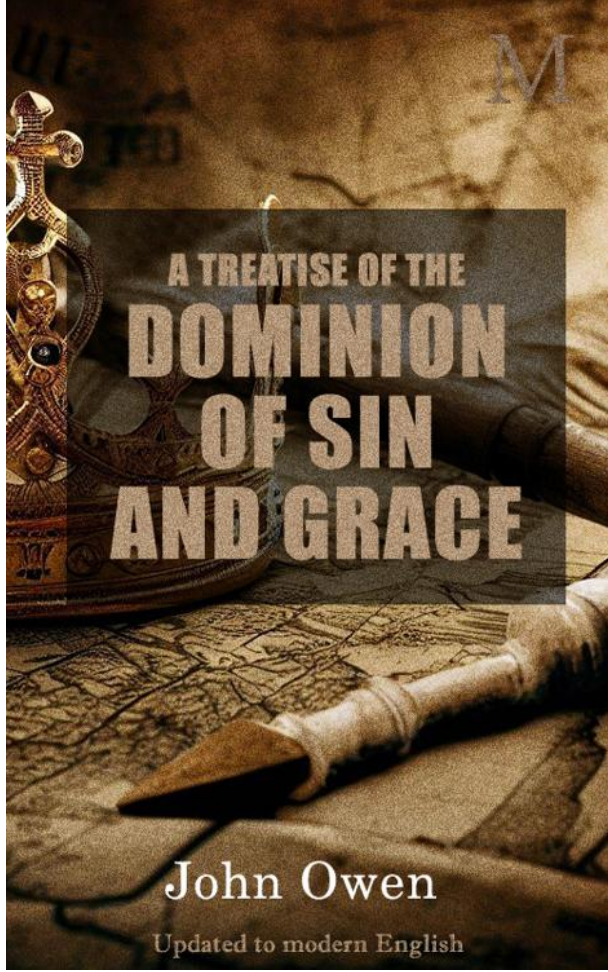


The background of the cover is a historical manuscript page. On the left, a golden crown with intricate details and a cross on top is visible. In the foreground, a quill pen with a wooden handle lies on a parchment surface. The text is overlaid on a dark, semi-transparent rectangular area in the center of the page.

A TREATISE OF THE
**DOMINION
OF SIN
AND GRACE**

John Owen

Updated to modern English



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A Treatise of the Dominion of Sin and Grace

by John Owen

WHEREIN SIN'S REIGN IS DISCOVERED, IN WHOM IT IS, AND
IN WHOM IT IS NOT;
HOW THE LAW SUPPORTS IT; HOW GRACE DELIVERS FROM
IT,
BY SETTING UP ITS DOMINION IN THE HEART.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the
law, but under grace.—Rom. 6:14.

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PREFATORY NOTE

IT appears that the following treatise was published by the widow of Owen, five years after his death; and we learn, from the preface which Isaee Chauncy prefixed to it, that the author had left it ready for the press. The most important part of it relates to the evidence by which we ascertain whether or not sin holds dominion over the heart. In the description and sifting of this evidence, the author manifests all his singular powers of spiritual analysis and discrimination.

We have had access to a manuscript which belonged to Dr Owen's friend, Sir John Hartopp, and which contains a large portion of this treatise. It serves to show how many obscure passages in the writings of Owen might have been elucidated and rendered perfectly clear, if the same advantage had been enjoyed in the preparation of his other works for this edition. The following are some instances of important corrections made on the text, as it stood in all previous editions, by the aid of this manuscript. On its authority we have altered "disavow" into "avow;" "it is that act by which the mind loads itself," into "it is that art by which the mind leads itself;" "mind" into

"wind;" "sin hath not the dominion," into "sin hath the dominion," the sense of the passage, as is evident from the context, having been spoiled by the insertion of the negative; "invisible" into "irresistible;" "affairs" into "affections," etc.

ANALYSIS

The treatise is founded on Rom. 6:14, and three facts are presupposed in the discussion that follows:—that sin dwells in believers; seeks to renew its dominion over them; and endeavours to accomplish this object by deceit and force, chap. 1.

Three leading inquiries are proposed:—I. Into the nature of this dominion; II. The evidence by which we ascertain whether it exists in us; and III. The reason or ground of the assurance that it shall not have dominion over believers.

I. As to the nature of this dominion,—1. It is evil and perverse, (1.) as usurped, and (2.) as exercised to evil ends. 2. It implies no force contrary to the human will. 3. It implies that the soul is not under the influence of grace to any extent; and, 4. that it is sensible of the power of sin, II.

II. As to the evidences of this dominion,—1. Some features of character are specified which, though seemingly, are not really inconsistent with the dominion of sin. 2. Certain things are mentioned which leave the case doubtful; as when sin takes hold of the imagination, when it prevails in the affections, when there is a neglect of the means by which it is mortified, when a reservation is made in favour of any known sin, and when hardness of heart is manifested, III. Hardness of heart is specially considered, and distinguished into natural, judicial, and partial or comparative; under the head of partial hardness there are mentioned,—(1.) Symptoms which, however evil in themselves, are not inconsistent with the existence of grace in the heart; and (2.) Symptoms which are hardly compatible with the reign of grace. And, 3. Incontestable

evidences that sin has dominion over the soul are briefly mentioned, IV.

III. The reason of the assurance that sin shall have no more dominion over believers is, that they are "not under the law, but under grace;" because,—whereas, 1. the law gives no strength against sin, 2. confers no spiritual liberty, and, 3. supplies no motives to destroy the power of sin, and, 4. whereas Christ is not in the law,—grace imparts these blessings, and thus enables us to subdue sin, V. Two practical observations are enforced,—1. The privilege of deliverance from the dominion of sin; and, 2. The importance of securing ourselves against the dominion of sin. and not suffering it to remain long doubtful whether or not we are under it, VI—ED.

TO THE SERIOUS READER

ONE of the great gospel inquiries that a Christian ought to be most critical and curious in resolving to himself, upon the most impartial examination of his own heart, concerning his spiritual state and standing in grace, is, whether he be in the faith or no: which doubt can be resolved but two ways;—either by faith itself closing with its true objects as offered in the gospel in its direct act (and so it evidenceth itself, being the evidence of things not seen, as all the natural senses evidence themselves by their own acts upon their proper objects,—for he that sees the sun hath argument enough to himself that he is not blind, but hath a seeing eye, and faith, therefore, is frequently represented to us by seeing, as John 6:40, and elsewhere;—which evidence is according to the degrees of faith, weaker or stronger, and hence carries lesser or greater assurances with it; but such as are of the highest and best nature, giving the greatest glory to the grace and truth of God, and the firmest stay to the soul in the greatest storms of temptation, being as an anchor fastened within the veil, sure and steadfast), or else additionally, that our joy may be full, and for farther confirmation, especially in such cases wherein our faith seems to fail us, and we are like Thomas, God

hath, out of his abundant grace in the gospel, provided arguments for us to raise from spiritual sense to judge of our state and standing by. But this requires the teachings of the Spirit, and thence a spirit of discerning, experience of, and insight into, our own hearts and ways, with senses exercised by reason of use, that these grounds and arguments may be matter of comfort and establishment unto us.

I call these latter evidences subordinate ones, and additional to that of faith, [and they are] of great use by way of establishment and confirmation unto believers, provided they be not abused to sole resting and reliance upon them, to the great prejudice of our life of faith: for we live by faith (so must all repenting sinners when they have attained to the highest pitch of holiness in this life), and not by sense, no, not even spiritual sense; it is a good handmaid to faith, but no good mistress to it.

Moreover, trials of this nature are often of a marvellous awakening and convincing nature unto poor secure sinners, formal and hypocritical professors, for many of them hold true with great demonstration in the negative: 1 John 3:14, "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death;" and verse 10, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." Now, these tests come upon an unregenerate man as clear and strong convictions of his undone estate, when, by gospel light shining into his dark heart, it evidently appears that there is a total absence of such eminent graces as are inseparable from a child of God. But when poor, broken-hearted, self-condemning sinner comes to try himself by these tests, especially under great temptation, he chargeth all that he finds in himself for hypocrisy, formality, and sin, sits altogether in darkness in respect of these sparks of internal light, and is fain at last, when he hath broken all his flints and worn out all his steel in compassing himself about with sparks of his own kindling, to turn unto Christ by faith, "as a prisoner of hope," believing in hope against hope, and from him to fetch, by a direct act of faith, as from the Sun of righteousness, all his light of life and comfort; and then he

will be able to light all his small tapers, yea, all inferior arguments of his good estate will flow in with much enlargement and increase of consolation, as streams of living water flowing forth of the fountain set open for sin and for uncleanness into the belly of the true believing sinner, receiving by faith of the fulness of Christ through the Spirit, abundantly supplying him with rivers of true, substantial, living graces and consolations, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, to the praise and glory of Christ.

Now, among disquisitions of this latter nature and use this is none of the least, whether we are under the dominion of sin or no. Either we are or are not. If we are, our state is most certainly dangerous, for such are under the law, and the law hath concluded all under wrath. If we are not under sin's dominion, we are in a blessed and happy estate, being under grace. For these two dominions divide the world, and every son and daughter of Adam is under one or the other, and none can be under both at the same time. Now, our being under grace can be no way better evidenced than by our being in Christ by faith: for he that is so "is a new creature, is passed from death unto life," will still be mortifying sin, the strong man in sin's dominion being cast out; and therefore faith is said to be our "victory," through the supply of all grace received from Jesus Christ. Indeed it calls for no small spiritual skill and understanding to pass a right judgment in these matters. Undoubtedly many are deceived in taking wrong measures to search out these deep things of God, taking them to belong to the mere faculties and endowments of a natural man, not considering that they are of the Spirit's revelation only. And hence it is that many poor creatures in a bondage state under the law, and therefore under sin's dominion, do work like slaves in the dunghill of their own hearts to find out some natural religion or moral goodness in themselves to recommend them unto God. But such recommendation must be under the law, it cannot be under grace; and therefore such are under the dominion of sin infallibly, as the Israelites were, which "followed after the law of righteousness, but attained not to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they

stumbled at that stumbling-stone," Rom. 9:31, 32. And it is greatly to be bewailed that many professors that sit under the means of grace are so tender of their secure and palliated consciences, that they cannot endure that the rays of true gospel light should shine directly into their hearts, being contented with a name only that they do live. They are loath to come to any narrow search or trial, lest they should be found out, and appear to themselves in their ugly shapes, whilst they are willing that all the world should have a good opinion of them; under which they cannot admit of any inward disturbances, but desire to sleep in a whole skin.

Others there are, sincere, broken-hearted believers, [who,] scared at the rock of presumption on which they see so many professors wrecked daily, are apt to fall upon the other extreme, and too wrongfully, to free grace, condemn themselves as being under the dominion of sin; and therefore censure themselves to be under the law and wrath, notwithstanding all their seeming faith and holiness, calling that presumption, and this hypocrisy. Hence, returning to a kind of "spirit of bondage again to fear," their faith is shaken by prevailing unbelief, their peace is broken, and all gospel ordinances rendered ineffectual, as to their true ends, of profit, education, and comfort. Hence, though they are truly under grace, they do not know, or rather, through temptation, will not acknowledge it; but "go mourning all the day long, because of the oppression of the enemy." But I beseech such a poor soul to consider a little, and not to "receive the grace of God in vain." Dost thou groan under the usurpation and oppression of remaining sin? And is this the dominion of it? is there no difference between sin's dominion and sin's tyranny and usurpation? Dominion is upon account of right of conquest or subjection. There is upon both that sin reigns in carnal and unregenerate men, who "yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin;" but you reckon yourselves dead unto sin," having no joy in its prevalency, but grief, being planted in this respect "in the likeness of Christ's death," who "died unto sin once, but dieth no more." Sin shall have no more dominion over him; "likewise reckon ye also yourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive

unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord;"—that is, to be under grace, to put yourself freely and joyfully under the conduct and dominion of Jesus Christ, and to keep up a continual fight and opposition against the prevailing power of sin. Indeed, sin will often, as an outlying watchful enemy, make its assaults and incursions on the best of God's children, as it did on David, Hezekiah, Peter; and though it may make breaches upon them, it shall not have a dominion and set up a throne of iniquity in their hearts. Grace will beat out sin's throne; for indeed the words of this text,—that is, the subject of the ensuing treatise,—carry the force of a promise to the saints, to animate and encourage them to fight against sin under the banner of our Lord Jesus, the captain of our salvation, made perfect through sufferings: "For sin shall not have dominion," etc.

In treating of which text, this late learned and reverend author hath acted the part of a good workman that rightly divided the word of God (as in all his other writings of the like nature), giving every one their portion as it belongs to them, with so much perspicuity and demonstration, that if, Christian reader, thou wilt afford a little time and pains to read, meditate, dilate, and digest well, the truths here laid before thee, through the blessing of the God of all grace, thou wilt find much satisfaction and real spiritual advantage unto thy soul, either to awaken and recover thee from under the dominion of sin (the dangerous and palpable symptoms thereof being here plainly made manifest), or else to discover thy happy estate in being taken from "under the law," and brought under the dominion of "grace," whereby thou mayst assume great encouragement to thyself to proceed more cheerfully in "running the race set before thee."

It is enough to say that the author hath left his encomium firmly rooted in the minds of all pious and learned men that are acquainted with his writings, polemic or practical; yea, his renown will always be great in after generations among the churches of Christ, and all true lovers of the great truths of the gospel. And that he is the author of this small tract is sufficient to recommend it to thy most serious perusal; taking this assurance, that it was left (among other writings

of great value) thus perfected for the press by his own hand, and is now by his worthy relict published for the benefit of others besides herself. I doubt not but thou wilt say that it will answer the several lines that have been drawn in thy heart by sin or grace, "as in water face answereth to face;" and that this may be the effect of thy perusal thereof, in order to thy spiritual and eternal welfare, is the hearty desire and prayer of thy unfeigned well-wisher,

J. C.

CHAPTER I

Sin's Great Design in All to Obtain Dominion

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Rom. 6:14.

What sins are compatible with being in a state of grace, and which are not? Sin's ultimate goal is to gain control. It has dominion over unbelievers and seeks to establish dominance over believers. Let's explore how sin operates.

The psalmist, engaging in a prayerful conversation with God concerning sin, acknowledges that all human beings possess unfathomable errors in their conduct, surpassing human understanding. These errors manifest as daily sins of weakness that necessitate continuous cleansing and forgiveness. In Psalm 19:12, he states, "Who can understand his own errors? Cleanse me from hidden faults." However, he assumes that these transgressions can coexist with a state of grace and acceptance by God. He did not entertain the notion of attaining absolute perfection in this earthly life, nor did he believe in a condition that would not require ongoing

purification and forgiveness. Hence, believers may have such sins—indeed, numerous sins—yet, when we humbly seek God for purifying and pardoning grace, these sins will neither rob us of inner peace in the present nor jeopardize our salvation in the future.

But he immediately speaks of another type of sins that, due to their nature and their effects, will undoubtedly be destructive to the souls of people wherever they exist. Verse 13 says, "Keep your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I will be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."

This is the crucial point upon which the entire state and condition of my soul depends. Although I am prone to many different types of sins, I am able to maintain my integrity and commitment to walking with God even amidst them all. And when I do fail, I am kept within reach of continuous cleansing and forgiving mercy provided to my soul by Jesus Christ. However, there is a state of life in this world where sin gains dominion over the soul, especially when one acts presumptuously. In such a state, integrity and freedom from condemning guilt cannot coexist.

Therefore, he fervently prays to be kept and protected from this state, which alone leads to eternal ruin for the souls of people.

The Apostle, in the words of the text, promises what he earnestly prays for to all believers, through the grace of Christ Jesus administered in the gospel. Both the prophet's personal prayer and the Apostle's promise, on behalf of God to us, demonstrate the immense importance of this matter, as we will explain shortly.

There are certain things implied or included in the apostle's words. We must first examine them briefly, for without doing so, we cannot fully grasp the truth that is being presented. These are:

1. It is assumed that sin still remains in and resides with believers. This is the meaning of the words: "Sin which is in you shall not

have dominion over you." This implies that those who are unaware of it or do not groan to be delivered from it, like the apostle himself does (Rom. 7:24), are not truly understanding themselves or comprehending what sin is, or the essence of gospel grace. The "flesh" persists in everyone, constantly desiring contrary to the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). It clings to all the faculties of our souls, hence it is referred to as the "old man" in contrast to the renewal of our minds and faculties, known as the "new man" (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:24), or the "new creature" within us. There is a constant inclination of the flesh towards fulfilling its own desires (Rom. 13:14), an ongoing work and predisposition. It remains in us as a dying, weakening, and deteriorating disposition, yet it still acts in line with its nature through inclinations, movements, and desires.

Both Scripture and personal experience confirm this, and the assumption of it forms the foundation for the entire doctrine of evangelical mortification. It is widely acknowledged that this is a duty—a duty that rests upon believers throughout their lives. Without this duty, they can never properly fulfill any other duty. This is an undeniable truth, except for those who are completely blinded by atheism or those who, due to the fever of spiritual pride, have lost sight of their own wretched condition and instead indulge in dreams of absolute perfection. Our present concern, however, does not involve either of these groups.

Now, the primary target of this mortification is the sin that resides within us. It is the "flesh" that needs to be "mortified," the "old man" that must be "crucified," and the "lusts of the flesh" with all their corrupt desires, actions, and tendencies that need to be destroyed (Col 3:5; Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:24). Unless we firmly grasp this concept, we cannot fully comprehend the magnitude of the grace and privilege expressed in these words.

It is believed that this sin, which, in its remaining effects, continues to exist in believers to varying degrees, can exert its power over them

to achieve victory and control. It is initially believed that it exercises dominion over some individuals, ruling over all unbelievers and those who are bound by the law. Furthermore, it strives to do the same in those who believe and are under grace. By affirming that sin shall not have dominion over us, it acknowledges that sin may contend for dominion, but it will not succeed or prevail. Therefore, it is described as fighting and warring within us (Romans 7:23), and as warring against our souls (1 Peter 2:11). This struggle, battle, and contention within us for dominion is the ultimate objective of all warfare, as anything that fights does so to gain power and rule.

Consequently, this is the overarching purpose of sin in all its actions. These actions vary according to the different desires in the minds of individuals, but their general aim in all cases is dominion. Whenever someone is tempted and enticed by their own desires, as the apostle James states, even if it is in a seemingly insignificant or uncommon matter, the purpose of sin is not limited to that particular temptation. Instead, its goal is to utilize it as a means to gain control over the soul. Believers should always remain vigilant against every manifestation of sin, even if the nature of these manifestations appears trivial and unlikely to reoccur. Each one of them seeks dominion and leads to destruction, which they will achieve if not hindered in their progression, as the apostle explains (James 1:14-15). Do not believe its flattering lies: "Is it not a minor issue?" "This is the first or last time it will happen." "It only requires a small place in your thoughts and affections." "It won't go any further." Do not yield to its urgency and solicitations, and do not entertain its excuses or promises. Its aim, in every instance, is to gain power over your souls and bring about their ruin.

There are two ways in which sin generally exerts its power and seeks to achieve dominion, and these are the only two ways through which anyone can plan or obtain an unjust rule. They are deceit and force, both of which I have thoroughly described in another discussion. In relation to this, it is promised that the Lord Christ will "deliver the

souls of the poor who cry out to him from deceit and violence" (Psalm 72:12–14).

These are the only two methods of acquiring an unjust dominion, and when they come together, they can have a tremendous influence that makes the struggle perilous. There are few believers who haven't experienced this, at least in their own perception. They have been ready to say, at some point or another, "We will eventually be defeated by this enemy." They have been compelled to cry out to Jesus Christ for help and assistance with as much urgency as the disciples did at sea when the ship was engulfed by waves, saying, "Lord, save us; we are perishing" (Matthew 8:24–26). They would continue to do so if he did not come timely to their aid (Hebrews 2:18). In this situation, the soul frequently experiences the power of Christ in his grace no less than the disciples witnessed his supreme authority when "he rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm."

We are provided with assurance against the dominion of sin. Although it may remain in us and strive for control through deceit and force, it shall not prevail; it shall not have dominion.

This is a matter of utmost importance for us. Our souls are, and must be, under the rule of some principle or law, and our state is determined and identified by this rule. We are either "slaves to sin leading to death, or obedient to righteousness" (Romans 6:16). This is the essence of the apostle's discourse in that entire chapter: the state of the soul, in terms of eternal life and death, is determined by the conduct and rule under which we live. If sin has dominion, we are eternally lost; if it is dethroned, we are secure. It may tempt, deceive, and entice us; it may fight, wage war, confuse, and disturb us; it may even catch us off guard and lead us into actual sin. However, if it does not have dominion over us, we are in a state of grace and acceptance with God.

CHAPTER II

What is the Dominion of Sin, which we are Freed from?

We will explore three aspects based on the words of this text: I. What is the dominion of sin from which we are freed and discharged by grace? II. How can we determine if sin has dominion over us or not? III. What is the reason and evidence for the assurance given that sin will not have dominion over us, namely because we are "not under the law, but under grace."

I. Regarding the first point, I will briefly mention some characteristics that reveal its general nature; the specific elements comprising it will be addressed later.

Firstly, the dominion of sin is perverse and evil, meeting the criteria that designate any rule or dominion as such, because it...

1. It is an unlawful seizure. Sin has no rightful authority to rule over the souls of people. People have no ability to grant sin the right to rule over them. They may willingly subject themselves to its enslavement, but this does not confer any right or legitimacy upon sin. Originally, all people have another sovereign to whom they owe complete obedience, and nothing can absolve them from their allegiance to this sovereign—God's law. The apostle indeed states that "to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness" (Romans 6:16). And it is true. By their voluntary submission to sin, people become its rightful slaves. However, this does not grant sin any authority over God's law, which alone has the right to rule over human souls. Those who surrender themselves to the service of sin are living in open rebellion against their true Lord. Consequently, several implications arise:

(1) It greatly intensifies the evil of a state of sin. Those who live in sin willingly detach themselves, to the extent of their capacity, from the authority of God's law, and willingly subject themselves to the tyranny of sin. If sin had any legitimate claim to this dominion, any valid justification to present, it would somewhat alleviate the guilt of those who surrender themselves to it. However, people "yield themselves" to the slavery of sin, as the apostle describes. They reject the authority of God's law and choose the foreign yoke of sin. This undoubtedly exacerbates their guilt and wretchedness. Yet, it is evident that the majority of people openly and overtly declare themselves as the servants and slaves of sin. They proudly display its symbols and engage in its degrading work. They even boast in their bondage and consider themselves brave and esteemed when they openly embrace sin through profanity, drunkenness, impurity, greed, and mockery of religion. However, their "condemnation does not sleep," regardless of whatever illusions they may entertain in the meantime.

(2.) Consequently, it follows that, in general, all individuals have the authority within themselves to reject the rule of sin and reclaim their freedom. They can, at will, assert the rightful claim and authority of God's law to govern their souls, completely disregarding any pleas or claims of power made by sin. They have the right to say to sin, "Depart from me; what business do I have with idols?"

I emphasize that all individuals possess this inherent right within themselves due to the natural allegiance they owe to God's law. However, they lack the ability on their own to exercise this right and effectively rid themselves of the yoke of sin. This is the work of grace. The dominion of sin is shattered solely by grace.

But you may ask, "What purpose does this right serve if individuals lack the power to enforce it? How can it be seen as an aggravation of their sin if they do not exercise the right they possess, especially when they lack the means to do so? Would you blame a person who

has a rightful claim to an estate but cannot recover it due to a lack of resources?"

I will briefly provide three answers to this question:—

[1.] No person alive neglects the use of this right to reject the yoke and dominion of sin because they are unable to do so on their own, but solely because they choose not to. They willingly opt to remain under the power of sin and view anything that would deliver them as an enemy. "The sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so," Rom. 8:7. Whenever the law asserts its right to rule over the soul, a person under the sway of sin regards it as an enemy that disrupts their peace, and they fortify their mind against it. Similarly, when the gospel comes and offers the way and means for the soul's liberation, extending its aid and assistance towards that end, it too is seen as an adversary, rejected along with all its offers. See Prov. 1:24–31; John 3:19. Therefore, this is the state of anyone who remains under the dominion of sin: they choose to do so, persisting in that condition through an act of their own will, openly displaying enmity towards anything that could provide deliverance—an enmity that will greatly aggravate their condemnation on the final day.

[2.] God may rightly demand from anyone that which the grace of the gospel has the power to enable them to perform and comply with. This grace is presented to them daily through its proclamation. Although we may not comprehend the methods and means of grace's effective communication to the souls of individuals, it is certain that grace is tendered in such a way through the preaching of the gospel that no one is left without it, no one lacks its aid and assistance—except those who, by an act of their own free will, refuse and reject it. This is the crux of the matter: "You refuse to come to me to have life," and all unbelievers have, or can have, this experience within themselves. They can ascertain, upon careful self-examination, that they willingly reject the assistance of grace offered for their

deliverance. Hence, their destruction is of their own making. However,—

[3.] There comes a time when people even lose their right as well. Just as the one who willingly had his ear pierced forfeited all claim to future liberty and was not allowed to go out in the year of jubilee, there is a moment when God judicially abandons individuals to the rule of sin, for them to remain under its sway forever, to the extent that they lose all entitlement to freedom. This is how He dealt with many idolatrous Gentiles in the past, as mentioned in Romans 1:24, 26, 28, and this is how He continues to deal with similarly corrupt sinners. It is also His approach towards the majority of the antichristian world, as seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, and with many who scorn the gospel, as described in Isaiah 6:9-10. When it reaches this point, individuals are condemned, having lost all right and claim to liberation from the dominion of sin. They may occasionally grumble about the service of sin or its consequences, experiencing shame and pain due to the disgraceful disorders that afflict many in their impurity. However, because God has judicially handed them over to sin, they don't even have the right to offer a single prayer or request for deliverance, and they will not do so. Instead, they are bound in the chains of accursed presumption or despair. Consider their actions and the recompense they receive, as stated in Romans 2:5-6. This is the most woeful state and condition of sinners in this world—an inevitable descent into the chambers of death. Those of you who have lived under the power of sin for a long time, beware, lest what is spoken of in these scriptures befall you! Currently, you still have the right to be delivered from the bondage and servitude in which you find yourselves if you make your plea in the heavenly court. You do not know how quickly you may be deprived of this right as well, through God's judicial abandonment to sin and Satan. Then, all complaints will be in vain, and all sources of effort for relief will be utterly dried up. Any hopes of future repentance will be cut off, and your cries will be disregarded, as stated in Proverbs 1:24-31. While it is still called Today, do not

harden your hearts, lest God swear in His wrath that you shall never enter into His rest.

To warn you, take note that the indications or signs of the impending arrival of such a season, of such an irreparable state, are as follows:

(1.) Prolonged persistence in the practice of any known sin. There are limits to divine patience. God's long-suffering waits for repentance for a time, as mentioned in 1 Peter 3:20 and 2 Peter 3:9. However, there comes a time when it only "endures vessels of wrath fitted for destruction," as stated in Romans 9:22. This typically occurs after a long period of continuing in known sin.

(2.) When convictions have been internalised and warnings have been disregarded. God usually does not deal with individuals in this manner until they have rejected the means of their deliverance. There is indeed a generation that, from their youth, live in contempt of God. Such proud sinners are described by the psalmist in Psalm 10:2-7, and there are rarely any signs of the decree going forth against this type of people. The apparent evidence is their "pursuit of drunkenness" and the addition of one form of sin to another, openly progressing in their sinful ways, boasting and showing a profane disregard for all sacred matters. However, generally, those in danger of this judicial hardness have previously received warnings and convictions that made some impression on them, but they are now left without any further calls or rebukes, or at least without any sense of them.

(3.) When individuals incur the guilt of sins that appear to encroach upon the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit, such as proud, contemptuous, and malicious reproaches against the ways of God, holiness, the Spirit of Christ, and His gospel. The Scriptures often depict this type of people as being close to a final and fatal rejection.

(4.) A voluntary abandonment of the means of grace and conversion to God that individuals have experienced, often accompanied by a

hatred of the Word and those who proclaim it. In such cases, God frequently and visibly gives them up in an irredeemable manner to the dominion of sin, declaring that He will have no further dealings with them.

(5.) A deliberate choice to associate with wicked, profane, unclean, and mocking company. It is exceedingly rare for anyone to be rescued from that snare. There are many other signs that indicate the imminent arrival of a hardening judgment that will consign people to eternal servitude to sin. Oh, if only poor sinners would awaken before it is too late!

2. This dominion of sin is wicked and corrupt, not only because it is unjust and wrongfully assumed, but also because it is always utilized and exercised for harmful purposes, leading to the detriment and destruction of those under its rule. A tyrant, a usurper, may employ their power and authority for the benefit of those they rule over, but the dominion of sin always brings evil outcomes for sinners. Sin, in its reign, may appear enticing, offering various advantages and satisfying their desires. They are promised rewards for their actions, with pleasure and profit to be gained. Moreover, it may even falsely guarantee them eternal rest or security, assuring them that nothing they do in its service will lead to failure. Through these means, sin keeps them in a state of false assurance. However, its ultimate purpose, the true intent behind all its power, is the eternal ruin of their souls. Sinners will come to understand this when it is too late, as stated in Jeremiah 2:13, 19.

Secondly, this dominion of sin is not merely a coercion against the will and efforts of those under its control. Where sin's power and influence rely solely on forcing the mind and soul through temptations, it does not have dominion. It may perplex them, but it does not govern them. Where sin does have dominion, it possesses the force and authority of a law within the wills and minds of those in whom it resides. Thus, it demands obedience from them, and they

willingly present themselves as servants to obey it, as stated in Romans 6:16.

Therefore, for this dominion of sin to exist, there must be some measure and degree of consent from the will. The constant resistance and prevailing power of the will against sin undermine its claim to rule and dominion, as the apostle extensively explains in the next chapter. The will is the supreme faculty and power of the soul; whatever principle acts in it and determines it, holds the authority. Despite light and conviction, the ultimate decision regarding duty and sin rests within the power of the will. If the desire to sin is removed, sin cannot have dominion. Here lies wisdom: the one who can discern between the influence of sin upon them and the rule of sin within them is on the path to peace. However, often— as we will further explore, along with the reasoning behind it—this is not easily attained. Convictions, on one hand, may create a significant appearance of opposition in the will against sin due to their unavoidable impact, even when it is not truly the case. Disturbed emotions, under temptations, may argue that the will itself is surrendered to the choice and service of sin, when it is not so. The will in this matter is akin to the shield of the Thebans; as long as it remains intact, they deemed themselves victorious even in death. Nevertheless, this matter is settled by the light of Scripture and experience, and it is presented here for resolution.

Thirdly, for this dominion of sin to exist, the soul must not be under the supreme guidance of any other authority—specifically, not under the Spirit of God and His grace as governed by the law. This is what truly holds sovereign rule over all believers. They are led, guided, and influenced by the Spirit, being under the governance of God and Christ alone. The rule of sin is entirely incompatible with this. No one can serve both these masters simultaneously. Grace and sin may coexist within the same soul, but they cannot both hold dominion at the same time. The throne is singular and allows only one ruler. Every evidence we have of being under the rule of grace affirms that we are not under the dominion of sin.

Therefore, this is the primary method we have to safeguard our peace and comfort against the claims of sin that disturb our consciences. Let us strive to maintain an experience of the rule of grace in our hearts, as mentioned in Colossians 3:15. We are and must be under the guidance and rule that determines our state. This rule can either be that of sin or of grace. There is no collaboration or partnership between them in terms of rule, although they can coexist in terms of residence. If we can assure ourselves of being under the rule of grace, we secure ourselves from the rule of sin. It is therefore wise, and forms the foundation of all our comforts, to obtain evidence and experience of being under the rule of grace. This will reveal itself if we diligently observe its actions and operations within us. It will manifest in two particular ways, among others:

1. By maintaining a consistent commitment to living for God and conforming to the example of Christ, despite being taken by surprise through temptations and the urgent enticements of sin. This is referred to as "cleaving unto God with purpose of heart," as mentioned in Acts 11:23. This will be evident wherever grace governs. Just as a sailor heading to sea has a specific destination and port in mind, guiding their course accordingly, they may encounter storms and adverse winds that push them off course and sometimes even backward towards their starting point. Nevertheless, their original intention remains intact, and they employ their skill and diligence to recover from losses and setbacks caused by crosswinds and storms. The same principle applies to a soul under the guidance of grace. Its steadfast purpose is to live for God, but along the way, it encounters the storms of temptations and the deceptive tactics of sin. These disturbances unsettle and disorient the soul, pushing it backward at times, as if attempting to divert it in the opposite direction and return to the shores of sin from which it embarked. However, where grace holds the rule and guidance, it will overcome all opposition and hindrances. It will restore the soul, bringing it back to order and rescuing it from the confusion and negative states into which it was drawn. Grace will

reestablish a dominant focus on living for God in all aspects of life. It will do this consistently, whenever the soul encounters such disturbances caused by the power of sin. When there is a firm and enduring strength in a cause or purpose, it will persist through all changes and variations. However, when the strength of a cause is merely circumstantial, the initial opposition and disorder will lead to ruin. If someone's commitment to living for God is only occasional, based on present convictions, the first vigorous opposition or temptation will disrupt and overthrow it. However, when this commitment is rooted in the soul's foundational design empowered by grace, it will break through all opposition and regain its influence in the mind and affections. Through this, grace demonstrates its rule and reveals that sin's presence in the soul is a result of rebellion rather than rightful dominion.

2. It does so by consistently practising grace in all religious duties, or at the very least, making a sincere effort to do so. When sin has dominion, it may allow the soul to perform religious duties, and in some cases, even excel in them. However, it ensures that divine grace is not exercised within them. Regardless of the pleasure derived from these duties or the emotions stirred by light, gifts, afflictions, or superstition, there is no exercise of faith and love in them. Faith and love are essential and inseparable from the rule of grace. Wherever grace governs, the soul will strive for the continual exercise of grace in all its duties and will not find satisfaction in mere external performance. If it falls short, it will examine itself and guard against similar lapses. Unless there is a great temptation or an overwhelming sense of guilt, which hinders the necessary spiritual boldness for the proper exercise of grace (namely, faith and love in holy duties), the soul will not be hindered from pursuing and utilising them.

If, through these means and similar operations of grace, we can have a confirming experience that we are under its rule and guidance, we

can free our minds from troubling apprehensions of sin's dominion, for both cannot reign in the same soul.

Fourthly, for this to occur, sin must make the soul aware of its power and rule, or at least do something that elicits this awareness, unless the conscience is completely calloused and hardened, beyond feeling. No rule or dominion exists without those subject to it being aware of it. There are two ways in which sin, in its dominion, will make those it rules over conscious of its presence:

1. In suppressing and overcoming the influence of the mind's convictions. Those who are under the dominion of sin (as we will soon see) can have insights and convictions regarding their obligations in many matters, and they may generally follow this light and conviction despite the dominion of sin. Just as a tyrant allows his slaves and subjects to pursue their own affairs, but if their actions, in substance or manner, come into conflict with or oppose his interests, he will make them aware of his power. Similarly, when sin has dominion, if individuals have light and conviction, it will generally permit them to comply with it in many things. It will allow them to pray, hear the word, abstain from various sins, and perform numerous duties, as explicitly affirmed in Scripture concerning many who were under the power of sin, and as we observe in practice. We witness considerable religious activity and the diligent observance of religious times and seasons, with many morally good and beneficial duties being performed by those who, in many other respects, proclaim themselves to be under the dominion of sin. However, when the light and conviction of these individuals rise up in opposition to the primary influence of sin in the lusts and ways it exercises its rule, they will become aware of its power within them. Those who suppress, ignore, disregard, or act directly contrary to their convictions will initially feel resentment towards the light, and then console themselves with resolutions for other times and seasons. But sin will prevail by virtue of its dominion.

From this, two things follow:

(1.) A consistent opposition to sin, driven by the light in the mind and convictions in the conscience, does not prove that those in whom it exists are not under the dominion of sin. Until individuals reach the point of complete blindness and hardness, there will be a capacity within them to judge what is good and evil, accompanied by self-judgment in relation to these matters, as the apostle explains in Romans 2:15. Many find contentment in this. When their light condemns sin, they believe they hate it, but they do not truly hate it. When convictions call for certain duties, they believe they love them, but they do not truly love them. What they perceive as the rule of light within them, in opposition to sin, is merely the rebellion of a naturally enlightened conscience against its dominion in the heart. In short, light can condemn every known sin, deter from many, urge the performance of every known duty, and lead to the fulfilment of many, yet sin can still have complete dominion over the soul. This will become evident when it is put to the test in those instances where sin exercises its ruling power.

(2.) It is a wretched condition for individuals whose minds are constantly caught between the guidance of their light and the compelling force of conviction on one hand, and the rule or dominion of sin on the other. Wherever light exists, it deserves to have the rule and guidance. It is the art by which the mind directs itself. For individuals to be coerced, by the power of their desires, to act against their light most of the time, as they do when sin has dominion, is a distressing and lamentable state. Such individuals are described as "rebellious against the light" in Job 24:13, because the light rightfully deserves to rule within them, but is overthrown by sin. This condition turns most people into a "troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

2. Sin, when it has dominion over someone, makes them aware of its power through its persistent influence on their mind and emotions in relation to the specific sins in which it primarily

exercises control. When sin has absolute dominion, it continuously predisposes, inclines, and stirs up the mind towards those sins. It directs the entire soul towards such sins or their circumstances. There is no clearer indication of sin's rule in someone than when it habitually engages their mind and emotions in constant involvement with this or that particular sin or wicked way.

However, it must be added that despite these signs of sin's ruling power, only a few of those under its dominion are aware of their state and condition. Many are so deeply under the influence of darkness, apathetic laziness, and negligence that they have no sense of this rule of sin. They are the ones described by the apostle in Ephesians 4:18-19. And even though they are the most wretched slaves on earth, they consider themselves the only ones who are free. They view others as being in bondage to foolish and superstitious fears, while they have the liberty to indulge in drinking, swearing, mocking religion, engaging in immorality, and defiling themselves without restraint. This is their idea of freedom, which is just as good as having it in hell—a freedom to curse and blaspheme God and harbour vengeful thoughts towards themselves and all of creation. The light within such individuals is darkness itself, as they have nothing to rise up against the rule of sin, which is the only source of a sense of its power. Others, as we mentioned earlier, may live in partial compliance with their light and convictions, abstaining from many sins and performing many duties, yet they continue in some known sin, allowing themselves to persist in it, while refusing to admit that sin has dominion over them.

Therefore, there are two challenging aspects in this matter:

1. Convincing those individuals in whom sin clearly has dominion that such is indeed their state and condition. They will exert their utmost efforts to avoid this conviction. Some justify themselves, some make excuses, and some refuse to even investigate this matter. It is rare, especially in recent times, to

witness anyone being brought under this conviction through the preaching of the word, even though it is the reality for many who listen to it.

2. Satisfying certain individuals that sin does not have dominion over them, despite its relentless activity within them and its warfare against their souls. Yet, unless this can be accomplished, they cannot experience true peace and comfort in this life. The concern of even the most devout believers, while they are in this world, lies in this very matter. As they grow in light, spirituality, experience, freedom of mind, and humility, they have a greater desire to understand the deceit, activity, and power of the remaining sin. Although it may not manifest itself openly, or at least not noticeably, in the same sins in which it reigns and rages in others, they are able to discern its more subtle, internal, and spiritual workings in their minds and hearts. These workings weaken grace, hinder its effective operation in holy duties, and cause various disruptions in their steadfastness in the life of God. Consequently, this fills them with distress.

CHAPTER III

Whether Sin Hath Dominion in Us or Not

Now let us address the second inquiry: Whether sin has dominion over us or not. In response to this, it is evident that some openly display sin's influence and proudly identify themselves as its servants. They wear sin's "livery," so to speak. Their allegiance is clear and undeniable. However, there are many cases where sin's service is not as easily discernible. It becomes questionable and uncertain. Despite its apparent prevalence, there are exceptions that challenge its dominion. Certain signs indicate the presence of sin's dominion. Moreover, there are specific graces and duties that must be exercised in order to mortify sin.

II. Now that we have established these general principles regarding the nature of sin's dominion, let us proceed to our main inquiry: Does sin have dominion over us? This question will help us determine whether we are under the law or under grace, and what our relationship with God is. It is a necessary inquiry for some and something that everyone should have rightly settled in their minds based on Scripture and experience. Our solid peace depends on this determination. Sin will always be present within us, lusting, fighting, and enticing us. However, the crucial question for our peace and comfort is whether it has dominion over us or not.

Firstly, we are not addressing those individuals in whom the reign of sin is absolute and easily discernible, even if they may not recognize it themselves. There are those who openly "yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin" (Rom. 6:13). Sin reigns in their mortal bodies, and they openly obey its lusts (verse 12). They openly declare themselves as "servants of sin unto death" (verse 16) and show no shame. Their countenance reveals their guilt, and they do not hide their sin, much like the people of Sodom (Isa. 3:9). These individuals are described in Ephesians 4:18-19, and the world is filled with such individuals. They are under the power of darkness, filled with enmity against God, and act in opposition to genuine godliness, serving various lusts. There is no doubt about their condition; they cannot deny it themselves. I do not mention this for the sake of passing judgment, but to emphasize how easily discernible it is. Those who openly display sin's influence can rightly be considered as its servants, and they will undoubtedly face the consequences of sin. Although they may currently enjoy their situation and disregard any convictions, they will eventually find it to be bitter (Isa. 50:11; Eccles. 11:9).

Secondly, there are many individuals in whom the situation is uncertain and not easily determined. On one hand, they may possess certain qualities that appear to contradict the reign of sin, but in reality, do not conflict with it. Upon closer examination, all their arguments and pleas in self-defense may crumble. On the other

hand, there may be some in whom the powerful and perplexing operation of sin seems to indicate its dominion, when in fact it does not, but rather signifies its stubborn rebellion.

The first category of things that appear to undermine and contradict the dominion of sin, but actually do not, can be classified into five categories:

1. Illumination in knowledge and spiritual gifts, accompanied by convictions of good and evil, and awareness of all known duties and sins. Many individuals continuously rebel against this in one form or another.
2. A change in affections, resulting in temporary delight in religious duties and a degree of consistency in their observance. This phenomenon is also observed in many individuals who are evidently still under the influence of sin and spiritual darkness.
3. The performance of numerous duties, both moral and evangelical, in substance, and conscientious abstinence from many sins. This was the case with the young man in the Gospel who, despite his adherence to these practices, lacked what was necessary to free him from the dominion of sin (Matthew 19:20-23).
4. Repentance for committed sins. Many seek security in this act, and it is indeed a blessed assurance when it is gracious, evangelical, and born out of faith, encompassing a complete return of the entire soul to God. However, there is a legal and partial repentance that focuses only on specific sins, which is not applicable in this case. Ahab did not escape the dominion of sin simply through his repentance, and Judas repented before he hanged himself.
5. Making promises and resolutions to abstain from sin in the future. However, the reliability of many individuals in these

matters is fleeting, like a morning cloud or early dew, as described by the prophet in Hosea 6:4.

When these things align in someone, they may have good reason to hope that they are not under the dominion of sin, and it is not easy to convince them otherwise. Their conduct in these matters may even be such that it would not be consistent with Christian charity to declare them under such dominion. Nevertheless, the fallacy inherent in these things has been exposed by many, and a greater demonstration of faith and holiness is required by all. Therefore, no one can be acquitted by relying on these pleas to prove their submission to the reign of sin.

Now, we turn to examine the things of the second kind, from which arguments may be drawn to suggest the dominion of sin in a person, but which may not definitively establish it. We must observe:

1. When sin has dominion, it truly rules over the entire soul and all its faculties. It becomes a corrupting habit within each of them, infecting them with the corruption they are susceptible to. In the mind, it brings darkness and vanity; in the will, spiritual deceit and perverseness; in the heart, stubbornness and sensuality. Sin exerts its power over and impacts them all. However,
2. Its dominion is evidenced and can be assessed by its operation within the distinct faculties of the mind, the disposition of the heart, and the course of one's life.

These are the aspects we will examine: firstly, those that make the case uncertain, and then those that clearly determine it in favour of sin. Hence, at present, I will not present positive evidence of individuals being free from the dominion of sin, but instead consider the arguments against them and assess their conclusiveness or how they may be refuted. And

1. When sin takes hold of the imagination in any instance and thereby engages the thought process in its service, it is a

dangerous sign of its rule or dominion. Sin can exert its control in the mind, fantasies, and imagination even when there is no opportunity for outward actions due to physical limitations. In these realms, sinful desires can grow as vast as hell, and the indulgence in lust is pursued eagerly. Pride, greed, and sensuality can reign and rage within the mind through corrupt imaginations, even when external expression is restricted by life circumstances.

The imagination is the primary avenue through which sin manifests and transforms its inclinations into actions, as described in Genesis 6:5. The constant evil thoughts that arise from the heart are like the bubbling of corrupt waters from a polluted fountain.

The intended imaginations refer to the fixation of the mind on objects of sin or sinful objects through continual thoughts accompanied by delight and satisfaction. It involves the mind's pursuit of fleshly gratification in its lusts, as mentioned in Romans 13:14, resulting in evil thoughts finding lodging, dwelling, and residing in the heart, as stated in Jeremiah 4:14.

This is the initial and direct consequence of the mind's vanity, which causes the soul to be estranged from the life of God. When the mind turns away from its rightful object with disdain and directs its thoughts and imaginations towards the pleasures and benefits of sin, it futilely seeks to regain the rest and satisfaction it has forsaken in God Himself. As Jonah 2:8 describes, they chase after empty vanities and abandon their own mercies. And when they immerse themselves in constant internal communion with the desires of the flesh, finding pleasure and approval in the advantages and delights of sin, sin can reign triumphantly within them, even if it does not outwardly manifest in their conduct. Such individuals are those who possess "a form of godliness but deny its power," for their hearts are filled with an assortment of ungodly desires, as the apostle declares in 2 Timothy 3:5.

And there are three evils with respect to which sin exercises its reigning power in the imagination in a particular manner:

(1.) Pride, self-importance, and a desire for power and greatness. It is said of the prince of Tyre that he claimed to be a god and sat in the seat of God (Ezek. 28:2), and similar foolish thoughts are attributed to the king of Babylon (Isa. 14:13, 14). No one among mankind can achieve such immense glory, power, and dominion in this world that their imaginations and desires cannot exceed what they actually possess. They can infinitely surpass their present achievements, like the conqueror who wept for not having another world to conquer. There are no bounds for their ambitions other than to be like God, even to be God Himself. This was the original intent of sin in the world. No one is so poor and lowly that they cannot elevate and exalt themselves in their imaginations almost to the level of God. God reproves this vanity and madness in His discourse with Job (Job 40:9-14). This self-exaltation in foolish thoughts and imaginations is closely tied to the fundamental corruption and depravity of our nature, as it first arose from a desire to be like God. Thus, sin can exercise its dominion in the minds of people through this aspect. Indeed, the empty wind and vanity of these imaginations, along with those that follow, constitute a significant part of the deceitful ways of sin. Human desires cannot be satisfied merely by committing actual sins; they endlessly wander and find satisfaction in the renewal and variety of these imaginations (Isa. 57:10).

(2.) Sensuality and a life of impurity. It is said of certain individuals that their "eyes are full of adultery" and they "cannot cease from sin" (2 Pet. 2:14), meaning that their imaginations are constantly engaged with objects of their impure desires. Day and night, they think about these things, immersing themselves in perpetual filth. Jude refers to them as "filthy dreamers, defiling the flesh" (verse 8). They live as if in a constant pleasurable dream, driven by their vile imaginations, even when they are unable to fulfill their lustful desires. These imaginations can be likened to dreams, in which individuals satisfy themselves with a simulated enactment of what they are unable to

do. Many individuals thus wallow in the mire of impurity throughout their lives and often engage in its sinful acts whenever they have the opportunity and advantage. Consequently, even the most secluded recluses can live lives of continual adultery, turning into actual cesspools of impurity. Our Savior severely condemns the root of this matter in Matthew 5:28.

(3.) Unbelief, distrust, and having negative thoughts about God fall into the same category. At times, these can so occupy the imaginations of individuals that they lose all delight in God and consider ways to flee from Him. This is a unique case that will not be addressed here.

Through the mind and its imagination, sin can exercise its dominion in the soul in these and similar ways. It can do so even when there is no outward demonstration of it in one's conduct. As a result, the minds of people become defiled, causing everything to appear impure to them (Titus 1:15). Once their minds are defiled, they view all things—possessions, duties, and actions—as impure.

However, not all instances of failing and sin in this regard conclusively prove that sin still has dominion over the mind as it did before. Even those who have been freed from the reign of sin may still exhibit some degree of this vice and evil. Such tendencies will persist until the vanity of our minds is completely healed and eradicated, which will not occur in this world. Therefore, I will now mention the exceptions that can be made against the claim of sin's dominion in the soul, despite the ongoing presence of these imaginative tendencies in forming wicked thoughts in the heart. And

(1.) The occasional occurrence of this is not evidence of the dominion of sin, as it may arise from the prevailing influence of a specific temptation. Let's consider the case of David as an example. I have no doubt that during his temptation with Bathsheba, his mind was filled with defiling thoughts. Hence, upon repentance, he not only prays

for forgiveness of his sin but also fervently cries out to God to "create a clean heart" within him (Psalm 51:10). He was aware of the defilement not only of his actions through actual adultery but also of his heart through impure thoughts. The same can apply to other temptations. When individuals are entangled in any form of temptation, it will generate numerous thoughts about it in their minds. Indeed, the power of temptation lies in the multiplication of evil imaginings. It blinds the mind, diverts it from considering its duties, and entices it to fully conceive of sin (James 1:14, 15). Therefore, in the case of a prevailing temptation that may befall a true believer, the corrupt workings of the imagination do not prove the dominion of sin.

If we inquire how the mind can be freed and cleansed from these troubling, defiling imaginations that arise from the pressing influence of certain temptations—such as those concerning earthly matters or similar things—I say it will never be achieved through strict vigilance and resolve against them, nor through resolute rejection. They will return with renewed force and new pretexts, despite the soul's repeated promises that they would not. There is only one way to cure this ailment, and that is through the complete mortification of the lust that fuels and is nourished by these imaginations. It is futile to try to shake off the fruit in this case without uprooting the source. Every temptation aims at satisfying some desire of the flesh or mind. These evil thoughts and imaginations are the workings of the temptation in the mind. There is no getting rid of them, no victory to be won over them, except by subduing the temptation; and there is no subduing the temptation without mortifying the lust for which it is intended. This is the course directed by the apostle in Colossians 3:3, 5. What he commands is that we should not set our minds on earthly things, as opposed to heavenly things; that is, we should not fill our imaginations, and thereby our affections, with them. But how can we be enabled to do this? The apostle answers: through the comprehensive mortification of sin (verse 5).

Due to a lack of wisdom and knowledge in this matter, or due to a reluctance to fully engage in the practice of mortifying sin, some individuals are plagued, perplexed, and even defiled by foolish and vain imaginations throughout their lives. Although these imaginations do not necessarily indicate the dominion of sin, they rob the soul of the peace and comfort it could otherwise enjoy.

However, it requires great spiritual skill and diligence to discern the true root and source of the foolish imaginations that may sometimes take hold of the mind. They lie deep within the heart, which itself is deep and deceitful, and are not easily identifiable. They present themselves under various pretexts, not directly revealing the pride or unclean lusts from which they originate. But a vigilant and diligent soul can trace them back to their true origins. If such thoughts are carefully examined—their purpose, the work they accomplish, and why they are so active in the mind—they will confess the truth about their origin and their aims. The mind is then guided to its duty, which is to eradicate the lust for which they try to make provision.

(2.) Such imaginations do not serve as evidence of the dominion of sin, regardless of their intensity, when they are distressing and burdensome to the soul, which groans under them and seeks deliverance. The apostle Paul provides a thorough account of the conflict between indwelling sin and grace in Romans 7. The things he attributes to sin are not its initial rising or involuntary motions, nor merely its inclinations and disposition. The things he ascribes to sin, such as fighting, rebelling, warring, leading captive, and acting as a law, cannot pertain to those initial motions. Nor does he refer to the outward performance or completion of sin, as the apostle John declares that believers cannot engage in such acts (1 John 3:9). Instead, Paul refers to the working of sin through these imaginations in the mind and the involvement of the affections. He declares this to be the great burden of believers' souls, causing them to consider their condition as wretched and miserable in some sense, and to earnestly cry out for deliverance (Romans 7:24). This is the present situation. These figments of the heart, these imaginations, will arise in the

minds of individuals. At times, they may arise to a significant extent. They may impose themselves deceitfully and forcefully, leading individuals captive to their control. Even when rejected, condemned, and defied, they will return as long as there is any vanity remaining in the mind or corruption in the affections. However, if the soul is aware of them, if it struggles under their weight, if it views them as adversaries to its purity, holiness, and peace, and if it prays for deliverance from them, they do not serve as evidence of the dominion of sin. In fact, a strong case against sin's dominion can be made based on the steadfast opposition the mind constantly engages in against these imaginations.

(3.) They are not proof of the dominion of sin when there is a prevailing detestation of the lust from which they arise and whose promotion they aim for, maintained in the heart and mind. I acknowledge that sometimes this detestation may not be evident. These various imaginations are merely effects of the incurable vanity and instability of our minds, which continually provide occasions for random thoughts. However, for the most part (as mentioned earlier), they serve the purpose of serving some lust and leading towards its satisfaction. They are what the apostle prohibits in Romans 13:14, "Make not provision for the flesh." This can be discerned through careful examination. Now, when the mind is firmly set in a constant detestation of the sin to which these imaginations lead, recognizing it as a sin against God, with a resolute determination against it in all circumstances that may arise, no evidence can be drawn from there for the dominion of sin.

(4) Sometimes evil thoughts are directly injected by Satan, and they are incredibly distressing to the soul for various reasons. Often, the content of these thoughts is dreadful and occasionally blasphemous. Moreover, they tend to enter the mind unexpectedly, with great force and irresistibility. Many have concluded that they are completely under the power of sin and Satan due to such thoughts. However, there are certain rules and infallible signs by which we can discern

their origin, and upon discovering their source, all claims of sin's dominion over them must vanish.

This is the first scenario that makes it uncertain whether sin has dominion over us or not.

2. It is a sign of sin's dominion when it exerts a prevailing influence over our affections. Indeed, the affections serve as sin's throne, where it displays its power. I have extensively addressed this matter in my discourse on Spiritual-mindedness, but here I will briefly offer one criterion to judge the dominion of sin in our affections.

It is certain that wherever sin has prevalence and predominance in our affections, it also has dominion over the entire soul. We are given a rule for this purpose in 1 John 2:15. We are obliged to "love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul." Therefore, if we have a prevailing love for anything else that surpasses our love for God and causes us to prioritize it over Him, it can only be due to the dominance of sin within us. The same principle applies to all other affections. If we love anything more than God, refusing to let it go for His sake, whether it be like a right eye or a right hand to us; if we derive more satisfaction and pleasure from it and cling to it in our thoughts and minds more than we do to God, as is common with people and their lusts, interests, possessions, and relationships; if we place more trust in it to fulfill our needs than in God, as many do with worldly pursuits; if our desires are expanded and our efforts intensified in seeking and attaining other things more than in seeking the love and favor of God; if we fear losing other things or facing danger from them more than we fear God—we are not under God's rule or His grace, but under the dominion of sin, which reigns in our affections.

It would be endless to provide examples of the power of sin in and over the affections of individuals. Self-love, love for the world, enjoyment of sensual things, an excessive valuation of relationships

and possessions, and other similar matters can easily demonstrate it. To address the matter at hand, we can observe the following:

(1) The prevalence of sin in the affections, to the extent that it signifies its dominion, is discernible to even the slightest ray of spiritual light through diligent self-examination and self-judgment. If there are those who are unaware of it and refuse to be convinced (as is the case with many), I know not how they can be freed from being under the rule of sin. This is a daily occurrence that we witness. People whose ways and actions clearly indicate that they are driven by an excessive love for the world and themselves yet find nothing wrong in themselves, nothing to disapprove of, except when their desires are not satisfied according to their expectations. All the commands in Scripture for self-examination, testing, and examination; all the guidelines provided for this purpose; all the warnings we receive about the deceitfulness of sin and our own hearts—are given to prevent the evil of closing our eyes to the prevailing corruption and disorder of our affections. And the outcome of all our efforts in this regard is seen in David's appeal to God Himself, as recorded in Psalm 139:23-24.

(2) When individuals are convinced of the irregularity and disorder of their affections yet choose to remain in that state without correcting or amending them due to some advantage and satisfaction they derive from their current condition, they appear to be under the dominion of sin. This is the case with those mentioned in Isaiah 57:10. Because of the present satisfaction, delight, and pleasure that their corrupt affections find in clinging excessively to their objects, they are unwilling to seek change and alteration.

So, this is the only reliable guideline in this matter: Regardless of how much sin may have affected our affections, regardless of its prevalence and entanglement, and regardless of how it may have defiled them, if we sincerely strive to discover this evil and consistently engage in the mortification of our corrupt affections through proper means, there is no argument in the disorder of our

affections to prove the dominion of sin in us. Our corrupt affections are the rightful targets of the important duty of mortification, which the apostle refers to as our "members which are upon the earth" (Col 3:5). This is a secure anchor for the soul in the midst of this storm. If we genuinely strive to mortify every noticeable corruption and disorder in our affections, we are protected from the dominion of sin. However, for those who are negligent in examining the state of their souls in terms of the inclination and engagement of their affections, who approve of themselves in their most significant irregularities, and deliberately indulge in any form of sin to gratify their corrupt affections, they must come up with justifications for their defense; I do not recognize them. The meaning of our present guideline will become clearer in what follows.

3. It is a dangerous sign of the dominion of sin when, despite being convinced of its necessity, it leads to neglecting the ways and duties specifically designed, directed, and ordained for its mortification and destruction. Let me explain this in a few points:

(1) Mortification of sin is the ongoing duty of all believers, of all who do not want sin to have dominion over them. When mortification is sincere, sin does not reign; and when there is no mortification, sin does reign.

(2) There are certain graces and duties that are particularly suited and ordained for the purpose of constantly carrying out the work of mortification in our souls. We will soon examine what they are, or at least some of them.

(3) When sin exerts its power in a particular lust or a strong inclination towards any actual sin, it is the soul's duty to diligently apply the specific graces and duties that are appropriate for its mortification.

(4) When individuals have been convinced of these duties and have attended to them based on that conviction, if sin prevails in them to the point of neglecting or abandoning those duties in terms of their performance or their application to the mortification of sin, it is a dangerous sign that sin has dominion over them. I make a distinction between neglecting such duties in terms of their performance and neglecting their application to the mortification of sin. It is possible for individuals to continue observing external duties for other reasons, or some of them, without applying them to this specific purpose. Thus, all external duties can be observed while sin reigns triumphantly (2 Tim. 3:5).

Having stated the meaning of the assertion, I will now mention some of those graces and duties that, when omitted or neglected, sin may prevail and hinder their application to the mortification of any sin:

The first is the daily exercise of faith in Christ as crucified. This is the fundamental means of mortifying sin in general, and it should be applied to every specific instance of sin. The Apostle Paul discusses this extensively in Romans 6:6-13. He says, "Our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." Our old self, or the body ruled by sin, represents the power and reign of sin within us. These must be destroyed or mortified so that we no longer serve sin and are freed from its power and rule. According to the Apostle Paul, this is accomplished through Christ's crucifixion. It is accomplished meritoriously by his actual death on the cross for us; it is accomplished virtually through the provision made for the mortification of all sin; and it is accomplished actually through the exercise of faith in him as crucified, dead, and buried. This exercise of faith is the means through which the virtue of his death is communicated to us for the purpose of mortifying sin. Through this process, we are said to be dead and buried with him, with baptism serving as a symbol of this reality. As a result, the world is crucified to us and we are crucified to the world, which is the essence of

mortifying sin. There are several ways in which the exercise of faith in Christ crucified is effective for this purpose:

Firstly, looking to him in this way will produce a sense of holy mourning within us. In Zechariah 12:10, it is promised that those who look upon the pierced Christ will mourn. This promise pertains to the time of the gospel and the grace of the gospel. When believers behold Christ as pierced, it evokes mourning in those who have received the promised Spirit of grace and supplication mentioned in the passage. This mourning forms the foundation of mortifying sin. It is a godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation, which is not to be regretted. Mortifying sin is an essential aspect of repentance. The more believers engage in this contemplation of Christ, the more humble they become, and they are kept in a state of mourning that is diametrically opposed to the interests of sin. It keeps the soul watchful against all the attempts of sin. Sin never reigns in a humble, mourning soul.

[2.] It is effective for the same purpose through a powerful motive, which calls and leads us to conformity with Christ. The Apostle Paul emphasises this in Romans 6:8-11. Our conformity to Christ as crucified and dead involves being dead to sin and thereby overthrowing its reign in our mortal bodies. We should consider this conformity as our duty: "Consider yourselves dead to sin." In other words, we should aim to be in that conformity to Christ crucified. Can anyone who has a spiritual understanding of Christ dying for sin continue to live in sin? Shall we keep alive within us that which he died to save us from eternal destruction? Can we see him bleeding for our sins and not strive to deliver them a death blow? The efficacy of exercising faith in this regard for the mortification of sin is known by all believers through experience.

[3.] Faith in this regard gives us communion with Christ in his death and unites our souls with its power. Hence, we are said to be "buried with him in death" and to be "planted together in the likeness of his death" (Romans 6:4-5). Our "old self is crucified with him" (verse 6).

Through faith, we have communion with Christ in his death, leading to the death of sin.

Therefore, this is the primary grace and duty that we should focus on for the mortification of sin. However, when sin holds such power and influence over the mind that it prevents or obstructs the exercise of faith, when the mind dares not think or meditate on Christ crucified due to the inconsistency of such thoughts with indulging in any lust, it is to be feared that sin is reigning on the throne.

If this is the case for anyone, if they have not yet utilised this way and means for the mortification of sin, or if, despite being convinced of it, they have been driven or held back from exercising faith in this matter, I have nothing to offer to absolve them from this evidence of sin's reign, except to urge them to promptly and earnestly engage in their duty in this regard. If they prevail and commit themselves to it, they will experience the evidence of their freedom.

Some may perhaps say that they are indeed "unskilled" in this "word of righteousness," as some are, referring to Hebrews 5:13. They do not know how to utilise Christ crucified for this purpose or how to approach it. They can understand other methods of mortification. The disciplines and penances prescribed by the Papists for this purpose are tangible, as are our own vows, resolutions, and other prescribed duties. But as for this way of deriving virtue from the death of Christ for the death of sin, they cannot comprehend it.

I readily believe that some may say so, and indeed should say so if they were to speak their minds, for it requires the spiritual wisdom of faith, and "not all men have faith." In the absence of this wisdom, the Papists have devised another way to compensate for the complete exercise of faith in this matter. They create crucifixes—images of Christ crucified—and then adore, embrace, mourn over, and expect great virtue from them. Without these images, they know no other way of approaching Christ to receive any virtue from his death or life. Others may find themselves in a similar predicament, but they would

do well to consider the reason for it. Is it not due to ignorance of the mystery of the gospel and the communication of spiritual provisions from Christ through it? Is it not because they have never truly been distressed in their minds and consciences by the power of sin and have thus never earnestly sought relief? Superficial convictions, whether of sin's guilt or power, will not drive anyone to Christ. When their consciences are truly burdened, and they know not what to do, they will learn better how to "look unto Him whom they have pierced." The condition of those who do not feel the necessity of applying themselves to Christ by faith every day for help and support is perilous. Or is it because they have other means of relief to turn to? Such as their own promises and resolutions, which, for the most part, only serve to deceive and pacify their conscience for a brief moment before vanishing into nothingness. Whatever the cause of this neglect may be, those who persist in it will wither away in their sins, for only the death of Christ for us can bring about the death of sin within us.

Secondly, another necessary duty for this purpose is continual prayer, particularly when it is applied to the prevalence of any specific lust in which sin exerts its power in a distinct manner. Prayer is the great ordinance of God for the mortification of sin, for the following reasons:

1. Through prayer, we obtain spiritual assistance and supplies of strength against sin. We must not only pray fervently for the forgiveness of sin in terms of guilt, but also for its subjugation in terms of power. One who neglects the latter is never truly earnest about the former. The pressures and troubles caused by the power of sin are as piercing to the mind as the guilt of sin is to the conscience. Merely being pardoned for sin will not bring peace to the soul, although the soul cannot have peace without it. Sin must also be mortified, or else we cannot find spiritual rest. Prayer, therefore, serves the purpose of seeking and obtaining supplies of grace that mortify and sanctify, thereby breaking the power of sin, diminishing its strength, withering its

root, destroying its life, and ultimately crucifying the entire old self. The apostle's request for the Thessalonians is the daily prayer of all believers for themselves: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely," (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

2. Consistently engaging in this duty in a proper manner will keep the soul in a state where sin cannot habitually prevail. One who can live in sin and still continue with the ordinary duties of prayer has never truly prayed as they ought to. Formality or some hidden reservation corrupts the whole act. A truly gracious and prayerful state (wherein we pray always) is entirely incompatible with a love for sin or any secret attachment to it. To pray well is to pray always, which means keeping the heart constantly in the frame required for prayer. In this state, sin can have no dominion or even a quiet haven within the soul.

[3.] Prayer is the soul's direct conflict against the power of sin. Sin is considered as the soul's enemy, which fights against it. In prayer, the soul engages in a struggle with sin, seeking to wound, kill, and destroy it. It applies all its spiritual resources to bring about its complete ruin. Through prayer, the soul expresses a genuine abhorrence of sin, condemns itself for its presence, and exercises faith in all of God's promises for its conquest and destruction.

It is evident that if sin has gained dominion over the mind to the point of neglecting this duty, either in general or in its effective application to specific instances where sin exerts its power, it is a troubling sign of sin's dominion in the soul.

It is certain that unmortified sin, sin that is indulged and not put to death, will gradually erode any sense of obligation towards the duty of prayer and alienate the mind from it, both in terms of its substance and manner of performance. We witness this every day in apostate believers. They may have had a gift of prayer and were consistent in its exercise, but the love of sin and living in it has devoured their gift and completely turned their minds away from the

duty itself, which is characteristic of hypocrites. "Will he take delight in the Almighty? Will he call upon God at all times?" (Job 27:10). While he may have done so for a time, once under the power of sin, he will no longer continue in such devotion.

Because sin deceives through a gradual progression to secure its dominion, it is important to provide a warning or caution by noting some of its steps so that its entry can be opposed. Just as the entrance of God's word brings light, enlightening the mind when it first exerts its power, the entrance of sin, its initial workings in the mind towards neglecting the duty of prayer, brings a deceiving darkness that must be resisted.

First, it will create a sense of unpreparedness in the mind towards the duty of prayer at its appropriate times. The heart should always rejoice when those times approach, due to the delight it finds in communing with God. Rejoicing and gladness in approaching God is a requirement for us, and therefore, with the thought and anticipation of those times, we should groan within ourselves for a readiness of mind that will make us fit for the fellowship with God that we are called to. However, when sin begins to prevail, everything will be unready and disordered. Strange hesitations will arise in the mind, either regarding the duty itself or the manner in which it should be performed. The principles of habit and formality manifest themselves in such cases. The body seems to compel the mind to engage in the duty, rather than the mind leading the body in fulfilling its part. The mind will find any other task to occupy itself with, rather than the work and duty that lies before it.

Therefore, a significant part of our wisdom in countering the power of sin within us lies in keeping our hearts constantly in a gracious disposition and readiness for the duty of prayer at its appropriate times. If we lose this ground, we will continually regress. Understand that there is no more effective safeguard for the soul against the power of sin than a gracious readiness and inclination towards this

duty in both private and public settings, according to the appropriate times.

Secondly, as sin progresses, along with unreadiness, it will also bring about unwillingness. The mind, under the influence of sin, finds the duty of prayer to be directly contrary to its current interests, disposition, and inclinations. It perceives nothing in it but trouble and disturbance. It speaks evil of them constantly, as was said of the prophet whom they no longer wanted to hear. As a result, a secret unwillingness prevails in the mind, and there is a reluctance to wholeheartedly engage in prayer. The attendance of such individuals in prayer resembles compliance driven by habit and convictions, as if they were under compulsion.

Thirdly, sin will eventually prevail to the point of complete neglect of the duty of prayer. This observation has been confirmed through long experience: if prayer does not consistently strive for the destruction of sin, sin will destroy prayer and completely alienate the soul from it. This is the path of those who backslide in their hearts; as they increase in sin, they decline in prayer, until they become weary of it and completely abandon it. They express their weariness, as stated in Malachi 1:13, saying, "What a weariness it is!" and "You snuff at it." They view it as a burden, a task, and they grow weary in attending to it.

Now, when I attribute the relinquishment of the duty of prayer as an effect of the prevalence of sin, I do not mean that individuals wholly and absolutely give it up, forsaking it in all forms—public and private—or in all seasons and occasions. Few reach such an extreme in sin, displaying such a desperate resolution against God. Perhaps they will still attend to the appointed times of prayer in their families or public gatherings, at least going through the motions with their lips. And in times of surprise and danger, they may personally cry out to God, as the Scriptures testify. But what I mean is this: they will no longer sincerely, immediately, and directly apply prayer to the mortification and destruction of that specific lust or corruption in which sin

exercises its power and rule over them. And when this is the case, it appears that sin has dominion. Regarding such a person, the psalmist says, "He has ceased to be wise and to do good. He plots evil on his bed; he sets himself on a path that is not good; he does not reject evil" (Psalm 36:3-4).

But what is intended here is a habitual relinquishment of this duty with respect to the mentioned purpose, which renders the soul secure in that state. It is meant that believers may experience a temporary prevalence of this evil through the power of sin and temptation. Just as God complains of His people in Isaiah 43:22, saying, "You have not called upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel," which means that their devotion lacked fervency and sincerity as required. Now, when believers find themselves in this state for a time due to the power of sin and temptation:

1. They do not approve of themselves in that condition. They frequently reflect on their actions and say, "It is not as it should be, nor as it was in the past. What we are doing is not good, and it will not bring peace in the end."
2. They secretly resolve to rise out of the dust of this sinful state. They say to themselves, "We will return to our first husband, for it was better with us then," as the church did in Hosea 2:7.
3. Every event that occurs to them, whether in the form of mercy or affliction, is seen as a call from God to deliver and restore them from their state of backsliding.
4. They heed the warnings given in preached sermons, especially when their particular condition is touched upon or exposed.
5. They find no peace, rest, or self-approval until they fully engage in the process of healing and recovery as described in Hosea 14:1-4.

In this way, it may be with some who have not yet been overtaken by the dominion of sin. However, the initial entry of sin should be

diligently guarded against as it leads to the danger and ruin of the soul.

Thirdly, constant self-abasement, condemnation, and abhorrence is another duty directly opposed to the influence and rule of sin in the soul. No mindset is a better antidote against the poison of sin. "He who walks humbly walks securely." God continuously pays attention to those who mourn, to those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit. It is the fertile ground where all grace thrives and flourishes. Maintaining a constant and proper sense of sin as sin, recognizing our involvement in it by nature and throughout our lives, along with a continual sorrowful remembrance of specific instances that have been particularly sinful, leading to a gracious self-abasement—this is the soul's best position in guarding against the deceit and invasion of sin. We must diligently adhere to this duty. Keeping our souls in a constant state of mourning and self-abasement is the most essential aspect of our wisdom in relation to all the purposes of the life in God. Moreover, far from being inconsistent with the consolations and joys offered by the gospel through faith, it is the only way to properly receive them into the soul. It is to such mourners, and only to them, that the comforts of the gospel are administered, as stated in Isaiah 57:18.

When sin seeks to establish its dominion, one of the first things it does is destroy this state of mind, and once it gains control, it prevents its restoration. It makes people careless and indifferent in this regard, even bold, presumptuous, and fearless. It obstructs any inclination towards self-reflection and consideration that leads to this state of mind. It presents them as unnecessary or untimely, or instills fear of them, portraying them as unsettling and disruptive without any benefit. If sin prevails in this, it paves the way for the security of its own dominion. Those under the rule of grace are vigilant against a proud, indifferent, senseless, and secure state of heart.

4. Having a reservation for a known sin, despite being convinced of its wrongness and the power of convictions, is evidence of the dominion of sin. This was the case with Naaman, who was willing to do all other things but made an exception for the sin that involved his honour and profit. When there is sincerity in conviction, it extends to all sins because it is about sin itself and recognizes the sinful nature in every known sin equally. Remaining true to convictions is essential for sincerity. If individuals can choose what to exempt and reserve, despite being convinced of its evil, it stems from the ruling power of sin. Arguments in the mind in favor of any sin, seeking to continue in it, undermine sincerity. Perhaps the excuse is that it is a small matter of little significance, which will be compensated by other acts of obedience, or it will only be retained until a more suitable time for abandonment. After conviction, people may become blinded and start questioning again whether what they wish to persist in is truly sinful or not. This often happens regarding covetousness, pride, and conformity to the world. It is a dreadful consequence of the ruling power of sin. Anything that compromises the universality of obedience in one aspect undermines its sincerity in all aspects.

5. Hardness of heart, which is often mentioned and lamented in the Scriptures, is another indication of the dominion of sin. However, since there are different degrees of hardness of heart, we need to consider them in order to accurately discern what constitutes evidence of that dominion and what may coexist with the rule of grace. It is a perplexing affliction that even the most righteous individuals frequently lament, while the most wicked remain completely unaware of it.

CHAPTER IV

Hardness of Heart Spoken to as an Eminent Sign of Sin's Dominion

Hardness of heart is discussed as a significant indication of sin's dominion, and it is explained that it can be either total or partial.

Total hardness can be either natural and universal, or judicial in specific individuals.

Natural hardness refers to the inherent blindness or stubbornness of the heart in sin, which cannot be cured by external means: "Hardness and impenitent heart" (Romans 2:5). This is the heart of stone that God promises to remove through the power of His grace (Ezekiel 36:26). We are not concerned with this type of hardness in our inquiry.

Judicial hardness can be attributed either directly to God or through the permission of the devil.

In the first case, God is often said to harden the hearts of individuals in their sins, leading to their ruin, as He did with Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21). He accomplishes this in two general ways: 1) By withholding from them the necessary light, wisdom, and understanding to perceive their condition, recognize the danger, and avoid destruction. 2) By preventing the means provided to convict and lead them to repentance from having their intended effect, and even causing these means to contribute to their hardening (Isaiah 6:9-10). Regarding this divine hardening, we can observe the following:

1. It is the most severe divine punishment in this world.
2. Therefore, it is inflicted only upon those who are habitually wicked and intentionally harden themselves in their sins (Romans 1:26, 28).
3. It often occurs during specific times and seasons that serve as crucial turning points for eternity.
4. The condition of those who are hardened in this way is hopeless and their wounds are incurable.

When someone is hardened in this manner, there is no doubt about the dominion of sin. Such a heart becomes its throne and rightful

abode, almost akin to being in hell.

Secondly, there is a judicial hardness that Satan, with God's permission, brings upon people (2 Corinthians 4:4). There are various means by which he accomplishes this, but they will not be discussed here.

However, there is also a hardness of heart that is only partial and comparative, even though it may appear to resemble total and absolute hardness. This raises the question of whether it is an evidence of sin's dominion or not.

There is a hardness of heart that is recognized and lamented by those who experience it. The church speaks of this in Isaiah 63:17, "O LORD, why have you made us wander from your ways and hardened our heart?" or, "allowed it to be so, without healing or restoring our hardness." There are several factors that contribute to this kind of hardness of heart, such as:

1. Lack of readiness to receive divine impressions from the Word of God. When the heart is soft and tender, it is also humble and contrite, and ready to tremble at the Word of God. It is said of Josiah that "his heart was tender" and "he humbled himself before the LORD" when he heard His Word (2 Kings 22:18, 19). Some may find this lacking to a great extent and be aware of it. They may observe a significant unwillingness to respond to divine warnings, rebukes, and calls. The preached Word does not affect them, and they sometimes complain that they sit under it like unmoving objects. They do not experience its power and are not transformed by it. As a result, they perceive that their hearts have become hardened, just as the church laments. Indeed, there is no better disposition of heart to be attained in this life than one that is receptive to the Word like wax to a seal, prepared and eager to receive its impressions. It is a frame of heart that is tender in embracing the various messages conveyed by the Word, whether for reproof, instruction, or consolation.

The absence of this disposition is a blameworthy hardness of heart.

2. Another aspect of hardness of heart is an unaffectedness with the guilt of sin and the sorrow and repentance that it demands. Every person with a spark of saving grace experiences some level of godly sorrow for sin. However, there should be a proportion between sin and sorrow. Great sins require profound grief, as seen when Peter, after his grievous sin, "wept bitterly." Specific aggravations of sin demand a corresponding sense of their weight. However, the soul does not find this within itself. It can bear the thoughts of sin and the rebukes of conscience without significant disturbance or remorse. It can brush off the accusations of sin without relenting, mourning, or being moved to tears. At times, it may even compare its heart to an adamant or flint, unyielding like a rock. This leads many to fear that they are under the dominion of sin, and their fear is heightened by the fact that it does not affect and humble them as it should. It must be acknowledged that any unaffectedness with sin, any lack of humility and godly sorrow over it, stems from an improper hardness of heart. Those who are not moved by it have ample reason to be concerned about their spiritual state and condition.
3. Similarly, a lack of concern for the sins of others with whom we live or are associated is of the same nature, albeit to a lesser extent. Mourning over the sins of others is a duty highly regarded by God (Ezekiel 9:4). It demonstrates the effective workings of various graces, such as zeal for God's glory, compassion for souls, and love for the glory and interests of Christ in the world. The absence of this concern arises from hardness of heart, and it is prevalent among us. Some individuals do not feel any sense of responsibility in this regard. They offer excuses, claiming that it is not their duty or that they need not be concerned—why should they care about the wickedness of the world? Let it answer for its own sins. They are

also unaffected when it hits closer to home. If their children experience losses, poverty, or ruin, then they are indeed affected. However, as long as their children prosper in the world, even if they have apostatized from the faith, become enemies of Christ, or openly embrace the ways of the world, they are not greatly concerned, especially if they are not scandalously wicked. Yet, this, too, stems from hardness of heart, which is mourned over in the presence of vigilant and active grace.

4. Another manifestation of this hardness of heart is a lack of a proper sense of divine displeasure, particularly in response to signs and indications thereof. God often provides these signs, whether regarding the state of the church in the world or concerning our own lives through afflictions and chastisements. During such times, He expects our hearts to be soft and receptive, ready to be impressed by His anger, and obedient to His mind and will. Those who remain stubborn-hearted and disregard Him and the works of His hands are the objects of His abhorrence. Believers may experience this to some degree, and they may be aware of it, leading to sorrow and humility.

These things, and many more of a similar nature, stem from hardness of heart or the remnants of our inherent hardness, and they greatly promote the influence of sin within us. However, when individuals are aware of this condition, when they are humbled by it, and when they mourn and cry out for its removal, it is far from being evidence of sin's dominion over them. On the contrary, it is a clear sign that the ruling power of sin has been broken and destroyed in their souls.

Yet, there are other instances of hardness of heart that present greater challenges and are hardly reconcilable with the rule of grace. I will mention some of them:

1. Security and insensitivity in the face of the guilt of significant actual sins. I do not claim that this is or can ever be absolute in

any believer. However, there are instances where individuals continue in their usual pace of duties and profession, albeit without any particular sense of humiliation, even though they are burdened by the provoking guilt of a known sin along with its aggravations. It recurs in their minds, and unless their conscience is seared, it will confront them. Yet, they choose to overlook it, preferring to forget and erase it from their thoughts rather than address it through specific repentance. This appears to have been the case with David after his sin with Bathsheba. I have no doubt that before God's message to him through Nathan, he had unpleasant thoughts about what he had done. However, there are no indications in the story or any of his prayers that he took it to heart or was genuinely humbled by it beforehand. This was a profound hardness of heart, and we know how difficult his recovery from it was. He was saved, but it was as though passing through fire. Therefore, if anyone who has been caught up in serious sin, such as drunkenness or other foolishness, tries to brush it off, to overlook it, to forget it, or to find solace in reasoning or considerations against facing its specific impact and experiencing genuine humility for it, they cannot have solid evidence that sin does not have dominion over them during that state and mindset. Such sinners should be warned. If they have brushed aside past sins until they have completely lost all sense of them or if they are currently in such a state, they should reconsider their approach. They should not allow any such sin to pass without a distinct sense of humility. Regardless of the final outcome, they cannot have a solid foundation for spiritual peace in this world.

2. There is a dangerous hardness of heart where the guilt of one sin does not make the soul vigilant against another of a different kind. When the heart is tender, if it falls into sin unexpectedly, it will not only guard against its recurrence or relapse but will also be diligent, cautious, and careful to avoid all other sins. This is true for all who walk humbly with a sense of sin. However, when individuals are in such a state, they become careless, bold, and

negligent. If they do not commit the same sin again, they are easily drawn into committing others. This was the case with Asa. He became angry with the seer who came to him with a divine message and even put him in prison because of his rage (2 Chronicles 16:10). One might think that after recovering from this state, Asa would have become humble and watchful against other sins. But that was not the case. It is mentioned that he "oppressed some of the people at the same time." And it didn't end there; "in his disease he sought not the LORD, but the physicians" (verse 12). In addition to persecution, he added oppression, and on top of that, unbelief. Nevertheless, it is said that "Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days" (1 Kings 15:14), meaning he had prevailing sincerity despite these failings. However, he was undoubtedly under the influence of great hardness of heart. The same is true for others in similar situations where one sin does not make them cautious and watchful against another. For example, when individuals have engaged in a life of excess, they may also fall into excessive anger towards their families and loved ones or neglect their duties or take other crooked paths in their conduct. This indicates a significant prevalence of sin in the soul, although, as seen in the example of Asa, it is not an infallible evidence of sin's dominion. Nevertheless, it is a condition inconsistent with divine peace and consolation.

3. When individuals fall into unspiritual frames, a state of spiritual deadness and decay from which they cannot be revived by the usual means of grace, it is a certain evidence of hardness of heart and the prevailing power of sin within. This holds true whether it is the fault of churches or of individual persons. The preaching of the word is the special divine ordinance for the restoration and recovery of those who have strayed in heart or in their conduct. If, despite the preaching of the word, individuals persist stubbornly in following the inclinations of their own hearts, unless God intervenes in an extraordinary manner, they are on the verge of ruin and can only rely on sovereign grace.

This was the situation with David. After his great sin, there is no doubt that he continued to participate in all the acts of divine worship, which are the regular means of preserving and restoring sinners from their backslidings. However, these means did not have the desired effect on him. He remained unrepentant in his sin until God used extraordinary measures, such as the special message from Nathan and the death of his child, to awaken and restore him.

In a similar manner, God will sometimes deal with churches and individuals. When ordinary means of recovery fail to bring about change, He will, by His sovereign grace and perhaps through a combination of extraordinary circumstances, heal, revive, and save them. This is what He promises to do in Isaiah 57:16–19.

However, those who trust solely in this approach, neglecting the ordinary means of healing, should be cautious. Since there is no direct promise for such deliverance and it is a matter left to absolute sovereignty, the outcome may bring bitterness and sorrow.

Therefore, those who find themselves in this state should be wary. Although God may indeed deliver them, it will be through "terrible things" (Psalm 65:5), acts that manifest His vengeance for their inventions (Psalm 99:8), even though He forgives them. David himself affirms that God had broken all his bones in dealing with him (Psalm 51:8).

I fear that this may be the current situation for many churches and professing believers today. It is evident that they have experienced significant spiritual decline, and despite various providential warnings, the ordinary means of grace, such as repentance and humility, have not been effective in their restoration. There is a great fear that God will employ severe measures and terrible circumstances to awaken them or, which is more dreadful, withdraw His presence from them.

4. It is of the same nature and signifies a significant presence of this evil when individuals find satisfaction and pleasure in an unmortified and unfruitful profession. This is a clear indication of sin's dominion. There are three things that reveal the compatibility of such a profession with hardness of heart or serve as its fruits:

(1.) Neglecting the primary duties of the profession, namely, self-mortification and fruitfulness towards others. Many who claim to be religious exhibit a noticeable deficiency and neglect in these areas. There is no evident effort to earnestly mortify their lusts, pride, anger, love for the world, excessive desires, and sensual appetites. They either indulge in them all or, at the very least, do not engage in a constant struggle against them. Moreover, when it comes to producing the fruits of righteousness that bring praise to God through Jesus Christ or engaging in good works as evidence of a living faith, they are conspicuously unproductive. Since these are the fundamental principles of the religion they profess, their neglect and deficiency stem from a hardness of heart that overrides their understanding and convictions. In such a case, what will prevent sin from reigning supreme? Finding pleasure and satisfaction in such a profession indicates a highly perilous state of mind. Sin may have complete dominion under such a profession.

(2.) Allowing habitual formality to permeate the performance of religious duties is of the same nature. Some succumb to the power of sin and neglect or omit these duties altogether. Others continue to carry out these duties, but their approach is marked by mere formality and lifelessness. They are careless when it comes to expressing and exercising genuine grace during these acts of worship, which clearly demonstrates the power of sin and a spiritual numbness of the heart. The Scriptures frequently and severely condemn this behaviour, characterising it as hypocritical. Consequently, the lukewarm church of Laodicea was warned of its imminent rejection by the Lord Jesus Christ, and God pronounces a severe judgment against all guilty of this in Isaiah 29:13-14. Yet, this

may be the state of many individuals, as evidenced by their eventual apostasy resulting from a prolonged adherence to this lifeless and heartless profession of religion and performance of its duties.

(3.) When individuals become unresponsive to the preaching of the word and derive no benefit from it. The general purposes of preaching the word to believers include: [1.] Increasing spiritual light, knowledge, and understanding; [2.] Cultivating growth in grace that enables obedience; [3.] Stirring up and invigorating grace through the communication of God's mind, will, love, and grace to our souls;—this is accompanied by [4.] Impacting the affections, continually renewing and sanctifying them; [5.] Providing guidance and supplying spiritual strength to resist temptations and overcome corruption; and [6.] Producing fruitfulness in works and the performance of obedient duties.

When individuals can sit under the preaching of the word without experiencing any of these effects on their minds, consciences, or lives, they have been greatly hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, as stated in Hebrews 3:12-13. Now, whether this is due to: [1.] Carelessness and a sense of security that has permeated all kinds of people, leading God to justly withhold the power and efficacy of His word from them; or [2.] An increase in unsanctified knowledge and gifts that fills individuals with self-exalted thoughts, preventing them from adopting the humble disposition necessary for teachability; or [3.] A loss of proper reverence for the ministry as God's ordained means to achieve all the purposes of the word, accompanied by a concealed hardening of conscience due to biases against its power, influenced by the suggestions of Satan; or [4.] A love for sin that the heart seeks to protect and shield from the impact of the word; or any other cause, it stems from a perilous hardness of heart and the dominion of sin.

When this state of mind, when such prevailing hardness exists in individuals, I cannot, no one can, provide them with assurance that sin does not have dominion over them. However, since all these

things can vary in degrees, it cannot be conclusively determined from any or all of them, in any degree, that it is so. But we can safely conclude the following: 1. It is impossible for anyone in whom this evil disposition is found, in any degree, without sincere efforts to combat it, to maintain true and lasting peace with God or within their own soul; any apparent peace is merely a destructive sense of security. 2. This is the pathway leading to ultimate obduracy and impenitence. Therefore, 3. It is the present duty of those who care for their souls to shake themselves free from this state of spiritual decay and not find rest until they have embarked on the path of recovery. God's calls for the return of such backsliders in heart are numerous, and the reasons and motivations for it are countless. They should never forget that without it, they will perish eternally, and they do not know how soon they may be overtaken by that destruction.

Thus far we have examined the question of whether sin has dominion over us or not. On the other hand, there are many evidences of the rule of grace that are sufficient to dismiss the pleas and assertions of sin to the throne. However, discussing these evidences is not the purpose of my current intention. I have solely examined the pleas of sin that make the inquiry difficult and the case uncertain, and they all arise from the workings of sin within us as it wages war against the soul, which is its proper and continual work, as stated in 1 Peter 2:11. It does so against the intent of the law, which is to live for God; against its order and peace, which it disrupts; and against its eternal blessedness, which it seeks to deprive us of. The examination of the asserted pleas may be beneficial to those who are sincere.

On the other hand, there are undeniable evidences of the dominion of sin in people, some of which I shall mention without further elaboration, as they require no proof or explanation:

1. It is evident when sin has taken control of the will. This occurs when there are no inherent constraints against sinning, but only external consequences that discourage it.

2. It is evident when people openly declare their sins without hiding them, boasting and glorifying in them, as many do.
3. It is evident when individuals approve of themselves in known sins, such as drunkenness, immorality, profanity, and similar offenses, without experiencing genuine repentance.
4. It is evident when people neglect their private and familial religious duties, rendering their public religious activities mere acts of hypocrisy.
5. It is evident when there is enmity towards true holiness and the power of godliness.
6. It is evident when individuals visibly abandon their religious profession, especially if accompanied by persecution against those who remain faithful.
7. It is evident when there is ignorance of the sanctifying principles of the gospel and the Christian faith.
8. It is evident when there is contempt for the means of conversion.
9. It is evident when people live in a state of complacency despite clear providential warnings and calls to repentance.
10. It is evident when there is opposition in the mind to the true cause of Christ in the world.

Wherever these things, and similar traits, are present, there is no doubt about what holds dominion and exerts control over the minds of individuals. As the apostle declares, this can be easily discerned by everyone, as stated in Romans 6:16.

CHAPTER V

What is the Assurance Given Us that sin Shall not have Dominion
Over Us

Now let us address the third question, which is: What assurance do we have, and what are the reasons behind it, that sin will not have

dominion over us? The basis for this assurance is that we are "not under the law, but under grace."

This reasoning reveals the power of this assurance, explaining how the law does not eradicate the dominion of sin, while grace dethrones sin and grants us dominion over it.

III. Now, let us address the second point raised at the beginning of this discussion, which is to inquire whether sin has dominion over any of us. Moving on to the third aspect presented by the words, we delve into the assurance given to us and its grounds, assuring us that sin will not have dominion over us. This assurance is based on the fact that we are "not under the law, but under grace."

When individuals find themselves engaged in a constant struggle against sin, viewing it as their greatest adversary that seeks to ruin their souls and bring eternal destruction upon them; when they have firsthand experience of its power and deceit, often causing them distress and unsettling their peace and comfort; when they have been on the brink of despair, fearing that one day they will succumb to its might—this is when the gospel brings them good news, assuring them that sin will never have dominion over them.

The foundation of this assurance lies in the fact that believers are "not under the law, but under grace." We can further demonstrate the strength of this reasoning through a few examples:—

FIRST, the law does not provide strength against sin for those who are under its authority, but grace does. Sin cannot be cast out or kept from its throne without spiritual power and strength in the soul to resist, overcome, and dethrone it. If it is not conquered, it will reign, and it cannot be conquered without a mighty prevailing power, which the law cannot and does not provide.

The term "law" can be understood in two ways: 1. It refers to the entire revelation of God's mind and will in the Old Testament. In this sense, it contained grace and provided life, light, and strength

against sin, as the psalmist affirms. It included not only the commandments but also the promise and the covenant, which conveyed spiritual life and strength to the church. However, this sense of the law is not the focus here, and it is not being contrasted with grace. 2. It signifies the covenant of perfect obedience: "Do this, and live." In this sense, those who are "under it" are contrasted with those who are "under grace." They are under its power, rule, conditions, and authority as a covenant. In this sense, everyone who is not established in the new covenant through faith in Jesus Christ is under the law. Jesus establishes the rule of grace in and over them. For all people, there is either the rule of God through the law or through grace, but one cannot be under both at the same time.

In this sense, God never ordained the law to convey grace or spiritual strength to the souls of people. If that were the case, the promise and the gospel would have been unnecessary. As the apostle Paul states, "If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law." If the law could provide life or strength, it would have produced righteousness, and we would have been justified by it. The law reveals and condemns sin but does not provide the strength to oppose it. It is not God's means for dethroning sin or destroying its dominion.

This law can be considered in two ways, but in neither of them was it intended to provide power or strength against sin:

1. In its original state when given to mankind in innocence, it fully and precisely expressed all of man's duties as required by God in His wisdom and holiness. It was God's way of governing man based on the righteousness in which he was created. However, it did not offer new assistance against sin, nor was there a need for it to do so. It was not intended to provide additional or increased grace to man but to rule and govern him according to what he had received. It continues to fulfill this purpose forever. It claims and maintains authority over all people, based on what they had and what they have, but it never had the power to

prevent the entrance of sin or to remove it once it has established its reign.

2. When it was renewed and given to the Israelite nation at Mount Sinai, and to all those who would join themselves to the Lord from the nations of the world, it still did not have the purpose of destroying or dethroning sin through the administration of spiritual strength and grace. It had additional aims given to it at that time, which it did not have in its original form. Its primary goal was to lead people to the promise and to Christ through it. It achieves this through all its acts and powers on the souls of individuals. As it exposes sin, provokes it through its severity, judges and condemns it, and pronounces curses on sinners, it drives them towards this end. This new purpose was added by grace when the law was renewed. In itself, the law has no other role with sinners except to judge, curse, and condemn them.

Therefore, there is no help to be expected against the dominion of sin from the law. It was never ordained by God for that purpose, nor does it contain or impart the necessary grace for that purpose, as stated in Romans 8:3.

Therefore, those who are "under the law" are under the dominion of sin. "The law is holy," but it cannot make those who have made themselves unholy holy; it is "just," but it cannot make them just—it cannot justify those whom it condemns; it is "good," but it cannot do them any good in terms of delivering them from the power of sin. God has not appointed it for that purpose. Sin will never be dethroned by the law; it will not yield to the law, neither in its authority nor its power.

Those who are under the law may, at times, try to break free from the control of sin and make a resolution to no longer be under its power. This happens when:

1. The law weighs heavily on their consciences, causing confusion and distress. The commandment confronts them, sin revives, and they experience a spiritual death (Romans 7:9, 10). This means that sin gains the power to destroy the sinner's hopes and trouble them with a sense of guilt and impending judgment. For "the power of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56)—it has the ability to trouble and condemn sinners through the law. When sinners find themselves in this state, when the law burdens them with a sense of sin's guilt and robs them of peace and tranquillity, they will resolve to cast off the control of sin and abandon its service in order to escape the weight of the law on their consciences. They will attempt this by engaging in certain acts of duty and abstaining from sin.
2. They will do the same under sudden occurrences of sickness, pain, danger, or even death itself. During these times, they will cry out, pray, and promise to change their ways, believing they are doing so earnestly. This situation is fully illustrated in Psalm 78:34–37 and is evident in the daily experiences of many people. There are few who, even if hardened and wicked, won't consider returning to God, abandoning the service of sin, and freeing themselves from its dominion when faced with such circumstances. For some, it results in a lasting change, although not a genuine conversion; however, for most, this newfound goodness fades away like a morning cloud or early dew.
3. Many people experience a similar effect when hearing the preaching of the word. A conviction pierces their hearts, leading them to despise their former ways and believe that changing their lifestyles and renouncing sin is the better path. These resolutions typically endure based on the company they keep. Positive influences can greatly assist them in maintaining their resolve, but when exposed to evil and corrupt influences, these resolutions quickly fade away.

4. Occasionally, acts of mercy and favour from providence can have the same impact on individuals who are not obstinate in their sin. This includes being rescued from imminent dangers or having the lives of close family members spared, among other similar experiences.

During such periods, individuals who are under the law will pay attention to their convictions and make an effort to shake off the yoke of sin. They will listen to what the law commands, under whose power they remain, and strive to comply with its requirements. They will perform many duties and abstain from many evils in their attempt to free themselves from the dominion of sin. However, alas! The law cannot empower them to accomplish this task; it cannot give them the necessary life and strength to fully carry out what their convictions urge them to do. Therefore, after a while, they begin to grow weary and exhausted in their progress, and eventually give up entirely. They may be able to break away from certain specific major sins, but they cannot completely shake off the entire dominion of sin.

It is different for those who are "under grace." Sin will not have dominion over them; they will be provided with the strength to dethrone it.

The term "grace" has various meanings in Scripture. In this context, as we are said to be under it and as it is contrasted with the law, it refers to the gospel. It is the means through which God communicates Himself and His grace by Jesus Christ to those who believe, along with the state of acceptance they are brought into through it (Romans 5:1, 2). Therefore, to be "under grace" means to have a share in the gospel covenant and state, with a rightful claim to all the privileges and benefits it offers, and to be under the administration of grace through Jesus Christ—to be a genuine believer.

However, the question arising from this is how it logically follows that sin will not have dominion over us in this state, how sin cannot

expand its territories and rule within this condition, and in what sense this assertion is made.

1. Does it mean that there will be no sin in believers anymore? In a certain sense, this is true. Sin, in terms of its condemning power, has no place in this state (Romans 8:1). The sins of those who believe are completely expiated and forgiven, as their guilt is washed away by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 1:3; 1 John 1:7). This aspect of sin's dominion, which consists of its condemning power, is entirely eliminated in this state. However, sin, in terms of its existence and operation, still remains in believers while they are in this world; they are all aware of it. Those who deceive themselves with a contrary notion are most under its power (1 John 1:8). Therefore, to be freed from the dominion of sin does not mean to be completely free from all sin, such that it has no presence in us whatsoever. That would be not to be under grace but to be in glory.
2. Does it mean that sin, although it remains, will not strive or contend for dominion within us? We have already explained that this is not the case. Scripture and the universal experience of all believers testify to the contrary. The assurance given here is that sin will not attain that dominion. For if it did not strive for it, there would be no grace in this promise—there is no deliverance from something we are not in danger of.

However, the assurance given here is based on other considerations. The first of these is that the gospel is the ordained means and instrument used by God to communicate spiritual strength to believers for the purpose of dethroning sin. It is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16), through which He exercises His power towards that end. Sin must truly be dethroned by the powerful working of grace within us, and this occurs through our own diligent efforts. We are absolved, acquitted, and freed from the rule of sin in terms of its supposed right and authority by the promise of the gospel. Through it, we are released from the rule of the law, upon

which sin's claim to dominion is based, for "the strength of sin is the law." However, we are freed from sin's internal power and its exercise of dominion through internal spiritual grace and strength, which are manifested through our faithful practice. This grace is imparted through the gospel, which provides life and power, along with a continuous supply of grace that is sufficient to dethrone sin and permanently prevent its return.

To, this is the situation that the apostle assumes and determines: "You who are believers are all in a constant conflict with sin. You find it always restless and troubling, sometimes strong and powerful. When it combines with urgent temptations, you fear that it will completely overcome you, leading to the ruin of your souls. As a result, you become weary, groan under its weight, and cry out for deliverance from it." The apostle thoroughly discusses all these things in this chapter and the next. However, he says, "Take courage! Despite all these things and your fears, sin will not prevail over you. It will not have dominion, and it will never destroy your souls." But what is the basis for this hope? What assurance do we have of this success? "You have this," says the apostle, "You are not under the law but under grace, or the rule of God's grace in Christ Jesus, administered through the gospel." But how does this provide relief? "Well, it is the ordained instrument of God, which He will use for the purpose of communicating such supplies of grace and spiritual strength that will eternally defeat the dominion of sin."

This is one significant difference between the law and the gospel, and it has always been regarded as such in the church of God until the communication of efficacious grace started to be questioned. The law guides, directs, and commands everything that goes against the interests and rule of sin. It judges and condemns both the actions that promote sin and the individuals who commit them. It frightens and terrifies the consciences of those who are under its dominion. However, if you were to ask the law, "What should we do then? This tyrant, this enemy, is too powerful for us. What aid and assistance will you provide to help us overcome it? What power will you give us

to destroy it?" Here, the law remains completely silent or declares that it has not been entrusted with anything of this nature by God. In fact, the strength it possesses is given to sin for the condemnation of the sinner. "The strength of sin is the law." On the other hand, the gospel, or its grace, is the means and instrument through which God communicates internal spiritual strength to believers. Through the gospel, they receive supplies of the Holy Spirit and the assistance of grace to subdue sin and destroy its dominion. Through it, they can confidently say that they can do all things through Him who empowers them.

So, the assurance of the apostle's statement that "sin shall not have dominion over us" is primarily based on the fact that we are "under grace." We are in a state where we have readily available supplies to defeat any attempts of sin to rule and have dominion over us.

However, some may express their fear that they are not in this state because they do not experience such supplies of spiritual strength and grace that would enable them to conquer sin. They are still troubled by it, and it threatens to take control of their minds, if it hasn't already. Therefore, they worry that they might be estranged from the grace of the gospel.

In response to this concern, the following points are presented:

1. Remember what has been explained about the dominion of sin. If one is unaware of what it is and how it manifests, some may mistakenly find comfort in their deplorable condition (which is the case for most people), while others may unnecessarily torment themselves with doubts. Making a clear distinction between the rebellion of sin and the dominion of sin is highly beneficial for finding spiritual peace.
2. Consider the purpose for which aids of grace are granted and communicated through the gospel. It is not for the immediate and complete destruction and elimination of sin within us, so

that it has no existence, motion, or power over us anymore. This work is reserved for glory, when our body and soul will be fully redeemed, a longing we currently have. However, these aids are given to us so that sin may be crucified and mortified in us—that is, gradually weakened and destroyed—in such a way that it does not ruin our spiritual life or hinder its necessary expression in our duties. These aids enable us to prevail against sins that would undermine our covenant relationship with God. As long as we have sufficient supplies of grace for this purpose, even though we continue to struggle with sin and feel perplexed by it, we are under grace, and sin shall no longer have dominion over us. It is enough for us that sin is gradually destroyed, and we have abundant grace to prevent its ruling power on all occasions.

3. Live in the faith of this sacred truth and always maintain a lively expectation of grace suitable to this purpose in your souls. It is the nature of true and saving faith, inseparable from it, to believe that the gospel is the means by which God administers grace for the defeat of sin. Whoever does not believe this does not truly believe the gospel itself, which is the power of God for salvation. If we live, walk, and act as if we have nothing to rely on but ourselves, our own efforts, and resolutions, especially in times of perplexity and surprise, it is no wonder that we do not sense the supply of divine grace. Most likely, we are under the law and not under grace. The fundamental principle of the gospel state is to live in expectation of continual communication of life, grace, and strength from Jesus Christ, who is our life and from whom we receive grace upon grace. Therefore, in this situation, we can continually reason with our souls, as David did: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation." We may experience great oppression from the power of this enemy, causing us to mourn throughout the day, and to some extent, this is appropriate. However, we should not despair or be discouraged in our duty or comfort. We can still

trust in God through Christ and live in continual expectation of spiritual relief that will surely preserve us from the dominion of sin. This faith, hope, and expectation are what the gospel calls us to, and when they are not nurtured and maintained in their proper exercise, our spiritual condition will deteriorate.

4. Specifically, turn to the Lord Christ, to whom the administration of all spiritual supplies is entrusted, and seek His communication of them to you according to your specific needs. If sin has gained an advantage through a powerful temptation, to the point where it appears to be contending for dominion in your soul, as it was with Paul under the attacks of Satan, remember the Lord's answer to him upon repeated prayer: "My grace is sufficient for you"; "Sin shall not have dominion over you." If sin, through its deceitfulness, has caused your soul to become lifeless and apathetic, leading you to forget and neglect your duties or to perform them without spiritual delight, or if it has nearly accustomed your soul to careless and corrupt inclinations or conformity to the world, or if it takes advantage of your darkness and confusion during troubles, distress, or temptations, on these and similar occasions, it is necessary to fervently seek the Lord Christ for the specific supplies of grace that can effectively control the power of sin in all these situations. We are directed to do so considering His office and authority for this purpose, His grace and readiness to provide, as stated in Hebrews 4:14-16.

5. Always remember the way and manner in which divine grace and spiritual aids operate. It is true that in our initial conversion to God, we are as if taken by surprise through a powerful act of sovereign grace, which changes our hearts, renews our minds, and quickens us with a principle of spiritual life. Ordinarily, many things are required of us as our duty in order to prepare for this, and previous operations of grace in our minds, such as illumination and a sense of sin, dispose us passively for it, like dried wood ready for burning. However, the actual work itself is

performed by an immediate act of divine power, without any active cooperation on our part. But this is not the law or rule for the communication or operation of ongoing grace in the subduing of sin. It is given in a way that involves our cooperation in the discharge of our duties. When we are diligent in fulfilling these duties, we can be certain that we will not be lacking in divine assistance, according to the established pattern of administering gospel grace. Therefore, if we complain that we do not experience the mentioned aids, and at the same time we are not diligent in attending to all the duties by which sin may be mortified in us, we are greatly undermining the grace of God.

Therefore, despite this objection, the truth remains steadfast: "Sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under the law, but under grace," because of the spiritual aids provided by grace for its subjugation and eradication.

SECONDLY, the law does not grant any kind of freedom; it leads to bondage and cannot liberate us from any dominion, including that of sin, as this can only be achieved through liberty. Fortunately, we have this liberty through the gospel. There are two aspects to this liberty: 1. Freedom in our state and condition; 2. Freedom in internal operation. And both are bestowed upon us through the gospel.

The first aspect involves our deliverance from the law and its curse, along with all the forces that claim authority over us by virtue of it, such as Satan, death, and hell. By the grace of God, we are transferred from this state, from which the law can never set us free, into a state of glorious liberty. The Son, through His grace, sets us free and we receive the Spirit of Christ. As it is written, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). Christ proclaims this liberty in the gospel to all who believe (Isa. 61:1). Those who hear and receive this joyful message are released from all debts, bonds, accounts, rights, and claims, entering into a state of perfect freedom. In this state, sin has no right to exercise dominion over any soul. They have crossed over into the kingdom of Christ, escaping the

power of sin, Satan, and darkness. This forms the foundation of our assured freedom from the rule of sin. It cannot invade the kingdom of Christ to snatch away any of its subjects and plunge them back into a state of sin and darkness. An individual's participation in this state should be asserted and upheld against all the attempts of sin (Rom. 6:1, 2). It is abhorrent that anyone who is a freeman in Christ, having died to the power of sin, would give in to its pretenses or endeavors to regain control.

Moreover, there is an internal liberty, which entails freedom of the mind from the powerful inward chains of sin, accompanied by the ability to engage all the powers and faculties of the soul in a gracious manner. This leads to the destruction of sin's power within the soul. Such liberty is also bestowed upon us through the gospel. It administers power to live for God and to walk in all His commandments, providing further evidence for the truth of the apostle's assertion.

THIRDLY, the law fails to provide us with effective motives and encouragements to diligently pursue the overthrow of sin's dominion in a manner of duty, which must be accomplished to prevent its ultimate triumph. The law operates primarily through fear, dread, threats, and terror of destruction. Although it does say, "Do this, and live," it also reveals the impossibility inherent in our nature to fully comply with its commands in the way and manner it prescribes. Consequently, the very promise of the law becomes a source of terror, as it implies the sentence of death upon our failure to fulfill its commands. These aspects weaken and discourage the soul in its struggle against sin, depriving it of life, activity, cheerfulness, and courage in its endeavors. Hence, those who engage in opposition to sin or renounce its service solely based on the motives of the law quickly grow weary and give up. We witness this phenomenon every day. One day they abandon all sin, their beloved sin, along with the company and circumstances that lead them to it. They have been frightened by the divine vengeance proclaimed by the law. And at times, they progress so far in this resolution that they appear to have

escaped the defilements of the world. Yet soon enough, they revert to their former ways and follies (2 Pet. 2:20–22). Their "goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it vanishes." Alternatively, if they do not return to wallowing in the same mire of their previous corruptions, they resort to the shadows of various superstitious observances, as is the case in the Papacy. In this manner, they openly succeed the Jews, who, ignorant of the righteousness of God and unwilling to submit to it, sought to establish their own righteousness through various means, as the apostle states (Rom. 10:3, 4). Within that apostate church, where individuals are motivated by the terrors of the law to renounce sin and oppose its power, finding themselves entirely incapable of achieving this through the works of the law itself, which must be perfectly righteous, they resort to a multitude of superstitious observances on which they rely in place of the law with its commands and duties. However, the law does not bring about perfection, nor do the motives it provides for undermining sin's influence within us have the strength to sustain and carry us through that undertaking.

However, the motives and encouragements provided by grace to strive for the complete destruction of sin through duty are of such a nature that they instill life, cheerfulness, courage, and perseverance. They constantly inspire, comfort, and rejuvenate the soul in all its work and duty, preventing it from becoming weary and despondent. These motives are derived from the love of God and Christ, from the entire work and purpose of Christ's mediation, from the ready assistance of the Holy Spirit, from all the promises of the gospel, and from the experiences of oneself and other believers. All of these factors provide the highest assurance of ultimate success and victory. When the soul is influenced by these motives, no matter the difficulties and opposition it encounters from tempting temptations or sudden surprises, it will "renew its strength, run without growing weary, walk without fainting," as promised in Isaiah 40:31.

FOURTHLY, Christ is not found in the law; he is not presented or communicated through it, and we do not partake in him by means of

it. This is the work of grace, of the gospel. In the gospel, Christ is revealed, presented, and exhibited to us, and through it, we partake in him and all the benefits of his mediation. He alone is the one who came to destroy the devil's work. The dominion of sin is the culmination of the devil's deeds, where all his intentions converge. This is what "the Son of God was revealed to destroy." He alone dismantles the kingdom of Satan, whose power is manifested in the reign of sin. Therefore, our assurance of this comforting truth primarily rests on this foundation. And what Christ has done and continues to do for this purpose is a significant aspect of the message revealed in the gospel.

The same can be said about the impartation of the Holy Spirit, who is the primary and effective cause of destroying the dominion of sin. For "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," and nowhere else. However, we receive this Spirit not "by the works of the law," but "by hearing with faith," as stated in Galatians 3:2.

CHAPTER VI

The Practical Observations Drawn from, and Application Made of, the Whole Text

Having explained the words and drawn some insights from them, I will now present one or two observations based on their purpose and conclude with an application.

Observation 1: Being delivered from the dominion of sin is an immeasurable mercy and privilege. This is how the apostle presents it, and this is how believers perceive it. To a soul engaged in the struggle against sin and temptation, there is nothing more gratifying, precious, and valuable than hearing that sin will not have dominion over them. Oh, how some would long to hear this proclaimed with power, so they could firmly believe it and find comfort in it! "Fools mock sin," and some take pride in serving it, which is disgraceful.

However, those who truly understand the present and future realities know that freedom from the dominion of sin is an invaluable mercy. Let us consider the grounds that demonstrate its worth.

Firstly, its value is evident from its causes. It is something no one can achieve by their own strength and efforts alone. A person may acquire wealth, wisdom, or knowledge through their own endeavours, but they cannot rid themselves of the yoke of sin by these means. Even if someone possessed all the riches in the world, they could not purchase this liberty; it would be worthless. When sinners depart from this world and enter the place of torment, they would gladly give up all they had, if they possessed anything, for a share in this liberty.

It is something that the law and all its obligations cannot secure. As we have explained, the law and its duties can never overthrow the dominion of sin. Anyone who experiences true conviction will discover the truth of this. When sin weighs heavily upon them and they fear its consequences, they will find that the law is weak, their flesh is weak, their duties are weak, and their resolutions and vows are weak—insufficient to provide relief. Even if they think they are freed one day, they will find themselves in bondage the next. Despite all this, sin will continue to rule over them with force and severity. Some spend their entire lives in this condition. They ignite their own sparks and walk in their light, only to eventually lie down in darkness and sorrow. They sin and promise to change, seeking to compensate through various duties, yet they can never free themselves from the yoke of sin. Therefore, we can learn about the excellence of this privilege, firstly, from its causes, of which I will mention a few:

1. The meritorious and procuring cause of this liberty is the death and blood of Jesus Christ. This is proclaimed in 1 Peter 1:18-19 and 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23. Nothing else could purchase this freedom. We were under the power and dominion of sin and could not be delivered without a ransom. Christ died, rose again, and revived so that He might be our Lord (Romans 14:9) and

deliver us from the power of all other lords. It is true that no ransom was owed to sin or Satan, who is its author. They are to be dethroned or destroyed by an act of power. Both the devil and sin, his work, are to be "destroyed" (Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8), not appeased. However, "the strength of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56), meaning that through the righteous judgment of God, we were held by the law, liable to the condemning power of sin. We could only be delivered from that law through this price and ransom. From this, two things follow:

(1.) Those who continue to live in sin, willingly serving it and submitting to its dominion, show the utmost disregard for the wisdom, love, and grace of Christ. They belittle the great cost at which Christ obtained our liberty; they consider His sacrifice of His precious blood to be a foolish trade-off. Whatever it may be, they prioritise the temporary satisfaction of their desires over it. This attitude stems from the poison of unbelief, revealing a deep contempt for the wisdom and love of Christ. Those who live in sin convey through their hearts that the liberty He purchased with His blood is not valuable or esteemed. They may flatter Him with their words through outward religious acts, but in their hearts, they despise both Christ and the entire work of His mediation. However, the time is approaching when they will learn the stark contrast between the slavery of sin and the freedom that Christ offers to believers. This is what is now presented to sinners in the dispensation of the gospel. Life and death are set before you; choose life so that you may live forever.

(2.) For believers, in all their struggles with sin, let them live in the exercise of faith regarding this purchased liberty secured by the blood of Christ. Two things will result from this: [1.] They will constantly possess a weighty argument to counter the deceit and force of sin. The soul will remind itself, "Shall I relinquish and let go of what Christ acquired for me at such a high cost by succumbing to the enticements of lust or sin? Shall I despise His purchase? God forbid!" See Romans 6:2. Such reasoning frequently safeguards the

mind from succumbing to the allurements and temptations of sin. [2.] It is an effective argument for faith to employ when pleading for deliverance from the power of sin. We ask for nothing more than what Christ has already purchased for us, and if we persist with this plea, it will be prevailing.

2. The Holy Spirit Himself is the internal efficient cause of this liberty, which further demonstrates the greatness of this mercy. Every act aimed at the mortification of sin is just as directly from Him as the positive graces that sanctify us. It is "through the Spirit" that we "put to death the deeds of the body," as stated in Romans 8:13. Wherever He is, there, and only there, is true freedom. Any attempts to mortify sin without His special help and workings are in vain. This reveals the extent of sin's dominion in the world. The very One who can destroy it, along with all His powerful operations, is generally despised. Consequently, those who despise Him will live and die as slaves to sin. Therefore, a significant part of our wisdom in attaining and preserving this freedom lies in exercising faith in the promise of our Saviour that our heavenly Father will "give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." When sin, in any instance or through any temptation, seeks power and control over us, we may initially turn to ourselves and rely on our resolutions, which have their place and should not be disregarded. However, we will find our greatest relief in immediate cries to God for the supply of His Spirit, without whom sin cannot be subdued. Keep this in mind, put it to the test on the next occasion, and God will bless it with success.

3. The duty of believers themselves is the instrumental cause of this freedom, which also reveals the significance of this privilege. This is one of the primary purposes of all our religious duties, including prayer, fasting, meditation, and watchfulness in obedience. They are all designed to prevent and destroy the influence of sin within us. We are called to enter a theatre to fight and contend, to enter a field where we will be tested in

warfare. Our enemy is sin, which strives and competes for control over us. We are to resist it even to the point of shedding our blood, meaning we are to give our utmost effort in both action and endurance. Surely, that which is appointed by God and commanded as the great purpose of our lifelong endeavours is of the highest importance in itself and to us.

Secondly, It is evident that the deliverance from the dominion of sin is a great mercy when we consider the bondage from which we are set free. Human nature naturally revolts against bondage, unless it has been degraded and corrupted by sensual desires. Throughout history, people of noble spirits have chosen death over becoming slaves. However, there is no bondage worse than being under the rule of sin. To be under the control of base lusts such as greed, impurity, drunkenness, ambition, pride, and others, and to seek their fulfilment in the desires of the mind and flesh, is the most wretched form of slavery.

Yet, we can say whatever we want on this matter; none consider themselves as free or project an appearance of greater freedom than those who openly serve sin. If those who do as they please, who are mostly applauded for their actions, who scorn their enemies and look down upon those who do not indulge in the same excesses, are not considered free, then who can be? They argue, like the Pharisees, that they alone are truly free and have never been enslaved to anyone! They utterly despise the restraining fear of divine judgment and future accountability! Read the description in Psalm 73:4–11. Who is as free and joyous as such individuals? As for others, they are plagued all day long and chastened every morning, as stated in verse 14. They bear the burden of this oppressive enemy and cry out continually for deliverance.

However, this observation does not in any way undermine the truth being emphasized. One significant aspect of the slavery of such individuals is that they are unaware of their own bondage and proudly proclaim their freedom. They are born in a state of enmity

with God and under the bondage of sin, and they find satisfaction in it, just as abject slaves do under the cruelest tyrants—they know no better. True freedom consists of inner peace, tranquillity of mind, and desires and inclinations towards the highest and noblest aspects of our rational souls. All these are foreign to those who spend their lives in the service of vile and base lusts. Do not envy their ostentation, their glittering appearances, their accumulations of wealth and treasures; they are, in essence, despicable and contemptible slaves. The apostle accurately describes their situation in Romans 6:17. It is a matter of eternal gratitude to God that we have been delivered from being "slaves to sin."

Yes, it is an evidence of grace and a good spiritual state when a soul truly recognises the excellence of this freedom, when it perceives the power and influence of sin to be weakened to the extent that it can rejoice in it and be thankful to God for it (Romans 7:25).

Thirdly, this is also true regarding the outcome of this bondage, or what it leads people to. If, after all the lowly servitude that sinful individuals endure in the service of their lusts, if, despite the inner conflicts they experience with fears and terrors in the world, they could anticipate any future reward, something might be said to alleviate their present misery. However, "the wages of sin is death"—eternal death under the wrath of the Almighty God is all they can expect. The ultimate consequence of the dominion of sin is to deliver them to the curse of the law and the power of the devil for eternity.

Fourthly, it prevents individuals from partaking in any genuine good, both in the present and the future. Whatever enjoyment those under the power of sin may have will quickly prove to be worthless. In the meantime, they have no taste of God's love, which alone can remove the poison from their pleasures. They have no glimpse of the glory of Christ, living in perpetual darkness as if they have never beheld light or the sun. They have no experience of the sweetness and excellence of the gracious influences of life, strength, and comfort from the Holy

Spirit, nor do they know the satisfaction and reward found in holy obedience. They will never come to the enjoyment of God.

All of these points, along with several others of a similar nature, could be further elaborated upon to demonstrate the magnitude of the mercy and privilege that comes with freedom from the dominion of sin, as presented by the apostle. However, the primary objective I had in mind has been accomplished, and I will only briefly touch on these matters.

I will now present one final observation, concluding this discourse:

Observation 2: It is of utmost importance for a soul engaged in a struggle against the power of sin to ensure that it does not fall under its dominion, to eliminate any uncertainty in the mind. To affirm the truth of this, we can observe the following:

Firstly, the conflict with sin, which necessitates ongoing repentance and mortification, will persist as long as we are in this world. Claims of perfection in this life contradict the Scriptures, contradict the universal experience of all believers, and contradict the inner sense and conscience of those who make such claims, as they demonstrate on a daily basis. We pray against sin, strive against it, and long for deliverance from it, by the grace of Christ healing our nature, and not without success. However, this success does not entail its complete eradication while we are still in this world. It will remain within us until the union of our soul and body, in which it has taken root, is dissolved. This is our destiny and our portion, resulting from our turning away from God and the corruption of our nature caused by it.

You may ask, "What purpose does the gospel and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ serve in this case, if it cannot deliver us from sin?" My response is that it provides us with fourfold relief, which effectively amounts to a continual deliverance, even though sin will remain within us while we are in this world:

1. It is ordained in such a way that the presence of sin in us becomes the basis, reason, and occasion for the exercise of all grace, as well as for illuminating the beauty of our obedience. Certain exceptional virtues, like repentance and mortification, would have no opportunity for expression if it were otherwise. And while we are in this world, there is a loveliness in these virtues that outweighs the evil of lingering sin. Moreover, the difficulty imposed on our obedience, which constantly demands the exercise and development of all grace, enhances its value. This is the source of humility and surrender to the will of God. It kindles our love and longing for the fellowship with Christ, elevating the excellence of his mediation. Thus, the apostle, upon considering this, bursts into an exclamation of gratitude, saying, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25) It sweetens our anticipation of future rest and reward. Therefore, our continued existence in this state and condition in this world—a state of spiritual warfare—is what is best for us and perfectly aligned with divine wisdom, considering the role and concern of our Lord Jesus Christ for our deliverance. Let us not complain, grow disheartened, or falter, but instead proceed with Christian fortitude until the end, and we shall achieve success because...
2. By the grace of Christ, believers are granted supplies and aids of spiritual strength, ensuring that sin will never progress further in them than what is necessary for the exercise of their virtues. Sin will never have its way or dominion over them, as we have previously explained.
3. The gospel administers mercy for the forgiveness of all that is inherently evil or has any negative effects. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The pardoning mercy, in accordance with the covenant, always disarms sin of its condemning power in believers, so that despite its utmost efforts, "being justified by faith, they have peace with God."

4. There will come a time, through the grace of Christ, when sin will be completely abolished—at death, when our journey of obedience is completed.

Therefore, it is not a discredit to the grace of Christ, which offers such a blessed deliverance from sin, to affirm that this sin, and hence the struggle with it, remains in believers while they are in this world.

Furthermore, there are two types of conflict with and against sin. One occurs in the unregenerate, characterized by the rebellion of conscience and understanding against the dominion of sin in various instances. Although sin may reign in the will and affections, the knowledge of good and evil, prompted by eternal hopes and fears, will resist it, leading to the performance of certain duties and abstinence from sin. However, this conflict can exist while sin still reigns, deceiving individuals into thinking it arises from the rule of grace when it actually stems from the rebellion of light and an unawakened conscience. On the other hand, there is a conflict with sin where grace rules and reigns. Even though grace has sovereignty over the mind and heart, the remnants of sin, especially in the corrupt affections, continuously rebel against it. Now, it is crucial for everyone to determine the nature of their own conflict with sin. If it belongs to the first type, they may still be under the dominion of sin; if it falls into the latter category, they are freed from it. Therefore, while the mind remains uncertain and undecided in this matter, it will be troubled by various negative consequences. I will mention some of them:—

Such a soul cannot experience true peace because it lacks certainty about its state. 2. It cannot find comfort in gospel consolations in any condition, as its justified fears of sin's dominion will undermine them. 3. It will become lifeless and mechanical in its duties, lacking spiritual courage and joy, which will eventually lead to weariness. Consequently, 4. All grace, particularly faith, will continually be weakened and diminished in this state. 5. The fear of death will keep the soul in bondage. Therefore, it is crucial to have this issue

properly addressed and resolved in our minds, and if the preceding discussions can contribute anything towards that, it will have fulfilled their intended purpose.

Now, I will provide a few directions on how to counteract and prevent sin from gaining such prevalence as to render the question of its rule uncertain in the mind. While many directions could be given, I will offer just a few:

1. The primary rule for preventing the growth and power of sinful habits is to be vigilant against their beginnings. Sin does not attempt dominion all at once, but rather through specific instances and particular lusts. Therefore, if any sin or corrupt desire begins to establish a predominant influence in the mind and affections, it must be vigorously confronted with mortification. Otherwise, it will disrupt the peace and potentially endanger the soul. One can easily detect this by maintaining diligent self-observation of the heart and actions. No sin gains complete control of the mind and affections without being promoted by natural inclinations, circumstances, temptations, or neglect that has strengthened unhealthy inclinations. However, those who are mindful of their soul's well-being can readily discern these factors.

The strict command given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ to "be watchful" and the wise instruction to "guard our hearts above all else" are particularly relevant to these beginnings of sin's power over us. As soon as we discover its alignment or association with any of these means by which it gains strength, if we do not oppose it with resolute and diligent mortification, it will progress according to the process described in James 1:14, 15.

Those who seek wisdom must make it familiar to their minds through constant and open interaction with it. They must regard wisdom as a sister and understanding as a close relative (Prov. 7:4). In doing so, wisdom will exert its influence on their minds. However,

if we allow sin, through any of the mentioned advantages, to become familiar to our minds—if we do not immediately say to it, "Depart from me," at the first sign of its attempt to gain power over us—it will vigorously contend for the throne.

2. Carefully examine and evaluate whether the things you may do or approve of in yourselves contribute to the power of sin and aid its rule over you. David prescribes this approach in Psalm 19:12, 13. "Hidden sins," those that may not be recognized as sins by ourselves, can pave the way for "presumptuous" sins. Pride may appear to be nothing more than a mindset associated with our wealth and status, or our abilities and talents. Sensuality may seem to be a lawful indulgence in the pleasures of life. Anger and irritability may be viewed as a just response to the perceived lack of respect we believe we deserve. Covetousness may be seen as a necessary concern for ourselves and our families. If the seeds of sin are covered by such justifications, they will eventually sprout and yield bitter fruits in the thoughts and actions of individuals. Moreover, all apostasy, whether in religion or morality, begins with such justifications. People argue that they can engage in certain actions lawfully, until they openly engage in unlawful deeds.
3. Keep your hearts always tender under the word. This is the true and only state of inconsistency with and opposition to the rule of sin. The loss of this tenderness or a decline in it is what has allowed sin to flood in among us. When this disposition is present, a conscientious fear of sinning will always prevail in the soul. When it is lost, people will boldly engage in all sorts of foolishness. To preserve this disposition, the following is required: (1) Cast out all corrupt habits of mind that are contrary to it (James 1:21). (2) Maintain an experiential awareness of its power and effectiveness on our souls (1 Pet. 2:1–3). (3) Abandon all prejudices against those who dispense the word (Gal. 4:16). (4) Keep the heart constantly humble, as it is in this disposition alone that it is teachable (Ps. 25:9); everything in preaching the

word opposes and displeases the minds of proud individuals. (5) Pray for a blessing on the ministry, as it is the best preparation for receiving benefit from it.

4. Detest the peace of mind that coexists with any known sin. People may occasionally fall into known sins, but if, while in that state, they reject all inward peace except that which arises from fervent and genuine desires for deliverance from those sins and repentance for them, they may be protected from the dominion of sin. However, if individuals can maintain a sense of peace in their minds while living in any known sin based on hopes, presumptions, or resolutions, they are close to the territory where sin reigns.
5. Continuously turn to the Lord Christ in all the aspects of his mediation to overcome sin, especially when it seeks to gain dominion over you (Heb. 4:16). This is the essence and core of all directions in this matter, which do not need further elaboration here, as they have been frequently addressed.

Lastly, remember that recognizing and appreciating our deliverance from the rule of sin is the most powerful motivation for living a life of obedience and holiness. The apostle Paul presents and emphasises this point in Romans 6.

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