

SIN'S TRUE CHARACTER

"Exceedingly sinful."

Romans 7:13

INTO the connection of these words our time, which is very short this evening, will not permit us to enter. It was something like this—Paul was showing that the Law could not make a man holy and he observes that he had, himself, found that when the Law came into his heart, it excited in him a desire to act contrary to its precepts. There were some actions which he would not have thought of performing until he found that they were forbidden—and then immediately he felt a desire to do them at once! To this a grave objection was raised. This were to make the Law aid and abet sin! Not so, replies the Apostle—it was not the Law that made him sin, for the Law is good—but it was the sinfulness of his heart that could thus turn that which was good into an occasion of evil. He further showed that this was the very design of the Law as given by Moses—to make clear how sinful sin was. The purpose for which it was sent was not to make men holy, but to make men see how unholy they were! It was not the cure of the disease, much less the creator of it, but it was the revealer of the disease that lurked in the constitution of man!

Now, what I want to call your attention to is that Paul here calls sin, "exceedingly sinful." Why didn't he say, "exceedingly black," or, "exceedingly horrible," or, "exceedingly deadly"? Why, because there is nothing in the world so bad as sin! When he wanted to use the very worst word he could find to call sin by, he called it by its own name and reiterated it—"sin," "exceedingly sinful." For if you call sin, black, there is no moral excellency or deformity in black or white. Black is as good as white and white is as good as black. And so you have expressed nothing. If you call sin, "deadly," yet death in itself has no evil in it compared with sin. For plants to die is not a dreadful thing, rather it may be a part of the organization of Nature that successive generations of vegetables should spring up and, in due time, should form the root-soil for other generations to follow. If you call it, "deadly," you have said but little. If you need a word, you must come home for it. Sin must be named after itself! If you need to describe it, you must call it, "sinful." Sin is "exceedingly sinful"

The text may suggest a broad argument and a special application. Our endeavor shall be to show you, then, that sin is in itself, "exceedingly sinful" and yet there are some signs of which it may be said with peculiar emphasis that they are "exceedingly sinful."

1. SIN IS IN ITSELF "EXCEEDINGLY SINFUL."

It is rebellion against God and "exceedingly sinful" because it interferes with the just rights and prerogatives of God. That great invisible Spirit whom we cannot see, whom even our own thoughts cannot encompass, made the heavens and the earth and all things that are—and it was His right that what He made should serve His purpose and give Him Glory. The stars do this. They jar not in their everlasting orbits. The world of matter does this. He speaks and it is done. The sun, the moon, the constellations of Heaven, yes, and the terrestrial forces, even the billows of the sea and the ravings of the wind—all these obey His behests. It is right they should. Shall not the potter make of the clay what he wills? Shall not he who uses the axe, fashion what he chooses for his own pleasure? You and I, favored in our creation—not inanimate clods, not worms having only sensations, without intellect—we who have been favored with thought, emotion, affection, with a high spiritual existence. Yes, with an immortal existence—we were especially bound to be obedient to Him that made us. Ask your conscience, do you not feel that God has rights towards you? Ask yourselves, if you make or preserve anything, call it your own and it is your own—do you not expect it to answer your end, or do your bidding? Why have you forgotten Him that made you? Why have you spent your powers and faculties for anything but His Glory? Ah, it is "exceedingly sinful" when the crown rights of Him upon whose will we exist are ignored, or impudently contravened! Yet according to the part we take in sin, we trample on His edicts and set at nothing His jurisdiction.

How exceedingly sinful is this rebellion against such a God! Muse on His attributes and consider His majesty, for He is not merely infinitely powerful, wise, all-sufficient and glorious, but He is supremely good! He is good to the fullest extent of goodness! He is a God whose Character is matchless! Not like Jupiter, to whom the heathens ascribed every vice, nor like Juggernaut, the bloody god of Hindustan! He is a pure and holy God whom we worship! Jehovah, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises. Now, it is conceivable that if God were some vast Being who had a natural right to our service, yet if His Character—(forgive, great God, the supposition!)—were severe without pity, rigorous without clemency, harsh without forbearance, there were some pretense why daring spirits should lead a rebellion against the oppressor. But our Father, God, the great Shepherd-King—who shall frame an excuse when we, for a single moment, revolt against Him, or lift a finger against His will? It were Heaven to serve Him! The angels will tell you this! It were bliss to do His will. The perfect spirits all proclaim this! Ah, sin is base, indeed, a rebellion against a monarch's gentlest sway, an insurrection against parent's most tender rights, a revolt against peerless benignity! Oh, shame on you, Sin! You are, indeed, "exceedingly sinful!"

What an aggravation of the sinfulness of sin is this—that it rebels against laws of which all are just! The table of the Ten Commandments contains not one commandment but what is founded upon the essential principles of right. If a law were proclaimed in England which violated the principles of equity, to break that law might be the highest duty! But when the laws of our country are just and right, it is not only an offense against the natural power of the State, but an offense against the understanding and the conscience of right when a man breaks such a statute! God's Laws have not only the Divine Authority, but they have also this recommendation, that they are all harmonious and adapted to the relations of our being. Was it not the State of Massachusetts that at first passed a resolution when they were about to make statutes, that they would be governed by the Laws of God until they found time to make better? Will they ever find opportunity to make better? Could any man strike out a clause and improve it? Could he add a sentence and mend it? No! The Law is holy, just and good! And, rightly understood, it naturally forbids evil and simply commends good—only good! Oh, Sin! You are sinful, indeed, that you should dare to revolt against that which in itself is right and just, virtuous and true!

Moreover, Brothers and Sisters—this may touch some of us to the quick—sin is "exceedingly sinful" because it is antagonistic to our own interest, a mutiny against our own welfare. Selfishness is a strong principle in us all. That which is good for us and personally advantageous should be regarded with tenacious attachment and were we wise, would be pursued with strong enthusiasm. Now, whenever God forbids a thing, we may rest assured it would be dangerous. God's commands are just like those notices, more suggestive of kindly warning than of stern prohibition, which we see upon the park waters in the days of frost, "Dangerous." God simply tells us that such-and-such a thing is fraught with peril, or it leads to destruction. What He permits or commends will be, if not immediately, yet in the long run, in the highest degree promotive of our best interests. God does but, as it were, consult our well-being and prosperity when He gives us Laws. Doesn't it seem a vicious thing, indeed, that a man will recklessly dare to slight himself in order to sin against his Maker? God says to you, "Do not thrust your arm in the fire." Nature says, "Do not do it." And yet when God says, "Do not commit fornication or adultery, do not lie, do not steal"—when He says, "Draw near to Me in prayer, love Me," these commands are in themselves as naturally wise as the injunction not to thrust your hand into the fire, or the counsel to eat and drink wholesome food when hunger and thirst require! Yet we spurn these commands. Like a child that is bidden not to drink of the poison cup, but will drink of it. Like a child that is refused the sharp tool lest he cut himself. And he will cut himself—not believing in his father's wisdom, but credulous of his own judgment because the cup looks sweet, it must be harmless—because the edged tool glitters, it must be a proper plaything! Know it, man, you do, when you sin, cut and tear yourself! Who but a madman would do that? If you neglect to do the right, you neglect to feed yourself with that which nourishes, and to clothe yourself with that which is comely! Who but an idiot would lend himself to such folly? Yet sin has made us such idiots and such madmen and, therefore, it is "exceedingly sinful!"

Sin, if we rightly consider it,

is an upsetting of the entire order of the universe. In your family you feel, as a father,

that nothing can go smoothly unless there is a head whose discretion shall regulate all the members. If your child should say, "Father, I am determined in this family that, whatever your will is, I will resist it, and whatever my will is, I will abide by it and always carry it out if I can," what a family that would be! How disorganized! What a household! Might we not say, what a Hell upon earth? There sails tomorrow a ship from the Thames under command of a captain, wise and good, who understands the seas. But he has scarcely reached the Nore before a sailor tells him that he shall not obey, that he does not intend either to reef a sail, or to do anything aboard the vessel that he is bid to do. "Put the fellow in irons!" Everybody says it is right. Or a passenger coming up from the saloon informs the captain that he does not approve of his authority and, throughout the whole of the voyage he intends to thwart him all he can. If there is a boat within hail, put that fellow on shore and do not be concerned if he lands in a muddy place! Get rid of him somehow! Everybody feels it must be. You might as well scuttle the ship and cut holes in her sides, as tolerate for a moment that the rightful central authority should be unshipped, or that every man should determine to do what is right in his own eyes! The happiness of everybody on board that vessel will depend upon order being kept. If one man is to do this, and another to do that, you might almost as well be shut up in a cage with lions, as be in such a vessel! Now, look at this world—it is but a floating ship on a larger scale—and who ought to be Captain here but He who made it, for His mighty hand alone can grasp that awful tiller! Who can steer this gigantic vessel over the waves of Providence—who but He? And who am I, and, my Hearer, who are you that you should say, "I will ignore the Lord High Admiral! I will forget the Captain! I will rebel against Him"? Why, if all do as you do, what is to become of the whole vessel, what of the whole world? When disorder is introduced, confusion, sorrow, dismay and disaster will be sure to follow!

If you want proof that sin is exceedingly sinful, see what it has done already in the world. Lift up your eyes and survey that lovely garden where every beautiful creature, both of bird and beast, and every flower of unwithering loveliness, and everything that can delight the senses are to be discovered in the sunlight. There are two perfect beings, a man and a woman, the parents of our race—then enters sin. The flowers are forthwith withered, a new wildness has seized upon the beasts, the ground brings forth her thorns and thistles and the man is driven out in the sweat of his face to earn his daily bread! Who withered Eden? You did, accursed Sin! You did it all! See there—but can you bear the sight?—clouds of smoke, rolling pillars of dust, the sound of clarion, the yet more dreadful boom of cannon! Listen to the shrieks and cries! They flee—they are pursued—the battle is over! Walk over the field. There lies a mangled mass of human bodies cut and torn, riddled with shot, skulls splintered with rifle balls, pools of blood! Oh, there is such a scene as only a fiend could gaze on with complacency! Who did all this? From where come wars and rumors but from your own lusts and from your sins? Oh, Sin, you are a carnage-maker! Sin, you cry, "Havoc," and immediately let loose the dogs of war! There had been none of this had you not come. But the spectacle multiplies in our vision. All over the world you have but to wander and you see little hillocks more or less thickly scattered everywhere. And if you analyze the dust that blows along the street and interrogate every grain, it will probably tell you it was once a part of the body of some man who in generations past died painfully and rotted back to mother earth! Oh, the world is scarred with death! What is this earth today, but a great Aceldema—a field of blood, a vast cemetery? Death has worm-eaten the world through and through. All its surface bears relics of the human race. Who slew all these? Who slew all these? Who, indeed, but Sin? Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death!

Should your venturous wings of imagination dare the flight to a land that is full of confusion and without any order, I scarcely dare ask you to follow me, nor if you could follow, would I venture to lead the way across the stream that parts the land of mortals from the regions of the immortals! Across that valley of the shadow of death, you might look on the gloomy region of wretched souls where their worm dies not, and their fire is not quenched—if you dared to peer into that dismal pit that has no bottom, that place wherein spirits condemned of God are put away forever and forever from all light of hope and restoration! But you shudder even as I shrink back in very horror from that place where God's wrath burns like a furnace—and the proud that do wickedness are as stubble—and the nations that forget God are forever consumed! Who lit that fire? Where is he that kindled it? It is Sin! Sin did it all. No man is there except for sin. No man that ever breathed was ever cast away except as punishment most just, for sin most grave! Sin is, indeed, "exceedingly sinful." Not even now have I reached the climax, nor must I venture the description. The worst phase is neither death nor Hell. But on Calvary's tree the Lord, Himself, who loved us and came to

earth to bless us, proved the sinfulness of sin when Sin nailed Him to the tree and pierced His side. And sinners, rejecting Him with many a jibe and sneer, exclaimed, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." In the agonies of Jesus, in the shame and spitting, in the woes and anguish that He endured, we read the sinfulness of sin, written as in capital letters, that even the half-blind might see! Oh, Sin, murderer of Christ, you are "exceedingly sinful!" My time has failed me, or I had meant to have enlarged upon—

II. SOME PARTICULAR SINS THAT ARE EXCEEDINGLY SINFUL ABOVE ANY ORDINARY TRANSGRESSION.

I mean sins against the Gospel. I will just give the catalog, that everyone here who is honest with himself may search and see whether he is guilty. To reject loving messengers sent from God, godly parents, earnest pastors, affectionate teachers—to reject the kind message that they bring and the yearning anxiety that they feel for us is "exceedingly sinful!" To resist the loving Gospel which talks to us only of mercy, pardon, adoption and redemption from Hell and exaltation to Heaven—to reject that is "exceedingly sinful!" To resist the dying Savior whose only motive in coming to earth must have been love, whose wounds are mouths that preach His love, whose death is the solemn proof of love—to despise, to neglect, to ignore Him—this is "exceedingly sinful!" To sin against Him after having made a profession of loving Him. To come to His Table and then go and sin with the ungodly. To be baptized in His name and yet to be unjust, dishonest, unrighteous—this is "exceedingly sinful!" To be numbered with His Church and yet to be of the world. To profess to be His followers and yet to be His enemies—this is "exceedingly sinful!" To sin against light and knowledge. To sin knowing better. To sin against conscience. To push conscience to one side. To do violence to one's better self. To sin against the Holy Spirit, against His admonitions, warnings, promptings, invitations—this is "exceedingly sinful!" To go on sinning after you have smarted. To continue to sin when sin costs you many pains and difficulties. To push onward to Hell, as if riding a steeple-chase, over post, and bar, and gate, and hedge, and ditch—this is "exceedingly sinful!"

Some of you here, tonight, are in this, exceedingly sinful. Oh, How I have pleaded with some of you! I have cried to you to come to Jesus. I have warned some of you again and again. If I am called to make answer at the judgment bar, I must say, "Amen," to the condemnation of many of you! I shall be obliged to confess that you knew better—that some of you drink when you know how wrong it is! That some of you can swear. That some of you are thieves. Some of you sin with a high hand and yet I scarcely know why you come to this Tabernacle again and again and again! You love to hear my voice and yet you cling to your sins—your sins that will surely damn you! Let me be clear of your blood! I will not mince matters with you or talk with you as if you are all saints when I know you are not—and as if you are all going to Heaven, when, alas, many of you are still swiftly spreading your wings to fly downward to Hell! Oh, may God arrest you, or otherwise the brightness and the light in which you sin will make your sin the darker and the plainer—and the warnings you hear will make your condemnation the more overwhelming when it comes!

But why must it come? Why will you die? Why are you set on sin? Why do you love mischief? I see often in the gaslight of my study poor gnats come flying in if the window is but ajar—and how they dash against the flame—and down they fall, but have scarcely recovered strength before up they fly again unto their destruction! Are you such? Are you mere insects, without wit, without knowledge? Oh, you are not, or else were you excusable! Come to my Savior, poor Souls! He is still willing to receive you! A prayer will do it. Breathe the prayer! A broken heart He will not despise. A look at Him will do it. A faint glance at Jesus pleading for you will do it! Holy Spirit, make them give that glance! Oh, by Your Irresistible Power, compel them to look and live! Oh, it shall be! God be thanked, it shall be! You shall look tonight and God shall have the Glory! And though you are "exceedingly sinful," yet shall you, through the precious blood, be fully forgiven—and I hope exceedingly grateful for the great forgiveness which Jesus brings! The Lord bless you, for His name's sake. Amen.

[The original title of this sermon is "SIN'S TRUE QUALITY."]