

# **"The Sins of Men Not Chargeable to God"**

## **Part 1**

**by**

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***"Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God';  
for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt any man."***

**James 1:13**

The word of God frequently teaches that a principal hindrance to embracing Christ's righteousness is man's lack of a due sense of his own unrighteousness. This stupidity on man's part is as unaccountable in its nature as it is dangerous in its effects. All men are persuaded that they have broken the precepts of God's law. Thus it might be expected that they would be persuaded they deserve to suffer the penalty for it. But experience makes it evident that it is otherwise. All men are convinced that they are sinners, but very few are convinced that they deserve to be miserable. The word of God, which searches the heart, unfolds the secret cause of this. In like manner, men are insensible of their ill deserving--not that they absolutely deny their sins but that they excuse them. Nor is this a new artifice. It is as old as sin itself.

It is natural for our affections to bias our judgment; and therefore when sin has polluted the one it is no surprise that it should pervert the other. The first man on earth was no sooner accused of sin than he strove to defend it, since he could not deny it; and thus he heightened his guilt by a presumptuous attempt to make allowances for it. We, his offspring, resemble him no less in excusing sin than in committing it. As a general rule, men either do not regret their sins at all, or else they regret them simply as misfortunes rather than faults, and as deserving pity rather than punishment. Prosperous sinners scarce see the harm of sin at all. Others, while they feel the harm of it redounding to themselves, lay the blame of it on something else.

It would be less unaccountable if men only justified or excused themselves to their fellow men, their partakers in guilt. One sinner may easily find a thousand plausible answers to the upbraiding language of another sinner. For how can a man be at a loss for a defense against those who cannot accuse him without condemning themselves? He may answer them in the apostle's own words: *"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things"* (Rom. 2:1).

But the misery of men's self love is that it makes them attempt to vindicate themselves not only against the biased charges of their guilty fellow men, but also against the most unbiased charges of their offended Creator. When men vindicate themselves against their associates in guilt only, it may be construed as a pretense to equality with them. But for men to defend themselves before God is in effect a pretense to innocence. They are not as sorry for their sins against his law as they are for the severity of God's law against their sins. Men deceive themselves by thinking that those temptations that allure them to sin are sufficient excuses for committing them. This is surely a disposition of mind that undermines repentance and saps the very

foundation of true religion.

Yet defending their sins is not the highest pitch to which the arrogance of sinners leads them. It is indeed high enough presumption (in one who has times without number offended God without cause) to justify himself when God accuses him. But it is still a far higher pitch of presumption when a sinner not only defends himself before God but also defends himself by accusing God, that is, discharging himself of the blame of his sin by laying it upon God! In this men seem to mirror their first parent Adam. The Scripture records that God gave Adam a helper suitable for him, which was, no doubt, an act of goodness on God's part. Yet when Adam sinned against God without cause, rather than be without a defense altogether he made the gift he received from God an excuse for his disobedience to him; that is, he made God's goodness to him an excuse for his ingratitude.

It is easy to observe how truly we imitate Adam's conduct. God has placed us in a beautiful world where we are surrounded with a variety of useful and delightful objects--his good creations. All of them display his glory. Many of them are for supplying our necessities, and others for our innocent gratification and comfort. All of them are favors from God and, consequently, should be effectual motives to love him. But instead of this we first make them occasions for departing from him, and afterwards excuses for doing so! As there is something of this perverse disposition in the corrupt nature of all men, so it has appeared in all ages; and that it was apparent in the days of the apostles is evident from this text, which was designed to check it: *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God."*

It will be helpful to observe two things. First, a rebuke to that arrogance of men which would lay the blame of their sins on God. Second, a strong assertion of God's untainted holiness and purity as a God who is infinitely free from tempting others, and from being tempted by others to anything that is evil.

*First*, the words contain a check to the impious arrogance of men that would lay the blame of their sins on God: *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God."* That is, let no man say it with his mouth or imagine it in his heart. Let no man dare to commit such an outrage against the holiness of God as to charge him with the blame of his sin, in whole or in part. The apostle here assures us that if we entertain such thoughts in our hearts, God will justly look upon it as a heinous violation of that homage and respect we owe him. This is one of the chief things that distinguishes the laws of God from those of men; the latter reach only our outward actions, the former reach our thoughts. One principal part of that holiness which the law of God requires is to entertain just thoughts of him; that is, high and exalted thoughts such as shall represent him to be what he truly is--perfectly pure and infinitely lovely. Nothing can be more contrary to this than to blame him for our sins! When God's law forbids such thoughts, it is certain evidence that they are false and that we are under the strongest obligations to reject them. God's truth is infallible; and therefore whatever man's natural corruption suggests, it can suggest nothing that should come in competition with that truth.

*Second*, to strengthen our impression of this, the apostle adds a strong assertion of God's spotless and incorruptible purity. His assertion consists of two parts.

1. He teaches that *God cannot be tempted with evil*. That is, there is nothing in God's own nature that can incline him to do anything but what is perfectly good and just, and there is no outward object that can make any impression or have any influence on him to bias him from

those eternal laws of justice and righteousness by which he always did and ever will govern the world. But the word *tempting* cannot only be taken in this sense of perverting God to do any evil action himself, but is also used when God is provoked to punish the evil actions of others. Thus the Israelites are said to have *tempted* him in the wilderness. In such cases, although that by which men tempt or provoke God is itself evil, that which he is provoked to do is always just and good. Men are said to tempt God when they approach him with the desire and expectation that he should transgress those laws which he himself has established, whether in the works of nature or of grace. God is a God of order, and in both works of nature and grace he works by means. When men expect or pray for the end without using the appointed means, they are said to tempt him. They have behaved as if they thought they could prevail with him to violate the perfect order that he himself has established. But since all their thoughts and desires can have no influence upon him in such a manner, the apostle justly affirms that God cannot be tempted with evil, because he cannot be perverted or corrupted with it.

2. As God cannot be perverted to transgress his own laws himself, neither does he pervert any other to do so. As he cannot be tempted with evil, *neither tempts he any man*. He neither deceives any man's judgment, nor perverts his will, nor corrupts his affections, nor does anything else whatsoever that he can therefore be charged with the blame of men's sins. We should also consider that tempting sometimes signifies not merely seducing men from good to evil, but discovering what is in men, whether it be good or evil. In Abraham's case the temptation was not an allurement to sin but a trial of grace. It is true that God needs no means to discover for himself what is in men, but he uses means for revealing men to themselves and to others; and this he does for ends worthy of infinite wisdom and in a manner agreeable to spotless holiness. Even men often find it their duty to discover the good or evil that is in others; and though in some of these cases the disposition of mind which is revealed is evil, the action by which it is discovered may be good. In the trials men make of one another it is often so; in the trials God makes of men it is always so. The actions by which God proves the good that is in men do not tend to lessen it, but to increase it and to perfect it. The actions by which he reveals the evil that is in men do not tend to increase it, but to lessen and often effectually cure it.

Therefore it is evident that those scriptures, wherein God is said to tempt or try men, contain nothing inconsistent with the apostle's doctrine in the text. In other words, however men's corrupt hearts may be too much inclined to blame God for their sins, yet that imputation is really as contrary to truth and justice as it is to the honor of God, who is as free from tempting or corrupting others with evil as he is incapable of being corrupted with it himself.

After what has been considered above, we need not dwell upon that branch of doctrine which affirms that God cannot be tempted with evil himself, because it is what men are less likely to argue against. Rather, the design of this discourse (which is evidently the apostle's principal scope) is to consider the certain evident truth that God is infinitely free from the blame of men's sins despite whatever dishonorable thoughts sinful men may have of him to the contrary.

It is useful here to observe the great importance of this doctrine, which, beside other reasons, is evident from the great pains the scriptures take to inculcate it upon us. This doctrine is plainly affirmed in every scripture that maintains God's perfect holiness. And it is no less obvious to those who read the scriptures, that of all God's attributes his holiness is that which is most frequently asserted and the belief of which is most earnestly urged upon us: "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty*" (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8).

The same doctrine is presented to our minds in a beautiful variety of expressions near the beginning of the heavenly song of Moses (Deut. 32:4):

*He is the Rock, His work is perfect;  
For all His ways are justice,  
A God of truth and without injustice;  
Righteous and upright is He.*

But there is one remarkable scripture that deserves our special consideration on this subject, because it makes the right knowledge of this doctrine (together with the knowledge of God's goodness) the only thing in the world we are allowed to glory in. That scripture is Jeremiah 9:23, 24:

*Thus says Yahweh:*

*Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,  
Let not the mighty man glory in his might,  
Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;  
But let him who glories glory in this,  
That he understands and knows Me,  
That I am Yahweh, exercising lovingkindness, judgment,  
and righteousness in the earth.  
For in these I delight, says Yahweh.*

This should raise in us a holy curiosity to be well versed in the knowledge of a doctrine in which we are commanded to glory almost to the exclusion of everything else. It should excite us to join prayers and endeavors in order to have a firm persuasion of it rooted in our minds, and a habitual lively impression of it fixed upon our hearts.

To set this matter in its true light, let it be observed that it is one main end of divine revelation to give us the true knowledge of God and of ourselves, and the impression that scripture all along endeavors to give is that his holiness is unblameable and our sin inexcusable; and this is for the purpose that we may ascribe the glory of perfect righteousness to him and take shame and confusion of face to ourselves. To use the words of the Psalmist, "*That You may be found just when you speak, and blameless when You judge*" (Ps. 51:4). To quote the apostle, "*That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*" (Rom. 3:19).

It is an indispensable duty of all rational creatures to love God. But sin has brought an additional obligation on us who are guilty creatures--it is not only to love God but also to loath ourselves. Without this we can neither know his righteousness nor his lovingkindness, which he bids us glory in; his righteousness in all we suffer, his lovingkindness in all we enjoy; how unworthy we are of the one, how richly we have deserved the other. In other words, without a right sense of the doctrine in the text we can neither practice due submission in our afflictions nor due gratitude for our comforts, and consequently we run the greatest risk of losing the one and having the other multiplied upon us.

Up to this point, this discourse has been given in order that it might, through divine grace, be a means of giving us a right impression of the importance and certainty of the doctrine in our text. It will now be proper to treat of the following particulars. First, to consider some observations

from scripture and experience to show that the unworthy thoughts of God which men hold (and which the text rebukes), however unreasonable, are notwithstanding very common and do a great deal of harm to men's souls as well as dishonor to God. Second, we shall collect evidence for the doctrine from God's works and ways, and we shall consider the arguments that are most proper for resisting these injurious thoughts of God, which the apostle warns us against. These will afford sufficient answers to all the objections and prejudices that men's natural corruption suggests against the doctrine. After this it will be easy to reflect upon what improvement we should make of a truth of so great moment, and in which the honor of God is so much concerned.

This is part one of Sermon I in *Sermons and Essays: by the Late Rev. Mr. John M'Laurin*, published from his manuscripts by John Gillies (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1811). **Note:** The text has been paraphrased for easier reading and clarity.

**The reader will find this sermon continued in Part 2.**