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SECRET SINS

#209

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AN EXAMINATION OF SECRET SINS

Obadiah Sedgwick (1600-1658)

"Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults."—Psalm 19:12

IT is the desire of a holy person to be cleansed, not only from public, but also from private and secret sins. "O wretched man! Who shall deliver me?" (Rom 7:24), said Paul. Why, O blessed Apostle! What is it that holds you? What is it that

molests you? Your life, you say, was unblameable before your conversion and since your conversion (Phi 3:4-7). Thou hast exercised thyself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men (Act 24:16). Yet you cry out, “O wretched man!” Yet you complain, “Who shall deliver me?” Verily, brethren, it was not sin *abroad*, but at *home*. It was not sin *without*, but—at this time—sin *within*. It was not Paul’s sinning with *man*, but Paul’s sinning with *Paul*. It was that “law of his members” warring secretly within him against “the law of his mind” (Rom 7:23). This made that holy man to cry out so, to complain so. As Rebekah was weary of her life—not, as we read, for any foreign disquietments,¹ but because of domestic troubles: the daughters of Heth within the house made her weary of life (Gen 27:46)—so the private and secret birth of corruption within Paul...was the cause of his trouble. That was the ground of his exclamation and desires, “Who shall deliver me?”

I remember that the same Paul advised the Ephesians to put off the former conversation² so that they could put on the renewed spirit of the mind, intimating that there are sins that are lurking within as well as sins walking about (Eph 4:22-23). True Christians must not only sweep the door, but wash the chamber also. My meaning is this: We are not only to come off from sins that lie *open* in the conduct, but also labor to be cleansed from sins and sinning that remain *secret* and *hidden* in the spirit and inner disposition...

IN WHAT RESPECTS ARE SINS CALLED SECRET? For the resolution of this, know that sin has a *double* reference:

It may refer to God: And so no sin or manner of sinning is really *secret*. “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?” said the Lord. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” said the Lord in Jer-emiah 23:24. It is true that wicked men with an atheistical folly imagine hiding themselves and their sinful ways from God. “Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?” (Isa 29:15)... Yet there stands no cloud, nor curtain, nor moment of darkness or secrecy between the eyes of God and the ways of man. “For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings” (Pro 5:21). He speaks principally there of the ways of the adulterer, which usually are plotted with the most cunning secrecy; yet God sees *all* those ways. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13)...

Sin may also refer to man: And thus, indeed, comes in the division of sin into first, *open*, and second, *secret*. Now, in this respect, sin may be termed *secret* diversely:

1. In respect of the person sinning: when his very sinning, formally considered, is hidden from himself. He does a thing that is really sinful, but to him it is not apprehensively.³ [We see this in the] outrages Paul breathed out against the Church in the times of his ignorance, which he did not know to be acts of sin but thought to be motions of a warranted zeal. In this sense, all the obliquities⁴ that may be fastened,⁵ at least upon *invincible ignorance*,⁶ may be called *secret sins*.

2. In respect of the manner of sinning: thus sins may be termed secret either: (1) When they are colored and disguised, though they fly abroad,⁷ yet not under that name [of sin], but appareled with some semblances of virtues. (2) When they are kept off from the stage of the world. They are like fire in the chimney. Though you do not see it, yet it burns. Many people, like those in Ezekiel, commit abominations in secret, as long as the public eye is not upon them. He is sinful and acts with the greatest vileness. All the difference between another sinner and him is this: he is a sinner, but the other one *admits* he is a sinner. It is the same with an open book and a shut book. The one that is shut has the same lines and words, but the lines in the one that is opened may be read and seen. (3) When they are kept not only from the public eye, but also from any mortal eye. The carnal eye of him who commits the sins does not see them. He does see them with the eye of conscience, but not with an eye of natural sense. Even those persons with whom he converses and who highly commend the frame of his ways cannot yet see the secret discourings and actings of sin in his mind and heart. Brethren, not all the actings of sin are *external*! They are not visible. But there are some, yes, the most dangerous acting within the soul, where corruption lies as a fountain and a root. The heart of man is a scheme⁸ of wickedness. A man says in his heart that [which] he dares not speak with his tongue, and his thought will do that which his hands dare not execute. Well then, sin may be called *secret* when it is sin and acted as sin even there [in the heart], where none but God and conscience can see.

¹ **foreign disquietments** – disturbances from outside the home.

² **conversation** – way of life.

³ **He does...apprehensively** – he does something that is in reality sinful, but he does not understand that it is.

⁴ **obliquities** – moral or mental faults.

⁵ **fastened** – laid to someone’s charge.

⁶ **invincible ignorance** – *Theological term*: ignorance beyond a person’s ability to remove or control for which he is not considered responsible.

⁷ **fly abroad** – go about in public.

⁸ **scheme** – system.

I think sin is like a candle in a lantern, where the shining is first within and then bursting out at the windows, or like boils and ulcerous humors⁹ that are scabs and scurvy¹⁰ stuff. They are first within the skin, and afterwards they break out to the view on the outside. So it is with sin. It is a malignant humor and a fretting¹¹ leprosy, diffusing¹² itself into several secret acts and workings within the mind. Then it breaks abroad and dares adventure the practice of itself to the eye of the world. Though that sin may never see the light, it is still like a child who is alive, but buried in the womb. Yet as that child is a man—a true man there closeted in that hidden frame of nature—so sin is truly sin, *though it never gets out beyond the womb that conceived and enlivened it...*

But what were those secret sins from which David desired to be cleansed? Nay, that is a secret. He does not instance in¹³ *any* one because his desire is to be freed from *every* one...But why should *we* desire to be cleansed from secret sins, from either secret acting or secret motions? I will give you several reasons for it:

1. Because secret sins will become public sins if they are not cleansed. It is with the soul as it is with the body wherein diseases are first bred and then manifested. And if you suppress them not in their root, you shall shortly see them break out in the fruit. It is like fire that catches the inside of the house first, and there, if you do not suppress it, will make a way to get to the outside. “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin” (Jam 1:15). Beloved, remember this: though the first ground of sin is within the heart, yet the propensity¹⁴ of sin is to come forth into public. The child in the womb does not have stronger throes to get out of its private lodging than sin secretly wrought to fly into open and manifest action. Amnon [was] sick with the sinful conceptions of incestuous lust, and what ado¹⁵ was there until he had committed that villainy! Let a man set up *any* sin in delightful contemplation and meditation, [and] that same inward acting of his sin either actually casts him upon the outward adventures or invites them. This is the least that it does. It strangely ripens his natural inclination. Besides that, it prepares him for a temptation that suits that way. Satan shall not need to tempt him much who has already tempted himself. He who will work sin in his heart, a weak occasion will draw it out into his life. Thirty pieces of silver will prevail with a covetous Judas, *who already had gold as his master in his heart...*

2. Secret sins are apt to deceive us most: therefore cleanse them. There is deceitfulness in all sinnings whatsoever: the soul is *deceived* by sin *whenever* it sins. But secret sins deceive us most! They are most apt to prevail with us:

First, because we do not have that strict and spiritual judgment of inward sins like we do of outward sins. Many times we conceive of them as no sins at all or else as slight and venial.¹⁶ To draw a sword and run a man through the heart—O this is a fearful murder! To draw a false word and to pierce through his good name slanderously, we likewise imagine that this may be bad. But to kill a man with malicious thought, with revengeful plots and desires, nay, this is scarcely thought as a matter culpable¹⁷ or at least very excusable. Beloved, it is the nature of sin to come off easily in the soul without stir and debate; and no sins come off so easily as those that we scarce¹⁸ imagine to be sins. Now, we are apt to think that secret sins are scarce sins.

Second, because most [sinners] decline sin upon outward respects¹⁹...They do not live in and visibly commit such sins because they like not shame and are afraid of punishment. But what are those to secret sinnings, where no law of man can reach and no eye of man can search?...Secret sinning—it being invisible—therefore escapes all the outward restraints by the seeing, speaking, and judging of men. It has mainly to attend to what conscience will say, which perhaps is ignorant or drowsy. And, if it does speak, yet it is not regarded. Now mark: of all sins, eye them most that most easily deceive you. These a man commits most, affects most, and continues in longest. Since, therefore, secret sins come under that form, is it not necessary to labor to be cleansed from them?

3. The strength of sin is inward; therefore labor to be cleansed from secret sins. If a man has a fever so that his tongue burns in his mouth and his flesh is even roasting with burning heat, yet the strength of that fever is not in his spirits

⁹ **ulcerous humors** – corrupt, putrid sores.

¹⁰ **scurvy** – scaly, shredded dry skin.

¹¹ **fretting** – pricking, painful; malignant.

¹² **diffusing** – spreading.

¹³ **instance in** – offer an example of.

¹⁴ **propensity** – natural inclination; tendency.

¹⁵ **ado** – excited activity.

¹⁶ **venial** – unimportant; excusable.

¹⁷ **culpable** – deserving blame.

¹⁸ **scarce** – barely; only just, if at all.

¹⁹ **upon outward respects** – with reference to what others will think.

and inward parts: [they] are set on fire by some humorous distemper.²⁰ So it is with sin. Though the outward actings are bad enough, yet the strongholds are within the soul...

4. The principal object of God's eye is the inward and secret frame of the soul: labor, therefore, to be cleansed from secret sins. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psa 66:18). "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Psa 51:6). Therefore is He often said in Scripture to "search the heart and reins," which intimates His special observation of the secret frame. It is true that God gives charge against open sins. Why? Because He would not have any to be profane; and so He gives singular charge against secret sins. Why? *Because He cannot endure any to be hypocritical.* The man is to God what his inside is. If you work wickedness in your heart, God *will* destroy you. Plaster your visible part with all sorts of pious expressions: if yet you can set up a form of sinning within, you are no-table hypocrites. The Lord sees you to be false and rotten, and He will discharge²¹ Himself of you...

There are many persons who wallow in secret sins. The Apostle complained of such in his time: "It is a shame to speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (Eph 5:12). He speaks of such as lived in secret fornication and uncleanness. Brethren, how many are there who apparel themselves in the secret thoughts of abhorred wickedness, but even in the secret actings of the same, as if there were no God to look on them, nor conscience to spy on them, nor Judgment Day to arraign²² them! Oh, how infinitely odious²³ you must be in the eyes of that holy God, who dare to court Him in public, and yet dare to provoke Him to His face thus in private. You are like a whor-ish strumpet²⁴ who dissembles marvelous affections to her husband abroad, and yet at home she will violate the covenant of her God before her husband's eyes. So you pretend so much for God before company, and yet in private you will presume to sin before His face! *He sees you*, and your conscience knows that right well.

There are, at the least, three horrible sins that you commit at once: First, that very *sin* that you would so conceal. Perhaps it may be a sin of the deepest dye. Yea, mark this: the most damnable sins are usually such that are committed in secret, as Sodom's adulteries, and such fearful kinds of pollutions, murders, and treasons, etc.

Second, *hypocrisy*, which is a screen to your sin, a holy cover for an unholy heart and practice. [This] makes the sinner so much the more vile in God's eyes, by how much the more that he not only sins against God, but wrests, as it were, something from God to cover and palliate²⁵ his rebellion against Him.

A third is *atheism*. If there is not formal atheism, yet, there is a virtual atheism. [It is] as if God were not God in secret, but only in public; that He could see in the light and not in the darkness; that His eye is as the eye of a man only, whereas He is a universal eye and is a Light without all darkness.

Outward occasions can incline to secret sinnings. Beloved, there lies a snare against us in almost all society.²⁶ We have such vile natures that as a spark of fire will easily kindle a box of tinder, [just] a word spoken, many times, kindles a world of passion, of malice, of revenge within us! Yea, the misplacing of a look begets in us secret disdain and discontent! Yea, the casting of an eye may enflame the heart with excess of lust. Need we not then (putting all these things together) to search our inward frame to see what care we have about and against secret sinnings?

From *The Anatomy of Secret Sins*, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a ministry of Reformation Heritage Books, www.heritagebooks.org.

Obadiah Sedgwick (1600-1658): Presbyterian minister and member of the Westminster Assembly; born in Marlborough, Wiltshire, England.

²⁰ **humorous distemper** – diseased, disordered condition.

²¹ **discharge** – rid.

²² **arraign** – to call to a court in order to answer an accusation of wrongdoing.

²³ **odious** – detestable; inspiring hatred, contempt, or disgust.

²⁴ **strumpet** – immoral woman; sexually loose woman.

²⁵ **palliate** – lessen the seriousness of.

²⁶ **society** – companionship with fellow human beings.

THE FOLLY, MISERY, GUILT, AND DANGER OF SECRET SINS

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.”—Psalm 19:12

I AM going after a certain class of men who have sins not unknown to themselves, but secret to their fellow creatures. Every now and then, we turn up a fair stone that lies upon the green sward²⁷ of the professing church, surrounded with the verdure²⁸ of apparent goodness; and to our astonishment, we find beneath it all kinds of filthy insects and loathsome reptiles. In our disgust at such hypocrisy, we are driven to exclaim, “All men are liars; there are none in whom we can put any trust at all!” It is not fair to say so of all, but really, the discoveries that are made of the insincerity of our fellow-creatures are enough to make us despise our kind because they can go so far in appearances, yet have so little soundness of heart. To you, sirs, who sin secretly and yet make a profession: you break God’s covenants in the dark and wear a mask of goodness in the light—to you, sirs, who shut the doors and commit wickedness in secret—to you I shall speak this morning. O may God also be pleased to speak to you and make you pray this prayer: “Cleanse thou me from secret faults.” I shall endeavor to urge upon all pretenders present to give up, to renounce, to detest, to hate, to abhor all their secret sins.

FIRST, THEN, THE FOLLY OF SECRET SINS. Pretender, thou art fair to look upon—thy conduct outwardly upright, amiable, liberal, gen-erous, and Christian. But thou dost indulge in some sin that the eye of man has not yet detected. Perhaps it is private drunkenness. Thou dost revile the drunkard when he staggers through the street; but thou canst thyself indulge in the same habit in private. It may be some other lust or vice. It is not for me just now to mention what it is. But, pretender, we say unto thee, “Thou art a fool to think of harboring a secret sin, and thou art a fool for this one reason: thy sin is *not* a secret sin. It is known and shall one day be revealed—perhaps very soon. Thy sin is not a secret: the eye of God hath seen it. Thou hast sinned before His face. Thou hast shut-to the door, drawn the curtains, and kept out the eye of the sun. But God’s eye pierceth through the darkness: the brick walls that surrounded thee were as transpar-ent as glass to the eye of the Almighty. The darkness that did gird thee was as bright as the summer’s noon to the eye of Him Who beholdeth all things. Knowest thou not, O man, that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13)?

As the priest ran his knife into the entrails of his victim, discovered the heart and liver and what else did lie within, so art thou, O man, seen by God, cut open by the Almighty. Thou hast no secret chamber where thou canst hide thyself. Thou hast no dark cellar where thou canst conceal thy soul. Dig deep, ay, deep as hell, but thou canst not find earth enough upon the globe to cover thy sin. If thou shouldst heap the mountains on its grave, those mountains would tell the tale of what was buried in their bowels. If thou couldst cast thy sin into the sea, a thousand babbling waves would tell the secret out. *There is no hiding it from God!* Thy sin is photographed in high heaven. The deed, when it was done, was photographed upon the sky; and there it shall remain. Thou shalt see thyself one day revealed to the gazing eyes of all men—a hypocrite, a pretender who didst sin in fancied secret, observed in all thine acts by the all-seeing Jehovah. O what fools men are to think they can do anything in secret! This world is as the glass hives wherein bees sometimes work: we look down upon them, and we see all the operations of the little creatures. So God look-eth down and seeth all our eyes are weak: we cannot look through the darkness. But His eye, like an orb of fire, penetrateth the blackness, readeth the thought of man, and seeth his acts when he thinks himself most concealed. Oh, it is a thought enough to curb us from all sin if it were truly applied to us: “Thou God seest me” (Gen 16:13)!

Stop thief! Drop thou that which thou hast taken to thyself. God seeth thee! No eye of detection of earth hath discovered thee, but God’s eyes are now looking through the clouds upon thee. Swearer! Scarce any for whom thou carest heard thy oath; but God heard it. It entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth.²⁹ And [thee] who ledest a filthy life and yet art a respectable merchant bearing among men a fair and goodly character: thy vices are all known, written in God’s book. He keepeth a diary of all thine acts. What wilt thou think on that Day when a crowd shall be assembled, compared with which this immense multitude is but a drop of a bucket? God shall read out the story of thy secret life, and men and angels shall hear it! Certain I am there are none of us who would like to have all our secrets read, especially our secret thoughts. If I should select out of this congregation the most holy man, should bring him forward, and say, “Now, sir, I know all

²⁷ **sward** – ground that is green with grass; turf.

²⁸ **verdure** – vivid green of thriving vegetation.

²⁹ **Lord God of Sabaoth** – Lord of the Armies; Lord of Hosts.

your thoughts and am about to tell them,” I am sure he would offer me the largest bribe that he could gather if I would be pleased to conceal at least *some* of them. “Tell,” he would say, “of my acts; of them I am not ashamed; but do not tell my thoughts and imaginations—of them I must ever stand ashamed before God.” What then, sinner, will be thy shame when thy privy lusts, thy closet transgressions, thy secret crimes shall be gazetted³⁰ from God’s throne, [and] published by His own mouth with a voice louder than a thousand thunders preached in the ears of an assembled world? What will be thy terror and confusion then, when all the deeds thou hast done shall be published in the face of the sun, in the ears of all mankind? O renounce the foolish hope of heresy; for thy sin is this day recorded and shall one day be advertised upon the walls of heaven.

IN THE NEXT PLACE, LET US NOTICE THE MISERY OF SECRET SINS. Of all sinners, the man who makes a profession of religion and yet lives in iniquity is the most miserable. A downright wicked man who takes a glass in his hand and says, “I am a drunkard. I am not ashamed of it,” shall be unutterably miserable in worlds to come. But brief though it be, he has his hour of pleasure. A man who curses and swears and says, “That is my habit. I am a profane man,” and makes a profession of it, he has, at least, some peace in his soul. But the man who walks with God’s minister, who is united with God’s Church, who comes out before God’s people and unites with them, and then lives in sin—what a *miserable* existence he must have of it! Why, he has a worse existence than the mouse that is in the parlor, running out now and then to pick up the crumbs, and then back again to his hole. Such men must run out now and then to sin. Oh! How fearful they are to be discovered! One day, perhaps, their character turns up; with wonderful cunning, they manage to conceal and gloss it over. But the next day something else comes, and they live in constant fear, telling lie after lie to make the last lie appear truthful, adding deception to deception in order that they may not be discovered...

If I must be a wicked man, give me the life of a roistering sinner³¹ who sins before the face of day. But, if I must sin, let me not act as a hypocrite and a coward! Let me not profess to be God’s and spend my life for the devil. That way of cheating the devil is a thing that every honest sinner will be ashamed of. He will say, “Now, if I do serve [the devil], I will serve him out and out. I will have no sham about it. If I make a profession [of Christ], I will carry it out. But if I do not—if I live in sin—I am not going to gloss it over by cant³² and hypocrisy.” One thing that has hamstrung the Church and cut her very sinews in twain has been this most damnable hypocrisy. Oh! In how many places have we men whom you might praise to the very skies, if you could believe their words, but whom you might cast into the nethermost pit if you could see their secret actions! God forgive any of you who are so acting! I had almost said, “I can scarce forgive you.” I can forgive the man who riots openly and makes no profession of being better. But the man who fawns, cants, pretends, prays, and then lives in sin, that man I hate—I cannot bear him, I abhor him from my very soul. If he will turn from his ways, *I will love him*. But in his hypocrisy, he is to me the most loathsome of all creatures...A mere profession, my hearers, is but painted pageantry to go to hell in! It is like the plumes upon the hearse and the trappings upon the black horses that drag men to their graves, the funeral array of dead souls. Take heed above everything of a waxen profession that will not stand the sun. Take care of all that needs to have two faces to carry it out: be one thing or else the other. If you make up your mind to serve Satan, do not pretend to serve God! If you serve God, *serve Him with all your heart*. “No man can serve two masters” (Mat 6:24). Do not try it; do not endeavor to do it, for no life will be more miserable than that. Above all, beware of committing acts that it will be necessary to conceal...

Secret sins bring fevered eyes and sleepless nights until men burn out their consciences and become in very deed ripe for the pit. Hy-pocrisy is a hard game to play at: it is one deceiver against many observers; [certainly] it is a miserable trade that will earn at last, as its certain climax, a tremendous bankruptcy. Ah! Ye who have sinned without discovery, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num 32:23); and bethink you, it may find you out ere long. Sin, like murder, *will* come out. Men will even tell tales about themselves in their dreams. God has sometimes made men so pricked in their consciences that they have been obliged to stand forth and confess the story. Secret sinner! If thou wantest the foretaste of damnation upon earth, continue in thy secret sin! For no man is more miserable than he who sinneth secretly and yet trieth to preserve a character. Yon stag, followed by the hungry hounds with open mouths, is far happier than the man who is followed by his sins. Yon bird, taken in the fowler’s net and laboring to escape, is far happier than he who hath weaved around himself a web of deception and labors to escape from it day by day by making the toils more thick and the web stronger. *Oh! The misery of secret sins!* Truly, one may pray, “Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”

BUT NOW...THE SOLEMN GUILT OF SECRET SIN. Now, John, you do not think there is any evil in a thing unless somebody sees it, do you? You feel that it is a very great sin if your master finds you out in robbing the till; but there is no

³⁰ **gazetted** – announced in an official journal or newspaper, therefore, publicly announced.

³¹ **roistering sinner** – a sinner known for rowdy, drunken merrymaking.

³² **cant** – insincere talk about religion and morals.

sin if he should not discover it—none at all! And you, sir, you fancy it to be very great sin to play a trick in trade,³³ [if] you should be discovered and brought before the court. But to play a trick and never be discovered—that is all fair. “Do not say a word about it, Mr. Spurgeon! It is all business.” You must not touch business. Tricks that are not discovered, of course—you are not to find fault with them. The common measure of sin is the notoriety of it. But I do not believe in that. A sin is a sin, whether done in private or before the wide world...Do not measure sin by what other people say of it. Measure sin by what God says of it and [by] what your own conscience says of it...

Brethren, do not, I beseech you, incur the fearful guilt of secret sins. No man can sin a little in secret: it will certainly engender more sin. No man can be a hypocrite and yet be moderate in guilt. He will go from bad to worse and still proceed until his guilt shall be published. He shall be found to be the very worst and the most hardened of men. Take heed of the guilt of secret sin...“Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord” (Jer 23:24). I would...that I could make every man look to himself and find out his secret sin. Come, my hearer, what is it? Bring it forth to the daylight. Perhaps it will die in the light of the sun. These things love not to be discovered. Tell thine own conscience *now* what it is. Look it in the face! Confess it before God! And may He give thee grace to remove that sin and every other. Turn to Him with full purpose of heart. But know that thy guilt is guilt, [whether] *discovered* or *undiscovered*. If there be any difference, it is worse because it has been secret. God save us from the guilt of secret sin! “Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”

AND NOTE, NEXT, THE DANGER OF SECRET SIN. One danger is that a man cannot commit a little sin in secret without being by-and-by betrayed into a public sin. You cannot, sir—though you may think you can—preserve a moderation in sin. If you commit one sin, it is like the melting of the lower glacier upon the Alps: the others must follow in time. As certainly as you heap one stone upon the cairn³⁴ today, the next day you will cast another, until the heap, reared stone by stone, shall become a very pyramid...Sin cannot be held in with bit and bridle. “But I am going to have a little drink now and then; I am only going to be intoxicated once a week or so. Nobody will see it; I shall be in bed directly.” You will be drunk in the streets soon. “I am only just going to read one lascivious book; I will put it under the sofa-cover when any one comes in.” You will keep it in your library yet, sir. “I am only going into that company now and then.” You will go there every day—*such* is the bewitching character of it. You cannot help it. You may as well ask the lion to let you put your head into his mouth. You cannot regulate his jaws; neither can you regulate sin. Once go into it, you cannot tell when you will be destroyed...You may labor to conceal your vicious habit, but it will come out. You cannot help it. You keep your little pet sin at home, but mark this: when the door is ajar, the dog will be out in the street. Wrap him up in your bosom, put over him fold after fold of hypocrisy to keep him secret, and the wretch will be singing some day when you are in company...

A man who indulges in sin privately gets his forehead as hard as brass by degrees. The first time he sinned, the drops of sweat stood on his brow at the recollection of what he had done. The second time, no hot sweat [stood] on his brow, only an agitation of the muscle. The third time, there was the sly, sneaky look, but no agitation. The next time, he sinned a little further. And by degrees, he became the bold blasphemer of his God, who exclaimed, “Who am I that I should fear Jehovah, and who is He that I should serve Him?” Men go from bad to worse. Launch your boat in the current: it must go where the current takes it. Put yourself in the whirlwind: you are but a straw in the wind; you must go which way the wind carries you, for you cannot control yourself. The balloon can mount, but it cannot direct its course: it must go whichever way the wind blows. If you once mount into sin, there is no stopping. Take heed if you would not become the worst of characters! Take heed of the little sins: they, mounting one upon another, may at last heave you from the summit and destroy your soul forever. There is a great danger in secret sins.

But I have here some true Christians who indulge in secret sins. They say it is but a little one, and therefore do they spare it. Dear brethren, I speak to you, and I speak to myself when I say this: Let us destroy all our little secret sins. They are called “little”; and if they be, let us remember that it is the foxes, even the little foxes that spoil our vines (Song 2:15). For our vines have tender shoots. Let us take heed of our little sins. A little sin, like a little pebble in the shoe, will make a traveler to heaven walk very wearily. Little sins, like little thieves, may open the door to greater ones outside. Christians, recollect that little sins will spoil your communion with Christ. Little sins, like little stains in silk, may damage the fine texture of fellowship. Little sins, like little irregularities in the machinery, may spoil the whole fabric of your religion. The one dead fly spoileth the whole pot of ointment. That one thistle may seed a continent with noxious³⁵ weeds. Let us, brethren, kill our sins as often as we can find them. One said, “The heart is full of unclean birds; it is a cage of them.” “Ah, but,” said another divine, “you must not make that an apology, for a Christian’s business is to wring their necks.” And so it is: if there be evil things [in the heart], it is our business to kill them. *Christians must not tolerate secret sins.*

³³ **play a trick in trade** – craftily cheat in a business deal.

³⁴ **cairn** – a mound of rough stones, raised up for a memorial or marker.

³⁵ **noxious** – a harmful weed growing on neglected land.

We must not harbor traitors. It is high treason against the King of Heaven. Let us drag them out to light and offer them upon the altar, giving up the dearest of our secret sins at the will and bidding of God. There is a great danger in a little secret sin. Therefore avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and shun it (Pro 4:15); and God give thee grace to overcome it.

From a sermon delivered on Sabbath morning, February 8, 1857, at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): English Baptist preacher; his sermons fill 63 volumes and include 20–25 million words, the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.

Take heed of secret sins. They will undo thee if loved and maintained: one moth may spoil the garment; one leak drown the ship; a penknife stab and kill a man as well as a sword. So one sin may damn the soul.—*Jeremiah Burroughs*

SECRET SINS HINDER SECRET PRAYER

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

THERE is no greater hindrance to secret prayer in all the world than secret sins. Therefore, stand upon your watch, and arm yourselves with all your might against them. There is an antipathy³⁶ betwixt secret sinning and secret praying, partly from guilt, which makes the soul shy of coming under God's secret eye; and partly from those fears, doubts, disputes, and disorders that secret sins raise in the heart. Light is not more opposite to darkness, Christ to Belial, or heaven to hell than secret prayer is to secret sins. Therefore, whatever you do, look that you keep clear of secret sins. To that purpose, consider...

[1] **First, that God is privy to³⁷ our most secret sins.** His eye is as much upon secret sins as it is upon open sins: "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Psa 90:8). God hath an eye upon our inmost evils; He seeth all that is done in the dark: "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD" (Jer 23:24). "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Pro 15:3). To say that God doth not see the most secret sins of the children of men is not only derogatory³⁸ to His omniscience, but also to His mercy; for how can God pardon those sins that He doth not see to be sins? There is no cloud, curtain, nor moment of darkness that can stand betwixt the eyes of God and the ways of men: "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings" (Pro 5:21). In this Scripture, Solomon mainly speaks of the ways of the adulterer, which usually are plotted with the most cunning secrecy. Yet God seeth all those ways. Look, as no boldness can exempt the adulterer from the justice of God, so no secrecy can hide him from the eye of God. Though men labor to hide their ways from others, and from themselves, yet it is but labor in vain to endeavor to hide them from God. Men that labor to hide God from themselves can never hide themselves from God. I have read that Paphnutius³⁹ converted Thais and Ephron, two famous strumpets, from uncleanness with this argument only: God seeth all things in the dark, when the doors are fast, the windows shut, and the curtains drawn"...

Those sins that lie closest and are most secretly lurking in the heart are as obvious and odious to God as those that are most fairly written upon a man's forehead. God...sees all—the most secret turnings and windings of our hearts. Our most secret sins are as plainly seen by Him as anything can be by us at noonday: "If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Psa 139:11-12). It is not the thickest clouds that can bar out His observance, Whose eyes fill heaven and earth. What is the curtain, the darkest night, the double lock, or the secret chamber to Him Who clearly observes all things in a perfect nakedness? God hath an eye upon the most inward intentions of the heart and the most subtle motions of the spir-it...Certainly, there is not a creature, not a thought, not a thing but lies open to the all-

³⁶ **antipathy** – a feeling of intense dislike.

³⁷ **privy to** – intimately acquainted with.

³⁸ **derogatory** – having the effect of lowering the honor; belittling.

³⁹ **Paphnutius of Thebes aka Paphnutius the Confessor** (died c. 360) – bishop of an Egyptian city in upper Thebaid and member of the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325.

seeing eye of God. The Lord knows our secret sinnings as exactly as our visible sinnings: “For he knoweth the secrets of the heart” (Psa 44:21)...

It was an excellent saying of Ambrose,⁴⁰ “If thou canst not hide thyself from the sun, which is God’s minister of light, how impossible will it be to hide thyself from Him, Whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun!” Though a sinner may baffle his conscience, yet he cannot baffle the eye of God’s omniscience. Oh! That poor souls would remember that as they are never out of the reach of God’s hand, so they are never from under the view of His eye. God is “all eye”: “For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes” (Jer 16:17). “For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves” (Job 34:21-22). “For thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer 32:19). You know what Ahasuerus, that great monarch, said concerning Haman. When coming in, he found him cast upon the queen’s bed on which she sat: “What!” saith he, “Will he force the queen also before me in the house?” (Est 7:8). There was the killing emphasis in the words *before me*—“Will he force the queen *before me*? What! Will he dare to commit such villainy, and I stand and look on?” O sirs! To sin in the sight of God, to do wickedly under the eye of God is a thing that He looks upon as the greatest affront⁴¹ and as the highest indignity that can possibly be done unto Him! “What!” saith He, “wilt thou be drunk before Me? Wilt thou swear and blaspheme before Me? Wilt thou be wanton⁴² and unclean before Me? Wilt thou be unjust and unrighteous under Mine eye? Wilt thou profane My Sabbaths and pollute My ordinances before My face? Wilt thou despise and persecute My servants in My presence? etc.”

This, then, is the killing aggravation⁴³ of all sin: It is done before the face of God. It is committed in the royal presence of the King of kings. The very consideration of God’s omnipresence should bravely arm us against sin and Satan! The consideration of His all-seeing eye should make us shun all occasions of sin and make us shy of all appearances of sin... Shall the eye of the judge keep the malefactor from picking⁴⁴ and stealing? Shall the eye of the master keep the servant from idling and trifling?⁴⁵ Shall the eye of the father keep the child from wandering and gadding?⁴⁶ Shall the eye of the husband keep the wife from extravagancies and indecencies?⁴⁷ ...And shall not the strict, the pure, the jealous eye of an all-seeing God keep thee from sinning in the secret chamber, when all curtains are drawn, doors bolted, and everyone in the house abed⁴⁸ or abroad but thee and thy Delilah?

Oh! What dreadful atheism is bound up in that man’s heart, who is more afraid of the eye of his father, his pastor, his child, his servant than he is of the eye, the presence of the eternal God? Oh! That all whom this concerns would take such serious notice of it as to judge themselves severely for it, as to mourn bitterly over it, as to strive mightily in prayer with God both for the pardon of it and for power against it.

The Apostle sadly complains of some in his time who wallowed in secret sins. “For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret” (Eph 5:12). He speaks of such as lived in secret fornications and uncleanness. There were many that had put on a form of godliness, who yet did allow themselves in the secret actings of abominable wickedness and filthiness as if there were no God to behold them, nor conscience to accuse them, nor Judgment Day to arraign them, nor justice to condemn them, nor hell to torment them. Oh! How infinitely odious must they be in the eyes of a holy God, who can highly court and compliment Him in public, and yet are so bold as to provoke Him to His face in private. These are like those whores who pretend a great deal of affection and respect to their husbands abroad, and yet at home will play the harlots before their husbands’ eyes!

Such as perform religious duties only to cloak and color over their secret filthinesses, their secret wickednesses; such as pretend to pay their vows and yet wait for the twilight (Pro 7:13-15; Job 34:15); such as commit wickedness in a corner and yet with the harlot wipe their mouths and say, “What have we done?”—such shall at last find the chambers, the stones out of the wall, the beam out of the timber, the seats they sit on, and the beds they lie on to witness against all their wanton dalliances⁴⁹ and lascivious carriages⁵⁰ in secret. “Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hab 2:11; Heb 13:4). He

⁴⁰ Ambrose (c. 339-397) – 4th century bishop of Milan, Trinitarian theologian, hymn writer.

⁴¹ **affront** – a deliberately offensive act.

⁴² **wanton** – sexually immoral.

⁴³ **killing aggravation** – overpowering circumstance that increases the guilt of.

⁴⁴ **picking** – robbing; plundering.

⁴⁵ **idling and trifling** – standing around and wasting time.

⁴⁶ **wandering and gadding** – deviating from the right path and carefree, aimless roaming.

⁴⁷ **extravagancies and indecencies** – wastefulness and offensive acts of immodesty.

⁴⁸ **abed** – in bed.

⁴⁹ **dalliances** – playful behavior intended to arouse sexual interest.

⁵⁰ **lascivious carriages** – lustful conduct.

will sentence them Himself. Why? Because such sinners carry it so closely and craftily that oftentimes none but God can find them out.

Magistrates often neglect the punishing of such sinners when their secret wickedness is made known. Therefore, God Himself will sit in judgment upon them. Though they may escape the eyes of men, yet they shall *never* escape the judgment of God. Heart iniquities fall not under any human sentence. Usually whoremongers and adulterers are marvelous close,⁵¹ secret, and subtle to conceal their abominable filthiness. Therefore, the harlot is said to be “subtil of heart” (Pro 7:10)...

[2] Secondly, consider that secret sins shall be revealed. The most hidden works of darkness shall be openly manifested. Though the actings of sin be in the dark, yet the judgments of sin shall be in the light. “For nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known, and come abroad” (Luk 8:17)...“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecc 12:14). Mark, he doth not say *some* work, but *every* work; and not only works, but secrets; and not only secrets, but *every* secret; and not only secret good things, but evil too. Whether good works or ill works, whether secret or open, *all* must be brought to judgment. The books of God’s omniscience and man’s conscience shall then be opened. Then secret sins shall be as legible in thy forehead as if they were written with the most glittering sunbeams upon a wall of crystal.

All men’s secret sins are printed in heaven, and God will at last read them aloud in the ears of all the world: “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1Co 4:5). Look, as there are a world of flies and motes in the air that we never see until the sun shines, so there are many thousand thousands of proud thoughts, unclean thoughts, worldly thoughts, malicious thoughts, envious thoughts, bloody thoughts, etc., that the world sees not, knows not. But in the Great Day, when the counsels of all hearts shall be manifest, then all shall out, then all shall appear to both the upper and the lower world. In the Great Day, all masks, viz-ards,⁵² and hoods shall be pulled off; and then all shall out. All that ever thou hast done in the secret chamber, in the dark corner, shall be made known to men and angels, yea, to the whole court of heaven and to all the world beside. “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom 2:16). In this Great Day, God will judge not only our words but our works, not only our open works, but also our secret works and ways...Though sinners, though the greatest of sinners, may hide and keep close their horrid abominations for a time, yet there will come a time when all shall out. All their secret marks and secret abominations shall be obvious to all the world...But sinners may be ready to object and say, “Let us but alone in our secret sins until that day. Then we shall do well enough.” Therefore, in the

[3] Third place, consider that God many times doth discover and make known to the world men’s secret sins even in *this* life (Isa 41:21-23). God loves to act suitable to His own names. Now, to be a revealer of secrets is one of His names (Dan 2:47). Accordingly, even in this world, He often brings to light the most hidden things of darkness. Of all the glorious attributes of God, none suffers so deeply by secret sins as the attribute of His *omniscience*. Therefore, in this world, God often stands up to vindicate the honor of that attribute by unmasking of sinners and by bringing to the light all those secret paths and ways of wickedness wherein they have long walked undiscovered.

It was for the honor of this blessed attribute of God that the secret-plotted sin of Ananias and Sapphira was so openly discovered. “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Act 5:1-11). Joseph’s brethren for a long time hid their mal-ice, their craft, their cruelty, their envy, their treachery in selling their brother into Egypt; but at last, by amazing and amusing providences, all was brought to light (Gen 42:21-22). Conscience, that for a time may seem to be asleep, will in time awake and make the sinner know that he is as faithful in recording as he is fearful in accusing. This Joseph’s brethren found by sad experience. So Gehazi: he sins secretly, he lies fearfully, and, after all, he defends it stoutly. But at last, all comes out. Instead of being clothed richly, he and his posterity were clothed with leprosy forever. Instead of two changes of garments, God hangs them up in chains as a monument of His wrath to all generations (2Ki 5:20). So Achan secretly and sacrilegiously⁵³ steals a goodly Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels’ weight. [He] hides them in the earth in the midst of his tent; and by reason of this, Israel flies before their enemies. But at last, Achan is taken, and all comes out: his gold-en wedge proved a wedge to cleave⁵⁴ him, and his Babylonish garment, a garment to shroud him. Joshua makes a bonfire of all that he secretly and sinfully had stolen and burns him, his children, and all that he had in it. Oh how openly, how severely doth God sometimes punish men for their most secret iniquity!

⁵¹ **marvelous close** – surprisingly hidden.

⁵² **vizards** – mask with a visor.

⁵³ **sacrilegiously** – grossly disrespectful towards God’s command.

⁵⁴ **wedge to cleave** – *play on words*: a sharp-edged tool to execute him.

The same you may see in that great instance of David. “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword”—this was done in a secret letter—“and hast taken his wife to be thy wife...Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun” (2Sa 12:9-12). David was very studious and very industrious to hide his sin and to save his credit. But the covering made of Uriah’s blood was too short and too narrow to hide his folly with Bathsheba. Therefore, when he had done all he could, his sin was tossed like a ball from man to man, through court, city, and country...

Conscience is God’s spy in the bosom. Conscience, as a scribe, a register,⁵⁵ sits in the closet of your hearts with pen in hand and makes a diurnal⁵⁶ of all your secret ways and secret crimes, which are above the cognizance⁵⁷ of men. Conscience sets down the time when, the place where, the manner how, and the persons with whom such and such secret wickednesses have been committed. [It makes it] so clear and evident that, go where you will and do what you can, the characters of them shall never be cancelled or razed out⁵⁸ until God appear in judgment. Let a man sin in the closest retirement that human policy can contrive; let him take all the ways he can to hide his sins, to cloak and cover his sin as Adam did; yet conscience will play the judge. It will bring in the evidence, produce the law, urge the penalty, and pass the sentence of condemnation upon him. There is many a man who makes a fair profession and who hath a great name in the world, who yet is self-condemned for those secret sins that are not obvious to the eyes of man or punishable by the hands of men. Yea, many times in this life, God raiseth such a hell of horror and terror in many men’s consciences by reason of their secret sins that they can have no rest nor quiet, neither at bed nor at board, neither lying down nor rising up. Fain⁵⁹ would they conceal their sins. Unwilling they are that the world should know how vile they have been in secret. But conscience being upon the rack and still a-gnawing, accusing, and condemning of them, they can hold no longer. Now all must out! Now those sins that were most secret and concealed come to be published upon the housetop.

Some that have been under anguish of conscience, others that have been smitten with a frenzy,⁶⁰ and many in their very sleep have been often the blazers and proclaimers of their own secret filthiness and wickedness. In those cases, God hath made many a secret sinner cry out with the leper, “Unclean, unclean” (Lev 13:45); and with Judas, before all present, “I have sinned” (Mat 27:4). Many times in this life, God doth very strangely and wonderfully discover those secret works of darkness in which persons have lived long undiscovered...

Secret sinning puts far more respect and fear upon men than upon God. Thou wilt be unjust in secret, wanton in secret, unclean in secret, and treacherous in secret, etc. Why? Because thou art afraid that such or such *men* should know it, that such and such *friends* should know it, or that such and such *relations* should know it? Ah! Poor wretch, art thou afraid of the eye of a man? Of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass? (Isa 51:12), and yet not tremble under His eye, Whose eyes are as a flame of fire, sharp and terrible, such as pierce into the inward parts? (Rev 1:14). Ah! How full of atheism is that man’s heart that tacitly⁶¹ saith, “If my sins be but hid from the eyes of the world, I do not care though the Lord knows them, though the Lord strictly observes them, though the Lord sets a mark, a memorandum⁶² upon them!” What is this, O man, but to brave it out with God, to tempt Him, and [to] provoke Him to His very face—Who is light and in Whom there “is no darkness at all”? (1Jo 1:5-6). Ah! Sinner, sinner, can man damn thee? Can man disinherit thee? Can man fill thy conscience with horrors and terrors? Can man make thy life a very hell? Can man bar the gates of glory against thee? Can man speak thee into the grave by a word of his mouth? After all, can man cast thee into endless, easeless, and remediless torments? Oh, no! Can God do all this? Oh, yes! Why then doth not thy heart stand more in awe of the eye of the great God than it doth of the eye of a poor, weak, mortal man?

I have insisted the longer on this particular because there is not any one thing in all the world that doth more hinder secret commun-ion with God and secret prayer than secret sins. Oh, that you would all make it your great business to watch against secret sins, to pray against secret sins, to mourn over secret sins, deeply to judge and condemn yourselves for secret sins, and carefully and conscientiously to shun and avoid all occasions and provocations that may be as fuel to secret sins.

⁵⁵ **register** – an official appointed to keep detailed records of names, dates, or events.

⁵⁶ **diurnal** – diary; journal.

⁵⁷ **cognizance** – conscious knowledge.

⁵⁸ **razed out** – erased; obliterated.

⁵⁹ **fain** – gladly.

⁶⁰ **frenzy** – temporary insanity.

⁶¹ **tacitly** – without stating or expressing.

⁶² **memorandum** – a note that helps remember something.

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680): Congregational preacher; author of *Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices* and many others; buried in Bunhill Fields, London.

MAN’S WAYS AND GOD’S WAY OF COVERING SINS

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”—Proverbs 28:13

MAN’S COVERING: There are many ways in which men try to cover their sin. Some do so by denying that they have sinned. Or, admitting the fact, they deny the guilt. Or else, candidly acknowledging both the sin and the guilt, they excuse and exonerate themselves on the plea of *certain circumstances* that rendered it, according to their showing, almost inevitable that they should act as they have done. By pretext⁶³ and presence, apology and self-vindication, they acquit themselves of all criminality and put a fine gloss upon every foul delinquency.

Excuse making is the commonest trade under heaven. The slenderest materials are put to the greatest account. A man who has no valid argument in arrest of judgment, no feasible reason why he should not be condemned, will go about and bring a thousand excuses and ten thousand circumstances of extenuation,⁶⁴ the whole of them weak and attenuated⁶⁵ as a spider’s web. Someone here may be saying within himself, “It may be I have broken the Law of God, but [the Law] was too severe. To keep so perfect a Law was impossible. I have violated it. But then, I am a man, endowed with passions that involve propensities and inflamed with desires that need gratification. How could I do otherwise than I have done? Placed in peculiar circumstances, I am borne along with the current. Subject to special temptations, I yield to the fascination. *This is natural.*” So you think; so you essay⁶⁶ to exculpate⁶⁷ yourself. But, in truth, you are now committing a fresh sin: for you are abasing⁶⁸ God. You are inculpating⁶⁹ the Almighty. You are impugning the Law to vindicate yourself for breaking it. There is no small degree of criminality about such an unrighteous defense. The Law is holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12). You are throwing the onus⁷⁰ of your sins upon God. You are trying to make out that, after all, *you* are not to blame. The fault lies with *Him* Who gave the commandment.

Do you think that this will be tolerated? Shall the prisoner at the bar bring accusations against the Judge who tries him? Or shall he challenge the equity of the statute while he is arraigned for violating it? And as for the circumstances that you plead, what valid excuse can they furnish? Has it come to this—that it was not you, but your *necessities* that did the wrong and are answerable for the consequence? Not you, indeed! You are a harmless, innocent victim of circumstances! I suppose, instead of being censured,⁷¹ you ought almost to be pitied. What is this, again, but throwing the blame upon the arrangements of Providence and saying to God, “It is the harshness of *Thy* discipline, not the perverseness of *my* actions, that involves me in sin.” What, I say, is this but a high impertinence,⁷² ay, veritable treason against the Majesty of that thrice-holy God before Whom even perfect angels veil their faces while they cry, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:3)? I pray thee, resort not to such a covering as this because, while *utterly useless*, it adds sin to sin and exposes thee to fresh shame.

⁶³ **pretext** – a fictitious reason that is concocted in order to conceal the real reason.

⁶⁴ **extenuation** – attempting to lessen the guilt of an offence by pleading partial excuses.

⁶⁵ **attenuated** – reduced in strength.

⁶⁶ **essay** – attempt.

⁶⁷ **exculpate** – free from blame; excuse.

⁶⁸ **abasing** – degrading; lowering in esteem.

⁶⁹ **inculpating** – bringing a charge against; accusing.

⁷⁰ **onus** – the burden of proving.

⁷¹ **censured** – formally rebuked; judged.

⁷² **impertinence** – behaving without proper respect.

In many cases, persons violating the Law of God have hoped to cover their transgression by secrecy. They have done the deed in darkness. They hope that no ear of man heard their footfall or listened to their speech. Possibly, they themselves held their tongue and flattered themselves that no observer witnessed their movements or could divulge their action...Men little know the ways in which the Almighty can find them out and bring the evidence that convicts out of the devices that were intended to cover their sin.

Do you not know that Providence is a wonderful detective? There are hounds upon the track of every thief, murderer, and liar—upon every sinner of every kind. Each sin leaves a trail. The dogs of judgment will be sure to scent it out and find their prey. There is no disentangling yourselves from the meshes of guilt, no possibility of evading the penalty of transgression. Very wonderful have been the ways in which persons who have committed crimes have been brought to judgment...We have read of men talking in their sleep to their fellows and babbling out in their dreams the crime they had committed years before. God would have the secret disclosed. No eye had seen, neither could other tongue have told. But the man turned king's evidence against himself! He had thus brought himself to judgment...

Do I address anyone who is just now practicing a secret sin? You would not have me point you out for all the world, nor shall I do so. Believe me, however, *the sin is known*. Dexterous though you have been in the attempt to conceal it, it has been seen. As surely as you live, *it has been seen*. "By whom?" say you. Ah! By One who never forgets what He sees and will be sure to tell of it...Certainly, He will one day proclaim it by the sound of trumpet to listening worlds. You are watched, sir. You are known. You have been narrowly observed, young girl. Those things you have hidden away will be brought to light, for God is the great [Revealer] of sin. His eye has marked you! His providence will track you. It is vain to think that ye can conceal your transgressions. Before high heaven, disguise is futile. Yea, the darkness hideth not: the night shineth as the day. I have known persons who have harbored a sin in their breast until it has preyed upon their constitution...There are those who have got a sin—if not a lie in their right hand, yea, a lie in their heart—and it is eating into their very life. They dare not confess it. If they would confess it to their God and make restitution to those whom they have offended, they would soon come to peace. But they vainly hope that they can cover the sin and hide it from the eyes of God and man. He that covereth his sin in this fashion *shall not prosper*.

Again, full many a time sinners have tried to cover their sin with falsehood. Indeed, this is the usual habit—to lie—to cloak their guilt by denying it. Was not this the way with Gehazi? When the prophet said, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" he said, "Thy servant went no whither." Then the prophet told him that the leprosy of Naaman should cleave to him all the days of his life...Oh! Sirs, ye must weave a tangled web, indeed, when once ye begin to deceive. When you have woven it, you will have to add lie to lie, and lie to lie, and yet all to no purpose; *for you will be surely found out*. There is something about a lie that always deludes the man who utters it. Liars have need of good memories. They are sure to leave a little corner uncovered through which the truth escapes. Their story does not hang together. Discrepancies excite suspicions, and evasions furnish a clue to discoveries until the naked truth is unveiled. Then the deeper the plot, the fouler is the shame. But to lie unto the God of truth—of what avail can that be? What advantageth it you to plead "not guilty" when He has witnessed your crime? That infallible Eye that never mistakes is never closed. He knows everything! From Him no secret is hid. Why, therefore, dost thou imagine that thou canst deceive thy Maker?

Some try to cover their sin by prevarication.⁷³ With cunning subtlety, they strive to evade personal responsibility. Memorable is the instance of David. I will not dwell upon his flagrant crime. But I must remind you of his sorry subterfuge,⁷⁴ when he tried to hide the baseness of his lust by conspiring to cause the death of Uriah. There have been those who have schemed deep and long to throw the blame on others, even to the injury of their reputation, to escape the odium of their own malpractices. Who knows but in this congregation, there may be someone who affects a high social position supported by a deep mercantile immorality?⁷⁵ Merchants there have been that have [swelled with pride] before the public as men of wealth, while they were falsifying their accounts, abstracting money, yet making the books tally, rolling in luxury, and living in jeopardy. Have they prospered? Were they to be envied? The detection that long haunted them at length overtook them; could they look it in the face? We have heard of their blank despair, their insane suicide; at any rate, a mis-erable exposure has been their melancholy climax. "Be sure your sin will find you out." You may run the length of your tether. It is short. The hounds of justice, swift of scent and strong of limb, are on your trail. Rest assured, you will be discovered...

Some people flatter themselves that their sin has already been hidden away by the lapse of time. "It was so very long ago," says one, "I had almost forgotten it. I was a lad at the time." "Aye," says another, "I am gray-headed now. It must have been twenty or thirty years ago. Surely, you do not think that the sin of my far-off days will be brought out

⁷³ **prevarication** – avoiding a straightforward statement of the truth.

⁷⁴ **subterfuge** – plan or course of action designed to deceive.

⁷⁵ **mercantile immorality** – dishonesty and cheating in financial and business matters.

against me? The thing is gone by. Time must have obliterated it.” *Not so, my friend.* It may be the lapse of time will only make the discovery the more clear...Ah! How often the transgressions of our youth remain within our bosoms! There lie the eggs of our young sin, and they hatch when men come into riper years. Do not be so sure that the lapse of time will consign your faults and follies to oblivion. You sowed your wild oats, sir; you have to reap them. The time that has intervened has only operated to make that evil seed spring up, and you are so much the nearer to the harvest. Time does not change the hue of sin in the sight of God. If a man could live a thousand years, the sins of his first year would be as fresh in the memory of the Almighty as those of the last. Eternity itself will never wash out a sin. Flow on, ye ages!...Flow on still in mighty streams, but the damning spot is there still. Neither time nor eternity can cleanse it. Only one thing can remove sin. The lapse of time cannot. Let not any of you be so foolish as to hope it will.

When the trumpet of the resurrection sounds, there will be a resurrection of characters, as well as of men. The man who has been foully slandered will rejoice in the light that reflects his purity. But the man whose latent vices have been skillfully veneered will be brought to the light too. His acts and motives will be alike exposed. As he himself looks and sees the resurrection of his crimes, with what horror will he face that Day of Judgment! “Ah! Ah!” says he, “Where am I? I had forgotten these. These are the sins of my childhood, the sins of my youth, the sins of my manhood, and the sins of my old age. I thought they were dead and buried, but they start⁷⁶ from their tombs. My memory has been quickened. How my brain reels as I think of them all! But there they are! And, like so many wolves around me, they seem all thirsting for my destruction.” Beware, O men! Ye have buried your sins, but they will rise up from their graves and accuse you before God. Time cannot cover them.

Or do any of you imagine that your tears can blot out transgressions? That is a gross mistake. Could your tears forever flow...the whole flood could not wash out a single sin...There is pardon to be had! Remission is to be found! Forgiveness can be procured...*Christ* can forgive you. *God* can blot out your sin...

GOD’S COVERING: This fact is affirmed concerning the people of God: All who have trusted in the atoning sacrifice that was presented by the Lord Jesus Christ upon Calvary may accept this welcome assurance: God has covered all their sin (Psa 85:2). How this hath come to pass, I will tell you. Before ever God covers a man’s sins, He unveils them. Did you ever see your sins unveiled? Did it ever seem as if the Lord put His hand upon you and said, “Look, look at them”? Have you been led to see your sins as you never saw them before? Have you felt their aggravations fit to drive you to despair? As you have looked at them, has the finger of detection seemed to point out your blackness? Have you discovered in them a depth of guilt, iniquity, and hell...that never struck your mind before? I recollect a time when that was a spectacle always before the eyes of my conscience. My sin was ever before me. If God thus makes you see your sin in the light of His countenance, depend upon it: He has His purposes of mercy toward you. When you see and confess it, He will blot it out. As soon as God in infinite lovingkindness makes the sinner know in truth that he *is* a sinner, and strips him of the rags of his self-righteousness, He grants him pardon and clothes his nakedness. While he stands shivering before the gaze of the Almighty, condemned, the guilt is purged from his conscience. I do not know of a more terrible position in one’s experience than to stand with an angry God gazing upon you and to know that wherever God’s eye falls upon you, it sees nothing but sin, sees nothing in you but what He must hate and must abhor...Not until this gracious work of conviction is fully wrought does the Lord appear with the glorious proclamation that whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus shall have his sins covered.

That proclamation, I have now openly to publish and personally to deliver to you. With your outward ears, you may have heard it hundreds of times. It is old, yet ever new. Whosoever among you, knowing himself to be guilty, will come and put his trust in Jesus Christ, shall have his sins covered. “Can God do that?” Yes, He can. He alone can cover sin: against Him, the sin was committed. The offended person must pardon the offender. No one else can. He is the King. He has the right to pardon. He is the Sovereign Lord, and He can blot out sin. Besides that, He can cover it lawfully, for the Lord Jesus Christ (though ye know the story, let me tell it again—the song of redemption always rings out a charming melody), Jesus Christ, the Father’s dear Son, in order that the justice of God might be vindicated, bare His breast to its dreadful hurt and suffered in our room, place, and stead what we ought to have suffered as the penalty of our sin. Now the sacrifice of God covers sin—covers it right over. He more than covers it: He makes it cease to be. Moreover, the Lord Jesus kept the Law of God, and His obedience stands instead of our obedience: God accepts Him and His righteousness on our behalf, imputing His merits to our souls.

Oh! The virtue of that atoning blood! Oh! The blessedness of that perfect righteousness of the Son of God by which He covers our sins!

From a sermon published after Spurgeon’s death on Thursday, February 24, 1916, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

⁷⁶ **start** – awake suddenly.

Whoredom is not a light sin, as carnal men take it to be. Sad judgments attend it, be it committed never so secretly.—*Thomas Manton*

OUR SECRET SINS IN GOD'S SIGHT

Edward Payson (1783-1827)

“*Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.*”—*Psalm 90:8*

IT is a well-known fact that the appearance of objects and the ideas that we form of them are very much affected by the situation in which they are placed in respect to us and by the light in which they are seen. Objects seen at a distance, for example, appear much smaller than they really are. The same object viewed through different mediums will often exhibit very different appearances. A lighted candle or a star appears bright during the absence of the sun; but when that luminary returns, their brightness is eclipsed. Since the appearance of objects and the ideas that we form of them are thus affected by extraneous⁷⁷ circumstances, it follows that no two persons will form precisely the same ideas of any object unless they view it in the same light or are placed with respect to it in the same situation.

These remarks have a direct and important bearing upon the intended subject of the present discourse. No person can read the Scriptures candidly and attentively without perceiving that God and men differ very widely in the opinion that they entertain respecting almost every object. And in nothing do they differ more widely than in the estimate that they form of man's moral character and of the malignity⁷⁸ and desert⁷⁹ of sin. Nothing can be more evident than the fact that in the sight of God our sins are incomparably more numerous, aggravated, and criminal than they appear to us. He regards us as deserving of an endless punishment, while we scarcely perceive that we deserve any punishment at all.

Now whence arises this difference? The remarks that have just been made will inform us. God and men view objects through a very different medium and are placed with respect to them in very different situations. God is present with every object. He views it as near, and therefore sees its real magnitude. But many objects, especially those of a religious nature, are seen by us at a distance and of course appear to us smaller than they really are. God sees every object in a perfectly clear light; but we see most objects dimly and indistinctly. In fine,⁸⁰ God sees all objects just as they are; but we see them through a deceitful medium that ignorance, prejudice, and self-love place between them and us.

Apply these remarks to the case before us. The Psalmist, addressing God, says, “Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.” That is, our *iniquities*, or open transgressions, and our *secret sins*, the sins of our hearts, are placed, as it were, full before God's face, immediately under His eye. He sees them in the pure, clear, all-disclosing light of His own holiness and glory. Now if we would see our sins as they appear to Him—that is, *as they really are*—if we would see their number, blackness, and criminality and the malignity and desert of every sin, we must place ourselves as nearly as is possible in His situation and look at sin, as it were, through His eyes. We must place ourselves and our sins in the center of that circle that is irradiated⁸¹ by the light of His countenance, where all His infinite perfections are clearly displayed, where His awful majesty is seen, where His concentrated glories blaze, burn, and dazzle with insufferable⁸² brightness. In order to [do] this, we must, in thought, leave our dark and sinful world—where God is unseen and almost forgotten and where consequently the evil of sinning against Him cannot be fully perceived—and mount up to heaven, the peculiar habitation of His holiness and glory. [*There,*] He does not conceal Himself behind the veil of His works and of second causes as *here*, but shines forth the unveiled God and is seen as He is.

Let us then, my hearers, attempt this adventurous flight. Let us follow the path by which our blessed Savior ascended to heaven and soar upward to the great capital of the universe, to the palace and the throne of its greater King.

⁷⁷ **extraneous** – coming from the outside.

⁷⁸ **malignity** – wickedness; harmfulness.

⁷⁹ **desert** – quality of deserving punishment.

⁸⁰ **in fine** – in summary.

⁸¹ **irradiated** – illuminated.

⁸² **insufferable** – impossible to endure.

As we rise, the earth fades away from our view. Now we leave worlds, suns, and systems behind us. Now we reach the utmost limits of creation. Now the last star disappears, and no ray of created light is seen. But a new light now begins to dawn and brighten upon us. It is the light of heaven that pours in a flood of glory from its wide-open gates, spreading continual meridian⁸³ day, far and wide through the regions of ethereal⁸⁴ space. Passing swiftly onward through this flood of day, the songs of heaven begin to burst upon our ears. Voices of celestial⁸⁵ sweetness, yet loud as the sound of many waters and of mighty thunders, are heard exclaiming, “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth...Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Rev 19:6; 5:13).

A moment more and you have passed the gates. You are in the midst of the city, you are before the eternal throne, you are in the immediate presence of God! All His glories are blazing around you like a consuming fire! Flesh and blood cannot support it. Your bodies dissolve into their original dust, but your immortal souls remain and stand naked spirits before the great Father of spirits. Nor in losing their tenements⁸⁶ of clay have they lost the powers of perception. No, they are now all eye, all ear; nor can you close the eyelids of the soul to shut out for a moment the dazzling, overpowering splendors that surround you and that appear as light condensed, like *glory that may be felt*! You see, indeed, no form or shape. Yet your whole souls per-ceive with intuitive clearness and certainty the immediate, awe-inspiring presence of Jehovah.

You see no countenance. Yet you feel as if a countenance of awful majesty, in which all the perfections of divinity shine forth, were beaming upon you wherever you turn. You see no eye. Yet a piercing, heart-searching eye, an eye of omniscient purity, every glance of which goes through your souls like a flash of lightning, seems to look upon you from every point of surrounding space. You feel as if enveloped in an atmosphere or plunged in an ocean of existence, intelligence, perfection, and glory; an ocean, of which your laboring minds can take in only a drop; an ocean, the depth of which you cannot fathom and the breadth of which you can never fully explore. But while you feel utterly unable to comprehend this infinite Being, your views of Him, so far as they extend, are perfectly clear and distinct. You have the most vivid perceptions, the most deeply graven impressions of an infinite, eternal, spotless mind in which the images of all things—past, present, and to come—are most harmoniously seen, arranged in the most perfect order and defined with the nicest⁸⁷ accuracy. [You perceive] a Mind that wills with infinite ease, but Whose volitions⁸⁸ are attended by a power omnipotent and irresistible, and that sows worlds, suns, and systems through the fields of space with far more facility than the husbandman scatters his seed upon the earth. [You perceive] a mind whence have flowed all the streams that ever watered any part of the universe with life, intelligence, holiness, or happiness, and that is still full, overflowing, and inexhaustible. You perceive also with equal clearness and certainty that this infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, all wise, all creating Mind is perfectly and essentially holy, a pure flame of holiness, and that as such, He regards sin with unutterable, irreconcilable detestation and abhorrence. With a voice that reverberates through the wide expanse of His dominions, you hear Him saying, as the Sovereign and Legislator of the universe, “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2). And you see His throne surrounded; you see heaven filled by those only who perfectly obey this command. You see thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand of angels and arch-angels—pure, exalted, glorious intelligences who reflect His perfect image, burn like flames of fire with zeal for His glory, and seem to be so many concentrations of wisdom, knowledge, holiness, and love. [This is] a fit retinue⁸⁹ for the thrice holy Lord of Hosts, Whose holiness and all-filling glory they unceasingly proclaim.

And now, my hearers, if you are willing to see your sins in their true colors; if you would rightly estimate their number, magnitude, and criminality, *bring them into the hallowed place*. [There] nothing is seen but the whiteness of unsullied⁹⁰ purity and the splendors of untreated glory. [There] the sun itself would appear only as a dark spot. And there, in the midst of this circle of seraphic⁹¹ intelligences, with the infinite God pouring all the light of His countenance round you, review your lives, contemplate your offences, and see how they appear. Recollect that the God in Whose presence you are is the Being Who forbids sin, the Being of Whose eternal Law sin is the transgression, and against Whom every sin is committed.

⁸³ **meridian** – pertaining to the power of the sun at midday.

⁸⁴ **ethereal** – heavenly; celestial.

⁸⁵ **celestial** – pertaining to heaven, as the abode of God, of angels, and of glorified spirits.

⁸⁶ **tenements** – habitations; bodies.

⁸⁷ **nicest** – most precise; exact.

⁸⁸ **volitions** – acts of willing and choice.

⁸⁹ **retinue** – group who attend an important person.

⁹⁰ **unsullied** – unstained; free from blemish.

⁹¹ **seraphic** – related to the seraphim, the angels of the highest order.

Keeping this in mind, let us bring forward what the Psalmist in our text calls “our iniquities,” that is, our more gross and open sins. See how they appear in the light of God’s countenance.

Have any of you been guilty of impious,⁹² profane, passionate, or indecent, corrupting language? How does such language sound in heaven? In the ears of angels, in the ears of that God Who gave us our tongues for noble purposes? Bring forward all the language of this kind that you have ever uttered. See it written as in a book: while you read it, remember that the eye of God is reading it at the same time. Then say, “Is this fit language for an immortal being to utter? Is this fit language for God to hear?” Especially, let everyone inquire whether he has ever violated the Third Commandment by using the name of God in a profane or irreverent manner. If he has, let him bring forward his transgressions of this kind and see how they appear in the light of God’s presence. Sinner, this is the Being Whose adorable name thou hast profaned, and Who, bending upon thee a look of awful displeasure, says, “I will not hold him guiltless, that taketh My name in vain.” O, what an aspect of shocking, heaven-daring impiety⁹³ does this assume when viewed in this situation!

Have any of you been guilty of uttering what is untrue? If so, bring forward all the falsehoods, all the deceitful expressions that you have ever uttered, and see how they appear in the presence of the God of truth, of that God Who has declared that He abhors a lying tongue and that all liars shall have their portion in the burning lake. O, what is it to stand convicted of falsehood before such a God as this!

Have any of you been guilty of perjury or false swearing, either at home or in foreign countries? If so, you may here see the awful Being Whom you mocked by calling Him to witness the truth of a known, deliberate lie. And how, think you, such conduct appears in His eyes? How does it now appear in your own? When you took that false oath, when you said, “So may God help me as I speak the truth,” you did in effect utter a prayer that His vengeance might fall upon you if what you swore was untrue. And will not God take you at your word? Will not that vengeance that you imprecated⁹⁴ fall upon you? O, be assured that it will, *unless deep, timely repentance and faith in Christ prevent.*⁹⁵

Have any of you transgressed the command that says, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy”? Such transgressions, I am aware, appear very trivial on earth; but do they appear so to Him Who gave this command? Do they appear so in heaven where an everlasting Sabbath is observed? Let those who have been guilty of such transgressions hear a voice from the glory around them saying, “I, to Whom you are indebted for all your time, allowed you six days for the performance of your necessary labors and reserved but *one* for Myself, but *one* to be employed exclusively in worshipping me and in working out your own salvation. But even this one day you denied Me. When spent in My service, you considered it as a weariness. [You] therefore employed it, either wholly or in part, in serving yourselves, thus proving yourselves to be wholly unqualified and unfit to enjoy an endless Sabbath in My presence.”

Have any of you—we must propose the unpleasant question—been guilty of violating the command that forbids adultery and its kindred vices? If so, bring forward these abominations and see how they look in heaven, in the presence of the holy angels, in the sight of that thrice Holy God Who has said, “I will come near and be a swift witness against the adulterers, and they shall have their portion in the lake of fire” (*cf.* Mal 3:5; Rev 21:8).

Have any of you been guilty of fraud, injustice, or dishonesty? Have you in your possession any portion of another’s property without the owner’s consent fairly obtained? If so, bring forward your dishonest gains. Hold out the hands that are polluted by them, and see how they look in heaven in the presence of that God Who has said, “[Let] no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such” (1Th 4:6).

Have any of you been guilty of intemperance?⁹⁶ If so, let such look at themselves and see how a drunkard, a rational being, self-degraded to a level with the beasts and wallowing in the mire of his own pollution, appears in heaven in the society of pure angelic spirits, in the sight of that God Who endued him with intellectual powers and thus capacitated him for being raised to an equality with the angels.

While attending to the preceding remarks, probably many, perhaps most of my hearers may have felt as if they were not personally concerned in them, as if they were guilty of none of these gross iniquities. I would indeed hope that, of some of them at least, none of you are guilty. But these are by no means the only iniquities of which God takes notice. For our text further informs us that He has set secret sins—*the sins of our hearts*—in the light of His countenance.

⁹² **impious** – ungodly; not showing due reverence for God.

⁹³ **impiety** – irreverence toward God; ungodliness.

⁹⁴ **imprecated** – called down.

⁹⁵ **prevent** – come beforehand.

⁹⁶ **intemperance** – excessive use of alcoholic beverages.

Let us then bring our hearts into heaven and there, laying them open to view, see how they will appear in that world of unclouded light and unsullied purity.

And, O, how do they appear! What a disclosure is made when, with the dissecting knife of a spiritual anatomist, we lay open the human heart with all its dark recesses and intricate windings and expose the lurking abominations that it conceals, not to the light of day, but to the light of heaven! My hearers, even in this sinful world, the spectacle that such a disclosure would exhibit could not be borne.

The man whose heart should thus be laid open to public view would be banished from society. Nay, he would himself fly from it, overwhelmed with shame and confusion. Of this, every man is sensible and therefore conceals his heart from all eyes with jealous care. Every man is conscious of many thoughts and feelings that he would be ashamed to express to his most intimate friend. Even those profligate, abandoned wretches who glory in foaming out their own shame, and whose mouths like an open sepulcher breathe out moral contagion, putrefaction, and death, scarcely dare utter to their own equally abandoned associates every thought and feeling that rises within them.

And if this is the fact, if the heart laid open to view would appear thus black in this dark, sinful world, who can describe or conceive of the blackness that it must exhibit when surrounded by the dazzling whiteness of heaven and seen in the light of God's presence, the light of His holiness and glory? How do proud, self-exalting thoughts appear when viewed in the presence of Him before Whom all the nations of the earth are less than nothing and vanity? How do self-will, impatience, and discontent with the allotments of Providence appear, when viewed as exercised before the throne of the infinite, eternal, universal Sovereign? How do angry, envious, revengeful feelings appear in the eyes of the God of love and in those regions of love where, since the expulsion of the rebel angels, not one such feeling has ever been exercised? How do wanton, impure thoughts appear—but we cannot pursue the loathsome, sickening enumeration. Surely, if all the evil thoughts and wrong feelings that have passed in countless numbers through...our hearts were poured out in heaven, angels would stand aghast at the sight! All their benevolence would scarcely prevent them from exclaiming in holy indignation, "Away with him to the abode of his kindred spirits in the abyss!" To the omniscient God alone would the sight not be surprising. He knows, and He alone knows, what is in the heart of man. What He knows of it, He has described in brief but terribly expressive terms. "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live...The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Ecc 9:3; Jer 17:9). Thus our own hearts appear even to us, if we view them in the light of God's countenance and recollect that in His sight, thoughts and feelings are actions, that a wanton look is adultery and hatred [is] murder...

The subject before us is far from being exhausted and very far from having had justice done to it. But we must leave it and hasten to a conclusion. Before we close, however, permit me to ask whether you cannot now perceive the reason why your sins appear more numerous and criminal in the sight of God than they do in your own? Have you seen or heard nothing that convinces you that they are far more numerous and aggravated than you had supposed? If so, you have seen nothing of what has been exhibited. You have, properly speaking, heard nothing that has been said. You have not seen your sins in the light of God's countenance; for had you seen them in that light, they would have appeared to you in some measure as they appear to God Himself...Can you not conceive, that were you really placed in heav-en before the throne of God with all the light of His glory shining around you, all the majesty of His countenance beaming upon you, every glance of His omniscient eye piercing your hearts—your sins would appear to you far more black and numerous than they now do? If so, allow me to remind you that a day is approaching in which you will be constrained to see your sins as they appear in the light of God's countenance. When that day arrives, His eternal Son, the appointed Judge, will be seen coming in the clouds of heaven with all His Father's glories blazing around Him, and all the bright armies of heaven following in His train. Seated on a throne of resplendent whiteness, with a countenance from the terrors of which the heavens and the earth will flee affrighted, He will summon the whole race of men before Him, and there cause their lives to pass in review, expose all their secret sins, lay open the inmost recesses of your hearts...But a conviction of sinfulness and guilt will then come too late. There is no available repentance beyond the grave. He that is found a sinner at the Judgment Day will continue a sinner and be treated as a sinner forever. O, then, my hearers, be persuaded now to come to the light that your deeds may be reprov'd and set in order before you.

From "Sins Evaluated by the Light of Heaven" in *The Complete Works of Edward Payson*, Vol. 2, reprinted by Sprinkle Publications.

Edward Payson (1783-1827): American Congregational pastor of the Congregational Church at Portland, Maine; born in Rindge, New Hampshire, USA.

FINAL JUDGMENT UPON SECRET SINS

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

“But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.”—Romans 2:8-9

WHEN the Day of Judgment comes, [the wicked] shall rise to the resurrection of damnation. When that day comes, all mankind that have died from off the face of the earth shall arise—not only the righteous, but also the wicked. “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan 12:2). “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works” (Rev 20:13). The damned in hell know not the time when the Day of Judgment will be; but when the time comes, it will be made known. It will be the most dreadful news that ever was told in that world of misery. It is always a doleful⁹⁷ time in hell. The world of darkness is always full of shrieks and doleful cries. But when the news is heard that the Day appointed for the judgment is come, hell will be filled with louder shrieks and more dreadful cries than ever before.

When Christ comes in the clouds of heaven to judgment, the news of it will fill both earth and hell with mourning and bitter crying. We read that all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him, and so shall all the inhabitants of hell. Then must the souls of the wicked come up to be united to their bodies and stand before the Judge. They shall not come willingly, but shall be dragged forth as a malefactor is dragged out of his dungeon to execution. They were unwilling when they died to leave the earth to go to hell. But now they will be much more unwilling to come out of hell to go to the last judgment. It will be no deliverance to them: it will only be a coming forth to their execution. They will hang back, but must come. The devils and damned spirits must come up together. The last trumpet will then be heard: this will be the most terrible sound to wicked men and devils that ever was heard. Not only the wicked that shall then be found dwelling on the earth shall hear it, but also those that are in their graves. “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (Joh 5:28-29).

Then must the souls of the wicked enter their bodies again, which will be prepared only to be organs of torment and misery. It will be a dreadful sight to them when they come to their bodies again, those bodies that were formerly used by them as the organs and instruments of sin and wickedness and whose appetites and lusts they indulged and gratified. The parting of soul and body was dreadful to them when they died, but their meeting again at the resurrection will be more dreadful... Thus shall they rise out of their graves, and shall lift up their eyes and see the Son of God in the clouds of heaven in the glory of His Father with all His holy angels with Him (Mat 25:31). Then shall they see their Judge in His awful majesty. [This] will be the most amazing sight to them that ever they saw and will still add new horrors. That awful and terrible majesty in which He will appear and the manifestation of His infinite holiness will pierce their souls...

Then must they appear before their Judge to give up their account. They will find no mountains or rocks to fall upon them that can cover them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. Many of them will see others at that time. [Some] were formerly their acquaintance, who shall appear with glorious bodies, with joyful countenances and songs of praise, and mounting up as with wings to meet the Lord in the air, while they are left behind. Many shall see their former neighbors and acquaintance, their companions, their brothers, and their wives taken and they left. They shall be summoned to go and appear before the Judgment Seat. Go they must, however unwilling. They must stand at Christ’s left hand in the midst of devils and wicked men. This shall again add still further amazement and will cause their horror still to be in a further degree than ever. With what horror will that company come together!

Then shall they be called to their account. Then shall be brought to light the hidden things of darkness. Then shall all the wickedness of their hearts be made known. Then shall be declared the actual wickedness they have been guilty of. Then shall appear their secret sins that they have kept hid from the eye of the world. Then shall be manifested in their true light those sins that they used to plead for and to excuse and justify. And then shall all their sins be set forth in all their dreadful aggravations. All their filthiness will be brought to light to their everlasting shame and contempt. Then it

⁹⁷ **doleful** – filled with or expressing grief; mournful.

shall appear how heinous many of those things were that they in their lifetime made light of. Then will it appear how dreadful their guilt is in thus ill-treating so glorious and blessed a Savior.

And all the world shall see it! Many shall rise up in judgment against them and condemn them: their companions whom they tempted to wickedness, others whom they have hardened in sin by their example shall rise up against many of them. The heathen that have had no advantages in comparison of them and many of whom have yet lived better lives than they shall rise up against them. And they shall be called to a special account: the Judge will reckon with them, they shall be speechless, they shall be struck dumb, their own consciences bearing testimony against them and shall cry aloud against them. For they shall then see how great and terrible a God He is against Whom they have sinned. Then shall they stand at the left hand, while they see others whom they knew on earth sitting at the right hand of Christ in glory, shining forth as the sun, accepted of Christ and sitting with Him to judge and condemn them.

Then the sentence of condemnation shall be pronounced by the Judge upon them. “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 25:41). This sentence will be pronounced with awful majesty. There shall be great indignation; and dreadful wrath shall then appear in the Judge—in His voice with which He shall pronounce the sentence. What a horror and amazement will these words strike into the hearts of the wicked on whom they shall be pronounced! Every word and syllable shall be like the most amazing thunder to them and shall pierce their souls like the fiercest lightning! The Judge will bid them depart from Him. He will drive them from His presence as exceedingly abominable to Him. And He shall give them the epithet⁹⁸ *accursed*: they shall be an accursed company, and He will not only bid them depart from His presence, but into everlasting fire, to dwell there as their only fit habitation. What shows the dreadfulness of the fire is that it is prepared for the devil and his angels. They shall lie forever in the same fire in which the devils, those grand enemies of God, shall be tormented! When this sentence shall be pronounced, there shall be, in the vast company at the left hand, tremblings, mourning, crying, and gnashing of teeth in a new manner—beyond all that ever was before. If the devils—those proud and lofty spirits—tremble many ages beforehand at the bare *thoughts* of this sentence, how will they tremble when it comes to be pronounced! And how, alas! will wicked men tremble! Their anguish will be aggravated by hearing that blessed sentence pronounced on those who shall be at the right hand: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat 25:34).

Then the sentence shall be executed. When the Judge bids them depart, *they must go*. However [unwilling], yet they must go. Immediately upon the finishing of the judgment and the pronouncing of the sentence will come the end of the world. The frame of this world shall be dissolved—the heavens be dissolved, and then the earth shall be set on fire. As God in wrath once destroyed the world by a flood of water, so now shall He cause it to be all drowned in a deluge of fire; and the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and “the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2Pe 3:10); and that great company of devils and wicked men must then enter into those everlasting burnings to which they are sentenced.

In this condition, they shall remain throughout the never-ending ages of eternity. Their punishment shall be then complete, and it shall remain in this completion forever. Now shall all that come upon them that they so long trembled for fear of, while their souls were in a separate state. They will dwell in a fire that never shall be quenched, and here they must wear out eternity...There is no reckoning up the millions of years or millions of ages; all arithmetic here fails, no rules of multiplication can reach the amount, for there is no end. They shall have nothing to do to pass away their eternity, but to conflict with those torments. This will be their work forever and ever. God shall have no other use or employment for them. This is the way that they must answer the end of their being. And they never shall have any rest, nor any atonement, but their torments will hold up to their height and shall never grow any easier by their being accustomed to them. Time will seem long to them, every moment shall seem long to them, but they shall never have done with the ages of their torment.

From “Sermon VII” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): American Congregational minister; well-known Puritan preacher and author during the Great Awakening; born in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony.

⁹⁸ **epithet** – a term used to characterize a person.

A PLEA FOR THOSE IN SECRET SIN

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

NOW I come...to plead with all my might with some of you whom God has pricked in your consciences. I have come to entreat you, if it be possible, even to tears, that you will give up your secret sins. I have one here for whom I bless God: I love him, though I know him not. He is almost persuaded to be a Christian. He halteth between two opinions: he intendeth to serve God, he striveth to give up sin, but he findeth it a hard struggle. As yet, he knoweth not what shall become of him. I speak to him with all love: My friend, will you have your sin and go to hell, or leave your sin and go to heav-en? This is the solemn alternative.

To all awakened sinners I put it: May God choose for you! otherwise, I tremble as to which you may choose. The pleasures of this life are so intoxicating, the joys of it so ensnaring, that did I not believe that God worketh in us to will and to do, I should despair of you. But I have confidence that God will decide the matter. Let me lay the alternative before you: On the one hand, there is an hour's merriment, a short life of bliss, and that a poor, poor bliss. On the other hand, there is everlasting life and eternal glory. On the one hand, there is a transient happiness and afterwards overwhelming woe. In this case, there is a solid peace and everlasting joy, and after it overflowing bliss. I shall not fear to be called an Arminian when I say, as Elijah did, "Choose you this day whom you will serve! If God be God, serve him; if Baal be God serve him" (*cf.* Jos 24:15; 1Ki 18:21). But, now, make your choice deliberately; and may God help you to do it! Do not say you will take up with religion without first counting the cost!...

Sinner, thou wilt never regret that choice, if God help thee to make it. Thou wilt find thyself a happy man here and thrice happy throughout eternity.

"But," says one, "Sir, I intend to be religious, but I do not hold with your strictness." I do not ask you to do so. I hope, however, you will hold with God's strictness. God's strictness is ten thousand times greater than mine. You may say that I am puritanical in my preaching. God will be puritanical in judging in that great day. I may appear severe, but I can never be as severe as God will be. I may draw the harrow with sharp teeth across your conscience, but God shall drag harrows of eternal fire across you one day. I may speak thundering things! God will not speak them, but hurl them from His hands. Remember, men may laugh at hell and say there is none. But they must reject their Bibles before they can believe the lie...

Sirs, will ye keep your secret sins and have eternal fire for them? Remember: It is of no use, they must all be given up, or else you cannot be God's child. You cannot by any means have both! It cannot be God and the world, it cannot be Christ and the devil; it must be one or the other. Oh! That God would give you grace to resign all; for what are they worth? They are your deceivers now and will be your tormentors forever. Oh! That your eyes were open to see the rottenness, the emptiness, and trickery of iniquity. Oh! That God would turn you to Himself. Oh! May God give you [the] grace...of repentance at this very hour; to say, "Henceforth it is war to the knife with my sins! Not one of them will I willingly keep, but down with them, down with them! Canaanite, Hittite, Jebusite—they shall all be driv-en out."

*"The dearest idol I have known, Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from its throne, And worship only thee."*

"But oh, sir, I cannot do it! It would be like pulling my eyes out!" Ay, but hear what Christ says: "It were better for thee to enter into life with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (*cf.* Mat 5:29). "But it would be like cutting my arm off!" Ay and it would be better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, than to be cast into hell fire forever (*cf.* Mat 5:30). Oh! When the sinner comes before God at last, do you think he will speak as he does now? God will reveal his secret sins: the sinner will not then say, "Lord, I thought my secret sins so sweet, I could not give them up." I think I see how changed it will be then. "Sir," you say now, "you are too strict!" Will you say that when the eyes of the Almighty are glowering on you? You say now, "Sir, you are too precise"; will you say that to God Almighty's face? "Sir, I mean to keep such-and-such a sin." Can you say it at God's bar at last? You will not dare to do it then. Ah! When Christ comes a second time, there will be a marvelous change in the way men talk. Methinks I see Him! *There* He sits upon His throne! Now, Caiaphas, come and condemn Him now! Judas! Come and kiss Him now! What do you stick at, man? Are you afraid of Him? Now, Barabbas! Go! See whether they will prefer you to Christ now. Swearer, now is your time! You have been a bold man. Curse Him to His face now. Now drunkard, stagger up to Him now! Now infidel, tell Him there is no Christ now—now that the world is lit with lightning and the earth is shaken with thunder until the solid pillars thereof do

bow themselves—tell God there is no God now; now laugh at the Bible; now scoff at the minister. Why men, what is the matter with you? Why, can't you do it? Ah! there you are, you have fled to the hills and to the rocks—"Rocks hide us! Mountains fall on us! Hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne" (cf. Rev 6:16). Ah! Where are now your boasts, your vauntings, and your glories? Alas! alas! for you in that dread day of wonders.

Secret sinner, what will then become of thee? Go out of this place unmasked, go out to examine thyself, go out to bend thy knee, go out to weep, go out to pray. God give thee grace to believe! And oh, how sweet and pleasant the thought, that this day sinners have fled to Christ, and men have been born again to Jesus! Brethren, ere I finish, I repeat the words at which so many have caviled—it is now or never, it is turn or burn. Solemnly in God's sight I say it; if it be not God's truth, I must answer for it in the Great Day of account. Your consciences tell you it is true. Take it home and mock me if you will; this morning I am clear of your blood. If any seek not God, but live in sin, I shall be clear of your blood in that Day when the watchman shall have your souls demanded of him. Oh, may God grant that you may be cleared in a blessed manner! When I went down these pulpit stairs a Sabbath or two ago, a friend said to me words that have been in my mind ever since: "Sir, there are nine thousand people this day without excuse in the Day of Judgment." It is true of you this morning. If you are damned, it will be not for [lack] of preaching to you, and it shall not be for [lack] of praying for you. God knoweth that if my heart could break of itself, it would for your souls; for God is my witness, how earnestly I long for you in the bowels of Christ Jesus. Oh, that He might touch your hearts and bring you to Him! For death is a solemn thing, damnation is a horrible thing, to be out of Christ is a dreadful thing, to be dead in sin is a terrific thing. May God lead you to view these things as they are and save you for His mercy's sake! "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mar 16:16).

"Lord, search my soul, try every thought; Though my own heart accuse me not Of walking in a false disguise, I beg the trial of thine eyes, Doth secret mischief lurk within? Do I indulge some unknown sin? O turn my feet whene'er I stray, And lead me in thy perfect way."

From a sermon delivered on Sabbath morning, February 8, 1857, at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens.

A SIGHT OF SIN AND A SIGHT OF JESUS

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn."—Zechariah 12:10

WE can only properly deal with sin as, at the same moment, we personally and closely deal with Jesus. A spiritual sight of the one object apart from a believing sight of the other will plunge the soul into the deepest despair. A sight of atoning blood must accompany the sight of our guilt. Seen and dealt with alone, dissociated from⁹⁹ the Savior, [our sin] is the darkest and most appalling object that can engage human study.

But God has met the case graciously and marvelously. The instrument that exhibits sin in its greatest *blackness* exhibits it in its fullest *pardon* at the same moment. A sight of sin and a sight of Jesus, as presented in the cross, are found in no other spot in the universe. Nowhere—not upon earth, where its ravages are vividly and fearfully traced—not in hell, where its punishment is fully and eternally endured—is sin seen as in the light of Christ's cross. God's hatred of its nature and infliction of its penalty, as exhibited in the soul-sorrow and bodily suffering of His beloved Son, is a demonstration unsurpassed, yea, unparalleled.

Oh, how *great* the love of God [is] to provide such a mirror in which to see at the same moment the enormity of sin and the completeness of its forgiveness!...There was but one Being in the universe Who concentrated upon Himself so much sin—yet, He knew no sin (2Co 5:21)—and in Whom met so much punishment of sin, as *Jesus*, the Sin-bearer of His Church. What defective views and realizations have we of this truth! How shallow our sounding of its infinite depths! How faint our experience of its preciousness and power! Yet it is all and everything to us in the momentous matter of our comfort, holiness, and hope.

⁹⁹ **dissociated from** – not connected with; regarded as distinct from or unconnected with.

If Jesus did not bear my transgression and curse, He did nothing for me; and I am yet in my sins. If He did, then the load is gone; the burden is annihilated—all transferred to Him and by Him borne into eternal oblivion. I am no longer my own sin and burden bearer: my sins were *all* laid on Jesus, not by my hand, but by the hand of God. Since Jesus has cared for my sins, then my only care should be first to realize their full pardon and then to walk so holily as not to recommit those sins that Christ bore...

To have a sight of sin and a sight of Jesus at the same moment constitutes one of the holiest and richest pages in the history of a child of God. There are many of the Lord's people who see sin, but who do not see Jesus at the same moment—who do not look at their sins through the medium of the cross. To look at sin through the divine holiness as reflected in the divine Law is to look and despair, *to look and die!* But to look at sin through Christ—to see it in the blood that cleanses it, in the righteousness that covers it, in the love that pardons it fully, freely, and forever—oh, *this* is to look and hope, *to look and live!* One eye upon sin and one eye upon sin's atonement will enable the soul to walk humbly and filially¹⁰⁰ with God. One eye looking at self and one eye looking at Christ will so regulate the experience of the soul, so accurately adjust its moral compass, as to preserve the balance between presumption and despair. [This will lead] to a humble, holy, watchful walk as it regards sin on the one hand, and to an assured, happy, hopeful sense of pardon, acceptance, and glory on the other.

No fact in Christian experience is more certain than this: sin is never properly seen until Christ is known; and Christ is never fully known until sin is seen in its existence, guilt, and power. It is a sense of our vileness, guiltiness, and condemnation that takes us to Christ. When we see Christ, accept Christ, and enter into believing rest in Christ, we then have the deepest conviction of the greatness, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and at the same moment the most assured conviction of our full and eternal deliverance from its guilt, tyranny, and condemnation. This harmony of tint—the blending of light and shade, sin and Christ—forms one of the loveliest and most impressive pictures of the many that illustrate the history of the Christian's life...

Here, then, let me pause and inquire, “Have you been brought to a true and deep repentance¹⁰¹ for sin?...Every glorified saint in heaven was once a mourning sinner on earth. Each happy spirit before the throne was once a penitent suppliant¹⁰² beneath the cross. Are you preparing to take your place among this happy, this countless throng? We reiterate the truth: without true and godly repentance for sin before God, you have no scriptural, valid evidence that you are saved! I ask not whether Sinai or Calvary, the Law or the Gospel, has awak-ened it—whether it flows from a terrific¹⁰³ sight of hell or a loving view of Jesus. All I ask is, “Has your heart been broken and your spirit become contrite before God? Examine yourself and prove your own self by God's Word, for it is your life!...

But our object is to present the great work of contrition¹⁰⁴ in a higher form, in its more evangelical character as experienced beneath the cross, as flowing from a believing, realizing view of Jesus the Crucified. And oh, how eminently calculated is the spectacle of Christ on the cross to produce this holy emotion!

The object of sight is JESUS. “They shall look upon me.” It is the most lovely, winning, wondrous object upon which the intelligent eye ever rested...Trace the points of attraction that meet in Jesus, and marvel not that when the eye roams over them, the heart is irresistibly won, the soul is instantly dissolved, and the believer prostrates himself at the foot of the cross in the profoundest sense of his vileness before God. All loveliness, all excellence, all glory meet and center in Jesus the Crucified. He is the most wonderful, as He is the most [beautiful] and attractive Being in the universe. All the infinite perfection of absolute Deity, all the finite excellence of impeccable¹⁰⁵ humanity concentrate in Christ...The Gospel dispensation¹⁰⁶ introduces us to a new world of loveliness and a new Being of love, wonder, and admiration, surpassing in His perfection all that earth in its pristine¹⁰⁷ glory ever beheld—THE INCARNATE SON OF GOD. Does love inspire, does loveliness win, do we stand in speechless awe before the image of the great, the good, the beautiful? Behold the Lamb of God!...

What marvelous power does the spiritual beholding of Christ in His moral beauty possess to produce in the believing heart the tender, holy sentiment of contrition! In what spiritual light can we contemplate ourselves—our righteousness and our unrighteousness? What view can we take of sin—the sin of our holy and of our unholy things, when

¹⁰⁰ **filially** – as a child in relationship to a parent.

¹⁰¹ **repentance** – “Repentance to life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sins and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it to God, with full purpose to strive after new obedience.” (Spurgeon's Catechism Q. 70)

¹⁰² **penitent suppliant** – repentant sinner humbly praying.

¹⁰³ **terrific** – dreadful; extremely terrifying.

¹⁰⁴ **contrition** – sincere remorse for wrongdoing; repentance.

¹⁰⁵ **impeccable** – incapable of sin.

¹⁰⁶ **dispensation** – age; period.

¹⁰⁷ **pristine** – original and unspoiled.

seen in contrast with the holiness, the beauty, and the perfection of Christ—*what* but the most humiliating, heart subduing, and self-abasing? Could we for a moment regard sin with indifference, could we in any one act look upon ourselves with complacency,¹⁰⁸ were we more conversant¹⁰⁹ with the purity, more enamored¹¹⁰ with the loveliness, and more deeply imbued¹¹¹ with the love of Jesus? Would not our experience be that of the evangelical Isaiah? “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:5).

Let us study more closely the Lord Jesus! It is only as by faith we see *His* spiritual beauty that *our own* pales. It is only as discoveries of His holiness are made to us by the Spirit that we cry, “Unclean! unclean!” (Lev 13:45), and lay our mouth in the dust. Oh, there is nothing like a clear apprehension of the Lord Jesus to empty, humble, and prostrate us at His feet! The region of the cross is too bright not to see our sinfulness, too pure not to loathe it, and too divine not to be assured of its pardon. One beam from that focus of light—oh, how excellent, nourishing, and sanctifying! One glimpse of that cross—oh, how replete¹¹² with life, bliss, and hope inconceivable, inexpressible! Who that has felt its magnetic power, its [transforming] influence beneath the corrodings of guilt, the shadings of sorrow, the assaults of Satan, the weariness of the world, the accusations of self, will not testify that nearness to the cross of Jesus is nearness to the source of perfect confidence, assured peace, and unruffled¹¹³ quietness? This, then, is the light in which we must view sin—every sin—all sin—even the light of the Savior’s glory as it gathers round His cross. Contemplating it in this light, we shall see sin as it really is—divested of its disguise, disentangled from its sophistry,¹¹⁴ dissevered¹¹⁵ from its causes. Thus, seeing it in its own native and naked deformity, the heart will dissolve into deep, holy, tender contrition beneath the cross of Jesus.

Not only does a sight of Christ’s beauty, but the spectacle of His sufferings contributes essentially to promote holy contrition for sin. We see suffering in the cross of Jesus in its unparalleled form. As a sufferer, Christ stood alone. Like the light in which Jehovah dwells, His sufferings were unapproached and unapproachable. “A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3), as no man ever was. What He endured when He exclaimed, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Mat 26:38); what was the bitterness of that cup of which the cry of His humanity went up to heaven that it should pass His lips untouched, but which yet He drank and drained; what was involved in that exclamation, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46), we shall never fully know... “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger” (Lam 1:12). Can we then approach the cross; stand before this marvelous, unequalled spectacle of suffering love; and remember that all this was [for our benefit]—for us, the sin bearing; for us, the soul sorrow; for us, the bodily anguish; for us, the thorn-crown, the bloody sweat, the cross, the death—and not feel a holy contrition for those sins that crucified the Lord of life and glory?

We feel a sense of pity for the individual who can behold human suffering with unmoved sensibility. Can we view the sickly pallor, the tremulous¹¹⁶ lip, the care-shaded brow, the tear-bedewed¹¹⁷ eye, the manly form that sorrow has bowed, or the gentle one that bereavement has mantled with its symbol of woe, unmoved? Turn to the cross of our suffering Lord. With what emotion other than the profoundest grief, with what feeling other than the deepest shame, with what thoughts other than the most self-abasing can we sit down and watch Him there! What! No penitence, no self-humiliation, no sin loathing, no sorrow for having wounded Jesus? The universe, as if conscious of its curse for man’s sin, is in sympathy with the suffering Savior dying for man’s sin. The sun is veiling, the heavens are mourning, the earth is trembling, the rocks are rending, the graves are opening—all in sympathy with a spectacle such as earth never saw and such as the universe is convulsed in seeing. And yet, how marvelously, how criminally insensible, impenitent, and cold we are!—we whose sins He was then bearing, whose curse He was then exhausting, whose death-penalty He was then suffering, who in that hour of atonement was covering our hell that He might [reveal] to us His heaven.

Surely, if sin is ever seen in its true light, if it is loathed, crucified, and forsaken, it is at the foot of Christ’s cross! It is here alone it can be truly studied. We must know *Christ* crucified before we shall know *sin* crucified. To gauge in any degree the depth of our iniquities, we must in some measure gauge the depths of Christ’s suffering. *There must be close,*

¹⁰⁸ **complacency** – self-satisfaction.

¹⁰⁹ **conversant** – well informed about.

¹¹⁰ **enamored** – in love; captivated.

¹¹¹ **imbued** – filled.

¹¹² **replete** – filled; abundantly supplied.

¹¹³ **unruffled** – free from emotional agitation or tension; calm.

¹¹⁴ **sophistry** – cunning; trickery.

¹¹⁵ **dissevered** – separated.

¹¹⁶ **tremulous** – quivering as from weakness; trembling.

¹¹⁷ **bedewed** – covered with drops as with dew.

personal dealings with the cross! This may reveal the secret of the crude, imperfect views of sin that you so mournfully deplore and the consequent absence of all spiritual vitality, joy, and hope in the soul.

You have been studying sin and your own sinfulness in the light of the present feverish uneasiness and restlessness that it produces and of the alarming consequences that it entails; and all the while you have found your feelings grow more callous, your conscience more seared, and your future painted in deeper, darker hues, and sin still maintaining its undisputed, unimpaired supremacy. *But, approach the cross!* Turn from the power, the tyranny, and the corrodings of sin, and view the wondrous provision the God of love has made for its pardon and its conquest. Concentrate your believing gaze upon Jesus suffering, Jesus dying for sin. Go and stand by the cross of Christ. One uplifted glance, one believing look, one dim sight of the pierced Savior—wounded, bleeding, dying for your iniquities—will revolutionize all your views and feelings respecting sin. It will appear to you as a new created thing. Its blackness, its turpitude,¹¹⁸ its results will stand out in such magnitude and color. At the same time, its atonement will appear so suitable, its redemption so costly, its pardon so complete, the purple flood that tides over all and drowns all and every transgression so effectual, and He who provided it all and accomplished it all, so divine, glorious, and precious [that it will] prostrate your soul before the cross, dissolved in penitence and love. Oh, there is no sensibility like that which springs from a view of Jesus crucified! No tears so precious, no feelings so true, no contrition so intense and tender as gushes from the hidden springs of the soul, touched and unsealed by the heart's believing communion with the suffering Savior!.

From "A Sight of Sin and a Sight of Jesus" in *Atonement and the Cross*, reprinted by Tentmaker Publications, www.tentmaker.org.uk.

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878): Nonconformist pastor; held pastorates in New York, USA, and in Leamington Spa, Bath, and Brighton, England; author of numerous books; born in London, England.



¹¹⁸ **turpitude** – depraved, shameful character.