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SERMONS AND TRACTS OF JOHN GILL
MAN'S FALL AND DEPRAVITY

**The Plague of a Man's Own
Heart, What it is, To Whom
Discovered**
1 KINGS 8:38
by John Gill

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*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth*
— Psalm 60:4

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SERMON 16

THE PLAGUE OF A MAN'S OWN HEART, WHAT IT IS, TO WHOM DISCOVERED

*And The Encouragement Given To Such Persons To Expect
Pardon Of All Their Sins.*

1 KINGS 8:38

Which shall know every man the plague of his own heart. ~~<1038>~~

The whole verse reads thus: *What prayer and supplication soever he made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart; and spread forth his hands towards this house (to complete the sense, it follows) then hear thou in heaven, thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, etc.*

THESE words are part of the prayer which Solomon offered up to God, at the dedication of the temple. After he had addressed the divine Being, by mentioning several of his attributes, and expressed his admiration that he should dwell upon the earth among men; he requests of God, that not only the present prayers might be graciously answered; but that all the future supplications of the Israelites, whether as a body of people, or individuals, might be regarded. In a more particular manner he entreats of the Lord, that when those who shall be sensible *of the plague of their own hearts*, and distressed by it, apply to him for relief, that he would hear and forgive. Thus the words I have read are introduced. ***Now from the words of the Text, I shall endeavour to shew***

I. What the plague of the heart is, what is meant by it, and what may be learned from it.

II. The knowledge that some persons have of the plague of their own heart. I say, some persons; because it seems clear, from the very manner in which the words are expressed, that all do not know the plague of their own heart.

III. What those persons may do, who are thus sensible of the plague of their own heart. They may spread out their hands to the Lord, and look towards his holy temple, in hope of having relief from thence; and even the forgiveness of their sins.

I. I shall inquire what is meant by the plague of the heart; and what we may learn from this expression, Which shall know every man the plague of his own heart.

In the first place, this plainly suggests, that the heart of man is not whole and sound. It is unhealthful; it is distempered; it is attended with a very grievous disease; for what more grievous than the plague? The disease of the heart of man is sin, and particularly indwelling sin; the sin of our nature, which has its seat in the heart. Every sin is a disease, as is clear from what the Psalmist says,

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases
(~~Psalm~~ Psalm 103:3).

Here diseases and iniquities are represented as the same; and the healing of these diseases is signified by the forgiveness of iniquity.

Now as every sin is a disease, so more especially indwelling sin, or the sin of our nature. This is a natural and hereditary disease to the sons of men; there are some bodily diseases, which come immediately from parents to children; and of this sort, in a moral sense, is the sin of our nature. We are, by nature, children of wrath; and the reason is, we are by nature, sinners; otherwise, we could not have been by nature children of wrath. Sin is natural to us: it is as natural for one of Adam's fallen race to sin, as it is to do any act whatever. It is natural to men; it is derived to them in a natural way. It is hereditary: we are conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity; born in sin, and so are called, *transgressors from the womb*. As our first parent Adam was, and as our immediate ones are, so in course must their offspring be; for *who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.*

This disease is epidemical and universal; all are tainted and affected with it. There are diseases in a natural sense which are called epidemical, which, when they come into a village, a town, or a country, go through them; but then, be they as epidemical or universal as they may, there are always some that escape; but in this case, there is not one, no not one of Adam's race. For almost six thousand years there has not been one of Adam's posterity

that has escaped this disease; except the man Christ Jesus, who descended not from him; by ordinary generation; otherwise, all mankind have been infected with this plague, this pestilential disease, sin. *All*, says the apostle, *are under sin. We have before proved, says he, that both Jews and Gentiles*; which is a division of all mankind into its proper parts, and includes the whole,

we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin (~~EBD~~Romans 3:9):

all under the power of sin; involved in the guilt of sin; and liable to punishment for it. This is the case of all mankind: all have sinned in their first head, Adam. *All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* Yea, Jehovah himself is represented as looking down from heaven, taking a survey of the children of men, of their qualities and actions; and the result of this survey is, that

they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one (~~EBD~~Romans 3:10, 11, 12).

Now if there were any person free from this infectious disease, sin; undoubtedly the omniscient eye of God would observe it. It is most manifest, then, that there are none of all the individuals of human nature that have escaped it: all are infected with it all; the body, and the members of it: the soul, and all the powers thereof. It may be said, of men in general, as it is of the body of the people of Israel, that *the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint*. It is an epidemical disease.

It is a very nauseous and loathsome disease: the Psalmist speaks of it as such,

My loins are filled with a loathsome disease (~~EBD~~Psalm 38:7).

He had respect to sin, or the fruit, and effect of it; for he had before observed, that there was *no soundness in his flesh, nor any rest in his bones*, because of his sin (~~EBD~~Psalm 38:3). This disease makes a person loathsome to Jehovah; who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. This is a disease that mankind are very early infected with; therefore, the apostate sons of Adam are represented by an infant *cast out into the open field, to the loathing of its person in the day that it was born*. Being infected with such a disease as this, it cannot but be loathsome in the eyes of God: and

sin, that makes us loathsome in the sight of God, makes us loathsome in our own sight too, when we are led to take a proper view of it. Hence those words of the apostle Paul, who had a large experience of the nature, force, and power of indwelling sin;

O wretched man, that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (~~4172~~Romans 7:24);

or from this dead body, which I carry about with me. Do but represent unto yourselves how loathsome it must be for a living man to have a dead body fastened to him, and be obliged to carry it along with him wherever he goes; and to have it wherever he is. Just so it is with the people of God, who have any knowledge of this pestilential disease, this body of death, which they continually carry about with them.

This is a disease, also, that is mortal in itself, a deadly disease; as the plague is generally supposed to be. There are diseases which are not unto death; but the disease of sin is unto death. We read of one sin in particular which is unto death. It is emphatically so, namely, the unpardonable sin; because it is *not forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come* (~~4103~~Matthew 7:32). But every sin is, in its own nature, deserving of death.

The wages of every sin, is death (~~4163~~Romans 6:23);

eternal death. This disease is incurable, except by the grace of God and the blood of Christ. What Jeremiah says of the people of Israel, that their *bruise was incurable, and their wound grievous*, because there was none to plead their cause that they might be bound up, and they had no healing medicines, may be said of all mankind, with respect to this disease of sin. It is incurable by any methods they themselves are capable of making use of, or others for them:

When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound; then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb; yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound (~~2153~~Hosea 5:13).

So let a sinner, that is diseased with sin, use whatever means he can, short of Christ, and his blood, they will be all ineffectual. Christ is the only physician that can cure the plague of the heart; and his blood is the sovereign balm. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? yes; and that Physician is Christ, that balm is his blood.

Now the disease I am speaking of, is called the plague: *the plague of the heart*. The plague is a distemper which, you all know, is very threatening, wasting, and destroying; and exceeding shocking and distressing. It is called the

pestilence that walks in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth
at noon day (~~3910~~ Psalm 91:6).

It destroys its thousands and ten thousands, when God gives it a commission; as in the case of David's numbering the people. It was sent at his own choice, and no less than seventy thousand persons were immediately destroyed by it. Whenever we hear of the plague breaking out in any of the countries abroad, to which our ships trade; we are always alarmed, lest they should, with the goods brought from thence, bring that dreadful distemper along with them; and all proper caution is taken to prevent, it. Whenever we hear of it nearer our borders, in a neighboring country, what an alarm does it give us? About forty years ago (This sermon was preached, Sept. 19, 1762), or it may be somewhat more, some of you may remember it broke forth in Marseilles, in France. What a consternation were the inhabitants of this city in! How many meetings for prayer were set up, and held for some time. But there is a plague nearer than this, it is in the heart of every man, and yet little or no notice is taken of it. A plague of more fatal consequences than a temporal disease is. The latter only destroys the body, but this destroys the soul to all eternity, unless it is cured by the grace of God, and the blood of Christ. It is the plague of the heart; and we carry it about with us.

The word here made use of, is sometimes used of the plague of leprosy; as in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of the book of Leviticus. Persons infected with that plague (after it was a clear case that so it was with them) *put a covering upon their upper lip, and cried, unclean, unclean* (~~4835~~ Leviticus 13:45). All sinners, like wise who are made sensible of the leprosy of sin, and that they are infected with it, humbly flee to Christ, the great physician, and say, as the leper in the gospel, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*. This leprosy of sin, is not only like that, which was outward in a man; but like that that got into a house, which could not be removed 'till the house was pulled down. Of this kind is the plague of the heart; the leprosy of sin in us; for it is an inward, spreading one; there is no removing of it 'till this earthly house of our tabernacle is taken down. Hence, says the apostle, *We, in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened*.

These hints may serve to give you some idea of the plague of a man's heart, indwelling sin and corruption. But,

Secondly. I shall give you a fuller view of this plague of the heart, by laying before you the state and condition of the heart of man, according to the scriptural account of it; which is this: A man's heart is wicked yea, wickedness itself. So it is said in ^{<418D>}Psalm 5:9. Their inward part, that is, their heart, is *very wickedness*. It is not only wicked, but wickedness itself; not only wickedness, but extreme wickedness; that is, extremely wicked. The carnal mind is said to be *enmity against God* (^{<418E>}Romans 8:7): not barely an enemy to God, but *enmity* itself; which expresses the great degree of enmity in the carnal mind of man, to God and all that is good.

Sin is not only sinful; but it is exceeding sinful: and it is made so to appear to a truly enlightened mind, as it was to the apostle Paul; who tells us, that sin by the commandment, became exceeding sinful. Such is the heart of man. It is wicked, wickedness itself: it is sinful, exceeding sinful; yea, it is the seat of all sin.

The corruption of nature, most properly the plague of our heart, is represented by the apostle, as that which *dwells* in us:

It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me
(^{<4177>}Romans 7:17).

By sin that *dwelt in him*, he means not any particular sin, distinct from others; but an assemblage of sins, corruptions, lusts, iniquities; for he afterwards represents it, not only as a person, but as a *law*, having power and authority; and, as a *body*, consisting of divers members, divers lusts and pleasures (^{<418B>}Titus 3:3). The heart of man is like Babylon; a *cage of every unclean and hateful bird, and the hold of every foul spirit*. It is the seat and source of all sin. It is the forge, where all is hammered; for the evil heart devises evil imaginations. There is the mint of sin; it comes from thence. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false-witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man (^{<415D>}Matthew 15:19, 20). Out of the abundance of the wickedness of the heart, the mouth speaketh bad things. All the evil actions of life have their rise from hence: and you may judge hereby of the malignity of man's heart, what a plague is there. It is so bad, that Jeremiah says,

it is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked

(~~247B~~ Jeremiah 17:9).

It is deceitful. There is deceitfulness in every sin: particularly in indwelling sin, the corruption of our nature. The apostle cautions the Hebrews to exhort one another daily, lest any of them should *be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin* (~~38B3~~ Hebrews 3:13). The old man is said to be *corrupt according to the deceitful lusts* of which he consists. So deceitful is man's heart, and the lust that dwells there, that even the best of men have been deceived thereby. Not only the apostle Paul was deceived by it, before his conversion, agreeable to that saying, *Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me; and by it slew me*: but even after conversion, the best and wisest of men have been deceived by their own hearts, and the deceitfulness thereof. For a man promises himself that in sinning, which he never enjoys. He promises to himself a great deal of pleasure in sinning: hence divers lusts and pleasures are joined together, as if they were one and the same; or, as if men, in serving the one, enjoyed the other. This is proposed, this is expected; but is it enjoyed? No; the pleasures expected from sin, are all an illusion, all a dream; that fantastic pleasure which is enjoyed, is a short-lived one. The pleasures of sin are but for a season, and issue, at last, in bitterness and death. Sin, though it is rolled in the mouth, and kept under the tongue as a sweet morsel, proves, in the end, as the poison of asps.

Men promise themselves much profit in sinning, which they never enjoy. This was the temptation of our first parents, with which they were imposed upon, and deceived. Satan suggested they should *be as Gods, knowing good and evil*. This was the bait, *more knowledge*; whereas, by dallying with the temptation, instead of gaining more knowledge, they lost in good measure, what they had. A man's heart promises him much profit in sinning; that he shall gain much riches in the way of illicit trade, and other unlawful practices; but how frequently is he disappointed and were it otherwise, *What would it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

Sometimes men propose to themselves and expect a great deal of honour among ungodly men, by following their examples, and complying with their customs; but how often are they disappointed! Besides, when the conscience comes to be awakened, and when the apostle's question is regarded, *What fruit had ye in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?* they will readily acknowledge, they had none at all.

A man proposes to himself liberty in sinning but does he enjoy it? No; he is brought into more and more bondage.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption. Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage (^{<4129>}2 Peter 2:19).

Whoever commits sin, is the servant of sin, the slave of it: *Is Ephraim a servant? is he a home-born slave?* Verily he is and so is every ungodly man.

They promise themselves peace; that they shall have peace, though they walk every man after the imagination of his own evil heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: but do they enjoy it? No: for while they are crying, *peace, peace, sudden destruction comes upon them.* How deceitful is the heart of man! That is promised which is never enjoyed. There is nothing in a man's heart to be trusted to: *he that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool:* even he that trusts in the goodness of his heart, in the supposed integrity of his heart, and of his conversation, which he supposes springs from thence. Persons of this character, *trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others.* They trust in themselves, that they *are rich, and increased in goods, and stand in need of nothing:* when, at the same time, *they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;* and will find themselves most miserably deceived another day. The heart of man is deceitful: the plague is in it; indwelling sin, and corruption. There is nothing more deceitful than the heart of man. It is exceedingly wicked; wicked to the highest degree of wickedness: which seems to be the meaning of the expression.

All that is in the heart of man is wicked. The thoughts and the imagination of the thoughts of the heart are so, according to ^{<4086>}Genesis 6:5. So in ^{<4059>}Matthew, chapter 15 verse 19, *Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts.* Men's thoughts are evil. The thought of wickedness is sin; abominable in the sight of God. The apostle therefore exhorts Simon Magus to pray that the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven (^{<4182>}Acts 8:22). The sensible sinner has reason to hope for this; therefore the wicked man is encouraged to forsake his way, and the righteous man his thoughts, and to turn to the Lord, who will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (^{<2857>}Isaiah 55:7); both evil thoughts and evil actions. Yea, the imagination of the thoughts is evil: the first formation of evil thoughts; or those motions, as the apostle calls them, of sin, which are in

our members (~~4005~~Romans 7:5), are evil. You read of some that thought themselves wise men, and good men; but became vain in their imaginations, and their evil hearts were darkened (~~4502~~Romans 1:21): and of others, more openly profane, that resolved to walk according to the imagination of their evil hearts (Jeremiah 8:12). Every thought, and every imagination of the heart, of man are evil.,

God is not in all their thoughts (~~3904~~Psalm 10:4);

nor, indeed, in any of their thoughts. His thoughts are not like theirs. His are holy, theirs are unholy: his are thoughts of peace, theirs are thoughts of evil. No good thoughts arise from the wicked heart of man. No good things come out of this Nazareth; for there is no good thing in it. Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is evil; only so, and always so. The imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is said to be evil from his youth (~~4002~~Genesis 8:21): hence he is represented as like the troubled sect, which cannot rest, continually casting up mire and dirt (~~2571~~Isaiah 57:20). The affections of the heart are inordinate; all out of course; run in a wrong channel, and to wrong objects. Men are *lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God*.

Their hearts are set upon the world and the things of it; the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. The mind of man is corrupted, depraved, distempered. There is vanity in it; hence men are said to walk in the vanity of their minds. They are empty of all that is good; yea, they are averse thereunto; for *the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be*. The mind is darkened by sin, has no light into divine and spiritual things; is darkness itself; calls evil good, and good evil; puts darkness for light, and light for darkness. The understanding being depraved, it passes a wrong judgment on things. Conscience being darkened, does not perform its office: being in many seared, as it were, with a red hot iron; and in every one it is evil. Happy those who have their *hearts sprinkled*, by the blood of Jesus, *from an evil conscience*. Their will is stubborn and inflexible. It is not subject to God's law, nor to his gospel. It is like the adamant, and called *a stony heart* (~~23119~~Ezekiel 11:19). Now, by all this, and much more, which the Scripture says on the subject, we may judge of the state of the heart of man; and in a good measure learn what is meant by *the plague* of it. It must be in a most sad condition, while under the influence of this pestilential disease.

Further. The plague of the heart is very deep and secret: it is an evil which none are acquainted with but a man's own conscience and God. Secret sins, heart sins, these may be called the plague of the heart. *Lord* (says the Psalmist) *thou hast set our secret sins in the light of thy countenance* (⁴⁹⁰⁸Psalm 90:8). Secret sins, which are in their own hearts; or, if committed, none but God and their own hearts are privy to them. Yea, there are some sins that a man himself is not privy to; they pass through his heart, and he, not being always upon his guard, cannot take notice of every thing that is done. Even a good man cannot; hence David says,

Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults
(⁴⁹¹²Psalm 19:12).

Or, the plague of the heart may denote such sins as are in a particular manner predominant in a man's heart. There are some sins which may be termed a man's *own way* (²⁵¹⁶Isaiah 53:6); constitutional sins, or sins which most *easily beset* (³⁸¹¹Hebrews 12:1). In some pride, in some the lust of impurity; in others ambition, and so on. These are common and prevailing sins in the hearts of men, and may be called *the plague of their hearts*; and which give great distress to those who have the grace of God. They find them to be a plague: indeed their daily experience proves it.

There is an expression in a parallel text where the same thing is intended, though in somewhat different language.

Then (says Solomon) what prayer, or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore, and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hand in this house; then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive (⁴⁴⁶⁹2 Chronicles 6:29, 30).

What is called in Kings, the plague of his own heart, is here denominated *his own sore*, and *his own grief*. This may a little enlarge our idea of the plague of the heart. A *man's own sore*, and *his own grief*. His *sore*; that which gives him a great deal of pain and uneasiness, as a sore does. So the corruption of nature does to a sensible sinner; when he is *pricked to the heart*, wounded through a sense of sin, how grievous and intolerable is it! *The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity*, the outward infirmity of his body; he may be able to bear it, with some degree of patience; but *a spirit wounded* with a sense of sin, *who can bear?* This is a sore which is very painful indeed! *Every man his own sore, and his own grief*. Sin causes

grief; and nothing more than the inward corruption of nature. David, we find expressing his grief on this account.

I go mourning all the day long; for my loins are filled with a loathsome disease, and there is no soundness in my flesh
(~~1386~~ Psalm 38:6, 7);

and so all good men do. They are like the doves of the valley, every one mourning for his own iniquity; especially the sin of his nature, which is his own. Hence Jabez's prayer to the Lord, was, *Keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me* (~~1340~~ 1 Chronicles 4:10): the corruption of nature, and its breakings forth.

This is what Solomon calls a man's *sore* and *grief*; because it produces grief to the people of God. They are grieved, because it is contrary to the holy nature of God, and his righteous law; against the Lord, who is their Maker, their Benefactor, their God, and Father: against him, who hath shewn so much favor to them, and expressed so much love towards them. It cuts them to the heart that they should sin against this God; and that his name should be dishonored in any measure by them, as it is by sin. It causes the enemy to open his mouth; and the way of truth is evil spoken of. This grieves the people of God: and because hereby the Holy Spirit of God is grieved,

Grieve not the Holy Spirit (~~1403~~ Ephesians 4:30):

and then the apostle goes on to mention various sins whereby the Spirit of God may be grieved. He who convinces them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; he who hath been their comforter, and is the Spirit of faith in them, the Spirit, of adoption to them, and the earnest of their heavenly inheritance; that he should be grieved by them is grievous to themselves. So, likewise, because hereby they are deprived of communion with God. Iniquity, in this respect, separates between God and the soul. They are filled with confusion, distress, and contrition of mind, as Peter was through his fall. But thus much may suffice for the opening of *the plague of the heart*. From all this somewhat may be gathered, and your own experience will furnish you within more, upon this humiliating subject. But

II. There is a knowledge of this. Some persons have a knowledge of it, and some have not. This is supposed in the text, by "All thy people Israel, which shall *know*, every man the plague of his own heart." That is, as many

of them as shall know the plague of their own hearts; suggesting, that all do not. Some do not know this. Carnal men do not. Only spiritual persons, that are under the influence of the Spirit of God, who *convincés of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment*. As for others, they know nothing of the plague of their own heart. They may possibly know something of the nature of sin, the difference between moral good and evil, by the light of nature, the laws of men, and the general notions obtained among men; but they know nothing of the *spring* of evil actions, of indwelling sin, the fountain of iniquity. To this they are strangers; and more especially such as are grown up to work all iniquity; whose consciences are cauterized, or seared with a hot iron. *All those who are whole*, know not the plague of their own hearts. *The whole need not a physician, but those that are sick*. The former need a physician as much as the latter; but they know not that they stand in need of one. The reason of which is, they do not know the plague of their own hearts; and therefore, in their own apprehensions, they need no physician. It is quite the reverse, however, with *those that are sick*; that is, who are sensible of the sickness: for, otherwise, all men are sick; but our Lord means, them that are sensible of it, as Ephraim was: “When Ephraim saw his sickness” (^{<BEB>}Hosea 5:13). Now those who are sensible of their sickness, feel their need of a physician; but those who are insensible of sickness, are like him, whom the wise man describes as upon *the top of a mast*; who says,

They have stricken me, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not (^{<BEB>}Proverbs 23:35).

So it is with such insensible sinners as are whole in their own esteem. Those who think themselves increased in goods, and in need of nothing, do not know the plague of their own hearts. Those who imagine they need no repentance, do not know the plague of their own hearts. The pharisee knows not the plague of his own heart: for his language is, *I am not as other men are*. The apostle Paul did not know the plague of his own heart, at the time to which he refers, when he says, *Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless*. The perfectionist knows not the plague of his own heart; if he did, he would not say, he is free from sin. Job says,

If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own cloths should abhor me (^{<BEB>}Job 9:30, 31).

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves (^{<BEB>}1 John 1:8):

but good men know the plague of their own hearts; being enlightened by the Spirit of God, convincing them of sin, of righteousness, and judgment. Such as are made light in the Lord, and made acquainted with salvation by him; are made light, so as to know themselves and the plague of their own hearts. Those in whose hearts God has commanded the light to shine, not only see *the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*; but they see the vileness of their nature, and the corruption of their hearts and that they know this, appears from the ingenuous confession of sin, which they make; not only of the outward actions of sin, which they commit; but also of indwelling sin. For while they are confessing the one, they are naturally led to the other; as the Psalmist was,

I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me
(~~PS~~ Psalm 51:5).

This appears from the groanings of the saints; for they groan being burdened, burdened with indwelling sin. So David says, (when speaking of sin, on which account he had no rest in his bones),

My groaning is not hid from thee (~~PS~~ Psalm 38:9).

Saints, under the New Testament speak the same language (for the people of God, under different dispensations, have the same experience in this respect).

O wretched man that I am, (says the apostle), who shall deliver me from the body of this death! (~~RO~~ Romans 8:24).

It appears by the feeling they have of a *law in their members, warring against the law of their minds*; fighting one against the other; so that they cannot do the things that they would. It appears from their non-dependence upon any religious duties performed by them; for however outwardly religious they may appear, in the sight of others, they are sensible of imperfection in their services; they know *there is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and sinneth not*; that there is strange distraction of mind, wanderings of thoughts, and a mixture of sin even in their most holy things. They cannot, therefore, depend upon any thing done by them; but acknowledge, when they have done all they can, that they are but *unprofitable servants*. It appears also, by their prayers against the plague of their own hearts. This leads us to consider,

III. What those persons may do, who are sensible of the plague of their own hearts. They may spread out their hands to the Lord, and make supplication to him, under a sense of their great depravity. They may pray that the Lord would keep them from the plague of their own hearts; that it may not break forth to the grieving of their souls, or the dishonor of the divine name; and that they be not destroyed thereby. Was David, when reflecting on the power of his enemy, induced to say, *I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul?* So the saints, when they behold the force of corruption in them, fear they shall some day perish thereby: yet in the midst of all their discouragements, they can spread out their hands to God, and pray that he would mortify those corruptions of nature. Though the Lord hath said, he *will subdue their iniquities*; it becomes them to pray that no iniquity may have dominion over them: that this house of Saul might grow weaker and weaker, while that of David grows stronger and stronger: that the inward man might be renewed day by day, and the old man put off, according to the former conversation: that though it be not destroyed, it may be weakened; and also, that the Lord would grant fresh manifestations of forgiving love, for sins of heart, as well as of life and conversation.

Upon the whole, this may serve to humble us before the Lord; when we consider what we are, what we have about us, and what is in us; namely, *the plague of the heart*. It is enough to humble the proudest heart, when sensible of it; and cause the words of Job to be adopted, *Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer? I have heard of thee, by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes.*

This also may lead us to wonder at the grace of God, that he should have any regard to such diseased and corrupted creatures as we are; and that God should *dwell upon earth*, in the hearts of sinful men, as in verse the twenty-seventh. This is marvelous grace, indeed! This may lead us, who know the plague of our own hearts, to be thankful to God, that he has not left us to that blindness persons are under the influence of, who talk of the goodness of their hearts; and see no need of the cleansing blood of Jesus, that healing balsam. Blessed be God, he hath not left us to this. Such neither know the disease, nor the physician; neither know the plague of their own hearts nor how they are to be cured of it. God, blessed be his name! hath opened our eyes to see our disease; and hath shewn us who the Physician is. Let it then be our great concern, *to shew forth the praises of him, who hath called as out of darkness, into his marvelous light.*