

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

"Fools make a mock at sin." Prov. xiv. 9.

Sin is the virus of spiritual beings, the moral malaria of God's universe. Its very existence is mysterious; its birth is unexplainable; its influence is subtle, and its results are awful in the extreme. What facile pen can picture it? What eloquent tongue, even though it be gifted like an angel's and blessed with all the powers possible to a finite intelligence, can fitly describe the evils it has wrought?

I. Let us notice some of the manifest effects of sin. We need not go far to find them. We live and walk, we wake and sleep in its evil influence as an atmosphere. Sin has somehow cast the shadow of its dire evils upon physical nature. The very ground is cursed for man's sake; the thorns and briers are reflections of his unworthiness. The wasting pestilence, the consuming drouth, the swelling flood, the sweeping tornado, the destroying earthquake, the riving thunderbolt, are, through some mysterious affinity, sequences, as it were, of moral evils.

But these are only indirect and remote and comparatively harmless consequences of sin. For it lays hold upon man with a grasp of iron, though its least touch is a dire curse. The entire bodily organization is deranged by it. It puts its torturing fingers upon the sensitive nerves, and they writhe and throb with pain. Sin makes wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. It puts to the rack every sense, every member, every faculty of the human body, every organism, every muscle, every nerve. If it were possible to gather together and inspect at a single glance the awful aggregate of its purely physical effects, we should all be appalled at the heart-rending spectacle.

Suppose we could assemble, in one vast concourse of suffering, the pain-stricken, the diseased, the maimed, the lame, the halt, the blind, the distressed, the bleeding, the broken; could empty all hospitals and sick-rooms, and invalid chambers; could spread side by side all earth's convulsed death-beds; could swing the doors of its asylums and let the inmates be marshaled in one vast army of madness and driveling idiocy; could bring the anguished babes, the famine-pinched, the bereaved mothers, and all the bowed and wrinkled and infirm children of age; could unlock our dungeons and empty all our scaffolds, bring all suffering criminals and inebriates, the weary, the heartbroken, the passion-tossed, -- bring every one from every quarter of the earth who has an ache or a burden or an infirmity or a disease or a wound occasioned by sin, to this common assemblage of woe! Great God! who but thee could bear the unutterable vision? What finite ear could endure the cries and groans and maniac shrieks and sobs and sighs and wails of this hideous, frightful chorus of physical woes which sin ever occasions?

But let not the march of our thought halt here. Let us move on with quickened energy to the consideration of the still greater and more deplorable effects of sin upon the soul. Outward evils are but the shadows of inward realities. If by some mighty effort of the imagination we could conceive; or if by some supernatural revelation we could know what is felt and done within the bosoms of men, the mind itself would be unhinged, and reason would flee from her throne in contemplation of it.

Could we but see, as God sees, all the fierce hatreds, the consuming lusts, the corrupting desires, the unappeased longings, the wasting griefs, the stings of conscience, the stifling fears, the cruel disappointments, the raging jealousies, the burning revenges, the tortures of remorse, the goadings of anguish, the unutterable woes of despair that gnaw and torment and rack and consume hearts that still live to suffer on, unwasted and inconsumable; could we thus see and know, as God does, what moral beings are suffering for one moment of time, the knowledge might utterly overwhelm and forever paralyze the onlooking. Nothing else could be thought of. The whole universe would appear to be one vast, rayless, shoreless ocean of woe, whose waves of suffering and agony roared louder than the thunder, and heaved and tossed without intermission forever.

But; friends, all this is just as real as though we, in our littleness, could see it and know it. Sin has, sin does this very moment wrap this world in a mantle of physical and mental anguish. How many other worlds are thus afflicted we know not. But here, at least, it inflicts every pain, wrings out every tear, burdens every breaking heart, wounds every tortured spirit, extorts every groan, convulses every death-bed, and digs every grave. Wherever it is, it will work a similar havoc. "Sin is a disease of the soul! a paralysis that weakens! a leprosy that pollutes! a plague that tortures! a pestilence that destroys!" a crime that damns every being within whose bosom it is permitted to dwell. Its only mission is destruction; its only possible wages is death; not physical death merely, but all that that dread word means, -- the loss of Holiness, Happiness, and Heaven.

There shall be, there are no tears, no crying, no pain, no death in Heaven, simply because no sin is permitted to enter that blessed realm.

But the shadow of sin even falls there; for God is there, and His loving heart must sadly miss the faces of the fallen sons of light who should ever be ministering in glory before His throne. And Jesus is there, bearing the print of the nails and the wound of the spear. Calvary cannot be forgotten. The incarnate God, whom sin assaulted with all its accursed agencies, working the ineffable iniquity of the crucifixion, can not forget that the same wickedness still exists, and every day spits upon Him and smites Him, crucifies Him afresh and puts Him to an open shame. Yes, the whole earth is tormented, and groans and travails under its burden of sin, and Heaven itself misses some of its brightness and glory because of it. Sin is the loss, the shame, the torment, the eternal detriment of the whole empire of God.

II. It is not difficult now to see why he is a fool who mocks at sin. In the common language of men, one is called a fool who acts as if not guided by good sense, nor possessed of ordinary intelligence and prudence. Plainly, then, he is acting the fool, who treats as of no consequence anything so disastrous, so powerful, and so far-reaching in its influence as sin. He is called a fool who wastes treasures or despises things precious, or mocks at danger, or defies destruction. It is irrational; it is senseless; it is playing the fool.

A famous queen of the Orient once dissolved a precious pearl and drank it in a cup of wine to the health of her guests; she was playing the fool. Once an Indian chief, intoxicated with vanity and a spirit of wreckless daring, and imagining that he could stem the mighty flood, pushed his bark canoe into the rapids and went over Niagara. A venturesome fool!

A man that hides a viper in his bosom is a fool. A man who assaults an enraged lioness in a jungle when robbed of her whelps, alone and empty-handed, is a rash fool. But what of the man who mocks at sin? It is stronger than a lion; its sting is deadlier than any scorpion's; the fell sweep of its mighty tide of evil influences is more irresistible than a Niagara torrent, and with infernal chemistry it dissolves even the "pearl of great price" in the cup of its unhallowed indulgence.

Make a mock at sin! As wise would it be to furnish your nursery with gun-cotton and dynamite for your children's playthings. As well would it be to take no precautions against cigars and matches, and nails in the boots, around a powder mill. A single grain of sand somehow worked its way into the granulating department of Laflin & Rand's powder factory in Paterson, N. J., on November 3, 1880. It was a little thing, only a trifle, but its friction caused the ignition of the powder, and a fearful explosion occurred, which destroyed the mill and blew the workmen into eternity. What a foolish thing to ignore such a possible result! But, ah me! men are found every day who are ready to make a mock at sin, whose least temptation may be a spark of fire to some unexpected magazine of passion whose fierce explosions will create eternal havoc in the soul. Fools, fools! Inconsiderate fools!

III. It remains for us to notice in what various ways men really do mock at sin; that is, make light of it as an unimportant thing. It may be we shall find that we have all been more or less guilty of playing the fool.

1. Those do it who openly boast of their sins, and who glory in their exploits of wickedness. How often have I seen a group of men talking together, glorying in their shame, each in turn laboring to prove himself viler than his fellows! Any day on our city streets you can hear men boasting of deeds with a kind of diabolical pride, about which they ought to be silent and blush with unspeakable shame. St. Paul wept over the mob "whose glory is in their shame."

2. Those who smile on the sins of others and willingly profit by them, and thus lend tacit encouragement to evil doers, are mocking at sin. It is done in business by Christian men winking at the sins of wicked partners, and sharing in the profits of their knavery. It is done in society by Christian people knowingly putting themselves in intimate association with the vile enemies of Christ. It is done in politics when people adhere to their party, right or wrong, blind to its political crimes. It is done weekly, daily, almost hourly, and it is becoming one of the grave questions of an upright man how he can avoid it.

3. They are mocking at sin who ridicule its reprovers, and set themselves in wilful opposition to those who are seeking its reformation. God's reformers have nearly always been martyrs through public abuse and hate.

Wesley and Finney and Phillips and Garrison trod no easy path. They wore a crown of thorns before they wore a chaplet of flowers. Fighting against such men is often one and the same with fighting against God. Even when

they are indiscreet and impractical, as reformers often are, still we must beware how we oppose them and impugn their motives, and ridicule their efforts, lest we be found to be defending the evils which they combat, and thus become of the number of those who mock at sin.

4. They especially mock at sin who knowingly and willingly set a bad and contagious example for others, and encourage them to continue in wrong doing.

It makes one shudder to think how much this is done. As to bad examples, how few do not set them! Number if you can the people who, by their neglect of the ordinances of God's house and by their irreligion, and their sneers at ministers and churches and the means of grace, are beguiling the young to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, and emboldening the old to sit in the seat of the scornful. All these are the unpaid emissaries of the prince of darkness, who spend their lives making a mock at sin.

5. Then there is that large class of people who, by their teaching and creed, hold out false hopes to the sinful. They lift their scornful outcry against the solemn warnings in Holy Writ of endless retribution, and laugh at the consequences of disobeying God. The air is full of it. It appears in the witticisms of the platform and the press, and in the coarse ribaldry of places of public resort.

The sublime utterances of the old prophets to deter men from iniquity, the solemn assurances of the apostles, the tender but still more terrible proclamations of the Son of God of an endless wrath upon final impenitence, are the passing jests of the street. It is practically a stifling of the voice of God to the soul, and a making sport of the pollutions and consequences of sin.

A plague once raged in ancient Athens. While the decaying bodies of the dead lay about the streets unburied, and multitudes were in mortal agony, and the very atmosphere was pregnant with death, the low and vile would gather in deserted palaces and abandon themselves to the most degrading excesses. The air was burdened by their blasphemies and the sound of their horrible revelry. Instead of supplicating the gods, they practiced their hideous orgies in time very face of death. So do men forsake the counsels, and despise the entreaties, and laugh at the threatened judgments of a holy God. They even stand on the brink of eternity, and face its darkness and deride its perils, and thus, like fools, make a mock at sin.

6. They commit this folly who, though not abandoned to profligacy of morals, still cling to sin and resist the pleadings of the Spirit, and procrastinate the day of repentance and salvation. It is no slight thing for one to deliberately resolve to continue a little longer in disobedience and rebellion against God. It is no light thing for a soul to say, either by act or word, "O Lord, I want to have my own way a little longer, and follow a little farther the way of the transgressor; a little more of self-indulgence and wrong doing. I may repent some time, but not yet, Lord; not yet." Ah, what a mocking at sin such conduct is! What an insult is such trifling to God Almighty!

It matters not how beautiful the exterior conduct may be, nor how courtly and gracious are the manners; whether the personal demeanor be gentle or gross, the underlying principle of a sinner's life is precisely the same,-- a spirit of rebellion against God, a treating sin as if it were a trifle. You who are as yet unreconciled to God, you may think yourself a lovely person, and not much of a sinner. May the God of mercy and grace undeceive you, and check such mocking while it is yet on your lips. Such unbelief is as fatal as any other. What difference does it make whether you are torn to pieces by wild beasts in an amphitheater, or are poisoned by the genial odor of flowers, if, in either case, death is alike certain?

If you reject the offered mercy of God and wilfully postpone your day of repentance, you are making light of transgression, and mocking at sin. Though you in manners be gentle and your tastes refined, and your sensibilities tender, and your heart affectionate, yet, if God is not loved, and sin is not forsaken, and Christ is not accepted, you are still trifling with evil, and in covert rebellion against a holy God.

Your destroyer understands you. His enticements will all come in pleasing form -- like the viper that stung Cleopatra to death, its breath mingled with sweetest perfume and covered over with flowers -- but still destruction, with its unsightliness and horrors, is in them.

Though Satan come with smiles and honeyed speech, robed as an angel of light, he is still only Satan, his bosom glowing with infernal malignity, and his heart full of hellish wiles.

Oh, that I had the power to create in the minds of all perfect hatred of sin! In God's name I pray you, who read these lines, to cease mocking at it. Avoid these innocent-looking beginnings of evil; these so-called harmless indulgences and sweetened pleasures of sin. Shut your eyes and your ears, bar all the doors of your immortal

spirit against the solicitations of evil. Its continued presence is contamination; its touch is leprosy; its vile embrace is certain death.

7. They mock at sin who talk of it as a necessity, and sneer at the possibility of holiness, and make light of God's commands to be holy. This is to set at naught the intercessory prayer of Jesus, and all His precepts, exhortations, promises, and expressed will that we should be sanctified. This is to scorn the tears and agony of Jesus who, "that He might sanctify the people, suffered without the gate." This is to pour contempt on the precious blood of the Son of God, which "cleanseth us from all sin." Oh, how daring to smile upon carnality, the fertile mother of all sin, and spurn the baptism with the Holy Ghost, its only cure! Remember, you have in your very natures a moral atmosphere which can be aroused by temptation into a very swoon of passion which will sear and blast the soul with its poisonous breath.

Cease, then, to sport with evil, or to mock at actual or inbred sin. Beware of all temptations! Look not upon the wine-cup! Its odor is fragrant; its taste is sweet; it is beautiful to look upon; but delirium and death are in its ruby depths.

Beware of evil books! Many of them corruscate with flashes of genius. Alas! that "imperial lepers" should go forth from "palaces of thought" to scatter seeds of iniquity in the minds of the young, that shall wave in an immortal harvest of destruction.

Beware of lewd and profane and Sabbath-breaking and infidel companions. "Evil communications corrupt good manners-" The wicked will receive you into their companionship, sensitive and pure and reverent and true; they will soil your modesty, dull your conscientiousness, chill your reverence, trample upon your virtues, and start you on a path of evil-doing, along which you will hasten "as if enamored of damnation"!

Oh, may God teach all our hearts the solemn lesson! Sin, like the carnality which mothers it, has in it despair and destruction and death and Hell. Hate sin, and flee from it for your very life.

But, O soul! sin is in you; by nature you are depraved and in bondage to it. Flee, then, to your atoning Savior, who can forgive you, and welcome the Holy Spirit, who can cleanse you, and break the galling chains of its terrible bondage.

Throw open every avenue of your being, and welcome God to come in and save and sanctify, and give eternal deliverance. Oh, what an unspeakable fool is he who rejects such a salvation, and makes a mock at sin!