

SECRET FAULTS

"Cleanse thou me from secret faults." Psalm 19:12.

This is the prayer of every true man in the most elevated moods of his life. In the thoughtful hours of life, he prays that he might have a pure heart, free from every secret sin. It is the desire of a holy person to be cleansed, not only from public, but also from private and secret sins.

With reference to secret faults, let us study:--

I. Their Certainty.

1. Every sin is seen and known about by the Lord.
2. Some sins are practiced secretly by us, and are not known by the world.

One might interpret secret faults as those which are unseen by our fellow creatures. There is a certain portion 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 as to how far we are good because the world looks at us, and how far we are good because He looks at us.

How have we acted here? Is it not true that we are often more pure before men than before God? We put our best side to the world. How carefully we veil our thoughts from our neighbors! Our schemes of pride! Our unspoken anger! Our fits of envy! Our greed! Our stained imaginations! And thus it comes to pass that good men think worse of themselves than society does. The best of men have ever had the feeling that if the world knew them better it would praise them less. However, the sins which people carefully keep secret are not as numerous as some people think. There are some sins and faults that we keep secret from the world and yet they are well-known to those at home. And there are other sins which a man may commit in business, so that his name is dishonored among honorable dealers, yet the shadow of them may never touch his home or the innocent faces of his adoring children. Such faults are secret beyond a certain circle.

3. Some sins are unknown to ourselves.

The secret faults referred to by the psalmist are those of which the individual himself is unconscious. They are the faults which others may or may not see in him, but which are always known by the Lord. They are the sins which we are committing, and yet we are ignorant of them, and have never been awakened to them, and are not conscious that they are there at all. We can see these secret faults in others, in our friends, and in the members of our family circles. Think how certain it becomes when we remember what we see in others. Is there anyone known to you, however good or beautiful, on whose faults or failings you could not put your finger? Is there any person, whom you know, whose weakness you have not long ago detected? Then, do not attempt to exempt yourself. You are bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, born with their weaknesses, and tempted with their temptations and sins.

It is only logical to conclude that if we can see faults in our neighbors, in our friends, in our nearest relatives, of which faults they are unconscious, then we too have faults which we do not suspect. These are the faults from which we should pray to be delivered.

Secret faults pertain to the motives, the feelings, the intentions of the heart. They relate particularly to such sins as:

(1) The secret bias of the heart to evil.

Many a parent is surprised to see his son, in some new situation in life, evince a propensity to some form of vice which he had never suspected. The reason is, that he has not been placed previously in a situation to develop that peculiar depravity of the heart.

(2) The unholy thoughts which we intend no other person shall know.

(3) The plans of evil which are not prosecuted to their completion.

They are made, and there is an intention of executing them, but the opportunity does not occur; or some unexpected barrier is thrown in the way; or the heart fails; or death breaks up the scheme. Only a small proportion of evil plans are ever executed.

II. Their Cause.

1. Heredity.

We inherit from our ancestors tendencies to certain forms of evil. Peculiar appetites and sensibilities are transmitted from generation to generation; and here is the secret of many a man's lapse into evil courses. It is sad to reflect that a drunkard or libertine may transmit to his children his passions, but that he cannot transmit his remorse.

2. Lack of knowledge.

We fail to take the time and trouble to examine ourselves. Neglect of thought and of religious instruction not infrequently explains this defect in knowledge.

III. Their Consequences.

Among all our sins, there are perhaps none more perilous than our secret sins. Why are secret faults perilous?

1. They 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 Jesus? We read the narrative about our Lord's death and we see how anxious Pilate was to liberate Jesus. He sent Jesus 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 innocency; then as a final appeal to the pity of the mob, he had Jesus publicly scourged so that the sight of Jesus, pale and physically exhausted, 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 crippled him in a decision for the right. 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 exposure to the Roman emperor, and that meant deposition, exile, or possibly death. Thus Pilate stood before the mob clamoring for the blood of Jesus, the very picture of irresolution and moral weakness, owing to the secret sins of his life. Against his own better judgment, he handed Jesus over to the enemy. Pilate's secret faults so weakened him morally that he found it doubly hard to make a great decision for the right. On the other hand, a clean heart gives the courage to make a great decision for the right.

2. They become the fixed habits of life.

People who live near a great cataract never hear the sound of the rushing waters. People who live near a railway junction are not startled by the screeching sounds of the locomotive in the night. Habit has a tremendous influence. Habits are not easily broken.

3. They prepare us for open falls.

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

IV. Their Cure.

1. Get rid of self-complacency.
2. Distrust yourself--"Who can understand his errors?"
3. Realize that God sees the things to which we are blind.
4. Remember that secret faults are real sins.
5. Practice rigid self-examination.
6. Be humble--Others have fallen and so may you.
7. Apply yourself to the study of the Word of God.
8. Compare yourself with your ideal constantly.
9. Cultivate a hatred for sin.
10. Practice vigilance.
11. Ask God to cleanse you.
12. Be willing to give up your secret faults.

Our hearts may be stained by secret sins or faults,
but Jesus Christ can make the foulest clean.

"Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."