

WALKING

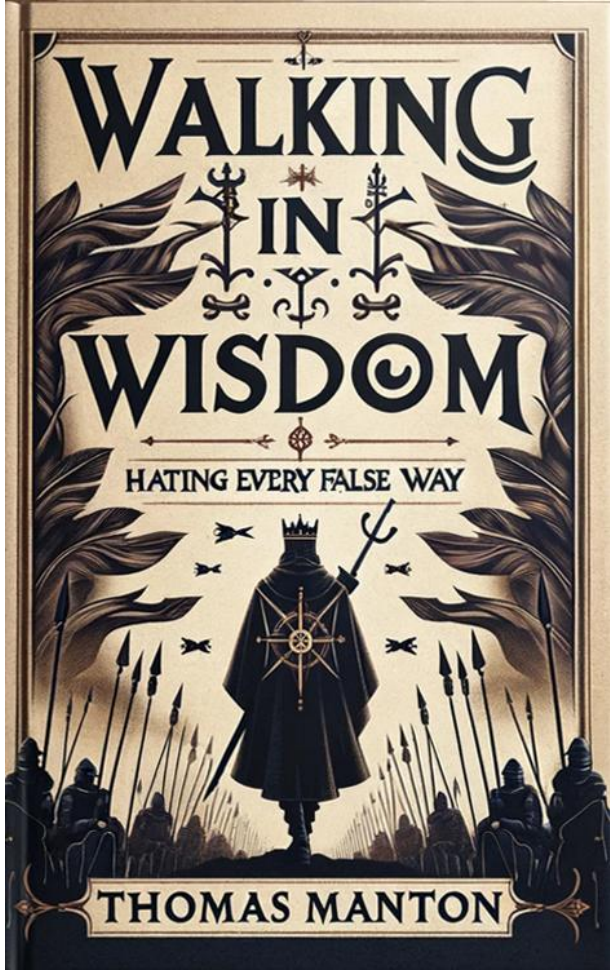
IN

WISDOM

HATING EVERY FALSE WAY



THOMAS MANTON



"Walking in Wisdom: Hating Every False Way"

by Thomas Manton

Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. — VER. 104

In the former verse, the man of God had spoken of the pleasure that was to be had by the word, now of the profit of it. There is a great deal of pleasure to spiritual sense; if we could once get our appetite, we should find a world of sweetness in it; and there is as much profit as pleasure. As the pleasure is spiritual, so also is the profit to be measured by spiritual considerations. To escape the snares of the devil and the dangers that waylay us in our passage to heaven is a great advantage. Now the word does not only warn us of our danger, but where it is received in the love of it, breeds a hatred of all these things that may lead us into it: 'Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.'

In this sentence, the prophet seems to invert the order set down in verse 101. He had said, 'I refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word,' where the avoiding of evil is made the means of profiting by the word. Here his profiting by the word is made the cause of avoiding evil. In the one verse, you have an account of his beginning with God, in the other of his progress.

In this verse there is—

1. The benefit he received by the word, and that is sound and saving knowledge.
2. The fruit and effect which this knowledge produces in his heart, therefore I hate every false way.

Mark, first, the firmness of this effect, I hate. He does not say I abstain, but I hate.

Secondly, the note of universality, every.

Thirdly, the object, false way. It is not said evil way, but false way; or, as it is in the original, 'every path of lying and falsehood.'

Falsehood is either in point of opinion or practice. If you take it in the first sense, for falsehood in opinion, or error in judgment, or false doctrine, or false worship, this sentence holds good. Those that get understanding by the word are established against error; and not only established against error, or against the embracing or profession of it, but they hate it.

1. They are established. All error comes from ignorance, or else judicial blindness.

[1.] From ignorance, or unfamiliarity with the word of God; so Christ said to the Sadducees, 'You err, not knowing the Scriptures,' Matthew 12:29. When men do not study the word, which is the rule of truth, it is no wonder they lie open to every fancy; they take up things hastily, and by a naive credulity are led away by every suggestion presented to them. So it is said in 2 Peter 3:16, that 'the unstable and unlearned wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction.' By the unlearned, it is not meant those that are unskilled in human literature, though that is a great help; but those

that are unskilled in the word of righteousness, poor deluded souls that lie under a great uncertainty.

[2.] Judicial blindness. For men that have great intellect and a presumption of their own wit are given up to be blinded by their own lusts; and though they know the Scriptures, yet they wrest them to speak according to the sense of their carnal interest, 1 Thessalonians 2:12. And so they see not what they see, being given up to the witchery and enchantment of error: Galatians 3:1, 'O foolish Galatians! who hath bewitched you?' So that all false ways proceed from the lack of reason and the pride of reason. The one is the cause of the simple's erring, who believes every word; the other of those that are knowledgeable and otherwise of great intellect, but they make their wit their idol, and so would be wise above the Scriptures, or else are swayed by their own lusts. They do not fix themselves in the power, love, and practice of truths revealed in the Scriptures, and so are given up to hellish delusions. Now, in this sense, I might speak with great profit of these words, especially now when so many errors are broached, and all the errors of Christianity come abreast to assault it at once; and such changeable times as produce various interests, whereby men are blinded, and such levity in the professors of religion.

Why, then, study the word with a teachable heart; that is, renouncing your own wit, and giving up yourselves to God's direction, and practising what is plain, without being swayed by the profits and pleasures of the world, and you may come to know what is the mind of God. Men think all is uncertain in religion and are apt to say with Pilate, 'What is truth?' John 18:38. No; the Scriptures are not obscure, but our hearts are dark and blind with worldly lusts. Otherwise, the counsel is plain, and you might say with David,

'Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.'

(1.) Where the Spirit of God does affect men with an earnest desire for knowledge, and so affect them as to desire to know the will of God, for no other reason but that they may avoid what is displeasing to God, and do what is pleasing in His sight; and therefore hear, pray, read, meditate, and study the holy Scriptures; they are sure to be right for the main.

(2.) Not only avoid the belief and profession of falsehood but hate it: 'I hate every false way.' Not the persons, but pity them: Philippians 3:19, 'I tell you weeping.' It should be the grief of our hearts to see them misled; but as for the error, hate it, whatever is not agreeable to the rule of truth, or dissents from the purity of the word. There is too great a coldness and indifference about the things of religion, as if truth were not to be stood upon. Carnal men hate the truth: Psalm 50:17, 'They hate instruction, and cast my laws behind their backs.' Truly we have much more reason to hate error, without which we cannot be safe, it is so catching with our natures.

2. In point of practice, and so every falsehood may be applied—

[1.] To craft, or carnal wisdom. I hate fraud and deceit; true understanding makes us hate false wisdom. A simple, honest conversation suits best with Christians: 2 Corinthians 1:12, 'In simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.'

[2.] Carnal or worldly vanities, and flattering or fallacious pleasures, these entice us with a fair outside, and promise a great deal of happiness and comfort to us; but when we neglect better things, and run after them, they deceive us in the end. They are called 'deceitful

riches,' Mark 4:19. And 'beauty' is said to be 'deceitful,' Proverbs 31:30. And those that run after these things are said to 'run after lying vanities,' Jonah 2:8; those that fail when we hope to enjoy them.

3. I take it more generally for all sin. Sinful ways are false ways, and will surely deceive those that expect good from them or walk in them: Hebrews 3:13, 'Deceitfulness of sin;' and 'deceitful lusts,' Ephesians 4:22; and 'sin hath deceived me, and slew me,' saith Paul, Romans 7:11. Sin is false and deceitful in many ways

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[1.] It presents itself in another dress than its own, proposing evil under the name of good, calling light darkness, and darkness light, Isaiah 5:20, or shadows of good for that which is really good, gilded trash for perfect gold.

[2.] As it promises happiness and impunity which it never performs or makes good, Deuteronomy 29:19, 20; and so the poor sinner is led as an ox to the slaughter, Proverbs 7:22, 23. And we do not see the danger of it till it be too late to help it, and it appears in its own colours in the foulness of the act and the severity of the punishment. Esau, when he had sold the birthright, bewailed it with tears when it was too late, Hebrews 12:16, 17. The foolish virgins tarried till the door was shut, Matthew 25:11, 12. It is good to have our eyes in our head, to see a plague when we may prevent it, Proverbs 22:3. The foulness of the act terrifies, as it did Judas when he betrayed his master, Matthew 27:4. Their hearts give evidence against them, Romans 2:15 'Excusing or accusing one another;' as Cain, Genesis 4:14, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.' The unclean person shall 'mourn at the last, when his flesh and his body shall be

consumed,' Proverbs 5:11. Adam and Eve were sensible too late, when their eyes were opened.

By the word of God, we get that true, sound wisdom which makes us hate every false way.

Four things are implied in the point and in the text:—

1. A hatred of sin.
2. The universality of this hatred, every false way.
3. That this is a part and fruit of wisdom, I get understanding, therefore I hate.
4. This wisdom and understanding are gotten by God's precepts.

First, it is our duty to hate sin. It is not enough to reform our practice, or to abstain from the act, or to avoid the occasions that may lead to it, but it must be hated: Psalm 97:10, 'You that love the Lord, hate evil.' He does not say forbear it, but hate it. Love to the chiefest good is fitly accompanied with hatred of the chiefest evil. God is our chiefest good: you love the Lord, and you must also hate evil. The one is as natural to grace as the other; for the new nature has its dislike and aversion, as well as its choice and prosecution. As it inclines us to choose God for our portion, and to pursue after things that lead to God, so it has a disposition to make us avoid that which is evil. There are things hurtful to the new nature as well as any other being; now hatred is to arm us against it. In short, this hatred is required—

1. Because this is the true principle of resistance against sin. Until a man hates sin, he is never truly set against it; as a man is never thoroughly gained to that which is good until he loves holiness for holiness' sake. His affections may be bribed with other considerations, but then he is rooted in holiness when he loves

holiness for its own sake. So a man that is not resolved against sin, that will not hate it for its own sake, may be frightened out of sin for a while, or by the interposings of conscience put out of humour, but his heart falls in again with his old lusts, until there be an enmity and detestation of sin; but when it comes to this hatred, then temptations cannot easily overcome—examples draw not, nor difficulties compel us to that which is evil. Persuasions and allurements formerly were of great force; straightway they followed; but when the bent is another way, they are not so easily drawn by force and examples, which seem to have such cogency. Before, men did easily swim with the stream, but here is a counter-motion when they hate that which is evil. This is the fence of the soul, and draws us to an indignation, Hosea 14:8.

2. Partly because this is a true distinctive evidence between those that are good and those that are evil. Many may forbear sin that yet do not hate it; they forbear it out of restraint, out of fear of punishment, shame, or worldly ends, yet they 'regard iniquity in their hearts,' Psalm 66:18; as a dog loves the bone, yet fears the blows. God judges not as man; man is blameless, he abstains from sin, but God hates sin. Man judges according to the action, but God judges according to the frame of the heart, 1 Samuel 16:7; for he is able to look to the inward springs, and poise our spirits. So on the other side, good men may slip into an evil action, but their hearts are against it; it is the evil which they hate, Romans 7:15. They may be foiled, but their hearts are bent another way.

But what is this hatred of sin?

1. It implies a universal repugnance in every part of a man against sin, not only in his reason and conscience, but in will and affections. There is not a wicked man who, in many cases, his conscience bids him do otherwise; but a renewed man, his heart inclines him to do otherwise; his heart is set against sin and taken up with the things of God: Romans 7:22, 'I delight in the law of God according to the inner man.' It is in the whole inward man, which consists of many parts and faculties. Briefly, then, it notes the opposition, not from enlightened conscience only, but from the bent of the renewed heart. Reason and conscience will take God's part and quarrel with sins, otherwise wicked men could not be self-condemned.
2. Hatred is a fixed, rooted enmity. Many a man may fall out with sin upon some occasion, but he has not an irreconcilable enmity against it. The transient motions of the soul are things quite distinct from a permanent principle that abides in a renewed heart; he has that same 'seed of God remaining in him,' 1 John 3:9. A habit notes a habitual aversion. A quarrel often falls out between us and sin upon several occasions when it has sensibly done us wrong, destroyed our peace, blasted our names, or brought temporal inconvenience upon us. In times of judgment and fears, and present troubles and dangers, men think of bewailing their sins and returning to God, but they fall out and fall in again; this is anger, not hatred; like the rising of the heart against a drawn sword when it is flashed in our faces, whereas afterwards we can take it up without any such commotion of spirit.
3. Hatred is an active enmity, warring upon sin by serious and constant endeavours, manifested by watching, striving, and groaning; watching before the temptation comes, resisting in the

temptation, groaning under it, and bemoaning ourselves after the temptation has prevailed over us.

[1.] There is a constant jealousy and watchfulness before the temptation comes. Those that hate sin will keep at a distance from whatever is displeasing to God: Proverbs 28:14, 'Happy is the man that fears always.' A hard heart, that knows not the evil of sin, rushes on to things according to the present inclination. But a man that has a hatred against sin, that has felt the evil of it in his conscience, that has been scorched in the flames of a true conviction, will not come near the fire. A broken heart is shy and fearful, therefore he weighs his thoughts, words, and actions, and takes notice of the first appearance of any temptation; they know sin is always present, soon stirred, and therefore live in a holy jealousy. Certainly, those that walk up and down heedlessly in the midst of so many snares and temptations wherewith we are waylaid in our passage to heaven, they have not this active enmity against sin, and therefore hatred is seen by watching.

[2.] It is seen by striving, or serious resistance in the temptation. A Christian is not always to be measured by the success, but by conflict; he fights it out: Romans 7:15, 'The evil which I hate, that do I.' Though they are foiled by sin, yet they hate it. An enemy may be overcome, yet he retains his spite and malice. Sin does not freely carry it in the heart, neither is the act completely willing: Galatians 5:17, 'Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh; for,' says he, 'the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you cannot do the things that you would;' that is, you cannot sin with such proneness and full consent and bent of heart as others; they have a principle of opposition, a rooted enmity in their souls against sin.

[3.] By a bitter grief after the temptation; as Peter, when he had fallen foully, 'he went out and wept bitterly,' Matthew 26:75. They do not lie in sin, but recover themselves by a kindly remorse; it is the grief of their souls that they have fallen into God's displeasure, grieved his Spirit, and jeopardised their communion with him. Oh! sin is grievous to a gracious heart, and this makes them groan and complain to God, 'O wretched man!' etc.

It is such an enmity against sin as aims at the utter extermination and expulsion of it, that endeavours to destroy it both root and branch. Hatred is all for mischief; annihilation, that is what hatred aims at. Anger works trouble, but hatred mischief. It is an implacable affection, that continues to the death, that will not be appeased till the thing which we hate is abolished. So where there is this hatred of sin, it follows sin closely until it has gotten the life of it.

As by the grace of justification, they have obtained such favour with God, *ne damnet*, it shall not damn; by the grace of sanctification, *ne regnet*, sin shall not reign; and still they are aspiring and looking after the grace of glorification, *ne sit*, that sin may no longer be; therefore they are longing and groaning under the remnants of corruption: Romans 7:24, 'O wretched man!' etc. Many scratch the face of sin, but they do not seek to root it up, to destroy the body of death; it is their constant grief that anything of sin is left in the heart, as enemies are not satisfied till they have the blood of each other. Where there is hatred, it is not enough to stop the spreading, weaken the power of sin, but labouring to destroy the being of sin; as David said of his enemies, 'I pursued them till they were destroyed;' so when we set against sin with an aim not to give over till we have the life of it; or as God said concerning the Canaanites, Deuteronomy 7:23, 'I will destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be

destroyed;' so does a renewed heart war against sin, that he may leave neither root nor fruit within them.

Use: If this is to hate sin, how few can say with David, 'I hate every false way'! How few are of David's temper! Some love sin with all their heart, that 'hide it as a sweet morsel under their tongue,' Job 20:12. The love of sin, that is the life of it; it dies when it begins to be hated; but when you have a love for it, it lives in the soul and prevails over us. And as they testify their love of sin, so they misplace their hatred. What do they hate? Not sin, but the word that discovers it. They 'hate the light, because their deeds are evil,' John 3:20. They do not hate sin, but God's messengers that plead against it: 1 Kings 22:8, 'I hate him,' says Ahab concerning Micaiah, 'for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil'. They hate the faithful brother that reproves them; he is hated because he will not hate his brother, to see sin upon him. They hate the magistrate that would reform, the faithful Christian that condemns them by his exact walking: John 15:19, 'Because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.' They hate God's image in his people, and cannot endure to be condemned by the light that shines out from their conversations. Godly men are objects reviving guilt, therefore they hate them. Thus shamefully are a man's affections transposed; we love where we should hate, and hate where we should love. And then if we come to the other sort of men, a degree above these, many are frightened out of their sins by slavish fear, but yet their hearts are in league with them still; and as they get out of the stocks of conscience, they enlarge themselves in all manner of carnal liberty: these are not changed, but awed; sin is not mortified, but only lurks to watch a safe opportunity when it may discover itself with more advantage.

Therefore I hate every false way. — VER. 104

The second proposition is the universality of this hatred, every false way. Those that hate sin must hate all sin.

1. This necessarily follows upon the former; for if we hate sin especially as sin, for the intrinsic evil that is in it, not upon foreign accidental reasons, then we will hate all sin, for hatred is εἰς τὰ γένη, to the whole kind; as Haman, when he hated the Jews, thought it scorn to lay his hand only on Mordecai, but would have destroyed all the Jews, Esther 5:6. It is but a casual dislike, and not a hatred. Certainly, if we hate sin as sin, we shall hate all sin. The same reasons that incline us to hate one sin will incline us to hate all. What is it to hate sin as sin? It is to hate it as a violation of God's law, as a contempt of God's authority, a breach of spiritual friendship, and a grief to the Spirit. These are the reasons to incline us to hate one as well as another. Well then, private reservation and indulgences, or setting up a toleration in our own hearts, will not stand with the hatred of all sin. Some sins may shame and trouble us more, but all are alike contrary to the will of God; therefore, if we hate them out of duty to God, we should hate them universally, 'every false way.'
2. Every sin is hateful to God, therefore every sin should be hateful to us. The reason for this is that we should hate what He hates and love what He loves. There is a perfect friendship between God and those in covenant with Him. True friendship is to will and nill the same thing; it is built upon likeness and suitability of disposition. This argument is urged by the Holy Ghost: Proverbs 8:13, 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.' This is friendship with God, to hate what God hates: 'I hate it, therefore they hate it.' Sins of thought are intended by pride and arrogance, for that puts us upon vain musings and imaginations;

and sins of word by the froward mouth; and sins of action by the evil way, outward practice. All this God hates, so should we: Revelation 2:6, 'Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.' If we are in the same covenant with God, we will have the same love, the same hatred. As we have the same nature with God, the saints are 'made partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Peter 1:4. The divine nature shows itself by suitable dispositions.

3. From our covenant relation with God, which implies an entire surrender of soul, without any reservation. When you give up yourselves to God, He will have all. If you say, God be merciful to me, and spare me in this, then you forfeit all the blessings of the covenant. God will have all or none; therefore all sin, without exception, must be hated by us, for otherwise God is not our chief good: if anything be loved besides Him, or against His will, it is loved above Him. One man allowed besides the husband is a violation of the marriage covenant; so one sin allowed in the heart breaks all the covenant between God and us: James 2:10, 'If a man keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' That sentence is not a legal sentence belonging to the covenant of works; that would be a mistake: it is not only true in the sense of the covenant of works, where one sin undoes us forever, but it is also true in the evangelical covenant. Thus, one sin allowed with full consent of heart makes void the gospel covenant, as one article not consented to annuls the whole treaty and agreement between us and God. It is not consistent with sincerity that we should bring down the gospel covenant to allow any one sin.
4. From the damage and mischief that it does to our souls. One sin keeps up the devil's interest; it is like a nest egg, left there to

draw a new temptation. You continue his empire in you; this is his great design, to keep a part. Conscience begins to work, they must have something; all then that he pleads for is but a part, and he knows that will bring the whole; as Pharaoh would have a pawn, either their flocks, herds, or children, that this might bring them back again. One sin reserved gives Satan an interest; one leak in the ship, though all the rest be stopped, if that be neglected, will sink it in time.

Use. Let us lay this branch also to heart. There is usually something wherein we would be excused and expect favour. We all have a tender part of our soul and loathe that it should be touched; some vain fashions, customs, or ways, and outgoings of soul, which we are unwilling to leave, though we have often suffered for them.

Consider, it is not consistent with your obedience and your love for God, nor with the power of grace in your hearts, to allow any false way. Herod did many things, yet perished for all that. A man may do many things that are good, upon sin's account. When you allow any one thing, it is only to hide and feed your lusts with greater pretence; so many religious things may be fuel for lusts, as well as carnal comforts. It is not in the interest of the flesh or indwelling corruption that men should have no religion; sin cannot be served in such a clean way unless there is something done in compliance with God's will, under some disguise or conformity to the will of God. Say then, Shall I do and suffer so many things in vain? Bring your hearts thus to hate every false way.

Thirdly, This is a part and fruit of true wisdom.

1. That this is a chief part of wisdom and understanding, to hate every false way, appears from Job 28:28, 'The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding.'

As much as we hate sin, so much we have of spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding. Certainly, to hate sin is wisdom; I prove it from the nature of sin. All disobedience is the greatest folly that can be in the world; and therefore, if to sin is to act foolishly, to hate sin is to be wise; and not to have understanding is certainly a fruit of folly, for a man to do that which will condemn himself, if ever he comes to himself. Now, when a man comes to himself, as when he dies or repents, oh! how will his heart condemn and reproach him for the vanity of his worldly course when he is filled with his own ways! Especially repentance, which is a coming to ourselves. As a man when he has slept off his drunkenness and excess, and begins to look back upon his follies committed under that distemper; such is repentance, it is an after-wisdom, and therefore it argues that there was imprudence and inconsideration in the things we repent of, and therefore we condemn ourselves. That is folly which gratifies those that are our utter enemies. Now sin gratifies the devil, who seeks our ruin: he 'goes about, seeking whom he may devour,' 1 Peter 5:8. You please him who seeks your utter destruction; and will you grieve God and please the devil? That is folly which brings no disadvantage upon him whom you disobey, but upon you it brings the greatest mischief imaginable. God is not hurt by your sins; He is above our injury: Proverbs 9:12, 'If you be wise, you shall be wise for yourself; but if you scorn, you alone shall bear it.' There is no hurt done to God; all the hurt is to our own souls: Proverbs 8:36, 'He that sins against me, wrongs his own soul; and he that hates me, loves death.' Every sinner is his own murderer and his own destroyer. All those arrows we shoot up against heaven, they fall down with more violence upon our own heads. That is folly for a man to hazard a jewel for a trifle, to stake his soul, and heaven, and eternal happiness, against a little flesh-pleasing and carnal

satisfaction: Jonah 2:8, 'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies.' Poor fleeting comforts, lying vanities, to follow after, and forsake their own mercy; that is, all that happiness which might have been their own. A sinner is a mad gambler, who throws away the kingdom of heaven at every cast for a little momentary short delight and vain contentment. That is folly to break with Him upon whom our all depends, our life, being, comfort, happiness; so does sin make us break with God: Isaiah 59:2, 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God.' Well then, if sin is to act foolishly, to depart from sin, this is wisdom, this is understanding. Certainly, he that provides against the greatest mischief escapes the greatest danger; he is the wise man, and not he that provides against temporal inconveniences only, such as poverty and disgrace. He that escapes sin, escapes hell, the wrath of God, the extremest misery that can befall a poor creature: Proverbs 15:24, 'The way of the wise is above, to avoid hell beneath;' and therefore it is a high point of wisdom to hate sin.

2. As it is a high point of understanding, so it is a fruit and effect of understanding. According to the degree of understanding that we have, so will our hatred of sin be; for he says, 'Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.' To prove this by two reasons:—

[1.] Our affections follow our apprehensions. There is no way to come to the heart but by the mind, by the understanding. Just as there is no way to come to the bowels to purge our distempers but by the mouth, stomach, and other passages that lead to the bowels, so there is no way to come to the heart and affections but by the understanding. Knowledge begets all other affections, those which belong to choice and pursuit, or those that belong to slight or

aversation. Those that belong to choice and pursuit, desire, delight. There is no desire for that which is unknown; so in those things that belong to slight and aversation, those affections, be it grief or shame for sin already committed, or fear or hatred that sin may not be committed. Grief or shame: Jeremiah 31:19, 'After I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.' It is light which humbles, and the soul is affected according to the sight it has of things; or go to those affections which serve to prevent the commission of sin, as hatred and fear. Hatred in the text; a good understanding goes before, a thorough hatred will follow.

[2.] Second reason: when the mind is filled with truths, and has acquired a good stock of knowledge by God's precepts, then it will be checking and urging the soul to caution against sin; and therefore the more understanding you get by God's precepts, the more are you warned and reminded of things: Psalm 119:11, 'I have hidden thy word in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.' When the word has laid up in the heart a good stock of knowledge, there will be one thought or another that will rise up and defy all temptations wherewith you are assaulted: Ephesians 6:17, 'Take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' In the spiritual conflict, we need weapons not only defensive but offensive; not only the shield of faith, but the sword of the Spirit, that we may destroy and slay sin, withstand temptation, and chase away Satan from us. What is this sword of the Spirit? The word of God. The more seasonable relief, the more fresh thoughts you have to withstand temptations which are apt to come upon you: Proverbs 6:21, 22, 'Bind them upon thine heart: when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.' This will always be urging him to duty and warning him of his danger.

A word of use. (1.) Get understanding; (2.) Never count yourselves to understand anything but as you increase in hatred of sin.

1. Get understanding. Partly—(1.) Because there are many false ways you will never discern without much understanding. There are many false ways that are disguised and represented under the show of good, and we are easily ensnared unless we have light to choose our way: 1 Corinthians 2:8, 'Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' A man will be carried on with a great deal of life and activity in a way contrary to God: Acts 26:9, 'I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.' Oh! the tyranny and madness of an erring conscience and an ignorant zealot! What a ready prey a man is to Satan, and is carried headlong into destructive courses when he has more zeal and earnestness of spirit than knowledge to guide him! How will he stumble and dash upon things that are very contrary to the will of God. (2.) If they can discern them, they shall not have a heart and skill to remedy them without understanding. We shall not have a heart, for light will be urging, calling upon us, reminding us of our duty, warning us of danger; whereas otherwise we shall go on tamely, like an ox to the slaughter, and like a fool to the correction of the stocks. We shall not have this restless importunity of conscience, which is a great restraint of sin; and then we shall not have the skill, for all is misapplied and misconceived by an ignorant spirit, for the whole business of his religion is making cordials instead of purges, and potions instead of antidotes, catching at promises when threatenings belong to him, lulling his soul asleep with new strains of grace, when he should awaken himself to duty.

2. Never count yourselves to have profited in anything until your hearts are awakened to a further hatred of sin. Christians! they are but notions; it is not saving knowledge unless it is in order to practice; men have no understanding who do not have this active and rooted enmity against sin: Psalm 111:10, 'A good understanding have all that do his commandments;' they that hate sin more, and are more weary of corruption. He is made wiser by the word that is made better by it. It is not the talker against, but the hater of iniquity that is the wise man. If wisdom enters upon the heart, and breaks out in our practice, by that is our thriving in knowledge to be measured: 1 John 2:3, 'Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.'

This was God's scope in giving the word, not to test men's wits, who could most sharply conceive, or their memories, who could most faithfully retain, or their eloquence, who could most nimbly discourse; but of the sincerity of the heart, who could most obediently submit to the will of God. Jeremiah 22:16, when he had spoken of hating sin and doing good, 'Was not this to know me? saith the Lord.' This is to know God, to hate sin. Outward things were not made for sight only, but for use, as herbs, plants, and stars. So our reason, and the scriptures the Lord has given us; it is not only for sight, but for use, that we may be wise to salvation; not that we may please ourselves with acute notions about the things of God, but seriously set our hearts to practise.

The fourth thing in this general point is that this wisdom and understanding are gotten by God's precepts. Mark, 'I hate every false way.' Why? 'Because by thy precepts I get understanding.' Where do we obtain it? By studying God's word. Romans 3:20, 'By the law is the knowledge of sin.' How is the knowledge of sin by the law? Three ways: according to the nature of the sin, according to who is the

sinner, and according to the guilt and dreadful state of those that lie in a state of sin. So the knowledge of sin, that is, the nature of it, where it lives, where it reigns, and what will be the effects of it, all this knowledge is by the law.

1. By the law is the knowledge of sin, *quoad naturam peccati*. There are many things we should never know but by the law of God, though we have some general notions of good and evil. Romans 7:7, says the apostle, 'I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.' Those first stirrings and secret lingerings of heart and inclinations to that which is contrary to the will of God, that they go before all consent of will, and all delight, these things we could never discern by the light of nature.
2. *Quoad subjectum*, what is the sinner, and who is guilty of it? So Romans 7:9, 'I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' He saw his lost, miserable, undone condition by the law of God. The acts of sin are discovered by the word of God; it discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart, Hebrews 4:12, and the state of sin; our natural face, the condition wherein we are, is to be seen in this glass.
3. *Quoad reatum et magnitudinem peccati*, what will be the effects of it? Romans 5:20, 'The law entered, that the offence might abound.' Therefore the law was given, that it might work a deep sense of the evil consequences of sin, and what wrath man was bound over to for violating the righteous law. The law represents the heinous nature of sin as it is ἀνομία, a transgression of the law, as it strikes at God's being or at God's authority, seeks to jostle him out of the throne; as it contradicts his sovereignty,

and plucks the sceptre out of his hand and the crown from his head, and makes men say, 'Who is lord over us?' As if we had nothing to guide us but our own lusts. The word of God discovers this pride of heart, and then the manifold mischiefs of sin are discovered; we get this understanding by the word. It is better to know these mischiefs of sin by the threatenings of the word than by our own bitter experience. It is sin that separates from God and renders us incapable of all blessings.

Use 1: Study yourselves, and take a view of the case and state of your souls by the glass of the word; see what you gain by every reading, hearing, every time you converse with it, what is given out to convince you of sin, or awaken your soul against sin.

Use 2: When you consult with the word, beg the light of the Spirit, which is the only lively and efficacious guide. The apostle speaks of knowing things in the evidence and 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power,' 1 Corinthians 2:4. There is the same demonstration of the Spirit. There is a manifest difference between the evidence of reason and arguments held out from a natural understanding, and the illumination or the demonstration of the Spirit. There are many who may have a full knowledge of the letter and the sense of the words, as they lie open to the evidence of reason, yet be without the light and power of those truths, for that is a fruit of the demonstration of the Spirit, the lively light of the Holy Ghost that goes along with the word.