

UNCONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN

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

Psalm nineteen opens with the freshness and gladness of the morning. As the devout singer looked out upon God's works and beheld the gorgeous sunrise, the adoration of his soul burst forth in joyous praise. Then, as if he were not completely satisfied with God's revelation in nature, he turned to that clearer and better witness, the inspired Word, and said, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." After he had looked into the books of nature and revelation, David opened the book of conscience and examined his own heart in the light of the other two.

While speaking of the law of God, some of its searching rays streamed down into David's soul and revealed regions of darkness which he had not suspected, as well as the tremendous contrast between himself and God. Overwhelmed with astonishment and grief, while comprehending the number and the frequency of his sins, and knowing full well that he had sins within him whose depths were still unfathomed, David cried: "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults."

This experience finds its parallel in every Christian heart and life. The most godly people readily acknowledge that every day of their lives gives them some new understanding of the sinfulness of their own hearts. Isn't it strange that, while the most holy people recognize that they are great sinners, there are those who make no profession of religion and have no aspirations whatever after holiness and yet they are scarcely conscious that they are sinners at all? In fact, it seems that the greatest transgressors are troubled the least by the accusations of conscience. Even though many refuse to recognize the existence of God and to acknowledge His blessings, they do not seem to know what sin is. Sensual and selfish men have the tendency to deny or to excuse the fact of sin, to conceal or to ignore it.

At the outset of our study of the unconsciousness of sin, it is well for us to remember that there are three levels of the mind. The first level is the conscious. I could wish that your conscious minds would be occupied with what I am saying to you. The second level is the subconscious. This is the region just below the conscious mind in which are stored all the memories which one may call into consciousness, such as familiar names and places. Just below the conscious and the subconscious is the third level which is known as the unconscious mind in which dwells the memories which seem to have been forgotten but which are still very much alive. The things which we have buried in the unconscious are anything but dead. For example, a great many of our fears are due to certain incidents in childhood which we have forgotten, but which have not disappeared. Character and happiness are affected vitally by the things which have been pushed down into the unconscious.

I should like to mention three things about the unconsciousness of sin:

I. The Certainty Of It.

1. Some of our sins are unknown to others.

There is a certain portion of each of our lives which is sheltered from the popular gaze. There is a certain privacy left, so that God may put us to the test and see whether our conduct is proper because others look at us or because He sees us. How do you act in this realm? Is it true that you are more pure before men than you are before God?

Most of us put our best side to the world. How carefully we veil from others our thoughts, our schemes of pride, our unspoken anger, our fits of envy, our greed and our stained imaginations! That accounts for the fact that the best people think worse of themselves than others think of them. The best of men have ever had the feeling that if the world knew them better it would praise them less.

However, it should be stated that the sins which people keep secret from others are not nearly as numerous as they think. Some of the sins which are kept secret from the world are well known by those at home. The people we meet on the street may never suspect that we have committed those sins, but a parent, a companion or a child may know about them all too well. Furthermore, there are sins which a man may commit in business, so that his name is dishonored among honorable competitors, and yet the shadow of them may never touch his home or his adoring children.

2. Some of our sins are unknown to us.

The secret faults to which our text refers are those sins in your life and mine of which we are unconscious. They are the sins which we commit of which we are unaware. Not having been awakened to them, we are not conscious that they are there at all. All of us are more or less blind to our own sins.

Some of our sins are hidden behind self-interest, prejudice or pride. Occasionally we go so far as to thank God that we are not as other men. Other sins are hidden behind rationalizations. Rationalization is a process whereby the mind tries to justify an attitude or an action which we know to be wrong. It is an effort to find relief from a guilt complex by some means other than repentance. For example, a man may drink intoxicating beverages on the pretext that doing so will make him popular or help him to forget his troubles. Apart from the truthfulness or the falsehood in such a consideration, there are important facts which are completely ignored; one of which is the difference between rationalization and reasoning. When one reasons out something, he brings into the focus of attention every fact that can possibly bear upon the subject in mind, but when he rationalizes it, he brings to bear only the facts he wants to consider. By this method one can satisfy himself that his stubbornness is just will power, his dissipation is just being a good sport, and his dishonesties are just smart business. Many are given to rationalizing their faults until they all but persuade themselves that their sins are virtues.

Still other sins are hidden behind commendable deeds. One says, "I don't go to church, but I live uprightly." Another says, "Maybe I do cut a few corners in business dealings, but I do a lot of good with my money." Thus by putting some commendable trait over against a bad one, we frequently balance the account in our own favor and try to forget that our sins are still there. Our faculty of judging ourselves is most unreliable. Sins of which we are not conscious are the ones which harm us most.

3. None of our sins are unknown to God.

Every sin in thought, motive, attitude, intention, plan, word or deed is known by the Lord.

II. The Consequences Of It.

1. Secret sins make right decisions more difficult.

Where is there a better illustration of this than the case of Pilate, the man who was responsible for the crucifixion of our Saviour? The narrative of our Lord's

death tells us how anxious Pilate was to liberate Him. He sent the Saviour to Herod; then he offered Barabbas as a substitute for the condemned Prisoner; then he entered into a controversy with the priests; then in a dramatic way he called for a basin of water so that in the presence of the assembled multitude he might wash his hands as a protestation of his innocence; then as a final appeal to the pity of the mob, he had the Lord Jesus publicly scourged so that the sight of His pale and exhausted body might excite the pity of the Jews.

Why didn't Pilate follow his better judgment? His own past secret conduct had forged chains about him and made it extremely difficult for him to make the right decision. He had done things in his own private life which would not bear the light of public scrutiny. The Jewish leaders knew this and threatened him with exposure to the Roman emperor, and Pilate knew that meant deposition, exile and possibly death. Therefore, Pilate stood before the mob, which was clamoring for the blood of Christ Jesus, as the personification of irresolution and moral weakness, due to the secret sins of his own life. Against his own better judgment Pilate handed the Lord Jesus over to His enemies. Pilate's secret sins weakened him to such an extent that he found it exceedingly difficult to make a great decision for the right. On the other hand, a clean heart and life gives one the courage to make a great decision for the right.

2. Secret sins prepare people for open falls.

Great sins are seldom momentary overthrows. They seldom hit us like bolts out of the blue. A man cherishes some hidden sin of which even his dearest friends are blissfully ignorant, and finally the day comes when, like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky, the secret is out and the loved ones and friends are shocked beyond expression. Do not imagine this man was carried off his feet by some sudden impulse. Perhaps for years he had been gloating over the unclean thing, and then one day under the pressure of temptation he unexpectedly gave way. The soil was silently and secretly prepared for this rank weed. So the sudden moral collapse, when character was forfeited, was not as sudden as was first thought.

III. The Cure For It.

1. Recognize that the sins of which we are unconscious are real.
2. Remember that God sees and knows the sins of which we are unconscious.
3. Repent of your sins of which you are unconscious.
4. Request God to cleanse you of your unconscious sins.

The worst thing you can do with your sins is to try to bury them unforgiven in the depths of the mind. By such procedure you simply give them a dark area in which to continue their nefarious activity. Sins that have been forgotten by us, as well as by others, may still be active in the unconscious mind, and thus be the cause of untold anxiety and misery. Many are tormented dreadfully by hidden sins.

The cleansing of the soul is a work of supreme urgency. Without this cleansing liberty, happiness and fellowship with God will be lacking. The cleansing of the soul is the work of God. That is why David prayed: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults," and "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."