

THE MONSTER DRAGGED TO LIGHT

NO. 1095

A SERMON
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 BY C. H. SPURGEON
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“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

*“Philosophers have measured mountains,
 Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states, and kings,
 Walked with a staff to heav'n and traced fountains:
 But there are two vast, spacious things,
 The which to measure it doth more behoove:
 Yet few there are that sound them; Sin and Love.”*

SO sang George Herbert, that sweet and saintly poet, and of one of those, “two vast, spacious things” we are about to speak this morning—namely, sin. May the Holy Spirit direct us in thought and speech while into the very center of our subject we plunge at once, keeping to the words of our text.

I. Our first point to consider this morning shall be that TO MANY MEN SIN DOES NOT APPEAR SIN.

Ay, and in all men in their natural blindness there is an ignorance of what sin is. It needs the power of the divine omnipotence, the voice of that same Majesty, which said, “Let there be light,” and there was light to illuminate the human mind, or else it will remain in darkness as to much of its own actual sin, and the deep and deadly evil which belongs to it. Man, with wretched perverseness of misconception, abides content in a wrong idea of it. His deeds are evil and he will not come to the light lest he should know more concerning that evil than he wishes to know.

Moreover, such is the power of self-esteem that though sin abounds in the sinner he will not readily be brought to feel or confess its existence. There are men in this world steeped up to the throat in iniquity, who never dream that they have committed anything worse than little faults. There are those whose souls are saturated with it till they are like the wool that has been lying in the scarlet dye, and yet they conceive themselves to be white as snow.

This is due in part to that dullness of conscience which is the result of the Fall. Though I have heard ten thousand times that conscience is the deputy of God in the soul of man, I have never been able to subscribe to that dogma. It is no such thing.

In many persons, conscience is perverted, in others, only a fragment of it remains, and in all, it is fallible and subject to aberrations. Conscience is in all men a thing of degrees dependent upon education, example, and previous character. It is an eye of the soul, but it is frequently partly purblind and weak, and always needs light from above or else it does but mock the soul.

Conscience is a faculty of the mind, which, like every other, has suffered serious damage through our natural depravity and it is by no means perfect. It is only the understanding acting upon moral subjects, and upon such matters it often puts bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness.

Hence it is that men's sins do not appear to them sin. In all probability, there is not one, even among renewed men, who fully knows the evil of sin, nor will there be until in heaven we shall be perfect. And then, when we shall see the perfection of divine holiness, we shall understand how black a thing was sin.

Men who have lived underground all their lives do not know how dark the mine is, nor can they know it until they stand in the blaze of a summer's noon.

In a great measure, our inability to see sin as sin arises from the exceeding deceitfulness both of sin and of the human heart. Sin assumes the brightest forms, even as Satan attires himself as an angel of light. Such a thing as iniquity, walking abroad in its own nakedness, is seldom seen. Like Jezebel, it tires its head and paints its face. And indeed, the heart loves to have it so and is eager to be deceived.

We will, if we can, extenuate our faults. We are all very quick-sighted to perceive something, which, if it does not quite excuse our fault, at all events prevents its being placed in the first-class of atrocities. Sometimes we will not understand the commandment. We are willing not to know its force and stringency. It is too keen and sharp, and we try to blunt its edge, and if we can find a milder meaning for it, we are glad to do so.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”—hence it invents a thousand falsehoods. As the deceivableness of sin is very great, so that it adorns itself with the colors of righteousness, and makes men believe that they are pleasing God when they are offending Him, so is man himself an eager self-deceiver, and like the fool in Solomon's Proverbs, he readily follows the flatterer.

In most men, their not seeing sin to be sin arises from their ignorance of the spirituality of the law. Men read the Ten Commandments and they suppose them to mean nothing more than the superficial sense. If they read, for instance, “Thou shalt do no murder,” straightway they say, “I have never broken that law.”

But they forget that he that hates his brother is a murderer and that unrighteous anger is a distinct violation of the command. If I willfully do anything which tends to destroy or shorten life, either my own or my neighbor's, I am breaking the commandment.

A man finds it written, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” “Well, well,” says he, “I am clear there.” Straightway he plumes himself upon the supposition that he is chastity itself. But if he be given to understand that the command touches the heart, and that a licentious look is adultery, and that even a desire to do that which is evil condemns the soul, then straightway he sees things in a very different light and sees that to be sin which had never troubled him before.

Commonly—ay, universally—until the Spirit of God comes into the soul, there is a total ignorance as to what the law means, and men say, with a light heart, “Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.” Whereas if they did but know it, they would say, “Lord, have mercy upon us, and cleanse us of our innumerable infractions of a law which we cannot keep, and which must forever condemn us as long as we abide under its power.”

Thus, you see a few of the reasons why sin does not appear in its true light to the unconverted, but cheats impenitent and self-righteous minds. This is one of the most deplorable results of sin. It injures us most by taking from us the capacity to know how much we are injured. It undermines the man's constitution and yet leads him to boast of un failing health. It beggars him and tells him he is rich. It strips him and makes him glory in his fancied robes.

In this it resembles slavery, which, by degrees, eats into the soul and makes a man content in his chains. Bondage at length degrades a man, so that at last he forgets the misery of slavery, and the dignity of freedom, and is unable to strike the blow when a happy hour offers him the chance of liberty.

Sin, like the deadly frost of the northern regions, benumbs its victim ere it slays him. Man is so diseased that he fancies his disease to be health and judges healthy men to be under wild delusions. He loves the enemy which destroys him, he warms at his bosom the viper whose fangs cause his death. The most unhappy thing that can happen to a man is for him to be sinful and to judge his sinfulness to be righteousness.

The Papist advances to his altar and bows before a piece of bread, but he does not feel that he is committing idolatry—nay, he believes that he is acting in a praiseworthy manner. The persecutor hounded his fellow creatures to prison and to death, but he thought he verily did God a service. You and

I can see the idolatry of the papist, and the murder committed by the persecutor, but the guilty persons do not see it themselves.

The passionate man imagines himself to be rightly indignant, the greedy man is proud of his own prudence, the unbeliever rejoices in his independence of mind. These are the aspects under which iniquity presents itself to the spiritually blind. There is the mischief of sin, that it throws out of gear the balances by which the soul discerns between good and evil.

What horrible beings those must have been who could run down a vessel crowded with living souls, and then, while hearing them shriek and cry for help, could go steaming away from them, leaving them all to perish in the overwhelming waters! To what a state of inhumanity must they have sunk to be able to do such a thing. The wreck of the vessel is hardly more dreadful than the wreck of the moral sense and common humanity in those who left the hundreds to die, when they might have saved them.

To be able to stab a man would be horrible, but to be so bad that after stabbing him, you felt no sense of wrong doing, would be far worse. Yet with every act of sin, there goes a measure of heart-hardening, so that he who is capable of great crimes is usually incapable of knowing them to be such. With the ungodly, this pestilential influence is very powerful, leading them to cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace, and to rebel against the most Holy God without fear or compunction.

And alas, since even in the saints there remains the old nature, even they are not altogether free from the darkening power of sin, for I do not hesitate to say that we all unwittingly allow ourselves in practices, which clearer light would show to be sins. Even the best of men have done this in the past. For instance, John Newton, in his trading for slaves in his early days, never seemed to have felt that there was any wrong in it. And Whitefield in accepting slaves for his orphanage in Georgia, never raised or dreamed of raising the question as to whether slavery was in itself sinful.

Perhaps advancing light will show that many of the habits and customs of our present civilization are essentially bad and our grandsons will wonder how we could have acted as we did. It may need centuries before the national conscience or even the common Christian conscience, will be enlightened up to the true standard of right—and the individual may need many a chastisement and rebuke from the Lord ere he has fully discerned between good and evil.

O you demon, sin, you are proved to be sin with a vengeance, by thus deluding us. You do not only poison us, but make us imagine our poison to be medicine—you defile us and make us think ourselves the more beautiful—slay us and make us dream that we are enjoying life!

My brethren, before we can be restored to the holy image of Christ, which is the ultimatum of every Christian, we must be taught to know sin to be sin. And we must have a restoration of the tenderness of conscience which would have been ours had we never fallen. A measure of this discernment and tenderness of judgment is given to us at conversion—for conversion, apart from it—would be impossible. How can a man repent of that which he does not know to be sin? How shall he humble himself before God concerning that which he does not recognize to be evil in God's sight?

He must have enlightenment. Sin must be made to appear as sin to him. Moreover, man will not renounce his self-righteousness till he sees his sinfulness. As long as he believes himself to be righteous, he will hug that righteousness and stand before God with the Pharisee's cry, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are!"

As long as it is possible for us to swim on the bladders of our own righteousness, we will never take to the lifeboat of Christ's righteousness. We can only be driven to free grace by sheer stress of weather, and as long as our leaky barque of self-will only keeps us above the flood, we will hold to it.

It is a miracle of grace to make a man see himself, so as to loathe himself and confess the impossibility of being saved by his own works. Yet, till this is done, faith in Jesus is impossible, for no man will look to the righteousness of another while he is satisfied with his own righteousness. And every one believes he has a righteousness of his own till he sees sin in its native hideousness. Unless sin is revealed to you as a boundless evil, whoever you may be, where God and Christ are, you can never come.

You must be made to see that your heart reeks with evil—that your past life has been defiled with iniquity. And you must also be taught that this evil of yours is no trifle, but a monstrous and horrible thing. You must be made to loathe yourselves as in the presence of God or else you never will fly to the atoning blood for cleansing. Unless sin is seen to be sin, grace will never be seen to be grace, nor Jesus to be a Savior, and without this, salvation is impossible.

Here then we leave this important point—bearing witness again that to the natural man sin does not appear as sin, and therefore, a work of grace must be wrought in him to open his blind eyes or he cannot be saved. These are no soft speeches and fair words, but hard truths—may the Holy Spirit lead many hearts to feel how sorrowfully true they are.

II. This leads us to our second consideration—WHERE SIN IS MOST CLEARLY SEEN, IT APPEARS TO BE SIN.

Its most terrible aspect is its own natural self. Sin at its worst appears to be sin. Do I seem to repeat myself? Does this utterance sound like a mere platitude? Then I cannot help it, for the text puts it so. And I know you will not despise the text.

But indeed, there is a depth of meaning in the expression, “Sin, that it might appear sin”—as if the apostle could find no other word so terribly descriptive of sin as its own name. He does not say, “Sin that it might appear like Satan.” No, for sin is worse than the devil, since it made the devil what he is. Satan as an existence is God’s creature, and this, sin never was. Its origin and nature are altogether apart from God.

Sin is even worse than hell, for it is the sting of that dreadful punishment. Anselm used to say that if hell were on one side, and sin on the other, he would rather leap into hell than willingly sin against God. Paul does not say, “Sin that it might appear madness.” Truly it is moral insanity, but it is worse than that by far. It is so bad that there is no name for it but itself.

One of our poets who wished to show how evil sin looks in the presence of redeeming love, could only say,

*“When the wounds of Christ exploring,
Sin doth like itself appear.”*

If you need an illustration of what is meant, we might find one in Judas. If you wanted to describe him, you might say he was a traitor, a thief, and a betrayer of innocent blood, but you would finish up by saying, “He was a Judas”—that gives you all in one. None could match him in villainy. If you wished a man to feel a horror of murder, you would not wish murder to appear to him as manslaughter, or as destruction of life, or as mere cruelty, but you would want it to appear as *murder*—you could use no stronger expression.

So here, when the Lord turns the strong light of His eternal Spirit upon sin, and reveals it in all its hideousness and defilement, it appears to be not only moral discord, disorder, deformity, or corruption, but neither more nor less than sin. “Sin,” says Thomas Brooks, “is the only thing that God abhors, it brought Christ to the cross, it damns souls, it shuts heaven, and it laid the foundations of hell.”

There are persons who see sin as a misfortune, but this is far short of the true view, and indeed, very wide of it. How commonly do we hear one sort of sinner called, “an unfortunate.” This indicates a very lax morality. Truly it is a calamity to be a sinner, but it is much more than a calamity. And he who only sees sin as his misfortune has not seen it so as to be saved from it. Others have come to see sin as folly, and so far they see aright, for it is essentially folly and every sinner is a fool. A fool is God’s own name for a sinner—commonly used throughout the book of Psalms.

But for all that, sin is more than folly. It is not mere want of wit or mistaken judgment, it is the knowing and willful choice of evil, and it has in it certain maliciousness against God, which is far worse than mere stupidity. To see sin as folly is a good thing, but it is not a gracious thing, nor a saving thing.

Some, too, have seen certain sins to be crimes, and yet have not viewed them as sins. Our use of the word “crime” is significant. When an action hurts our fellow men, we call it a crime. When it only

offends God, we style it a sin. If I were to call you criminals, you would be disgusted with me. But if I call you sinners, you will not be at all angry, because to offend man is a thing you would not like to do, but to offend God is to many persons a small matter, scarcely worth a moment's thought.

Human nature has become so perverted that, if men know that they have broken human laws, they are ashamed, but the breach of a command, which only affects the Lord Himself, causes them very small concern. If we were to steal, or lie, or knock another down, we would be ashamed of ourselves, and so we ought to be. But for all that, such shame would be no work of grace.

Sin must appear to be *sin* against God—that is the point. We must say with David, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” With the prodigal, we must cry, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” That is the true view of it. The Lord bring us to confess our transgressions after that sort.

And here lend me your ears a minute or two. Think how odious a thing sin is. Beloved, our offenses are committed against a law which is based upon right. It is holy, and just, and good—it is the best law which could be conceived. To break a bad law, we may be more than excusable, but there can be no excuse for transgression when the commandment commends itself to every man's conscience. There is not one command in God's Word which is harsh, arbitrary, or unnecessary. If we ourselves were perfect in holiness and infinitely wise, and should have written a law, we should have written just the law which God has given us.

The law is just to our fellow men and beneficial to ourselves. When it forbids anything, it does but set up danger signals where real danger to ourselves exists. The law is a kind of spiritual police to keep us out of harm's way. Those who offend against it injure themselves. Sin is a false, mean, unrighteous thing, it does evil all round, and brings good to nobody. It has not one redeeming feature. It is evil, only evil, and that continually. It is a wicked, wanton, purposeless, useless rejection of that which is good and right, in favor of that which is disgraceful and injurious.

We ought also to remember that the divine law is binding upon men, because of the right and authority of the lawgiver. God has made us, ought we not to serve Him? Our existence is prolonged by His kindness, we could not live a moment without Him—should we not obey Him? God is superlatively good, He has never done us any harm. He has always designed our benefit and has treated us with unbounded kindness. Why should we willfully insult Him by breaking laws which He had a right to make and which He has made for our good?

Is it not shameful to do that which He hates, when there can be nothing to gain thereby and no reason for doing it? How I wish every heart here could hear that plaintive lamentation of the Lord—it is an wonderful condescension that He should describe Himself as uttering it—“The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know—my people do not consider.” That other word of pleading is equally pathetic where the Lord expostulates and cries, “O, do not this abominable thing that I hate!”

After all His tenderness in which He has acted towards us, as a father to his child, we have turned against Him and harbored His enemy. We have found our pleasure in grieving Him, and have called His commands burdens, and His service a weariness. Shall we not repent of this? Can we continue to act thus basely?

This day, my God, I hate sin not because it damns me, but because it has done You wrong. To have grieved my God is the worst of grief to me. The heart renewed by grace feels a deep sympathy with God in the ungrateful treatment which He has received from us. It cries out, “How could I have offended Him? Why did I treat so gracious a God in so disgraceful a manner? He has done me good and no evil, wherefore have I slighted Him?”

Had the Eternal been a tyrant and had His laws been despotic, I could imagine some dignity in a revolt against Him. But seeing He is a Father full of gentleness and tenderness, whose loving-kindnesses are beyond all count, sin against Him is exceeding sinful. Sin is worse than bestial, for the beasts only return evil for evil. It is devilish—for it returns evil for good.

Sin is lifting our heel against our benefactor—it is base ingratitude, treason, causeless hate, spite against holiness, and a preference for that which is low and groveling—but whither am I going? Sin is sin, and in that word we have said all.

It would appear that Paul made the discovery of sin as sin through the light of one of the commands. He gives us a little bit of his own biography, which is most interesting to notice. He says, “I had not known lust except the law had said thou shalt not covet.” It strikes me that when Paul was struck down from his horse on his way to Damascus, the first thought that came to him was, “This Jesus whom I have been persecuting, is after all the Messiah and Lord of all. Oh, horror of horrors, I have ignorantly warred against Him. He is Jesus, the Savior who saves from sins, but what are my sins? Wherein have I offended against the law?”

In his lonely blindness, his mind involuntarily ran over the Ten Commandments. And as he considered each one of them with his poor half-enlightened judgment, he cried to himself, “I have not broken that! I have not broken that!” till at last he came to that command, “Thou shalt not covet,” and in a moment, as though a lightning flash had cut in twain the solid darkness of his spirit, he saw his sin, and confessed that he had been guilty of inordinate desires. He had not known lust if the law had not said, “Thou shalt not covet.”

That discovery unveiled all the rest of his sins—the proud Pharisee became a humble penitent and he who thought himself blameless cried out, “I am the chief of sinners.” I pray God by some means to let the same light stream into every soul here, where as yet it has not penetrated. O my hearers, I beseech the Lord to let you see sin as sin, and so lead you to Jesus as the only Savior.

III. I shall need your best attention to the third point, which is this—THE SINFULNESS OF SIN IS MOST CLEARLY SEEN IN ITS PERVERTING THE BEST OF THINGS TO DEADLY PURPOSES.

So the text runs, “Sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good.” It is evident that we are atrociously depraved since we make the worst conceivable use of the best things. Here is God’s law which was ordained to life, for, “He that doeth these things shall live in them,” is willfully disobeyed and so sin turns the light of God into an instrument of death. It does worse still. The sin that is in us, when it hears the commandment, straightway resolves to break it.

It is a strangely wicked propensity of our nature, that there are many things which we should not care for otherwise, which we lust after at once, as soon as they are forbidden. Have you ever noticed, even in regard to human law, that when a thing is prohibited, persons long after it?

I do not remember, in all the years I have lived in London, any cravings of the populace to hold meetings in Hyde Park till an attempt was made to keep them out, and then, straightway, all the railings were pulled down and the ground was carried by storm. The park has been a field of battle ever since.

Had liberty of speech in the park never been interfered with as it was, most unwisely, nobody would have cared to hold forth at the Reformer’s tree or any other tree. They would have said, “What’s the use of dragging up there all through the mud for miles, when we can meet more comfortably in a hall under cover,” but because they must not do it, they resolve to do it. That is the way with our common nature, it kicks at restraint—if we must not do a thing, then we will do it!

Even before she fell, our mother Eve felt drawn to the forbidden tree, and the impulse in her fallen sons and daughters is far more forcible. As by one common impulse we wander from the road appointed and break hedges to leap into fields enclosed against us. Law to our depraved nature is but the signal for revolt. Sin is a monster indeed, when it turns a preventive law into an incentive to rebellion. It discovers evil by the law, and then turns to it and cries, “Evil be thou my good.”

This is far from being the only case in which good is turned to evil through our sin. I might mention many others. Very briefly then, how many there are who turn the abounding mercy of God, as proclaimed in the Gospel, into a reason for further sin! The preacher delights to tell you in God’s name, that the Lord is a God ready to forgive and willing to have mercy upon sinners, and that whosoever believes in Jesus shall receive immediate pardon.

What do men say, “O, if it be so easy to be forgiven, let us go on in sin. If faith be so simple a matter, let us put it off until some future time.” O, base and cruel argument! To infer greater sin from infinite love! What if I call it devilish reasoning—for so it is—to make of the very goodness of a gracious God a reason for continuing to offend! Is it so that the more God loves, the more you will hate? The better He is, the worse you will be? Shame! Shame!

Then again, there are individuals who have indulged in very great sin, and have very fortunately escaped from the natural consequences of that sin, and what do they gather from this forbearance on God’s part? God has been very longsuffering and pitiful to them, and therefore, they defy Him again, and return presumptuously to their former habits.

They dream that they have immunity to transgress, and even boast that God will never punish them, let them act as they may. Sin appears sin, indeed, when the longsuffering which should lead to repentance is regarded as a license for further offending. What a marvel that the Eternal does not crush His foes at once, when they count His gentleness to be weakness and make His mercy a ground for further disobedience!

Look again at thousands of prosperous sinners whose riches are their means of sinning. They have all that heart can wish, and instead of being doubly grateful to God, they are proud, and thoughtless, and deny themselves none of the pleasures of sin. The blessings entrusted to them become their curses, because they minister to their arrogance and worldliness.

They war against God with weapons from His own armory. They are indulged by providence and then they indulge their sins the more. Fullness of bread too often breeds contempt of God. Men are lifted up, and then look down upon religion, and speak loftily against the people of God, and even against the Lord Himself. With His meal in their mouths, they blaspheme their benefactor, and with the wealth which is the loan of His charity, they purchase the vile pleasures of iniquity.

This is horrible, but so it is, that the more God gives to man, the more man hates His God, and he to whom God multiplies His mercies returns them by multiplying his transgressions. I remember in our Baptist martyrology, the story of one of the Baptists of Holland escaping from his persecutors. A river was frozen over, and the good man crossed it safely, but his enemy was of greater bulk and the ice gave way under him.

The Baptist, like the child of God as he was, turned around and rescued his persecutor just as he was sinking beneath the ice to certain death. And what did the wretch do? As soon as ever he was safely on the shore, he seized the man who had saved his life, and dragged him off to prison, from which he was only taken to be put to death!

We marvel at such inhumanity. We are indignant at such base returns—but the returns which the ungodly make to God are baser far. I wonder myself as I talk to you, I wonder that I speak so calmly on so terribly humbling a theme. And remembering our past lives and our long ingratitude to God, I marvel that we do not turn this place into one vast Bochim or place of weeping, and mingle our tears in a flood, with expressions of deep shame and self-aborrence for our dealings towards God.

The same evil is manifested when the Lord reveals His justice and utters threats. When a threatening sermon is delivered, you will hear men say as they go out from hearing such a discourse, although the preacher has spoken most affectionately, “We will have no more of this hell-fire preaching, we are wearied and worried with these threatenings of judgment.”

*“Thy judgments, too, unmoved they hear,
Amazing thought! which devils fear
Goodness and wrath in vain combine,
Their heart betrays no feeling sign.”*

Try the same man with God's tenderness and speak of God's love, and he will be hardened by it, for the Gospel hardens some men and becomes a savor of death unto death unto many. O sin, you are sin indeed to make the Gospel of salvation a reason for deeper damnation!

When great judgments are abroad in the land, not a few of the ungodly become more insolent against God and even rail at Him as a tyrant. The fire which ought to melt them only makes them harder. The terrors of God they defy, and like Pharaoh they demand, "Who is the Lord?"

We have known persons in adversity—very poor and very sick, who ought to have been led to God by their sorrow, but instead thereof, they have become careless of all religion and cast off all fear of God. They have acted like Ahaz of whom it is written, "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz."

The rod has not separated them from sin, but whipped them into a worse state. Their medicine has become their poison. The more the tree has been pruned, the less fruit it has yielded. Ploughing has only made the field more barren. That which has often proved so great a blessing to believers, has been utterly lost upon them. Why should they be smitten any more, they will revolt more and more?

One very singular instance of the heart's perversity is the fact that familiarity with death and the grave often hardens the heart, and none become more callous than grave-diggers and those who carry dead men to their graves. Men sin openly when graves are open before them. It is possible to work among the dead, and yet to be as wild as the man possessed of a devil in our Lord's day, who dwelt among the tombs. The Egyptians were accustomed to hold their riotous festivals in the presence of a corpse, not to sober their mirth, as some have said, but to make them the more wanton, gluttonous, and drunken, because they should so soon die.

Coffins and shrouds should be good sermons, but they seldom are so to those who see them every day. In times when cholera has raged, and in seasons when the pest, in the olden times, carried off its thousands, many men have not been at all softened, but have grown callous in the presence of God's grim messenger and even jested at him. Hervey finds holy "meditations among the tombs," but unholy men are as far off from God in a churchyard as in a theater.

Another strange thing I have often noticed—as a proof of sin's power to gather poison from the most healthful flowers, I have observed that some transgress all the more because they have been placed under the happy restraints of godliness. Though trained to piety and virtue, they rush into the arms of vice as though it were their mother. As gnats fly at a candle as soon as ever they catch sight of it, so do these infatuated ones dash into evil.

Young people who are placed in the providence of God where no temptations ever assail them, in the midst of holy and quiet homes, where the very name of evil scarcely comes, will often fret and worry themselves to get out into what they call, "life," and thrust their souls into the perils of bad company.

The sons and daughters of Adam long to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their very preservation from temptation grows irksome to them, they loathe the fold and long for the wolf. They think themselves hardly done by that they have not been born in the midst of licentiousness and tutored in crime.

Strange infatuation, and yet many a parent's heart has been broken by this freak of depravity, this reckless lust for evil. The younger son had the best of fathers, and yet he could never be quiet till he had gained his independence, and had brought himself to beggary in a far country, by spending his living with harlots.

Observe another case. Men who live in times when zealous and holy Christians abound are often the worse for it. What effect has the zeal of Christians upon such? It excites them to malice. All the while the church is asleep, the world says, "Ah, we do not believe your religion, for you do not act as if you believed it yourselves," but the moment the church bestirs herself, the world cries, "They are a set of fanatics. Who can put up with their ravings? We could have believed their religion had it been brought to us with respectful sobriety, but accompanied by enthusiasm it is detestable."

Nothing will please sinners but their sins, and if their sins could be made into virtues, they would fly to their virtues at once, so as to remain in opposition. Contrary to God man will go, his very nature is enmity against his Creator. The quaint poet with whose verse we commenced our sermon, has truly said—

*“If God had laid all common, certainly
Man would have been th’ encloser: but since now
God has impal’d us, on the contrary
Man breaks the fence, and every ground will plough.
O what were man, might he himself misplace!
Sure to be cross he would shift feet and face.”*

Sin is thus seen to be exceeding sinful. That plant must possess great vitality which increases by being uprooted and cut down. That which lives by being killed is strangely full of force. That must be a very hard substance which is hardened by lying in the blast furnace, in the central heat of the fire, where iron melts and runs like wax.

That must be a very terrible power which gathers strength from that which should restrain it, and rushes on the more violently in proportion as it is reined in. Sin kills men by that which was ordained to life. It makes heaven’s gifts the stepping stones to hell, uses the lamps of the temple to show the way to perdition, and makes the ark of the Lord, as in Uzzah’s case, the messenger of death.

Sin is that strange fire which burns the more fiercely for being dampened, finding fuel in the water which was intended to quench it. The Lord brings good out of evil, but sin brings evil out of good. It is a deadly evil—judge you how deadly! O that men knew its nature and abhorred it with all their hearts! May the Eternal Spirit teach men to know aright this worst of ills, that they may flee from it to Him who alone can deliver.

Now, what is all this about and what is the drift of this discourse? Well, the drift of it is this. There is in us by nature a propensity to sin which we cannot conquer, and yet conquered it must be, or we can never enter heaven. Your resolutions to overcome sin are as feeble as though you should try to bind Leviathan with a thread and lead him with a string. As well as hope to bind the tempest, and rein in the storm as to govern yourself by your own reservations as to sin.

Nor is sin to be overcome by philosophy, it laughs at such a spider’s web. Nor can it be prevented, nor will the soul be cleansed from it by any outward observances. Genuflections, penances, fastings, washing, are all in vain. What then must be done?

We must be new created. We are too far gone for mending. We must be made afresh. And for cleansing there is no water beneath the skies, nor any above them, that can remove our stain. But there is a fountain filled with the blood of God’s own Son. He that is washed there shall be made white. And there is an all-creating Holy Spirit, who can fashion us anew in Christ Jesus into holiness.

I would to God you all despaired of being saved, except by a miracle of grace. I would God you utterly despaired of being saved except by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. I would you were driven to look away from self, each one of you, to Him who on the bloody tree bore the wrath of God, for there is life in a look at Him, and whosoever looks at Him shall be saved—saved from the power of sin, as well as its guilt.

That which the brazen serpent took away was the burning poison in the veins of the men who had been bitten by the serpents. They were diseased with a deadly disease, and they looked, and it was healed. It was not filth that was taken from them, it was disease that was healed by their simple look. And so a look at Christ does not merely take away sin, but it heals the disease of sin—and mark you, it is the only possible healing for the leprosy of iniquity.

Faith in Jesus brings the Holy Spirit with His sacred weapons of invincible warfare into the field of the human heart—and He overthrows the impregnable strongholds of sin, makes lust a captive, and slays the enmity of the heart. Sin, being made to appear sin, grace is made to appear grace—God’s Holy Spirit gets the victory and we are saved.

God grant that this may be the experience of us all. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 7

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.