



Sin: The Foundation of Holiness

An Exposition of J.C. Ryle's Foundational Doctrine



"He that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness, must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of sin. He must dig down very low if he would build high."

- J.C. Ryle

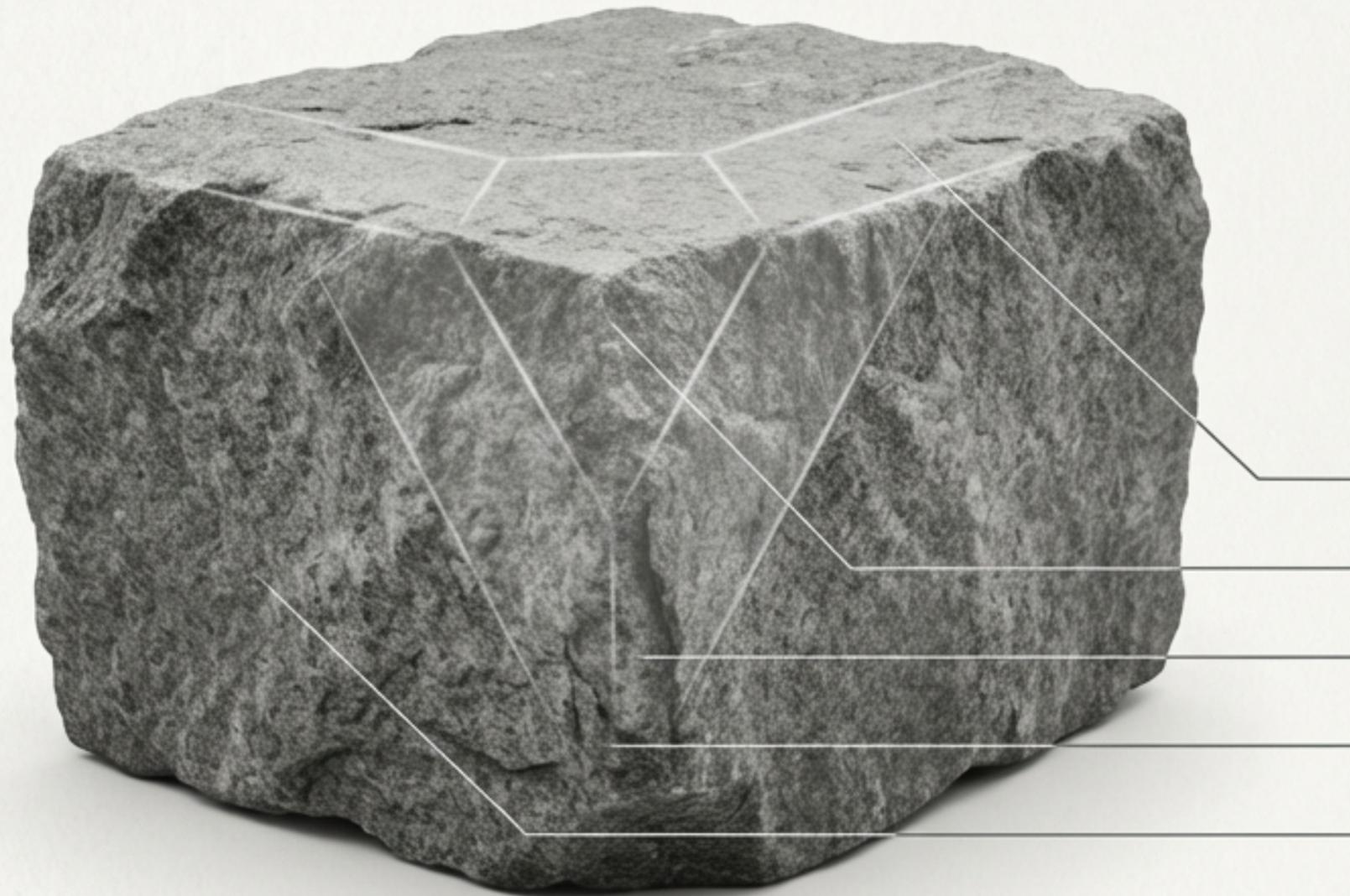
A Right Knowledge of Sin Is the Root of All Saving Christianity

- Without understanding the disease, the remedy has no meaning. Doctrines like justification, conversion, and sanctification become mere “words and names.”
- The first act of God in spiritual creation is to send “light” into the heart to reveal guilt, just as the first act of material creation in Genesis was “light.”
- Most errors, heresies, and false doctrines are traceable to dim or indistinct views of sin. If a man does not realize the danger of his soul’s disease, he will be content with false remedies.



PART 1: THE FOUNDATION - A DIAGNOSIS OF SIN

The Five Facets of a Vile Disease



To understand the problem of sin, we must examine it from every angle. J.C. Ryle's analysis reveals five interconnected facets that form a complete picture:

1. **Its Definition:** What is sin?
2. **Its Origin:** Where does it come from?
3. **Its Extent:** How far has it spread?
4. **Its Guilt:** How offensive is it?
5. **Its Deceitfulness:** How does it hide?

Sin is a State of Corruption and a Transgression of Law

General Definition (A State of Being)

As the Ninth Article states, sin is “the fault and corruption of the nature of every man...whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil.” It is a vast moral disease affecting the entire human race.



God's Law



Transgression

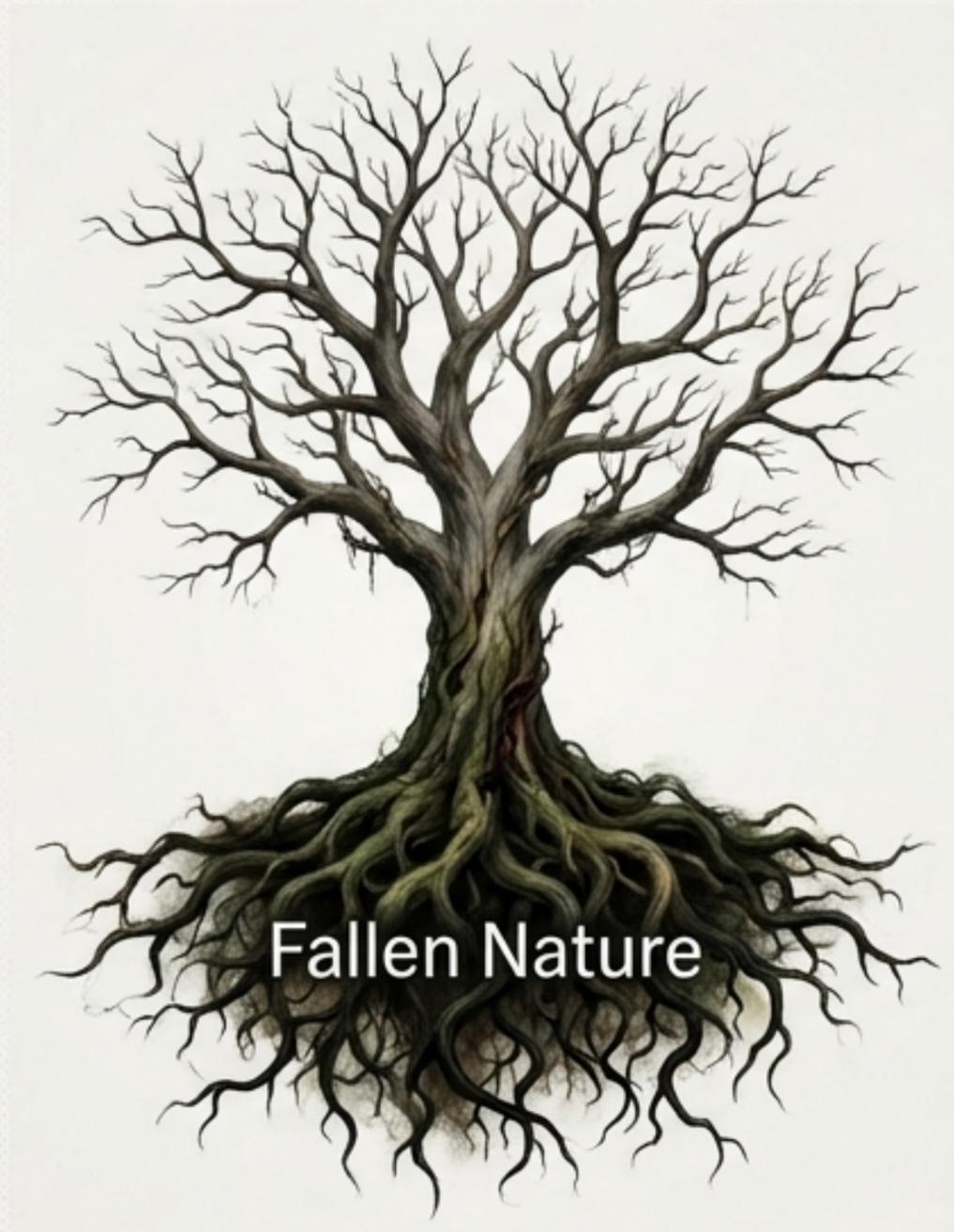
Particular Definition (An Act)

“A sin” consists in doing, saying, thinking, or imagining anything not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God.
“Sin is the transgression of the law.” (1 John iii. 4)

Critical Nuances

- Sins of Omission: We sin by “leaving undone the things we ought to do.”
- Sins of Ignorance: A person may commit sin and yet be ignorant of it, fancying himself innocent when he is guilty. Our consciousness does not determine our sinfulness.

Sin Is a Family Disease, Inherited from Within



- The sinfulness of man begins from within, not from without. It is not the result of bad training or bad companions.
- We inherit it from our first parents, Adam and Eve. All are born in the image of fallen Adam, with a heart and nature inclined to evil. “By one man sin entered into the world.”
- Therefore, the common excuse—“He has a good heart at the bottom”—is diametrically opposed to the truth. The first cause of all sin lies in the natural corruption of the heart itself.

The Disease Pervades Every Faculty, Leaving a Temple in Ruins.



- Sin runs through every part of our moral constitution: the understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, and the will are all infected. Even the conscience is blinded. 'From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness.' (Isa. i. 6)
- Man retains marks of a majestic temple where God once dwelt, but it is now in utter ruins. A shattered window here, a broken column there, give a faint idea of the original design, but its glory is lost.
- This explains the paradox of humanity: so noble in its artistic and scientific achievements, yet so groveling and debased in its spiritual affections.

Sin's Infection Is Universal and Persistent

Geographical Universality



Search the globe, from the most civilized nations to the remotest islands. When first discovered, they have always been the abode of lust, cruelty, and deceit. "Everywhere the human heart is naturally "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.""

Persistence in Believers



The greatest proof of sin's power is that it cleaves to a person even after conversion. "This infection of nature doth remain, yea, even in them that are regenerate." It is checked, controlled, and mortified, but its roots remain until death. The daily struggle against it testifies to its enormous power.

The True Measure of Sin's Guilt Is the Cross of Christ.



- As finite, fallen creatures, we can form none but the most inadequate conceptions of the hideousness of evil in the sight of a perfectly holy God. He is of "purer eyes than to behold iniquity."
- The most overwhelming proof of sin's guilt is the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Terribly black must that guilt be for which nothing but the blood of the Son of God could make satisfaction.
- Heavy must that weight of human sin be which made Jesus groan in Gethsemane and cry from Golgotha, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Sin's Masterstroke is Deceitfulness.



- Temptation rarely presents itself in its true colors. Sin comes to us, like Judas, with a kiss, and like Joab, with flattering words.
- We see its deceitfulness in our readiness to extenuate and minimize its guilt: “It is but a little one! God is merciful! We only do as others!”
- We see it in the smooth words we coin for wickedness: “fast,” “gay,” “wild,” “thoughtless.” We may give wickedness smooth names, but we cannot alter its nature in God’s sight.

“Exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb. iii. 13)

The Weight of Sin Leads to Humiliation; The Grace of the Gospel Leads to Thankfulness.



Reason for Humiliation

We are guilty, vile, corrupt creatures. The holiest saint is a "miserable sinner" in himself, a debtor to mercy and grace to the last. We have cause to cry every night, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"



Reason for Thankfulness

There is a remedy revealed for man's need, as wide and deep as man's disease. We need not despair if we look at sin and at Jesus Christ at the same time.

The best things which we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned.

The Gospel is a Full, Perfect, and Complete Medicine.
“Though sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded.”



The remedy is found in Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the everlasting covenant.

- **His Work:** Dying for our sins and rising for our justification.
- **His Offices:** Priest, Substitute, Physician, Shepherd, Advocate.
- **His Provision:** Precious blood that cleanses all sin; everlasting righteousness; perpetual intercession.
- **His Power:** To save to the uttermost the chief of sinners.

“Blessed be God for Jesus Christ.” - John Flavel

PART 2: THE FORTRESS - DEFENDING THE FAITH

A Scriptural View of Sin Is the Best Antidote to Theological Error.



A clear, full, distinct understanding of the nature, sinfulness, and deceitfulness of sin acts as a fortress. It guards the believer against the prevailing intellectual and spiritual plagues of the age, preserving the integrity of both doctrine and life.

The Fortress Guards Against Defective Religion



1. Vague, 'Misty' Theology

A deep sense of sin gives Christianity weight and urgency. It shows people why they must come to Jesus, making them feel they are in danger of hell and in need of a real savior, not a "mingle-mangle" of ideas.



2. Broad & Liberal Theology

It forces an answer to the gnawing sense of guilt that philosophy and "free inquiry" cannot satisfy. It grounds faith in the non-negotiable realities of man's ruin and Christ's redemption.



3. Sensuous & Ceremonial Christianity

When conscience is truly awakened to sin, it hungers for the great Physician, not for gaudy toys. Music, flowers, and banners seem like solemn triflings when one feels a deadly disease.

The Fortress Protects Personal Holiness.



A Defense Against: 1. Overstrained Theories of Perfection

It reminds us that "this infection of nature doth remain" even in believers. It keeps us humble, recognizing that Christ alone is without sin and we "offend in many things."



A Defense Against: 2. Low Views of Personal Holiness

It counters the modern trend of a comfortable, easy-going, half-worldly faith. Realizing how vile sin is drives us nearer to Christ, and in abiding in Him, we bear more fruit and become more like our Master in our daily ways.

To Build High, We Must First Dig Low.

An increased feeling about holiness is a sign of our times. But any movement towards a deeper spiritual life must begin with first principles. We must return to the 'old paths.' The first step towards attaining a higher standard of holiness is to realize more fully the amazing sinfulness of sin. It is the necessary excavation before the glorious construction.

