

# Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 240

## THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

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*Sin is the transgression  
of the law.*

1 John 3:4

### Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,  
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,  
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

# Free Grace Broadcaster

## THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

# 240

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# WHAT IS SIN?

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

**W**HAT is sin? Ah, what man is capable of supplying an adequate answer: “Who can understand his errors?” (Psa 19:12). A volume might be written thereon and still much be left unsaid. Only the One against Whom it is committed can fully understand its nature or measure its enormity. And yet, from the light that God has furnished us, a partial answer at least can be gathered. For example, we read in 1 John 3:4, “Sin is the transgression of the law”; and that such transgression is not confined to the outward act is clear from “the thought of foolishness is sin” (Pro 24:9). But what is meant by “sin is the transgression of the law”? It means that sin is a trampling upon God’s holy commandment. It is an act of defiance against the Lawgiver. [Because] the Law [is] “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12), it follows that any breach of it is an evil and enormity<sup>1</sup> that God alone is capable of estimating.

All sin is a breach of the eternal standard of equity.<sup>2</sup> But it is more than that: it reveals an inward enmity that gives rise to the outward transgression. It is the bursting forth of that pride and the self-will that resents restraint, that repudiates control, that refuses to be under authority, that resists rule. Against the righteous restraint of law, Satan opposed a false idea of “liberty” to our first parents: “Ye shall be as gods” (Gen 3:5). And he is still plying the same argument and employing the same bait. The Christian must meet it by asking, “Is the disciple to be above his Master, the servant superior to his Lord?” Christ was “made under the law” (Gal 4:4), lived in perfect submission thereto, and has left us an example that we should follow His steps...

Sin, then, is an inward state that precedes the evil deeds. It is a state of heart that refuses to be in subjection to God. It is a casting off the divine Law and setting up self-will and self-pleasing in its stead.

From *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



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<sup>1</sup> **enormity** – extreme or monstrous wickedness.

<sup>2</sup> **eternal...equity** – that is, God’s Law is the eternal standard of what is fair and right.

# SIN: AN INFINITE EVIL

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

**T**ELL me what you think of sin, and I will tell you what you think of God, of Christ, of the Spirit, of the divine Law, of the blessed gospel, and of all necessary truth. He who looks upon sin merely as a fiction, as a misfortune, or as a trifle<sup>1</sup> sees no necessity either for deep repentance or a great atonement.<sup>2</sup> He who sees no sin in himself will feel no need of a Savior. He who is conscious of no evil at work in his heart will desire no change of nature. He who regards sin as a slight affair will think a few tears or an outward reformation ample satisfaction. The truth is, no man ever thought himself a greater sinner before God than he really was. Nor was any man ever more distressed at his sins than he had just cause to be. He who never felt it to be an evil and a bitter thing to depart from God (Jer 2:19) is to this hour an enemy of his Maker, a rebel against his rightful and righteous Sovereign.

When God speaks of the evil of sin, it is in such language as this: “Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer 2:12-13). God is a God of truth and would never speak thus about anything that was not atrocious and enormous<sup>3</sup> in its very nature. Yet it should be observed that He mentions only such sins as are chargeable to all men, even the most moral and decent.

In this estimate of the evil of sin, the righteous do well agree with God. The most piteous<sup>4</sup> and bitter cries that ever ascended from earth to heaven were uttered under the sting of sin or were for deliverance from its power. In doctrine, there can be no worse tendency than that which diminishes men’s abhorrence of iniquity. Nor is there a darker sign in religious experience than the slightness of the impressions some have concerning the heinous nature of all sin. It is worse than poverty, sickness, reproach. It is worse than all sufferings. The reason is because it is “exceeding sinful” (Rom 7:13). The worst thing that

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<sup>1</sup> **trifle** – matter of little importance.

<sup>2</sup> See FGB 203, *Repentance*, and FGB 227, *Atonement*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>3</sup> **atrocious and enormous** – horrifyingly wicked and extremely evil.

<sup>4</sup> **piteous** – mournful.

can be said of any thought, word, or deed is that it is *wicked*. It may be foolish; but if it is sinful, it is infinitely worse. It may be vulgar and, as such, should be avoided; but if it is sinful, it should be avoided, were it ever so polite. An act may offend man and yet be very praiseworthy; but if it displeases God, nothing can excuse its commission.

Some have proposed curious and unprofitable questions respecting the *infinitude*<sup>5</sup> of the evil of sin. An answer to them would probably give rise to a host of others like them, so there would be no end of folly. Besides, men do not propose or discuss idle questions when they are anxious to know how they may be saved from sin. Then they cry, “Men and brethren, what must we do? Is there mercy, is there help, is there hope for such perishing sinners as we are? If so, where can we find salvation?” Questions that are merely curious and not practical in religion are unworthy of study and consideration. Yet it may be proper to say that anything is to us infinite, the dimensions of which we cannot gauge, the greatness of which we cannot understand. In this sense, sin is an infinite evil. We cannot set bounds to it. We cannot say, “Thus far it comes and no further” (*see* Job 38:11). “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jam 1:15). And who but God can tell all that is included in that fearful word *death*?

Moreover, sin is committed against an infinite God. The ill-desert<sup>6</sup> of any evil deed is to be determined in part by the dignity of the person against whom it is directed. To strike a brother is wrong; to strike a parent is worse. To strike a fellow-soldier is punishable with chains; to strike a commanding officer is punishable with death. On this principle, the Bible reasons, “If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him?” (1Sa 2:25). God is our Maker, Father, Governor, and Judge. He is glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders. He is the best of all friends, the greatest of all beings, the most bountiful of all benefactors. By ties stronger than death and more lasting than the sun, we are bound to love, fear, honor, and obey Him. To sin against Him is so impudent, ungrateful, and wicked that no created mind can ever adequately estimate its atrocity; and so, it is an infinite evil. If sin had its own way, it would dethrone the Almighty! All rebellion tends to the utter subversion of the government against which it is committed; and all sin is rebellion against the government of God. If men saw their sins aright, they would more highly prize di-

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<sup>5</sup> **infinitude** – quality of being infinite; having no limit.

<sup>6</sup> **ill-desert** – quality of deserving blame or punishment.

vine mercy; and if they had more worthy conceptions of God's grace, they would have more abasing views of themselves.

We may learn much of the evil nature of sin by the names that the Bible gives to it and to those who practice it. It is called disobedience, transgression, iniquity, foolishness, madness, rebellion, evil, evil fruit, uncleanness, filthiness, pollution, perverseness, frowardness,<sup>7</sup> stubbornness, revolt, an abomination, an accursed thing. In like manner, deeds of wickedness are called evil works, works of darkness, dead works, works of the flesh, works of the devil. And wicked men are called sinners, unjust, unholy, unrighteous, filthy, evil men, evil doers, seducers, despisers, children of darkness, children of the devil, children of hell, corrupters, idolaters, enemies of God, enemies of all righteousness, adversaries of God and man, liars, deceivers.

From low, meagre<sup>8</sup> apprehensions of the divine nature and law flow a slight estimate of the evil of sin, spiritual pride, self-conceit, and a disesteem<sup>9</sup> of the most precious righteousness of Jesus Christ. He who can go to Gethsemane and Calvary and come away with slight views of the evil nature of sin must be blind indeed. There God speaks in accents not to be misunderstood but by the willful. Yet such is the perverseness of men that they often refuse to learn even at the cross of Christ. Beveridge<sup>10</sup> says that man's understanding is so darkened "that he can see nothing of God in God, nothing of holiness in holiness, nothing of good in good, nothing of evil in evil, nor anything of sinfulness in sin. Nay, it is so darkened that he fancies himself to see good in evil and evil in good, happiness in sin and misery in holiness." We all naturally belong to the generation of "the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears." In coincidence with these general views, Brooks<sup>11</sup> says, "There is no sin little because [there is] no little God to sin against."

Bunyan<sup>12</sup> near death said, "No sin against God can be little because it is against the great God of heaven and earth; but if the sinner can find out a little God, it may be easy to find out little sins."

John Owen<sup>13</sup> says, "He that hath slight thoughts of sin, never had great thoughts of God."

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<sup>7</sup> **frowardness** – perversity; quality of being turned away from what is right or good.

<sup>8</sup> **meagre** – inadequate; insufficient.

<sup>9</sup> **disesteem** – lack of respect; low opinion.

<sup>10</sup> **William Beveridge** (1637-1708) – Anglican bishop, preacher, and author.

<sup>11</sup> **Thomas Brooks** (1608-1680) – Puritan Congregational preacher and author.

<sup>12</sup> **John Bunyan** (1628-1688) – English preacher and one of the most influential writers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Luther<sup>14</sup> said, “From the error of not knowing or understanding what sin is, there necessarily arises another error—that people cannot know or understand what grace is.”

The Westminster Assembly<sup>15</sup> says, “Every sin, even the least, being against the sovereignty, goodness, and holiness of God and against His righteous law, deserveth His wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come, and cannot be expiated<sup>16</sup> but by the blood of Christ.”

Paul says, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23).

Chrysostom<sup>17</sup> says, “There is in human affairs nothing that is truly terrific<sup>18</sup> but sin. In all things else, in poverty, in sickness, in disgrace, and in death (which is held to be the greatest of all evils), there is nothing that is really dreadful. With the wise man, they are all empty names. But to offend God, to do what He disapproves, this is real evil.”

Truly, every wise man will say that he has cause to cry, “Show me my sin, my lost condition; show me Thy love, Thy mercy. Show me the extent, the holiness, the spirituality of Thy commandments. Reveal Thy Son in me. Let Him be the cure of sin, both of its horrible pollution and its horrible guilt.”

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www.sprinklepublications.net.

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**William S. Plumer (1802-1880):** American Presbyterian minister and author; born in Greensburg, PA, USA.



Sin is not only a revolt against God, but a deification of self. It is a determination to gratify my own inclinations; it is saying, “I will be lord over myself.”—*A. W. Pink*

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<sup>13</sup> **John Owen** (1616-1683) – English Congregational pastor, author, and theologian.

<sup>14</sup> **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German monk, theologian, and university professor, whose ideas inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.

<sup>15</sup> **Westminster Assembly of Divines** – council of divines (theologians) appointed to restructure the Church of England; meeting from 1643 to 1653, it produced a new form of church government, a confession of faith, two catechisms, and the Directory for Public Worship.

<sup>16</sup> **expiated** – cleansed from guilt; paid for.

<sup>17</sup> **John Chrysostom** (c. 347-407) – early theologian, bishop, and eloquent preacher of the Greek Church.

<sup>18</sup> **terrific** – causing terror; dreadful.

# NOTHING SO VILE AS SIN

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

**W**E may take a survey of everything in and on the earth, and we cannot find anything so vile as sin. The basest and most contemptible thing in this world has some degree of worth in it, as being the workmanship of God. But sin and its foul streams have not the least part of worth in them. Sin is wholly evil, without the least mixture of good—vileness in the abstract. Its heinousness<sup>1</sup> appears in its author: “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning” (1Jo 3:8). Sin is his trade, and he practices it incessantly.<sup>2</sup> Sin’s enormity is seen in what it has done to man: it has completely ruined his nature and brought him under the curse of God. Sin is the source of all our miseries; all unrighteousness and wretchedness are its fruits. There is no distress of the mind, no anguish of the heart, no pain of the body, but is due to sin. All the miseries that mankind groans under are to be ascribed to sin. It is the cause of all penalty: “Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart” (Jer 4:18). Had there been no sin, there would have been no wars, no national calamities, no prisons, no hospitals, no insane asylums, no cemeteries! Yet who lays these things to heart?

Sin assumes many garbs; but when it appears in its nakedness, it is seen as a black and misshapen monster. How God Himself views it may be learned from the various similitudes<sup>3</sup> used by the Holy Spirit to set forth its ugliness and loathsomeness. He has compared it with the greatest deformities and the most filthy and repulsive objects to be met with in this world. Sin is likened to (1) the scum of a seething pot in which is a detestable carcass (Eze 24:12); (2) the blood and pollution of a newborn child, before it is washed and clothed (Eze 16:4, 6); (3) a dead and rotting body (Rom 7:24); (4) the noisome<sup>4</sup> stench and poisonous fumes that issue from the mouth of an open sepulcher (Rom 3:13); (5) the lusts of the devil (Joh 8:44); (6) putrefying sores (Isa 1:5–6); (7) a menstruous cloth (Isa 3:22; Lam 1:17); (8) a canker

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<sup>1</sup> **heinousness** – monstrous and outrageous wickedness.

<sup>2</sup> **incessantly** – without ceasing.

<sup>3</sup> **similitudes** – comparisons drawn between two things.

<sup>4</sup> **noisome** – extremely offensive smell.



or gangrene<sup>5</sup> (2Ti 2:17); (9) the dung of filthy creatures (Phi 3:8); (10) the vomit of a dog and the wallowing of a sow in the stinking mire (2Pe 2:22).

Such comparisons show us something of the vileness and horrible-ness of sin; yet in reality, it is beyond all comparison. There is a far greater malignity<sup>6</sup> in sin than is commonly supposed even by the majority of church members. Men regard it as an infirmity and term it a human frailty or hereditary weakness. But Scripture calls it “an evil thing and bitter” (Jer 2:19), an abominable thing that God hates (Jer 44:4). Few people think of it thus; rather, the majority regard it as a mere trifle, a matter of so little moment that all they have to do is cry in the hour of death, “Lord, pardon me; Lord, bless me,” and all will be eternally well with them. They judge sin by the opinion of the world. But what can a world that “lieth in wickedness” (1Jo 5:19) know about God’s hatred of sin? It does not matter what the world thinks, but it matters a great deal what God says about it. Others measure the guilt of sin by what conscience tells them—or fails to! But conscience needs informing by the Bible. Many uncivilized tribes have put their girl babies and old people to death, and conscience did not chide<sup>7</sup> them. A deadened conscience has accompanied multitudes to hell without any voice of warning. Tens of thousands of religionists see so little filth in sin that they imagine a few tears will wash away its stain. They perceive so little criminality in it that they persuade themselves that a few good works will make full reparation for it.

All comparisons fail to set forth the horrible malignity in that abominable thing that God hates. We can say nothing more evil of sin than to term it what it is: “Sin, that it might appear *sin*” (Rom 7:13). “Who is like unto thee, O LORD?” (Exo 15:11). When we say of God that He is *God*, we say all that can be said of Him. “Who is a God like unto thee?” (Mic 7:18). We cannot say more good of Him than to call Him God. We cannot say more evil of sin than to say it is sin. When we have called it that, we have said all that can be said of it. When the apostle wanted a descriptive epithet<sup>8</sup> for sin, he invested it with its own name: “that sin by the commandment might become *exceeding sinful*” (Rom 7:13). That was the worst he could say of it, the ugliest name he could give it—just as when Hosea denounced the Ephraimites for their idolatry: “So shall Bethel do unto you because of the evil

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<sup>5</sup> **canker or gangrene** – cancer.

<sup>6</sup> **malignity** – wickedness.

<sup>7</sup> **chide** – express disapproval; rebuke.

<sup>8</sup> **epithet** – offensive or contemptuous word or phrase.

of your evil” (10:15, *literal translation*). The prophet could not paint their wickedness any blacker than to double the expression.

The hideousness of sin can be set forth no more impressively than in the terms used by the apostle in Romans 7:13: “That sin ... might become exceeding sinful” is a very forcible expression. It reminds us of similar words used by Paul when magnifying the glory that is yet to be revealed in the saints and with which the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared, namely, “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2Co 4:17). No viler name can be found for sin than its own. Andrew Fuller<sup>9</sup> stated, “If we speak of a treacherous person, we call him a ‘Judas’; if of Judas, we call him a ‘devil’; but if of Satan, we [lack] a comparison because we can find none that is worse than himself. We must therefore say, as Christ did, ‘When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own.’ It was thus with the apostle, when speaking of the evil of his own heart, ‘That sin by the commandment might become’—what? He [lacked] a name worse than its own—he could not find one—he therefore unites a strong epithet to the thing itself, calling it, ‘exceeding sinful.’”<sup>10</sup>

There are four great evils in sin: the total absence of the moral image of God, the transgression of His just law, obnoxiousness<sup>11</sup> to His holiness, and separation from Him—entailing the presence of positive evil, guilt [that] cannot be measured by any human standard, the most repulsive defilement, and misery inexpressible. Sin contains within it an *infinite evil*, for it is committed against a Being of infinite glory, unto Whom we are under infinite obligations. Its odiousness<sup>12</sup> appears in that fearful description, “filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness<sup>13</sup>” (Jam 1:21), which is an allusion to the brook Kidron into which the garbage of the temple sacrifices and other vile things were cast (2Ch 29:16). Sin’s hatefulness to God is seen in His awful curse upon the workmanship of His own hands, for He would not anathematize<sup>14</sup> man for a trifle. If He does not afflict willingly, then most certainly He would not curse without great provocation. The virulence<sup>15</sup> and vileness of sin can only be gauged at Calvary, where it

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<sup>9</sup> **Andrew Fuller** (1754-1815) – English Particular Baptist minister and theologian.

<sup>10</sup> From “Letter XI: Love to Christ” in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Controversial Publications*, ed. Joseph Belcher, Vol. 2, 194.

<sup>11</sup> **obnoxiousness** – offensiveness.

<sup>12</sup> **odiousness** – repulsiveness.

<sup>13</sup> **superfluity of naughtiness** – excessive or overflowing wickedness.

<sup>14</sup> **anathematize** – curse; threaten with divine punishment.

<sup>15</sup> **virulence** – bitter hostility and hatefulness.

rose to the terrible commission of Deicide;<sup>16</sup> at the cross it “abounded” to the greatest possible degree. The demerits of sin are seen in the eternal damnation of sinners in hell, for the indescribable sufferings that divine vengeance will then inflict upon them are sin’s rightful wages.

Sin is a species of atheism, for it is the virtual repudiation of God. It seeks to discredit Him, to rebel against Him: “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?” (Exo 5:2). Sin is a malignant spirit of independence. Whether imperceptibly influencing the mind or consciously present, it lies at the root of all evil and depravity. Man desires to be lord of himself; hence his ready reception at the beginning of the devil’s lie, “Ye shall be as gods” (Gen 3:5). Man’s credence<sup>17</sup> of that lie was the dissolution of the tie that bound the creature in willing subjection to the Author of his being. Thus, sin is really the denial of our creaturehood and, in consequence, a rejection of the rights of the Creator. Its language is “I am. I am my own, and therefore I have the right to live unto myself.” Thornwell<sup>18</sup> pointed this out: “Considered as the renunciation of dependence upon God, it may be called unbelief; as the exaltation of itself to the place of God, it may be called pride; as the transferring to another object the homage due to the Supreme, it may be called idolatry; but in all these aspects the central principle is one and the same.”<sup>19</sup>

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



What is sin? It is our poverty; it is the sickness and languor of our souls; it is a noisome and a pestilent disease; it is lameness, blindness, and impotency; it is a monstrous and loathsome deformity; it is a dungeon with fetters and vermin; in a word, it is misery. It is really as great an evil to our souls as these are to our bodies. It is so represented in the Word of Truth. It is all these; it is more; it is worse than all these; and what an advantage would it be to be rid of such a horrid, hideous evil as this.—*David Clarkson*

The great design of God in sending Christ into the world—His incarnation, humiliation, death, and passion—were all about this: the conquering and destroying of sin. How great an enemy was this that God must send out His Son to conquer it? He can arm flies, lice, frogs, the meanest of creatures, to overthrow the greatest power and force on the earth; but no less than His Son was strong enough to conquer sin.—*Samuel Bolton*

<sup>16</sup> **Deicide** – murder of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

<sup>17</sup> **credence** – acceptance.

<sup>18</sup> **James Henley Thornwell** (1812-1862) – Southern Presbyterian preacher and author.

<sup>19</sup> “Lecture XIV: The State and Nature of Sin” in *Lectures in Theology*, Vol. 1, 362.

# A HEINOUS, EXECRABLE THING

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

I shall show what a heinous and execrable<sup>1</sup> thing sin is. It is the complication of all evil; it is the spirits of mischief distilled. The Scripture calls it the “accursed thing” (Jos 7:13); it is compared to the venom of serpents, the stench of sepulchers. The apostle useth this expression of sin, “Out of measure sinful” (Rom 7:13), or, as it is in the Greek, “Hyperbolically<sup>2</sup> sinful.” The devil would paint over sin with the vermilion<sup>3</sup> color of pleasure and profit that he may make it look fair; but I shall pull off the paint from sin that you may see the ugly face of it. We are apt to have slight thoughts of sin and say to it, as Lot of Zoar, “Is it not a little one?” (Gen 19:20). But that you may see how great an evil sin is, consider these four things:

1. **The origin of sin from whence it comes:** It fetcheth its pedigree<sup>4</sup> from hell. Sin is of the devil: “He that committeth sin is of the devil” (1Jo 3:8). Satan was the first actor *of* sin and the first tempter *to* sin: sin is the devil’s firstborn.

2. **Sin is evil in the nature of it.**

(1) *It is a defiling thing.* Sin is not only a defection, but a pollution. It is to the soul as rust is to gold, as a stain is to beauty. It makes the soul red with guilt and black with filth. Sin in Scripture is compared to a “menstruous cloth” (Isa 30:22), to a plague-sore (1Ki 8:38). Joshua’s filthy garments, in which he stood before the angel (Zec 3:3), were nothing but a type and hieroglyphic<sup>5</sup> of sin. Sin hath blotted God’s image and stained the orient<sup>6</sup> brightness of the soul. Sin makes God loathe a sinner (Zec 11:8); and when a sinner sees his sin, he loathes himself (Eze 20:43). Sin drops poison on our holy things: it infects our prayers. The high priest was to make atonement for sin on the altar (Exo 29:36) to typify that our holiest services need Christ to make an atonement for them. Duties of religion in themselves are good, but sin corrupts them, as the purest water is polluted running through muddy ground. Under the law, if the leper had touched the

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<sup>1</sup> **heinous and execrable** – extremely wicked and detestable, deserving to be cursed.

<sup>2</sup> **hyperbolically** – Greek ὑπερβολή means “in the extreme; extraordinarily overabundant.”

<sup>3</sup> **vermilion** – brilliant red.

<sup>4</sup> **fetcheth...pedigree** – gets its line of descent or genealogy.

<sup>5</sup> **hieroglyphic** – symbol.

<sup>6</sup> **orient** – shining like the dawn.

altar, the altar had not cleansed him; but he had defiled the altar. The apostle calls sin, “Filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2Co 7:1). Sin stamps the devil’s image on a man...It turns a man into a devil: “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (Joh 6:70).

(2) *Sin is a grieving of God’s Spirit.* “Grieve not the holy Spirit of God” (Eph 4:30). To grieve is more than to anger.

Question: *How can the Spirit be said to be grieved? For, seeing He is God, He cannot be subject to any passion.* Answer: This is spoken metaphorically.<sup>7</sup> Sin is said to grieve the Spirit because it is an injury offered to the Spirit, and He takes it unkindly, and, as it were, lays it to heart. And is it not much thus to grieve the Spirit? The Holy Ghost descended in the likeness of a dove; sin makes this blessed dove mourn...Is it not sad to grieve our Comforter?

(3) *Sin is an act of contumacy<sup>8</sup> against God; a walking antipodes<sup>9</sup> to heaven:* “If ye will walk contrary to me...” (Lev 26:27). A sinner tramples upon God’s Law, crosseth His will, doth all he can to affront,<sup>10</sup> yea, to spite God. The Hebrew word for sin signifies “rebellion”: [so] there is the heart of a rebel in every sin...Sin strikes at the very Deity! Sin would not only unthrone God, but un-god Him. If the sinner could help it, God would no longer be God.

(4) *Sin is an act of disingenuity<sup>11</sup> and unkindness.* God feeds the sinner, keeps off evils from him, bemiracles<sup>12</sup> him with mercy; but the sinner not only forgets God’s mercies, but abuseth them. He is the worse for mercy, like Absalom, who, as soon as David had kissed him and taken him into favor, plotted treason against him (2Sa 15:10)...God may upbraid<sup>13</sup> the sinner: “I have given thee,” may God say, “thy health, strength, and estate. Thou requitest<sup>14</sup> Me evil for good, thou woundest Me with My own mercies—is this thy kindness to thy friend? Did I give thee life to sin? Did I give thee wages to serve the devil?”

(5) *Sin is a disease.* “The whole head is sick” (Isa 1:5). Some are sick with pride, others with lust, others with envy. Sin hath distempered<sup>15</sup> the intellectual part: it is a leprosy in the head; it hath poisoned the

<sup>7</sup> **metaphorically** – using a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable, in order to suggest a resemblance.

<sup>8</sup> **contumacy** – stubborn resistance to authority.

<sup>9</sup> **antipodes** – exact opposite.

<sup>10</sup> **affront** – confront defiantly.

<sup>11</sup> **disingenuity** – unfair treatment.

<sup>12</sup> **bemiracles** – bestows miracles upon.

<sup>13</sup> **upbraid** – find fault with.

<sup>14</sup> **requitest** – pay back; reward.

<sup>15</sup> **distempered** – spiritually diseased or disordered.

vitals: “Their and conscience is defiled” (Ti 1:15). It is with a sinner as with a sick patient: his palate is distempered [so that] the sweetest things taste bitter to him. The word that is sweeter than the honeycomb (Psa 19:10) tastes bitter to him; they “put sweet for bitter” (Isa 5:20). This is a disease, and nothing can cure this disease but the blood of the Physician.

(6) *Sin is an irrational thing.* It makes a man act not only wickedly, but foolishly. It is absurd and irrational to prefer the lesser before the greater, the pleasures of life before the rivers of pleasures at God’s right hand forevermore (Psa 16:11). Is it not irrational to lose heaven for the satisfying or indulging of lust?...

(7) *Sin is a painful thing.* It costs men much labor in pursuing their sins. How do men tire themselves in doing the devil’s drudgery<sup>16</sup>? They “weary themselves to commit iniquity” (Jer 9:5). What pains did Judas take to bring about his treason? He went to the high priest, and then after to the band of soldiers, and then back again to the garden ...While the sinner travails with his sin, in sorrow he brings forth. It is called “serving divers lusts” (Ti 3:3). Not *enjoying*, but *servicing*: Why so? Because not only of the slavery in sin, but the hard labor: it is “serving divers lusts.” Many a man goes to hell in the sweat of his brow.

(8) *Sin is the only thing God hath an antipathy<sup>17</sup> against.* God doth not hate a man because he is poor or despised in the world. You do not hate your friend because he is sick. But that which draws forth the keenness of God’s hatred is sin: “Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate” (Jer 44:4). And sure, if the sinner dies under God’s hatred, he cannot be admitted into the celestial mansions. Will God let him live with Him whom He hates?...Until sin be removed, there is no coming where God is.

**3. See the evil of sin in the price paid for it:** It cost the blood of God to expiate it. “O man,” saith St. Austin,<sup>18</sup> “consider the greatness of thy sin, by the greatness of the price paid for sin.” All the princes on earth or angels in heaven could not satisfy for sin—only Christ. Nay, Christ’s active obedience was not enough to make atonement for sin, but He must suffer upon the cross; for, “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb 9:22). O what an accursed thing is sin that Christ should die for it! The evil of sin is not so much seen in that one thousand are damned for it, as that Christ died for it.

<sup>16</sup> **drudgery** – slavish, wearisome work.

<sup>17</sup> **antipathy** – strong hostility toward.

<sup>18</sup> **St. Austin** or **St. Augustine** (354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian.

#### 4. Sin is evil in the effects of it.

(1) *Sin hath degraded us of our honor...* God made us in His own image, a little lower than the angels; but sin hath debased us... Sin hath done this: it hath plucked off our coat of innocence, and now it hath debased us and turned our glory into shame. “And in his estate shall stand up a vile person” (Dan 11:21). This was spoken of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was a king, and his name signifies “illustrious”; yet sin hath degraded him—he was a vile person.

(2) *Sin disquiets the peace of the soul.* Whatever defiles, disturbs; as poison tortures the bowels [and] corrupts the blood, so sin doth the soul (Isa 57:20-21). Sin breeds a trembling at the heart; it creates fears, and there is torment in fear (1Jo 4:18). Sin makes sad convulsions in the conscience. Judas was so terrified with guilt and horror that he hanged himself to quiet his conscience. And is he not likely to be ill-cured<sup>19</sup> that throws himself into hell for ease?

(3) *Sin produceth all temporal evil.* “Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore she is removed” (Lam 1:8). It is the Trojan horse: it hath sword, famine, and pestilence in the belly of it... Sin creates all our troubles: it puts gravel into our bread, wormwood<sup>20</sup> in our cup. Sin rots the name, consumes the estate, buries relations...

(4) *Sin unrepented of brings final damnation.*<sup>21</sup> The canker<sup>22</sup> that breeds in the rose is the cause of its perishing, and corruptions that breed in men’s souls are the cause of their damning. Sin, without repentance, brings the “second death” (Rev 20:14), that is, “a death always dying.”<sup>23</sup> Sin’s pleasure will turn to sorrow at last, like the book the prophet did eat, sweet in the mouth, but bitter in the belly (Rev 10:10). Sin brings the wrath of God, and what buckets or engines can quench that fire? “Where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mar 9:44).

From “Concerning Sin” in *A Body of Divinity*, in the public domain.

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**Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686):** English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and author; possibly born in Yorkshire, England, UK.




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<sup>19</sup> **ill-cured** – miserably cured, that is, in a worse condition.

<sup>20</sup> **wormwood** – bitterness.

<sup>21</sup> See FGB 210, *Day of Judgment*, and FGB 211, *Hell*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>22</sup> **canker** – fungal disease in trees and shrubs.

<sup>23</sup> Attributed to **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153), French monastic reformer.

# SIN IS CONTRARY TO GOD

Ralph Venning (c. 1621-1673)

*But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.—Romans 7:13*

**W**E now proceed to lay open in what especially the sinfulness of sin consists...Sin is a transgression of God's Law, which is not only holy and just as made and given by a holy and just God, but also good as it respects man for whom God made it, according to our text and its context...I say, sin being a transgression of God's Law, which was made for man's good, the sinfulness of sin must needs lie in this: it is contrary (1) to God, (2) to man...These are both evident from the Law; for by it, as our text says, sin appears sin. And, by the commandment, sin clearly and undeniably becomes most exceeding...or above measure sinful, i.e., extremely guilty of displeasing and dishonoring God and of debasing and destroying man. On both accounts, it is justly obnoxious *to*<sup>1</sup> and deservedly worthy of the hatred of God and man. And I heartily wish that the outcome will be that man may hate it as God does, Who hates it and nothing else but it; or (to be sure) He hates none but for it.

**The sinfulness of sin not only appears from, but consists in this: *it is contrary to God.*** Indeed, it is contrariety<sup>2</sup> and enmity<sup>3</sup> itself. Carnal men, or *sinner*s, are called by the name of "enemies to God (*see* Rom 5:10; Col 1:21); but the carnal mind or sin is called enmity itself (Rom 8:7). Accordingly, it and its acts are expressed by names of enmity and acts of hostility, such as walking contrary to God (Lev 26:21), rebelling against God (Isa 1:2), rising up against Him as an enemy (Mic 2:8), striving and contending with God (Isa 45:9), and despising God (Num 11:20). It makes men haters of God (Rom 1:30), resisters of God (Act 7:51), fighters against God (Act 5:39; 23:9), even blasphemers of God, and in short, very atheists, who say there is no God (Psa 14:1). It goes about to ungod God and is by some of the ancients called *Deicidium*, God-murder or God-killing...Here then is the desperately wicked nature of sin: it is not only high treason against the

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<sup>1</sup> **obnoxious to** – legally subject to; exposed to.

<sup>2</sup> **contrariety** – opposition.

<sup>3</sup> **enmity** – hostility; the state of being an enemy.



majesty of God, but it scorns to confess its crime. It is obstinate and will not that He reign over it. It is not only not subject, but it will not be subject, nor be reconciled to God; such is its enmity! But to show this more particularly:

**1. Sin is contrary to the nature of God.** God's name is holy; and as His name is, so is He—His nature all holy. He is so and cannot but be so. Therefore, God takes it worse that men should think Him wicked like themselves (Psa 50:16-22), than that they think Him not to exist (Psa 14:1). It is said to weary Him when men say that evil is good in His sight (Mal 2:17). This is the thing God glories in: He is holy, even glorious in holiness (Exo 15:11).

Holiness is the attribute that frees God, not only from evil itself, but from all appearance or suspicion of evil. If God were not holy, many of the things that God does would look unlike Him: His justice and judgments would look not only like severity, but tyranny, were not it and they holy. His love in its conduct and behavior to some people would look like fondness and respect of persons, but that it is holy. His patience would look like a toleration, if not approbation<sup>4</sup> of sin, but that it is holy patience. Thus, many acts of God, were it not for holiness, would appear as seemingly evil as they are really good, and would be as much suspected by all, as they are unjustly censured<sup>5</sup> by some.

God is holy, without spot or blemish or any such thing, without any wrinkle or anything like it, as they also that are in Christ shall one day be (Eph 5:27). He is so holy that He cannot sin Himself, nor be the cause or author of sin in another. He does not command sin to be committed, for to do so would be to cross His nature and will. Nor does He approve of any man's sin when it is committed, but hates it with a perfect hatred. He is without iniquity and of purer eyes than to behold (i.e. approve) iniquity (Hab 1:13).

On the contrary, as God is holy, all holy, only holy, altogether holy, and always holy, so sin is sinful, all sinful, only sinful, altogether sinful, and always sinful (Gen 6:5). "In my flesh," that is, in my sinful, corrupt nature, "there dwelleth no good thing" (Rom 7:18). As in God there is no evil, so in sin there is no good. God is the chiefest of goods and sin is the chiefest of evils. As no good can be compared with God for goodness, so no evil can be compared with sin for evil.

**2. Sin is contrary to all the names and attributes of God.** It sets it-

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<sup>4</sup> **approbation** – approval.

<sup>5</sup> **censured** – judged; disapproved.

self in opposition to them all. (1) It deposes the *sovereignty* of God as much as in it lies. It wills that the King of kings should not be on the throne and govern this world that He has made. It was by this instinct that Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go” (Exo 5:2). The voice and language of sin is, “Our lips are our own: who is lord over us?” (Psa 12:4). It was from hence that the Jews of old said, “We are lords; we will come no more unto thee” (Jer 2:31). Thus, it attempts to dethrone God. (2) It denies God’s *all-sufficiency*. As if there were not contentment and satisfaction enough to be had in the enjoyment of God, but that vanity and wickedness had more of pleasure and profit than He, Whose ways are all pleasantness and Whose service is the health of man! Every prodigal who leaves the Father’s house says in effect, “It is better to be elsewhere.” (3) It challenges the *justice* of God and dares God to do His worst (Mal 2:17). It provokes the Lord to jealousy and tempts Him to wrath. (4) It disowns His *omniscience*. “Pooh!”<sup>6</sup> they say, “God does not see, nor does the most High regard.” (5) It despises the riches of God’s *goodness* (Rom 2:4). (6) It turns His grace into *wantonness* (Jude 4). It will make bold with God and sin because grace abounds. In short, sin is “the dare of His justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, and the contempt of His love,” as one writer<sup>7</sup> prettily expresses this ugly thing. We may go on and say, it is the upbraiding of His providence (Psa 50), the scoff of His promise (2Pe 3:3-4), the reproach of His wisdom (Isa 29:16). And as is said of the “man of sin,” i.e., who is made up of sin (2Th 2:3), it opposes and exalts itself above all that is called God (and above all that God is called), so that it sitteth as God in the temple of God, showing itself as if it were God (2Th 2:4).

**3. Sin is contrary to the works of God.** It works contrary to God, and it is contrary to God’s works and is called the work of the devil (1Jo 3:8). All God’s works were exceedingly good, beautiful even to admiration; but the works of sin are deformed and monstrously ugly, for [sin] works disorder, confusion, and everything that is abominable. Sin may be arraigned<sup>8</sup> for all the mischiefs and villainies that have been done in the world; it is the master of misrule, the author of sedition, the builder of Babel, the troubler of Israel and all mankind.

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<sup>6</sup> **pooh** – exclamation expressing contempt or disregard for anything.

<sup>7</sup> The author is quoting John Bunyan, “Bunyan’s Dying Sayings,” in *The Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 1, 65.

<sup>8</sup> **arraigned** – called before a court to answer for a criminal charge.

So contrary is sin to the works of God that it sought and still seeks to undo all that God does, that there might be no seed, nor name, nor root left Him in the earth. Everything works according to its nature: as the root is, so is the fruit; thus, every tree is known, whether it is a good tree or a bad (Mat 7:17-18). God is good and does good (Psa 119:68). Sin is evil and does evil; indeed, it does nothing else. So, sin and its works are contrary to God and His works.

**4. Sin is contrary to the Law and will of God, to all the rules and orders of His appointment.** There is not one of His laws that it has not broken and endeavored to make void and of none effect. It is not only a transgression of, but also a contradiction to the will of God. When the Son of God came into the world to declare and do His Father's will, He was encountered *by* and underwent the contradiction *of* sinners (Heb 12:3), who would have made men believe that neither He nor His doctrine was of God. Sin is an anti-will to God's will: it sets itself to oppose preaching, prayer, and all the institutions of God. And it does this, not only out of envy to man that he should not be the better for them, but out of enmity to God that He should not be worshipped in the world. Now, to act contrary to the will and statutes of God is to act contrary to God Himself, as may be seen by comparing Leviticus 26:14-15 with verses 21, 23, and 27 of the same chapter, and many other places. David, in fulfilling the will of God, was said to be a man after God's own heart (Act 13:22); and they who obey the will of sin are said to walk after the heart of sin (Eze 11:21).

**5. Sin is contrary to the image of God in which man was made.** God made man in His own likeness, viz.,<sup>9</sup> in righteousness and true holiness (Eph 4:24). Now, sin is clean contrary to this image, as much unlike it as deformity and ugliness are unlike handsomeness and beauty, as darkness is to light, as hell to heaven. Yes, and there is more too: sin is the devil's image. When God made man, He made him in His own image; so, when the devil [convinced] man [to] sin, he thereby made him [in] *his* own image and likeness...The word *Elohim* is used not only of God and good angels, but of fallen angels or devils (1Sa 28:13). And under the covert<sup>10</sup> of this ambiguous word, he craftily abused our first parents; for he well knew that by sinning they could not become like *Elohim*, God above, but would become like *Elohim*, the gods below. And alas! Are we not like *Elohim-devils*, knowing good by loss and evil by its sad and dismal effects? Thus, he that

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<sup>9</sup> viz. – *Latin = videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

<sup>10</sup> covert – covering; hiding place.

runs may read the picture, image, and likeness of the devil in sin; sinners are as much like the devil as anything. “He that committeth sin is of the devil” (1Jo 3:8), not only a servant but a child of the devil: “Ye are of your father the devil,” said holy Jesus to the sinful Jews (Joh 8:44). Never was child more like the father than a sinner is like the devil. Sin has the nature, the complexion, the air, the features, the very behavior of the devil.

**6. Sin is contrary to the people and children of God.** It is true, sin cannot hate them as much as God loves them, nor do them as much hurt as God can do them good. Yet, out of spite and envy, it will do its worst and hate them because God loves them. God’s children are His darlings and favorites, as dear to Him as the apple of His eye. In all their afflictions, He bears a part and is afflicted, and looks upon it as if He Himself were treated as they are in this world (Act 9:4-5; Mat 25:41-45). Now, the nearer and dearer they are to God, and the more God’s heart is set upon them for good, the more sin sets its heart against them for evil. Sin is always warring against the seed of God in them—the flesh lusts against the Spirit (Gal 5:17) and wars against their souls (1Pe 2:11). So, by sin’s ill-will, God’s people should neither enjoy nor do any good in this world. It is always provoking the serpentine race to make war upon, to imprison and persecute, even to destruction, the little flock and remnant of the holy seed. It will not, further than it is rebuked by grace, let them have one quiet day. It disturbs and interrupts them, so that they cannot attend upon God without distraction. When they would do good, evil is present with them, either to keep it undone or to make it ill done. It endeavors to spoil all they take in hand and to turn their holy things into iniquity, by reason of which they cry out as greatly oppressed, “Wretches that we are! Who shall deliver us from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24)...

**7. Sin is contrary to and set against the glory of God and all that should and would give glory to Him or has any tendency to do so.** Confession of sin and repentance gives glory to God (Jos 7:19), and sin endeavors to obstruct and hinder this. It began to practice upon Adam and Eve and still carries on this trade among the children of men (Rev 16:9). Faith would give glory to God; so, in order that men may not believe, sin employs the devil to blind their eyes (2Co 4:4). Good men would do all they do to the glory of God, but sin will let them do nothing at all and is ever throwing one dead fly or another into their most precious boxes of ointment (Ecc 10:1). Sin is so malicious that it will not only displease and dishonor God itself, but labors to defeat and frustrate the endeavors of all who attempt to do

otherwise. If sin's desires might take place, there should not be a person or thing by whom and by which God should be pleased or glorified. It gives out false reports of God and goodness, lays prejudices and rocks of offence and stumbling in men's ways that they may be out of love with all that is good—so desperately is it bent against the honor of God!

**8. Sin is contrary and opposite to the being and existence of God.** (This was hinted at before.) It makes the sinner wish and endeavor that there might be no God, for sinners are haters of God (Rom 1:30). As he who "hateth his brother is a murderer" (1Jo 3:15), so, as much as in him lies, he who hates God is a murderer of God. Sin keeps garrisons and strongholds against God (2Co 10:4-5). It strives with and fights against God, and if its power were as great as its will is wicked, it would not suffer God to be. God is a troublesome thing to sinners, and therefore they say to Him, "Depart from us" (Job 21:14), and of Christ Jesus, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psa 2:3). And when the Holy Ghost comes to woo and entreat them to be reconciled, they resist and make war with the Spirit of peace (Act 7:51). So that they are against every person in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>11</sup> In short, and for a conclusion, sin is contrary to God and all that is dear to Him or has His name upon it; and though it is against all good, yet not so much against any good as [it is] against God, Who is, and because He is, the chiefest good.

Before we pass on, let me beseech you, whoever you are who read this, to pause a little and consider what is said. For what is said of sin is to be considered by the sinner and is meant of your and my sin. Shall I not plead for God and your soul, and entreat you to be on God's side and to depart from the tents of wickedness? Poor soul! Can you find it in your heart to hug and embrace such a monster as this? Will you love that which hates God and which God hates? God forbid! Will you join yourself to that which is nothing but contrariety to God and all that is good? Oh, say to this idol, this devil, "Get hence! What have I to do with you, you (*Elymas*<sup>12</sup>) sorcerer, you full of all malignity<sup>13</sup> and mischief; you child, yea, father of the devil—you who are the founder of hell, an enemy to all righteousness, who ceases not to pervert the right ways of the Lord and to reproach the living God! Away! Away! Shall I be seduced by you to grieve the God of all my joy, to

<sup>11</sup> See FGB 231, *The Triune God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>12</sup> **Elymas** – Jewish magician on the isle of Cyprus, mentioned in Acts 13:8. According to 13:6, he was also called Bar-Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> **malignity** – wickedness and deep-rooted hatred.

displease the God of all my comfort, to vex the God of all my contentment, to do evil against a good God, by Whom I live, move, and have my being? Oh no!”

Thus, consider these things and do not go on to provoke the Lord, lest a worse thing befall you than any hitherto. Do not contend with God Who is stronger than you are, Who is able when He will (and He will one day be found both able and willing enough) to turn the wicked into hell, the element of sin and sinners, who shall go into it as into their own place, as Judas did (Act 1:25). Oh, learn to pity your own soul; for he who sins offends and wrongs God, but also wrongs and destroys his own soul, or, as some read the text, despises his own soul (Pro 8:36). Oh, think of it! What! Have you no value, no regard for your soul? Will you neglect and despise it, as if it were good for nothing but to be damned and go to hell? Will you be a self-soul-murderer? Shall your perdition<sup>14</sup> be of yourself? Oh, look to yourself; for sin, notwithstanding all its flattering pretenses, is against you and seeks nothing less than your ruin and damnation.

From *The Plague of Plagues*, in the public domain.

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**Ralph Venning (c. 1621-1673):** Nonconformist pastor and theologian; born in Devonshire, England, UK.



I cannot understand that Christian who can look back upon his past life without a tear. If he can turn to the black pages of his history, which not only have no record of goodness, but are full of entries concerning his sins against his present Lord and Master, and yet not weep at the remembrance of them, surely he can never have learned the true nature of sin.—*Charles Spurgeon*

A hundred preachers are unable to make an unregenerate person realize the dreadful nature of sin, or show him that he has been a lifelong rebel against God, or change his heart so that he now hates himself and longs to please God and serve Christ. Only the Spirit can bring man to the place where he is willing to forsake every idol, cut off a hindering right hand or pluck out an offending right eye.—*A. W. Pink*

What is sin but the offering of the highest indignity to the infinite and Supreme Being, the Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor of mankind? It is an affronting of all His perfections, a reflection upon His wisdom, a contempt of His power, an insult to His holiness, a disparagement of His goodness, and an open defiance to His truth and faithfulness. If then sin be such an evil, an evil infinitely worse

than we are capable to represent it, how can any imagine that God will  
 forbear or neglect to punish such who obstinately live and die  
 in the practice of it?—*Thomas Boston*

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<sup>14</sup> **perdition** – eternal damnation.

# SIN: THE GREATEST EVIL

Samuel Bolton (1606-1654)

**S**IN truly is, and God's people apprehend it to be, the greatest evil in the world...If you compare the evil of sin with other evils,<sup>1</sup> you shall see how short all other kinds of evils are to this evil of sin.

**1. Most of all, other evils are only outward.** They are only such as are on the body, the estate, the name; but sin is an inward evil, an evil upon the soul, which is the greatest of evils.

**2. All other evils are only of a temporal nature.** They have an end. Poverty, sickness, disgrace—all these are great evils; but these and all others have an end. Death puts a conclusion to them all. But this evil of sin is of an eternal nature that shall never have an end. Eternity itself shall have no period to this.

**3. All other evils do not make a man the subject of God's wrath and hatred.** A man may have all other evils and yet be in the love of God. You may be poor and yet precious in God's esteem. You may be under all kinds of miseries and yet dear in God's thoughts. But sin is an evil that makes the soul the subject of God's wrath and hatred. The absence of all other goods, the presence of all created evils, will not make you hateful to God if sin is not there, so the presence of all other goods and the absence of all other evils will not render you lovely if sin is there.

**4. All other evils only oppose your wellbeing, and your wellbeing for the present.** For they cannot rob you of future happiness, but sin opposes your wellbeing forever. You cannot be happy if you are not holy. Nay, sin opposes your being: it brought you to death! You would sin yourselves into nothing again if God did not hold you up to [exist] that you might be miserable for sin.

**5. All other evils are only destructive to a man's self: they fight only against particulars.** But sin is contrary to the universal good, being contrary to God, and is, as far as it may be, destructive to the very

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<sup>1</sup> EDITOR'S NOTE: Throughout this article, the author compares *moral* evil with *natural* evil. Moral evil, or *sin*, is any human violation of God's Law. Natural evil is anything that produces pain, distress, loss, or calamity, such as natural disasters—earthquakes, hurricanes, famine, plagues. Natural evils *are not sin*, although God may send them upon believers and unbelievers alike because of their sin.

being of God, as I shall show hereafter.

**6. All other evils are God's creatures,<sup>2</sup> and so far good.** He owns all the rest, He is the Author of all the rest. "Is there any evil in the city that I have not done?" (Amo 3:6), meaning all the evil of *penal punishment*, not *sinful evil*. But sin is the devil's creature, yea, and worse than he, being all sin.

**7. All other evils are God's medicine and are used as medicines, either for the prevention of sin or for the cure of sin.** For the prevention of sin: that you might not be condemned with the world, He lays afflictions and evils upon you (1Co 11:32). He suffered Satan to tempt Paul and gave him up to his buffetings, which yet is the greatest evil in the world next to sin, the greatest penal evil in the world. And all to prevent sin, as the Apostle himself said in 2 Corinthians 12:7: God sent a messenger of Satan to buffet him, and what was the reason? Why, it was to prevent sin lest he should be exalted above measure, that is, lest he should be proud.

And as He uses all other evils for prevention, so for the cure of sin. You know no medicine can be as bad as is this disease. Now, all other evils God has laid upon His people for the cure or for the recovery of them out of the state of sin. And to speak as much as I can at once, there is not as much evil in the damnation of a thousand worlds of men for sin as there is evil in the least sin, the least sinful thought that rises upon your spirits, inasmuch as the good of these falls short of the good and glory of God.

Thus, you see, by collation and comparison of this evil with others in which I might more enlarge myself, that of all evils, sin is the greatest evil. We will now come to the demonstration of this point:

That which fights against and opposes the greatest Good must be the greatest evil, [and] sin opposes and fights against the greatest Good. Hence a church father called sin "God-slaughter," that which strikes against the being and essence of God, that which, were it strong enough, were it infinitely evil as God is infinitely good, would labor to "un-be" God...

If sin were as evil as God is good, that is, adequately and proportionably, if infinitely evil as God is good, sin would be too hard for God to pardon. It would be too hard for God to subdue, too hard for God to conquer. Sin would endeavor to conquer God. Indeed, there is more evil in the least sin than there is good in any, nay, all the angels

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<sup>2</sup> **creatures** – created things.



of heaven. Therefore, you see it conquered them, spoiled all their goodness, made them devils, which it could not have done if the good in them had been greater than the evil in sin.

And though it is not able to conquer God, to overcome Him, there is more goodness in God than evil in ten thousand hells of sin; so, it cannot overcome the power of God, the mercy of God, the holiness of God—yet it fights against God and makes parley<sup>3</sup> against Him every day. It musters up all its strength against God and comes into open field to bid defiance against Him *every day*.

Nay, when it is beaten out of the open field by the power of God and His ordinances, then it has strongholds, as the apostle tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:4, and from thence fights against Him and opposes Him. There it lusts against Him, it wills against Him, the heart rises against Him. When sin is beaten out of the field, yet it will be a long time before it is beaten out of the strongholds. When sin in *practice* is overcome and conquered, yet sin in *affection* is hard to be overcome. That contrariness<sup>4</sup> that is between God and your heart is hard to conquer. It will cost you many a battle, many an assault, before you can conquer sin in its strongholds, overcome sin in the heart. Though sometimes it may seem to be overcome and to render up all, yet afterwards it gathers together again and will make new and fresh assaults upon you, to weaken and wound you. Nay, and herein lies the malignity, the poisonous and venomous nature of sin: though God has conquered it, though it is never so weakened, yet it will act against God and spit its venom still.

You have an emblem of it in the thief upon the cross. When he was nailed upon the cross, his hands and feet made fast and only one member loose, yet that one member could spit its venom at Christ, revile Christ. So though God has crucified sin, yet as long as there is any life in it, it will act itself and spit venom against God, which shows that great contrariness between God and sin. And this contrariness and opposition of the chief good must show sin to be the greatest evil.

From *Sin: The Greatest Evil*, in the public domain.

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**Samuel Bolton (1606-1654):** English theologian, scholar, and member of the Westminster Assembly; born in London, England, UK.




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<sup>3</sup> **parley** – argument.

<sup>4</sup> **contrariness** – opposition between two or more things.

# DEGREES OF SIN

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

**A**RE all transgressions of the Law equally heinous? Some sins in themselves, and because of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others. “He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin” (Joh 19:11). The Stoic philosophers<sup>1</sup> held that all sins were equal; but this Scripture clearly holds forth that there is a gradual difference in sin. Some are greater than others. Some are “mighty sins” and “crying sins” (Amo 5:12; Gen 18:21). Every sin has a voice to speak, but some sins cry. As some diseases are worse than others and some poisons more venomous, so some sins are more heinous. “Ye have done worse than your fathers...thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways” (Jer 16:12; Eze 16:47). Some sins have a blacker aspect than others: to clip the king’s coin is treason, but to strike his person is a higher degree of treason. A vain thought is a sin, but a blasphemous word is a greater sin.

That some sins are greater than others appears (1) because there was difference in the offerings under the Law: the sin offering was greater than the trespass offering; (2) because some sins are not capable of pardon as others are; therefore, they must needs be more heinous, as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mat 12:31); (3) because some sins have a greater degree of punishment than others: “Ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Mat 23:14). “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25). God would not punish one more than another if his sin was not greater. It is true, “All sins are equally heinous in respect of the object,” [that is], the infinite God, against Whom sin is committed. But, in another sense, all sins are not alike heinous: some sins have more bloody circumstances in them, which are like the dye to the wool to give it a deeper color.

**Question: What sins may be said to be more heinous than others?**  
(1) *Such sins are more heinous as are committed without any occasion offered.* A man swears or is angry and hath no provocation. The less the occasion of sin, the greater is the sin itself. (2) *Such sins are more heinous that are committed presumptuously.*<sup>2</sup> Under the Law there was no sacrifice for presumptuous sins (Num 15:30).

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<sup>1</sup> **Stoic philosophers** – members of a Greek school of philosophy, founded about 308 B.C.

<sup>2</sup> **presumptuously** – with arrogant self-confidence.

**Question: What is it to sin presumptuously, which doth heighten and aggravate sin and make it more heinous?** To sin presumptuously is to sin against convictions and illuminations, or an enlightened conscience. “They are of those that rebel against the light” (Job 24:13). Conscience, like the cherubim, stands with a flaming sword in its hand to deter the sinner, and yet he will sin. Did not Pilate sin against conviction and with a high hand in condemning Christ? “For he knew that for envy [the Jews] had delivered him” (Mat 27:18). He confessed he “found no fault in him” (Luk 23:14). His own wife sent to him saying, “Have nothing to do with that just man” (Mat 27:19). Yet for all this, he gave the sentence of death against Christ. He sinned presumptuously against an enlightened conscience...These sins make deep wounds in the soul. Other sins fetch blood; they are a stab at the heart.

**Question: How many ways may a man sin against illuminations and convictions?** *When he lives in the total neglect of duty.* He is not ignorant that it is a duty to read the Word, yet he lets the Bible lie by as rusty armor, seldom made use of. He is convinced that it is a duty to pray in his family, yet he can go days and months, and God never hears [from] him. He calls God “Father,” but never asks His blessing. Neglect of family-prayer doth, as it were, uncover the roof of men’s houses and make way for a curse to be rained down upon their table.

*When a man lives in the same sins he condemns in others.* “Thou that judgest doest the same things” (Rom 2:1). As Austin<sup>3</sup> says of Seneca,<sup>4</sup> “He wrote against superstition, yet he worshipped those images which he reproved”...

*When a man sins after counsels, admonitions, warnings, he cannot plead ignorance.* The trumpet of the gospel has been blown in his ears and sounded a retreat to call him off from his sins; he has been told of his injustice, living in malice, keeping bad company, yet he would venture upon sin. This is to sin against conviction. It aggravates the sin and is like a weight put into the scale to make his sin weigh the heavier...

*To sin against convictions and illuminations is joined with slighting and contempt of God...* Judas knew Christ was the Messiah...and yet he impudently<sup>5</sup> went on in his treason. Nay, when Christ said, “Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table...woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Luk 22:21-22), Judas knew Christ

<sup>3</sup> **St. Austin** or **St. Augustine** (354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian.

<sup>4</sup> **Lucius Annaeus Seneca** (c. 4 B.C.-A.D. 65) – Roman philosopher, statesman, and orator.

<sup>5</sup> **impudently** – arrogantly disrespectful.

meant him...Thus, to sin presumptuously against an enlightened conscience dyes the sin of a crimson color and makes it greater than other sins.

*Such sins are more heinous than others, which are sins of continuance.* The continuing of sin is the enhancing of sin. He who plots treason makes himself a greater offender. Some men's heads are the devil's mint-house<sup>6</sup>: they are a mint of mischief. "Inventors of evil things" (Rom 1:30)...

*Those sins are of greater magnitude that are mixed with ingratitude.* Of all things, God cannot endure to have His kindness slighted. His mercy is seen in reprieving men so long, in wooing them by His Spirit and ministers to be reconciled, in crowning them with so many temporal blessings. To abuse all this love—when God has been filling up the measure of His mercy, for men to fill up the measure of their sins—is high ingratitude and makes their sins of a deeper crimson. Some are worse for mercy...Just so<sup>7</sup> some deal with God: He bestows mercy, and they plot treason against Him. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Isa 1:2)...Certainly sins against mercy are more heinous.

*Those sins are more heinous than others that are committed with [delight].* A child of God may sin through a surprise or against his will: "The evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom 7:19). He is like one that is carried down the stream involuntarily. But to sin with delight heightens and greatens the sin. It is a sign the heart is *in* the sin. "They set their heart on their iniquity," as a man follows his gain with delight (Hos 4:8). "Without are dogs...and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Rev 22:15). To tell a lie is a sin; but to love to tell a lie is a greater sin.

*Those sins are more heinous than others that are committed under a pretense of religion.* To cheat and defraud is a sin, but to do it with a Bible in one's hand is a double sin. To be unchaste is a sin; but to put on a mask of religion to play the whore makes the sin greater. "I have peace offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows...come let us take our fill of love" (Pro 7:14, 18). She speaks as if she had been at church and had been saying her prayers: who would ever have suspected her of dishonesty? But, behold her hypocrisy: she makes her devotion a preface to adultery...

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<sup>6</sup> **mint-house** – place in which the fabrication of anything is carried on; source of invention.

<sup>7</sup> **just so** – in this way.

*Sins of apostasy are more heinous than others.* Demas forsook the truth and afterwards became a priest in an idol temple, says Dorotheus<sup>8</sup> (2Ti 4:10). To fall is a sin; but to fall away is a greater sin. Apostates cast a disgrace upon religion. “The apostate,” says Tertullian,<sup>9</sup> “seems to put God and Satan in the balance; and having weighed both their services, prefers the devil’s and proclaims him to be the best master,” in which respect, the apostate is said to put Christ to “open shame” (Heb 6:6)...It is a sin not to profess Christ, but it is a greater [sin] to deny Him...A pagan sins less than a baptized renegade.

*To persecute religion makes sin greater (Act 7:52).* To have no religion is a sin, but to endeavor to destroy religion is a greater [sin]. Antiochus Epiphanes<sup>10</sup> took more tedious journeys and ran more hazards to vex and oppose the Jews than all his predecessors had done to obtain victories. Herod “added this above all, that he shut up John in prison” (Luk 3:20). He sinned before by incest; but by imprisoning the prophet, he added to his sin and made it greater...

*It aggravates sin and makes it greater, when a man not only sins himself, but endeavors to make others sin.* (1) Such as teach errors to the people, who decry<sup>11</sup> Christ’s deity or deny His virtue, making Him only a political head, not a head of influence; who preach against the morality of the Sabbath or the immortality of the soul—these men’s sins are greater than others. If the breakers of God’s Law sin, what do they that teach men to break them? (Mat 5:19). (2) Such as destroy others by their bad example. The swearing father teaches his son to swear and damns him by his example. Such men’s sins are greater than others, and they shall have a hotter place in hell.

You see, all sins are not equal. Some are more grievous than others and bring greater wrath. Therefore, especially take heed of these sins. “Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins” (Psa 19:13). The least sin is bad enough; you need not aggravate your sins and make them more heinous. He that has a little wound will not make it deeper. Oh, beware of those circumstances that increase your sin and make it more heinous! The higher a man is in sinning, the lower he shall lie in torment.

From “All Sins Not Equally Heinous” in *The Ten Commandments*,  
in the public domain.



<sup>8</sup> **Dorotheus of Gaza** (505-565) – Palestinian monk and later abbot of a monastery.

<sup>9</sup> **Tertullian** (ca. 160-225) – Latin theologian from Carthage, Africa.

<sup>10</sup> **Antiochus Epiphanes** (215-164 B.C.) – Hellenistic Greek king and persecutor of the Jews.

<sup>11</sup> **decry** – publicly denounce.

# INNUMERABLE, MONSTROUS SINS

Edward Payson (1783-1827)

*Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite?—Job 22:5*

**I**T [is] necessary to show, as clearly as possible, what meaning is attached to the terms *sin* and *wickedness* in the Word of God. I say, in the Word of God, for it is too evident to require proof that by these terms, men usually mean something very different from what is meant by the inspired writers.

The word *sin*, for instance, is considered by many as synonymous with crime; and by crime, they mean the violation of some human law or of the common rules of morality and honesty. Hence, they conclude that if a man obeys the laws of his country and lives a sober, moral life, he has few, if any, sins to answer for. They attach a similar meaning to the term *wicked*. By a wicked man, they suppose, is intended a man openly and grossly immoral, impious, or profane; one who treats religion with avowed disrespect or who denies the divine authority of revelation.

But very different is the meaning that the inspired writers attach to these terms. By wicked men, they mean *all who are not righteous*—all who do not repent and believe the gospel, however correct their external conduct may be; and by sin, they mean a violation of the Divine Law, which requires us to love God with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves. For, says the apostle, sin is a transgression of or a deviation from the Law (1Jo 3:4). This Law branches out into various and numerous precepts, prescribing with great minuteness our duties towards all the beings with whom we are connected, and the dispositions that are to be exercised in every situation and relation of life. The violation and disregard of any of these precepts is a sin...

In a word, when we do not perfectly obey all God's commands in feeling, thought, word, and action, we sin. When we do not feel, think, speak, and act as He requires, we are guilty of what are denominated sins of *omission*. When we feel, think, speak, or act in such a manner as He forbids, we are guilty of the sin of *commission*. These general remarks will be sufficient to convince everyone who knows anything of God, of himself, or of the Divine Law that his sins are exceedingly numerous.

But since most men are unacquainted with all these subjects, and especially with the nature, strictness, and extent of God's Law, it will be necessary, in order to produce conviction, to be more particular. And since the heart is represented as the fountain whence all evil flows, the tree that gives its own character to all the fruit it produces, let us begin with that and consider,

**1. The sin of our hearts or, in other words, of our dispositions and feelings.** The sins of this class alone, of which the best man on earth is guilty, are innumerable. They form by far the heaviest part of the charge, which will be brought against every impenitent sinner at the Judgment Day. Yet most men think nothing of them. They seem to imagine that if the outside be clean, the feelings and dispositions of the heart are of little consequence. But God thinks very differently; and a moment's reflection will convince us that a being who commits no outward sins may, notwithstanding, be the chief of sinners.

Such, for instance, are the evil spirits. None will deny that they are sinful in the highest degree...All their sins are inward sins—sins of the heart. It is obvious, then, that persons may be the greatest sinners in the universe without being guilty of one outward sin. The Law of God and the gospel of Christ teach the same truth. What they principally require is right feelings and dispositions. What they chiefly forbid and condemn are feelings and dispositions that are wrong...If we wish to know the number of our sins, we must look first and chiefly at the feelings and dispositions of our hearts. And if we do thus look at them, we shall be convinced in a moment that our sins are numberless.

Every moment of our waking existence in which we do not love God with all our hearts, we sin; for this constant and perfect love to God His Law requires. Every moment in which we do not love our neighbor as ourselves, we sin; for this also we are commanded to do. Every moment in which we do not exercise repentance, we sin; for repentance is one of the first duties required of us. Every moment in which we do not exercise faith in Christ, we sin; for the constant exercise of faith the gospel everywhere requires. When we do not set our affections on things above, we sin; for on these we are required to place them. When we are not constantly influenced by the fear of God, we sin; for we are commanded to be in the fear of the Lord all day long. When we do not rejoice in God, we sin; for the precept is, "Rejoice in the Lord alway" (Phi 4:4). When the contents of God's Word [do] not properly affect us, we sin; for this [lack] of feeling indicates hardness of heart—one of the worst of sins. When we do not forgive and love our enemies, we sin; for this Christ requires of us. In

a word, whenever our hearts are not in a perfectly holy frame, we are sinning. For God's language is, "Be ye holy, for I am holy...Be therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Lev 11:44; 1Pe 1:16; Mat 5:48). And if we thus sin when we do not exercise right feelings, much more do we sin when we exercise those that are wrong. When we are dissatisfied with any part of God's Word or with any of His providential dispensations; when we feel a disposition to murmur at our situation, at our disappointments and afflictions, at the weather, or the seasons, we sin; for these are heart-risings of rebellion against God. They render it impossible for us to say sincerely, "Thy will be done" (Mat 6:10). When we hate anyone, we sin; for he that hateth his brother is a murderer. When we feel a revengeful or unforgiving temper, we sin; for if we forgive not our enemies, God will not forgive us. When we secretly rejoice in the calamities of others, we sin; for he that is glad at calamities shall not go unpunished; God is said to be displeased with those who rejoice when their enemy falls (Pro 24:17). When we envy such as are above us, we sin; for envyings are mentioned among the sinful works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21). When we covet anything that is our neighbor's, we sin; for the Tenth Commandment expressly forbids this. When we love the world, we sin; for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1Jo 2:15). But I forbear to enlarge; for who that knows anything of himself will deny that the wickedness of his heart is great and its iniquities numberless?

**2. Let us, in the next place, consider the sinfulness of our thoughts.** The thoughts are the offspring of the mind, as the feelings are of the heart; and the Scriptures plainly teach that they may be sinful. The wise man declares foolish thoughts to be sinful. Our Savior classes evil thoughts with thefts, murders, and adulteries (Mat 15:19; Mar 7:21). "O Jerusalem," says Jehovah, "wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" (Jer 4:14). "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isa 55:7). "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD" (Pro 15:26). "Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts" (Jer 6:19). Even men's characters are determined by their thoughts and purposes: "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Pro 23:7). These passages are more than sufficient to prove that there may be much sin committed in thought. And if vain, foolish thoughts are sinful, who, who, my hearers, can enumerate his sins? Who can even number the sins of this kind of which he is guilty in a



single day? And many of these thoughts are rendered peculiarly sinful by being indulged in the house of God, during the hours set apart for devotion, when, if ever, the mind ought to be solemn and collected. But it is here impossible to descend to particulars. We must leave everyone to reflect as he pleases on the atheistic thoughts; the impious and profane thoughts; the impure, covetous, vain, foolish, and absurd thoughts that have passed through his mind and [have] been entertained there. And while you reflect on this, remember that thoughts are the language of disembodied spirits; that thoughts are words in the ear of God; and that our guilt in His sight is no less great than if we had actually given utterance to every thought that has lodged in our minds. Agreeably, we find our Savior answering the *thoughts* of those around Him, just as He would if they had expressed them in words. And in many passages, God charges sinners with saying what, it appears, they only thought. In the ear of Jehovah, then, our thoughts have a tongue; and what He hears them say, we may learn from the inspired declaration: “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). And surely no man who believes this declaration, none who believes that thoughts are words in the ear of Jehovah, can doubt that his wickedness is great and his iniquities numberless.

**3. From sins of thought let us next proceed to those of the tongue.**

From what has been said of our feelings and thoughts, it is evident that this class of sins also must be exceedingly numerous, “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mat 12:34). If, then, sin prevails in the heart, it will flow out through the lips. That it does so is but too obvious. Not to insist on the falsehoods, the slanders, the profane, impious, and indecent expressions that are daily uttered by many persons, it may be sufficient to remind you that of every *idle* word that men speak, “they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Mat 12:36). Every idle word, then, is a sin.

But what are idle words? I answer: all that are not necessary and that do not tend to produce good effects. God’s precepts are, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying” (Eph 4:29). Let your speech be always with grace, that it may minister grace unto the hearers (Col 4:6; Eph 4:29). “Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Eph 5:4). These rules, perhaps, will be considered by some as too strict; but, my friends, they are the rules that God prescribes in His Word. They are the rules by which we must be tried hereafter. And every word that does not

[agree] with them is an idle word and, consequently, sinful. How innumerable, then, are the sins of the tongue...I shall only add that whenever we speak of others as we should not wish them to speak of us, we sin against the law of love and violate our Savior's golden rule: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Mat 7:12). Happy is the man who can truly say that, in this respect alone, his transgressions are not numberless.

**4. Let us now consider our sinful actions.** And here, my friends, we shall not speak of what the world calls sins. We shall say nothing of thefts, frauds, injuries, intemperance, and debauchery. If there are any among my hearers who are not free from these gross enormities, I must leave the task of reproving them to their own consciences. Our concern is principally with those sinful actions that are by most men thought innocent; and for which, therefore, conscience seldom, if ever, reproves them.

To begin with what have been called sins of *omission*: "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it" (Pro 4:27). "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jam 4:17). From these passages, it appears that whenever men have an opportunity to do good, either to the bodies or souls of men or of doing any good work for the glory of God and neglect to improve it, they sin. Of how many sins, then, are we guilty! How many thousands of opportunities for doing good have we suffered to pass unimproved...We have failed to glorify the God in Whose hand our breath is. Prayer and praise glorify God. But these duties we have all neglected during a considerable part of our lives, and many of us are still neglecting them. We are commanded, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1Co 10:31). These precepts apply to our words as well as to our actions; and they prove that every word that we have not spoken, every action that we have not performed with a view to promote the glory of God—in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—is a sin...To bring all that need be said on this subject to a point: every feeling, thought, word, and action that is not in all respects as it ought to be or as God requires it to be, is sinful...If men's feelings, thoughts, words, actions are numberless, so are their sins...

Hence, we see why the atonement<sup>1</sup> made by Christ was necessary. Men had all sinned. Their wickedness was great, and their transgres-

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<sup>1</sup> See FGB 225, *The Work of Christ*; FGB 226, *Christ upon the Cross*; FGB 227, *Atonement*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

sions infinite. Hence, they deserved an infinite punishment. And God was obliged in justice to inflict on them such a punishment, unless some sufficient atonement could be made. As sin and the punishment due to sin were infinite, no atonement that was not infinite in value could suffice. And where could such an atonement be found? Men could not make it, for they were already under sentence of death and [had] forfeited everything that they possessed.

Yet the atonement must be made by a man because it was for the benefit of men. The language of the Law was, “Man has sinned and man must die.” In this exigency,<sup>2</sup> the Eternal Word, the Son of God, interposed.<sup>3</sup> He consented to become man, to bear the sins of men, or, in other words, the punishment, which their sins deserved; to stand as the representative of sinners and suffer the curse of the Law in their stead.

This He has done. He has thus magnified the Law and made it honorable (Isa 42:21). He deserves some reward for this wonderful act of benevolence and obedience. A just God is as much bound to reward Him, as He is to punish the wicked. But what reward shall He give Him? He needs nothing for Himself. But there is a reward infinitely valuable in His estimation, infinitely dear to His benevolent heart. It is the pardon and salvation of His people—of *every* sinner who confides in His merits and intercession and submits to be reconciled through Him to God. This reward was promised Him. This reward is given Him. God can now “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

None, however, will believe in Jesus, none will apply to Him for salvation, but those who see and feel that their wickedness is great and their iniquities infinite. You may see therefore, my friends, why I have led your attention to this subject...You may easily conceive how precious the Savior would appear to you, did you feel burdened with the weight of all the sins with which you are here charged...Fly, then, to the cross of Christ, “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7).

From “Our Sins Infinite in Number and Enormity” in *The Complete Works of Edward Payson*, Vol. 2, in the public domain.

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**Edward Payson (1783-1827):** American Congregational preacher; born in Rindge, New Hampshire, USA.




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<sup>2</sup> **exigency** – urgent need.

<sup>3</sup> **interposed** – came between the holy God and sinful man.

# REPENTANCE, FAITH, AND SIN

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.—Luke 13:3*

**F**IRST of all, what is repentance<sup>1</sup>? Let us see that we set down our feet firmly on this point. The importance of the inquiry cannot be overrated.

Repentance is one of the foundation stones of Christianity. Sixty times, at least, we find repentance spoken of in the New Testament. What was the first doctrine our Lord Jesus Christ preached? We are told that He said, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mar 1:15). What did the apostles proclaim when the Lord sent them forth the first time? They “preached that men should repent” (Mar 6:12). What was the charge that Jesus gave His disciples when He left the world? That “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations” (Luk 24:47). What was the concluding appeal of the first sermons that Peter preached? “Repent, and be baptized...Repent ye, and be converted” (Act 2:38; 3:19). What was the summary of doctrine that Paul gave to the Ephesian elders, when he parted from them? He told them that he had taught them publicly, and from house to house, “testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:21). What was the description that Paul gave of his own ministry, when he made his defense before Festus and Agrippa? He told them that he had showed all men that they should “repent, and do works meet for repentance” (Act 26:20). What was the account given by the believers at Jerusalem of the conversion of the Gentiles? When they heard of it, they said, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Act 11:18)...Surely, we must all agree that these are serious considerations. They ought to show the importance of the inquiry I am now making. A mistake about repentance is a most dangerous mistake. An error about repentance is an error that lies at the very roots of our religion. What, then, is repentance? When can it be said of any man that he repents?

**Repentance is a thorough change of man’s natural heart upon the subject of sin.** We are all born in sin. We naturally love sin. We take

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<sup>1</sup> See FGB 203, *Repentance*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

to sin as soon as we can act and think, as the bird takes to flying and the fish takes to swimming. There never was a child that required schooling or education to learn deceitfulness, sensuality, passion, self-will, gluttony, pride, and foolishness. These things are not picked up from bad companions or gradually learned by a long course of tedious instruction. They spring up of themselves, even when boys and girls are brought up alone. The seeds of them are evidently the natural product of the heart. The [inclination] of all children to these things is an unanswerable proof of the corruption and fall of man. Now, when this heart of ours is changed by the Holy Ghost, when this natural love of sin is cast out, then takes place that change that the Word of God calls “repentance.” The man in whom the change is wrought is said to “repent.” He may be called, in one word, a “penitent” man.

But I dare not leave the subject here. It deserves a closer and more searching investigation. It is not safe to deal in general statements when doctrines of this kind are handled. I will try to take repentance to pieces and dissect and analyze it before your eyes. I will show you the parts and portions of which repentance is made up. I will endeavor to set before you something of the experience of every truly penitent man.

(1) **True repentance begins with *knowledge of sin*.** The eyes of the penitent man are opened. He sees with dismay and confusion the length and breadth of God’s holy Law, and the extent—the *enormous* extent—of his own transgressions. He discovers, to his surprise, that in thinking himself a “good sort of man,” and a man with a “good heart,” he has been under a huge delusion. He finds out that, in reality, he is wicked, guilty, corrupt, and bad in God’s sight. His pride breaks down. His high thoughts melt away. He sees that he is neither more nor less than a great sinner. This is the first step in true repentance.

(2) **True repentance goes on to work *sorrow for sin*.** The heart of a penitent man is touched with deep remorse because of his past transgressions. He is cut to the heart to think that he should have lived so madly and so wickedly. He mourns over time wasted, over talents misspent, over God dishonored, over his own soul injured. The remembrance of these things is grievous to him. The burden of these things is sometimes almost intolerable. When a man so sorrows, you have the second step in true repentance.

(3) **True repentance proceeds, further, to produce in a man *confession of sin*.** The tongue of a penitent man is loosed. He feels he must speak to that God against Whom he has sinned. Something within

him tells him he must cry to God, pray to God, and talk with God about the state of his own soul. He must pour out his heart and acknowledge his iniquities at the throne of grace. They are a heavy burden within him, and he can no longer keep silence. He can keep nothing back. He will not hide anything. He goes before God, pleading nothing for himself and willing to say, "I have sinned against heaven and before Thee: my iniquity is great. God be merciful to me, a sinner!" When a man goes thus to God in confession, you have the third step in true repentance.

(4) **True repentance, furthermore, shows itself before the world in a thorough *breaking off from sin*.** The life of a penitent man is altered. The course of his daily conduct is entirely changed. A new King reigns within his heart. He puts off the old man. What God commands he now desires to practice; and what God forbids he now desires to avoid. He strives in all ways to keep clear of sin, to fight with sin, to war with sin, to get the victory over sin. He ceases to do evil. He learns to do well. He breaks off sharply from bad ways and bad companions. He labors, however feebly, to live a new life. When a man does this, you have the fourth step in true repentance.

(5) **True repentance, in the last place, shows itself by producing in the heart a settled habit of *deep hatred of all sin*.** The mind of a penitent man becomes a mind habitually holy. He abhors that which is evil and cleaves to that which is good. He delights in the Law of God. He comes short of his own desires frequently. He finds in himself an evil principle warring against the Spirit of God. He finds himself cold when he would be hot, backward when he would be forward, heavy when he would be lively in God's service. He is deeply conscious of his own infirmities. He groans under a sense of indwelling corruption. But still, for all that, the general bias of his heart is towards God and away from evil. He can say with David, "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way" (Psa 119:128). When a man can say this, you have the fifth, or crowning step, of true repentance.

But now, is the picture of repentance complete? Can I leave the subject here and go on? I cannot do it. There remains yet one thing behind that ought never to be forgotten. Were I not to mention this one thing, I might make hearts sad that God would not have made sad and raise seeming barriers between men's souls and heaven.

True repentance, such as I have just described, is never alone in the heart of any man. It always has a companion—a blessed companion. It is always accompanied by living faith in our Lord and Savior

Jesus Christ. Wherever faith is, there is repentance; wherever repentance is, there is always faith...I am bold to say that the two graces are never found separate, one from the other. Just as you cannot have the sun without light, ice without cold, fire without heat, or water without moisture, so long you will never find true faith without true repentance; and you will never find true repentance without living faith. The two things will always go side by side.

And now...let us search and try our own hearts, and see what we know about true repentance. I do not affirm that the experience of all penitent people tallies exactly, precisely, and minutely. I do not say that any man ever knows sin, mourns for sin, confesses sin, forsakes sin, or hates sin perfectly, thoroughly, completely, as he ought. But this I do say: all true Christians will recognize something that they know and have felt in the things that I have just been saying. Repentance, such as I have described, will be, in the main, the experience of every true believer. Search, then, and see what you know of it in your own soul.

Beware that you make no mistake about the nature of true repentance. The devil knows too well the value of that precious grace not to dress up spurious imitations of it. Wherever there is good coin, there will always be bad money. Wherever there is a valuable grace, the devil will put in circulation counterfeits and shams of that grace, and try to palm them off on men's souls. Make sure that you are not deceived.

*From Old Paths: Being Plain Statements of Some of the Weightier Matters of Christianity, in the public domain.*

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**J. C. Ryle (1816-1900):** Bishop of the Anglican Church; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England, UK.



The righteousness of God's demand for my repentance is evident if we consider the heinous nature of sin. Sin is a renouncing of Him Who made me. It is refusing Him His right to govern me. It is the determination to please myself; thus, it is rebellion against the Almighty. Sin is spiritual lawlessness and utter disregard for God's authority. It is saying in my heart, "I care not what God requires, I am going to have my own way; I care not what be God's claim upon me, I am going to be lord over myself." Reader, do you realize that this is how you have lived?

—A. W. Pink

Sin brings a sting in the conscience, a curse in the estate,  
yet men love it.—*Thomas Watson*

# UNKNOWN DEPTHS OF HUMAN SIN

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.—Luke 23:34*

**F**IRST, my friends, it appears from the text that there are unknown depths in human iniquity: “They know not what they do.” You will tell me, perhaps, that Christ applied this remark to His murderers, who did not know that He was the Son of God; for, if they had known Him to be the Messiah, “They would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1Co 2:8); and it might have been said to them, “Ye did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1Ti 1:13). I grant you that this was the immediate meaning of Christ’s words; but, I think...this saying is true of the entire human family. Whenever any of us sin, we know not what we do.

Do not misunderstand me. There is no man in the world who has not enough perception left to teach him the difference between right and wrong...Yet I must admit at the outset that it is possible for the conscience to become so blind through prevailing customs, so seared through lengthened habit, and so perverted through absolute ignorance that men may sin and yet know not what they do...Let me show you, as briefly and forcibly as I can, how this is the fact.

**Who among us knows, to the full, the real meaning and nature of sin?** I can give some description to you of what sin is; but I question, brethren, whether even the most enlightened of us know the whole of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Sinner, I address myself pointedly to you. Do you know that when you sin, you call God a *fool*? You say that His Law is not the best thing for you; that He has made a mistake and has asked you to do that which would not conduce to your happiness. You call God a fool—is that nothing? Do you know that when you sin, you call God a *liar*? He tells you that sin is a bitter and an evil thing. You say, “No, it is sweet; it is pleasant; at any rate, I will taste it.” You give the lie to the Eternal God—is that nothing? Whenever you sin, you call God a *tyrant*. You do, in fact, avow that He has given laws that are hard and arbitrary, which He ought not to have given and which you are determined to break because you feel that they are not for your happiness—they do not promote your comfort. And is this nothing? Is this



nothing—to call the all-wise God a fool, the truthful God a liar, and the good and generous God a tyrant?

But there is more than this in your sin. Every time a man sins, he aims a blow at the crown of God. He refuses to let God be the King, but puts his hand—his wicked hand—upon the diadem of deity and would dash the crown from God’s head if he could. Nay, more: he aims a blow at God’s very existence. The language of sin is, “No God!” and every time a sinner sins, he tries to get rid of God; his aim and drift is to slay the Eternal One and to put the King of kings out of His own universe. Is this nothing? Is this *nothing*? Doth not even this, feeble though the explanation be, make sin to be exceeding sinful? Verily, when we sin, we know not what we do.

I can hardly believe that there is a man in this assembly who would, in cool blood, stand up and say, “I defy God; I will do my best to drive Him from His throne, ay, and to drive Him from existence!” And yet, sinner, every time you curse, lie, swear, or break God’s Law in any way whatever, you do, in fact, do all these things. And I think I may say you know not what you do.

Let us now shift the kaleidoscope again and get another view of this great and solemn truth:

**None of us know what we do, if we judge of sin by its loathsomeness in God’s sight.** There is not a man living who knows how much God hates and abhors sin...Wherever sin is, there is God’s utmost hate, anger, and ire.<sup>1</sup> He cannot endure it; His eyes cannot light upon it without burning it up, and His hand is ever longing to smite it to the death. Why, look ye, sirs, God had a choice archangel—a glorious being, whose wings were like the beams of the rising sun, whose stature was like a great snow-clad mountain, and whose beauty was as a fair field girt with flowers. He sinned, and God spared neither him nor the angels that followed him in his rebellion, but cast them down to hell and reserved them “in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). Angelhood could not save an angel; angelic stature, a seraphic voice, and a cherubic flight, could not save Satan and his hosts when the stain of sin had fallen on them. How much, then, must God hate sin!

When God had made the world, He smiled and said, “It is good” (*see* Gen 1:31). “The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7); for the world was very good, and

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<sup>1</sup> ire – wrath.

God's own heart was glad at the sight of the new-made world. But when Adam sinned, God did not spare Eden, with all its perfections of beauty. Later, when the iniquity of man was fully ripe, He did not spare the round world itself, but bade the floods upleap from their cavernous darkness and bade the clouds burst their swaddling bands, and the earth was covered with a flood; for "it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Gen 6:6).

Nay, if we want to see more clearly still how God hates sin, let us see how sin came upon His own Son—His only-begotten, His well-beloved Son. It came there, not by any deed of His own, but because He took our iniquities upon Himself; therefore, "he was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa 53:12). And did His Father spare Him? Far from it. He smote Him with the rod, He scourged Him with the lash, He pierced Him to the heart with His sword! He gave up His darling to the power of the dog, and "lama sabachthani?"<sup>2</sup> was a sorrowful proof that God hates and loathes sin, let it be wherever it may. Now, sirs, would you go and press to your bosom, dandle, pamper, and pet the thing that God loathes and hates? I [think] not. If we had ever before our eyes God's hatred of sin, and this was revealed to our heart by the Holy Ghost, we should long to be rid of it. Therefore, I say that when we take hold of it and embrace it, we know not what we do.

**Again, what man among us knows sin in its awful consequences?** Is there a mother here who would go home tonight and ask herself the quickest way to damn her child's soul? Is there a father here who would take counsel with his own wickedness as to the readiest method of sending his son to hell? I think not. Yet, when the father is a drunkard or a swearer, what does he do but do his worst to ruin his child? And when the mother is prayerless, godless, Christless, does she not do her utmost to murder her child's soul? Verily, we in our relationships, when we go into sin, know not what we do...When you commit iniquity—especially those of you who occupy the responsible position of parents, masters, ministers, or employers in any way—you do your best to destroy the souls of others! So I can truly say, "Surely you know not what you do."

Do you know, sinner, that every time you sin, your sin affects the whole world? Let me not stagger you: it is only our finite vision that prevents us seeing the effect of even one thought upon the entire uni-

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<sup>2</sup> **lama sabachthani?** – "Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psa 22:1; Mat 27:46; Mar 15:34).

verse. The word I am speaking, just now, sets in motion a wave in the air that reaches your ear; it will abide in your memory, to a certain degree, throughout eternity. In limiting the sphere of my voice to your ears, I have set eternity pulsating. You shall think these things over either in the waves of fiery hell or in the fields of glorious heaven. Eternity has been affected by the speech of a man. And so it is with what you do: there is an effect produced on earth, on heaven, on hell, by whispered blasphemy or by an unseen lust. You cannot sin alone; you are part of a universe. You cannot disentangle yourself from the meshes of the net of society. You are in the ship of the universe, and you cannot get out of it. You cannot even be thrown out of it, as Jonah was cast out of the ship into the sea. Your sin is [helping to drag] other men down to hell, or else the grace that is in you is helping to uplift others towards God and heaven. Mind *that* when you sin! For, from this day, I think that you will hardly be able to say as, perhaps, you may have done before, that you know not what you do.

But sinner, let me speak to you solemnly—to you—about something in which no imagination is needed. Do you see that man yonder? What is he doing? I see a pearly gate, within which I mark the splendors of bliss unutterable and hear the hymns of the paradise of God. What is that man doing? He is putting bolts and bars upon that gate to shut himself out. Do you call him a madman? Sinner, that madman is *you*. Your sins are shutting you out of heaven.

Do you see yonder man? He is carrying faggots<sup>3</sup> on his weary shoulders and stooping to the very ground as he bears his burden. For what purpose is he carrying that fuel? It is to make a bed of fire on which he shall lie and swelter in flames for ever. Do you call him a madman? Sinner, that madman is *you*. What is hell but the laying on upon your back of a whip whose knots you have yourself tied? What is it but the drinking of a cup of gall, every drop of which was distilled from your own sin?

These are awful things to say; but I feel that, when I look at what hell is in all its horrors and what the loss of heaven is with all its dreadful darkness, I must say to you, when you sin, surely you know not what you do...You, when you sin, are a suicide without excuse because you flee from good that stands before you to an evil that has no mixture of benefit or mercy. You leap into the fire yourself—a fire that you have kindled yourself and that your own blasphemous breath has fanned. Oh, may God teach us when we sin, what we have

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<sup>3</sup> **faggots** – bundles of small sticks, twigs, or tree branches bound together and used for fire.

really done that we may not do it again and that, by His grace, we may be led to the precious blood of Christ to have the guilt of it washed away!

Only once more upon this point, and then I will leave it. “They know not what they do.” *Sinner, do you know that when you sin, eternity is involved in every act?* Faith binds me to eternal bliss; sin and unbelief fetter me to everlasting woe. I think I hear the voice of a spirit that has been these last ten years in Hades. Listen! listen! There is a cry, a groan; and now the words are audible: “Fool that I was to come here! Here am I tortured in agony indescribable that is to go on forever—and for what? For a few hours of giddy mirth,<sup>4</sup> for a few silly jokes that I might indulge my pride rather than submit to the free grace of God. Why am I here? Because I would serve Satan; and God knows that it was a bitter service. What little sweet it had is all forgotten now.” Do you hear this man as he speaks to himself? “Oh, if I could ever escape from this dreadful dungeon, it would be a heaven to me! If these awful fires could be quenched, if this gnawing worm would but die, then I would be content. If, after ten thousand, thousand, thousand years, I could hope to make my escape from this pit of woe, I would set all the bells of my heart a-ringing for very joy at the bare possibility that, at last, I might escape. But what is it that I see written before me? Forever! Forever, on my chains; forever, branded on my limbs of pain; forever, on you waves of fire; forever, in the angry gaze of an incensed Deity; forever, in those hungry depths that seem to yawn to suck me into deeper woe; forever, forever, forever, forever!” O drunkard, swearer, whoremonger—when thou sinnest the next time, recollect that the deed thou doest entails everlasting consequences, which will run on forever, forever, forever! Surely, when you have sinned in the past, you must have been ignorant of this overwhelming truth: you could not have known what you were doing!

But have I some here who say that they *do* know what they are doing? They have been so faithfully warned, so affectionately dealt with, so earnestly prayed for that, when they sinned, they sinned willfully, knowing what they did. O my dear hearers, that is true of some of you! I have often felt, when I have come out of the pulpit, that you would be without excuse in the Day of Judgment. God knoweth that I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God—divine sovereignty in all its absoluteness and the sinner’s responsibility in all its fulness. I have preached to you the doctrines of grace; but

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<sup>4</sup> **giddy mirth** – foolish amusement.

I have not, therefore, kept back the demands of God upon you. I know that, should you perish, it will neither be for [lack] of preaching nor of weeping. Well, sirs, if you do perish with the gospel preached in your ears, you perish fearfully indeed.

Room there—room!—make way, ye priests of Moloch! Stand back, ye followers of Ashtaroth! Ye worshippers of Baal, stand back! Give up your choice seats: the highest places in the synagogue of hell. Make room, for here comes a man who read his Bible and heard the Word faithfully preached—give *him* the choicest place! Now cannibals, pirates, and all ye poor beings who sinned, but knew not what you did, make room. For here comes a man who sinned with God before his very eyes and blindly rushed upon the spear of the Almighty when the light of heaven was shining upon his eyeballs! Make room for him, I say. Get up, ye who have been guilty of murder and of the shedding of blood in lands where Christ was never preached—get up, and give place to this man! “What!” say they, “art thou become like one of us?” Yes, say we, not only like one of you, but deeper than your depth, more fiery than your flames, more horrible than your horrors, shall be the dread, the doom, the destruction of this man of whom it could not be said, “He knew not what he did.” God have mercy upon you, my hearers! May His sovereign grace be extended toward you, the lines of His election embrace you, the blood of Christ’s redemption wash you, the voice of His effectual calling awaken you, and the power of His grace preserve you. Or alas! Woe unto you...If the gospel preached unto you had been preached in Sodom, it had continued unto this day; and if in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

From a sermon delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,  
on a Lord’s Day Evening in the year 1861.

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**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



If sin is the greatest evil, then see the utter impossibility of anything under heaven to relieve and help us from under the guilt of sin save Jesus Christ alone. Have you committed but one sin? You have done that which all the treasures of righteousness in heaven and earth are not able to relieve or help you in save Jesus Christ.—*Samuel Bolton*

Do anything rather than sin! O hate sin! There is more evil in the  
least sin, than in the greatest bodily evils that can  
befall us.—*Thomas Watson*

# OUR SINS VIEWED AT THE CROSS

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

*They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.—Zechariah 12:10*

**O**H, there are no affections like those that spring from a view of Jesus crucified! No tears so precious, no feelings so true, no contrition<sup>1</sup> so intense and tender as gushes from the hidden springs of the soul, touched and unsealed by the heart's believing communion with the suffering Savior!

Law and judgment do but harden,  
All the time they work alone;  
But a sense of blood-bought pardon  
Soon dissolves the heart of stone.<sup>2</sup>

Yes, if there is anything that can dissolve that heart of stone, it is Christ's atoning blood. You have been around the mount that burns with fire, draped with blackness and darkness and tempest, but your heart has felt no softening. You have traversed the round of legal duty, have been strict in every religious engagement, have been conscientious in the fulfilment of every relative obligation, and yet your soul has felt no peace. In all this, you have not found Jesus. You have sought Him in splendid temples, in gorgeous worship, in costly sacrifices, in excited crowds, in the pious circles of rank and wealth and influence, and still you have not found Jesus.

But at length, by some power, invisible and inexplicable, gently and persuasively moving upon your mind, you have been led into another, more shaded and sequestered<sup>3</sup> path: you have sought Jesus at the cross, in poverty and desertion; in humiliation and sorrow; in suffering, blood, and death. And lo! you have found just the Savior that you needed, the peace you craved, the joy for which you longed, the hope for which you sighed; and now, beneath the cross of Jesus, you are prostrate—a rebel won, a soul penitent, a sinner saved! Oh, one moment's believing, close contact with the cross will do more to break the heart for sin, deepen the conviction of its exceeding sinfulness,

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<sup>1</sup> **contrition** – sincere remorse for wrongdoing.

<sup>2</sup> From the hymn by Joseph Hart (1712-1768), "Jesus Christ Our God and Savior," also known in a shorter version as "Nothing but Thy Blood, O Savior."

<sup>3</sup> **sequestered** – isolated and hidden away.

and [set free] the soul from all its bondage and its fears, bringing it into a sense of pardon and acceptance and assured hope, than a lifetime of the most rigid legal duties that ever riveted their iron chain upon the soul.

But it is not so much Christ's personal beauty and suffering that most deeply moves the heart: it is the spectacle of His *suffering love*! The picture of love sacrificing itself—courting death in its most terrific form—for an object unworthy of its affection would seem sufficient to melt the marble to sensibility...When in faith we look upon Him Whom by our sins we have pierced, we behold not suffering only, but suffering love—love the divinest and most ancient, love the most tender and strong, love the most self-sacrificing—the dying love of Jesus!

Nothing provides a clue to the marvels of Christ's history but love. Love was the inciting cause of all, the moving spring of all, the rational solution of all the wondrous events that traced the life of our blessed Lord. Oh, how He loved! The love of Christ—it passes knowledge! Lying at the cross where incarnate love was transfixed, where it sorrowed, bled, and died, the soul dissolves into tenderness and contrition. He who writes the history of the cross, writes the history of love—the only record of love that shall be preserved in the archives of eternity. This is the love upon which the pierced Savior invites us to look. To look at the incarnate God is to look upon incarnate love. Bring your soul, my reader, beneath the focus of the cross, and you have concentrated upon it the burning rays of incarnate love—and self-abasement, holy penitence, and sweet affection will be the blessed result.

Who can stand unmoved before the sight, look, and words of love—that love sacrificing itself for us? Such is the love of Jesus! Often as its history has been traced, its story told, its pains and sorrows and death portrayed, yet, when shed abroad afresh in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, when we approach the cross and attain a clearer view of its reality, a deeper sense of its depth and tenderness, a more vivid realization of its marvelous sacrifice, a more spiritual apprehension of the wondrous redemption it has wrought, the full salvation it has finished, the free pardon, the perfect peace, and the unspeakable joy it inspires, the hell it has sealed, and the heaven it has opened, oh, can we look upon Him Whom our sins—past, present and future—so deeply pierced and not mourn?

We thus reach an important part of our subject—the looking upon Him Whom we have pierced: “They shall look upon me.” There must

be a believing, spiritual apprehension of Christ, or sin cannot properly be seen, or seen only to plunge the observer into the depths of despair. The mere presentation of the cross to the natural eye will awaken no emotion, other than natural ones. That which is natural can only produce what is natural. Nature can never rise above itself: it invariably finds its own level. Thus, in a contemplation of the sufferings of Christ, there may in minds of deep natural sensibility be emotion, the spectacle may affect the observer to tears—but it is nature only...My reader, beware of mistaking nature for grace—the emotions of a stirred sensibility—for the tears of a broken and a contrite heart.

The eye that looks upon Christ and upon sin through Christ is the eye of faith, that marvelous telescope of the renewed soul that beholds the invisible, sees the unseen, peers into eternity, and makes future things present realities. This it is that dissolves the heart into holy, tender contrition. Such a sight of Him Whom we have pierced will smite the rock, and the streams of godly grief will flow. One simple, believing, close look at the cross will more quickly and effectually subdue the heart for sin, give a deeper sight of its sinfulness, and inspire the soul with a stronger confidence in the forgiving love of God than all the thunders that rolled and the lightnings that flashed around the brow of Sinai.

You who have some legal apprehension of sin, who see your depravity, feel your condemnation, dread the judgment—you who have been laboring for acceptance with God, oh, receive the message of the gospel! Look believingly to the cross, gaze upon Him Whom your sins pierced, and you shall realize the marvelous effects in your soul of one believing look of faith, one drop of atoning blood, one beam of forgiving love, transforming the sepulchral darkness<sup>4</sup> of your soul into the meridian light of God's salvation. Oh, most significant words: "They shall look upon ME!" They shall turn from Moses, from the Law, from their sacrifices, and from all their sins and transgressions, and one object shall attract and fix their believing gaze: "ME whom they have pierced."

The effect of this believing look at sin through Christ, and at Christ as putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, we are yet to consider. Our remarks must be brief. We read, "And they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zec

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<sup>4</sup> **sepulchral darkness** – darkness like that of a tomb.



12:10). The following are some of the distinctive features of that deep contrition for sin that springs from a view of this glorious sacrifice.

It is *evangelical* in its nature, as opposed to the legal. It is an emotion in alliance with the gospel and not the Law. It is from Christ; it is produced by Christ; it is full of Christ. It is a flower that blooms beneath the cross. A sight of atoning blood, a sense of pardoned sin, the streams of dying love as they flow from the cross gliding into the soul, in a word, a full, clear, simple sight of Jesus as saving sinners, sinners the vilest, sinners the oldest, sinners the chief—sinners who have not one plea springing from themselves but the greatness and the number and the turpitude<sup>5</sup> of their transgressions—will fill the soul with gospel mourning.

It is *holy* in its nature in opposition to the sorrow of the world. It is emphatically and preeminently godly sorrow. The most holy posture of the soul is at the foot of the cross. There, all the feelings and thoughts that possess it are produced by, and are in sympathy with, the most extraordinary display of holiness the intelligent creation ever beheld: the Son of God dying for our sins! Holy, then, is the nature and holy the fruits of that contrition for sin that dissolves the heart before the spectacle of Jesus crucified. Never is sin more vividly seen or so deeply felt, never is self so profoundly loathed or so entirely forsaken, as when the believing soul is enshrined within the pierced side of Christ...

It is *intense*. The deepest feeling of which the human soul is capable is experienced beneath the cross of Christ. Our Lord has selected from the world of imagery the most expressive and touching simile<sup>6</sup> to illustrate this: a parent's grief for his first-born! To behold the heir of the family and the inheritor of the estate, the tall cedar, the strong and beautiful staff, smitten to the earth, borne to an early tomb, is intense sorrow indeed! Is there a sorrow that surpasses it in intensity? There is! Deep and keener far [is] that sorrow that overwhelms the soul prostrate in view of Jesus upon the cross. The one sorrow touches but the natural; the other stirs to the lowest depth the spiritual affections of the soul. In the one, the religious element has no place; in the other, there is the deepest sense of sin against the holy Lord God. How conclusive of this [are] the Scripture's specimens of godly sorrow for sin. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever

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<sup>5</sup> **turpitude** – moral perversion.

<sup>6</sup> **simile** – figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds.

before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight...Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa 51:2-4, 9, 17)...Trace the remarkable workings of this intense godly sorrow in the repentant Corinthians. “For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!” (2Co 7:11). Truly, “They shall mourn and be in bitterness, as one that mourns for his first-born.”

It is the *harbinger of joy*. The sight of sin and the sight of Christ at the same moment constitute an element of the deepest, purest joy. The tears of godly sorrow are the seeds of holy joy. He that goes forth weeping, bearing this precious seed, shall doubtless return again with joy. Weeping beneath the cross may endure for a night, but the joy of the Lord will assuredly dawn with the dawn of morning. The gloom that drapes the soul weeping at the cross shall dissolve into light, unclouded and serene. The joy of knowing that God is reconciled in Christ Jesus, that sin is pardoned, that peace is possessed, that heaven is secure, oh, it is a “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1Pe 1:8). Henceforth, O believer, the cross shall, like the glorious sun, illumine your path through this region of sin and sorrow with its growing luster, until it leads you up to the realms of perfect day. O God! to life’s last and latest hour, let me be a weeper at the cross! Precious Savior! in view of my sins and my sinfulness, in view of the awful solemnities of eternity, what can I do but cling to Thy cross? And when death, of whom Thou, O Christ, are the plague, dissolves the silver cord and sets my spirit free, take me to the place where Thine own soft hand shall wipe my tears and turn my present and momentary sorrow for sin into the future and eternal joy of perfect holiness! Lord, for that blissful hour my longing spirit pants!

From “A Sight of Sin and a Sight of Jesus” in *At the Foot of the Cross*,  
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**Octavius Winslow (1808-1878):** Prominent evangelical pastor and author; born in Pentonville, England, UK.



Oh, the love of Christ! That He should bear sin, which is  
more than all miseries, a greater evil than death,  
than hell itself!—*Samuel Bolton*