

The Discovery and Defeat of Sin

Spiritual Refining, volume 2,
A Treatise of Sin in contemporary language

By Anthony Burgess

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*The Discovery and Defeat of Sin:
Spiritual Refining (Vol. 2) by Anthony Burgess in
Contemporary English*

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The original book was a compilation of sermons published under the title: *Spiritual Refining: Part 2 or, A Treatise of Sin with its Causes, Differences, Mitigations and Aggravations. Particularly of the desperate Deceitfulness of Man's Heart, of Presumptuous and Reigning Sins, and of Hypocrisy and Formality in Religion*. Thomas Newberry printed it in London, 1654.

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Author's Preface

These sermons were prepared as part of the former book titled *Spiritual Refining* (volume one), but that book, swelling in bulk, forced the content of this book to be withheld. Yet because of the perpetual usefulness, as long as men have hearts and are subject to temptations, it was thought fit not to hide this light under a bushel, so that although in the former book, there was delivered the substance of true grace and its counterfeit, yet this book will much conduce to a further discovery and illustration of that subject, and so in reference to that treatise may be considered to be an addition for further adoring and amplifying that matter. The main scope of this work is to bring not only the ungodly, but a believer also, into more acquaintance with his own heart. For a man may have a very long standing in Christianity, yet by frequent searching into the book of his heart, find more errors than ever he thought of. So here I commend a new study and a new art to the world. This treatise may well be called liberal, for if rightly managed, it will set a man at liberty from that entanglement and bondage that the lusts of sin have over him.

It is true, this subject has been searched into by many practical authors, yet it's good to have several books about the same matter since we do not bring new matter in divinity (no more then in philosophy, which is the same matter under a multitude of forms). First, its good because one book of such a subject may come into a reader's hands, when another book may not. Also, every writer has his several gifts to prepare and dress up the matter treated of and one writer's gifts may prevail more than others. No doubt it is with books as it is with men and their preaching. There is a wonderful dispensation of God's providence here, for some men, though they have no eminency either of gifts or graces, yet are blessed with more spiritual success and acceptance in their labors than men of greater name and renown. So it is with books. Not always those books that are the most learned, the most exquisite and elaborate find the highest place in men's affections, but the success is as God in wisdom and mercy does grant to it. Hence, though the ministers of

Christ plant and water by writing as well as preaching, yet still it's God that gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6,7).

A two-fold advantage may come by this book through God's blessing.

First, the true Christian may come to further assurance and knowledge of the work of grace in his heart and accordingly walk more thankfully, joyfully and fruitfully.

Secondly, the mouths of malicious enemies, those who blaspheme the way of purity, may be stopped. For whereas they are prone to accuse the godly as deceivers and hypocrites, they may at last be ashamed, beholding the upright and sincere conversation of the godly mingled with a holy fear. Though the world misjudges their persons and misconstrues their actions, yet they have the testimony of a sincere and upright heart within.

Now lest this self-examination degenerate into blind imitation, and be thought to keep men always in a sad howling wilderness, I have therefore shown that a deep search into the hearts of deceitfulness is amiably consistent with the assurance of God's love in Christ. It is a Christian's weakness when the holy fear about his heart shall diminish his faith and joy in the unsearchable riches of God's grace, or when a full enjoyment of this faith, joy and grace weakens the believers tenderness and diligence in heart-examinations. Yet because such is the tender hearts of many who fear God, they are easily tempted to believe that there is no grace at all in their hearts, because they experimentally discover more falsehood and hypocrisy in themselves than they thought of. I shall therefore, by way of antidote, direct the reader to the following distinctions which, if they are attended, may be sufficiently armed for all those objections that commonly harass the godly. I will do this in the preface because they are not fully mentioned in the book itself.

First, *let the heart-searching Christian distinguish between grace in the idea or definition of it and the real existence of it in it's subject.* When divines do write or speak about grace, they commonly describe it in its abstracted and exact nature as Tully decipheres his *Orators* or Plato his *Commonwealth*. No because the people of God read and hear such rules and definitions they conclude that they have no grace because it is not according to such a description. But grace in a definition is one thing and grace in the heart is another thing. The participation of grace is not as perfect as the description of it.

Second, *let them constantly consider the difference between the truth of grace and the perfection of grace.* Not attending to this many times breeds perplexing doubts. Perfection of parts is one thing and the perfection of degrees is another thing. It is true that this definition is doubted of, thinking that to affirm even a perfection of parts, though not of degrees, borders too much on Pelagianism, and that no man has perfection of parts, but is to grow therein, as such in degrees. But certainly if there is no perfection of parts, then believers could not be said to be regenerated, to be new creatures, to have the image of God repaired in them; for these expressions do necessarily suppose the essence, though not the perfection of godliness. Therefore, let the humble soul aspire and breathe after perfection, but take comfort in the discovery of the truth of grace, though in a low degree.

Third, *let them make a difference between truth of grace and the evidence or assurance of it.* It is not good argument to conclude people have no grace because they do not perceive it. Some diseases take away the sense of natural life and no wonder then if there are obstructions that sometimes hinder the perception of our spiritual life. It is a known saying of Augustine that whoever believes also perceives and feels that he believes. Yet this is to be understood of a potential aptitude if there is no strong impediment, otherwise grace and the assurance of it are many times separable. Hence the promises are made to those that have grace, not to those that know they have grace.

Fourth, *let them further distinguish between the having of grace absolutely and the enjoyment of it according to our desires.* The godly man sometimes staggers, questioning whether he has grace because he does not have as much as he prays for. It is similar to some covetous men who think themselves not rich because they don't have so vast of an estate as they have inordinately propounded to themselves.

Fifth, *let not the godly man make the work of grace upon another mans heart the rule upon his own.* Yet how often will the tender heart be making such comparisons because they have not been wrought upon in such a manner and to such a degree as others whom they know. Therefore they are apt to doubt of all. But we read in the Scriptures of different conversions of men to Christ and therefore we must not limit God to one way.

Sixth, *let them not fail to distinguish between partial hypocrisy and total.* There is no godly person but one with a hypocrite within himself as well as other sins and those sins are ready to put itself fourth, as well as

others. The preference and the predominance must be distinguished or else it will be despair to the most upright believer that lives.

Finally, and this must not be forgotten, *that even in hypocrisy or any other prevalent sin there must be a difference made between the violently resisted prevalence and a constant, total and quiet submission to it.* David in the matter of Uriah had hypocrisy and guile of heart, even prevailing over him, but it was contrary to the principles of grace within. Therefore sin did not always keep durable and quiet control. Insomuch that a difference is to be made about a godly man's sins of frailty, some are ordinary but some (such as David's we mentioned) are extraordinary. In these sins there is more reigning power, yet it can never obtain a full and quiet control.

These observations I commend to that Christian who shall, with all care, fall upon that duty of searching the deceitfulness of his heart. By this light, his holy trembling will not interrupt his joy nor will his evangelical joy abate his godly trembling. But as it is in matter of doctrine to be believed, it is our duty to try and search, yet in that searching we must not become skeptics but hold fast the truth. So in matters to be practiced, we are to discern and make a difference between the true and counterfeit, yet not being inconsistent and never being persuaded merely by our hearts.

What is presented to you, improve it practically and remember the teaching of our Savior, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17). I rest,

Thy hearty well-willer,

Anthony Burgess

Sutton-Coldfield

Dec. 9, 1653

section one

On the deceitfulness and
guile of man's heart

Chapter 1:

The Ingredients and Demonstrations of the Deceitfulness of the Heart

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

My previous book covered the work of grace in the hearts of God’s people, under the several titles of regeneration, sanctification and conversion. Now my intent is to show the contrary or opposite to all these. For although it’s a general rule that truth, at the same time discovers itself and its contrary error, yet it is as general and known a rule that contraries set together better illustrate one another. That this work may be better managed. I will first treat the deceitfulness of man’s heart in general and, when that is clearly discovered, then all the particular hypocrisies of it may be sooner manifested.

Come now to the text and for the consistency of it. Know that the prophet in this chapter speaks of Judah’s captivity and calamity – but she is not made captive to men before she had made herself a captive to sin. Other lords ruled over her because so many lusts ruled in her. And the prophet therefore declares the causes of their punishment that God may be justified that in their own consciences. Hence we see in verse one he says, their sin was written with a pen of iron upon the table of their hearts. The guilt of their iniquity was indelibly upon their own consciences. They could not but be convinced of it and they could not hide it from God. Now the sins that were the causes of their judgment or the vapors that made this thundering and lightening were several.

First, *idolatry* is shown in verses one and two.

Secondly, *they had a carnal confidence in human strength*, forsaking the Lord: Judah had made “flesh his strength” (v. 5). And this sin of carnal confidence is excellently described by the cursed effects of it and by the opposite grace, of trusting in God. On this the prophet takes occasion to go to the root of all wickedness inside the heart of man that flows from the poisoned fountain from where all the infected streams flow.

Exegetical Details

So here in the text you have several things.

First, a *proposition*. “The heart is deceitful.” And in that observe that the subject is the heart, which is the chief and principle part of man. The heart is the fountain of all knowledge, affections and resolutions. As some philosophers made the head the chief seat or metropolis of the soul in all her operations, so the Scripture makes the heart the chief place of all. Thus you see it is not the eye or the tongue but the heart – the most inward part of man. As the Psalmist in expressing the high impiety of some men said, “their inward part is very wickedness” (Psalm 5:9, KJV), or as in the Hebrew “wickedness,” the abstract is replaced by the concrete and the plural number replaced for the singular to express the exceeding sinfulness thereof.

Second, we have the *predicate*, it’s “deceitful.” The Hebrew word comes of a root to “supplant,” and therefore Jacob had his name from it, because he supplanted Esau about his birthright. Thus the heart of man is full of deceit and guile, whereby he cheats himself of his own everlasting happiness.

Third, there is the *aggravation*, “above all things.” There is nothing in the world that has so much deceit.

Fourth, there is the *consequent effect*, “desperately sick.” The deceitfulness of it makes it incurable: As those parts of the body, like the lungs, which are so placed that no remedy can easily apply to them and are more incurably effected by disease. Thus the heart of man, having so many secret and false windings, are not healed without great difficulty.

Fifthly, this deceitfulness is aggravated by the inscrutability of it by anyone but God alone, “who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and test the mind” (v. 9-10). It is only the Lord, who made the heart, who knows the depths of it.

General Observation

Thus we see that *the heart of every man is naturally full of deceit and guile and therefore desperately wicked.*

Solomon spoke of things that are hard to be found out: “The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea” (Pro. 30:19, KJV) because these leave no steps to

trace them by. But even harder than these to find out is the heart of man and not merely the evil in other's hearts. Others cannot know what is in a man's heart, but of ourselves we are not even able to dive into those depths either. There is an abyss, a depth within every man's heart, whereby he cannot know the bottom of his ways. Who thinks that they repent, believe and love God, when alas, his heart deceives him all the while? So this is a large subject to preach upon and it a very profitable and necessary point. Indeed this is the beginning of our conversion, when a man comes to be undeceived. Until this deceitfulness in your heart is removed in part, there is a great gulf between yourself and true repentance.

The Many Facets of Deceitfulness

To open this, let us first consider what comprises this deceitfulness of the heart, for there are many ingredients.

First, *this implies a great depth in every man's heart*. That as your deep waters are hardly fathomed, that men cannot discern what is in the bottom of them shows that man's heart has an abyss. As God is said to have his deep things, the "depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10) and Satan has his depths (Rev. 2:24) so man also has his deep things. No man can ever be acquainted with his own heart, that does not search deep, that does not dive deep into the secret things of his soul. Oh, how men would not so easily persuade themselves that they do repent, that their ways please God, that they have good hearts, if they would search to the bottom. Thus, scripture presses this as a great and necessary duty, to search our hearts, to examine ourselves, to commune with our own hearts on our beds and to be still (Psalm 4:4).

Secondly, *it implies the crookedness and unevenness of the heart*. Even as the serpent that goes in a crooked and uneven manner is said to be more subtle than other beasts of the field (Gen. 3:1) so it is with man's heart. It has many crooked turnings in it. When you think you are going in a way towards God, your heart hurries away to the world or some lust. Therefore the pure and upright man is opposed to the man who is forward or crooked and therefore God is said to be torturous with such a man (Ps. 18:26). The Hebrew word for "torturous" signifies a wrestling with man, to throw him down with skill. The same word is attributed both to God and man, so that the deceitful man, like the wrestler, turns

himself this way and that way into many motions and gestures to obtain his end. Just as John and the Pharisee, God on the other side will overthrow him, and be above him in all his craft. The heart then is deceitful because it has many crooked turning ways, sometimes to God, sometimes to the world and Satan.

Third, *there are implied many concaves and secret recesses of the heart.* As the labyrinth had many secret hollow places and windings out of which a man could never expedite himself, thus it is with man's heart. Man's heart is like a vast wilderness where there is no trodden path or way, like deep vaults where there are many horrid cells and holes. Thus the Apostle expresses in Hebrews 4:12 that God's word pierces, "to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." How many concaves, secret lurking holes and complexities of wheels within wheels are here in man's heart? So it is only by the light of God's word that we are ever able to come to the *intima* and *minima* that are in our souls.

Fourth, *this deceitfulness, inconstancy and mutability is a great cause.* The heart of man is therefore deceitful because it can be so suddenly put into several and contrary shapes. It will hate what is loved and will loath what it desired. It will appear in fits as really looking towards good, and then presently cast off again. No polypus or chameleon has more colors than the heart of a man has. This variability and lack of steadfastness is a grand cure of all that guile within us, and the Scripture compares this deceitfulness to a deceitful bow (Hos. 7:16). Just as the archer stretches out his bow and is ready to deliver the arrow to its mark when the very neck of the bow breaks and all falls upon the archer thus it is with people. You would think they had set their hearts for God, they were grounded on him and were now approaching and drawing close to him, but then all breaks and falls to the contrary. Hence Scripture brands every man a liar (Rom. 3:4). Every man's heart is a lying heart and until it is sanctified there is no believing or trusting it. Now if you would set this down in principle, Oh Lord, how is it within me? How shall I know when I am godly, when I have done my duty? This I conclude on, that I have to do with a notorious liar, branded by God for a liar, and that is my own heart. Oh, let me get out of this deceit, let me believe lies no longer!

Fifthly, *another cause of the deceitfulness of the heart is the horrible ignorance and darkness that covers the whole soul.* He that walks in darkness, cannot tell where he goes and there is no wonder why such a man is al-

ways off the path (John 12:35). They cannot but walk or fall into the ditch who are blind and so also with man's heart. It resembles the deep created at first when darkness covered it. Those depths of the heart are all covered over with darkness, with ignorance and blindness of mind (Eph. 5:8). Thus, converted men are called light, and those who are unconverted, darkness. How then can it be otherwise, but that every man should deceive his own soul, for he has no light to discover or to discern all the filth that resides in himself. Sinners are in a dungeon full of noisome and vicious lusts that rise upon them and fill them as so many Egyptian frogs, yet the sinner knows nothing and thinks all is well. Come out of the darkness if you would be no longer deceived.

Sixthly, *self-flattery and self-love in a great manner makes the heart deceitful*. There is a natural over-dependence of man's self: "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes" (Pro. 21:2). Who would think this were possible and yet if you single out man by man every one of them would judge his own ways to be right. Therefore judging and condemning of a man's self is that duty which every true convert is first set upon so that he no longer justifies himself and no longer flatters and deludes himself. He cries out, 'Woe to me that I called darkness light and good evil!' Thus the convert will bewail himself. Until this work of grace comes, every man is an ivory idol to himself, in love with himself and will never be convinced that he is undone, that his estate is damnable, that he is separated from Christ and hopeless. Oh no, he is too much in love with himself ever to be persuaded of these things. God Himself said, "you thought that I was one like yourself ... now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you" (Ps. 50:21). Thus a man, being deceived through self-love, imagines a merciful god to himself as he would have, and judges God according to his own disposition. As the Roman painter being called to paint a goddess draws it after the image of the woman he was in love with, thus self-love fills a man with spiritual drunkenness so that he is altogether deceived in what he thinks and does.

Finally, *the deceitfulness of the heart is not only from innate causes but magnified by and outward force which is the devil, who has set his throne and seat in every man's heart*. Just as we read of bodies possessed by the devil, so every man's soul is spiritually possessed by the devil. In Ephesians 2:2 the devil is called the Prince of this world and is said to rule in the hearts of the disobedient. Hence he is called the strong one that possesses the house until Christ, a stronger one than he, comes and con-

quers him (Luke 11:21). Now the devil is the Dragon (Rev. 12:3) and that old serpent full of craft and subtlety and so the heart of a man, being his instrument, must then participate of his guile. The devil at first used the serpent because it is more subtle than other beasts of the field, so he delights to use the hearts of men which is the seat of their wisdom and understanding and where the best parts and greatest abilities reside. To this day, he desires the heart more than any other.

Thus you see how many ways this deceitfulness comes to be in every man's heart. It was the voice of the heathen Oracle who said, *know yourself*. It was taught that this was the beginning of wisdom. Certainly he is in a ready way to salvation who begins to distrust his own heart, that begins to think, 'I have given too much credit to my heart and have easily believed what my heart has told me.' There is no greater folly. It was the wise man who said, "Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool" (Pro. 28:26). Certainly this is true not only in the world but even in the church are such fools that put a vain confidence in their own hearts that they are well, that they repent and love God.

Deceitfulness Shown in Experience

In the next place we shall give you several signs or demonstrations, *a posteriori*, that the heart of man is deceitful.

First, *in that a man will generally acknowledge the necessity and duty of godliness but when it comes to the particulars – that he must live a godly life and must strive to enter into the strait gate – he cannot yield to them*. What a gross deceiving of a man's self is this! If to be godly in the general, to walk holy in the abstract be so good and necessary, is not also necessary for you in the particulars? We read of a young man that came to Christ with much voluntary readiness. To discover the deceit in his heart Christ bid him to observe the commandments. He replied that he had kept all of them from his youth (Mat. 19:20) at which point our Savior gives him a personal command to discover the falsehood of his heart, "go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (v. 21). This was like the jealousy offering water to the adulteress woman which made her thigh rot. When the rich man, "heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (v. 22). I bring this instance to show that general commands and general duties people approve of, but when it comes to their particulars, they fly back

and discover their nakedness. Isn't this a palpable deceit, for a man to commend godliness, to admire a holy life, and yet when it comes to his particulars, he fails to endeavor after it himself?

Secondly and contrary, *the deceitfulness of the heart appears in that men will condemn sin in general and yet, in their particular practice, wallow in it.* How can men come to be so grossly deceived? They will acknowledge drunkenness, lusts and that oaths are grievous sins that offend God and that hell belongs to those who do so. Yet concerning themselves you will find them committing the same sins. Just as David's wrath was kindled to demand severe punishment when the parable was of a man in the general that had stolen his neighbors lamb (2 Sam. 12:6). But he did not know that he was the man. Oh, you who daily read and hear, *swear not at all*, do you not think: 'I am the swearer' (Jam. 5:12)? You who hear, *be not drunk with wine where is excess*, do you not think, 'I am the drunk?' And so it is of every sin. Oh, were it not for that abyss and depth of guile in the heart you could never practice in particular that which you condemn in general.

Third, *the deceitfulness of the heart appears in that there is no kind of grace or duty required by God but the heart of man will do the counterfeit of it.* The heart will do that which is like the genuine and yet differ from it as much as earth from Heaven. Thus, does a godly David humble himself upon the prophets admonition and so does Ahab. Does David find gladness in his heart by the word? So too the contemporary believer receives the word with joy (Mat. 13:44). Whatever the godly do in the truth and real power of grace so to the hearts of even the unregenerate men often have a faint imitation of. We see this in the dreams of pharaoh's butler and baker (Gen. 40). They both dreamed and their dreams were alike, in-somuch that when Joseph interpreted the butler's dream that his head should be lifted up, not to heaven, but to be hanged in dishonor. Thus in Christianity both seem to believe alike, to repent alike, but the principle manner and end have a world of difference. Just as the water of the sea and of the clouds, though both water alike, yet one is repulsive and salty and the other is sweet. There is hardly any grace in which some unregenerate man is not said to have – to believe and repent – because they have the outward resemblance of it. So just as excellent painters have drawn the image of lovely things and the spectators have almost been deceived into thinking life itself is in the paintings, thus it is with the hypocrisy and falsehood in our hearts.

Fourth, *this deceitfulness appears, not only in that they can do those things that are like grace, but they have such a sense and a persuasion upon them that they are indeed genuine graces.* Oh, the woeful tragedy that this deceit has made! Men are persuaded of themselves, that they have the Spirit of God and his graces, when they are nothing but the deceitful motions of their own hearts. Did the foolish virgins perceive any defect in themselves? Did they not go as confidently to meet the bridegroom as if they were the wife already (Mat. 25:1-13)? What did our savior mean by this, but that many Christians would live and die with a confident boldness that they are going to Christ, their bridegroom, and not have the least thought that they lack oil, that they lack the essentials. Oh, that this truth might fall like live coals of fire into your heart! There is a delusion, a false persuasion upon most men's hearts that they are affected as if they were godly, as if they did belong to God, when there is a vast gulf between them. I do not speak this to unsettle the tender and godly heart, that he should doubt his condition, but to ransack the presumptuous and self-flattering heart. Oh, it will one day no longer be as you think, as you see it, as you are persuaded, but whether the truth of grace is indeed in you.

Fifthly, *the deceitfulness of the heart appears in that men will seem to love and honor those godly men that lived in former times, but now cannot abide with the godly that live with them by following such men's steps.* This is a deceit in man's heart. Observe it in the Pharisees, how religiously and devoutly they speak. If we had lived in the prophet's days we should not have killed for stoned them, they said. These Pharisees therefore they built up famous monuments in the prophets memory, yet they killed the apostles who lived in their days, who walked in the steps of the prophets. One of the ancient Christians well exhorts us: If you hear a man praising the ancient doctors and teachers of the church, see how he is affected by his present teachers. You that commend Paul, Peter, Augustine, Chrysostom and their zeal and courage against wickedness, if you do not love the present zeal and godly fervor of your teachers this originates from the deceitfulness of your heart. The other demonstrations of this guileful heart I shall insist upon later.

To conclude let me instruct you in the fountain and rise of all our calamity in that this deceitful heart is the root of all your spiritual evil. Therefore those of you who are not thinking of repenting or turning to God, our writing and your reading is in vain. As we say, its impossible to

cure the church of Rome for she holds that she cannot err. So it is here. Therefore you are not persuaded to change your heart or your life because you are deceived as if all were well already. Oh, if your hearts were like white blanks as Aristotle said the soul was, then we might more easily write the Law of God into your hearts. But the heart is blotted all over because there are destructive principles in you, against which here is no disputing until God removes the very fundamental principles within you. Begin, then, with this truth: I have been a miserable, blind, deceived wretch all my lifetime. I truly thought such a way would lead to heaven. My heart told me all was well, I need not be troubled, but, Oh, how I am bewildered and how greatly was I out of the way until God opened my eyes.

Chapter 2:

Digging Deep to Discover Hypocrisy

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

There remains further signs and manifestations of the deceitfulness of man’s heart to which I proceed.

First, *this is a plain sign of the gross hypocrite and guile of a man’s heart in that though a man live in gross and notorious sins that lay the conscience waste and desolate, yet he hopes for salvation.* You would think that no mad delusion could enter into a man’s heart, yet what is more frequent than this deception over the whole church? “Be not deceived,” Paul writes, “neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Observe the caution, *do not be deceived.* This phrase supposes that they are very apt to delude their own soul, thinking they might be saved, despite the commission of those notorious sins. Oh, how sinners drink down this sweet potion! If not, how could so much wickedness and ungodliness be found among professing Christians! If any one sinner is questioned in this point – whether he hopes to be saved – he will, without any scruple, answer in the affirmative, Yes that he does. God forbid anything else. Now where can he have this hope? How can his heart persuade him? Does not every leaf in Scripture stand like a fiery sword to keep him out of paradise? Does not every chapter in the Word of God meet him as an angel with a naked sword of Balaam to stop him in the way (Num. 22:22-41)? Yet in all this the sinner blesses his own soul and faith, thinking it will go well with him. Were not a man bewitched and deceived in a gross manner, he could no more judge that his way was the way of salvation, or his life the life of happiness, than that the sun is a black coal, or light is darkness. If hell is ever made heaven, if clods of earth made stars, then he may think that he is on his way to thrones of glory. Oh, beloved how we pity poor, bewitched creatures that have lost their senses! Here is a spiritual witchcraft, a heart-sorcery above all expression. Think of this again and again, you that live in profane lives. You

need not say, 'Who will tell me what will become of me? How shall I know whether this life of mine will be rewarded with happiness?' Alas, even the very blind man can see this. The Scripture has made and set it up like a beacon that all may take notice of: "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:8).

Second, *another sign of the deceitfulness of the heart, is to rest contented in the privileges and promises in Christianity and disregarding the duties and obligations they enforce.* These are the ones satisfied in the titles of believers, of being Christians by profession, but disregard the offices and duties which these command. What a blatant hypocrite is this, to divide the things that God has inseparably conjoined? "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19). Those that cried 'Lord, Lord' had prophesied and cast out devils in His name but they had not destroyed the works of the devil in their own lives. They were workers of iniquity and therefore Christ commanded them to depart because He didn't know them (Mat. 7:21-23). Every man that is baptized is, by profession, a Christian. Yet those who fail to walk according to all that Christ prescribed have hearts that deceive themselves. He is not what he thinks himself to be and one day this will become apparent. Thus the Apostle James writes, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless" (Jam. 1:26). He puts a false syllogism upon himself by thinking that religion, in the seeming appearance, is enough. So we may take that of the Apostle to be a universal proposition: "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue," his eyes and especially his heart and affections from all manner of lusts and impieties – this man's religion is a mere deceit and snare to him. It is because of this dangerous and universal deceitfulness, that James spends a great part his epistle to show that faith is a dead faith, and he is a dead man, who cannot demonstrate the possession of his faith by the fruits of a godly life. Christ was not satisfied to see leaves upon the fig tree. He looked for fruit and because there was none he cursed it with a heavy curse so that never again would it produce fruit (Mark 11:12-14). Come then out of all of your disguises, you are a child of the devil, and in the state of gall and bitterness. Though you made a profession of your faith and are baptized like Simon Magus, like him, "your heart is not right before God" (Acts 8:21). He did not think so, or perceive so but Peter sill told him so and he

prayed for pardon. You, therefore, that do not live in the duties according to Christian privileges, lay off your counterfeit dress. God knows you. When king Jeroboam's wife went disguised to Ahijah the prophet it wasn't but while she entered into the door that the prophet knew who she really was (1 Kings 14:5-6). May your own heart say, 'Come you hypocrite, you false heart, bewail your guile. You mock God and man and it is vain to cover anything from God.'

Third, *the deceitfulness of the heart appears in those frequent and many commands to search the heart, to try it, ransack it and get to the bottom of it.* Now if the heart was plain and open, if it had no depths, so secret windings, why would we need all these commands? You are commanded to make a private search as if for thieves and spies in your own heart. How often are these exhortations: "Let us test and examine our ways" (Lam. 3:40); "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith ... test yourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5). A mining expert is careful to bring gold to the touchstone to see whether it is good or bad, so also Psalm 4:4, "ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent." Dig into the heart and sweep it out with diligence just as the woman took a candle and swept her entire house to find her lost silver coin (Luke 15:8-10). Oh, the lusts and corruptions of the heart that do not appear at first but only appear after the second or third search. The lusts of your heart may lie in your heart like Achan's wedge of gold, covered in earth and hid among other stuff (Jos. 7:21). You may live forty or more years and yet be a great stranger to your own heart, not knowing what sins lie there and what corruptions prevail over you. Therefore, Scripture presents as the first initial and preparative work of all commands to search our hearts. We must take time to be still, with much meditation and quietness making analysis and search into our hearts that those snakes and worms which lie underground may be brought to light. But how this duty is neglected! The very Papists will rise up at judgment and condemn us, who have hours appointed to the purpose of this examination and search of the heart. Swarez, a Jesuit, said he prized that examination time than all other in handling those volumes entitled the *Controversies*. The truth is that studying and searching into your heart and disputing with it is the most profitable and advantageous study that can be done. Oh, if you would read the books of your heart more you would understand the sense and meaning of your hearts. You would quickly become a scholar in Christ's school.

To understand the motions of the planets and not of your own heart, or to know the natures and operations of herbs and plants, or to measure the dimensions of oceans but not study the depth and length and breadth of your own heart, is but a barren knowledge. We may say, ‘physician, heal yourself,’ ‘astronomer, measure your own heart,’ ‘philosopher, understand your own nature.’

Fourth, *the deceitfulness of the heart appears that only God can know it.* The angels, those exact creatures, are not able to know what is in a man’s heart, nor can the devils go any further than conjecture or so far as man reveals himself. Upon the question, “who can understand it?” is replied, “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind” (Jer. 17:10), so that the heart of a man is such a deep ocean which none can dive to the bottom but the all-seeing eye of God to whom darkness and light is all one. Is not the heart of man full of cavities and windings in that angels and devils are not able to know what is in our hearts? Indeed the prophets did sometimes know the hearts of others as Elisha knew what was in Gehazi’s heart, but this was by God’s revelation in which He made those thoughts known to the prophet. Hence we prove Christ to be true God, because he knew what was in men’s hearts and did see what was in their hearts. To see is more than to know. I may know another man’s thoughts if he reveals them to me but I cannot see them in their hearts. Yet Christ saw what was in their hearts. Hence, the apostle said, “for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:20). He knows far more evil in us than we do ourselves. If we can discern so many errors and so much filthiness, what does the Lord know of us? This made the apostle Paul say, “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Cor. 4:4). Oh, then remember this – God knows more of you than you know of yourself. If you cannot perceive the sin that makes you an abomination in your own eyes and a mere beast, how much more does God know by looking into your heart?

Fifth, *the guile of the heart is notably manifested in that even a regenerate and godly man, sanctified by God’s Spirit and has truth in the inward parts, yet still has much of this hypocrisy and deceitfulness abiding in him.* This rust must cling closely that filing will not get off. That impurity in the metal adheres in which burning fire will not consume. That this deceitfulness is still adhering can be seen in David, a man after God’s own heart. With what hypocrisy did he contrive his adultery with Bathsheba

and the murder of Uriah? How many subtle projects did he contrive to cover his sins? That the hypocrisy of his own heart carried him to all this appears in his writing, "Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being" (Psalm 51:6). He feels the sore of the plague and what was the circumstance for all his misery – the lack of truth in his inward being. By another example, notice the deceitfulness of a godly man in that Nathaniel had the greatest commendation given, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit" (John 1:47). Yet this is not to be understood absolutely, as if there was no hypocrisy in his heart, but comparatively in respect to others. Even among godly men and women, some have more plainness and sincerity of heart than others. The consideration of this is unknown deceitful temper of our hearts made David cry out, "cleanse thou me from secret sins" (Ps. 19:12, KJV). It is a prayer for those sins never yet discovered, those he had not taken notice. Lord, what I do not know of, what I am not convinced of, You pardon.

Sixth, *that the heart is full of guile and unknown to man's self appears in that many times God leaves men unto temptations and puts them in trials so they ay have an experiential knowledge of themselves.* God tempted Abraham and it was made known to himself. Of Hezekiah it is said that God left him in that proud passage of showing all his treasures to the Babylonian ambassadors to try what was in his heart (Isa. 39). This was so Hezekiah might see there was that pride, vanity, and ambition that he would not think possible in himself. Thus, when God lets a false prophet come along to the Israelites and the things that he told them came to pass, "For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deu. 13:3). Oh, we see that were there not such persecutions, heresies and scandals in the church of God, many would never know themselves. As Paul writes, "there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:19, KJV). Certainly, it is good for a Christian to consider whether all God's providences in his church are not tempting providences to see what is in a heart, whether love towards God or whether carnal desires carry you on. The shaking winds discover the roots of a tree, the boiling of the water discovers what is in the vessel, burning and busy times, times of liberty and suffering, all reveal men to themselves. Their corruptions would otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Seventh, *the hearts deceitfulness is plainly discovered when a man, under the occasion and temptation of sin, will commit it even though earlier he would have abhorred that sin and thought all the world would be given to him if he avoided it.* This is a remarkable point, especially to take us off from those high pinnacles and lofty presumptions we are apt to fix upon. Oh, if we ever be such or do such or fall into a sin, they abhor it. Oh, vain man, how little do you know the deceitfulness of the heart. This made Solomon write, “Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always” (Prov. 28:14). If Solomon himself had taken this counsel, if he had feared always, even in the midst of that abundance and prosperity he had, there would be no need to dispute whether he was saved or ultimately damned. Remember that influence of Hazeal, the one who the prophet looked upon so steadfastly that Hazeal finally wept. Being asked by Hazeal why he did so it was responded because he had power and also the cruelty to rip up the very woman pregnant with the child (2 Kin. 8:12-15). He defied the fact with a great abomination and yet afterwards he did it. This was a deceitful heart. But it is no marvel to see this in Hazeal. Even in Peter, a godly man and very zealous for Christ, gives is an instance of the hearts deceit! Christ told him he would deny him. Peter answered by saying, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away” (Matt. 26:33). But we see that when the temptation came he did not only deny Christ but swore and cursed that he didn’t know the man (v. 74). Such is the guile of our hearts, that it would betray Christ every day if the Lord did not keep truth and righteousness in our inward being. Hence are the petitions to God that he would “restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish” the believer (1 Pet. 5:10). We see the promises from God that he will put fear in our hearts so that we will never depart from Him (Jer. 32:40), for without this the heart will fly back like a deceitful bow. How often are the Israelites in times of temptation, who humble themselves and cried out over their sins are yet remembered as, “a generation whose heart was not steadfast” (Ps. 78:8, 37). And this brings us to the eight sign of the deceitfulness of man’s heart.

Eight, *that under God’s judgments, under heavy pressures and miseries then it cries out to God that it will no longer live in sin, and recognizes that God is righteous and they have sinned. But no sooner is the rod off their backs and their hypocrisy appears again.* It was the great deceitfulness of the Israelites that God so often complained of. Israel is compared to grasshoppers that leap towards heaven and then suddenly fall to the

ground and a prophet said their righteousness was like the morning dew, which, although it falls in abundance, immediately vanishes. So here is a obvious discovery of the hearts deceitfulness: Under dangers, in times of God's judgments, they seem to be much affected and cry out when the waters of God's wrath overwhelms them. But, like the water-driven mill, when the waters of God's wrath are diverted or dried up, Israel no longer moves at all. Pharaoh and Ahab humbled themselves and said that they had sinned, acknowledged God as being righteous while the scourge was upon them, but later they returned to their own temper. Even as very cold water, though it's heated, will return to its natural coldness once its taken out of the fire. Many people facing mortal diseases, when they seem to be approaching death, then cry out to pray for them and comfort them. It is here that they confess and bewail the sins they have committed. But once they have recovered and the fear of death is over, they return to their former wickedness with great delight. Oh, that men would be apprehensive of this deceit and would cry out over those resolutions and vows made in their agonies and pain and say, 'This deceitfulness of heart undoes me.'

The ninth discovery of the deceitfulness of the heart is passive. *All the lawful comforts and objects which God has appointed to be instruments of His glory, honor and our exercise in godliness, tempt our hearts aside and lead it away from God. So that riches, honors, pleasures and all the comforts in the world entice and seduce the heart from God.* The heart is like tender, ready to take every spark of fire that falls upon it. Thus scripture calls it, "the deceitfulness of riches" (Matt. 13:22). Why? Because the heart is so corrupt that the profit of money, deceitfulness of honors and pleasures immediately allure. Were not the heart of a man this corrupt, nothing in the world would corrupt it. Therefore the Apostle James shows every man to be enticed and led away by the lusts in his own heart (1:14). Enticed, that is, as the bird is deceived by the bait and doesn't see the net. James does not make the devil the cause of our sin, much less God. Were it not that the lusts of a man's own heart do first deceive, the devil could not deceive you, nor alluring objects. Your own heart betrays you. Even as in some invincible strongholds, the enemy could never surprise us, did not some treacherous person within discover our weakness.

Finally, *the deceitfulness of the heart is seen, in an active sense, in the deception of others.* Even God Himself, the heart would deceive if possible in all its mock religion, mock devotion and fair pretense it has. "Do not

be deceived,” Paul wrote, “God is not mocked” (Gal. 6:7). Through hypocrisy and fair pretense, men do what lies in them in attempting to mock and even deceive God Himself. In respect to others, the deceitfulness of the heart appears in all the falsehood, lying, dissimulation of love, respect, and intended good when nothing but malice and venom is in the heart. David makes a sad complaint by saying, “Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone; for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man” (Psa. 12:1). The best is a hypocrite, “for everyone is godless and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly,” says the prophet Isaiah (9:17). Another prophet writes shows us that sinners would keep their secrets from their wives. So if we look to only converse among men we will see only lies, equivocations, artful coaxing and over-reaching so that we are led to say, ‘Truth is banished in the world and unrighteousness has left the earth.’

As use of instruction we see that *the one main end of the Word of God and preaching is to discover this deceitful heart*. These are to make us known to ourselves. Like a mirror that will show a deformed man all his unloveliness, these two are like a mirror, not to the face but the heart. All those hidden and unknown lusts may there by brought to light. This ministry is compared to light. As the sunbeams discover those many thousands of trenches under rivers, which the darkness conceals, so is this ministry. In a powerful and soul-saving way this ministry will make you see yourself to be that beast, that devil, to have that dunghill and that hell in your heart that you did not perceive. Look for this benefit in preaching, not what fits your ear and pleases your fancy, but what discovers the dark corners of your soul and brings glorious light into your heart. Then you will cry out, ‘Oh, Lord how long have I lived and did not know myself!’ I thought all was sell, everything was quiet, but now I am like the Syrian army, that being stricken by the prophet blind, thought they were being led to their own camp but when their eyes were opened they found themselves in the midst of the enemies camp. Thus, by having your eyes opened you see yourself to be in the power of all your sins, all your enemies and the curses of God.

Chapter 3:

Excusing and Justifying Sin

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

We have given several demonstrations of the deceitfulness of the heart and now I will demonstrate in two or three particulars, where our salvation is concerned. Here you will be able to judge the heart’s deceitfulness about other things.

The first instance about sin is the committing of it. It’s a point well worth insisting on to show the unsearchable hypocrisy and hidden deceitfulness that the heart of man has about sin in that it does it and yet carries on as if it didn’t sin. If there was a way to make sin no longer sin or that sin should not be damnable, this would greatly content the sinner. But this being impossible, he labors to delude his own heart and to cover over sin in his own soul while he commits the sin.

First, *his deceitfulness about sin appears in that he will bribe his understanding to do whatever it can to justify sin, to make it no sin, but lawful and necessary.* When God reproved Jonah for his sinful anger towards the withered vine, the prophet replies, “Yes, I do well to be angry” (4:9). He pleaded for his vice as a virtue. Even the Israelites, in failing to offer sacrifices to their idol, the “Queen of Heaven,” had many arguments for their idolatry. They pleading that the abundance and prosperity they had in the past was taken away because they were neglecting the “Queen of Heaven” (Jer. 44). Oh, the hypocrisy of the heart, that can find arguments to justify sin and make transform transgression to duty. Thus, the Pharisees pleaded against Christ from the Scripture and thought they were serving God in it (John 16:2). Paul said of himself that he was bound to do what he did in persecuting the saints and compelling blasphemy from them (Acts 26:9-11). From this comes the desperate sickness and incurableness that follows in the text: “if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness” (Matt. 6:23)! Their minds and understanding are corrupted and they have become Pharisees, they please the affections, say what they say, deny what they deny. Thus the sun is always in eclipse,

there is always some interposition of one earthly advantage or another and when the faculty has been distempered or made drunk then it is no surprise that it judges deceitfully. Oh then be jealous of your own heart, lest it plead for Baal, lest it argue for sin. While you could not embrace sin as it appeared in its ugly colors, the heart will put new clothes on it to make it appear lovely. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isa. 5:20)! Such is the great deceitfulness of men in this matter as if opinion is truth, that there is no real difference between sin and virtue, that sin is only sin if men think so, otherwise it's not. These thoughts destroy Scripture and pull up the very foundations of religion. In Popery there are a loads of distinctions to maintain image-worship in that one of their own authors has said that the worshipper must be able to know them all. Take heed therefore of your heart as the great sophister, the great juggler who will cast a mist before your eyes and will raise up a devil in Samuel's clothes.

Second, *the deceitfulness of a man's heart will appear about sin in that a man will venture upon the occasions and temptations of it while fully resolving not to commit the sin.* This is a great dilution of the heart. How many have fallen into the brink of the pit by coming close to the sin? To stay away from the temptation of sin is a great matter in that we are taught to constantly pray against it (Mat. 6:13). And will you live against your prayers so presumptuously? Will you pray that you would not enter into the temptation of uncleanness, lasciviousness, drunkenness and will then go into the house and company where these sins live? Oh, wretched and deceived man! If you are not strong enough to refuse going into the temptation, how will you, *within* the temptation be strong enough refuse the sin itself? Which is more easily overcome? If the green twig will burn, then certainly the dry one will too. David, in beginning of the first verse of the first Psalm writes, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers." As the heathen said well, 'How is he a good man who does not hate bad men?' Therefore, Paul exhorts us to have no fellowship with the workers of darkness, "but instead expose them" (Eph. 5:11). We read in Jewish Law that if a man sets a hedge on fire and then accidentally burns a whole field of corn he must make restitution, because, although the fire began on the hedge, it became a raging fire (Ex. 22:6). Just as those men who came near the fiery furnace were burned (Dan. 3:22), so are those

that come near temptation. Augustine tells us of his friend Alphius who attended stage-plays but resolved to shut his eyes at any unlawful objects. Ultimately, we are told, he could not abstain in the midst of the temptation. Do not let your hear deceive you any more in this way, but keep from all occasions of sin as you would avoid hell itself. Oh, one day you will curse the people and companions who enticed you to wickedness.

Third, *the heart is deceitful in that before sin is committed it presents only the pleasures, profits and delights of sin and afterwards comes the hook and the bitter scorpions tail.* Thus James writes that, “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (1:4). There are some illustrations to further convey this. It is like the bird that sees only the wheat but not the line of the net or the fish that sees the bait but not the hook. It’s like when Jael promised Sisera a drink of milk but then later drove a large nail through his head, killing him (Jdg. 4:21). She showed the milk but hid the nail. The other illustration is the biblical phrase, “to be violently carried away,” as one that does not have the leisure to meditate on the danger. His thoughts are drawn aside from the images of the hell and judgment belonging to every sin. The devil enticed Eve in both of these ways, partly by showing her the desirableness of the fruit of the forbidden tree and partly in persuading her she would not die even if she did eat of it. Thus the heart is a false and treacherous heart to you. It suggests only the pleasures and advantages of sin but nothing of the torture, torment and guilt that will come with it. Judas’ heart betrayed Christ by convincing him of the thirty pieces of silver and their profit but mentioned nothing of the anguish and horror that would surprise him from betraying the innocent one (Matt. 26:13 with 27:3-5). The heart that now finds ease and delight will find gnawing worms and scorpions. This deception the heart has done and will do, therefore avoid flattering yourself otherwise.

Fourth, *the heart deceives in thinking itself freed from iniquity if it does not act itself, even though it counsels others to takes delight in sin, encouraging them in sin, or at least failing to reprove them.* Truly this is a notorious deceit of the heart. To excuse itself even though it has given way or complied with others that do sin. It’s hard to say whether a man’s own sin or the consenting of other men’s sin will lie as the heaviest burden upon men at the judgment. It will not be easy to say, ‘Such sin was not mine, it was not of my doing.’ You may easily come to partake in other men’s sins which made one godly man pray, ‘Lord, forgive me for other

men's sins.' It is here that Pilate deceived himself. Because the Jews took opportunity for him to crucify Christ, and that nothing less than His blood would satisfy them, he gave into the condemnation and washed his hands of the death of Christ saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves" (Matt. 27:24). What deceit was this? How was he innocent in condemning the innocent? We read of Nicodemus who was a fearful man, but would not consent to Christ's death but opposed the whole counsel. If you are a master of a family and are not a swearer or drunk or a profane person yourself, your heart deceives you if you know of servants of sin within your family and do not endeavor to confront and reform them. There are many who will not be drunk themselves but delight to make others drunk. They take pleasure in seeing other men overtaken. This is so far from innocence that the scripture makes the taking pleasure in those that sin to be worse than the sin itself. "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32). The scripture goes higher in making a man a partaker of other men's sins if he holds his peace and does not - with prudence, charity and zeal - reprove him. "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Eph. 5:11). Reproof is commonly called 'spiritual alms.' As in all physically ministry to the needs of others, God will punish for omissions at the day of judgment: "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me" (Matt. 25:43). So is the case in spiritual alms. 'I was profane and you did not reprove me, I was ungodly and you did not instruct me.' So it is said of temporal life that the he who does not preserve another mans life when he can, kills him and is a murder. So also, he that does not labor for the spiritual life and salvation of another man, when he can and should, is a murderer of his soul. Oh, let us observe our hearts in this matter to see if we are deceiving ourselves or else, while we say that we are not sinners and do not offend in great transgressions, yet we be partakers and accomplices either mediately or immediately.

Fifth, *the heart is deceitful in sin when it will commit iniquity and pretends that much good will come out of it.* This has been a frequent deceit. They say they would not have done such and such a thing but there was a need and much good will come as a result. There were such in the apostles time. "And why not do evil that good may come" (Rom. 3:8)? But

see what a heavy sentence Paul passes upon them by saying that, "Their condemnation is just." It is therefore a sad deceit of the heart for any man to encourage himself to do wicked actions because it's probable that good may come by it. This is directly against scripture and such divinity should be disowned. Augustine said, a man may not tell a lie even if it were to save the whole world. Indeed if good comes by sin, as sometimes does, it is this: All salvation comes by Christ who was crucified by the wickedness of malicious men. Likewise, much good came to Joseph's family in his brother's sins against him and therefore said to them, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). If I say that good sometimes comes from sin it is not as a genuine and proper effect of evil but the over-ruling power of God that makes it so. Otherwise your sins of themselves make more sin. Therefore, when the godly have sometimes done evil in frailty, expecting some good, the blessing and good that they have obtained has been so clogged with miseries that the sweetness of the mercy has been taken away and, thus, they have bitterly learned this truth. Jacob, in telling a lie to get the blessing is one example of this. It is best to wait in God's timing and in His ways then by Him rushing good to us through evil means. Observe your heart very diligently that such dilutions do not easily take place and that you fail to live wholly by scriptures commands.

Sixth, *the heart is deceitful in that by avoiding outward iniquity it thinks itself to be good, even though the heart is a dunghill and cage of unclean lusts.* Here did the Pharisees continually delude themselves. None could charge the Pharisees with such gross sins as the publicans committed and hence our Savior often begged them to look inward. Cleanse the inside. "And the Lord said to him, 'Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness'" (Luke 11:39). No matter how painted on the outside, there is a great difference between a truly godly man and a hypocrite (Matt. 23:27). The godly man is greatly humbled for the sins of his heart. Though they never break out into action the godly are greatly troubled if sin arises and moves in their hearts. Paul explains this brokenness in Romans 7 by making those sad out-cries and complaints only because of heart movements stirring against the Law of God. But the hypocrite who does all things to be seen of men and does not respect God is satisfied if the outside is clean. Look into your own heart as that deceitful root of all bitterness even if no branches sprout out publicly. What a serious and necessary exhortation

Solomon gives us: “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). As the heart is deceitful above all things so above all keepings and watchings we must watch it. Why so? For out of the heart flow the springs of life. Sinful eyes and wicked hands originate from a sinful heart. Do not bless yourself because you have a publicly blameless life, for if your heart is full of proud, earthly, sinful thoughts you are an abomination and loathsome sinner before God. Hence in Matthew 5 our Savior preached strange but true doctrine when he informed his listeners of those traditional errors and interpretations of the commands they had been brought up in, by wrongly thinking the commands only forbid outward sins. No, says our Savior, there also is heart-adultery and heart-murder. Let none of us flatter ourselves with a fair outside when the heart is inwardly filthy. He is no better than a snake who has a glittering appearance but is inwardly full of poison.

The heart is also deceitful about sin in that it is subtle and crafty to find many excuses about it. We must stand in wonder at all the wiles and crafts of men in this respect. We have this from Adam at the first, in covering his nakedness with leaves. Even in godly men there is too much of this crooked serpent. In David we see great colors and excuses in the murder of Uriah. Likewise, Aaron joined with the Israelite people in making a calf for idolatry and excused himself with this excuse: “I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf” (Ex. 32:24). It was as if he had not intended or thought of any such result. This is not only a sin itself but also the aggravation of sin. To seek out excuses, to labor for lurking holes to run into makes us stand in wonder at the guile and hypocrisy of a man’s heart. What a ready excuse the heart has for every sin, what coverings men will make for their own nakedness.

Excuse one: *They will lay the blame off of themselves and onto others.* They would not have done so and so but others persuaded them or they were forced into it. This will not be any excuse with God for there is never any necessity to sin and sin is a greater evil than any temporal evil. Therefore our Savior bids us to, “not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul,” but rather, “fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Saul made an excuse for himself for why he offered a sacrifice before Samuel arrived. Oh, the people would have it so and he could not refute it and this lost him his kingdom (1 Sam. 13:8-23). A little thing we would have thought, but disobedience is a thing like

witchcraft. At first, Adam laid the sin upon Eve and Eve on the serpent so there is a hereditary corruption in all of us. When we offend we try to lay the blame somewhere else, if possible. The godly man judges himself the most and lays the heaviest load upon himself. David said, "Please let your hand, O Lord my God, be against me and against my father's house ... do not let the plague be on your people" (1 Chr. 21:17). Do not deceive yourself by putting it on others.

Excuse two: *To put it upon the devil*. This is to say, true, I have committed such and such sins but the devil, he is the one who tempted me. This is no excuse, partly because the devil cannot force you to sin and because it is your own voluntary giving up to him. Thus we read of Peter charging Ananias with that lie against the Holy Spirit questions, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie" (Acts 5:3). Notice that it is sin to let Satan fill his heart and therefore he is not excused but blamed. The devil's temptation will not be excuses because the origin of it all is the lust of a man's own heart. I will not dispute that practical question as to whether there are any sins committed that the devil does not also tempt and suggest? It is enough to know that the Apostle James tells us in the first chapter that makes lust within us to be the fountain of all evil and shows what degrees lust at last comes forth as. So it is but a mere deceit of man's heart to say that the devil tempted me, that he it was not I but him for it is man's own lust that opens the first to let the devil in.

Excuse three: The littleness of the sin. Why do men need to be so severe and make such ado? It is but a little sin, a very small matter! Thus men accustomed to petty oaths, lies and lascivious speech. These kinds of petty sins, as men account them, greatly deceive themselves. If men would judge correctly they would account no sin to be little. For although the Scripture makes some sins as gnats, and other as camels, yet take the least sin and its guilt is greater than you can bear. If you ask 'why,' the answer has already been prepared: There is no little sin because there is no little God. All sin is a transgression of the Law and the least blemish in the soul has an infinite evil in it because it is against a God of infinite majesty. Further, no sin is to be accounted little, because the guilt can only be done away by Christ's blood. Had Christ died to take away every sin but that one petty oath, that one lascivious word, all your tears and all your sighs could never have satisfied. Though it be a debt of a penny, if left unpaid it would keep you in that dungeon of hell forever.

Fourth, men deceive themselves in sin by excusing because sin is universal, that all men do it. Why should they be concerned about doing something contrary to all the world? This is a heavy temptation and men think that they will be easily pardoned for that which is universally committed. But this will deceive you. For God expressly commands that we should not follow a multitude into evil and therefore we read of Lot. Though he was one man, how unspotted he kept himself, troubled over his own soul with seeing and hearing the wicked deeds of other men. Our Savior, too, makes it necessary for every man to be singular, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" (Matt. 5:46). The Apostle Paul also warns us, "Do not be conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2). So the universality and multitude of sin will not excuse us.

The use of the exhortation is to cause us to stand upon our watch with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21-23). When you have been forewarned by the Spirit of God and if you fail to take heed, your condemnation is justified. No wonder so many millions of sins are daily committed seeing how so few watch and pray against their own hearts. Here is a good and necessary prayer: *Oh, Lord save me and deliver me from my own self.* Oh, in those eternal flames, how you will cry out and howl with indignation against your own heart. Oh, you will cry, 'what a miserable and deceived wretch am I and all my hopes and comforts are gone. How is my honey turned to gall and wormwood. Oh, that I had wisdom and understanding to prevent these torments.' You that cannot tolerate hypocrisy in another, why is your own heart not loathsome to yourself?
