

in gloom in darkness, but even glory in their ignorance, as the means of safety, and a way of sure escape from the wrath to come—who take care not to learn their duty, that they may not be obliged to do their duty. It seems almost impossible that any man who lives in a christian land can dare to plead this excuse. Have you not the faculties of reason, understanding, and conscience? Is not the law of God set before you in terms which none can misunderstand? Are not the precepts of the Gospel, perspicuity itself? Is not every duty urged upon you with a frequency and earnestness which makes ignorance almost impossible and negligence inexcusable? In some respects, indeed, this pretended ignorance is worse than avowed sin: for we thereby declare that the divine law is imperfect, and that many important precepts have been omitted by the Lawgiver.

We proceed now to one of the frequent pretences by which men palliate their sins—the force of temptation. This would be, indeed, an ample excuse, if temptations possessed any power to compel us to sin. But this they cannot do. What is that mighty power which men ascribe to temptations, and which they affirm none can resist? Their power is small, indeed; for they have no power except merely that of presenting themselves before us; if we only turn away our eyes, they are extinguished. But by a strange fallacy, we ascribe to these lifeless insensible things what is really inherent in our own minds: we persuade ourselves to sin, and then imagine that *they* persuade us: we pursue *them*, and then suppose that they have pursued and overtaken us: we exclaim that we are tempted by God, when we are tempted and enticed by our own lust. It is the utmost folly to speak of being tempted irresistibly. All our temptations are of a finite nature; but our motives to resistance are infinite. Now, no finite thing can overcome or influence the mind irresistibly; because we can turn from it, and contemplate something greater and more important. Did Satan offer us the whole world as the price of sin, we would most justly incur the anger of God by compliance with his solicitations; because motives of ten thousand times greater force urge us to obedience. How much more guilty must he be who yields to a far less temptation, some small portion—some mere fraction of the world—some contemptible pleasure or worthless attainment! I need not speak of the confusion which would be introduced into the moral world if such an excuse were received. No one sins without some inducement; for this would be to act without motive or design. If then, the temptation excused the sin, the divine law would be rendered powerless at the very time when its

power was most required. Some may say it is unjust to place us amid temptations, and then punish us for yielding to their power. But the apostle conclusively answers this objection: No temptation befalls us, but what has been endured by men of like infirmities with ourselves. The same grace that supported them, is able to strengthen us for the contest and the victory, and to make us stand in the evil day.

If temptation be no excuse for sin, it must be still more vain to plead the force of long habit. It is true, that habit enslaves the mind so completely as often to urge it on to sin against all the warnings and exhortations of conscience. But does this furnish any excuse for the sins to which it leads? Surely not. This well known power of habit ought to have been a most urgent motive to avoid those chains and bonds, which almost no human strength can shake off, when once fixed upon the soul. At the very first temptation, this motive should have urged us to resistance; at the second temptation, it ought to have occurred with still more force; and every successive sin into which we fell, ought to have shewn us more clearly the instant duty of fleeing from the dangerous entanglement. And shall a man come forward, and plead as an apology for sin, that very thing which ought to have rendered sin far more odious and detestable in his sight? Often does the word of God assure us that habit forms a high aggravation of guilt. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? How then shall ye who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well?” How obvious is this even to common reason. Do we pay one debt by contracting still deeper and heavier obligations? Does one crime make a sinner, but a thousand crimes a saint? What father would speak thus to his rebellious child: “The first time you offended me, I was displeased; the next time, I was less offended; and now that your rebellious temper has been so confirmed that you cannot govern or control it, I am not angry at all.” As for the somewhat similar excuse so often alleged—the common custom of the world around us—I would merely observe that this only adds new guilt to your transgression, that you give your countenance and encouragement to a sinful custom, and thus destroy not only your own soul, but so far as lies in you, the souls of a whole neighbourhood or nation. If a rebel stand alone, and lift only his single hand against his king, his feeble efforts may be despised. But if he join a host of rebels and swell the ranks of revolt, then he stands exposed to the vengeance of his prince. Shall not the number of his accomplices in crime, in place of excusing his conduct, be an argument for his condemnation?