

After every other excuse has been shown to be vain, some have the presumption to charge the divine law itself with injustice. They exclaim that the standard of duty is far above our reach: that none can possibly attain to that perfection which it enjoins, and that no man can be called on to perform more than he is able. To abstain perfectly from every sin, and perform perfectly every duty, may be a law fit for angels, but not for weak, imperfect man. To this we simply reply, that God could make no law, except one which demands perfect obedience; and, therefore, to affirm that he had no right to give us such a law, is just to say that he had no right to give us a law at all. Some imagine that the pleasure attending sin forms some palliation of their guilt. But the very reverse is the truth; for the more pleasure we feel or fancy to be in sin, we show that our mind is the more deeply depraved; and that we are the more destitute of the love of God and of righteousness.

Let us now advert to the sin and folly of this self-justifying spirit.

That this self-deceit is in the highest degree unwise and foolish, must appear from the extreme weakness of the pretences that have been mentioned. It is almost invariably found that the more heinous the crime and the more abandoned the criminal, the more easily is the conscience satisfied with the excuses advanced in defence of it.

The folly of this self-deceit will appear still farther, if we reflect that it must soon cease, and that all these delusions will soon be exposed. Conscience is not dead, but sleepeth; though now compelled to keep silence, it waits only for the day of judgment to raise its voice on high. Its reproaches may now be avoided, answered, silenced, or despised; but soon it will speak in different language and with a different tone. Think how those excuses which content you now, will appear at the day of judgment, and before the bar of Almighty God. Think how the convinced sinner, when first awakened to a sense of his danger, trembles and is amazed at the view of his sins; how completely all those palliations which once gave peace to his conscience, vanish away, and leave him helpless and forlorn. And if in the midst of life, health and comfort, while there is yet space for repentance, a convinced conscience can so distract and overwhelm the soul, what will be the amazement and consternation of him who is undeceived only before the judgment seat of God? It would require many volumes to answer the vain excuses which even one sinner has brought forward; but at that day, they shall disappear in a moment, and he shall stand speechless and self-condemned.

None shall then dare to plead, I would have repented and obeyed, but I had no power to do so; I prayed for grace, but grace was denied me. I sought knowledge, but could not obtain it. I resisted temptation, but was unsuccessful. I endeavoured to keep God's commandments, but found them unreasonable and impossible.

Let us remember that we shall be judged, not by our own opinions or reasonings, but by the unchangeable laws of God. Let us remember the responsibility under which we are, as moral and accountable beings. Many seem to imagine that because our actions are free, because we are left to the exercise of our own will and the guidance of our own conscience, we are therefore under no restraint or responsibility. Now the case is just the reverse. The more free we are from compulsion and restraint, the more accountable we are to God for the use of our freedom. The commander of an army, sent on some distant service, is more responsible to his king than the ordinary soldiers are, just because he is more left to his own will and his own discretion. A steward left in the full charge of his master's house and property, is more responsible to his lord than the inferior servants are, just because his temporary command was supreme. So it is with us in regard to God. We may employ our talents, our time, our faculties, our property, in whatever way we may think best; we may think of God, or we may forget God; we may devote our time and our faculties to holiness or to sin; we may employ our property in works of piety and charity, or in the service of vanity and folly; and no earthly power can control our conduct, or punish us for the neglect of our duty, or the abuse of our blessings. But just because we are so entirely free and uncontrolled in this world, shall we be responsible in the world to come. How vain, then, to rest content with those excuses which may deceive our fellow-men, or may pass uncondemned by that low standard of duty which the world has formed for itself, and set up in place of the law of God!

But the chief evil of this self-justifying temper is that it prevents the soul's accepting of the salvation revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The very first step we must take in coming to Christ is a deep and heartfelt conviction of sin, a full sight of our ruin and misery, and a complete perception that we are without excuse—that God is righteous and that we are wicked. How then can he embrace the Gospel, who, perhaps, never confessed even to his own conscience that he was guilty of a single sin; who, although he may admit the doctrine of human guilt as a part of his creed, has