

The Mischief of Sin

The Mischief of Sin

by
Thomas Watson

Edited by
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Foreword by
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Foreword

Rev. Don Kistler, publisher of the Soli Deo Gloria line, sent me a manuscript of this wonderful work when he learned I had recently completed my own book on sin (*The Vanishing Conscience*). I had been contemplating for weeks the biblical doctrines of human depravity and divine holiness. My mind and heart were full of thoughts about the wretchedness of the human heart and the richness of God's grace.

I was therefore naturally eager to read this book—but unprepared for the sumptuous soul-feast it offered. Reading it reminded me once again how seriously the Puritans dealt with Scripture, how clearly they thought, how straightforwardly they preached, how sensibly they presented their doctrine, and how wonderfully they could convey heavenly truth through the medium of earthly language. The book enriched and expanded my own understanding of sin and grace beyond anything I could have anticipated.

Thomas Watson was without equal as a Puritan writer. His works are all practical studies of Christian doctrine. In the words of Charles Spurgeon, "Watson was one of the most concise, racy, illustrative, and suggestive of those eminent divines who made the Puritan age the Augustan period of evangelical literature. There is a happy union of sound doctrine, heart-searching experience and practical wisdom in all his

works.”¹ Watson’s best known work, *A Body of Divinity*, is one of the finest of all classic Puritan works. *The Mischief of Sin*, though perhaps not as well known, shows with equal clarity why Watson remains one of the best loved and most significant writers of his age.

Watson is a sort of Puritan Melchizedek. His lineage, as well as the dates of his birth and death, are not precisely known. Yet he emerged out of the Puritan era to write several powerful works that continue to influence the minds and hearts of readers.

This book is one of the most difficult to obtain of all Watson’s works—until now, that is. The church owes a great debt of gratitude to Don Kistler and Soli Deo Gloria for finding one copy in a library and making it available once again in this beautifully designed edition.

Thomas Watson’s study of sin is profound, convicting, thought-provoking, and filled with rich spiritual insight. It distills the best attributes of Puritan writing. As devotional as it is doctrinal, as practical as it is biblically sound, and as delightful as it is convicting, this book cuts to the very heart of the biblical issues regarding sin. You cannot read it and remain indifferent toward sin in your own life.

In stark contrast to the prevailing modern attitude toward sin, Thomas Watson shows clearly that every sin is an indefensible transgression against God’s holiness. He exposes the unutterable vileness of all our spiritual failings and refuses to offer excuses or rationalizations to soothe human pride or mollify the sinful ego. In

¹ Charles H. Spurgeon. “Brief Memoir of Thomas Watson” in Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1958), vii.

fact, pride itself he denounces as a heinous sin.

This is such a departure from the contemporary tendency to treat evildoers as victims that you may be shocked by the contrast. But Watson presents his case so biblically and convincingly that it is impossible to argue against him.

Against the dark backdrop of sin and the utter hopelessness of the human condition, Watson displays the shining jewel of divine grace. He points to Jesus Christ as the only answer to human despair, and counsels sinners to confess their sin and seek God's mercy through His Son, Jesus Christ. Unfolding the most sublime aspects of biblical truth, Watson shows that where sin abounds, grace abounds even more.

You might be tempted to think that a book on sin must be heavy, somber reading. But instead you will find this book a tremendous uplift as your soul is infused with a holy hatred of sin and a new appreciation for the boundless riches of God's grace.

Few books have moved me as this one did. I thank God that after so many years on a library shelf, it will now be available to a new generation of readers.

John MacArthur
Sun Valley, CA
February 1994

The Epistle to the Reader

CHRISTIAN READER,

The excess of impiety which has broken down the banks of common civility and modesty at first led my thoughts to these ensuing subjects. The spirits of men are leavened with atheism, and their lives are stained with debauchery. I do not know what to call them but baptized heathens. Not long since, there was a complaint that the springs grew low. I am sure the floods of sin are risen, even to a deluge. There is a generation among us of whom I may say, as Oecumenius, they militate against religion. They are so prodigiously profane that they esteem the Bible a fable and would jeer all holiness out of the world. The Prince of the Air now works in the children of disobedience, Ephesians 2:2.

In our Savior's time, many men's bodies were possessed with the devil. But now their souls are possessed. One is possessed with a blasphemous devil, another with a spiteful devil, another with a drunken devil. This is one great sign of the approach of the last day: iniquity shall abound, Matthew 24:12. Men's lusts grown fierce and insatiable and, like imps, lie sucking them. But O how dire and tremendous will the effects of sin be! My text says, "They were brought low for their iniquity." Sin is such a trade that whoever follows is sure to break. What did Achan get by his wedge of gold? It was a wedge to cleave asunder his soul from God. What

did Judas get by his treason? He purchased a halter. What did King Ahaz get by worshiping the gods of Damascus? They were the ruin of him and all Israel, 2 Chronicles 28:23. Sin is first comical and then tragical. I may fitly apply those words of Solomon to sin, Proverbs 7:26. "She hath cast down many wounded." O what a harvest of souls is the devil likely to have! Isaiah 5:14, "Hell hath enlarged itself." It is fain to make room for its guests. 'Tis matter of grief to think that the dragon should have so many followers and the Lamb so few.

Cyprian brings in the devil insulting Christ thus: "As for my followers, I never died for them as Christ has died for His. I never promised them as great a reward as Christ has done to His; yet I have greater numbers than He, and my followers venture more for me than His do for Him."

Some sin out of ignorance, yet even the blind can find the way to hell. But most sin out of choice. They know the dish forbidden, but they lust after it, though in the day they eat thereof, they shall surely die.

My design in this small treatise is to give check to sinners and sound a religious retreat in their ears, to make them return from the hot pursuit of their impieties. If notwithstanding all admonitions they will run counter to the Word, and prostitute themselves to their sordid lusts, they are suicide, and their blood will be upon their own head. What remains but that God should say in anger, as in Zachariah 11:9, "That that dieth, let it die, and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off."

I have, at the request of some friends, made this discourse (imparted formerly to my own family) pub-

lic. I acknowledge it is not inflated with rhetorical huffing and puffing, embellished with flowers of eloquence. St. Paul's preaching was not with enticing words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power, 1 Corinthians 2:4. Plainness is ever best in beating down sin. When a wound festers, it is fitter to lance it than to embroider it with silk or lay vermilion upon it.

Reader, that God will bless these few meditations to you, and make them operative upon your heart, shall be the prayer of him who is your friend, studious of your eternal welfare,

Thomas Watson