

THE DEEP-SEATED CHARACTER OF SIN

NO. 812

A SERMON
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 BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond:
 it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars.”
 Jeremiah 17:1*

IN traveling in the East, inscriptions upon the rocks are often met with, which have remained almost as sharp and clear as when they were first cut by the graver’s tool. Some of these owe their indelible character to the hardness of the rocks upon which they have been engraven. They must have been written, to use the expressive language before us, “with a pen of iron,” and engraven as “with the point of a diamond.” When such writing had been once achieved, those who had achieved their purpose might have said with Pilate, “What I have written I have written,” for there it stood, and there it stands.

The prophet declares that the sin of Judah was as indelibly cut into their nature as the rock writings in the stone. Their hearts were as hard as rock, and sin was inscribed thereon deeply and plainly, as though written with some iron instrument. Their spirits were just as senseless and obdurate as adamant itself, and their iniquity appeared as if engraven with the point of a diamond.

What was said of Judah, may, with equal truthfulness be said of the whole human race. Circumstances here do not alter cases. Put men where you will, whether they belong to Judah or to the uncircumcised nations, as face in water answereth to face, so the heart of man to man—each man is like his fellow. The hardness of Judah’s heart is repeated in the stubbornness of barbarian and Roman, Greek, and Scythian, seen indeed in us, for to deal with ourselves is our main business this morning.

I. We shall commence by answering the question, WHAT IS SIN?

We are always hearing about it. It is constantly dunned into our ears by the preacher. We cannot turn over a page of Holy Writ without meeting with it. What is sin? How few people have obtained a right idea of sin! how much smaller is the number who express the idea clearly!

If you ask the Pharisee of old what sin was—“Well,” he said, “it is eating without washing your hands. It is drinking wine without having first of all strained out the gnats, for those insects are unclean, and if you should swallow any of them, they will render you defiled.” His repentance dealt with his having touched a Gentile, or having come on the wind side of a Publican.

Many in these days have the same notion, with a variation. We have read of a Spanish bandit, who, when he confessed before his father-confessor, complained that one sin hung with peculiar weight upon his soul that was of peculiar atrocity. He had stabbed a man on a Friday, and a few drops of the blood of the wound had fallen on his lips, by which he had broken the precepts of holy church, in having tasted animal food on a fast day. The murder did not seem to arouse in his conscience any feeling of remorse at all—not one atom—he would have done the same tomorrow, but an accidental violation of the canons of mother church excited all his fears.

I read only last night in the newspaper an account of a visit paid by a strict High Churchman to a little meeting of Plymouth brethren. And I was amused with the guilt that evidently rested on the writer’s conscience in having been found in such an assembly.

He tells us, in the first place, that he was not quite well enough to sit out the usual long service in the church. And in the second place, that he had been to a celebration of the Eucharist in the morning, and therefore, he thought that for once he might be pardoned for indulging his curiosity. His mind was, however, evidently burdened with the weight of his heinous sin.

There are men in England, to whom it would be one of the highest crimes and misdemeanors to worship God with the most holy of His servants so long as they did not meet within walls which had been superstitiously consecrated. Singular, indeed, are the ideas which many men have of transgression.

But such is not God's view of sin. Half of those things which mere ecclesiastics condemn are not sins at all. To break the commandments of men may be virtuous, to kick against the conventionalities of a man-made church may be an evidence of enlightenment, to refuse homage to a proud hierarchy may be a bounden duty. The chains of custom, the fetters of fashion, the manacles of priestcraft, are to be scorned by all who claim the right of manhood, to break them in sunder is no sin.

Sin is a want of conformity to the will of God. Sin is disobedience to God's command. Sin is a forgetfulness of the obligations of the relation which exist between the creature and the Creator. This is the very essence of sin. Injustice to my fellow creature is truly sin, but its essence lies in the fact that it is sin against God who constituted the relation which I have violated.

It is surprising, when we talk with persons who profess that they have forsaken their sins, how very seldom they will give you a distinctly spiritual definition of sin. I believe they understand it in their hearts, but their understandings come short of the desired point. Ask them the question, "What sin has most troubled you?" Or "What in your sin most distressed you?" You will be amazed at their replies. Seldom enough will they answer that sin is obnoxious to them because it is an offense against God, but they will light on some one offense, and indicate that as the weight which lies heaviest.

One very sincere young man told me that nothing had previously pricked his conscience until he upset an oil can in the warehouse where he was working, and in foolish fear of his master, denied that he had done so. He felt that he had told a lie, and was so overwhelmed with a sense of his meanness, that he felt thoroughly degraded, and was led to search his heart and to make the discovery of the corruption of his nature.

It did not appear to have occurred to him up till that moment that he had been living wrongly in living without God, or that he was acting lowly in his ungrateful neglect of his Maker, to whom he owed his hearty service. Sin, through all those years, only meant to him mean things towards his fellow mortals. Now he knows how ill it is to rebel against his God.

This last week an esteemed brother minister was telling me, that in speaking to a man who professed to have been converted, he asked him which sin remained as a load upon his mind. "Well," said the man, "I have to see after cows, and I have often beaten the cows very badly." "What do you do now?" "Oh, I coax them instead of beating them."

Now, I have no doubt that in his peculiar calling, cruelty to animals would be most strikingly laid upon his conscience, but the pastor had to say to him, "Yes, quite so, but the great sin in your fault is that the cows are God's creatures, and that He is angry if we treat His creatures unmercifully." The guilt lies in all our offenses in our disobedience to the good Lord, who has a claim to be served by us with all our heart, and soul, and strength.

Conscience readily enough tells us we are wrong if we defraud our fellow men, but if we rob God, how feebly does the moral sense upbraid us! If we were ungrateful to our parents or friends, we should feel that we had done a grievous wrong, but we confess that we are ungrateful to God, and yet our shame is not so deep as a due sense of wrong would produce.

If we were disloyal to our country, and rebellious against its laws, we should feel it to be a great crime, but some of us remain in disloyalty to the King of kings, and in disobedience to the best laws that were ever framed, and yet our spiritual treason does not strike us with horror!

David touched the pith of the matter when he said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight." Sin is a want of conformity to the will of God, a breach either in imagination, or desire, or word, or action, of the divine law. It is, to repeat the words I have used before, a forgetfulness of the due relation which exists between a creature and the Creator.

It is but right that He who made us should have our service. It is a great and intolerable wrong that, being created by God, we yet refuse to yield to His will. It is right that He who is so good to us should

have our love, it is sin that, living upon God's goodness, we do not return to Him our heart's affection. It is right that, being sustained by divine beneficence from day to day, we should give to Him constant thankfulness, but being so sustained, we do not thank Him, and herein lies the very soul of sin.

Let it be remembered that tens of thousands of persons in this so-called Christian land, live in utter neglect of God. If there were no God, it would not in any way affect the lives of most men. They live precisely as if there were none. "God is not in all their thoughts." They never pause over an action, and ask, "Will God be angry with this?" They are never moved to the performance of virtue by the reflection that God will approve it.

There is no God to them, though the table be loaded with the bounties of His providence, no God even though the sick chamber is made to feel the terror of His rod, no God to them though they walk in all the fields of nature and behold evidences of deity on every side, no God though they might see His finger in every event of their lives. They live like brutes in this respect, and alas! many of them die the same, without God, without hope, earth grubbers, buried in earth.

Multitudes of men who are occasionally stirred with the thought of God, yet nevertheless, as often as they can, forget Him. They cannot quite be without reflections upon the existence of the Deity and their own relation to Him, but still it is so unpleasant a thought, and so contrary to the general set of their nature, that they shake it off as much as possible, and plunge into the frivolities and dissipation's of pleasure, or into the stormy seas of care and trouble in business, into anything, so that they may be able to be clear of the undesirable remembrance of their Maker. If they hear a peculiarly earnest sermon, they resolve to remember their Creator, but then they have resolved before, and they find it as easy to forget now as then.

Sometimes an arrow from the eternal One sticks in their loins, and oh! what crafts and arts are practiced to get that arrow out! How they would, if they could, escape from conviction, and continue light-hearted and frivolous in forgetfulness of their God, His law, His justice, and the coming throne before which all the creatures shall be summoned.

Yes, and even when men are compelled to think of God, yet for all that, they go on sinning. They think of Him, and yet violate His command, own His presence and yet do despite to His love. Ah! men and brethren, it is a strange thing, it shows what a monster, what a diabolical miracle sin is, that God should be around us all the day long, and yet before His very face we should dare to say and think, and do that which is contrary to His will, although a word could crush us as the moth is crushed, although His will would sink us into the profoundest hell.

What words shall denounce the arrogance and impudence of sin? Who shall sufficiently condemn an evil which defies JEHOVAH to His face, and hurls defiance at the thundering God? This it is which makes sin so much sin, that it is not sin against God's creatures, an indirect thing, but it is high treason against the Majesty of God Himself, it is a defiance of Him to His face, a stabbing of Godhead, so far as man can do it, to the very heart. This is sin.

Now, in the light of this truth, pausing just a minute, let me ask the believer to humble himself very greatly on account of sin. That I have not loved my God with all my heart, that I have not trusted Him with all my confidence, that I have not given to Him the glory due unto His name, that I have not acted as a creature should do, much less as a *new* creature is bound to do, that, receiving priceless mercies, I have made so small a return—let me confess this in dust and ashes, and then bless the name of the atoner who, by His precious blood, hath put even this away, so that it shall not be mentioned against us any more forever.

Let me invite the unconverted to reflect upon their state in the light of this truth. If sin consisted only in dishonesty, in lying, in swearing, in drunkenness, many of you might plead not guilty, and it might go well with you. But if the sin which will bring upon you the punishment of hell be a neglect of God, a want of love to Him, then where are you?

You who, with the Pharisee, could say, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men," where are you? Why, this shows you that your heart may be vile and filthy, and you yourself may be condemned,

while your outward conduct may be very commendable and all who know you may be praising you for your consistency. Let this truth, then, shine right into your souls, and as you see it to be truth, and see yourself discovered by it, remember—

*“There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;”*

fly to it, and make this the unceasing prayer of your heart, “Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great. Blot it out for Jesus’ sake.”

II. In the second place, the question, HOW IS THE FIXEDNESS OF SIN WHICH IS DECLARED IN THE TEXT PROVED?

The prophet tells us that man’s sinfulness is as much fixed in him as an inscription carved with an iron pen in granite. How is this fixedness proved? It is proven in two ways in the text, namely, that it is graven upon the table of their heart, and secondly, upon the horns of their altar.

It clearly proves how deeply evil is fixed in man, when we reflect that sin is in the very heart of man. Man loves sin. Sin is not an accident to man, a ditch into which he falls because he cannot help it, but sin is the subject of man’s deliberate preference. Man selects evil and rejects good.

If a man, for a while, falls into a habit, and yet that habit yields him no satisfaction, you may very readily break him of it. But when a man finds his habit to be pleasant to his nature, and even dear to him, you may rest assured that you are not likely to turn him from it. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots.

When a sin becomes intertwined with the roots of the affections, you cannot uproot it. When the leprosy eats deep into the heart of humanity, who can expel it? It becomes henceforth a hopeless case, so far as human power is concerned. Since sin reigns and rules in man’s affections, it is deep ingrained indeed.

My unconverted hearer, the sin of forgetting God is in your heart, you know it is. You do not like to think of Him. It is not your desire to be obedient to Him. Your pleasure lies in quite another direction. You know very well that when you take up the Bible in the evening and begin to read it, it is a dreadfully dry book. You have no interest in it.

And when you go to a place of worship you find no pleasure in it. Your heart does not go after God’s praise, you are like the mouse which crept into the church, and finding hymn books very dry nibbling, was glad to get away again. The larder suited her better, and so it does you. The music hall, the ballroom, and the theater, are most to your taste, because there you will not be worried with the things of God.

God, and holiness, and heaven, and hell, and eternity, and the atonement, why these things are old and cheerless sounds to you. You have heard them many, many times, they ring no music into your ear, but rather beat like muffled drums in a funeral march! As soon expect a stream to flow uphill as look for a natural heart seeking after God.

If it were right in this place to talk of certain sins, there are many that would blush and hide their face and say, “I pray that I may never fall into them,” and yet they close not their ears when the evil is recited, but listen with evident interest thereto. When we read police reports and divorce reports, we should be deeply pained and made to shudder, were it not that our evil heart of unbelief is hardened towards evil.

Everybody knows that the light literature of the day, which is pretty freely spiced with shameful sin, goes down readily, and second and third editions are called for. Your very decent and moral people like a precious mouthful of scandal or uncleanness to give a flavor to their reading. Yes, there is a love of sin in the heart, a love of everything that is contrary to God, and there is a forgetfulness, a distaste, even a hatred to thoughts concerning the great Father of Spirits.

Oh! if you loved God, you would not live without prayer as some of you do! if you loved God, you would not repeat forms of prayer as some of you do, you would talk to your Father without your book. My child never reads a book to me when he wants anything, but he comes with his mouth and his heart ready at once, without any teaching from his brother, to ask me for what he needs.

If you loved God, you would not live day by day without speaking of Him, without meditating upon His glorious works, and without seeking after fellowship and communion with Him. But inasmuch as you love Him not who is so worthy and who by such gentle ways woos your love, who shall deny that your want of love to God is deeply engraven in the very center of your heart, and cut into your nature itself?

The second proof the prophet gives of the infixedness of human sin is that it was *written on the horns of their altars*. When people are bad, at their best they must be very bad. But such were the men of Judah. They sinned in their very religion. These people sinned by setting up idols and departing from JEHOVAH, we sin in quite another way.

When you get the unconverted man to be religious—which is a very easy thing—what form does the religion take? Frequently he prefers that which most gratifies his taste, his ears, or his sight. Yes, of course he does not object to a religion which is produced and assisted by painted windows, praising machines, elegant tailoring, and fine music. Men's carnal appetites are pleased with these things, and it is gratifying to human nature to discover that such things may be called religion.

The fact is, that there is no more true religion in fine music than in discord, and no more genuine worship in a cathedral than in a hovel. Men might as well look at vestments, and windows, and carvings, in the artificers' shops where they are made, and there would be quite as much devotion as in looking at them in the place where they are fixed.

Others think if their ears are pleased with listening to an eloquent discourse, they are worshipping God. He who can speak well is to them as one who maketh a goodly sound on a pleasant instrument. Their religion is to admire elocution, but there is no religion in that. There can be no more grace in listening to an eloquent minister than in listening to an eloquent parliamentary orator.

If your heart is touched, that is the worship of God. If your heart is drawn to God, that is the service of God. But if it is the mere ringing of the words, and the falling of the periods, and the cadence of the voice that you regard, why, sirs, you do not worship God, but on the very horns of your altars are your sins. You are bringing a delight of your own sensuous faculties and putting that in the place of true faith and love, and then saying to your soul, "I have pleased God," whereas you have only pleased yourself.

When men become serious in religion, and look somewhat to the inward, they then defile the Lord's altar by relying upon their own righteousness. Nothing is more pleasing to human nature than the attempt to do something by which it may merit salvation at the hand of God. God thunders out, "By the works of the law there shall no flesh living be justified," and in the teeth of that millions of men say, "We will be justified by the works of the law," so, coming to God with the pretense of worshipping Him, they offer Him that which He abhors, and give the lie to Him in all His solemn declarations.

If God says that by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified, and man declares, "But I will be so justified," he maketh God a liar, whether he knows it or not, his sin has that within it.

Man is much like a silkworm, he is a spinner and weaver by nature. A robe of righteousness is wrought out for him, but he will not have it. He will spin for himself, and like the silkworm, he spins, and spins, and he only spins himself a shroud. All the righteousness that a sinner can make will only be a shroud in which to wrap up his soul, his destroyed soul, for God will cast him away who relies upon the works of the law.

In other ways men stain the horns of their altars. Some do it by carelessness. Some of you who come here are filled with vain thoughts. I thank God that I have not to complain of inattentive audiences, but still how often during prayer your hearts are anywhere but at the throne of God! and when the sacred song is rising up to the Majesty of heaven, your lips are moving, but your hearts are not praising God!

Ah! my friends, if secret things were testified abroad, how many times it would be seen that the horns of your altar have been stained by irreverence and carelessness. Those lips must be deprived indeed which even in prayer and praise still continue to sin.

The horns of our altars are defiled by hypocrisy. Into our churches there will come men who, like Demas and Judas, intrude themselves, uncalled, sitting at the Master's table, baptized into His name, and yet for all that, being hollow and rotten, deceivers and deceived.

You may have seen two fencers practicing their art, and noticed how they seem to be seeking each other's death, how they strike and thrust as though they were earnestly contending for life. But after the show is over, they sit down and shake hands, and are good friends. Often so it is in your prayers and confessions, you will acknowledge your sins, and profess to hate them, and make resolutions against them, but it is all outward show—fencing, not real fighting—and when the fencing bout is over, the soul shakes hands with its old enemy, and returns to its former ways of sin. Oh, this foul hypocrisy is a staining of the horns of the altar with a vengeance!

But I shall not detain you longer. The fact is clear that men do that, and the inference is also logical, that if men love sin in their hearts, and if even in their religion they still perpetrate sin, then it must be deeply engraven in them as with the point of a diamond.

III. Thirdly and briefly, WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF THIS?

How did sin get such a firm footing in humanity? How is it that the evil one has so stormed the city of Mansoul, as to entrench himself in the impregnable castle of the heart, and bid the black banner float thereon?

The answer is, first, we must never forget the fall. Certain theologians ignore the fall, but for all that, it remains the saddest and the second greatest event in human history. We are fallen. We are none of us today as God made us. "God made man upright, but he has sought out many inventions."

Our first parent was the perfect man, but he polluted the fountain of life, and "Behold," as David said, "we are born in sin and shapen in iniquity," in sin do our mothers conceive us. The human judgment is out of balance, it uses false weights and false measures. "It puts darkness for light and light for darkness."

The human will is no longer supple, as it should be, to the divine will, our neck is naturally as an iron sinew, and will not bow to JEHOVAH's golden scepter. Our affections also are twisted away from their right bent. Whereas we ought to have been seeking after Jesus, and casting out the tendrils of our affections towards Him, we cling to anything but the right, and climb upon anything but the true. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint."

Human nature is like a magnificent temple all in ruins. Where there ought to be shouts of sacred joy, rising paeans of incessant praise, you can hear the howling of the dragon, and the hooting of the owl. Magnificence is there, but for all that the ruin is complete. This accounts for the depth and fixedness of sin in us, that it is a matter of birth.

Original sin, let it be denied and explained away as it may, remains a great truth, and there are problems in human history which never can be explained without the belief in it. Indeed, every man is in himself such a problem that if you deny his original depravity, you miss the key to his life. But if you believe that doctrine, you may then understand what manhood is, and you are on the tract towards getting to find out how manhood can be made better and holier.

In addition, however, to our natural depravity, there comes in, in the second place, *our habits of sin*. Well may sin be deeply engraven in the man who has for twenty, forty, fifty, or perhaps seventy years, continued in his iniquity. Put the wool into the scarlet dye, and if it lies there but a week, the color will be so ingrained in the fabric that you cannot get it out. But if you keep it there for so many years, how shall you possibly be able to bleach it?

Man has continued in sin, hence the prophet says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? If so, then he that is accustomed to do evil may learn to do well." Use is second nature. Nature

originally is bad, but the use comes in as a second mischief, and makes us doubly inclinable towards evil.

You must recollect, in addition to this, that sin is a most clinging and defiling thing. Who does not know that if a man sins once, it is much easier to sin that way the next time, nay, that he is much more inclinable towards that sin? This is conspicuous in certain sins of the flesh which we all condemn. Let any person once have given way, and it becomes an awful struggle—a struggle in which the major part are defeated altogether when they attempt it—to break loose from their bands of lasciviousness.

I mention that one sin because its power to return upon us is so conspicuous, but it is an illustration of the same thing in every other sin. If you fall into covetousness, you will find it very hard to be generous. But if you continue to be grinding and grasping, generosity will become an impossibility.

The muscles of the arm, if you never exert them except in one fashion, will become set, so that you cannot move them, like the Indian Fakir who held his arm aloft so long that he could not take it down again. Man, continuing in sin, becomes fixed in its habit.

Only the other day we read of a great millionaire in New York, who was once weak enough to resolve to give a beggar a penny. He had grown old in covetousness, and he recollected himself just as he was about to bestow the gift, and said, “I should like to give you the penny, but you see I should have to lose the interest of it forever, and I could not afford that.” Habit grows upon a man. Everybody knows that when he has been making money, if he indulges the propensity to acquire, it will become a perfectly tyrannical master, ruling his entire being.

Hence the reason why sin being in the nature, and secondly, coming upon us in the use and the habit, and thirdly, being in itself a thing which naturally clings to us and gets a dominancy over us, it is written within us as with the point of a diamond.

I may add that *the prince of the power of the air*, the evil spirit, takes care, so far as he can, to add to all this. He chimes in with every suggestion of fallen nature. If we say “One,” he is always ready to say, “Two.” If we want a lie to help us in any of our plans, he will be at our beck and call at once. He knows when to use the bellows, when he sees that the fire is beginning to burn. He will never let the tinder lie idle for lack of sparks, nor the ground lie waste for want of the seeds of thorns and thistles.

He has an aptitude for dealing with human nature for his own purposes, and so is never far away when a sin is to be produced. When we begin to fasten a nail, he is ready to drive it home, and clinch it too, so that the sin of Judah may be written as with an iron pen, and graven as with the point of a diamond.

Hitherto, my dear brethren and sisters, I have had to enlarge upon a very dreary statement. What I have said I feel persuaded is true, but I feel no satisfaction in speaking it. I have declared what I believe to be the truth as it is in Jesus, but it is a burden to have to state these things.

Let no man imagine that we are the inventors of these doleful doctrines. If they be not true, they certainly are amongst the most miserable of human conceptions, but if they be true, it is among the most honest things that man can do to tell people plainly of them, that they may be prepared against them. But we will not so finish, we will advance to a more cheering topic.

IV. Our fourth point will be, WHAT IS THE CURE FOR ALL THIS?

Sin thus stamped into us, thus ingrained into our nature, can it ever be got out?

It *must* be got out, or we cannot enter heaven, for there shall by no means enter within those pearly gates anything that defileth. None but the perfect can enter into the land of the perfect, where the thrice holy God is the center of a perfectly holy company. We must be cleansed and purified, but how can it be done?

It can only be done by a supernatural process. You cannot do it yourself. The dead in the grave can sooner raise themselves than you who are accustomed to do evil can learn to do well. Even those who are saved by divine grace will tell you that they can do nothing without the Spirit of God, much less can you who are dead in sin.

If the vessel that is well rigged and manned cannot move upon the waters without the breath of heaven, much less can the unshapen timber which lies in the merchant's yard make itself into a ship, and then cross the seas. If the living Christian needs divine assistance, much more do you. You have destroyed yourselves, but your help is not in yourselves. In God your help is to be found. Your only help—to make short matter of it—lies in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became the Son of man that He might lift the sons of men up from their natural degradation and ruin. How does Jesus Christ then take away these deeply-inscribed lines of sin from human nature?

I answer, He does it first in this way. If our heart be like granite, and sin be written on it, Christ's ready method is to take that heart away. "A new heart also will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you." Has it ever struck you what a wonderful thing it is for God to promise to give man a new heart?

If you get a tree, and saw a branch or two off, you may regret that the branches are gone, but a new branch may come, and though you may grow a new branch on the tree, you could not obtain a new heart for it. When once the tree gets thoroughly rotten in the center you must give it up as hopeless. You cannot put new sap into it.

But here God promises by the hand of His Son that He will give us new hearts, hearts in which there shall be no sin, hearts which shall have no tendency towards evil, but which shall be pure hearts, hearts in every part renewed, and filled with love divine, perfect and right, and pure and good—a copy of His own heart.

The Lord Jesus Christ has for many now present wrought this miracle. He has given them the new heart, and though the old heart is still there, contending and fighting, yet the new heart will get the victory. We have now new loves, new hates, the name of God is now the sweetest bell that ever rings, the thought of God's law is marrow and fatness to us. A sense of God's love is like honey dropping from the honeycomb.

Now, the thought of hell, solemn as it is, does not alarm us. The thought of heaven is bright and lustrous, and cheers us in traversing this wilderness.

Now, to muse upon eternity, and the fact that we shall see the Lord forever, face to face, is our daily delight. We are not what we ought to be, nor what we want to be, but still our leanings and inclinations are towards better things. The new heart has its helm turned in an opposite direction from that in which the old heart was steering, we are sailing under a new flag now, we have enlisted under a new prince, and by God's grace we shall conquer, and we shall enter into the joy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a part of the covenant of grace and a part of His Gospel that Jesus can give to us hearts in which there shall not be this tendency to sin, and so the deep-seated sinfulness of our nature shall be overcome.

Next to that, inasmuch as the guiltiness of sin is as permanent as sin itself, Jesus Christ is able to take our guilt away. His dying upon the cross is the means by which the blackest sinner out of hell can be made white as the angels of God, and that too in a single instant.

You understand the doctrine of the atonement, but however, let me sound it in your ears again. Sin is a thing which God must punish, the eternal laws of the universe demand that there shall never be an offense committed against the rules of God which shall escape without a penalty. The penalty of sin is death, and God has never seen fit to mitigate this, its justice makes it perpetual.

The Lord has been pleased to open a way of mercy by sending His only begotten Son into this world as our substitute. He became a man, and He suffered for His people what they ought to have suffered. He endured at the hand of God what all the redeemed ought to have endured.

Now, God, at this day, never pardons a sin without having first punished it—punished it on Christ for us. God never punishes the man for whom Christ died, but all besides must bear their iniquity. If you believe in Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ died for you, and God cannot put two to death for one offense, nor can He ask for payment twice of one debt, you are therefore free.

Christ paid the debts of all His people and obtained their full discharge when He rose again from the dead, and now every soul that believes in Him is clear at the bar of divine justice, because it is written,

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.” “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

See then, my brethren, Jesus Christ can take away the deeply-engraven inscription of our sin, and can remove the horrible stains of our iniquity—justly remove them through what He has suffered on our behalf. The Holy Spirit also comes in, the new nature being given and sin being forgiven, the Holy Ghost comes and dwells in us, as a Prince in His palace, as a God in His temple.

Oh! wondrous mystery, that God should dwell in a human heart! He who fills heaven and earth—whom all worlds cannot comprehend! He, before whom angels bow with veiled faces, deigns to make Himself a habitation within the body of the man that trusts in Him!

If you are now relying alone on Jesus Christ, then the Holy Ghost is in you this morning, and being there, He controls your passions—passions which otherwise would master you. He rules your will, a stubborn thing, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. He guides your affections, wandering things, like wild asses of the desert, not to be tamed. He sits, this day, within your soul, as God’s lieutenant in the kingdom of your humanity, ruling, preventing, directing, and making you meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Do I hear any say, “Then, I would to God that I may experience the divine process—the new nature given, which is regeneration, the washing away of sin, which constitutes pardon and justification, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, which insures final perseverance and complete sanctification. Oh, how can I have these precious things?”

You may have them, whoever you may be, by simply believing in Jesus. Does it seem too simple? Try and you will find it effectual. The most potent remedies for disease are not always the most elaborate. The simplest may often be the most effectual. I tell you, you who gad about after your ceremonies, and repentance, and tears, you will never get in all these that which you can have by simply coming to Jesus and trusting in Him.

Now have done with your own doings. Cast yourself on Him who has done everything for you. Spin no more, but take the raiment already woven. Work no more, but take the ransom already paid. Strive no more in your own energy after the works of the law, but take the great accomplished work which Jesus Christ has performed. Believe and live. These are the words which God emblazons across the brow of truth, which I would fain write across the brow of heaven itself, which I would have thundered out by every wave, whispered by every gale, and spoken by every breath of air. Believe and live! Trust Christ and live!

The remedy will meet the disease. This heavenly chisel will cut out the diamond wrought inscription. This hammer which Christ wields will dash to pieces the granite upon which the pen of iron has written your sin. Trust in the Lord to save you, and you shall yet be made as Adam was at the first, in the image of God, and you shall stand before the eternal throne, amongst the white-robed pure as they, amongst the celestials as heavenly as they, and near to God, even made a partaker of the divine nature, “having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust.”

God bless you, for Christ’s sake.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. 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.