

O Wretched Man that I Am!

Who is it that is so miserable? Perhaps there are many human hearts that will answer, "It is I, most certainly. I am sure that my case is designated." But who are you? A man of pleasure? Yes, a man of pleasure. You have sought for happiness in the ball-room, in the theatre, at the card-table or bowling-alley; you, like the boy, have chased the rainbow, but have never been able to overtake it. It has always been in the next valley, or on the next hill. In all your giddy round of pleasure, you have never found any substantial good; you have been repeatedly deceived, and you are conscious that you are a wretched man. This is indeed most true. But you have not that state of feeling that Paul had, when he uttered the words at the head of this article. He was never "a man about town." Your wretchedness has no sympathy with his source of anguish.

The man of wealth exclaims, "My case is designated. I have for years made it my study, day and night, and used unceasing toil to accumulate wealth, and I have partially succeeded; but my desires have outstripped my acquisitions, and I am no more satisfied than I was in early life. I am indeed a wretched man!" But the source of your unhappiness is not similar to that of the apostle to the Gentiles. He never sought for the gold of Ophir or California. He learned that in whatever state he was therewith to be content.

The ambitious man says, "The captain of this article describes my case. I have sought for the honour and applause of this world, and have partially obtained my object; but in the train of my success have followed cares and perplexities, that have far out-weighed all my consolations. All my happiness consisted in anticipation, not in fruition, and I am more wretched than I was in the humble walks of life." You also greatly mistake the source of the apostles unhappiness. He never sought to please men. If this had been his governing purpose, he could not have been the servant of Christ.

The question asked at the beginning still remains unanswered. Who is the wretched man? Not the man of pleasure, nor the ambitious man. They are indeed most miserable—consuming all things and hungry still; but they understand not the exclamation placed at the head of this article.

At a certain period in the life of Paul he had no knowledge of this source of grief. Once he was alive without the law, but the commandment came, sin revived, and he died. By the law he obtained a knowledge of sin, yea, by looking into the glass of the divine law, he was taught his exceeding sinfulness. He had indeed received Christ as the end of the law for his righteousness; but there was a law in his members that warred against the law of his mind, and brought him into captivity. As he advanced in his Christian course, he still advanced more and more in a knowledge of the wickedness of his own heart. This it was that led him to cry out, "O wretched man that I am!"

"My God! I cry with every breath,
Exert thy power to save;
O break the yoke of sin and death,
And thus redeem the slave!"

We learn from this truth, that a knowledge of the sinfulness of the human heart is essential to true piety. There are those who profess to have made great attainments in sanctification, who seem to have very little acquaintance of indwelling sin. In a short time, under particular influences, they have risen very high, in their own estimation, in spiritual attainments. They are rich, increased in goods, and have need of nothing. But if their feelings are analyzed, you will not find Paul's sense of sin as its base. This is not an ingredient in its history. That religious experience which has not the essential features of Paul cannot be genuine. A knowledge of the sinfulness of the human heart is absolutely essential to true piety. This was a constituent part of President Edwards's piety. "I am" says he, "accustomed to go about from week to week, and from month to month, saying as I go, 'Infinite upon infinite, infinite upon infinite; such is my sense of sins.'"

Such a man as Edwards sympathized