

From John Owen's Exposition on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.
(Commentary of Chapter Five, verses 7-11)

I

"In all the sins of men God chiefly regards the principle, that is, the heart, or what is in it."

"They do err, saith he, "in their hearts."

"The heart he principally requires in our obedience, and this he principally regards in our disobedience."

"My son, saith he, give me thine heart;" and "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me."

"When the heart is upright, as to its general frame, God will bear with many failings, many miscarriages. And when it is false, thousands of duties are of no esteem with him."

"If once a man begins justly to suspect that the hearts of them with whom he hath to do, are not upright with him, but false and guileful, let them pretend what they will, and act what they please, all is utterly disregarded and despised."

II

"The sinful actions of men against those who deal with them in the name, and according to the will of God, are principally against himself. The people chode with Moses; but when God came to call them to an account, he says, the strove with himself. The people chode with Moses; but when God came to call them to an account, he says, they strove with him and provoked him. So Moses told the people to take them off from their vain pretences, and coverings of unbelief, Exodus 29:2, "The whole congregation murmured against Moses and Aaron." But, saith he, ver. 4, "The Lord heareth your murmurings, which ye murmur against him, and what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but the Lord." As if he had said, mistake not yourselves, it is God and not us, that you have to do with in this matter. What you suppose you speak only against us, is indeed directly, though not immediately, spoken against God. And under the New Testament, our Saviour applies this rule to the dispensers of the gospel, Luke 10:16. Saith he, He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and him that sent me To violate the authority of an ambassador among men is always esteemed as the dishonor of him by whom he is employed; especially if it be done to him in the discharge of his office. Nor are kings or states ever more highly provoked, than when an injury or an affront is done to their ambassadors. according to the light of nature, what is done immediately against a representative as such, is done directly and intentionally against the person represented. The enmity of men is against God himself, against his way, his work, his will, which his ambassadors do but declare. But these things in themselves are out of their reach, they cannot hurt them, nor will they own directly an opposition ot them. Therefore are pretences invented Agustin those who are employed by God; under their covert they may execute their rage against God himself; but he sees that they are all but coverts for their lusts and obstinacy; that himself is intended while his messengers are attacked, and he esteems it so. Let the messengers of God take heed, that they neither act nor speak anything but what they have sufficient warrant from him for. It is an impious and a dangerous thing to affix God's name to our own imaginations. God will not put his seal of approbation, unless we stand in his counsels, and be found in the ways of his will."

III

"When the provocations of unbelief come to their height, there is no room for repentance either on the part of God or the sinner. Not for the sinner; since men, for the most part after this, have no thought of repenting. Either they see themselves irrecoverable, and so grow desperate; or stupidly senseless and lie down in security."

"The error of the heart in preferring the ways of sin, before obedience with its rewards, is the root of all great provoking sins and rebellions against God. Many sins are the effects of men's impetuous lusts and corruptions; many there are hurried into by the power and efficacy of temptations; most are produced by both these in conjunction; but as for great provocations, such as carry in them apostasy and rebellion against God, they proceed from a deceiving and a deceived heart. There are many noisome and hurtful errors in the world; but this is the great soul ruining error, when the heart is practically corrupted, to prefer sin and its wages before obedience and its reward."

"In brief, when the directive part of the mind is diverted from attending to the reason of the things proposed; when it is corrupted by false pretences imposed on it by the corrupt lusts and affections, which have possessed the imagination with their objects, and their present deceivableness. When the accusing judging faculty is baffled, slighted, and at best partially silenced, as wearied with doing its work in vain, and accustomed to repulses; when in its reflective acts, whereby it should receive impressions from its own self-accusations and reproofs, are made obtuse, hard, and senseless, not regarding what is spoken in it or to it; and when by these means carnal affections bear sway in the soul, impetuously inclining it to seek after their satisfaction; they is the heart under the power of the error we speak of, that error which is the principle of all great provocations and ruinous apostasies from God.

"For, this heart error sets all the lusts of the soul at liberty to seek after their satisfaction in sin; makes it slight and contemn all the promises annexed to obedience, and disregard the threatenings that lie against sin; and so prepares it for the utmost rebellion. And of all errors let us take heed of this practical error of the heart. It is not men's being orthodox or sound in their opinions that will relieve them, if they are under the power of this great fundamental error. And it is a matter to be lamented, to see how men will contest for their opinions under the name of truth, and cast all manner of severe reflections on those that oppose them, whilst themselves err in their hearts and know not the ways of God. And this is a frame which of all others God most abhorreth. For when men pretend to be for him, and are really against him, as all such are, shall not the Searcher of hearts find it out? orthodox liars, swearers, drunkards, adulterers, oppressors, persecutors, are an unspeakable burden to the patience of God."

Owen, Hebrews Commentary chapter 5:7-11.