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THE SINS OF SINNERS FINDING THEM OUT.

[Several Sermons.]

SERMON XV.

NUMBERS xxxii. 23.

And be sure your sin will find you out.

THIS verse contains a fair warning which Moses gives to the Reubenites, in case they should dare to be false in the business in hand. This warning hath two parts.

1. A protestation, in which he solemnly declares, that they should be guilty before God, in case they acted falsely, and should desert their brethren in the wars of Canaan. He tells them God is their party, and so doing they would not only wrong their brethren, which they might think was all, but they would dishonour God and make him their enemy. *Behold, ye have sinned against the Lord.* As if he had said, Remember you will affront God by it, and bring guilt upon your consciences before the Lord. We may here observe that in all sinful practices, God is the great object with whom we have to do as the offended party. Thus when David had defiled Bathsheba, and murdered Uriah, and thus awfully injured them both, yet in confessing his guilt he says, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight." Iniquity does not only spread its offence on earth, but it strikes against heaven too, and that chiefly.

2. In the warning there is a certification, in which he assures them that God and they should reckon for it in case they acted falsely. Here the end of that sinful practice is represented, *Your sin has found you out.* This implies that they would as it were hide themselves from their sin, when they had committed it, they would make many shifts to soothe themselves and cover the matter. They would take the sinful sweet of it, and when they had done this, they would stave off the blame, shame, and punishment of it. But in vain. He assures them it shall dog them at the heels, till it overtake and find them out. He gives them proper notification that this would be the end of it. *Be sure your sin will find you out.* Know you your sin: it shall find you out. Think on it beforehand, that it will get up with you at length. This is the nature of sin,

will not hide by any means always, under any cover but one, the righteousness of a Redeemer. Let sinners bury it if they can, let them dig deep as hell to hide it, it will have a resurrection, it will appear sooner or later as a terrible ghost to them. *And be sure your sin will find you out.*

Doctrine—One time or other sin will find out the sinner.

In prosecuting this doctrine I shall,

I. Show how sinners shift this meeting, that their sins may not find them out.

II. In what respects sin shall find out the sinner.

III. Whence it is that sin certainly will find out the sinner. I am then,

I. To show how sinners shift this meeting, that their sins may not find them out. Sinners are in their hearts utterly averse to be found out by their sins, and they have many shifts for that vain purpose.

1. They will excuse and justify their sin as if there were no evil in them. They will cast some fair cloak over foul actions, that their sin may pass for a lawful thing. Thus Saul and his army, "took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord God in Gilgal." This was their pretence to cover their covetousness. This in many cases is done in the world; persons defending their sinful practices and will not be convinced of the evil of them. And even in other cases, persons may attain to such a degree of blindness, that they get their consciences soothed in atrocious crimes, as if there were little or no evil in them. "God gives them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."

2. They will carry the matter so quickly as that it shall be hid from the eyes of the world, while in the meantime God's watchful eye is still upon them, though they do not regard it. "And Ephraim said, yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me, that were sin." Many make such use of secret places and darkness, for their wicked purposes, as will banish them out of God's secret place, and bring them into eternal darkness, if a miracle of grace pluck not the brands out of the burning, and their sin in time find them out, Job xxiv. 15, 16.

3. They will deny it when charged upon them, and so cover one sin with another. "They wipe their mouth and say we have done no wickedness." O what pains do many take to ruin their own souls. Credit before the world is bought at prodigious rates of soul, and consciences, lies, and perjury. It is no wonder the con-

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sciences of some be dead and seared as with a hot iron, when they so often speak in opposition to them, to cover their sins.

Lastly, They will keep out of the way, where their sin is most likely to find them out. They live strangers to themselves, dare not examine themselves impartially; they avoid communing with their own hearts and consciences as with their greatest enemy. And there is no doubt that this makes many to apostatize and give up with all duties of religion, especially secret duties, for they have no confidence in God, and their hearts condemn them. We now proceed,

II. To show in what respects sin shall find out the sinner. An offended God appoints the meeting, and will see it kept, so as the sinner shall not always shift, but his sin shall give him a dreadful after-meeting. And that often in time, always in eternity. The sin of Cain, of Saul, of Judas, soon found them out. And what many have hoped to cover, has been to their confusion discovered before the world. But however long the meeting may be put off, it will never be put off beyond death, there is a day coming will declare the secrets of sinners; *for in* that day God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. And God makes the sins of some to find them out in time, that it may appear there is a God to judge on earth, and he allows others to go on, that it may appear there is an after reckoning.

Now God makes sin find out the sinner,

1. By discovering and bringing to light their works of darkness. "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid that shall not be known." They havet oo strong a party, that have a watchful eye of providence to wrestle against in hiding their sin. God can employ a bird of the air to carry the voice, yea, can make the sinner as he did Judas put out himself, and turn his own accuser. Joseph's brethren got their sin covered for several years, and when they thought they were out of hazard of meeting, it, it appears to them in Egypt like a terrible ghost.

By laying the shame of it upon their faces before the world, as he has done with many who thought themselves secure enough from it, "Fill their faces, says the Psalmist, with shame, that they might seek thy name, O Lord." God has so united sin and shame together, that shame shall certainly follow sin, in time or in eternity. Many are a shame to the profession of Christianity, but God will at length turn it back on themselves. They think much to bear their shame now in time; but how much more confounding will it be, to have their shame proclaimed before the world of angels and men at the great day, after which impenitent sinners shall never lift up their head. Thus "they shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt."

3. By presenting sin in its native colours to their awakened consciences. This the Lord did with Cain and Judas. Satan and the wicked heart dress up sin in such a manner as it appears lovely to the sinner. But the day will come, when God will tear off the false ornaments, the paint and the varnish from it, and make it appear the most horrible spectacle that ever the sinner saw. The thirty pieces of silver made a horrid treachery to appear small to Judas ; but when his conscience awakened on him, it was guilt that sunk him, he was not able to stand under it. So also Cain was made to say that his punishment was greater than he was able to bear.

Lastly, By giving them the due reward of his works. "Woe unto the wicked ! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him." The time of our life is a sowing time. Sin is a seed, that though it may be long hid under ground, yet will bring a doleful harvest at length. "For he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." The brim of the cup of sin may be sweet, but bitter will the dregs be, which the sinner shall surely be made to drink. The hand of vengeance may be long in striking, but it will strike at length. And however easily the sinner may run into arrears, it will bring a fearful reckoning.

And God will make the punishment one way or another to answer the sin, so as the sinner shall find that his sin has found him out. God has many ways of writing people's sin in their punishment, that they shall be obliged to own that God remembers their sin against them, and sometimes as Adoni-bezek they are unable to say, *as I have done, so God hath requited me*. The Sodomites burned in lust, and they were burned with fire and brimstone. Let us now,

III. Show whence it is that sin certainly will find out the sinner. How can it be otherwise, if we consider,

1. That none can sin without witnesses, who will surely at length discover the sin. Let sinners choose the most secret place for their works of darkness, they have always two witnesses present with them.

Conscience within their own breast, is as a thousand witnesses, whose testimony one cannot get denied. *Their conscience also bears witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another*. Conscience may be a very silent witness for a time, but though it be silent it is not quite idle. It writes down the sinner's wickedness and keeps it on record, which record will be read, when the sinner with his guilt is set before the Judge here or hereafter, when the books are opened and the black book of conscience among others.

The other witness is the omniscient God, whose eye is always upon the sinner. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit ? Or whither

shall I flee from thy presence?" Who can hide his thoughts from him that searcheth the heart? and to what place can the sinner go, where God is not before him? Darkness and light are alike to him. And how can the crime escape discovery, where the Judge and Law-giver himself is witness. Little do sinners think of this, because God does not strike them down in an instant. But this witness will speak to their terror and confusion at length.

2. God has said it. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." It is then his will, that sin shall find out the sinner, and who can hope to hide what God will have brought to light.

Use 1. Of information. This lets us see,

1. That an evil conscience is a sad companion, and guilt lying within the breast unrepented of, will break out sadly at length, to the sinner's confusion. It made Cain a burden to himself, Gen. iv. 13. A good conscience is the sweetest support, and gives the greatest ease in the world. But no rack like to that of an ill conscience, completely awakened. Many a secret blow it gives the sinner, that the world knows not of.

2. God is a just God, and will not be mocked, nor can he be blinded. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Let men run on in sin as long as they will, God will call them to an account at last, and they shall see that God did not overlook their sins, though he did not presently strike. He has a concern for his honour and his holy law, which sinners trample under foot, and he will fill their faces with shame that do so, and vindicate his glory at their cost.

3. There is a watchful eye of providence over the world that never closeth, but taketh notice of all men's actions at all times and in every place. And he bringeth secret things to light, at the time in which it may bring most glory to himself, and most confusion to the impenitent sinner. God loves to take hopeless cases in hand, and when all probable means fail, then to stretch forth his own arm and work; that it may be seen that it is his own work.

Use 2. Of warning. I would hence warn all,

1. To take heed when you think you stand, lest you fall. The way of sin is down the hill, it is easy to go downward, but there may be broken bones before you get up again.

2. Please not yourselves in that you get your sins covered, and hid from the eyes of men. For though you may prosper a while in that course, yet your feet may slip at last. And if you do not

find yourselves sometimes caught in the snare, your sin will find you out, it will fare with you as it never did with any before you.

Indulge not yourselves in secret sins, for the day will come, that what is done in secret, shall be proclaimed on the house tops. And hide your shame as long as you will, it will one day cover you in mercy or in wrath.

Lastly, Let us all labour to find out our sins, lest they find us out. We must meet them. Better seek them out that we may carry them to the sea of the Redeemer's blood, than to stay till they find us out, which may plunge us into seas of wrath. Amen.

[*Subject continued.*]

THE SINS OF SINNERS FINDING THEM OUT.

SERMON XVI.

NUMBERS xxxii. 23.

And be sure your sin will find you out.

I HAVE spoken to the two first general heads. I shall now proceed,

III. To inquire more particularly than we have yet done, into the Lord's making sin find out the sinner. This is one of these things in which the providence of God does shine most illustriously; upon which unbiassed spectators must say, "This is the finger of God, and verily there is a God to judge upon the earth." Consider here,

I. The general kinds of sin, which the Lord makes to find out the sinner. As for open sins confessed by the sinner, I need not speak of these, the sinner meets with them every day. But,

1. Sins which men will not own to be sins; the Lord makes to find out the sinner. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." The crucifying of Christ, the Jews would not allow to be their sin, in their blindness they denied the charge. But when the Spirit of the Lord comes, he makes them own it. Thus Peter addressed them, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren what shall we do?" In a time of defection and apostacy from

the Lord, men stand out against conviction, they will not take with their sin. But afterwards when God ariseth to plead, he opens up the putrifying sores and makes men's folly appear to them.

2. Secret sins to which no man is witness, the Lord makes them find out the sinner. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." The sinner pleaseth himself with this, that no eye seeth him. But God makes the world hear well of it at length. And what is done in secret, he bringeth forth in the face of the sun. How secret was Onan's sin, but the stroke of God reached him for it. For the most secret sins are open to an omniscient God, and he will make the sinner find it so.

II. The time in which the Lord makes sin to find out the sinner. Times and seasons are in the Lord's hand, and the time fixed by his providence is always the best time, and whoso considereth circumstances will be obliged to own it. The best time for his own honour, and for the conviction of the sinner in mercy or in wrath.

Sometimes the sinner is found out presently, God takes the sinner instantly in his sin. Thus "when Jeroboam put forth his hand from the altar, against the man of God, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand which he put forth against him dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him." As soon as they go off the way, the lion finds them, as soon as they break over the hedge the serpent bites them. This is necessary to keep the world within some tolerable bounds of morality, otherwise profanity and wickedness would overflow all banks. Sometimes the sinner is not found out till long after. It was about three months before Judah's sin found him out: "When he was told that Tamar his daughter-in-law had played the harlot, and was with child by whoredom." Nay, it may go on years, many years, and never appear all the time, and yet find them out at length, before they leave this world. A person's sin may have as much time, before it find them out, as in the sinner's own opinion it may be dead and rotten, and in no hazard of rising to disturb them. It was at least long twenty years before the sin of Joseph's brethren found them out. Sins of youth may put off the rencounter till old age and death arrive.

III. The place, where sin finds out the sinner. Many times there is much of God seen in this, and God reserves the discovery always to the fittest place. "For he is a rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he." And he can make the sinner's own feet carry him to the place of this sad tryst, and heavy meeting, while he has no mind of any such thing.

1. God can make sin find out the sinner sometimes, where he can

have least support under the awful meeting with his sin. Thus God sent Joseph's brethren to Egypt, a strange land, that their sin might find them out, Gen. xlii. 21. They were now far from their friends and relations, who might have comforted them, under any distress which they saw them under. But stripped of all comforters, their consciences have leisure to toss them to purpose. Thus the sinner leaves God for his sin, and God leaves the sinner alone with his sin.

2. Where they may have least help to shift their sins finding them out. Thus there is no word of Judah's sinful companion, Hirah the Adullamite, when his sin finds him out. Providence it seems parted them on that occasion; otherwise he that had helped Judah to cover his sin before, might have helped him now, to have denied and concealed it, notwithstanding of the speaking evidences of it. Companions in sin are oft times farthest to seek when their help is most needed, and some time or other they will all prove physicians of no value.

3. Where it will confound the sinner most and pierce his heart most keenly. When Judah's daughter-in-law "was brought forth, she sent to her father-in law, saying, by the man whose these are am I with child; and she said, discern I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff. And Judah acknowledged them." Here the sin was discovered publicly in judgment before many witnesses, in whose sight the shame of the foul fact was spread on his face. Thus God makes secret sins, which no eye has seen committed, find out the sinner publicly before many witnesses, and in the face of the sun.

IV. The means by which the Lord makes sin find out the sinner. There is much of God seen in this also. He never wants means to discover the most secret sins, which he wishes to bring to light. Sometimes this is done,

1. By the natural product of the sin, by which the sin is made to discover itself. Thus the sin of Judah and Tamar was discovered by her being with child. The bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen discovered Saul's sin, which shewed he had not performed the commandment of the Lord. Thus persons may go long on in sin, but a watchful providence makes their feet slide in due time, and their sin find them out, by fixing some mark to their sin by which the world may know it.

2. By some act of indiscretion and folly in the sinner himself. As in the case of Judah's signet, bracelets and staff given to Tamar. O the stupendous conduct of providence, in the infatuating of sinners, taking common discretion from them, that otherwise have

abundance of hellish craft and subtilty for the hiding of their sin. Yet their eyes are, by the just judgment of God, withheld from seeing, what otherwise might have been easily perceived. And this will gall them to the heart afterwards, that they should have acted so foolishly, unless their hearts be touched with repentance. But who can retain the prudence, which God intends for his own holy purposes to take from them.

3. By some unforeseen accident which the sinner by his own utmost diligence could not prevent. "Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." Man's capacity is but narrow, there are many things which he cannot foresee. When he goes out of the way of God, he may, ere he be aware, be caught fast in such a snare, as will hold him till his sin find him out. "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are caught in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." There is no safety out of the path of duty. When persons go away from God, they make themselves many enemies, for every person and thing are enemies to them to whom God and their own consciences are enemies.

Lastly, By making their consciences restless, till their own mouths discover their own sin and shame. Witness Judas. The Lord never wants means to make sin find out the sinner, as long as there is a conscience within the sinner's breast. Much secret wickedness has thus been brought to light in the world. And we have had instances of it, where the guilty were forced to turn their own accusers, when none was charging them with it; yes, and when to all appearance there was no true repentance for the sin. However, conscience may sometimes be commanded and held down, God can easily make it so turbulent within one's breast, that it will no longer keep the secret of their sin.

V. The way and manner of sin's finding out the sinner. This many a time is such, as must needs make men to say, *This is the finger of God*. Providence appoints the meeting, and wonderfully brings matters about for the keeping of it.

1. Ofttimes sin finds the sinner unexpectedly and surprisingly when they are not looking for it. How surprisingly did Judah's sin, and the sin of Joseph's brethren find them out. It meets the sinner like a ghost in a moment, when he is not looking for it; and catches him before he can get his sinful craft collected to stave it off.

2. Often does the way which sinners take to hide their sin, prove the way of its finding them out. "The Lord is known by the judgment

which he executeth; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." The means which they use for burying it out of sight, God makes the occasion of its rising upon them. How often have cunning contrivances of mischief turned on the heads of the contrivers, God catching the wise in their own craft, to his own glory and their confusion.

3. Sin always finds out the sinner securely, that there is none escaping, no getting beyond it, but the sinner is hedged in on every side. Cain felt the greatness of his punishment, but he could not escape from it. God's prisoners are kept fast, and though it may be long before he speak to the sinner, yet he will speak home at length. He may be long in beginning to reckon with the sinner, but he will make a thorough reckoning when he does begin. He says as in the case of Eli, "When I begin, I will also make an end."

Lastly, God's writing the sin upon the punishment, so that the sinner shall be forced to say, *As I have done, so God hath requited me*. Thus God makes men's sins so to find them out, that they cannot fail to see that he remembers such a sin against them.

Sometimes the punishment is the same in kind with the sin: as in the case of Adoni-bezek. The same punishment was inflicted upon himself, which he had inflicted upon threescore and ten captive kings. Thus many that injure others have the same injury returned into their own bosom, and are treated in the same way that they have treated others. Thus Absalom did to David as he had done to Uriah. Pharaoh slew the first-born of the Israelites, and therefore God slew the first-born of Egypt. Pharaoh would have every new born son of Israel cast into the river, and God drowns him and all his host in the red sea.

Sometimes there is a visible likeness between the sin and the punishment. The Sodomites burned with lust, and God sends fire and brimstone on them to burn them to ashes. Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire, and they were consumed with fire from before the Lord. Jacob beguiled his father, by pretending to be Esau, and Laban him, by palming Leah on him for Rachel.

Sometimes there is a certain relationship betwixt the sin and the punishment. Jeroboam's hand withering, the belly of the adulteress swelling, and her thigh rotting. Companions of sin turning plagues and causes of woe to one another. Eli's indulgence to his sons was punished with the death of them.

Finally, Sometimes there is a direct contrariety betwixt the sin and the punishment. Thus God threatened the Israelites: "Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with

gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies, which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things; and he shall put a yoke of iron on thy neck, until he have destroyed thee." Adam would be like God, and he became like the beast that perisheth. David, proud of the number of his people, is punished with the loss of seventy thousand of them. The Jews crucify Christ to preserve their nation, and it ruins it entirely.

Use 1.—There is a God. The fool says in his heart and by his practice, there is none. But God is known by the judgments he executeth. When we see in ourselves or others, sin thus finding the sinner out, we should be confirmed in the faith of that fundamental article of all religion. And oppose it to those temptations to atheism, which the corrupt heart raises from sinners prospering so long in a sinful course.

2. There is a providence. That God is not an idle spectator, but a careful observer of human affairs. His eye is upon us at all times, in the dark as in the light; and secret sins are as open to him as those done in the face of the sun. Nothing can be hid from his sight, but every thing is open and manifest unto him. He looks on as a witness, and as a judge, and in due time discovers his hatred of it.

Lastly, He is a just God, that will at length shew himself terrible to impenitent sinners. He will call sinners in due time to an account, and though he spare long he will not spare always. The sinner thinks that because God does bear with him long, therefore he is such a one as himself, that there is no such evil in sin as is pretended, and because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sinner is set in him to do wickedly. But God will speak to the confusion of sinners in mercy or in wrath. Amen.

[*Subject continued.*]

THE SINS OF SINNERS FINDING THEM OUT.

SERMON XVII.

NUMBERS xxxii. 23.

And be sure your sin will find you out.

IV. I shall now confirm the doctrine. Here consider,

1. That no man can sin without witnesses. This has been already illustrated under the third head.

2. Consider that God both can and will make sin find out the sinner. How then can the sinner escape. Many a time atrocious crimes escape among men, because such as would, cannot find them out, and such as can, will not do it. But there is neither cannot, nor will not with God in this case.

1. God can do it. For he hath every thing necessary to qualify him to find out the guilty. He is privy to the most secret wickedness. "For the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." See what a discovery of secret wickedness the Lord makes to the prophet, Ezek. viii. 8,—12. God sees what is in us, about us, or done by us, however it be concealed. And with God the most subtile contrivances for concealing of sin, are no better than the silly art of poor children, to turn their backs and cover their own eyes to hide themselves. The thickest covers which can be made for sin are so thin, that they hinder not the broad view of the omniscient eye. Again he never forgets, nay, he cannot forget, because of the perfection of his nature, and besides he has interposed a solemn oath in the matter. "The Lord, saith the prophet Amos, hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, surely I will never forget any of their works." It may be long before a process be raised before the Lord; when it is called it may get a sist and delay, through the long suffering of the Judge. But it never drops out of the records. "For the iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid." The Lord never forgets unpardoned iniquity.

God also hath all power to break through all opposition, which the sinner can by art or might lay in the way of his sins finding him out. For he is omniscient and omnipotent. The most subtle sinner he can outwit. "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness; and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong." The most cunning deviser he can counterwork. "He disappointeth the de-

vices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise." And the most powerful and stubborn sinner he can break. "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him and prospered." No counsel can avail against the Lord, "and by strength shall no man prevail, the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them."

2. God will do it. For he hath said it, his truth is engaged for it. "God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent; hath he said it, and shall he not do it." He hath solemnly said it under a protestation in the text. So that either God's truth must fail, or the sinner's sin shall find him out. "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed, and hid, that shall not be known." And what art can hide what God's truth is engaged to bring to light? God says to the sinner covering his sin, as to Cain, *if thou doest evil, sin lieth at the door*. Like a watch-dog ready to take the criminal by the throat, whenever he stirs out at the door, and this dog though it may sleep long at the door, will rise on the sinner at length. *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.*

3. It lies upon God's honour to make sin find out the sinner. Sinners getting away with their sins, run into a mistake to the dishonour of God; but God for his honour's sake, will rectify the mistake, though it will be to the sinner's cost. "These things hast thou done, says he, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thee." Men of honour in the world are concerned in a special manner for it, so that he that toucheth it, touches the apple of their eye. And can any think but God is very jealous for his honour. "I am the Lord; that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images."

The honour of God's rectoral justice, by which he governs the world, is concerned in this matter. *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* Crimes allowed to pass unpunished, reflect on the justice of those under whose jurisdiction they are. The whole world is under God's jurisdiction. And how shall it be known that the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, if sin do not sooner or later find out the sinner. And hence it comes to pass, that those who are most dear to God, their sins find them out also. "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned." This, therefore, is given as the reason of God's publicly punishing David, 2 Sam. xii. 12, 13. Though God answers his people and forgives them, *Yet he takes vengeance on their inventions.*

This belongs also to the honour of his holiness, by which he is pure from, and hates with a perfect hatred, all iniquity. *He is glorious in holiness.* If he should not set a mark of his indignation against sin, one time or other, where would be the evidence of his perfect hatred of it? Do not they who join in covering sin, make themselves partakers of the guilt? And does not then the spotless holiness of God make it sure that sin shall find out the sinner. The honour also of his omniscience and providential vigilance require it. Therefore says Joshua to Achan, "My son, give I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him." It is the perverse reckoning of sinners upon God's long suffering and forbearance, that leads them to say, "The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth." And therefore, either sin must find out the sinner, or God will lose the glory of his omniscience. The sinner in his secret wickedness, robs God of that glory, but in open confession he restores it, thereby owning that since God knows it, it is all one as if all the world knew it, and therefore he confesseth it before the world.

It concerns also the honour of this message delivered by his servants in his name to sinners. They are commanded to tell sinners that their sins will find them out. They are to say, "Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him." And it lies on the honour of God to confirm the words of his servants which they spake on the credit of his word. Thus it is said, "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground." If sinners were not sometimes found out even in the world, men would turn atheists, and would not believe a word spoken to them in the name of the Lord.

4. History and observation afford abundant testimony to this grand truth, in the events that have appeared and do appear in the world in all ages. Many a practical commentary has providence written on our text in the shame and ruin of many a man and woman; although the brightest piece of it is reserved to be written out at the last day, when thousands of blanks that are in it shall be filled up. And,

1. As to history. What profane history, written by Christians, Jews, Mahometans or pagans, wants striking instances of this nature? But I shall confine myself to sacred history, where we have wonderful instances, first, of sins finding out sinful nations and societies. We have heard already of sins finding out the Sodomites and the Egyptians. The sinning angels wanted not wisdom to have hid their sin, if it could have been hid, nor strength to have staved off the meeting, if any such thing could have been done: but it found

them out, and put them in chains of darkness. The old world, it seems, thought the long tryst was fairly baulked. They continued in their usual courses, "Until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not till the flood came and took them all away." Thus the meeting was kept. The sinful Benjamites twice shifted their sins finding them out. Hence says the prophet Hosea, referring to the history, Judges xx. "They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah, therefore he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins." Accordingly the third time almost razed their name out of the earth. The Jews were appointed to give their land sabbatical years, Levit. xxv. 4. But through covetousness they quite gave up the practice, and thought it was good economy and lawful gain; but ere all was done their sin found them out. "To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah," they were kept in captivity, "Until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years." Afterward the Jews would make their court to the Romans, by crucifying Christ, but their sin soon found them out to their destruction.

We have instances also of sins finding out particular persons. How did sin find out the first sinner Adam, who would be as God, and became as the beasts, that perish, whom no tree or bush in the garden could hide from his offended God. Cain's secret murder of his brother haunted him like a ghost, wherever he went. David's secret sins of adultery and murder, were set in the light, and proclaimed to all into whose hands the Bible comes. Nebuchadnezzar's pride, who was driven to dwell with beasts, and Herod eaten up of worms. And many other such instances of sins finding out the sinners might be mentioned.

2. As to observation. Who sees not this often accomplished on others in their sight, or hear of it by frequent reports brought to their ears. What secret wickedness is there daily breaking forth, in some place or other, and set in the light, that has been done in the dark, and perhaps has been long hid. We have this day a fresh instance of God's discovering a course of secret wickedness, that for several years has spurned all methods of bringing the matter to light.

Again, who may not observe this in the course of providence with himself. How often does God make even the thoughts of the heart to meet the sinner, that never was ripened into action, so that all may know that *God searcheth the reins and hearts*. God often makes sin find out the sinner, when yet he does not carry the quarrel to the streets and blaze it abroad in the world. But it is that the sin-

ner may know, that God will judge him. God knows it, and makes the sinner know, that he knows and remembers it too, by some secret check, perhaps quite unobserved, or unobservable by others.

Use 1.—Of information. This informs us,

1. That there will be a day, in which God will yet plead his controversy with these lands, however long it be put off. The sins of Scotland and the sins of England will find them out, and God will treat with them as covenant breaking nations, whom he would have healed but they would not. The national perjury, blood of saints, contempt of the gospel, and profanity, with all the pieces of defection and backslidings, however covered and crusted over, will no doubt yet find out the nations, and all ranks of persons in church and state. And is never more ready to find them out, than when they are buried out of sight and people are saying, the bitterness of death is past.

2. When we meet with any stroke or cross dispensation, we ought to read it in the sin at which it points and humble ourselves, else we fight against God. "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved: thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return."

It should make us say, I remember my sin this day. And I think you and I both have reason to say so, when we think upon the astonishing course of providence with us this winter, in the matter of the Sabbath days, which God for the most part hath made heartless, half silent Sabbaths to us. O let us lay this matter to heart and examine how we have improved Sabbaths and public ordinances, since on them God has stamped such a mark of his anger against us.

Those whose sins have found them out have no reason to murmur, but to be thankful that God has checked them sooner than they thought. For sin must find out the sinner, and the sooner the better. Better now than in another world. Better now than upon the brink of eternity, or before the tribunal of God. Yes, *but ill is good on trust*, will the impenitent sinner say. But the proverb is ill applied here. For God will pay home the principal, with full interest for the time it has lain over, when he begins to reckon with the sinner, and then the sinner will change his mind.

Putting off the reckoning and delaying accounts pays no debt. Reprieves are not pardons. The debt of sin that is not confessed in God's way, and carried to the blood of Christ, to be swallowed up there, will neither die nor drown. The sinner will to his astonishment hear of it sooner or later, *It will surely come, it will not tarry.*

Perhaps it has already lain over many years, and perhaps it may lie over as long yet; but be sure it will find you out at length. Old sores that have not been well cured will readily break out, and old guilt will soon or late bring fresh pain.

5. Sin is a bastardly thing, that at sometime no body will desire to father. Adam sins and hides himself. Cain murders his brother but is averse to own it. So just and holy, so agreeable to the rational nature is the law of God, that the sinner is or will be self condemned. Therefore it will sometimes be a confounding question, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." Alas that we should be hurrying into those things of which we shall be ashamed, and lay up so much matter of future grief, shame and remorse to ourselves. Some indeed glory in their shame, but that brow of brass will at length be broken, when sinners shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt.

6. Whoever then will have the sweet of sin, must lay their accounts with the sour of it. They that drink of the brim of that cup must drink of the dregs of it too. God has fixed shame, sorrow and torment of heart to sin, with such strong bands that none shall be able to break. Where sin dines, judgment will sup. Wrath follows it, as the shadow does the body. The stinging serpent lies on the other side of the hedge of God's law, which they who break over will find.

Lastly, In vain do sinners fight against their sins finding them. It is lost labour, it will not do, for God is their party. It is vain for sinners to hide themselves, and hide their own eyes from their sins, for see them they must. *Yea, they shall see and be ashamed.* Men may close their eyes upon their sin, but God will open them, and make the frightful spectacle appear to them. Conscience will not always be seared, nor the mind blinded. God will take off the vail and say, *I will set thy sins in order before thee.*

It is in vain to hide these sins which God calls them to discover for his own glory. Secret sins, so secret as they give no scandal to men, God calls not men to discover ordinarily. But scandalous sins by which the name of God is blasphemed before the world, God calls sinners to make open confession of them, that they may restore him the glory before men, that they have taken away before them. And however sinners may struggle against the glorifying of God this way, God will not want his glory of them. For he hath said, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." And that is a heavy saying, "Who hath hardened himself against God and prospered?"

Objection. But there is much secret wickedness in the world, from which sinners get away, without its finding them out. This is a grand objection against the doctrine, from which sinners are apt to encourage themselves: therefore I will consider it, and in answer to it, offer these particulars.

1. There are secret rebukes and strokes which a sinner often meets with from the hand of God, these, though undiscernible to the world, are yet visible to the sinner himself. The lashes of conscience often go deep in accusing sinners. Many a fair face is often put upon the black heart of a guilty person, that blasts their sinful pleasures. And do they escape that are put into the hands of this tormentor? No hand was laid upon Cain, yet he complains that his sin was heavier than he was able to bear. Sins often find out the sinner, when it is not known to others. None knew that the sin of Joseph's brethren had found them out but Joseph and themselves.

2. Sin many times finds out sinners before the world, and though some escape yet many are taken in that snare. I need not repeat instances. There are some that God makes examples to others, and they that will not take warning by them, may themselves come also to be made examples to others, and from them, others will take warning. Hence says Paul to the Hebrews, "Let us labour therefore to enter into rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." Though some escape yet you may be taken, therefore do not you adventure, in hopes of getting away with your sin. While there are so many whose sin has found them out in the land of the living, not only in their name, but in their persons, it is folly to go on securely in sin, expecting never to be detected.

3. Sin often finds out the sinner's name, when he is dead and gone, so that they die like a candle going out, leaving a bad savour in the world behind them. The name of the wicked shall rot. Their name rots with their bodies. God does with some sinners that get out of the world without sin finding them out, as some do with such as die by their own hands, they hang them up after they are dead, for a terror to others. Their names are as their bodies were unburied, left behind them for a loathing to such as think on them.

4. Sin often finds out the sinner in his relations or family after he is gone. God takes away the sinner and pursues the quarrel in the eyes of the world against them that are his. This is described in a striking manner, Job xx. 26,—29. This is also threatened in the second commandment. Sin not found out is one of the worst of legacies, which God to his own glory, takes the payment of in his own hand, to make all men to see that there is a God to judge upon

the earth. It is a consuming moth, that will consume substance, and erase the remembrance of sinners from the earth. See what God says to Eli, for the wickedness of his sons and his lenity to them, 1 Sam. ii. 30,—36.

5. Sin never fails to find out the sinner in another world. There is a tribunal immediately after death, where the impenitent sinner will find that his sins are not forgotten. *After death is the judgment.* But there will be a day of judgment at the end of the world, when secret things will be brought to light and laid open. "In that day God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. Then he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil. Then the dead small and great shall stand before God, and the books will be opened." The records of the most secret wickedness will be read before the world of angels and men. These works of darkness, which now cannot be dived into, will be laid open then in their most minute circumstances, before the universal congregation.

Now judge ye, if any encouragement can be drawn, from some sinners getting away without their sin finding them out. You see that out it must be, and out it will be, if not in time, yet in eternity. And better now than hereafter, for,

1. Now God is on a throne of mercy, and if sin find out the sinner now, he may go to Christ with it, who will cover it with his blood, and upon the sinner's coming to him, God has promised, saying, "I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." If the criminal fall down before his judge and submit himself, he will get his soul for a prey. "For if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But hereafter the white flag of peace is taken in, the time of trial is over, the door of mercy shut, and no more pardons dispensed. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us: and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are."

2. The most public place in all this world, is but a secret corner in comparison of that assembly that shall be at the great day. "Before the Judge shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." And what matter what shame fall on the sinner now, so that he may lift up his face in that great assembly unashamed.

Question. But why is it that sin finds some out in time, and that

others are put off to another world? *Answer.* The sins of some sinners find them out in time, for these reasons.

1. Sometimes for their own good and eternal welfare, that their souls may be saved in the day of the Lord. The thief who was brought to the cross on the discovery of his sin was saved, when many others, no doubt, escaped and so perished. And thus it is thought concerning Ahab, that the discovering of his sin was a mean to bring him to repentance. Whatever God may do with others, one way or other, he will make sin find out his elect in this world, that it shall so toss them as to bring them to Christ.

2. For his own glory, that the world may see there is a God that concerns himself in matters done in the world as the Judge of it. "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth." These things are real evidences of God's omniscience, justice and holiness. So that while the sins of some find them out, he leaves not himself without a witness. And it becomes a bar in the way of prevailing atheism in the world, striking sinners with the thought, that there is a God.

3. For a terror and warning to others. "And all Israel shall hear and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you." God makes examples of some, that others may learn wisdom by their folly. And therefore it says to all, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." This is the end of church discipline in public rebukes. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." And they are far gone in hardness, and must be very insensible of their own case, who are not humbled and stirred up to watchfulness by these means. And idle unconcerned spectators of these things, are very like to become a spectacle themselves to others.

But again, sin's finding out some is delayed for a time, and they get away with them even in the face of death; so that their sin never finds them out in this world. And this,

1. Is in wrath to themselves, they are given over as helpless, *Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.* Their punishment is reserved till they get it altogether in full tale. "How are they brought into desolation as in a moment; they are utterly consumed with terrors." It is a fearful case when God allows accounts with a sinner to lie over, till he be in another world; and never brings him to a reckoning till there. I assure you God deals not so with any of his own. "But when we are judged, says Paul, we are chastened of the Lord,

that we should not be condemned with the world." It is a sign of a very hopeless case, when God ceaseth to be a reprover to a sinner.

2. It is to be a certain evidence and token to the world of a judgment to come. Were every one's sin made to find him out in this world, and he brought to reckon for it here, it would tempt the world to think there were no future judgment. But since so many processes are laid by undiscussed in time, it is an argument that the judgment will sit in eternity. And indeed, every one of those sins that sinners get away with, is an argument for a day of judgment. For since God is a just God, he must reward sinners according to their works, going on in their sin, and since that is not done now, it will certainly be done hereafter.

3. The mischievous effects of some persons' sins are never complete till they be gone. And even when they are off the stage, their guilt may be running on to a greater and greater height in this world, for all which they shall be made to reckon at the great day. So the mischief of Haman lived when he was dead. Thus Esther, after his death, "Spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device which he had devised against the Jews." Jeroboam, long after he was dead, is called Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin. So there is no breaking off of such sins but by the repentance of the party. And when he does not repent, no wonder his sin does not find him out till it be completed.

Use 2. Of Exhortation. And this doctrine serves to dehort from several sinful practices, and to exhort to several duties.

Dehortation 1. Beware of leading a careless and untender life. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Most men walk carelessly, they are as indifferent about keeping a clean conscience as the workman is of keeping the motes and dust off his clothes, who never troubles himself, as long as they do not come into his eyes. This is not the good old way of the saints, "who exercised themselves, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man."

Now that is a careless and untender life,

1. When a man keeps not upon his spirit a fear of falling into temptation. "Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." Many will be sorry after they have fallen into the mire, but when they are out of that, alas! they do not look before them when they come near another, as affrighted at it, and they are into that one too, before they are aware. O sirs! when grew the world so, as one might travel

through any part of it fearlessly, go into any company, and walk on without taking heed to his steps. There is not a saint in heaven that knew it so in their day.

2. When one tamely yields up himself, to be guided by his passions, lusts, and affections, and is not habitually guarded by reason, religion, and conscience. People may call this infirmity of the will, but they will never make less of it than a careless untender life, that will find them out, and make them broken bones, if God has any kindness for them. "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." It was said of Christ, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the seas obey him?" But of how many may we say, What manner of a Christian is this? that the wind of passions, and the seas of temptation, ever command him and carry him headlong. By the smallest spark he goes up like powder, and by the smallest blast he is driven like a feather or chaff before the wind. Now beware of this.

Motive 1. We have a careful enemy that watcheth all advantages and opportunities against us. "As a roaring lion, he walketh about seeking whom he may devour." While we sleep, the devil wakes; while we stand still, he goes about us; while we fear nothing he takes the advantageous occasion to make his attack. Ah! shall not the diligence of our malicious enemy, rouse us to look about us and be upon our guard. Our souls are a prey, which he thinks well worth his pains to catch, and do not we reckon it worth all our pains to keep them?

2. Consider where you are. They that are in heaven need not watch, nor fear a surprise. *The gates of that city shall not be shut at all by day*, for no enemy can approach it. But you are not there, but on earth, where you are never out of hazard, alone, nor in company. "You are among the lions' dens, and the mountains of the leopards." It is the haunt of wild beasts. They have their dens without us and within us. One man may be a snare to another, and a man may be a snare to himself. There is a thicket of snares and temptations through which we have to go. We carry a body of death with us, which is like tinder, to kindle the flames of hell about our ears.

3. Careless walking is ungodly walking. "If," says God, "ye walk contrary unto me, (Hebrew, at a venture) and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you, according to your sins." No man becomes a Christian by chance, nor walks with God by random. The Christian life is a labour, a warfare, a rowing against the stream. Assure yourselves then that by careless

walking, you can never attain to the rest, the crown, nor to the shore of Immanuel's land.

Lastly, Consider your sin will find you out. Careless untender living often betrays sinners into some foul mires, the mud of which they can never wipe off while they live. How many have been set up as beacons. How many that have dashed themselves to pieces upon the rock of security, have *there* been set up as beacons to others. Ask David what betrayed him into his adultery, and he will tell you that it was his careless walking. And I believe there are few, if any, gross and scandalous outbreaks among them that profess the name of Christ, but they will be found to be the just judgment of God upon former careless walking, and what naturally flowed from it. Is it any wonder that he who walks in a rough uneven way, and will not look to his feet, should break a leg or an arm sometime or other.

Again, Careless walking never fails to make a poor case of the soul. Can the idle soul think to escape suffering want. There always comes a winter which enquires at the careless walker, What has summer been doing? Hence some professors have little or no experience of religion, but with good wishes and meanings, they go on all their days, like the door on the hinges they make no progress; they are ever learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth.

Besides, such conduct brings always some stroke at length, which shews that the Lord has not forgot it. It will one time or other lie heavy on the sinner. He gets either a merciful rousing out of that careless disposition, "Make me, says David in this case, to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice," or it ruins him for altogether, as it did those of Laish, Judges xviii. 27.

Dehortation 2. Venture not upon nor live in secret wickedness. There is much of this in the world; when persons find an opportunity and secrecy withal, they think then is the time to break over the hedge. And they may do it fearlessly for there is no eye to see them, nor will their credit be lost by it. Thus secrecy makes thieves, cheaters, unclean persons, murderers, and many other kinds of sinners. But, O sirs, be sure your sin will find you out, however secret. Venture not upon such things.

Motive 1. Are not God and your own conscience witnesses unto you in the most secret place. You cannot go from his Spirit, nor flee from his presence. The darkness of the night or some solitary place may hide you from the eyes of men, but can they hide you from the eye of God and your own conscience? Whither can you

go where they are not with you? Perhaps a child's presence would hinder you and will you own a God, a conscience, and not have so much respect to them as to a child? Will you dare the omniscient eye? Should you not rather say with Joseph, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

2. Many have thought themselves as secure from discovery as you, whose shame has been laid upon them, and they received the due reward of their work before the sun. And how do you know that the hellish trade will succeed better in your hands than in theirs? It is dangerous sporting with the all seeing eye. Take example by others, lest God set you up for an example next. And venture not upon the ice where so many have been drowned.

3. Secret wickedness seldom goes alone, but much more is often necessary to cover it. So that the person having once entered the devil's ground, finds a kind of necessity to go farther and farther in it. Adam having stolen the forbidden fruit, sins again to palliate it, by hiding himself, and indirectly laying the blame on God. David's adultery made way for drunkenness and murder. Lies in opposition to conscience are common in this case, so that one way or other conscience becomes like the highway, constantly trode upon, that it is no wonder it be quite dead for a while, till God put new life into it.

4. As long as you hide your sin and do not repent, the way is closed up betwixt heaven and you. There is a kind of excommunication from the presence of God passed upon you, neither will he be with you any more, while the accursed thing remains in your tabernacle. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things." And hence it is some wither, their secret wickedness blasts them, that they pine away in their iniquity. Perhaps they think they can confess to God and beg pardon. But in any case while they go on in the sin, they can have no pardon. For thus runs the divine declaration, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." And in the case of your wronging others, as by theft, while you are enjoying the fruits of your sin, you shall as soon pull the sun out of the firmament as get a pardon out of God's hand, for in that case restitution is a necessary part of repentance. So that the souls of many are in a case they little think. Thus Zaccheus, as a true penitent, was willing to restore fourfold.

5. Secret wickedness will damn your soul as well as open.

"There shall be tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." And O where will be your profit, if you should gain the whole world and lose your own souls? Is there any pleasure or profit whatever that will make up this loss? O throw not away a precious soul for what will not profit. It will be no comfort when men are roaring amongst the whole congregation of devils and damned spirits, that what they did, they did it secretly.

Lastly, If you will venture, be sure your sin will find you out, it will give you a meeting sometime, it may be when you are not looking for it. Your secret stolen waters shall overflow you at length, and your bread eaten in secret shall stick in your throat. And if you be so in love with secrecy you may get enough of it. God may give you your stroke in secret also, where there shall be none to help you; but you shall get the whole weight of your own burden as he did with Onan.

Some perhaps will value all this but very little, they know other things, secret wickedness has prospered in their hand long, and to this day, there are none who can lay any thing to their charge. But do you know the reason of that? If you did, it would be no great encouragement. "To me, saith God, belongeth vengeance and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them shall make haste." Run on then as long as you will, as sure as God hath said it, your foot shall slide in due time, here or hereafter.

Dehortation 3. Do not employ yourselves to defend or justify your sin, as if there was little or no evil in it; but rather lie open to conviction from the word of God, which is the law of liberty. This is an evil frequent in the world, by which men shut their own eyes, and drag their consciences at the heels of their self-will. They will extol some notorious sins as great duties. Thus Saul extolled his own sinful conduct in the Amalekites, 1 Sam. xv. What they have done, not because it was lawful, must be lawful because they have done it. Their credit is engaged, and therefore they cannot quit it, but must go forward and defend an ill action because they have done it. At least they will palliate their guilt by every mean, and do their utmost to extenuate it, when they find it impossible altogether to defend it. Beware of this.

Motive 1. This is a horrid profanation of the name of God to make a shelter for sin under the covert of his holy law. "These wrest the scriptures to their own destruction." This is to make God the patron of sin, and is like the wounding of a man with his own sword. Some have scripture ready to defend their sinful practices, and thus the holy word is abused to the defence of unholy

practices. This is a course as desperate as if the sick man should mix the antidote with poison, which makes his recovery hopeless. This is the conduct of ungodly men, "Who turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness."

2. This course may well aggravate your guilt, it will never lessen it. It may blind your own eyes, but not God's. *Be not ye therefore partakers with them.* Jezebel caused a fast to be proclaimed, to palliate the murder of Naboth; Saul smothers the business of the Amalekites; but did these contrivances avail them any thing before God? Did not Saul see himself rejected for tampering with the command of God, and Jezebel was eaten up by dogs. Men may turn sin into what colours they please in their own eyes, but they will never make it any thing but the hue of hell in the sight of God.

3. It is a plain evidence of untenderness of heart, and will go far to prove a man hollow hearted before God. What less can be demanded as a sign of sincerity, than to be willing to know our sins, and our duty? "How many, says Job, are mine iniquities and sins? Make me to know my transgression and my sin." They that are not willing to know their sins, are not willing to part with them. "That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do so no more." They that are not willing to part with their sins, deal falsely with God. What can you make then of aversion to admit conviction, but rebelling against the light, a staving off of repentance and reformation with long weapons; a shrewd sign indeed of a hollow heart.

4. They that take this way, lay themselves open to the fearful stroke of delusion, Isa. lxvi. 2,—4. Men that go about to defend their sins, though it were in jest, may come to believe the thing in earnest at length. "And as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." For it is just in God to put out those eyes that men shut against the light. The more pains men take to cover and extenuate their sin, the heart is more hardened, the conscience more deadened, and at length it may come to a fearful height. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them."

Lastly, It is in vain to defend or extenuate sin, for it will come out and appear in its native colours. If we will not penitently draw off the mask which we have sinfully put upon it, God will do it and make it appear in its native colours. Men often do with

their sins as with their bodily sores, they roll them up with rags. But if God come to cure them, he will draw off all these, uncover the running sore, and open it up in mercy. And if not so, they will be opened up before the world at the great day. For whatever men think or say of their sinful practices, neither their sayings nor thoughts of them, but the truth of the matter will be the rule of God's judgment. "We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth, against them that commit such things."

Dehortation 4.—Sin not presumptuously with a high hand in opposition to reason and conscience, checks and reproofs from word and providence. Sins of infirmity are common to all, unavoidable through the weakness of the flesh, and make the best go all their days with a bowed down back. But some venture on sin deliberately and fearlessly, and wilfully break over the hedge. Beware of this.

Motive 1. Consider God is the party with whom you have to do. He is wise, you cannot outwit him; he is mighty, and you cannot out-brave him. He makes the earth to quake and rends the rocks in his anger; and takes up the isles as a very little thing. In your presumptuous sins, you do but dash your heads against a rock. The head will be wounded, but the rock stands firm. He has given a law, he will see it regarded, and sinners will either bow or break before him.

2. Consider the awful fence which he has set about this law. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." They that travel in deserts carry fire with them to drive away the wild beasts from them. God has set a hedge of fire about his law, whoso will transgress must go through it. There is a net to catch the sinner, that he shall not enter the forbidden ground, but he shall be hard and fast in the snare. These are the threats of wrath, with which God's word is inlaid. You may make light of these for a time, but you will change your mind, and be forced to say, "Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our way, so hath he dealt with us."

3. Conscience the more it is trampled under foot, will rise at length the more violently and sting the more piercingly. Thus "after thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Men that war with their conscience may gain for a time, but the victory will at last fall to the other side. We may say of conscience as of Gad, "A troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last." And the more harshly it has

been treated, the more terrible will its resentments be. Presumptuous sins do but weave the cords, wherewith the sinner will be the faster bound. Sinning against light makes the way for outer darkness.

Lastly, Your sin will find you out. And likely, a sudden unexpected meeting it will give you. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." Look abroad through the world, and you will see the truth of this written in the sudden ruin of many presumptuous sinners, whose triumphing has been but for a moment; who have run on casting off all fear and in a moment have fallen into the ruin, out of which they could not rise again. How many have run their course like the wild ass, "That snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away? All they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her." So the sinners' month has come, when the foot has been taken from them, and their life and death has been like the crackling of thorns under a pot, noisy but soon laid.

Dehortation 5th, and last. Strive not against your sins finding you out. When the time comes that the Lord makes sin to find out the sinner, O what wrestling do sinners often make to avoid the meeting. They shut their eyes, and they will not see though God is writing their sin before them in legible characters. They will deny their sin when it is charged upon them, as Saul had the impudence to say he had performed the commandment of the Lord, when the bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen were proclaiming his sin. If they meet with a stroke sent from God for the very purpose to charge it home upon them, they will say it is but a chance, 1 Sam. vi. 9. Beware of this.

Motive 1. In so doing you fight against God. He by his word or providence deals with you to own it, and you stave it off. It is dangerous entering the lists with such a party. It is the proper office of the Spirit of God to convince of sin, and those who ward off convictions set themselves against the Spirit to quench the holy fire and so run themselves deeper and deeper into guilt.

2. You fight against your own souls and wrong them. "He that sinneth against me, says the Saviour, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death." The boil that is to be cured must be lanced and opened up; and the guilt to be removed, must be discovered and the sinner made sensible of it, in the way prescribed by God. If you will not allow your sin to find you out, you block up the way of repentance to your own souls; and if you will not repent of it you must perish by it. Many times when the Lord is taking

the way to cure the sinner, he wrestles against it, as if he were going to kill him. But O does not the loss redound to you, if you gain your point.

Lastly, Strive as long as you will, your sin will find you out at length. If you ward off the first charge, another will come which it will be impossible to escape. If secret convictions and bosom checks will not do, you may come to get some heavy stroke, that may be more effectual; and if a small one do not, a greater will. And if nothing prevail in time, it will be so charged upon you in eternity that you shall stand speechless.

EXHORTATIONS.

Exh. I.—Believe this and think upon it, especially when you are tempted to sin. Know this to be the nature of sin, and charge your conscience with it, when you are tempted. Sinners often take time to think, even on the brink of temptation, that there is hope it may never come to light; but will you think, it is certain, that one time or other, if you yield to temptation, it will find you out.

1. This might be a notable mean to keep you from sin. O how averse are people to bear the shame of sin, after they have sown it to themselves they cannot think to reap it. But will you think on that in time. Look to the shame, sorrow, and torment, that are to follow sin, before you fall in with it: and assure yourselves that if you take the one, you must take the other also.

2. God hath said it, and said it to us, for that very end, that it may move us to hold off from the way of sin. Thus it is certain, it cannot fail, and thus we are warned and rendered inexcusable. We cannot say, it was not told us.

3. We cannot act rationally, or as reasonable creatures, if we will not forecast the event of our actions, which is so plainly and solemnly told us. How sad is it that men should be blindly hurried away by their passions into sin, and sink themselves in a gulf of misery without ever thinking that they are entering on a way that leads to destruction. A prudent man foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on and are punished. Passions and corrupt affections are dangerous guides, because they are blind and furious and always for venturing come what will come. But religion and reason must guide the man, if he will act either as a man or a Christian.

4. How often are the dregs of sin bitter, quickly after the drinking out of the cup. No sooner is it over than the sinner calls himself a beast and a fool. He slides away pleasantly on the ice, but presently he is groaning out under broken bones. A little foresight would prevent this, Job xx. xi.—14. O were it not far better to

have it to say, I have not done what I was tempted to do, than O that I had not done it. Temptation casts a mist before the eyes when it is not resisted, which, when the tempter has got his design, often presently clears up, and the soul sees itself in a mire. This was the case with Adam and Eve, "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked." And then what answer can one give to that question of conscience, "What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are ashamed? for the end of these things is death."

5. How often do the bitter dregs cast up long after the sweet is forgotten and out of mind. This was eminently the case with Joseph's brethren. Many other sinners have mourned at the last, when their flesh and their bodies have been consumed. Sin is a seed that may lie long under ground, yet will spring up at length, and will bring forth grapes of gall, and bitter clusters, which the sinner must wring out and drink. Sins of youth may set and keep tryst heavily with the sinner in old age. "His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust." The fear of this made David cry, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions." And Job says, "for thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me possess the sins of my youth." O should not this be considered in time, and the conscience in the hour of temptation be awed with that, Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the end?

Lastly, It is the business of the tempter to keep this out of your view, as that which contributes to the marring of his projects. "For surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." And if you intend to resist him, you must arm yourselves with this consideration timeously. It will be in upon you, better take it before you enter the snare, when it may do you good, than after you are in it, when it will rack your conscience.

Ezh. II. Search your own sins. Labour to prevent sins finding you out, by your finding out them. We should do in this case, as when one knows there is some hateful or venomous beast in their house; they search for it diligently, till they find it out, lest it should come upon them unawares and do them harm. No serpent nor toad is such a dangerous guest as sin is. Search it out then, and search till you find it out. And,

1. Make a serious survey of your whole life. "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." Go back the track of your whole life, and see where the prints of your feet are to be found out of the way of God. This will not be done cursorily to purpose. You would take a particular time for it. Men will take time

to adjust and settle their accounts with men, why not take time to settle their accounts with God.

Go through the several stages of your life. Neglect not to look into your birth and infancy. "Behold, says David, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Behold and remember the sins of childhood. *For childhood and youth are vanity.* Sins may be committed in childhood, which will find out the sinner long after. Cast up the sins of youth, it is a time of heedlessness and rashness, in which often much sorrow and misery is laid up for the time to come. "Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Follies of youth may be the burden of old age, and must reckon for them precisely with God here or hereafter. Survey the sins of middle age. "Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity." And let the sins of old age be narrowly examined.

Search into the several corners of your conversation. Examine your way in your dealing with God and men. Look how you have carried in respect of the duties of religion towards your Creator; of sobriety with respect to yourself; of righteousness with respect to your neighbour. Trace your way in the several relations in which you stand, how you have behaved as a husband, wife, parent, child, servant, master, subject, church-member. How have you behaved alone and in company. What you have done for God's honour, and the good of others in the world. Ask yourselves particularly, In what case is your salvation work? What progress have you made in the work of your day and generation?

2. Search out particularly those sins in you that have been most dishonouring to God, and shocking to your conscience, whether secret or open. For these will most readily give you a fearful meeting if you do not prevent them. No matter though they be of an old date, for when the conscience is roused, they will be fresh and lively in respect of the sting. All sins deserve wrath, and will bring it if not pardoned; but some are more heinous in the sight of God than others, which providence useth to write over in the particular strokes sent for them. Therefore as ever you would prevent this, search them out till you find them.

3. Search out the several steps and outbreakings of that sin, with which you have been most easily beset and led astray. "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth most easily beset us." That is the special idol of jealousy, which provoketh God to jealousy, and which a holy providence ordinarily makes sinners smart for in a remarkable manner. So that as it has been a peculiar grief to his Spirit, he makes it also some time or other a peculiar grief to the

sinner's heart. Thus Eli's softness to his children, which seems to have been his weak side, found him out very terribly at length. God may pardon his own people's weaknesses, and yet may cause them remarkably smart for them, by taking vengeance on their inventions. So that in that respect horror may take hold upon them.

4. Search into those sins which you thus discover. *Let us search and try our ways.* Open them up and look into the lurking evil that is in them. When the serpent is found, rip it up to see where the poison lies. "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." View them in the dishonour which they have reflected on God, in the multitude of mischiefs which they have brought forth to your own souls, or to others. Notice their several aggravations, the light, love, privileges, and obligations, against which you have sinned. Draw out the libel at length against yourselves, that you may prevent its being presented against you in wrath. Present it to yourself in its native colours.

Lastly, These things which you have omitted or done with a doubting or erring conscience, examine narrowly and strictly, for our opinion of sin can never alter the nature of it. The after reckoning of conscience is often the most true one. Thus Paul says, "But what things were gain for me, those I counted loss for Christ." There are many things in which persons have peace, in which they could have no peace, if they would narrowly examine them. And when they will not do it, God makes their sin to find them out, writing out their disguised sins, in such a stroke as sets them in their own colours, which this search might be a proper means to prevent.

Motive 1. If there be a way under heaven to prevent sin's finding out the sinner in wrath, this is it. "For if we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged." It is the way amongst men, for one judge to enter a process against a transgressor of the laws and to discern against him, to keep him out of the hands of one that would be more severe. Take you the same course in your own process. Erect a tribunal within your own breast, place conscience on the judgment-seat, let it narrowly examine the cause and pass an impartial sentence, if you would be safe. If not, the day will come when you will find that your own indulgence to yourselves has ruined you.

2. In case providence see it meet to make some stroke to overtake you, even for that sin or sins which you have acknowledged

and lamented aforehand, yet you shall have more comfort in that case, and it shall be less than otherwise it would have been. "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." Remarkable is the difference of these two laws, *Exod. xxii. 1.—4.* "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and shall kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. But if the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double." The reason of this difference, where the sin was more complete, the punishment was greater; where less, it was less. So that there shall ever be found an advantage of taking this course.

Lastly, It is impossible but your sin and you must meet. And where there is no shifting of the meeting, sure it is the wisest course to yield to it in time. If a besieged city can by no means hold out, it is the best way to keep things from an extremity presently to yield. "Agree then with thine adversary quickly; whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

Exh. 3d and last. Repent then and turn from your sins unto God. Give up with your sinful courses and ways. Let the consideration of the bitterness that will be in the end of it, move you to put an end to them with all speed. For escape as long as you will otherwise, be sure your sin will find you out at last.

Motive 1. As your sin goes on, your accounts increase, and while they are making one treasure, God is making another. "Thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." None of your sins are forgotten, as long as they are not forgiven; neither are they forgiven while you are going on in them. And it is a miserable office to be increasing your debts to divine justice, taking no proper means to be delivered from the burden.

2. You will be brought to a reckoning for them all. "For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Sin is a debt that will neither die nor drown, but in the sea of the Redeemer's blood. And the longer the reckoning be delayed, it will be the more dreadful when it comes. Judgment that comes slow with feet of lead, strikes with iron hands when it comes. Therefore break off your sinful

course in time, lest your sin overtake you, when there will be no remedy.

As many unrepented and unforsaken sins as hang about you, so many snares and traps are for your ruin. And when God begins to reckon for one, he may reckon for all with you. *When I begin*, says he, *I will also make an end*. It is often with the sinner in this case as with a man when he breaks; all his creditors come on him one after another, when once one begins. And thus the ruin of some is completed, and heavy is the case of others made.

Question. What should one do, whose sin is, or has already found him out?

1. Bless God and be thankful that he ceaseth not to be a reprover to you. It is a fearful case where the Lord lays the reins on the sinner's neck, and will not bestow a check upon him. "And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth," said God to Ezekiel, that thou shalt be dumb and shalt not be to them a re-prover, for they are a rebellious house. It is a token for good when the Lord checks the sinner, and restrains him, and causes the serpent to bite him as soon as he goes over the hedge. The child whom the parent is most concerned to educate right, gets many faults shown him and frequent checks. Despise not your own mercy, but fall in with it.

2. Carefully pursue any providential hint that God makes to you of sins and faults in your way. "A reproof entereth more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool." Be taught by slender means, if you would not provoke God to teach you by more severe handling. A tender conscience will be taught more by a frown, than others by a heavy rod on their backs.

3. Read the sin in the punishment, and justify God in what he is doing, or has done against you. So did good Eli. "And he said, it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." So did Hezekiah. "He said to Isaiah, good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken: he said moreover, for there shall be peace and truth in my days." The humbled soul will do this, when the proud un-humbled spirit will strive against a reproving God, and so bring on a heavier stroke.

4. Flee with your guilt to the Redeemer's blood. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin, and for uncleanness." When God discovers your spiritual uncleanness, and we find the load of guilt on our souls: we must go to God, confess our sin freely and fully, and make application to the blood of sprinkling. Then shall our souls be cleansed from sin, by the precious *blood of his Son*. The

sting shall be taken out of the conscience, for this *blood purgeth the conscience from dead works*. And there shall be a raising up both in confidence in the Lord, and if God see it meet the stroke shall depart, however the quarrel shall be ended.

Lastly, Forsake that sin. Give up with it and strive against it. Turn to the hand that smiteth and be not like those of whom it is said, "Thou Lord hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return." Return not with the dog to the vomit, otherwise you will get a sharper rebuke next.

Question. What should one do, who is afraid in a humble manner that their sin find them out? That is, that the Lord's anger justly fall upon them for their sin. "My soul, says David, trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments."

1. Go to the Lord Jesus, the great burden bearer, and lay all your guilt over upon him. Lay the hand of faith on the head of the sacrifice, and plead the promise of forgiving and forgetting. For saith the Lord, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

2. Lay yourselves down at the Lord's feet, acknowledging that you deserve wrath, but begging for his Son's sake, he would turn it away; withal resolved to submit to whatsoever chastisement he will lay on you, saying, "Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."

Lastly, Mourn over your sin and walk humbly and softly under the sense of it. Faith in Christ's blood and true repentance is the best grave-stone for guilt, that it neither rise on a soul here nor hereafter. Amen.

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*Ettrick, August 2, 1719.—Forenoon.*

THE GREAT DANGER OF PROFESSORS WHO HOLD THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

### SERMON XVIII.

ROMANS i. 18.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.*

It is highly necessary to move men to depart from iniquity, that they understand how heinously the Lord takes their going on in it,