

## CHAPTER XIII.

*Directions against Scandal taken, or an aptness to receive hurt, by the words or deeds of others.*

It was not only an admonition, but a prophecy of Christ, when he said, "Woe to the world because of offences! It must be that offences come." And, "Blessed is he that is not offended or scandalized in me." He foreknew that the errors and misdoings of some, would be the snare and ruin of many others; and that, when "damnable heresies arise, many will follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Like men in the dark, where if one catch a fall, he that comes next him, falls upon him.

There are four sorts of persons that use to be scandalized, or hurt by the sins of others.

1. Malignant enemies of Christ and godliness who are partly hardened in their malice, and partly rejoiced at the dishonour of religion, and insult over those that give the offence, or take occasion by it to blaspheme or persecute.

2. Some that are more equal, and hopeful, and in greater possibility of conversion, who are stopt by it in their desires, and purposes, and attempts of a godly life.

3. Unsound professors, or hypocrites, who are turned by scandals from the way of godliness, which they seemed to walk in.

4. Weak Christians, who are troubled and hindered in their way of piety, or else drawn into some particular error or sin, though they fall not off.

So that the effects of scandal may be reduced to these two. I. The perverting of men's judgments, to dislike religion, and think hardly, either of the doctrine or practice of Christianity. II. The emboldening of men to commit particular sins, or to omit particular duties; or at least the troubling and hindering them in the performance: against which, I shall first give you distinctly some Meditative Direc-

tions, and then some Practical Directions against them both together.

I. *Direct.* 1. 'Consider what an evident sign it is, of a very blind or malicious soul, to be so apt to pick quarrels with God and godliness, because of the sins of other men.'

Love thinketh not ill of those we love: ill will and malice are still ready to impute whatever is amiss, to those whom they hate. Enmity is contentious and slanderous; and will make a crime of virtue itself, and from any topic fetch matter of reproach. There is no witness seemeth incredible to it, who speaketh any thing that is evil of those they hate. An argument 'a baculo ad verbera' is sufficient. Thus did the heathens by the primitive Christians; and will you do thus by God? Will you terrify your own consciences, when they shall awake, and find such an ugly serpent in your bosom, as malice and enmity against your Maker and Redeemer? It is the nature of the devil, even his principal sin. And will you not only wear his livery, but bear his image, to prove that he is your father? And by community of natures, to prove that you must also have a communion with him in condemnation and punishment? And doth not so visible a mark of devilism upon your souls, affright you, and make you ready to run away from yourselves? Nothing but devilish malice can charge that upon God or godliness, which is done by sinners against his laws. Would you use a friend thus? If a murder were done, or a slander raised of you, or your house were fired, or your goods stolen, would you suspect your friend of it? Or any one that you honoured, loved, or thought well of? You would not certainly, but rather your enemy, or some lewd and dissolute persons that were most likely to be guilty. You are blinded by malice, if you see not how evident a proof of your devilish malice this is, to be ready when men that profess religion do any thing amiss, to think the worse of godliness or religion for it! The cause of this suspicion is lodged in your own hearts.

*Direct.* 11. 'Remember that this was the first temptation, by which the devil overthrew mankind, to persuade them to think ill of God, as if he had been false to his word, and had envied them their felicity.' "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your

eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil <sup>b</sup>." And will you not be warned by the calamity of all the world, to take heed of thinking ill of God, and of his Word, and of believing the devil's reports against him?

*Direct.* III. 'Consider that to think ill of God, is to think him to be a devil; and to think ill of godliness is to take it to be wickedness: and can man be guilty of a more devilish crime? Nay, is it not worse than the devil that tempteth you to it can commit. To be God is to be good, even the infinite, eternal, perfect good, in whom is no evil, nor none can be. To be a devil, is to be evil, even the chief that do evil, and would draw others so to do. It is not an ugly shape in which a painter doth represent the devil, which sheweth us his ugliness indeed: an enemy of godliness is more like to him than the picture: it is his sinfulness against God, which is his true deformity. Therefore to suspect God to be evil, is to suspect him to be the devil, so horrid a blasphemy doth this sin partake of. And if godliness be bad, then he that is the author and end of it, cannot be good.

*Direct.* IV. 'Consider what horrible blindness it is to impute men's faults to God, who is the greatest adversary to sin in all the world, and who will most severely punish it, and to godliness which is perfectly its contrary.' There is no angel in heaven so little to be suspected to be the friend of sin as God. Creatures are mutable in themselves; angels have the innocent imperfection of creatures; saints on earth have a culpable imperfection through the remainder of sin. If you had only suspected these, you might have had some pretence for it; but to quarrel with God or godliness, is madder than to think that light is the cause of darkness.

*Direct.* V. 'And think what extremity of injury and injustice this is to God, to blame him or his laws, for those sins of men which are committed against him and his laws.' Who is it that sin is committed against but God? Is it not he that made the laws, which it is the transgression of? Are not those laws, think you, strict enough against it? Is it not their strictness which such as you dislike? Were they laws that would give you leave to be worldly, sensual,

<sup>b</sup> Gen. III. 4, 5.

and proud, you would never quarrel with them; and yet you charge men's sins on these laws, because they are so strict against them. Do you impute sin to God, because he will judge men for it to hell fire, and cast them for ever out of his glorious presence into misery? O cursed impudence! How righteous is God in condemning such malicious souls! Tell us if you can, would you have had God to have forbidden sin more strictly? Or condemned it more severely? Or punished it more terribly? If you would, you pray for greater vengeance than hell upon yourselves! Woe to you, when he executeth but so much as he hath already threatened! Shall the crime of rebels be imputed to the king, against whom they rebel? If a thief shall rob you, or a servant deceive you, or a son despise you, is he just that will so much increase your injury, as to lay the blame of all upon yourselves? You will say, "It is not God that we are offended with." But if it be at a holy life, it is at God: for what is godliness, but the loving, and serving, and obeying God? If you say, that it is not godliness neither: why then do you distaste or speak against a godly life, on this occasion? If you say, "It is these hypocrites only that we dislike:" what do you dislike them for? Is it for their virtue or their vices? If it be for their sins, why then do you not speak and do more against sin, in yourselves and others? We will concur with you to the utmost in opposing sin wherever it be found. If it be their hypocrisy that you blame, persuade yourselves and other men to be sincerely godly. How would you have hypocrisy avoided? By an open profession to serve the devil? Or by sincerity in serving God? If the latter; why then do you think evil of the most serious obedience to God? Alas! all Christian countries are too full of hypocrites. Every one that is baptized, and professeth Christianity, is a saint or a hypocrite! All drunken, covetous, ambitious, sensual, unclean Christians, are hypocrites, and not Christians indeed. And these hypocrites can quietly live a worldly, fleshly life, and never lament their own hypocrisy, nor their perfidious violating their baptismal vow. But if one that seemeth diligent for his soul prove an hypocrite, or fall into any scandalous sin, here they presently make an outcry; not to call the man from his sin, but to make a godly, diligent life seem odious

to all, by telling men, 'These are your godly men.' It is godliness that they quarrel with, while they pretend only to find fault with sin. Why else do you not find fault with the same sin equally in all? Or, at least, persuade men by such examples to be less sinful, and more watchful, and not to be less religious and more loose. Tell me truly of any one that is more against sin than God, or any thing more contrary to it than godliness and true religion, or any men that do more against it than the most religious, and then I will join with you in preferring those. Till then remember how you condemn yourselves, when you condemn them that are better than yourselves.

*Direct. vi.* 'Think what a foolish, audacious thing it is to set yourselves against your God and judge.' Will you accuse him of evil, because men do evil? Are you fit to judge him? Are guilty worms either wise or just enough for such an attempt, or strong enough to bear it out? What do you but set your faces against heaven, and profess rebellion against God, when you blame his laws and government, and think the obeying and serving him to be evil?

*Direct. vii.* 'Consider what cruelty it is to yourselves, to turn the faults of others to your ruin, which should be your warning to avoid the like.' If another man sin, will you not only do so too, but be the more averse to repentance and reformation? Will you cut your throat, because another cut his finger, or did so before you? Why should you do yourselves such mischief?

*Direct. viii.* 'Remember that this was the design of the devil in tempting religious people to sin, not only to destroy them, but to undo you and others by their falls.' If he can make you think the worse of religion, he hath his design and will; he hath killed many at a blow. Yea, perhaps the sinner may repent, and be forgiven, when you that are driven from repentance and godliness by the scandal, may be damned. And will you so far gratify the devil, in the wilful destruction of yourselves? Sin is contagious; and this is your catching of the infection, if it prevail to drive you further from God? And thus this plague devour-eth multitudes.

*Direct. ix.* 'He that will think ill of godliness for men's sins, shall never want occasion of such offence, nor such

temptations to fly from God.' If you are so foolish or malignant, as to pick quarrels with God and godliness for men's faults, (which nothing but God and godliness can reform,) you may set up your standard of defiance against heaven, and see what you will get by it in the end. For God will not remove all occasion of your scandal. There ever have been, and will be, hypocrites in the church on earth. Noah's ark had a Ham, Abraham's family had an Ishmael, and Isaac's an Esau, and David's an Absalom, and Christ's a Judas. The falls of good men are cited in Scripture, to admonish you to take heed. Noah, Lot, David, Joseph's brethren have left a mark behind them where they fell, that you may take a safer way. If you will make all such the occasion of your malignity, you turn your medicine into your poison, and choose hell because some others choose it, or because some stumbled in the way to heaven.

And for those who are emboldened in sin, because they see their superiors or religious men commit it, or read that David, Noah, Peter, &c. fell, let them consider,

*Direct. I.* 'That it is rule, and not example, which you must chiefly live by.' Do the laws of God by which you must be judged, allow of sin? If they do, then fear it not.

*Direct. II.* Is not the example of Christ much better than a sinner's? If you will follow examples, follow the best, even that which was given you purposely to imitate. The greatest and most learned man is fallible, and the most religious is not wholly free from sin: sincerity writeth after a perfect copy, though it cannot reach it.

*Direct. III.* 'Consider that sin is not the better but the worse, for being committed by a religious, a great, or a learned man.' Their place, their knowledge, and profession aggravateth it. And shall that embolden you which God most hateth?

*Direct. IV.* 'And consider that when he that falleth by a surprise, doth rise again by repentance, and is pardoned, those that are hereby emboldened to sin deliberately and impenitently, shall be condemned.' You may sin with David or Peter when you will, but you cannot rise with them by true repentance, without that grace which you wilfully resist and forfeit.

*Direct. v.* Lastly, 'Consider that the best men, and the greatest, are the most dangerous tempters, when they mislead us.' A David was a stronger temptation to Bathsheba, than another man could have been. A Peter might sooner mislead Barnabas, and others, into a sinful dissimulation and separation, than another could have done. Therefore do not think that where your danger is greatest, your venturousness should be most.

*Practical Directions against Offence and Hurt by others.*

*Direct. i.* 'Lay well your foundation, and understand the nature and reasons of religion; and then you will be so far from disliking it for the errors and falls of others, that it will be written upon your minds, as with a beam of the sun, That there can be no reason against obeying God, and against the careful securing of our salvation.' This will be the first and undoubted principle, which nothing in the world can make you question. Whatever scandals, persecutions or sufferings may attend a holy life, you will still be past doubt that there is no other way. No other eligible, no other tolerable, no other rational, or that will lead to happiness. Whatever falls out in the world, if the most great, or learned, or religious fall away, it will not make you question, Whether a man be a living creature, nor whether the sun be light, nor whether two and two be four. No more should it make you question, Whether God be better than the creature, heaven than earth, or a life of holiness than a life of sin. You will say as Peter, "Lord, whither should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Whatever scandals are given, or whatever befall the church, or if all the disciples of Christ forsake him, this remaineth as sure as that the earth is under us, that there is no other way than holiness, for a wise man once to take into his thoughts.

*Direct. ii.* 'Get once a sincere love to God, and a holy life, and then no scandals will make you jealous of it, nor think of looking any other way.' It is want of true and hearty love, that maketh you so easily taken off.

*Direct. iii.* 'To this end, know religion by experience;

\* John vi. 68.

and this will put you past all doubt of his goodness.' He that never tasted sugar, may be persuaded by argument that it is not sweet, or may think it bitter when he seeth another spit it out; and he that knoweth godliness, but by looking on, or hearsay, may thus be drawn to think it bad: but so will not he that hath truly tried it; I mean not only to try what it is to hear, and read, and pray; but what it is to be humble, holy and heavenly, both in heart and life.

*Direct. iv.* 'When you see any man sin, be sure you do that duty which it calls you to.' Every fall that you see of others doth call you to see the odiousness of sin (as you will do when you see a drunkard spewing, or a thief at the whipping-post). And it calleth you to search for, and lament the root of such sin in yourselves, and set your watch more strictly upon such a warning; and it calls you to compassionate the sinner, and if you have hope and opportunity to endeavour his recovery. If you will conscionably do this duty which is your own, you will be the less in danger of hurt by scandal. It is duty that must help to prevent infection.

*Direct. v.* 'Be watchful among all men, high and low, learned or unlearned, good and bad.' Venture not blindly upon the singular opinion of any men whatsoever; nor into any new unproved way. Remember that all men are a temptation to others; and therefore be armed and watch against such temptation. Know well what it is, that is the peculiar temptation, which the quality of those that you have to do with, layeth before you. Spend no day or hour in any company, good or bad, without a wise and careful vigilancy.

*Direct. vi.* 'Be as little as you can in scandalous and tempting company.' Presume not to touch pitch, and promise yourselves to escape defilement; especially fly from two sorts of scandals. First, The discourses and societies of heretical or schismatical men, who speak perverse things to draw away disciples after them<sup>d</sup>. Those that presume to run into such snares, and think their own understanding and stability are sufficient to preserve them, do shew by their pride that they are near a fall<sup>e</sup>. Secondly, The company of sensual persons, at stage-plays, gaming, inordinate plays,

<sup>d</sup> Acts xx. 50.<sup>e</sup> 1 Cor. x.



and wanton dalliance. For this is to bring your tinder and gunpowder to the fire ; and the less you fear it, the greater is your danger.

*Direct.* VII. 'Look more at the good that is in others, than at their faults and falls.' The fly that will fall on none but the galled ulcerous place, doth feed accordingly. Is a professor of religion, covetous, drunk, or any other ways scandalous? Remember that it is his covetousness or drunkenness that is bad. Reprove that, and fly from it, and spare not; but religion is good; let that therefore be commended and imitated. Leave the carrion to dogs and crows to feast upon; but do you choose out the things that are commendable, and mind, and mention, and imitate those.

*Direct.* VIII. Lastly, 'Think and speak as much against the sin and danger of taking scandal, as against the sin and danger of giving it.' When others cry out, 'These are your religious people,' do you cry out as much against their malignity and madness, who will dislike or reproach religion for men's sins. Which is to blame the law-makers or laws, because they are broken; or to fall out with health, because many that once were in health, fall sick; or to find fault with eating, because some are lean; or with clothing, because some are cold. Open to yourselves and others, what a wicked and perilous thing this is, to fall out with godliness, because some are ungodly, that seemed godly. Many cry out against scandal, that never think what a heinous sin it is to be scandalized, or to suffer men's sins to be a scandal to you; and to be the worse, because that others are so bad. No one must differ from them in an opinion, or a fashion of apparel, or in a mode or form of worship, but some are presently scandalized; not knowing that it is a greater sin in them to be scandalized, than in the other by such means (supposing them to be faulty) to give them the occasion. Do you know what it is to be scandalized or offended in the Scripture sense? It is not merely to be displeased, or to dislike another's actions (as is before said); but it is to be drawn into some sin, or hindered from some duty, or stopped in the course of religion, or to think the worse of truth, or duty, or a godly life, because of other men's words or actions; and do you think him a good

Christian, and a faithful or constant friend to godliness, who is so easily brought to quarrel with it? Or is so easily turned from it, or hindered in it? Some peevish, childish persons are like sick stomachs, that no meat can please; you cannot dress it so curiously, but they complain that it is naught, or this aileth it, or that aileth it, when the fault is in themselves; or like children, or sick persons that can scarce be touched but they are hurt: do you think that this sickliness or curiosity in religion, is a credit to you? This is not the tenderness of conscience which God requir-eth, to be easily hurt by other men's differences and faults. As it is the shame of many ladies and gentlewomen, to be so curious and troublesomely neat, that no servant knoweth how to please them; so is it in religion, a sign of your childish folly, and worse, to be guilty of such proud curiosity, that none can please you, who are not exactly of your mind and way. All men must follow your humours in gestures, fashions, opinions, formalities and modes, or else you are troubled, and offended, and scandalized; as if all the world were made to please and humour you! Or you were wise enough, and great and good enough, to be the rule of all about you! Desire and spare not, that yourselves and all men should please God as exactly as possible. But if the want of that exactness in doubtful things, or a difference in things disputable and doubtful among true Christians, do thereupon abate or hinder your love or estimation of your brethren, or communion with them, or any other Christian duty, or tempt you into censoriousness or contempt of your brethren, or to schism, persecution or any other sin; it is you that are the great offenders, and you that are like to be the sufferers; and have cause to lament that sinful aptness to be thus scandalized.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### *Directions against Soul-murder, and partaking of other Men's Sins.*

THE special Directions given Part iii. Chap. xxii., to parents and masters, will in this case be of great use to all others; but because it is here seasonable to speak of it fur-