

## Sin Avoided by Considerations of God

Edward Payson

"How can I—sin against God?" Genesis 39:9

This, my hearers, is the genuine language of a pious heart. It ought to be the language of every heart. To every tempter, to every temptation, our invariable reply should be, How can I sin against God! To persuade you to make this reply, whenever you are tempted to sin, is my present design. And perhaps I cannot prosecute this design more effectually, than by attempting to show you what is implied in the language which we wish you to adopt. This therefore I propose to do.

The meaning, the force of this language lies almost entirely in the word God. And O how many reasons, why we should not sin against him, are wrapped up in this one word! Could we, my hearers, make you see the full import of this word; could we pour upon your minds the overwhelming flood of meaning which it contains, you would feel, that no additional motives were necessary, to deter you from sinning against him whose name it is. But this we cannot do. Could we take this one word for our theme, and expatiate upon it through eternity, we should be able to tell you but a part, a small part, of its meaning. All we can do is, to tell you something of what it means, in the mind, in the mouth of a pious man. Suppose such a man placed before you. Suppose you see him assailed and urged to sin, by every temptation to which human nature can be exposed. Suppose that on the one hand, the world holds up all her pleasures, riches and honors, and says to him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt consent to sin. And suppose that, on the other hand, she places before him poverty, imprisonment, contempt, torture, and death, and says, To all these evils I doom thee, if thou refuse to sin. Then hear him reply, How can I sin against God? and listen while he tells you what he means by this language. Notice his expressions; weigh well the reasons which he assigns, and see whether he does not act wisely, whether he does not constrain you to justify his conduct in refusing to yield to temptation and sin against God. And if you feel, as we proceed, that he completely justifies himself in the eye of reason, that he speaks and acts wisely, then make his language and his conduct your own.

1. God, you may understand the good man as saying, is a being of perfect, of infinite excellence. His works, as well as his word, assure me that he is so. They assure me that from him comes every good and perfect gift; that he is the Father of lights, the source of all the intellectual and moral excellence, which is possessed by creatures, whether in heaven, or on earth. Now there must be more in the fountain, than there is in all the streams which proceed from it. There

must be more excellence in the Creator, than in all the creatures which he has formed. How then can I sin against him? There are many of my fellow creatures, who possess much intellectual and moral excellence, and whom I should therefore be unwilling to offend. And ought I not, then, I appeal to you whether I ought not, to be far more unwilling to offend him, who is the source of all excellence? who is excellence itself! Do you ask me to be more particular I reply, God is holy. He is the thrice Holy One; he cannot look on sin, but with the deepest abhorrence. How then can I sin against him? How can I insult his spotless purity, by polluting myself with sin, when the light of his holiness shines around me? God is good, infinitely good, he is goodness itself. And O, how can I sin against goodness, infinite goodness? God is just, and his justice binds him to punish sin. He is Almighty, and his power enables him to punish it. I am unable to resist him, if I wished to do it. How can I, how dare I, then, offend him, and provoke his justice to employ his power in destroying me? God is everywhere present, and knows all things. How then can I sin against him? How can I pollute by my sins a place which is made sacred, which is rendered holy ground, by his presence? God is infinitely wise. In his wisdom he counsels me not to sin; and how can I disregard the counsels of infinite wisdom? God is true; he is truth itself; he has told me that misery is the consequence of sin, and how can I disbelieve eternal truth? God is merciful and gracious. He has mercifully offered to forgive all my transgressions, great and numberless as they are. How can I then, if there is one spark of gratitude or ingenuousness in my heart, ever consent to offend him again? God is condescending. He has graciously condescended to feel and express an interest in my welfare, and in that of my fellow worms. And how can I then abuse his condescension? In fine, when I see that everything glorious, excellent, and lovely is summed up in the character of one Being, how can I sin against that Being?

2. God is my Creator. He is the former of my body, the Father of my spirit. As such he is my nearest relative. How then can I sin against him? Look at this body. He contrived it. He formed every particle of it. He gave me these limbs, these senses. How then can I employ them in offending him? Consider my soul. He breathed it into me. He endowed it with all the faculties which it possesses. And can I suffer them to sin against him who gave them? Shall the thing formed rise up against him who formed it? I am not my own, I am the property of him who made me. Everything which I possess is his. And how can I disregard his rights? How can I be so foolish, so ungrateful, so impious, as to sin against a Father; against such a Father, against him but for whom I had never existed? You would not justify me in offending an earthly parent. You would justly censure me, you would consider me as an unnatural wretch, should I plant thorns in the breast of a kind father, an affectionate mother. And ought you not much more to condemn me, —ought I not to abhor myself, should I offend and grieve my Father in heaven?

3. God is my Preserver and Benefactor. He has watched over me and preserved me, every moment since my existence commenced. He has shielded me from

ten thousand evils and dangers. He has preserved me, while multitudes of my coevals have perished. He is preserving me at this moment. How can I then, while in the very act of experiencing his preserving goodness, requite him with disobedience? And while he has been my constant preserver, he has in numberless other ways acted as my benefactor. All the happiness which I ever tasted, he imparted. All the blessings which I ever enjoyed, he gave. Each of them bore this inscription, The gift of God. The food which has nourished me, the garments which have clothed me, the habitation which has sheltered me, the relatives and friends whose kindness has cheered my existence; all come from him. And even now, it is his light which shines around me; it is his air which I breathe; the earth on which I stand is his; even now my hands are filled with blessings which he has bestowed. How then can I raise them against him? How can I requite with ingratitude this kind, constant, unwearied benefactor!

4. God is my rightful Sovereign. As my Creator and Proprietor, he has the best of all possible titles to control me. He, who gave and who preserves my existence, has surely a right to prescribe the manner in which I shall spend it. He who gave me my limbs and faculties has surely a right to say what I shall do with them. And he has exercised this right. He has enacted laws for the regulation of my conduct. These laws he has made known to me. And they forbid me to sin. They forbid this particular sin, which I am now urged to commit. And I see not how I can escape from the obligations which I am under to obey them. I see not how I can escape from the government of God, or cease to be his rightful subject. And while I am one of his subjects, I see not how I can disobey him, without becoming a rebel and a traitor, and thus exposing myself to his just displeasure. And how can I do this? How can I consent to become a rebel against the King of kings, the Sovereign of the universe? How can I dare brave the displeasure of Omnipotence, of one who governs all things by the word of his power? And why should I wish to do it? All his commands are holy and just and good. They require nothing of me which does not tend to secure my best interests, my everlasting happiness. They forbid nothing which would not debase and injure me. Why, then, should I transgress, how can I transgress such a law as this, when in doing it I sinned against the greatest and best of sovereigns?

5. God is the providential, as well as moral Governor of the universe, and the sole Dispenser of all blessings, natural and spiritual. As such I am constantly dependent on him for everything which I need. I am in his hands; as he has given, so he can take away, all that I possess. He has only to speak the word, and all blessings forsake me, all evils come upon me; nor can all creatures united continue to me one blessing, which he sees fit to take away, or avert one evil which he commissions to assail me. How can I, then, unless I become a madman, consent to forfeit, his favor and incur his displeasure, by sinning against him? Especially how can I do this, when I know that he is the Judge, as well as the Governor of the universe, and that, as such, he will summon me to his bar, and pronounce upon me a sentence, which will render me happy or miserable forever! I know he has power to execute this sentence. I know that he

has power to destroy both soul and body in hell. And dare I, can I, then, offend him! Can I barter heaven for the temptation which now urges me to sin? Can I take the price of sin in my arms, and for the sake of it plunge into hell? Can all the rewards which you offer compensate me for the heaven, which I shall lose by sin? Are all the tortures, with which you threaten me, to be compared with those miseries, into which I shall sink myself by sin? You will not assert this. I cannot then, —O, no, no, —I cannot consent to sin against God. Ask me to do anything else, however difficult or painful, and I will, if possible, comply; but ask me not to sin against God; ask me not to destroy body and soul forever, for this I cannot, cannot do.

6. God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As such so he loved our ruined race, that he gave his only begotten Son to die for its salvation. He gave him to die for me, for my relatives, for my fellow creatures. He gave him to die for us, when we were sinners, rebels, enemies; gave him, that we might be saved from the consequences of our own follies and vices. Through his crucified Son, he has offered me pardon and peace and everlasting life, on the easy terms of renouncing my sins, and believing in him. Nay more, he has besought me to accept of salvation on these terms, and to be reconciled to himself. He has shown himself willing to receive and welcome me no less kindly, than the father in the parable received and welcomed his returning prodigal son. And the Saviour, by consenting to die for us, has evinced love and condescension equally wonderful. He has done and suffered more for us than any earthly friend would or could have done. Now if I consent to sin, I shall crucify afresh this Saviour; I shall dishonor and offend and grieve the Father who gave him to die for me. And how can I do this? How can I requite him evil for good? Tell me, ye who urge me to sin, how can I so far divest myself of gratitude, of ingenuousness, of all sensibility to kindness as to be guilty of such conduct! Tell how I can ever justify myself, how I can ever prove that I am not a base ungrateful wretch, if I should consent to sin against my God and Redeemer, after they have done all this. But you cannot tell me. You can furnish me with no apology, with no shadow of an excuse for such ingratitude. Tempt me not then to be guilty of it, for I cannot, no, I cannot sin against the God and Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all grace and mercy. I cannot grieve and crucify afresh that Saviour who has voluntarily expired for me on the cross.

Thus, my hearers, have I endeavored to show you something of what a good man means when he says, How can I sin against God; and stated some of the considerations which he may urge as reasons why he cannot consent to sin against him. And now let me ask, Are not these reasons more than sufficient to justify him in refusing to sin, however strongly he may be urged to it? Is there anything in this language which indicates weakness, or superstition, or enthusiasm? Rather, does it not approve itself to the understanding and conscience of every person present, as being perfectly reasonable? Would you not censure and condemn him, should he consent to sin against God, when considerations so numerous and so powerful forbid it? If so, you must, would you

be consistent, condemn yourselves whenever you sin; for, my hearers, every consideration which the good man has now been represented as urging to prove that he ought not to sin against God, may be urged with equal force to prove, that you ought not to sin against him. If the good man ought to adopt such language, then each of you ought to adopt it. If it is wise and proper that he should form such a determination; then, for the same reason, it is wise and proper that you should form it. And now to come to the great object of this discourse, let me ask, will you not adopt it? We set before you God, the infinite, everlasting God; a being absolutely perfect, in whom all possible excellence is concentrated and condensed; a being who is your Creator, your Preserver, your Benefactor, your rightful Sovereign, your Judge; a being who has so loved you, that he spared not his own Son; but delivered him up for us all, and whose offers of grace and mercy are continually sounding in your ears. This Being we set before you and say, How can you sin against him? And what we wish of you is, that each of your hearts should echo, How can I sin against God?

Let me then repeat the question, Is this, shall it henceforth be, the language of your hearts? Perhaps some may reply, It is, it shall be their language. We will no more sin against God. If we ever sin, it shall only be against our fellow creatures, or against ourselves, not against him. But, my friends, all sin is against God. Though in some forms it may be more immediately against ourselves, or our fellow creatures, yet in every form it is ultimately against him. It is against his law, his authority, his government, his glory. It strikes at him directly in all these respects. To say that we will no more consent to sin against God is equivalent to saying, We will no more consent to sin at all. And saying this implies repentance; for the same views which lead a man to say, How can I sin against God? will lead him to repent of having already sinned against him. Besides, God's first command is, Repent. To disobey this command is, therefore a sin. Of course, he who says, How can I sin against God? will say, How can I defer repentance a single hour? All the considerations which ought to have prevented him from sinning against God, will now operate to make him repent of his sins. He will say, Against this infinitely perfect Being, against infinite wisdom and power and holiness and justice and goodness and mercy and truth, I have sinned. Against my Creator, and Preserver and Benefactor, I have sinned. Against my Sovereign and Judge, against the mighty Monarch of the universe, against the God and Father of MY Lord Jesus Christ, against my adorable crucified Saviour, I have sinned. And O, how could I do this? What cruel ingratitude, what impious folly and madness, possessed me! I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. And he who says this, will also believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will see that unbelief is one of the greatest sins which can be committed against God; that it calls in question all his perfections, and represents him as wholly unworthy of confidence. How then, he will ask, can I any longer persist in it? Besides, he will see that he needs such a Saviour as Jesus Christ, to save him from the consequences of sins which he has already committed against God, and from those sinful propensities which urge him to sin afresh. This will operate as an additional reason why he should believe without delay. Having exercised

repentance and faith in Christ, he will proceed to exhibit the effects of both, by denying himself, crucifying his sinful propensities, and replying to every temptation; How can I sin against God?

And now, my hearers, if any of you mean to adopt the language of our text, you will soon have occasion to make use of it. As soon as you leave this house, and through the remainder of the week, you will be assailed by temptations from within and without, to sin against God. Those of you, who have hitherto neglected religion, will be tempted to neglect it a little longer. And those of you, who have professedly embraced it, will be tempted to act in a manner inconsistent with your profession. The situation of both classes will be this. On one side, a thousand little tempters of various kinds will be whispering, Do consent to sin against God. Sin against him at least in this one thing. It will be a trifling offence, and you can repent of it afterwards, and be forgiven. On the other side, God will stand in all his infinite perfections, in all his endearing relations, and with the tenderness of a father, with the authority of a master, with the majesty of a universal monarch, will say, Yield not to these temptations; sin not against me. Then you will be called to weigh the rights, the claims of Jehovah against the pleadings of temptation. Then you must either adopt, or reject, the language of our text. Now then, while temptation is at a distance; while the voice of passion is silent, while reason and conscience can speak and be heard, determine which you will do. To assist in forming a right determination, consider how frequently, how greatly you have already sinned against God. How often, when temptation urged you, and God forbade you to sin, have you yielded to the former, and disobeyed the latter. Are not those instances already sufficiently numerous? Are they not too numerous? Are you not ready to wish that, when tempted to sin, you had always replied, How can I sin against God? Do you feel nothing like sorrow, nothing like relenting, when you reflect how often you have sinned against all that is endearing in relation, against all that is sacred in authority, against all that is touching in kindness? Can you contemplate God impartially and say, I think I have treated him as well as he deserves to be treated. He has no reason to complain of the manner in which I have treated him. I have paid him all that I owe him. I have loved him and feared him, and obeyed and thanked him, as much as he has any right to expect? If you cannot say this; if you feel that you have not treated your God, your Creator, your Benefactor, your Redeemer. as he deserves, can you refrain from lamenting it? Is there nothing in your breast which makes you wish to fall at his feet and say, Lord, I have not treated thee as thou art worthy to be treated. I have sinned, I have committed iniquity. I have done foolishly. O, forgive me, for thy Son's sake forgive me, and let me offend thee no more. If anything within urges you to do this, O yield to it; for it is the Spirit of God urging you to repentance. If you feel any disposition to do it, indulge that disposition; for it may prove the commencement of repentance. And if you repent of past sins, you will feel disposed and enabled to say with new resolution, How can I any more sin against God? for you will then come under the influence of new motives, and will see new reasons why you should guard against sin; for as soon as you become a penitent sinner, you will be a pardoned sinner; you will

taste and see that the Lord is good; you will know something of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; and that love will constrain you to live, not unto yourselves, but to him who died for you and rose again. Then you will say, How can I, a redeemed sinner, a pardoned sinner, whom Christ has bought with his own blood, who have by a most wonderful display of divine grace and mercy, been saved from the lowest hell, —how can I any more sin against my deliverer? I am become a member of Christ. How call I crucify my head? God has adopted me as a child: How can I sin against my Father in heaven? The Spirit of God has taken up his residence in my heart: How can I grieve him and provoke him to forsake me?

Such are some of the new motives under whose influence you will come, if you now yield to him who urges you to repent. O then yield to the gentle inward monitor which, I would fain hope, is now whispering repentance. Give way to those better feelings which are beginning to rise within you; and under their influence fall at the feet of your much injured and long offended, but still gracious God. Let me, I beseech you, let me see peace restored between you and him before you leave this house. Come with me to his mercy seat and say, Other lords, O God, have had dominion over us; but they shall rule us no more. We have sinned, greatly sinned against thee, but we would sin no more. O hold us back from sin; turn us from all our iniquities; help us to say from the heart, we will be thy people; and say thou to us, I will be your God.

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