



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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Ninth Sermon on 2 Thessalonians Chapter Two

By Thomas Manton

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. — 2 Thes. 2:11,12.

WE have considered the sin of those seduced by Antichrist; now the judgment. It is twofold:—(1.) Delusion in this world, ver. 11; (2.) Damnation in the next, ver. 12.

1. Delusion in this world; where take notice of three things:—(1.) The author of it: *God shall send it*; (2.) The degree or nature of the punishment: *strong delusion*; (3.) The issue of it: *that they should believe a lie*.

2. Their punishment in the next world: *that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*; where take notice:—(1.) Of the terribleness of it, it is no less than everlasting damnation: **kriJwsi** for **katakriJwsi**; (2.) The justice and equity of it: ‘They believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.’

1. I begin with their judgment in this world: ‘For this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie.’

Doct. That by God’s just judgment there is an infatuation upon the followers and abettors of Antichrist, that they swallow the grossest errors to their own destruction.

To clear this I shall speak:—(1.) To the author; (2.) The degree or kind of the punishment; (3.) The effect and issue.

1. As to the author: *penyei autoiVo QeoV*. Here a difficulty ariseth; for God is not, and cannot be, the author of sin. He that is essentially good cannot be the cause of evil; and he that is *ultor peccati*, the avenger of sin, cannot be *auctor peccati*, the author of it. If he should cause man to sin, how will his punishment of it be just? I answer—As it is a sin, God hath no hand in it; but as it is a punishment of sin, God hath to do in it.

To clear this to you, consider—

[1.] He that is the supreme Lord and Governor of his creatures is also their Judge; for legislation and judgment belong to the same authority. And therefore God is called sometimes our King, and sometimes our Judge: Gen. 18:25, ‘Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ Rom. 3:5,6, ‘Is God unrighteous? how then shall he judge the world?’ That is his office and prerogative.

[2.] God’s way of judging for the present is either external or internal. As, for instance, there are two acts of judicature—reward and punishment. In rewarding, God’s external government is seen in dispensing outward blessings to his people, as the fruit of their obedience: Micah 2:7, ‘Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?’ His promises speak good, and as fulfilled do good, yield protection, maintenance, and such a measure of outward prosperity as supporteth and maintaineth them during their service. David owned God’s dealing with him in this sort: Ps. 119:56, ‘This I had, because I kept thy precepts.’ So as to his internal government, in giving them peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost: Rom. 14:17, ‘For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;’ Prov. 3:17, ‘Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.’ These are the internal rewards of obedience. And so also God often rewardeth grace with grace; as Isa. 58:13,14, ‘If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thy own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it;’ Ps. 31:24, ‘Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.’ Proficiency in the same grace is a reward of the several acts and exercise of it. So in punishing, sometimes he useth the way of external government, by the terrible judgments exercised upon men for the breach of his law: Rom. 1:18, ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the

truth in unrighteousness:’ Heb. 2:2, ‘Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;’ sometimes the way of internal government, by terrors of conscience, or punishing sin committed with sin permitted. Both these parts are seen in punishing both the godly and the wicked; as, for instance, in the godly, in the way of external government: 1 Cor. 11:32, ‘But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.’ In the way of internal government, the lesser penal withdrawals of the Spirit, which God’s people find in themselves after some sins and neglects of grace, are grievous. But the judgments upon the souls of the ungodly are most dreadful, when the sinner is either terrified or stupefied; terrified by horrors of conscience: 1 Cor. 15:56, ‘The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law;’ or stupefied by being given up to their own hearts’ counsels: Ps. 81:12, ‘So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.’ So that the sinner is left dull and senseless and past feeling: Eph. 4:18, ‘Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.’ By the first, by horrors of conscience, they are made to feel God’s displeasure at the courses they walk in; but when that is long despised, and men sin on still, then the other and more terrible judgment cometh; for the giving up a sinner to his own lusts, and his losing all remorse, is the last and sorest judgment on this side hell.

[3.] As to God’s internal judgments, the scripture chiefly insists upon two parts of this internal dispensation—blindness of mind and hardness of heart; they usually go together. Blindness of mind is spoken of, John 12:39,40, ‘Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.’ All passages are obstructed whereby the word might enter and work conversion unto God. It was God laid this punishment of blindness upon them.

Hardness of heart, in that famous instance, Exod. 4:21, ‘I will harden Pharaoh’s heart’ God doth not make them that see, blind, nor them that are soft, hard; but leaveth them to their own prejudice, obstinacy, and unpersuadableness, and that when highly provoked. The former is under our consideration.

[4.] To understand God’s concurrence as a judge, we must not say too much of it or too little. We must not say too much of it, lest we leave a stain and blemish upon the divine glory. God infuseth no sin, no blindness nor hardness, into the hearts of men; all influences from heaven are good: he conveyeth no deceit into the minds of men

immediately, nor doth he command or persuade men to oppose the truth. Nor doth he impel or excite their inward propensions so to do. All this belongeth not to God, but either to man or Satan. Nor must we say too little; as, for instance, God is not said to blind or harden by bare prescience or foresight, that they will be blinded or hardened; because God foreseeth other things, and yet they are not ascribed unto God; as that men will kill, or steal, or do wrong, and yet God is not said to kill or steal, as he is said to blind and harden; and therefore there is a difference between God's concurrence to this effect and other sins. Nor only by way of manifestation, as if this were all the sense, that in the course of his providence God doth in the issue declare how blind and hard they are. That some other thing is meant by it is seen in the prayers by which we deprecate this heavy judgment. As when the saints pray, Isa. 63:17, 'Lord, harden not our hearts from thy fear;' or David, Ps. 119:19, 'Lord, hide not thy commandments from me.' They mean not thus, Lord, show not to the world how hard and blind I am, but cure my blindness and hardness of heart; keep back this judgment from me. Again, we must not say that all that God doth is a bare, naked, and idle permission, as if it happened besides his will and intention, and God had no more to do in it than a man that standeth on the shore and seeth a ship ready to be drowned he might have helped it, but permitted it. No; besides all this, there is not a bare permission only, but a permissive intention and a judicial sentence, which is seconded by an active providence. Many things concur to the blinding of the mind and hardening of the heart, all which God willeth, but justly. The wicked take occasions of their own accord to blind and harden themselves. Satan tempteth of his own malice, but all this could not be done with effect and success without the will of God. There is a supreme power overruling, and ordering all that is done in the world.

[5] God's concurrence may be stated by these things:—(1.) His withdrawing or taking away the light and direction of his Holy Spirit: Deut. 29:4, 'The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear, unto this day.' Now, when God lets them loose to their own hearts' counsels, then they fall into damnable errors. A greyhound held in by a slip or collar runneth violently after the hare when it is in sight; as soon as the slip and collar are taken away, the restraint is gone, and his inbred disposition carrieth him. So men that are greedy of worldly things are powerfully drawn into errors countenanced by the world, when God taketh off the restraint of his grace, and giveth them up to their own lusts. Now herein God is not to be blamed, for he is debtor to none, and the grace of his Spirit is forfeited by their not receiving the love of the truth. He is so far from being bound to give grace, that he seemeth to be bound in justice to withdraw what is given already by men's

wickedness and ingratitude. Voluntary blindness bringeth penal blindness; and because men will not see, they shall not see. And when they wink hard, and shut their eyes against the light of the gospel, it is just with God in this manner to smite them with blindness: and since they had no love to the truth, they are given up to errors and deceits. And because they despise the holy scriptures, and dote on vain fables, and would not take up a course of sound godliness and holiness, he suffereth them to weary themselves with sundry superstitions.

(2.) Not only by desertion, but by tradition, delivering them up to the power of Satan: 2 Cor: 4:4, 'The God of this world hath blinded their eyes.' Satan, as the executioner of God's curse, worketh upon the corrupt nature of man, and deceiveth them. It is said, 1 Chron. 21:1, 'Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel;' but it is said, 2 Sam. 24:1, 'And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.' How shall we reconcile these two places? God gave him over to be tempted by Satan—by God as a judge, by Satan as an executioner. Temptations to sin come immediately from the devil, but they are governed by God for holy and righteous ends. So again, 1 Kings 22:22, the evil spirit had leave and commission to be a lying spirit in Ahab's prophets: 'Go forth and do so, and thou shalt prevail with him.' There is a permissive intention, not an affective. When they grieve his Spirit, God withdraweth and leaveth them to the evil spirit, who works by their fleshly and worldly lusts, and then they are easily seduced who prefer worldly things before heavenly.

(3.) There is an active providence which raiseth such instruments and propoundeth such objects as, meeting with a naughty heart, do sore blind it. (1.) For instruments: Job 12:16, 'The deceived and the deceiver are his.' Take it in worldly, or take it in religious, matters, man's deceiving others, or being deceived by others, is of God; for it is said, both are his; not only as his creatures, but subject to the government and disposal of providence, how and whom they shall deceive, and how far they shall deceive. So Ezek. 14:9, 'If the prophet be deceived that hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived him.' This is a great transaction in the world, a sad judgment, not to be cavilled but trembled at. For man's ingratitude, God raiseth up false prophets to seduce them that delight in lies rather than in the truths of God. (2.) For objects: wicked instruments varnish and dress up this cause with all the art they can to make it a powerful deceit, and then it is befriended and countenanced by the powers of the world, and so easily prevaieth with them who are moved either with worldly hopes or fears, and have debauched their conscience by worldly respects. God saith, Jer. 6:21, 'I will lay stumbling-blocks before this people.' If we will find the sin, God

will find the occasion. If Judas hath a mind to sell his Master, he shall not want chapmen to bargain with him. The priests were consulting to destroy Christ at the same time that the devil put it into his heart, Mat. 26:3, being alarmed by the miracle of raising Lazarus. Birds and fishes are easily deceived with such baits as they greedily catch at, so God by his just vengeance ordereth such occurrences and occasions as take with a naughty and carnal heart.

2. The degree or kind of the punishment, *energeian pl anhv*; I render it ‘strong delusion,’ or ‘the efficacy of error;’ that is, such delusion as shall have a most efficacious force to deceive them. The prevalency and strength of the delusion is seen in two things:—(1.) The absurdity of the errors; (2.) The obstinacy wherewith they cleave to them.

[1] The absurdity of the errors. I will instance in three things—False image worship and bread worship, invocation of saints, and supererogation of works.

(1.) Adoration of images. Idolaters are usually represented as sottish; as Ps. 115:8, ‘They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.’ He had described the senselessness of the idols before. They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; noses have they, but they smell not, &c. Now as idols are senseless, so the idolaters are brutish; that is, the makers, worshippers, and servers of them, are as void of true wisdom as the images are of sense and motion: Isa. 44:18, ‘They have not known, nor understood; for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand.’ There is a fatal obduration upon them all along there. Their senselessness is set forth from ver. 9 to ver. 20; they that worship the work of their own hands are themselves but stocks and stones, being blinded by the just judgment of God. If it be said this is meant of the idols of the Gentiles, not of the images of God, and Christ, and the Virgin Mary, and saints; still God will not be worshipped by an idol, and there is no difference between the images of the papists and the heathens, but only in the name.

(2.) Another thing that I will instance in is the invocation of saints—a sottish error, and respect paid to them that are so far out of the reach of our commerce; and a thing not only without precept, promise, or precedent in scripture, but also against scripture, which always directeth to God by one Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. The scripture saith, Go to God if you lack anything, and they say, Go to the saints; if they say, not as authors of grace, or any divine blessing, but as intercessors, though that be not true, yet that derogateth from Christ, whose office it is to intercede

with the Father. So that this is to put the creature in the place of God. But it is not only contrary to scripture, but the very motion and inclination of the Spirit when he stirreth us or moveth us to pray: Rom. 8:15, 'Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father;' Gal. 4:6, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father;' he inclineth us to come to God, and yet this they will leave.

(3.) A third error that I shall instance in is, that man may supererogate, not only merit for himself, but lay in an overplus to increase the treasure of the church; when the scripture telleth us that our best works are imperfect, yea, polluted; and our Lord himself hath told us that 'when ye have done all, say ye, We are unprofitable servants,' Luke 17:10. But what will not men believe that can believe these things? There are other absurdities as gross as these, but this sufficeth for a taste.

[2.] The obstinacy wherewith they cleave to them. Nothing will reclaim them; not scripture, nor reason, nor evidence of truth, but they still cry the opinion of the church, and the faith of their fore-fathers, and will invent any paltry shift and distinction, rather recede from anything than once admit that the church hath erred; like the obstinate Jews in Christ's time, that denied apparent matter of fact, John 8:33, 'We were never in bondage to any man,' though they were in Egypt and Babylon, and were now under servitude and the power of the Romans. Though we prove they have erred, and do err, still the church cannot err; or rather, like the elder Jews in the prophet Jeremiah's time, Jer. 44:16-19, 'As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever goeth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings to her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, and our kings, and our princes: for then we had plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we have left off burning incense to the queen of heaven, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and the famine.' Such sottish obstinacy is there in men that dote upon their own invented superstitious and idolatrous services, custom, antiquity, practice of their ancestors, the authority and usage of their great ones, their rulers, the generality of observance. This is their knot of arguments by which they confirm themselves; just as the papists plead for their superstitions at this day; and to make the mess more complete, they add the plenty and prosperity they enjoyed—what a merry world it was before the new gospel came in, when they had nothing but mass and matins; and all the calamities that have fallen out they impute not to their own sins, but to the gospel. Now, when a people are thus obstinate, and measure religion not by reasons of conscience, but the interests of the belly, it is a sign that they

are under the power of delusion, and error hath more efficacy with such corrupt minds than the truth.

[3.] The causes of it show the efficacy of error. (1.) The sinning of their learned to keep out all instructions, allowing the vulgar only prayers in a strange tongue, and the scriptures in no tongue, and teaching them implicitly to believe as the church believeth. When the Lord permitteth such guides to order the affairs of his church, his great judgment of hardening and stubbornness is upon them: Jer. 5:31, 'The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so.' (2.) When gain, interest, and ambition move them thereunto; as those masters in the Acts exclaim against Paul and Silas, when they saw their hope of gain was gone, Acts 16:19-21, 'These men do exceedingly trouble the city;' and Demetrius, Acts 19:25, 'Ye know by this craft we have our wealth.' This is a tender point to touch interest, and when once it cometh to this, they will proceed in their folly, and defend one falsehood with another; for the great idol of the world is gain or love of money: 1 Tim, 6:10, 'For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith.' It were a happiness if such kind of arguments did only prevail with us to embrace a religion that might convince others that it was religion itself that we loved; that our interests did not keep others from their duty, and that we could embrace a religion for the goodness of it, even to our own loss. (3.) Another cause is pride of themselves, and prejudice to others; lest they should seem to be in an error and wrong, and to learn of a few novelists—shall they teach them? No; rather they will remain ignorant still. Alas! it is not easy to strike sail, and submit to the teaching of those whom they hate; therefore men continue those first prejudices they have imbibed, and will rather live and die in their errors than give God glory by a submission to truth, such a proud opinion and conceit have they of their own learning and knowledge. This cause also conduceth to make the resolution more strong—pre-engagement in a contrary way. It is disgraceful to change; men think it is taken notice of as a great wonder, Acts 6:7, 'that a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.' But such wonders are not wrought every day; they of all men are most pertinacious; but God can of stones raise up children to Abraham. Now, would to God these causes of error were only found in the antichristian estate. They are everywhere, but these cause strong delusion.

3. The issue and effect; that they should believe a lie. Two things must be explained:—, (1.) The object; {2.) The act.

[1.] The object: a lie; that is, either—(1.) False doctrines: 1 Tim. 4:2, ‘Speaking lies in hypocrisy,’ when palpable errors are taken for truths. A man given over by God to delusion will swallow the grossest errors and fictions, and that in matters dangerous and destructive to salvation. False doctrines are often called a lie in scripture, as opposite to the truth; and yet such things are received by those from whose parts the world could expect better things. (2.) False miracles in their legends. A man would wonder any should have the face to obtrude such ridiculous stories, and scandalous to religion, upon the world. (3.) False calumnies against those instruments whom God employed in the Reformation. Popery is a religion supported by lies; as that Calvin was a sodomite, and burnt in the shoulder at Noyon for that crime, and the Popish dean and chapter of that place have published his vindicate; that Luther was an incarnate devil, begotten by an *incubus*. I should weary you to rake in this dunghill; but I must close it with the general observation that antichristians will lie; some among them call them pious frauds, but they are diabolical forgeries.

[2] The act is, that they are given up to believe a lie. This must be applied to their erroneous doctrines, as common to them all; to their false miracles and calumnies; not to the inventors, but to the seduced, who swallow these things. All that oppose the truth do not go apparently against conscience, but being given up to the efficacy of error, they may believe that false religion wherein they live. Let us open the term *believe*. What is it to believe’ a thing? You may know by the Opposites. Now, opposite to faith there is—(1.) Doubtfulness, when men halt between two opinions: 1 Kings 18:21, ‘If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.’ This doubtfulness proceedeth from want of bringing the case to a trial and thorough hearing. (2.) Conjecture: Acts 26:28, almost persuaded— ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’ (3.) Opinion: Mat. 13:4, ‘Hath not root in himself, but dureth for a while,’ &c. (4.) Firm persuasion. They will censure nothing; for if of truth, John 6:69, ‘We believe and are sure,’ &c.; if of error, Acts 26:9, ‘I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.’ (5.) Resolved adherence. If to the truth, that is called ‘receiving the truth in the love of it;’ if to error, it is seen in men’s obstinacy and zeal suffering in it: 1 Kings 18:28, ‘Cutting themselves with knives and lances, till blood gushed out.’ Suffering for it; for a man may give his body to be burned for an error, a man may sacrifice a strong body to a stubborn mind: 1 Cor. 13:3, ‘Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth nothing.’ And persecuting the contrary: John 16:2, ‘They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.’ To apply this:—Many that live within the kingdom of

Antichrist, some are doubtful, some almost persuaded, some espouse the common prevailing opinions, others adhere to them with much false zeal and superstition; these are those who are given up to believe a lie.

Use 1. Information.

1. To show us the reason why so many learned men are captivated by Antichrist, and live yet in the popish religion, for this is a great scruple to many. The answer is ready: The Lord hath suffered them to be deluded by him whose coming is after the working of Satan in all power, &c.: Rev. 17:2, 'The inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.' It is an intoxication; the errors of that state are plausibly defended and supported by worldly interests. There is the witchery of worldly allurements, and the intoxicating wine of errors defended and owned within their bounds and places of their education and abode; so that men have seemed to lose their understandings, and not have that advisedness which well becomes a man. Possibly they may have doubts and checks of conscience, but the name of the church charmeth them, and worldly magnificence strangely inveigleth them. They may know that the religion professed by Protestants is sincere, holy, and saving; but being allured by licentiousness, or entangled by covetousness, or puffed up with pride, are loth to change, or are vanquished and astonished with fear of death, and other inconveniencies; or, it may be, do not use that advised and serious deliberation, which a matter of salvation requireth. Four causes may be given:—(1.) Self-confidence. God will show the folly of those that depend on the strength of their own wit: Prov. 3:5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths;' and therefore will bring to nought the wisdom of the wise, and destroy the understanding of the prudent, when it is lifted up against the interests of Christ's kingdom, 1 Cor. 1:19. (2.) Prejudice. The priests and scribes could readily tell that Christ was to be born in Bethlehem when Herod sent to consult them, Mat. 2:4-6; yet who more obstinate against him that was born there? They expected a temporal Messiah, and therefore could not see what they saw. What was apparent to children was a riddle to the rabbis. So they expect some open enemy of the church to attack it by power and force, little dreaming of a bishop, &c. (3.) Pride. Many of the Jewish church believed in Christ, but they did not profess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: John 12:42,43, 'They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' They loved not an hated opinion. Many may fear the Pope to be Antichrist, but pride and interest will not let them submit to a change. (4.) The judgment of God is the great cause that men do not, or will not, know Antichrist; God hath not given them eyes to see, as Christ was not

received in Jerusalem; the things of their peace were hid from their eyes: Luke 19:41, 42, ‘He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.’

2. It sheweth us that the prevalency of this wicked one should be no blemish to providence; for the permission of him is one of God’s dreadful providential dispensations. That it should have such success, it raiseth atheistical thoughts in weak spirits; yea, it is an offence to the godly, as it is a prejudice to the truth. But God hereby will show us:—(1.) That there are deceits and errors as well as truth in the world; much of choice, not chance; and lest we should think this an antiquated dispensation, to try the professors of the gospel who lived in the midst of pagans; it cometh nearer to us. But he that condemneth all religion on this account, judgeth one man for another’s crime, which is unjust—doth as foolishly as he that thinketh there is no true money because there are some counterfeit pieces. (2.) That God, in concomitancy with the gospel, will discover his dreadful justice as well as his wonderful mercy by it, that we may tremble whilst we admire grace. (3.) That it is a great evil to be deceivers or active promoters of delusions, and it will not wholly excuse us that we are deceived, Mat. 15:14. (4.) What need all serious Christians have to pray to God not to be led into temptation. Alas! what would become of us if left to ourselves in an hour of temptation? (5.) Let us fear to slight the grace offered. Among other threatenings, God threateneth to smite his people with blindness: Deut. 28:28, ‘The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart.’ (6.) What a ready way to destruction it is to measure religion by worldly interests. This bred Antichrist, kept him up in the world, and blindeth his seduced proselytes to this day.

Use 2. is caution to take heed of spiritual blindness and infatuation, that this judgment fall not upon us; that God leave us not to our own lusts, hearts, and counsels, without check and restraint. It may in part befall God’s people. What shall we do to avoid it? (1.) Take heed of sinning against light, either by sins of omission or commission James 4:17, ‘To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.’ They will find it to be sin in the sad effects. (2.) Take heed of hypocrisy in the profession of the truth. God oweth the hypocrite an ill turn, and seemeth to be engaged to discover him before the congregation: Prov. 26:26, ‘Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation;’ and usually it is by giving him up to some licentious practice or strong delusion, by which he breaketh the neck of his profession. (3.) Take heed of pride and carnal self-sufficiency. God may leave his people to dangerous falls when they make their bosom their oracle,

and think to carry all by the strength of their own understanding 2 Chron. 32:31, ‘God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.’ It is good to consult with God continually. (4.) Take heed of following the rabble: John 4:20, ‘Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship,’ &c. But learn to see by your own eyes, that you may have sure evidence you are in God’s way, Prov. 24:13,14.

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