

Moses' Confession

By **REV. SAMUEL W. ZWEMER, D.D.**

Ps. 90:8—"Our secret sins in the light of Thy Countenance."

The ideal time and place to read this **oldest** psalm is on a moonlight night at the great Pyramids. The oldest expression of penitence—a page torn from Moses' own diary; wet with his tears. Why did he not enter into Canaan? You remember the story? Of Nebo's lonely mountain, of Massa and Meribah.

Here Moses makes his great confession. Here we see Moses' secret sin in the light of God's countenance. For sin is the most dreadful thing in the whole universe and there is no searchlight that penetrates deeper, reveals more clearly and convicts of sin more startlingly than the face of God or the Cross of Calvary.

Paul puts it all into one sentence: "There He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made . . ." We were all there when they crucified our Lord. Even Moses felt that there was some relation between the face of God and the failure of his life.

The whole Psalm is called by Isaac Taylor "The most sublime of all the Psalms," a revelation of God's absolute greatness and omnipotence; man's frailty, weakness and sinfulness; and God's judgment on sin; the words *anger*, and *wrath* occur five times. One could find a proof text for every word in the Westminster Catechism definition of God in this one Psalm: "God is a Spirit, infinite in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth."

On Calvary these three met: God's Holiness—God's Love—Man's Sin. They met once, never to meet again! Here "mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other." "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

Our text raises three questions: (1) What are secret sins? (2) What is the light that reveals them? (3) What is the effect of that light?

I. WHAT ARE SECRET SINS?

Surely not those that are hidden from God; because He knows all; but those that are hidden from men and from ourselves. (The last particularly).

Luther's version: "unerkannte Suende" (unrecognized sins).
 (a) Sin is rebellious in its nature; it is the transgression of God's law. Its first letter "S"; hiss of the serpent. The Bible is the only sacred book that deals fundamentally with the subject, its origin, its consequences, its character; its punishment in this world and hereafter, its forgiveness—blotting out forever.

There are 12 different Hebrew and Greek words for sin and over 1000 references in Old and New Testaments. The Bible is an encyclopedia on sin. Theologians tell us: "Sin is a specific evil, moral, not natural, its seat is the soul, and it consists in transgression of or want of conformity to the law of God." It is rebellion against our Creator and Redeemer. Crime relates only to society and legality and courts of justice. Vice relates to morality, personality, but sin relates to God and His holiness.

Dostoviesky's—"The Two Brothers"; Dante's—"Purgatorio;" Shakespeare's—"Macbeth"; Tolstoi's—"The Resurrection" are all on Conscience! So in the Bible and in classical literature, Sin always includes three things; Guilt—before the bar of conscience, bar of man and bar of God; Pollution—uncleanness, sense of shame; Bondage—helplessness, "Bound in the prison house of sin."

God loves the sinner but God hates sin. There are many classifications of sin and degrees, but all sin springs from the same root and bears the same fruit. The wages of sin—of every kind of sin—always is death. That is, the final result of sin is to separate us from God. We are reminded of Robert L. Stevenson's striking phrase: "fall in fall out of the hand of God."

(b) Secret sins are the most important, because as germs of disease die in the sunlight, so the germs of Sin breed in darkness. Behind the closed door, the closed book, the sealed envelope, the hardened heart. There secret sins thrive.

When Dante describes his entrance into paradise he speaks of himself, after he met the guardian angel, as follows: "Seven times the letter that denotes the inward stain. He on my forehead with the truthful point. Of his drawn sword inscribed. And, "Look he cried, when entered. That Thou wash these scars away."

They were the scars of the seven deadly sins according to medieval theology: "Pride, envy, anger, intemperance, lasciviousness, covetousness, spiritual sloth—these seven were Dante's seven scars on his sanctified forehead." This is an old but a Biblical classification.

"Let him that is without secret sins cast the first stone at

the sinners who are not in God's house." For two of these deadly sins, intemperance and lasciviousness belong specifically to the world; Five cling to God's people—Pride, envy, anger, covetousness, sloth—all down the ages. The Sin of Jonah, a self-righteous preacher without compassion for heathen and of Simon the Pharisee, a self-righteous pew-holder without love for the lost.

II. Now what is **THE LIGHT THAT REVEALS OUR SECRET SINS?** Here, again, not the ordinary word for light, but "burning light" shining light. The light "His Countenance."

God the Father has no form or face or body or likeness, yet Moses on the Mountain, with Elijah, saw the face of God of which he speaks. It is the face of Jesus Christ whose eyes are as a flame of fire and in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is the express image of Divinity. He is the glory of the invisible God. "Majestic sweetness sits enthroned, etc. . . ." When we study these words in the Old Testament, Light of His countenance, Moses used them in blessing: Numbers 6:26—(first time) "The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." Psalm 4:6, "Many there are who say . . . lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." Psalm 11:7, "The upright shall behold His face." Psalm 21:6, "Glad with joy in Thy countenance." Psalm 42:5, "I shall yet praise Him for help of His countenance." II Cor. 4:6, "Light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Most of all in the glory of the Cross. For the cross of Jesus is the whitest and most dazzling light, that streams from the throne of God—the King Eternal—immortal—invisible. (John 3:16)

Not the Judgment Day nor the Fire of Hell—Nor the gaze of man or of all men, has such penetrating power as one look of Jesus from the Cross. Rebellion in the light of God's justice is black, but in the light of God's LOVE it is devilish, ingratitude and cowardly rebellion. The light that radiates from the face of Jesus on Calvary is the X-ray of God's Holiness and love.

It penetrates through everything. The X-ray of the Cross goes far beyond the whole spectrum of the Old Testament. Beyond the red rays of David (51st Psalm) the purple of Moses (Ps. 90) and the violet of Isaiah (chap. 6). "I am undone . . ." It pierces through everything. This is best seen by illustration. Think of Mary Magdalene at the feast when Jesus looked at her. Of Peter in the hall and by the lake; of Simon the Pharisee; of Paul on the road to Damascus. Their secret sins in the light of His countenance. "Depart from me, I am a sinful . . ."

When Cowper saw Christ looking at him, he wrote "There is a fountain filled with blood." The dying thief rejoiced to see . . . When Wesley saw Christ gazing into his heart, he wrote "Jesus Lover of My Soul let me to Thy bosom fly." When Toplady met Jesus face to face he wrote, "Rock of Ages." "Nothing in my hand I bring," etc.

The greatest saints have always felt themselves the greatest sinners because they lived and prayed nearest the searchlight. **THE CROSS!**

No book has helped me more in my devotional life than Bishop Andrews' "Private Devotions." Who was Bishop Andrews? And why has his book such wonderful power? He was one of the translators of King James' Version, a contemporary of Bacon. Spiritually "Andrews belongs to the family of Abraham and Isaiah and Paul and Pascal and Bunyan and Law and all the evangelical succession."

"I am made of dust and ashes," said Abraham.

"From the head to the foot I am made of putrefying sores," said Isaiah.

"In me there dwelleth no good thing," said Paul.

"I defy the devil himself to equal me", said the author of Grace Abounding.

"We are made of falsehood, duplicity and insincerity," said Pascal, "and we cloak up these things in ourselves from our selves."

"Man is only a compound of corrupt and disorderly tempers," says William Law.

"I am made of sin," groans Bishop Andrews and with that one awful word he lets us down into the whole bottomless pit of sin and shame and pain, and misery that is in his own evil heart.

"I am a burden to myself," he continues still on his face before God. "I am ruined, wretched, excessively sinful creature."

"You will sometimes see", says Andrews—"in the wall of a Church or in the wall of a house or in the wall of a garden a stone with the smooth mark of the boring-iron still upon it—the boring-iron by means of which the blast was let in which shattered the hard rock into a thousand pieces. So, sometimes one single sin will still leave its mark on a man long, long after it has been forsaken, repented of, atoned for, and forgiven. One single sin will so explode and shatter his conscience, it will so bruise and break his heart into a thousand pieces, that like one of the chil-

dren of Israel "a true penitent will feel the taste of dust of the golden calf in every cup he ever after drinks, in his sweetest, well as in his bitterest cup."

But such a man, to whom much has been forgiven, loves much and can then have compassion on the ignorant and those who are out of the way. Such a man can truly preach the Gospel, for he has felt its power in his own soul. Note, therefore, lastly, in our text:

III. THE EFFECT OF GOD'S SEARCH-LIGHT.

(a) It destroys forever the superficial teachings of perfectionism. There is no perfect holiness for man in God's sight until we see His face. Paul was not of this perfectionist school. His sense of sin grew with his years. Sin appears exceedingly sinful daily. Romans VII is not a theological discourse, but a page from his diary wet with tears.

(b) It humbles us; increases our daily penitence and humility. It pours contempt on all our pride. As Isaiah says then "all our righteousnesses are filthy rags." Not our transgressions and sins.

(c) It gives us more compassion for those who are ignorant and out of the way. We are touched with the feeling of their infirmity. Because we too are tempted, we remember that but for the grace of God we, too, would have stumbled and fallen.

"Judge not that ye be not judged." The infinite pity of Jesus Christ is due to the fact that He (who was made sin for us, although he knew not sin) saw reflected in His own heart, on the tree the sin of the whole race. In that mirror on the cross he saw at once all God's justice, all man's sin, and all God's love. Then burst His mighty heart! And there flowed forth blood and water! And he became "of sin the double cure to cleanse me from its guilt and power."

"Simon, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee . . ."

"This woman hath not ceased to kiss my feet . . ."

"To whom little is forgiven,

"To whom much is forgiven . . . loved much."

The Indian Christian, Sadhu Sunder Singh: put it all in one sentence for us: "Those who think that salvation from SIN will come easily have no strength to abandon sin, but those who realize that God became incarnate, and shed his precious blood to save us from our Sin, will not do that which gives suffering to God or to a brother in Christ."

Our message is "free salvation", but at what a terrible cost!

It is a "simple Gospel" only for those who have never thought deeply.

To take the condemnation of sin and the wrath of God against Sin, out of the Cross is to cut the very nerve out of the Gospel. "He was made sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance." If we say we have no sin . . . If we confess our sins He is faithful and just . . .

A M E N

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