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**A Treatise of the
Dominion of Sin
and Grace**

John Owen



A Treatise of the Dominion of Sin and Grace

Author(s): Owen, John (1616-1683)

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Description: This treatise by John Owen is founded on Romans 6:14. Owen, an English Congregationalist, assumes three facts are true before the writing of his piece. First, that sin dwells in believers; second, that it seeks to renew its dominion over them; and third, that it endeavors to accomplish its goal by deceit and force. He then explores the nature of sin's power over humanity, explains how to tell when sin is in one's life, and then assures believers that sin does not have the ultimate power in their lives. Owen's work is a perfect blend of recognition of sin and the influence it has on all humans, and comforting assurance that it does not have the last word. It reiterates the basic knowledge Christians find in the Bible about sin, but Owen's sharp mind is able to glean implied meanings and give more body to the information found in Scripture. Readers who want an honest yet hopeful account of sin need look no further than Owen's *Treatise*.

Abby Zwart

CCEL Staff Writer

Contents

A Treatise of the Dominion of Sin and Grace	1
Title Page.	1
Prefatory note.	2
Analysis.	3
To the serious reader.	4
Title.	8
Chapter I. Dominion the aim of sin.	9
Chapter II. Nature of the dominion of sin.	12
Chapter III. Evidence of the dominion of sin.	20
Chapter IV. On hardness of heart.	35
Chapter V. Grounds of the assurance given in the text.	42
Chapter VI. Practical observations from the text.	51
Indexes	59
Index of Scripture References	60
Index of Names	63
Index of Pages of the Print Edition	64



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A treatise
of
the dominion of sin and grace;
wherein sin's reign is discovered, in whom it is, and in whom it is not; how the law
supports it; how grace delivers from it, by setting up its dominion in the heart.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

— [Rom. vi. 14.](#)

By the late pious and learned minister of the gospel,

John Owen, D.D.

London: 1688.



Prefatory note.

It appears that the following treatise was published by the widow of Owen, five years after his death; and we learn, from the preface which Isaac Chauncy prefixed to it, that the author had left it ready for the press. The most important part of it relates to the evidence by which we ascertain whether or not sin holds dominion over the heart. In the description and sifting of this evidence, the author manifests all his singular powers of spiritual analysis and discrimination.

We have had access to a manuscript which belonged to Dr Owen's friend, Sir John Hartopp, and which contains a large portion of this treatise. It serves to show how many obscure passages in the writings of Owen might have been elucidated and rendered perfectly clear, if the same advantage had been enjoyed in the preparation of his other works for this edition. The following are some instances of important corrections made on the text, as it stood in all previous editions, by the aid of this manuscript. On its authority we have altered "disavow" into "avow;" "it is that act by which the mind loads itself," into "it is that art by which the mind leads itself;" "mind" into "wind;" "sin hath not the dominion," into "sin hath the dominion," the sense of the passage, as is evident from the context, having been spoiled by the insertion of the negative; "invisible" into "irresistible;" "affairs" into "affections," etc.



Analysis.

The treatise is founded on [Rom. vi. 14](#), and three facts are presupposed in the discussion that follows:— that sin dwells in believers; seeks to renew its dominion over them; and endeavours to accomplish this object by deceit and force, chap. i.

Three leading inquiries are proposed:— I. Into the nature of this dominion; II. The evidence by which we ascertain whether it exists in us; and III. The reason or ground of the assurance that it shall not have dominion over believers.

I. As to the *nature* of this dominion, — 1. It is evil and perverse, (1.) as usurped, and (2.) as exercised to evil ends. 2. It implies no force contrary to the human will. 3. It implies that the soul is not under the influence of grace to any extent; and, 4. that it is sensible of the power of sin, ii.

II. As to the *evidence* of this dominion, — 1. Some features of character are specified which, though seemingly, are not really inconsistent with the dominion of sin. 2. Certain things are mentioned which leave the case doubtful; as when sin takes hold of the imagination, when it prevails in the affections, when there is a neglect of the means by which it is mortified, when a reservation is made in favour of any known sin, and when hardness of heart is manifested, iii. Hardness of heart is specially considered, and distinguished into natural, judicial, and partial or comparative; under the head of partial hardness, there are mentioned, — (1.) Symptoms which, however evil in themselves, are not inconsistent with the existence of grace in the heart; and (2.) Symptoms which are hardly compatible with the reign of grace. And, 3. Incontestable evidences that sin has dominion over the soul are briefly mentioned, iv.

III. The *reason of the assurance* that sin shall have no more dominion over believers is, that they are “not under the law, but under grace;” because, — whereas, 1. the law gives no strength against sin, 2. confers no spiritual liberty, and, 3. supplies no motives to destroy the power of sin, and, 4. whereas Christ is not in the law, — grace imparts these blessings, and thus enables us to subdue sin, v. Two practical observations are enforced, — 1. The privilege of deliverance from the dominion of sin; and, 2. The importance of securing ourselves against the dominion of sin, and not suffering it to remain long doubtful whether or not we are under it, vi. — Ed.

To the serious reader.

One of the great gospel inquiries that a Christian ought to be most critical and curious in resolving to himself, upon the most impartial examination of his own heart, concerning his spiritual state and standing in grace, is, whether he be in the faith or no: which doubt can be resolved but two ways; — either by *faith itself* closing with its true objects as offered in the gospel in its *direct act* (and so it evidenceth itself, being the evidence of things not seen, as all the natural senses evidence themselves by their own acts upon their proper objects, — for he that sees the sun hath argument enough to himself that he is not blind, but hath a seeing eye, and faith, therefore, is frequently represented to us by seeing, as [John vi. 40](#), and elsewhere; — which evidence is according to the degrees of faith, weaker or stronger, and hence carries lesser or greater assurances with it; but such as are of the highest and best nature, giving the greatest glory to the grace and truth of God, and the firmest stay to the soul in the greatest storms of temptation, being as an anchor fastened within the veil, sure and steadfast), or else *additionally*, that our joy may be full, and for farther confirmation, especially in such cases wherein our faith seems to fail us, and we are like Thomas, God hath, out of his abundant grace in the gospel, provided arguments for us to raise from spiritual sense to judge of our state and standing by. But this requires the teachings of the Spirit, and thence a spirit of discerning, experience of, and insight into, our own hearts and ways, with senses exercised by reason of use, that these grounds and arguments may be matter of comfort and establishment unto us.

I call these latter evidences *subordinate ones*, and *additional* to that of faith, [and they are] of great use by way of establishment and confirmation unto believers, provided they be not abused to sole resting and reliance upon them, to the great prejudice of our life of faith: for we live by faith (so must all repenting sinners when they have attained to the highest pitch of holiness in this life), and not by sense, no, not even spiritual sense; it is a good *handmaid* to faith, but no good *mistress* to it.

Moreover, trials of this nature are often of a marvellous awakening and convincing nature unto poor secure sinners, formal and hypocritical professors, for many of them hold true with great demonstration in the negative: [1 John iii. 14](#), “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death;” and [verse 10](#), “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” Now, these tests come upon an unregenerate man as clear and strong convictions of his undone estate, when, by gospel light shining into his dark heart, it evidently appears that there is a total absence of such eminent graces as are inseparable from a child of God. But when a poor, broken-hearted, self-condemning sinner comes to try himself by these tests, especially under great temptation, he chargeth all that he finds in himself for hypocrisy, formality, and sin, sits altogether in darkness in respect of these sparks of internal light, and



is fain at last, when he hath broken all his flints and worn out all his steel in compassing himself about with sparks of his own kindling, to turn unto Christ by faith, “as a prisoner of hope,” believing in hope against hope, and from him to fetch, by a direct act of faith, as from the Sun of righteousness, all his light of life and comfort; and then he will be able to light all his small tapers, yea, all inferior arguments of his good estate will flow in with much enlargement and increase of consolation, as streams of living water flowing forth of the fountain set open for sin and for uncleanness into the belly of the true believing sinner, receiving by faith of the fulness of Christ through the Spirit, abundantly supplying him with rivers of true, substantial, living graces and consolations, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, to the praise and glory of Christ.

Now, among disquisitions of this latter nature and use this is none of the least, *whether we are under the dominion of sin or no*. Either we are or are not. If we are, our state is most certainly dangerous, for such are under the law, and the law hath concluded all under wrath. If we are not under sin’s dominion, we are in a blessed and happy estate, being under grace. For these two dominions divide the world, and every son and daughter of Adam is under one or the other, and none can be under both at the same time. Now, our being under grace can be no way better evidenced than by our being in Christ by faith: for he that is so “is a new creature, is passed from death unto life,” will still be mortifying sin, the strong man in sin’s dominion being cast out; and therefore faith is said to be our “victory,” through the supply of all grace received from Jesus Christ. Indeed it calls for no small spiritual skill and understanding to pass a right judgment in these matters. Undoubtedly many are deceived in taking wrong measures to search out these deep things of God, taking them to belong to the mere faculties and endowments of a natural man, not considering that they are of the Spirit’s revelation only. And hence it is that many poor creatures in a bondage state under the law, and therefore under sin’s dominion, do work like slaves in the dunghill of their own hearts to find out some natural religion or moral goodness in themselves to recommend them unto God. But such recommendation must be under the law, it cannot be under grace; and therefore such are under the dominion of sin infallibly, as the Israelites were, which “followed after the law of righteousness, but attained not to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone,” [Rom. ix. 31, 32](#). And it is greatly to be bewailed that many professors that sit under the means of grace are so tender of their secure and palliated consciences, that they cannot endure that the rays of true gospel light should shine directly into their hearts, being contented with a name only that they do live. They are loath to come to any narrow search or trial, lest they should be found out, and appear to themselves in their ugly shapes, whilst they are willing that all the world should have a good opinion of them; under which they cannot admit of any inward disturbances, but desire to sleep in a whole skin.



Others there are, sincere, broken-hearted believers, [who,] scared at the *rock of presumption* on which they see so many professors wrecked daily, are apt to fall upon the other extreme, and too wrongfully, to free grace, condemn themselves as being under the dominion of sin; and therefore censure themselves to be under the law and wrath, notwithstanding all their seeming faith and holiness, calling that presumption, and this hypocrisy. Hence, returning to a kind of “spirit of bondage again to fear,” their faith is shaken by prevailing unbelief, their peace is broken, and all gospel ordinances rendered ineffectual, as to their true ends, of profit, edification, and comfort. Hence, though they are truly under grace, they do not know, or rather, through temptation, will not acknowledge it; but “go mourning all the day long, because of the oppression of the enemy.” But I beseech such a poor soul to consider a little, and not to “receive the grace of God in vain.” Dost thou groan under the usurpation and oppression of remaining sin? And is this the *dominion* of it? is there no difference between sin’s *dominion* and sin’s *tyranny* and usurpation? Dominion is upon account of right of conquest or subjection. There is upon both that sin reigns in carnal and unregenerate men, who “yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin;” but you reckon yourselves “dead unto sin,” having no joy in its prevalency, but grief, being planted in this respect “in the likeness of Christ’s death,” who “died unto sin once, but dieth no more.” Sin shall have no more dominion over him; “likewise reckon ye also yourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord;” — that is, to be under grace, to put yourself freely and joyfully under the conduct and dominion of Jesus Christ, and to keep up a continual fight and opposition against the prevailing power of sin. Indeed, sin will often: as an outlying watchful enemy, make its assaults and incursions on the best of God’s children, as it did on David, Hezekiah, Peter; and though it may make breaches upon them, it shall not have a dominion and set up a throne of iniquity in their hearts. Grace will beat out sin’s throne; for indeed the words of this text, — that is, the subject of the ensuing treatise, — carry the force of a promise to the saints, to animate and encourage them to fight against sin under the banner of our Lord Jesus, the captain of our salvation, made perfect through sufferings: “For sin shall not have dominion,” etc.

In treating of which text, this late learned and reverend author hath acted the part of a good workman that rightly divided the word of God (as in all his other writings of the like nature), giving every one their portion as it belongs to them, with so much perspicuity and demonstration, that if, Christian reader, thou wilt afford a little time and pains to read, meditate, dilate, and digest well, the truths here laid before thee, through the blessing of the God of all grace, thou wilt find much satisfaction and real spiritual advantage unto thy soul, either to awaken and recover thee from under the dominion of sin (the dangerous and palpable symptoms thereof being here plainly made manifest), or else to discover thy happy estate in being taken from “under the law,” and brought under the dominion of “grace,”

whereby thou mayst assume great encouragement to thyself to proceed more cheerfully in “running the race set before thee.”

It is enough to say that the author hath left his encomium firmly rooted in the minds of all pious and learned men that are acquainted with his writings, polemic or practical; yea, his renown will always be great in after generations among the churches of Christ, and all true lovers of the great truths of the gospel. And that he is the author of this small tract is sufficient to recommend it to thy most serious perusal; taking this assurance, that it was left (among other writings of great value) thus perfected for the press by his own hand, and is now by his worthy relict published for the benefit of others besides herself. I doubt not but thou wilt say that it will answer the several lines that have been drawn in thy heart by sin or grace, “as in water face answereth to face;” and that this may be the effect of thy perusal thereof, in order to thy spiritual and eternal welfare, is the hearty desire and prayer of thy unfeigned well-wisher,

J. C.¹

1 These are said to be the initials of Isaac Chauncey, respecting whom the reader will find a note, vol. v., p. 404. — Ed. [Isaac Chauncey, M.A. and M.D., was pastor of Bury Street congregation, London, from 1687 to 1702. It was the congregation of which Dr Owen had the charge in 1683, when he died. Dr Chauncey was the son of Mr Chauncey, President of Harvard College, New England, and had been ejected from the living of Woodborough, Wiltshire, at the time of the Restoration. On demitting the charge of his congregation in 1687, he was succeeded by the celebrated Dr I. Watts. He was subsequently appointed tutor to a new academical institution at Homerton, London, — the same institution which has acquired wide-spread celebrity under the able and honoured presidency of the Rev. John Pye Smith, D.D.]

A treatise
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For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

[Rom. vi. 14.](#)



Chapter I.

What sin is consistent with the state of grace, and what not — Sin's great design in all to obtain dominion: it hath it in unbelievers, and contends for it in believers — The ways by which it acts.

The psalmist, treating with God in prayer about sin, acknowledgeth that there are in all men unsearchable errors of life, beyond all human understanding or comprehension, with such daily sins of infirmity as stand in need of continual cleansing and pardon: [Ps. xix. 12](#), "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." But yet he supposeth that these things are consistent with a state of grace and acceptation with God. He had no thought of any *absolute perfection* in this life, of any such condition as should not stand in need of continual cleansing and pardon. Wherefore, there are or may be such sins in believers, yea, many of them, which yet, under a due application unto God for purifying and pardoning grace, shall neither deprive us of peace here nor endanger our salvation hereafter.

But he speaks immediately of another sort of sins, which, partly from their nature, or what they are in themselves, and partly from their operation and power, will certainly prove destructive unto the souls of men wherever they are: [Verse 13](#), "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."

This is the hinge whereon the whole cause and state of my soul doth turn: Although I am subject to many sins of various sorts, yet under them all I can and do maintain my integrity, and covenant uprightness in walking with God; and where I fail, am kept within the reach of cleansing and pardoning mercy, continually administered unto my soul by Jesus Christ: but there is a state of life in this world wherein sin hath dominion over the soul acting itself presumptuously, wherewith integrity and freedom from condemning guilt are inconsistent.

This state, therefore, which alone is eternally ruinous unto the souls of men, he deprecates with all earnestness, praying to be kept and preserved from it.

What he there so earnestly prays for, the apostle in the words of the text promiseth unto all believers, by virtue of the grace of Christ Jesus administered in the gospel. Both the *prayer* of the prophet for himself, and the *promise* of the apostle in the name of God unto us, do manifest of how great importance this matter is, as we shall declare it to be immediately.

There are some things supposed or included in these words of the apostle. These we must first a little inquire into, without which we cannot well understand the truth itself proposed in them; as, —

1. It is supposed that *sin doth still abide in and dwell with believers*; for so is the meaning of the words: "That sin which is *in you* shall not have *dominion over you*;" that is, none of

them who are not sensible of it, who groan not to be delivered from it, as the apostle doth, [Rom. vii. 24](#). Those who are otherwise minded know neither themselves, nor what sin is, nor wherein the grace of the gospel doth consist. There is the “flesh” remaining in every one, which “lusteth against the Spirit,” [Gal. v. 17](#); and it adheres unto all the faculties of our souls, whence it is called the “old man,” [Rom. vi. 6](#), in opposition unto the renovation of our minds and all the faculties of them, called the “new man,” [Eph. iv. 24](#), or “new creature” in us; and there is *πρόνοια τῆς σαρκὸς εἰς ἐπιθυμίας*, [Rom. xiii. 14](#), — a continual working and provision to fulfil its own lusts: so that it abides in us in the way of a dying, decaying habit, weakened and impaired; but acting itself in inclinations, motions, and desires, suitable unto its nature.

As Scripture and experience concur herein, so a supposition of it is the only ground of the whole doctrine of *evangelical mortification*. That this is a duty, a duty incumbent on believers all the days of their lives, such a duty as without which they can never perform any other in a due manner, will not be denied by any, but either such as are wholly under the power of atheistical blindness, or such as by the fever of spiritual pride have lost the understanding of their own miserable condition, and so lie dreaming about absolute perfection. With neither sort are we at present concerned. Now, the first proper object of this mortification is this sin that dwells in us. It is the “flesh” which is to be “mortified,” the “old man” which is to be “crucified,” the “lusts of the flesh,” with all their corrupt inclinations, actings, and motions, that are to be destroyed, [Col. iii. 5](#); [Rom. vi. 6](#); [Gal. v. 24](#). Unless this be well fixed in the mind, we cannot understand the greatness of the grace and privilege here expressed.

2. It is supposed that *this sin*, which, in the remainders of it, so *abides* in believers in various degrees, may put forth its power in them to obtain victory and dominion over them. It is first supposed that it hath this dominion in some, that it doth bear rule over all unbelievers, all that are under the law; and then that it will strive to do the same in them that believe and are under grace: for, affirming that it shall not have dominion over us, he grants that it may or doth contend for it, only it shall not have success, it shall not prevail. Hence it is said to fight and war in us, [Rom. vii. 23](#), and to war against our souls, [1 Pet. ii. 11](#). Now, it thus fights, and wars, and contends in us for dominion, for that is the end of all war; whatever fights, it doth it for *power* and rule.

This, therefore, is the general design of sin in all its actings. These actings are various, according to the variety of lusts in the minds of men; but its general design in them all is *dominion*. Where any one is tempted and seduced of his own lusts, as the apostle James speaks, be it in a matter never so small or so unusual, the temptation whereunto may never occur again, the design of sin lies not in the particular temptation, but to make it a means to obtain dominion over the soul. And the consideration hereof should keep believers always on their guard against all the motions of sin, though the matter of them seem but small, and

the occasions of them such as are not like to return; for the aim and tendency of every one of them is dominion and death, which they will compass if not stopped in their progress, as the apostle there declares, [James i. 14, 15](#). Believe not its flatteries:— “Is it not a little one?” “This is the first or shall be the last time;” “It requires only a little place in the mind and affections;” “It shall go no farther.” Give not place to its urgency and solicitations; admit of none of its excuses or promises; it is power over your souls unto their ruin that it aims at in all.

3. There are two ways whereby, in general, sin acts its power and aims at the obtaining this dominion, and they are the two only ways whereby any may design or attain an unjust dominion, and they are *deceit* and *force*, both of which I have fully described in another discourse;² with respect whereunto it is promised that the Lord Christ shall “deliver the souls of the poor that cry unto him from deceit and violence,” [Ps. lxxii. 12–14](#).

These are the two only ways of obtaining an unjust dominion; and where they are in conjunction they must have a mighty prevalency, and such as will render the contest hazardous. There are few believers but have found it so, at least in their own apprehensions. They have been ready to say, at one time or another, “We shall one day fall by the hand of this enemy;” and have been forced to cry out unto Jesus Christ for help and succour, with no less vehemency than the disciples did at sea when the ship was covered with waves, “Lord, save us; we perish,” [Matt. viii. 24–26](#). And so they would do did he not come in seasonably to their succour, [Heb. ii. 18](#). And herein the soul hath frequently no less experience of the power of Christ in his grace than the disciples on their outcry had of his sovereign authority, when “he rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.”

This dominion of sin is that which we have here security given us against. Though it will abide in us, though it will contend for rule by deceit and force, yet it shall not prevail, it shall not have the dominion.

And this is a case of the highest importance unto us. Our souls are, and must be, under the rule of some principle or law; and from this rule our state is determined and denominated. We are either “servants of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness,” [Rom. vi. 16](#). This is the substance of the discourse of the apostle in that whole chapter, — namely, that the state of the soul, as unto life and death eternal, follows the conduct and rule that we are under. If sin have the dominion, we are lost forever; if it be dethroned, we are safe. It may tempt, seduce, and entice; it may fight, war, perplex, and disquiet; it may surprise into actual sin: yet if it have not the dominion in us, we are in a state of grace and acceptation with God.

2 See his discourse on *Indwelling Sin*, vol. vi. — Ed.

Chapter II.

The inquiries for understanding the text proposed — The first spoken to, namely, What is the dominion of sin, which we are freed from and discharged of by grace.

We shall inquire into three things from the words of this text:— I. *What is that dominion of sin* which we are freed from and discharged of by grace. II. *How we may know* whether sin hath the dominion in us or not. III. *What is the reason and evidence* of the assurance here given us that sin shall not have dominion over us, — namely, because we are “not under the law, but under grace.”

I. As unto the first of these, I shall only recount some such properties of it as will discover its nature in general; the particulars wherein it doth consist will be considered afterward.

First, The dominion of sin is perverse and evil, and that on both the accounts which render any rule or dominion so to be; for, —

1. It is *usurped*. Sin hath *no right* to rule in the souls of men. Men have no power to give sin a right to rule over them. They may voluntarily enslave themselves unto it; but this gives sin no right or title. All men have originally another lord, unto whom they owe all obedience, nor can any thing discharge them from their allegiance thereunto; and this is *the law of God*. The apostle saith, indeed, that “to whom men yield themselves servants to obey, his servants they are to whom they obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness,” [Rom. vi. 16](#). And so it is. Men are thereby the proper servants of sin; they become so by their own voluntary subjection unto it. But this gives sin no title against the law of God, whose right alone it is to bear sway in the souls of men; for all that give up themselves to the service of sin do live in actual rebellion against their natural liege Lord: Hence sundry things do follow:—

(1.) The great *aggravation* of the evil of a state of sin. Men who live therein do voluntarily wrest themselves, what lieth in them, from under the rule of the law of God, and give up themselves to be slaves unto this tyrant. Could it lay any *claim* to this dominion, had it any *title* to plead, it were some alleviation of guilt in them that give up themselves unto it. But men “yield themselves” to the slavery of sin, as the apostle speaks; they reject the rule of God’s law, and choose this foreign yoke; which cannot but be an aggravation of their sin and misery. Yet so it is, that the greatest part of men do visibly and openly profess themselves the servants and slaves of sin. They wear its livery and do all its drudgery; yea, they boast themselves in their bondage, and never think themselves so brave and gallant as when, by profane swearing, drunkenness, uncleanness, covetousness, and scoffing at religion, they openly avow the lord whom they serve, the master to whom they do belong. But their “damnation slumbereth not,” whatever they may dream in the meantime.

(2.) Hence it follows that ordinarily all men have a *right* in themselves to cast off the rule of sin, and to vindicate themselves into liberty. They may, when they will, plead the

right and title of the law of God unto the rule of their souls, to the utter exclusion of all pleas and pretences of sin for its power. They have right to say unto it, "Get thee hence; what have I to do any more with idols?"

All men, I say, have this right in themselves, because of the natural allegiance they owe to the law of God; but they have not power of themselves to execute this right, and actually to cast off the yoke of sin: but this is the work of grace. Sin's dominion is broken only by grace.

But you will say then, "Unto what end serves this *right*, if they have not *power* in themselves to put it in execution? and how can it be charged as an aggravation of their sin that they do not use the right which they have, seeing they have no power so to do? Will you blame a man that hath a right to an estate if he do not recover it, when he hath no means so to do?"

I answer briefly three things:—

[1.] No man living neglects the *use of this right* to cast off the yoke and dominion of sin because he *cannot* of himself make use of it, but merely because he *will not*. He doth voluntarily choose to continue under the power of sin, and looks on every thing as his enemy that would deliver him: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject unto the law of God, neither indeed can be," [Rom. viii. 7](#). When the law comes at any time to claim its right and rule over the soul, a man under the power of sin looks on it as his enemy, that comes to disturb his peace, and fortifies his mind against it; and when the gospel comes and tenders the way and means for the soul's delivery, offering its aid and assistance unto that end, this also is looked on as an enemy, and is rejected, and all its offers unto that end. See [Prov. i. 24–31](#); [John iii. 19](#). This, then, is the condition of every one that abides under the dominion of sin: he *chooses so to do*; he continues in that state by an act of his own will; he avows an enmity unto every thing which would give him deliverance; — which will be a sore aggravation of his condemnation at the last day.

[2.] God may justly require that of any which it is in the power of *the grace of the gospel* to enable them to perform and comply withal; for this is tendered unto them in the preaching of it every day. And although we know not the ways and means of the effectual communication of grace unto the souls of men, yet this is certain, that grace is so tendered in the preaching of the gospel, that none go without it, none are destitute of its aids and assistances, but those alone who, by a free act of their own wills, do refuse and reject it. This is that which the whole cause depends on, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life;" and this all unbelievers have, or may have, experience of in themselves. They may know, on a due examination of themselves, that they do *voluntarily* refuse the assistance of grace which is offered for their deliverance: therefore is their destruction of themselves. But, —

[3.] There is a time when men lose even *the right* also. He who gave up himself to have his ear bored lost all his claim unto future liberty; he was not to go out at the year of jubilee:

so there is a time when God *judicially* gives up men to the rule of sin, to abide under it forever, so as that they lose all right unto liberty. So he dealt with many of the idolatrous Gentiles of old, [Rom. i. 24, 26, 28](#), and so he continues to deal with the like profligate sinners; so he acts towards the generality of the antichristian world, [2 Thess. ii. 11, 12](#), and with many despisers of the gospel, [Isa. vi. 9, 10](#). When it is come to this, men are *cast at law*, and have lost all right and title unto liberty from the dominion of sin. They may repine sometimes at the service of sin, or the consequence of it, in shame and pain, in the shameful distempers that will pursue many in their uncleanness; yet God having given them up judicially unto sin, they have not so much as a right to put up one prayer or petition for deliverance, nor will they do so, but are bound in the fetters of cursed presumption or despair. See their work and wages, [Rom. ii. 5, 6](#). This is the most woful state and condition of sinners in this world, — an unavoidable entrance into the chambers of death. You that have lived long under the power of sin, beware lest that come upon you which is spoken of in these scriptures! You have as yet a right unto deliverance from that bondage and servitude wherein you are, if you put in your claim in the court of heaven. You know not how soon you may be deprived of this also, by God's giving you up judicially unto sin and Satan. Then all complaints will be too late, and all springs of endeavours for relief be utterly dried up. All your reserves for a future repentance shall be cut off, and all your cries shall be despised, [Prov. i. 24–31](#). Whilst it is yet called To-day, harden not your hearts, lest God swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest.

That you may be warned, take notice that the signs or symptoms of the approach of such a season, of such an irrecoverable condition, are, — (1.) A long continuance in the practice of any known sin. There are bounds to divine patience. The long-suffering of God for a time waits for repentance, [1 Pet. iii. 20](#); [2 Pet. iii. 9](#): but there is a time when it doth only “endure vessels of wrath fitted to destruction,” [Rom. ix. 22](#), which is commonly after a long continuance in known sin. (2.) When convictions have been digested, and warnings despised. God doth not usually deal thus with men until they have rejected the means of their deliverance. There is a generation, indeed, who, from their youth up, do live in a contempt of God. Such are those proud sinners whom the psalmist describes, [Ps. x. 2–7](#), etc. There are seldom any tokens of the going forth of the decree against this sort of men. The appearing evidences of it are their “adding drunkenness to thirst,” one kind of sin unto another, making a visible progress in sinning, adding boasting and a profane contempt of all things sacred unto their course in sin. But, ordinarily, those that are in danger of this judicial hardness have had warnings and convictions, which made some impression on them; but are now left without any calls and rebukes, or at least any sense of them. (3.) When men contract the guilt of such sins as seem to intrench on the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost; such as proud, contemptuous, malicious reproaches of the ways of God, of holiness, of the Spirit of Christ and his gospel. This sort of persons are frequently marked in the



Scripture as those who at least are nigh unto a final and fatal rejection. (4.) A voluntary relinquishment of the means of grace and of conversion unto God which men have enjoyed; and this is commonly accompanied with a hatred of the word and those by whom it is dispensed. Such persons God frequently, and that visibly, gives up in an irrecoverable way unto the dominion of sin; he declares that he will have no more to do with them. (5.) The resolved choice of wicked, profane, unclean, scoffing society. It is very rare that any are recovered from that snare. And many other signs there are of the near approach of such a hardening judgment as shall give up men everlastingly to the service of sin. O that poor sinners would awake before it be too late!

2. This dominion of sin is *evil and perverse*, not only because it is unjust and usurped, but because it is always used and exercised unto *ill ends*, unto the hurt and ruin of them over whom it is. A tyrant, a usurper, may make use of his power and rule for good ends, for the good of them over whom he rules; but all the ends of the dominion of sin are evil unto sinners. Sin in its rule will pretend fair, offer sundry advantages and satisfactions unto their minds. They shall have wages for their work, pleasure and profit shall come in by it; yea, on divers pretences, it will promise them eternal rest at the close of all, at least, that they shall not fail of it by any thing they do in its service. And by such means it keeps them in security. But the whole real design of it, that which in all its power it operates towards, is the eternal ruin of their souls; and this sinners will understand when it is too late, [Jer. ii. 13, 19](#).

Secondly, This dominion of sin is not *a mere force* against the will and endeavours of them that are under it. Where all the power and interest of sin consist in putting a force on the mind and soul by its temptations, there it hath no dominion. It may perplex them, it doth not rule over them. Where it hath dominion, it hath the force and power of a law in the wills and minds of them in whom it is. Hereby it requires obedience of them, and they “yield themselves servants to obey it,” [Rom. vi. 16](#).

Wherefore, unto this dominion of sin there is required *a consent of the will* in some measure and degree. The constant reluctancy and conquering prevalency of the will against it defeats its title unto rule and dominion, as the apostle declares at large in the next chapter. The will is the sovereign faculty and power of the soul; whatever principle acts in it and determines it, that hath the rule. Notwithstanding light and conviction, the determination of the whole, as unto duty and sin, is in the power of the will. If the will of sinning be taken away, sin cannot have dominion. Here is wisdom: he that can distinguish between *the impressions of sin upon him* and *the rule of sin in him* is in the way of peace. But this oftentimes, — as we shall farther see, with the reason of it, — is not easily to be attained unto. Convictions, on the one hand, will make a great pretence and appearance of an opposition in the will unto sin, by their unavoidable impressions on it, when it is not so; and disturbed affections, under temptations, will plead that the will itself is given up unto the choice and service of sin, when it is not so. The will in this matter is like the Thebans’ shield; whilst that was



safe, they conceited themselves victorious even in death. However, this case is determined by the light of Scripture and experience, and it is here proposed unto a determination.

Thirdly, It is required unto this dominion of sin that the soul be not under *any other supreme conduct*, — that is, of the Spirit of God and of his grace, — by the law. This is that which really hath the sovereign rule in all believers. They are led by the Spirit, guided by the Spirit, acted and ruled by him, and are thereby under the government of God and Christ, and no other. With this the rule of sin is absolutely inconsistent. No man can at once serve these two masters. Grace and sin may be in the same soul at the same time, but they cannot bear rule in the same soul at the same time. The throne is singular, and will admit but of one ruler. Every evidence we have of being under the rule of grace is so that we are not under the dominion of sin.

This, therefore, is the principal way and means which we have to secure our peace and comfort against the pretences of sin unto the disquietment of our consciences. Let us endeavour to preserve an experience of the rule of grace in our hearts, [Col. iii. 15](#). Under a conduct and rule, whence our state is denominated, we are and must be. This is either of sin or grace. There is no composition nor copartnership between them as to rule: as to *residence* there is, but not as unto *rule*. If we can assure ourselves of the one, we secure ourselves from the other. It is therefore our wisdom, and lies at the foundation of all our comforts, that we get evidences and experience of our being under the rule of grace; and it will evidence itself, if we are not wanting unto a due observation of its acting and operation in us. And it will do it, among others, these two ways:—

1. By keeping up a *constancy of design* in living to God and after conformity unto Christ, notwithstanding the interposition of surprisals by temptations and the most urgent solicitations of sin. This is called “cleaving unto God with purpose of heart,” [Acts xi. 23](#). This will be wherever grace hath the rule. As a man that goeth to sea designs some certain place and port, whither he guides his course; in his way he meets, it may be, with storms and cross winds that drive him out of his course, and sometimes directly backward towards the place whence he set forth; but his design still holds, and in the pursuit thereof he applies his skill and industry to retrieve and recover all his losses and back-drivings by cross winds and storms. So is it with a soul under the conduct of grace. Its *fixed design* is to live unto God, but in its course it meets with storms and cross winds of temptations, and various artifices of sin. These disturb him, disorder him, drive him backwards sometimes, as if it would take a contrary course, and return unto the coast of sin from whence it set out. But where grace hath the rule and conduct, it will weather all these oppositions and obstructions; it will “restore the soul,” bring it again into order, recover it from the confusions and evil frames that it was drawn into. It will give a fresh predominancy unto its prevalent design of living unto God in all things. It will do this constantly, as often as the soul meets with such ruffles from the power of sin. When there is a radical firmitude and strength in a cause or design, it will

work itself out through all changes and variations; but when the strength of any cause is but occasion, the first opposition and disorder will ruin us. So if men's purpose of living unto God be only occasional, from present convictions, the first vigorous opposition or temptation will disorder it and overthrow it; but where this is the radical design of the soul, from the power of grace, it will break through all such oppositions, and recover its prevalency in the mind and affections, Hereby doth it evidence its rule, and that the whole interest of sin in the soul is by rebellion, and not by virtue of dominion.

2. It doth so by keeping up a constant *exercise of grace* in all religious duties, or at least a sincere endeavour that so it may be. Where sin hath the dominion, it can allow the soul to perform religious duties, yea, in some cases to abound in them; but it will take care that divine grace be not exercised in them. Whatever there may be of delight in duties, or other motions of affection, which light, and gifts, and afflictions, and superstition, will occasion, there is no exercise of faith and love in them; this belongs *essentially* and inseparably unto the rule of grace. Wherever that bears away, the soul will endeavour the constant exercise of grace in all its duties, and never be satisfied in the work done without some sense of it. Where it fails therein, it will judge itself, and watch against the like surprisals; yea, unless it be in case of some great temptation, the present sense of the guilt of sin, which is the highest obstruction against that *spiritual boldness* which is required unto the due exercise of grace, — that is, of faith and love in holy duties, — shall not hinder the soul from endeavouring after it or the use of it.

If by these means, and the like *inseparable operations of grace*, we can have an assuring experience that we are under the rule and conduct of it, we may be free in our minds from disturbing apprehensions of the dominion of sin; for both cannot bear sway in the same soul.

Fourthly, It is required hereunto that sin make the soul *sensible* of its power and rule, at least do that which may do so, unless conscience be utterly seared and hardened, and so "past feeling." There is no rule or dominion but they are or may be sensible of it who are subject thereunto. And there are two ways whereby sin in its dominion will make them sensible of it in whom it rules:—

1. In *repressing and overcoming the efficacy of the convictions of the mind*. Those who are under the dominion of sin (as we shall see more immediately) may have light into and conviction of their duty in many things, and this light and conviction they may follow ordinarily, notwithstanding the dominion of sin. As a tyrant will permit his slaves and subjects *ordinarily* to follow their own occasions, but if what they would do come, either in matter or manner, to interfere with or oppose his interest, he will make them sensible of his power: so sin, where it hath the dominion, if men have light and conviction, will allow them ordinarily and in many things to comply therewithal; it will allow them to pray, to hear the word, to abstain from sundry sins, to perform many duties, as is expressly affirmed in the Scripture



of many that were under the power of sin, and we see it in experience. How much work do we see about religion and religious duties, what constant observation of the times and seasons of them, how many duties performed morally good in themselves and useful, by them who on many other accounts do proclaim themselves to be under the dominion of sin! But if the light and conviction of this sort of persons do rise up in opposition unto the principal interest of sin in those lusts and ways wherein it exerciseth its rule, it will make them in whom they are sensible of its power. They that stifle, or shut their eyes against, or cast out of mind, or go directly contrary unto, their convictions, light in such cases will first repine, and then relieve itself with resolutions for other times and seasons; but sin will carry the cause by virtue of its dominion.

Hence two things do follow:—

(1.) A *constant repugnancy* against sin, from light in the mind and conviction in the conscience, doth not prove that those in whom it is are not under the dominion of sin; for until blindness and hardness do come on men to the uttermost, there will be in them a judging of what is good and evil, with a self-judging with respect thereunto, as the apostle declares, [Rom. ii. 15](#). And herein many do satisfy themselves. When their light condemns sin, they suppose they hate it; but they do not: when convictions call for duties, they suppose they love them; but they do not. That which they look on as the rule of light in them, in opposition unto sin, is but the rebellion of a natural enlightened conscience against the dominion of it in the heart. In brief, light may condemn every known sin, keep from many, press for every known duty, lead to the performance of many, yet sin have a full dominion in the soul; and this it will evidence when it comes to the trial in those instances where it exercises its ruling power.

(2.) That miserable is their condition whose minds are ground continually between the conduct of their light with *the urgency of conviction* on the one hand, and the *rule or dominion of sin* on the other. Wherever light is, it is its due to have the rule and conduct. It is that art whereby the mind *leads* itself. For men to be forced, by the power of their lusts, to act for the most part against their light, as they do where sin hath the dominion, it is a sad and deplorable condition. Such persons are said to “rebel against the light,” [Job xxiv. 13](#), because of its right to rule in them, where it is deposed by sin. This makes most men but a “troubled sea, that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.”

2. Sin will make those in whom it hath dominion sensible of its power, by its continual solicitation of the mind and affections with respect unto that sin or those sins wherein it principally exerciseth its rule. Having possessed the will and inclinations of the mind with the affections, — as it doth wherever its dominion is absolute, — it continually disposeth, inclineth, and stirreth up the mind towards those sins. It will level the bent of the whole soul towards such sins, or the circumstances of them. Nor is there a more pregnant discovery



of the rule of sin in any than this, that it habitually engageth the mind and affections unto a constant exercise of themselves about this or that, some sin and evil way or other.

But yet we must add, that notwithstanding these indications of the ruling power of sin, they are but few in whom it hath this dominion that are convinced of their state and condition. Many are so under the power of darkness, of supine sloth and negligence, and are so desperately wicked, as that they have no sense of this rule of sin. Such are those described by the apostle, [Eph. iv. 18, 19](#). And whereas they are the vilest slaves that live on the earth, they judge none to be free but themselves; they look on others as in bondage to foolish and superstitious fears, whilst they are at liberty to drink, swear, scoff at religion, whore, and defile themselves without control. This is their liberty, and they may have that which is as good in hell, — a liberty to curse and blaspheme God, and to fly with revengeful thoughts on themselves and the whole creation. The *light* in such persons is *darkness itself*, so be that they have nothing to rise up in opposition unto the rule of sin, whence alone a sense of its power doth arise. Others, as we observed before, living in some compliance with their light and convictions, abstaining from many sins and performing many duties, though they live in some known sin or other, and allow themselves in it, yet will not allow that sin hath the dominion in them.



Wherefore, there are two things hard and difficult in this case:—

1. To convince those in whom sin evidently hath the dominion that such indeed is their state and condition. They will with their utmost endeavour keep off the conviction hereof. Some *justify* themselves, some excuse themselves, and some will make no inquiry into this matter. It is a rare thing, especially of late, to have any brought under this conviction by the preaching of the word, though it be the case of multitudes that attend unto it.

2. To satisfy some that sin hath not the dominion over them, notwithstanding its restless acting itself in them and warring against their souls; yet unless this can be done, it is impossible they should enjoy solid peace and comfort in this life. And the concernment of the best of believers, whilst they are in this world, doth lie herein; for as they grow in light, spirituality, experience, freedom of mind and humility, the more they love to know of the deceit, activity, and power of the remainders of sin. And although it works not at all, at least not sensibly, in them, towards those sins wherein it reigneth and rageth in others, yet they are able to discern its more subtile, inward, and spiritual actings in the mind and heart, to the weakening of grace, the obstructing of its effectual operations in holy duties, with many indispositions unto stability in the life of God; which fills them with trouble.

Chapter III.

The second inquiry spoken to, Whether sin hath dominion in us or not — In answer to which it is showed that some wear sin's livery, and they are the professed servants thereof — There are many in which the case is dubious, where sin's service is not so discernible — Several exceptions are put in against its dominion where it seems to prevail — Some certain signs of its dominion — Graces and duties to be exercised for its mortification.

II. These things being thus premised in general concerning the nature of the dominion of sin, we shall now proceed unto our principal inquiry, — namely, Whether sin have dominion in us or no, whereby we may know *whether we are under the law or under grace*, or what is the state of our souls towards God. An inquiry this is which is very necessary for some to make, and for all to have rightly determined in their minds, from Scripture and experience; for on that determination depends all our solid peace. Sin will be in us; it will lust, fight, and entice us; — but *the great question*, as unto our peace and comfort, is, whether it hath dominion over us or no.

First, We do not inquire concerning them in whom the reign of sin is absolute and easily discernible, if not to themselves yet to others. Such there are who visibly “yield their members instruments of unrighteousness unto sin,” [Rom. vi. 13](#). “Sin reigns in their mortal bodies,” and they openly “obey it in the lusts thereof,” [verse 12](#). They are avowedly “servants of sin unto death,” [verse 16](#), and are not ashamed of it. “The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not,” [Isa. iii. 9](#). Such are those described [Eph. iv. 18, 19](#), and such the world is filled withal; such as, being under the power of darkness and enmity against God, do act them in opposition to all serious godliness and in the service of various lusts. There is no question concerning their state; they cannot themselves deny that it is so with them. I speak not for the liberty of censuring, but for the easiness of judging. Those who openly wear *sin's livery* may well be esteemed to be sin's servants; and they shall not fail to receive sin's wages. Let them at present bear it never so high, and despise all manner of convictions, they will find it, bitterness in the latter end, [Isa. l. 11](#); [Eccles. xi. 9](#).

Secondly, But there are many in whom *the case is dubious* and not easily to be determined; for, on the one hand, they may have sundry things in them which may seem repugnant unto the reign of sin, but indeed are not inconsistent with it. All arguments and pleas from them in their vindication may fail them on a trial. And, on the other hand, there may be some in whom the effectual working of sin may be so great and perplexing as to argue that it hath the dominion, when indeed it hath not, but is only a stubborn rebel.

The things of the first sort, which seem destructive of and *inconsistent with the dominion of sin*, but indeed are not, may be referred to five heads:—

1. *Illumination* in knowledge and spiritual gifts, with convictions of good and evil, of all known duties and sins. This is that which some men live in a perpetual rebellion against, in one instance or another.

2. A *change in the affections*, giving a temporary delight in religious duties, with some constancy in their observation. This also is found in many who are yet evidently under the power of sin and spiritual darkness.

3. A *performance of many duties*, both moral and evangelical, for the substance of them, and an *abstinence*, out of conscience, *from many sins*. So was it with the young man in the Gospel, who yet wanted what was necessary to free him from the dominion of sin, [Matt. xix. 20–23](#).

4. *Repentance for sin committed*. This is that which most secure themselves by; and a blessed security it is when it is gracious, evangelical, a fruit of faith, comprising the return of the whole soul to God. But there is that which is legal, partial, respecting particular sins only, which is not pleadable in this case. Ahab was no less under the dominion of sin when he had repented him than he was before; and Judas repented him before he hanged himself.

5. *Promises and resolutions* against sin for the future. But the goodness of many in these things is “as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away,” as it is in the prophet, [Hosea vi. 4](#).

Where there is a concurrence of these things in any, they have good hopes, at least, that they are not under the dominion of sin, nor is it easy to convince them that they are; and they may so behave themselves herein as that it is not consistent with Christian charity to pronounce them to be so. Howbeit, the fallacy that is in these things hath been detected by many; and much more is by all required to evidence the sincerity of faith and holiness. No man, therefore, can be acquitted by pleas taken from them, as unto his subjection to the reign of sin.

The things of the second sort, whence arguments may be taken to prove the dominion of sin in any person, which yet will not certainly do it, are those which we shall now examine. And we must observe, —

1. That where sin hath the dominion, it doth indeed rule in *the whole soul* and all the faculties of it. It is a vicious habit in all of them, corrupting them, in their several natures and powers, with that corruption whereof they are capable:— So in the mind, of darkness and vanity; the will, of spiritual deceit and perverseness; the heart, of stubbornness and sensuality. Sin in its power reaches unto and affects them all. But, —

2. It doth evidence its dominion and is to be tried by its acting in the distinct faculties of the mind, in the frame of the heart, and in the course of the life.

These are those which we shall examine:— first, those which render the case dubious; and then those that clearly determine it on the part of sin. I shall not, therefore, at present,

give positive evidences of men's freedom from the dominion of sin, but only consider the arguments that lie against them, and examine how far they are conclusive, or how they may be defeated. And, —

1. *When sin hath in any instance possessed the imagination, and thereby engaged the cogitative faculty in its service, it is a dangerous symptom of its rule or dominion.* Sin may exercise its rule in the mind, fancy, and imagination, where bodily strength or opportunity gives no advantage for its outward perpetration. In them the desires of sin may be enlarged as hell, and the satisfaction of lust taken in with greediness. Pride, and covetousness, and sensuality, may reign and rage in the mind by corrupt imaginations, when their outward exercise is shut up by circumstances of life.

The first way whereby sin acts itself, or coins its motions and inclinations into acts, is by the *imagination*, [Gen. vi. 5](#). The continual evil figments of the heart are as the bubbling of corrupt waters from a corrupted fountain.

The imaginations intended are the *fixing of the mind on the objects of sin* or sinful objects, by continual thoughts, with delight and complacency. They are the mind's purveying for the satisfaction of the flesh in the lusts thereof, [Rom. xiii. 14](#), whereby evil thoughts come to lodge, to abide, to dwell in the heart, [Jer. iv. 14](#).

This is the first and proper effect of that *vanity of mind* whereby the soul is alienated from the life of God. The mind being turned off from its proper object, with a dislike of it, applies itself by its thoughts and imaginations unto the pleasures and advantages of sin, seeking in vain to recover the rest and satisfaction which they have forsaken in God himself: "They follow after lying vanities, and forsake their own mercies," [Jonah ii. 8](#). And when they give themselves up unto a constant internal converse with the desires of the flesh, the pleasures and advantages of sin, with delight and approbation, sin may reign triumphantly in them, though no appearance be made of it in their outward conversation. Such are they who have "a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof;" their hearts being filled with a litter of ungodly lusts, as the apostle declares, [2 Tim. iii. 5](#).

And there are three evils with respect whereunto sin doth exercise its reigning power in the imagination in an especial manner:—

(1.) *Pride, self-elation, desire of power and greatness.* It is affirmed of the prince of Tyrus, that he said "he was a god, and sat in the seat of God," [Ezek. xxviii. 2](#); and the like foolish thoughts are ascribed unto the king of Babylon, [Isa. xiv. 13, 14](#). None of the children of men can attain so great glory, power, and dominion in this world, but that in their imaginations and desires they can infinitely exceed what they do enjoy, like him who wept that he had not another world to conquer. They have no bounds but to be as God, yea, to be God; which was the first design of sin in the world: and there is none so poor and low but by his imaginations he can lift up and exalt himself almost into the place of God. This vanity and madness God reproveth in his discourse with [Job xl. 9–14](#); and there is nothing more germane and

proper unto the original depravation and corruption of our natures than this self-exaltation in foolish thoughts and imaginations, because it first came upon us through a desire of being as God. Herein, therefore, may sin exercise its dominion in the minds of men; yea, in the empty wind and vanity of these imaginations, with those that follow, consists the principal part of the deceitful ways of sin. The ways of men cannot satisfy themselves with what sins they can actually commit; but in these imaginations they rove endlessly, finding satisfaction in their renovation and variety, [Isa. lvii. 10](#).

(2.) *Sensuality and uncleanness of life*. It is said of some that they have “eyes full of adultery,” and that they “cannot cease from sin,” [2 Pet. ii. 14](#); that is, their imaginations are continually working about the objects of their unclean lusts. These they think of night and day, immiring themselves in all filth continually. Jude calls them “filthy dreamers, defiling the flesh,” [verse 8](#). They live as in a constant pleasing dream by their vile imaginations, even when they cannot accomplish their lustful desires; for such imaginations cannot be better expressed than by dreams, wherein men satisfy themselves with a supposed acting of what they do not. Hereby do many wallow in the mire of uncleanness all their days, and for the most part are never wanting unto the effects of it when they have opportunity and advantage; and by this means the most cloistered recluses may live in constant adulteries, whereby multitudes of them become actually the sinks of uncleanness. This is that which, in the root of it, is severely condemned by our Saviour, [Matt. v. 28](#).

(3.) *Unbelief, distrust, and hard thoughts of God*, are of the same kind. These will sometimes so possess the imaginations of men as to keep them off from all delight in God, to put them on contrivances of fleeing from him; which is a peculiar case, not here to be spoken unto.

In these and the like ways may sin exercise its dominion in the soul by the mind and its imagination. It may do so when no demonstration is made of it in the outward conversation; for by this means the minds of men are defiled, and then nothing is clean, all things are impure unto them, [Tit. i. 15](#). Their minds being thus defiled, do defile all things to them, — their enjoyments, their duties, all they have, and all that they do.

But yet all failing and sin in this kind doth not prove absolutely that sin hath the dominion in the mind that it had before. Something of this vice and evil may be found in them that are freed from the reign of sin; and there will be so until the vanity of our minds is perfectly cured and taken away, which will not be in this world. Wherefore I shall name the exceptions that may be put in against the title of sin unto dominion in the soul, notwithstanding the continuance in some measure of this work of the imagination in coining evil figments in the heart. And, —

(1.) This is no evidence of the dominion of sin, where it is *occasional*, arising from the prevalency of some present temptation. Take an instance in the case of David. I no way doubt but that in his temptation with Bathsheba, his mind was possessed with defiling

imaginations. Wherefore, on his repentance, he not only prays for the forgiveness of his sin, but cries out with all fervency that God would “create a clean heart in him,” [Ps. li. 10](#). He was sensible not only of the defilement of his person by his *actual adultery*, but of his heart by *impure imaginations*. So it may be in the case of other temptations. Whilst men are entangled with any temptation, of what sort soever it be, it will multiply thoughts about it in the mind; yea, its whole power consists in a multiplication of evil imaginations. By them it blinds the mind, draws it off from the consideration of its duty, and enticeth it unto a full conception of sin, [James i. 14, 15](#). Wherefore, in this case of a prevalent temptation, which may befall a true believer, the corrupt working of the imagination doth not prove the dominion of sin.

If it be inquired how the mind may be freed and cleared of these perplexing, defiling imaginations, which arise from the urgency of some present temptation, — suppose about earthly affairs, or the like, — I say it will never be done by the most strict watch and resolution against them, nor by the most resolute rejection of them. They will return with new violence and new presences, though the soul hath promised itself a thousand times that so they should not do. There is but one way for the cure of this distemper, and this is a thorough mortification of the lust that feeds them and is fed by them. It is to no purpose to shake off the fruit in this case unless we dig up the root. Every temptation designs the satisfaction of some lust of the flesh or of the mind. These evil thoughts and imaginations are the working of the temptation in the mind. There is no riddance of them, no conquest to be obtained over them, but by subduing the temptation; and no subduing the temptation but by the mortification of the lust whose satisfaction it is designed unto. This course the apostle directs unto, [Col. iii. 3, 5](#). That which he enjoins is, that we would not set our minds on the things of the earth, in opposition unto the things above; that is, that we would not fill our imaginations, and thereby our affections, with them. But what is the way whereby we may be enabled so to do? — that is, saith he, *the universal mortification of sin*, [verse 5](#).

For want of the wisdom and knowledge hereof, or for want of its practice, through a secret unwillingness to come up unto a full mortification of sin, some are galled and perplexed, yea, and defiled, with foolish and vain imaginations all their days; and although they prove not the dominion of sin, yet they will deprive the soul of that peace and comfort which otherwise it might enjoy.

But yet there is much spiritual skill and diligence required to discover what is the true root and spring of the foolish imaginations that may at any time possess the mind; for they lie deep in the heart, that heart which is deep and deceitful, and so are not easily discoverable. There are many other pretences of them. They do not directly bespeak that pride or those unclean lusts which they proceed from, but they make many other pretences and feign other ends; but the soul that is watchful and diligent may trace them to their original. And if such thoughts are strictly examined at any time, what is their design, whose work they



do, what makes them so busy in the mind, they will confess the truth, both whence they came and what it is they aim at. Then is the mind guided unto its duty; which is the extermination of the lust which they would make provision for.

(2.) Such imaginations are no evidence of the dominion of sin, in what degree soever they are, where they are *afflictive*, where they are a burden unto the soul, which it groans under and would be delivered from. There is a full account given by the apostle of the conflict between indwelling sin and grace, [Rom. vii](#). And the things which he ascribes unto sin are not the first rising or involuntary motions of it, nor merely its inclinations and disposition; for the things ascribed unto it, as that it fights, rebels, wars, leads captive, acts as a law, cannot belong unto them. Nor doth he intend the outward acting or perpetration of sin, the doing, or accomplishing, or finishing of it; for that cannot befall believers, as the apostle declares, [1 John iii. 9](#). But it is the working of sin by these imaginations in the mind, and the engagement of the affections thereon, that he doth intend. Now, this he declares to be the great burden of the souls of believers, that which makes them think their condition wretched and miserable in some sort, and which they earnestly cry out for deliverance from, [Rom. vii. 24](#). This is the present case. These figments of the heart, these imaginations, will arise in the minds of men. They will do so sometimes to a high degree. They will impose them on us with deceit and violence, leading captive unto the law of them. Where they are rejected, condemned, defied, they will return again while there is any vanity remaining in the mind or corruption in the affections. But if the soul be sensible of them, if it labour under them, if it look on them as those that fight against its purity, holiness, and peace, if it pray for deliverance from them, they are no argument of the dominion of sin; yea, a great evidence unto the contrary may be taken from that firm opposition unto them which the mind is constantly engaged in.

(3.) They are not proofs of the dominion of sin when there is a *prevalent detestation of the lust* from whence they proceed, and whose promotion they design, maintained in the heart and mind. I confess, sometimes this cannot be discovered. And all such various imaginations are but mere effects of the incurable vanity and instability of our minds, for these administer continual occasion unto random thoughts; but, for the most part (as we observed before), they are employed in the service of some lust, and tend unto the satisfaction of it. They are that which is prohibited by the apostle: [Rom. xiii. 14](#), "Make not provision for the flesh." And this may be discovered on strict examination. Now, when the mind is fixed in a constant detestation of that sin whereunto they lead, as it is sin against God, with a firm resolution against it, in all circumstances that may occur, no proof can be thence taken for the dominion of sin.

(4.) Sometimes evil thoughts are the *immediate injections of Satan*, and they are on many accounts most terrible unto the soul. Usually, for the matter of them, they are dreadful, and oftentimes blasphemous; and as unto the manner of their entrance into the mind, it is,

for the most part, surprising, furious, and irresistible. From such thoughts many have concluded themselves to be absolutely under the power of sin and Satan. But they are by certain rules and infallible signs discoverable from whence they do proceed; and on that discovery all pretences unto the dominion of sin in them must disappear.

And this is the first case, which renders the question dubious whether sin have the dominion in us or no.

2. It is a sign of the dominion of sin, when, in any instance, it hath a *prevalency in our affections*; yea, they are the throne of sin, where it acts its power. But this case of the affections I have handled so at large in my discourse of *Spiritual-mindedness*,³ as I shall here very briefly speak unto it, so as to give one rule only to make a judgment by concerning the dominion of sin in them.

This is certain, that where sin hath the prevalency and predominancy in our affections, there it hath the dominion in the whole soul. The rule is given us unto this purpose, [1 John ii. 15](#). We are obliged to “love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul;” and therefore if there be in us a predominant love to any thing else, whereby it is preferred unto God, it must be from the prevalency of a principle of sin in us. And so it is with respect unto all other affections. If we love any thing more than God, as we do if we will not part with it for his sake, be it as a right eye or as a right hand unto us; if we take more satisfaction and complacency in it, and cleave more unto it in our thoughts and minds than unto God, as men commonly do in their lusts, interests, enjoyments, and relations; if we trust more to it, as unto a supply of our wants, than unto God, as most do to the world; if our desires are enlarged and our diligence heightened in seeking after and attaining other things, more than towards the love and favour of God; if we fear the loss of other things or danger from them more than we fear God, — we are not under the rule of God or his grace, but we are under the dominion of sin, which reigns in our affections.

It were endless to give instances of this power of sin in and over the affections of men. Self-love, love of the world, delight in things sensual, an over-valuation of relations and enjoyments, with sundry other things of an alike nature, will easily evidence it. And to resolve the case under consideration, we may observe, —

(1.) That the prevalency of sin in the affections, so far as to be a symptom of its dominion, is discernible unto the least beam of spiritual light, with a diligent searching into and judgment of ourselves. If it be so with any that they know it not, nor will be convinced of it (as it is with many), I know not what can free them from being under the reign of sin. And we see it so every day. Men all whose ways and actions proclaim that they are acted in all things by an inordinate love of the world and self, yet find nothing amiss in themselves, nothing that they do not approve of, unless it be that their desires are not satisfied according to their

3 See the preceding treatise in this volume. — Ed.

expectations. All the commands we have in the Scripture for self-searching, trial, and examination; all the rules that are given us unto that end; all the warnings we have of the deceitfulness of sin and of our own hearts, — are given us to prevent this evil of shutting our eyes against the prevalent corruption and disorder of our affections. And the issue of all our endeavours in this kind is in the appeal of David to God himself, [Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24](#).

(2.) When men have convictions of the irregularity and disorder of their affections, yet are resolved to continue in the state wherein they are without the correction and amendment of them, because of some advantage and satisfaction which they receive in their present state, they seem to be under the dominion of sin. So is it with those mentioned, [Isa. lvii. 10](#). Upon the account of the present satisfaction, delight, and pleasure, that their corrupt affections do take in cleaving inordinately unto their objects, they will not endeavour their change and alteration.

This, then, is the sole safe rule in this case: Whatever hold sin may have got on our affections, whatever prevalency it may have in them, however it may entangle and defile them, if we endeavour sincerely the discovery of this evil, and thereon set ourselves constantly unto the mortification of our corrupt affections by all due means, there is not in their disorder any argument to prove the dominion of sin in us. Our affections, as they are corrupt, are the proper objects of the great duty of mortification; which the apostle therefore calls our “members which are upon the earth,” [Col. iii. 5](#). This is a safe anchor for the soul in this storm. If it live in a sincere endeavour after the mortification of every discoverable corruption and disorder in the affections, it is secure from the dominion of sin. But as for such as are negligent in searching after the state of their souls, as unto the inclination and engagement of their affections, who approve of themselves in their greatest irregularities, resolvedly indulge themselves in any way of sin to gratify their corrupt affections, they must provide themselves of pleas for their vindication; I know them not. But the meaning of our present rule will be farther manifest in what ensues.

3. It is a dangerous sign of the dominion of sin, when, after a conviction of their necessity, it prevaileth unto *a neglect of those ways and duties which are peculiarly suited, directed, and ordained, unto its mortification and destruction*. This may be cleared in some particulars:—

(1.) Mortification of sin is the constant duty of all believers, of all who would not have sin have dominion over them. Where mortification is sincere, there is no dominion of sin; and where there is no mortification, there sin doth reign.

(2.) There are some graces and duties that are peculiarly suited and ordained unto this end, that by them and their agency the work of mortification may be carried on constantly in our souls. What they are, or some of them, we shall see immediately.

(3.) When sin puts forth its power in any especial lust, or in a strong inclination unto any actual sin, then it is the duty of the soul to make diligent application of those graces and duties which are specific and proper unto its mortification.



(4.) When men have had a conviction of these duties, and have attended unto them according to that conviction, if sin prevail in them to a neglect or relinquishment of those duties as unto their performance, or as unto their application unto the mortification of sin, it is a dangerous sign that sin hath dominion in them. And I distinguish between these things, — namely, a neglect of such duties as unto their performance, and a neglect of the application of them unto the mortification of sin; for men may on other accounts continue the observance of them, or some of them, and yet not apply them unto this especial end. And so all external duties may be observed when sin reigneth in triumph, [2 Tim. iii. 5](#).

The meaning of the assertion being stated, I shall now name some of those graces and duties upon whose omission and neglect sin may prevail, as unto an application of them unto the mortification of any sin:—

The *first* is, *the daily exercise of faith on Christ as crucified*. This is the great fundamental means of the mortification of sin in general, and which we ought to apply unto every particular instance of it. This the apostle discourseth at large, [Rom. vi. 6–13](#). “Our old man,” saith he, “is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” Our “old man,” or the body of sin, is the power and reign of sin in us. These are to be destroyed; that is, so mortified that “henceforth we should not serve sin,” that we should be delivered from the power and rule of it. This, saith the apostle, is done in Christ: “Crucified with him.” It is so meritoriously, in his actual dying or being crucified for us; it is so virtually, because of the certain provision that is made therein for the mortification of all sin; but it is so actually, by the exercise of faith on him as crucified, dead, and buried, which is the means of the actual communication of the virtue of his death unto us for that end. Herein are we said to be dead and buried with him; whereof baptism is the pledge. So by the cross of Christ the world is crucified unto us, and we are so to the world, [Gal. vi. 14](#); which is the substance of the mortification of all sin. There are several ways whereby the exercise of faith on Christ crucified is effectual unto this end:—

[1.] Looking unto him as such will beget *holy mourning* in us: [Zech. xii. 10](#), “They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and mourn.” It is a promise of gospel times and gospel grace. A view of Christ as pierced will cause mourning in them that have received the promise of the Spirit of grace and supplication there mentioned. And this mourning is the foundation of mortification. It is that “godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of,” [2 Cor. vii. 10](#). And mortification of sin is of the essence of repentance. The more believers are exercised in this view of Christ, the more humble they are, the more they are kept in that mourning frame which is universally opposite unto all the interests of sin, and which keeps the soul watchful against all its attempts. Sin never reigned in an humble, mourning soul.

[2.] It is effectual unto the same end by the way of a powerful motive, as that which calls and leads unto conformity to him. This is pressed by the apostle, [Rom. vi. 8–11](#). Our con-



formity unto Christ as crucified and dead consists in our being dead unto sin, and thereby overthrowing the reign of it in our mortal bodies. This conformity, saith he, we ought to reckon on as our duty: "Reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin;" that is, that you ought so to be, in that conformity which you ought to aim at unto Christ crucified. Can any spiritual eye behold Christ dying for sin, and continue to live in sin? Shall we keep that alive in us which he died for, that it might not eternally destroy us? Can we behold him bleeding for our sins, and not endeavour to give them their death-wound? The efficacy of the exercise of faith herein unto the mortification of sin is known unto all believers by experience.

[3.] Faith herein gives us communion with him in his death, and unites the soul unto it in its efficacy. Hence we are said to be "buried with him into death," and to be "planted together in the likeness of his death," [Rom. vi. 4, 5](#). Our "old man is crucified with him," [verse 6](#). We have by faith communion with him in his death, unto the death of sin.

This, therefore, is the first grace and duty which we ought to attend unto for the mortification of sin. But where sin hath that interest and power in the mind as to take it off from this exercise of faith, to prevent or obstruct it, as it will do, so as that it shall not dare to think or meditate on Christ crucified, because of the inconsistency of such thoughts with an indulgence unto any lust, it is to be feared that sin is in the throne.

If it be thus with any; if they have not yet made use of this way and means for the mortification of sin; or if, being convinced of it, they have been for any season driven or withheld from the exercise of faith herein, — I have nothing to offer to free them from this evidence of the reign of sin, but only that they would speedily and carefully address themselves unto their duty herein; and if they prevail on themselves unto it, it will bring in its own evidence of their freedom.

Some, it may be, will say that indeed they are "unskilful" in this "word of righteousness," as some are, [Heb. v. 13](#). They know not how to make use of Christ crucified unto this end, nor how to set themselves about it. Other ways of mortification they can understand. The discipline and penances assigned by the Papists unto this end are sensible; so are our own vows and resolutions, with other duties that are prescribed; but as for this way of deriving virtue from the death of Christ unto the death of sin, they can understand nothing of it.

I easily believe that some may say so, yea, ought to say so, if they would speak their minds; for the spiritual wisdom of faith is required hereunto, but "all men have not faith." On the loss of this wisdom, the Papists have invented another way to supply the whole exercise of faith herein. They will make crucifixes, — images of Christ crucified, then they will adore, embrace, mourn over, and expect great virtue from them. Without these images they know no way of addressing unto Christ for the communication of any virtue from his death or life. Others may be at the same loss; but they may do well to consider the cause of it: for, is it not from *ignorance of the mystery of the gospel*, and of the communication of supplies of spiritual things from Christ thereby, — of the efficacy of his life and death unto our

sanctification and mortification of sin? Or is it not because indeed *they have never been thoroughly distressed in their minds and consciences by the power of sin*, and so have never in good earnest looked for relief? Light, general convictions, either of the guilt or power of sin, will drive none to Christ. When their consciences are reduced unto real straits, and they know not what to do, they will learn better how to “look unto Him whom they have pierced.” Their condition, whoever they are, is dangerous, who find not a necessity every day of applying themselves by faith unto Christ for help and succour. Or is it not because they have *other reliefs* to betake themselves unto? Such are their own promises and resolutions; which, for the most part, serve only to cheat and quiet conscience for an hour or a day, and then vanish into nothing. But whatever be the cause of this neglect, those in whom it is will pine away in their sins; for nothing but the death of Christ *for us* will be the death of sin *in us*.

Secondly, Another duty necessary unto this end is *continual prayer*, and this is to be considered as unto its application to the prevalency of any particular lust wherein sin doth in a peculiar manner exert its power. This is the great ordinance of God for its mortification; for, —

[1.] Hereby we obtain spiritual aids and supplies of strength against it. We are not more necessarily and fervently to pray that sin may be *pardoned as to its guilt*, than we are that it may be *subdued as to its power*. He who is negligent in the latter is never in good earnest in the former. The pressures and troubles which we receive from the power of sin are as pungent on the mind as those from its guilt are on the conscience. Mere pardon of sin will never give peace unto a soul, though it can have none without it. It must be mortified also, or we can have no spiritual rest. Now, this is the work of prayer, — namely, to seek and obtain such supplies of mortifying, sanctifying grace, as whereby the power of sin may be broken, its strength abated, its root withered, its life destroyed, and so the whole old man crucified. That which was the apostle’s request for the Thessalonians is the daily prayer of all believers for themselves, [1 Thess. v. 23](#).

[2.] A constant attendance unto this duty in a due manner will preserve the soul in such a frame as wherein sin cannot habitually prevail in it. He that can live in sin and abide in the ordinary duties of prayer doth never once pray as he ought. Formality, or some secret reserve or other, vitiates the whole. A truly gracious, praying frame (wherein we pray always) is utterly inconsistent with the love of or reserve for any sin. To pray well is to pray always, — that is, to keep the heart always in that frame which is required in prayer; and where this is, sin can have no rule, no, nor quiet harbour, in the soul.

[3.] It is the soul’s immediate conflict against the power of sin. Sin in it is formally considered as the soul’s enemy, which fights against it. In prayer the soul sets itself to grapple with it, to wound, kill, and destroy. It is that whereby it applies all its spiritual engines unto its utter ruin; herein it exerciseth a gracious abhorrency of it, a clear self-condemnation on



the account of it; and engageth faith on all the promises of God for its conquest and destruction.

It is hence evident that if sin hath prevailed in the mind unto a negligence of this duty, either in general or as unto the effectual application of it unto any especial case where it exerts its power, it is an ill symptom of the dominion of sin in the soul.

It is certain that unmortified sin, sin indulged unto, will gradually work out all due regard unto this duty of prayer, and alienate the mind from it, either as unto the matter or manner of its performance. We see this exemplified every day in apostate professors. They have had a gift of prayer, and were constant in the exercise of it; but the love of sin and living in it hath devoured their gift, and wholly taken off their minds from the duty itself: which is the proper character of hypocrites “Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?” [Job xxvii. 10](#). He may do so for a season, but, falling under the power of sin, he will not continue so to do.

Now, because sin useth great deceit herein, in a gradual progress for attaining its end, and thereby securing its dominion, we may, in a way of warning or caution, take notice of some of its steps, that the entrance of it may be opposed: for as the “entrance of God’s word giveth light,” [Ps. cxix. 130](#), — the first putting forth of its power on the soul gives spiritual light unto the mind, which is to be improved, — so the entrance of sin, the first actings of it on the mind, towards the neglect of this duty, brings a deceiving darkness with them, which is to be opposed:—

1st. It will produce in the mind *an unreadiness unto this duty in its proper seasons*. The heart should always rejoice in the approach of such seasons, because of the delight in God which it hath in them. To rejoice and be glad in all our approaches unto God is every way required of us; and therefore, with the thoughts of and on the approach of such seasons, we ought to groan in ourselves for such a preparedness of mind as may render us meet for that converse with God which we are called unto. But where sin begins to prevail, all things will be unready and out of order. Strange tergiversations will rise in the mind, either as unto the duty itself or as unto the manner of its performance. Customariness and formality are the principles which act themselves in this case. The body seems to carry the mind to the duty whether it will or no, rather than the mind to lead the body in its part of it; and it will employ itself in any thing rather than in the work and duty that lies before it.

Herein, then, lies a great part of our wisdom in obviating the power of sin in us: Let us keep our hearts continually in a gracious disposition and readiness for this duty, in all its proper seasons. If you lose this ground, you will yet go more backwards continually. Know, therefore, that there is no more effectual preservative of the soul from the power of sin than a gracious readiness for and disposition unto this duty in private and public, according to its proper seasons.



2dly. In its progress, unto unreadiness it will add *unwillingness*; for the mind prepossessed by sin finds it directly contrary unto its present interest, disposition, and inclination. There is nothing in it but what troubles and disquiets them; as he said of the prophet who was not willing to hear him any more, it speaks not good but evil of them continually. Hence a secret unwillingness prevails in the mind, and an aversion from a serious engagement in it; and the attendance of such persons to it is as if they were under a force, in a compliance with custom and convictions.

3dly. Sin will at length prevail unto a *total neglect of this duty*. This is an observation confirmed by long experience: If prayer do not constantly endeavour the ruin of sin, sin will ruin prayer, and utterly alienate the soul from it. This is the way of backsliders in heart; as they grow in sin they decay in prayer, until they are weary of it and utterly relinquish it. So they speak, [Mal. i. 13](#), “Behold, what a weariness is it!” and, “Ye have snuffed at it.” They look on it as a task, as a burden, and are weary in attending unto it.

Now, when I place this as an effect of the prevalency of sin, — namely, a relinquishment of the duty of prayer, — I do not intend that persons do wholly and absolutely, or as to all ways of it, public and private, and all seasons or occasions of it, give it over utterly. Few rise to that profligacy in sin, unto such desperate resolution against God. It may be they will still attend unto the stated seasons of prayer in families or public assemblies, at least drawing near to God with their lips; and they will, on surprisals and dangers, personally cry unto God, as the Scripture everywhere testifieth of them. But this only I intend, — namely, that they will no more sincerely, immediately, and directly, apply prayer to the mortification and ruin of that lust or corruption wherein sin puts forth its power and rule in them; and where it is so, it seems to have the dominion. Of such an one saith the psalmist, “He hath left off to be wise, and to do good. He setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil,” [Ps. xxxvi. 3, 4](#).

But such a relinquishment of this duty, as unto the end mentioned, as is habitual, and renders the soul secure under it, is intended; for there may, through the power of temptation, be a prevalency of this evil in believers for a season. So God complains of his people, [Isa. xliii. 22](#), “Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel;” that is, comparatively, as unto the fervency and sincerity of the duty required of them. Now, when it is thus with believers for a season, through the power of sin and temptation, — (1st.) They do not approve of themselves therein. They will ever and anon call things to consideration, and say, “It is not with us as it should be, or as it was in former days. This thing is not good that we do, nor will it be peace in the latter end.” (2dly.) They will have secret resolutions of shaking themselves out of the dust of this evil state. They say in themselves, “We will go and return unto our first husband, for then was it better with us than now;” as the church did, [Hosea ii. 7](#). (3dly.) Every thing that peculiarly befalls them, in a way of mercy or affliction, they look on as calls from God to deliver and recover them from their backsliding frame.

(4thly.) They will receive in the warnings which are given them by the word preached, especially if their particular case be touched on or laid open. (5thly.) They will have no quiet, rest, or self-approbation, until they come thoroughly off unto a healing and recovery, such as that described, [Hosea xiv. 1–4](#).

Thus it may be with some over whom sin hath not the dominion; yet ought the first entrance of it to be diligently watched against, as that which tends unto the danger and ruin of the soul.

Thirdly, *Constant self-abasement*, condemnation, and abhorrency, is another duty that is directly opposed unto the interest and rule of sin in the soul. No frame of mind is a better antidote against the poison of sin. “He that walketh humbly walketh surely.”⁴ God hath a continual regard unto mourners, those that are of a “broken heart and a contrite spirit.” It is the soil where all grace will thrive and flourish. A constant due sense of sin as sin, of our interest therein by nature and in the course of our lives, with a continual afflictive remembrance of some such instances of it as have had peculiar aggravations, issuing in a gracious self-abasement, is the soul’s best posture in watching against all the deceits and incursions of sin. And this is a duty which we ought with all diligence to attend unto. To keep our souls in a constant frame of mourning and self-abasement is the most necessary part of our wisdom with reference unto all the ends of the life of God; and it is so far from having any inconsistency with those consolations and joys which the gospel tenders unto us in believing, as that it is the only way to let them into the soul in a due manner. It is such mourners, and those alone, unto whom evangelical comforts are administered, [Isa. lvii. 18](#).

One of the first things that sin doth when it aims at dominion is the destruction of this frame of mind; and when it actually hath the rule, it will not suffer it to enter. It makes men careless and regardless of this matter, yea, bold, presumptuous, and fearless; it will obstruct all the entrance into the mind of such self-reflections and considerations as lead unto this frame; it will represent them either as needless or unseasonable, or make the mind afraid of them, as things which tend unto its disquietment and disturbance without any advantage. If it prevail herein, it makes way for the security of its own dominion. Nothing is more watched against than a proud, regardless, senseless, secure frame of heart, by them who are under the rule of grace.

4. A reserve for any one known sin, against the light and efficacy of convictions, is an argument of the dominion of sin. So was it in the case of Naaman. He would do all other things, but put in an exception for that whereon his honour and profit did depend. *Where there is sincerity in conviction, it extends itself unto all sins*; for it is of sin as sin, and so of every known sin equally, that hath the nature of sin in it. And to be true to convictions is the life of sincerity. If men can make a choice of what they will except and reserve, notwith-

4 [Prov. x. 9](#). The English version has it, “He that walketh uprightly.” — Ed.

standing their being convinced of its evil, it is from the ruling power of sin. Pleas in the mind in the behalf of any sin, that is, for a continuance in it, prevalent thereunto, ruin all sincerity. It may be the pretence is that it is but a little one, of no great moment, and that which shall be compensated with other duties of obedience; or it shall be retained only until a fitter season for its relinquishment; or men may be blinded after conviction to dispute again whether what they would abide in be sinful or no, as is the case frequently with respect unto covetousness, pride, and conformity to the world. It is a dreadful effect of the ruling power of sin. Whatever impeacheth the universality of obedience in one thing overthroweth its sincerity in all things.

5. Hardness of heart, so frequently mentioned and complained of in the Scripture, is another evidence of the dominion of sin. But because there are various degrees also hereof, they must be considered, that we may judge aright what of it is an evidence of that dominion, and what may be consistent with the rule of grace; for it is that mysterious evil whereof the best men do most complain, and whereof the worst have no sense at all.



Chapter IV.

Hardness of heart spoken to as an eminent sign of sin's dominion; and it is shown that it ought to be considered as total or partial.

Hardness of heart is either *total* and absolute, or *partial* and comparative only.

Total hardness is either natural and universal, or judiciary in some particular individuals.

Natural hardness is the blindness or obstinacy of the heart in sin by nature, which is not to be cured by the use or application of any outward means: "Hardness and impenitent heart," [Rom. ii. 5](#). This is that heart of stone which God promises in the covenant to take away by the efficacy of his almighty grace, [Ezek. xxxvi. 26](#). Where this hardness abides uncured, unremoved, there sin is absolutely in the throne. This, therefore, we do not inquire about.

Judiciary hardness is either immediately from God, or it is by the devil through his permission.

In the first way, God is frequently said to harden the hearts of men in their sins and unto their ruin; as he did with Pharaoh, [Exod. iv. 21](#). And he doth it in general two ways:—
1. By withholding from them those supplies of light, wisdom, and understanding, without which they cannot understand their condition, see their danger, or avoid their ruin. 2. By withholding the efficacy of the means which they enjoy for their conviction and repentance, yea, and giving them an efficacy unto their obduration, [Isa. vi. 9, 10](#). And concerning this divine induration we may observe, —

1. That it is the severest of divine punishments in this world. 2. That therefore it is not executed but towards those that are habitually wicked, and so do of choice harden themselves in their sins, [Rom. i. 26, 28](#). 3. For the most part it respects some especial times and seasons, wherein are the turning-points for eternity. 4. That the condition of those so hardened is remediless, and their wounds incurable.

Where any are thus hardened, there is no question about the dominion of sin. Such a heart is its throne, its proper seat, next to hell.

Secondly, There is a judiciary hardness which Satan, through God's permission, brings on men, [2 Cor. iv. 4](#); and there are many ways whereby he doth effect it, not here to be insisted on.

But there is a hardness of heart that is indeed but partial and comparative, whatever appearance it may make of that which is total and absolute; whence the inquiry ariseth whether it be an evidence of the dominion of sin or no.

There is a hardness of heart which is known and lamented by them in whom it is. Hereof the church complains, [Isa. lxiii. 17](#), "O Lord, why hast thou hardened our heart from thy fear?" or, "suffered it so to be, not healing, not recovering our hardness." And there are sundry things which concur in this kind of hardness of heart; as, —

1. *Want of readiness to receive divine impressions from the word of God.* When the heart is soft and tender, it is also humble and contrite, and ready to tremble at the word of God. So it is said of Josiah that “his heart was tender,” and “he humbled himself before the Lord,” when he heard his word, [2 Kings xxii. 18, 19](#). This may be wanting in some in a great measure, and they may be sensible of it. They may find in themselves a great unreadiness to comply with divine warnings, reproofs, calls. They are not affected with the word preached, but sometimes complain that they sit under it like stocks and stones. They have not an experience of its power, and are not cast into the mould of it. Hereon they apprehend that their hearts are hardened from the fear of God, as the church complains. There is, indeed, no better frame of heart to be attained in this life than that whereby it is to the word as the wax to the seal, fit and ready to receive impressions from it, — a frame that is tender to receive the communications of the word in all their variety, whether for reproof, instruction, or consolation; and the want hereof is a culpable hardness of heart.

2. There belongs unto it an *[un]affectedness with the guilt of sin*, as unto the sorrow and repentance that it doth require. There is none in whom there is any spark of saving grace but hath a gracious sorrow for sin, in some degree or other. But there is a proportion required between sin and sorrow. Great sins require great sorrows, as Peter, on his great sin, “wept bitterly;” and all especial aggravations of sin require an especial sense of them. This the soul finds not in itself. It bears the thoughts of sin and the rebukes of conscience without any great concussion or remorse; it can pass over the charge of sin without relenting, mourning, dissolving in sighs and tears; and it cannot but say sometimes thereon that its heart is like the adamant or the flint in the rock. This makes many fear that they are under the dominion of sin; and they fear it the more because that fear doth not affect and humble them as it ought. And it must be granted that all unaffectedness with sin, all want of humiliation and godly sorrow upon it, is from an undue hardness of heart; and they who are not affected with it have great reason to be jealous over themselves, even as unto their spiritual state and condition.

3. Of the same kind, in its measure, is *unaffectedness with the sins of others* among whom we live, or in whom we are concerned. To mourn for the sins of others is a duty highly approved of God, [Ezek. ix. 4](#). It argues the effectual working of many graces, as zeal for the glory of God, compassion for the souls of men, love to the glory and interest of Christ in the world. The want hereof is from hardness of heart; and it is that which abounds among us. Some find not themselves at all concerned herein; some make pretences why they need not so be, or that it is not their duty, — what is it unto them how wicked the world is? it shall answer for its own sins. Nor are they moved when it comes nearer them. If their children come to losses, poverty, ruin, then they are affected indeed; but so long as they flourish in the world, be they apostates from profession, be they enemies to Christ, do they avowedly belong unto the world and walk in the ways of it, they are not much concerned, especially

if they are not scandalously profligate. But this also is from hardness of heart, which will be bewailed where grace is vigilant and active.

4. *Want of a due sense of indications of divine displeasure* is another instance of this hardness of heart. God doth oftentimes give signs and tokens hereof, whether as unto the public state of the church in the world, or as unto our own persons, in afflictions and chastisements. In the seasons hereof he expects that our hearts should be soft and tender, ready to receive impressions of his anger, and pliable therein unto his mind and will. There are none whom at such a time he doth more abhor than those who are stout-hearted, little regarding him or the operation of his hands. This in some measure may be in believers, and they may be sensible of it, to their sorrow and humiliation.

These things, and many more of the like nature, proceed from hardness of heart, or the remainder of our hardness by nature, and are great promoters of the interest of sin in us. But where any persons are sensible of this frame, where they are humbled for it, where they mourn under, and cry out for its removal, it is so far from being an evidence of the dominion of sin over them in whom it is, that it is an eminent sign of the contrary, — namely, that the ruling power of sin is certainly broken and destroyed in the soul.

But there are other instances of hardness of heart, which have much more difficulty in them, and which are hardly reconcilable unto the rule of grace. I shall mention some of them:—

1. *Security and senselessness under the guilt of great actual sins.* I do not say this is, or can at any time be, absolute in any believer; but such it may be as whereon men may go on at their old pace of duties and profession, though without any peculiar humiliation, albeit they are under the provoking guilt of some known sin, with its aggravations. It will recur upon their minds, and conscience, unless it be seared, will treat with them about it; but they pass it over, as that which they had rather forget and wear out of their minds than bring things unto their proper issue by particular repentance. So it seems to have been with David after his sin with Bathsheba. I doubt not but that before the message of God to him by Nathan, he had displeasing thoughts of what he had done; but there are not the least footsteps in the story or any of his prayers that he laid it seriously to heart and was humbled for it before. This was a great hardness of heart; and we know how difficult his recovery from it was. He was saved, but as through fire. And where it is so with any one that hath been overtaken with any great sin, as drunkenness or other folly, that he strives to wear it out, to pass it over, to forget it, or give himself countenance from any reasoning or consideration against the especial sense of it and humiliation for it, he can, during that state and frame, have no solid evidence that sin hath not the dominion in him. And let such sinners be warned who have so passed over former sins until they have utterly lost all sense of them, or are under such a frame at present, that they recall things to another account, and suffer no such



sin to pass without a peculiar humiliation, or, whatever be the final issue of things with them, they can have no solid ground of spiritual peace in this world.

2. There is such a dangerous hardness of heart, *where the guilt of one sin makes not the soul watchful against another of another sort*. Wherever the heart is tender, upon a surprisal into sin, it will not only watch against the returns thereof or relapses into it, but will be made diligent, heedful, and careful against all other sins whatever. So is it with all that walk humbly under a sense of sin. But when men [are] in such a state [they] are careless, bold, and negligent, so as that if they repeat not the same sin, they are easily hurried into others. Thus was it with Asa. He was “wroth with the seer” that came unto him with a divine message, and smote him, “and put him in a prison house, for he was in a rage,” [2 Chron. xvi. 10](#). A man would think that when he was recovered out of this distemper, it might have made him humble and watchful against other sins; but it was not so, for it is added that he “oppressed some of the people at the same time.” And he rested not there, but “in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians,” [verse 12](#). Unto persecution he added oppression, and unto that unbelief. Yet, notwithstanding all this, “Asa’s heart was perfect with the Lord all his days,” [1 Kings xv. 14](#); that is, he had a prevalent sincerity in him notwithstanding these miscarriages. But he was, doubtless, under the power of great hardness of heart. So is it with others in the like cases, when one sin makes them not careful and watchful against another; as when men have stained themselves with intemperance of life, they may fall into excess of passion with their families and relations, or into a neglect of duty, take any other crooked steps in their walk. This argues a great prevalency of sin in the soul, although, as we see in the example of Asa, it is not an infallible evidence of its dominion; yet of that nature it is wherewith divine peace and consolation are inconsistent.

3. When men fall into such unspiritual frames, such deadness and decays, *as from which they are not recoverable by the ordinary means of grace*, it is a certain evidence of hardness of heart and the prevalency of sin therein. It is so, whether this be the fault of churches or of particular persons. The preaching of the word is the especial divine ordinance for the healing and recovery of backsliders in heart or life. Where this will not effect it in any, but they will go on frowardly in the ways of their own hearts, unless God take some extraordinary course with them, they are on the brink of ruin, and live on sovereign grace alone.

Thus was it with David. After his great sin, there is no doubt but he attended unto all ordinances of divine worship, which are the ordinary means of the preservation and recovery of sinners from their backslidings. Howbeit they had not this effect upon him. He lived impenitently in his sin, until God was pleased to use extraordinary means, in the especial message of Nathan and the death of his child, for his awakening and recovery.

And thus God will deal sometimes with churches and persons. Where ordinary means for their recovery will not effect it, he will by sovereign grace, and it may be by a concurrence

of extraordinary providences, heal, revive, and save them. So he promiseth to do, [Isa. lvii. 16–19](#).

But where this is trusted unto, in the neglect of the ordinary means of healing, seeing there is no direct promise of it, but it is a case reserved unto absolute sovereignty, the end may be bitterness and sorrow.

And let them take heed who are under this frame; for although God may deliver them, yet it will be by “terrible things,” as [Ps. lxxv. 5](#), — such terrible things as wherein he will “take vengeance of their inventions,” [Ps. xcix. 8](#), though he do forgive them. So David affirms of himself, that God in his dealing with him had broken all his bones, [Ps. li. 8](#).

I fear this is the present case of many churches and professors at this day. It is evident that they are fallen under many spiritual decays; neither have the ordinary means of grace, repentance, and humiliation, though backed with various providential warnings, been efficacious to their recovery. It is greatly to be feared that God will use some severe dispensation in terrible things towards them for their awakening, or, which is more dreadful, withdraw his presence from them.

4. Of the same nature it is, and argues no small power of this evil, *when men satisfy and please themselves in an unmortified, unfruitful profession*; a severe symptom of the dominion of sin. And there are three things that manifest the consistency of such a profession with hardness of heart, or are fruits of it therein:—

(1.) *A neglect of the principal duties of it*. Such are mortification in themselves, and usefulness or fruitfulness towards others. A deficiency and neglect in these things are evident amongst many that profess religion. It doth not appear that in any thing they seriously endeavour the mortification of their lusts, their pride, their passion, their love of the world, their inordinate desires and sensual appetites. They either indulge unto them all, or at least they maintain not a constant conflict against them. And as unto usefulness in the fruits of righteousness, which are to the praise of God by Jesus Christ, or those good works which are the evidence of a living faith, they are openly barren in them. Now, whereas these are the principal dictates of that religion which they do profess, their neglect of them, their deficiency in them, proceed from a hardness of heart, overpowering their light and convictions. And what shall long, in such a case, stop sin out of the throne? Self-pleasing and satisfaction in such a profession argues a very dangerous state and habit of mind. Sin may have a full dominion under such a profession.

(2.) The admission of *an habitual formality into the performance of religious duties* is of the same nature. In some the power of sin, as we observed before, prevails unto the neglect and omission of such duties. Others continue the observation [of them], but are so formal and lifeless in them, so careless as unto the exerting or exercise of grace in them, as gives an uncontrollable evidence of the power of sin and a spiritual senselessness of heart. There is nothing that the Scripture doth more frequently and severely condemn, and give as a char-

acter of hypocrites, than a diligent attendance unto a multiplication of duties whilst the heart is not spiritually engaged in them. For this cause the Lord Christ threatened the utter rejection of the lukewarm church of Laodicea; and God pronounceth a most severe sentence against all that are guilty of it, [Isa. xxix. 13, 14](#). Yet thus it may be with many, and that thus it hath been with them many do manifest by their open apostasy, which is the common event of this frame and course long continued in; for some in the daily performance of religious duties for a season do exercise and preserve their gifts, but, there being no exercise of grace in them, after a while those gifts also do wither and decay. They are under the power of the evil whereof we treat, — namely, a hard and senseless heart, — that can approve of themselves in such a lifeless, heartless profession of religion, and performance of the duties thereof.

(3.) When men grow *senseless under the dispensation of the word*, and do not at all profit by it. The general ends of preaching the word unto believers are:— [1.] The increase of spiritual light, knowledge, and understanding, in them; [2.] The growth of grace, enabling to obedience; [3.] Holy excitation of grace, by impressions of its power in the communication of the mind, will, love, and grace of God, unto our souls; — which is attended with, [4.] An impression on the affections, renewing and making them more holy and heavenly continually; with, [5.] Direction and administration of spiritual strength against temptations and corruptions; and, [6.] Fruitfulness in the works and duties of obedience.

Where men can abide under the dispensation of the word without any of these effects on their minds, consciences, or lives, they are greatly hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, as in [Heb. iii. 12, 13](#), this case is stated. Now, whether this be, — [1.] From that carelessness and security which is grown on all sorts of persons, against which God doth justly express his indignation, by withholding the power and efficacy of his word in its administration from them; or, [2.] From an increase of an unsanctified light and gifts, which fill men with high thoughts of themselves, and keep them off from that humble frame which alone is teachable; or, [3.] From a loss of all due reverence unto the ministry as God's ordinance for all the ends of the word, with a secret fortification of conscience by prejudices against its power, from the suggestions of Satan; or, [4.] From the love of sin, which the heart would shelter and secure from the efficacy of the word; or from what other cause soever it be, — it proceeds from a dangerous hardness of heart, from the power of sin.

Where this is the state of the minds of men, where this hardness is thus prevalent in them, I do not, no man can, give them assurance that sin hath not the dominion in them; but because all these things are capable of various degrees, it may not be concluded absolutely from any or all of them, in any degree, that so it is. But this we may safely conclude, — 1. That it is impossible for any man in whom this evil frame is found in any degree, and not sincerely endeavoured against, to keep any true solid peace with God or in his own soul; what seems to be so in him is but a ruinous security. 2. That this is the high road unto final

obduration and impenitency. And therefore, 3. It is the present duty of those who have any care of their souls to shake themselves out of this dust, and not to give themselves any rest until they are entered into the paths of recovery. The calls of God unto such backsliders in heart for a return are multiplied; the reasons for it and motives unto it are innumerable. This ought never to depart from their minds, that without it they shall eternally perish, and they know not how soon they may be overtaken with that destruction.

Thus far have we proceeded in the inquiry, whether sin hath the dominion in us or no. There are on the other side many evidences of the rule of grace, sufficient to discard the pleas and pretences of sin unto the throne; but the consideration of them is not my present design. I have only examined the pleas of sin which render the inquiry difficult and the case dubious; and they arise all from the actings of sin in us as it fights against the soul, which is its proper and constant work, [1 Pet. ii. 11](#). It doth so against the design of the law, which is to live to God; against the order and peace of it, which it disturbs; and against its eternal blessedness, which it would deprive it of. The examination of the pretences insisted on may be of some use to them that are sincere.

But, on the other hand, there are uncontrollable evidences of the dominion of sin in men, some whereof I shall mention, and only mention, because they need neither proof nor illustration:—

1. It is so where sin hath possessed the will. And it hath possessed the will when there are no restraints from sinning taken from its nature, but from its consequents only. 2. When men proclaim their sins and hide them not, — when they boast in them and of them, as it is with multitudes; or, 3. Approve of themselves in any known sin, without renewed repentance, as drunkenness, uncleanness, swearing, and the like; or, 4. Live in the neglect of religious duties in their closets and families, whence all their public attendance unto them is but hypocrisy; or, 5. Have an enmity to true holiness and the power of godliness; or, 6. Are visible apostates from profession, especially if they add, as is usual, persecution to their apostasy; or, 7. Are ignorant of the sanctifying principles of the gospel and Christian religion; or, 8. Are despisers of the means of conversion; or, 9. Live in security under open providential warnings and calls to repentance; or, 10. Are enemies in their minds unto the true interest of Christ in the world. Where these things and the like are found, there is no question what it is that hath dominion and bears rule in the minds of men. This all men may easily know, as the apostle declares, [Rom. vi. 16](#).

Chapter V.

The third inquiry handled, namely, What is the assurance given us, and what are the grounds thereof, that sin shall not have dominion over us — The ground of this assurance is, that we are “not under the law, but under grace” — The force of this reason shown, namely, How the law doth not destroy the dominion of sin, and how grace dethrones sin and gives dominion over it.

III. And thus much hath been spoken unto the second thing proposed at the entrance of this discourse, — namely, an inquiry, *Whether sin have the dominion in any of us or no.* I proceed unto that which offers itself from the words, in the third place: *What is the assurance given us, and what are the grounds of it, that sin shall not have dominion over us; which lies in this, that we are “not under the law, but under grace.”*

Where men are engaged in a constant conflict against sin; where they look upon it and judge it their chiefest enemy, which contends with them for their souls and their eternal ruin; where they have experience of its power and deceit, and through the efficacy of them have been often shaken in their peace and comfort; where they have been ready to despond, and say they shall one day perish under their powers, — it is a gospel word, a word of good tidings, that gives them assurance that it shall never have dominion over them.

The ground of this assurance is, that believers are “not under the law, but under grace.” And the force of this reason we may manifest in some few instances:—

First, The law *giveth no strength against sin* unto them that are under it, but grace doth. Sin will neither be cast nor kept out of its throne, but by a spiritual power and strength in the soul to oppose, conquer, and dethrone it. Where it is not conquered it will reign; and conquered it will not be without a mighty prevailing power: this the law will not, cannot give.

The law is taken two ways:— 1. For the whole revelation of the mind and will of God in the Old Testament. In this sense it had grace in it, and so did give both life, and light, and strength against sin, as the psalmist declares, [Ps. xix. 7–9](#). In this sense it contained not only the law of precepts, but the promise also and the covenant, which was the means of conveying spiritual life and strength unto the church. In this sense it is not here spoken of, nor is anywhere opposed unto grace. 2. For the covenant rule of perfect obedience: “Do this, and live.” In this sense men are said to be “under it,” in opposition unto being “under grace.” They are under its power, rule, conditions, and authority, as a covenant. And in this sense all men are under it who are not instated in the new covenant through faith in Christ Jesus, who sets up in them and over them the rule of grace; for all men must be one way or other under the rule of God, and he rules only by the law or by grace, and none can be under both at the same time.

In this sense the law was never ordained of God to convey grace or spiritual strength unto the souls of men; had it been so, the promise and the gospel had been needless: “If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law,” [Gal. iii. 21](#). If it could have given life or strength, it would have produced righteousness, we should have been justified by it. It discovers sin and condemns it, but gives no strength to oppose it. It is not God’s ordinance for the dethroning of sin, nor for the destruction of its dominion.

This law falls under a double consideration, but in neither of them was designed to give power or strength against sin:—

1. *As it was given unto mankind in the state of innocency*; and it did then absolutely and exactly declare the whole duty of man, whatever God in his wisdom and holiness did require of us. It was God’s ruling of man according to the principle of the righteousness wherein he was created. But it gave no new aids against sin; nor was there any need that so it should do. It was not the ordinance of God to administer new or more grace unto man, but to rule and govern him according to what he had received; and this it continueth to do forever. It claims and continues a rule over all men, according to what they had and what they have; but it never had power to bar the entrance of sin, nor to cast it out when it is once enthroned.

2. *As it was renewed and enjoined unto the church of Israel on Mount Sinai*, and with them unto all that would join themselves unto the Lord out of the nations of the world. Yet neither was it then, nor as such, designed unto any such end as to destroy or dethrone sin by an administration of spiritual strength and grace. It had some new ends given then unto it, which it had not in its original constitution, the principal whereof was to drive men to the promise, and Christ therein; and this it doth by all the acts and powers of it on the souls of men. As it discovers sin, as it irritates and provokes it by its severity, as it judgeth and condemneth it, as it denounceth a curse on sinners, it drives unto this end; for this was added of grace in the renovation of it, this new end was given unto it. In itself it hath nothing to do with sinners, but to judge, curse, and condemn them.

There is, therefore, no help to be expected against the dominion of sin from the law. It was never ordained of God unto that end; nor doth it contain, nor is it communicative of, the grace necessary unto that end, [Rom. viii. 3](#).

Wherefore, those who are “under the law” are under the dominion of sin. “The law is holy,” but it cannot make them holy who have made themselves unholy; it is “just,” but it cannot make them so, — it cannot justify them whom it doth condemn; it is “good,” but can do them no good, as unto their deliverance from the power of sin. God hath not appointed it unto that end. Sin will never be dethroned by it; it will not give place unto the law, neither in its title nor its power.

Those who are under the law will at some seasons endeavour to shake off the yoke of sin, and resolve to be no longer under its power; as, —

1. When the law presseth on their consciences, perplexing and disquieting them. The commandment comes home unto them, sin reviveth, and they die, [Rom. vii. 9, 10](#); that is, it gives power to sin to slay the hopes of the sinner, and to distress him with the apprehension of guilt and death: for “the strength of sin is the law,” [1 Cor. xv. 56](#); — the power it hath to disquiet and condemn sinners is in and by the law. When it is thus with sinners, when the law presseth them with a sense of the guilt of sin, and deprives them of all rest and peace in their minds, they will resolve to cast off the yoke of sin, to relinquish its service, that they may be freed from the urgency of the law on their consciences; and they will endeavour it in some instances of duty and abstinence from sin.

2. They will do the same under surprisals with sickness, pain, dangers, or death itself. Then they will cry, and pray, and promise to reform, and set about it, as they suppose, in good earnest. This case is fully exemplified, [Ps. lxxviii. 34–37](#); and it is manifest in daily experience amongst multitudes. There are few who are so seared and profligate but at such seasons they will think of returning to God, of relinquishing the service of sin, and vindicating themselves from under its dominion. And in some it worketh a lasting change, though no real conversion doth ensue; but with the most this “goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.”

3. The same effect is produced in many by the preaching of the word. Some arrow of conviction is fastened in their minds, whereon their former ways displease them, and they judge it is better for them to change the course of their lives, and to relinquish the service of sin. These resolutions for the most part abide with them according to the society which they have or fall into. Good society may much help them in their resolves for a time, when by that which is evil and corrupt they are presently extinguished.

4. Sometimes merciful, endearing providences will have the same effect on the minds of men not obdurate in sin. Such are deliverances from imminent dangers, sparing the lives of near relations, and the like.

In such seasons, men under the law will attend unto their convictions, and endeavour for a while to shake off the yoke of sin. They will attend unto what the law saith, under whose power they are, and endeavour a compliance therewith; many duties shall be performed, and many evils abstained from, in order to the quitting themselves of sin’s dominion. But, alas! the law cannot enable them hereunto, — it cannot give them life and strength to go through with what their convictions press them unto; therefore, after a while they begin to faint and wax weary in their progress, and at length give quite over. It may be they may break off from some great sins in particular, but shake off the whole dominion of sin they cannot.

It is otherwise with them that are “under grace.” Sin shall not have dominion over them; strength shall be administered unto them to dethrone it.



“Grace” is a word of various acceptations in the Scripture. As we are here said to be under it, and as it is opposed unto the law, it is used or taken for the gospel, as it is the instrument of God for the communication of himself and his grace by Jesus Christ unto those that do believe, with that state of acceptation with himself which they are brought into thereby, [Rom. v. 1, 2](#). Wherefore, to be “under grace” is to have an interest in the gospel covenant and state, with a right unto all the privileges and benefits thereof, to be brought under the administration of grace by Jesus Christ, — to be a true believer.

But the inquiry hereon is, how it follows from hence that sin shall not have dominion over us, that sin cannot extend its territories and rule into that state, and in what sense this is affirmed.

1. Is it that there shall be no sin in them any more? Even this is true in some sense. Sin as unto its condemning power hath no place in this state, [Rom. viii. 1](#). All the sins of them that believe are expiated or done away, as to the guilt of them, in the blood of Christ, [Heb. i. 3](#), [1 John i. 7](#). This branch of the dominion of sin, which consists in its condemning power, is utterly cast out of this state. But sin as unto its being and operation doth still continue in believers whilst they are in this world; they are all sensible of it. Those who deceive themselves with a contrary apprehension are most of all under the power of it, [1 John i. 8](#). Wherefore, to be freed from the dominion of sin is not to be freed absolutely from all sin, so as that it should in no sense abide in us any more. This is not to be under grace, but to be in glory.

2. Is it that sin, though it abides, yet it shall not fight or contend for dominion in us? That this is otherwise we have before declared. Scripture and the universal experience of all that believe do testify the contrary; so doth the assurance here given us that it shall not obtain that dominion: for if it did not contend for it, there could be no grace in this promise, — there is none in deliverance from that whereof we are in no danger.

But the assurance here given is built on other considerations; whereof the first is, that the gospel is the means ordained and instrument used by God for the communication of spiritual strength unto them that believe, for the dethroning of sin. It is the “power of God unto salvation,” [Rom. i. 16](#), that whereby and wherein he puts forth his power unto that end. And sin must be really dethroned by the powerful acting of grace in us, and that in a way of duty in ourselves. We are absolved, quitted, freed from the rule of sin, as unto its pretended right and title, by the promise of the gospel; for thereby are we freed and discharged from the rule of the law, wherein all the title of sin unto dominion is founded, for “the strength of sin is the law:” but we are freed from it, as unto its internal power and exercise of its dominion, by internal spiritual grace and strength in its due exercise. Now, this is communicated by the gospel; it gives life and power, with such continual supplies of grace as are able to dethrone sin, and forever to prohibit its return.

This, then, is the present case supposed and determined by the apostle: “You that are believers are all of you conflicting with sin. You find it always restless and disquieting,



sometimes strong and powerful. When it is in conjunction with any urgent temptation, you are afraid it will utterly prevail over you, to the ruin of your souls. Hence you are wearied with it, groan under it, and cry out for deliverance from it." All these things the apostle at large insists on in this and the next chapter. "But now," saith he, "be of good comfort; notwithstanding all these things, and all your fears upon them, sin shall not prevail, it shall not have the dominion, it shall never ruin your souls." But what ground have we for this hope? what assurance of this success? "This you have," saith the apostle, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace;" or the rule of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, administered in the gospel." But how doth this give relief? "Why, it is the ordinance, the instrument of God, which he will use unto this end — namely, the communication of such supplies of grace and spiritual strength as shall eternally defeat the dominion of sin."

This is one principal difference between the law and the gospel, and was ever so esteemed in the church of God, until all communication of efficacious grace began to be called in question: The law guides, directs, commands, all things that are against the interest and rule of sin. It judgeth and condemneth both the things that promote it and the persons that do them; it frightens and terrifies the consciences of those who are under its dominion. But if you shall say unto it, "What then shall we do? this tyrant, this enemy, is too hard for us. What aid and assistance against it will you afford unto us? what power will you communicate unto its destruction?" Here the law is utterly silent, or says that nothing of this nature is committed unto it of God; nay, the strength it hath it gives unto sin for the condemnation of the sinner: "The strength of sin is the law." But the gospel, or the grace of it, is the means and instrument of God for the communication of internal spiritual strength unto believers. By it do they receive supplies of the Spirit or aids of grace for the subduing of sin and the destruction of its dominion. By it they may say they can do all things, through Him that enables them.

Hereon then depends, in the first place, the assurance of the apostle's assertion, that "sin shall not have dominion over us," because we are "under grace." We are in such a state as wherein we have supplies in readiness to defeat all the attempts of sin for rule and dominion in us.

But some may say hereon, they greatly fear they are not in this state, for they do not find such supplies of spiritual strength and grace as to give them a conquest over sin. They are still perplexed with it, and it is ready to invade the throne in their minds, if it be not already possessed of it. Wherefore they fear lest they are strangers from the grace of the gospel.

In answer hereunto the things ensuing are proposed:—

1. *Remember what hath been declared concerning the dominion of sin.* If it be not known what it is and wherein it doth consist, as some may please themselves whilst their condition is deplorable (as it is with the most), so others may be perplexed in their minds without just

cause. A clear distinction between the *rebellion* of sin and the *dominion* of sin is a great advantage unto spiritual peace.

2. *Consider the end for which aids of grace are granted and communicated by the gospel.* Now, this is not that sin may at once be utterly destroyed and consumed in us, that it should have no being, motion, or power in us any more. This work is reserved for glory, in the full redemption of body and soul, which we here do but groan after. But it is given unto us for this end, that sin may be so crucified and mortified in us, — that is, so gradually weakened and destroyed, — as that it shall not ruin spiritual life in us, or obstruct its necessary acting in duties, and for prevalency against such sins as would disannul the covenant relation between God and our souls. Whilst we have supplies of it which are sufficient unto this end, although our conflict with sin doth continue, although we are perplexed by it, yet we are under grace, and sin shall have no more dominion over us. This is enough for us, that sin shall be gradually destroyed, and we shall have a sufficiency of grace on all occasions to prevent its ruling prevalency.

3. *Live in the faith of this sacred truth, and ever keep alive in your souls expectation of supplies of grace suitable thereunto.* It is of the nature of true and saving faith, inseparable from it, to believe that the gospel is the way of God's administration of grace for the ruin of sin. He that believes it not believes not the gospel itself, which is "the power of God unto salvation," [Rom. i. 16](#). If we live, and walk, and act, as if we had nothing to trust unto but ourselves, our own endeavours, our own resolutions, and that in our perplexities and surprisals, it is no wonder if we are not sensible of supplies of divine grace; — most probably we are under the law, and not under grace. This is the fundamental principle of the gospel state, that we live in expectation of continual communications of life, grace, and strength, from Jesus Christ, who is "our life," and from whose "fulness we receive, and grace for grace." We may therefore, in this case, continually expostulate with our souls, as David doth: "Why go you mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Why are you cast down? and why are you disquieted within us? Still hope in God; he is the health of my countenance." We may be sensible of great oppression from the power of this enemy; this may cause us to go mourning all the day long, and in some sense it ought so to do. Howbeit we ought not hence to despond, or to be cast down from our duty or our comfort. Still we may trust in God through Christ, and live in continual expectation of such spiritual reliefs as shall assuredly preserve us from the dominion of sin. This faith, hope, and expectation, we are called unto by the gospel; and when they are not cherished, when they are not kept up unto a due exercise, all things will go backward in our spiritual condition.

4. *Make especial application unto the Lord Christ,* unto whom the administration of all spiritual supplies is committed, for the communication of them unto you, according unto all especial occasions. Hath sin got the advantage of a powerful temptation, so as that it seems to put hard for dominion in the soul; as it was with Paul under the buffetings of Satan,

when he had that answer from the Lord, upon his reiterated prayer, “My grace is sufficient for thee;” — “Sin shall not have dominion over thee”? Hath it, by its deceitfulness, brought the soul into a lifeless, senseless frame, made it forgetful of duties, negligent in them, or without spiritual delight in their performance? Hath it almost habituated the soul unto careless and corrupt inclinations, unto the love of, or conformity to, the world? Doth it take advantage from our darkness and confusion, under troubles, distresses, or temptations? On these and the like occasions it is required that we make especial fervent application unto the Lord Christ for such supplies of grace as may be sufficient and efficacious to control the power of sin in them all. This, under the consideration of his office and authority unto this end, his grace and readiness from special inducements, we are directed unto, [Heb. iv. 14–16](#).

5. *Remember always the way and method of the operation of divine grace and spiritual aids.* It is true, in our first conversion to God, we are as it were surprised by a mighty act of sovereign grace, changing our hearts, renewing our minds, and quickening us with a principle of spiritual life. Ordinarily, many things are required of us in a way of duty in order thereunto; and many previous operations of grace in our minds, in illumination and the sense of sin, do materially and passively dispose us thereunto, as wood when it is dried is disposed to firing: but the work itself is performed by an immediate act of divine power, without any active co-operation on our part. But this is not the law or rule of the communication or operation of actual grace for the subduing of sin. It is given in a way of concurrence with us in the discharge of our duties; and when we are sedulous in them, we may be sure we shall not fail of divine assistance, according to the established rule of the administration of gospel grace. If, therefore we complain that we find not the aids mentioned, and if at the same time we are not diligent in attendance unto all the duties whereby sin may be mortified in us, we are exceedingly injurious to the grace of God.

Wherefore, notwithstanding this objection, the truth stands firm, that “sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under the law, but under grace;” because of the spiritual aids that are administered by grace for its mortification and destruction.

Secondly, The law *gives no liberty of any kind*; it gendereth unto bondage, and so cannot free us from any dominion, — not that of sin, for this must be by liberty. But this we have also by the gospel. There is a twofold liberty:— 1. Of state and condition; 2. Of internal operation; and we have both by the gospel.

The *first consists in our deliverance from the law and its curse*, with all things which claim a right against us by virtue thereof; that is, Satan, death, and hell. Out of this state, from whence we can never be delivered by the law, we are translated by grace into a state of glorious liberty; for by it the Son makes us free. And we receive the Spirit of Christ; now, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,” [2 Cor. iii. 17](#). This liberty Christ proclaims

in the gospel unto all that do believe, [Isa. lxi. 1](#). Hereon they who hear and receive the joyful sound are discharged from all debts, bonds, accounts, rights, and titles, and are brought into a state of perfect freedom. In this state sin can lay no claim to dominion over any one soul. They are gone over into the kingdom of Christ, and out from the power of sin, Satan, and darkness. Herein, indeed, lies the foundation of our assured freedom from the rule of sin. It cannot make an incursion on the kingdom of Christ, so as to carry away any of its subjects into a state of sin and darkness again. And an interest in this state ought to be pleaded against all the attempts of sin, [Rom. vi. 1, 2](#). There is nothing more to be detested than that any one who is Christ's freeman, and dead to the power of sin, should give place again unto any of its pretences to or endeavours for rule.

Again, there is an *internal liberty*, which is the freedom of the mind from the powerful inward chains of sin, with an ability to act all the powers and faculties of the soul in a gracious manner. Hereby is the power of sin in the soul destroyed. And this also is given us in the gospel. There is power administered in it to live unto God, and to walk in all his commandments; and this also gives evidence unto the truth of the apostle's assertion.

Thirdly, The law *doth not supply us with effectual motives and encouragements* to endeavour the ruin of the dominion of sin in a way of duty; which must be done, or in the end it will prevail. It works only by fear and dread, with threatenings and terrors of destruction; for although it says also, "Do this, and live," yet withal it discovers such an impossibility in our nature to comply with its commands, in the way and manner wherein it enjoins them, that the very promise of it becomes a matter of terror, as including the contrary sentence of death upon our failure in its commands. Now, these things enervate, weaken, and discourage, the soul in its conflict against sin: they give it no life, activity, cheerfulness, or courage, in what they undertake. Hence those who engage themselves into an opposition unto sin, or a relinquishment of its service, merely on the motives of the law, do quickly faint and give over. We see it so with many every day. One day they will forsake all sin, their beloved sin, with the company and occasions inducing them thereunto. The law hath frightened them with divine vengeance. And sometimes they proceed so far in this resolution that they seem escaped from the pollutions of the world; yet soon again they return to their former ways and follies, [2 Pet. ii. 20–22](#). Their "goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." Or if they do not return to wallow in the same mire of their former pollutions, they betake themselves to the shades of some superstitious observances, as it is in the Papacy: for they openly succeed into the room of the Jews, who, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and not submitting thereunto, went about variously to establish their own righteousness, as the apostle speaks, [Rom. x. 3, 4](#); for in that apostate church, where men are wrought on by the terrors of the law to relinquish sin and set themselves in opposition unto its power, finding themselves altogether unable to do it by the works of the law itself, which must be perfectly holy, they betake themselves to a number of superstitious

observances, which they trust unto in the room of the law, with its commands and duties. But the law makes nothing perfect, nor are the motives it gives for the ruin of the interest of sin in us able to bear us out and carry us through that undertaking.

But the motives and encouragements given by grace to endeavour the utter ruin of sin in a way of duty are such as give life, cheerfulness, courage, and perseverance; they continually animate, relieve, and revive the soul, in all its work and duty, keeping it from fainting and despondency: for they are all taken from the love of God and of Christ, from the whole work and end of his mediation, from the ready assistances of the Holy Ghost, from all the promises of the gospel, from their own with other believers' experiences; all giving them the highest assurance of final success and victory. When the soul is under the influence of these motives, whatever difficulty and opposition it meets withal from soliciting temptations or surprisals "it will renew its strength, it will run and not be weary, it will walk and not faint," according to the promise, [Isa. xl. 31](#).

Fourthly, *Christ is not in the law*; he is not proposed in it, not communicated by it, — we are not made partakers of him thereby. This is the work of grace, of the gospel. In it is Christ revealed; by it he is proposed and exhibited unto us; thereby are we made partakers of him and all the benefits of his mediation. And he it is alone who came to, and can, destroy this work of the devil. The dominion of sin is the complement of the works of the devil, where all his designs centre. This "the Son of God was manifested to destroy." He alone ruins the kingdom of Satan, whose power is acted in the rule of sin. Wherefore, hereunto our assurance of this comfortable truth is principally resolved. And what Christ hath done, and doth, for this end, is a great part of the subject of gospel revelation.

The like may be spoken of the communication of the Holy Spirit, which is the only principal efficient cause of the ruin of the dominion of sin; for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," and nowhere else. But we receive this Spirit not "by the works of the law," but "by the hearing of faith," [Gal. iii. 2](#).

Chapter VI.

The practical observations drawn from, and application made of, the whole text.



Having opened the words, and made some improvement of them, I shall now take one or two observations from the design of them, and issue the whole in a word of application.

Obs. 1. It is an unspeakable mercy and privilege to be delivered from the dominion of sin. As such it is here proposed by the apostle; as such it is esteemed by them that believe. Nothing is more sweet, precious, and valuable, unto a soul conflicting with sin and temptation, than to hear that sin shall not have the dominion over it. Ah! what would some give that it might be spoken unto them with power, so as that they might steadfastly believe it and have the comfort of it? “Fools make a mock of sin,” and some glory in the service of it, which is their shame; but those who understand any thing aright, either of what is present or what is to come, do know that this freedom from its dominion is an invaluable mercy; and we may consider the grounds which evidence it so to be.

First, It appears so to be from *the causes of it*. It is that which no man can by his own power and the utmost of his endeavours attain unto. Men by them may grow rich, or wise, or learned; but no man by them can shake off the yoke of sin. If a man had all the wealth of the world, he could not by it purchase this liberty; it would be despised. And when sinners go hence to the place where the rich man was tormented, and have nothing more to do with this world, they would give it all, if they had it, for an interest in this liberty.

It is that which the law and all the duties of it cannot procure. The law and its duties, as we have declared, can never destroy the dominion of sin. All men will find the truth hereof that ever come to fall under the power of real conviction. When sin presseth on them, and they are afraid of its consequents, they will find that the law is weak, and the flesh is weak, and their duties are weak, and their resolutions and vows are weak; — all insufficient to relieve them. And if they think themselves freed one day, they shall find the next that they are under bondage. Sin, for all this, will rule over them with force and rigour. And in this condition do some spend all their days in this world. They kindle sparks of their own, and walk in the light of them, until they lie down in darkness and sorrow. They sin and promise amendment, and endeavour recompenses by some duties, yet can never extricate themselves from the yoke of sin. We may therefore learn the excellency of this privilege, first, from its causes, whereof I shall mention some only:—

1. The *meritorious procuring cause* of this liberty is the death and blood of Jesus Christ. So it is declared, [1 Pet. i. 18, 19](#); [1 Cor. vi. 20](#), ; [vii. 23](#). Nothing else could purchase this freedom. Under the power and dominion of sin we were, and could not be delivered without a ransom. “Christ died, and rose, and revived,” that he might be our Lord, [Rom. xiv. 9](#), and so deliver us from the power of all other lords whatever. It is true, there was no ransom due to sin or Satan who was the author of it. They were to be dethroned or destroyed by an act



of power. Both the devil and sin, which is his work, are to be “destroyed,” not appeased, [Heb. ii. 14](#), [1 John iii. 8](#). But “the strength of sin is the law,” [1 Cor. xv. 56](#); that is, through the righteous sentence of God, we were held by the law obnoxious unto the condemning power of sin. From that law we could not be delivered but by this price and ransom. Two things hence follow:—

(1.) Those who live in sin, who willingly abide in the service of it, and endure its dominion, do cast the utmost contempt on the wisdom, love, and grace of Christ. They despise that which cost him so dear; they judge that he made a very foolish purchase of this liberty for us with his dearest blood. Whatever it be, they prefer the present satisfaction of their lusts before it. This is the poison of unbelief. There is in it a high contempt of the wisdom and love of Christ. The language of men’s hearts that live in sin is, that the liberty which he purchased with his blood is not to be valued or esteemed. They flatter him with their lips in the outward performance of some duties; but in their hearts they despise him and the whole work of his mediation. But the time is approaching wherein they will learn the difference between the slavery of sin and the liberty wherewith Christ makes believers free. And this is that which is now tendered unto sinners in the dispensation of the gospel. Life and death are here set before you; choose life, that ye may live forever.

(2.) Let those that are believers, in all their conflicts with sin, live in the exercise of faith on this purchase of liberty made by the blood of Christ; for two things will hence ensue:— [1.] That they will have a weighty argument always in readiness to oppose unto the deceit and violence of sin. The soul will hereon say to itself, “Shall I forego and part with that which Christ purchased for me at so dear a rate, by giving place to the solicitations of lust or sin? shall I despise his purchase? God forbid!” See [Rom. vi. 2](#). By such arguings is the mind frequently preserved from closing with the enticements and seductions of sin. [2.] It is an effectual argument for faith to use in its pleading for deliverance from the power of sin. We ask for nothing but what Christ hath purchased for us; and if this plea be pursued, it will be prevalent.

2. The *internal efficient cause* of this liberty, or that whereby the power and rule of sin is destroyed in us, is the Holy Spirit himself; which farther evinceth the greatness of this mercy. Every act for the mortification of sin is no less immediately from him than those positive graces are whereby we are sanctified. It is “through the Spirit” that we “mortify the deeds of the body,” [Rom. viii. 13](#). Where he is, there, and there alone, is liberty. All attempts for the mortification of sin without his especial aids and operations are frustrate. And this manifests the extent of the dominion of sin in the world. He alone by whom it can be destroyed, and all these efficacious operations of his whereby it is so, are generally despised; and they must live and die slaves unto sin by whom they are so. Wherefore, a great part of our wisdom for the attaining and preserving this liberty consists in the acting of faith on that promise of our Saviour, that our heavenly Father will “give the Holy Spirit to them that



ask him” of him. When sin in any instance, by any temptation, urgeth for power and rule in us, we are ready to turn into ourselves and our own resolutions, which in their place are not to be neglected; but immediate cries unto God for such supplies of his Spirit as without which sin will not be subdued, we shall find our best relief. Bear it in mind, try it on the next occasion, and God will bless it with success.

3. *The instrumental cause of this freedom* is the duty of believers themselves in and for the destruction of sin. And this also manifests the importance of this privilege. This is one of the principal ends of all our religious duties, — of prayer, of fasting, of meditation, of watchfulness unto all other duties of obedience; they are all designed to prevent and ruin the interest of sin in us. We are called into a theatre, to fight and contend; into a field, to be tried in a warfare. Our enemy is this sin, which strives and contends for the rule over us. This we are to resist even unto blood; that is, unto our utmost in doing and suffering. And certainly that is in itself and unto us of the highest importance, which, on divine appointment and command, is the great end of the constant endeavours of our whole lives.

Secondly, It appears so to be from the *consideration of the bondage which we are delivered from thereby*. Bondage is that which human nature is most averse from, until it be debased and debauched by sensual lusts. Men of ingenuous spirits have in all ages chosen rather to die than to be made slaves. But there is no such bondage as that which is under the dominion of sin. To be under the power of base lusts, as covetousness, uncleanness, drunkenness, ambition, pride, and the like, to make provision to fulfil their desires in the wills of the mind and the flesh, is the worst of slavery.

But we may say what we please on this subject; none think themselves so free, none make such an appearance of generous freedom unto others, as those who are avowed servants of sin. If those are not freemen who do what they please, and are for the most part approved in what they do, who puff at all their enemies, and scorn such as pusillanimous slaves who go not forth unto the same compass of excess with them, who shall be esteemed free? They plead, with the Pharisees, that they are the only freemen, and were never in bondage to any! The servile restraints of fear from divine judgment and future accounts they wholly despise! See the description, [Ps. lxxiii. 4–11](#). Who so free, so joyous, as such persons! As for others, they are “plagued all the day long, and are chastened every morning,” [verse 14](#); yea, they go heavily and mournfully under the oppression of this enemy, crying out continually for deliverance.

But the truth insisted on is not at all impeached by this observation. It is a great part of the slavery of such persons that they know not themselves to be slaves, and boast that they are free. They are born in a state of enmity against God and bondage under sin; and they like well of it, as all abject slaves do under the worst of tyrants: they know no better. But true liberty consists in inward peace, tranquillity of mind, designs for and inclinations unto the best things, the most noble objects of our natural, rational souls. All these they are utter



strangers unto who spend their lives in the service of vile and base lusts. Envy not their gallantry, their glittering appearances, their heaps of wealth and treasures; they are, on the whole, vile and contemptible slaves. The apostle determines their case, [Rom. vi. 17](#). It is a matter of eternal thankfulness unto God that we are delivered from being “the servants of sin.”

Yea, it is an evidence of grace, of a good frame of spirit, when a soul is made really sensible of the excellency of this freedom, when it finds the power and interest of sin to be so weakened as that it can rejoice in it, and be thankful to God for it, [Rom. vii. 25](#).

Thirdly, It is so with respect unto *the end of this bondage*, or what it brings men unto. If, after all the base drudgery which sinful men are put unto in the service of their lusts; if, after all the conflicts which their consciences put them on, with fears and terrors in the world, — they could expect any thing of a future reward hereafter, something might be spoken to alleviate their present misery: but “the wages of sin is death;” eternal death, under the wrath of the great God, is all they are to look for. The end of the dominion of sin is to give them up unto the curse of the law and power of the devil for evermore.

Fourthly, It keeps men off from *the participation of all real good, here and hereafter*. What men under the power of sin do enjoy will quickly appear to be “a thing of nought.” In the meantime, they have not the least taste of the love of God; which alone takes out the poison of their enjoyments. They have not the least view of the glory of Christ; without which they live in perpetual darkness, like those who never behold the light nor sun. They have no experience of the sweetness and excellency of the gracious influences of life, and strength, and comfort, from the Holy Ghost, nor of that satisfaction and reward which is in holy obedience; nor shall ever come to the enjoyment of God.

All these things, and sundry others of the like sort, might be insisted on and enlarged, to manifest the greatness of the mercy and privilege which is in a freedom from the dominion of sin, as it is here proposed by the apostle; but the principal design I intended is accomplished, and I do but touch on these things.

I shall add one observation more, and with it put a close to this discourse:—

Obs. 2. It is the great interest of a soul conflicting with the power of sin to secure itself against its dominion, that it is not under its dominion, not to have the cause hang dubious in the mind. To clear the truth hereof we may observe the things that follow:—

First, The conflict with sin, making continual repentance and mortification absolutely necessary, will continue in us whilst we are in this world. Pretences of perfection here are contrary to the Scriptures, contrary to the universal experience of all believers, and contrary to the sense and conscience of them by whom they are pleaded, as they make it evident every day. We pray against it, strive against it, groan for deliverance from it; and that, by the grace of Christ healing our nature, not without success. Howbeit this success extends not unto its absolute abolition whilst we are in this world. It will abide in us until the union of the soul



and body, wherein it hath incorporated itself, be dissolved. This is our lot and portion; this is the consequent of our apostasy from God, and of the depravation of our nature thereby.

You will say, then, “Whereto serves the gospel and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in this case, if it be not able to give us deliverance herein?” I answer, It doth give us a fourfold relief, which amounts virtually to a constant deliverance, though sin will abide in us whilst we are in this world:—

1. It is so ordered that *the continuance of sin in us shall be the ground, reason, and occasion, of the exercise of all grace, and of putting a lustre on our obedience*. Some excellent graces, as repentance and mortification, could have no exercise if it were otherwise; and whilst we are in this world, there is a beauty in them that is an overbalance for the evil of the remainders of sin. And the difficulty which is hereby put on our obedience, calling continually for the exercise and improvement of all grace, renders it the more valuable. Herein lies the spring of humility and self-resignation to the will of God. This makes us love and long for the enjoyment of Christ, putting an excellency on his mediation; whence the apostle, on the consideration of it, falls into that ejaculation, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” [Rom. vii. 25](#). This sweetens unto us our future rest and reward. Wherefore, the continuance of us in this state and condition in this world, — a state of spiritual warfare, — is best for us, and highly suited unto divine wisdom, considering the office and care of our Lord Jesus Christ for our relief. Let us not complain, or repine, or faint, but go on with Christian fortitude unto the end, and we shall have success; for, —

2. There are, by the grace of Christ, such supplies and aids of spiritual strength granted unto believers, that *sin shall never proceed farther in them than is useful and needful for the exercise of their graces*. It shall never have its will upon them nor dominion over them, as we have before declared.

3. There is *mercy administered in and by the gospel for the pardon of all that is evil in itself or in any of its effects*: “There is no condemnation unto them that are in Christ Jesus.” Pardoning mercy, according to the tenor of the covenant, doth always disarm this sin in believers of its condemning power; so that, notwithstanding the utmost endeavours of it, “being justified by faith, they have peace with God.”

4. *There is a season when, by the grace of Christ, it shall be utterly abolished*, — namely, at death, when the course of our obedience is finished.

Wherefore, to affirm that this sin, and consequently a conflict with it, doth abide in believers whilst they are in this world, is no disparagement unto the grace of Christ, which gives such a blessed deliverance from it.

Secondly, There is a double conflict with and against sin. The one is in those that are unregenerate, consisting in the rebellion of light and conscience against the rule of sin in many particular instances; for although sin be enthroned in the will and affections, yet the knowledge of good and evil in the mind, excited by the hopes and fears of things eternal,

will make head against it, as unto the performance of sundry duties and abstinence from sin. This conflict may be where sin is in the throne, and may deceive themselves, supposing it to be from the rule of grace, when it is only from the rebellion of light and the charge of a conscience yet unseared. But there is a conflict with sin where grace hath the rule and is enthroned; for although grace have the sovereignty in the mind and heart, yet the remainders of sin, especially in the corrupt affections, will be continually rebelling against it. Now this, we say, is the interest of all, namely, to inquire of what sort and kind that conflict with sin is which is in them. If it be of the first sort, they may yet be under the dominion of sin; if of the latter, they are freed from it. Wherefore, whilst the mind is dubious in this case and undetermined, many evil consequences it will be perplexed withal. I shall name some of them:—

1. Such a soul can have no solid peace, because it hath not satisfaction what state it doth belong unto.
2. It cannot receive refreshment by gospel consolations in any condition, for its just fears of the dominion of sin will defeat them all.
3. It will be dead and formal in all its duties, without spiritual courage and delight, which will at length make it weary of them.
4. All grace, especially faith, will be weakened and impaired under this frame continually.
5. Fear of death will hold the soul in bondage. Wherefore, it is highly necessary to have this case well stated and determined in our minds; whereto if the foregoing discourses may contribute any thing, it is what was designed in them.

There remains only to give some few directions how the prevalency of sin, unto such a degree as to render the case about its rule dubious in the mind, may be obviated and prevented. Some few of the many that might be given I shall propose:—

1. The great rule for preventing the increase and power of vicious habits is, *watch against beginnings*. Sin doth not attempt dominion but in particular instances, by one especial lust or another. Wherefore, if any sin or corrupt lust begin, as it were, to set up for a peculiar predominancy or interest in the mind and affections, if it be not entertained with severe mortification, it will ruin the peace, if not endanger the safety, of the soul. And when this is so, it may easily be discovered by any one who keepeth a diligent watch over his heart and ways; for no sin doth so entirely advance itself in the mind and affections, but it is promoted therein either by men's natural inclinations, or by their circumstances on occasions of life, or by some temptation which they have exposed themselves unto, or by some such neglect wherein the frequency of acts has strengthened vicious inclinations. But these things may be easily discerned by those who are in any measure awake unto their soul's concernments.

The strict charge given us by our Lord Jesus Christ to “watch,” and that of the wise man, “above all keepings to keep our heart,” have especial regard unto these beginnings of sin's obtaining power in us. So soon as a discovery is made of its coincidence or conjunction with any of these ways of the promotion of its power, if it be not opposed with severe and diligent mortification, it will proceed in the method declared, [James i. 14, 15](#).

Those who would be wise must familiarize wisdom unto their minds by a continual free converse with it. They must say unto wisdom, "Thou art my sister," and call understanding their kinswoman, [Prov. vii. 4](#). So will wisdom have power in and over their minds And if we suffer sin, by any of the advantages mentioned, to familiarize itself unto our minds, — if we say not unto it, "Get thee hence," upon the first appearance of its activity for power in us, — it will put hard for the throne.

2. *Carefully inquire and try whether such things which you may do or approve of in yourselves do not promote the power of sin, and help on its rule in you.* This method David prescribes, [Ps. xix. 12, 13](#). "Secret sins," such as are not known to be sins, it may be, to ourselves, make way for those that are "presumptuous." Thus pride may seem to be nothing but a frame of mind belonging unto our wealth and dignity, or our parts and abilities; sensuality may seem to be but a lawful participation of the good things of this life; passion and peevishness, but a due sense of the want of that respect which we suppose due unto us; covetousness, a necessary care of ourselves and our families. If the seeds of sin are covered with such pretences, they will in time spring up and bear bitter fruit in the minds and lives of men. And the beginnings of all apostasy, both in religion and morality, lie in such pretences. Men plead they can do so and so lawfully, until they can do things openly unlawful.

3. *Keep your hearts always tender under the word.* This is the true and only state of inconsistency with and repugnancy to the rule of sin. The loss hereof, or a decay herein, is that which hath opened the flood-gates of sin amongst us. Where this frame is a conscientious fear of sinning will always prevail in the soul; where it is lost, men will be bold in all sorts of follies And that this frame may be preserved, it is required, — (1.) That we cast out all vicious habits of mind that are contrary unto it, [James i. 21](#); (2.) That we preserve an experience of its power and efficacy on our souls, [1 Pet. ii. 1–3](#); (3.) That we lay aside all prejudices against those that dispense it, [Gal. iv. 16](#); (4.) That we keep the heart always humble, in which frame alone it is teachable, [Ps. xxv. 9](#), — every thing in the preaching of the word comes cross and displeasing to the minds of proud men; (5.) That we pray for a blessing on the ministry, which is the best preparation for receiving benefit by it.

4. *Abhor that peace of mind which is consistent with any known sin.* Men may have frequent surprisals into known sins, but if, whilst it is so with them, they refuse all inward peace but what comes in by most fervent and sincere desires of deliverance from them and repentance for them, they may be safe from the dominion of sin; but if men can on any hopes, or presumptions, or resolutions, preserve a kind of peace in their minds whilst they live in any known sin, they are nigh the borders of that security which is the territory wherein sin doth reign.

5. *Make continual applications unto the Lord Christ, in all the acts of his mediation, for the ruin of sin,* especially when it attempts a dominion in you, [Heb. iv. 16](#). This is the life

and soul of all directions in this case, which needs not here to be enlarged on; it is frequently spoken unto.

Lastly, Remember that a *due sense of deliverance from the dominion of sin is the most effectual motive unto universal obedience and holiness*; as such it is proposed and managed by the apostle, [Rom. vi.](#)

Indexes

Index of Scripture References

Genesis

6:5

Exodus

4:21

1 Kings

15:14

2 Kings

22:18-19

2 Chronicles

16:10 16:12

Job

24:13 27:10 40:9-14

Psalms

10:2-7 19:7-9 19:12 19:12-13 19:13 25:9 36:3-4 51:8 51:10 65:5 72:12-14 73:4-11
73:14 78:34-37 99:8 119:130 139:23-24

Proverbs

1:24-31 1:24-31 7:4 10:9

Ecclesiastes

11:9

Isaiah

3:9 6:9-10 6:9-10 14:13-14 29:13-14 40:31 43:22 50:11 57:10 57:10 57:16-19
57:18 61:1 63:17

Jeremiah

2:13 2:19 4:14

Ezekiel

9:4 28:2 36:26

Hosea

2:7 6:4 14:1-4

Jonah

2:8

Zechariah

12:10

Malachi

1:13

Matthew

5:28 8:24-26 19:20-23

John

3:19 6:40

Acts

11:23

Romans

1:16 1:16 1:24 1:26 1:26 1:28 1:28 2:5 2:5-6 2:15 5:1-2 6 6:1-2 6:2 6:4-5 6:6
6:6 6:6 6:6-13 6:8-11 6:12 6:13 6:14 6:14 6:14 6:16 6:16 6:16 6:16 6:17
7 7:9-10 7:23 7:24 7:24 7:25 7:25 8:1 8:3 8:7 8:13 9:22 9:31-32 10:3-4 13:14
13:14 13:14 14:9

1 Corinthians

6:20 7:23 15:56 15:56

2 Corinthians

3:17 4:4 7:10

Galatians

3:2 3:21 4:16 5:17 5:24 6:14

Ephesians

4:18-19 4:18-19 4:24

Colossians

3:3 3:5 3:5 3:5 3:5 3:15

1 Thessalonians

5:23

2 Thessalonians

2:11-12

2 Timothy

3:5 3:5

Titus

1:15

Hebrews

1:3 2:14 2:18 3:12-13 4:14-16 4:16 5:13

James

1:14-15 1:14-15 1:14-15 1:21

1 Peter

1:18-19 2:1-3 2:11 2:11 3:20

2 Peter

2:14 2:20-22 3:9

1 John

1:7 1:8 2:15 3:8 3:9 3:10 3:14

Jude

1:8

Index of Names

Chauncy, Isaac: [2 7 7 7 7](#)

Chauncy, Mr: [7](#)

Hartopp, Sir John: [2](#)

Owen, John: [2 2 2 7](#)

Pye Smith, Dr John: [7](#)

Watts, Isaac: [7](#)

Index of Pages of the Print Edition

499 500 501 502 503 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522
523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545
546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560