

# THE SINNER'S SANCTUARY

GOSPEL FREEDOM FROM DEATH,  
CONDEMNATION, AND THE LAW

*Hugh Binning*



## The Sinner's Sanctuary



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Gospel Freedom from Death,  
Condemnation, and the Law

Hugh Binning

Edited by  
David Searle

Introduced by  
Sinclair B. Ferguson



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*The Sinner's Sanctuary*

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For Neil

*a brother in Christ for sixty years*



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**HUGH BINNING,**  
**Preacher of *The Sinner's Sanctuary***

Sinclair B. Ferguson

*The Sinner's Sanctuary* consists of a series of forty sermons on Romans 8:1–15. They were preached by Hugh Binning, minister in Govan, now part of Glasgow, on the south bank of the River Clyde in the west of Scotland. They are representative of his all-too-brief ministry from 1650 until his death in 1653 at the age of twenty-six. He was, by any measure, a remarkable minister. But today he is largely forgotten. Indeed, it is unlikely that many people (even in his native land of Scotland) would be able to place him in the long story of the kirk. We owe a debt to David Searle, the editor of this volume, for bringing Binning's ministry back to life for us in this twenty-first-century garb.

**The Seventeenth Century**

Hugh Binning lived during one of the most complex periods of Scottish church history, but he did not live long. He belongs, therefore, to that long-admired group of ministers who appear to us to have been cut short too early, and yet, under God, have made an impact that lingers long after their death.

The details of Binning's life can be quickly related. He was born in 1627 on his father John's estate at Dalvenan, near Kirkmichael in Ayrshire. His mother, Margaret, was a McKail, and Hugh McKail, the Covenanter martyr of 1666, was a nephew. At age thirteen, Hugh (or Hew) matriculated at the University of Glasgow, and following graduation began the study of theology

with a view to the ministry. His studies were interrupted when, although only eighteen, he was elected to the post of regent in philosophy. He clearly had a measure of Calvin's genius for both memory and intellectual penetration.<sup>1</sup> In addition to his teaching responsibilities, he continued his theological studies and was ordained to the pastoral charge of Govan some four years later. Judging by his literary remains, of which *The Sinner's Sanctuary* represents less than a quarter, he served the people of Govan and beyond with great diligence in the brief time they were privileged to have his ministry. He died of consumption (pulmonary tuberculosis) in 1653 in his twenty-sixth year.

Binning lived in tumultuous times. It will be remembered that, following the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, the throne of England had passed from the Tudor dynasty to the Stuarts in the person of James VI of Scotland, who also became James I of England. While the crowns were thus united, the two parliaments remained independent for a further century (they were eventually united in 1707). James was deeply committed to the divine right of kings and to maintaining that right, as Elizabeth I had done, by controlling the episcopate and through them the whole church. But the underlying tensions between king and parliament that simmered during his reign erupted under his son, Charles I, and eventually led to the outbreak of the civil wars between 1642 and 1651. While these were *English* wars, they also involved the Scots. Charles's execution in January 1649 led to the establishment of a republic in England and the ensuing protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. Meanwhile, the loyal Scots proclaimed his son, Charles II, king and celebrated his coronation at Scone in Perthshire in January 1651. Two unhappy conflicts followed.

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1. John Howie comments, "The abstruse depths of philosophy, which are the torture of a slow genius and a weak capacity, he dived into without any pain or trouble; so that, by his ready apprehension of things, he was able to do more in one hour than some others could do in many days by hard study and close application." John Howie, *The Scots Worthies*, rev. ed. (W. H. Carlaw, 1870; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 208.

## Conflicts

First, a combination of Scottish support for the Stuart monarchy and his own fear of Presbyterianism establishing itself in England led Oliver Cromwell to invade and occupy Scotland. Against substantially greater numbers, his disciplined New Model Army routed the Scots at the Battle of Dunbar (1650). During his residence, Cromwell visited Glasgow, accompanied by his chaplains Joseph Caryl (who had served as one of the divines of the Westminster Assembly) and the younger but even greater figure of John Owen. A long-lived but undocumented recollection credits Hugh Binning with defending Presbyterian church order over against Congregationalism in discussions with the Independents (i.e., separatists) Caryl and Owen. After asking the name of the young man who had performed so impressively and receiving the answer “Hew Binning” (which in a West Scotland accent may well have sounded more like “Shugh Bunning”), Cromwell is reputed to have replied, “He hath bound well”—and then, placing his hand on the sword at his thigh, added, “But this will loose all again!” The story, while lacking contemporaneous documentation, is by no means impossible.

It is by no means easy for twenty-first-century Christians to appreciate how important church unity was to mid-seventeenth-century Presbyterians or why they feared congregationalism so much. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a major element in the Roman Catholic Church’s criticism of the Reformed churches was that one division—namely, from Rome—would inevitably produce the domino effect of uncontrollable further division. Scottish Presbyterians saw the development of Independency as a threat to unity and a fulfillment of this prophecy. They therefore regarded with deep suspicion the presence in the New Model Army of the more radical voices of Quakers, Mechanic Preachers, Ranters, and the like. For the Scots, in addition to the principle that biblical church order was presbyterian, the country’s adoption of the 1638 National Covenant and the 1643 Solemn League and Covenant

(between the nations) meant maintaining them was a primary, God-honoring duty. Cromwell, for his part, with his twin fears of monarchy and Presbyterianism, seems to have placed more stock in the events of providence. Thus, while he was conscious that fellow believers would lose their lives in military conflict, he read his stunning victories as evidence that God was on the side of both his strategy and his army. Hence his (in)famous letter to the general assembly of the Church of Scotland, “I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.”<sup>2</sup>

A second conflict emerged within the context of these external tensions. In accepting the throne in Scotland upon his father’s death, Charles II professed loyalty to the Scottish covenants—a profession the church accepted. But leading Scottish ministers read his profession differently and formed essentially two parties within the kirk—“Resolutioners” (who were sympathetic to the king), and Protesters (who mistrusted him). In October 1650, the Protesters presented the kirk’s general assembly with a protest against the haste with which Charles’s promise had been accepted and against the willingness of the kirk to “promise... power to the king before he had evidenced any change of his principles.” They further stated that “the continuing of that power in his hand was sinful till that change should appear.” In the following years, they took a step further and refused to acknowledge the authority of any general assembly in which the “plurality” was “corrupt.”

The tragedy inherent in the situation was the way it divided men who had been comrades in arms. Robert Baillie stood with the Resolutioners while Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie, his fellow commissioners at the Westminster Assembly, were among the most resolute Protesters. And with the latter stood Hugh Binning. In the aftermath, Rutherford’s friend David

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2. “Life of David Dickson,” in *Select Practical Writings of David Dickson* (Edinburgh: Free Church of Scotland, 1845), xlvii. Written on August 3, 1650, from Musselburgh on the outskirts of Edinburgh.

Dickson (a Resolutioner and the author of the first commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith), acknowledged that he and his brethren had been too naive in their trust in Charles II.<sup>3</sup>

Although Hugh Binning was younger than other leading figures in the debates, he nevertheless played a significant part in them. But inevitably his relationship with some of his older brethren was strained, as was also true of his younger contemporary Andrew Gray.<sup>4</sup> And perhaps an element that added to the strain was Binning's preaching style. This leads us to the main theme of this introduction to *The Sinner's Sanctuary*.

### Preaching Style

Preaching styles have varied over the years. The dominant style in any era has usually been shaped by two factors. The first is the influence of preachers to whom ministerial students listen and whom they regard as models to be followed. The second is the influence of rhetorical theories and styles—*tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis* (times change, and we change with them). While the first influence is much more evident than the second, the latter nevertheless exerts a powerful, if unrecognized, influence.

In the case of Hugh Binning and of Andrew Gray (their names were coupled together in the minds of their critics), even a superficial comparison of their sermons with the standard

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3. An insight into the strength of feeling on both sides can be found in a letter written in 1657 by the Resolutioner James Sharp in which he gives an account of a confrontation between himself and George Gillespie that took place in the presence of Oliver Cromwell, John Owen, Thomas Manton, and others in London. See William Stephen, ed., *A Register of the Consultations of the Ministers of Edinburgh and Some Other Brethren of the Ministry*, vol. 1, 1652–1657 (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1921), 348–69. Sharp later became archbishop of St. Andrews and was murdered at Magus Moor in 1679.

4. Shortly after turning twenty, Andrew Gray (1633–1656) was installed as minister of the Outer High Kirk (meeting in Glasgow Cathedral) in 1653. Visitors to Glasgow Cathedral today can still see the evidence of an Outer and an Inner Church—a pulpit still stands in the outer section as well as one in the inner section of the building.

preaching style of their day reveals a striking, and apparently quite self-conscious, change.<sup>5</sup>

This difference was expressed in a decidedly negative way by both Robert Baillie (1602–1662) and David Dickson (1583–1663), two leading ministers in the west of Scotland and, at one time, joint holders of the chair of divinity in the University of Glasgow. Historians are indebted to the loquacious Baillie for the eyewitness accounts (not to mention scuttlebutt) he left us in his *Letters and Journals* (including correspondence from the Westminster Assembly at which he was one of the Scots commissioners). Baillie was less than sympathetic to Binning, not only because he, Baillie, was a Resolutioner while Binning adopted the view of the Protesters, but because, as an older man, he clearly did not appreciate the younger man plowing his own furrow when it came to homiletical style. In a letter to his cousin William Spang in July 1654 he wrote of Binning and of Andrew Gray,

He hes the new guyse [style] of preaching, which Mr Hew Binning and Mr Robert Leighton began, contemning [despising] the ordinarie way of exponing [expounding] and dividing a text, of raising doctrines and uses; bot runs on in a discourse on some common head, in a high, romancing, unscriptural style, tickling the ear for the present, and moving the affections in some, bot leaving, as he confesses, little or nought to the memorie and understanding. This we must misken [be ignorant of, here probably in the sense of ignore], for we cannot help it.<sup>6</sup>

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5. A comparison of Binning's sermons on Romans 8:3–4 (below, 113–86) with, for example, those of Thomas Jacomb, makes this immediately evident. See Jacomb, *Romans Eight: Verses One to Four* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 160–373.

6. Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, 1841–42), 3:258–59. The letter is dated July 19, 1654. I have maintained the original spelling but altered the medial *s* to the modern style. Twentieth-century writers in this period have taken a better view of Binning. Commenting on his preaching, Professor G. D. Henderson wrote, “He deserves to be remembered as one of the first rank of Scotland's preachers.... Every page contains something that is well said and worth saying.” G.D. Henderson, *Religious*

This despite the fact that Gray's colleague in the Inner High Kirk, the great James Durham, once said that Binning's preaching "could make men's hair stand on end."<sup>7</sup> David Dickson's critique was similar, but with an even stronger sting in the tail. Tricks of rhetoric, Dickson allegedly commented, did not save many souls.<sup>8</sup>

It is a serious question whether either Baillie or Dickson actually sat under the ministry of Binning with the kind of frequency that would enable them to give a balanced assessment of his preaching. Their comments probably contain elements of truth (with respect to the description) but also elements of prejudice (with respect to the critique). And perhaps the latter was exacerbated by the differences between Binning and themselves on the issues that troubled the church at large. Nevertheless, they give us a useful entry point into reflecting on Hugh Binning the preacher and, therefore, on what to expect as we begin to read his sermons on Romans chapter eight.

For admirers of Binning, it would be the find of the decade were a journal penned by him to be unearthed in an as-yet-uncatalogued box of manuscripts somewhere in one of the great libraries of Scotland—especially if it contained his reflections on preaching. Nevertheless, in the absence of such a discovery, it is clear that even prior to his preaching ministry he had given careful thought to basic questions of understanding and communication. As regent in philosophy, he had already established a reputation for deconstructing the approach and dense

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*Life in XVII Century Scotland* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 216. Likewise, Principal John Macleod commends the way he paid "special attention to the vesture of [his] thought. A thinker like Binning had thoughts that it was worth a man's while to clothe in worthy words." John Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 3rd ed. (1943; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 95.

7. Robert Wodrow, *Analecta, Or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences Mostly Relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians*, ed. M. Leishman (Edinburgh: Maitland Club, 1842–43), 3:54.

8. William G. Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1888), 134. Blaikie provides no documentation, but the relationship between Baillie and Dickson lends credibility to the criticism.

vocabulary of the older scholastic methodology and simplifying the approach to philosophical issues. This move on his part is undoubtedly reflected in his preaching. Baillie referred to the traditional style of preaching as exposition and division—analyzing doctrines and then proceeding to various aspects and dimensions of their application. His colleagues at the Westminster Assembly advocated this approach as “found by experience to be very much blessed of God, and very helpful for the people’s understandings and memories.”<sup>9</sup> But they had not regarded it as fixed according to the law of the Medes and Persians, and acknowledged, “This method is not prescribed as necessary for every man, or upon every text.”<sup>10</sup> One has the impression Robert Baillie was less flexible.

It may be helpful to set this view of the Westminster divines (including Baillie) in a broader context. Perhaps Baillie might have been more sympathetic had Gray, Leighton, and Binning been older men. Even Robert Leighton (1611–1684), whom he associates with Binning and Gray, was a decade younger.<sup>11</sup> Older men often find it irksome when younger men (perhaps assumed

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9. The Directory for Public Worship (1645), “Of the Preaching of the Word.”

10. Directory, “Of the Preaching of the Word.”

11. Robert Leighton seems to have been viewed as the fountain of the new style of preaching and was regularly associated in that context with both Hugh Binning and Andrew Gray. It is perhaps significant in the light of the following comments on Peter Ramus that Leighton did not seem to have a particularly high view of the beneficial effects of the study of Aristotle. In the seventh of his series of *Exhortations to the Candidates for the Master of Arts in the University of Edinburgh*, he told them, “To speak the truth, the philosophy which prevails in the schools, is of a vain, airy nature, and more apt to inspire the mind with pride rather than to improve it.” Robert Leighton, *The Whole Works of Robert Leighton, D.D.* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859), 719. Leighton later became Bishop of Dunblane and then Archbishop of Glasgow. His works include a still-famous exposition of 1 Peter. Perhaps significantly, the plaque commemorating him in St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, bears the words, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9). Seventeenth-century Scotland was not an easy time or place in which to be a man of irenic spirit, not least for one willing to accept the office of bishop, even if he viewed the role as that of pastor and preacher.

therefore to be *immature*) buck long-accepted patterns. But those patterns were not quite so long accepted in the Reformed churches as might be assumed from listening to Robert Baillie's critique.

### Reformed Preaching

A glance at the sermons preached by John Calvin during his long ministry in Geneva reveals a different pattern of preaching from the formula of the Westminster divines (and doubtless illustrates the wisdom of *not* establishing it as required for all). Certainly, Calvin's sermons contain biblical doctrine and are rich in application, but they are by no means shaped according to the Westminster formula. Understandably so, since at the height of his powers Calvin was preaching every weekday and twice on the Lord's Day. And he characteristically employed the *lectio continua* method, working his way systematically, day after day, through whole books of the Bible, only occasionally peaching on what would later be called an "ordinary."<sup>12</sup> Calvin was burdened with many additional responsibilities—serving as professor of Old Testament and lecturing each week, sustaining a massive correspondence, sitting on Thursdays with other members of the Consistory listening to the pastoral flotsam and jetsam of Geneva, participating in the meetings of local ministers on Fridays, writing commentaries and various treatises, and revising his *Institutes*. In addition, his health was far from robust. While it must have been exhilarating for parishioners to wait only twenty-three hours for the next sermon, from a practical point of view, this placed massive demands on Calvin's time, so preaching *lectio continua* was essential to sustaining such an intense program of biblical exposition. Yet, there was a beautiful simplicity in his homiletical approach, and he certainly never transgressed the later warning of the Westminster divines that a preacher ought

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12. A text or passage to which the preacher would return in successive sermons in an extended exposition of its doctrine and uses.

“not always to prosecute every doctrine which lies in his text.”<sup>13</sup> Nor did he burden his hearers with multiple divisions.

What, then, explains the transition to the method that Baillie regarded as normative? While we do not have access to Binning’s personal thought processes, we are able to trace at least one major influence on this standard method in preaching. It lies in the work of the French humanist scholar Pierre de La Ramée (Peter Ramus, 1517–1572).

### **Peter Ramus**

Born a Roman Catholic, Ramus became a Calvinist and was killed in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in Paris in 1572. A creative thinker (inter alia, he suggested the abolition of university tuition fees), Ramus was critical of Aristotle, particularly his logic. His position inevitably set him on a collision course with the authorities since Aristotle’s work had been almost canonized through the acceptance and use of the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Ramus sought to replace Aristotelian complexity with what he saw as a method of greater simplicity—influenced (so it seems to the present writer) by his great interest in the connected disciplines of logic and mathematics. For Ramus, then, a key to both understanding and communication in any discipline was the *organization* of the subject matter by the teacher so that it could be more readily understood and more clearly communicated. At its best, the method enabled a teacher or communicator, in this case the preacher, to state his theme or topic and then divide it—that is, analyze it stage by stage to lay bare its significance.<sup>14</sup>

To the extent that this new method became influential and began to permeate much (but by no means all) university teaching, its impact was felt most by men whose ultimate goal

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13. Directory, “Of the Preaching of the Word.”

14. An indication of how far Ramus’s influence spread in Europe is seen in the life of one of his pupils, Andrew Melville, who was a major influence in the development of the Reformed churches in Scotland. Thomas M’Crie, *The Life of Andrew Melville*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1824), 23–24.

was communication—teaching large numbers of people through the regular exposition of Scripture. And so, the development of the so-called Plain Style of preaching, which focused on understanding and application rather than on literary eloquence and aesthetic effect, found the Ramist approach a helpful handmaid. This is not to say that preachers were self-consciously Ramists, any more than most preachers today reflect to any great extent on the source and nature of the influences that lie behind the way they preach. But such influences are always present. They are as present today, even if often unnoticed, just as much as the Ramist influence was present in evangelical preaching from the late sixteenth through the seventeenth centuries. We would be naive to assume contemporary methods of preaching simply employ the method sempiternal.

### Seventeenth-Century Preaching

The role of Peter Ramus in the development of Puritan preaching should not be misinterpreted as though what was preached was Ramism rather than Scripture. This was certainly emphasized in the most famous book on preaching to emerge within the English Puritan movement—namely, *The Arte of Prophecyng* by William Perkins (1558–1602).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Perkins's lesser-known contemporary, Richard Bernard (1568–1642), argued that the method was in fact itself biblical. In his pastoral manual, *The Faithful Shepherd*, he specifically argued from 1 Corinthians 11:23–34 that this pattern of preaching was already evident in the ministry of the apostle Paul. We can enumerate his argument as follows:<sup>16</sup>

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15. The original publication was written in Latin by Perkins in 1592 and was therefore addressed primarily, if not exclusively, to preachers rather than to their hearers. It was posthumously published in English in 1606.

16. As summarized in Richard Bernard, “Dedicatory Letter,” in *The Faithfull Shepherd, Wholly in a Manner transposed, and made anew, and very much enlarged, both with precepts and examples, to further young Divines in the study of Divinitie* (London: printed by Arnold Hatfield for John Bill, 1621).

1. vv. 23–25: The text, drawn from Matthew 26:26–28
2. v. 26: The scope of the exposition
3. v. 27: The doctrine
4. v. 28: The use of the doctrine
5. v. 29: The reason that reinforces the doctrine
6. vv. 30–31: The application
7. v. 32: The answer to an objection
8. vv. 33–34: The exhortation and summary repetition of what was reprehended, and its remedy

Even a cursory glance at the section on preaching in the Directory for Public Worship reveals the extent to which this perspective became almost *de rigueur*.<sup>17</sup> Whether or not Binning had read Richard Bernard, he was certainly very familiar with the Directory. But he clearly felt this method was not one he should adopt. In fact, he explicitly (and boldly) spells out his concerns about the standard practice at the beginning of sermon 23 in *The Sinner's Sanctuary* (on Romans 8:9):

Paul speaks of a right dividing of the word of truth (2 Tim. ii:15.): not that ordinary way of cutting it all in parcels, and dismembering it, by manifold divisions, which I judge makes it lose much of its virtue [i.e., power, force], which consists in union, though some have pleasure in it, and think it profitable; yet I do not see that this was the apostolic way, that either

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17. The Inner High Kirk and the Outer High Kirk in Glasgow constituted two sections of the same building. By contrast with Andrew Gray's preaching, that of James Durham, Gray's next-door neighbor in the Inner High Kirk, very clearly illustrated the Westminster method. At the end of his expositions of the letters to the churches in Revelation 2:1–3:22 he includes an excursus on preaching, arguing that these two chapters exemplify the preaching of Christ to the churches and therefore provide preachers with significant indications of the nature of true preaching. See James Durham, *A Commentarie upon the Book of the Revelation* (Glasgow: Robert Sanderson, 1680), 223–29. Parallels abound between what Durham says in this essay and the section, “Of the Preaching of the Word,” in *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* (1645)—a document in which the Scots Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly were heavily involved. See Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:117, 131, 148.

they preached it themselves, or recommended it to others; but rather he means, the real distribution of the food of souls unto their various conditions, as it is the duty of a steward to be both faithful and wise in that, to give every one their own portion....<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps Binning felt that while exegesis of Scripture is a work possible for a person of any age, detailed pastoral application that extends a sermon to an hour or longer is probably beyond the capacity of someone comparatively recently out of his teens; indeed, it could be inappropriate and therefore unwise. How Binning's preaching might have developed had he lived longer is a matter of some speculation. Robert Wodrow—who believed his ministry would have been more profitable to his congregation if he had followed the common method—records that at the end of his life, Binning himself reached the same conclusion:

He followed much Mr Leighton's way of preaching, which made him less useful to the common people of Govan. Mr R. Muir of Kilbride told me, that Mr Ralf Rodger told him, that Mr Binning, at his death, did very much regrate [regret] him his taking such a way of preaching; and said, if he had lived, he was fully resolved to have followed that way of preaching, by doctrine, reasons, and uses, which he declared he was then pleased with.<sup>19</sup>

### Hugh Binning's Preaching

We have only edited versions of the sermon manuscripts Binning left behind, without any indication of the extent to which they were pruned for publication by his original editors. Nor do we know the extent to which he may have elaborated on his written text in the pulpit. Given the preaching traditions among

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18. Hugh Binning, *The Works of Hugh Binning*, ed. M. Leishman, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: A. Fullerton and Co., 1858), 213–14.

19. Wodrow, *Analecta*, 3:40. Wodrow also records that Ralf Roger remembered Binning saying that “his manner of preaching was matter of griefe to him.” *Analecta*, 3:438.

Scottish evangelicals in this period, it is highly unlikely that he took his manuscript into the pulpit with him, and so the time taken to communicate the material contained in the written text and the time taken to preach the sermon was almost certainly not identical. The sermons as written in *The Sinner's Sanctuary* would typically not have taken more than half an hour to preach.

But it is not only form, or for that matter length with its corresponding impact on detailed content, that marks out Binning's sermons. His typical approach is different and much more varied than the standard method. He sounds much more topical than exegetical, and indeed he is. And so, by and large, his introductions can begin at some distance from the details of the specific text. Rather than beginning by unfolding its words, he employs the main theme and gradually leads the hearer toward the truth of the text. Binning is not so much an *exegetical* preacher as he is a *thematic* expositor.

From all accounts, Binning had already reflected on these rhetorical and methodological issues as a teacher of philosophy. And granted that lecturing and preaching are different communication genres, it is very often the case that a person's general approach in one genre comes to expression in the way he communicates in the other. In my own view, this is very evident in Binning's sermons. It would, however, be a false move on our part if we assumed from the critique of Baillie and Dickson that his sermons are lacking in order or in application.<sup>20</sup> He did not throw out the baby with the bathwater, as it were. There is order and development, and there is no lack of application. What is different is the route by which he draws his hearers into the central motif on which he wants to focus attention, placing less demand on the memory of the hearer.

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20. The same is true of the sermons of Andrew Gray who appears to have been an exceedingly popular preacher, more so than the learned James Durham, his neighbor in the Inner High Kirk (Glasgow Cathedral). There was apparently sufficient free space in the Inner High Kirk for Durham to find himself preaching to the *overflow* from the Outer High Kirk where Andrew Gray occupied the pulpit.

That is not to say that his sermons are popular in the sense of being light or superficial. Binning's preaching makes its own demands on the listener. It is possible to detect the philosopher in Hugh Binning, leading us gently to reflect with him on his great theme. And it is possible that the impetus here was not only his predilection for conceptual thinking; it may also have been an evangelistic tactic designed to interest the hearer and to stimulate thought. If so, Binning would be neither the first nor the last preacher to depart from the Ramist method. Richard Bernard might be able to trace it in 1 Corinthians 11, but not *everywhere* in Paul, nor in the preaching of the One whom the common people heard so gladly.

Yet, it is important to stress that Binning does seek to expound and apply God's Word. Sermon 10, the first of four sermons on Romans 8:3, provides a random sample that illustrates (1) the difference in Binning's preaching, (2) the way he holds up his theme and draws the hearer in, while at the same time (3) he expounds the text and (4) is sensitive to the importance of application. He begins by holding up God's sending of Christ into the world the way a jeweler might hold up a diamond to the light. He then points us to three of its facets before he reaches his peroration: the reason Christ was sent, what He accomplished, and what the effect of this is in our lives.

David Dickson was surely inappropriately critical in saying that Binning's and Gray's "tricks of rhetoric" would not save souls. After all, the traditional method was a form of rhetoric. As we can see in sermon 10, Binning was not lacking in expressing the importance of coming to faith in Christ:

This, then, I leave upon your consciences, beseeching you to lay to heart the impossibility you are encompassed with on both hands; justice requiring a ransom, and you have none, and justice requiring new obedience again, and you can give none; old debts urging you, and new duty pressing you, and ye alike disabled for both; that so finding yourselves thus environed with indigency and impossibility within, you may be

constrained to flee out of yourselves unto him that is both able and willing. This is not a superficial business, as you make it. It is not a matter of fancy, or memory, or expression, as most make it. Believe me, it is a serious business, a soul-work, such an exercise of spirit as useth to be when the soul is between despair and hope. Impossibility within, driving a soul out of itself, and possibility, yea, certainty of help without, even in Christ, drawing a soul in to him. Thus is the closure made, which is the foundation of our happiness.<sup>21</sup>

### **Influence and Lessons**

Did Binning contribute to a transformation in Scottish preaching? That question would be a worthy research project for a doctoral student to pursue. As we have noted, preachers tend to be shaped by the preaching they hear and by the training they receive, directly or indirectly, from their teachers. There is doubtless a thesaurus of Scottish homiletical material from the two hundred years after Binning on which such a study could be based. And given the fact that Binning's various works were reprinted over the years, it might be possible to trace his influence. But whether by immediate influence or simply by rerouting the stream a little, Binning's preaching does exhibit some characteristics that emerge in the later tradition of Scottish preaching. And there are certainly lessons (or perhaps uses) that can be gleaned from reflecting on his preaching.

Perhaps our first reflection should be to moderate the impact of Baillie's comment that Binning's preaching was of a "high, romancing, unscriptural style, tickling the ear for the present, and moving the affections in some."<sup>22</sup> To a modern reader, this conveys the impression of preaching that was both superficial and overly emotional. But as becomes clear when reading Binning, he did not make the mistake of seeking to bypass the intellect in order directly to appeal to and affect the emotions. If

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21. See below, page 123.

22. Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 3:258–59.

indeed he shared Jonathan Edwards's desire that his preaching should touch and raise the affections of his hearers, he also held with Edwards that the preacher does not address the affections directly as though he could circumvent the mind.<sup>23</sup> Rather, the reality of the truth communicated to the mind will in turn have a corresponding impact and influence on the affections commensurate with the nature of the truth communicated. And certainly the solemnity of Binning's closing words in sermon 10 (quoted above) should be adequate to dismiss any thought that he was merely a tickler of ears. In fact, he meets C. S. Lewis's communication test: we should not tell those to whom we communicate (either in speaking or in writing) *how they should feel* about something. Rather, we should describe and expound that something *so that they will thus feel* about it.<sup>24</sup>

Second, a distinction can be made between preaching that seems to carry with it the atmosphere of the workshop and preaching that has the atmosphere of the showroom. He does not overload his preaching by taking us down the diamond mine, as it were, to demonstrate to us how its detailed workings produce precious stones. He takes us straight to the jeweler's shop to show and sell us the ring. He does not burden us with details of how he came to understand the text in the way he does, or by detailing the technicalities of interpreting it. He holds up the finished product, the ring, so that we can admire and purchase it.

Third, Binning's preaching still requires careful attention and thought—he was, at that time, a preacher who taught philosophy until recently. His approach to preaching deliberately avoids the kind of intensity of information and multiplicity of divisions that can give hearers too little breathing space for

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23. Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts on the New England Revival* (Boston, 1743; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 115–17.

24. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Children*, ed. L. W. Dorsett and M. L. Mead (London: William Collins, 1985), 63–64.

meditation, reflection, and personal application. Perhaps Binning had learned something here from his master. The Lord Jesus Himself told the apostles that He had many things still to teach them, “but you cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). It is the Spirit, not the preacher, who is the ultimate teacher. He takes what is Christ’s and shows it to us (John 16:14). Good preaching allows Him space to work in the minds and hearts of its hearers.

If we fast-forward through the following centuries, we can find examples of how the novel characteristics of Binning’s preaching reappeared in different form. If speculation is permitted in assessing historical figures, then my own suspicion is that even if Wodrow’s testimony to Binning’s volte-face in relation to the older method is accurate, Binning’s employment of it, had he lived, would have been less rigorous than it had become in the hands of some. So, for example, in the eighteenth century, we see Thomas Boston employ less intensity of division and subdivision—although the general form remains. And in the nineteenth century, it seems to have been relatively common in Thomas Chalmers’s sermons, in distinction from the lecture, to approach the text from a thematic distance, drawing the hearer in to the theme or burden of the text. And while in Robert Murray M’Cheyne there is a more immediate focus on the text, the form of the sermon has a much greater simplicity than was suggested by the Westminster divines. There is a studied lack of heaviness, and a spirit of inviting hearers to admire the ring rather than descend into the mine to discover how the precious jewel was excavated. In him, Binning has at least one young and notable successor.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, Binning’s preaching also demonstrates a basic principle that is well illustrated in the history of Scottish preaching: individuality. Preachers need to grow in the gifts of personality

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25. Interestingly, at the beginning of his ministry, Robert M’Cheyne also tended to eschew divisions, but came to recognize their usefulness in helping hearers to follow the development of the sermon.

and ministry God has given them, and, no matter how much they may admire them, not pretend to possess the gifts others have. Only in this way will they be fully themselves. The cloning process that is sometimes created in schools and training programs is usually a hindrance to this aspect of preaching. Baillie tended toward a one-size-fits-all methodology, which tends to produce a level of competence, but in that context a young preacher may never get beyond the sameness that such fixed methods of approach tend to produce.

We know from Robert Baillie's own testimony that as professor of divinity in Glasgow he taught a class which covered the section on preaching in the Directory for Public Worship.<sup>26</sup> No doubt he would have preferred that Hugh Binning had sat under his instruction. But had Binning preached as Baillie would have preferred, he would have been a young David wearing Saul's homiletical armor. Perhaps rather daringly, the young philosopher-pastor preferred the stones and sling he knew he could employ effectively, rather than a method that would have denied who he really was and the specific way he was wired with the gifts of Christ. Clearly Binning was developing his views on preaching—natural enough since he was still in his twenties—but it would be idle to speculate about his development had he lived.

Thus, while Richard Bernard might claim that the standard method was to be found in Scripture, the truth of the matter was, and still is, that Ezekiel could never have preached Isaiah's sermons, nor Paul the sermons of the apostle John, and vice versa. The Scriptures are rich in illustrations of Phillips Brooks's famous definition of preaching as modes of communication. Moreover, it seems certain that the Lord Jesus, the preacher par excellence, had more than one mode of communication; so it would be erroneous to make a single mode the permanent

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26. Robert Baillie to David Dickson, March 8, 1651, Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 3:131.

model. Presumably, Robert Baillie could not have preached the sermons of Hugh Binning with ease, and the reverse is almost certainly true—a principle that Richard Bernard himself could have illustrated from Scripture.

There was a day when books of sermons sold and passed through several editions. That is rarely true today. It is also true that *reading* a sermon is different from being present in person when it was preached. Today, however, we are not restricted to written versions of what we have not heard in person—we are able to hear and see preaching at any hour of the day or night. But Hugh Binning's sermons come from another era than ours; his style of preaching is different from the sermons most contemporary Christians hear. But when we travel to a foreign country and see it through the eyes of its citizens, we then return home to discover that we now also view our own country in a different light. So too, it can prove to be an illuminating and even life-redirecting experience to make the reading journey to another place and another time. It is, no doubt, the editor's and publisher's joint desire that this will be true for readers of Hugh Binning's *The Sinner's Sanctuary*.

So, thanks to David Searle's devoted labors in giving a modern hue to Hugh Binning's seventeenth-century Scottish accent and vocabulary, in these pages you can be transported back in time and perhaps far away in space to the south banks of the River Clyde, to find yourself among the citizens of Govan coming to hear their remarkable young parish minister. The grace and power of his sermons belie his youthfulness. Perhaps not all who came could follow in detail what their minister was teaching them, but his sense of the wonder of the gospel and of the privileges of the Christian life would surely have touched them deeply. And they still communicate to us that there is no greater privilege in all the world than being a Christian. So, the original publishers of *The Sinner's Sanctuary* were surely right to tell its first readers—however quaintly they may seem to us to have expressed it—

If worthiness of matter—as the curious carved stones of the temple were to the disciples—be amiable to thine eyes, and nervous sentences, solid observations, with a kind of insinuating, yet harmless behaviour, be taking with thy spirit, here they are also. And acquainting thyself with them, either as the sinner or the saint (which thine own conscience shall best inform thee of), there shall be virtue found to proceed from them, either for thy soul's refining from the dross of this corrupt age, or to a diligent heed-taking to preserve thyself pure from the pollutions which are in the world through lust, to be more and more pure against the day and coming of Christ our Saviour.<sup>27</sup>

And still today, although at a distance of three hundred fifty years, read thoughtfully and meditated on quietly, Binning's sermons can reproduce the same experience.

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27. From the original Preface to *The Sinner's Sanctuary*, reprinted in *The Works of Hugh Binning* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 118.



## SERMON 1

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### *The Day of Complete Redemption*

*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which  
are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after  
the Spirit.*

—ROMANS 8:1

#### **The Threefold Evils Which Afflict Us**

There are three things which concur to make man miserable—sin, condemnation, and affliction. Everyone may observe that “man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward” and that his days here are few and evil. He “is made to possess months of vanity and wearisome nights are appointed” for him (Job 5:7; 7:3). He is “of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Heathens have written many meditations on the misery of man’s life, and in this have outstripped most Christians. We count among our miseries only some afflictions and troubles, such as poverty, sickness, reproach, banishment, and the like.

The heathen have numbered even the natural necessities of humanity among our miseries—to be continually turned around in a circle of eating, drinking, and sleeping. What burden should it be to an immortal spirit constantly to tread round on that wheel! While Christians make more of the body than the soul,<sup>1</sup> the heathen have accounted this body a burden to the soul. They

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1. He means that Scripture teaches that our bodies are to be cleansed and rendered fit to be temples of the living God (e.g., see 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).

place among the greatest miseries of men prosperity, honor, pleasure, and such things upon which men pour out their souls. For they see them as vanity and vexation in themselves, both in the enjoying and losing of them. But alas, they have not known the fountain of all this misery, which is sin and its final accomplishment, namely, condemnation. They thought trouble came out of the ground and dust, either by a natural necessity or by chance. However, the Word of God uncovers to us both the ground of our misery and its end.

### **The Grounds of Human Miseries**

Its ground and beginning were man's defection from God and so walking according to the flesh. It has been from this corrupt fountain that all the calamities and streams of miseries in the world have flowed. It has not only extended itself to all humanity but even to the whole creation, subjecting it to futility (Rom. 8:20). "O man," said the Lord to Adam, "not only shall you eat your food in pain, but the ground is cursed because of you, and you who were created immortal, will return to the dust which you have magnified above your soul" (Gen. 3:17–19).

The end of man's defection is the outcome of the beginning, in that the beginning had all the evil of sin in it, and now the end has all the evil of punishment in it. These streams of this life's wretched state flow into an infinite, boundless, and bottomless ocean of eternal wrath. If you live according to the flesh you shall die, for "to set the mind on the flesh is death" (Rom. 8:6), and this means not only death here, but eternal death after this. The miseries then of this present life are not a proportionate punishment of sin: they are but a guarantee given of that massive debt which is to be paid on the final day of reckoning—that is, condemnation—for they "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:9).

### **The Remedy for Human Misery**

Now, as the law exposes the perfect misery of mankind, so the gospel has brought to light a perfect remedy of all this misery. Jesus Christ was manifested to take away sin, and therefore His name is “Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Judgment was by one unto condemnation of all, but now there is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

Thus two evils are removed, which indeed have all evil in them. First, He takes away the curse of the law, made upon all who are under it; second, by His Holy Spirit He takes away the sin against the law. He has a twofold virtue, for He “came by water and blood” (1 John 5:6–7)—by blood to cleanse away the guilt of sin, and by water to purify us from sin itself.

However, in the meantime there are many afflictions and miseries common to all humanity that come upon us. You may ask, “Why are not these removed by Christ?” I say, the evil of them is taken away, though they themselves remain. Death is not taken away, but the sting of death is removed. Although death, afflictions, and all miseries are overcome by Jesus Christ, so they have become His instruments in order that we might benefit by them. The evil in them is God’s wrath and our sinfulness, but these are now removed by Jesus Christ.

### **Though Sin Remains in Us It No Longer Has Dominion**

They would be removed completely if it were not for our good that they remain because “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). So then we have a most complete deliverance in extent, but not in degree. Sin remains in us but not in dominion and power. Wrath is sometimes kindled because of our sin, but it cannot ever increase to everlasting burnings. Afflictions and miseries may change their name and be called “discipline” and “trials,” and as such they are good and

not evil. Nevertheless, Christ has reserved for us until another day our full and perfect deliverance which is therefore called the day of complete redemption, when all sin, wrath, and misery shall have an end and be swallowed up through our "adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). This is the sum of the gospel, and this is the substance of this chapter.

### **Our Consolation in Christ Jesus**

The threefold consolation answerable to our threefold evils is that there is "no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Here in our text is a blessed message to condemned, lost sinners who have that sentence within their breasts. This was the purpose of Christ's coming and dying, that He might deliver us from sin as well as from death, and so that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. This is why He has given the Holy Spirit, and dwells in us by the Spirit, to quicken us who are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

Oh, what consolation will this be to souls who look upon the body of death within them as the greatest misery and groan with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24)! This cry arises from Romans 7:17: "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." But because there are many grounds of heaviness and sadness in this world, the gospel opposes them. It bestows upon us the expectation we have of that blessed hope to come, of which we are so sure that nothing can rob us of it. In the meantime, "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities" and "all things work together for good to them that love God" (8:26, 28).

From all this the believer in Jesus Christ has grounds of triumph and boasting before the perfect victory, even as Paul does in the name of believers, from verse 31 to the end. Upon these considerations, he who cried out not long before, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" now cries out, "Who shall condemn me?" The distressed wrestler has become a victorious champion; the defeated soldier

has become more than conqueror. Oh, that your hearts could be persuaded to hearken to this joyful sound and to embrace Jesus Christ for grace and salvation! How quickly would a song of triumph in Christ swallow up all your present complaints and lamentations!

### **The Threefold Lament**

All the complaints among men may be reduced to one or other of these three—I hear the most part bemoaning themselves thus: either (1) “Alas, for the afflictions and unhappiness of this life, this evil world!” or else (2) “Alas for poverty, for contempt, for sickness! Oh! miserable man that I am, who will take this disease away?” or else (3) “Who will show me any good thing?”—any temporal good? (Ps. 4:6). But if you knew and considered your final end on the last day, you would cry out more and you would refuse to be comforted even if these three causes of complaint were removed.

But I hear some bemoaning themselves more sadly because they have heard the law and the sentence of condemnation that is coming upon them. The law has entered and “killed” them. “Oh! What shall I do to be saved?” they cry. “Who will deliver me from the wrath to come?” And, “What are all present afflictions and miseries compared to eternity?”

### **Though Christ Forgives, Sin Is Still Present in Us**

Yet there is one lamentation beyond all these. It is when the soul finds the sentence of absolution in Jesus Christ, but his eyes are then opened to see that body of death and sin within himself, and that he is a man whose sin is totally diffused throughout every part of his being. Then that soul bemoans itself with Paul, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). He cries, “I am delivered from the condemnation of the law, but what comfort is it, as long as sin remains so powerful in me? Nay, this makes me often doubt

my deliverance from wrath and the curse, seeing sin itself is not taken away.”

Now, if you could be persuaded to hearken to Jesus Christ and embrace this gospel, oh what abundant consolation you will have! What a perfect answer to all your complaints! They would be swallowed up in such a triumph as Paul's are here: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:25). Embracing the gospel would uncover for you a perfect remedy of sin and misery, that you should complain no more, or at least, not as they complain who have no hope. You shall never have a remedy of your earthly miseries unless you anticipate them by beginning with what is eternal. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God... and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). But first, seek to flee from the wrath to come and you shall escape it, for when the evil of time is concluded, all your afflictions shall be removed. So first remove the greatest complaints of sin and condemnation, and then how easy is it to endure all the lamentations of this life, and even to rejoice in the midst of them!

### **Three Truths about the Christian**

We have in this verse three things of great importance to consider: first, a great and precious privilege; second, the true nature of the child of God; third, the special property of a believer.

The first, this great and precious privilege which is implied in our text, is one of the greatest in the world because for our souls it is of eternal consequence. Second, we learn that the essence of the believer's nature is that it is of God because he is in Jesus Christ; this new nature is implanted in him by faith. Third, his distinguishing property is serenity and is consistent with the privilege of his godly nature; consequently, the believer does not live as the worldly man lives, according to his base flesh, but he lives according to the Spirit.

These three qualities of the child of God are mutually consistent with each other for they comprise a harmonious unity and are constantly in perfect step with one another. That rich

privilege together with the sweet property of godliness share a common center with the man who is in Jesus Christ, and who lives according to the Spirit. Further, whoever enters into Christ and abides in Him encounters and participates in both justification and sanctification; these two are to be found nowhere else, other than present together in the life of the believer.

If you knew the nature of a Christian, you would fall in love with these properties for themselves, but if these will not allure you, consider also the incomparable privilege the believer has beyond all others that you may fall in love with the nature of the Christian. Let concern for yourselves and your own well-being draw you into Jesus Christ, that you may walk even as He walked. For I assure you, once you are truly in Christ, you would love the Christian's very nature and daily conduct, not only for the absolution from your sins and the salvation that accompanies it, but for its own sweetness and excellency beyond all other.

Like the people of Samaria, you would not simply believe on account of the woman's testimony, which points to our own necessity and misery, but you would believe in Jesus Christ and walk according to the Spirit for the testimony these graces have in your consciences (John 4:42). You would no more be allured by only these three privileges to embrace Christianity, but you would think Christianity itself to be the greatest privilege, a reward unto itself. "Godliness is great gain in itself,"<sup>2</sup> even if it did not have such sweet consequences.

### **All Are under the Sentence of Condemnation**

That you may know this privilege, consider the condition of all men through their fallen state. Paul expresses it thus: "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin...judgment came upon all men to condemnation...and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12, 18). See then how all are under a sentence of condemnation by one act of trespass!

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2. *Pietas ipsa sibi merces est.*

This sentence is the curse of the law, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10).

If you knew the consequences of this curse, you would indeed think it a privilege to be delivered from it. Sin is of an infinite deserving because against an infinite God it is an offense of an infinite magnitude, and therefore the curse upon the sinner involves eternal punishment. Oh what weight is in the apostle's words, ye "shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:9). If it was truly understood, it would weigh down upon a man's soul, filling it with fearful sorrow to the point of death.

### *Banishment from the Heavenly Kingdom*

This condemnation includes both "condemnation and punishment, knowing the penalty of condemnation,"<sup>3</sup> and both are infinite in themselves and eternal in their continuance. What an unpleasant and bitter life would one lead, being born to inherit a kingdom and yet losing it by being banished from it? But no heart can conceive what an incomparable loss it would be to suffer banishment forever from a heavenly kingdom.

In God's favor is life, and in His presence are rivers of pleasures forevermore. When your petty penny losses<sup>4</sup> greatly afflict your spirits, how much more would the apprehension of so great an impending loss do to you? Would it not be like a death to you, even worse than death, to be separated from this life and eternally banished from the presence of His glory? If there should be no more punishment but this only; if the wicked were to endure forever on earth; and the godly, whom they despised and mocked, were translated to heaven, what torment would it be to your souls to think upon that blessedness which the godly

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3. *Damnum et pœnam, pœnam damni sensus.*

4. *penny losses*: trivial financial losses.

enjoy above and how foolishly you have been deprived of it for something of no value? What would a rich man's advantages and gains be to him when he considers what an infinite loser he is—how he has sold a kingdom for a dunghill?

*The Banishment Is for All Eternity*

Now if there was any hope that after some years his banishment from heaven might end, his misery might be assuaged, but there is not one single drop of such consolation. He is eternally banished from that glorious life in the presence of God, which those enjoy whom he despised. Or consider the case of a man who has been shut up all his lifetime in a pit, knowing that he would never see the light ever again, would not this be torment enough to him? But then imagine intense pain being added to his perpetual darkness, so that he is incessantly tormented within by a gnawing worm, as well as fire added to his agony. What then? His passions that so greedily sought satisfaction are now in equal measure sensible to feeling the pain of his torment.

And when there is no end to his anguish, for it is eternal—alas, whose heart can comprehend such suffering? In this life there is some comfort in knowing that bodily afflictions will end in death, for physical pain destroys itself when it destroys the body. But when there is an immortal soul for pain to feed upon, what then? At length even the body shall live on in the sense that physical death will not completely destroy it, but it shall be subjected to an everlasting destruction in a “living death.”

This is the sentence that is declared against us all in the Word of God, and not one jot of His word shall fall to the ground: heaven and earth may fail sooner. Would you not consider it to be an irrevocable decree if every nation on earth, along with all the angels above, convened to condemn a man to death and pass the death penalty upon him? Nay, but this word that is daily spoken to you, which passes this sentence upon you all, is even more certain; indeed, this sentence of death must be executed, unless you are under that blessed exception made

here and elsewhere in the gospel: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

### **It Is the Eternal God with Whom We Have To Do**

I beseech you, consider what it is to have such a judge condemning you. Would not any of you be afraid if you were under the sentence of a king? If that judgment were upon your head, who of you would be in contented peace and quietness? Would you not flee from the anger of a king, whose wrath is like the roaring of a lion? But here upon your heads is the sentence of the King over all kings and nations. I ask those to whom this death sentence applies, "Who would not fear thee, O King of all nations?" (Jer. 10:7). For the One with whom you have to do is not a great man who has strength to destroy your body; nor is it someone who is determined to kill you. This would indeed be a matter of immense concern.

Rather is it the great and eternal Jehovah who lifts up His hand to heaven and swears He lives forever, He it is who is against you. It is He who has all power over your body and soul and has no alternative but to exercise His omnipotence toward you. He is able to kill both soul and body and cast you into hell. On account of the just penalty of your sin He will not spare you but will pour out upon you all the curses in this Book.

You would have no peace of mind if you were declared a rebel by the king and parliament; but alas, that is a small thing. They can only reach your body. But neither can they always do that because you may flee from them. But whither can you flee from God? You cannot escape from His dominions, for the earth and sea are His, and everything in them. Men may not always be able to track you down, and so they can have no guarantee of finding you. But darkness cannot hide you from the Lord of all. He may delay for a long time because, whenever He pleases, He can overtake and find you.

I beseech you, then, to consider this. It is of eternal consequence for your soul. What profit is it for a man to gain the

world, if he then loses his soul? If the gainer be lost, what then is gained? This is of eternal consequence! What are many thousands of years compared to this? You may try to look beyond all these things and might comfort yourselves in some forlorn hope, but you cannot see into your eternal destiny. There is still far more ahead of us than what is now past; nay, in truth there is nothing past—life has only just begun.

### **Christ Could Scarcely Bear the Weight of the Divine Wrath**

Oh, that you would consider this curse of God that is upon us all! What effects had the curse upon Christ when He bore it? It made His soul heavy unto death: it was a cup that He could scarcely drink. He who fashioned and sustains the frame of this world was almost near to succumbing under the weight of this wrath. It made Him sweat blood in the garden. He that could do all things and speak all things was reduced to tears. "Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me."

When this condemnation was so terrible to Him, the Mighty One upon whom all help was laid, what shall this be to you? No man's sorrow was ever like His, nor pain ever like His, even if all the scattered torments on earth were joined together in one. But because He was God, He overcame and came out through it. But what do you think shall be the condition of those who shall endure that same torment—and not for three days, or three years, or even some thousands of years, but beyond imagining—for all eternity?

### **None of Us Can Bear the Weight of the Divine Wrath**

I beseech you solemnly to consider this condemnation which awaits you; do not ignore it. Do you think you can endure what Christ endured? Do you think you can bear the weight of wrath according to God's power and justice? And yet the judgment of this condemnation is come upon all men. But alas! Who fears Him according to His wrath? Who knows the power of His anger? You may sleep secure, as if all this belonged to the past

and does not apply to you. We declare unto you in the Lord's name that this condemnation is yet awaiting you because you have not rightly examined yourselves. It is preached to you that you may flee from it. But if you yourselves will not admit your guilt and condemnation, the righteous Judge must condemn you.

### **The Immense Privilege of God's Mercy**

Now, since it is true that this condemnatory sentence is passed on all men, what a privilege must it be to be delivered from it and to have that sentence repealed by a new act of God's mercy and favor? David proclaims him a blessed man whose sins are forgiven and covered; and, indeed, blessed are those who escape that pit of eternal misery. Because there is no human entitlement to a heavenly inheritance and kingdom or to be delivered from that wrath to come upon the children of disobedience, this is an infinitely greater felicity than the enjoyment of all earthly delights.

### **There Is No Price We Can Pay for Our Souls**

"What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2:4). The riches, advantages, and pleasures that men spend their labor for, all these will they part with in order to escape with their lives. The covetous man will cast his coffers overboard rather than lose his life; the sensuous man will suffer pain and torment in cutting off a limb rather than die. But if men knew their souls and the immortality and eternity that awaits them, for their souls they would not only give skin for skin and all that they have but their lives also. You would choose to die a thousand deaths in order to escape this eternal death.

You may ask, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Indeed, what would he give, and what does he have to give? We cherish any privilege that we have, and two things cause us to value it. First, the necessity of it and second, the preciousness of it; these two are important here. Is it not a necessity to live

and have a being? Everyone must think so since they will give all they have to redeem themselves. All other things are incidental to them, for their lives are their dearest possession; therefore, they will surrender everything rather than themselves.

But I ask this: What is more necessary than simply to be alive? Surely it is to be safe eternally. To escape the divine condemnation is far more important than anything else. And the truth of this will be seen on the last day when men shall cry for hills and mountains to fall on them and save them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16). Men will choose rather to forfeit their lives than to fall under that wrath. Oh, how acceptable would a man's nonexistence be to him on that great day of wrath! Who shall be able to stand when kings and princes, slaves and free, great and small, shall cry out for mountains to grind them into powder rather than to hear that sentence of condemnation? And yet their cries shall not be answered.

### **The Final Judgment Day**

O blessed are all those that trust in Him when "his wrath is kindled but a little" (Ps. 2:12). You toil and vex yourselves and spend your time worrying about your body and life, but as precious as they are to you now, you would gladly exchange them one day for immunity from God's wrath and curse. How will that man think his lines are fallen in pleasant places—how will he despise the glory of earthly kingdoms, even if all were united in one—who considers in his heart how all kings, tongues, and nations must stand before the judgment seat of God? There will the books of His divine law be opened by which to judge them, as also the books of their consciences to verify His accusation and precipitate their own sentence.

Then, in the open view of all the sons of Adam and the angels, all secrets shall be brought out and their accusation read as large as their lifetime. And as many curses shall be pronounced against everyone as there will be revealed breaches of the law of God, of which they are found guilty. Then all those who have

been condemned will seek to hide in dark corners, and they will cry for mountains to fall upon them. But alas, there can be no hiding place from His presence.

What do you think the man who will stand before God and is absolved in judgment by Jesus Christ will think within himself, notwithstanding his provocations more than many of those who have been condemned? What will a king then think of his crown and dominions when he reflects on them? What will the poor, persecuted Christian then think of all the glory and perfection of this world when he looks back upon it? Oh know, poor, foolish men, what madness it is to barter your souls for trifles! You run the greatest hazard of all for a fleeting moment's satisfaction. You will repent of this folly too late and will become wise to judge yourselves fools, only to find that there is no longer any opportunity to repent of your sin.

This solemn warning is both necessary and exceedingly valuable. The truth is that your souls at present are kept captive under that sentence of everlasting imprisonment; you are all prisoners, though you do not realize it. What will you give in ransom for your souls? Your sins and iniquities have sold you to the righteous Judge of all the earth as malefactors, and He has passed the sentence of your perpetual imprisonment under Satan's custody in hell.

### **The Price of a Soul Is Infinitely Costly**

Now what will you give to redeem your souls from that pit? How few know the worth of their souls! And so they offer to God some of their riches in exchange for their souls. Do not some of you think that you have made satisfaction for your sins by paying a civil penalty to the judge? Many others think their own tears and sorrow for their sin may be a suitable price to avoid justice, at least if their penitence is joined with the promise of amendment at some time in the future. And so men consider their sins are pardoned, and their souls redeemed.

But alas, the redemption of the soul is infinitely costly, for the soul lives forever. All your substance would be utterly spurned if you were to offer it. A few of you might give all your possessions for your souls! And yet though you give it, it will not suffice even though you pay up to your last farthing. Nor will your sorrow and reformation complete the sum, no, nor even begin it. “For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God” (Jer. 2:22). The condemnation would still stand against you.

Imagine that the whole world convenes to settle this matter of finding a ransom for mankind. Suppose all the treasures of monarchs, the mines and depths of the earth, the coffers of rich men—all of these—were searched; nay, let the earth, the sea, the heavens, and sun and moon be added to achieve the very highest possible value. Even more, add on all the merits of angels above and men below, all their good actions and sufferings, yet the final sum of all those additions would not pay the least farthing of this debt. The earth would say, “I am unable to pay the ransom price” and the heavens above would give the same answer. Angels and men might say, “We have heard about this infinitely costly ransom price, but how to raise it is hidden from all living creatures.”

### **Christ Has Paid the Ransom Price**

Where then is this redemption from the curse? Where shall a ransom be found? Indeed, God has found it; it is with Him. He has given His Son as the ransom for many, and His blood is more precious than souls, or than any gold and silver. Is not this then a great privilege, that if all the kingdoms of the world were sold at the highest price, yet they could not provide the ransom? What a jewel is this! What a pearl!

Whoever of you have escaped this wrath, consider the greatness of your privilege. Oh, consider the dignity that has been bestowed upon you, that you may engage your hearts to Him, to

become His, and His wholly! For “ye are bought with a price” and therefore are no longer your own (1 Cor. 6:20). Christ has given Himself for you and was made a curse to redeem you from the curse. Oh, how you should live as privileged men, as redeemed people!

### **Ponder on the Hope of Deliverance**

I beseech you to gather up your thoughts and consider and ponder on this sentence that is passed against every one of us. There is now hope of delivery from it if you will take it to heart. But if you will still continue in the ways of sin and refuse to repent, be sure of this: you are but multiplying those curses, weaving into bonds the many cords of your iniquities, to bind you in everlasting chains. You are but digging a pit for your souls, you who sweat in your sins and continue in them and will not embrace this ransom offered.

The key and lock of that pit is eternal despair. Oh, consider how quickly your pleasures and gains will end, and spare some of your thoughts from present things to contemplate eternity, and that thread that you are spinning out for ever and ever. Consider the infinite length of the years of the Ancient of Days, who has no beginning of days nor end of time! Be mindful now of this, lest you are reduced to misery for as long as God is blessed, and that is forever.

### **The Unspeakable Privilege of Being “in Christ”**

Everyone would love to have more privileges than others, but there is one that carries a soul far away from this world, and that is the believer in Jesus Christ. For those who believe are said to be “in Christ,” engrafted into Him by faith, as living members of that body of which Christ is the head. Christ Jesus is the head of His body, the church, and as its head He communicates life to all its members, for He is “the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” There is a mighty working power in the Head, which diffuses itself throughout the members (Eph. 1:19, 22–23). There are

many expressions of union between Christ and believers. There is no natural union between men, but this spiritual union of Christ with believers binds us together in Christ.

The foundation and the building have a common dependence in the cornerstone, for in him the walls are joined together. It is Christ Jesus who is the foundation and “the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together, grows into an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:20–21). The head and members of a body are united, and so it is with Christ and believers; they “grow into him in all things” (Eph. 4:15). Parents and children have the closest of bonds; so it is with Christ Jesus and the everlasting Father, for He shows to the Father the children who He has given Him. We are His brothers, and He is not ashamed to call us so; moreover, we are one flesh with Him.

There is a marriage between Christ and the church which is the great meditation of the Song of Solomon. He is the vine tree, and we are branches grafted into Him. Nay, this union is so intimate that it is mutual; “I in them and they in me,” says Christ who dwells in us by faith, enabling us to believe in Him and love Him (cf. John 15:5). We dwell in Christ by that same faith and love. Christ Jesus is our “house,” as it were, for from Him we get all our “furniture” for living. He is also our storehouse and treasure, our place of strength and pleasure; further, He is our city of refuge with its strong tower and a pleasant river to refresh us. But we are also His habitation where He dwells by His Spirit; we are His workhouse, where He fashions all His curious pieces of the new creation, forming it for the day of His espousals, the great day of redemption.

### **Reflect on What We Once Were**

This gives us to understand what we once were. We may stand here and reflect upon our former condition and find reasons for both delight and sorrow. We were once without Christ in the world, and therefore “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). How I wish it was engraved on men’s hearts

that they are born out of Christ Jesus, that they are wild olives growing up from the stock of degenerate Adam. He was once planted a noble vine, but how quickly turned he into a corrupt plant; instead of grapes, he brought forth wild grapes that were sour!

We all come from a wild olive tree which is “contrary to nature” (Rom. 11:24). It grows outside the garden of God in the barren wilderness; it is no use for anything for it only brings forth fruit unto death and needs to be cut down and cast into the fire. It is a tree which the Lord has cursed: “cursed is the ground because of you...thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you” (Gen. 3:17). This was the fatal sentence pronounced on Adam.

### **The Worthless “Fruit” of the Godless**

Oh that you would know your condition by nature, how all your good inclinations, dispositions, and education cannot make your stock or your fruit good! “Israel is an empty vine, he brings forth fruit only for himself” (Hos. 10:1); this is our name. Nay, but many delude themselves into thinking that they do bring forth good fruit. Have not the godless spread forth their branches, and brought forth many pleasant fruits of temporal patience, sobriety, magnanimity, prudence, and such like? Do not some cultured men do many acts of civility profitable to others? Do not many pray and read the Scriptures from their youth up? Yes, indeed, these are fruits of a sort, but for all that, such a man is an empty vine, for he brings forth fruit only for himself; and so, as in the original, he is a vine whose fruit is worthless for he does not fear the Lord (Hos. 10:1–3).

All these fruits are but for himself and from himself; he does not direct them to God’s glory, but only to his own praise or advantage, to make them his ornament. He is unaware of his own futility in seeking all his adornment and life from the wrong source. What were all these fair blossoms and fruits of the heathen nations? Indeed, they were more worthy and far

better than those we see now among the multitude of professing Christians, for theirs are but shining sins.<sup>5</sup>

What is all your praying and fasting, but for yourselves? The Lord asked the people, “Did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?” (Zech. 7:5). No, they did it for themselves, as do many among us today. Herein is the wildness and degeneracy of your natures. Either you bring forth very bitter fruits, such as intemperance, avarice, contention, swearing, and the like, or else you produce fruits that have nothing but a fair skin, like apples of Sodom that are beautiful on the tree but when handled turn to ashes; so none of your fruits are either from God or for God.

### **The Self-Deception of the Unregenerate Heart**

I think everyone entertains this secret persuasion in his heart: although our nature may be weak, yet it is not wicked; it may be helped with education, care, and diligence, and improved upon until it pleases God and benefits others. Who is persuaded in heart that he is an enemy to God, and cannot be subject to God’s law? Who actually believes that his heart is desperately wicked? Is it common for a person to believe that? Ah, but it is indeed deceitful above all things, and its deceit is uncovered when it seeks to persuade you that you do have a good heart in God’s sight. Will not profane men, whose hands are defiled, maintain the uprightness of their hearts?

They say, “No one is born good but will become so.”<sup>6</sup> I beseech you, consider that you were born out of Christ Jesus. Yet you imagine that you are born and educated as Christians and that you have the name “Christian” from infancy, for you have been baptized. But I ask about this claim: Water baptism does not engraft you into Jesus Christ. Nay, it declares this to you, that by nature you are far off from Jesus, and wholly defiled and that all your thoughts are only evil.

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5. *Splendida peccata.*

6. *Nemo nascitur bonus sed fit.*

### **The Concluding Appeal**

Now, I beseech you, how did it come about that you have been changed? Or has there even been a change? Is not the greater part of our natures “the old man”? Are any of you truly new creatures? Those who are in Christ are new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17). Just now you have Adam’s nature which you were born with. You bear the image of the earthly, and do you not still bear it, who are still earth-bound? Do you think that in your fallen state you can inherit the kingdom of God? Can you pass over from a state of condemnation to a state of life with no longer any condemnation, without there being a radical change?

No, you cannot! The flesh and blood with which you were born cannot inherit the incorruptible. You must be engrafted into the second Adam and bear His image before you can say that you are partakers of His blessings (1 Cor. 15:47–49). Now I must challenge your consciences: How many of you have been changed? Are not most of you just the same as you have been from your childhood? Do not be deceived; you are still strangers from the promises of God and without this hope in the world.