

and loftier their religious aspirations—the more readily they take up the confession of the Apostle, and declare themselves to be the chief of sinners. They may thank their God that they have not been allowed to fall into gross and open sins, but they all find in their hearts so much wickedness continually abiding as to constrain them into the humble attitude and confession of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

But further, this conviction of sin is rendered more impressive as in every believer's mind it is connected with the ransom that has been paid for it. The perfect and awful holiness of God annihilates all human attempts to establish righteousness. Every man's conscience accuses him and condemns him. How much more the holy law of God! The awful punishments denounced against sin convince men of its hatefulness in the sight of God, and show them its exceeding sinfulness. But the truth that sends home yet a deeper conviction of sin to the heart and awakens yet a stronger sense of its vile-ness, is the Gospel truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. So dreadful was the guilt of the human race, so fearful the inevitable doom that awaited the helpless sinner, that heaven was excited to mercy, and the Son of God came to save. And every sin committed is against that mercy. Every sin we commit is a sin in the sight of Him who created us, of Him who loads us daily with his benefits; but, greatest aggravation of all, every sin we commit is a sin against Him who loves us with an everlasting love. We sin in the sight of high and holy Heaven, and draw on our heads the just vengeance of offended purity; but more, we sin against a true and loving friend, who, in His death for us, has given the most undoubted proof of His love. This is the deepest stain of our guilt, that we have not only sinned against holiness and justice, but with base ingratitude spurned away infinite mercy, and trampled on the offers of infinite love. Thus many things combine to make the Apostle utter from his inmost soul this confession, which seems so strange and uncalled for, and enable us to sympathize with him, and force from our lips the same acknowledgment, I am the chief of sinners.

We may argue, indeed, that if the Apostle, with his holy life and multitude of labors and sufferings for the sake of Christ, made such a confession, we may with small shame utter the same. But this is not enough. We must stand single and alone before the majesty of heaven; we must gather up our garments and stand in the light of Heaven's holiness and purity, till despair and confusion fill our souls, and to our own eyes the full shame of our nakedness appear; we must drag ourselves to Heaven's judgment-seat, and reckon up our deeds, and call before us our most secret thoughts, and words, and actions: we must weigh these in the balances

of God's word, and try them with most searching tests, that every sin may stand forth in its full enormity; the punishment must be seen impending, and the ransom which was paid in the sufferings of our Lord and Saviour must be seen in the light of the love, the infinite love, which He bears to our souls. When thus our sin comes before us in its true nature, and with aggravation rising upon aggravation, so strong a conviction shall smite our souls, so deep a sense of our sinfulness, and so powerful an abhorrence of our iniquity, that we shall deem it impossible any sinner could have sinned so grievously. When the mother stands over the inanimate body of her first-born, and the full anguish of her bitter bereavement shakes the foundation of the soul, does she not feel that the cup of wrath is full, and that there breathes not one who has been tried with such a trial? When the widow bends over the clay-cold fern of her husband, and feels that the whole stay of bread and the whole staff of water has been taken from her, as the sense of desolation overwhelms her spirit with sorrow unutterable, does she not in her anguish and grief exclaim—Was ever such desolation as mine? When the prophet is weeping over a degenerate and fallen people, with the vision of their vices rising before him, does he not call out in vehement sorrow—“Draw near, all ye that pass by, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow wherewith I am afflicted.” And so the sinner, when his sin rises before him in all its enormity, as he beholds himself with all his impurities standing exposed to the full blaze of the perfect holiness of God; as he sees the judgment seat set and the books opened, and the Judge, the all-discerning Judge, on the throne, and feels at once the fearfulness of the impending doom and the justice of the sentence; as he reflects on the manifold goodness of God, and there rises into his view some real conception of the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of that love of God in Christ Jesus against which he has sinned—it is then he finds all the pleas whereon he propped and stayed himself before, suddenly give way, and he sinks overwhelmed by the enormity of his guilt, feeling in his inmost heart that he is a sinner. It is when the Spirit of God has unsealed his spiritual vision and disclosed to his view his enmity towards God, the long array of sins against infinite love, the realities of his condition, that bitter sorrow and anguish for sin possess his soul. The pains of hell take hold on him. He mourns over Him whom his sins have pierced, as one mourneth over an only son and is in bitterness for Him as one is in bitterness for his first-born. It is then that the conviction of sin truly pierces his heart. He feels so solitary in his sorrow, so desolate and deserted of God, so carried away with grief and hatred of his sin, that it is as if the eye of God were upon him alone and singled him