

Human Sinfulness

by Gardiner Spring

The wickedness of man is great, with every inclination of the thoughts of his heart being only evil all the time, and it requires the exceeding greatness of God's power to subdue it.

Scripture: Genesis 6:5, Genesis 6:12, Psalm 51:5, Proverbs 4:23, Jeremiah 17:9, John 3:3, Romans 3:10, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Human Depravity", "Total Depravity"

Description

Gardiner Spring preaches about the profound wickedness of man's heart as described in Genesis, emphasizing the continuous evil inclinations and the deceitful nature of human sinfulness. He highlights the importance of understanding the depth of human depravity before conversion, stressing that God alone can transform the sinful heart. Spring explains that human wickedness is great, unyielding, and pure, existing in all ages and places, and that only through the grace of God can man be saved from the eternal consequences of such depravity.

Transcript

"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." Genesis 6:5

"The earth was corrupt and filled with violence; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." Genesis 6:12

It is one thing to describe human sinfulness, and another to define it. We describe it, when we furnish illustrations of it, when we speak of its nature or properties, and when we represent it by its resemblance to other things; we define it, when we so describe it that it cannot be mistaken, and show wherein it differs from other things which it resembles.

Next to just views of God, just views of the morally depraved character of man, are essential to the knowledge of divine truth. There is no doctrine more important to a scriptural theology and a scriptural piety, than the truth which the Scriptures reveal in relation to the character of man prior to his conversion. It stands among the first things which God has so distinctly revealed.

One reason why he left the family of man without a written revelation, during the patriarchal age, and without those specific laws and numerous restraints imposed upon them in subsequent ages, and without

those tokens of his displeasure which ultimately cut off almost the entire population of the earth; was to give the human heart the opportunity of acting itself out, of developing its true character, and of showing the obduracy, strength, and growth of its wickedness. The experiment was full, and the lessons to be derived from it are such as may never be forgotten. The sun shone brightly; the blessings of providence were showered down on every side; the wise gloried in their wisdom, the rich in their riches, and the mighty in their might. Men everywhere walked in the ways of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes. The proud were happy, and the men of violence and blood triumphant. The most enviable comforts were reserved for the proudest heart; the highest honors for the most flagitious life; the most remarkable deliverances for the most irreverent and presumptuous. "The earth was corrupt and filled with violence; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth."

They filled up the measure of their iniquity, and treasured up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. They were left, in no small degree, to themselves, and at liberty to act as they pleased. And most fully did they discover their true character, and show what was in their hearts. Giant sinners they were, and men mighty and renowned for wickedness. And not until this melancholy development was made, was that memorable sentence written, the force of which no philosophy has been able to pervert, no criticism to fritter away, and no false and smooth theology to pare off: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." We have nothing to do, but honestly and faithfully analyze this definition, in order to have some just conceptions of human wickedness, and of the natural heart.

The first remark we make concerning it is, that this is the view of man's fallen nature, as it is presented to the eye of God. It were no marvel that men do not take this view of themselves, or of one another. They are not used to take a just view of their own character; nor is it an easy thing for them so to do. We read of one whose prayer was, "Lord, make me to know my transgression and my sin!" There are obstacles to be surmounted in becoming acquainted with themselves, so great, that it requires even more than the ordinary lights of truth and conscience to make this honest disclosure. The Savior has taught us that "when he, the Spirit of truth has come, he will convince the world of sin." To nothing are men more blind than to the abominations of the human heart; nor are there any impressions which they stifle and resist more vigorously than those which give them just conceptions of themselves.

We do not suppose that any other being in the universe would have given such a picture of the human character as is here furnished, except that God who searches the thoughts and tries the hearts of men. The characters of men are not concealed from him; he sees that the picture, dark as it is, is true to the life. It is not God who caricatures men by representing them better than they are. They are men who daub with untempered mortar, and speak smooth things, because they are partial, and seek to please men, and do not look on the heart.

God knows and sees all things; it is the heart that he looks at, as well as the outward deportment; nor is his judgment ever wrong or perverted. He has no mistaken views of the human character; nor does he ever form a false or extravagant estimate. There is no secret place where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves from his searching scrutiny. No knowledge and no ignorance, no original or incurred obligations, no station in society and no influence however acquired, no circumstances which render human wickedness more or less aggravated, escapes his notice.

Whatever gives character to it--whether it be the motive, the deed, the time, the place, the manner, the struggles of conscience resisted, the admonitions disregarded, the barriers broken through--all is

accurately observed by him who weighs the actions of men. Desires of wickedness that are never gratified; purposes of iniquity that are never accomplished; iniquity that is prevented by the restraints of his providence; iniquity that is embarrassed by a sense of shame, and by the fear of its consequences; is all written in the book of his omniscience, as with a pen of iron and the point of a diamond.

Whatever views men may take of their own character, and whatever views they may preach from the pulpit, or publish to the world through the press; and however they may deceive and mislead their fellow-men by them; they cannot practice this deception upon God. He has a full view of their wickedness, both present and past. Men sometimes, by some sudden flash of conscience, or some unlooked-for lifting of the veil from their hearts, see their own sins; but they easily forget these impressions.

Even those who are most impartial in their self-inspection, most faithful in their scrutiny, and most patient in their retrospection, remember but a very small part of the numerous transgressions of which they have been guilty. Memory sometimes runs back and alights upon some particular sin, the image of which haunts the imagination; the remembrance of one sin sometimes leads to the recollection of others, until, by those laws of association which influence the mind, the gloomy path and the black recesses of wickedness are laid open; and in such a retrospect, the conscience feels a burden which it is impossible to throw off but by throwing a cloud of oblivion upon the past.

But the affecting spectacle is always present to the divine mind. To his view, with whom a thousand years are as one day, the sins of the past are like the sins of yesterday. To no being in the universe is the history of human wickedness so perfectly known. He himself was the writer of that history for nearly four thousand years; while his providence has written it from the fall of man to the present hour. In discussing the doctrine of man's moral depravity, therefore, our appeal must be to what God himself has written.

The next remark is that the WICKEDNESS OF MAN IS GREAT WICKEDNESS. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth." It is always great; great in its nature, even where the overt expressions of it are not marked with high degrees of enormity. The mere fact that it is committed against God, is a transgression of his law, and assumes the character and position of revolt against his lawful authority, renders it "exceedingly sinful." The spirit from which it originates is the most vile, reckless, and selfish spirit in the universe, and is enough to stamp it with infamy. It is a deceitful and malignant spirit; the poison of asps is under its lips, and its mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Jesus Christ, with all his characteristic meekness and mildness, when addressing wicked men, speaks of them as "serpents and a generation of vipers," and declares that they "are of their father, the devil, and the lusts of their father they will do."

If we advert also to the various forms which it assumes, and the numerous ways in which it is expressed, we cannot avoid the conclusion that it is great wickedness. It is radical atheism; "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." It is enmity against God; this the Scriptures declare to be the characteristic of every "carnal mind." It is forgetfulness of God; "of the Rock that begat you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God that formed you." It is disregard of God; for it "sets at nothing all his counsel, and would none of his reproof." It is bold and impudent; for it "casts his law behind its back," and "provokes him to anger continually to his face." There is no expression of ingratitude with which it is not familiar; God's complaint against men is, that "he has nourished and brought them up as children, but they have rebelled against him." It is stupid and brutish; "wise to do evil, but to do good it has no knowledge." It "gropes in the dark," and makes men "stagger, like a drunken man." It is "like the deaf adder that stops her ear;" it "delights in" its scorning; it "hates knowledge and knows not at what it stumbles;" it "loves darkness rather

than light, because its deeds are evil;" and it "receives not the things of the Spirit of God, because they are foolishness to it, neither can it know them because they are spiritually discerned." It is deceitful and hypocritical; "speaking peace when mischief is in its heart," "feeding on ashes," "holding fast deceit," "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," "waxing worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

If we fix our thoughts upon deeds of wickedness the most vile and cruel, the most malignant and spiteful, the most implacable and unmerciful, the most expressive of diverse lusts and pleasures, the most sensual, the most excessive, and the most devilish; we find them all, in all their atrocious and sickening forms, among the deeds predicated in the Scriptures of the heart of man. Idolatry, with all its concomitant vices and corruptions--Sabbath-breaking, with all its negligence, its abuses, its contempt of the sanctuary and its secret sins--the crushing severity of parents toward their children, and the willful disobedience of children to their parents--murder with its blackest horrors, and war with its fiercest devastations--licentiousness with its degrading associations, and its abysses of ignominy--covetousness, dishonesty, and fraud--lying lips and a slanderous tongue--all that tramples under foot the laws of God and man, with all that is subversive of the best interests of men for time and eternity; are but the indices of the great wickedness that finds its place and is nurtured in the heart of man.

What scenes of moral depravity present themselves to view, when we look upon the world around us! Were the being who is the perpetrator of such deeds of wickedness, to act without disguise, concealment, or restraint; what proofs would he not furnish of surpassing wickedness, and how far short of that spirit and those deeds of evil which are now found only in the abodes of the devil and the damned, would be the ordinary deeds of men! Or, if from these, we look at a different class of sins, and turn our thoughts to the neglect and rejection of the glorious gospel of the ever-blessed God; what proof do they furnish of great wickedness! Mark the lightness and unconcern with which the mass of men in Christian lands treat the claims of Christian piety. Listen to the sneers of infidelity, and to the contemptuous merriment of those who are not infidel; observe the profane ribaldry with which men regard the religion of the Son of God and its divine Author; and how convincing the proof that such people are guilty of great wickedness. Observe too the multitudes who, while they outwardly respect the claims of this salvation, refuse to accept it, and will not come to Jesus Christ that they might have life. Where this aversion to that which is full of truth and grace? Why is it that men turn away from that which is so lovely, pure, glorious, that angels stoop down in admiration of its beauty and excellence? Man surely must be a strangely depraved being, thus to turn away from that which every holy and virtuous mind in the universe delights in. Sin men can practice with greediness; evil courses they can pursue; but to turn from evil, to welcome the grace that would rescue them from this bondage of iniquity and death, they have no heart. And what do these things demonstrate, but that the wickedness of man is great in the earth; that his moral tendencies are on the side of sin, and the natural current of his mind is downward, and not easily resisted?

There are also several characteristics of human wickedness which confirm these general views. One of these is the strength and vigor of men's evil propensities. In the emphatic language of the prophet, the heart of man is "desperately wicked." It is deeply imbedded wickedness. It grows with the growth of the intellectual and physical faculties, and strengthens with their strength. It is the master power of the soul, and rules it with despotic sway. It blinds the understanding, perverts the conscience, corrupts and bribes the memory, pollutes the imagination, and makes the man a slave to sin. He is in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity.

The Scriptures speak of the strength and intensity of human wickedness in no measured terms. Our Lord told the unbelieving Jews, that "they were of their father the devil, and the lusts of their father they would

do." He told them "they were serpents and a generation of vipers." Nor is the human heart, all the world over, by nature, any too good to incur this opprobrium. Paul says of the heart of every unrenewed man, that "it is enmity against God." It possesses no such mildness and inoffensiveness as men frequently flatter themselves exists. Wickedness is in its nature strong and vigorous. It is difficult to conceive of stronger principles of action, than dwell in the bosom of every unrenewed man, when once they are incited. The human heart has nothing within itself to suppress the most vigorous and fearful expressions of sin. It will always express any degree of wickedness for which it discovers sufficient inducements, if not prevented by the restraining grace, or the restraining providence of God. Esau would have slain Jacob, but for this restraint. Cataline would have slaughtered Cicero and the Roman senate; Napoleon would have added to slaughtered armies still greater slaughters, had not the providence of God restrained his sword. Conspiracy upon conspiracy, well matured in the heart of man, would have been accomplished in deeds of blood and fire, but for the restraints of a higher power. It ever has been, and still is the high prerogative of God to "restrain the wrath of man." Both good men and bad would have committed a thousand acts of wickedness where they have committed one, had not God controlled and restrained their hearts. Many an amiable and moral man who has indignantly repelled the charge that he hated God, has afterwards been brought to see that he had a heart that could hate him. Many a man who has revolted at crimes committed by his fellow men, has afterwards found, when circumstances and motives favored the deed, that his own heart was none too good to perpetrate the same enormities. Many a man, who like the king of Israel, when the prophet disclosed his future wickedness, has exclaimed, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this thing!" has afterwards, like this self-deluded monarch, practiced the very enormities, from the prospect of which he once shrunk with horror.

And what do these things teach us, but that there is a strength as well as an extent of corruption within the heart of man that is of the most alarming character. The heart of man was no worse in the days of Herod, and Pontius Pilate, and Nero, than it is now. Wicked men do not need more wicked hearts than they have, to conduct themselves just as the greatest prodigies of wickedness have done before them. You cannot name a sin so vile, but it has been engendered in the heart of man, man's hand has perpetrated it. It is a point of easy demonstration, that men have hearts that are capable of deliberate wickedness of the highest aggravation. Nothing is too desperate for them to devise and perpetrate. Is there a sin which blinds the understanding, sears the conscience, pollutes and stupefies the senses, and ruins the soul; the heart of man has committed it. Is there a crime so great as to expose its perpetrators to ignominy, exile, and death from their fellow men; the history of man is the history of such crimes. Is there iniquity so great that God will not forgive it either in this world, or the world to come; very often have men committed it. Are there crimes which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, and which have been known only to the all-seeing God? Ten thousand times ten thousand such crimes have been treasured up in the human heart. The history of the sinner's life would fill him with amazement and dismay; but what would be his dismay, if "the unwritten, secret history of his, heart" should be disclosed? Which of us would consent to have the history of his desires and thoughts read out before the world? Never after such a disclosure would it again be doubted that the wickedness of man is great. It is a view of man's wickedness that shocks us, and one that is almost incredible, when we say, in sober earnest, that the difference between wicked men on earth and wicked men in hell is, that here in this world of hope, and mercy, the exercises of the depraved heart are controlled and suppressed; and there, in that world of despair and wrath, they are ungoverned and acted out. All doubt will soon vanish. The world of disembodied spirits will soon tell who among us have a heart that is desperately wicked, and are vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.

Another characteristic of man's heart consists in the obduracy and determination of its wickedness. We can conceive of wickedness which is to the last degree vigorous and intense; but then it may not be so unyielding and determined as to resist, and, with unconquerable obstinacy, every possible inducement to holiness. Yet, if there be a truth that is clearly taught in the Scriptures, it is that the wickedness of the human heart is such that it is insuperable by any finite power. The Scriptures represent it as a "heart of stone." They affirm that the wicked are "hardhearted," and "stout-hearted and far from righteousness." They do indeed speak of the subjugation of its obstinacy and stoutness; but it is not by the might, nor power of man. They speak of its voluntary and cheerful surrender to Jesus Christ, but it is by the "exceeding greatness of that power which God wrought when he raised him from the dead." They speak of its submitting to God; but it is only when made willing and in the day of divine power. Deep is the shadowing here given of the human character. What exceeding sinfulness, and what strange and unaccountable willfulness of depravity is that which is open to no successful attack, until subdued by Almighty grace!

Instruct a wicked man in all the principles of revealed religion; set before his mind the unreasonableness of his conduct; furnish him with every conceivable consideration to diminish the extent or weaken the vigor of his iniquity: and it is all to no effect. No light of truth will subdue his determined heart; the more he sees and knows, the more vigorously does he resist and rebel. Set before him the infinite authority of the God he has provoked; and he shall tremble under the weight of it, but he will not turn and live. Allure him by the divine goodness and mercy; and the goodness of God does not lead him to repentance. Set before him the fullness and all-sufficiency of the mighty Savior, the promises and invitations of his gospel, and the glories of God's right hand; and no tenderness of Jesus' love, no hope of pardon, no fellowship of the saints, or joys of heaven, will allure his obdurate heart. It has a determination of purpose which nothing earthly can change. Such is his obduracy, that he cannot come to Christ, unless the Father draws him. Probe his conscience, and make him tremble; unman his fortitude, and make him weep, you may; you may pour upon his ear that "trumpet of horror" that will by-and-by awake the dead; you may draw aside the veil of eternity, and show him that hell is naked before him, and that destruction has no covering; and though he may be awakened, and may cry out in agony, yet there is nothing in all the terrors of the pit that loosens his bonds, or that can induce him to break off his iniquities by righteousness, and his transgressions by turning to God.

He is chained to his purpose by a spirit of desperation; and the more you urge him by considerations the most tender and the most fearful, the more does his obstinacy keep pace with all the difficulties you throw in his way. Even when the minds of the wicked are awake to the instructions of God's word, and to the solemn and affecting expostulations of his providence, they will stand and resist the force of the truth and the obligations of duty, and contend with their Maker to the last. No, when the Eternal Spirit is striving with them; when he opens their eyes to see their danger, and awakens their consciences to feel their guilt; when he makes them feel that they are in the broad way that leads to death, and that they must repent and believe the gospel, or perish: they still cleave to their wickedness, and had rather perish than repent and believe the gospel. It is then their carnal mind rises in most sensible and determined hostility to God; their iniquity revives, and they sin faster and stronger than ever. The more light and convictions are thrown upon their minds, the more unyielding do their hearts become. The Scriptures set this in a very strong light when they say, "Though you grind a fool in a mortar, among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." If omnipotent grace does not interpose, they persist in their obduracy.

Another feature in this early description of human wickedness is, THAT IT IS PURE AND UNMINGLED WICKEDNESS. That sin to no small extent is one of the distinctive properties of the human race, is a fact too obvious to be called in question. Those who hold the most loose opinions of human depravity, do not deny that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." But whether man is by nature a totally depraved being; and whether his wickedness is such as to be without any mixture of holiness, is a question which has ever divided the unevangelical from the evangelical world.

That some are worse than others; that no man is as bad as he is capable of being, and as he will be in future and more matured stages of his wickedness, are positions we are not disposed to controvert; nor is it necessary to controvert them in order to maintain the doctrine of total depravity. That doctrine we understand to be, that every man is by nature destitute of holiness, and that whatever in his nature or conduct is capable of being compared with the law of God, is positively sinful.

And is not this the view of the human character which is given in the Scriptures? What is the meaning of the declaration, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." If every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil, what is there in his heart that is not evil? If this evil is continual, and without interruption, where is there any room for one right principle, emotion, or act?

Elsewhere, we are instructed that "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart." What is there good in the heart that is full of evil? "There is none righteous," says the Apostle, "no, not one; there is none that does good, no, not one." This Apostle himself, even before his conversion, was a man of blameless outward deportment, and even a rigid and severe religionist; afterward, he was one of the most self-denying and devoted servants of God the world has seen; yet he says of himself "I know that in me, that is in my flesh,--my unrenewed mind,--there dwells no good thing."

The import of these and similar declarations is, that all the moral dispositions and exercises of man's heart, until it is renewed by the Spirit of God, are sinful. No matter how wise and accomplished men may be; no matter how worthy of confidence in their communion with their fellow men; no matter how amiable and mild in their natural dispositions; if unrenewed, their hearts are the seat of unmixed wickedness, and they are altogether inclined to evil. Their thoughts are sinful; their desires, their purposes and motives are sinful; whatever passes through their minds, of which the law of God takes cognizance, is evil and not good, disobedience and not obedience.

And thus their whole heart is sinful. All that appertains to it is unholy and wrong. The exterior may be fair, but there is nothing but moral corruption within. There is a fullness of iniquity, which, though it flow not forth in the filth and scum of wickedness, sends forth streams that are mingled with no good thing. There is no cessation in the streams, and there is no purity. Their "inward thought is very wickedness." They may please men, and be the objects of their admiration and applause; but so long as they are in the flesh, "they cannot please God."

They are destitute of everything which God requires and approves. And hence the Scriptures so familiarly represent them as "dead in sin;" not diseased merely, but dead; not dead to the claims and obligations of holiness, but dead in sin. And hence, in enforcing this truth, the Scriptures also so familiarly represent it as necessary that they should be "born again," and "pass from death unto life," before the first pulse of spiritual life, or true holiness, throbs within their bosoms. Such men sin as constantly as they act; the "ploughing of the wicked is sin," because it comes from so sinful a heart. They sin as constantly as they

think; nor can the amount of their iniquity be estimated without a due estimate of the unnumbered thoughts and emotions of wickedness that pass with such amazing rapidity through their minds. There is not a single claim of God or of his truth, of his purposes or his government, of his law or his gospel, of what he is, has done, or will perform, toward which the state of their hearts is not just the opposite of what he requires. Such is the extent and universality of their wickedness.

Still another fact to which this first definition of human wickedness bears witness is, THAT WHAT IS THERE AFFIRMED OF ONE AGE OF THE WORLD IS TRUE OF MAN EVERYWHERE AND IN ALL AGES. The objection that this description of human wickedness is applicable only to a very corrupt age, and a very degenerate race, is more plausible than solid. Where is the evidence that human nature is essentially changed from the days of Noah to the present hour? The language of the sacred historian is certainly strong and comprehensive.

It is the wickedness of man of which he speaks; they are the imaginations of the thoughts of man's heart, wherever he is found, until he is renewed by the grace of God. When you look at the character of the antediluvian world, and compare it with the character of subsequent ages, under the same moral culture, do you not perceive that it is the true index of fallen humanity all over the world? You inspect the conduct of such men as Nimrod, Pharaoh, Jeroboam, Manasseh, and Ahab; and though you see human nature in some of its worst forms, you only see what is in the heart of man.

It is the eagle allured by the scent of prey; and "where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together!" You look into the pages of history, and read the achievements of ambition, the plots of treachery, the deeds of wrong and violence, of lust and blood; and what do you survey, if not the character of man? You observe the human character in the great marts of business; you advert to places and scenes where wicked men are congregated in large masses; you traverse the streets of London, or Paris, or Lisbon, or Stockholm, or Constantinople, where the habits are formed under influences not the most favorable to moral virtue; and what do we observe if not the character of man?

If you ask the merchant and the ship owner what views they have formed of human nature; it might call up the blush of shame upon their face to give an honest answer. If you inquire of the judge on the bench, or the barrister at the bar, and who have more or better opportunities of scrutinizing the characters of men, they will tell you that there is very little sterling virtue in the world. The melancholy fact is, that those who know the most of mankind, in all countries, in all climates, and under all circumstances, know the most of human wickedness, and have the most humiliating impressions of human depravity.

Nor can the universal fact be accounted for, that the old are so much more suspicious than the young, but that the more men themselves know of men, the more are they convinced that they are not trustworthy. If it be still said, that this is unfair and disingenuous reasoning, we demand again, where is the unfairness? If you reply, it is not true that all men are thus wicked; we reply, we do not affirm that they are so; and only affirm that such examples indicate what is in man, and that left to himself he is no better than this.

We do not, as it is slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, assert that the character of the race is to be decided by its prisons; but this we say, that the hearts of the best of men are, by nature, no better than the hearts of the worst of men. If the conduct of one wicked man is not so bad as the conduct of another, or if in any of its forms it differs from that of others; it is not because there is naturally any radical difference in their hearts, but because their character is formed under different exterior influences.

All have not the same capacity for wickedness; nor the same strength of appetite and passions; nor the same opportunities of sinning; nor the same temptations and inducements. Man is substantially the same being everywhere; under the same training and motives, his heart will act itself out much in the same way. The stream of corruption without never rises higher than the fountain of corruption within. The reason why some men are good and some are bad, is that the difference is made by the grace of God.

The reason why some wicked men are more wicked than others, and the reason why the same men are more wicked at some times than at others, is that their minds are not so vigorous at one time as at another, and they are impelled by stronger considerations. Their wickedness is always as great as the state of their minds and their outward condition will allow, because "the imagination of the thoughts of their heart is evil, only evil continually."

With this view of human wickedness, what must be our reflections? What everlasting unworthiness of all good, and what everlasting desert of evil are befitting us as men! What an aggregate of wickedness is treasured up against the man whose iniquity is unpardoned! If the reader can number the sands on the shore, or weigh the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance, then can he estimate his own ill-desert. How deep the wickedness in the heart of man; how deep the abyss of misery into which he deserves to fall! "Infinite upon infinite" scarcely fathoms these depths. All the plagues that are written in God's book do not adequately measure the desperate wickedness of the human heart.

Why is it, then, that so many cry, peace! peace! but that the heart of man is "deceitful above all things." Men are strangely blind to their own character. How true it is, that "he that trusts to his own heart is a fool!" Memory is treacherous; but the heart is more treacherous. The imagination is full of lying vanities; but the heart is a greater liar even than the imagination. It is made up of deception, because it is made up of wickedness. It deceives others and it deceives itself. It practices its deceptions with amazing and dire success, overreaching and outrunning its own original intentions of wickedness, breaking its promises and vows, and hurrying men down the vortex of their own passions when they thought the surface was equable and smooth. It is no rare occurrence for them to confess that they err in judgment, and that their outward conduct is faulty; but very rarely are they convinced that the more radical error is error at heart.

It is surprising to see how soon the heart expresses its deceitfulness, and at what an early age it is acted out. On almost every other subject, except those which are religious and moral, a little child, unless it has been tampered with, is ingenuous and honest. But on this whole class of subjects, no sooner is the conscience awake, than the heart proves a traitor. It is most ingeniously deceitful, and has at its command all the arts of palliation, apology, quibbling, and tergiversation which are discoverable in more matured minds. There is nothing more observable in wicked men, and there is nothing of which good men more complain, than the deceitfulness of their hearts. Deceit is one of the deep-seated characteristics of the heart of man, and adheres to him with indomitable pertinacity; it sloughs off even from the moral constitution of good men, with the last excrescence's of the body of sin and death.

It is a marvel in the view of some, that men should be often so agitated and distressed by a sense of their wickedness. But why should any marvel at a fact so easily accounted for? What more is necessary in order to fill the mind with anxiety and distress, than for any man to "know the plague of his own heart!" Let the most thoughtless man in the world see this, and he cannot help feeling that he has a burden too great for him to bear. His own conscience unites with the truth of the Bible in assuring him that the wrath of God abides on him; that he is a dying man, and must soon appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; and that it is but the recompense due to his sins, if he escape not the damnation of hell. The marvel is, that there

should be an unconverted man in the world, who is not pricked in his heart, and does not cry out, with the alarmed thousands on the day of Pentecost, "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved!" O this heart of wickedness! this heart of adamant! What must eternity be to a man who has such a heart!

This is no false alarm which I am sounding. No man can go into eternity with such a heart and be safe. He must become an altered man, or be lost. "Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Human wickedness does not change itself; it is never so wise, nor so well balanced, nor is it ever so sorely pressed, and in such a state of suspense, as to alter its own course. No, it is an iron despotism which omnipotence must break. Such a man stands on slippery places. Ministers may preach to him; Christians may pray for him; but he must have other helpers, and find refuge in him who "has mercy on whom he will have mercy."

Here lies all our hope for lost and ruined man. Time and opportunity will fit them for perdition; infinite grace alone can overcome this heart of sin, and fit them for the joys of God's right hand. Nor may any man quarrel with this truth, until he finds he can be saved without it. Nor may he make it a refuge of lies, and plead it as an excuse for not breaking off his iniquity by righteousness, and his transgressions by turning to God. Flee I pray you from the delusion of a heart that would thus deceive you to your own undoing.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/gardiner-spring/human-sinfulness/>

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