No. 162

On being accessory to the vices of others.
Romans 1, 32. "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

In the S. from which this passage is taken, St. Paul describes in glowing terms the corruption and depravity of the heathen world at the time of the appearance of X. The picture is indeed full of dark colours; but no one, acquainted with the subject, will deny that it is true to life. At the close of his strong and energetic description, he mentions a circumstance, which seems to heighten their criminality, that they not only commit these crimes, but have pleasure in them who do commit them. It was not enough to sin,
selves, but they must countenance & sanction
sins of others, thus multiplying & extending as far
as possible, all the defensible effects of bad prin-
ciples & dissolute conduct.

This is the point, to which the present discourse
wishes to direct your attention; in the guilt of being
necessary to the vices of others. God has so formed
us, that we are capable, not only of becoming per-
d既 ourselves, but of promoting the wickedness of
around us. At the same time, that we indulge
ourselves in sin, we may do more of vice, we may
take pleasure in those, who are engaged in the same
unnatural course. If vice, its consequences were
confined to the individual, God knew, it would
then be bad enough. It would be the destruction
pines of the mind of a being designed for high & noble
purposes. But when the individual takes pleas-
er in the vices of others, it becomes a source of
irregard, to step within the circle of his influence &
acquaintance; then in the extension of increase of de-
pravity & wretchedness, we see of what making so great
malign man is capable in connexion with his fellow men. Poison, often thrown into a fountain, confined there, it need not be so much dreaded, but when we reflect that tainted waters are to flow from that fountain, mingle with other waters, who shall calculate the mischief that may be produced? Thus it is with man, he may act beyond himself; his deeds of personal sins may be the least he has to answer for; he may be guilty of indirect offences in helping others to be vicious. He may be the bleakest of his transgressions; he may even make others more wicked than himself; he may teach them to do what he dares not do, as the offences of his neighbours and friends may stand, like so many dark and fearful witnesses against him in the record of his account.

Such is the subject presented to us in the text, I propose to take notice of a few of the methods by which we may become accessory to the vices of others, by which we may shrive in the language of the Apostle, that we have pleasure in them that do inequity.
We may become accessory to the vices of those around us, by giving currency to immoral principles of those persons. The most correct theories of the purest principles have but a lamentably small influence in promoting virtue. Men are generally much more than their principles, even when their principles are good, and believe better than they practice. Where then must be the consequence, when principles themselves are corrupted, of the understanding, as well as the heart, is taught to laugh at the restraints of virtue? What can it be, but that men should see in all the freedom of vice can wish for, so much disturbed by painful admonitions, of fearful accidents? And what shall we think of him, who can thus lend his service to the cause of enormity? Is he not in truth accessory to the guilt of others? Is he not in fact the author of crimes, which would never have been committed, but under sanction of the principles with he has inculcated? When I speak of aiding, or abetting the vices of others by diffusing erroneous opinions, I would not be understood to have reference to any peculiarities of religious opinions other.
ever. Not that there is no difference among the doc
tor's teachings by different forms, when considered in
what should be their true and proper effects. Doctrines
are taught with if men dared to act consistently upon
them, would produce immorality of licentiousness. In
the truth is, peculiar religious opinions seldom have
much effect, as such, upon the character of the people
who follow out all the consequences of their theories.

There is a redeeming spirit in man, and whatever
may be the errors of the system, to which he belongs,
generally makes those errors into a dead letter with
out effect, without danger. Here, then, in technical
theories in doctinal peculiarities, there is not
much to be apprehended. The chief danger we have
to fear is from those, who strike at the foundation
of morality, who annihilate the distinction between
right & wrong, who diffuse a general undistinguis
ing contempt for serious things, who teach the igno
rance of the young, that the principles of virtue, or
this world pretends to reverence, are nothing but pret
casts of hypocrisy, that after all everyone seeks
his own interest in the shortest and best way. the only
difference is that one does it under better appearan-
ces than another, that religion is nothing but a name in the mouths of a canting few to impose upon the deluded many. That though it may be well enough to talk about virtue, none but fools will ever think of submitting to her restraints. Surely they, who diffuse such sentiments are in a striking sense guilty of being accessory to the vices of others. Say not, 'that this is a delusion of the imagination,' 'that these, who encroach upon principles and hold out such views are scarcely at all, to be found in society. You know, that such there are, who corrupt by their foul notions the young; the virtuous: not, it may be, who openly and loudly decry what is good, yet there is a cowardice about vice, a distrust of herself, that will hardly allow her to do this, but who insinuate and put forward by degrees the most corrupting principles; views, of excite doubts of means, of means, whereby they cannot raise open hostility. This out, because vice has no churches dedicated to her service, no pulpits to sound her praises of flesh her cause, that, therefore, she lacks defenders.
faster. Oh no. There are those, who know how to serve her more craftily, more successfully, who not only allow themselves every sinful gratification they desire, but hesitate not to defend the principles in which they act, to recommend them to others, who drop it into ears not unwilling to hear that, as the observed of Sunday is a display of hypocrisy and sanctity, that the preacher is an umpire whose business is to moralise, that the whole institution of religion is but a tool of an instrument in the hands of the cunning, powerful to oppress the simple, to the weak, of that all the service which is rendered to religion and virtue is but the service of fear, or flatly or delusion. Nay, when such views of principles are inculcated, as they often are, by men of an education a little superior to that of these around them, who are looked up to, however unworthy, as standing on a higher ground, of who can tell where their bad effects shall cease? Who can tell how many that would never have entered the forbidden ground, shall thus be tempted, allure, then many that were timid in vice shall be emboldened.
many that were bold shall become desolate. Truly he, who spreads around him the poison of desire among sentiments, does all he can to extend the empire of vice; he has pleasure in them as he contemplates iniquity.

2. Another way in which we may countenance the vices of others is by the influence of our example. We may by our conduct suggest to our companions, to all who see our actions or motives to action, of most pernicious tendency. You know, sirs, that God has formed us so, that we have a sort of powerful influence on each other. Habits of feelings: q. among the means by which this influence is attained or exerted? I know of none stronger efficacious than example. What we do is usually more powerful than what we say. Who does not know how different is the effect on principles when contemplated in the abstract, or when practiced in action? Dissenters, discussions, precepts, can but give us the skeleton of duty, the combined elements of character. But when you
are principles exemplified, you see them living, breathing, speaking, acting; you see them under the thousand modifications into which they are thrown by circumstances, by peculiarities of digestion, temper, talents, habits of thought, and the various lines of shades with all the intercourse of society may mingle them. Example is indeed a mighty engine with which man may wield to influence the character and happiness of his fellow man. It is in the hands of all, though not in all of equal power. Each one, however humble he be, is connected with a little circle, to whom his example is of importance, for he may do good or harm by the course of conduct by which he becomes subject to the inspection of his associates. If my habits of life are such as to induce others to practice vice, I of course become an accomplice in their vices. I am answerable for what I teach by my actions, as well as for what I teach by my principles and precepts. Let each one apply these sentiments, adopt this language, cherishing a lively sense of the importance of that power of affecting others which God has entrusted them. I know that men do not always set a bad example or fail...
were to draw others to vice. There are some, whose deviations from duty arise more from carelessness of negligence than from any settled purpose of exciting a bad influence in the midst of their heedless indulgence of vice, they do not once think, how many eyes are fixed on them, how many are learning from them to practice the same vices, to strengthen the same bad passions, & to act from the same licentious motives. But myself, our carelessness and want of attention will be but a poor excuse for spreading around us the mischief of a bad example. It is not enough for you to say, that you do not mean to teach others any thing bad by your life and conduct; you must have so, or that it will be impossible for others to learn any thing bad from you, even if they are disposed to. If you leave an avenue open, you must expect it to be filled with passengers. You may be seen at the places where the sons of riot and intemperance resort to gratify their base propensities, & it is possible you may go there without any bad intentions, may even have the bewitching vice, ask you there witness; but remember, whatever may be your intentions, there are enough who will be glad to avow themselves of your example.
make the most of it for their own justification. You are solemnly bound to refrain from every thing, that may be turned to account in the end of vice. But with regard to many, I wish there was even this third of flimsy palliative for the bad influence of their examples; it would be well if they did not clearly manifest the pleasure in teaching by their conduct the less of vice, that they seek for companions in guilt, have the partnership of others in their base pursuits. There is always a certain class in society, who want only to have a certain course of conduct exhibited to their view, in order to adopt it, to whom what they see others do suggests to them the idea that they may do it too. They are a class of weak, floating characters, subject to be directed by any foreign impulses. These are the prey of those who are seeking associates in vice, if they have only to display the form of vice, living, acting in that example, to decry, to secure them. But unhappily there are not the only characters liable to be spoiled by example. The young of inexperienced, unpracticed in the ways of the world, are yet free from the pullation of vice, the ardent of generous, who rapidly slide on the form
Send it presented before them, those who do
in social intercourse, laws designed to conform their
selves to those around them from good motives, all
these, and many others are in danger from the corrupting
influence of example. They will look to those who are
practised in deviations from duty, who leave them to
dissipate their time in idle occupations, in the
pursuit of degrading service of vice, to join the
bands of those who live as if they forget the high
weighty purpose for our life is given, to attain that
happiness the fouling of empty, of what is mean, to
pursue of selfish objects, to think it a sign of smart
men's superiority to common fears to mix with gay
and undisciplined faces, to deem religion on the Sabbath
a jest of those who pretend to regard it as no better
than a trial of dissenters, to despise the Sabbath's
institutions, as though at such as think it of any
importance to attend to them, to live without God in the
world, without thinking of another world, in which
we will judge the secrets of men by J.C. - It is thus,
that example is a snare; to be a snare of life unto life
becomes a snare of death unto death. It is thus that by
example men become accomplices in the sins of others.
must expect the obedience of all addressed to
the faithless one in the parable—then wicked
servants of magistrates, those in authority
for the governments of a nation down to the offices of
towns—heads of families to whom many look for
direction and guidance, masters of people of property,
have those under their influence in their employ-
ment, if these or others, suffer a vice to take root
down, so they might eradicate, if they permit
morbid habits to be practiced without making an
effort to prevent them, if profaneness, intemper-
ance, oath-breaking, other forms of depravity,
triumph under their eye, if moral all good manners,
decent feelings, shall not a finger to aid the
cause of morality against such enemies, if they
suffer those powers to be thus trampled on by high
hands! Once I must say, if I believe truth, your
consciences will bear me out in saying, that they
are most lamentably unfaithful to their trust,
that the blame of the prevalence of these vices will
fall on them in precisely the same proportion as
they might have suppressed them. Of what use is it, that we have laws in favor of good morals, and magistrates to execute these laws, if they are never executed, so become the laughing stock of the abandoned profligate? Nay, it is a thing of vital importance to the interests of society, that every man should feel the solemn obligation under which he is laid to devote to the cause of virtue all the power and influence with he has. When I consider how much intemperance and other vices that now walk abroad to the grief of shame of every good man, might be checked, how immorality might at least be compelled to be more secret, less obscene, less disgusting in their practices, and a taste for doing good, for imparting relief and diffusing around the blessings of benevolence, might be formed and encouraged, — if at least once, but a disposition in the part of the virtuous, who are entrusted with power of influence, to perform this sacred duty, of combine their efforts judiciously in the good cause when I reflect on this, I cannot but mourn over the loss of virtue sustained by this omission. — I know that very injudicious means are sometimes put in
practice for the suppression of vice, means. Here only to swell opencast to the evil, they would cure. But because good men have sometimes been found, in their well meant effects, one cannot infer that no effects are necessary or obligatory. That thing has not been done well is no reason it should not be done at all. I would have the utmost care of being circumspect in the exertion of any influence we may have for the suppression of vice. But any effect we may make be grounded on knowledge of human nature, with a reference to the actual character of passions of men. It must be left to good sense and discretion to select the means. But let not caution en masse with the obligations of duty, let caution indence or fear have hold of the difficulty of doing good and prevent firm not doing it at all. There certainly are ways, in which magnificence of parents, masters, may use or strong influence to check vice, of that too in a prudent, judicious, per- tricable, effectual way. There is too much heedless of feeling on this subject; too much hurrin to taking a little trouble; a truth compels me to
too much insensibility to duty. Need some form of all the appurtenances to increase much faster than they would, if all the influence of power of society were directed as they ought to be. Let us not forget that as accountable for not preventing the evil we might have prevented, as for not doing the good we might have done.

These are some of the leading ways in which we may, whether designedly or not, countenance the vices of others, & manifest, even if we do not feel that we take pleasure in those who commit sin. Your own reflection will suggest to you particular exemplifications of these remarks, & lead you to think of other ways of countenancing vice, as much to be avoided as these. My hearers, this subject is not a light or trifling thing; it is essentially connected with the vital interests of the community in which we live. It is of the highest importance to parents, officers, to all who by rank or authority, have influence over the public manners of others. This influence they are to consider as a sacred trust committed with them by God, for the use of which they...
are to account. There is a sweet reward attending the discharge of this duty, even here. Think of the pleasure, some must enjoy, who being passed through life, entering on every occasion of proved influence, who has encouraged virtue by every means of forming up prize in all its forms, who has held out a hand to strengthen the timid of the weak in goodness, dabbled the bold in gentleness, strove to make him pick a ashamed of his sin, who has given to the service of virtue of God the power of influence with God conferred for that purpose. Was he not a rich reward in the reflections of his heart, the testimony of his conscience? Compare with him the man, whose life has been lost to the cause of goodness, who has shamelessly abused the influence, in which he possessed, to the encouragement of vice, if not by promoting, at least by not prevent
ing, who has manifested bad principles, holding limitation a corrupt example, neglected to put the check upon the might have put, an vice, if this man ever reflects, will not reflect upon themselves in this villain? Can he look with pleasure
may be look with any other feelings than those of anger on the moral ruin he has brought around. - Shall not the voice of that depravity which he has encouraged, ring like the charge of an accusatory spirit through his ears? - Nay, the welfare of your children, the welfare of your families, the good of the community, - the voice of God require you to do that mighty work that you don't in any way suffer yourselves to take pleasure in that as sinfulness. - Something you can do for the cause of virtue. - Let that be done! - As though, like the widow's mite, it should be small, it will be welcomed by Him. She gave again the means of doing it, as a valuable contribution to the treasury of virtue. - A great reward shall be in higher Oct. 1822.
At home, Oct. 6. 1822 - afternoon.