

from *A True Sight of Sin* (1659)

Wherein this true sight and apprehension of sin properly discovers itself:

I answer, a true sight of sin hath two conditions attending upon it, or it appears in two things: we must see sin (1) clearly; (2) convictingly—what it is in itself and what it is to us, not in the appearance and paint of it, but in the power of it; not to fathom it in the notion and conceit only, but to see it with application.

We must see it clearly in its own nature, its native color and proper hue. It's not every slight conceit, not every general and cursory, confused thought or careless consideration that will serve the turn or do the work here. We are all sinners: it is my infirmity, I cannot help it; my weakness, I cannot be rid of it. No man lives without faults and follies, the best have their failings, "In many things we offend all." But alas! all this wind shakes no corn, it costs more to see sin aright than a few words of course. It's one thing to say sin is thus and thus, another thing to see it to be such; we must look wisely and steadily upon our distempers, look sin in the face and discern it to the full. The want whereof is the cause of our mistaking our estates and not redressing of our hearts and ways: (Gal. 6. 4) "Let a man prove his own work." Before the goldsmith can sever and see the dross asunder from the gold, he must search the very bowels of the metal, and try it by touch, by taste, by hammer and by fire; and then he will be able to speak by proof what it is. So here: we perceive sin in the crowd and by hearsay, when we attend some common and customary expressions taken up by persons in their common converse, and so report what others speak, and yet never knew the truth, what either others or we say; but we do not single out our corruptions and survey the loathsomeness of them, as they come naked in their own natures.

This we ought to do. There is great odds betwixt the knowledge of a traveler, that in his own person hath taken a view of many coasts, passed through many countries and hath there taken up his abode some time, and by experience hath been an eyewitness of the extreme cold and scorching heats, hath surveyed the glory and beauty of the one, the barrenness and meanness of the other—he hath been in the wars, and seen the ruin and desolation wrought there—and another that sits by his fireside and happily reads the story of these in a book, or views the proportion of these in a map. The odds is great, and the difference of their knowledge more than a little: the one saw the country really, the other only in the story; the one hath seen the very place, the other only in the paint of the map drawn. The like difference is

there in the right discerning of sin. The one hath surveyed the compass of his whole course, searched the frame of his own heart, and examined the windings and turnings of his own ways. He hath seen what sin is and what it hath done, how it hath made havoc of his peace and comfort, ruined and laid waste the very principles of reason and nature and morality, and made him a terror to himself. When he hath looked over the loathsome abominations that lie in his bosom, that he is afraid to approach the presence of the Lord to bewail his sins and to crave pardon, lest he could be confounded for them while he is but confessing of them—afraid and ashamed lest any man living should know but the least part of that which he knows by himself, and could count it happy that himself was not, that the remembrance of those hideous evils of his might be no more. Another happily hears the like preached or repeated, reads them writ or recorded in some authors, and is able to remember and relate them. The odds is marvelous great! The one sees the history of sin, the other the nature of it; the one knows the relation of sin as it is mapped out and recorded, the other the poison, as by experience he hath found and proved it. It's one thing to see a disease in the book or in a man's body, another thing to find and feel it in a man's self. There is the report of it, here the malignity and venom of it.

But how shall we see clearly the nature of sin in his naked hue?

This will be discovered, and may be conceived in the particulars following. Look we at it: first, as it respects God; secondly, as it concerns ourselves.

As it hath reference to God, the vileness of the nature of sin may thus appear:

It would dispossess God of that absolute supremacy which is indeed His prerogative royal, and doth in a peculiar manner appertain to Him, as the diamond of His crown and diadem of His deity; so the Apostle, "He is God over all blessed for ever" (Rom. 9. 5). All from Him and all for Him, He is the absolute first being, the absolute last end, and herein is the crown of His glory. All those attributes of wisdom, goodness, holiness, power, justice, mercy, the shine and concurrency of all these meeting together, is to set out the inconceivable excellency of His glorious name, which exceeds all praise: "Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory," the right of all and so the rule of all and the glory of all belongs to Him.

Now herein lies the inconceivable heinousness of the hellish nature of sin: it would jostle the Almighty out of the throne of His glorious sovereignty, and indeed be above Him. For the will of man being the chiefest of all His workmanship, all for his body, the body of the soul, the mind to attend upon the will, the will to attend upon God and to make choice of Him and His will, that is next to Him and He

only above that: and that should have been His throne and temple or chair of state in which He would have set his sovereignty forever. He did in a special manner intend to meet with man, and to communicate Himself to man in His righteous law, as the rule of His holy and righteous will, by which the will of Adam should have been ruled and guided to Him and made happy in Him; and all creatures should have served God in man, and been happy by or through him, serving of God being happy in him. But when the will went from under the government of his rule, by sin, it would be above God and be happy without Him, for the rule of the law, in each command of it, holds forth a threefold expression of sovereignty from the Lord, and therein the sovereignty of all the rest of His attributes.

1. The powerful supremacy of His just will, as that He hath right to dispose of all and authority to command all at His pleasure: "What if God will?" (Rom. 9. 22); "My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46. 10). And as it's true of what shall be done upon us, so His will hath sovereignty of command in what should be done by us; we are to say, "The will of the Lord be done." David's warrant was to do all God's will (Acts 13. 22), and our saviour himself professeth (John 6. 38) that "He came not to do his own will but the will of Him that sent him." And therefore His wrath and jealousy and judgment will break out in case that be disobeyed.

2. There is also a fullness of wisdom in the law of God revealed to guide and direct us in the way we should walk: (Psal. 19. 7) "The law of God makes wise the simple"; (II Tim. 3. 15) "It's able to make us wise unto salvation."

3. There's a sufficiency of God to content and satisfy us. "Blessed are they who walk in His ways and blessed are they that keep His testimonies" (Psal. 119. 1, 2). "Great prosperity have they that love the law, and nothing shall offend them" (verse 16). And in truth there can be no greater reward for doing well than to be enabled to do well; he that hath attained his last end he cannot go further, he cannot be better.

Now by sin we jostle the law out of its place and the Lord out of His glorious sovereignty, pluck the crown from His head and the scepter out of His hand; and we say and profess by our practice, there is not authority and power there to govern, nor wisdom to guide, nor good to content me, but I will be swayed by mine own will and led by mine own deluded reason and satisfied with my own lusts. This is the guise of every graceless heart in the commission of sin; so Pharaoh: "Who is the Lord? I know not the Lord nor will I let Israel go" (Exod. 5. 2). In the time of their prosperity, see how the Jews turn their backs and shake off the authority of the Lord: "We are lords," say they, "we will come no more at Thee" (Jer. 2. 31), and "Our

tongues are our own, who shall be lord over us" (Psal. 12. 4)? So for the wisdom of the world, see how they set light by it as not worth the looking after it: (Jer. 18. 12) "We will walk after our own devices and we will every one do the imagination of his own evil heart." Yea, they set up their own traditions, their own idols and delusions, and lord it over the law: "Making the command of God of none effect" (Matt. 15. 8, 9). So for the goodness of the word: (Job 22. 17; Matt. 3. 14) "It is in vain to serve God and what profit is there that we have kept his ordinances, yea, His commandments are ever grievous." It's a grievous thing to the loose person, he cannot have his pleasures but he must have his guilt and gall with them; it's grievous to the worldling that he cannot lay hold on the world by unjust means but conscience lays hold upon him as breaking the law. Thou that knowest and keepst thy pride and stubbornness and thy distempers, know assuredly thou dost jostle God out of the throne of His glorious sovereignty, and thou dost profess, not God's will but thine own (which is above His) shall rule thee. Thy carnal reason and the folly of thy mind is above the wisdom of the Lord, and that shall guide thee; to please thine own stubborn crooked perverse spirit is a greater good than to please God and enjoy happiness, for this more contents thee. That when thou considerest but thy course, dost thou not wonder that the great and terrible God doth not pash such a poor insolent worm to powder and send thee packing to the pit every moment?

It smites at the essence of the Almighty and the desire of the sinner, in not only that God should not be supreme but that indeed He should not be at all; and therefore it would destroy the being of Jehovah (Psal. 81. 15). Sinners are called the haters of the Lord: (John 15. 24) "They hated both me and my Father." Now he that hates endeavors, if it be possible, the annihilation of the thing hated, and it's most certain, were it in their power, they would pluck God out of Heaven, the light of His truth out of their consciences and the law out of the societies and assemblies where they live, that they might have elbow room to live as they list. Nay, whatever they hate most, and intend and plot more evil against in all the world, they hate God most of all, and intend more evil against Him than against all their enemies besides, because they hate all for His sake. Therefore wicked men are said to destroy the law (Psal. 126, 119). The adulterer loathes that law that condemns uncleanness; the earthworm would destroy that law that forbids covetousness, they are said to hate the light (John 3. 21), to hate the saints and servants of the Lord: (John 15. 18) "The world hates you." He that hates the lantern for the light's sake, he hates the light much more; he that hates the faithful because of the image of God and the grace that appears there, he hates the God of all grace and holiness, most of all. So God to Sennacherib: (Isa. 37.

28) "I know thy going out and thy coming in, and thy rage against me." Oh! it would be their content if there was no God in the world to govern them, no law to curb them, no justice to punish, no truth to trouble them. Learn therefore to see how far your rebellions reach. It is not arguments you gainsay, not the counsel of a minister you reject, the command of a magistrate ye oppose, evidence of rule or reason ye resist, but be it known to you, you fly in the very face of the Almighty. And it is not the gospel of grace ye would have destroyed, but the spirit of grace, the author of grace, the Lord Jesus, the God of all grace that ye hate.

It crosseth the whole course of providence, perverts the work of the creation and defaceth the beautiful frame and that sweet correspondence and orderly usefulness the Lord first implanted in the order of things. The heavens deny their influence, the earth her strength, the corn her nourishment: thank sin for that. Weeds come instead of herbs, cockle and darnel instead of wheat: thank sin for that, (Rom. 8. 22) "The whole creature" (or creation) "groans under vanity"—either cannot do what it would or else misseth of that good and end it intended, breeds nothing but vanity, brings forth nothing but vexation. It crooks all things so as that none can straighten them, makes so many wants that none can supply them (Eccles. 1. 15). This makes crooked servants in a family, no man can rule them, crooked inhabitants in towns, crooked members in congregations; there's no ordering nor joining of them in that comely accord and mutual subjection: "Know," they said, "the adversary sin hath done all this." Man was the mean betwixt God and the creature, to convey all good with all the constancy of it; and therefore when man breaks, heaven and earth breaks all asunder: the conduit being cracked and displaced, there can be no conveyance from the fountain.

In regard of ourselves, see we and consider nakedly the nature of sin, in four particulars:

It's that which makes a separation between God and the soul, breaks that union and communion with God for which we were made, and in the enjoyment of which we should be blessed and happy: (Isa. 59. 1, 2) "God's ear is not heavy that it cannot hear nor His hand that it cannot help, but your iniquities have separated betwixt God and you and your sins have hid His face that He will not hear." For He professeth, (Psal. 5. 4) that He is a God that wills not wickedness, neither shall iniquity dwell with him. "Into the new Jerusalem shall no unclean thing enter, but without shall be dogs" (Rev. 21. 27). The dogs to their kennel, and hogs to their sty and mire; but if an impenitent wretch should come into heaven, the Lord would go out of heaven: Iniquity shall not dwell with sin. That then that deprives me of my greatest good for which I came into the world, and for which

I live and labor in the world, and without which I had better never to have been born—nay, that which deprives me of an universal good, a good that hath all good in it—that must needs be an evil, but have all evil in it. But so doth sin deprive me of God as the object of my will, and that wills all good, and therefore it must bring in truth all evil with it. Shame takes away my honor, poverty my wealth, persecution my peace, prison my liberty, death my life, yet a man may still be a happy man, lose his life, and live eternally. But sin takes away my God, and with Him all good goes; prosperity without God will be my poison, honor without Him my bane; nay, the word without God hardens me, my endeavor without Him profits nothing at all for my good. A natural man hath no God in anything, and therefore hath no good.

It brings an incapability in regard of myself to receive good, and an impossibility in regard of God Himself to work my spiritual good, while my sin continues, and I continue impenitent in it. An incapability of a spiritual blessing: "Why transgress ye the commandment of the Lord that ye cannot prosper do what ye can" (II Chron. 24. 20). And he that being often reproved hardens his heart, shall be consumed suddenly and there is no remedy, he that spills the physic that should cure him, the meat that should nourish him, there is no remedy but he must needs die: so that the commission of sin makes not only a separation from God, but obstinate resistance and continuance in it maintains an infinite and everlasting distance between God and the soul. So that so long as the sinful resistance of thy soul continues, God cannot vouchsafe the comforting and guiding presence of His grace, because it's cross to the Covenant of Grace He hath made, which He will not deny, and His oath which He will not alter. So that should the Lord save thee and thy corruption, carry thee and thy proud unbelieving heart to heaven He must nullify the Gospel (Heb. 5. 9): "He's the author of salvation to them that obey Him," and forswear Himself (Heb. 3. 18): "He hath sworn unbelievers shall not enter into His rest"; He must cease to be just and holy, and so to be God. As Saul said to Jonathan concerning David (I Sam. 20. 30, 31), "So long as the son of Jesse lives, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom." So do thou plead against thyself, and with thy own soul: so long as these rebellious distempers continue, grace and peace and the kingdom of Christ can never be established in thy heart. For this obstinate resistance differs nothing from the plagues of the state of the damned, when they come to the highest measure, but that it is not yet total and final, there being some kind of abatement of the measure of it and stoppage of the power of it. Imagine thou sawest the Lord Jesus coming in the clouds, and heardest the last trump blow, "Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment"; imagine thou sawest the Judge of all the world

sitting upon the throne, thousands of angels before Him and ten thousands ministering unto Him, the sheep standing on His right hand and the goats at the left; suppose thou heardest that dreadful sentence, and final doom pass from the Lord of life (whose word made heaven and earth, and will shake both) "Depart from me, ye cursed": how would thy heart shake and sink, and die within thee in the thought thereof, wert thou really persuaded it was thy portion? Know, that by thy daily continuance in sin, thou dost to the utmost of thy power execute that sentence upon thy soul. It's thy life, thy labor, the desire of thy heart, and thy daily practice to depart away from the God of all grace and peace, and turn the tombstone of everlasting destruction upon thine own soul.

It's the cause which brings all other evils of punishment into the world and without this they are not evil, but so far as sin is in them. The sting of a trouble, the poison and malignity of a punishment and affliction, the evil of the evil of any judgment, it is the sin that brings it, or attends it: (Jer. 2. 19) "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee, know therefore that it is an evil, and bitter thing that thou has forsaken the Lord"; (Jer. 4. 18) "Thy ways and doings have procured these things unto thee, therefore it is bitter, and reacheth unto the heart." Take miseries and crosses without sin, they are like to be without a sting, the serpent without poison; ye may take them, and make medicines of them. So Paul (I Cor. 15. 55), he plays with death itself, sports with the grave: "Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?" The sting of death is sin. All the harmful annoyance in sorrows and punishments, further than either they come from sin or else tend to it, they are rather improvements of what we have than parting with anything we do enjoy; we rather lay out our conveniences than seem to lose them, yea, they increase our crown and do not diminish our comfort. "Blessed are ye when men revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil of you for my sake, for great is your reward in Heaven" (Matt. 5. 11). There is a blessing in persecutions and reproaches when they be not mingled with the deserts of our sins; yea, our momentary short affliction for a good cause and a good conscience works an excessive exceeding weight of glory. If then sin brings all evils, and makes all evils indeed to us, then is it worse than all those evils.

It brings a curse upon all our comforts, blasts all our blessings, the best of all our endeavors, the use of all the choicest of all God's ordinances: it's so evil and vile, that it makes the use of all good things, and all the most glorious, both ordinances and improvements, evil to us (Hag. 2. 13, 14). When the question was made to the priest, "If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of the holy things, shall it be unclean?" And he answered, "Yea. So is this people, and so is

this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands, and that which they offer is unclean." If any good thing a wicked man had, or any action he did, might be good, or bring good to him, in reason it was the services and sacrifices wherein he did approach unto God and perform service to Him, and yet "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 28. 9 and Tit. 1. 15) "To the pure all things are pure; but to the unbelieving there is nothing pure, but their very consciences are defiled." It is a desperate malignity in the temper of the stomach that should turn our meat and diet into diseases, the best cordials and preservatives into poisons, so that what in reason is appointed to nourish a man should kill him. Such is the venom and malignity of sin, makes the use of the best things become evil, nay, the greatest evil to us many times: (Psal. 109. 7) "Let his prayer be turned into sin." That which is appointed by God to be the choicest means to prevent sin is turned into sin out of the corrupt distemper of these carnal hearts of ours.

Hence then it follows that sin is the greatest evil in the world, or indeed that can be. For, that which separates the soul from God, that which brings all evils of punishment and makes all evils truly evil, and spoils all good things to us, that must needs be the greatest evil. But this is the nature of sin, as hath already appeared.

But that which I will mainly press is, sin is only opposite to God, and cross as much as can be to that infinite goodness and holiness which is in His blessed majesty. It's not the miseries or distresses that men undergo that the Lord distastes them for, or estrangeth Himself from them; He is with Joseph in the prison, with the three children in the furnace, with Lazarus when he lies among the dogs and gathers the crumbs from the rich man's table, yea, with Job upon the dunghill, but He is not able to bear the presence of sin. Yea, of this temper are His dearest servants: the more of God is in them, the more opposite they are to sin wherever they find it. It was that He commended in the church of Ephesus, "That she could not bear those that were wicked" (Rev. 2. 3). As when the stomach is of a pure temper and good strength, the least surfeit or distemper that befalls, it presently distastes and disburdens itself with speed. So David noted to be "a man after God's own heart." He professeth: (Psal. 101. 3, 7) "I hate the work of them that turn aside, he that worketh deceit shall not dwell in my house; he that telleth lies, shall not tarry in my sight." But when the heart becomes like the stomach, so weak it cannot help itself nor be helped by physic, desperate diseases and dissolution of the whole follows, and in reason must be expected. Hence see how God looks at the least connivance or a faint and feeble kind of opposition against sin as that in which He is most highly dishonored; and He follows it with most hideous plagues, as that indulgent carriage

of Eli towards the vile behavior of his sons for their grosser evils: (I Sam. 2. 23, 24) "Why do you such things? It's not well, my sons, that I hear such things." It is not well, and is that all? Why, had they either out of ignorance not known their duty or out of some sudden surprisal of a temptation neglected it, it had not been well; but for them so purposely to proceed on in the practice of such gross evils, and for him so faintly to reprove, the Lord looks at it as a great sin thus feebly to oppose sin. And therefore (verse 29). He tells him that he honored his sons above God, and therefore He professeth, "Far be it from me to maintain thy house and comfort, for he that honors me I will honor, and he that despiseth me shall be lightly esteemed" (verse 30). Hence it is the Lord Himself is called "the holy one of Israel," (Hab. 1. 12) "who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity"—no, not in such as profess themselves saints, though most dear unto Him; no, nor in His son the Lord Jesus, not in his saints. (Amos 8. 7) The Lord hath sworn by Himself, "I abhor the excellency of Jacob"; whatever their excellencies, their privileges are, if they do not abhor sin, God will abhor them: (Jer. 22. 24) "Though Coniah was as the signet of my right hand, thence would I pluck Him." Nay, He could not endure the appearance of it in the Lord Christ, for when but the reflection of sin (as I may so say) fell upon our savior, even the imputation of our transgressions to him, though none iniquity was ever committed by him, the Father withdrew His comforting presence from him, and let loose His infinite displeasure against him, forcing him to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Yea, sin is so evil (that though it be in nature, which is the good creation of God) that there is no good in it, nothing that God will own; but in the evil of punishment it is otherwise, for the torments of the devils, and punishments of the damned in hell, and all the plagues inflicted upon the wicked upon earth, issue from the righteous and revenging justice of the Lord, and He doth own such execution as His proper work: (Isa. 45. 7) "Is there any evil in the city," *viz.* of punishment, "and the Lord hath not done it? I make peace, I create evil, I the Lord do all these things." It issues from the justice of God that He cannot but reward everyone according to His own ways and works; those are a man's own, the holy one of Israel hath no hand in them. But he is the just executioner of the plagues that are inflicted and suffered for these; and hence our blessed savior becoming our surety, and standing in our room, he endured the pains of the second death, even the fierceness of the fury of an offended God, and yet it was impossible he could commit the least sin, or be tainted with the least corrupt distemper. And it's certain it's better to suffer all plagues without any one sin than to commit the least sin and to be freed from

all plagues. Suppose that all miseries and sorrows that ever befell all the wicked in earth and hell should meet together in one soul, as all waters gathered together in one sea; suppose thou heardest the devil's roaring, and sawest hell gaping, and flames of everlasting burnings flashing before thine eyes? It's certain it were better for thee to be cast into those inconceivable torments than to commit the least sin against the Lord. Thou dost not think so now, but thou wilt find it so one day.

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