

Temptation and Deliverance

or

Joseph's Great Temptation and Gracious Deliverance

A Sermon by Jonathan Edwards

GENESIS xxxix. 12. And he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.

We have here, and in the context, an account of that remarkable behaviour of Joseph in the house of Potiphar, which was the occasion both of his great affliction, and also of his high advancement and prosperity in the land of Egypt.

We read in the beginning of the chapter, how Joseph, after he had been so cruelly treated by his brethren, and sold into Egypt for a slave, was advanced in the house of Potiphar, who had bought him. Joseph was one that feared God, and therefore God was with him; and so influenced the heart of Potiphar his master, that instead of keeping him as a mere slave, to which purpose he was sold, he made him his steward and overseer over his house, and all that he had was put into his hands; in so much, that we are told, ver. 6. "that he left all that he had in his hand; and he knew not ought that he had, save the bread which he did eat."? While Joseph was in these prosperous circumstances, he met with a great temptation in his master's house. We are told that, he being a goodly person and well favoured, his mistress cast her eyes upon and lusted after him, and used all her art to tempt him to commit uncleanness with her.

Concerning this temptation, and his behaviour under it, many things are worthy to be noted.

Particularly

We may observe, how *great* the temptation was, that he was under. It is to be considered, that Joseph was now in his *youth*; a season of life, when persons are most liable to be overcome by temptations of this nature. And he was in a state of unexpected *prosperity* in Potiphar's house; which has a tendency to lift persons up, especially young ones, whereby commonly they more easily fall before temptations.

And then, the *superiority* of the person that laid the temptation before him rendered it much the greater. She was his mistress, and he a servant under her. And the *manner* of her tempting him.

She did not only carry herself so towards Joseph, as to give him cause to *suspect* that he might be admitted to such criminal converse with her; but she directly *proposed* it to him; plainly manifesting her disposition to it. So that here was no such thing as suspicion of her unwillingness to deter him, but a manifestation of her desire to entice him to it. Yea, she appeared greatly engaged in the matter.

And there was not only her desire manifested to entice him, but her authority over him to enforce the temptation. She was his mistress, and he might well imagine, that if he utterly refused a compliance, he should incur her displeasure; and she, being his master's wife, had power to do much to his disadvantage, and to render his circumstances more uncomfortable in the family.

And the temptation was the greater, in that she did not only tempt him once, but frequently, *day by day*, verse 10. And at last became more violent with him. She caught him by his garment, saying, *Lie with me*.

His *behaviour* was very remarkable under these temptations. He absolutely refused any compliance with them: he made no reply that manifested as though the temptation had gained at all upon him; so much as to hesitate about it, or at all deliberate upon it. He complied in no *degree*, either to the gross act she proposed, or anything *tending* towards it, or that should at all be gratifying to her wicked inclination. And he persisted resolute and unshaken under her continual solicitations, ver. 10. "And it came to pass as she spoke to Joseph day by day that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her." He, to his utmost, avoided so much as being where she was. And the motives and principles, from which he acted, manifested by his reply to her solicitations, are remarkable.—He first sets before her, how injuriously he should act against his master, if he should comply with her proposal: "Behold, my master—hath committed all that he hath to my hand; there is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me, but thee, because thou art his wife." But he then proceeded to inform her of that, which, above all things, deterred him from a compliance, *viz.* that it would be great wickedness, and sin against God.— "How shall I do this, and sin against God?" He would not do any such thing, as he

would not injure his master; but that which influenced more than all on this occasion, was the fear of sinning against God.

On this account he persisted in his resolution to the last.

In the text we have an account of his behaviour under the last and greatest temptation that he had from her. This temptation was great, as it was at a time when there was nobody in the house but he and his mistress, ver. 11, there was an opportunity to commit the fact with the greatest secrecy. And at this time it seems that she was more violent than ever before. She caught him by the garment, &c. She laid hold on him, as though she were resolute to attain her purpose of him. Under these circumstances he not only refused her, but fled from her, as he would have done from one that was going to assassinate him; he escaped, as for his life. He not only would not be guilty of such a fact, but neither would he by any means be in the house with her, where he should be in the way of her temptation.—This behaviour of Joseph is doubtless recorded for the instruction of all. Therefore from the words I shall observe, that it is our duty, not only to avoid those things that are themselves sinful, but also, as far as may be, those things that leads and expose to sin.

Sect. I

Why we should avoid what tends to sin.

Thus did Joseph: he not only refused actually to commit uncleanness with his mistress, who enticed him; but refused to be there, where he should be in the way of temptation, ver. 10. He refused to lie by her, or be with her. And in the text we are told, “he fled and got him out;” would by no means be in her company. Though it was no sin in itself, for Joseph to be in the house where his mistress was; but under these circumstances it would expose him to sin. Joseph was sensible he had naturally a corrupt heart, that tended to betray him to sin; and therefore he would by no means be in the way of temptation; but with haste he fled, he ran from the dangerous place. Inasmuch as he was exposed to sin in that house, he fled out of it with as much haste as if it had been on fire; or full of enemies, who stood ready with drawn swords to stab him to the very heart. When she took him by the garment, he left his garment in her hands; he had rather lose his garment, than stay a moment there, where he was in such danger of losing his chastity.

I said, that persons should avoid things that expose to sin, *as far as may be*; because it is possible that persons may be *called* to expose themselves to temptation; and when it is so, they may hope for divine strength and protection under temptation.

It may be a man's indispensable duty to undertake an office, or a work, attended with a great deal of temptation. Thus *ordinarily* a man ought not to run into the temptation of being persecuted for the true religion; lest the temptation should be too hard for him; but should avoid it, as much as may be: therefore Christ thus directs his disciples, Matt. x. 23. "When ye be persecuted in one city, flee to another." Yet, the case may be so, that a man may be called not to flee from persecution; but to run the venture of such a trial, trusting in God to uphold him under it. Ministers and magistrates may be obliged to continue with their people in such circumstances; as Nehemiah says, Neh. vi.11. "Should such a man as I flee?" So the apostles.—yea, they may be called to go into the midst of it; to those places where they cannot reasonably expect but to meet with such temptations. So Paul went up to Jerusalem, when he knew beforehand, that *there bonds and affliction awaited him*, Acts xx. 23.

So in some other cases, the necessity of affairs may call upon men to engage in some business that is peculiarly attended with temptations. But when it is so, they are indeed least exposed to sin; for they are always safest in the way of duty. Prov. x. 9. "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely." And though there be many things by which they may have extraordinary temptations, in the affairs they have undertaken, yet if they have a clear call, it is no presumption to hope for divine support and preservation in it.

But for persons needlessly to expose themselves to temptation, and to do those things that tend to sin, is unwarrantable, and contrary to that excellent example set before us. And that we ought to avoid not only those things that are in themselves sinful, but also those things that lead and *expose* to sin, is manifest by the following arguments.

1. It is very evident that we ought to use our utmost endeavours to avoid sin; which is inconsistent with needlessly doing those things that expose and lead to sin. And the greater any evil is, the greater care, and the more earnest endeavours, does it require to avoid it. Those evils that appear to us very great and dreadful, we use proportionally great care to avoid. And therefore the greatest evil of all, requires the greatest and utmost care to avoid it.

Sin is an infinite evil, because committed against an infinitely great and excellent Being, and so a violation of infinite obligation: therefore however great our care be to avoid sin, it cannot be more than proportional to the evil we would avoid. Our care and endeavour cannot be infinite, as the evil of sin is infinite; but yet it ought to be to the utmost of our power; we ought to use every method that tends to the avoiding of sin. This is manifest to reason.—and not only so, but this is positively required of us in the word of God. Josh. xxii. 5. “Take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your soul.” Deut. iv. 15, 16. “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, lest ye corrupt yourselves.” Chap. xii. 30. “Take heed to thyself, that thou be not snared,” &c. Luke xi. 36. “Take heed and beware of covetousness.” 1 Cor. x. 12. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” Deut. iv. 9. “Take heed to thyself, keep thy soul diligently.” These and many other texts of Scripture plainly require of us the utmost possible diligence and caution to avoid sin.

But how can he be said to use the utmost possible diligence and caution to avoid sin, that voluntarily does those things which naturally expose and lead to sin? How can he be said with the utmost possible caution to avoid an enemy, that voluntarily lays himself in his way? How can he be said to use the utmost possible caution to preserve the life of his child, that suffers it to go on the edge of precipices or pits; or to play on the borders of a deep gulf; or to wander in a wood, that is haunted by beasts of prey?

2. It is evident that we ought to avoid things that expose and lead to sin; because a due sense of the evil of sin, and a just hatred of it, will necessarily have this effect upon us, to cause us so to do.—If we were duly sensible of the evil and dreadful nature of sin, we should have an exceeding dread of it upon our spirits. We should hate it worse than death, and should fear it worse than the devil himself; and dread it even as we dread damnation. But those things that men exceedingly dread, they naturally shun; and they avoid those things that they apprehend expose to them. As a child, that has been greatly terrified by the sight of any wild beast, will by no means be persuaded to go where it apprehends that it shall fall in its way.

As sin in its own nature is infinitely hateful, so in its natural tendency it is infinitely dreadful. It is the tendency of all sin, eternally to undo the soul. Every sin naturally carries hell in it!

Therefore, all sin ought to be treated by us as we would treat a thing that is infinitely terrible. If anyone sin, yea, the least sin, do not necessarily bring eternal ruin with it, this is owing to nothing but the free grace and mercy of God to us, and not to the nature and tendency of sin itself. But certainly, we ought not to take the less care to avoid sin, or all that tends to it, for the freeness and greatness of God's mercy to us, through which there is hope of pardon; for that would be indeed a most ungrateful and vile abuse of mercy. Were it made known to us, that if we ever voluntarily committed any particular act of sin, we should be damned without any remedy or escape, should we not exceedingly dread the commission of such? Should we not be very watchful and careful to stand at the greatest distance from that sin; and from everything that might expose us to it; and that has any tendency to stir up our lusts, or to betray us to such an act of sin? Let us then consider, that though the next voluntary act of known sin shall not necessarily and unavoidably *issue* in certain damnation, yet it will certainly *deserve* it. We shall thereby really deserve to be cast off, without any remedy or hope; and it can only be owing to free grace, that it will not certainly and remediless be followed with such a punishment. And shall we be guilty of such a vile abuse of God's mercy to us, as to take encouragement from it, the more boldly to expose ourselves to sin?

3. It is evident that we ought not only to avoid sin, but things that expose and lead to sin; because this is the way we act in things that pertain to our temporal interest.—Men avoid not only those things that are themselves the hurt or ruin of their temporal interest, but also the things that tend or expose to it. Because they love their temporal lives, they will not only actually avoid killing themselves, but they are very careful to avoid those things that bring their lives into danger; though they do not certainly know but they may escape.

They are careful not to pass rivers and deep waters on rotten ice, though they do not certainly know that they shall fall through and be drowned. They will not only avoid those things that would be in themselves the ruin of their estates—as setting their own houses on fire, and burning them up with their substance; taking their money and throwing it into the sea, &c.—but they carefully avoid those things by which their estates are exposed. They have their eyes about them; are careful with whom they deal; are watchful, that they be not overreached in their bargains, and that they do not lay themselves open to knaves and fraudulent persons.

If a man be sick of a dangerous distemper, he is careful to avoid everything that tends to increase the disorder; not only what he knows to be mortal, but other things that he fears may be prejudicial to him. Men are in this way wont to take care of their temporal interest. And therefore, if we are not as careful to avoid sin, as we are to avoid injury in our temporal interest, it will show a regardless disposition with respect to sin and duty; or that we do not much care though we do sin against God.

God's glory is surely of as much importance and concern as our temporal interest. Certainly we should be as careful not to be exposed to sin against the Majesty of heaven and earth, as men are wont to be of a few pounds; yea, the latter are but mere trifles, compared with the former.

4. We are wont to do thus by our dear earthly friends.—We not only are careful of those things wherein the destruction of their lives, or their hurt and calamity in any respect, directly consist; but are careful to avoid those things that but remotely tend to it. We are careful to prevent all occasions of their loss; and are watchful against that which tends, in any wise, to deprive them of their comfort or good name; and the reason is, because they are very dear to us. In this manner, men are wont to be careful of the good of their own children, and dread the approaches of any mischief that they apprehend they are, or may be, exposed to. And we should take it hard if our friends did not do thus by us.

And surely we ought to treat God as a dear friend: we ought to act towards him, as those that have a sincere love and unfeigned regard to him; and so ought to watch and be careful against all *occasions* of that which is contrary to his honour and glory. If we have not a temper and desire so to do, it will show that, whatever our pretences are, we are not God's sincere friends, and have no true love to him.—If we should be offended at any that have professed friendship to us, if they treated us in this manner, and were no more careful of our interest; surely God may justly be offended, that we are no more careful of his glory.

5. We would have God, in his providence towards us, not to order those things that tend to our hurt, or expose our interest; therefore certainly we ought to avoid those things that lead to sin against him.

We desire and love to have God's providence such towards us, as that our welfare may be well secured. No man loves to live exposed, uncertain and in dangerous circumstances.

While he is so, he lives uncomfortably, in that he lives in continual fear. We desire that God would so order things concerning us, that we may be safe from fear of evil; and that no evil may come nigh our dwelling; and that because we dread calamity. So we do not love the appearance and approaches of it; and love to have it at a great distance from us. We desire to have God to be to us as a wall of fire round about us, to defend us; and that he would surround us as the mountains do the valleys, to guard us from every danger, or enemy; that so no evil may come nigh us.

Now this plainly shows, that we ought, in our behaviour towards God, to keep at a great distance from sin, and from all that exposes to it: as we desire God, in his providence to us, should keep calamity and misery at a great distance from us, and not to order those things that expose our welfare.

6. Seeing we are to pray we may not be led into temptation, certainly we ought not to run ourselves into it.—This is one request that Christ directs us to make to God in that form of prayer, which he taught his disciples—“Lead us not into temptation.” And how inconsistent shall we be with ourselves, if we pray to God, that we should not be led into temptation; and at the same time, we are not careful to avoid temptation; but bring ourselves into it, by doing those things that lead and expose to sin. What self-contradiction is it, for a man to pray to God that he may be kept from that, which he takes no care to avoid! By praying that we may be kept from temptation, we profess to God that being in temptation is a thing to be avoided; but by running into it we show that we choose the contrary, *viz.* not to avoid it.

7. The apostle directs us to avoid those things that are in themselves lawful, but tend to lead others into sin; surely then we should avoid what tends to lead ourselves into sin.—The apostle directs, 1 Cor. viii. 9. “Take heed lest—this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak.” Rom. xiv. 13. “That no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother’s way.” Ver. 15. “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably.

Destroy not him with thy meat.” Ver. 20, 21. “For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.”—Now if this rule of the apostle be agreeable to the word of Christ, as we

must suppose, or expunge what he says out of the canon of the Scripture; then a like rule obliges more strongly in those things that tend to lead *ourselves* into sin.

8. There are many precepts of Scripture, which directly and positively imply, that we ought to avoid those things that tend to sin.

This very thing is commanded by Christ, Matt. xxvi. 41. where he directs us to “watch lest we enter into temptation.” But certainly running ourselves into temptation, is the reverse of watching against it.—We are commanded to abstain from all *appearance* of evil; *i. e.* do by sin as a man does by a thing, the sight or appearance of which he hates; and therefore will avoid anything that looks like it; and will not come near or in sight of it.

Again, Christ commanded to separate from us those things that are stumbling-blocks, or occasions of sin, however dear they are to us. Matt. v. 29. “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.” Ver. 30. “And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off.” By the right hand offending us, is not meant its paining us; but the word in the original signifies, being a stumbling-block; if thy right hand prove a stumbling-block, or occasion to fall; *i.e.* an occasion to sin. Those things are called offences or stumbling-blocks in the New Testament, which are the occasions of falling into sin.—Yea, Christ tells us, we must avoid them, however dear they are to us, though as dear as our right hand or right eye. If there be any practice that naturally tends and exposes us to sin, we must have done with it; though we love it never so well, and are never so loth to part with it; though it be as contrary to our inclination, as to cut off our own right hand, or pluck out our own right eye; and that upon pain of damnation, for it is intimated that if we do not, we must go with two hands and two eyes into hell fire.

Again, God took great care to forbid the children of Israel those things that tended to lead them into sin. For this reason, he forbid them marrying strange wives, (Deut. vii. 3, 4.) “Neither shall thou make marriages with them,—for they will turn away thy sons from following me, that they may serve other gods.” For this reason they were commanded to destroy all those things, that the nations of Canaan had used in their idolatry; and if any were enticed over to idolatry, they were to be destroyed without mercy; though ever so near and dear friends. They were not only to be parted with, but stoned with stones; yea, they themselves were to fall upon them, and put them to death, though son or daughter, or their bosom friend. (Deut. xiii. 6,. &c.) “If thy brother,—or thy son, or thy daughter, or the

wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods,—thou shalt not consent unto him,—neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him. But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death.”

Again, the wise man warns us to avoid those things that tend and expose us to sin; especially the sin of uncleanness. Prov. vi. 27. “Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burnt?

Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt?—So, whosoever touches her, shall not be innocent.” This is the truth held forth; avoid those customs and practices that naturally tend to stir up lust. And there are many examples in Scripture, which have the force of precept; and recorded, as not only worthy, but demand our imitation. The conduct of Joseph is one; and that recorded of King David, is another. Psal. xxxix. 1, 2. “I said I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good”—even from good—that is, he was so watchful over his words, and kept at such a great distance from speaking what might in any way tend to sin; that he avoided, in certain circumstances, speaking what was in itself lawful; lest he should be betrayed into that which was sinful.

9. A prudent sense of our own weakness, and exposedness to yield to temptation, obliges us to avoid that which leads or exposes to sin.

Whoever knows himself, and is sensible how weak he is, and his constant exposedness to run into sin—how full of corruption his heart is, which, like fuel, is ready to catch fire, and bring destruction upon him—how much he has in him to incline him to sin, and how unable he is to stand of himself—who is sensible of this, and has any regard of his duty, will he not be very watchful against everything that may lead and expose to sin? On this account Christ directed us, Matt. xxvi. 41. “To watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation.” The reason is added, the flesh is weak! He who, in confidence of his own strength, boldly runs the venture of sinning, by going into temptation, manifests great presumption, and a sottish insensibility of his own weakness. “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.” Prov. xxviii. 26.

The wisest and strongest, and some of the most holy men in the world, have been overthrown by such means. So was David; so was Solomon,—his wives turned away his heart. If such persons so eminent for holiness were this way led into sin, surely it should be a warning to us. “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

Sect. II

What things lead and expose to sin.

If anything be made out clearly, from reason and the word of God, to be our duty, this would be enough with all Christians. Will a follower of Christ stand objecting and disputing against what is irrefragably proved and demonstrated to be his duty?

But some may be ready to inquire, how shall we know what things do lead and expose to sin? Let a man do what he will, he cannot avoid sinning, as long as he has such a corrupt heart within him. And there is nothing a man can do, but he may find some temptation in it. And though it be true, that a man ought to avoid those things that lead and expose to sin—and that those things which have a special tendency to expose men to sin, are what we ought to shun, as much as in us lies—yet how shall we judge and determine what things have a natural tendency to sin, or do especially lead to it?

I would answer in some particulars which are plain and easy; and which cannot be denied without the greatest absurdity.

1. That which borders on those sins, to which the lusts of men’s hearts strongly incline them, is of this sort. Men come into the world with many strong and violent lusts in their hearts, and are exceeding prone of themselves to transgress; even in the safest circumstances in which they can be placed. And surely so much the nearer they are to that sin, to which they are naturally strongly inclined; so much the more are they exposed. If any of us who are parents should see our children near the brink of some deep pit, or close by the edge of the precipice of a high mountain; and not only so, but the ground upon which the child stood slippery, and steeply descending directly toward the precipice; should we not reckon a child exposed in such a case? should we not be in haste to remove the child from its very dangerous situation?

It was the manner among the Israelites, to build their houses with flat roofs, so that persons might walk on the tops of their houses. And therefore God took care to make it a law among them, that every man should have battlements upon the edges of their roofs; lest any person should fall off and be killed. Deut. xxii. 8. "When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence." And certainly we ought to take the like care that we do not fall into sin; which carries in it eternal death. We should, as it were, fix a battlement, a guard, to keep us from the edge of the precipice. Much more ought we to take care, that we do not go upon a roof that is not only without battlements, but when it is steep, and we shall naturally incline to fall.—Men's lusts are like strong enemies, endeavouring to draw them into sin. If a man stood upon a dangerous precipice, and had enemies about him, pulling and drawing him, endeavouring to throw him down; would he, in such a case, choose or dare to stand near the edge? Would he not endeavour, for his own safety to keep at a distance?

2. Those things that tend to feed lusts in the imagination are of this kind.—they lead and expose men to sin. Those things that have a natural tendency to excite in the mind the imagination of that which is the object of the lust certainly tend to feed and promote that lust. What can be more evident, than that a presenting of the object tends to stir up the appetite? Reason and experience teach this.—Therefore, all things, whether words or actions, which have a tendency and expose to sin, tend also to raise in the mind imaginations of what the lust tends to. It is certainly wrong to feed a lust, even in the imagination. It is quite contrary to the holy rules of God's words. Prov. xxiv.

9. "The thought of foolishness is sin." Matt. v. 28. "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery." A man, by gratifying his lusts in his imagination and thoughts, may make his soul in the sight of God to be a hold of foul spirits, and like a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. And sinful imaginations tend to sinful actions, and outward behaviour in the end. Lust is always first conceived in the imagination, and then brought forth in the outward practice. You may see the progress of it in Jam. i. 15. "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin."—Such things are abominable in the sight of a pure and holy God. We are commanded to keep at a great distance from spiritual pollution; and to hate even the very "garment spotted with the flesh." Jude 23.

3. Those things that the experience and observation of mankind show to be ordinarily attended or followed with sin, are of this sort. Experience is a good rule to determine by in things of this nature. How do we know the natural tendency of anything, but by observation and experience?

Men observe and find that some things are commonly attended and followed with other things; and hence mankind pronounce, that they have a natural tendency to them. We have no other way to know the tendency of anything. Thus men by observation and experience know that the warmth of the sun, and showers of rain, are attended with the growth of plants; and hence they learn, that they have a tendency to it. So they find by experience, that the bite of some kinds of serpents is commonly followed with illness, and often with death; and hence they learn, that the bite of such serpents has a natural tendency to bring disorder upon the body, and exposes to death.—And so, if experience and common observation shows, that any particular practice or custom is commonly attended with that which is very sinful, we may safely conclude that such a practice *tends* to sin; that it leads and exposes to it.

Thus we may determine that tavern-haunting and gaming are things that tend to sin; because common experience and observation show, that those practices are attended with a great deal of sin and wickedness. The observation of all ages and all nations, with one voice, declares it. It shows, where taverns are much frequented for drinking and the like, they are especially places of sin, of profaneness, and other wickedness; and it shows, that those towns, where there is much of this, are places where no good generally prevails. And it also shows, that those persons that are given much to frequenting taverns are most commonly vicious persons. And so of gaming; as playing at cards, experience shows, that those persons that practise this, do generally fall into much sin. Hence these practices are become infamous among all sober virtuous persons.

4. Another way by which persons may determine of some things, that they lead and expose to sin, is by their own experience, or what they have found in themselves.—This surely is enough to convince them, that such things actually lead and expose to sin; for what will convince men, if their own experience will not? Thus if men have found by undeniable experience, that any practice or custom stirs up lust in them, and has betrayed them into foolish and sinful behaviour, or sinful thoughts; they may determine that they lead to sin. If

they, upon examining themselves, must own that a custom or practice has disposed them to the omission of known duty, such as secret or family prayer, and has indisposed them to reading and religious meditation—or if they find, since they have complied with such a custom, they are less watchful of their hearts, less disposed to any thing that is serious; that the frame of their mind is more light, and their hearts less disposed on the things of another world, and more after vanity—these are *sinful effects*; and therefore if experience shows a custom or practice to be attended with these things, then experience shows that they lead and expose to sin.

5. We may determine whether a thing be of an evil tendency or not, by the effect that an outpouring of the Spirit of God, and a general flourishing of religion, has with respect to it. If this puts a stop to any practice or custom, and roots it out; surely it argues, that that practice or custom is of no good tendency. For if there be no hurt in it, and it tends to no hurt, why should the Spirit of God destroy it? The Spirit of God has no tendency to destroy any thing that is neither sinful, nor has any tendency to sin. Why should it? Why should we suppose, that he is an enemy to that which has no hurt in it; nor has any tendency to that which is hurtful?

The flourishing of religion has no tendency to abolish or expel anything that is no way against religion. That which is not against religion, religion will not appear against. It is a rule that holds in all contraries and opposites; the opposition is equal on both sides. So contrary as light is to darkness, so contrary is darkness to light. So contrary as the flourishing of religion is to any custom, just so contrary is that custom to the flourishing of religion. That custom that religion tends to destroy, that custom, if it prevail, tends also to destroy religion. Therefore, if the flourishing of religion, and the outpouring of the Spirit of God, tends to overthrow any custom, that takes place or prevails, we may surely determine, that that custom is either in itself sinful, or tends and exposes to evil.

6. We may determine, by the effect that a general decay of religion has with respect to them, whether they be things of a sinful tendency or not. If they be things that come with a decay of religion, that creep in as that decays, we may determine they are things of no good tendency. The withdrawing of good does not let in good but evil. Evil, not good, comes in, as good gradually ceases. What is it but darkness that comes in, as light withdraws?

Therefore, if there be any decay of religion in the town, or in particular persons, and upon this, any certain customs or practices take place and are allowed, which were wholly abstained from and renounced, when religion was in a more flourishing state; we may safely conclude that such customs and practices are contrary to the nature of true religion; and therefore in themselves sinful, or tending to sin.

7. We may in many things determine whether any custom be of a good tendency, by considering what the effect would be, if it was openly and universally owned and practised. There are many things which persons practise somewhat secretly, and which they plead to be not hurtful; but which if they had suitable consideration to discern the consequence of everybody openly practising the same, would soon show a most woeful state of things. If therefore there be any custom, that will not bear universal open practice and profession; we may determine that *that* custom is of an ill tendency. For if it is neither sinful in itself, nor tends to anything sinful, then it is no matter how open it is: for we need not be afraid of that custom being too prevalent and universal, that has no ill tendency in it.

Sect. III

A serious warning to all, and especially young people.

Thus I have mentioned some general rules, by which to determine and judge, what things are of a bad and sinful tendency. And these things are so plain, that for a person to deny them would be absurd and ridiculous.—I would now, in the name of God, *warn all persons* to avoid such things, as appear by these rules to lead and expose to sin. And particularly, I would take occasion to warn *young people*, as they would approve themselves fearers of God, to avoid all such things in company, that being tried by these rules, will appear to have a tendency to sin. Avoid all such ways of talking and acting as have a tendency to this; and follow the example of Joseph. Not only gross acts of uncleanness, but all degrees of lasciviousness, both in talking and acting, are strictly forbidden in Scripture; as what should not be so much as once named among saints or Christians. Gal. v. 9. “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness.” Eph. v. 3, 4, 5. “But fornication, and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; for this ye know,

that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God.” We should hate even the garments spotted with the flesh, *i.e.* should hate and shun all that, in the least degree, approaches to any such thing.

And I desire that certain customs, too common among young people, may be examined by those rules that have been mentioned. That custom in particular, of young people of different sexes reclining together—however little is made of it, and however ready persons may be to laugh at its being condemned—if it be examined by the rules that have been mentioned, it will appear, past all contradiction, to be one of those things that lead and expose to sin. And I believe experience and fact abundantly bear witness to it. It has been one main thing that has led to the growth of uncleanness in the land. And there are other customs and liberties, customarily used among young people in company, which they who use them know that they lead to sin. They know that they stir up their lusts; and this is the very end for which they do it, to gratify their lusts in some measure. Little do such persons consider, what a holy God they are soon to be judged by, who abominates the impurities of their hearts.—If therefore they do actually stir up and feed lust, then certainly they tend to further degrees and more gross acts. That which stirs up lust, makes it more violent, and does therefore certainly the more expose persons to be overcome by it. How evident and undeniable are these things; and how strange that any should make a derision of them!

Possibly you may be confident of your own strength; and may think with yourself, that you are not in danger, that there is no temptation in these things, but what you are able easily to overcome.

But you should consider that the most self-confident are most in danger. Peter was very confident that he should not deny Christ, but how dreadfully otherwise was the event! If others that have fallen into gross sins, should declare how it was with them; doubtless they would say, that they at first thought there was no danger; they were far from the thought that ever they should commit such wickedness; but yet by venturing further and further, they fell at last into the foulest and grossest transgressions. Persons may long withstand temptation, and be suddenly overcome at last.

None so much in danger, as the most bold. They are most safe, who are most sensible of their own weakness; most distrustful of their own hearts; and most sensible of their continual need of restraining grace. Young persons, with respect to the sin of uncleanness,

are dealt with by the devil, just as some give an account of serpents charming birds and other animals down into their mouths. If the serpent takes them with his eyes, though they seem to be affrighted by it, yet they will not flee away, but will keep the serpent in sight, and approach nearer and nearer to him, till they fall a prey.

Another custom that I desire may be examined by the fore-mentioned rules, is that of young people of both sexes getting together in companies for mirth, and spending the time together till late in the night, in their jollity. I desire our young people to suffer their ears to be open to what I have to say upon this point; as I am the messenger of the Lord of hosts to them; and not determine that they will not hearken, before they have heard what I shall say. I hope there are but few persons among us so abandoned, as to determine that they will go on in a practice, whether they are convinced that it is unlawful or not; or though it should be proved to them to be unlawful by undeniable arguments.—Let us then examine this custom and practice by what has been said. It has been proved undeniably, that we ought not to go on in a practice that leads and exposes to sin; and rules have been laid down to judge what does thus expose and lead to it, which I think are plain and undeniable.

Certainly a Christian will not be unwilling to have his practices examined and tried by the rules of reason and God's word; but will rather rejoice in it. And I desire particularly that the practice may be tried by that sure touch-stone of experience. This is one of the rules of trial that have been mentioned; that any custom which the experience and observation of mankind show to be ordinarily attended with sin, may be concluded to be unlawful. And if we look abroad in the country, I doubt not but these two things will be found.

1. That as to those *places* where there is most of this carried on among young people, (as there is more of it in some places than others,) it will be found, as a thing that universally holds, that the young people there are commonly a loose, vain, and irreligious generation; little regarding God, heaven or hell, or anything but vanity. And that commonly in those towns where most frolicking is carried on, there are the most frequent breakings out of gross sins; fornication in particular.

2. If we go through the country, we shall for the most part find, that those *persons* who are most addicted to this practice, are the furthest from serious thought, and are the vainest and loosest upon other accounts. And whence should this be, if such a practice was not sinful, or had not a natural tendency to lead persons into sin.

Now I appeal to those who have made pretences to serious religion and saving piety. You have formerly pretended to keep up religion in your closets, and in your own souls; now seriously ask yourselves whether or not you have not found, that this practice has *indisposed* you to serious religion, and taken off your minds from it? Has it not tended to your neglect of secret prayer? And, if you have not wholly neglected it, have you not found, that you have been abundantly more ready to turn it off in *any* manner, and glad to have done with it? more backward to reading and serious meditation, and such things? And, that your mind has been exceedingly diverted from religion, and that for some time?—I do not send you far off to find out whether this custom be not of bad tendency—not beyond the sea, but your own breast; there let the matter be determined.

Let us now try this custom by the effect which the outpouring of the Spirit of God on a people has with respect to it. This we are under great advantage to do; because there has lately been, in this place, the most remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God, that has even been in New England, and it may be in the world, since the apostles' days. And it is well known, that *before* then, the custom *did* prevail in the town; but *after*, the custom was altogether laid aside; and was so for several years.—No account can be given why the Spirit of God, and the flourishing of religion, should abolish such a custom, unless that custom be either in its nature or tendency an enemy to the Spirit of God, and to religion.—The fruits of the Spirit of God are good, and therefore it is good that this custom should be removed; for this is plainly one of the effects. And if so, it is because the custom is bad, either in its nature or tendency; otherwise there would be no good in its being removed. The Spirit of God abolished this custom for this reason, because if it had been kept up in the town, it would have had a direct tendency to hinder that work which the Spirit was about to do amongst us. This was undeniably the reason.

Supposing such a custom had been begun and set up, by the young people all over the town, in the midst of the time of the late outpouring of the Spirit, all of a sudden; would any wise persons, that have truly the cause of religion at heart, rejoiced at it? Would not everyone have concluded, without any hesitation, that there was great danger that it would take off people's minds from religion, and make them vain; and so put an end to the flourishing of religion? Would not every considerate person have thought thus of it? And if such a custom would have had an ill tendency *then*, so it will *now*.

Objection. The town is not in such circumstances now, as it was then: it might have done hurt then, by putting an end to the great concern; but now it may do no hurt; for there is now no such great concern to be interrupted by it.

Answer. Though the town is not in such circumstances now as it was then, yet there *ought* to be as much engagedness of mind about religion, as much concern among sinners, and as much engagedness among the godly, as then; and it is to our shame that there is not. And if such a practice would have tended to *destroy* such a religious concern then, it certainly tends to *prevent* it now. It is a rule that will hold, that what has a tendency to destroy a thing when it is, tends to prevent when it is not. And are we not praying from Sabbath to Sabbath, and from day to day, for such a concern again? And do not those who pretend to be converted, and yet have lately set up this custom, pray for the same? Are you a convert, a saint, and yet not desire that there should be any more pouring out of the Spirit of God? The town has cause to be ashamed of such converts, if it has any such.

And if ye do, why do you do what tends to prevent it.

Again, Let this practice be tried by the effect that a general decay of religion has with respect to it. Now we have a trial: it is now a time that religion is greatly decayed amongst us; and the effect is, that this custom comes in with this decay. Young people begin again to set up their old custom of *frolicking*, (as it is called,) and spending a great part of the night in it, to the violation of family order. What is the reason, if this custom is not bad, either in its nature or tendency that it did not come in before, when religion was lively? Why does it stay till it can take the advantage of the withdrawment of religion? This is a sign that it is a custom that shuns a spirit of lively religion, as darkness shuns the light, and never comes in till light withdraws.

And here again, I would send persons to their own experience. How did this practice come in with you in particular; you, that two or three years ago seemed to be so engaged in religion? Did it not come in, did you not begin to practise it, as the sense of religion wore off? And what is the matter? Why did not you set up the practice then, when your heart was taken up about reading, meditation, and secret prayer to God? If this do not at all stand in the way of them, and is no hindrance to them, why was you not engaged in both together? What account can you give of it?

Why did you leave off this practice and custom, or abstain from it? To what purpose is this changing?

One while it must be avoided as evil and another while practised and pleaded for as good? The making such an alteration does not look well, nor will it be for the honour of religion in the eye of the world. For whether the practice be lawful or not, yet such a thing will surely be improved to our disadvantage. For your avoiding it then has this appearance in the eye of the country, that then you condemned it; and therefore your now returning to it, will appear to them as backsliding in you. Such changelings are evermore, in the eye of the world, greatly to the dishonour of their profession; let it be what it will.

Indeed, this custom, as it is practised, does not only tend to sin, but is in itself very disorderly, sinful, and shameful. For it is attended late in the night, and in the dead of the night, to the neglect of family prayer, and violating all family order; which is disorder and profaneness. Is it lawful to rob God of his ordinary sacrifices, for the sake of your pleasure, diversion, and jollity? Are you of that mind, that it is a decent thing that the stated worship of the great God should give way to your mirth, and your diversions? Is this the way of God's holy children? Those works that are commonly done in the dead of night, seem to have a black mark set upon them by the apostle, and Christians are exhorted to avoid them, Rom. xiii. 12, 13. "Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness; not in chambering and wantonness." The word here rendered *rioting* is of far different signification from the term, as used in our laws; for the forcible doing an unlawful thing, by three or more persons assembled together for that purpose. But the word here properly signifies a *disorderly convention* of persons in order to spend their time together in pleasure and jollity. So the word is commonly used in Scripture: Prov. xxiii. 20. "Be not amongst riotous eaters of flesh." Prov. xxviii. 7. "He that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father." Luke xv. 13.—"wasted his substance with riotous living."—Again, a black mark seems to be set on such in Scripture, as in 1 Thess. v.5-7. "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night."

Many of you that have lately set up this practice of frolicking and jollity, *profess* to be children of the light and of the day; and not to be the children of darkness. Therefore *walk as in the day*; and do not those works of darkness, that are commonly done at unseasonable hours of the night. Such things are not only condemned by the apostle, but are looked upon as infamous in all ages among sober people, as all past writings manifest. Therefore it is a thing of bad report, and so forbidden. Phil. iv. 8. "Whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue—any praise, think on these things."

Objection. But the wise man allows of this practice, when he says, Eccles. iii. 4. "There is a time to mourn and a time to dance."

Answer. This is nothing to the purpose; for the utmost that any can pretend that it proves, is that it may be used under some circumstances; but not at all, that dancing and other things used by our young people in their frolics are lawful, in those circumstances: any more than what is said in the same chapter, ver. 3.—"there is a time to kill," proves that it is lawful for a man to commit murder.—To deny that dancing, under any circumstances whatever, was lawful, would be absurd; for there was a religious dancing in the Jewish church, which was a way of expressing their spiritual mirth. So David danced before the Lord. And he calls upon others to praise God in the dance. So there may be other circumstances wherein dancing may not be unlawful. But all this makes nothing to the present purpose; to prove that this particular custom is not of a bad tendency. Besides, when the wise man says, "there is a time to dance," that does not prove, that the dead of the night is the time for it. The same wise man doth not justify carnal mirth, but condemns it. Eccl. ii. 2. "I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doth it?"

Objection. If we avoid all such things, it will be the way for our young people to be ignorant how to behave themselves in company.

Answer. But consider what this objection comes to. It certainly comes to this, *viz.* That the pouring out of the Spirit of God upon a people, tends to banish all good conduct, good breeding, and decent behaviour from among them; and to sink them down into clownishness and barbarity!

The Spirit of God did actually put an end to this practice among us.—But who is not ashamed to make such an objection? Will any of our young converts talk thus? Will you, that

think you were converted by the late pouring out of the Spirit of God, and are made holy persons, heirs of eternal life, talk so blasphemously of it?

If our young people are resolute still to go on notwithstanding all that has been said, I hope that those of them who call themselves converted, will first find out some rational, satisfying answer to the arguments that have been used against it. This at least may be reasonably expected of them, seeing they make such a profession. You have this day been partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, and therein solemnly renewed your profession.—If after such light set before you, and such mercy given, you will go on, be it known to you, that you're eating now, and at other times, will prove only an eating and drinking judgement to yourselves.

And I desire heads of families, if they have any government over their children, or any command of their own houses, would not tolerate their children in such practices, nor suffer such conventions in their houses.—I do not desire that young people should be abridged of any lawful and proper liberties. But this custom can be of no benefit or service in the world: it tends only to mischief.—Satan doubtless would be glad to have such an interest amongst us as he used to have; and is therefore striving to steal in, while we are sleeping: but let us rouse up ourselves, and vigorously oppose his encroachments. I shall repeat those words of the apostle, Rom. xiii. 12-14. and leave them to the serious consideration of all persons, old and young. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."