

SIN'S TRUE QUALITY

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“Exceeding sinful.”
Romans 7:13

INTO the connection of these words our time, which is very short this evening, will not permit us to enter. It was something like this—Paul was showing that the law could not make a man holy, and he observes that he had himself found that, when the law came into his heart, it excited in him a desire to act contrary to its precepts.

There were some actions which he would not have thought of performing until he found that they were forbidden—and the straightway he felt a desire to do them at once. To this a grave objection was raised. This were to make the law aid and abet sin. Not so, replies the apostle—it was not the law that made him sin, for the law is good, but it was the sinfulness of his heart that could thus turn that which was good into an occasion of evil.

He further showed that this was the very design of the law as given by Moses to make clear how sinful sin was. The purpose for which it was sent was not, to make men holy, but to make men see how unholy they were. It was not the cure of the disease, much less the creator of it, but it was the revealer of the disease that lurked in the constitution of man.

Now, what I want to call your attention to is, that Paul here calls sin, “exceeding sinful.” Why didn’t he say, “exceeding black,” or “exceeding horrible,” or “exceeding deadly”? Why, because there is nothing in the world so bad as sin. When he wanted to use the very worst word he could find to call sin by, he called it by its own name and reiterated it—“sin,” “exceeding sinful.”

For if you call sin black, there is no moral excellency or deformity in black or white. Black is as good as white and white is as good as black, and you have expressed nothing. If you call sin, “*deadly*,” yet death in itself has no evil in it compared with sin. For plants to die is not a dreadful thing, rather it may be a part of the organization of nature that successive generations of vegetables should spring up, and in due time should form the root-soil for other generations to follow.

If you call it, “*deadly*,” you have said but little. If you need a word, you must come home for it. Sin must be named after itself. If you need to describe it, you must call it, “sinful.” Sin is “exceeding sinful.”

The text may suggest a broad argument and a special application. Our endeavor shall be to show you then that sin is in itself, “exceeding sinful,” and yet there are some signs of which it may be said with peculiar emphasis that they are “exceeding sinful.”

I. SIN IS IN ITSELF “EXCEEDING SINFUL.”

It is rebellion against God and “exceeding sinful” because it interferes with the just rights and prerogatives of God. That great invisible Spirit whom we cannot see, whom even our own thoughts cannot encompass, made the heavens and the earth and all things that are, and it was His right that what He made should serve His purpose and give Him glory.

The stars do this. They jar not in their everlasting orbits. The world of matter does this. He speaks and it is done. The sun, the moon, the constellations of heaven, yea, and the terrestrial forces, even the billows of the sea and the ravings of the wind, all these obey His behests. It is right they should. Shall not the potter make of the clay what he wills? Shall not he who uses the adze, fashion what he chooses for his own pleasure?

You and I, favored in our creation—not inanimate clods, not worms, having sensations only, without intellect—we who have been favored with thought, emotion, affection, with a high spiritual existence—aye, with an immortal existence—we were especially bound to be obedient to Him that made us. Ask your conscience, do you not feel that God has rights towards you?

Ask yourselves, if you make or preserve anything, call it your own and it is your own—do you not expect it to answer your end or do your bidding? Why have you forgotten Him that made you? Wherefore have you spent your powers and faculties for anything but His glory? Ah! it is “exceeding sinful” when the crown-rights of Him upon whose will we exist are ignored or impudently contravened. Yet according to the part we take in sin, we trample on His edicts and set at nought His jurisdiction.

How exceeding sinful is *this rebellion against such a God!* Muse on His attributes and consider His majesty, for He is not merely infinitely powerful, wise, all-sufficient, and glorious, but He is supremely good. He is good to the fullest extent of goodness. He is a God whose character is matchless. Not like Jupiter, to whom the heathens ascribed every vice, nor like Juggernaut, the bloody god of Hindustan. He is a pure and holy God whom we worship. JEHOVAH, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises.

Now, it is conceivable that if God were some vast being who had a right naturally to our service, yet if His character—(forgive, great God, the supposition!)—were severe without pity, rigorous without clemency, harsh without forbearance, there were some pretense why daring spirits should lead a rebellion against the oppressor.

But our Father, God, the great Shepherd-King—who shall frame an excuse when we for a single moment revolt against Him or lift a finger against His will? It were heaven to serve Him. The angels will tell you this. It were bliss to do His will. The perfect spirits all proclaim this. Ah! sin is base indeed, a rebellion against a monarch's gentlest sway, an insurrection against parent's tenderest rights, a revolt against peerless benignity! Oh! shame on thee, Sin! You are “exceeding sinful” indeed.

What an aggravation of the sinfulness of sin is this—that *it rebels against laws, every one of which are just*. The table of the ten commandments contains not one commandment but what is founded upon the essential principles of right. If a law were proclaimed in England which violated the principles of equity, to break that law might be the highest duty. But when the laws of our country are just and right, it is not only an offense against the natural power of the State, but an offense against the understanding and the conscience of right when a man breaks such a statute.

God's laws have not only the divine authority, but they have also this recommendation, that they are all harmonious and adapted to the relations of our being. Was it not the State of Massachusetts that at first passed a resolution when they were about to make statutes, that they would be governed by the laws of God until they found time to make better?

Will they ever find opportunity to make better? Could any man strike out a clause and improve? Could he add a sentence and mend? No! The law is holy, and just, and good. And rightly understood, it naturally forbids evil and simply commends good—only good. Oh, Sin! You are sinful indeed that you should dare to revolt against that which in itself is right and just, virtuous and true.

Moreover, brethren—this may touch some of us to the quick—sin is “exceeding sinful” *because it is antagonistic to our own interest, a mutiny against our own welfare*. Selfishness is a strong principle in us all. That which is good for us and personally advantageous should be regarded with tenacious attachment, and were we wise, would be pursued with strong enthusiasm.

Now, whenever God forbids a thing, we may rest assured it would be dangerous. God's commands are just like those notices, more suggestive of kindly warning than of stern prohibition, which we see upon the park waters in the days of frost, “Dangerous.” God simply tells us that such and such a thing is fraught with peril or it leads to destruction.

What He permits or commends will be, if not immediately, yet in the long run, in the highest degree promotive of our best interests. God does but, as it were, consult our well-being and prosperity when He gives us law. Doesn't it seem a vicious thing, indeed, that a man will recklessly dare to slight himself in order to sin against his Maker?

God says to you, "Do not thrust your arm in the fire." Nature says, "Do not do it." And yet when God says, "Do not commit fornication or adultery, do not lie, do not steal"—when He says, "Draw near to Me in prayer, love Me," these commands are in themselves as naturally wise as the injunction not to thrust your hand into the fire, or the counsel to eat and drink wholesome food when hunger and thirst require.

Yet we spurn these commands. Like a child that is bidden not to drink of the poison cup and will drink of it. Like a child that is refused the edged tool lest he cut himself, and he will cut himself—not believing in his father's wisdom, but credulous of his own judgment, because the cup looks sweet, it must be harmless—because the edged tool glitters, it must be a proper plaything.

Know it, man, you do when you sin cut and tear yourself. Who but a madman would do that? If you neglect to do the right, you do neglect to feed yourself with that which nourishes, and to clothe yourself with that which is comely. Who but an idiot would lend himself to such folly? Yet such idiots and such madmen has sin made us and therefore it is "exceeding sinful."

Sin, if we rightly consider it, *is an upsetting of the entire order of the universe*. In your family you feel as a father that nothing can go smoothly unless there is a head whose discretion shall regulate all the members. If your child should say, "Father, I am determined in this family that, whatever your will is, I will resist it, and whatever my will is, I will abide by it and always carry it out if I can." What a family that would be! How disorganized! What a household! Might we not say, what a hell upon earth!

There sails tomorrow a ship from the Thames under command of a captain, wise and good, who understands the seas. But he has scarcely reached the Nore before a sailor tells him that he shall not obey, that he does not intend either to reef a sail or to do anything aboard the vessel that he is bidden. "Put the fellow in irons!" Everybody says it is right.

Or a passenger coming up from the saloon informs the captain that he does not approve of his authority and throughout the whole of the voyage he intends to thwart him all he can. If there is a boat within hail, put that fellow on shore and do not be concerned if he lands in a muddy place. But get rid of him somehow. Everybody feels it must be.

You might as well scuttle the ship, cut holes in her sides, as tolerate for a moment that the rightful central authority should be unshipped, or that every man should determine to do what is right in his own eyes. The happiness of everybody on board that vessel will depend upon order being kept. If one man is to do this, and another to do that, you might almost as well be shut up in a cage with tigers as be in such a vessel.

Now, look at this world—it is but a floating ship on a larger scale—and say who ought to be Captain here but He that made it, for His mighty hand alone can grasp that awful tiller. Who can steer this gigantic vessel over the waves of Providence—who but He? And who am I, and my hearer, who are you that you should say, "I will ignore the Lord High Admiral. I will forget the Captain. I will rebel against Him"? Why, if all do as you do, what is to become of the whole vessel, what of the whole world? When disorder is introduced, confusion, sorrow, dismay, and disaster will be sure to follow.

If you want proof that sin is exceeding sinful, *see what it has done already in the world*. Lift up your eyes and survey that lovely garden where every beautiful creature, both of bird and beast, and every flower of unwithering loveliness, and everything that can delight the senses are to be discovered in the sunlight. There are two perfect beings, a man and a woman, the parents of our race—enters there sin, the flowers are forthwith withered, a new wildness has seized upon the beasts, the ground brings forth her thorns and thistles, and the man is driven out in the sweat of his face to earn his daily bread.

Who withered Eden? You did, accursed sin! You did it all. See there—but can you bear the sight?—clouds of smoke, rolling pillars of dust, the sound of clarion, the yet more dreadful boom of cannon. Hark to the shrieks and cries. They fly—they are pursued—the battle is over! Walk over the field. There lies a mangled mass of human bodies, cut and torn, riddled with shot, skulls splintered with rifle balls, dabbled pools of blood.

Oh! there is such a scene as only a fiend could gaze on with complacency. Who did all this? Whence come wars and fightings but from your own lusts and from your sins? Oh! sin, you are a carnage-maker! Sin, you do cry, “Havoc,” and straightway let loose the dogs of war! There had been not of this had you not come.

But the spectacle multiplies in our vision. All over the world you have but to wander, and you see little hillocks more or less thickly scattered everywhere. And if you analyze the dust that blows along the street and interrogate every grain, it will probably tell you it was once a part of the body of some man who in generations past died painfully and rotted back to mother earth.

Oh! the world is scarred with death. What is this earth today, but a great Aeldema—a field of blood, a vast cemetery? Death has worm-eaten the world through and through. All its surface bears relics of the human race. Who slew all these? Who slew all these? Who, indeed, but sin? Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

I scarcely dare ask you to follow me, nor if you could follow, would I venture to lead the way, across the stream that parts the land of mortals from the regions of the immortals, should your venturesome wings of imagination dare the flight to a land that is full of confusion and without any order. Across that valley of the shadow of death, you might look on the gloomy region of wretched souls, where their worm dies not and their fire is not quenched.

If you dared to peer into that dismal pit that has no bottom, that place wherein spirits condemned of God are put away forever and forever from all light of hope and restoration. But you shudder even as I shrink back in very horror from that place where God's wrath burns like a furnace, and the proud that do wickedness are as stubble, and the nations that forget God forever are consumed.

Who lit that fire? Where is he that kindled it? It is sin, sin that did it all. No man is there except for sin. No man that ever breathed was ever cast away except as punishment most just for sin most grave. Sin is indeed “exceeding sinful.”

Not even now have I reached the climax, nor must I venture the description. The worst phase is neither death nor hell. But on Calvary's tree the Lord Himself who loved us, and came to earth to bless us, proved the sinfulness of sin when sin nailed Him to the tree and pierced His side, and sinners, rejecting Him with many a jibe and sneer, exclaimed, “We will not have this man to reign over us.”

In the agonies of Jesus, in the shame and spitting, in the woes and anguish that He endured, we read the sinfulness of sin, written as in capital letters, that even the half-blind might see. Oh! sin, murderer of Christ, you are “exceeding sinful.” My time has failed me or I had meant to have enlarged upon—

II. SOME PARTICULAR SINS THAT ARE EXCEEDING SINFUL ABOVE ANY ORDINARY TRANSGRESSION.

I mean sins against the Gospel. I will just give the catalog, that everyone here who is honest with himself may search and see whether he be guilty. To reject loving messengers sent from God, godly parents, earnest pastors, affectionate teachers—to reject the kind message that they bring and the yearning anxiety that they feel for us is “exceeding sinful.”

To resist the loving Gospel which talks to us only of mercy, pardon, adoption, and redemption from hell and exaltation to heaven—to reject that is “exceeding sinful.” To resist the dying Savior whose only motive in coming to earth must have been love, whose wounds are mouths that preach His love, whose death is the solemn proof of love—to despise, to neglect, to ignore Him—this is “exceeding sinful.”

To sin against Him after having made a profession of loving Him. To come to His table and then go and sin with the ungodly. To be baptized in His name and yet to be unjust, dishonest, unrighteous—this is “exceeding sinful.” To be numbered with His church and yet to be of the world. To profess to be His followers and yet to be His enemies—this is “exceeding sinful.”

To sin against light and knowledge. To sin, knowing better. To sin against conscience. To push conscience to one side. To do violence to one's better self. To sin against the Holy Ghost, against His admonitions, warnings, promptings, invitations—this is “exceeding sinful.” To go on sinning after you have smarted. To continue to sin when sin costs you many pains and difficulties. To push onward to

hell, as if riding a steeple-chase, over post, and bar, and gate, and hedge, and ditch—this is “exceeding sinful.”

Some of you here tonight are in this exceeding sinful. Oh! How I have pleaded with some of you. I have cried to you to come to Jesus. I have warned some of you again and again. If I am called to make answer at the judgment bar, I must say “Amen” to the condemnation of many of you. I shall be obliged to confess that you did know better—that some of you drink when you know how wrong it is. That some of you can swear. That some of you are thieves. Some of you sin with a high hand and yet I scarcely know why you come to this Tabernacle again and again and again.

You love to hear my voice and yet you cling to your sins—your sins that will surely damn you. Let me be clear of your blood. I will not mince matters with you or talk with you, as if you are all saints when I know you are not—and as if you are all going to heaven, when, alas! many of you are still swiftly spreading your wings to fly downward to hell. Oh! may God arrest you, or otherwise the brightness and the light in which you sin will make your sin the darker and the plainer—and the warnings you hear will make your condemnation the more overwhelming when it comes.

But why must it come? Why will you die? Why are you set on sin? Why do you love mischief? I see often in the gas-light of my study poor gnats come flying in if the window be but ajar—and how they dash against the flame—and down they fall, but have scarcely recovered strength before up they fly again unto their destruction.

Are you such? Are you mere insects, without wit, without knowledge? Oh! you are not, or else were you excusable. Come to my Savior, poor souls! He is still willing to receive you. A prayer will do it. Breathe the prayer. A broken heart He will not despise. A look at Him will do it. A faint glance at Jesus pleading for you will do it.

Holy Spirit, make them give that glance. Oh! by Your irresistible power, constrain them now to look and live. Oh! it shall be. God be thanked, it shall be. You shall look tonight and God shall have the glory. And though you be “exceeding sinful,” yet shall you, through the precious blood, be fully forgiven, and I hope exceeding grateful for the great forgiveness which Jesus brings. The Lord bless you, for His name's sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 51; ROMANS 7:7-25

PSALM 51

There are many sweet notes in Christian music, but to my own heart there is none so softly, tenderly, sweet as the note of repentance. Full assurance rings out her clarion trumpet strain and we ought to be able to send it forth, but sometimes we are unable. Conquest over sin gives us Miriam's timbrel to dance to and it is well, but everyday use commends me to the harp strings of penitence.

We ought always to be able to play on those strings. They always fit our guilty fingers. They are always sweet to the ear of the Most High. Mr. Rowland Hill used to say that there was one friend of his whom he could not take to heaven and whom he thought he would regret to leave—and that was sweet repentance. I suppose when God wipes every tear from our eyes we shall not be able to weep for sin, but until then—

*“Lord, let me weep for naught but sin,
And after none but Thee;
And then I would—(oh that I might!)—
A constant weeper be,”*

for these bitter sweets—these sweet bitters—are almost the choicest of our sorrow joys or joyful sorrows that we have this side of heaven. Thus David sings.

Verse 1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

And really, brethren, if we cannot feel that we have need to say, “Have mercy upon me,” and if, indeed, this is not the habitual language of our soul, there must be something more wrong about us than even open sin. Not to be able to confess sin and not to be able to mourn it is one of the direst states of sin—in which even sin can be found—but to be able to say from the very soul, “Have mercy upon me: blot out my transgressions,” indicates that there is a soundness still in us by divine grace.

Do you notice what a quick eye David has here for the softer attributes of God? Did ever any man put words together more pleasantly? “According to thy lovingkindness”—“according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.” God never looks more beautiful than when He is seen through a tear. If, under a sense of sin, you see Him as the strangely forgiving God, oh! how pleasant a God He is, and how our hearts love Him!

2. *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

It is not the punishment. The child of God has got away from the legal fear that dreads the punishment. The sin—the *sin*—is that which he loathes and hates. “Lord, get rid of it. I seem to want double cleansing. Wash me. Wash me thoroughly. And when You have done that, cleanse me, for there are stains that washing will not get out. Try fire, Lord, if water will not do it, but somehow wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

It is thrown out on the surface. Health comes back when the disease manifests itself by an outward eruption. It is when you do not acknowledge it—it is when it is not before you—when you cannot perceive it—will not confess your sin—it is then that it is at the heart-strings, killing you, murdering you. Confessed sin has the teeth taken out of it, but sin that is not felt and known, and still is there, breeds the canker of self-conceit and pride, and is deadly to the heart.

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

For in sin, this is the essence of it—that it is sin against God. You cannot get the worldly man to feel that. “I have done no hurt to my neighbor. I have not injured society.” But how different it is with the child of God. It is against God that he has sinned. What if he has never left his chamber—if he has never done an action or said a word? Yet that proud heart of his that rebelled when he was full of pain—that murmuring spirit that would not accept the Lord’s will—that is enough to lay him in the dust—and he mourns it and confesses it. “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.”

5. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

It is not merely that I sinned, but I *am* sin. I am a lump of sin—a heap of iniquity—by nature so. It is not merely *in* me, but it *is* me—my very self. It is in my blood, my bones, my marrow. O God, can You cleanse me from this?

6. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

And sin is a lie and sin is folly. God desires truth and wisdom. Can He give us both of these? Yes, and He will—only let us acknowledge the untruthfulness and confess the unwisdom, and put ourselves into His hands for His infinite grace to deal with us and He will yet do it. “In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.”

7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

“With hyssop.” Just as the priest took the bunch of herbs, and put it into the basin full of blood, and stirred it round and round till he soaked the hyssop in the crimson, and then sprinkled it upon the penitent, so, Lord, apply the blood of Christ to my soul. “Purge with me hyssop”—

“And I shall be clean.”

I shall not be clean any other way. This is the only cleansing—and purgation by the sacrificial atonement. And You alone must do it. Lord, do it now.

8-9. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*

I do not want to hear it unless You make me to hear it. I would not be comforted unless You comfort me. Dread above everything, dear friends, false comfort—false judgments of yourselves—high motions about your own attainments—grand ideas of your own standing in yourselves.

10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

For there must not merely be a creation, but a daily renewal, or else what You have once created will soon be blotted and marred as Your first natural creation was. Go on from day to day to make and keep my heart pure within.

11. *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*

Do not fling me away as a man pulls up a weed by the roots and throws it on a dunghill.

“Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.”

Oh! how often will the child of God have to pray this prayer? The Holy Spirit is in him and he knows it, but he grieves the Spirit—and when his heart is very tender this is his daily fear—lest the Spirit of God should depart from him. “Take not thy holy spirit from me.”

12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

I did know it once. What joy it is—the joy of Your salvation. Give it me back, O Lord. I cannot live on the old mercy. The recollection does not satisfy. It only makes me hunger. “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.”

13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

Nobody ever teaches the mercy of God so well as he that tastes it. Sinner, do you know what a good God my Lord Jesus is? He has forgiven my innumerable sins and therefore I love to speak of Him, and to speak of Him to such as you are, such as I am. “He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him.”

Dear friends, if you know the Savior, be sure you tell all you know. Or if you cannot tell it all, tell as much as you can, and as long as you have got breath. And it may not be long. You may not have many more opportunities, for sickness comes so suddenly and puts the strong man aside so soon. Do use for God what time you have and tell of His love while you are yet in the land where men can hear it, and where you can speak of it. Let this be your prayer—“Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

He said that he would be a preacher? Nay, he said that he would be a singer. God's people feel that they cannot do too much when they get a sense of pardoned sin. They will be both preacher and presenter. They will preach. They will sing. They will have all the irons in the fire. They will not be afraid of turning their faculties to too many accounts.

15-17. *O LORD, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

What a sweet verse that is! Have you got a broken heart tonight, dear friend, and do you feel almost ashamed to bring it, because it is in such a broken condition? It is in the best possible condition. I have read accounts of meetings of God's saints met by the ten days together and talking all about great things

that have been done for them, and from the first to the last no indication of a broken heart or of a contrite spirit.

I confess I could not understand it and did not want to understand it. I would rather stand with the poor publican behind the door five minutes and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," than sit ten days with perfect brethren to magnify and glorify God about what I thought He had done for me, because I am persuaded that in the latter case I should be always in danger of magnifying myself, rather than God—whereas in the former case I should be near the truth and near where I ought to be.

Oh! keep to this—"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

18-19. *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

Notice this. David felt that he had done something to pull down the walls of Zion. His bad example would do mischief to the cause of God and his prayer to be forgiven is not a selfish one, which deals only with his own particular blessing or his own desire for mercy. He wants the church to prosper. He wants God's work to go on and so he cannot close the prayer, even of a penitent and broken heart, without crying, "Build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

In proportion as we think less of ourselves, we shall think more of the church of God, and more of the work of God in the land. To despise yourself is the way to honor God and His people. But when you honor yourself, you will first despise others, and it will go on by degrees to a dishonoring of God Himself, from which may the Lord save us!

ROMANS 7

This is Paul's own account of his inward conflicts. He longed to conquer sin. He wanted to become a free man and live always a godly and holy life, but he found that there was a battle within his nature.

Verse 7. *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

There are some who hope to overcome their evil propensities by the law. They think that if they can know and feel the authority of the law of God, that will have an awe over their minds and they shall become holy. Now the law is in itself supremely holy. It cannot be improved. We could not add to it or take from it without injuring it. It is a perfect law.

But what is its effect upon the mind? When it comes into an unrenewed mind, instead of checking sin, it causes sin. The apostle says that he had not known lust, except the law had said, "Thou shalt not covet." There is a something about us which rebels against law the moment we come to it. There are some things we should never think of doing if we were not prohibited from them, and then there becomes a tendency at once in this vile nature of ours to break the law.

8. *But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.*

If there had never been any law, there could not have been any sin, because sin is a breaking of law. The law is good. We are not speaking about that. The law is necessary, but still, such is our nature that the very existence of law argues and creates the existence of sin. And when the law comes, then sin comes immediately. "Without the law sin was dead."

9. *For I was alive without the law once;*

I thought that I was everything that was good. I imagined that I was doing everything that was right. I felt no rebellion in my heart. I was alive.

9. *But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

I kicked at that commandment. My holiness was soon gone. The excellence which I thought I had in my character soon vanished, for I found myself breaking the law.

10-13. *And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. 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.*

There was sin in his nature, but he did not know it. But when the commandment came, then that evil nature said, "I won't keep that commandment," and it took occasion at once to show itself by breaking that commandment. It was something like a medicine which many a wise physician has given to his patient. There is a deadly disease in the internals of the man and he gives him a medicine that throws it out. You see it on the skin. You feel the pain of it. It would have been his death anyhow. It can only be his death now, but now it is a part of the process of the cure to bring the disease where it can be seen.

And so the law comes into a man's heart and because of the rebellion of his nature, he kicks against the law and sins. It does not make him sinful. It only shows that he was sinful, for a perfect law would not make a perfect man sin. It would lead and guide him in the way of holiness. But a perfect law coming into contact with an imperfect nature soon creates rebellion and sin.

It is an illustration that is not good throughout, but still it is of some use. You have seen quicklime—you throw water on it. The water is of a cooling nature. There is nothing in the water but that which would quench fire, and yet when it is thrown upon the lime the consequence is a burning heat. So is it with the law cast upon man's nature. It seems to create sin. Not that the law does it of itself, but coming into contact with the vicious principles of our nature, sin becomes the product of it. It is the only product.

You may preach up the law of God till everybody becomes worse than he was before. You may read the ten commandments till men learn what to do in order to provoke God. The law does not create holiness. It never can.

14. *For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, Fleshly.*

14. *Sold under sin.*

Even now that I have become a Christian and am renewed by grace.

15. *For that which I do, I allow not:*

I often do that which I do not justify, which I do not wish to do again, which I abhor myself for doing.

16. *For what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.*

This is the believer's riddle. To say that this is not a believer's experience is to prove that the man who says it does not know much about how believers feel. We hate sin and yet, alas! Alas! we fall into it! We would live perfect lives if we could, we that are renewed. We make no justification for our sin—it is evil and abominable—yet do we find these two things warring and fighting within.

16. *If, then, I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.*

My inmost heart says the law is good, though I have not kept it as I wish I had—yet my very wish to keep it is the consent of my nature to the goodness of that law—and proves that there is a vitality about me which will yet throw out the disease and make me right in the sight of God.

17. *Now then it is no more I that do it.*

The real "I," the true "I," the new-born "ego." Thank God for that—to have a will to do good, to have a strong, passionate desire to be holy. "To will is present with me."

17. *But sin that dwelleth in me.*

I would be earnest in prayer, and my thoughts are distracted. I would love God with all my heart, and something else comes in and steals away a part of it. I would be holy as God is holy, but I find myself falling short of my desires. So the apostle means.

18-20. *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it,*

The true and real “I.”

20. *But sin that dwelleth in me.*

Oh! this accursed indwelling sin! Would God it were driven out. We do not say this to excuse ourselves—God forbid—but to blame ourselves that we permit this sin to dwell within us. Yet must we rejoice in God that we are born-again, and that this new “I,” the true “I,” will not yield to sin, but fights against it.

21. *I find then a law.*

Or rule.

21-24. *That, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

Now, the more holy a man gets, the more he cries in this fashion. While he is low down in the scale, he puts up with sin and he is uneasy, but when he gets to see Christ and get somewhat like He, the more nearly he approximates to the image of his Master, the more the presence of the least sinful thought is horrifying to him.

He would, if he could, never look on sin again—never have the slightest inclination to it, but he finds his heart getting abroad and wandering when he would tether it down, if he could, to the Cross and crucify it there. And so the more happy he is in Christ the more desperately does he cry against the wretchedness of being touched with sin, even in the least degree. “Oh! wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

25. *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

It will be done. I shall be delivered. I shall be perfect—

*“Oh, blissful hour! Oh, sweet abode!
I shall be near and like my God.”*

Oh! to be without fault before the throne—without tendency to sin, without the possibility of it, immaculately clean, with a heart that sends forth pure waters like the river of life that flows from beneath the throne of God! This is our portion. We are looking for it, and we will never rest until we get it, blessed be His name. “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

25. *So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God;*

With the new nature.

25. *But with the flesh, the law of sin.*

With the flesh—this old rubbishy stuff that must die and be buried, and the sooner the better. With my old corrupt nature, I serve the law of sin. But what a mercy it is that the next verse is that, notwithstanding that, “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.