

Sin

by J.C. Ryle

J.C. Ryle's sermon on sin emphasizes its definition, origin, extent, and the profound need for understanding its nature in relation to holiness and salvation.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:6, Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 5:21-28, Luke 12:48, Romans 5:12, Romans 6:23, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Ephesians 2:3, Hebrews 3:13, 1 John 3:4

Topics: "Grace and Redemption", "Understanding Sin"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the critical importance of understanding sin as the foundation of Christian holiness. He argues that a clear view of sin is essential for grasping doctrines like justification and sanctification, as it reveals the true nature of human corruption inherited from Adam. Ryle warns against the deceitfulness of sin, which often leads individuals to underestimate its severity and their own guilt before God. He concludes that recognizing the depth of sin should lead to greater humility and a deeper appreciation for the grace of God found in Jesus Christ, who provides the remedy for our sinful condition.

Transcript

SIN

"Sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4).

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

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

of the chief wants of the contemporary church has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.

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

"Sin," speaking generally, is, as the Ninth Article of our church declares, "the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusts always against the spirit; and, therefore, in every person born into the world, it deserves God's wrath and damnation." Sin is that vast moral disease which affects the whole human race, of every rank and class and name and nation and people and tongue, a disease from which there never was but one born of woman that was free. Need I say that One was Christ Jesus the Lord?

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

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

Again, I need not tell a careful student of the New Testament, that there are sins of omission as well as commission, and that we sin, as our Prayer Book justly reminds us, by "leaving undone the things we ought to do," as really as by "doing the things we ought not to do." The solemn words of our Master in the Gospel of St. Matthew place this point also beyond dispute. It is there written: "Depart . . . , you cursed, into everlasting fire . . . for I was an hungry, and you gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink" (Matt. 25:41, 42).

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

2. Concerning the origin and source of this vast moral disease called "sin," I am afraid that the views of many professing Christians on this point are sadly defective and unsound. I dare not pass it by. Let us, then, have it fixed down in our minds that the sinfulness of man does not begin from without, but from within. It is not the result of bad training in early years. It is not picked up from bad companions and bad

examples, as some weak Christians are too fond of saying. No! It is a family disease, which we all inherit from our first parents, Adam and Eve, and with which we are born. Created "in the image of God," innocent and righteous at first, our parents fell from original righteousness and became sinful and corrupt. And from that day to this all men and women are born in the image of fallen Adam and Eve and inherit a heart and nature inclined to evil. "By one man sin entered into the world." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." "We are by nature children of wrath." "The carnal mind is enmity against God." "Out of the heart [naturally, as out of a fountain] proceed evil thoughts, adulteries" and the like (Rom. 5:12; John 3:6; Eph. 2:3; Rom. 8:7; Mark 7:21).

The fairest child, who has entered life this year and become the sunbeam of a family, is not, as his mother perhaps fondly calls him, a little "angel" or a little "innocent," but a little "sinner." Alas! As that infant boy or girl lies smiling and crowing in its cradle, that little creature carries in its heart the seeds of every kind of wickedness! Only watch it carefully, as it grows in stature and its mind develops, and you will soon detect in it an incessant tendency to that which is bad, and a backwardness to that which is good. You will see in it the buds and germs of deceit, evil temper, selfishness, self-will, obstinacy, greediness, envy, jealousy, passion, which, if indulged and let alone, will shoot up with painful rapidity. Who taught the child these things? Where did he learn them? The Bible alone can answer these questions! Of all the foolish things that parents say about their children there is none worse than the common saying: "My son has a good heart at the bottom. He is not what he ought to be, but he has fallen into bad hands. Public schools are bad places. The tutors neglect the boys. Yet he has a good heart at the bottom." The truth, unhappily, is diametrically the other way. The first cause of all sin lies in the natural corruption of the boy's own heart, and not in public schools.

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

I admit fully that man has many grand and noble faculties left about him, and that in arts and sciences and literature he shows immense capacity. But the fact still remains that in spiritual things he is utterly "dead" and has no natural knowledge, or love, or fear of God. His best things are so interwoven and intermingled with corruption, that the contrast only brings out into sharper relief the truth and extent of the Fall. That one and the same creature should be in some things so high and in others so low; so great and yet so little; so noble and yet so mean; so grand in his conception and execution of material things and yet so groveling and debased in his affections; that he should be able to plan and erect buildings like those at Carnac and Luxor in Egypt and the Parthenon at Athens, and yet worship vile gods and goddesses and birds and beasts and creeping things; that he should be able to produce tragedies like those of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and histories like that of Thucydides, and yet be a slave to abominable vices like those described in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans--all this is a sore puzzle to those who sneer at "God's Word written" and scoff at us as bibliolaters. But it is a knot that we can untie with the Bible in our

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

Let us remember, beside this, that every part of the world bears testimony to the fact that sin is the universal disease of all mankind. Search the globe from east to west and from pole to pole; search every nation of every climate in the four quarters of the earth; search every rank and class in our own country from the highest to the lowest--and under every circumstance and condition, the report will be always the same. The remotest islands in the Pacific Ocean, completely separate from Europe, Asia, Africa and America, beyond the reach alike of Oriental luxury and Western arts and literature, islands inhabited by people ignorant of books, money, steam and gunpowder, uncontaminated by the vices of modern civilization, these very islands have always been found, when first discovered, the abode of the vilest forms of lust, cruelty, deceit and superstition. If the inhabitants have known nothing else, they have always known how to sin! Everywhere the human heart is naturally "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). For my part, I know no stronger proof of the inspiration of Genesis and the Mosaic account of the origin of man, than the power, extent and universality of sin. Grant that mankind have all sprung from one pair and that this pair fell (as Genesis 3 tells us), and the state of human nature everywhere is easily accounted for. Deny it, as many do, and you are at once involved in inexplicable difficulties. In a word, the uniformity and universality of human corruption supply one of the most unanswerable instances of the enormous "difficulties of infidelity."

After all, I am convinced that the greatest proof of the extent and power of sin is the pertinacity with which it cleaves to man, even after he is converted and has become the subject of the Holy Spirit's operations. To use the language of the ninth Article: "This infection of nature does remain--yes, even in them that are regenerate." So deeply planted are the roots of human corruption, that even after we are born again, renewed, washed, sanctified, justified and made living members of Christ, these roots remain alive in the bottom of our hearts and, like the leprosy in the walls of the house, we never get rid of them until the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved. Sin, no doubt, in the believer's heart, has no longer dominion. It is checked, controlled, mortified and crucified by the expulsive power of the new principle of grace. The life of a believer is a life of victory and not of failure. But the very struggles which go on within his bosom, the fight that he finds it needful to fight daily, the watchful jealousy which he is obliged to exercise over his inner man, the contest between the flesh and the spirit, the inward "groanings" which no one knows but he who has experienced them--all, all testify to the same great truth, all show the enormous power and vitality of sin. Mighty indeed must that foe be who even when crucified is still alive! Happy is that believer who understands it and, while he rejoices in Christ Jesus, has no confidence in the flesh and, while he says, "Thanks be unto God who gives us the victory," never forgets to watch and pray lest he fall into temptation!

4. Concerning the guilt, vileness and offensiveness of sin in the sight of God, my words will be few. I say "few" advisedly. I do not think, in the nature of things, that mortal man can at all realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the sight of that holy and perfect One with whom we have to do. On the one hand, God is that eternal Being who "charges His angels with folly" and in whose sight the very "heavens are not clean." He is One who reads thoughts and motives as well as actions and requires "truth in the inward

parts" (Job 4:18; 15:15; Ps. 51:6). We, on the other hand--poor blind creatures, here today and gone tomorrow, born in sin, surrounded by sinners, living in a constant atmosphere of weakness, infirmity and imperfection--can form none but the most inadequate conceptions of the hideousness of evil. We have no line to fathom it and no measure by which to gauge it. The blind man can see no difference between a masterpiece of Titian or Raphael and the queen's head on a village signboard. The deaf man cannot distinguish between a penny whistle and a cathedral organ. The very animals whose smell is most offensive to us have no idea that they are offensive and are not offensive to one another. Fallen men and women, I believe, can have no just idea what a vile thing sin is in the sight of that God whose handiwork is absolutely perfect--perfect whether we look through telescope or microscope; perfect in the formation of a mighty planet like Jupiter, with his satellites, keeping time to a second as he rolls round the sun; perfect in the formation of the smallest insect that crawls over a foot of ground. But let us nevertheless settle it firmly in our minds that sin is "the abominable thing that God hates"; that God "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon that which is evil"; that the least transgression of God's law makes us "guilty of all"; that "the soul that sins shall die"; that "the wages of sin is death"; that God will "judge the secrets of men"; that there is a worm that never dies and a fire that is not quenched; that "the wicked shall be turned into hell" and "shall go away into everlasting punishment"; and that "nothing that defiles shall in any wise enter" heaven (Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13; James 2:10; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23; Rom. 2:16; Mark 9:44; Ps. 9:17; Matt. 25:46; Rev. 21:27). These are indeed tremendous words, when we consider that they are written in the book of a most merciful God!

No proof of the fullness of sin, after all, is so overwhelming and unanswerable as the cross and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and the whole doctrine of His substitution and atonement. Terribly black must that guilt be for which nothing but the blood of the Son of God could make satisfaction. Heavy must that weight of human sin be which made Jesus groan and sweat drops of blood in agony at Gethsemane and cry at Golgotha, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). Nothing, I am convinced, will astonish us so much, when we awake in the resurrection day, as the view we will have of sin and the retrospect we will take of our own countless shortcomings and defects. Never until the hour when Christ comes the second time will we fully realize the "sinfulness of sin." Well might George Whitefield say, "The anthem in heaven will be: What has God wrought!"

5. One point only remains to be considered on the subject of sin, which I dare not pass over. That point is its deceitfulness. It is a point of most serious importance and I venture to think it does not receive the attention which it deserves. You may see this deceitfulness in the wonderful proneness of men to regard sin as less sinful and dangerous than it is in the sight of God and in their readiness to extenuate it, make excuses for it and minimize its guilt. "It is but a little one! God is merciful! God is not extreme to mark what is done amiss! We mean well! One cannot be so particular! Where is the mighty harm? We only do as others!" Who is not familiar with this kind of language? You may see it in the long string of smooth words and phrases which men have coined in order to designate things which God calls downright wicked and ruinous to the soul. What do such expressions as "fast," "gay," "wild," "unsteady," "thoughtless," "loose" mean? They show that men try to cheat themselves into the belief that sin is not quite so sinful as God says it is, and that they are not so bad as they really are. You may see it in the tendency even of believers to indulge their children in questionable practices, and to blind their own eyes to the inevitable result of the love of money, of tampering with temptation and sanctioning a low standard of family religion. I fear we do not sufficiently realize the extreme subtlety of our soul's disease. We are too apt to forget that temptation to sin will rarely present itself to us in its true colors, saying, "I am your deadly enemy and I want to ruin you forever in hell." Oh, no! Sin comes to us, like Judas, with a kiss, and like Joab, with an outstretched

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

And now, before I go further, let me briefly mention two thoughts which appear to me to rise with irresistible force out of the subject.

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

With my whole heart I subscribe to that passage in Hooker's sermon on "Justification," which begins: "Let the holiest and best things we do be considered. We are never better affected unto God than when we pray; yet when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted! How little reverence do we show unto the grand majesty of God unto whom we speak! How little remorse of our own miseries! How little taste of the sweet influence of His tender mercies do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if in saying, 'Call upon Me,' He had set us a very burdensome task? It may seem somewhat extreme, which I will speak; therefore, let every one judge of it, even as his own heart shall tell him, and not otherwise; I will but only make a demand! If God should yield unto us, not as unto Abraham--if fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yes, or if ten good persons could be found in a city, for their sakes this city should not be destroyed but, and if He should make us an offer thus large: 'Search all the generations of men since the Fall of our father Adam, find one man that has done one action which has passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all, and for that one man's only action neither man nor angel should feel the torments which are prepared for both,' do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be found to be among the sons of men? The best things which we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned." *

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

On the other hand, I ask my readers to observe how deeply thankful we ought to be for the glorious gospel of the grace of God. There is a remedy revealed for man's need, as wide and broad and deep as man's disease. We need not be afraid to look at sin and study its nature, origin, power, extent and vileness, if we only look at the same time at the almighty medicine provided for us in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Though sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. Yes: in the everlasting covenant of redemption, to which Father, Son and Holy Spirit are parties; in the Mediator of that covenant, Jesus Christ the righteous, perfect God and perfect Man in one Person; in the work that He did by dying for our sins and rising again for our justification; in the offices that He fills as our Priest, Substitute, Physician, Shepherd and Advocate; in the precious blood He shed which can cleanse from all sin; in the everlasting righteousness that He brought in; in the perpetual intercession that He carries on as our Representative at God's right hand; in His power to save to the uttermost the chief of sinners, His willingness to receive and pardon the vilest, His readiness to bear with the weakest; in the grace of the Holy Spirit which He plants in the hearts of all His people, renewing, sanctifying and causing old things to pass away and all things to become new--in all this (and oh, what a brief sketch it is!)-in all this, I say, there is a full, perfect and complete medicine for the hideous disease of sin. No wonder that old Flavel ends many a chapter of his admirable Fountain of Life with the touching words: "Blessed be God for Jesus Christ."

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

a. I say, then, in the first place, that a scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to that vague, dim, misty, hazy kind of theology which is so painfully current in the present age. It is vain to shut our eyes to the fact that there is a vast quantity of so-called Christianity nowadays which you cannot declare positively unsound, but which, nevertheless, is not full measure, good weight and sixteen ounces to the pound. It is a Christianity in which there is undeniably "something about Christ and something about grace and something about faith and something about repentance and something about holiness," but it is not the real "thing as it is" in the Bible. Things are out of place and out of proportion. As old Latimer would have said, it is a kind of "mingle-mangle," and does no good. It neither exercises influence on daily conduct, nor comforts in life, nor gives peace in death; and those who hold it often awake too late to find that they have got nothing solid under their feet. Now I believe the likeliest way to cure and mend this defective kind of religion is to bring forward more prominently the old scriptural truth about the sinfulness of sin. People will never set their faces decidedly towards heaven and live like pilgrims until they really feel that they are in danger of hell. Let us all try to revive the old teaching about sin in nurseries, in schools, in training colleges, in universities. Let us not forget that "the law is good if we use it lawfully" and that "by the law is the knowledge of sin" (1 Tim. 1:8; Rom. 3:20; 7:7). Let us bring the law to the front and press it on men's attention. Let us expound and beat out the Ten Commandments and show the length and breadth and depth and height of their requirements. This is the way of our Lord in the sermon on the mount. We cannot do better than follow His plan. We may depend upon it, men will never come to Jesus and stay with Jesus and live for Jesus unless they really know why they are to come and what is their need. Those whom the Spirit draws to Jesus are those whom the Spirit has convinced of sin. Without thorough conviction of sin, men may seem to come to Jesus and follow Him for a season; but they will soon fall away and return to the world.

b. In the next place, a scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to the extravagantly broad and liberal theology which is so much in vogue at the present time. The tendency of modern thought is to reject dogmas, creeds and every kind of bounds in religion. It is thought grand and wise to condemn no opinion whatever, and to pronounce all earnest and clever teachers to be trustworthy, however heterogeneous and mutually destructive their opinions may be. Everything, forsooth, is true and nothing is false! Everybody is right and nobody is wrong! Everybody is likely to be saved and nobody is to be lost! The atonement and substitution of Christ, the personality of the devil, the miraculous element in Scripture, the reality and eternity of future punishment, all these mighty foundation-stones are coolly tossed overboard, like lumber, in order to lighten the ship of Christianity and enable it to keep pace with modern science. Stand up for these great verities, and you are called narrow, illiberal, old-fashioned and a theological fossil! Quote a text, and you are told that all truth is not confined to the pages of an ancient Jewish book, and that free inquiry has found out many things since the book was completed! Now, I know nothing so likely to counteract this modern plague as constant clear statements about the nature, reality, vileness, power and guilt of sin. We must charge home into the consciences of these men of broad views and demand a plain answer to some plain questions. We must ask them to lay their hands on their hearts and tell us whether their favorite opinions comfort them in the day of sickness, in the hour of death, by the bedside of dying parents, by the grave of a beloved wife or child. We must ask them whether a vague earnestness, without definite doctrine, gives them peace at seasons like these. We must challenge them to tell us whether they do not sometimes feel a gnawing "something" within, which all the free inquiry and philosophy and science in the world cannot satisfy. And then we must tell them that this gnawing "something" is the sense of sin, guilt and corruption, which they are leaving out in their calculations. And, above all, we must tell them that nothing will ever make them feel rest but submission to the old doctrines of man's ruin and Christ's redemption and simple childlike faith in Jesus.

c. Furthermore, a right view of sin works as an antidote to a ceremonial and formal kind of Christianity which has carried away so many in its wake. Unenlightened minds may find such a view of religion attractive in a certain sense, yet I cannot see how a sensuous and formal religion can thoroughly satisfy the Christian. A little child is easily quieted and amused with playthings, toys and dolls, as long as he isn't hungry. Let him feel the cravings of nature within, and you will discover quickly that only food can nourish him and satisfy his hunger. Likewise, a man's soul will not find satisfaction in music and flowers and candles and incense and banners and processions and beautiful vestments and confessionals and humanly contrived ceremonies. He may amuse himself with such, but let his soul awaken and rise from the dead, and he will not rest content with these things. They will seem to him mere solemn triflings and a waste of time. Let him see the scope of his sin, and he will also see his need for his Savior. He hungers and thirsts, and nothing will satisfy him but the bread of life. The prominence of this form of formal and sensuous Christianity, I dare to say, would not exist if Christians were taught more often in fullness the nature, vileness and sinfulness of sin.

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

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

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

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

As to the best remedy for the state of things I have mentioned, I will venture to give an opinion. Other schools of thought in the churches must judge for themselves. The cure for evangelical churchmen, I am convinced, is to be found in a clearer apprehension of the nature and sinfulness of sin. We need not go back to Egypt and borrow semi-Roman "Catholic" practices in order to revive our spiritual life. We need not restore the confessional, or return to monasticism or asceticism. Nothing of the kind! We must simply repent and do our first works. We must return to first principles. We must go back to "the old paths." We must sit down humbly in the presence of God, look the whole subject in the face, examine clearly what the Lord Jesus calls sin, and what the Lord Jesus calls doing His will. We must then try to realize that it is terribly possible to live a careless, easy-going, half-worldly life, and yet at the same time to maintain evangelical principles and call ourselves evangelical people! Once we see that sin is far viler and far nearer to us and sticks more closely to us than we supposed, we will be led, I trust and believe, to get nearer to Christ. Once drawn nearer to Christ, we will drink more deeply out of His fullness and learn more

thoroughly to "live the life of faith" in Him, as St. Paul did. Once taught to live the life of faith in Jesus, and abiding in Him, we will bear more fruit, will find ourselves more strong for duty, more patient in trial, more watchful over our poor weak hearts, and more like our Master in all our little daily ways. Just in proportion as we realize how much Christ has done for us, will we labor to do much for Christ. Much forgiven, we will love much. In short, as the apostle says, "With open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image . . . even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

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

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