

“The Trial of Indwelling Sin”
(Romans 8:13)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, Flavel introduced us to the way God helps us to search our hearts to see if there is any saving grace in them, and that is through trial:
 - a. He calls us to examine our hearts: “Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test? (2 Cor. 13:5).
 - b. And then He tries us so that we might better see what’s there: “But You know me, O LORD; You see me; and You examine my heart’s *attitude* toward You” (Jer. 12:3).

2. There are many sorts of trials, each revealing different things about us. Last week, we saw two:
 - a. The trial of prosperity: “Prosperity, success, and the increase of outward enjoyments, are to grace what fire is to gold. . . . Prosperity discovers many sad symptoms of a naughty heart” (Proverbs 27:21; 538-539). The unbeliever and the Christian both respond differently to it:
 - (i) Prosperity makes unbelievers ignore God, while it causes the believer to work to humble himself before Him.
 - (ii) Prosperity makes the unbeliever desire more of the world, while it causes the believer to love God more and guard his heart against worldliness.
 - (iii) And prosperity makes the unbeliever indifferent to the advancement of God’s kingdom, while it will not deter the believer from putting God first.
 - (iv) Prosperity may have some adverse affects on the Christian, but the Lord will always be at the center of his heart.

 - b. The trial of adversity:
 - (i) It may affect both the unbeliever and the believer in the same way: both may fear it, be unwilling to face it, be impatient and anxious through it, want it to end, and be driven to their knees by it.
 - (ii) But there will also be differences:
 - (a) The unbeliever will deny the affliction comes from God; he won’t seek to know what caused it (such as sin); he would avoid the adversity by sinning if he could; he will turn to man for help rather than God; and he will always come through the trial more corrupt than before.
 - (b) The believer, on the other hand, will turn to God, acknowledge that God sent it and submit to it, will justify God of any wrongdoing, will humble himself and seek to know why God is disciplining him, will endure it rather than avoid it by sinning, and will bless God for whatever he gains through it, even though it may cost him dearly (“It Is Well with My Soul”).

B. Preview.

1. Tonight, we move on to the next trial: that of indwelling sin: Flavel writes, “Nothing makes a deeper search into our bosoms, nothing sifts our spirits more narrowly, or tells us what our state is more plainly, than our behaviour towards that corruption which dwells in us . . . The manner of our behaviour towards sin, and our carriage towards it before, or under, or after the commission of it, *in that* the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil” (550-551, emphasis added).
2. Flavel will show us the five ways the Lord tests our hearts through it:
 - a. The first is abstinence: Why do we abstain from sin?
 - b. The second is hatred of sin: Do we hate sin as sin?
 - c. The third is sorrow for sin: If we grieve for it, why do we?
 - d. The fourth is refusal to submit to sin: How do we respond to the temptations of sin?
 - e. And the fifth is opposition to, and conflict with, sin: Why do we oppose it and is our opposition universal?

II. Sermon.

- A. The first is abstinence: Why do we abstain from sin?
 1. For the hypocrite, the answer may be:
 - a. First, because he wants one of his lusts more than the other; since he cannot have both, he dispenses with one of them (*Touchstone*, 551-552).
 - b. Second, he may forgo a particular sin because of some Providential restraint, such as was the case with Abimelech, when the Lord prevented him from violating Abram’s wife, Sarai (Genesis 20:6; 552).
 - c. Third, he may abstain from particular sins because he has no inclination towards them (*e.g.*, certain men never become drunkards because they are not inclined toward drinking; *ibid.*).
 - d. Fourth, education may restrain him from certain sins because he was strongly warned against them in his youth, such as Joash who did what was right as long as Jehoiada the priest was alive (2 Kings 12:2; *ibid.*).
 - (i) Perhaps this isn’t the best example. It does show us how individuals or society can restrain sin.
 - (ii) A better text for Flavel’s principle would be Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.”
 - e. Finally, he may avoid certain sins because of the consequences of those sins, both in this world and in the world to come (552-553).
 2. The true saint, however, will abstain from sin for entirely different reasons:
 - a. First, because he fears God: Job said, “Does He not see my ways and number all my steps? (Job 31:4; cf. v. 1; Nehemiah 5:15; 553).

- b. Second, because he loves God and does not want to displease Him, such as Joseph who didn't want to dishonor God by listening to Pharaoh's wife (Genesis 39:9; *ibid.*).
- c. Third, because he hates what is contrary to God, as Paul says in Romans, the righteous man is to abhor what is evil and cling to what is good (Romans 12:9; *ibid.*).
- d. Fourth, because his new nature restrains him, the Spirit setting its desire against the flesh (Galatians 5:17).
- e. Fifth, because of the grief and sorrow it brings in having offended God (2 Corinthians 7:11; 553-554).
- f. And sixth, because of what the forgiveness of sin cost the Lord Jesus Christ, who died that we should no longer be the slaves of sin (Romans 6:6; 554).
- g. Why do we abstain from sin?

B. The second is hatred of sin: Do we hate sin as sin?

- 1. The unregenerate man cannot hate sin *because* it is sin.
 - a. He may hate it in someone else and censure him for it, but he will not do so to himself: he will see the speck in his brother's eye, but not the log in his own eye (Matthew 7:3; 554-555).
 - b. He may hate the consequences of that sin, just "as the thief hates the gallows."
 - c. He may even lay it aside for a time because it weighs heavily on his conscience. But he cannot hate sin as sin, because by nature he loves it, as Peter says, he is like the dog who returns to its vomit, or the pig that after washing returns to wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:22; 555). He cannot stay away from what he loves.
- 2. The gracious soul, on the other hand, hates sin because it is an offense to God.
 - a. He hates it more in himself than in others, as Paul who hates and fights against the principle of sin in his soul (Romans 7:21-23).
 - b. He hates not only particular sins, but all sin, as the psalmist says, "From Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way" (119:104; 555-556).
 - c. He will never be reconciled to sin (Psalm 85:8).
 - d. He considers it to be the greatest of evils, so that he would rather face the worst of afflictions than to commit the most pleasurable of sins, as Moses who chose to suffer with God's people rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:25).
 - e. The gracious soul, more than anything else, desires to be fully delivered from this evil: as Paul writes, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24; cf. v. 25; 556).

C. The third is sorrow for sin: If we grieve for it, why do we?

- 1. Not everyone who mourns his transgressions of God's Law is necessarily regenerate. The unbeliever also experiences sorrow.

- a. His more serious sins trouble him because they wound his conscience, but he's not really concerned about how it affects his soul. Judas felt bad about betraying Jesus, but then killed himself without repenting (Matthew 27:4, 5; 556-557).
 - b. The exposure of his sin troubles him more than the guilt it brings: We read in Jeremiah, "As the thief is shamed when he is discovered, so the house of Israel is shamed; they, their kings, their princes and their priests and their prophets" (Jeremiah 2:26).
 - c. He may grieve over his punishment, but not because the sin itself provokes God (557).
2. The godly, on the other hand, grieve because they have wronged God and His Spirit (Luke 15:21).
- a. They mourn the defilement that sin brings on their souls, because they love purity (Psalm 119:140).
 - b. They lament the resulting alienation from God, as David does in our call to worship: "Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11).
 - c. This sorrow goes deeper into their souls than other sorrows, as David writes, "For my iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me" (Psalm 38:4; 557-558).
 - d. They realize they can do nothing to remove this grief, but that only the pardon and peace that comes from God can take it away (558).
- D. The fourth is refusal to submit to sin: How do we respond to the temptations of sin? Flavel writes, "The behaviour and carriage of the soul with respect to subjection to the commands of sin, shews what our estate and condition is."
- 1. Both the converted and the unconverted have "original corruption dwelling in them," therefore both are capable of committing gross sins (558-559).
 - 2. However, sin does not reign over both.
 - a. The hypocrite is under the dominion of sin, but the gracious man is not.
 - b. Even though the righteous man may fall to the same sin often, as the unrighteous man also does, this does not mean he is under the dominion of sin: "For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in *time of calamity*" (Proverbs 24:16; 559).
 - c. Even though he is impatient under reproof for his sin as the unrighteous (2 Chronicles 16:10), though he is more susceptible to one particular sin than another (Psalm 18:23), though he may sin knowing that what he is doing is wrong (Psalm 51:6), this does not prove that he is under the dominion of sin as the wicked man who commits the same sins (559-560).
 - d. When a man gives his full consent to his sin (Psalm 36:4), when he begins customarily to practice sin (1 John 3:9; 560), when he delights in sin (Isaiah 66:3; 5560-561), and when he is impatient under "Christ's yoke and government" (Romans 6:17-18; 561), then he is under the dominion of sin.

- e. A righteous man might grow weary of spiritual things and may be surprised and temporarily captivated by sin, but he will become even wearier of his sin and will struggle to be free from it.
 - f. Though corruption may draw a righteous man to sin, he cannot think about his sin without feeling shame and sorrow for it (Matthew 26:75).
 - g. He cannot give his full consent to sin (Romans 7:22; 561-562).
 - (i) He is restless and disquieted while in that sin (Psalm 51:10-12).
 - (ii) He does not continue to progress in sin, but uses his failure as a warning to keep himself from committing any further sin (2 Corinthians 7:11).
 - (iii) A righteous man would gladly be rid of all his sin, if he could (Romans 7:24; 562).
 - (iv) He is happy when God in His providence prevents him from further sin, such as when Abigail came to David to prevent him from taking vengeance on her husband Nabal (1 Samuel 25:32, 33; 562-563).
 - (v) He heartily begs for God's assistance to keep him from sin (Psalm 19:13), and, after crying out to the Lord, he does what he can to prevent himself from sinning (Isaiah 33:15; 563).
- E. And the fifth is opposition to, and conflict with, sin: Why do we oppose it and is our opposition universal? "Our opposition to, and conflicts with sin discover what we are, gold or dross."
1. If a man's opposition to sin is universal, then he is regenerate. If, however, his opposition is only against particular sins, then he is unregenerate, for "a gracious heart hates every false way" (Psalm 119:104). If a man does not hate every sin, then his aversion to any particular sin must be for some other reason than the hatred of it; for if he hated sin in general, he would hate every particular sin.
 2. If his resistance to sin comes from his inclination towards righteousness, then he is converted (Galatians 5:17). But if his resistance arises purely from his conscience, merely from fear of the consequences of sin, this may reveal self-deception (Daniel 6:14; 563-564).
 3. The regenerate man's resistance to sin is permanent (2 Timothy 4:7), while the hypocrite's is only transient (2 Peter 2:20-22).
 4. The regenerate man opposes both the root and the fruit of sin (Romans 7:24), while the unregenerate opposes only the latter (564-565).
 5. The regenerate man opposes sin in the strength of God (Ephesians 6:10-11), while the unregenerate opposes sin only in his own strength.
 6. Finally, the regenerate man successfully fights against sin (Romans 6:6), while the unregenerate fails – lacking grace, he cannot put his sins to death (565).
 7. How we respond to temptation to sin and our fallings into sin says a great deal about the state of our hearts. May the Lord use these things to help us discern our own condition. Amen.