

## *The Misery of Man.*

### A SERMON

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*For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all.—  
Rom. xi: 32.*

THE man who thoroughly understands this single verse has the key to the whole Bible. The doctrine of the Bible has these two fundamental articles: The Misery of Man—The Mercy of God. The text mentions them both, and sets them over against each other. “God hath concluded them all in unbelief,” here is man’s misery; “that He might have compassion upon all,” here is God’s mercy.

I shall discuss these two declarations in two sermons. To-day I shall show you man’s misery, leaving it for the next Lord’s day to show the remedy for this misery in the mercy of God. The text of my first sermon is the first sentence of the whole passage: “God hath concluded them all in unbelief.” It needs certain explanations. In the first place, to connect it with the rest of the chapter, where the apostle has divided the human race into two classes—Jews and Gentiles—we see that his complete idea is this: “God hath concluded them all in unbelief;” that is, Jews as well as Gentiles. Now, are we to conceive that the apostle’s meaning is limited to Jews and Gentiles, his contemporaries? It embraces all men, of all periods. This is settled beyond a doubt by another passage, where he sets forth the same view, extending it to all mankind. “But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin.” We may, therefore, lay aside the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and confine ourselves to the general thought of the text, “God hath concluded all men in unbelief.”

The word “unbelief” might be replaced by the synonymous word “sin,” which is more commonly employed in the Scriptures, and which the apostle uses in the parallel passage from the Epistle to the Galatians, which we have just quoted. As to this expression, “God hath concluded all under sin,” it would be as unnecessary as it is easy to prove by all the Bible that it does not mean that God constrains men to sin, but that He declares them to be sinners. Finally, “the man” in question is the natural man; that is, man as he is by nature and before he has submitted to that radical change which the Scriptures call “conversion.”

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Thus explained, this is the doctrine of the text: *God has declared that every man, in his natural state, is a sinner.* It is of this truth that I wish to convince you to day.

Does this wish seem to you uncharitable, and does some one complain that from among so many themes which I might have fixed upon for this pulpit I have selected so harsh a one? I will answer him by an illustration: A man is attacked by a severe sickness; incurable, if neglected; curable, if taken in season. Two friends visit him; one of them says, "You are not sick;" the other, "You are sick, and if you do not send for a physician you are in peril of your life." The kindness of the first, is it not cruel?—and the cruelty of the second, is it not kind? I am about to perform to you to-day the office of the second friend—and God keep me from ever performing that of the first! I would not be kind to you after the manner of the world, which covers up the sickness of your soul in order that you may remain sick and may die; but I would be harsh after the manner of St. Paul; after the manner of St. John; after the manner of Jesus Christ; after the manner of God, who assure you of sin, that you may seek the remedy and may live; and I ask God to give me grace to convince you of sin, with power, with authority, but especially with love.

First of all, thoroughly understand what I mean by saying that you are all sinners. The word "*sin*" is imperfectly understood by many; and from this arises the common objection to the truth of the text. "The gospel," it is said, "exaggerates when it includes all under the universal accusation of sin; it speaks contrary to experience. If one should look at my life he would see that I am not a sinner; that I am neither avaricious, nor brutal, nor a drunkard; that I am not a treacherous friend, an ungrateful son, an unfaithful husband; and that if I were, I know others who surely are not." Those who speak thus confound two different things—*sin* and *vice*. I did not say all men are vicious. Should I say it, not only should I exaggerate, I should expressly contradict myself; for vice is an immoral state which brings upon one who lives in it the blame of other men—it is a disgrace; and it is true that in the more philosophical of modern languages the word *vice* is primarily synonymous with *shame*. Just as when we speak of a man with a feeble constitution we imply that other men are of a constitution more robust; so, when we speak of a vicious man, we imply that he belongs to a race who are not so. Avarice is a vice; men generally are not avaricious. Intemperance is a vice; men generally are not intemperate. Brutality is a vice; men generally are not brutal. All men are not vicious; but all men are sinners, which is a very different thing.

I cannot better give you the exact idea of this word *sin* than by recalling to you the original meaning in the language in

which the New Testament was written. The Greek word, which we here translate sin, signifies *to fail of an end; to lose one's way*. The sinner is a being lost; he is a traveler, with a destination before him, but misled to a route which does not lead to it. Or, putting in place of the figure what it signifies: the sinner is one who ought to follow a certain moral direction, and who takes the opposite. Having thus explained what it is to be a sinner, I shall now show that we are all such by nature, because we ought to love God more than everything else—and, in our natural state, we do love something else more than God.

If to establish these two points I should confine myself to the Scriptures I should say everything in a very few words; for I venture the declaration that in no book can you find anything more clearly established, or everywhere more constantly implied, than are these two assertions in the Scriptures—namely, that man ought to love God more than everything else, and that it is his nature to love something else more than God.

As to the first, one of the distinctive characteristics of the Scriptures is to put God especially in the foreground, and boldly claim for Him our first attention and our first love. To love God above everything was the very spirit and substance of the old law. The first commandment of the Decalogue is this: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” And it signifies not only “Thou shalt reserve to God thine external worship, to the exclusion of every other being called a god,” but more—Thou shalt reserve to God thine inward worship, thy love—to God, in preference to every other object. Moses and the prophet thus explained this commandment when they elsewhere declared in terms more distinct: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” The new law, which is the perfect one, instead of abrogating any portion of the old, sustained and developed it, and put in its true light the fundamental principle that we must love God more than everything else. And Jesus Christ answered the question of the lawyer, “What is the greatest commandment of the law?” by turning to the precept of Moses: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul,” and saying, “This is the first and great commandment.” It is true that this commandment is joined to another, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” But He gives us to understand by the epithet which He applies to it that it is “second,” and like “the first.” And he elsewhere makes it apparent, as do all His apostles also, that He considers love to one's neighbor as subordinate to love to God, and as necessarily springing out of it; so that it is less as a sacred, fundamental commandment

that He recommends it than as a sequel and sign of the first, according to the words of St. John: "We have received of Him this commandment, that he who loveth God love his brother also." Let no man, as he remembers that the gospel many times put *charity* above the commandments of the law, conclude that this view is overthrown; for the word *charity* has a meaning more comprehensive in the original language of the New Testament than in our own—it signifies love in general; Christian love; pure, disinterested affection, whether applied to the Creator or to the creature; so that it has been translated in many languages by the word *love*. Moreover, not to leave any doubt that love for God ought to rule over and regulate every other love, Jesus Christ chose, among all our affections, the one most obligatory—namely, the love of our neighbor; and, among all the exercises of this love, the one most indispensable, namely, filial piety, and then declared that even filial piety must be constantly subordinated to piety toward God. "Who so loveth father or mother more than Me cannot be My disciple." Lo, He firmly maintains, with all the Scriptures, that man must love God above everything else.

The Scriptures do not speak less clearly upon the second proposition: that such is man's estate by nature, that he loves something else more than God. It would be easy for me to cite texts in which this disturbance is affirmed: "All we like sheep, have gone astray;" as sheep who separate themselves from the shepherd, "we have turned every one to his own way;" we have begun to be "children of disobedience," estrayed from God, without love to Him, living after our own desires without inquiring what is His will; "and are, by nature, children of wrath, even as others"; "the whole world lieth in wickedness"; we are "dead in trespasses and in sins"; "if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." But should I limit myself to these detached quotations, I should give you the impression that the Scriptures have declared the disturbance of man's affections only in isolated passages; which you may think perhaps I have gathered after great research, and with regard to which it is needful to examine the time, the occasion, and a certain wordiness of language; whereas they express themselves less in isolated declarations than in direct allusions, less by the letter rather than by the spirit and harmony of the whole; and in passages where they more completely disclose and develop their fundamental principles. But this is all I am able to lay before you in a few words. I am obliged to remand every one of you to the Bible in order to prove the truth of this affirmation; recalling to your attention a single portion which I especially commend to your study: namely, the first three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, from which I have taken my text.

No doubt the object of this Epistle was to exhibit Christian doctrine ; for the apostle himself at the beginning announced his design in this verse, which is, as it were, the title of his whole work : "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." Very well, read then these three chapters all together, and with that attention which recovers the force of the apostle's language often lost in the first reading, from the ardor and profession with which he writes, and you will see that he rests the whole economy of salvation upon the disorder of man's natural affections, in terms so strong and positive, that after having read them we are compelled to admit that one cannot enter upon the Christian life without recognizing this disorder any more than one can enter a house without going through the door. For, wishing to carry the reader to this conclusion, which he announced at the outset, and repeats to the end of his argument, that God henceforth offers to man "justification by faith," because man could hope nothing "through works"—which means, by explaining St. Paul by St. Paul, that God henceforth offers to man eternal life as a favor because man can hope to make no return for it—he establishes the position that Jews as well as Gentiles are unworthy of reward ; and, on the contrary, are worthy of punishment, because that all are sinners ; and he proves the sin equally of Jew and Gentile, by what history records of their corruption.

Should any one think that he destroys his argument by saying that these chapters of St. Paul were written only for his cotemporaries, and that they do not concern us, he strangely abuses a principle, in which, indeed, there is some truth. It is true that we find in the Gospel written at a particular period, and primarily intended for the men of that period, certain details which have no direct application to ourselves, or to our own period ; certain allusions, exhortations, reproofs, considerations in connection with the circumstances of the time, and the character and genius of the age. It is moreover true that we might justly apply this observation to the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans, and say that certain facts to which St. Paul appeals, in order to prove the disturbance in man's affections, are taken from the history of his own time, and cannot all be connected with ours ; and, above all, that the picture, which he delineates, being made up of peoples taken as a whole, and by a single glance, is composed of different traits imprinted upon different individuals in such a manner, that all the disorders which he describes do not pertain to any one man in particular. This is all true ; but it is not less true that the Gospel, though it was written to all men, was written for all men ; that the eternal wisdom which dictated it, and to whose eye "a thousand years is as one day, and one day as a

thousand years," had in view all men and all periods; that St. Paul charges upon all men the existence of that same germ of evil, though it does not manifest itself by the very same fruits, and that, if instead of having written to the Romans in the first century, he had been writing to the Parisians in the nineteenth, he would have reached, though partly by different facts, the same declaration from which he would have excepted no one! "Every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that seeketh after God. They are altogether gone out of the way: they are altogether become unprofitable. There is none that doeth good"—he repeats it—"no, not one." For if we deny the universality of these declarations; if, in the interpretation of the Gospel we attribute a larger part of it to the peculiarity of the period than the speaker has just indicated as proper; if we venture to maintain that not only certain peculiarities, but related precepts, not only certain proofs in detail, but even entire arguments as well as the conclusion reached, not only certain verses but even entire paragraphs, chapters, perhaps whole books ought not to be considered because they were written only for contemporaries and do not concern us—you see the result! Free to cull from the Gospel, we shall believe nothing but what we want to believe, we shall reject whatever displeases us, upon the pretext that it does not concern us. And since it is easy to have a presentiment of what will be pleasing—that is, what will be conformed to our personal preference, and as everything which is contrary to us will displease us, it follows that we shall admit no more into the Gospel than what we already believe before we begin to read; and that we shall eliminate from it whatever is contrary to our ideas, that is precisely what might correct them, in other words, what was especially intended by God for us. After reading the last line we shall be almost precisely at the point where we began the first: little will be changed except in name; we shall have no change in the deep connections and sentiments of the soul. Far from me be those human systems and forced interpretations which under pretext of abstracting from our faith all that is unreasonable, falls into that terrible error, against which the Angel of the Revelation takes so much pains to warn the apostle St. John of "adding unto," or "taking from"; of correcting, substituting, "wresting the Scriptures," as Peter calls it; or, forgive the expression, of *disevangelizing* the Gospel and neutralizing the divine in the Word of God! Let this refined gospel, this gospel of man, teach what it pleases, I cling to the Gospel of God; and according to this Gospel, man is by nature in a state of sin, of error, of disorder. If not, we must efface all these passages which I have quoted, as well

as many others not quoted, in which this disorder is affirmed. If not, we must blot out all these passages which insist upon the necessity of conversion and recovery ; since man cannot return to the way, when he has never wandered from it, nor can he recover what he has not lost. If man is not in this condition of disorder, we must blot out all those passages which proclaim this reconciliation, this wonderful deliverance, this love which surpasses all knowledge ; since there can be no reconciliation without enmity ; no wonderful deliverance without frightful pain ; no infinite mercy without infinite misery. We must tear away page after page, treatise after treatise, book after book ; and after we have thus torn the Bible into tatters, we must tear these tatters themselves ; or, agree that according to the Bible, every man in his natural state is a sinner.

When the Word of God thus explains itself I do not need for myself any other authority ; but because I fear that many have not sufficient faith in the Bible to admit unhesitatingly all that it teaches, I shall for a moment descend to their plane, and compel them to see how reason itself, instead of contradicting the doctrine of the Bible, cannot refuse its assent to this doctrine ; because reason also establishes in its own manner these two points : that man ought to love God more than anything else, and that in his state of nature he loves other things more than he loves God.

To prove from reason that our supreme love is due to God is not an easy thing ; not because the justice of the proposition does not seem clear to me, but, on the contrary, because it seems so clear to me that, seeing it as by instinct, I am embarrassed when I try to demonstrate it. Still, let us try, and let us show that God as a Sovereign is worthy of our love, whether we consider Him in Himself or in His relations to us.

Who could be more to be loved, in Himself considered, than the Perfect One, in whom are found in the highest degree, tempered and relieved by each other, qualities the most worthy of admiration, the most worthy of affection, in whom everything is so excellent that all nations agree in reserving for those things which they wish to praise beyond expression the epithet *divine*? And how can it fail to appear that such a Being has a right to expect of us, if we are in harmony with Him, all the veneration, all the devotion, all the love of which we are capable ?

But how much more appropriate to Him these sentiments when we contemplate not only what He is in Himself, but what He is in His relations to us : as the Being without whom we should have nothing, we should hope nothing—to say it in one word, without whom we should not be ! Pause a moment upon this last relation and consider it apart by itself ; and in order to perceive the obligation of loving God more than every-

thing else, only reflect that He is your Creator, and that you are His creature. Try to get some idea of what it is to create—to bring something out of nothing; to make us to be who would otherwise never have been. We cannot fathom the depth of this thought. It has abysses, where our power of thought is lost. But the little we can understand of it, even the impossibility of understanding more, will suffice to show us that the relation which unites the Creator to the creature is so strong, so intricate, so comprehensive, and, if I may so express it, so peculiar, that every other relation ought to be subordinated to it; every other obligation ought to be inferior to our obligation to God, and every other affection ought to be preceded, controlled and ruled over by love for God. But, more than this, not only is God supremely worthy of our love, He alone is worthy of it. All that is lovely comes from God; or, rather, all that is lovely *is* God. Holiness, truth, morality, conscience, happiness—names, honored by the respect of all nations and the reflecting men of the greatest genius—words which make the soul of man vibrate with a holy thrill, but have no authority which they do not borrow but from Him—fragments broken into pieces by minds too finite to comprehend all His attributes at one glance in one harmonious whole!

Holiness is God's will, truth His thought, happiness His state, morality His law, conscience his representative; and if you go back to the beginning of things, you see all these different routes, which religion and sound philosophy have revealed to man, converging more and more toward their Source, and all things finally meeting together in God, the common Centre of all radiance in the whole universe. Since, then, God is your beginning, your centre, your end, your all, commence to give Him your love, your heart, yourselves entirely; and after that there will be time to see to what extent your affections may be given to other objects without abstracting from that first love, while subordinating everything to it. Here is order. Depart from it, cease to love God more than everything else, and you will fall into a disorder as much greater as the fundamental relation which unites you to the Creator, upon whom depend all the secondary ones, which unite you to creatures, is greater than all other relations; since the first cannot be broken without taking all the rest with it.

Let us make this clear by an illustration. Learn the state of a man who does not love God more than all things else by what would happen to a planet, for instance, to the earth, if, ceasing to pursue her regular orbit around the sun, she should break away from her course and open for herself a free and independent pathway into space. Through this estrangement, through this *sin* of the earth would be broken the fundamental law of her being, and with it all the other laws de-

pendent upon it; at the same time that her relations to the sun would be disturbed, the same would be the case with her relation to her satellite and to all the other planets. Imagine the confusion which these changes would introduce among us: seasons which are marked by the earth's motion, day and night, summer and winter would no longer succeed each other; the ebb and flow of the seas deprived of their rule and restraint; the life of plants, animals and men arrested; and, without multiplying anticipations, disorder following disorder, until we should have a frightful chaos, in which, if perchance some traces of the original glory and beauty of our globe remained, they would only serve to magnify her confusion and shame. Such must be the inward disorder of man if he sunder himself from the principle of his being and deny to God his highest love.

Thus reason gives full assent to this assertion of the Scriptures, that in order to be in harmony with the creation man needs to love God more than everything else. It gives a similar assent to the other assertion of the Scriptures, that man in his natural state loves something else more than God.

For, examine seriously—you who have not submitted your hearts to conversion, and who, therefore, are in your natural state—examine if the sentiment which you cherish toward God can be called a dominant love. Love does not hide itself in the heart. It shows itself outwardly by certain visible marks. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;" the eyes look, the hand toils, the whole man acts. Very well. Do you find in your life the marks of a dominant love to God? You shall judge of this yourselves. Supposing now that this love is in those who listen to me, I am about to draw an imaginary picture of their lives in order that you may compare it with your actual life, to see if my supposition is well or ill-founded.

To love God above all things is manifestly the natural bent of their hearts; and when I just said that they ought to live supremely for Him, each one understood me, anticipated me. In the morning, as soon as they awake, God is their first thought—a thought which they do not need to search for, since it comes to them of itself. They find it everywhere, indoors and out of doors. It is a thought which penetrates and environs them. It is in their heart, in the day-dawn which shines upon them, in the air they breath. In the evening the same thought follows them to the end, survives all other memories, is last extinguished by sleep, and oftentimes still occupies them in the dreams of the night, as during the day it occupied those moments of leisure when the mind was left to follow its own instinctive movements, without control of the will. All the day God is the soul of all they do; their

only ambitious to love and obey Him. Compelled to devote themselves to material emportments, they would suffer from being distracted from His service, did they not find means of returning to it by the spirit whicyh they carry into their labor. Their greatest trial in this world is the fact that, by a burdensome body and finite powers they are prevented from giving themselves up with entire freedom to an apprehension of His attributes and His favors. With them the love of kindred and friends is, as it were, a reflection of the love of God, and when they love any other being but God, it is still God whom they love in that being. If they read, God is the favorite object of their reading. A book is preferred in proportion as it tells them more about Him; but His Word, above all things, has a peculiar attraction which they discover in nothing else; and in its assiduous study they find their duty even less than their pleasure. If they speak, God is still the habitual theme of their discourse. His name comes most frequently of itself to their lips. His goodness, how to please Him, the sadness of giving Him offense, fill all their conversation. They give only what time is indispensable to the cares of this life and the interests of this world, and if conversation in which God is not long occupies them, they at once experience a void which can be filled only by returning to Him. Finally, whatever they may do, even to eating and drinking, they do it to the glory of God. Nothing is more constant, more rigorous, more constraining than the sentiment which inspires them. And all men see, in all their life, that they are His without effort, from preference, devoted by a supreme affection.

My brethren dearly beloved, far be it from me to speak with irony. By this picture of what your life would be if you loved God supremely I wished you to see at a glance how far you are from love of this kind. Each one of you has been able to make for himself a comparison of this imaginary life with his real life; and each one has seen that it was different in all of these particulars. It is not true that each one of you has anticipated me when I described how we ought to live first of all for God. On the contrary, when you encountered some strong expression of love for God or devotion to God, you were tempted to see in it something novel, exaggerated or mysterious. It is not true that to love God is the irresistible bent of your soul. In order that this love spring up within you, you must be excited, stirred up; and the moment after it disappears like a spark, which mounts into the air and is extinguished. It is not true that your hardest deprivation is, that you are prevented by a burdensome and earthly body from meditating upon God and serving Him. You little perceive the misery of such a body, except when afflicted by material necessities or physical sufferings. It is not true that in all

whom you love it is God that you love. The sentiments of love and friendship are so vivid only because they relate to human beings ; and if God ever comes between you and them, it is as a protector and not as the supreme object of affection. It is not true that the reading which attracts you most is that which makes you think most of God, and above all, His Word. You read religious reading from a sense of duty. You read your Bible because of your conscience. It is a task which must be done in order that you may be at peace with yourselves. But you keep your taste, your curiosity, your ardor for books full of worldly interests, if not of worldly lusts. It is not true that God is the habitual and favorite theme of your thoughts ; alas, everthing finds a place there but He ! The happiness and health of your children, anxiety about their career, the prosperity of your country, the news of the day, the petty events of domestic life, perhaps, things most frivolous and indifferent, will occupy you in their turn, will fill your mind, will engage your conversation ; but the name of God will never be mentioned, or will be employed with a timid reserve when not used with a profane levity. If it occurs to a man to speak of God with any animation, a certain pious shame will withhold him ; he will not dare, it will seem strange, people will say he is preaching, that it is not the time, is not the place ; as if to true love did not belong all times and all places ! as though true love had so carefully to observe all the proprieties, and to bow so teachably to appearances of indifference ! as though true love were something that a man could lay off and put on at his pleasure ! as though he could show it or conceal it according to the day of the week, the hour of the day, the atmosphere of a dwelling !

Ah ! I must say of your love for God precisely the opposite of what I have just said : there is nothing living, loving, animating in this love ! The sentiment which you cherish for God (that which I say does not escape from me in the heat of discourse, it is an expression exact and well considered) the sentiment which you cherish for God is nothing different, if we may judge from your life, from a frigid esteem, a sentiment which a father or mother or brother or spouse or friend would not only not be satisfied with, but would regard as an indignity. Hence it is true that in the eye of reason itself the natural man does not love God more than everything else ; is a wanderer, is a sinner.

After having seen that you do not love God with a dominant love, let us examine further, and we shall each one of us find some other object which we do love with a dominant love, and as we ought to love God. This object is not the same with all. All are sinners, but all are not sinners in the same way.

The object of the supreme love of a great many, indeed, of

nearly all men, in their natural state is the world. I thus term outward and visible things which contribute to our personal well-being and social standing: such as fortune, rank, popularity, knowledge, talent. It is one of these that the most of you will find the object of your supreme love; not of a cold esteem such as you accord to God, but of a passionate and ardent affection. To you the supreme object of attachment is your property. It is no cold esteem which you render to silver and gold; it is an ardent and passionate attachment. You regard them as your supreme good. You identify them with yourself. You make them your life, your rank, your everything. To another the object of supreme affection is rank, popularity. It is not a cold esteem which you accord to worldly distinctions; it is an ardent and passionate ambition. In order to attain them you sacrifice your time, your ease, your health, your taste, your pride. To another the object of supreme love is knowledge, talent. It is not with a cold esteem that you have given yourself up to science, to intellect; it is with a burning and passionate admiration. With what fervor do you desire them for yourselves; with what animation do you exalt them in others! With nearly all of you your supreme affection is the world and the things of the world. These things fill your hearts, preoccupy your minds, enliven your discourses. Your thoughts about them are always full of life and animation. You occupy yourselves with them, you speak of them, you write about them, you cherish them, you live in them. The first class of sinners and the most numerous are those who prefer the world to God—*worldly sinners*.

But let us be fair. All are not characterized by this worldliness of thought. Some have souls more tender and attachments more noble. They give not their hearts to outward things; they give them to family and friendship. The object of their supreme affection is a father or a mother, a husband, a wife, a child, a friend, to whose happiness they devote their projects, their plans—all that they do and all that they have; for whom they seem to exist, as much as for themselves, and even more; and without whom they would not care to live. I guard myself against confounding them with *worldly sinners*. Their sentiments are as much superior as the soul is above things that are seen. I agree even that there is in this strong affection something touching, something lovely. But a beautiful idol is all the same an idol. Because they have set their supreme affection upon something more elevated than material things, it is no less true that they prefer the creature to the Creator. They divert to man that which they owe to God. They sin. The second class of sinners are those who prefer to God the objects of their affection—*affectionate sinners*!

Finally, perhaps, is that class of men who devote their su-

preme love neither to the world nor to the affections of the heart, but to what they accept as their duty, controlling their life according to conscience, without mounting up to the will of God and trying to become perfect, not to please God, but to content themselves. Certainly such men are superior to worldly sinners—to affectionate sinners even; and I am glad that our fallen nature is yet capable of such noble aspirations. But when we have granted them all that they can claim—honestly and honorably claim—we must still recognize the fact that these men are out of harmony with creation. They make a god of their conscience, and through this they unconsciously demoralize their conscience itself; for the conscience has the same relation to God which the moon has to the sun—it is only an auxiliary light, since God remains our principal light. The moment that it no longer says, *God wills*, but *I will!* conscience itself is rebellious; it sins. And then it happens to him who gives it his first love as Jesus Christ predicted: “If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” It is therefore possible for these slaves of duty, these worshipers of conscience, to be virtuous men, but not holy men; exempt from vice, but not exempt from sin. The third class of sinners, those who set conscience above God, are *virtuous sinners!*

Abstract these three classes of sinners—the multitude of worldly sinners, the great crowd of affectionate sinners, the well-scattered family of virtuous sinners—and what remains as Thy portion, O my God, and how many have reserved for Thee that supreme affection which is due from all? Not one! —no, not even a single one! We have all forsaken the Creator for the creature; we have altogether gone astray; we are all sinners.

My brethren, if this discourse has found any entrance into your souls; if it has penetrated you with any conviction, any feeling, any suspicion of the misery of your nature, I conjure you not to stifle that impression. You will succeed in allaying it, if you wish to. You have only to say, as you leave the church, “This doctrine is an exaggeration!” You will find it echoed all around you. You will believe it, because you wish to. You will efface the solemn truth which I have demonstrated, but to your own injury! Because you have dissipated the truth, it will be no less the truth; because you have shut the Bible, it will be no less the Word of God; because you have put your hand upon your wound, it will be no less severe, and you will gain nothing by covering it; but you will conceal it from the surgeon until, perhaps, it shall prove fatal. May your perilous security trouble you! May this first glimpse which has been shown you of your misery lead you to search the Word of God for an authority more conclusive,

and to which I wish to refer you; well persuaded that reason can do nothing but prepare the heart, and that God has reserved it to His Spirit "to convince of sin." Hear this voice, of which we read on every page. "The voice of God, and not of man," will, little by little, reveal to you the unutterable disorder of your affections, and will teach you to see yourselves to be such as God sees you. Here you will discover in those defects, which seem to you little things, offences against the Divine Majesty for which your blood cannot atone; in the thoughts, which seem to you so innocent to-day, mysteries of iniquity; in the conduct, which your conscience to-day approves, sins in disguise—in a word, no longer look at yourselves in your natural darkness, but in the pure light of God, and, so far from doubting that you are sinners, you will scarcely believe there was ever a time in your life when you have been ignorant of it.

Do not fear the severity with which the gospel judges you. The gospel, while it condemns your real state with which the world contents you, gives you to understand that you are called back to a grandeur of which the world has no conception, and that you may recover it. It decides you sinful only because it would make you holy; it would not prove you poor except to give you all things. The condemnation which it pronounces upon you is only the sign of that deliverance which it has in reserve, and of which one has said everything when he has only mentioned Thy name, O Jesus! that is, *Saviour!*

Yes, great God! who now bringest low that thou mayest lift up; who now disturbeth that thou mayest comfort; who doth now disquiet us that thou mayest establish our goings, we accept the sentence of our condemnation. We accept it with repentance and sorrow, but with thankfulness and hope, as the token of our deliverance. We hide nothing of our disorder. Shed abroad in our hearts thy clear light, that we may see ourselves as we are. May this sight awaken in all this assembly at once a cry of surprise and anguish which shall rend the atmosphere of indifference with which we are surrounded—a cry which shall reach Thee and move Thy fatherly heart; so that, utterly renouncing all our self-righteousness; humbled, and not only humbled, but believing; and not only believing, but yielding ourselves unreservedly to Thy love, we may emerge from this abyss of our own misery into the unfathomable depths of Thy mercy. Amen.