

CHAPTER 9.

Particular directions in relation to the foregoing case proposed —

FIRST. Consider the dangerous symptoms of any lust — 1.

Inveterateness — 2. Peace obtained under it; the several ways

whereby that is done — 3. Frequency of success in its seductions — 4.

The soul's fighting against it with arguments only taken from the

event — 5. Its being attended with judiciary hardness — 6. Its

withstanding particular dealings from God — The state of persons in whom these things are found.

III. THE foregoing *general rules* being supposed, *particular directions* to the soul for its guidance under the sense of a disquieting lust or distemper, being the main thing I aim at, come next to be proposed. Now, of these some are previous and preparatory, and in some of them the work itself is contained. Of the *first sort* are these ensuing: —

FIRST. Consider what dangerous *symptoms* thy lust hath attending or accompanying it, — whether it hath any deadly mark on it or no; if it hath, *extraordinary* remedies are to be used; an ordinary course of mortification will not do it.

You will say, “What are these dangerous marks and *symptoms*, the desperate *attendancies* of an indwelling lust, that you intend?” Some of them I shall name: —

1. *Inveterateness.* — If it hath lain long corrupting in thy heart, if thou hast suffered it to abide in power and prevalency, without attempting vigorously the killing of it, and the healing of the wounds thou hast received by it, for some long season, thy distemper is dangerous. Hast thou permitted worldliness, ambition, greediness of study, to eat up other duties, the duties wherein thou oughtest to hold constant communion with God, for some long season? or uncleanness to defile thy heart with vain, and foolish, and wicked imaginations for many days? Thy lust hath a dangerous symptom. So was the case with David: ~~xxxv~~ Psalm 38:5, “My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.” When a lust hath lain long in the heart, corrupting, festering, cankering, it brings the soul to a woeful condition. In such a case an ordinary course of humiliation

will not do the work: whatever it be, it will by this means insinuate itself more or less into all the faculties of the soul, and habituate the affections to its company and society; it grows familiar to the mind and conscience, that they do not startle at it as a strange thing, but are bold with it as that which they are wonted unto; yea, it will get such advantage by this means as oftentimes to exert and put forth itself without having any notice taken of it at all, as it seems to have been with Joseph in his swearing by the life of Pharaoh. Unless some extraordinary course be taken, such a person hath no ground in the world to expect that his latter end shall be peace.

For, first, How will he be able to distinguish between the long abode of an *unmortified lust* and the *dominion of sin*, which cannot befall a regenerate person? Secondly, How can he promise himself that it shall ever be otherwise with him, or that his lust will cease tumultuating and seducing, when he sees it fixed and abiding, and hath done so for many days, and hath gone through a *variety* of conditions with him? It may be it hath tried *mercies* and *afflictions*, and those possibly so remarkable that the soul could not avoid the taking special notice of them; it may be it hath weathered out many a storm, and passed under much variety of gifts in the administration of the word; and will it prove an easy thing to dislodge an inmate pleading a title by prescription? Old neglected wounds are often mortal, always dangerous. Indwelling distempers grow rusty and stubborn by continuance in ease and quiet. Lust is such an inmate as, if it can plead time and some prescription, will not easily be ejected. As it never dies of itself, so if it be not daily killed it will always gather strength.

2. Secret pleas of the heart for the *countenancing* of itself, and keeping up its peace, notwithstanding the abiding of a lust, without a vigorous gospel attempt for its mortification, is another dangerous symptom of a deadly distemper in the heart. Now, there be several ways whereby this may be done. I shall name some of them; as, —

(1.) When upon *thoughts*, perplexing thoughts about sin, instead of applying himself to the destruction of it, a man searches his heart to see what evidences he can find of a good condition, notwithstanding that sin and lust, so that it may go well with him.

For a man to gather up his experiences of God, to call them to mind, to collect them, consider, try, improve them, is an excellent thing, — a duty

practiced by all the saints, commended in the Old Testament and the New. This was David's work when he "communed with his own heart," and called to remembrance the former loving-kindness of the Lord. (¹⁷¹⁶ Psalm 77:6-9.) This is the duty that Paul sets us to practice, ¹⁷¹⁸2 Corinthians 13:5. And as it is in itself excellent, so it hath beauty added to it by a proper season, a time of trial or temptation, or disquietness of the heart about sin, — is a picture of silver to set off this golden apple, as Solomon speaks. But now to do it for this end, to satisfy conscience, which cries and calls for another purpose, is a desperate device of a heart in love with sin. When a man's conscience shall deal with him, when God shall rebuke him for the sinful distemper of his heart, if he, instead of applying himself to get that sin *pardoned* in the blood of Christ and *mortified* by his Spirit, shall relieve himself by any *such other evidences* as he hath, or thinks himself to have, and so disentangle himself from under the yoke that God was putting on his neck, his condition is very dangerous, his wound hardly curable. Thus the Jews, under the gallings of their own consciences and the convincing preaching of our Savior, supported themselves with this, that they were "Abraham's children," and on that account accepted with God; and so countenanced themselves in all abominable wickedness, to their utter ruin.

This is, in some degree, a blessing of a man's self, and saying that upon one account or other he shall have peace, "although he adds drunkenness to thirst." Love of sin, undervaluation of peace and of all tastes of love from God, are enwrapped in such a frame. Such a one plainly shows, that if he can but keep up hope of escaping the "wrath to come," he can be well content to be unfruitful in the world, at any distance from God that is not final separation. What is to be expected from such a heart?

(2.) By applying *grace and mercy* to an unmortified sin, or one not *sincerely* endeavored to be mortified, is this deceit carried on. This is a sign of a heart greatly entangled with the love of sin. When a man hath secret thoughts in his heart, not unlike those of Naaman about his worshipping in the house of Rimmon, (¹⁷¹⁸2 Kings 5:18.)

"In all other things I will walk with God, but in this thing, God be merciful unto me,"

his condition is sad. It is true, indeed, a resolution to this purpose, to indulge a man's self in any sin on the account of mercy, seems to be, and doubtless in any course is, altogether inconsistent with Christian sincerity, and is a badge of a hypocrite, and is the "turning of the grace of God into wantonness;" (Jude 4.) yet I doubt not but, through the craft of Satan and their own remaining unbelief, the children of God may themselves sometimes be ensnared with this deceit of sin, or else Paul would never have so cautioned them against it as he doth, ^(Rom)Romans 6:1, 2. Yea, indeed, there is nothing more natural than for fleshly reasonings to grow high and strong upon this account. The flesh would fain be indulged unto upon the account of grace, and every word that is spoken of mercy, it stands ready to catch at and to pervert it, to its own corrupt aims and purposes. To apply mercy, then, to a sin not vigorously mortified is to fulfill the end of the flesh upon the gospel.

These and many other ways and wiles a deceitful heart will sometimes make use of, to countenance itself in its abominations. Now, when a man with his sin is in this condition, that there is a secret liking of the sin prevalent in his heart, and though his will be not wholly set upon it, yet he hath an imperfect velleity towards it, he would practice it were it not for such and such considerations, and hereupon relieves himself other ways than by the mortification and pardon of it in the blood of Christ; that man's "wounds stink and are corrupt," and he will, without speedy deliverance, be at the door of death.

3. *Frequency of success* in sin's seduction, in obtaining the prevailing consent of the will unto it, is another dangerous symptom. This is that I mean: When the sin spoken of gets the consent of the will with some *delight*, though it be not actually outwardly perpetrated, yet it hath success. A man may not be able, upon outward considerations, to go along with sin to that which James calls the "finishing" of it, (^(James)James 1:14, 15.) as to the outward acts of sin, when yet the will of sinning may be actually obtained; then hath it, I say, success. Now, if any lust be able thus far to prevail in the soul of any man, as his condition may possibly be very bad and himself be unregenerate, so it cannot possibly be very good, but dangerous; and it is all one upon the matter whether this be done by the choice of the will or by inadvertency, for that inadvertency itself is in a manner chosen. When we are inadvertent and negligent, where we are

bound to watchfulness and carefulness, that inadvertency doth not take off from the voluntariness of what we do thereupon; for although men do not choose and resolve to be negligent and inadvertent, yet if they choose the things that will make them so, they choose inadvertency itself as a thing may be chosen in its cause.

And let not men think that the evil of their hearts is in any measure extenuated because they seem, for the most part, to be surprised into that consent which they seem to give unto it; for it is negligence of their duty in watching over their hearts that betrays them into that surprisal.

4. When a man fighteth against his sin only with *arguments from the issue* or the punishment due unto it, this is a sign that sin hath taken great possession of the will, and that in the heart there is a superfluity of naughtiness. Such a man as opposes nothing to the seduction of sin and lust in his heart but fear of shame among men or hell from God, is sufficiently resolved to do the sin if there were no punishment attending it; which, what it differs from living in the practice of sin, I know not. Those who are Christ's, and are acted in their obedience upon gospel principles, have the death of Christ, the love of God, the detestable nature of sin, the preciousness of communion with God, a deep-grounded abhorrency of sin *as sin*, to oppose to any seduction of sin, to all the workings, strivings, fightings of lust in their hearts. So did Joseph. "How shall I do this great evil," saith he, "and sin against the LORD?" my good and gracious God. (⁴⁰³⁰Genesis 39:9.) And Paul, "The love of Christ constraineth us;" (⁴⁰³⁴2 Corinthians 5:14.) and,

"Having received these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit," ⁴⁰⁰⁰2 Corinthians 7:1.

But now if a man be so under the power of his lust that he hath nothing but law to oppose it withal, if he cannot fight against it with gospel weapons, but deals with it altogether with hell and judgment, which are the proper arms of the law, it is most evident that sin hath possessed itself of his will and affections to a very great prevalency and conquest.

Such a person hath cast off, as to the particular spoken of, the conduct of *renewing* grace, and is kept from ruin only by *restraining* grace; and so far is he fallen from grace, and returned under the power of the law. And can it

be thought that this is not a great provocation to Christ, that men should cast off his easy, gentle yoke and rule, and cast themselves under the iron yoke of the law, merely out of indulgence unto their lusts?

Try thyself by this also: When thou art by sin driven to make a stand, so that thou must either serve it and rush at the command of it into folly, like the horse into the battle, or make head against it to suppress it, what dost thou say to thy soul? what dost thou expostulate with thyself? Is this all, — “Hell will be the end of this course; vengeance will meet with me and find me out?” It is time for thee to look about thee; evil lies at the door. Paul’s main argument to evince that sin shall not have dominion over believers is, that they “are not under the law, but under grace,” ²⁸⁶⁴Romans 6:14. If thy contendings against sin be all on legal accounts, from legal principles and motives, what assurance canst thou attain unto that sin shall not have dominion over thee, which will be thy ruin?

Yea, know that this reserve will not long hold out. If thy lust hath driven thee from stronger gospel forts, it will speedily prevail against this also. Do not suppose that such considerations will deliver thee, when thou hast voluntarily given up to thine enemy those helps and means of preservation which have a thousand times their strength. Rest assuredly in this, that unless thou recover thyself with speed from this condition, the thing that thou fearest will come upon thee. What *gospel principles* do not, *legal motives* cannot do.

5. When it is probable that there is, or may be, somewhat of judiciary hardness, or at least of chastening punishment, in thy lust as disquieting. This is another dangerous symptom. That God doth sometimes leave even those of his own under the perplexing power at least of some lust or sin, to correct them for former sins, negligence, and folly, I no way doubt. Hence was that complaint of the church, “Why hast thou hardened us from the fear of thy name?” ²⁸⁶⁷Isaiah 63:17. That this is his way of dealing with unregenerate men no man questions. But how shall a man know whether there be anything of God’s chastening hand in his being left to the disquietment of his distemper? Ans. Examine thy heart and ways. What was the state and condition of thy soul before thou fellest into the entanglements of that sin which now thou so complainest of? Hadst thou been negligent in duties? Hadst thou lived inordinately to thyself? Is there

the guilt of any great sin lying upon thee unrepented of? A *new sin may be permitted*, as well as a *new affliction sent*, to bring an old sin to remembrance.

Hast thou received any eminent mercy, protection, deliverance, which thou didst not improve in a due manner, nor wast thankful for? or hast thou been exercised with any affliction without laboring for the appointed end of it? or hast thou been wanting to the opportunities of glorifying God in thy generation, which, in his good providence, he had graciously afforded unto thee? or hast thou conformed thyself unto the world and the men of it, through the abounding of temptations in the days wherein thou livest? If thou findest this to have been thy state, awake, call upon God; thou art fast asleep in a storm of anger round about thee.

6. When thy lust hath already *withstood* particular dealings from God against it. This condition is described, ^{<25707}Isaiah 57:17,

“For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.”

God had dealt with them about their prevailing lust, and that several ways, — by affliction and desertion; but they held out against all. This is a sad condition, which nothing but *mere sovereign grace* (as God expresses it in the next verse) can relieve a man in, and which no man ought to promise himself or bear himself upon. God oftentimes, in his providential dispensations, meets with a man, and speaks particularly to the evil of his heart, as he did to Joseph’s brethren in their selling of him into Egypt. This makes the man reflect on his sin, and judge himself in particular for it. God makes it to be the voice of the danger, affliction, trouble, sickness that he is in or under. Sometimes in reading of the word God makes a man stay on something that cuts him to the heart, and shakes him as to his present condition. More frequently in the hearing of the word preached, his great ordinance for conviction, conversion, and edification, doth he meet with men. God often hews men by the sword of his word in that ordinance, strikes directly on their bosom-beloved lust, startles the sinner, makes him engage unto the mortification and relinquishment of the evil of his heart. Now, if his lust have taken such hold on him as to enforce him to break these bands of the Lord, and to cast these cords from him, — if it

overcomes these convictions, and gets again into its old posture, — if it can cure the wounds it so receives, — that soul is in a sad condition.

Unspeakable are the evils which attend such a frame of heart. Every particular warning to a man in such an estate is an inestimable mercy; how then doth he despise God in them who holds out against them! And what infinite patience is this in God, that he doth not cast off such a one, and swear in his wrath that he shall never enter into his rest!

These and many other evidences are there of a lust that is dangerous, if not mortal. As our Savior said of the evil spirit, “This kind goes not out but by fasting and prayer,” so say I of lusts of this kind. An ordinary course of mortification will not do it; extraordinary ways must be fixed on.

This is the first particular direction: Consider whether the lust or sin you are contending with hath any of these dangerous symptoms attending of it.

Before I proceed I must give you one caution by the way, lest any be deceived by what hath been spoken. Whereas I say the things and evils above-mentioned may befall true believers, let not any that finds the same things in himself thence or from thence conclude that he is a true believer. These are the evils that believers may fall into and be ensnared withal, not the things that constitute a believer. A man may as well conclude that he is a believer because he is an adulterer, because David that was so fell into adultery, as conclude it from the signs foregoing; which are the evils of sin and Satan in the hearts of believers. The seventh chapter of the Romans contains the description of a regenerate man. He that shall consider what is spoken of his dark side, of his unregenerate part, of the indwelling power and violence of sin remaining in him, and, because he finds the like in himself, conclude that he is a regenerate man, will be deceived in his reckoning. It is all one as if you should argue: A wise man may be sick and wounded, yea, do some things foolishly; therefore, everyone who is sick and wounded and does things foolishly is a wise man. Or as if a silly, deformed creature, hearing one speak of a beautiful person, should say that he had a mark or a scar that much disfigured him, should conclude that because he hath himself scars, and moles, and warts, he also is beautiful. If you will have evidences of your being believers, it must be from those things that constitute men believers. He that hath these things in himself

may safely conclude, "If I am a believer, I am a most miserable one." But that any man is so, he must look for other evidences if he will have peace.