

Now, if we had an adequate perception of the moral nature of God, his purity, his righteousness, his truth, and a knowledge equally precise of our own character,—if we had the full conviction that all his powers and perfections are necessarily active, foster and bless whatever is like to them, and oppose and assail whatever is obnoxious to them,—then according to our actual state, our sinfulness or our holiness, would be the feelings with which we should think of God; we should either tremble before him in speechless terror, or exult in the assurance of our own safety and of his love.

But it is one of the most deadly effects of sin, that it makes us blind to its own existence and its own desperate evil. Our conscience, perhaps, rebukes us for manifest acts of transgression, and yet at the same time allows our deceitful heart to soften them down by some extenuating epithet, and never, for a moment, reflects that these several acts are all signs of a corrupt nature, branches which indicate the existence of a sinful root within. Moreover, our conscience is so unfaithful, that it often takes no note of the growth of evil in the heart. The increasing dominion which it is acquiring over the soul. Certain passions,—covetousness, pride, ambition, lust—so quietly assert their position, and are so habitually allowed, that their real character is never inquired into,—their desperate malignity is overlooked and forgotten. Thus our very nature becomes debased, the power to estimate truly what is right and what is wrong decays, the judgment which we form of our own character is painfully erroneous, the growing alienation and opposition between ourselves and God is unperceived, the downward, hell-ward tendency of our course is not detected, and hence strangers at once to ourselves and to our obvious destination, we cry “peace, peace, when there is no peace.” For the blindness which makes us ignorant of ourselves renders us insensible of the observant presence and the judicial activity of God. How far we have offended him, how terrible the reckoning which he has against us, we do not stop to inquire. As Adam and Eve never woke up to a sense of the enormity of their guilt, or saw that they were naked, until they heard the voice of the Lord amidst the trees of the garden, and then hid themselves in fear and shame, so until the divine word, carried direct by the Spirit of God to our heart, reveals to us *his* pure presence, and the truth as to *our* own state, we walk erect and self-complacent; but when in his light we behold ourselves and him, we “abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Now, our text intimates that there were members in the Corinthian Church so richly endowed, that they were enabled to present the truth in such wise as to produce exactly these effects. The gospel of Christ itself, and certain correlative truths which it implies, if they can only be brought home in their own native intensity, are well fitted to arouse the slumbering conscience, and reveal to the sinner the deepest secrets of his heart. How *malignant* does the nature of sin appear, when it is seen to be committed against that love which willingly bore the shame of the cross! How *fatal* an evil must sin be, when its consequences can only be adequately represented and effectually turned aside by the bitter sufferings of Calvary! When does the righteousness of God, as guardian of eternal law, shine out so grandly as in the sacrifice of his well beloved Son? Where is the ideal of human perfection fully realised except in the life of the man Christ Jesus? And if these things can by any means be made real to the soul, must they not touch and influence its deepest springs? Every excellence displayed by our Lord will then suggest some corresponding defect in the sinner's character,—some positive evil of which he has been guilty. Every sin that is charged against him