this heading the responsibility of the mind in reference to particular duties and sins; so we shall do these two things:

1. Show what is required in the mind of a believer regarding particular duties.

2. Declare the way that the deceit of sin works, to draw it away from it.

1. For the right performance of any duty, it is not enough that the thing is merely done, but that it is done as instructed. This is the great duty of the mind; to attend to the rule of duties, and to take care that all that relates to them is properly arranged. Our progress in obedience is our edification. Now, it is little help to a building, if a man brings wood and stones, and heaps them up together without order; they must be hewed and squared, and fitted by line and rule, if we intend to build. Nor is it to any advantage to our growth in faith and obedience that we multiply duties, if we heap them on one another, and do not order them according to rule; so God rejects a multitude of duties, when not suited to the rule: Isaiah 1:11, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices?" and, verse 14, "They are a trouble to me; I am weary to bear them." So all acceptable obedience is according to "rule," Galatians 6:16; it is a regular obedience. As letters in the alphabet heaped together signify nothing, unless they are in the right order, no more do our duties without this. That they may be so is the great duty of the mind, which it is to attend to with all diligence: Ephesians 5:15,

"Walk diligently," in all things. We walk in duties, but we walk diligently in this attention of the mind.

(1.) There are some special things which the rule directs to that the mind is to attend in every duty. As, -

[1.] It is full and complete. Under the law no beast was allowed to be a sacrifice that had any defect. Such were rejected. Duties must be complete. Such a part of the price may be kept back that all the rest is unacceptable. Saul sparing Agag and the fattest of the cattle, rendered useless the destroying of all the rest. Thus, when men give alms, or perform other services, but not as the rule requires, (which the mind on reflection could realise), the whole duty is made of no account.

[2.] It is done in faith, in the strength of Christ, John 15:5, without whom we can do nothing. It is not enough that the person be a believer, though that is necessary, Ephesians 2:10, but also that faith is in every duty that we do; for our whole obedience is the "obedience of faith," Romans 1:5, - that is, which the faith requires, and which the grace of faith brings forth. So Christ is said to be "our life," Colossians 3:4, our spiritual life; that is, the author and cause of it. Now, as in natural life nothing can be performed except by the working of the principle of life; so, in spiritual life, no spiritually vital act, - that is, no duty acceptable to God, - can be performed except by the working of Christ, who is our life. And we can only do this by faith; so the apostle says, Galatians 2:20,

"Christ lives in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."

Not only was Christ his life, a living principle to him, but he led a life, in all duties of holiness and obedience, by the faith of the Son of God, deriving supplies of grace and strength from him. So a believer should diligently attend to this, so that everything he does to God is done in the strength of Christ; all who intend to walk with God should diligently inquire how to do this.

[3.] In this respect to rule, the way that duty is done should be considered. Now, there are two things in the manner of the performance of duty which a believer, who is trusted with spiritual light, ought to attend to: -

1st. That it is done in the way and by the means that God has prescribed concerning the way it is done This is especially to be regarded in the worship of God, as the substance and the way it is done fall equally under his command. If this is not noted, the whole duty is spoiled. I speak not of those who have been deluded by the deceitfulness of sin, so that they disregard the rule of the word, and worship God according to their own imaginations; I speak mainly of those do not make the authority of God the sole guide both of what they do and of the way they do it. And this is why God so often calls on his people to consider diligently, that they may do all as he had commanded.

2dly. The affections of the heart and mind in duties must be done in the heart. The commands of God regarding this are innumerable, and the lack of it renders every duty an abomination to him. A sacrifice without a heart, without salt, without fire, of what value is it? No more are duties without spiritual affections. And herein is the mind to keep the charge of God, - to see that the heart which he requires is offered to him. Also we find that God requires special affections to accompany special duties: "He who gives, with cheerfulness;" which, if they are not attended to, the whole is lost.

[4.] The mind is to attend to the purpose of these duties, which is principally the glory of God in Christ. Sin and self will impose several other aims on our duties: especially two it will press hard on us with, - first, Satisfaction of our consciences; secondly, The praise of men; for self-righteousness and ostentation are the main aims of men who have fallen from God in moral duties. In their sins they attempt to satisfy their lusts; in their duties, their pride. The mind of a believer is diligently to watch against these, and to keep in all a single eye to the

glory of God, in obedience to the great rule: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." These and similar things the mind of a believer is obliged to attend diligently to. Here lies the deceit of sin, - to draw the mind off from this watch, and to bring an carelessness on it. If it can do so, and strip our duties of the beauties which lie in this attention to them, it will not trouble itself nor us about the duties themselves. It attempts this several ways: -

1st. By persuading the mind to content itself with generalities, and to forget about attending to specifics. For example, it would persuade the soul to rest satisfied in a general aim of doing things to the glory of God, without considering how every particular duty may have that tendency. Thus Saul thought that he had fulfilled his duty, and done the will of God, and sought his glory in his war against Amalek, when, for want of attending to specifics, he had dishonoured God, and ruined himself and his posterity. Men may persuade themselves that they have a general design for the glory of God, when they are not active in attending to specifics. If, instead of fixing the mind by faith on advancing the glory of God in a duty, the soul contents itself with an idea of doing so, the mind is already diverted. If a man goes on a journey, it is not only necessary for him to start going that way; but if he does not take the right turnings, he may lose his way and never come to his journey's end. And if we suppose that in general we aim at the glory of God, as we all profess to do, if we do not attend to it distinctly on every duty that comes our way, we shall never come to our journey's end either. He who satisfies himself with a general purpose, without putting it into practice, will not long retain that purpose. The principle of duties works on the mind in the same way. Duties should be done in faith, in the strength of Christ; but if men content themselves that they have faith, and do not labour in every particular duty to act that faith, to lead their spiritual lives, in every detail, by the faith of the Son of God, the mind is drawn off from its duty. It is in particular actions that we express our faith and obedience; and what we are in them, that we are, and no more.

2dly. It draws the mind away from those duties by insinuating a secret

contentment into it from the duty that has been done. This is the work of a natural conscience. If the duty is done, though it comes short in almost all things of the rule, then conscience will be satisfied; as Saul, on his expedition against Amalek, cries to Samuel, "Come in, you blessed of the Lord; "I have performed the commandment of the Lord." He satisfied himself, though he had not done the whole will of God as he ought to. And thus was it with them, Isaiah 58:3, "Why have we fasted and you regard it not?" They had pleased themselves in the their duties, and expected that God also should be pleased with them. But he shows them where they had failed, so far as to render what they had done an abomination; and he lays a similar charge against them, chap. 48:1, 2. The deceitfulness of sin attempts to draw the mind to the performance of the duty itself. "Pray you ought, and you have prayed; give alms you ought, and you have given alms; be content in what you have done, and continue in the same way." If it prevails here the mind is discharged from watchfulness, which leaves the soul on the borders of many evils; for, -

3dly. Hence familiarity will quickly follow, which is the height of sin's work: for men's minds may thus be distracted from duties, in the midst of doing them; for then the mind may be habitually diverted from its service. What is done with such an attitude is not done to God, Amos 5:25. None of their sacrifices were to God, although they professed that they were all so. But they did not attend to his worship in faith, and to his glory, and he despised all their duties, See also Hosea 10:1. And this is the reason why professors thrive so little in their duties: - They do them wrongly, as their minds are elsewhere; so they have little or no communion with God in them, which is the end they are designed for, and the only way they can be useful to themselves. Many duties of worship and obedience are performed by a woeful generation of hypocrites, with neither life nor light, or acceptance from God, their minds being far from a proper understanding what they do due to the deceitfulness of sin.

2. It is the same with sins. There are things in every sin that the mind of a believer, must attend to diligently, for the safety of the soul. God

has appointed and sanctified remedies, to rebuke and check the working of the law of sin, that are well fitted to that purpose in the law of grace. The deceit of sin attempts to draw off the mind from attending to them. Some few of them we shall a little reflect on: -

(1.) The first is the sovereignty of God, the great lawgiver, by whom it is forbidden. This Joseph fixed on in his great temptation: Genesis 39:9, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" There was in it a great evil, a great ingratitude against man, which he insists on, verses 8, 9; but what fixed his heart against it was that it was sin against God. So the apostle informs us that in our dealing in anything that is against the law, our respect is still to be to the Lawgiver and his sovereignty: James 4:11, 12,

"If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy."

Consider this: there is one lawgiver, holy, righteous, armed with sovereign power; he is able to save and destroy. Hence sin is called rebellion, casting off his yoke, despising of him, in his sovereignty as the great lawgiver; and the mind should always attend to this in the lusts, actions, and suggestions of the law of sin, especially under temptation: "It is God that has forbidden this thing; the great lawgiver, under whose sovereignty I am, in dependence on whom I live, and by whom I am to be disposed of, as to my present and eternal condition." This Eve fixed on at the beginning of her temptation, "God has said, You shall not eat of this tree," Genesis 3:3; but she did not stand her ground but allowed her mind to be diverted by the subtlety of Satan, which was the entrance of her transgression: and so it is to us all in our deviations from obedience.

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

himself, Job 31:23,

"Destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure."

He had mentioned many evils in the foregoing verses, and pleads his innocency from them, although due to his greatness he could have easily committed them without fear of danger from men. Here he gives the reason that he abstained from them; "Destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure." "I considered," says he, "that God had appointed 'death and destruction' for the punishment of sin, and that such was his power, that he could inflict it, in a way as no creature is able to avoid." So the apostle directs believers to consider what a "fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God," Hebrews 10:31; because he has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will recompense," verse 30. He is a sin-avenging God, who will by no means acquit the guilty; as in the declaration of his gracious name, infinitely full of encouragements to poor sinners in Christ, he adds that in the end, that "he will by no means clear the guilty," Exodus 34:7, - that he may keep on the minds of those he pardons a sense of the punishment that is due to sin on account of his justice. And so the apostle would remind us that "our God is a consuming fire," Hebrews 12:29; that is, that we should consider his holiness and justice, that appoints a fit reward to sin. And when men ignore this, he reckons it as the height of their sins: Romans 1:32,

"They knew that it is the judgement of God, that those who commit such things were worthy of death, yet continued to do them."

What hope is there for such? There is, indeed, relief against this for believing souls in the blood of Christ; but this is not to take off the mind from it as it is appointed of God to be a restraint from sin. And both these, the sovereignty of God and the punishment of sin, are put together by our Saviour: Matthew 10:28, "Fear not those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

(3.) The consideration of all the love and kindness of God, against whom every sin is committed, is another thing that the mind ought diligently to attend to; and this is powerful, if rightly managed in the soul. This Moses presses on the people: Deuteronomy 32:6,

"Do you thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is he not your Father who bought you? has he not made you, and established you?"

"Is this a requital for eternal love, and all the fruits of it? for the love and care of a Father, of a Redeemer, that we have been made partakers of?" And the apostle speaks regarding this, 2 Corinthians 7:1,

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

The promises should be received in such a way as to stir us up to holiness, and bring about an abstinence from all sin. And what promises are these? "God will be a Father to us, and receive us," chap. 6:17, 18; which comprises the whole of the love of God towards us here and to eternity. If there be any spiritual ingenuity in the soul, whilst, the mind is attentive to this, the power of sin can not prevail against it. Now, there are two parts of this consideration: -

[1.] What is general in it, and common to all believers. This is expressed thus; 1 John 3:1-3,

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man who has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure."

"Consider," says he, "the love of God, and the privileges that we enjoy by it: 'Behold, what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called the sons of God.' Adoption is a special fruit of it, and how great a privilege is this! The world knows nothing of the blessed condition which we enjoy through this love: 'The world knows us not.' It is such love, and its effects are so unspeakably blessed and glorious, that we are unable to comprehend them." How, then, should we use this contemplation of the excellent, unspeakable love of God? Why, says he, "Every one who has this hope purifies himself." Every man who has been made partaker of this love, and thus a hope of enjoying of the fruits of it, of being made like God in glory, "purifies himself," - that is, abstains from all, as the following words declare.

[2.] It is to be considered as to such peculiar mercies and fruits of love as everyone's soul has been made partaker of. Every believer, besides the love and mercy which he has in common with all his brethren, has also experienced some some special mercies, where he has a joy which no stranger meddles with, Proverbs 14:10, - particular applications of covenant love and mercy to his soul. Now, these are all provisions laid in by God, to be borne in mind against an hour of temptation, that the consideration of them may preserve the soul from sin. 1 Kings 11:9, it is charged as the great evil of Solomon, that he had sinned against special mercies, special intimations of love; he sinned after God had "appeared to him twice." God required that he should remembered that especial favour, and used it to resist sin; but he neglected it, and is burdened with this sore rebuke. And, indeed, all especial mercies are misspent on us, if they are not used for this. So the mind should attend to this, and oppose every attempt that is made by the law of sin.

(4.) The considerations that arise from the blood and mediation of Christ are of the same importance. So the apostle declares, 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15,

"For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that those who

live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to him who died for them, and rose again."

There is a constraining power in this; it is great, effectual, if duly attended to. But I must not here insist on these things; -

(5.) I shall not speak of the inhabitation of the Spirit, - the greatest privilege that we partake of in this world. The consideration how he is grieved by sin; how his dwelling-place is defiled thereby; how his comforts are lost, despised by it, - might also be insisted on: but we have said enough. Now, herein lies the duty of the mind in reference to particular sins and temptations: - It is carefully to attend to these things; to consider them constantly; to have them continually ready to oppose all the lust, actions, attempts, and rage of sin.

Sin in an especial manner puts forth its deceit in this. It labours to draw off the mind from attending to these things, - to deprive the soul of this great antidote against its poison. It attempts to cause the soul to satisfy itself with general undigested notions about sin, that it may have nothing in particular to resort to in defence against and temptations. It does this in these ways: -

[1.] It is from the deceit of sin that the mind is spiritually slothful, and so neglects this duty. Its principal duty is to watch; which is the great warning that the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples in reference to their dangers from sin and Satan: Mark 13:37,

"I say to all, Watch;" that is, "Use your utmost diligence, that you are not entangled with temptations."

It is called also consideration: "Consider your ways," - "Consider your latter end;" the lack of which God complains of in his people, Deuteronomy 32:29. Now, spiritual sloth is contrary to these indispensable conditions of our safety, as the apostle declares, Hebrews 6:11, 12,

"And we desire that every one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end: that you are not slothful."

If we show not diligence, we are slothful, and in danger of failing to inherit the promises. See 2 Peter 1:5-11,

"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; to virtue knowledge," etc.

"For if these things be in you and abound, they cause you to be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he who lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. So, brethren, be careful to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things you shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be given to you into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," All this the mind is turned from, if once, by the deceit of sin, it is made slothful. Now, this sloth consists in four things: -

1st. Carelessness. It does not consider its special concerns. The apostle, persuading the Hebrews with all earnestness to attend diligently, that they may not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, gives as the reason, that they were "dull of hearing," chap. 5:11; that is, that they were slothful, and did not attend to their duty. Heedlessness is apt to creep on the soul, and it does not diligently consider its state, and what it should be doing.

2dly. An unwillingness to be stirred up to its duty. Proverbs 19:24,

"A slothful man hides his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again."

There is an unwillingness in sloth to take any notice of warnings or stirrings up by the word, Spirit, judgements, anything that God makes use of to call the mind to consider the condition of the soul. And this is clear evidence that the mind is made slothful by the deceit of sin,

when especial calls and warnings, whether in a suitable word or a pressing judgement, cannot prevail with it to pull its hand out of its bosom; that is, to set about the special duties that it is called to.

3dly. Weak and ineffectual attempts to restore itself to its duty.  
Proverbs 26:14,

"As the door turns on its hinges, so the slothful man turns on his bed."

As a door turns on its hinges, there is some motion but no progress. It moves up and down, but is still in the place that it was. So is it with the spiritually slothful man on his bed, or in his security. He makes some motions or faint efforts towards a discharge of his duty, but does not go on. Where he was one day, there he is the next; Where he was one year, he is the next. His efforts are faint, cold, and insubstantial; he makes no progress by them, but is always beginning and never finishing his work.

4thly. A faint heart when difficulties and discouragements come.  
Proverbs 22:13,

"The slothful man says, There is a lion outside, I shall be slain in the streets."

Every difficulty deters him from duty. He thinks it impossible to attain that accuracy and perfection which he is to press after; so contents himself in his old coldness, negligence, rather than run the hazard of a full reflection on his state. Now, if the deceit of sin has once drawn away the mind into this frame, it lays it open to every temptation and incursion of sin. The spouse in the Canticles seems to have been overtaken with this, Song of Solomon 5:2, 3; so she makes excuses why she cannot attend to the call of Christ, and apply herself to her duty in walking with him.

[2.] It draws away the mind from its duty in reference to sin by external events. It falls in conjunction with some urging temptation,

and surprises the mind into thoughts of another nature than those it ought to insist on in its own defence So it seems to have been with Peter: his carnal fear closing with the temptation wherein Satan sought to winnow him, filled his mind with so many thoughts about his own danger, that he could not take consider the love and warning of Christ, nor the evil his temptation led him to, nor anything that he ought to have insisted on for his preservation. So, when he thought of his folly in neglecting those thoughts of God and the love of Christ which, through the assistance of the Holy Ghost, might have kept him from his scandalous fall, he wept bitterly. And this how the deceit of sin commonly works as to particular evils: - It lays hold on the mind with anxiety about the present sin, and so possesses it that either it recovers not itself at all, or if any thoughts of them be suggested, the mind is so preoccupied that they make no impression on the soul. Thus was David surprised in his great sin. Sin and temptation so possessed and filled his mind with the object of his lust, that he utterly forgot those considerations which kept him from his iniquity. Here, therefore, lies the great wisdom of the soul, in rejecting the very first motions of sin, because by parleys with them the mind may be drawn off from attending to its remedies, and so the all rushes into evil.

[3.] It draws away the mind by long and frequent temptations, conquering it at last. This does not happen without neglect of the soul, in want of stirring up itself to rebuke sin, in the strength and by the grace of Christ; which would have prevented its victory.

This is the first way that the law of sin acts its deceit against the soul: - It draws the mind away from attending to its proper work in respect of duty and sin. And so far as this is done, the person is said to be "drawn away". He is "tempted;" every man is tempted, when he is thus drawn away by his own lust, or the deceit of sin dwelling in him. And the effect of this work may be summarised under three heads: -

1. Lack of watchfulness of spirit to every duty, and against even the most secret actions of sin.

2. Neglect of those duties that weaken and ruin the law of sin, and disable its deceitfulness.

3. Spiritual sloth, as regards considering duties and sins.

To the degree that these things are brought about in the soul, a man is drawn off by his own lust or the deceit of sin.

## CHAPTER 11.

The work of sin by deceit to entangle the affections - How it is done - Means of prevention.

THE second thing in the words of the apostle ascribed to the deceitful working of sin is its enticing. A man is "drawn away and enticed." And this seems particularly to relate to the affections. The mind is drawn away from duty, and the affections are enticed to sin. So a man is said to be "enticed," or entangled as with a bait; for it alludes to the bait with which a fish is taken on the hook which holds him to his destruction. Concerning this, we shall briefly show two things:

1. What it is to be enticed, or entangled with the bait of sin, to have the affections tainted with an inclination to it; and when they are so.

2. What course sin takes, and how it proceeds to entice the soul: -

(1.) The affections are entangled when they stir up frequent imaginations about the object which this deceit of sin leads and entices towards. When sin prevails, and the affections are gone fully after it, it continually fills the imagination with it, with images and likenesses of it. Such persons "devise iniquity, and work evil on their beds;" which they also "practise" when "it is in the power of their hand," Micah 2:1. As, in particular, Peter tells us that "they have eyes full of an adulteries, and cannot cease from sin," 2 Peter 2:14, - that is, their imaginations are continually filled with thoughts of the object of their lusts. And it is so in part where the affections are in part entangled with sin, and begin to turn aside to it. John tells us that the things that are "in the world" are "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," 1 John 2:16. The lust of the eyes is what they convey to the soul. Now, it is not physical seeing, but the fixing of the imagination on such things, that is meant. And this is called the "eyes," because thereby things are represented to the mind and soul, as outward objects are by the eyes. And often the outward sight of the eyes causes these imaginations. So Achan declares how sin prevailed

with him, Joshua 7:21. First, he saw the wedge of gold and Babylonish garment, and then he coveted them. He rolled them in his imagination, and then fixed his heart on obtaining them. Now, the heart may have a settled detestation of sin; but yet, if a man find that the imagination of the mind is frequently tempted by it, he may know that his affections are secretly enticed.

(2.) This is heightened when the imagination prevails with the mind to think about it, with secret delight. This is termed by casuists, an abiding thought with delight; which towards forbidden objects is sinful. And yet this may be when the consent of the will to sin is not obtained, - when the soul would not for the world do the thing, which thoughts begin to lodge in the mind about. This "lodging of vain thoughts" in the heart the prophet complains of as a great sin, to be abhorred, Jeremiah 4:14. All these thoughts are messengers that carry sin to and fro between the imagination and the affections, and increase it, inflaming the imagination, and more and more entangling the affections. Achan thinks on the golden wedge, this makes him like it and love it; by loving it his thoughts are infected, and return to the imagination of its worth; and so little by little the soul is inflamed to sin. And here if the will parts with its sovereignty, sin is conceived.

(3.) Excuses for sin, or thinking of the mercies of God towards sin, show that the affections are entangled with it. It is a great part of the deceit of sin, to put lessening thoughts of sin to the mind. "Is it not a little one?" or, "There is mercy provided;" or, "I will stop after a little while," is its language in a deceived heart. Now, when the heart is ready to receive such thoughts in reference to sin, it is evidence that the affections are enticed. When the soul is willing to be tempted, to listen to its dalliances, it has lost its conjugal affections to Christ, and is entangled. This is "looking on the wine when it is red, when it gives its colour in the cup, when it moves itself aright," Proverbs 23:31; - contemplating the invitations of sin, whose end the wise man gives us, verse 32. When the deceit of sin has prevailed thus far on any person, then he is entangled. The will has not yet consented to sin, but the soul is near it.

2. Our next inquiry is, How the deceit of sin proceeds thus to entice the affections? Three of its baits are shown here: -

(1.) It makes use of its former dominion over the mind to draw it off from its watchfulness. Says the wise man, Proverbs 1:17, "Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird;" or "before the eyes of every thing that has a wing," as in the original. If it has eyes open to discern the snare, and a wing to carry it away, it will not be caught. And the deceit of sin would spread its nets in vain to entangle the soul, whilst the eyes of the mind are on it, and so stir up the wings of its will and affections to carry it away. But if the eyes be diverted, the wings are of little use for escape; so this is one of the ways the fowler uses. They have lights, to divert the sight of their prey; and when that is done, they cast their nets on them. So does the deceit of sin; it first diverts the mind by false reasonings, and then casts its net on the affections to entangle them.

(2.) Taking advantage of such seasons, it presents sin as desirable, as exceeding satisfactory to the corrupt part of our affections. It gilds over the object by a thousand pretences, which it presents to corrupt lusts. This is laying a bait, which the apostle in this verse evidently alludes to. A bait is desirable, and presented to the hungry creature for its satisfaction; and it is rendered desirable by all craft. Thus is sin presented by the help of the imagination to the soul; that is, sinful objects, which the affections cleave to, are presented. The apostle tells us that there are "pleasures of sin," Hebrews 11:25; which, unless they are despised, as they were by Moses, sin cannot be escaped. Hence they that live in sin are said to "live in pleasure," James 5:5. Now, this pleasure of sin gives satisfaction to the flesh, to lust, to corrupt affections. Hence is that caution, Romans 13:14, "Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts;" that is, "Do not allow your minds, thoughts, or affections to fix on sinful objects, that give satisfaction to the lusts of the flesh, to nourish them." He speaks again, Galatians 5:16, "Do not fulfil the lusts of the flesh;" - "Do not bring in the pleasures of sin, to give them satisfaction." When men are under the

power of sin, they are said to "fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind," Ephesians 2:3. So the deceit of sin attempts to entangle the affections by suggesting to them, through the assistance of the imagination, that it will satisfy its corrupt lusts, now set at liberty by the carelessness of the mind. It presents its "wine sparkling in the cup," the beauty of the adulteress, the riches of the world, to sensual and covetous persons; and similarly, to some degree, to believers themselves. So when sin would entangle the soul, it prevails with the imagination to solicit the heart, by representing this false-painted beauty or pretended desirability of sin; and then if Satan, with any temptation, assists it, it inflames all the affections, and puts the whole soul into disorder.

(3.) It hides the danger that attends sin; it covers it as the hook is covered with the bait, or the net spread over with meat for the fowl to be taken. It is not possible that sin should utterly deprive the soul of the knowledge of its danger. It cannot remove its persuasion that "the wages of sin is death," and that it is the "judgement of God that they that commit sin are worthy of death." But this it will do, - it will so possess the mind and affections with the desirableness of sin, that it diverts them from a practical contemplation of the danger of it. What Satan did by his first temptation, sin has done ever since. At first Eve guards herself with calling to mind the danger of sin: "If we eat or touch it we shall die," Genesis 3:3. But so soon as Satan had filled her mind with the beauty and usefulness of the fruit to make one wise, how quickly she laid aside her consideration of the danger of eating it, the curse due to it; or else relieves herself with a vain hope and pretence that it should not be, because the serpent told her so! So was David beguiled in his transgression by the deceit of sin. His lust being satisfied, his sense of the guilt of his transgression was taken away; so he is said to have "despised the LORD," 2 Samuel 12:9, in that he considered not the evil that was in his heart, and the danger that attended it in the threatenings of the law. Now sin, when it presses on the soul to this purpose, will use a thousand wiles to hide the terror of the Lord from it. Hopes of pardon shall hide it; future repentance shall hide it; present boldness of lust shall hide it; opportunities shall hide

it; circumstances shall hide it; extenuation of sin shall hide it; balancing works against it shall hide it; considering earthly things shall hide it; desperate resolutions to risk everything to enjoy lust in its pleasures shall hide it. A thousand wiles it has, which cannot be numbered.

(4.) Having prevailed thus far, magnifying the pleasures of sin, hiding its end, it engenders a train of thought fixed on the sin, to conceive it and bring it forth, the affections being already taken over.

Here we may give some directions for correcting this woeful work. Would we not be enticed? would we not tend to conceive sin? would we avoid the road which goes down to death? - let us take heed of our affections; which are so important in the course of our obedience, that they are commonly in the Scripture called the heart, as the principal thing which God requires in our walking before him. And this is not a slight thing. Proverbs 4:23, says the wise man, "Keep your heart with all diligence;" or, as in the original, "above" or "before all keepings;" - "Before every watch, keep your heart. You have many keepings that you watch to: you watch to keep your lives, your estates, your reputations, your families; but," says he, "above all these keepings, attend to that of the heart, of your affections, that they may not be entangled with sin." There is no safety without it. Save all other things and lose the heart, and all is lost, - lost to all eternity. You will say, then, "How shall we do this duty?"

1. Keep your affections on the right object.

(1.) In general. This advice the apostle gives, Colossians 3. His advice in the beginning of that chapter is to direct us to put sin to death: Verse 5, "Put to death what is earthly in you;" - "Prevent the working and deceit of sin which wars in your members." To enable us to do this, he gives us that great direction: Verse 2, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Fix your affections on heavenly things; this will enable you to put sin to death; fill them with the things that are above, let them be exercised with them, and so

enjoy the chief place in them. They are above, blessed objects, answering to our affections; - God himself, in his beauty and glory; the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "altogether lovely, the chiefest of ten thousand;" grace and glory; the mysteries revealed in the gospel; the blessedness promised thereby. Were our affections taken up with these things, as they should be, - it is our happiness when they are, - what access could sin, with its painted pleasures, with its sugared poisons, have to our souls? how should we loathe all its proposals, and say to them, "Get you hence as an abominable thing!" For what are the pleasures of sin, compared with the reward which is presented to us? Which argument the apostle presses, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18.

(2.) Let the object of your affections, in an especial manner, be the cross of Christ, which has great power to frustrate the work of indwelling sin: Galatians 6:14,

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified to me, and I to the world."

The cross of Christ he gloried and rejoiced in; this his heart was set on; and these were the effects of it, - it crucified the world to him, made it a dead and undesirable thing. The baits and pleasures of sin are taken out of the world, and the things that are in the world, - "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." These are the things that are in the world; from these sin takes all its baits. If the heart be filled with the cross of Christ, it casts loathing on them all; it leaves no beauty, no pleasure in them. Again, says he, "It crucifies me to the world; makes my heart, my affections, dead to any of these things." It roots up corrupt affections, leaves no principle to go and make provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts. So labour to fill your hearts with the cross of Christ. Consider the sorrows he underwent, the curse he bore, the blood he shed, the cries he put forth, the love that was in all this to your souls, and the mystery of the grace of God in it. Meditate on the vileness and punishment of sin as represented in the cross, the blood, the death of Christ. Is Christ crucified for sin, and shall not our hearts be crucified with him to sin? Shall we receive, or

even listen to, what pierced and slew our dear Lord Jesus? God forbid! Fill your affections with the cross of Christ, that there may be no room for sin. The world once put him out of the house into a stable, when he came to save us; let him now turn the world out of doors, when he is come to sanctify us.

2. Look to the vigour of your affections towards heavenly things; if they are not constantly attended to, they are apt to decay, and sin lies in wait against them. Many complaints we have in the Scripture of those who lost their first love, in allowing their affections to decay. And this should make us jealous over our own hearts, lest we also should be overtaken with a similar backsliding. So be jealous over them; often strictly examine them and call them to account; supply to them due considerations for their exciting and stirring up to duty.

## CHAPTER 12.

The conception of sin through deceit - What it consists of - The consent of the will to sin - Its nature - How it is obtained - Other advantages made use of by the deceit of sin - Ignorance - Error.

THE third success of the deceit of sin in its progressive work is the conception of actual sin. When it has drawn the mind off from its duty, and entangled the affections, it proceeds to conceive sin in order to bringing it forth: "Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin." Now, the conception of sin can be nothing but the consent of the will; for as sin cannot be committed without the consent of the will, so where the will has consented, nothing in the soul hinders its accomplishment. God does, indeed, by various ways and means, frustrate the bringing forth of these adulterous conceptions, causing them to melt away in the womb, or one way or other prove abortive, so that none of that sin which is willed or conceived is committed; but nothing in the soul remains to check to it when once the will has given its consent. Often, when a cloud is full of rain, a wind comes and drives it away; and when the will is ready to bring forth its sin, God diverts it: but yet the cloud was as full of rain as if it had fallen, and the soul as full of sin as if it had been committed.

This conceiving of sin, then, is its ability to gain the consent of the will. And thus the soul loses its chastity towards God in Christ, as the apostle intimates, 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3. So we must observe, -

1. That the will is the cause of obedience and disobedience. Moral actions are good or evil as they partake of the consent of the will. He spake truth of old who said, "Every sin is so voluntary, that if it is not voluntary it is not sin." It is most true of actual sins. Their iniquity lies in the acts of the will in them, as concerns those who commit them; in itself the reason of sin is its aberration from the law of God.

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

(1.) Deliberate consent, - a prevailing consent; the convictions of the mind being conquered, and no principle of grace in the will to weaken it. With this the soul goes into sin as a ship before the wind with all its sails displayed. It rushes into sin like the horse into the battle; men thereby, as the apostle speaks, "giving themselves over to sin with greediness," Ephesians 4:19. Thus Ahab's will was in the murdering of Naboth. He did it with deliberation; doing it gave him such satisfaction as that it cured his malady or the distemper of his mind. This is that consent of the will which acts in the finishing and completing of sin in unregenerate persons, and does not relate to the single acts of sin, of which we speak.

(2.) There is a consent of the will which is attended with a secret opposition, and will to the contrary. Thus Peter's will was to deny his Master. His will was in it, or he would not have done it. It was voluntary, what he chose to do at that time. Sin would not have come forth if it had not been thus conceived. But there was also in his will a contrary principle of love to Christ, and faith in him, which did not fail completely. Its effect was intercepted, and its operations suspended, through the violence of the temptation; but it was in his will, and weakened his consent to sin. Though it consented, it was not done with self-pleasing, which wilful acts produce.

3. Although there may be a general consent in the will, which may allow certain sins to be conceived, there cannot be a total consent of the will of a believer to any sin; for, -

(1.) In his will there is a principle of grace that is fixed on good: Romans 7:21, "He would do good." And this usually overrules the principle of sin, so that the will is ruled from it. Grace has the rule, not sin, in the will of every believer. Consent to sin in the will which is against the generally prevailing principle in that will, cannot be absolute.

(2.) There is not only a prevailing principle in the will against sin, but there is also a secret reluctance in it against consenting to sin. It is

true, the soul is sometimes unaware of this, because the consent to sin overrides the prevailing principle, and takes away the sense of the desires of the Spirit, the reluctance of the principle of grace in the will. But the general rule holds true: Galatians 5:17, "The Spirit lusts against the flesh." It does so, though not always to the same degree, nor with the same success; and the prevalence of the contrary principle in this or that particular act does not disprove it. It is so on the other side. There is no act of grace in the will but sin lusts against it; although the soul is not conscious of it, because of the prevalence of the contrary acting of grace, yet it is enough to keep those actions from perfection. So is it in this opposition of grace against the work of sin in the soul; though its actions are not sensed, it is enough to keep that act from being complete. Much spiritual wisdom lies in discerning between the opposition of the principle of grace in the will against sin, and the rebukes that conscience gives the soul on conviction for sin.

4. Repeated acts of consent to sin may beget a disposition and inclination in it to similar acts, that may bring the will to a proneness and readiness to consent to sin easily; which is a condition of soul dangerous, and greatly to be watched against.

5. This consent of the will, which we have thus described, may be considered two ways: -

(1.) As it concerns the circumstances, causes, means, and inducements to sin.

(2.) As it concerns particular sins.

In the first sense the will virtually consents to sin in every neglect of preventing it, in every neglect of duty that makes way for it, in every listening to temptation leading towards it; for where there is no act of the will, there is no sin. But we now speak of the consent of the will to particular sins, so that either sin is committed, or is prevented by other ways and means. And herein consists the conceiving of sin.

Next we consider the way that the deceit of sin gains the consent of the will, and conceives actual sin in the soul.

1. The will is a rational appetite, - rational as guided by the mind, and an appetite as excited by the affections; and so is influenced by both.

2. It consents to nothing, but as it has an appearance of some present good. It cannot consent to anything that it knows is evil. Good is its natural object, so whatever is presented to it for its consent must be presented under an appearance of being either good in itself, or good at present to the soul; so that, -

3. We may see the reason why the conception of sin is placed here when the mind has been drawn away and the affections entangled. Both these have an influence on the consent of the will, and the conception of actual sin thereby. Our way here is plain. We have seen how the mind is drawn away by the deceit of sin, and how the affections are entangled; - what remains is but the effect of these things; so to show this, we will give some examples of some of the deceits, and corrupt reasonings, and then show how they cause the will to consent to sin: -

(1.) The will is imposed on by that corrupt reasoning, that grace is exalted in a pardon, and that mercy is provided for sinners. The first deceives the mind, and opens the way to the will's consent by removing the sight of evil, which the will has an aversion to. In carnal hearts, this prevails so far as to make them think that their liberty consists in being "servants of corruption," 2 Peter 2:19. Its poison often taints the minds of believers; against which we are cautioned in the Scripture. There is a use and an abuse of the doctrine of the grace of the gospel. Grace is a twofold mystery, of walking with God, and coming to God; and the great design of sin is to alter the mystery of grace by applying considerations to one which belong to the other; so each part is hindered, and the influence of grace in them is defeated. See 1 John 2:1, 2:

"These things write I to you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we

have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins."

Here is the whole design of the gospel briefly expressed. "These things," says he, "I write to you." What things were these? chap. 1 verse 2: "The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show to you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us," - that is, the things concerning the person and mediation of Christ; and, verse 7, that pardon, forgiveness, and expiation from sin is through the blood of Christ. But why does he write these things to them? what do they teach, what do they lead to? A universal abstinence from sin: "I write to you," says he, "that you sin not." This is the only genuine end of the doctrine of the gospel. But to abstain from all sin is not our condition in this world: verse 8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." What, then, shall be done? Since we have sinned, is there no relief provided for our souls in the gospel? Yes; says he, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." There is full relief in the propitiation and intercession of Christ for us. This is the doctrine of the gospel, and its application to our souls: - first, to keep us from sin; and then to relieve us against sin. But the deceit of sin puts this "new wine into old bottles," whereby the bottles are broken, and the wine perishes. It takes the last first. "If any man sin, there is pardon provided," is all the gospel that sin would allow to abide on the minds of men. When we want to approach God in faith, it tells us we should be free from sin, whereas the gospel presents the pardon of sin for our encouragement. When we have come to God, and should walk with him, it will only present the latter, that there is pardon of sin; whereas the gospel instructs us to keep ourselves from sin, the grace of God bringing salvation having appeared to us to that purpose.

Now, the mind being entangled with this deceit and diverted from the true ends of the gospel, sin imposes on the will in several ways to obtain its consent: -

[1.] By a sudden temptation. Temptation represents a thing as a present good, which is a real evil. Now, when temptation befalls the soul, the principle of grace in the will rises up to reject it. But if the mind is deceived by sin, it breaks in on the will with a corrupt reasoning from gospel grace and mercy, which first reduces, then abates the will's opposition, and then causes it to consent on the side of temptation; and sin in the sight of God is conceived, though it may never be committed. Thus the seed of God is sacrificed to Moloch, and the weapons of Christ used to serve the devil.

[2.] It does it unawares. It insinuates the poison of this corrupt reasoning by little and little, until it has prevailed. And as the whole effect of the doctrine of the gospel in holiness and obedience consists in the soul's being cast into its mould, Romans 6:17; so apostasy from the gospel is casting the soul into the mould of this false reasoning, that sin may be indulged because there is grace and pardon. Thus the soul is at ease in negligence, and feels no need to attend to duties and avoid sins. It takes the soul away from the mystery of the law of grace, which is to look for salvation as if we had never performed any duty, being, after we have done all, unprofitable servants, resting on sovereign mercy through the blood of Christ, and attending to duties as if we looked for no mercy; that is, with no less care, though with more liberty and freedom. This the deceitfulness of sin attempt by all means to work the soul from; and thereby debauches the will regarding consent to sin.

(2.) The deceived mind imposes on the will, to obtain its consent to sin, by suggesting the advantages that may arise thereby; which is one way it is drawn away. It makes what is absolutely evil appear good. So was it with Eve, Genesis 3. Forgetting the law, covenant and threats of God, she reflects on the benefits she should obtain by her sin, and adds them up to gain the consent of her will. "It is," says she, "good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise." What should she do, then, but eat it? Her will consented, and she did so. Pleas for obedience are laid out of the way, and only the pleasures of sin are considered. So says Ahab, 1 Kings 21; "Naboth's vineyard is

near my house, and I may make it a garden of herbs; therefore I must have it." A deceived mind proposed this to his will, until it made him obstinately pursue his covetousness through perjury and murder, to the ruin of himself and his family. Thus the guilt and tendency of sin is disguised as advantages, and so is resolved on in the soul.

As the mind being withdrawn, so the affections being enticed and entangled do greatly further the conception of sin in the soul by the consent of the will; and they do it two ways: -

[1.] By some hasty impulse, being drawn forth by some violent temptation, they inflame the whole soul, and draw the will to consent to what they are drawn to. So with David in the matter of Nabal. A violent provocation from the unworthy behaviour of that foolish churl stirs him up to revenge, 1 Samuel 25:13. He resolves to destroy a whole family, the innocent with the guilty, verses 33, 34. Revenge and murder were conceived, resolved, and consented to, until God graciously took him off. His provoked affections caused his will to consent to the conception of bloody sins. It was the same with Asa in his anger, when he smote the prophet; and with Peter in his fear, when he denied his Master. Let that soul which would take heed of conceiving sin take heed of entangled affections; for sin may be suddenly conceived, the consent of the will may be suddenly obtained; which brings guilt to the soul, though the sin be never done.

[2.] Enticed affections gain the consent of the will by frequent temptations, whereby they get ground little by little, and enthrone themselves. Take an instance in the sons of Jacob, Genesis 37:4. They hate their brother, because their father loved him. Their affections being enticed, new occasions entangle them farther, as his dreams and the like. This rankled in their hearts, and never ceased tempting their wills until they resolved on his death. The unlawfulness, the unnaturalness of the action, the grief of their aged father, the guilt of their own souls, are all laid aside. The hatred and envy that they had conceived against him ceased not until their wills had consented to his ruin. This gradual progress of the prevalence of corrupt affections to

tempt the soul to sin the wise man excellently describes, Proverbs 23:31-35. Sin commonly works in this way to destroy souls which seem to have made good steps in the ways of God: - When it has entangled them with one temptation, and brought the will to like it, another temptation comes, either to neglect some duty or to refuse more light; the reason men fall off utterly from God is not usually their first temptation. So this is the third act of the deceit of sin. It obtains the will's consent to its conception; and thus many sins are conceived in the heart, which defile the soul no less, and cause it to contract less guilt, than if they were actually committed.

There are one or two particular ways it uses to resist the voice of the word and the Spirit for its ruin.

1. It uses the darkness of the mind to work out its intentions. A dark mind totally, - that is, devoid of saving grace, - is the working-place of sin. Hence its effects are called the "works of darkness," Ephesians 5:11, Romans 13:12, as springing from thence. Sin brings forth by the help of it. The working of lust in a dark mind is the upper region of hell; for it lies next door to it for filth, horror, and confusion. Now, there is a partial darkness abiding still in believers; they "know but in part," 1 Corinthians 13:12. Though there be in them all a principle of saving light, - the day-star is risen in their hearts, - yet all the shades of darkness are not utterly expelled from them in this life. And there are two principal parts of the remaining darkness that is in believers: -

(1.) Ignorance of the will of God, of the rule and law in general, or of the reference of the particular fact that lies before the mind to the law.

(2.) Error positively; taking that for truth which is falsehood, and that for light which is darkness. The law of sin uses both of these to exert its power in the soul.

(1.) Is there a remaining ignorance of anything of the will of God? Sin will be sure to make use of it. Though Abimelech was not a believer, he had moral integrity; he declares it in a solemn appeal to God, the

searcher of all hearts, Genesis 20:5. But being ignorant that fornication was so great a sin that a morally honest man should not do, lust brings him to intend evil in reference to Sarah. God complains that his people "perished for lack of knowledge," Hosea 4:6. Being ignorant of the mind and will of God, they rushed into evil at every command of the law of sin. Many a man, being ignorant of his duty to instruct his family, relying on public teaching for all of it, is, by the deceitfulness of sin, brought into habitual negligence of duty. The more ignorance of the will of God and duty, the more advantage to the law of sin. So we may see what is the true knowledge which is acceptable with God. How do many poor souls, poor in theology, yet walk well with God! It seems they know enough, so that sin has not much advantage against them; when others, full of knowledge, follow their lusts in their ignorance, being unaware of it.

(2.) Error is a worse part of the mind's darkness, and gives great advantage to the law of sin. There is ignorance in every error, but there is not error in all ignorance. Here is an example; there are men who, being zealous for some error, seek to persecute the truth. Indwelling sin desires no greater advantage. How will it every day, every hour, pour forth wrath and revilings; breathe revenge and murder, under the name of zeal! On this account we may see poor creatures pleasing themselves every day; as if they vaunted in their excellency, when they are foaming out their own shame. Under their real darkness and pretended zeal, sin sits securely, and fills pulpits, houses, prayers, streets, with bitter fruits of envy, malice, hatred, false speakings, as full as they can hold. The result with such poor creatures is that the holy, blessed, meek Spirit of God withdraws from them, and leaves them to that evil worldly spirit, which the law of sin has cherished in them. Sin dwells nowhere more secure than in such an attitude.

2. It protects itself against the pursuits of the word and Spirit of grace. One of its wiles is the alleviation of its own guilt. It pleads that it is not so bad or so filthy as is pretended; so it proceeds in two ways: -

(1.) Absolutely. It will plead that the evil which it tends to is not so pernicious as conscience is persuaded that it is; it may be entered on without ruin. It will urge this unexpectedly, when the soul cannot weigh its suggestions in the balance of the sanctuary; and the will is often imposed on, and shifts itself from under the sword of the Spirit: - "It may be let alone, or allowed to die of itself, which probably within a while it will do; no need of that violence in putting it to death; it is time enough to deal with a matter of no greater importance hereafter;" with other pleas like those before mentioned.

(2.) Comparatively; and this is a large field for its deceit to lurk in: - "Though it is an evil to be relinquished, and the soul is to watch against it, it is not of that magnitude as we see in the lives of others, even saints of God, much less such as some saints of old have fallen into." By these and similar pretences, it seeks to keep its abode in the soul when pursued to destruction. And how little a portion of its deceitfulness have we declared!

## CHAPTER 13.

Several ways that the bringing forth of conceived sin is obstructed.

BEFORE we proceed to the remaining evidences of the power of the law of sin, we shall look at the Scripture which was the foundation of our discourse of the deceitfulness of sin, namely, James 1:14. The apostle tells us that "lust conceiving brings forth sin;" seeming to intimate, that the sin which is conceived is brought forth. Now, placing the conception of sin in the consent of the will to it, and the bringing forth of sin in its actual commission, we know that these do not necessarily follow one another. There is a world of sin conceived in the womb of the wills and hearts of men that is never brought forth. How does that come to pass? I answer, then, -

1. That this is not so, is no thanks to sin nor the law of it. What it conceives, it would bring forth; and that it does not is for the most part but a small abatement of its guilt. A will to sin is actual sin. There is nothing wanting on sin's part that every conceived sin is not actually accomplished. The prevention lies elsewhere.

2. There are two things that are necessary in the creature that has conceived sin, to bring it forth; - first, Power; secondly, Continuance in the will of sinning until it is committed. Where these two are, actual sin will unavoidably follow. So what hinders conceived sin from being brought forth must affect either the power or the will of the sinner. This must be from God. And he has two ways of doing it:

(1.) By his providence, whereby he obstructs the power of sinning.

(2.) By his grace, whereby he diverts or changes the will to sin. There is much of grace in providence, and much of the wisdom of providence seen in grace. But I distinguish them, because they thus appear most important; - providence, in acts towards the creature; grace, in internal working in his will. And we shall begin with the first: -

(1.) When sin is conceived, the Lord obstructs it by his providence, in taking away that power which is necessary for its accomplishment; as,

[1.] Life is the foundation of all power, the principle of operation; when that ceases, all power ceases with it. Even God himself, to show the everlasting stability of his own power, gives himself the title of "The living God." Now, he frequently prevents the power of executing sin by taking away the lives of those who have conceived it. Thus he dealt with the army of Sennacherib, when he had threatened that "the LORD should not deliver Jerusalem out of his hand," 2 Kings 18:35. God threatens to cut short his power, that he should not execute his intention, chap. 19:28; which he does, by taking away the lives of his soldiers, verse 35, without whom his conceived sin could not be brought forth. This obstruction of conceived sin, Moses excellently sets forth in the case of Pharaoh: Exodus 15:9, 10,

"The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied on them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. You blew with your wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters."

Sin's conception is fully expressed, and as full a prevention is linked to it. In like manner he dealt with the companies of fifties and their captains, who came to take Elijah, 2 Kings 1:9-12. Fire came down from heaven and consumed them, when they were ready to have taken him. What is of universal relevance we have in that great providential alteration which put a period to the lives of men. Men living hundreds of years had a long season to bring forth the sins they had conceived; thereon the earth was filled with violence, injustice, and rapine, and "all flesh corrupted his way," Genesis 6:12, 13. To prevent a similar flood of sin, God shortens the course of the pilgrimage of men in the earth, and reduces their lives to a much shorter measure. Besides this general law, God daily cuts off persons who had conceived much mischief in their hearts, and prevents the execution of it: "Blood-thirsty and deceitful men do not live out half their days." They have yet much work to do, if they had enough time to

execute the sinful purposes of their minds. The psalmist tells us, Psalm 146:4, "In the day that the breath of man goes forth, his thoughts perish:" he had many plans about sin, but now they are all cut off. So also, Ecclesiastes 8:12, 13,

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

As even believers may conceive sin through its power and deceit, does God ever prevent them doing it, by taking away their lives? I answer, -

1st. That God does not take away the life of any of his, to prevent the execution of any particular sin; for, -

(1st.) This is contrary to the patience of God towards them, 2 Peter 3:9. This is the purpose of God's patience towards believers, that before they depart they may come to the sense and repentance of every known sin. This is the unchangeable rule of God's patience in the covenant of grace; which far from being an encouragement to sin, is a motive to universal watchfulness against it, - of the same nature with all gospel grace, and of mercy in the blood of Christ. This would lie in a direct contradiction to it.

(2dly.) Whereas conceived sin contains the whole of it, as our Saviour declares, Matthew 5; and to be cut off under its guilt, to prevent its progress, means there is no time for repentance, they must perish for ever who are so cut off. But God deals not so with his; he casts not off the people whom he foreknew. So David prays for the patience of God, that it might not be so with him: Psalm 39:13, "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more." But yet, -

2dly. God may take away the lives of his own, to prevent the guilt that otherwise they would be involved in; as, -

(1st.) In the coming of a great trial. When God knows that one of his would not be able to hold out against it, but would dishonour him and defile themselves, he may take them out of the world, to take them out of the way of it: Isaiah 57:1, "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come;" not only the evil judgment, but the evil of temptations, which is often much worse. Thus a captain will call off a soldier from his watch, when he knows that he is not able, through some infirmity, to bear the force of the enemy that is coming on him.

(2dly.) If they start something that is not acceptable to him, through ignorance of his mind and will. This seems to have been the case of Josiah. And, doubtless, the Lord often thus proceeds with his. When any of his own are engaged in ways that please him not, through the darkness and ignorance of their minds, that they may not proceed to farther evil or mischief, he calls them off from their station and takes them to himself, where they shall err no more. But God has other ways of diverting his own from sin than by killing of them.

[2.] God hinders the bringing forth of sin, by cutting short the power of those who had conceived it, so that, though their lives continue, they shall not be able to execute what they had intended, or to bring forth what they had conceived. This was the case with the builders of Babel, Genesis 11. Whatever they aimed at, it was in the pursuit of apostasy from God. One thing they needed to accomplish what they aimed at was oneness of language; so God says, verse 6, "They have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, that they have imagined to do." What does God do to prevent their conceived sin? does he bring a flood to destroy them? does he send his angel to cut them off, like the army of Sennacherib? does he take away their lives? No; their lives continue, but he "confounds their language," so that they cannot go on with their work, verse 7. In like manner he dealt with the Sodomites, Genesis 19:11. They were engaged in their filthy lusts. God smites them with blindness, so that they could not find the door. Their lives continued, and their will of sinning; but their power is cut short. His

dealing with Jeroboam, 1 Kings 13:4, was of the same nature. He stretched out his hand to lay hold of the prophet, and it withered and became useless. And this is an eminent way of God's providence in the world, to stop that flood of sin which would overflow all the earth were it released. He cuts men short of their moral power, whereby they should effect it. Many a wretch who has conceived mischief against the church of God has thus been stripped of the power he thought to accomplish it with. Some have their bodies smitten with disease, that they can no more serve their lusts; some are deprived of the instruments they would work with. There has been, for many days, enough sin conceived to root out the righteous from the face of the earth, had men strength and ability to their will, if God did not cut off and shorten their power. Psalm 64:6,

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

All things are ready; the design is well laid, their counsels are deep and secret; what shall hinder them from doing what they have planned? Verses 7, 8, "But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; they shall suddenly be wounded." God meets with them, brings them down, that they shall not be able to implement their plans. And this way of God's preventing sin seems to be peculiar to the men of the world; God deals thus with them every day, and leaves them to pine away in their sins. They go all their days big with the iniquity they have conceived, and are greatly burdened that they cannot do it. The prophet tells us that "they practise iniquity that they had conceived, because it is in their power," Micah 2:1. If they have power for it, they will do it: Ezekiel 22:6, "To their power they shed blood." This is the measure of their sin, their power. Many of them do as much evil, as much sin, as they can. Their restraint lies in being deprived of power. Their bodies will not serve them for their uncleanness, nor their hands for revenge, nor their abilities for persecution; but they are still burdened with conceived sin, and are troubled by it all their days. Thus they become in themselves, as well as to others, "a troubled sea, that cannot rest," Isaiah 57:20.

It may be, also, in temptations, or in mistakes, God may thus prevent his own from performing sin in his own. He dealt like this with Jehoshaphat, who had designed, against the mind of God, to join in alliance with Ahab, and to send his ships with him to Tarshish; but God breaks his ships by a wind, that he could not do what he had planned. But in God's dealing with his own in this way, there is a difference from the way he deals with others; for, -

1st. In his own, it is so only in cases of extraordinary temptation. When, through the violence of temptation and craft of Satan, they are hurried from under the conduct of the law of grace, God may take away their power, that they shall not be able to do what they had planned. But this is the ordinary way he deals with wicked men. This hook of God is on them in the whole course of their lives; and they struggle with it, being "as a wild bull in a net," Isaiah 51:20. God's net is on them, and they are filled with fury that they cannot do all the wickedness that they would.

2dly. God does it not so as to leave them to wrestle with sin, and then try other ways of doing it, when their plans fail; but by their disappointment awakens them to think of their condition and what they are doing, and so consumes sin in the womb. Some men's deprivation of power for committing conceived sin has been sanctified, so that it changes their hearts from all dalliances with that or other sins.

[3.] God hinders conceived sin from coming forth by putting forth an opposing power to sinners. He leaves them their lives, and leaves them power to do what they intend; only he raises up an opposite power to forbid and restrain them. So in 1 Samuel 14:45. Saul had sworn that Jonathan should be put to death; and went on resolutely to slay him. God stirs up the spirit of the people; they oppose themselves to the wrath of Saul, and Jonathan is delivered. So also, 2 Chronicles 26:16-20, when king Uzziah would have offered incense, contrary to the law, eighty priests resisted him, and drove him out of the temple.

And there are many such assistances which God stirs up to deliver his people from the fury of persecutors. He raises up saviours or deliverers on mount Zion, "to judge the mount of Edom." So, Revelation 12:16, the dragon, and those acting under him, spirited by him, were in a furious endeavour to destroy the church; God stirs up the earth to her assistance, even men of the world not engaged with others in the design of Satan; and by their opposition stops them carrying out their plans. God deals with his own people in similar manner, Hosea 2:6, 7. They were in the pursuing their iniquities, following after their lovers; God leaves them for a while to act in the folly of their spirits; but he sets a hedge before them, that they shall not be able to fulfil their designs.

[4.] God prevent the accomplishment of conceived sin by taking away the objects on whom, the sin conceived was to be committed. Acts 12:1-11 yields us an instance of this. When the day was coming when Herod thought to have slain Peter, who was shut up in prison, God takes him away from his rage. So also was our Saviour himself taken away from the murderous rage of the Jews before his hour was come, John 8:59, John 10:39. Both primitive and latter times are full of stories to this purpose. Prison doors have been opened, and creatures appointed to die have been rescued from the jaws of death. In the world itself, amongst adulterers, the sin of one is often hindered by the taking away of the other. So wings were given to the woman to carry her into the wilderness, and to disappoint the world in the execution of their rage, Revelation 12:14.

[5.] God does this by diverting the thoughts of men who had conceived sin. Genesis 37:24, the brethren of Joseph cast him into a pit, so he would die of starvation. Whilst they were pleasing themselves with what they had done, God orders a company of merchants to come by, and diverts their thoughts from the killing to the selling of their brother, verses 25-27; and we know how far they were subservient to the infinitely wise counsel of God. Thus, also, when Saul was in the pursuit of David, and was ready to destroy him, God stirs up the Philistines to invade the land, which both diverted his thoughts and

drew the course of his actions another way, 1 Samuel 23:27.

And these are some of the ways God hinders the bringing forth of conceived sin, by opposing his providence to the power of the creature. And we may take a brief view of the great advantages to faith and the church of God which may be found in this matter; as, -

1st. This may give us insight into the providence of God, by obstructing the breaking forth of sin in the world. It is he who makes those dams, and shuts up those flood-gates of corrupted nature, that it shall not break forth in a deluge of abominations, to overwhelm the creation with confusion. As it was of old, so it is at this day: "Every thought and imagination of the heart of man is evil, and that continually." That all the earth is not in all places filled with violence, as it was of old, is merely from the mighty hand of God working to obstruct sin. From hence alone it is that the highways, streets, and fields are not all filled with violence, blood, rapine, uncleanness, and every villany that the heart of man can conceive. Oh, the infinite beauty of divine wisdom and providence in the government of the world! for the conservation of it asks daily no less power and wisdom than its creation required.

2dly. If we will look to our own concerns, they will in force us to adore the wisdom and er of the providence of God in stopping the progress of conceived sin. That we are at peace in our houses, at rest in our beds, that we have any quiet in our enjoyments, is from that alone. Who would not be defiled or destroyed, - whose house would not be ruined, - whose blood almost would not be shed, - if wicked men had power to perpetrate all their conceived sin? It may be the ruin of some of us has been conceived a thousand times. We owe this providence for our lives, our families, our estates, our liberties, for whatever is or may be dear to us; for may we not say sometimes, with the psalmist, Psalm 57:4

"My soul is among lions: and I lie even among those who are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and

their tongue a sharp sword?"

And how is the deliverance of men contrived from such? Psalm 58:6,

"God breaks their teeth, even the great teeth of the young lions."

He keeps this fire from burning, or quenches it when it is ready to break out into a flame. He breaks their spears and arrows, so that sometimes we are not so much as wounded by them. Some he cuts off and destroys; some he cuts short in their power; some he deprives of the instruments whereby they work; some he deprives opportunity, or diverts; and often causes them to spend their lusts among themselves. We may say, therefore, with the psalmist, Psalm 104:24,

"O LORD, how manifold are your works! in wisdom have you made them all: the earth is full of your riches;"

and with the prophet, Hosea 14:9,

"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? all the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein."

3dly. If this is how God prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin in wicked men, we may learn how miserable their condition is, and in what perpetual torment they spend their days. They "are like a troubled sea," says the Lord, "that cannot rest." As they labour that others may have no peace, so it is certain that they have none; the principle of sin is not weakened in them, the will to sin is not taken away. They have a womb of sin, that conceives monsters every moment. Yea, for the most part, they are framing folly all day long. One lust or other they are contriving how to satisfy. They are either devouring by malice, or tainting by uncleanness, or trampling on by ambition, or swallowing down by covetousness, all that stand before them. Many of their follies they bring to birth, and are in pain to be delivered; but God every day disappoints them, and shuts up the

womb of sin. Some are filled with hatred of God's people all their days, but can never exercise it. So David describes them, Psalm 59:6,

"They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city."

They go up and down and "belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips," verse 7, and yet are not able to accomplish their designs. What tortures do they live in! Envy, malice, wrath, revenge, devour their hearts by not getting vent. And when God has exercised the other acts of his wise providence in cutting short their power, when nothing else will do, he cuts them off in their sins, and to the grave they go, full of purposes of iniquity. Others are no less diverted by the power of other lusts which they are not able to satisfy. This is the travail they are exercised with all their days: - If they accomplish their designs they are more wicked than before; and if they do not, they are filled with discontent. This is the portion of those who know not the Lord nor the power of his grace. Envy not their condition. Despite their outward show, their hearts are full of trouble, and sorrow.

4thly. Do we see the flood-gates of men's lusts and rage open against the church, and do they dominate, and power is for a season on their side? Let not the saints of God despond. He has effectual ways to stifle their conceptions, to give them dry breasts and a miscarrying womb. He can stop their fury when he pleases. "Surely," says the psalmist, "the wrath of man shall praise you: you restrain the remainder of wrath," Psalm 76:10. When so much of their wrath is let out as shall exalt his praise, he can, when he pleases, set up a power greater than the combined strength of all sinning creatures, and restrain the remainder of the wrath that they had conceived. "He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth," verse 12. Some he will cut destroy, some he will terrify, and prevent the rage of all. He can knock them on the head, or break out their teeth, or chain up their wrath; and who can oppose him.

5thly. Those who have received benefit may know to whom they owe

their preservation, and not look on it as a common thing. When you have conceived sin, has God weakened your power for sin, or denied you opportunity, or taken away the object of your lusts, or diverted your thoughts by new providences? - know assuredly that you have received mercy thereby. Though God deal not these providences always in subservience to the covenant of grace, yet there is always mercy in them, always a call in them to consider the author of them. If God had not thus dealt with you, it may be this day you had been a terror to yourselves, a shame to your relations, and under the punishment due to some notorious sins which you had conceived. Besides, there is commonly an additional guilt in sin brought forth, above what is in the conception of it. It may be others would have been ruined by it here, or drawn into a partnership in sin by it, and so have been eternally ruined by it, all which are prevented by these providences; and eternity will witness that there is a singularity of mercy in them. Do not look, then, on any such things as common accidents; the hand of God is in them all, and that a merciful hand if not despised. If it be, yet God does good to others by it: the world is the better; and you are not so wicked as you would be.

6thly. We may also see hence the great use of magistracy in the world, that great appointment of God. Amongst other things, it is subservient to this holy providence, in obstructing the expression of sin, - namely, by the terror of him who bears the sword. God fixes that on the hearts of evil men, which he states, Romans 13:4,

"If you do what is evil, be afraid; for he bears not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath on those who do evil."

God fixes this on the hearts of men, and by the dread of it closes the womb of sin, that it shall not bring forth. When there was no king in Israel, none of whom evil men were afraid, there was woeful work amongst the children of men, as we may see in the last chapters of the book of Judges. The greatest mercies and blessings that in this world we are made partakers of, next to the gospel and covenant of grace,

come to us thus. This is the proper work of magistracy; to be subservient to the providence of God in obstructing the bringing forth of conceived sin.

These are some of the ways whereby God prevents the bringing forth of sin, by putting obstacles to the power of the sinner. But sin is not consumed by them, but shut up in the womb. Men are not burdened for it, but with it; not laden in their hearts and consciences with its guilt, but perplexed with its power, which they are not able to control.

(2.) The way that God prevents the production of conceived sin is by working on the will of the sinner, so making sin miscarry. There are two ways that God prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin by working on the will of the sinner; and they are, -

[1.] By restraining grace;

[2.] By renewing grace.

The first of these is common to the regenerate and unregenerate, the latter peculiar to believers; and God does it variously by them both.

[1.] God operates in restraining grace, by some arrow of conviction, fixed in the heart and conscience of the sinner, regarding the particular sin which he had conceived. This staggers and changes the mind, causes the hands to hang down and the weapons of lust to fall out of them. Thus conceived sin proves abortive. How God does this work we cannot fully know. It is done in unspeakable variety, and the works of God are past finding out. But as to what light may be given to it from Scripture instances, after we have manifested the general way of God's procedure, it shall be insisted on.

God dealt thus in the case of Esau and Jacob. Esau had long conceived his brother's death; he comforted himself with the thoughts of it, and resolutions about it, Genesis 27:41. Upon his first opportunity he comes forth to execute his intended rage, and Jacob concludes that he

would "smite the mother with the children," Genesis 32:11. An opportunity is presented to this wicked and profane person to bring forth that sin that had lain in his heart now twenty years; he has full power in his hand to perform his purpose. In the midst of this posture of things, God comes in on his heart with some secret and effectual working of his Spirit and power, changes him from his purpose, causes his conceived sin to melt away, that he falls on the neck of him with embraces whom he thought to have slain.

He dealt in a similar way with Laban the Syrian, Genesis 31:24. By a vision in the night, God hinders him from so much as speaking roughly to Jacob. It was with him as in Micah 2:1: - he had devised evil on his bed; and when he thought to have practised it in the morning, God interposed in a dream, and hides sin from him, as he speaks, Job 33:15-17. To the same purpose is that of the psalmist concerning the people of God: Psalm 106:46, "He made them to be pitied of all those who carried them captives." Men usually deal harshly with those whom they have taken captive in war. It was the way of old to rule captives with force and cruelty. Here God turns and changes their hearts, not to himself, but to this particular of respect to his people. And this way in general God every day prevents the bringing forth of a world of sin. He sharpens arrows of conviction on the spirits of men as to the particular that they are engaged in. Their hearts are not changed as to sin, but their minds are altered as to this or that sin. They break, the vessel they had fashioned, and go to work on some other. Now, that we may a little see into the ways whereby God accomplishes this work, we must consider the following: -

1st. That the general way that restraining grace works, whereby God thus prevents the bringing forth of sin, lies in certain arguments presented to the mind of the sinner, whereby he is induced to change his mind as to the sin he had conceived. Reasons against it are presented to him, which prevail on him to give over his purpose. This is the general way of the working of restraining grace, - it is by arguments rising up against the perpetration of conceived sin.

2dly. That no arguments are sufficient to stop any purpose of sinning if the sinner has power and opportunity to bring it forth. They are not in themselves restraining grace; for if they were, the administration of grace would be entrusted to every man who advises against sin. Nothing can be called grace but with respect to its relation to God. God, by the power of his Spirit, can transform mere reasons into restraining grace. We shall now consider some of the arguments he uses: -

(1st.) God stops many men in their ways, on the conception of sin, by pointing out the difficulty, if not impossibility, of doing what they aim at. They want to do it, but God sets a hedge before them, that they shall judge it to be so difficult, that it is better to let it alone. Thus Herod would have put John Baptist to death on the first provocation, but he feared the multitude, because they considered him a prophet, Matthew 14:5. He had conceived his murder, and was free for the execution of it. God raised this consideration in his heart, "If I kill him, the people will riot; he has a great party amongst them, and sedition will arise that may cost me my life or kingdom." He feared the multitude, and dared not execute the wickedness he had conceived, because of the difficulty he foresaw he should be entangled with. And God made the argument effectual for the season; for we know that men will venture the utmost hazards to satisfy their lusts, as he also did afterward. The Pharisees were in the same condition. Matthew 21:26, they wanted to have decried the ministry of John, but dared not for fear of the people; and, verse 46 of the same chapter, by the same argument they were deterred from killing our Saviour, who had provoked them by a parable setting out their deserved and approaching destruction. They dared not do it for fear of a tumult among the people, seeing they looked on him as a prophet. Thus God overawes the hearts of innumerable persons in the world every day, and causes them to desist from attempting to bring forth the sins they had conceived. Difficulties they shall meet with, so that it would prove impossible for them to accomplish them. We owe much of our quiet in this world to the efficacy given to this consideration in the hearts of men by the Holy Ghost; adulteries, rapines, murders, are stifled by it.

Men would go into them daily, but they judge them impossible to fulfil.

(2dly.) God does it by an argument taken from the troubles that befall men in the pursuit of sin. If they follow it, this or that trouble will follow. And this argument, as managed by the Spirit of God, is the great engine in his hand whereby he gives bounds to the lusts of men, that they break not out to the confusion of all that order and beauty which yet remains in the works of his hands. Paul gives us the general import of this argument, Romans 2:14, 15,

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

If any men in the world may be thought to pursue all the sins their lusts can conceive, it is those who do not have the law. "But though they have it not," says the apostle, "they show the work of it; they do many things which it requires, and abstain from many things that it forbids, and so show its efficacy." How do they do so? Why, their thoughts accuse or excuse them. It is from the consideration that they have within themselves about sin and its results, which prevail on them; for conscience is a man's judging of himself with respect to the future judgment of God. Thus Felix was staggered in his pursuit of sin, when he trembled at Paul's preaching of righteousness and judgment to come, Acts 24:25. So Job tells us that the consideration of punishment from God has a strong influence on the minds of men to keep them from sin, Job 31:1-3. The Lord makes use of that consideration, even towards his own, when they have broken the cords of his love and cast off the rule of his grace for a season.

(3dly.) God does this same work by the unprofitableness of what men are engaged in. By this were the brethren of Joseph kept from slaying him: Genesis 37:26, 27, "What profit is it," say they, "if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?" - "We shall get nothing by it; it will

bring in no advantage to us." And the ways that God obstructs conceived sin are so many that it is impossible to describe them all. There is nothing present or to come, nothing belonging to this life or another, nothing desirable or undesirable, nothing good or evil, but an argument may be taken from it for the obstructing of sin.

(4thly.) God accomplishes this work by arguments taken from what is good and honest, what is, praiseworthy, and acceptable to himself. This is the great road wherein he walks with the saints in their temptations, or in their conceptions of sin. He brings back to their minds a consideration of all those motives to obedience which are revealed in the gospel. He reminds them of his own love, mercy, and kindness, - his eternal love, with the fruits of it, of which they have been made partakers; he reminds them of the blood of his Son, his cross, sufferings, mediation, and the attention of his heart, love, honour, name, in their obedience; reminds them of the love of the Spirit, with all his consolations, and privileges he has entrusted them with; reminds them of the gospel, the glory and beauty of it; reminds them of the excellency of obedience, - of doing that duty they owe to God, - of that quietness and serenity of mind that they enjoy in it. On the other side, he reminds them of the offence of sin in the eyes of his glory, saying in their hearts, "Do not do that abominable thing which my soul hates;" reminds them of their wounding the Lord Jesus Christ, and putting him to shame, - of their grieving the Holy Spirit, by which they are sealed to the day of redemption, - of their defiling his dwelling-place; reminds them of the dishonour which they bring on the gospel and their faith in it; reminds them of the terrors, darkness want of peace, that they may bring on their own souls. From these considerations God puts a stop to the law of sin in the heart, that it shall not bring forth the evil it has conceived.

One or two examples may be mentioned. Joseph resists his first temptation thus: Genesis 39:9, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" The evil of sinning against God detains him from the least inclination to his temptation. "It is sin against God, to whom I owe all obedience, the God of my life and of all my mercies. I will not do it." The argument wherewith Abigail prevailed on David, 1 Samuel

25:31, to withhold him from revenge and murder, was of the same nature; and he acknowledges that it was from the Lord, verse 32. Sometimes, I confess, God secretly works the hearts of men by his own finger, without such arguments as those shown, to stop the progress of sin. So he tells Abimelech, Genesis 20:6, "I have withheld you from sinning against me." Now Abimelech knew not that the thing he intended was sin; so he pleads, that in the "integrity of his heart and innocency of his hands" he did it, verse 5. God turned his will and thoughts, that he should not accomplish his intention; but by what ways or means is not revealed. Nor is it evident what course he took to change Esau's heart, when he came out against his brother to destroy him, Genesis 33:4. Whether he stirred up in him a fresh spring of natural affection, or caused him to consider what grief by this means he should bring to his aged father, who loved him so tenderly; or whether, being now grown great and wealthy, he more and more despised the difference between him and his brother, is not known. It may be God did it by an immediate act of his Spirit on his heart, without any intervening of these or any of similar considerations. Now, though the things mentioned are in themselves at other times weak, yet when they are managed by the Spirit of God to such purpose, they become effectual, and operate his preventing grace.

[2.] God prevents conceived sin from coming forth by spiritual saving grace, either in the first conversion of sinners or in the following supplies of it: -

1st. This is one part of the mystery of his grace and love. He meets men sometimes, in their highest resolutions for sin, with the highest efficacy of his grace. Hereby he manifests the power of his grace, and gives the soul a farther experience of the law of sin, when it takes such a farewell of it that it is changed in the midst of its resolutions to serve its lusts. By this he melts down the lusts of men, causes them to wither at the root, that they shall no more strive to bring forth what they have conceived, but be filled with shame and sorrow at their conception. An example of this work of God, for the instruction of all generations, we have in Paul. His heart was full of wickedness, blasphemy, and

persecution; his conception of them was come to rage and madness, to exercise them all to the utmost: so the story relates it, Acts 9; and so he himself declares it, Acts 26:9-12, 1 Timothy 1:13. In the midst of all this violent pursuit of sin, a voice from heaven shuts up the womb and dries the breasts of it, and he cries, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" Acts 9:6. The same person seems to intimate that this is the way of God's procedure with others, to meet them with his converting grace in the height of their sin and folly, 1 Timothy 1:16: for he himself, he says, was a pattern of God's dealing with others; as he dealt with him, so also would he do with some such-like sinners: "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." And we have many examples of it in our own days. This way of God's dealing with sinners is set forth, Job 33:15-18. Dionysius the Areopagite is another instance of this work of God's grace and love. Paul is dragged before him, to plead for his life, as "a setter forth of strange gods," which at Athens was death by the law. In the midst of this frame of spirit God meets with him by converting grace, sin withers in the womb, and he cleaves to Paul and his doctrine, Acts 17:18-34. The like dispensation towards Israel we have, Hosea 11:7-10. God is pleased to leave no generation unconvinced of this truth, if they only attend to their own experiences and the examples of this work of his mercy amongst them. Every day, one or other is taken in the fullness of his purpose to go on in sin, and is stopped in his course by the power of converting grace.

2dly. God does it also by special assisting grace. This is the common way he deals with believers. God puts a stop to the prevalence of the law of sin in them, by giving them special assistance. As David says of himself, Psalm 73:2, "His feet were almost gone, his steps had well-nigh slipped," - he was at the very brink of unbelieving, despairing thoughts and conclusions about God's providence in the government of the world, from whence he was recovered, as he afterwards declares, - so is it with many a believer; he is often at the very brink of some folly or iniquity, when God intervenes by assisting grace, and restores them to an obedient frame of heart again. And this is a

peculiar work of Christ, wherein he manifests his faithfulness towards his own: Hebrews 2:18, "He is able to help those who are tempted." It is not an absolute power, but a power clothed with mercy, that is meant, - such a power as is put forth from a sense of the suffering of poor believers under their temptations. And how does he exercise this merciful ability towards us? Chap. 4:16, he gives forth, and we find in him, "grace to help in time of need," - seasonable help for our deliverance, when we are ready to be overpowered by sin and temptation. When lust has conceived, and is ready to bring forth, - when the soul lies at the brink of some iniquity, - he gives help, relief, deliverance, and safety. Here lies a great part of the faithfulness of Christ towards his poor saints. He will not allow them to be worried with the power of sin, nor to be carried out to ways that dishonour the gospel, or fill them with shame and reproach, and so render them useless in the world; but he steps in with the saving assistance of his grace, stops the course of sin, and makes them in himself more than conquerors. And this lies under the promise, 1 Corinthians 10:13,

"There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted more than you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it,"

Temptation shall try us, - it is for our good; many holy ends does the Lord bring about by it. But when we are tried to the utmost of our ability, so that one assault more would overbear us, a way of escape is provided. And as this may be done several ways, so this we are now on is one of the most eminent, - by supplies of grace to enable the soul to resist, and conquer. And when once God begins to deal in this way of love with a soul, he will not cease to add one supply after another, until the whole work of his grace and faithfulness be accomplished; so, Isaiah 57:17, 18. Poor sinners there are so far captivated to the power of their lusts that the first and second dealings of God with them are not effectual for their delivery, but he will not give them over; he pursues a design of love towards them, and so ceases not until they are recovered. These are the general heads of the second way whereby

God hinders the bringing forth of conceived sin, - namely, by working on the will of the sinner. He does it either by common convictions or special grace, so that of their own accord they let go the purpose and will of sinning. And this is no mean way of his providing for his own glory and the honour of his gospel in the world, whose professors would stain the whole beauty of it if they were left to themselves.

3dly. Besides these general ways, there is one yet more special, that works both on the power and will of the sinner, and this is the way of afflictions. Affliction, work by both these ways in reference to conceived sin. They work on the power of the creature. When a man has conceived a sin, and is in full pursuit of it, God often sends a sickness and abates his strength, or cuts him short in his plenty, and so takes him off from the pursuit of his lusts, though his heart is not weaned from them. His power is weakened, and he cannot do the evil he would. In this sense it belongs to the first way of God's preventing sin. Great afflictions work sometimes not from their own nature, but from the gracious purpose of him that sends them. He insinuates into them grace and power, love and kindness, which take the heart and mind from sin: Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept your word." And in this way, because of the power of renewing and assisting grace, they belong to the latter means of preventing sin.

And these are some of the ways God stops the progress of sin, both in believers and unbelievers; and even if we tried to search out his ways to perfection, we still conclude that we only know a small part of him.

## CHAPTER 14.

The power of sin demonstrated by the effects it has had in the lives of professors - First, in actual sins - Secondly, in habitual backsliding.

WE now proceed to other evidences of that sad truth. But as most of our work is done, I shall be more brief in discussing the rest.

So we here consider the demonstration which this law of sin has in all ages given of its power, by the woeful fruits that it has brought forth, even in believers. Now, these are of two sorts: -

1. The great eruptions of sin in their lives;

2. Their habitual backsliding from the condition of obedience and communion with God, which they had obtained; - both which, by the rule of James, are due to this law of sin, and belong to the fourth head of its progress, and are both convincing evidences of its power.

1. Consider the fearful eruptions of actual sin in the lives of believers, and we shall find our position evidenced. Should I go through at large with this consideration, I must recount all the sad failings of the saints that are left on record in the holy Scripture; but the details of them are known to all. Only some few things may be remarked; as, -

- (1.) Most of them occur in the lives of men that were not of the ordinary sort of believers, but of men that had a peculiar eminence because they walked with God in their generation. Such were Noah, Lot, David, Hezekiah, and others. They were not men of an ordinary size, but higher than their brethren, by the shoulders and upwards, in faith and in real holiness. And surely it must be a mighty efficacy that could hurry such giants in the ways of God into such abominable sins as they fell into. An ordinary engine could never have turned them out of the course of their obedience. It was a poison that no athletic constitution of spiritual health, no antidote, could withstand.

(2.) These men did not fall into their great sins at the beginning of their life of faith, when they had had little experience of the goodness of God, of the sweetness of obedience, of the power and craft of sin, of its impulses, temptations, and assaults; but after a long course of walking with God, and acquaintance with all these things, together with innumerable motives to watchfulness. Noah, according to the lives of men in those days of the world, had walked uprightly with God some hundreds of years before he stumbled, Genesis 9. Righteous Lot seems to have been towards the end of his days ere he defiled himself with the abominations recorded. David, in a short life, had as much experience of grace and sin, and as much close, spiritual communion with God, as had any of the sons of men, before he was cast to the ground by this law of sin. So was it with Hezekiah, who was none of the meanest. Now, to set on such persons, so well acquainted with its power and deceit, so armed and provided against it, that had been conquerors over it for so many years, and to prevail against them, argues a power too mighty for anything but the Spirit of the Almighty to withstand. Who can look to have a greater stock of inherent grace than those men had; to have more experience of God and the excellency of his ways, the sweetness of his love and of communion with him, than they had? who has either better equipment to oppose sin with, or more obligation so to do, than they? and yet we see how fearfully they were prevailed against.

(3.) As if God had permitted their falls on purpose, that we might learn to be wary of this powerful enemy, they all of them fell out when they had newly received mercies from the hand of God, that ought to have kept them diligent and watchful in close obedience. Noah was newly come forth of that world of waters, where he saw the ungodly world perishing for their sins, and preserved by that miracle which all ages must admire. Whilst the world's desolation was an hourly reminder to him of his preservation by the hand of God, he falls into drunkenness. Lot had just seen what every one who thinks on trembles, he saw, as one speaks, "hell coming out of heaven" on unclean sinners; the greatest evidence, except the cross of Christ, that God ever gave of the judgment to come. He saw himself and children delivered by the

miraculous hand of God; but while these strange mercies were fresh on him, he fell into drunkenness and incest. David was delivered out of all his troubles, and the rule over his enemies round about, and he makes use of his peace from a world of troubles to contrive murder and adultery. Immediately after Hezekiah's great and miraculous deliverance he falls into pride and boasting. Their falls in such seasons seem to be permitted to instruct us all in this truth; so that no persons, in no seasons, with whatever measure of grace, can promise themselves security from its prevalence except by constantly keeping close to Him who gives supplies that are above its reach. This should make us look about us. Are we better than Noah, who had that testimony from God, that he was "a perfect man in his generation," and "walked with God?" Are we better than Lot, whose "righteous soul was vexed with the evil deeds of ungodly men," and is commended by the Holy Ghost? Are we more holy, wise, and watchful than David, who obtained this testimony, that he was "a man after God's own heart?" or better than Hezekiah, who appealed to God himself, that he had served him uprightly, with a perfect heart? And yet we see what rule this law of sin worked in and over them. They are set up as buoys to show us the rocks, where they made their shipwreck, and would have done to their ruin, had not God prevented it in his faithfulness.

2. It manifests its power in the habitual backsliding from zeal and holiness, from the condition of obedience and communion with God they had attained, which are found in many believers. Promises of improvement are many and precious, the means excellent and effectual, the benefits great and unspeakable; yet it often happens, that decays and backsliding are found on professors, and on many of the saints of God. Now, whereas this must principally be from the strength of indwelling sin, the observation itself is true, - namely, that some of the saints often decline from that growth in faith, grace, and holiness which might be expected from them, - and then show that the cause of this evil lies in what we are dealing with. To prevail on true believers to a sinful decline and gradual apostasy, requires more strength than prevailing on unsound professors to total apostasy; as the wind which will blow down a dead tree will scarcely shake a

living, well-rooted tree. But this it will do. There is mention made in the Scripture of "the first ways of David," and they are commended above his latter, 2 Chronicles 17:3. The last ways of David were tainted with the power of indwelling sin. Though we have mention only of the actual eruption of sin, yet that uncleanness and pride which was working in him in numbering the people were certainly rooted in a decline from his first frame. Those rushes did not grow without mire. David would not have clone so in his younger days, when he followed God in the wilderness of temptations and trials, full of faith, love, humility, brokenness of heart, zeal, tender affection to all the ordinances of God; all which were eminent in him. But his strength is impaired by the deceitfulness of sin, and he becomes a prey to lusts and temptations. We have a notable instance in most of the churches that our Saviour awakens to consider their condition in Revelation. We may single out one of them. Many good things were in the church of Ephesus, Revelation 2:2, 3, for which it is greatly commended; but it is charged with a gradual falling off: Verses 4, 5, "You have left your first love. Remember therefore from whence you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works." There was a decay, both inward as to faith and love, and outward as to obedience and works, by the testimony of Christ himself. The same also might be showed concerning most of the other churches. Five of them are charged with backsliding. Hence there is mention in the Scripture of the "kindness of youth," of the "love of espousals," with great commendation, Jeremiah 2:2, 3; of our "first faith," 1 Timothy 5:12; of "the beginning of our confidence," Hebrews 3:14. And cautions are given that we "lose not what we have worked for" 2 John 8. A habitual decline from first commitments to God, from first communions with God, from first strictness in duties of obedience, is common amongst professors.

So let us ask; -

(1.) Is their zeal for God as warm, living, vigorous, as it was at the first? or rather, is there not a selfish frame of spirit come on most professors? Iniquity has abounded, and their love has waxed cold. Was it not of old a burden to their spirits to hear the name, and ways, and

worship of God blasphemed? Could they not have said, with the psalmist, Psalm 119:136, "Rivers of waters run clown our eyes, because men keep not your law?" Were not their souls solicitous about the interest of Christ in the world, like Eli's about the ark? Did they not contend earnestly for every part of the faith once delivered to the saints especially where the grace of God and the glory of the gospel was especially concerned? Did they not labour to condemn the world by a holy lifestyle? And do now the generality of professors abide in this frame? Have they grown in it? or is there not an indifference grown on the spirits of many in this thing? do not many despise all these things, and look on their own former zeal as folly? May we not see many, who have formerly been respected, become daily a reproach to the men of the world through their follies? Is it not with them as it was of old with the daughters of Zion, Isaiah 3:24, when God judged them for their wantonness? has not the world and self utterly ruined their profession? and are they not regardless of their former commitments? are not some in an open enmity to the ways of God? They please them no more, but are evil in their eyes. But how is it with the best? Are not almost all men grown cold? are they not less committed than formerly? are they not grown weary in their religion; so things are mediocre at home, and careless in the world? at least, do they not prefer their ease and secular advantages before these things? - an attitude that Christ abhors, and declares that those in whom it prevails are none of his. Some seem to retain a zeal for truth; but wherein they make the fairest appearance, they will be found to be most abominable. They cry out against errors, - not for truth, but for party's and interest's sake. If a man is on their party and promotes their interest, however corrupt he may be in his judgment, he is embraced, and, admired. This is not zeal for God, but for a man's self. It is not, "The zeal of your house has eaten me up," but, "Master, forbid them, because they follow not with us." Better for men never to pretend to any zeal at all than to substitute such wrathful selfishness in it.

(2.) Is men's delight in the worship of God the same as in former days? do they find the same sweetness in them as they did? How precious

was the word to them formerly! What joy and delight they had in hearing it! How would they have run to partake of it, where it was dispensed in its power and purity, in the demonstration of the Spirit! Did they not call the Sabbath their delight? Did they not long after the converse of saints, and did they not undergo dangers to find it? And are they still like that? Are there not backslidings to be found amongst them? May it not be said, "Grey hairs on them, and they perceive it not?" Are not men ready to say, "' What a weariness is it!' Malachi 1:13. It is even a weariness to have to observe the ordinances. Why do we have to be so strict in the observing the Sabbath? Why do we have to listen to so many sermons? Why do we have to reflect on what is said? Unconsciously a great disrespect, even a contempt, of the excellent ways of Christ and his gospel is fallen on many professors.

(3.) May not the same conviction be farther carried on by an inquiry into the universal course of obedience and the performance of duties that men have been engaged in? Is there the same tender conscience of sin as was in days of old, the same care in private duties, the same love to the brethren, the same readiness for the cross, the same humility of mind and spirit, the same self-denial? The steam of men's lusts, which taints the air, will not allow us so to say.

We need go no farther than this wretched generation, to show the truth of the observation. The Lord give repentance before it is too late!

Now, all these backsliding, all these decays proceed from this root and cause; - they are all the product of indwelling sin, and all show the power of it: to prove it, I shall not need to go farther than the rule which out of James we have already considered, - namely, that lust or indwelling sin is the cause of all actual sin and all habitual falls in believers. This is what the apostle means in that place to declare. I will present now; -

1. That this shows a great efficacy and power in sin;
2. The ways it brings about this cursed effect; - all in design of our

general end, in calling on believers to avoid it.

1. It appears to be a work of great power from the provision that is made against it, which it prevails over. There is plentiful provision made in the covenant of grace, not only to prevent backsliding, but also for their continuance towards perfection; as, -

(1.) The word itself and all the ordinances of the gospel are appointed and given to us for this, Ephesians 4:11-15. The purpose of giving gospel officers to the church is also the purpose of giving the ordinances to be administered by them; for they are given "for the work of the ministry," - that is, to administer the ordinances of the gospel. Now, what are these ends? They are to prevent decays and backsliding in the saints, to carry them on to perfection; so it is said, verse 12. In general, it is for the "perfecting of the saints," carrying on the work of grace in them, and the work of holiness and obedience by them; or for the edifying of the body of Christ, building them up in an increase of faith and love, of every true member of the mystical body. But how far are they appointed to carry them on, to build them up? has it bounds fixed to its work? does it carry them so far, and then leave them? "No," says the apostle, verse 13. The word of the gospel, and its ordinances, are designed for our assistance, until the whole work of faith and obedience is complete. It is appointed to perfect that faith, knowledge, and growth in grace and holiness, which is allotted to us in this world. But what if oppositions lie in the way, Satan and his instruments working with great subtlety? Why, verse 14, these ordinances are designed for our deliverance from all their assaults, so that "speaking the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things who is the head, even Christ Jesus." This is the use of all gospel ordinances, the chief end for which they were given and appointed of God, - to preserve believers from all decays of faith and obedience, and to carry them towards perfection. These are means which God, the good husbandman, uses to cause the vine to thrive and bring forth fruit. Briefly, the word is milk and strong meat, to nourish and strengthen of all sorts and all degrees of believers. It has both seed and water in it, and manuring with it, to make them fruitful. The

ordinance of the supper is appointed to strengthen our faith, in the remembrance of the death of the Lord, and the exercise of love one towards another. The communion of saints is for to edify each other in faith, love, and obedience.

(2.) God continually calls us to make use of the means appointed. He shows them to us, as the angel showed the water-spring to Hagar. Commands, exhortations, promises, threatenings, are multiplied to this purpose; Hebrews 2:1. He is continually saying to us, "Why will you die? why will you wither and decay? Come to the pastures provided for you, and your souls shall live." If we see a lamb run from the fold into the wilderness, we wonder not if it is torn by wild beasts. If we see a sheep leaving its green pastures, to abide in barren heaths, we count it no marvel, if we see him lean and ready to perish; but if we find lambs wounded in the fold, we wonder at the boldness of the beasts of prey that dared set on them there. If we see sheep pining in full pastures, we judge them to be diseased. It is indeed no marvel that poor creatures who forsake their own mercies, and run away from the fold of Christ, are torn with divers lusts, and pine away with hunger; but to see men living under all the means of spiritual thriving, yet not to be fat and flourishing, argues some powerful distemper, whose poisonous qualities hinder the efficacy of the means they enjoy. This is indwelling sin. It is so powerful, so poisonous, that it can bring leanness on the souls of men in the midst of all means of growth and flourishing. It may well make us tremble, to see men living under the gospel, with preaching, praying, administration of sacraments, and yet grow colder every day in zeal for God, more selfish and worldly, even declining as to the degrees of holiness which they had attained to.

(3.) Together with the provision of outward means of spiritual growth, there are also supplies of grace continually provided for the saints from their head, Christ. He is the head of all the saints; and he is a living head, and such a living head that he tells us that "because he lives we shall live also," John 14:19. He communicates spiritual life to all that are His. In him is the fountain of our life; which is therefore said to be "hid with him in God," Colossians 3:3. And this life he gives

to his saints by quickening them by his Spirit, Romans 8:11; and he continues it to them by the supplies of living grace which he communicates to them. From these two, his quickening us, and continually giving out supplies of life to us, he is said to live in us: Galatians 2:20, "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me;" - "The spiritual life which I have is not my own; not from myself was it begun, not by myself is it maintained, but it is solely the work of Christ: so that it is not I that live, but he lives in me, the whole of my life being from him alone." Neither does this living head communicate only a bare life to believers, that they should merely live and no more, a poor, weak, dying life, as it were; but he gives out enough to afford them a strong, thriving, flourishing life, John 10:10. He comes not only that his sheep "may have life," but that "they may have it more abundantly;" so as that they may flourish, be fat and fruitful. Thus is it with the whole body of Christ, Ephesians 4:15, 16, whereby it "grows up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by what every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love." The end of all communications of grace and supplies of life from this living and blessed head, is the increase of the whole body and every member of it, and the edifying of itself in love. His treasures of grace are unsearchable; his stores inexhaustible; his life, the fountain of ours, full and eternal; his heart bounteous and large; his hand open and liberal: so that there is no doubt but that he communicates supplies of grace for their increase in holiness abundantly to all his saints. Whence, then, is it that they do not all flourish accordingly? As you may see it often in a natural body, so is it here. Though the seat and rise of the blood and spirits in head and heart be sound, yet there may be a withering member in the body that intercepts the influences of life to it, so that though the heart and head perform their office, giving no less supplies to that than they do to any other member, yet the effect is merely to keep it from perishing, - it grows weaker every day. The withering of any member in Christ's mystical body is not for the want of his communication of grace for an abundant life, but from the interception that is made of the efficacy of it, by the opposition of

indwelling sin. So where lust grows strong, a great deal of grace will only keep the soul alive, and not give it any fruitfulness at all. Often Christ gives very much grace where not many of its effects appear. It spends its strength in withstanding the assaults of corruption, so that it cannot put forth its strength towards fruitfulness. As a medicine, that is fit both to check evil humours, and to strengthen nature, if the evil humour is strong, spends its whole strength in subduing it, contributing less to the relief of nature than it would do, if it met not with such opposition; so is it with the eye-salve and the healing grace which we have abundantly from the wings of the Sun of Righteousness. It is forced often to put forth its virtue to oppose lusts and corruptions. That is why the soul receives not that strengthening to fruitfulness which otherwise it might receive. How healthy and flourishing, how fruitful in holiness, might many a soul be by that grace which is continually communicated to it from Christ, which now, is only not dead, but weak and useless! And this is clear evidence of the power of indwelling sin, that it can give such a check to the mighty power of grace, so that despite the blessed and continual supplies that we receive from our Head, yet many believers decline habitually, as to where they were before, and their last ways do not agree with their first. This makes the vineyard in the "very fruitful hill" to bring forth wild grapes; this makes trees barren in fertile fields.

(4.) Besides the continual supplies of grace that are communicated to believers, which causes them to thirst no more as to a total lack, there is also a readiness in the Lord Christ to help the souls of his, as they have need. The apostle tells us that he is "a merciful High Priest," and "able" (that is, ready, prepared, and willing) "to help those who are tempted," Hebrews 2:18; and so we are invited to "come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," - that is, grace sufficient and suitable to any temptation we may be under. Our merciful High Priest is ready to give out this seasonable grace over and above the constant supplies of the Spirit. Besides the never-failing springs of ordinary covenant grace, he has also refreshing showers for times of drought; and this is to the advantage of the saints for their growth in grace. But despite all

these, such is the power of indwelling sin, so great its deceitfulness, so many its wiles, that many of them for whose growth all this provision is made yet go back, as to their walking with God. Samson's strength showed itself when he brake seven new sticks and seven new cords, wherewith he was bound, as burning tow and as thread. The malaise which is so stubborn that the most sovereign remedies can not prevail against it, ought to be taken good note of. Such is this indwelling sin if not watched over. It breaks all the cords made to bind it; it blunts the instruments appointed to root it up; it resists all healing medicines, though never so sovereign; and is therefore of great power. Besides, believers have innumerable obligations, from the love, the command of God, to grow in grace, to press forward towards perfection, as they have abundant means provided for them so to do. To do so is the greatest advantage, sweetness, contentment to them in the world. It is the burden of their souls, that they do not so do, that they are not more holy, more zealous, useful; they desire it above life itself. They know it is their duty to watch against this enemy, to fight against it, to pray against it; and so they do. They more desire his destruction than the enjoyment of all this world and all that it can afford. And yet, despite all this, such is the subtlety, and, and fury, and boldness of this adversary, that it frequently brings them down. Hence it is with believers sometimes as it is with men at sea. They have a fair wind, all night long; they ply their tackling, attend their business, and consider how they proceed in their voyage. In the morning coming to measure what progress they have had, they find that they have gone backwards. A swift tide has frustrated all their labours, and rendered the wind in their sails almost useless; they have borne up against the stream, but have made no progress. So is it with believers. They have a good gale of supplies of the Spirit from above; they attend duties diligently, pray constantly, hear attentively, and omit nothing that may carry them on their voyage towards eternity; but after a while, coming seriously to consider, by the examination of their hearts and ways, what progress they have made, they find that all their assistance and duties have not been able to bear them up against some strong tide or current of indwelling sin. They have not been driven on rocks, - it has preserved them from gross sins: but they have lost in their spiritual

frame, or gone backwards, and are entangled in decays. Now, because we want to prevent this power of sin; and, because of all the effects that it produces, there is none more dangerous than that it prevails on many to an decline from their former ways, despite all the sweetness their souls have found in them; - I shall consider how, and through what assistance, it prevails, that we may better watch against it.

## CHAPTER 15.

Decays in grace caused by indwelling sin - The ways it does it.

2. THE means whereby indwelling sin prevails on believers to backsliding and decays as to degrees of grace and holiness are many: -

(1.) Upon the first conversion and calling of sinners to God and Christ, they have usually many fresh springs breaking forth in their souls and refreshing showers coming on them, which bear them up to much faith, love, holiness, fruitfulness, and obedience; as on a land-flood, when many lesser streams run into a river, it overflows, and rolls on with a more than ordinary fulness. Now, if these springs be not kept open, if they prevail not for the continuance of these showers, they must decay and go backwards. We shall name one or two of them: -

[1.] They have a fresh, vigorous sense of pardoning mercy. As this is in the soul, so will its love and delight in God, so will its obedience be; as, is the sense of gospel pardon, so will be the life of gospel love. Luke 7:47, "I say to you," says our Saviour of the poor woman, "Her sins, which were many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." Her great love was an evidence of great forgiveness, and her great sense of it: for our Saviour is not giving a reason of her forgiveness, as though it were for her love; but of her love, that it was because of her forgiveness. Having in the foregoing parable, from verse 40 and onwards, convinced the Pharisee with whom he had to do that he to whom most was forgiven would love most, as verse 43, he gives an account of the great love of the woman, springing from the sense she had of the great forgiveness which she had so freely received. Thus sinners at their first conversion are very aware of great forgiveness; "Of whom I am chief," lies next their heart. This subdues their hearts and spirits to all in God, and quickens them to all obedience, that such poor cursed sinners as they were should so freely be delivered and pardoned. The love of God and of Christ in their forgiveness constrains them to live to God.

[2.] The fresh taste they have had of spiritual things keeps up such a relish of them, that worldly contentments, whereby men are drawn off from close walking with God, are rendered undesirable to them. Having tasted of the wine of the gospel, they desire no other, for they say, "This is best." So was it with the apostles: "Will you also go away?" John 6:67. They answer by Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life," verse 68. They had such a fresh relish of the doctrine of the gospel and the grace of Christ on their souls, that they can entertain no thoughts of declining from it. As a man who has been long kept in a dungeon, if brought forth into the light of the sun, finds so much pleasure in it, in the beauties of the old creation, that he thinks he can never be weary of it, nor shall ever be contented to be under darkness again; so is it with souls when first brought into the marvellous light of Christ, to see the beauties of the new creation. They see a new glory in him, that sullies the desirableness of all earthly diversions. And they see a new guilt and filth in sin, that gives them a hatred of its old delights and pleasures.

Now, whilst these springs are kept open in the souls of converted sinners, they constrain them to a vigorous, active holiness. They can never do enough for God; so that often their zeal as saints puts blots on their prudence as men, as might be instanced in many of the martyrs of old.

This is the first way that indwelling sin prepares men for backsliding in grace and obedience, - it attempts to stop or taint these springs.

1st. It works by sloth. It prevails in the soul to neglect continual thoughts about the things that influence it to fruitful obedience. If care be not taken, and all means that are appointed of God to keep a living sense of them on the soul, they will dry up; and so the obedience that should spring from them will do so also. Isaac dug wells, but the Philistines stopped them, and his flocks had no benefit by them. Let the heart neglect even a little the gracious, soul-affecting thoughts of the love of God, the cross of Christ, the greatness and excellency of gospel mercy, the beauties of holiness, they will quickly become

unfamiliar. He who shuts his eyes in the sun can see nothing at all when he opens them again. And as a man loses faith towards these things, they lose power towards him. Those things that so greatly affected him can now do little with him because of his unbelief. So was it with the spouse in the Song of Solomon, Song of Solomon 5:2; Christ calls to her, verse 1, with a marvellous gracious invitation to communion with him. She who had formerly been ravished when she first heard that joyful sound, being now at carnal ease, gives a poor answer to his call, which ended in her sorrow. As indwelling sin prevails by spiritual sloth on the souls of men to neglect the motions of God's Spirit in their understandings of divine love, and to omit to stir up continual thoughts of faith about it, the whole soul decays. Thus God oft complains that his people had "forgotten him;" that is, grew unmindful of his love and grace, - which was the beginning of their apostasy.

2dly. By causing the mind to have formal, weary, powerless thoughts of the things which should bring it to thankful obedience. The apostle cautions us that in dealing with God we should use reverence and godly fear, because of his purity, holiness, and majesty, Hebrews 12:28, 29. And this is what the Lord himself spake in the destruction of Nadab and Abihu, "I will be sanctified in those who come nigh me," Leviticus 10:3. He will be dealt with in a holy, reverent manner. So are we to deal with all the things of God where we have communion with him. The soul is to have a great reverence of God in them. When men begin to consider them lightly, not using them for the purpose they were made for, they lose sight of their beauty, and glory, and power. When we have anything to do where faith or love towards God is to be exercised, we must do it with all our hearts, with all our minds, strength, and souls; not perfunctorily, which God abhors. He does not only require that we remember his love and grace, but that we serve him according to their excellency. It was the sin of Hezekiah that he "rendered not again according to the benefits done to him," 2 Chronicles 32:25. So, whilst we consider gospel truths, the uttermost labour of the soul ought to be, that we may be "changed into the same image" or likeness, 2 Corinthians 3:18; that is, that they may have

their full effect on us. Otherwise, James tells us what our "beholding the glory of the Lord in a glass," there mentioned by the apostle, - that is, reading or hearing the mind of God in Christ revealed in the gospel, - comes to: James 1:23, 24,

"It is like a man seeing his natural face in a glass: for he sees himself, and goes away, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was."

It makes no impression on him, fixes no image of his likeness in his imagination; because he does it lightly, and with a transient look. So is it with men who only think of gospel truths in a slight manner, without labouring, with all their hearts, minds, and strength, to have them ingrafted on their souls. Now, this is the way of sinners in their first commitments to God. When they think of pardoning mercy, they labour to affect their whole souls with it, and stir themselves to suitable affections constant obedience. They do not merely think of the excellency of Christ and spiritual things, now newly revealed to them in a saving light, but they press with all their might after a fuller enjoyment of them. This keeps them humble and holy, thankful and fruitful. But if they do not diligently grow in this wisdom, indwelling sin, working by the vanity of the mind, will bring them to content themselves with scanty thoughts of these things, without labouring to let them work in the soul. As men decay in this, so they decay and decline in the power of holiness and close walking with God. The springs being stopped or tainted, the streams will not run so swiftly or sweetly, as formerly. Some wither almost into nothing. They talk of religion and spiritual things as much as they did, and perform duties with as much constancy as they did; but they have poor starving souls as to any real communion with God. By the subtlety of indwelling sin they have grown formal, and learned to deal with spiritual things in an outward manner; so they have lost all their life, vigour and savour towards them. Be serious in spiritual things if you intend to be bettered by them.

3dly. Indwelling sin often stops these springs of gospel obedience, by false opinions corrupting the simplicity of the gospel. False opinions

are the work of the flesh. They mostly proceed from the darkness of the minds of men, with a mixture of corrupt affections. The apostle was jealous over his Corinthians in this matter. He was afraid lest their minds

"should by any means be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ," 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3;

which he knew would be attended by a decline in faith, love, and obedience. We have seen some who, after they have received a sweet taste of the love of God in Christ, of the excellency of pardoning mercy, and have walked humbly with God for many years in the truth, have, by the corruption of their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ, despised all their own experiences, and rejected the truth that would advance their obedience. Hence John cautions the elect lady and her children to take heed they were not seduced, lest they should "lose what they had worked for," 2 John verse 8; - lest they should cast away all their former obedience as a thing of no value. How many are there who used to put an unspeakable value on the pardon of sin in the blood of Christ, - who delighted in gospel revelations of spiritual things, and walked in obedience to God because of them, - who have turned aside from the truth as it is in Jesus, and despise the springs of their former obedience! And as this is done openly in some, there are also secret inroads of corrupt opinions that taint the springs of gospel obedience, and gain ground on them through the vanity of men's minds. Such are those who diminish the freedom of grace, and promote the labours of men in their spiritual ability. They are works of the flesh; and although some may pretend that they promote holiness, they taint the springs of true obedience, turn the heart from God, and bring the whole soul into spiritual decay.

And this is one way that indwelling sin produces this pernicious effect of drawing men off from the power, purity, and fruitfulness attending their first conversion and commitments to God, causing a decline of their holiness and grace. There is nothing we ought to be more watchful against, if we truly intend to deal with this enemy. It is no

small part of the wisdom of faith, to observe whether gospel truths continue to have the same work on the soul as they did; and whether they continue to be improved as at the first. A commandment that is always practised is always new, as John speaks of love. And gospel truths will be always new and fresh to him who really improves, because they are new in practice; but they are burdensome to another who grows used them, and even loathes the manna that he often eats..

(2.) Indwelling sin does this by taking men off from their watch against the returns of Satan. When our Lord Christ comes first to take possession of any soul for himself, he binds that strong man and spoils his goods; he deprives him of all his power. Satan being thus frustrated in his hopes, leaves the soul, as finding it dead to his baits. So he left our Saviour on his first attempts. But it is said he left him only "for a season," Luke 4:13. He intended to return when he saw an opportunity. So is it with believers. Being repelled, he leaves them for a season. Freed from his assaults, they proceed vigorously in their obedience, and so flourish in the ways of God. But Satan returns, and if the soul does not stand continually on his guard against him, he will quickly get advantages that shall damage his his fruitfulness. Hence some, after they have spent some time, may be years, in cheerful walking with God, have spent all their latter days wrestling with the temptations he has entangled them in. Others have plainly fallen under the power of his assaults. It is like a man who, having for a while lived usefully amongst his neighbours, done good and communicated according to his ability, distributing to the poor, and helping all around about him, at length, falling into the hands of oppressive men, is forced to spend his substance in defending himself at law, and so becomes useless where he lives. So is it with many a believer: after he has walked in fruitful obedience, to the glory of God and edification of the church of Christ, being afresh set on by the return of Satan, he has enough to do all the rest of his life to keep himself alive; woefully decaying as to grace. Now, this success which Satan obtains in his undertaking is also from indwelling sin. This encourages him, makes way for his return, and gives entrance to his temptations. You know how it is with men when he is cast of them by

gospel conviction; after he has waited a while, he says he will return. And what is the issue? Carnal lusts have prevailed over the man's convictions, and made his soul fit to receive returning devils. It is so as to the measure of prevalence that Satan obtains against believers, by sin causing the soul to be vulnerable to his temptations.

Now, the ways that indwelling sin helps Satan to return are those which dispose toward a decline. Satan is a watchful and crafty adversary; he will neglect no opportunity. So wherever our spiritual strength is impaired by sin, or wherever our lusts press, Satan falls in with that weakness and presses towards that ruin; so that all the actions of the law of sin are subservient to this. One or two seem principally to invite Satan to attempt a return: -

[1.] It entangles the soul in the things of the world, all which are merchants for Satan. When Pharaoh had let the people go, he heard after a while that they were entangled in the wilderness, and supposed that he would be able to overtake them and destroy them. This stirs him up to pursue them. When Satan finds that those he has been cast out from are entangled in the things of the world, he is encouraged to attack them again, as the spider comes down on the strongest fly that is entangled in his web; for his temptations only impel them to what their lusts incline them to, by adding poison to their lusts, and gilding their objects. And often he gets so in on the souls of men, that they are never free of him whilst they live. And as men's diversions in the world increase, so do their entanglements from Satan. When they have more to do in the world than they can manage, they shall have more to do from Satan than they can withstand. When men are made spiritually faint, by dealing with the world, Satan sets on them, as Amalek did on the weak of the people who came out of Egypt.

[2.] It does this by making the soul negligent, and taking it from its watch. We have showed that it is a main part of the deceitfulness of indwelling sin to make the soul neglect the diligent, watchful attendance to its duty which is required. Now, nowhere are diligence

and watchfulness more strictly enjoined than in the returning assaults of Satan: 1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant." And why? "Because of your adversary the devil." Unless you are exceeding watchful, he will surprise you; and all the injunctions of our blessed Saviour to watch refer to him and his temptations. Now, when the soul is made careless, forgetting what an enemy it has to deal with, or is lifted up with the successes it has obtained against him, then Satan attempts a re-entrance of his old habitation; which if he cannot obtain, yet he makes their lives uncomfortable to themselves and unfruitful to others, in weakening their root and withering their fruit through his poison. He comes down on our duties of obedience as the fowls on Abraham's sacrifice; so that if we watch not, as he did, to drive them away (for by resistance he is overcome and put to flight), he will devour them.

[3.] Indwelling sin takes opportunity to withdraw men from their primitive zeal and holiness, from their first faith, love, and works, by the evil examples of professors amongst whom they live. When men first engage into the ways of God, they have a reverent esteem of those whom they believe to have been made partakers of that mercy before them; these they love and honour, as it is their duty. But after a while they find many of them walking crookedly, like the men of the world. Here sin takes opportunity. Unconsciously it prevails with men to comply with them. "This way does well enough with others; why may it not do so with us also?" Such is the inward thought of many. And so, through the craft of sin, the generation of professors corrupt one another. As a stream arising from a clear spring or a fountain, whilst it runs in its own peculiar channel and keeps its water unmixed, preserves its purity, but when it falls in with other streams that are foul, though running the same way, it becomes discoloured also; so is it in this case. Believers come forth from the spring of the new birth with purity and cleanness; this for a while they keep in the course of their private walk with God: but when they fall into society with others, whose profession runs the same way as theirs towards heaven, but are sullied with sin and the world, they are often corrupted, and so decline from their first purity, faith, and holiness. I shall add some cautions that preserve men from this infection: -

1st. In the body of professors there are many hypocrites. Though we cannot say of this or that man that he is so, yet it is certain that some are. Our Saviour has told us that it will be so to the end of the world. All who have oil in their lamps have it not in their vessels. Let men take heed how they conform to the professors they meet, lest, instead of saints and the best of men, they have for their example hypocrites, who are the worst; and when they think they are like those who bear the image of God, they are conformed to those who bear the image of Satan.

2dly. You do not know what may be the present temptation of those whose ways you observe. It may be they are under some peculiar desertion from God, and so are withering for a season, until he send them some refreshing showers from above. It may be they are entangled with special corruptions, which is their burden, that you know not of; and for any to deliberately to adopt the attitude that others are cast into by the power of their temptations, or to think they can do what they see others do, whose troubles they know not, is presumption. He who knows such or such a person to be a living man and of a healthy constitution, if he sees him crawling up and down about his affairs, feeble and weak, sometimes falling, sometimes standing, and making small progress in anything, will he think it sufficient for himself to do so also? will he not inquire whether the person he sees have not lately fallen into some sickness that has weakened him and brought him into that condition? Assuredly he will so do. Take heed, Christians; many of the professors with whom you converse are sick and wounded, - the wounds of some of them stink and are corrupt because of their folly. If you have any spiritual health, do not think their weakness will be accepted in you; much less think it will be well for you also to become sick and wounded.

3dly. Remember that of many of the best Christians, only the worst is known and seen. Many who keep up precious communion with God may often, by their natural tempers of passion, not carry so glorious appearances as others who come short of them in grace and the

power of godliness. In respect of their outward lifestyle it may seem they are scarcely saved, when in respect of their faith and love they may be eminent. They may, as the King's daughter, be all glorious within, though their clothes are not always of wrought gold. Take heed, then, that you are not infected with their worst, when you are not able to imitate them in their best.

[4.] Sin does this work by cherishing some particular lust in the heart. The soul contends against this faintly. It contends against it on the account of sincerity; it cannot but do so: but it does not make thorough work, vigorously to put it to death by the strength and power of grace. Now, where it is thus with a soul, habitual decline as to holiness will assuredly follow. David shows us how, in his first days, he kept his heart close to God: Psalm 18:23, "I was upright before him, and I kept myself from my iniquity." His great care was lest any lust should prevail in him that might be called his iniquity. The same course steered Paul also, 1 Corinthians 9:27. He was in danger of being lifted up by his spiritual revelations. This makes him "keep his body in subjection," that no carnal reasonings might take place in him. But where indwelling sin has given strength to a special lust, it proves a principal means of a general decline; for as a weakness in any vital part will make the whole body weak, so weakness in any one grace, which a perplexing lust brings with it, will make the soul. It every way weakens spiritual strength. It weakens confidence in God in faith and prayer. The knees will be feeble and the hands will hang down in dealing with God, where a troublesome lust lies in the heart and has not been put to death. It will take such hold on the soul that it shall not be "able to look up," Psalm 40:12. It darkens the mind by innumerable foolish imaginations, which it stirs up. It pricks the conscience with those spots and stains which by its actions it brings on the soul. It contends in the will for dominion. An active corruption wants to have command in the soul, and it is always ready to take the throne. It disturbs the thoughts, and sometimes will even frighten the soul from dealing with it by meditation, lest, corrupt affections being entangled by it, grace loses ground instead of prevailing. It breaks out often into scandalous sins, as it did in David and Hezekiah, and loads

the sinner with sorrow and discouragement. So it becomes to the soul like a moth in a garment, to eat its strongest threads, so that though the whole hangs together, it is easily torn to pieces. Though the soul with whom it is thus may keep up a fair profession for a while, yet his strength is secretly devoured, and every temptation tears his conscience at pleasure. It becomes with such men as it is with some who have for many years been of a sound, strong constitution. Some secret distemper seizes on them. For a season they take no notice of it, or, if they do, they think they shall do well enough with it, and easily shake it off when they have a little leisure to attend to it; but for now, they think, as Samson with his locks cut, they will do as at other times. Sometimes, they complain that they are not well, they know not what ails them, and rise violently in an opposition to their distemper; but after a while struggling in vain, the vigour of their spirits and strength failing them, they are forced to yield to the power of a consumption. And now all they can do is little enough to keep them alive. It is so with men brought into spiritual decay by any secret corruption. It may be they have had a vigorous principle of obedience and holiness. Indwelling sin watching its opportunities, by some temptation or other has inflamed some particular lust in them. For a while, they take little notice. Sometimes they complain, but think they will do as in former times, until, being unconsciously weakened in their spiritual strength, they have enough to do in keeping alive what remains and is ready to die, Hosea 5:13.

[5.] It works by neglecting private communion with God in prayer and meditation. If it prevails, it will produce a decline in the whole course of obedience. All neglect of private duties is principled by a weariness of God, as he complains, Isaiah 43:22, "You have not called on me, you have been weary of me." Neglect of prayer proceeds from weariness; and where there is weariness, we will withdraw from what we are weary of. Now, God alone being the fountain and spring of spiritual life, if there is weariness of him and withdrawing from him, decay in the life must follow. Indeed, what men are in these duties (I mean as to faith and love in them), that they are, and no more. Here lies the root of their obedience; and if this fail, all fruit will quickly fail. You may

sometimes see a tree flourishing with leaves and fruit, good and pleasant. After a while the leaves begin to decay, the fruit to wither, the whole to droop. Search, and you shall find the root, where it should draw in moisture from the earth to supply the body and branches with sap and juice for growth and fruit, has received a wound, is some way perished, and does not perform its duty, so that though the branches may flourish for a while with what they had received, they must decay. So it is here. These duties of private communion with God are the means of receiving supplies of spiritual strength from him, - of sap and fatness from Christ, the vine and olive. While they do so, the lifestyle and course of obedience flourishes and is fruitful, - all outward duties are cheerfully and regularly performed; but if there be a wound, a defect, in the root, that should take in spiritual moisture, that should be shared with the whole, the rest may for a season maintain their appearance, but after a while profession will wither, fruits will decay, and the whole be ready to die. Hence our Saviour lets us know, Matthew 6:6, what a man is in secret, in these private duties, that he is in the eyes of God, and no more; and one reason amongst others is, because they have a more vigorous acting of unmixed grace than any other duties. In most particular duties, there is an alloy of gifts, which sometimes even devours the pure gold of grace, which should be the chief and principal in them. In these there is immediate intercourse between God and what is of himself in the soul. If once sin, by its deceits and treacheries, can take the soul from communing with God and constancy in these duties, it will cause a declining in the whole of a man's obedience. It has made its entrance, and will assuredly make good its progress.

[6.] Growing in the knowledge of truth without application is another thing that indwelling sin uses to corrupt the souls of believers. The apostle tell us that "knowledge puffs up," 1 Corinthians 8:1. If it is not applied, it inflates men; like a man who has a dropsy, we are not to expect that he has strength according to his size; like trees that are continually putting forth shoots, which keeps them from bearing fruit. When men are like this, they can receive evangelical truths in a new and more glorious light or more clear revelation than formerly, or new

manifestations of truth which they knew not before, and please themselves in so doing, without labouring to have the power of those truths on their hearts, and their souls made conformable to them. But they also deal with all truths formerly known, which were sometimes inlaid in their hearts with more power. This has proved, if not the ruin, yet the great impairing of many. By this means, from humble, close walking, many have withered into an empty, talking profession. Everything has become alike to them; - whether they are true or false, if they can discuss them, all is well. This is food for sin; it increases it, and is increased by it. It is a notable way for the vanity that is in the mind to exert itself without a rebuke from conscience. Whilst men are talking about religion, and hearing preaching, with great delight, as those in Ezekiel 33:32, conscience, unless thoroughly awake, and furnished with spiritual wisdom and care, will be pacified, and not protest against the state that the soul is in. But all this may be nothing but the acting of the mind's natural vanity. And generally this is so when men content themselves with the notions of truth, without labouring to experience the power of them in their hearts, and bring forth fruit in their lives; so decay must needs follow.

[7.] Growth in carnal wisdom also helps sin to produce this effect. "Your wisdom and your knowledge," says the prophet, "has perverted you," Isaiah 47:10. As carnal wisdom increases, faith decays. Its effect is to teach a man to trust in himself; faith will teach him to trust wholly in another. So it labours to destroy the whole work of faith, by causing the soul to return to self sufficiency. How many a humble, broken-hearted creature, who followed after God in simplicity and integrity of spirit, has returned to a worldly, carnal frame, and utterly withered in their faith through following the ways of others, and yielding to temptations and opportunities in the world! Many are so sullied that they are not the men they were.

[8.] Great sin, lying unrepented of in the heart and conscience, furthers indwelling sin. The great turn of the life of David was in harbouring his sin without repentance. It was otherwise with Peter, and his outcome was different. A great sin will greatly affect the life of

a professor. If it is well cured in the blood of Christ, with the humiliation that the gospel requires, it often proves a means of more watchfulness and contentment than before. If it is neglected, it hardens the heart, weakens spiritual strength, and discourages it from communion with God. So David complains, Psalm 38:5, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness." His malaise was not so much from his sin as his folly, - not so much from the wounds he had received as from his neglect of their cure. It is like a broken bone, well set, which leaves the place stronger than before; otherwise it makes the man a cripple all his days. Whatever it uses, sin is still the principle; and this is no small evidence of its power.

## CHAPTER 16.

The strength of indwelling sin shown from its effects in the unregenerate.

We have been dealing with the power of indwelling sin in believers. Now, I have elsewhere showed that its nature and all its natural properties remain in them. We cannot prove the strength of sin directly from its power in those in whom it is not at all weakened: yet by observing it, we may caution believers of the real power of that mortal enemy.

If the plague rages in one city, destroying multitudes, and there is in another an infection of the same kind, which does not reach such a height due to remedies used; a man may show the inhabitants the danger of that infection by the effects that it has among others, who have not the benefit of those remedies; which will both teach them to value those remedies, and be more watchful against the infection. It is so in this case. Believers may be taught what is the power of that plague of sin by the effects it produces in others, who have not those remedies from death which the Lord Jesus Christ has given them.

I shall now illustrate this by showing the power it has in the unregenerate.

1. It appears in the violence it offers to the nature of men, compelling them to sins against all the principles of the reasonable nature God has given them. Every creature of God has a law of operation implanted in it, which governs all that it does of its own accord. So fire ascends, bodies that are weighty descend, water flows; according to the principles of their nature. What hinders them in their operation is force; as what hinders a stone from descending or fire from going upwards. What forces them to move contrary to the law of their nature is the greatest force, of which the degrees are endless. Now, all would acknowledge that the force that could take a great millstone and fling it into the air would be wonderful.

Man, also has his laws of operation. First, in common with other creatures; secondly, with reference to the special end for which he was made. In this law of nature common to man with other creatures, is nourishing their young, living quietly with their own kind, following what is good for them. These are things which all creatures have in the law of their nature.

But man, being created in an especial manner to give glory to God by obedience, and to obtain the reward of enjoying him, there are many things that are peculiar to him, - as to love God above all, to seek the enjoyment of him as his chief good, to inquire after his mind and will and to yield obedience; all which are part of the law of his nature.

Now a man might perform the actions of the law of his nature merely from the principles of his nature, as they do; but the law of his dependence on God, and doing all things in obedience to him is beyond that. He can never be considered as a mere creature, but as a creature made to glorify God by rational, moral obedience, - rational, because performed with reason; and moral, because regulated by law.

For instance, man, in common with other creatures takes care of the nourishing of his children. There is implanted in him a love and care for them. Now, if other creatures answer this instinct, and are not hardened against them like the ostrich, into whom God has not implanted this natural wisdom, Job 39:16, 17, they fulfil the law of their creation. With man it is not so. It is not enough for him to answer the instinctive inclination of his nature, as in the nourishing of his children; but he must do it in subjection to God, and do it to his glory, - the law of moral obedience overarching all his being and all his operations. All these things are in man, implanted in his nature, seconded by the command of God, as he is able to yield moral obedience and do all things for his glory.

So, whatever drives a man to break this law of his nature, - which is not only as to throw millstones upward, to drive beasts from taking

care of their young, to prevent cattle from herding themselves, but, more than that, to cast off what lies in him, his fundamental dependence on God as a creature made to obey him, - must have great power.

Now, this is frequently done by indwelling sin in unregenerate people. For instance: -

(1.) Nothing is more deeply inlaid in the nature of living creatures, and so of man himself, than love for their young. Many creatures will die for them; some feed them with their own flesh and blood; all deprive themselves of food which they would benefit from, to impart it to them, and act in their behalf to the utmost of their power.

Now, such is the power of indwelling sin in man, - an infection that the nature of other creatures knows nothing of, - that in many it prevails to stop this fountain, to beat back the stream of natural affections, to root up the principles of the law of nature, and to drive them to a neglect, a destruction of their own children. Paul tells us of the old Gentiles that they were "without natural affection". Romans 1:31. What he is referring to is that barbarous custom among the Romans, who often, to spare the trouble of educating their children, and to be free to satisfy their lusts, destroyed their own children from the womb; so far did the strength of sin prevail to obliterate the law of nature, and to repel its power.

Examples of this nature are common in all nations; amongst ourselves, of women murdering their own children, through the deceitful reasoning of sin. Thus sin turns the strong current of nature, darkens the light of God in the soul, and controls the principles of nature that are influenced by the will of God.

This evil has, through the power of sin, received a fearful aggravation. Men have not only slain but cruelly sacrificed their children to satisfy their lusts. The apostle reckons idolatry, and so, consequently, all superstition, among the works of the flesh, Galatians 5:20; that is, the

product of indwelling sin. Now, it is from here that men have offered that unspeakable violence to the law of nature. So the psalmist tells us, Psalm 106:37, 38. The same is again mentioned, Ezekiel 16:20, 21, and in sundry other places. For the present it may suffice to intimate that they took their children and burnt them to ashes in a soft fire; the wicked priests who assisted in the sacrifice giving them this relief, that they made a clamour so that the wretches might not hear the cries of the poor, dying, tormented infants. Naturalists can give no rational account, they can only admire the secret force of that little fish which, they say, will stop a ship in full sail in the midst of the sea; and we must acknowledge that it is beyond our power to give an account of that secret force and unsearchable deceit that is in that inbred traitor, sin, that can not only stop the course of nature, when all the sails of it, that carry it forward, are so filled as they are in that of affections to children, but also drive it backward with such a violence and force as to cause men so to deal with their own children as a good man could not be persuaded to deal with his dog. And it may be to the advantage of the best to consider that they carry in them what in others has produced these effects.

(2.) The like may be spoken of all other sins against the prime dictates of the law of nature, that mankind has been stained and defamed with, - murder of parents and children, of wives and husbands, sodomy, incest, and similar enormities; in all which sin prevails in men against the whole law of their being and dependence on God.

Should I reckon up the murders of Cain and Abel, the treason of Judas, with their aggravations; or recall the villainy of Nero, in whom sin seemed to give an example of what it could debase the nature of man to? In a word, all the premeditated perjuries; all the bloody revenges; all the filth and uncleanness; all the enmity to God and his ways that is in the world, - is fruit growing from this root.

2. It shows its power in preventing men from believing under the gospel. So: -

(1.) Under the gospel, only few believe. So the preachers complain, Isaiah 53:1, "Who has believed our report?" which the apostle interprets of the paucity of believers, John 12:38. Our Saviour, Christ himself, tells us that "many are called," - the word is preached to many, - "but few are chosen." And so the church complains of its number, Micah 7:1. Few enter the narrow gate; daily experience confirms this woeful observation. How many villages, parishes, towns, may we go to where the gospel, has been preached many years, and perhaps scarce meet a true believer in them, who shows forth the death of Christ in his lifestyle! In the best places, and most eminent for profession, are not such persons like the berries after the shaking of an olive-tree, - two or three in the top of the topmost boughs, and four or five in the highest branches?

(2.) There is presented to men in the preaching of the gospel, as motives to believing, everything that prevails with men to do what they do in their lives. Whatever anyone does deliberately, he does it either because it is reasonable for him so to do, or advantageous, or pleasant, or necessary for the avoidance of evil. And, God knows, often men are prevailed on by very poor things. How often will men, for a very little pleasure, a very little profit, be induced to do what will embitter their lives and damn their souls; and what industry will they use to avoid what they consider grievous to them! Any one of these is enough to oil the wheels of men's labours, and set men working.

But all these things centre in the proposal of the gospel and the command of believing; and every one of them such that the whole world can present nothing like it: -

[1.] It is the most reasonable thing that can be presented to a man, that he who, through his own fault, has lost the way of bringing glory to God and saving his own soul, should embrace that blessed way to attain what God, in infinite grace, love, mercy, wisdom, and righteousness, has shown to him. And, -

[2.] It is the most profitable thing that a man can possibly be invited

to; the forgiveness of sins, the love and favour of God, a blessed immortality, eternal glory. And, -

[3.] It is most pleasant. Surely it is pleasant to be brought from darkness into light, from a dungeon to a throne, - from captivity to Satan and lusts, to the glorious liberty of the children of God, with a thousand heavenly sweetnesses. And, -

[4.] It is surely necessary, not only from the command of God, who has the supreme authority over us, but also for the avoidance of eternal ruin of body and soul, Mark 16:16. It is constantly expressed thus: "Believe, or you perish under the weight of the wrath of the great God, for evermore."

But now, although all these considerations are preached to men, and pressed on them in the name of the great God from day to day and from year to year, very few set their hearts to embrace what they lead to. Tell men ten thousand times that this is wisdom, riches - that all their profit lies in it - that they will assuredly and eternally perish, within a few hours, if they receive not the gospel; assure them that it is their only concern; let them know that God himself speaks all this to them; - yet all is one, they will not heed it, but say, "We will have nothing to do with these things." They will rather perish in their lusts than accept mercy.

(3.) It is indwelling sin alone that disables and hinders men from believing. Blindness of mind, stubbornness of the will, sensuality of the affections, all concur to keep poor perishing souls at a distance from Christ. Men are made blind by sin, and cannot see his excellencies; obstinate, and will not lay hold of his righteousness; senseless, and take no notice of their own eternal concerns.

So what can prevail with men, wise and prudent in other things, to neglect the love of God, the blood of Christ, the eternal welfare of their own souls, on worthless pretences, must have an astonishing power.

Whose heart, who has once heard of the ways of God, will not bleed to see poor souls eternally perishing under a thousand gracious invitations to accept of mercy and pardon in the blood of Christ? And can we not be astonished at the power of that principle that causes them to run headlong to their own destruction? And yet all this befalls them from the power and deceit of sin that dwells in them.

3. It is evident in their total apostasies. Many men not really converted are much worked on by the word. The apostle tells us that they "escape from those who live in error," 2 Peter 2:18. They separate themselves from idolatry and false worship, owning and professing the truth: and they also escape the "pollutions of the world," verse 20; that is, "the corruption that is in the world through lust," as he expresses it, chap. 1:4, - those corrupt and unclean ways which the men of the world, in the pursuit of their lusts, walk and live in. These they escape from, in amending their lives according to the convictions they have from the word; for he tells us, that all this is brought about "through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," - that is, by the preaching of the gospel. They are so far worked on as to forsake all ways of false worship, to profess the truth, to reform their lives, and to walk true to their convictions.

By this means they gain the reputation of professors: "They have a name that they live," Revelation 3:1, and are made "partakers" of some or all of those privileges of the gospel that are numbered by the apostle, Hebrews 6:4, 5.

It is not here my concern to show how far a man may be worked on by the word, and yet not be really brought to yield to Christ, or what may be the limits of common grace on unregenerate men. All agree that it may be carried on so far that it is hard to discern between its effects, and those of saving grace.

But despite all this, many utterly fall from God; some into debauchery, some to worldliness, some to persecute the saints, - all to the loss of their souls. "They are," says the apostle, "entangled again." To

entangle, James 1:14, 15, is the work of indwelling sin; that alone entangles the soul, as the apostle speaks, 2 Peter 2:18, 20. They are allured from their profession into apostasy through the lusts of the flesh.

It prevails on them, through its deceit and power, to forsake their profession and their commitment to God. And this shows the greatness of its power in several ways: -

(1.) It negates that great power which is put forth in the word to convict and reform them. We see by experience that men are not easily worked on by the word; most men can live under it all their lives, and continue as senseless as the seats they sit on, or the flint in the rock. Mighty difficulties must be conquered, great strokes must be given to the conscience, before this can be brought about. It is like stopping a river in his course, and turning his streams another way; like stopping a stone in its fall; or turning away the wild ass, when furiously set to pursue his way, as the prophet speaks, Jeremiah 2:24. To turn men from their corrupt ways; to make them pray, fast, and willingly do many things contrary to the flesh, which is predominant in them; to cause them to profess Christ and the gospel despite being mocked; to give them light to see into mysteries, and gifts for their duties; to make dead, blind, senseless men walk, and talk, and do all that living men do, with conviction and reformation, are the effects of mighty power. Indeed, the power that the Holy Ghost puts forth by the word, in convicting sinners, awakening their consciences, enlightening their minds, changing their affections, awing their hearts, reforming their lives and compelling them to duties, is inexpressible.

But indwelling sin opposes all these. It opposes all the work of the Spirit by the word, with all the advantages of providence in afflictions and mercies which attend it. When sin is enraged, all these become like the cords with which Samson was bound before his head was shaven. Cry to it, "The Philistines are on you; there is a suitable temptation; now show your strength," - all these things become like tow that has smelt the fire; conscience is stifled, reputation in the

church despised, light dimmed, the impressions of the word cast off, convictions discarded, heaven and hell despised: sin makes its way through all, and turns the soul from the ways of God. Sometimes it does this by degrees, taking away convictions from the Spirit by the word, sullyng conscience by degrees, hardening the heart, and making the affections sensual, that the poor backslider scarce knows what he is doing, until he comes to the very bottom of all impiety, profaneness, and enmity against God. Sometimes, coinciding with some vigorous temptation, it suddenly plunges the soul into a course of alienation from God and the profession of his ways.

(2.) It takes them off from those hopes of heaven which, on their convictions, obedience, and temporary believing, they had found. There is a general hope of heaven, or at least of escaping hell, of an peaceful immortality, in the most stupid souls in the world, who, either by tradition or instruction from the word, are persuaded that there is another state of things to come after this life; but it is, in unenlightened persons, a senseless, unaffecting thing, that has no hold on them nor power in them, except to give them peace of mind. It is not so with those who are worked on by the word; their hope of heaven and blessed immortality is often accompanied with great exultations, and is a relief to them in the worst of their trials. They would not part with it for all the world; and they retreat in their minds to it for comfort and relief.

Now, the power of sin prevails with them to forgo all this. Let heaven go if it will, a blessed immortality with the enjoyment of God himself, sin must be served, and provision made to fulfil its lusts.

If a man, in the things of this world, had a hope of a large inheritance, of a kingdom, that he is satisfied that it will not fail him, but that he shall surely enjoy it, and lead a happy and a glorious life in the possession of it many days; if one should go to him and tell him, "It is true, the kingdom you look for is an ample and honourable dominion, full of all good things desirable, and you may attain it; but come, cast away all hopes and expectations of it, and come join with me in the

service and slavery of such and such an oppressing tyrant;" - you will grant he must have some bewitching power with him, that should prevail with a man in his wits to follow his advice. Yet thus it is, and much more so, in the case we have in hand. Sin itself cannot deny that the kingdom of heaven, which the soul is in hope of, is glorious and excellent, nor does it seek to convince him that his thoughts of it are vain and will deceive him, but prevails with him to cast away his hopes, to despise his kingdom that he was expecting, for no other motive but that he may serve some worldly, cruel, or sensual lust. Certainly, here lies a secret power, whose depths cannot be fathomed.

(3.) The apostle manifests the power of the entanglements of sin in apostates, in that it turns them from the way of righteousness after they have known it, 2 Peter 2:21. It will be found at the last day an evil and bitter thing that men live all their days in the service of sin, self, and the world, refusing to travel the ways of God, to which they are invited. Though they have no experience of their excellency, beauty, pleasantness, safety; yet, having evidence brought to them from God himself that they are so, the refusal of them will be bitterness in the end. But the condition of those who, as the apostle speaks, "having known the way of righteousness," are by the power of indwelling sin "turned aside from the holy commandment," is far worse. To leave God for the devil, after a man has made some trial of him and his service, - heaven for hell, after a man has had some cheering thoughts of it, - the fellowship of the saints for an ale-house or a brothel-house, after a man has been admitted to their communion, and tasted the pleasantness of it; to leave walking in pure, clear, straight paths, to wallow in mire and filth; - this will be for a lamentation: yet sin prevails on apostates to do this against all their light, conviction, experiences, professions, commitments, or whatever may be strong on them to keep them up to the known ways of righteousness.

(4.) It shows its strength in them by bringing them to a total renunciation of God in Christ, and the power of all gospel truth, - in the sin against the Holy Ghost. By it an end is put to all dealings between God and man in a way of grace. It is a sin to death. And the

hardness and blindness of many men's hearts brings them to this; they are set out of the reach of mercy. They choose to have no more to do with God; and God swears that they shall never enter into his rest: so sin brings forth death. A man is brought by it to renounce the end for which he was made, to reject the means of his coming to the enjoyment of God, to provoke him to his face, and so to perish in his rebellion.

I have not mentioned these things to describe fully the power of indwelling sin in unregenerate men; only by a few instances I thought to give a glimpse of it. He who would have a fuller view of it needs only to open his eyes, to have a sight of that wickedness which rages all the world over. Let him consider the flood of the things mentioned by Paul to be "the fruits of the flesh," Galatians 5:19-21, - that is, among the sons of men, in all nations, towns, parishes; and then let him add to it that the world, which is full of the filth of these abominations, is a pleasant garden, a paradise, compared to the heart of man, where they are all conceived, and hourly millions more vile abominations, which, being stifled in the womb are never able to come forth; - let a man use the law for his light and rule, take this course, and if he has any spiritual discerning, he will quickly understand.

## CHAPTER 17.

The strength of sin shown from its resistance to the power of the law.

THE measure of the strength of any person or defended city may be assessed by the opposition they can endure without being overcome. If we hear of a city that has endured a long siege without being taken, whose walls have endured great assaults and are not demolished, then we conclude it strong, if not impregnable, though we have never seen it.

This is the power of indwelling sin. It is able to hold out, and not only to live, but also to maintain its dominion, against all opposition.

I shall mention only the opposition that is made to it by the law, which is often great, always fruitless; all its assaults are resisted, and it is not overthrown. The law opposes sin, and its power; as, -

1. It reveals it. Sin in the soul is like a hidden fever in the body, - its being undetected is a great means of its power; or as traitors in a civil state, - whilst they lie hid, they vigorously carry on their design. Most men know nothing of this sickness, the death of their souls. Though they have been taught the principles of it, they know nothing of its power. They know it not so as to deal with it as their mortal enemy; as a man cannot be said to know that he has a hectic fever, if he loves his life, and does nothing to stop its progress.

So the law reveals this enemy; it convinces the soul that there is such a traitor in its bosom: Romans 7:7, "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, you shall not covet." "I had not known it;" that is, fully, clearly. Conscience will be troubled about it; but a man cannot thus know it clearly. It gives a man such a sight of it as the blind man had in the gospel on the first touch of his eyes: "He saw men like trees walking," - obscurely. But when the law comes, it gives the soul a distinct sight of this indwelling sin. Again, "I had not known it;" that is, the depth of it the habitual inclination of my

nature to sin, which is here called "lust," as it is in James 1:14. "I had not known it," or not known it to be sin, "but by the law." This, then, the law does, - it draws out this traitor from secret places, the recesses of the soul. When the law comes, a man is no longer ignorant of his enemy. If he will now perish at his hand, it is knowingly; he has to admit that the law warned him of him, revealed him to him, and cried about him in his various affections, as an officer does when he discovers a thief, calling out for assistance to arrest him.

2. The law not only reveals sin, but reveals it to be a very bad inmate, pernicious to the soul: Romans 7:13, "Was what is good," - that is, the law, - "made death to me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by what is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." What I mean is that sin is made known by the law, - it is seen to be sin; and it is seen in its true colours, - exceedingly sinful. The law makes the soul know the guilt of this indwelling sin, - how great, how vile it is, how against God, how hated by him. The soul shall never again look on it as a small matter when it has been so greatly caught out.

As a man who finds himself ill, and sends for a physician of skill, asks for a diagnosis; he, considering his condition, tells him, "Alas! I am sorry for you; the case is very different than you imagine: your disease is mortal, and it has proceeded so far, pressing on your spirits and infecting all your blood, that I think you will only live a few hours without treatment." So it is in this case. A man may have some trouble in his mind and conscience about indwelling sin; he finds all not so well as it should be with him, more from the effects of sin and its continual eruptions than the nature of it, which he hopes to wrestle with. But now, when the law comes, it lets the soul know that its disease is terminal, that it is exceeding sinful, as being the cause of his alienation from God; and thus also the law proceeds against it.

3. The law judges the person, or lets the sinner plainly know what he is to expect, on the account of this sin. This is the law's proper work; its revealing property is preparative to its judging. The law is itself

when it is in the throne. Here it minces not the matter with sinners, as we use to do one with another, but tells him plainly," 'You' are the 'man' in whom this exceeding sinful sin dwells, and you must answer for the guilt of it." And I think if anything could rouse a man to opposite it, utterly to destroy it, this would be it. The law lets him know that on account of this sin he is under the curse and wrath of God; it pronounces the sentence of everlasting condemnation on him for it. "Abide in this state and perish," is its language. It gives the soul this warning in this world, and will leave it without excuse in the world to come.

4. The law so follows on its sentence, that it alarms the soul, and does not let it enjoy any peace in harbouring its sinful inmate. Whenever the soul has obeyed the commands of sin, the law immediately flies on it with the wrath of the Lord, and makes it tremble. It shall have no rest, but is like a poor beast that has a deadly arrow sticking in its sides, that makes it restless wherever it is and whatever it does.

5. The law does not stop here; it also slays the soul, Romans 7:9; that is, by convicting of the nature, power, and deserts of this indwelling sin, it deprives him in whom it is of all the self-righteousness and hope he used to sustain himself with, - it leaves him as a poor, dead, helpless, hopeless creature; and all this as it opposes this sin. May we not now expect that its power will be broken, - that it will die away before these strokes of the law of God? But the truth is, such is its power and strength, that it is quite otherwise. For by every fall it gains new strength; so is it with all the falls that are given to indwelling sin by the law: for, -

(1.) It is not conquered. A conquest infers two things in respect of the conquered, - first, loss of dominion; and, secondly, loss of strength. Whenever any one is conquered he is deprived of both these; he loses both his authority and his power. So when the strong man is overcome, he is bound and his goods are taken. But neither of these befalls indwelling sin by the assaults of the law. It loses none of its dominion or strength by all the blows that are given to it. The law

cannot do this, Romans 8:3; it cannot deprive sin of its power and dominion, for he who "is under the law is also under sin;" - that is, whatever power the law gets on the conscience of a man, so that he fears to sin, lest the sentence and curse of it should befall him, sin still reigns and rules in his heart. So the apostle says, Romans 6:14,

"Sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace;"

intimating plainly, that however much a person is subject to the authority of the law, it will not free him from the dominion of sin. The law, by all its work on the soul, instead of freeing it from the reign of sin, greatly increases its misery, as the sentence of the judge on the bench against a criminal adds to his misery. The soul is under the dominion of sin, and may abide securely in that woeful condition, fearing neither sin nor judgement. When the law sets on him, it brings him into great trouble and perplexity, but does not deliver him at all. It was thus with the Israelites when Moses had delivered his message to Pharaoh; they were so far from getting liberty by it that their bondage was increased, and "they found that they were in a very evil case," Exodus 5:19. We shall see that sin acts like Pharaoh; finding its rule disturbed, it grows more oppressive, and doubles the bondage of their souls. This is not, then, the work of the law, to destroy sin, or deprive it of dominion. Nor does it, by all these strokes of the law, lose anything of its strength; it continues both its authority and its force; it is neither destroyed nor weakened;

(2.) It is so far from being conquered that it is only enraged. The work of the law only provokes sin, and causes it to put out its strength with more power than formerly. This the apostle shows, Romans 7:9-13.

But you will say, "Do we not see by experience, that many are worked on by the preaching of the law to leave sins and amend their lives, and to contend against those other corruptions which they cannot yet put to death? And it cannot be denied that the law, when preached and applied to the conscience, has great power." I answer, -

[1.] It is acknowledged that the power of the law of God is very great. It shall surely do everything God intends. But the subduing of sin is not its work, - God did not design it for that; so it is no dishonour if it cannot do what is not its proper work, Romans 8:3.

[2.] Whatever effects it have on some, it makes no impression at all on most, such is the power of sin. Men may live many years in congregations where the law is powerfully preached, and applied to the consciences as to all the purposes for which the Lord wishes to use it, and be unmoved by it. They are neither convicted by it, nor awed, nor instructed; but continue deaf, ignorant, secure, as if they had never been told of the guilt of sin or the terror of the Lord. Congregations are full of these who proclaim the triumph of sin over the dispensation of the law.

[3.] When conviction, or awe, or insight occur, it is not from the power of the letter of the law, but from the power of the Spirit of God putting forth his virtue for that purpose; and we agree that the Spirit of the Lord can quell the power of lust when he pleases. But, -

[4.] Despite all that may be observed of the power of the law on the souls of men, yet it is evident that lust is not conquered, subdued, or put to death by it; for, -

1st. Though the course of sin may be repelled for a season by the law, yet its spring is not dried up. Though it hides itself for a season, it is but to shift out of a storm, and then to return again. As a traveller, meeting with a violent storm turns out of his way to some house or tree for his shelter, but so soon as the storm is over he returns to his way again; so it is with men in bondage to sin. They are in a course of pursuing their lusts; the law meets with them in a storm from heaven, terrifies and hinders them in their way. This turns them for a season out of their course; they will run to prayer or amendment of life, for some shelter from the fearful storm of wrath on their consciences. But is their course stopped? are their principles altered? Not at all; so

soon as the storm is over, they begin to lose that sense and the terror that was on them, and return to their former course in the service of sin. This was the state with Pharaoh once and again.

2dly. In such seasons sin is not conquered, but diverted. When it seems to fall under the power of the law, it is only turned into a new channel; it is not dried up. If you set a dam across a river, so that it turns all its streams in a new course, you will not say you have dried up that river, though some who look into the old channel may think that the waters are gone. So is it in this case. The streams of sin may run in open sensuality and profaneness; the preaching of the law sets a dam against these courses, - conscience is terrified, and the man dares not walk in his former ways. His companions in sin, not finding him in his old ways, begin to laugh at him for his scruples; believers begin to be persuaded that the work of God is on his heart, because they see his old streams dried up: but if there has been only a work of the law, the stream may be blocked, but the spring of sin is not dried up, only its streams are turned another way. Perhaps the man finds other more secret or more spiritual sins; or if he is turned from them also, all the strength of sin will take up residence in self-righteousness, and pour out filthy streams in the same way. So despite the work of the law on the souls of men, indwelling sin will keep alive in them still.

Some other evidences of the same truth.

1. The great labours of men ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, to subdue sin and put it to death, which are all fruitless, show the great strength and power of it.

Men who have no strength against sin may yet be made aware of the strength of sin. The way they usually come to that knowledge is by some previous sense they have of the guilt of sin. Men have this by the light of their consciences; they cannot avoid it. They have no choice; whether they will or not, they know sin to be evil, and such an evil that puts them under the judgement of God. This pricks the minds and consciences of some so far as that they are kept in awe, and dare not

sin as they would. Being awed with a sense of the guilt of sin and the terror of the Lord, men begin to abstain from sin, at least from such sins as they have been most terrified about. Whilst they have this design in hand, the strength and power of sin begins to reveal itself to them. They begin to find that there is something in them that is not in their own power; for, despite their resolutions, they sin still, in such a manner that their consciences tell them they must perish eternally. This puts them on self-efforts to suppress the eruption of sin, because they cannot be quiet unless so they do, nor have any peace within. Now, being ignorant of the only way that sin is to be put to death, - that is, by the Spirit of Christ, - they fix on many ways in their own strength to suppress it, if not to slay it; being ignorant of that only way where consciences burdened with the guilt of sin may be pacified, - that is, by the blood of Christ, - they labour in vain: for no man, by self-effort, can obtain peace with God.

Some of the ways they labour to suppress the power of sin, which causes them distress due to their inability to do so, we must look into:

(1.) They will vow not to do the sins they have been most liable to, and been most perplexed with. The psalmist shows this to be the main method that hypocrites use to get themselves out of trouble. They make promises to God, which he calls flattering him with the mouth, Psalm 78:36. So, being pricked with the guilt of sins that they have frequently been overtaken in, they promise that, at least for some time, they will not commit that sin again; and this is prescribed by some who pretend to direct their consciences. Conscience now makes them watch over themselves regarding that sin; so it has one of two effects. Either they abstain from it for a time, or they do not. If they do not, their sin is increased, and so their terror, and they are discouraged in making any opposition to sin; so, after one or two attempts, knowing only this way, of vowing against it, they cease all resistance, and become wholly the servants of sin, restrained only by outward considerations, without any serious efforts to recover. But if they succeed in their resolutions, and abstain from actual sins for a while, then either they think they have done their duty, and may

now indulge their lusts, and so are entangled again in the same sin; or they reckon that their vow and promise has preserved them, and so sacrifice to their own virtue, setting up a righteousness of their own against the grace of God, which rather than weakening indwelling sin, strengthens it. The best success that can be ascribed to this approach is that it restrains some eruptions of sin; but it does not weaken its power; so such persons, by all their labours, are far from being freed from the perplexing power of sin.

This is the state of most men under the power of conviction. Hell, death, and the wrath of God, are continually presented to their consciences; this makes them labour with all their strength against what most increases their fears, - that is, the actual eruption of sin: for while they are freed from that they feel safe, though sin defiles the heart continually. Outward medicines may cover running sores, and stop their corruption from coming forth, but they cause them to fester inwardly, and so, though it may be not so offensive as it was before, yet it is far more dangerous: so is it with this repelling of the power of corruption by men's vows against it, - external eruptions may be restrained for a time, but the inward root is not weakened in the least. And most commonly this is the result: - sin, having gained more strength, and being enraged by its restraint, breaks all its bounds, and captures the soul; which is the cause of most apostasies, 2 Peter 2:19, 20.

The Holy Ghost compares sinners, because of the fierce, poisonous nature of this indwelling sin, to lions, bears, and asps, Isaiah 11:6-9. Now, this is the excellency of gospel grace, that it changes the nature of these untamed beasts, making the wolf as the kid, the lion as the lamb, and the bear as the cow. When this is done, they may safely be trusted in, - "a little child may lead them." But self-effort does not change their nature; it only restrains their outward violence. He who takes a lion or a wolf and shuts him up from ravening, while his inward violence remains, will expect it to break its bonds, and fall to its former ways. Shutting them up does not change their natures, but only restrains their rage. So it is here: only grace can change the heart and take away the poison that is in it by nature; men's self-effort only

coerces them outwardly. But, -

(2.) Beyond bare vows and promises, with some watchfulness to observe them in a rational use of ordinary means, men may go to extraordinary lengths to put sin to death. This is the foundation of all that has a show of wisdom and religion in the Papacy: their hours of prayer, fastings; their cloistering themselves; their pilgrimages, penances, and self-torturing discipline, - spring all from this root. I shall not speak of the innumerable evils that have attended these self-invented ways of putting sin to death, and how all of them have been turned into occasions of sin; nor of the horrible hypocrisy of most of their observers; nor of that superstition which gives life to them all, riveted in the natures of some and their constitutions, fixed on others by prejudice, and taken up by others for secular advantages. I suppose the best that can be made of it is that it is a self-invented design of men ignorant of the righteousness of God, to check the power of indwelling sin. It is almost incredible what horrible sufferings this has carried men to; surely, their blind zeal and superstition will rise at the judgement to condemn the negligence of those to whom the Lord has granted the saving light of the gospel. But what is the end of these things? The apostle gives us an account, Romans 9:31, 32. They do not attain the righteousness they aim at; they do not conform to the law: sin is not put to death, or the power of it weakened; but what it loses in carnal pleasures, it gains in blindness, superstition, self-righteousness, and soul-pride, contempt of the gospel and the righteousness of it, and reigns no less than in the worst sinners in the world.

2. The strength and power of this law of sin may be farther seen from its life in the soul, despite the wound that is given to it in the first conversion of the soul to God; and in the continual opposition to it by grace.

The humility, self-abasement, watchfulness, diligence, and application to the Lord Christ for relief, which befit those who find the power of this law of sin in themselves by experience, have been mentioned

through the whole book.

"To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."