

*THE AMERICAN PULPIT OF THE DAY.*

---

THIRTY-FIVE  
SERMONS

BY THE

MOST DISTINGUISHED LIVING AMERICAN PREACHERS.

---

SECOND SERIES.

---



London :

R. D. DICKINSON, 27, FARRINGDON STREET.

---

1876.

## SIN IS SPIRITUAL SLAVERY.

BY REV. W. G. T. SHEDD, D.D.

*“Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”—JOHN viii. 34.*

THE word which is translated “servant” in the text literally signifies a slave; and the thought which our Lord actually conveyed to those who heard him is, “Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.” The apostle Peter, in that second Epistle of his which is so full of terse and terrible description of the effects of unbridled sensuality upon the human will, expresses the same truth. Speaking of the influence of those corrupting and licentious men who have “eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin,” he remarks that while they promise their dupes “liberty, they themselves are the servants [slaves] of corruption: for of whom man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”

Such passages as these, of which there are a great number in the Bible, direct attention to the fact that sin contains an element of servitude; that in the very act of transgressing the law of God there is a reflex action of the human will upon itself, whereby it becomes less able than before to keep that law. Sin is the suicidal action of the human will. It destroys the power to do right, which is man’s true freedom. The effect of vicious habit in diminishing a man’s ability to resist temptation is

proverbial. But what is habit but a constant repetition of wrong decisions, every single one of which reacts upon the faculty that put them forth, and renders it less strong and less energetic to do the contrary? Has the old debauchee, just tottering into hell, as much power of active resistance against the sin which has now ruined him as the youth has who is just beginning to run that awful career? Can any being do a wrong act, and be as sound in his will and as spiritually strong after it as he was before it? Did that abuse of free agency by Adam, whereby the sin of the race was originated, leave the agent as it found him—uninjured and undebilitated in his voluntary power?

The truth and fact is, that sin, in and by its own nature and operations, tends to destroy all virtuous force, all holy energy, in any moral being. The excess of will to sin is the same as the defect of will to holiness. The degree of intensity with which any man loves and inclines to evil is the measure of the amount of power to good which he has thereby lost. And if the intensity be total, then the loss is entire. Total depravity carries with it total impotence and helplessness. The more carefully we observe the workings of our own wills, the surer will be our conviction that they can ruin themselves. We shall indeed find that they cannot be forced, or ruined from the outside. But, if we watch the influence upon the will itself of its own wrong decisions, its own yielding to temptations, we shall discover that the voluntary faculty may be ruined from within; may be made impotent to good by its own action; may surrender itself with such an intensity and entireness to appetite, passion, and self-love, that it becomes unable to reverse itself and overcome its own wrong disposition and direction. And yet there is no compulsion, from first to last, in the process. The man follows himself. He pursues his own inclination. He has his own way, and does as he pleases. He loves what he inclines to love, and hates what he inclines to hate. Neither God, nor the world, nor Satan himself, forces him to do wrong. Sin is the most spontaneous of self-motion. But self-motion has

consequences as much as any other motion. Because transgression is a self-determined act, it does not follow that it has no reaction and results, but leaves the will precisely as it found it. It is strictly true that man was not necessitated to apostatize; but it is equally true that if by his own self-decision he should apostatize, he could not then and afterwards be as he was before. He would lose a knowledge of God and divine things which he could never regain of himself; and he would lose a spiritual power which he could never again recover of himself. The bondage of which Christ speaks when he says, "Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin," is an effect within the soul itself of an unforced act of self-will, and, therefore, is as truly guilt as any other result or product of self-will—as spiritual blindness, or spiritual hardness, or any other of the qualities of sin. Whatever springs from will we are responsible for. The drunkard's bondage and powerlessness issue from his own inclination and self-indulgence, and, therefore, the bondage and impotence is no excuse for his vice. Man's inability to love God supremely results from his intense self-will and self-love; and, therefore, his impotence is a part and element of his sin, and not an excuse for it.

"If weakness may excuse,  
What murderer, what traitor, parricide,  
Incestuous, sacriligious, may not plead it?  
All wickedness is weakness."

The doctrine, then, which is taught in the text is the truth that sin is spiritual slavery; and it is to the proof and illustration of this position that we invite attention.

The term "spiritual" is too often taken to mean unreal, fanciful, figurative. For man is earthly in his views as well as in his feelings, and therefore regards visible and material things as the emphatic realities. Hence he employs material objects as the ultimate standard, by which he measures the reality of all other things. The natural man has more consciousness of his body than he has of his soul; more sense of this world than of the other. Hence we find that the carnal man expresses his

conception of spiritual things by transferring to them, in a weak and secondary signification, words which he applies in a strong and vivid way only to material objects. He speaks of the "joy" of the spirit, but it is not such a reality for him as is the "joy" of the body. He speaks of the "pain" of the spirit, but it has not such a poignancy for him as that anguish which thrills through his muscles and nerves. He knows that the "death" of the body is a terrible event, but transfers the word "death" to the spirit with a vague and feeble meaning, not realizing that the second death is more awful than the first, and is accompanied with a spiritual distress, compared with which the sharpest agony of material dissolution would be a relief. He understands what is meant by the "life" of the body, but when he hears the "eternal life" of the spirit spoken of, or when he reads of it in the Bible, it is with the feeling that it cannot be so real and life-like as that vital principle whose currents impart vigour and warmth to his bodily frame. And yet the life of the spirit is more intensely real than the life of the body is; for it has power to overrule and absorb it. Spiritual life, when in full play, is bliss ineffable. It translates man into the third heavens, where the fleshly life is lost sight of entirely, and the being, like St. Paul, does not know whether he is in the body or out of the body.

The natural mind is deceived. Spirit has in it more of reality than matter has, because it is an immortal and indestructible essence, while matter is neither. Spiritual things are more real than visible things, because they are eternal, and eternity is more real than time. Statements respecting spiritual objects, therefore, are more solemnly true than any that relate to material things. Invisible and spiritual realities, therefore, are the standard by which all others should be tried; and human language when applied to them, instead of expressing too much, expresses too little. The imagery and phraseology by which the Scriptures describe the glory of God, the excellence of holiness, and the bliss of heaven, on the one side; and the sinfulness of sin, with the woe of hell, on the other, come short of the sober and actual matter of fact.

We should, therefore, beware of the error to which in our unspirituality we are specially liable; and when we hear Christ assert that "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin," we should believe and know that these words are not extravagant, and contain no subtrahend—that they indicate a self-enslavement of the human will which is so real, so total, and so absolute, as to necessitate the renewing grace of God in order to deliverance from it.

This bondage to sin may be discovered by every man. It must be discovered before one can cry, "Save me, or I perish." It must be discovered before one can feelingly assent to Christ's words, "Without me ye can do nothing." It must be discovered before one can understand the Christian paradox, "When I am weak, then am I strong." To aid the mind in coming to the conscious experience of the truth taught in the ext, we remark:—

I. Sin is spiritual slavery, if viewed in reference to man's sense of obligation to be perfectly holy.

The obligation to be holy, just, and good, as God is, rests upon every rational being. Every man knows, or may know, that he ought to be perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect, and that he is a debtor to this obligation until he has fully met it. Hence even the holiest of men are conscious of sin, because they are not completely up to the mark of this high calling of God. For, the sense of this obligation is an exceedingly broad one, like the law itself which it includes and enforces. The feeling of duty will not let us off with the performance of only a part of our duty. Its utterance is, "Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass; one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled." Law spreads itself over the whole surface and course of our lives, and insists imperatively that every part and particle of them be pure and holy.

Again, this sense of obligation to be perfect as God is perfect is exceedingly deep. It is the most profound sense of which man is possessed, for it outlives all others. The feeling of duty to God's law remains in a man's mind either to bless him or to curse him,

when all other feelings depart. In the hour of death, when all the varied passions and experiences which have engrossed the man his whole lifetime are dying out of the soul, and are disappearing one after another, like signal-lights in the deepening darkness, this one particular feeling of what he owes to the Divine and the Eternal law remains behind, and grows more vivid and painful, as all others grow dimmer and dimmer. And therefore it is, that in this solemn hour man forgets whether he has been happy or unhappy, successful or unsuccessful, in the world, and remembers only that he has been a sinner in it. And therefore it is, that a man's thoughts, when he is upon his death-bed, do not settle upon his worldly matters, but upon his sin. It is because the human conscience is the very core and centre of the human being, and its sense of obligation to be holy is deeper than all other senses and sensations, that we hear the dying man say what the living and prosperous man is not inclined to say: "I have been wicked; I have been a sinner in the earth."

Now it might seem, at first sight, that this broad, deep, and abiding sense of obligation would be sufficient to overcome man's love of sin, and bring him up to the discharge of duty—would be powerful enough to subdue his selfwill. Can it be that this strong and steady draft of conscience—strong and steady as gravitation—will ultimately prove ineffectual? Is not truth mighty, and must it not finally prevail, to the pulling down of the stronghold which Satan has in the human heart? So some men argue. So some men claim, in opposition to the doctrine of Divine influences and of regeneration by the Holy Ghost.

We are willing to appeal to actual experience in order to settle the point. And we affirm in the outset, that exactly in proportion as a man hears the voice of conscience sounding its law within his breast does he become aware, not of the strength, but of the bondage of his will; and that in proportion as this sense of obligation to be perfectly holy rises in the soul, all hope or expectation of ever becoming so by his own power sets in thick night.

In our careless, unawakened state, which is our ordinary

state, we sin on from day to day, just as we live on from day to day, without being distinctly aware of it. A healthy man does not go about holding his fingers upon his wrist, and counting every pulse; and neither does a sinful man, as he walks the streets and transacts all his business, think of, and sum up, the multitude of his transgressions. And yet that pulse all the while beats none the less, and yet that will all the while transgresses none the less. So long as conscience is asleep, sin is pleasant. The sinful activity goes on without notice—we are happy in sin, and we do not feel that it is slavery of the will. Though the chains are actually about us, yet they do not gall us. In this condition, which is that of every unawakened sinner, we are not conscious of the “bondage of corruption.” In the phrase of St. Paul, “we are alive without the law.” We have no feeling sense of duty, and, of course, have no feeling sense of sin. And it is in this state of things that arguments are framed to prove the mightiness of mere conscience, and the power of bare truth and moral obligation over the perverse human heart and will.

But the Spirit of God awakens the conscience—that sense of obligation to be perfectly holy which has hitherto slept now starts up, and begins to form an estimate of what has been done in reference to it. The man hears the authoritative and startling law, “Thou shalt be perfect, as God is.” And now, at this very instant and point, begins the consciousness of achievement—of being, in the expressive phrase of Scripture, “sold under sin.” Now the commandment “comes,” shows us first what we ought to be, and then what we actually are, and we “die” (Romans vii. 9-11). All moral strength dies out of us. The muscle has been cut by the sword of truth, and the limb drops helpless by the side. For we find that the obligation is immense. It extends to all our outward acts; and having covered the whole of this great surface, it then strikes inward and reaches to every thought of the mind, and every emotion of the heart, and every motive of the will. We discover that we are under obligation at every conceivable point in our being and



in our history, but that we have not met obligation at a single point. When we see that the law of God is broad and deep, and that sin is equally broad and deep within us; when we learn that we have never thought one single holy thought, nor felt one single holy feeling, nor done one single holy deed, because self-love is the root and principle of all our work, and we have never purposed or desired to please God by any one of our actions; when we find that everything has been required, and that absolutely nothing has been done, that we are bound to be perfectly holy this very instant, and, as a matter of fact, are totally sinful, we know in a most affecting manner that "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin."

But suppose that after this disheartening and weakening discovery of the depth and extent of our sinfulness, we proceed to take the second step, and attempt to extirpate them. Suppose that after coming to a consciousness of all this obligation resting upon us, we endeavour to comply with it. This renders us still more painfully sensible of the truth of our Saviour's declaration. Even the regenerated man, who in this endeavour has the aid of God, is mournfully conscious that sin is the enslavement of the human will. Though he has been freed substantially, he feels that the fragments of the chains are upon him still. Though the love of God is the predominant principle within him, yet the lusts and propensities of the old nature continually start up like devils, and tug at the spirit to tug it down to its old bondage. But that man who attempts to overcome sin without first crying, "Create within me a clean heart, O God!" feels still more deeply that sin is spiritual slavery. When he comes to know sin in reference to the obligation to be perfectly holy, it is with vividness and hopelessness. He sees distinctly that he ought to be a perfectly good being instantaneously. This point is clear. But instead of looking up to the hills whence cometh his help, he begins, in a cold, legal, and loveless temper, to draw upon his own resources. The first step is to regulate his external conduct by the Divine law. He tries to put a bridle upon his tongue, and to walk carefully

before his fellow-men. He fails to do even this small outside thing, and is filled with discouragement and despondency.

But the sense of duty reaches beyond the external conduct, and the law of God pierces like the two-edged sword of an executioner, and discerns the thoughts and motives of the heart. Sin begins to be seen in its relation to the inner man, and he attempts again to reform and change the feelings and affections of his soul. He strives to wring the gall of bitterness out of his own heart with his own hands. But he fails utterly. As he resolves and breaks his resolutions, as he finds evil thoughts and feelings continually coming up from the deep places of his heart, he discovers his spiritual impotence—his lack of control over what is deepest, most intimate, and most fundamental in his own character—and cries out, “I am a slave, I am a slave to myself.”

If, then, you would know from immediate consciousness that “whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin,” simply view sin in the light of that obligation to be perfectly pure and holy which necessarily and for ever rests upon a responsible being. If you would know that spiritual slavery is no extravagant and unmeaning phrase, but denotes a most real and helpless bondage, endeavour to get entirely rid of sin, and to be perfect as the spirits of just men made perfect.

II. Sin is spiritual slavery, if viewed in reference to the *aspirations* of the human soul.

Theology makes a distinction between common and special grace—between those ordinary influences of the Divine Spirit which rouse the conscience, and awaken some transient aspirations after religion, and those extraordinary influences which actually renew the heart and will. In speaking, then, of the aspirations of the human soul, reference is had to all those serious impressions, and those painful anxieties concerning salvation, which require to be followed up by a mightier power from God, to prevent their being entirely suppressed again, as they are in a multitude of instances by the strong love of sin and the world. For though man has fallen into a state of death in

trespasses and sins, so that if cut off from every species of Divine influence, and left entirely to himself, he would never reach out after anything but the sin which he loves, yet through the common influences of the Spirit of Grace, and the ordinary workings of a rational nature not yet reprobated, he is at times the object of internal stirrings and aspirations that indicate the greatness and glory of the heights whence he fell. Under the power of an awakened conscience, and feeling the emptiness of the world, and the aching void within him, man wishes for something better than he has or than he is. The minds of the more thoughtful of the ancient pagans were the subjects of these impulses and aspirations; and they confess their utter inability to realize them. They are expressed upon every page of Plato, and it is not surprising that some of the Christian Fathers should have deemed Platonism, as well as Judaism, to be a preparation for Christianity, by its bringing man to a sense of his need of redemption. And it would stimulate Christians in their efforts to give revealed religion to the heathen, did they ponder the fact which the journals of the missionary sometimes disclose, that the Divine Spirit is brooding with his common and preparatory influence over the chaos of Paganism, and that here and there the heathen mind faintly aspires to be freed from the bondage of corruption—that dim stirrings, impulses, and wishes for deliverance are awake in the dark heart of Paganism; but that owing to the strength and inveteracy of sin in that heart they will prove ineffectual to salvation, unless the gospel is preached, and the Holy Spirit is specially poured out in answer to the prayers of Christians.

Now all these phenomena in the human soul go to show the rigid bondage of sin, and to prove that sin has an element of servitude in it. For when these impulses, wishes, and aspirations are awakened, and the man discovers that he is unable to realize them in actual character and conduct, he is wretchedly and thoroughly conscious that “whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.” The immortal, heaven-descended spirit, feeling the kindling touch of truth and of the Holy Ghost, thrills

under it, and essays to soar. But sin hangs heavy upon it, and it cannot lift itself from the earth. Never is man so sensible of his enslavement and his helplessness as when he has a wish but has no will.

Look, for illustration, at the aspirations of the drunkard to be delivered from the vice that easily besets him. In his sober moments they come thick and fast, and during his sobriety, and while under the lashings of conscience, he wishes, nay, even longs, to be freed from drunkenness. It may be that under the impulse of these aspirations he resolves never to drink again. It may be that amid the buoyancy that naturally accompanies the springing of hope and longing in the human soul, he for a time seems to himself to be actually rising up from his "wallowing in the mire," and supposes that he shall soon regain his primitive condition of temperance. But the sin is strong, for the appetite that feeds it is in his blood. Temptation, with its witching solicitation, comes before the will—the weak, self-enslaved will. He aspires to resist, but will not; the spirit would soar, but the flesh will creep; the spirit was the wish, but the flesh was the will; the man longs to be sober, but actually is and remains a drunkard. And never—be it noticed—never is he more thoroughly conscious of being a slave to himself, than when he thus ineffectually aspires and wishes to be delivered from himself.

What has been said of drunkenness, and the aspiration to be freed from it, applies with full force to all the sin and all the aspirations of the human soul. There is no independent and self-realizing power in a mere aspiration. No man overcomes even his vices, except as he is assisted by the common grace of God. The self-reliant man invariably relapses into his old habits. He who thinks he stands is sure to fall. But when, under the influence of God's common grace, a man aspires to be freed from the deepest of all sin because it is the source of all particular acts of transgression—when he attempts to overcome and extirpate the original and inveterate depravity of his heart—he feels his bondage more thoroughly than ever. If it is

wretchedness for the drunkard to aspire after freedom from only a single vice, and fail of reaching it, is it not the depth of woe, when a man comes to know "the plague of his heart," and his utter inability to cleanse and cure it? In this case the bondage of self-will is found to be absolute.

At first sight it might seem as if these wishes and aspirations of the human spirit, faint though they be, are proof that man is not totally depraved, and that his will is not helplessly enslaved. So some men argue. But they forget that these aspirations and wishes are never realized. There is no evidence of power except from its results. And where are the results? Who has ever realized these wishes and aspirations in his heart and conduct? The truth is that every unattained aspiration that ever swelled the human soul is proof positive, and loud, that the human soul is in bondage. These ineffectual stirrings and impulses, which disappear like the morning cloud and the early dew, are most affecting evidences that "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin." They prove that apostate man has sunk, in one respect, to a lower level than that of the irrational creation. For high ideas and truths cannot raise him. Lofty impulses result in no alteration or elevation. Even Divine influences leave him just where they find him, unless they are exerted in their highest grade of irresistible grace. A brute surrenders himself to his appetites and propensities, and lives the low life of nature without being capable of aspirations for anything purer and nobler. But man does this very thing—nay, immerses himself in flesh, and sense, and self, with an entireness and intensity of which the brute is incapable—in the face of impulses and stirrings of mind that point him to the pure throne of God, and urge him to soar up to it! The brute is a creature of nature because he knows no better, and can desire nothing better; but man is "as the beasts that perish," in spite of a better knowledge, and a loftier aspiration!

If, then, you would know that "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin," contemplate sin in reference to the aspirations

of an apostate spirit originally made in the image of God, and which, because it is not eternally reprobated, is not entirely cut off from the common influences of the Spirit of God. Never will you feel the bondage of your will more profoundly than when under these influences, and in your moments of seriousness and anxiety respecting your soul's salvation, you aspire and endeavour to overcome inward sin, and find that unless God grant you his special and renovating grace, your heart will be sinful through all eternity, in spite of the best impulses of your best hours. These upward impulses and aspirations cannot accompany the soul into the state of final hopelessness and despair—though Milton represents Satan as sometimes looking back with a sigh and a mournful memory upon what he had once been—yet if they should go with us there, they would make the ardour of the fire more fierce, and the gnaw of the worm more fell. For they would help to reveal the strength of our sin, and the intensity of our rebellion.

III. Sin is spiritual slavery, if viewed in reference to the *fears* of the human soul.

The sinful spirit of man fears the death of the body, and the Scriptures assert that by reason of this particular fear we are all our lifetime in bondage. Though we know that the bodily dissolution can have no effect upon the imperishable essence of an immortal being, yet we shrink back from it, as if the sentence "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return," had been spoken of the spirit—as if the worm were to "feed sweetly" upon the soul, and it were to be buried up in the dark house of the grave. Even the boldest of us is disturbed at the thought of bodily death, and we are always startled when the summons suddenly comes—"Set thy house in order, for thou must die."

Again, the spirit of man fears that "fearful something after death," that eternal judgment which must pass upon all. We tremble at the prospect of giving an account of our actions. We are afraid to reap the harvest, the seed of which we have sown with our own hands. The thought of going to a just

judgment, and of receiving from the Judge of all the earth, who cannot possibly do injustice to any of his creatures, only that which is our desert, shocks us to the centre of our being! Man universally is afraid to be judged with a righteous judgment! Man universally is terrified by the equitable bar of God!

Again, the apostate spirit of man has an awful dread of eternity. Though this invisible realm is the proper home of the human soul, and it was made to dwell there for ever, after the threescore and ten years of its residence in the body are over, yet it shrinks back from an entrance into this untried world, and clings with the desperate force of a drowning man to this "bank and shoal of time." There are moments in the life of a guilty man when the very idea of eternal existence exerts a preternatural power, and fills him with a dread that paralyzes him. Never is the human being stirred to so great depths, and roused to such intensity of action, as when it feels what the Scripture calls "the power of an endless life." All men are urged by some ruling passion which is strong. The love of wealth, or of pleasure, or of fame, drives the mind onward with great force, and excites it to mighty exertions to compass its end. But never is a man pervaded by such an irresistible and overwhelming influence as that which descends upon him in some season of religious gloom—some hour of sickness, or danger, or death—when the great eternity, with all its awful realities, and all its unknown terror, opens upon his quailing gaze. There are times in man's life when he is the subject of movements within that impel him to deeds that seem almost superhuman; but that internal ferment and convulsion which is produced when all eternity pours itself through his being turns his soul up from the centre. Man will labour convulsively, night and day, for money; he will dry up the bloom and freshness of health for earthly power and fame; he will actually wear his body out for sensual pleasure. But what is the intensity and paroxysm of this activity of mind and body, if compared with those inward struggles and throes when the overtaken and startled sinner sees the eternal world looming

into view, and with strong crying and tears prays for only a little respite, and only a little preparation! "Millions for an inch of time!" said the dying English Queen. "O eternity! eternity! how shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in eternity?" says the man in the iron cage of despair. This finite world has indeed great power to stir man, but the other world has an infinitely greater power. The clouds which float in the lower regions of the sky, and the winds that sweep them along, produce great ruin and destruction upon the earth; but it is only when the "windows of heaven are opened" that "the fountains of the great deep are broken up," and "all in whose nostrils is the breath of life, die," and "every living substance is destroyed which is upon the face of the ground." When fear arises in the soul of man, in view of an eternal existence for which he is utterly unprepared, it is overwhelming. It partakes of the immensity of eternity, and holds the man with an omnipotent grasp.

If, now, we view sin in relation to these great fears of death, judgment, and eternity, we see that it is spiritual slavery, or the bondage of the will. We discover that our terror is no more able to deliver us from the "bondage of corruption," than our aspiration is. We found that in spite of the serious stirrings and impulses which sometimes rise within us, we still continue immersed in sense and sin; and we shall also find that in spite of the most solemn and awful fears of which a finite being is capable, we remain bondmen to ourselves and our sin. The dread that goes down into hell can no more ransom us, than can the aspiration that goes up into heaven. Our fear of eternal woe can no more change the heart, than our wish for eternal happiness can. We have, at some periods, faintly wished that lusts and passions had no power over us; and perhaps we have been the subject of still higher aspirings. But we are the same beings, still. We are the same self-willed and self-enslaved sinners, yet. We have all our life-time feared death, judgment, and eternity, and under the influence of this fear we have sometimes resolved and promised to become Christians. But we are the very same beings,



still; we are the same self-willed and self-enslaved sinners, yet.

Oh! never is the human spirit more deeply conscious of its bondage to its darling iniquity, than when these paralyzing fears shut down upon it, like night, with "a horror of great darkness." When under their influence, the man feels most thoroughly and wretchedly that his sin is his ruin, and yet his sinful determination continues on, because "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin." Has it never happened that, "in the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men," a spirit passed before your face, like that which stood still before the Temanite; and there was silence, and a voice saying, "Man! man! thou must die, thou must be judged, thou must inhabit eternity"? And when the spirit had departed, and while the tones of its solemn and startling cry were still rolling through your soul, did not a temptation to sin solicit you, and did you not drink in its iniquity like water? Have you not found out, by mournful experience, that the most anxious forebodings of the human spirit, the most alarming fears of the human soul, and the most solemn warnings that come forth from eternity, have no prevailing power over your sinful nature, but that immediately after experiencing them, and while your whole being is still quivering under their agonizing touch, you fall, you rush, into sin? Have you not discovered that even that most dreadful of all fears—the fear of the holy wrath of Almighty God—is not strong enough to save you from yourself? Do you know that your love of sin has the power to stifle and overcome the mightiest of your fears, when you are strongly tempted to self-indulgence? Have you no evidence, in your own experience, of the truth of the poet's words:

"The Sensual and the Dark rebel in vain,  
Slaves by their own compulsion."

If, then, you would know that "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin," contemplate sin in relation to the fears

which of necessity rest upon a spirit capable, as yours is, of knowing that it must leave the body, that it must receive a final sentence at the bar of judgment, and that eternity is its last and fixed dwelling-place. If you would know, with sadness and with profit, that sin is the enslavement of the will that originates it, consider that all the distressing fears that have ever been in your soul, from the first, have not been able to set you free in the least from innate depravity; but that, in spite of them, all your will has been steadily surrendering itself, more and more, to the evil principle of self-love and enmity to God. Call to mind the great fight of anguish and terror which you have sometimes waged with sin, and see how sin has always been victorious. Remember that you have often dreaded death, but you are unjust still. Remember that you have often trembled at the thought of eternal judgment, but you are unregenerate still. Remember that you have often started back when the holy and retributive eternity dawned like the day of doom upon you, but you are impenitent still. If you view your own personal sin in reference to your own personal fears, are you not a slave to it? Will or can your fears, mighty as they sometimes are, deliver you from the bondage of corruption, and lift you above that which you love with all your heart, and strength, and might?

It is perfectly plain, then, that "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin," whether we have regard to the feeling of obligation to be perfectly holy which is in the human conscience, or to the ineffectual aspirations which sometimes arise in the human spirit, or to the dreadful fears which often fall upon it. Sin must have brought the human will into a real and absolute bondage, if the deep and solemn sense of indebtedness to moral law; if the "thoughts that wander through eternity;" if the aspirations that soar to the heaven of heavens, and the fears that descend to the very bottom of hell—if all these combined forces and influences cannot free from its power.

It was remarked, in the beginning of this discourse, that the bondage of sin is the result of the reflex action of the human

will upon itself. It is not a slavery imposed from without, but from within. The bondage of sin is only a particular aspect of sin itself. The element of servitude, like the element of blindness, or hardness, or rebelliousness, is part and particle of that moral evil which deserves the wrath and curse of God. It, therefore, no more excuses or palliates, than does any other self-originated quality in sin. Spiritual bondage, like spiritual enmity to God, or spiritual ignorance of him, or spiritual apathy towards him, is guilt and crime.

And in closing, we desire to repeat and emphasize this truth. Whoever will enter upon that process of self-wrestling and self-conflict which has been described, will come to a profound sense of the truth which our Lord taught in the words of the text. All such will find and feel that they are in slavery, and that their slavery is their condemnation. For the anxious, weary, and heavy-laden sinner, the problem is not mysterious, because it finds its solution in the depths of his own self-consciousness. He needs no one to clear it up for him, and he has neither doubts nor cavils respecting it.

But an objection always assails that mind which has not the key of an inward moral struggle to unlock the problem for it. When Christ asserts that "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin," the easy and indifferent mind is swift to draw the inference that this bondage is its misfortune, and that the poor slave does not deserve to be punished, but to be set free. He says, as St. Paul did in another connection: "Nay verily, but let them come themselves, and fetch us out." But this slavery is a self-enslavement. The feet of this man have not been thrust into the stocks by another. This logician must refer everything to its own proper author, and its own proper cause. Let this spiritual bondage, therefore, be charged upon the self that originated it. Let it be referred to that self-will in which it is wrapped up, and of which it is a constituent element. It is a universally received maxim, and the agent is responsible for the consequences of a voluntary act, as well as for the act itself. If, therefore, the human will has inflicted a suicidal blow upon itself, and one of

the consequences of its own determination is a total enslavement of itself to its own determination, then this enslaving result of the act, as well as the act itself, must all go in to constitute and swell the sum-total of human guilt. The miserable drunkard, therefore, cannot be absorbed from the drunkard's condemnation upon the plea that by a long series of voluntary acts he has, in the end, so enslaved himself that no power but God's grace can save him. The marble-hearted fiend in hell, the absolutely lost spirit in despair, cannot relieve his torturing sense of guilt by the reflection that he has at length so hardened his own heart that he cannot repent. The unforced will of a moral being must be held responsible for both its direct and its reflex action; for both its sin, and its bondage in sin.

The denial of guilt, then, is not the way out. He who takes this road "kicks against the goads." And he will find their stabs thickening, the farther he travels and the nearer he draws to the face and eyes of God. But there is a way out. It is the way of self-knowledge and confession. This is the point upon which all the antecedents of salvation hinge. He who has come to know, with a clear discrimination, that he is in a guilty bondage to his own inclination and lust, has taken the very first step towards freedom. For, the Redeemer the Almighty Deliverer, is near the captive, so soon as the captive feels his bondage and confesses it. The mighty God, walking upon the waves of this sinful, troubled life, stretches out his arm, the very instant any sinking soul cries, "Lord, save me." And unless that appeal and confession of helplessness is made, he, the merciful and the compassionate, will let the soul go down before his own eyes to the unfathomed abyss. If the sinking Peter had not uttered that cry, the mighty hand of Christ would not have been stretched forth. All the difficulties disappear so soon as a man understands the truth of the Divine affirmation: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself—it is a real destruction, and it is thy own work—"but in ME is thy help.'