

THE PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.

VOL. III. PITTSBURGH, OCTOBER, 1834. No. 5.

SERMON XXXIII.

BY JOHN MATTHEWS, D. D.

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT SOUTH
HANOVER, INDIANA.

THE DECEITFUL AND WICKED HEART.

JEREMIAH 17:9.—*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

WHEN the sun set last evening, and darkness covered the earth, you were perfectly assured that he would rise again;—you felt an entire confidence that any purpose depending for its accomplishment on this event could not fail. Had your prosperity or adversity, your sickness or health, your life or death, been inseparably connected with the rising of the sun, you would have looked for it with the same certainty with which you did for the dispersion of darkness. This confidence is the result of truth understood and believed by the mind. This truth is derived from the regularity with which God, according to his purpose, directs all the movements of the heavens and the earth; and in connection with this, from the plain declarations of his word, that day and night, seed time and harvest, summer and winter, shall succeed each other till the end of time. The whole word of God is truth; because it is given by divine inspiration. The passage just repeated, and which we consider the text for the present, is true—emphatically true. Last evening, the rising of the sun this morning, was a future, but confidently expected event. That which was then expected, has been realized: the sun has risen;—for he is now shedding his beams on the earth. We are as certain of this fact, as we are of our own existence; for we are at this moment surrounded by his light. But it really is not, cannot be more certain that the sun has risen, and is now shining, than it is that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. These are the words of the prophet, moved by the Holy Spirit,—*the Spirit of truth*.

This passage implies that other things are deceitful. Men often deceive each other. The man who has any thing to sell, will praise the article beyond its real merit, that he may obtain for it more than its value. On the other hand, *the buyer saith, it is naught, it is naught;*

but when he is gone his way, having defrauded his neighbor, *then he boasteth*. Promises are made, and thus expectations are excited, without the honest intention, and without the probable means of performing them. Such instances of wilful deception are too common. Hence that suspicion that is cherished, that watchfulness that is employed by those who are much acquainted with the world. Hence those securities that are required in all the important transactions of life. Hence, too, the necessity for laws to defend the character, and protect the rights, of one part of the community from the fraudulent designs and the wicked impositions of the other. There are some who *lie in wait to deceive*; who mark out from the multitude the weak, the simple, the unsuspecting, the ignorant, and make these the victims of their deceitful policy. There are not a few *deceitful workers*, who will pursue, for weeks and months, that course of conduct, which is calculated and intended to remove the suspicions and excite the confidence of those whom it is their diabolical purpose to deceive and to ruin. There is many a female, once with the fair prospect of comfort and respectability before her, now, in the deepest disgrace, excluded from decent society, who can witness to the success of such deceitful workers, such cold-blooded, detestable seducers. Hypocrites are deceivers by profession. All their good works, all their acts of devotion, are intended to deceive others. They wish you to believe that they are pious, while conscious that they are not, that they may the more easily defraud the fatherless, and rob the house of the widow. Indeed, to the most sincere and upright man, it is deeply humiliating to know that he belongs to a race, with whom he can have no intercourse without unceasing vigilance and caution to secure himself from their fraudulent designs.

The world, in its three great divisions, its pleasures, its riches and its honors, is deceitful; not from design, but because it is perverted to purposes which it was not intended to answer. Those who have been most successful in the pursuit of worldly pleasures, if they speak the language of experience, will pronounce them *vanity of vanities; all is vanity*. Those who have hoarded up the riches of earth, have hoarded up corroding cares, anxieties and fears in the same proportion. They will experience the *deceitfulness* of riches; the pleasure was in the ardent pursuit, not in the possession. When a man is raised to honor by the suffrages of a free and grateful people, as the reward of merit, of a life of active beneficence, such honor is *better than precious ointment*. This man will submit to the cares, and discharge the duties of the office which he fills, not for the sake of the honor connected with it, but for the sake of doing good, of being more extensively useful. But when this office is sought and obtained by the arts of duplicity, with strife and contention, he will find himself deceived; his happiness will be imaginary, not real.

But deceitful as men are to each other; deceitful as the world is to those who give it their chief attention; and deceitful as many other

things are; the heart is deceitful *above all things*. Some men, from education or even from selfishness, are honest in their dealings; but the deceitfulness of the heart is universal, having no limits but those of the human family. Every sinful heart is *full of deceit*, and every heart is sinful. Men who use deceit with their tongues, for the want of opportunity, are not always practising their arts of duplicity; but the wicked heart is, at all times, under all circumstances, *working a deceitful work*. Men deceive each other for the sake of some temporal object, some momentary pleasure; but the deceptions of the heart involve the things that are spiritual, the deep interests of the soul, the joys and sorrows of eternity. Man, by his *cunning craftiness*, aims to deceive his fellow man; but the heart deceives itself: the sinner is, at once, both the deceiver and deceived, both inflicting and suffering the injury. Such deceitfulness, so universal in extent, so constant in operation, relating to things of such transcendent importance, leading its author and its victim to fearful and endless perdition, can be found in nothing but the wicked heart of man: here it is found in its supreme, unparalleled degree. This heart is not only deceitful, but deceitful *above all things*. Let us, then, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, inquire,

I. *What is the cause of this deceitfulness; and, that the subject may be useful to us, may come home to our consciences,*

II. *Refer to some examples, from which its nature and reality may be clearly seen in its effects.*

I. What, then, is the cause of this deceitfulness? Why is this proneness to deceive as characteristic of the human heart, as features are of the countenance? When you see the river, flowing with a widening and deepening current, you are sure that there are fountains which furnish this constant supply of water; and that you could trace the stream up to the fountains from which it flows. Can this flood of iniquity, this torrent of deceitfulness, which is whelming our guilty world in misery, and in its results, reaching eternity, be traced back to its fountain, to a cause that will account for such singular and tremendous effects? It can. If we mistake not, the *wickedness* of the heart is this cause. The heart is deceitful, because it is wicked; deceitful *above all things*, because *desperately wicked*. So far as the heart is made *good*, changed by the Spirit and truth of God, so far is it an *honest heart*, in which there is *no guile*. The holy angels, because they are holy, deceive not. Satan, because he is that *wicked one*, *deceiveth the whole world*. They are *wicked men* who are *seducers, waxing worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*. In a heart, perfectly pure, motives to deception cannot be found, or even supposed; and without motives, deception could not be practised; for it implies design; and the accomplishment of some purpose, according to this design. Thus, although the bible was not intended to teach philosophy in systematic order, yet, as it regards mind and its operations, and as far as our spiritual interests are involved, it gives us the true

philosophy: effects are ascribed to their true and adequate causes; and causes are seen producing their appropriate effects.

The heart is **DESPERATELY** wicked. Of this passage, critics and commentators have given different expositions. Some tell us that it means, *infirm, weak, frail*. This interpretation does not correspond with the whole tenor of scripture; with accurate observation and experience on this subject. The deceitfulness practised by the heart is not, as it ought to be, if such was its cause, *infirm, weak, and frail*; it is active, powerful, energetic; producing the most wonderful effects of endless perdition. The guilt of man does not admit, for its atonement, of an infirm, weak and frail Mediator; but one possessing and exercising all the attributes of Deity, is indispensably necessary for this purpose. The great power and wisdom of angels would fail in this enterprise of mercy. The atonement required, was not, in its merit, to be in proportion to the results of mere infirmity, weakness and frailty; but of the most deliberate, persevering and active rebellion against God. When the heart is changed and made new, it is not mere infirmity, weakness and frailty that are strengthened, but enmity that is slain, affections and lusts that are crucified, requiring divine energy to accomplish the work.

Others tell us that the word should be rendered *incurable*: the heart is deceitful above all things and *incurable*. To this we have no objections; for its meaning is the same with the current version. That case of disease which is incurable is, for this reason alone, desperate. If any possible remedy could be applied with success, the case would not be desperate; for there would still be hope respecting it. Now this is literally true of the heart; it is *incurably*, and therefore *desperately wicked*. This wickedness admits of no possible remedy, and is therefore hopeless and desperate. When the diseased man is restored to health, it is not the disease, but the man that is cured; and by the destruction of the disease, or by driving it from the system. So the mind, the immortal soul, may be restored to spiritual life and health, only, however, by the destruction of sin, or by driving it from the moral system. Sinfulness is not essential to rational minds, to intelligent beings: the minds of Adam and Eve were, for a time without sin; the mind, that essential part of the human nature of Christ, was perfectly pure; myriads of angels are holy. The mind may, therefore, be delivered from sin, and restored to perfect holiness; only, however, by the utter destruction of sin. The means of salvation, are therefore, the means of this destruction. The Son of man came not to destroy *men's lives, but the works of the devil*.

That this truth may be more clearly understood, let us adopt the rhetoric of Paul, who views sin clothed with all the attributes of distinct personality, and agency, as exercising intelligence, practising deceit, selecting fit occasions for accomplishing intended purposes, reigning, having dominion, dwelling and working in the heart, waging war, slaying its victims, &c. This is the person, according to the vivid

conceptions, the glowing rhetoric of Paul, who is the deliberate, the determined, the active enemy of God; who will neither ask nor receive mercy; who is determined neither to cease from his efforts, nor give up his subjects, but with his life, his very existence; whose struggles and warfare are the struggles and warfare of desperation. No degree of kindness can soften or change him into a friend; his fixed determination is, to conquer or die. Hence, if his subjects are delivered from his dominion, *this body of sin must be destroyed*; *this old man must be crucified*, as the only possible means of deliverance.

When the sinner approves of sin, embraces it in his heart, yields himself to its control, refuses to forsake it, or even be sorry for it—and this is strictly true of all men by nature—he is so completely identified with it, that whatever is said of sin when personified, is strictly true, and may be said of the sinner himself. Every impenitent sinner on earth embraces sin with a grasp so powerful, that nothing but Omnipotence can relax it. In the deliberations and purposes of his own mind, he is resolved, with adamantine firmness, never to forsake sin, never to exist without it, never to submit to God, never to have Christ the Savior to reign over him. He has taken the attitude of wilful rebellion against God, and is fully determined that this attitude shall be eternal. He is determined never to repent of sin, never to ask for mercy, never to be the friend of God. What are these but the workings and promptings of desperation? His heart, while he is thus identified with sin, or while he remains impenitent, is *incurably*, and therefore *desperately wicked*. The most fearful enemy is he who fights from desperation.

The history of Greece furnishes a striking illustration of this fact. The Persian monarch, with an army more numerous, it is supposed, than ever was marshalled before or since his time, had invaded the country for the purpose of conquest. Leonidas, the Lacedemonian chief, with three hundred Spartans, and a few others, determined to sacrifice themselves on the altar of Grecian liberty, to the safety and glory of their country. Having not the slightest hope of vanquishing the millions of the Persian army, and determined not to survive the crisis, they fought from absolute desperation. Their strength was the strength of despair; their courage was the courage of despair. The conflict was dreadful. The number slain, except where miraculous power interposed, was probably never so great, when compared with the small number of assailants.

Such is every impenitent sinner on earth. His course of persevering rebellion can flow from nothing but desperate wickedness. In scriptures he is considered and called an *enemy to God*. He is a friend of the world; and *whosoever will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God*. His opposition is not merely in theory or speculation, but in principle and in practice. He is *an enemy in his mind*,—his thoughts and reasonings and purposes are all inimical—and exert a powerful influence on his life; he is therefore an enemy by

wicked works. *He striveth with his Maker; he resists the Spirit and truth of God; he despises and rejects the only Savior*, and is an enemy to the cross of Christ. Thus he is, emphatically, and by profession, a *fighter, a warrior against God*. (Acts 5:39.) In this conflict with his Maker, the language of his heart is, *no God, no God!* Following the desires and purposes of his heart, he chooses and determines to live *without God in the world*.

Now, when it is remembered that the *wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*, against the very course which this impenitent sinner, this desperate rebel, is habitually pursuing; that this wrath *abideth on him* every moment; that it is increasing with every sin he commits; that it is approaching, with inconceivable rapidity, nearer and nearer, with every hour that passes; that he *knows not the day nor the hour*, when this tremendous torrent of *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*, shall burst upon him; the desperate wickedness of his heart must appear in the most striking light. Nothing but desperation can break through the restraints thrown around him to arrest his progress to perdition. His sentence of condemnation is written in capitals, large enough to fill the wide expanse of heaven over his head; but instead of trembling, he provokes the Judge with still more daring crimes. Conscience often reproves and condemns him, often remonstrates and pleads with him; but he does violence to this internal and friendly monitor, hardens his heart, and plunges deeper in sin. God, his offended Sovereign, with the voice of mercy, with infinite kindness, calls to him to turn and live; assures him that after all his years of rebellion, after all his aggravated offences, if he will repent and believe in a crucified Savior, he shall be saved; his sins, through the blood of the atonement, shall be freely pardoned; but he *makes light* of these invitations and promises, *refuseth to be healed*, smites with malicious scorn, the cup of salvation from his lips, tramples the blood of atonement under his feet, *does despite unto the Spirit of grace*, and thus raises the standard of defiance against Omnipotence. With much longsuffering the Lord waits with him, gives him time for reflection, time for repentance, and with increasing earnestness repeats the invitations of mercy; but he despises the heavenly birthright, and *turns the grace of God* into more insolent rebellion.

Who are the parties engaged in this conflict? The sinner is a creature *but of yesterday*, a poor *worm* of the earth, weak and frail, dependent on God for his existence, for his breath, and for the power which is exerted in sin. It is God against whom he fights; the self-existent, eternal, omnipotent Jehovah, with whom this rebel-worm is contending; that God, who, with a single touch, could crush him in death. It is weakness contending with infinite power; it is folly disputing with divine wisdom; it is insignificance arrayed against the majesty of heaven; it is the wickedness, the malice, the enmity of demons, waging war with the holiness, the purity of the universe.

The supposition that the sinner can succeed in this unequal combat, would be the most inexcusable blasphemy. Sooner, ten thousand times sooner, might Leonidas, with his chosen band, have been expected to vanquish the Persian host: sooner, by millions, might the meanest worm that crawls on the earth, be expected to heave the mountain from its deep foundation into the midst of the ocean. If the sinner will identify himself with sin; if he refuses to repent and forsake it, his utter and eternal destruction is inevitable. The character, the laws, the government of God—the interests of the universe require it. At the appointed time, when the measure of his iniquity is filled up, when the forbearance of God is exhausted, when it will make the best impression on the universe, then *sudden destruction cometh upon him, and he shall not escape; then shall he be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* The case of Leonidas does not more clearly exhibit the reality and nature of desperation, than does the case of the hardened, impenitent, incorrigible sinner. By resolving to continue in sin, as he frequently and deliberately does, he cuts off the possibility of escape, and seals the certainty of his own perdition.

Once more,—and this wickedness will fully account for the deceitfulness of the human heart. The sinner is ignorant, in a great measure, of the degree and tendency of his wickedness. He is not aware of the vileness and malignity of his own heart. He will readily confess, indeed, that he is a sinner; but it will be with the same indifference with which he would point out his right hand from his left; proving, most conclusively, that he does not understand the fearful import of the confession which he makes. This is implied in the latter clause of the text: *Who can know it?* evidently implying that none but God can know it. Hence it follows; *I, the Lord, search the heart, and try the reins, &c.* There exists in active and constant operation in the sinner's heart, a principle of enmity against God; and yet he is not fully aware of either its existence or its influence. If an enemy lies in ambush against us, he is more dangerous than when meeting us in the open field. If we know the ambuscade, we shun it and are safe; if we know it not, we go forward and are ruined. The sinner's heart is *desperately wicked*, but he knows it not; therefore, it is *deceitful above all things.*

II. Let us now select a few instances illustrating this deceitfulness. Hazael, chief officer of the king of Syria, was sent to the prophet Elisha. During the interview, the prophet fixed his eyes steadfastly on him, and wept. Hazael, being ashamed, inquired, *why weepeth my lord?* The prophet replied; *Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel,* mentioning some of the most savage cruelties, as a part of this evil. Hazael replied: *But what! is thy servant a dog; that he should do this great thing?* He considers it impossible for him to be guilty of such atrocities, and therefore repels the intimation of the prophet with indignant feelings. Yet after a short time, and under different circumstances, he is guilty of those

very barbarities, which the prophet had foretold. He knew not, nor even suspected the wickedness of his own heart, and therefore it deceived him; and yet that wickedness was there, and wanted only a suitable occasion to break forth in all its appropriate acts of brutal violence. Here, then, is a striking instance of the deceitfulness arising from the unknown, the unsuspected wickedness of the heart.

Another, not less striking, is furnished by the young man, the young ruler, who came to the Savior, with the respectful salutation, *Good Master*; with the pious inquiry, *what good thing shall I do*; and for the best of all objects, *that I may inherit eternal life*; at the same time *kneeling* in proof that he was humble, sincere and willing to be taught. While other young men of wealth are neglecting, perhaps persecuting the Savior, this young ruler *runs to him*, lest the present opportunity, if neglected, might never return. While others are spending their time in idleness, or in works of darkness; he is engaged in *doing good*. While others are stained with every species of crime against their fellow-men, he is free from every stain of this kind. As it regards relative duties, he is perfectly moral; for the Savior does not question, but seems to admit the truth of his declaration on this subject. In this young man there is much that is naturally amiable, for the Savior *beholding him*, that is, viewing with attention, not his features or external appearance, but his disposition, his character, *loved him*. Doubtless this young man expected to receive the instruction for which he asked with approbation and delight; but how great was his disappointment! He is ignorant of his own heart. He has not the slightest suspicion that there is in it *such a root of bitterness*, such, till now, concealed opposition to this Teacher. Had he been asked, when presenting his request, do you not dislike and reject this Teacher? he would, no doubt, have indignantly replied, am I a Samaritan, or a devil, that I should do this? Yet he cannot conceal from himself the fact that he rejects this Teacher. As a man, he may respect and receive him; but as a religious instructor, he deliberately rejects him. He is determined to give up the hopes of eternal life, rather than part with his beloved wealth. The voice of the Savior has turned the sorrow of many a heart into joy; in this case, it turns anticipated joy into sadness, sorrow and grief. The viper in his bosom is not perceived, till warmed and irritated by this crisis, it strikes its deadly fangs against this *Good Teacher*.

Who does not recollect the case of Peter, as an afflictive and melancholy instance of the deceitfulness of the heart? We hear his public and solemn professions of attachment to his Master; *Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I not deny thee*. He considers it possible that others, even the other apostles, might forsake their Lord, yet if they should, he is confident that he will not. The Savior kindly and plainly warns him of the event about to take place; but he seems to suspect, not his own heart, but the truth of the prediction, and becomes more confident; *Though I die with thee, yet will I not deny thee*. In making these professions, there is reason to

believe that he was sincere; but there was still greater reason to believe that he was ignorant, totally ignorant of his own heart. But let us follow them to the palace of the high priest, where his Master, as a culprit, is on trial for his life. A damsel says to him; *Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.* The crisis has now come. What will Peter now say? Has he forgotten the professions, made but a few hours ago? No, he has not forgotten them; they are in his thoughts; for his Master, to whom they related, is, at this moment, within his view. Silence, or even delay, is inadmissible; he must speak; and he does speak; *But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.* After going out on the porch, another maid said to them that stood by, *This is one of them.* He has had a few minutes, at least, for reflection, to recover from the perturbation of the first unexpected attack, to hear the voice of conscience, to compare his late professions with his still more recent denial, but having taken the first step, he is prepared for the second. *And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.* Returning from the porch, and mingling again with those in the palace, several persons affirmed that he *was one of them*, for his speech proved him to be a Galilean. One, in particular, alleging that he was one of them, for he himself had seen him in the garden. Here is proof in support of the charge alleged; the dialect which he used, and the testimony of an eye-witness, who had seen him, in the garden, draw the sword in defence of his Master. What an earthquake of feeling must have agitated his bosom at this moment! He has had an hour for reflection. He must either confess the wickedness and turpitude of his former denials, or add to them another, still more wicked and base. *But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man of whom you speak!* Is this the man who, but a few hours ago, professed an attachment greater than that of all others, and declared that he would die sooner than deny his Master? It is the same man! To have denied once, and in simple language, would have been wicked; but to deny twice, and thrice, with an oath, and then cursing and swearing, is desperately wicked! These denials come from the heart; for there was time, between each of them, for reflection; and not to reflect was impossible. During two of these denials, his Master was in his view; and during the last, it is highly probable his eye was fixed on him. That wickedness, developed in these denials, was in the heart, when the warm professions of attachment were made; but he does not know, nor even suspect that it was there. When told by his Master that he would, *that very night*, deny him, most evidently he does not believe it. Had he known or even suspected this, he would not have been so greatly deceived; he would not have fallen from the extreme of confident profession, to the guilt and turpitude of these repeated denials. Here, then, is one of the most instructive, impressive and afflictive instances, and also one of the clearest proofs of the wickedness and deceitfulness of the heart, that can be found in the annals of human nature.

Let us now select a few cases, illustrating the same subject, from ourselves, coming under our own observation and making a part of our own experience.

Multitudes are deceiving themselves respecting the character and state of their hearts, by giving undue importance to mere natural goodness, and the good opinion of others founded on this goodness. There is nothing harsh, severe, or repulsive in their temper; kind, affectionate and cheerful in all the relations of life; courteous and obliging to others; moral in their deportment, respectful to religion, constantly attending public worship. And perhaps there is added to all this, the interest which youth, and wealth, and influence in society can impart. They are respected and esteemed by all, and sincerely loved by many. How easy is it, and how probable is it, that these will substitute this mere natural goodness, for that which is spiritual—the good opinion of men for the approbation of their Judge! How difficult and almost impossible is it for such to believe that, with an active and deep-rooted enmity, they hate God, and hate the Savior, and his salvation! Yet such is the fact, (John 15:23,24.) They do not profess to have been *born again*, to love God, or to repent of sin; they belong to the world, are the friends of the world; of course, they are the *enemies of God, the enemies of the cross of Christ*. Without *repentance toward God*, and *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*, they will soon be confirmed in this state; and, divested of all this natural goodness, will forever be *hateful and hating one another*. It is afflictive in the extreme, to think that those who are now so amiable, will, at some future period, fight and rage against God, with all the fury and malice of devils! The seeds of this wickedness are now in their hearts; but they know it not, they believe it not; and are, therefore, deceived to their own destruction.

The deceitfulness of the heart is manifest, again, in this: that sinners are often led, step after step, to a degree of shameless impiety, of daring wickedness, which they once supposed impossible that they would ever reach. But taking the first step, they are prepared for the second, and this leads to a third, until they *drink iniquity like water*. They first *walk in the counsel of the ungodly*, then *stand in the way of sinners*, then *sit in the seat of the scornful*. The first step, in this *broad way which leadeth to destruction*, is taken, without much apprehension of danger; because its connection with the last is not perceived, nor supposed to exist. Yet that connection exists, and strengthens as every successive step is taken. The youth, when the first profane word escapes from his lips, has no intention of becoming, by profession and by habit, a profane swearer, a bold blasphemer. But the first having been uttered, the second and third follow, until the habit is formed, and he belches forth, without either shame or remorse, the language of hell upon earth. The man who indulges in the temperate use of ardent spirits, has no intention of becoming a drunkard, and of dying, unobserved and unpitied, in the ditch. And yet most cases of habitual intoxication and premature death from the excessive use of this insidious poison, commenced with the temperate use of it.

But one of the most striking and deplorable instances of the deceitfulness of the heart is, the supposed intention to repent at some future

time. It is general, we may say universal, with those who profess to believe the Bible, to quiet their conscience by resolving to repent hereafter. We say this is a delusion. The determination to live in sin and enjoy its pleasures for the present, is so utterly inconsistent with the determination to repent in future, that they cannot exist in the mind at the same time. It is impossible that these two purposes can exist in the mind at the same time; for they are destructive of each other, as light is of darkness. Light necessarily excludes darkness, and darkness is the absence of light. It is impossible for this room to be full of light, and full of darkness, at the same time; because the one necessarily implies the absence of the other. So the determination to live in sin, and enjoy its pleasures for the present, is utterly inconsistent with a determination to repent of it in future. The motive which leads to the purpose of living in sin is, the pleasure expected from it. This implies that the knowledge of this pleasure must be in the mind when the purpose is formed; for if the mind is totally ignorant of this pleasure no motive can be derived from it; and without a motive, neither this nor any other purpose can be formed. So the purpose of future repentance implies that the knowledge of this repentance is in the mind, when the purpose is formed. Now, repentance is a sorrow, *a godly sorrow* for sin. The purpose of living in sin, and of future repentance are supposed to exist in the mind at the same moment; of course the knowledge of this pleasure and of this sorrow is in the mind at the same moment. This knowledge will, in some degree, be the anticipation, the foretaste, respectively of this pleasure and this sorrow; that is, the mind derives from the same source, and at the same moment, both pleasure and pain, both joy and sorrow. This is plainly impossible; and the mind cannot accomplish impossibilities. *Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? or a vine figs? So can no fountain yield both salt water and fresh.* It is admitted that both joy and sorrow may be in the mind at the same time, but then they are always derived from different sources, and never from the same. But in this case, they both spring from the same source, and are unmingled. The sinner, who postpones his reformation, does not intend that the pleasures of sin shall be mingled and embittered with anticipations of penitential sorrow. This sorrow, according to his supposed intention, is not to commence till some future, and generally distant period. When this sorrow commences, he does not intend that it shall be mingled and assuaged with the recollections of sinful pleasures. It is, therefore, not more absurd to suppose that a thing is, and is not, at the same moment, than to suppose these two purposes can exist in the mind, at the same time.

Besides; although the sinner may have felt sorrow, arising from different sources, yet he has never felt the sorrow of true repentance. This sorrow has something peculiar, by which it differs from all other sorrows. It is the *gift*, the free unmerited favor of the *exalted Prince and Savior*. It is an essential part of regeneration, which is

the work of the Holy Spirit. Now the sinner intends to accomplish his supposed repentance himself, by his own unaided power, as he intends to live in the practice of sin. The repentance which he intends to accomplish is to be his own work, not that of the Holy Spirit; to be the result of his own efforts, not the gift of the Savior. Hence, if he should accomplish all that he intends, it would not be evangelical repentance, which is the work of the Spirit and the gift of God. Repentance is produced, through the Spirit, by a deep sense of the vileness and hatefulness of sin, connected with an "apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ." Now altho' the sinner may have some idea of the guilt and danger of sin, he has not the faintest idea of its vileness and hatefulness, nor of the mercy of God. He is not vile in his own eyes; and if vileness was charged upon him by others, he would, no doubt, resent it with indignant warmth. He does not even profess to be a christian, that is, to have asked and obtained of God the pardon of his sins; and by his own profession he is ignorant of that mercy, which is exercised in granting this pardon. It is impossible, therefore, to derive a motive from that knowledge which does not, and cannot exist in his mind; and it is equally impossible to form the supposed resolution without a motive.

Again; repentance is inseparably connected with other features of the christian character; with faith in Christ, love to God, gratitude, humility, peace of conscience, joy in the Lord, the hope of heaven, &c. The intention to repent in future is the intention to exercise all these devout and spiritual affections and dispositions, with which repentance is connected, and without which even true repentance itself is impossible. This repentance is not, and cannot be understood except in connection with these other affections; and these affections, love to God, for instance, and joy in the Lord, can be known only from experience; and the sinner declares by profession and practice that this is not his experience. True, he may, like a parrot, repeat the words; but like the parrot, too, he will be ignorant of their meaning. This knowledge, with that of the vileness of sin and the mercy of God, are *things of the Spirit of God, which the natural man receiveth not; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*. To discern and to know these things, he must become a *spiritual man*; he must be *born of the Spirit, put on the new man, put on Christ*; that is, he must cease to be an impenitent sinner, and become a real christian, a true penitent. Now he understands all these things, and now his intention to repent is real, because it goes into immediate operation; for now *he abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes*. And now, too, his intention to live in sin is crucified and dies; proving most conclusively that the intention to repent in future, is not real, but a most fatal delusion, one of the most destructive instances of the deceitfulness of a desperately wicked heart.

Has there ever been an instance of repentance according to this supposed intention? Not one; we verily believe, *not one*. The lost spirits of Adam's race, now in the bottomless pit, can furnish no such in-

stance: they have perished because they did not repent; though, doubtless, as they supposed, this was their intention. We may, and we do appeal to those christians here present; you have all, in the days of your thoughtless wickedness, had such intention; did you repent and embrace the Gospel according to this intention, and in consequence of it? and was the repentance which you have felt, and daily feel, the same thing, the same state and exercise of the mind, with that which your intention contemplated? We confidently affirm that you did not; and that your repentance is entirely different from what you intended. When your heart melted with godly sorrow it was a new feeling, the knowledge of which has not before entered the mind. Not an instance, therefore, can be found of repentance taking place according to this intention.

It is a truth, then, established on testimony the most ample and satisfactory, that there is not an impenitent sinner on earth who has, or can have an intention to repent in future. Such an intention would be the commencement of repentance, and he would, from that moment, cease to be impenitent. His intention to continue in sin is the commencement, or rather, is a part of that sin. His determination is, never to repent, never to forsake sin, never to submit to God, never to ask for mercy, never to love God, never to be holy; but to remain the active enemy of God, of Christ, and of his salvation! He may think otherwise; he may, to quiet his conscience, persuade himself that he is sincere; but he is deceiving himself. The more successful he is in quieting his conscience, the stronger proof does he furnish that his *heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.*

Multitudes who profess the religion of Christ and are members of the church, are deceived. They mistake the mere workings of imagination for the exercise of faith. The Savior is supposed to be seen hanging, suffering, bleeding, dying on the cross, speaking comfort to them, pronouncing their sins forgiven: all this is mistaken for the knowledge and belief of the gospel, in which alone Christ is offered for acceptance; of that atonement, on account of which *God can be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus.* Intense feelings; though nothing but mere animal passions, will be excited, which, receiving a tinge, a slight coloring from religion, and bearing some resemblance to these which are the work of the Spirit, are mistaken for genuine spiritual affections. Thus deception is stamped on the soul, to be removed in too many instances, only by the light of eternity, and the voice of the Judge, bidding them to depart as *workers of iniquity.*

Christians, even real christians, are not free from these deep and subtle delusions. We believe that we are much better than we really are; that there is far less wickedness in our hearts than there really is. Hence, apprehensive of little or no danger, we cease to *watch and pray*; and when the shock of temptation comes, calculated to rouse into fearful activity, the latent, the unsuspected wickedness of the heart, we are vanquished and fall, and thus bring a reproach on the

cause of Christ, and *pierce our own souls through with many sorrows*. Such lessons of bitter experience ought to teach us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. We have, as we profess and believe, a zeal for the glory of God and the cause of Christ, which is the *bitter zeal and strife* mentioned by the apostle James. We give censure to others, not because they have sinned against God, but because they differ from us in our peculiar views and measures. We administer reproof more to gratify a censorious spirit than to promote the true interests of the church. This zeal is often nothing but party spirit, perhaps intolerant bigotry which condemns others for the same things which we readily excuse in one of our own party. We profess *borthertly love*, and christian affections; but it is confined chiefly to those of our own denomination, who are supposed to love us. This love may please ourselves, and those who are the objects of it; but sinners love each other for the same reason. We are the warm friends and zealous advocates for peace; and so little are we acquainted with our own hearts, that, under this profession, we are soon involved in contention, discord and strife; manifesting a fierceness of spirit which pierces like the point of a sword. But it is for peace we are so fiercely contending; yet it must be on our own terms. It is peace for which we thus *bite and devour*; and the end will justify the means. We believe that if we possessed the wealth which some others do, we would be much more liberal than they are in the support of all benevolent institutions; while we are not as liberal as we might, and of course, ought to be with the means we now have. If we are not as liberal, now, as we might; and if we are not as liberal as others are, with means no greater, perhaps less, than our own, it is certain that, if our wealth was increased, we would not be more liberal in proportion. That we are not more liberal now, is not for the want of means, but of a *willing mind*. In this case there is a two-fold deception: we cast the blame of our stinted contributions really, though not professedly, on God. He has not given us the wealth which he has to some others; therefore we will not return to him his due portion of what he has entrusted to our stewardship. We profess to be *clothed with humility*; yet the exhibitions of this humility are little short of direct solicitations for nutriment to pride and vanity.

But time will not permit us to pursue this subject in all its details. We can all remember the time when we have supposed that sinful passions should never again pollute our hearts; and yet one *hour* has scarcely elapsed till some trivial occurrence excited within us a host of unhallowed feelings, which so disturbed our peace as to unfit us for any thing like devotion. We can all remember the hour of calm and spiritual reflection, when we determined, that, if God should spare us, we would, before this time, have made greater attainments in the divine life, and have done more for the cause of Christ, than we have done. All that was wanting, as we then believed, was the opportunity; and yet when the opportunity has fairly come, our resolution has melted away, and the greatest effort made was, to invent an excuse for being less engaged, and for doing less than we had intended.

Sin, in the heart of christians, is as malignant, and as deceitful, as it is in the most impenitent: it differs only in degree, not in nature.

Beloved christians, professed disciples of Christ; you see from this subject the great importance of self-examination. Multitudes who occupy a place in the church on earth, perhaps an office, perhaps the ministerial office, will, at the last day, be publicly and solemnly denied by the Savior. They may esteem themselves, and be esteemed by others, as christians; they may now be zealous, active and useful, but will then be driven from him as *workers of iniquity*. Are you not ready to say, *Lord is it I?* Are my hopes to be thus blasted by the crush of despair? If you should now be deceiving yourselves with a *name that you live, and are dead*, how much better to make the discovery now, while an *honest and good heart* may be obtained, than when *mercy will be clean gone forever?* If your hopes are founded on scriptural reasons, these reasons, instead of suffering loss, will brighten and strengthen under the most impartial examination; if they are not thus founded, this inquiry will be the best means, through the Spirit, of discovering the delusion. Your danger may be inferred from the frequency and earnestness with which you are cautioned against self-deception? *Be not deceived: let no man deceive himself: take heed that ye be not deceived.* By frequent examination and earnest prayer to God, you may discover what is genuine and what is spurious in your religious exercise; and thus you will learn both your strength and your weakness. Pride is the native and vigorous growth of a depraved and wicked heart; and under its influence you are far more likely to be deceived by *thinking yourselves to be something, when you are nothing*, than by thinking less favorably of yourselves than truth requires; by believing that you are *rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing*, than by judging that you are more *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*, than you really are. Therefore, *examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* Examine, not only whether you have what you suppose to be faith, and love, and repentance, but whether this faith is the *work and gift of God*, whether this love is *shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost*, whether this repentance is *working out reformation to salvation*. Invoke, with the Psalmist, the aid of God: *Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart! Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Impenitent sinners! this subject presents to you the most powerful motives to come to Christ, to come now, this day, this hour, this moment! These motives are derived, in part, from the clear and forcible exhibitions of your guilt and danger: from the proof that your *hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. This wickedness, as the work of the devil, must be destroyed; as the *old man*,

it must be crucified. If, therefore, you refuse to repent and forsake sin; if you refuse to live, to exist without it, you must die with it,—die the *second death*. If you will not have sin crushed in your hearts, under the stroke of divine justice, you must be crushed with it. Do you reply that you are helpless, and therefore cannot come? This indeed is a truth; but it is a truth which you neither believe nor feel. Your supposed intention of future repentance, which has the effect of quieting your conscience, which true repentance alone ought to produce, is made in your own strength. If you are helpless, raise the cry of helplessness to God. This cry is the most solemn and earnest that ascends from this earth to heaven. The Lord will hear it and *will be your help*. None who raise this cry shall ever perish; for *God will be your refuge and strength*. Come then to Christ as guilty and helpless sinners—*believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved*; for his *blood cleanseth from all sin*. This blood, sprinkled on the heart, will dissolve its connection with sin. Without this blood, your hearts will remain incurably wicked. Delay is dangerous. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*.