

41 ¶ "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.<sup>42</sup> "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.<sup>43</sup> "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, <sup>44</sup> [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.]<sup>45</sup> "If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, <sup>46</sup> [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] <sup>47</sup> If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, <sup>48</sup> where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.<sup>49</sup> "For everyone will be salted with fire.<sup>50</sup> "Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

The kingdom of God is a serious matter; that is why to put a spiritual stumbling-block in someone's way will be punished so severely (42). Indeed, the value of the kingdom of God is so great that no sacrifice is too great to make for it. Hand, foot, and eye stand for the most precious of human possessions yet better lose them than the kingdom of God. Of course, this is meant metaphorically not literally, as some early fathers took it and as some fundamentalist non-Christian religions still understand it.

Jesus spoke strongly about hell (48). It is the opposite of the kingdom of God, and there does not seem to be any 'third option'. Yet Jesus spoke of hell to believers in warning, not to sinners in condemnation. Is. 66:24, which Jesus quoted, describes Gehenna, the smouldering rubbish dump of Jerusalem, which was used as a picture of God's judgment on sin. Salt is another metaphor; it purifies, as fire does. If we purify ourselves now (there is no thought of some 'purgatory' after death), we will not come under God's judgment later. This is a very different concept from the hell of popular Buddhism or other faiths. If we are 'salted' like this with the values of the kingdom, we will not argue who is greatest but will live at peace with one another.

The Lord Jesus Christ is talking to his own disciples, not to the world. In other words, this is not an evangelistic word. The Lord Jesus is not explaining to his hearers how they become Christians. These are men who have spent at least two years following him. They are looking forward to reigning with him in the kingdom of God. Jesus is talking here about the struggle his people are going to have with themselves. He had

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warned them early on in their discipleship that they were bound to meet external  
persecution: "Men will revile you and persecute them and say all manner of evil against  
you falsely for my sake." Jesus later on warns his men about Satan coming to them and  
accusing them of their sin. The devil will desire them, sifting them like wheat. But Christ  
is not preparing them for either of those conflicts in these familiar words of our text.  
He is talking about an inevitable battle with their own sinful nature, and that is going to  
be their daily experience.

God's way of redeeming us is to deliver all of us through Christ from the condemnation  
of sin, and also through the indwelling Spirit he delivers us all from the domination  
which sin has over every unregenerate man. But God's way of redeeming us does not  
include deliverance from the presence of indwelling sin before we die. God does not  
extract all of sin from a single Christian - like a dentist extracts a decaying tooth. The  
forces of decay remain in the hearts and souls of every child of God and need to be  
resisted and shrunk. Every Christian gets jolted with the sudden force of remaining sin.  
We ask ourselves after some humiliating episode, "Can I really be a Christian at all when  
I am still thinking and imagining and talking and behaving in this way?"

As that is the case then the Christian life is going to be a struggle not only with the  
world, and Satan but it is going to be a struggle with ourselves and in ourselves. I am  
being told by the Lord himself that I must fight against the sin that is found in my own  
heart and can be expressed through my words or even my body. I won't be happy  
listening to sermons on this theme. I might wriggle in my seat, and argue in my mind  
with the preacher, and threaten to leave the church, and try to discover some other  
way of growing as a Christian to prove him wrong. I might go to conventions and  
conferences, and read read books, listen to other sermons and seek short cuts, and  
look for experiences of the Spirit. I will mostly anything- anything rather than have to  
fight with my own sinful self.

Don't go looking anywhere else, because God has appointed two means of victory over  
remaining sin. Firstly, we must by faith look unto Jesus, and secondly, we must by

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repentance be killing remaining sin. Continually be believing in the finished work of  
Christ and all the promises that are in Him for us and continually be repenting.

This is the daily life of the Christian, faith and repentance; looking unto Jesus and laying  
aside the sin that so easily besets us; trusting in the Lord and putting to death  
remaining sin; putting on Jesus and putting off all kinds of sin. These are the two sides  
of the coin. So no follower of Jesus Christ can choose a Christian pathway which only  
consists of looking unto Jesus, and which shuns the duty of what the Puritans called  
mortification. God's way of victory consists of daily trusting in the Lord Jesus, exalting  
Him, loving Him and daily putting to death sin not returning to the Law and external  
There was, and it continues today, a period of church history that became characterized  
by the rise of holiness and perfectionist movements. Those movements promised a  
one-off act of faith by which Christ-likeness could be claimed and obtained. That was  
the secret of the Christian life, that not by struggling with sin but by letting go and  
letting God go to work quietly in our lives Christians could avoid the battle.

Our great confidence is this - error can never continue to dominate the church century  
after century. Christ is going to teach his people, and so more realistic and biblical  
counsels will always emerge.

We are always in danger of reacting from one extreme to another. In our appreciation  
of the Puritans I think we need to remember that the greatest writing and preaching of  
John Owen was on the subject of the glories of Christ, not how to love by or use the  
Law to live better. Scarcely anyone else wrote on that theme as he did, and I think he  
would be dismayed to learn that in the 21st century the church was more fascinated  
by what he said about killing indwelling sin than what he wrote about the greatness of  
the Lord Jesus- we need both

#### 1. POWERFUL INDWELLING SIN IS FOUND IN EVERY CHRISTIAN.

Let's read the words of the apostle Paul in his classic section on the effects of  
remaining sin in the believer.( at least for todays purpose we will use this view of  
Romans 7- there are various approaches to this text) It is found in Romans 7 and you

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see there the different words and phrases he uses to describe it. He refers to it as,  
"the law of sin at work in my members" (v.23); "this body of death" (v.24); "my sinful  
nature" (v.18); "sin living in me" (v.17); "sin" (v.11); "the law of sin and death" (8:2  
Christians display the works of the flesh when we are, for example, overwhelmed with  
self-pity, or when we are full of bitterness, or when we retaliate, or when we lust, or are  
covetous, or unforgiving, or deceive, or are proud, or hate, or are angry. All such  
actions appear because of indwelling sin.

Paul in Romans 7 refers to it as a 'law.' Why does he do that? He uses the word  
because it expresses the power, and authority and control that sin can wield in our  
lives.

And so there is also the Law of Christ. Christ is our Law and not to the denial of any  
written commands He has given us. But He is the authority. His authority is represented  
in us by His Spirit. The words themselves have no authority or power they are merely  
text.

But He is the incarnation of the text. The words are alive in Him because HE is the  
Living Word and living still.

So the evils that we Christians wouldn't do the law of sin constrains us to do. The law  
of sin in every Christian is like that, "Feed my desires! Give me a morsel!" it demands.  
Remember where this law of sin is. It is an internal power; it is within the Christian. I go  
in and I find it, and I go in and in and I find it there, in my heart - this law of sin and  
death affects me from within. Satan and the temptations of this world are from the  
outside coming to bear upon me, but the strength and of sin is within me. Every  
Christian will know its power. At times it is like a raging river carrying us along and we  
fight against it, but non-Christians don't feel this power because they go with the flow.  
They have surrendered to sin and it is bearing them along with no remorse, day by day.  
But the Christian is fighting with it. The Christian alone knows the danger of sin and its  
consequences and he is resisting it all his life.

Especially when we are at our best we discover this law of sin. It is when we want to do

people, preaching and testifying to the Savior, defending his cause before councils and synagogues, being accused and reviled and persecuted. It ever the law of sin might test them it could be at times like these that perhaps they would find the law, as it were, of cowardice, or pride, or retaliation, or even hatred powerfully working within them.

This law of sin never takes it easy. It is a permanent guest in our hearts. If only it would call a truce. Sin is always on duty. It subtly and persistently opposes us. If we think we should have a time of personal prayer, that is the time it opposes us. If we think we ought to go off to the meeting, then it opposes us. If we think we should make a call and encourage a friend, it is at that moment that it stirs itself and opposes us. We are in a constant tug of war against the law of sin and death. When there is a simple duty to do towards God or our neighbor then evil is right there with us. That's the reason we feel lazy, or stingy, or sensitive, or critical, or self-justifying - indwelling sin makes us act like that. Do we want to pray? Do we want to meditate on the Word? Do we want to give a generous gift to the kingdom of God? Do we want to resist temptation? Do we want to get out of our armchair and visit a person? Then it is that this horrible pest arises with a thousand distractions and surprises and makes sure that we don't do what we want.

The strength of the sin does not have to be instructed; it doesn't have to serve an apprenticeship; sin so easily besets us. To know what is the most disturbing response to any condition we are in of joy or sorrow comes easily to the law of sin. It can make us mad, or resentful, or sorry for ourselves, or bitter, or lustful, or stingy. It can sow seeds of doubt in our lives. It can make us indifferent and apathetic.

Remaining sin is the biggest enemy within every single Christian.