

Of Actual Sins and Transgressions.

by John Gill

The sermon discusses the nature and types of actual sins, including sins against God, others, and oneself, and the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost.

Scripture: Galatians 5:19

Topics: "The Nature of Sin", "Sin and Redemption"

Description

John Gill addresses the concept of actual sins and transgressions, explaining how the corruption of human nature, stemming from Adam's sin, leads to various actual sins categorized as the 'works of the flesh.' He emphasizes that these sins can be internal or external, against God, others, or oneself, and highlights the importance of understanding the nature and consequences of sin in relation to God's law. Gill also discusses the distinctions between sins of omission and commission, as well as the degrees of sin, ultimately pointing to the necessity of Christ's sacrifice for redemption from these sins.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 3--Chapter 12

OF ACTUAL SINS AND TRANSGRESSIONS.

From the sin of Adam arises the corruption of nature, with which all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, are infected; and from the corruption of nature, or indwelling sin, arise many actual sins and iniquities; which are called in scripture, "The works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19), or corrupt nature, in distinction from the fruits of the Spirit, or inward principles of grace and holiness; (see Gal. 5:17,22). These are the same with the "lusts of the flesh", and "the desires" or "wills of the flesh" (Eph. 2:3).

The internal sinful actings of the mind will; even all manner of concupiscence, which lust or corrupt nature works in men, and which war against the soul: they are called sometimes, "the deeds of the body", of the body of sin; which, through the Spirit, are mortified weakened, kept under, so as not to be frequently committed, and be a course of sinning (Rom. 8:13 6:6). And sometimes, the deeds of the old man, the old principle of corrupt nature, to be put off, with respect to the outward conversation, and not be governed by the dictates of it (Col. 3:9 Eph. 4:21).

Sometimes they are represented by corrupt fruit, brought forth by a corrupt tree; such is man's sinful heart and nature, and such the acts that spring from it: if the tree is not good, good fruit will not grow upon it: the heart must be made good ere good works can be done by men, (Matthew 7:16-20; 12:33). Those actual sins are the birth of corrupt nature, which is like a woman that conceives, bears, and brings forth; "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin" (Jam. 1:15; Rom. 7:5).

Corrupt nature is the fountain, and actual sins, whether internal or external, are the streams that flow from it; "Out of the heart", as from a fountain, "proceed evil thoughts", &c. (Matthew 15:19), as is the spring, so are the streams; if water at the fountainhead is bitter, so are the streams; "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place, sweet water and bitter?" No. Actual sins are deviations from the law of God; for "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Actions, as natural actions, are not sinful; for all actions, or motions, are from God, the first Cause; from whom nothing sinful comes; creatures depend on him in acting, as well as in subsisting; "In him we move"; or otherwise they would be independent of him; whereas, "all things are of him".

But an action is denominated good or bad, from its agreement or disagreement with the law of God, its conformity or disconformity to it; it is the irregularity, obliquity, and aberration of the action from the rule of the divine law, that is sin; and this whether in thought, word, or deed; for actual sins are not to be restrained to outward actions, performed by the members of the body, as instruments of unrighteousness; but include the sinful actings of the mind, evil thoughts, carnal desires, the lusts of the heart, "heresies", errors in the mind, false opinions of things, and "envyings", are reckoned among the "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:20,21).

And when we distinguish actual sins from original sin, we do not mean thereby that original sin is not actual. The first sins of Adam and Eve were actual sins, transgressions of the law of God; "Eve was in the transgression"; that is, guilty of an act of transgression; and we read of "Adam's transgression", which designs the first sin he committed (1 Tim. 2:14; Rom. 5:14). And original sin, as derived from the sin of our first parents, is also actual; it is a want of conformity to the law of God, and is very active and operative; as it dwells in men, it works in them all manner of concupiscence; it hinders all the good, and puts upon doing all the evil it can; and is itself exceeding sinful.

But actual sins are second acts, that flow from the corruption of nature. My business is not now to enlarge on particular sins, by explaining the nature, and showing the evil of them; which more properly belongs to another part of my scheme that is to follow, even "Practical Divinity". I shall therefore only treat of actual sins very briefly, in a doctrinal way, by giving the distribution of sins into their various sorts and kinds, reducing them to proper classes, and ranging them under their respective heads. 1.

First, With respect to the object of sin, it may be distinguished into sins against God; sins against others, our neighbours, friends, and those in connection with us; and against ourselves; for which distinction there seems to be some foundation in 1 Samuel 2:25. "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?"-- 1a. There are some sins that are more immediately and directly against God; all sin, indeed, is ultimately against him, being contrary to his nature and will; a transgression of his law; a contempt and neglect, and indeed a tacit denial of his legislative power and authority; who is that "Lawgiver that is able to save and to destroy".

The sins of David against Uriah are confessed by him to be against the Lord; "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). But there are some sins more particularly pointed at him, committed against

him, in an open, bold, and audacious manner; "Their tongues and their doings are against the Lord" (Isa. 3:8). Such are they as Eliphaz describes, who "stretch out their hands against God" (Job 15:25,26), their carnal minds being enmity against God. Particularly sins against the first table of the law, are sins against God; such as atheism in theory and in practice; which is, a denying that there is a God, and strikes at the very Being of him: blasphemy of his name, his perfections, and providences; which is one of the things that proceed from the evil heart of man: idolatry, having other gods before him, and serving the creature besides the Creator; bowing down to, and worshipping idols of gold, silver, brass, wood, and stone: to which may be added, sensuality, voluptuousness, making the belly a god, and covetousness, which is idolatry: taking the name of God in vain, using it on trifling occasions, and in a light and irreverent manner: cursing fellow creatures in the name of God, and swearing falsely by it, which is perjury: want of love to God, and of fear of him; having no regard to his worship, private and public; a profanation of the day of worship, and a neglect of the ordinances of divine service. 1b.

Sins against others, are the violations of the second table of the law; as disobedience to parents; not giving that honour, showing that reverence and respect, and paying that regard to their commands that ought to be: to which head may be reduced, disobedience to all superiors; the king as supreme, the father of his country; subordinate magistrates; ministers of the word, masters, &c. Murder, or the taking away of the life of another, is a sin against the sixth command, as the former are against the fifth; of this there are divers sorts; as parricide, fratricide, &c. which last is the first actual sin we read of after the sin of our first parents: it seems as if the sin of murder greatly abounded in the old world, since at the beginning of the new, a special law respecting it was made; "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6).

All sins of unchastity, in thoughts, and by obscene words and filthy actions, are violations of the seventh command, which forbids adultery, fornication, incest, and all unnatural lusts: taking away a man's property, privately or publicly, by force or fraud, by false accusations, and by circumventing and overreaching in trade and business, are breaches of the eighth command; and not only doing injury to the persons and properties of others, but to their good name, credit, and reputation, comes under the name of actual sins against others; for taking away a man's good name is as bad as taking away his money, and is next to taking away his life. 1c.

There are sins against a man's self; the apostle reckons fornication as sinning "against" a man's "own body" (1 Cor. 6:18), what is a pollution of it brings dishonor upon it, fills it with nauseous diseases, and weakens the strength of it. Drunkenness is another sin against a man's self; it is what deprives him of the exercise of his reason, impairs his health, wastes his time, his substance, and at last his body. Suicide is a sin against a first principle of nature, self-preservation.

The Stoics applaud it as an "heroic" action; but it is a base, mean, and cowardly one; and betrays want of fortitude of mind to bear up under present adversity, and to meet what is thought to be coming on. However, no man has a right to dispose of his own life; God is the giver, or rather lender, of it, and he only has a right to take it away. 2. Secondly, With respect to the subject of sin, it may be distinguished into internal and external; sins of heart, lip, and life; or of thought, word, and action. 2a.

Internal sins, sins of the heart; the plague of sin begins there, that is the seat of it; it is desperately wicked, it is wickedness itself; and out of it all manner of sin flows; the thoughts of it are evil, they are abominable to God, and very distressing to good men, who hate vain thoughts; the very thought of foolishness or wickedness is sin.[1] The imagination of the thoughts of the heart is evil continually; the very substratum of

thought, the motions of sin in the mind, work to bring forth fruit unto death; the desires and lusts of the mind are carnal and sinful, which are various; the lust of uncleanness in the heart; the lust of passion, wrath, and revenge; the lust of envy, which the object of it cannot stand before, and which slays the subject of it; the lusts of ambition and pride; and which are thus summed up by the apostle, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:15).

Errors in the mind, false opinions of things contrary to the word of God; all unreasonable doubts, even in saints themselves; and all the actings of unbelief, which proceed from an evil heart, come under this sort of sins, internal ones, or sins of the heart. 2b. Sins of the lip, or of words, which are external, openly pronounced, whether respecting God or man, and one another; as all blasphemy of God, evil speaking of men, cursing and swearing, lying one to another; all obscene and unchaste words, every sort of corrupt communication; all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking; all foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient; yea, every idle word, comes into the account of sin, and will be brought to judgment; see (Eph. 4:25,29,31 5:4; Matthew 12:36,37). 2c.

Outward actions of the life and conversation; a vain conversation, a course of sin, the garment spotted with the flesh, right eye and right hand sins, and all that the members of the body are used as instruments in the commission of. 3. Thirdly, With respect to the parts of sin: they may be divided into sins of omission and sins of commission; when some things are left undone which should be done, and which are done when they ought not to be; such a distinction may be observed in the words of Christ, or however a foundation for it there is in them (Matthew 23:23; 25:42-44), and both these sorts of sins are very strongly expressed in Isaiah 44:22-24.

Sins of omission are against affirmative precepts, not doing what is commanded to be done; sins of commission are against negative precepts, doing what is forbidden to be done; (see Jam. 4:17). 4. Fourthly, Sin may be distinguished by the principle from whence it arises. Some sins arise from ignorance, as in the princes of the world, that crucified the Lord of life and glory; in the apostle Paul when unregenerate, in persecuting the saints, and doing many things contrary to the name of Jesus; and which he did ignorantly, and in unbelief; and in others who know not their master's will, and so do it not, and yet pass not uncorrected; especially whose ignorance is willful and affected, who know not, nor will understand, but reject and despise the means of knowledge, and say to God, depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways; the sins of others are presumptuous ones, and are done willfully, knowingly, and of choice, and who are worthy of many stripes; (see Luke 12:47,48).

Some sins are through infirmity of the flesh, the power of Satan's temptations, and the snares of the world, which men are betrayed into through the deceitfulness of sin, and are overtaken and overpowered at an unawares, and surprised into the commission of them; and which is the case oftentimes of the people of God. 5. Fifthly, Sins may be distinguished by the degrees of them into lesser and greater; for all sins are not equal, as the Stoics say;^[2] and some are more aggravated than others, with respect to the objects of them; as sins against God are greater than those against men; violating of the first table of the law, greater than that of the second: and with respect to persons that commit them, and with respect to time and place when and where they are committed, with other circumstances; some are like motes in the eye, others as beams.

Our Lord has taught us this distinction, not only in Matthew 7:3-5 but when he says, "He that delivered me unto thee, hath the greater sin" (John 19:11). And this appears from the different degrees of punishment of sin, which are allotted in proportion to it; so as our Lord speaks of some cities, where his doctrines were

taught, and his miracles wrought, and repented not, that it would be "more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, than for them" (Matthew 11:20-24). According to the laws of Draco, all sins were equal, and all were punished with the same capital punishment; the stealing of an apple, as the murder of a man.

Hence it was said, that Draco wrote his laws, not in ink, but in blood.[3] Not such are the laws of God; nor such the nature of sin according to them. 6. Sixthly, Sins may be distinguished by their adjuncts. As, 6a. Into secret and open sins. Secret sins are such as are secretly committed, or sins of the heart; which none but God, and a man's own soul, are privy to; and some pass through it unnoticed and unobserved by the good man himself; and are opposed to presumptuous sins; which distinction may be observed in Psalm 19:12, 13.

Others are done openly, publicly, before the sun, and in sight of all, without fear or shame. Some men's sins go beforehand to judgment; they are notorious ones; condemned by all, before the judgment comes; and others more secretly committed, they follow after; for all will be brought into judgment (1 Tim. 5:24; Eccl. 12:14). 6b. The papists distinguish sin into venial and mortal: which cannot be admitted without a limitation or restriction; for though all sin is venial or pardonable, through the grace of God and blood of Christ, and is pardoned thereby, excepting one, that will be hereafter mentioned; yet none are pardonable in their own nature; or are so small and trifling as to be undeserving of death, only of some lesser chastisement; for all sin is mortal, and deserving of death; "The wages of sin", of any and every sin, without distinction of greater and lesser, is death, eternal death, as it must be; for "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things", be they greater or lesser, "written in the book of the law to do them": if, therefore, every breach of the law subjects to the curse of it, which is death, then every sin is mortal.

Yet, 6c. Sin may be distinguished into remissible and irremissible. All the sins of God's people are remissible, and are actually remitted. God forgives them all their iniquities, and heals all their diseases, their spiritual maladies: and on the other hand, all the sins of reprobates, of abandoned sinners, that live and die in final impenitence and unbelief, are irremissible; "He that made them will not have mercy on them", to forgive their sins; "And he that formed them will show them no favour that way (Isa. 27:11).

There is one sin which is commonly called, the "unpardonable sin", which is the sin, or blasphemy, against the Holy Ghost; and of which it is expressly said, that "it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come" (Matthew 12:31,32). But not every sin against the Holy Ghost is here meant; every sin committed against God is committed against the Holy Ghost, as well as against the Father and the Son; he, with them, being the one God, against whom all sin is committed: nor is it a denial of his deity, and of his personality, though sins against him, yet they arise from ignorance of him, and are errors in judgment; and from which persons may be recovered, and repent of, and renounce: nor is a denial of the necessity of the operations of his grace on the souls of men, in order to their regeneration, conversion, and sanctification, this sin, for the same reasons: men may, and good men too, grieve the Holy Spirit by their sins; yea, vex him, as the Israelites; and yet not sin the unpardonable sin: yea, a man may break all the Ten Commandments, and not sin the sin against the Holy Ghost; it is a sin not against the law, but against the gospel; it lies in the denial of the great and fundamental truth of the gospel, salvation by Jesus Christ, in all its branches; peace and pardon by his blood, atonement by his sacrifice, and justification by his righteousness; and this after he has received the knowledge of this truth, under the illuminations, convictions, and demonstrations of the Spirit of God; and yet, through the instigation of Satan, and the wickedness of his own heart, knowingly, and willfully, and maliciously denies this truth, and obstinately persists therein.

So that as he never comes to repentance, he has no forgiveness, here nor hereafter. Not because the Holy Spirit is superior to the other divine Persons; for they are equal: nor through any deficiency in the grace of God, or blood of Christ; but through the nature of the sin, which is diametrically opposite to the way of salvation, pardon, atonement, and justification; for these being denied to be by Christ, there can be no pardon; for another Jesus will never be sent, another Saviour will never be given; there will be no more shedding of blood, no more sacrifice, nor another sacrifice for sin; nor another righteousness wrought out and brought in.

And, therefore, there remains nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and indignation, to come on such persons. Upon all which it may be observed, from what a small beginning, as the sin of our first parents might seem to be, what great things have arisen; what a root of bitterness that was which has brought forth so much unwholesome and pernicious fruit; such a vast number of sins, and of such an enormous size: what a virtue must there be in the blood of Christ, to cleanse from such sins as these, and all of them; and in his sacrifice to make atonement for them; and in his righteousness to justify from them! And how great is the superabounding grace of God, that where sin has thus abounded, grace should superabound! ENDNOTES:

[1] Prov. xxiv. 9. This is a Christian doctrine; "apud nos et cogitare peccare est", Minutius Felix in Octavio, p. 39. and yet an heathen poet asserts it, from whom one would not have expected it; "nam scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat ullum, facti crimen habet---" Juvenal, Satire 13. v. 209. Vid. Alex. ab Alex. Genial. Dier. l. 2. c. 16.

[2] Laert. l. 7. Vita Zeno, p. 510.

[3] Plutarch in Solon. p. 87.

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