

A Confessing Sinner, and a Forgiving God

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"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:8, 9

Perfection in Christ the Scriptures are full of; perfection in man the Scriptures know not. The whole testimony of God in his word is to perfection in Christ. Every Scripture that speaks of his Godhead declares his perfection: for what is there but perfection in Godhead? And every passage that speaks of his humanity declares his perfection: for if he had not had a perfect human nature, he could not have offered that nature a sacrifice for sin. As the Lamb of God, without spot, or blemish, or any such thing, he is "holy; harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." (Heb. 7:26.) If there is any perfection in the church, it is only found in Christ; by her having an eternal and vital union with him. But as to man, that fallen creature, the whole testimony of God's word is to the depth of his apostacy. The Scripture positively declares, "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God: they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10-12.) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9.) And lest we should fancy, that when the blessed Spirit had regenerated and taken possession of a man, making his body his temple, then there was some perfection to be found in his heart, the Scripture brings before our eyes the awful falls and sad departures of God's most highly

favoured saints—Noah, Lot, Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon. These blots are recorded against God's eminent saints, to put down that false notion, that there is any thing like perfection in the creature.

And yet there are those who indulge in the wild dream of human perfectibility. There are those who even boast that they have attained to perfection. And there were such doubtless in John's day. There were, in his time, proud, ignorant, blind, deluded wretches, who said that they had cleansed their heart from all evil, that perfection dwelt in them, and that sin was no more to be found in them. Some of these were Pharisees, completely ignorant of the requirements of God's holy law, thoroughly unacquainted with the depth of man's fall. And others were dry doctrinalists, who could speak much about Christ; but, knowing nothing of the workings of depravity in their own nature, overlooked all the heavings and boilings of the corrupt fountain within; and because they read of the church's perfection in Christ, claimed unsinning perfection to themselves.

Against these characters John deals this heavy blow; against those who claim this perfection he brings out this sharp sword, and cuts them down with this overwhelming stroke, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Talk about your Christianity—talk about your religion—talk about your standing—and say, "I have no sin," you are a deceiver, John boldly declares: "so far from being, as you think you are, a perfect Christian, the very truth is not in you; you are nothing but a deceived, awfully deceived character." But he brings out, with the other hand, consolation for the people of God, who feel distressed on account of their inward guilt and sin. Thus whilst, on the one hand, he cuts down the perfectionist, legal or

evangelical—on the other, he raises up the poor, condemned, drooping saint, who is bowed down with a sense of his guilt and shame; and opening the rich cordial of gospel consolation, says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

These, then, with God's blessing, will be the two leading features of my subject this evening.

I.—John's declaration,—*"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* And II.—That *comforting cordial* for poor, bowed down, guilty creatures—*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

I.—Man, in a state of nature, whether he be in profanity or in a profession, knows nothing of the real character of sin. God indeed has not left himself without witness in the human heart; natural conscience, where it is not seared as with a hot iron, bears testimony against sin. But its hideous nature, its awful depths, its subtlety, its workings, its movements, its cravings, its lustings; the heights to which it rises, the depths to which it sinks—no man is vitally and experimentally acquainted with sin thus except that man into whose heart light has shone, and into whose conscience life has come. There is a veil over man's heart by nature—a veil of ignorance, of delusion, of unbelief, of self-deception; and as long as that "veil remains untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament," as the apostle speaks, (2 Cor. 3:14,) nothing is seen of the purity and perfection of God, or of the spirituality and breadth of his holy law, and nothing is known of the deep sinfulness and corruption of the creature. But when the Lord the Spirit takes a man really and vitally in hand; when he truly begins his sovereign work of grace upon

the soul, he commences by opening up to the astonished eyes of the sinner something of the real nature of sin. I do not mean to say, he discovers to the sinner at first the whole depth of the malady; he rather deals with him as the wise physician deals with his patient. The patient comes with an incurable disease; the physician sees in a moment the nature of the malady; he knows that death has laid hold of him, and that a few months will close his mortal career. But he does not tell him so at first; he begins to open up the case, wears a solemn countenance, hints to him his condition; but reserves his deeper admonitions for a future occasion, that he may gradually let him into the awful secret, that he may by degrees unfold to him that he is on the borders of the grave, and that the green turf will soon close over his bones. Thus the blessed Spirit, in his first dealings with the sinner's conscience, does not open up to him the depth of the malady. He makes him indeed feel that the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint; he discovers to him the purity of God, the breadth and spirituality of the law, and, correspondingly, a sense of iniquity in himself; he brings upon his conscience outward transgressions, and lays upon it the guilt of those sins which are open to the eye, and which are the more conspicuous branches that spring out of so deep a root. But, after a time, he begins to take him, as he took the prophet Ezekiel, into "the chambers of imagery," and shows him greater things than these. He not only shows him the huge, high, wide-spreading branches of sin, but bids him look down and see how deeply-rooted sin is in his very being; that sin is not an accident, a faint blot that may soon be washed out; a something on the surface, like a skin disease, that may be healed by a simple plaster, or gentle ointment. He shows him that sin is seated in his very bones; that this deep-rooted malady has taken possession of him; that he is a sinner to his very heart's core; that every thought, every word, every action of man's whole being is

one mass of sin, filth, and pollution. And if he attempt, as most awakened sinners do attempt, to purify himself, to ease his guilt, by lopping off a few outside branches; if he attempt to wash himself clean from iniquity, the Spirit will teach him the meaning of Job's words, "Though I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." (Job. 9:30, 31.) Until at last he brings him to this spot, that he is a sinner throughout; yea, that he is the chief of sinners; that every evil lodges in his heart, and the seed of every crime dwells in his fallen nature.

When a man is brought here, he is brought to the place of the stopping of mouths: his own righteousness is effectually cut to pieces; his hopes of salvation by the works of the law are completely removed from under him. Those rotten props, those vain buttresses are cut away by the hand of the Spirit from the sinking soul, that he may fall into himself one mass of confusion and ruin. And until he is brought here he really can know nothing of a free-grace salvation, of the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin, of God's electing love, of Christ's substitution and suretyship, of his atoning blood, his justifying righteousness, and dying love; he can know nothing of the rich provisions of almighty power and eternal mercy that are lodged in the fulness of a covenant Head. He has no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no heart to feel, no arms to embrace a whole Christ, a precious Christ, a Saviour from the wrath to come; who has stood in the sinner's place and stead, made full atonement for sin, fulfilled the law, brought in everlasting righteousness, and justified the ungodly. He cannot receive this precious Saviour who "of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," until he has fallen and been buried in the ruins of guilt and shame.

Now, such a character as this will never say, "I have no sin. A man taught by the Spirit, who has a living conscience, who feels the workings of godly fear, who has seen an end of all perfection, who knows the breadth of God's law, never dares to mock God, never dares so deceive himself, as to say, "I have no sin; I have cleansed my heart from iniquity; there remains no more pollution in me; I am pure every whit." No such presumptuous language as this can ever pass out of that heart which God has circumcised to fear his name. None can utter such language but that "generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12); or such as resemble that wretch, of whom we read, "such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness." (Prov. 30:20.)

Can we say, then, that "we have no sin" *in thought*? Is not every thought sinful, except such as come immediately from God? Must not every thing which springs from my polluted heart be polluted? If there be a fountain that casts forth salt water, must not every drop of that fountain be briny and salt? If my heart is altogether a mass of sin, then every thought that proceeds from that heart must be deeply tainted with sin. Therefore, we cannot say, "I have no sin," in that sense, when every thought is full of sin.

Nor can we say, "we have no sin" *in word*. Who ever speaks without some sin attending the utterance of his lips? We may speak upon worldly things; is not sin mixed with it? We speak on divine things, does not sin attend it? We talk to sinners, sin is mingled with our speech; we talk to saints, sin is mingled with our words.

Can we say, we never sin *in deed*—we, that have made a profession, some ten, some twenty years,—can we say, that

we have never sinned in deed in action? The Lord may have kept us from falling into very great and grievous sins; but who dare say (I dare not), he has not sinned in action? Who has not walked upon the very brink of evil, if he has not actually stumbled and fallen into it? Who can lift up his head before God and before his people, and say, "Since the Lord quickened my soul I have never done any one thing I am ashamed of?" If we say, we have never so sinned, it is to be feared we come under John's condemnation, "we deceive ourselves."

Can we say, we have no *pride*? when we find it continually working. Can we say, we have no *hypocrisy*? when it is continually manifesting itself. Can we say, we have no *presumption*? when it is continually intruding its hateful head. Can we say, we have no *rebellion*? when the feeblest trial will stir up its proud waves. Can we say, we have no *covetousness*? when our heart is often going after the things of time and sense. Can we say, we have no *peevishness*? when a mere trifle will sometimes stir up our evil temper. Can we say, our *eyes* have no sin? when they are gathering iniquity with well-nigh every look. Can we say, our *ears* are free from sin? when nearly every thing that passes through them contaminates the conscience, and works upon our depraved nature. Can we say, our *lips* are free from sin? when they are continually uttering that which is not for the glory of God. Can we say, our *hands* are free from sin? Can we say, our *feet* are free from sin? Can we say of ourselves, in any shape, in any form, that "we have no sin?"—when it gets up with us as we rise in the morning, and to our shame and sorrow is with us all the day: when it lies down with us, and often accompanies us in the night season? Can we say, with this daily, hourly, momentarily experience of sin continually defiling our conscience with its filthy streams, can we ever be amongst those who say, "we have no sin?" If we

say so, we should have a lie in our right hand. If we said so, we should do violence to our own convictions, and speak against the testimony of God in our own conscience.

It is, then, a mercy to have a negative evidence, if you have not a positive one. It is a mercy, if you feel that you are sinners. Look at those who say they have no sin, who are perfectly free, who have cleansed their hearts, and reformed their lives, and have lopped this wide-spreading tree down to the very ground. What is the testimony of the Holy Ghost concerning them? They "deceive" themselves; they are deluded; they are blinded by the god of this world; they know not God; they know not themselves; they know not the evil of their hearts; they know not the workings of their fallen nature; they are altogether under the power of Satan as an angel of light, and there is no truth in them. They know nothing of the power of God, of the truth as it is in Jesus, of salvation by grace, of the Spirit's work upon the heart, or of the dealings of God upon the enlightened conscience.

II.—But, on the other hand, as this bright sword in the hand of the Spirit cuts down all fleshly perfectionists, and lays low in the dust as deceived creatures those who boast they have cleansed themselves from all impurity, how it smiles upon the poor mourning pilgrim here below! Whilst it turns its face clothed with frowns, and menaces wrath and destruction against all self-deceivers who say they have no sin, what a smiling countenance does the same text turn to the poor mourners in Zion, who feel painfully they are sinning every moment, and are sighing and crying by reason of the plague of their heart! To them we turn; for to them especially does the second branch of our subject speak in words of sweet consolation, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

i.—This is addressed to God's people; those who know the depth of the fall, who are mourning and sighing by reason of indwelling sin, and upon whose conscience it often presses as a burden too heavy to be borne. Now look at the difference between these two characters. We will suppose them seated this evening in the same pew. Here is one, who says, "I have no sin;" he knows nothing of the evil of the heart, of the workings of his own corruptions; he sees nothing of the purity of God's character; he knows nothing of the condemnation of the holy law; he thinks himself bound for heaven, and has no doubt of safely arriving there—a vessel fraught for its destined harbour, and never concerning faith to make shipwreck; congratulating himself he is not so bad as others; casting an eye of disdain upon those whom he sees labouring under sin, and the evils of their heart; and flattering himself that he stands high in God's favour because he is so like God. That man, whoever he be, is a deceived wretch; and so far as being on the road to heaven, he is travelling fast down to the chambers of death. But, by his side, hanging his head, drooping in spirit, cast down in soul, is one whose heart God has touched; into whose conscience the blessed Spirit has brought light and life; one who has had the veil taken off his heart; one who knows himself by divine teaching to be a sinner before God. And what are his feelings? "O my sins, my sins! What a burden they are to my conscience! Shall I ever have them taken off? Shall I ever hear the sweet words proclaimed to my soul, 'Go free?' Will my soul ever be landed in glory? Will my sins be for ever a mill stone around my neck; or will they be cast into the depths of the sea, that when sought for they shall never be found?" Look at these two characters. One all joy, the other all sorrow; one all presumption, the other all unbelief; one all confidence, the other all doubting; one all risings, the other all sinkings; the one growing day by day higher and higher,

till at last, like Job's hypocrite, his head reaches the clouds, and the other sinking, sinking, sinking in his feelings, growing day by day viler and viler, guiltier and guiltier, worse and worse. Which is the sinner? which is the saint? Which is the heir of heaven? which is the heir of hell? Which is the child of God? which is the child of the Wicked One? Which is the tare? which is the wheat? Which is the sheep? which is the goat? I leave it to conscience to decide. I know well on which side of the line that poor bowed down sinner stands; that he is on the right side of the line of mercy, and will one day stand at the right hand of the good and great Shepherd, when he shall separate the sheep from the goats.

But for his comfort the Lord speaks by his Apostle John in these words, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But is it so very easy to put this in practice? Very easy in theory, very easy by the lips; but with the heart, O, how difficult, O, how impossible, except God himself is pleased specially to work with divine power in the soul!

There are several things that keep a man, though he feel sin, from confessing it to God.

1. One is, *hardness of heart*. The Lord's family have often to feel very painfully hardness of heart. The law cannot soften, guilt cannot melt, the very pangs of hell in a man's conscience cannot dissolve or break down. They only harden. His conscience may bleed with guilt, and his heart be hard as adamant; and therefore this hardness, (and O what a wretched feeling it is for a child of God to be so hard Godward, so impenitent, so unfeeling, so unable to melt down at the feet of his dread Majesty) this hardness will seal and shut the mouth against confession.

2. Another thing that keeps the mouth from uttering the language of confession is *despondency*. Wherever despondency lays hold of a child of God, he cannot fully nor freely confess: he may feel miserable through sin; he may have the pangs of hell in his soul; but there is no free discharge; there is no flowing forth; his heart is shut up and closed by this stone on the well's mouth; and this stops confession.

3. *Unbelief*—that God does not or will not hear his cries. Doubts and fears of being rejected, and all the sad misgivings, fears, and terrors of an awakened conscience—these are often a great bar against confession of sin; for unbelief stops the mouth, as well as the utterance of the feelings of the soul.

But yet the Lord does bring his people to confess. Is it not his own promise? "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." (Jer. 31:9.) So that the Lord (and the Lord alone) can make the soul really confess its sins before him. And when is that? Why, sometimes the Lord presses this confession out of the sinner's lips by the *very weight of guilt* that he puts upon him. He feels so guilty, so full of shame and sin, that he must confess; he can bear the burden no longer. It is so in nature. How many felons, at the gallows foot, have been compelled by the testimony of conscience to confess their crimes? How many a hidden murderer has been obliged by the weight of his sin to come forward and deliver himself into the hands of justice? Shall natural conscience force confession; and shall spiritual conscience not force it forth? So that when guilt lies very heavy upon a man's conscience, confession flows, because confession is forced out of it.

But still, another thing is wanted, and that is, that confession should be *drawn out* of him, as well as driven. Is not this true in nature? If you have a child, and believe that child has done something wrong, you can sometimes draw confession out of him when you cannot drive. Hard speeches, taking down the rod, and threatening him with punishment, will only shut his mouth; but take him on your knee, and you will then find that you can draw out of his bosom that confession which the fear of the rod only kept closer in his own breast. Is it not so in grace? Does not the Lord draw sometimes confession of sin out of our bosom? Does not the Lord sometimes by the sweet and secret operations of his grace upon the soul draw us to his footstool? Does he not shew us the mercy-seat? and does he not draw forth, by the sweet enkindlings of light and life, the confession of those sins by which our conscience has been burdened and guilty?

But still, there is something more wanting to bring it fully out, to lift it out of the very depths of the heart. Driving may bring out some, drawing may bring out more; but still there is some remaining, like water at the bottom of a well, which neither driving nor drawing will completely bring forth. Yet there is one thing that can do it, that goes down to the very depth of the well, that sinks into the very feelings of a man's innermost conscience; that is, some discovery of a bleeding, suffering, agonizing Redeemer. And when there is some sight to the eye of faith of a bleeding, agonizing, suffering Jesus, then confession comes out of the very bottom of a man's heart. There is not a single secret that is kept back; there is no reserve made; the heart is emptied down to the very bottom.

But, "if we confess our sins;" that is, if we are enabled under these feelings to tell the Lord that we have transgressed, that we have backslidden, that our idolatrous heart, that our

adulterous eye, that our covetous spirit, that our wicked nature has broken forth on the right hand and on the left; if we are enabled thus to "confess our sins," God has revealed for our comfort this blessed promise.

But some may ask this question, "What! am I to confess every sin I have committed?" How can you? How many have you committed? How many millions of moments have you lived?—so many millions of sins you have committed. How many times have you drawn breath into your lungs? How many times has your pulse beat since you came into this mortal state?—so many times has sin been committed by you. And therefore how can we confess *all* our sins? We might as well think, when we walk at midnight, and look up to the bright sky, of counting every star; we might as well dream, when strolling by the sea-shore, of counting every sand, or numbering every pebble, as think of telling the Lord every sin we have committed. But those that lie upon the soul, those that are manifested in the light and life of God's teaching, those which are deeply felt, and which honest conscience bears witness to; those which the Spirit discovers—these we are to confess, these we shall confess, and these we must confess, as God gives us the power. O! however painful, may the Lord ever give you and me, who desire to fear his name, power to confess our sins to him. I am sure we must, if the conscience is made tender. We cannot go to him with lip service; we may sometimes bend our knee before him, and attempt to confess. But it is hard work; mere labour with the lip that tendeth to penury. But there will be times and seasons when the Lord will so lay the guilt of our numerous transgressions upon our conscience, that we must bewail, cry, groan, and tell him with shame and confusion of face that we are the vilest of transgressors, and of sinners the chief.

Whatever be your confidence of going to heaven, whatever your strong assurance, whatever your knowledge of the doctrines of grace, whatever be the opinions you have formed of yourselves, or the opinion that others have formed of you, I would not pick up your religion if it lay before me in the street, if it know nothing of honest confession of sin. I should as soon think of taking up the dung that lies in the road, or some cast-off shoe, such as we see lying in the canal; I should as soon think of picking up some dirty rag that lies in the street, and putting it into my bosom, as take up a religion that knows nothing of confession before God or honesty before man.

But what a gracious promise the Lord gives to those who confess! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

1. "*He is faithful.*" Why should John select this attribute? Why should not John say, "He is merciful"—"He is gracious"—"He is kind?" Why should John lay this stress upon God's *faithfulness*? I will tell you: because he desires to lay it upon a very broad foundation. If I wish to erect a very noble, commanding and lofty superstructure, I must have a foundation, a basis, equally broad equally strong, for that building to stand upon. Now God's faithfulness is, if I may use the expression, that broad attribute in the divine majesty on which everything rests. As the Apostle says, "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Faithfulness—in other words, truth—is the very character of God. He might not be merciful, but he must be faithful. Mercy in God was not known till man fell. Ages had rolled away before the mercy of God was known; but God's faithfulness was ever known, and must be known, to the creatures of his hand. It is the very foundation of the Godhead. If he could cease to be faithful, he would cease to be God. And, therefore, when the Apostle would lay

a very broad foundation for the poor sinner to stand upon, he does not build it upon God's mercy, though so great; nor upon God's grace, though superabounding; nor upon God's love though everlasting; but he places it upon a greater, wider, stronger, broader foundation than these; and that is, God's eternal faithfulness—the veracity, the truthfulness, the very character of Jehovah, as he that cannot lie. But in what way, and in what sense is God's attribute of faithfulness manifested? In this: God has promised to pardon repentant sinners; God has promised to forgive those that come to him, confessing their transgressions against him. Now it would impugn the divine veracity, it would cast a shade over God's holy character, if there were any repentant sinner whom God rejected; if there were any broken heart which God did not heal; if there were any spiritual confession that did not enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. And therefore, John builds up the soul, not on God's mercy (though all pardon flows from God's mercy), but on God's faithfulness, because what he has said, he will fulfil to the very letter.

2. But this is not the only attribute of God's character that John brings forward. He says, "He is faithful and *just*." O what a word is that! There is scarcely to my mind such a word in the Bible as that; so great, so glorious, so comforting: "He is faithful and *just*." "Just?" say you, "Why I know that God's mercy and God's grace can pardon sinners; but how can God be just, and pardon transgressors? Does not God's justice demand the punishment of sin? Does not God's justice blaze forth in eternal lightnings against the soul that transgresses his holy law? How, then, can it be true, that God can be just, and yet forgive a confessing sinner? But it is true—divinely true—blessedly, eternally true. And in it is locked up that grand mystery of redemption by the blood and obedience of God's co-equal Son. It is locked up in this one word—"*just*." But how? it may be asked. In this way. The

Lord of life and glory became a security and substitute for those whom his Father gave to him. He entered into their place and stead. He endured the punishment that was due to them. For them he fulfilled the whole law by his doings, and by his sufferings. For them he bled, and for them he died. For them he rose again, and for them ascended up to the right hand of the Father. And now justice demands the sinner's pardon, and puts in its righteous plea. And see the difference. Mercy begs, justice demands: mercy says, "I ask it as a boon;" mercy, as a part of God's character, looks down with pity and compassion on the mourning criminal: but justice says, "It is his due; it is his right; it belongs to him; it is his because the Redeemer has discharged his debt, because the Surety has stood in his place, because the Saviour has obeyed that law for him which he could not obey in his own person." So that when we can receive this blessed and glorious truth—that to those who confess their sins, "God is faithful," and not merely "faithful," but also "just to forgive them their sins,"—how it draws out of the bosom of Jehovah a full, free, and irrevocable pardon of all transgressions, and especially of those transgressions that the sinner confesses at his footstool!

Has the Lord made sin your burden? Has he ever made you feel guilty before him? Has he ever pressed down your conscience with a sight and sense of your iniquities, your sins, your backslidings? And does the Lord draw, from time to time, honest, sincere, unreserved confession of those sins out of your lips? What does the Holy Ghost say to *you*? What has the blessed Spirit recorded for your instruction, and for your consolation? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Not merely on a footing of mercy; still less because you confess them. It is not your confessing them, but it is thus—your confessing them is a mark of divine life; your confessing them springs from the

work of grace upon your heart. If, then, you possess divine life, if you have grace in your soul, you are a child of God; and if a child of God, Jesus obeyed for you—Jesus suffered for you—Jesus died for you—Jesus has put away your sin. And, therefore, you being a child of God, and Jesus having done all these things for you, God is now "faithful" to his promise that he will receive a confessing sinner; and "just" to his own immutable and veracious character. And thus, from justice as well as mercy, from faithfulness as well as compassion, he can, he will, and he does pardon, forgive, and sweetly blot out every iniquity and every transgression of a confessing penitent.

ii.—*"And cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* He cleanses our conscience from the guilt, cleanses our heart from the filth, and cleanses our soul from the power; for these three comprehend the cleansing operations of the Spirit upon the heart. We mourn under the guilt of sin; we sigh and groan under the power of sin. Now if the Lord can cleanse by his blood from the guilt of sin; can wash away, by the application of that holy fountain, the filth of sin; and by the power of his grace can deliver and keep from the power of sin; what more do we want? If the guilt, the filth, and the power, is this three-headed monster, this three-fold malady, this thrice-twined cord that holds a poor sinner, then there is blood to purge away its guilt, a fountain to wash away its filth, and grace to deliver from its power. What more do you want? You have all that God can give, all that a living Mediator can freely and graciously bestow.

Look, then, what a frowning aspect upon some, what a smiling aspect upon others, this text in God's holy word casts. What is your state? What is your condition? What are the workings of your heart? Unhumbled, unexercised, unplagued, unsorrowing, unconfessing? O what a frowning

aspect do these words of God present to you! The cherubim, with their flaming swords, guarding Paradise, were not more fearful to the terrified sons of Adam, than such a text displaying its awful blazing lightnings, against the self-righteous pharisee, against the Arminian perfectionist, against all, whoever they be, in a profession, or out of a profession in the church, or out of the church—against all who have never, by divine teaching, felt the ruins of the fall, and have never had their conscience enlightened and enlivened to see and feel sin, and have never known themselves lost, ruined and undone.

On the other hand, what a smiling countenance, what open arms, what a tender bosom, what a sympathizing heart, does the text open to God's own mourning sighing, heart-broken, and penitent family! What is your greatest grief? Because your worldly circumstances do not flourish? Because you cannot prosper in the world as you would? Because your body is not healthy and strong? Trifles; trifles! Scars; scars! Flesh wounds, superficial sores! not a deep-rooted malady; not that which penetrates into the very core of a man's being. Sin; the plague of the heart, the corruption of our fallen nature, the evil that dwelleth in us, the pride, the hypocrisy, the presumption, the unbelief, the infidelity, the rebellion, the blasphemy, the carnality, the desperate wickedness of our depraved heart—is not this the greatest trial that you daily feel? Take your other burdens—all of them; tie them together; make a bundle of them; put it in the balance; and put in the other the plague of your heart, the evil of your nature, the hidings of God's face, the workings that pass, day by day, in your chambers of imagery. Does not the one scale, the temporal scale, kick the beam? and does not the other, the spiritual scale, sink as low as the balance can fall? It does; it does, I am sure it does when the heart is made honest, and when the conscience is

made tender and alive in God's fear.

But yet, how the text smiles upon such; or rather, how the Lord, the God of all grace, who revealed it (blessings be upon his name!) how he smiles! how he wins! how he embraces in the arms of his mercy and love those who feel the evil of sin, who sorrow, grieve, and groan because of their transgressions; and who, in sadness of heart and sincerity of mouth, are enabled, from time to time, to confess their transgressions at the footstool of mercy and grace! there is free pardon for all such; complete forgiveness; the Lord blots out all their sins; they shall no more be brought against them; and they will one day bless God, that ever they felt their guilt, were ever enabled to confess them, and were ever led to believe that God had freely pardoned and received them, not for anything in themselves, but for his name's sake, whom they desire eternally to love, admire, and adore.