

SERMON IX.

**ANY ONE FORM OF SIN PERSISTED IN IS FATAL TO THE SOUL.**

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Text.--James 2:10: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all."

Text.--Luke 16:10: "He that is unjust in the least, is also unjust in much."

In speaking from these words, I inquire,

*I. What is it to persist in sin?*

*II. Any one form of sin persisted in, is fatal to the soul.*

**I. What is it to persist in sin?**

- 1. To persist in sin is, not to abandon it. If a person should only occasionally, under the force of temptation, fall into a sin, any form of sin, and should repent and abandon it for a time, and should only occasionally be overcome by a temptation to commit that form of sin, it would not be proper to say that he persisted in it. For, according to this supposition, he is not wilful, or obstinate, or habitual in the commission of this sin; but it is rather accidental in the sense that the temptation sometimes overtakes and overcomes him notwithstanding his habitual abandonment of it and resistance to it. But if the commission be habitual, a thing allowed, a thing indulged in habitually--such a sin is persisted in.
- 2. A sin is persisted in, although it may not be outwardly repeated, if it be not duly confessed. An individual may be guilty of a great sin, which he may not repeat in the act; nevertheless, while he neglects or refuses to confess it, it is still on his conscience unrepented of, and in that sense, is still persisted in. If the sin has been committed to the injury of some person or persons, and be not duly confessed to the parties injured, it is still persisted in.

If any of you had slandered his neighbor to his great injury, it would not do for you to merely abstain from repeating that offense. The sin is not abandoned until it is confessed, and reparation made, so far as confession can make it. If not confessed, the injury is allowed to work; and therefore the sin is virtually repeated, and therefore persisted in. Again,

- 3. A sin is persisted in when due reparation has not been made. If you have wronged a person and it is in your power to make him restitution and satisfaction, then, so long as you persist in neglecting or refusing to do so, you do not forsake the sin, but persist in it. Suppose one who had stolen your property, resolved never to repeat the act, and never to commit the like again; and yet he refuses to make restitution and restore the stolen property as far as is in his power; of course he still persists in that sin, and the wrong is permitted to remain.

I once had a conversation with a young man to this effect: He had been in the habit of stealing. He was connected with a business in which it was possible for him to steal money in small sums; which he had repeatedly done. He afterwards professed to become a Christian, but he made no restitution. He found in the Bible this text--"Let him that stole steal no more." He resolved not to steal any more, and there let the matter rest. Of course he had no evidence of acceptance with God, for he could not have been accepted. However he flattered himself that he was a Christian for a long time, until he heard a sermon on confession and restitution, which woke him up. He then came to me for the conversation of which I have spoken.

He was told that, if it was in his power, he must make restitution and give back the stolen money, or he could not be forgiven. But observe his perversion of Scripture. To be sure it is the duty of those who have stolen property to steal no more; but this is not all. He is bound to restore that which he has stolen, as well as to steal no more. This is a plain doctrine of Scripture, as well as of reason and conscience.

## **II. I now come to the main doctrine of our texts--that any one form of sin persisted in, is fatal to the soul.**

That is, it is impossible for a person to be saved, who continues to commit any form of known sin.

- 1. It is fatal to the soul because any one form of sin, persisted in, is a violation of the spirit of the whole law. The text in James settles that: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all." The law requires supreme love to God, and equal love to our fellow men.

Now sin is selfishness; and always requires the preference of self-interest and self-gratification to obedience to God, or to our duty to our fellowmen.

Whosoever, therefore, habitually prefers himself to God, or is selfish in regard to his fellow men, can surely not be a Christian. If in any one thing he violates the law of love, he breaks the spirit of the whole law, and is living in sin.

- 2. Persistence in any form of sin cannot consist with supreme love to God or equal love to our fellow men. If we love God more than ourselves, we cannot disoblige Him for the sake of obliging ourselves. We cannot displease Him, knowingly and habitually, for the sake of pleasing ourselves.

For we supremely love whom we supremely desire to please. If we supremely desire to please ourselves, we love ourselves supremely. If we love God supremely, we desire supremely to please Him; and cannot, consistently with the existence of this love in the soul, consent to displease Him.

Under the force of a powerful temptation that diverts and partially distracts the mind, one who loves God may be induced to commit an occasional sin, and occasionally to displease God.

But if he loves God supremely, he will consent to displease Him only under the pressure of a present and powerful temptation that diverts attention and partially distracts the mind. So that his sin cannot be habitual; and no form of sin can habitually have dominion over him if he is truly a Christian.

- 3. The text in James affirms the impossibility of real obedience in one thing, and of persistent disobedience in another, at the same time. It seems to be an error too common, into which many fall, that persons can really obey God in the spirit of obedience in some things, while at the same time there are certain other things in which they withhold obedience; in other words, that they can obey one commandment and disobey another at the same time--that they can perform one duty acceptably, and at the same time refuse to perform other duties.

Now the text in James is designed flatly to contradict this view of the subject. It asserts as plainly as possible, that disobedience in any one point is wholly inconsistent with true obedience for the time being in any other respect; that the neglect of one duty renders it impossible for the time being to perform any other duty with acceptance; in other words, no one can obey in one thing and disobey in another at the same time. But,

- 4. Real obedience to God involves and implies supreme regard for His authority.

Now if anyone has a supreme regard for God's authority in any one thing, he will yield to His authority in everything.

But if he can consent to act against the authority of God in any one thing for the time being, he cannot be accepted in anything; for it must be that, while in one thing he rejects the authority of God, he does not properly accept it in any other. Hence, if obedience to God be real in anything, it extends for the time being, and must extend, to everything known to be the will of God. Again,

- 5. One sin, persisted in, is fatal to the soul, because it is a real rejection of God's whole authority. If a man violates knowingly any one of God's commandments as such, he rejects the authority of God; and if in this he rejects the authority of God, he rejects His whole authority for the time being, on every subject. So that if he appears to obey in other things while in one thing he sets aside and contemns God's authority, it is only the appearance of obedience, and not real obedience. He acts from a wrong motive in the case in which he appears to obey. He certainly

does not act out of supreme respect to God's authority; and therefore he does not truly obey Him. But surely one who rejects the whole authority of God cannot be saved.

I fear it is very common for persons to make a fatal mistake here; and really to suppose that they are accepted in their obedience in general, although in some things or thing they habitually neglect or refuse to do their duty.

They live, and know that they live, in the omission of some duty habitually, or in the violation of their own conscience on some point habitually; and yet they keep up so much of the form of religion, and do so many things that they call duties, that they seem to think that these will compensate for the sin in which they persist. Or rather, so many duties are performed, and so much of religion is kept up, as will show, they think, that upon the whole they are Christians; will afford them ground for hope, and give them reasons to think that they are accepted while they are indulging, and know that they are, in some known sin.

They say--To be sure I know that I neglect that duty; I know that I violate my conscience in that thing; but I do so many other things that are my duty, that I have good reason to believe that I am a Christian.

Now this is a fatal delusion. Such persons are totally deceived in supposing that they really obey God in anything. "He that is unjust in the least, is really unjust also in much;" and "whosoever will keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all." Again,

- 6. Any form of sin persisted in is fatal to the soul, because it is inconsistent with true repentance. Sin, however great, will be forgiven if repented of. But what is repentance? Repentance is not mere sorrow for sin, but it is the heart-renunciation of sin; it is the giving up of sin from the heart, and of all sin as sin; it is the rejection of it because it is that abominable thing which God hates; it is the turning of the heart from self-seeking to supreme love to God and equal love to our fellow men; it is heart-reformation; it is heart-rejection of sin; it is heart-turning to God. Now, while any one sin is persisted in and not given up, there can be no true repentance; for after all, this form of sin is preferred to the will of God--the indulgence of sense in this particular is preferred to pleasing God. There can, therefore, be no true repentance unless all known sin be for the time utterly abandoned.
- 7. Persistence in any form of sin is fatal to the soul, because it is utterly inconsistent with saving faith. That faith is saving which actually does save from sin; and no other faith is saving, or can be. That faith is justifying which is sanctifying. True faith works by love; it purifies the heart; it overcomes the world. These are expressly affirmed to be the characteristics of saving faith. Let no one suppose that his faith is justifying when in fact it does not save him from the commission of sin; for he cannot be justified while he persists in the commission

of any known sin. If his faith does not purify his heart, if it does not overcome the world and overcome his sins, it can never save him. Again,

- 8. Persistence in any one form of sin is fatal to the soul, because it withstands the power of the Gospel. The Gospel does not save whom it does not sanctify. If sin in any form withstand the saving power of the Gospel; if sin does not yield under the influence of the Gospel; if it be persisted in, in spite of all the power of the Gospel on the soul, of course the Gospel does not, cannot save that soul. Such sin is fatal. But again,
- 9. Persistence in any one form of sin is fatal to the soul, because the grace of the Gospel cannot pardon what it cannot eradicate.

As I have already said, a sin cannot be pardoned while it is persisted in. Some persons seem to suppose that, although they persist in many forms of sin, yet the grace of God will pardon sins that it has not power to eradicate and subdue. But this is a great mistake. The Bible everywhere expressly teaches this: that if the Gospel fails to eradicate sin, it can never save the soul from the consequences of that sin. But again,

- 10. If the Gospel should pardon sin which it did not eradicate, this would not save the soul.

Suppose God should not punish sin; still, if the soul be left to the self-condemnation of sin, its salvation is naturally impossible. It were of no use to the sinner to be pardoned, if left under this self-condemnation. This is plain. Let no one, therefore, think that if his sins are not subdued by the grace of the Gospel he can be saved.

- 11. But again, and lastly, sin is a unit in its spirit and root. It consists in preferring self to God.

Hence, if any form of preferring self to God be persisted in, no sin has been truly abandoned; God is not supremely loved; and the soul cannot, by any possibility, in such a case, be saved.

## **REMARKS.**

1. What a delusion the self-righteous are under. There is no man that is not aware that he has sinned at some time, and that he is a sinner. But there are many who think that, upon the whole, they perform so many good deeds, that they are safe. They are aware that they are habitually neglecting God, and neglecting duty, that they neither love God supremely nor their neighbor as themselves; yet they are constantly prone to give themselves credit for a great deal of goodness. Now let them understand that there is no particle of righteousness in them, nor of true goodness, while they live in neglect of any known duty to man--while they are constantly prone to give themselves credit for a great deal of goodness. But they seem to think that they have a balance of good deeds.

2. How many persons indulge in little sins, as they call them; but they are too honest, they think to indulge in great crimes. Now both these texts really contradict this view. "He that is unjust in that which is least, is unjust also in much." If a man yields to a slight temptation to commit what he calls a small sin, it cannot be a regard for God that keeps him from committing great sins. He may abstain from committing great sins through fear of disgrace or of punishment, but not because he loves God. If he does not love God well enough to keep from yielding to slight temptations to commit small sins, surely he does not love Him well enough to keep from yielding to great temptations to commit great sins. Again,

3. We see the delusion of those who are guilty of habitual dishonesties, tricks of the trade for example, and yet profess to be Christians.

How many there are who are continually allowing themselves to practice little dishonesties, little deceptions, and to tell little lies in trade; and yet think themselves Christians. Now this delusion is awful; it is fatal. Let all such be on their guard, and understand it. But again,

4. We see the delusion of those professors of religion who allow themselves habitually to neglect some known duty, and yet think themselves Christians. They shun some cross; there is something that they know they ought to do which they do not; and this is habitual with them. Perhaps all their Christian lives they have shunned some cross, or neglected the performance of some duty; and yet they think themselves Christians. Now let them know assuredly that they are self-deceived.

5. Many, I am sorry to say, preach a Gospel that is a dishonor to Christ. They really maintain--at least they make this impression, though they may not teach it in words and form--that Christ really justifies men while they are living in the indulgence habitually of known sin.

Many preachers seem not to be aware of the impression which they really leave upon their people. Probably, if they were asked whether they hold and preach that any sin is forgiven which is not repented of, whether men are really justified while they persist in known sin, they would say, No. But, after all, in their preaching they leave a very different impression. For example, how common it is to find ministers who are in this position; --You ask them how many members they have in their church. Perhaps they will tell you, five hundred. How many do you think are living up to the best light which they have? How many of them are living from day to day with a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man, and are not indulging in any known sin either of omission or commission? Who are living and aiming to discharge punctually and fully every duty of heart to God and to all their fellow men? Push the inquiry, and ask, How many of your church can you honestly say, before God, you think are endeavoring to live without sin? That do not indulge themselves in any form of transgression or omission?

They will tell you, perhaps, that they do not know a member of their church, or at least they know but very few, of whom they can say this. Now ask them further--How many of

your church do you suppose to be in a state of justification? And you will find that they have the impression that the great mass of their church are in a state of justification with God; in a state of acceptance with Him; in a state in which they are prepared to die; and if they should die just in this state by any sudden stroke of Providence, and they should be called upon to preach their funeral sermon, they would assume that they had gone to heaven.

While they will tell you that they know of but very few of their church of whom they can conscientiously say--I do not believe he indulges himself in any known sin; yet let one of that great majority, of whom he cannot say this, suddenly die, and this pastor be called to attend his funeral, would he not comfort the mourners by holding out the conviction that he was a Christian, and had gone to heaven? Now this shows that the pastor himself, whatever be his theoretical views of being justified while indulging in any known sin, is yet after all, practically an Antinomian; and practically holds, believes, and teaches, that Christ justifies people while they are living in the neglect of known duty; while they are knowingly shunning some cross; while they persist in known sin. Ministers, indeed, often leave this impression upon their churches, (and I fear Calvinistic ministers quite generally,) that if they are converted, or ever were, they are justified although they may be living habitually and always in the indulgence of more or less known sin; living in the habitual neglect of known duty; indulging various forms of selfishness. And yet they are regarded as justified Christians; and get the impression, even from the preaching of their ministers, that all is well with them; that they really believe the Gospel and are saved by Christ.

Now this is really Antinomianism. It is a faith without law; it is a Savior that saves in and not from sin. It is presenting Christ as really setting aside the moral law, and introducing another rule of life; as forgiving sin while it is persisted in, instead of saving from sin.

6. Many profess to be Christians, and are indulging the hope of eternal life, who know that they never have forsaken all forms of sin; that in some things they have always fallen short of complying with the demands of their own consciences. They have indulged in what they call little sins; they have allowed themselves in practices, and in forms of self-indulgence, that they cannot justify; they have never reformed all their bad habits; and have never lived up to what they have regarded as their whole duty. They have never really intended to do this; have never resolutely set themselves, in the strength of Christ, to give up every form of sin, both of omission and commission; but, on the contrary, they know that they have always indulged themselves in what they condemn. And yet they call themselves Christians! But this is as contrary to the teaching of the Bible as possible. The Bible teaches, not only that men are condemned by God if they indulge themselves in what they condemn; but also that God condemns them if they indulge in that the lawfulness of which they so much as doubt. If they indulge in any one thing the lawfulness of which is in their own estimation doubtful, God condemns them. This is the express teaching of the Bible. But how different is this from the common ideas that many professors of religion have!

7. Especially is this true of those who habitually indulge in the neglect of known duty,

and who habitually shun the cross of Christ. Many persons there are who neglect family prayer, and yet admit that they ought to perform it. How many families are there who will even stay away from the female prayer-meeting to avoid performing the duty of taking a part of those meetings. How many there are who indulge the hope that they are saved, are real Christians; while they know that they are neglecting, and always have neglected some things, and even many things, that they admit to be their duty. They continue to live on in those omissions; but they think that they are Christians because they do not engage in anything that is openly disgraceful, or, as they suppose, very bad.

Now there are many that entirely overlook the real nature of sin. The law of God is positive. It commands us to consecrate all our powers to His service and glory; to love Him with all our heart and our neighbor as ourself. Now to neglect to do this is sin; it is positive transgression; it is an omission which always involves a refusal to do what God requires us to do. In other words, sin is the neglect to fulfill our obligations. If one neglects to pay you what he owes you, do you not call that sin, especially if the neglect involved necessarily the refusal to pay when he has the means of payment?

Sin really consists in withholding from God and man that love and service which we owe them--a withholding from God and man their due.

Now, where anyone withholds from God or man that which is their due, is this honest? Is this Christian? And while this withholding is persisted in, can an individual be in a justified state? No, indeed!

The Bible teaches that sin is forgiven when it is repented of, but never while it is persisted in. The Bible teaches that the grace of God can save us from sin--from the commission of sin, or can pardon when we repent, and put away sin; but it never teaches that sin can be forgiven while it is persisted in.

Let me ask you who are here present, do you think you are Christians? Do you think, if you should die in your present state, that you are prepared to go to heaven? That you are already justified in Christ?

Well now, let me further ask, are you so much as seriously and solemnly intending to perform to Christ, from day to day, your whole duty; and to omit nothing that you regard as your duty either to God or man? Are you not habitually shunning some cross? Omitting something because it is a trial to perform that duty? Are you not avoiding the performance of disagreeable duties, and things that are trying to flesh and blood? Are you not neglecting those around you? Are you not failing to love your neighbor as yourself? Are you not neglecting something that you yourself confess to be your duty? And is not this habitual with you?

And now, do you suppose that you are really to be saved while guilty of these neglects habitually and persistently? I beg of you, be not deceived.

8. The impression of many seems to be, that grace will pardon what it cannot prevent; in

other words that if the grace of the Gospel fails to save people from the commission of sin in this life; it will nevertheless pardon them and save them in sin, if it cannot save them from sin.

Now, really, I understand the Gospel as teaching that men are saved from sin first, and as a consequence, from hell; and not that they are saved from hell while they are not saved from sin. Christ sanctifies when He saves. And this is the very first element or idea of salvation, saving from sin. "Thou shall call His name Jesus," said the angel, "for He shall save His people from their sins." "Having raised up His Son Jesus," says the apostle, "He hath sent Him to bless you in turning every one of you from his iniquities."

Let no one expect to be saved from hell, unless the grace of the Gospel saves him first from sin. Again,

9. There are many who think that they truly obey God in most things, while they know that they habitually disobey Him in some things. They seem to suppose that they render acceptable obedience to most of the commandments of God, while they are aware that some of the commandments they habitually disregard. Now the texts upon which I am speaking expressly deny this position, and plainly teach that if in any one thing obedience is refused, if any one commandment is disobeyed, no other commandment is acceptably obeyed, or can be for the time being.

Do let me ask you who are here present, is not this impression in your minds that, upon the whole, you have evidence that you are Christians?

You perform so many duties and avoid so many out-breaking sins, you think that there is so great a balance to your favor, that you obey so many more commands than you disobey, that you call yourselves Christians, although you are aware that some of the commandments you never seriously intended to comply with, and that in some things you have always allowed yourself to fall short of known duty. Now, if this impression is in your minds, remember that it is not authorized at all by the texts upon which I am speaking, nor by any part of the Bible. You are really disobeying the spirit of the whole law. You do not truly embrace the Gospel; your faith does not purify your hearts and overcome the world; it does not work by love, and therefore it is a spurious faith, and you are yet in your sins. Will you consider this? Will you take home this truth to your inmost soul?

10. There are many who are deceiving themselves by indulging the belief that they are forgiven, while they have not made that confession and restitution which is demanded by the Gospel. In other words, they have not truly repented; they have not given up their sin. They do not outwardly repeat it; neither do they in heart forsake it.

They have not made restitution; and therefore they hold on to their sin, supposing it will do if they do not repeat it; that Christ will forgive them while they make no satisfaction, even while satisfaction is in their power. This is a great delusion, and is an idea that is greatly dishonoring to Christ. As if Christ would disgrace Himself by forgiving you while

you persist in doing your neighbor wrong.

This He cannot do; this He will not, must not do. He loves your neighbor as really as He loves you. He is infinitely willing to forgive, provided you repent and make the restitution in your power; but until then, He cannot, will not.

I must remark again,

11. That from the teachings of these texts it is evident that no one truly obeys in any one thing, while he allows himself to disobey in any other thing. To truly obey God in anything, we must settle the question of universal obedience; else all our pretended obedience is vain. If we do not yield the whole to God, if we do not go the whole length of seriously giving up all, and renouncing in heart every form of sin, and make up our minds to obey Him in everything, we do not truly obey Him in anything. Again,

12. From this subject we can see why there are so many professors of religion that get no peace, and have no evidence of their acceptance. They are full of doubts and fears. They have no religious enjoyment, but are groping on in darkness and doubt; are perhaps praying for evidence and trying to get peace of mind, but fall utterly short of doing so.

Now, in such cases you will often find that some known sin is indulged; some known duty continually neglected; some known cross shunned; some thing avoided which they know to be their duty, because it is trying to them to fulfil their obligation. It is amazing to see to what an extent this is true.

Sometime since an aged gentleman visited me, who came from a distance as an inquirer. He had been a preacher, and indeed was then a minister of the Gospel; but he had given up preaching because of the many doubts that he had of his acceptance with Christ. He was in great darkness and trouble of mind; had been seeking religion, as he said, a great part of his life; and had done everything, as he supposed, in his power, to obtain evidence of his acceptance.

When I came to converse with him, I found that there were sins on his conscience that had been there for many years; plain cases of known transgression, of known neglect of duty indulged all this while. Here he was, striving to get peace, striving to get evidence, and even abandoning preaching because he could not get evidence; while all the time these sins lay upon his conscience. Amazing! amazing! Again,

13. I remark, that total abstinence from all known sin, is the only practicable rule of life. To sin in one thing and obey in another at the same time, is utterly impossible. We must give up, in heart and purpose, all sin, or we in reality give up none. It is utterly impossible for a man to be truly religious at all, unless in the purpose of his heart he is wholly so, and universally so. He cannot be a Christian at home and a sinner abroad; or a sinner at home and a Christian abroad.

He cannot be a Christian on the Sabbath, and a selfish man in his business or during the

week. A man must be one or the other; he must yield everything to God, or in fact he yields nothing to God.

He cannot serve God and mammon. Many are trying to do so, but it is impossible. They cannot love both God and the world; they cannot serve two masters; they cannot please God and the world. It is the greatest, and yet the most common, I fear, of all mistakes, that men can be truly, but knowingly, only partially religious; that in some things they can truly yield to God, while in other things they refuse to obey Him. How common is this mistake! If it is not, what shall we make of the state of the churches? How are we to understand the great mass of professors? How are we to understand the great body of religious teachers, if they do not leave the impression, after all, on the churches, that they can be accepted of God while their habitual obedience is only very partial; while, in fact, they pick and choose among the commandments of God, professing to obey some, while they allow themselves in known disobedience of others. Now, if in this respect the church has not a false standard; if the mass of religious instruction is not making a false impression on the churches and on the world in this respect, I am mistaken. I am sorry to be obliged to entertain this opinion, and to express it; but what else can I think? How else can the state of the churches be accounted for? How else is it that ministers have no hope that the great mass of their churches are in a safe state? How else is it that the great mass of professors of religion can have any hope of eternal life in them, if this is not the principle practically adopted by them, that they are justified while only rendering habitually but a very partial obedience to God; that they are really forgiven and justified while they only pick and choose among the commandments, obeying those, as they think, obedience to which costs them little, and is not disagreeable, and is not unpopular; while they do not hesitate habitually to disobey where obedience would subject them to any inconvenience, require any self-denial, or expose them to any persecution. Again,

14. From what has been said, it will be seen that partial reformation is no evidence of real conversion. Many are deceiving themselves on this point. Now we should never allow ourselves to believe that a person is converted if we perceive that his reformation extends to certain things only, while in certain other things he is not reformed; especially when in the case of those things in which he is not reformed he admits that he ought to perform those duties, or to relinquish those practices. If we find him still persisting in what he himself admits to be wrong, we are bound to assume and take it for granted that his conversion is not real. Again,

15. Inquirers can see what they must do. They must abandon all sin. They must give up all to Christ; they must turn with their whole heart and soul to Him; and must make up their minds to yield a full and hearty obedience as long as they live. They must settle this in their minds; and must cast themselves upon Christ for forgiveness for all the past, and grace to help in every time of need for the future. Only let it be settled in your mind fully that you will submit yourself to the whole will of God; and then you may expect, and are bound to expect Him to forgive all the past, however great your sins may have been.

You can see, Inquirer, why you have not already obtained peace. You have prayed for pardon; you have prayed for peace; you have endeavored to get peace, while in fact you

have not given up all; you have kept something back. It is a perfectly common thing to find that the inquirer has not given up all. And if you do not find peace, it is because you have not given up all.

Some idol is still retained; some sin persisted in--perhaps some neglect--perhaps some confession is not made that ought to have been made, or some act of restitution. You have not renounced the world, and do not in fact renounce it and renounce everything, and flee to Christ.