

THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN

NO. 2130

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 16, 1890,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today;
 lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”
 Hebrews 3:13.*

SIN is the greatest evil in the universe. It is the parent of all other ills. All manner of evils draw their bitterness from this fountain of wormwood and gall. If a man had every possession a mortal could desire, sin could turn every blessing into a curse. And, on the other hand, if a man had *nothing* for his inheritance but suffering and stood clear from all sin, his afflictions, his losses, his deprivations might each one be a gain to him. We ought not to pray so much against sickness, or trial, or temptation, or even against death itself, as against sin! Satan, himself, cannot hurt us except as he is armed with the poisoned arrows of sin.

Lord, keep us from sin. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” There is no evil like the evil of sin—deliver us from it, O Lord! Alas, we are sadly prone to sin and evil has great influence over us. When I say this, I refer not only to those who are “dead in trespasses and sins,” in whom sin is the great reigning power—for they are the *servants* of sin—but I refer also to the people of God. Even we that have been born-again and are, in a measure, sanctified by the Spirit of God—even we, I say—have a fleshly nature whose tendencies are evil, whose desires draw towards sin.

How soon we slip! How much we need to be held up! How ought we daily to cry for Divine Grace lest we, also, should be “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”! Upon that subject I am going to speak this morning, dwelling, for the most part, upon “the deceitfulness of sin.” To God’s people this is a very important matter—for in the deceit of sin lies our main danger. If sin comes to us as sin, we are swift to hate it and strong to repel it, by the Grace of God. When we are walking with God, we only need to know that an action is forbidden and straightway we avoid it—we shun the evil thing when it is plainly evil.

But when sin puts on another dress and comes to us speaking a language which is not its own—even those who would avoid sin as sin, may, by degrees, be tempted to evil and deluded into wrong. It is well when sin carries its black flag at the masthead for then we know what we are dealing with. The deceitfulness of sin is most ruinous. We have grave cause to watch and pray against secret sins, veiled sins, popular sins, fascinating sins, deceitful sins. May God grant that the words which I may now utter may set us on our watchtower and excite all our faculties to enquire diligently, lest we be “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Let us come at once to the center of our subject. Our first head is, *sin has a singular power to deceive*. Secondly, *its deceivableness has hardening influence upon the soul*—we may grow “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” And, therefore, thirdly, *there is great need that this be fought against*. We must strive against our cunning enemy and resist him in many ways, one of which is mentioned in the text—“Exhort one another daily, while it is called Today.” May the Holy Spirit put power into our meditation at this hour!

I. First, then, SIN HAS A SINGULAR POWER TO DECEIVE. We have only to look back to the beginning of our race to be sure of this. Eve, in the Garden, was pure, intelligent and filled with good dispositions. Her faculties were well balanced for no original sin or natural depravity had put her mind out of order. Yet that lovely woman, without a taint upon her heart or will—perfect as she came from her Maker’s hand—was overcome by Satan who embodied in himself the deceitfulness of sin.

The serpent played his part right cunningly with the woman and soon withdrew her from her loyal obedience to the Lord God. She began to question, to parley, to argue with rebellious suggestions and after a while she put forth her hand and took of the fruit which had been forbidden. And she also gave it to her husband with her and he did eat of it. If man in his perfection was so readily deceived by sin, what do you think of yourself, fallen and inclined to evil as you are? Will

not sin soon deceive you? I will even go further back than the Garden—for the serpent who was the instrument of evil in the Garden was once an angel of God!

Lucifer, the light-bearer, Son of the Morning, once stood high in the hierarchy of spirits. But sin entered into his heart and the sublime angel became a loathsome fiend! Lucifer became Satan, as prompt for evil as once he had been swift for good. If sin overcame angels, can we fight with it? If sin entangled in its thrice-accursed net even the pure spirits of Heaven, what do you think, sons and daughters of fallen parents—will you not soon be deceived by it unless the Grace of God shall make you wise unto salvation? Since your hearts are deceitful and sin is deceitful, you are in peril, indeed!

The deceitfulness of sin will be seen in several points to which I call your attention. *Its deceit may be seen in the manner of its approaches to us.* Sin does not uncover all its hideousness nor reveal its horrible consequences—but it comes to us in a very subtle way offering us advantages. Intellectually, it comes with a question, or an inquiry. Ought we not to question and to enquire? Are we to receive everything implicitly? The question is, however, full often the thin end of the wedge which Satan drives home in the form of carnal wisdom, doubt, infidelity and practical atheism.

The practice of sin may be encouraged by a doubt as to its penalty. “Yes, has God said?” is the speculative question which is meant to undermine the foundations of godly fear in the heart. How tiny a drop of sinful distrust of God’s Word will poison all the thoughts of the soul! Sin frequently comes as a bare suggestion or an imagination—an airy thing spun of such stuff as dreams are made of. You do not think of committing the fault, nor even of talking of it—but you think of it pleasantly and view it as a thing bright and lustrous to the imagination. The thought fascinates and then the spell of evil begins its deadly work—thought condenses into desire and desire grows to purpose—and purpose ripens into *act*.

So slyly does sin come into the soul that it is there before we are aware of it. I have known a sin insinuate itself by the way of the repulsion of another sin. A man has wasted his substance in profligacy—and by way of repentance in later days he becomes a miser—greedy, wretched, living only for himself and his hoard. So have I seen the publican reform and develop into a Pharisee. The pendulum went sadly far in this direction and now, to make amends, it swings too far the other way. The shivering fit follows upon the burning heat—it is but the same fever of sin in different phases. A man will fly from pride to meanness, from moroseness to jollity, from obstinacy to laxity. Thus the shutting of one gate may open another and one sin may crawl in as another creeps out.

You set all your guards to keep the northern border and the enemies come up from the south, taking you unawares. You pursue a virtue till you hurry into a vice and shun one evil so much that you fall into a worse. Sin has a way of adapting itself to us and to our circumstances. One man is of a sanguine temperament and he is tempted to speculate, to gamble and ultimately to become dishonest. Another man is of a sober frame of mind and he is tempted to be melancholy, disputatious, peevish, rebellious against God. To the young man sin will come with fire for passions which are all too ready to blaze. To the old man sin will come with the chill frost of parsimony, or the frost of sloth, or the canker of care.

Sin’s quiver has an arrow for the rich and a dart for the poor—it has one form of poison for the prosperous and another for the unsuccessful. This master fisherman in the sea of life does not use the same bait for all sorts of fish but he knows the creatures he would capture! If sin finds you poor as an owlet, it will tempt you to envy, or to steal, or to doubt God, or to follow crooked ways of gain. If sin finds you abounding in riches, it will follow quite another tack and lure you on to self-indulgence, or to pride, or worldly fashion.

Satan knows more about us than we know about ourselves—he knows our raw places and our weak points—and in what joint there was a breakage in our youth. Sin, like the north wind, finds out every cranny in the house of manhood and comes whistling in where we fondly dreamed that we were quite screened from its intrusion. Sin creeps towards us as a lion stealthily draws near to his prey, or as the enemy creeps towards his victim without sound of foot or stir of twig. Beware of the sin which, like Agag, comes delicately! Watch well against the temptation whose words are smoother than butter but inwardly they are drawn swords.

Next, *sin is deceitful in its object*, for the object which it puts before us is not that which is its actual result. We are not tempted to provoke our Maker, or willfully cast off the authority of righteousness. We are not invited to do these things for their own sake. No, no—we are moved to do evil under the idea that some present *good* will come of it! The man thinks, when he yields to sin, that he shall enjoy an additional pleasure or shall gain an extra profit—or at least shall avoid a measure of evil and escape from something which he dreads. He does the wrong for the sake of what he hopes

will come of it. In brief, he does evil that good may come! Thus, the seemingly good is dangled before the short-sighted creature, man, as the bait before the fish.

In every case, this object is a piece of deceit. Evil does not lead to good, nor sin promote our real profit—we are fooled if we think so. Yet, in most cases the man does not commit the sin with the design of breaking the Law of God and defying his Maker, but because he fancies that something is to be gained—and, in his judgment, he better understands what is good for him even than the Lord God by whose wisdom he ought to be guided. Just as in the case of the old serpent, the argument is, “God refuses you that which would be for your advantage and you will be wise to take it.” The arch-deceiver insinuated that God knew that if Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit their eyes would be opened and they would be as gods—and therefore, to keep them under subjection, He denied them the charming fruit.

Perhaps Milton’s idea is right. “See what this fruit has done for me,” says the serpent. “I, a mere reptile, am now able to speak and argue like a man! Go, take the fruit and you, as men, will rise to the rank of God.” Thus are we lured and lured like the silly fowls of the air! The object set before us is delusive—the reward of sin may glitter, but it is not gold—but yet, as gold, it thrusts itself upon our erring judgment. This deceitfulness of sin is present everywhere—the street, the house, the private room—all come to be enchanted ground unless we dwell in God. Are we not often caused to think that we could make at least a little gain, or do a measure of extra good if we might just to a small degree quit the strait and narrow way? This is falsehood, base as Hell.

Sin is deceitful, next, in the names it wears. It is very apt to change its title. It seldom cares for its own true description. Fine words are often used to cover foul deeds. We read, at times, in the newspapers, of gentlemen who have an alias, or possibly half-a-dozen—in such cases there is always a reason for it. Sin has many names by which it would disguise its real character. In his, “Holy War,” Mr. Bunyan tells us that Covetousness called himself by the name of Prudent-Thrifty. Lasciviousness was named Harmless-Mirth and Anger was known as Good-Zeal. Nowadays anger is known as “proper spirit,” and infidelity is “Advanced Theology.”

Almost every sin, nowadays, has a pretty name to be called by on Sundays and silver slippers to wear in fine society. The paintbrush and the powder box are much used upon the wrinkled countenance of sin to make it look fair and beautiful. The fig leaf is not only worn on the man’s body—sin itself puts on the apron. To hide the nakedness of sin is the great desire of Satan, for thus he hopes that even the better sort may fall in love with a decent evil though they might have shunned an odious transgression. Alas, how sadly prone are men to call things by false names! Even those who profess to be godly men—when they are indulging sin—will speak of it as though it were no raven, black as night, but a dove, with its wings covered with silver.

I knew one who often drank to excess but he spoke of himself as obliged to “take a little for his health.” He was not drunk, but excited. And if he shouted uproariously, it was caused by his convivial temperament. This dear innocent only took “a glass” or a “drop” and yet one might not be further off the truth if he described him as taking a barrel or a hoghead! Diminutives are names of endearment and men would not talk of their sins as such little things unless they loved them dearly. Today, “worldliness” is “being abreast of the age.” False doctrine is described as “advanced thought.” Indifference to the Truth of God is liberality; heresy is breadth of view. Yet names do not alter things! Call garlic perfume and it remains a rank odor. Style the fiend an angel of light and he is none the less a devil. Sin—call it by what names you may—is still evil, only evil and that continually.

Hear how our God cries concerning it—“Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!” Lord, save us from the wolf in the sheep’s clothing! May we have Grace to see through the mask of sin, detect its loathsome face and turn from it with full purpose of heart! *Sin also shows its special deceitfulness in the argument which it uses with men.* Have you never heard its voice whispering to you, “Do not make much ado about nothing. Is it not a little one? There is no need to boggle over so small a matter as this. It is not right, but still it is a mere trifle, unworthy of notice. Do it! Do it!” My Friends, can there be such a thing as a *small* sin? The point of the rapier is small and for that reason the more deadly. That which grieves the Lord cannot be a little evil. To pluck the fruit from the forbidden tree was, of all actions, the simplest—yet it brought death into the world with all its train of woe—and that which seems most trifling may have infinite consequences following in its track.

Then sin will raise the question, and say, “Is this really wrong? May we not be too precise? Are not the times changed? Do not circumstances alter the command?” Sin is great at raising difficult points of reasoning. “Are there not

some points of view in which this act may be allowable, though from more usual points of view it must certainly be regarded as an unhallowed thing?" He that wills to do wrong is eager to find a loophole for himself. He that has begun to seek an excuse is on the border of the enemy. He that is loyal to the core and true to his King in everything makes short work of questions, for when he is not sure that a thing is right he leaves it alone.

The deceitfulness of sin creates in the mind a tendency to do evil because others have done so. We have known people so eager to excuse sin that they cry, "Look at Noah, at David, at Peter," and so on—as if the fault of others were an excuse for them. It is true that these men did wrong and were restored—but they suffered greatly. That is a vile mind which eats up the sins of God's people as men eat bread. Arguing for the indulgence of sin because of the failings of good men is not only folly, but wickedness! What if a man was saved who had taken poison? Shall I, therefore, drink the deadly draught?

Some time ago a person sought to blow out his brains with a pistol. He still lives—and shall I, therefore, put a revolver to my forehead? Yet such detestable arguments often suffice to mislead men through the deceitfulness of sin! Beware of the witchery of sin! With feeble minds the argument is, "Beware lest you be singular. As well be out of the world as out of fashion. When you are at Rome you must do as Rome does." Weak minds are plentiful and to these, to be thought singular and odd is a thing to be dreaded and shunned—they must be in the swim though the water should be of the foulest. To them it would be next door to a crime or a calamity to be out of fashion. To some of us this is no temptation for we prefer to quit the crowd and walk alone—but to the bulk of people this is a mighty argument and yet a most deceitful one.

Sin has often whispered in the vain minds of men, "This action might be very wrong for other people, but it will not be evil in you. Under your present circumstances you may take leave to overlook the command of God. True, you would severely condemn such a sin in another, but in yourself it is quite another matter. Things must be left to your superior discretion. You who do so much that is good and are such a remarkable person, you may venture where others should not."

Sin will also plead with you that your circumstances are such that they furnish you with an excellent justification—you cannot do otherwise than make an exception to the general rule under the singular conditions in which you are now placed. It tempts you to put forth your hand unto iniquity, arguing that it is the quick way and the only way out of your present difficulties. This is specious reasoning—yet are men foolish enough to be swayed by it. Sin will also flatter a man with the notion that he can go just so far and no farther and retreat with ease. He can tread the verge of crime and yet be innocent. Another person would be in great danger—but this self-satisfied fool thinks that he has such power over himself and that he is so intelligent and so experienced—that he can stop at a safe point. This moth can play with the candle and not singe its wings. This child can put its finger between the bars and yet never burn himself.

I know you, my self-contained Friend, and I know your boast that you can stand on the edge of a cliff and look down upon the foaming sea and while other people's heads grow giddy, your brain is clear and your foot is firm. You may try the experiment once too often! The deceivableness of sin is such that it makes those most secure who are most in peril. Oh, for Grace to watch and pray lest we, also, become "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"!

This deceivableness is further seen in the excuses which it frames afterwards. It needs a great general to cover a retreat and conduct it to a safe conclusion. Sin knows how to furnish a rear-guard for itself lest it be assailed by the troops of repentance. To screen the conscience from regret is one of the efforts of deceitful sin. "Ah," says the man to himself, "I did wrong but what can you expect of poor flesh and blood?" To hear him talk you would think him a pitiable *victim*, rather than a blameworthy offender! With a sham tear in his eyes he lays this flattering unction to his soul—that he is weak but not wicked—he was compelled to do wrong! He deludes himself into thinking he would not have thought of it had there not been a necessity. Beware of aptness in the making of an excuse! And above all beware of casting the blame of sin on Providence, or on God.

Sin will also add, "And, after all, though you were wrong, yet you were not so bad as you might have been. And considering the temptation, you may wonder at your own moderation in transgression. On the whole, you have behaved better than others would have done." Thus the sinner will weave a garment out of the cobwebs of his sins. Self-righteousness is poor stuff when it can be fashioned even out of our faults! Such is the deceivableness of sin, that it makes itself out to be praiseworthy.

Then sin will suggest, “Well, you can soon make up for lost time. Live nearer to God and be more useful! And then your little divergence will soon be made up.” It even ventures coarsely to propose a price for pardon. “Give something extra to a good cause and make amends for offenses.” The old Popish idea of purchasing pardon by some extra piece of religion comes up in many forms. “Ah!” you say, “surely nobody hears such deceitful talk!” Has sin never whispered all this to you? If it has not, then it has taken another way of deceiving you—but deceive you it will unless Almighty Grace shall keep you ever on the watch against its devices!

The deceitfulness of sin is seen again in its promises. We shall not go far into sin without finding out how greatly it lies to us. It promises liberty and the man who yields to it becomes a slave. It promises light and the man gives up the old faith to go after the new light and before long the darkness thickens about him into sevenfold midnight! Sin promises elevation of mind and spirit and before long the wretch is worldly, pleasure-loving, groveling, superstitious! Sin keeps none of its promises, save only to the ears. Holiness is truth—but sin is a lie. Sin is false through and through—it promises pleasure and it leads to misery—it feigns a Heaven, but inflicts a real Hell.

Once more, *sin is deceitful in the influence which it carries with it.* At first sin cultivates a free and easy bearing and it says to the sinner, “Don’t think. Leave consideration to older heads.”—

*“I count it one of the wisest things
To drive dull care away.”*

The guilty one goes on day after day without looking to his way. His happiness lies in carelessness. He hurries downward to destruction and it is enough to him that the road is easy. With a laugh and a joke he puts off serious things till tomorrow. He is a free-thinker and, to a large extent, a free actor, too—those who are near him often find him making too free. Yes, but he is being deceived and by-and-by, when conscience wakes up, he will find it so. Out of his own mouth will come the death warrant of his jollity.

In these more serious days, what does sin say?—“You have provoked the Spirit of God and there is no mercy for you. Do not listen to the preacher of the Gospel, it is impossible that you should be forgiven. Your case is hopeless—you are finally condemned—and there is no changing the verdict. As for the promises of God, they are not for such a sinner as you are. You are given up to despair and you will, without doubt, perish everlastingly.” This is the opposite pole of sin’s deceiving, for, though it has changed sides, it is still deceiving. Despair is as much a sin as profanity—to doubt God is as truly a crime as to take pleasure in uncleanness.

Thus will sin, by any means, by all means, endeavor to keep men under its tyranny so as to work their ruin. Let no man in this place think that he cannot be deceived—he is already deluded by his pride. Let no woman dream that she has come to such a state of perfection that she cannot be deluded by sin—she is even now in imminent peril. We have a cunning enemy and we have no wit of our own wherewith to match the subtlety of the old serpent and the deceitfulness of sin. Unless we call in the help of Him who is “the Wisdom of God,” we shall be led as an ox to the slaughter and perish in our folly.

II. I want you, in the second place, to notice very carefully that THIS DECEITFULNESS HAS A HARDENING POWER OVER THE HEART—“Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” How does that come about? Partly through *our familiarity with sin.* We may look at hateful sin till we love it. It has the eyes of a basilisk and its gaze is fascinating. At first you are shocked by sin—but if you see it every day it will cease to distress you. Persons who have never heard profane language are greatly grieved as they go down the streets of London—and yet even good people who live in certain localities come to hear it without horror.

This is one of the sad influences of sin—it makes the heart rough by contact with it. The lion in the fable alarmed the fox when first he saw him but soon he ceased to tremble at him and at last made him his companion. Familiarity with sin makes the conscience dull and at length deadens sensibility. *Security in wrongdoing* also leads to this kind of hardening. A man has been dishonest—he is found out and he suffers for it. I could almost thank God, for now he may cease from his evil course. But one of the greatest curses that can happen to a man is for him to do wrong with impunity—he will do it again and again and again and he will proceed from bad to worse.

I am always glad when I hear of a young gambler whose pocket is cleaned out at his first venture—if he has any wit he will quit the way of destruction—at least we hope he will. But if he gains at first he will stake more and more and become a confirmed gamester. It is just so with sin. Its deceitfulness is assisted by a man’s being able to go a little further

and a little further without any great hurt appearing to come of it—and so the heart grows used to the increasing heat and is hardened to it—until he can live in a furnace heated seven times hotter by sin.

Sinners descend by an inclined plane till they find themselves far down in the abyss and think it impossible to rise out of it. Then there follows on the back of this insensibility to sin *an insensibility to the Gospel*. I think I could mention some who come here who once trembled under the Word—but they do not tremble now. They still come because they like to pick out the few smart bits the preacher may say, or the witty anecdotes that he may let fall—but nothing touches their conscience or arouses their fears.

If there is a sermon that is likely to disturb them, they play the part of the adder which will not hear. I think with sadness, of one, who, in reply to the remark, “What a terrible sermon we had this morning!” answered, “I never pay any attention to that kind of thing. I only listen to him when he is comforting us.” Hypocrites get into such a condition at last, that if all the Apostles were to preach to them and Jesus Himself were to denounce the judgments of God, they would simply make an observation upon the style of the address, or remark that it was a very searching discourse. But as for themselves being moved, they are so “past feeling” that nothing comes home to them. The devils believe and tremble—these profess to believe every Truth of God—but trembling is not for them.

In time comes in the help of *unbelief*. When a man begins to doubt his Bible, to doubt the Atonement, to doubt the wrath to come and so on, there is generally a cause for it—and that cause is not always intellectual, but moral and spiritual. “There is something rotten in Denmark.” I mean something rotten in the *heart* and this makes something rotten in the head. Very naturally a man does not like that Truth of God which does not like him. That which condemns him he tries to condemn. A Truth makes him uneasy and so he tries to doubt it—and the tone of society soon helps him to discover a stale objection which will answer his turn and enable him to set up in business as an unbeliever. Then he ceases to feel the preaching, for, as a rule, we only feel under the Gospel in proportion as we believe it to be true! And if we persuade ourselves that it is all a myth, or a fiction, we have made a pillow for our guilty heads.

One of the worst points about hardening in sin is companionship in it. Evil men seek other evil men to be their associates. Oh, how many are ruined by company! We do not wonder that they get no good on Sundays when we know where they spend their week evenings. Who are their chosen companions when they take their pleasure? Many a man will do, when connected with others, what he himself would never have thought of doing. Inasmuch as others are of the same mind, he joins hand in hand with them and encourages *himself* in evil. The daring, the looseness, the profanity, the infidelity of abler persons tempt the weak-minded to venture where they would have been afraid to go. So the deceitfulness of sin which led the man to seek evil company leads to the further hardening of his heart by that company.

O Sirs! Your hearts are every day either softening or hardening! The sun that shines with vehement heat melts the wax, but it, at the same time, hardens the clay. The effect of the Gospel is always present in some degree—it is a savor of life unto life—or a savor of death unto death—to all who hear it. You cannot listen to my plain rebukes and earnest warnings without growing worse, if you do not grow better! Pray God to give you a lively conscience and when you have it, do nothing to deaden it. It is much better, even, to be morbidly sensitive and fear that you are wrong when you are right than to grow careless as to whether you are right or wrong—and so to go on blindly till you fall into the ditch of open sin.

“Do professing Christians ever do this?” Do they *not* do it? Is not this the heartbreak of pastors, the dishonor of the Church, the crucifying of our Lord afresh? O Lord, preserve us from it, lest any one of us is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!

III. Now I conclude by a practical observation that THIS DECEITFULNESS OF SIN AND THIS TENDENCY TO BECOME HARDENED NEED TO BE FOUGHT AGAINST. How is it to be done? I will not keep to my text just now, but enlarge the scope of my discourse by taking in the context. The way to keep from hardness of heart and from the deceitfulness of sin is *to believe*. We read, “To whom swore He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.”

Believe!—Faith *has* saved you. Believe!—Faith *will* save you! Believe!—Faith has brought you to Christ! Believe!—Faith will keep you in Christ! Believe against the present temptation. Believe against all future deceitfulness of sin. You shall find that just in proportion as faith grows strong, the deceit of sin will be baffled. Under the strong light of a living faith you see through the sinful imposture and you no longer put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! But

under the half light, the twilight, the darkness of a questioning, half-hearted faith you cannot see the true color of an act and you are easily deceived. Believe in the living God and in His righteousness and in your obligation to serve Him—then sin will appear exceeding sinful. Believe in Christ, who took your sin, and bore it in His own body on the Cross—then sin will be seen in its black colors. Believe in the Holy Spirit, by whose power you can be delivered from the deceitfulness of sin and as you believe, so shall it be unto you and you shall stand fast where the half-Believer slides.

The next advice I would give is this—if you would be saved from the deceitfulness of sin *confess it* honestly before God. It is necessary to lay bare your heart before the living God. Though sin calls itself by another name, you call it by its right name. When you have sinned, make no excuses for yourself, but with weeping and lamentation cry, “Lord, I have sinned.” Tell the Lord all the evil connected with your transgression and try to spy out and humbly learn the villainy of your heart, the falseness of your nature, the crookedness of your disposition and the loathsomeness of your corruptions.

Pray that sin may appear *sin*—it cannot appear in a worse light. Thus you shall not so readily be caught in its traps and lures. It lays its snares in the darkness—keep your eyes open. It digs its pits and covers them most cunningly—look before you put your foot down. Tread very cautiously, for your way is full of pitfalls. When you have sinned, then confess the great evil of your wickedness—for this humble penitence will be not only your way to pardon—but to future purity. Oh, that the Spirit of God may teach you this! Again, *cultivate great tenderness of heart*. Do not believe that to grieve over sin is lowering to manhood—indulge yourself largely in sweet repentance. Do not think that to yield to the power of the Word and to be greatly affected by it, shows you to be weak—think, rather, that this is an infirmity in which your strength lies.

As for myself, I would be swayed by the Word of God as the ripe corn is swayed by the summer wind. I would be by God’s Spirit as readily moved as the leaves of the aspen by the breeze. I would be sensitive to the gentlest breath of my Lord. God grant that we may have a conscience quick as the apple of an eye! A conscience seared as with a hot iron is the sure prelude of destruction. God save us from a heart over which sin has cast a coat of callous insensibility!

But the text, itself, says, “*Exhort one another daily*,” from which I gather two lessons. First, hear exhortation *from* others and, secondly, practice exhortation *to* others. I have known people of this kind, that if a word is spoken to them, however gently, as to a wrong which they are doing, their temper is up in a moment. Who are they that they should be spoken to? Dear Friend, who are you that you should *not* be spoken to? Are you such an off-cast and such an outcast that your Christian Brothers and Sisters must give you up? Surely you do not want to bear that title!

I have even known persons take offense because the Word has been spoken from the pulpit too pointedly. This is to take offense where we ought to show gratitude! “Oh,” says one, “I will never hear that man again! He is too personal.” What kind of a man would you like to hear? Will you give your ear to one who will please you to your ruin and flatter you to your destruction? Surely you are not so foolish! Do you choose that kind of doctor who never tells you the truth about your bodily health? Do you trust one who falsely assured you that there was nothing the matter with you when all the while a terrible disease was folding its cruel arms around you?

Your doctor would not hurt your feelings. He washes his hands with invisible soap and gives you a portion of the same. He will send you just a little pill and you will be all right. He would not have you think of that painful operation which a certain surgeon has suggested to you. He smirks and smiles until, after a little while of him and his pills, you say to yourself, “I am getting worse and worse and yet he smiles and smiles and flatters and soothes me. I will have done with him and his little pills and go to one who will examine me honestly and treat me properly. He may take his soap and his smile elsewhere.”

O Sirs, believe me, I would think it a waste of time—no, a crime like that of *murder*—to stand here and prophesy smooth things to you! We must all learn to hear what we do not like. The question is not, “Is it pleasant?” but, “Is it true?” We ought to be able to take a loving exhortation from our Brothers and Sisters. We must do so if we are to be preserved from the deceitfulness of sin. Another eye may see for me what I cannot see myself. Reproofs should be given with great tenderness but even if they wound us, we must bear them. “Let the righteous smite me. It shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil.” Let us be thankful that some saints love us well enough to give themselves the pain and trouble of exhorting us.

And then let us endeavor, if the Lord is keeping us by His Grace, to “exhort one another daily.” We are not to scold one another daily, nor to suspect one another daily, nor to pick holes in one another’s coats daily—but when we see a manifest fault in a Brother, we are bound to tell him of it in love—and when we do not see any fault of commission, but the Brother is evidently growing lax and cold, it is well to stir him up to greater zeal by a loving exhortation. Wisely said, a word may save a soul from declension and sin. A good fire may need a little stirring. The best of Believers may grow better by the communications of his friends.

Alas, we do not care enough for the souls of our Brethren! If we thought more carefully of others, we should probably think more carefully about ourselves. “Exhort one another daily.” Watch over your own children, your wife, your husband and then do not forget your neighbors and fellow workmen. Cry to God to give us union of spirit with all the Lord’s chosen and may that union of spirit be a living and loving one! We would not be frozen together in chill propriety, but we would be *welded* together at a white heat of loving earnestness, so as to be truly one in Christ Jesus! Let us take for our motto, “One and all.” Let us maintain individuality by each one watching against personal sin and merging individuality in the commonwealth of saints by each one laboring for the sanctification of his brother.

But, oh, dear Friends, after all that I have said, he is well kept whom the Lord keeps! Commit yourselves unto the Lord—the Holy Spirit who is able to keep you from stumbling. Let us, by a renewed act of faith, hand ourselves over to the Lord Jesus that He may save us. You that have never done so, I pray that you may be moved to it. You *cannot* keep yourselves. Up till now you may have been virtuous, sober, honest, respected and beloved—but will it last? Take a life assurance policy upon your moral character by going to Jesus Himself and asking Him to renew you in heart and soul, by His Spirit, that you may be in Christ Jesus and in Him may abide forever.

If you have been greatly deceived by sin, yet come to Jesus now! He can undeceive you and undo the damage you have suffered. Trust in Him, who is the faithful and true Witness, to deliver you from all falsehood and sin and to keep you true to the end. The Lord bless these words of mine, which, however feeble, have been earnestly meant for your good, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews 3.
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