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In Many Things We Offend All

"In many things we offend all." — James 3:2

Summary:

We must measure our sins by God's judgment rather than by our partial, self-protective view. We forget countless offences, but none are hidden from him; and failure appears in our response to Christ, our worship, charity, use of time, conduct under discipline, temper, and speech. The confession that all offend must never excuse personal sin or become empty words. When sincerely felt, it produces repentance, dependence on Christ, humility, openness to correction, patience with others, longing for holiness, and watchful prayer for greater progress in the divine life.

Outline:

1. **Measure sin by God's judgment**
    - Self-love and a deceitful heart keep us from seeing our offences as God sees them.
2. **Forgotten sins are not forgotten by God**
    - Past transgressions remain present to him and are recorded in his remembrance.
3. **Our failures reach many areas of life**
    - We offend in relation to Christ, devotion, charity, time, trials, temper, and speech.
4. **Confession must be personal and sincere**
    - We must not use universal failure to excuse ourselves or repeat the words without conviction.
5. **True conviction produces holy fruit**
    - It leads to repentance, Christ, humility, teachableness, compassion, vigilance, and hope.

Text

To establish this truth, we must judge our offences by God's standards, not human judgment. In asking, "Who can understand his errors?" David shows that no one fully knows them. Self-love makes us reluctant to examine our faults; our deceitful hearts find countless ways to excuse evil, doubt our guilt, and overlook the gravity of acknowledged sins.

Thus, we see only a fraction of our sins and must not assume we seem as innocent to God as we do to ourselves. If even the heavens are unclean in his sight, what will be revealed when he exposes our iniquities and secret sins? Nor should we count only the offences we remember.

Recent sins trouble us more than those committed years ago, but none are past to God. To him, for whom a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day, all things are present; time does not erase our former sins.

Though we have forgotten countless offences, God has forgotten none; they are recorded in his book of remembrance. If we could read our lives—from youth to adulthood, in secret and in public, through weakness and wilfulness, intention and action—even one chapter would show we could not answer for one in a thousand transgressions. We would cry with the psalmist, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me."

Have we not often offended? Consider our disregard for the Lord Jesus; neglectful, formal devotion; cold, narrow charity; wasted time and missed opportunities; our response to discipline; faults of temper; and unrestrained speech. The charges could multiply, and reflection on any one should confirm our guilt. Yet how should we confess?

These words are not always used as James and his brethren used them. Some use them to censure others, not judge themselves, hiding behind the offence's prevalence. Challenged about their conduct, they reply that no one is faultless, even the best err, and "in many things we offend all."

Others may speak without bad intent, but vaguely and without conviction. Their confession is empty lip-service, neither arising from nor leading to anything. Admitting general imperfection differs from contritely acknowledging specific sin. Sincere confession brings deep repentance and godly sorrow, reveals

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our need for the Saviour, and endears us to Christ's cross and grace. It humbles us, checks pride, and makes us welcome reproof.

It also helps us accept divine correction without complaint and treat others' weaknesses tenderly. It turns our thoughts heavenward and awakens longing for a sinless state, along with vigilance, care, and zeal. Though perfection is beyond us here, we should strive to overcome our faults and grow in the divine life.

Since sin springs from our depraved nature, we need more grace to subdue it. How can those dead to sin continue living in it? Grace works through means: we must identify where we most often fail, where we are most easily overcome, and where temptation finds us weakest. Then we must watch and pray lest we enter temptation.

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, Morning and Evening Exercises (January 31, Evening), first published in 1854.