

Secret Sins in the Light of God's Countenance

Psalm 90:8

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Marilyn & Steve - Power India

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What you think of God shapes your whole world-view. For one thing, if you have a low view of God, you'll have a higher view of yourself than you ought to have, and that's the sin of pride. So how we think about God has major practical ramifications, and I want to show you that this morning by looking at a psalm that rehearses some of the major attributes of God—Psalm 90.

Psalm 90 is probably the oldest psalm in the psalter. If your Bible includes the inscriptions at the beginning of the psalms, you'll see that this one is titled "**A Prayer of Moses the man of God.**" So this psalm was written by Moses, some 450 years before the time of David.

Obviously, the way the psalms are ordered in our Bibles is not chronological. The psalms are actually organized in 5 books, and Psalm 90 is the first psalm in book four. It's the only psalm in the psalter attributed to Moses, and as the inscription suggests, it is in the form of a prayer. It's a prayer for grace and mercy.

Now, we're mainly going to focus on one verse in this psalm this morning—verse 8—but before we get there, I want

to look at the psalm as a whole so that we have a better idea of the context. Notice how Moses frames his prayer by reciting back to God a list of some of the divine attributes. He speaks of the *eternality* of God in verse 2: "**from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**" He alludes to the *sovereignty* of God in verse 3; he speaks of the *timelessness* of God in verse 4; he mentions the *wrath* of God in verse 7; he refers to the *omniscience* of God in verse 8; and then he returns to the *wrath* of God in verses 9 and 11. That part of Moses' prayer is all worship and confession. And notice that his emphasis is on the fearsome attributes of God, culminating with an overwhelming sense of God's wrath.

But then in verse 12, he starts making petitions. In verse 13, he prays for *compassion*. And he turns his attention to the merciful attributes of God. He specifically mentions *God's mercy* in verse 14; *God's glory* in verse 16; And *God's beauty* in verse 17.

Now, woven into that abbreviated survey of divine attributes is a series of contrasts. For everything that is true about God, Moses acknowledges that the opposite is true about humanity. Whatever God is, we are not. God is eternal (v. 2); we are made of dust (v. 3). He is "**from everlasting to everlasting**" (v. 2); our lives "**are soon gone, and we fly away**" (v. 10). A thousand years are like one day to God (v. 4); eighty years is about the most time we can expect to live (v.

10). God is glorious and beautiful (vv. 16-17); we are sinful (v. 8). A whole millennium passes by like a watch in the night in God's estimation (v. 4); but our short lives seem full of labor and sorrow (v. 10). So the contrast is between the eternality and glory of God versus the frailty and misery of human existence.

Now, you might think that's a morbid or depressing theme, but it's not. There's a note of triumph that runs through this prayer. It begins and ends with a celebration of what God means to His people. That's what it's all about. And that's why Moses has so much to say about God's attributes. This is an anthem about God's glory and goodness, and he sets that truth against the stark backdrop of human misery so that we can see the wonder of God's mercy and blessing even better.

Of course, there's a historical setting for this psalm. Remember that after Moses and the Israelites left Egypt, they wandered for forty years in the wilderness, because of their own sin and unbelief. More than a million Israelites left Egypt at the Exodus. (Exodus 12:37 indicates that there were 600,000 men of fighting age. There would have been about as many adult women as men, so conservatively, there were at least a million.) But out of that mass of people there were only two who were adults when they left Egypt who made it into the promised land—Joshua and Caleb. Even Moses never

got to enter Canaan. All of them were wanderers and vagabonds for forty years, until that generation died off.

And the *reason* was that they had provoked God to displeasure by constantly complaining, rebelling, falling into the grossest kinds of sins, and whatnot. Numbers 13 describes how, when it was time to enter the Promised Land, they sent scouts ahead to check it out, and all but two of them came back with an evil report, frightened, timid, saying **"We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are"** (Numbers 13:31). *[Put a marker in Psalm 90 and turn to Numbers 14 for a minute, and let's look at the context for the psalm.]* Remember, the scouts came back, and all except Joshua and Caleb gave a negative report. They claimed the land was filled with giants, and said the Israelites were like grasshoppers compared to them. In other words, they came back and called God a liar.

Numbers 14:2 says **"All the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!'"** "Why did the Lord bring us here to the wilderness?" they asked—**"Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?"** And verse 4 says they even decided to choose a new leader, and they were preparing to go back to Egypt.

Verses 5-9 describe how Moses and Aaron, and Joshua and Caleb, pleaded with the people not to rebel against God (v. 9): **"the LORD is with us; do not fear them."**

But (v. 10), the people were about to stone Moses and Aaron and Joshua and Caleb to death when suddenly **"the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel."** The visible manifestation of God's glory—the Shekinah—appeared in the Tabernacle, **"And the LORD said to Moses, 'How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?'"**

And the Lord threatened to wipe out the entire nation and start over with Moses (v. 12): **"I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."**

But Moses pleaded with God and begged for forgiveness on behalf of the people (v. 19): **"Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now."**

And God was gracious. He forgave them (v. 20). That's a vital point. These were redeemed people. But as Hebrews 12:6 says, **"the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."** So as a consequence of their unbelief, God forbade them to enter the Promised Land. He condemned them to 38 years of wandering in the wilderness,

until that entire generation died off. Look down at verse 28 (still in Numbers 14):

As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you:

29 your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me,

30 not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

So that's how one whole generation of Israel were condemned to the wilderness and kept out of the Promised Land. From that point on, *they knew* they would live the rest of their lives suffering the consequences of their sin. A whole generation, except for two men, had their bodies scattered all over the wilderness. It was one of the bleakest times in the history of Israel. Scripture continually points back to the sin of that generation as a negative example. That is the whole point of 1 Corinthians 10. Verse 11 says: "**these things happened to *them* as an example, but they were written down for *our* instruction.**"

By the way, it wasn't long after this incident that Moses lost his temper in front of the Israelites, and God forbid even Moses from entering the promised land. you can read about *that* in Numbers 20. Numbers 20:12: "**The LORD said to Moses**

and Aaron, **'Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.'**"

Now, go back to Psalm 90. That's the context for this passage. Moses and his entire generation now know that they will never enter the Promised Land in this earthly life. They had left Egypt in search of a land filled with milk and honey. Their hearts were set on it. But now Canaan will never be their dwelling place. They are condemned to live in tents in the wilderness until they die.

By the time he writes Psalm 90, Moses has come to grips with the fact that he will never enter Canaan. But He realizes that he already has even better dwelling-place than any earthly land that flows with milk and honey. Verse 1: **"Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations."** Even back in Egypt, when the Israelites were condemned to the worst kind of slavery, God had been their refuge. And during those long years in the wilderness, God was the One in whom they lived and moved and had their being. He was their fortress and their strong tower. He was their **"dwelling place in all generations."**

Moses rehearses the eternity of God (v. 2): **"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."** And then he contrasts that with the mortality of men.

Remember, Moses is very aware of his own frailty, and by this time, so were all the Israelites. I did the math on this, and if there were a million adults at Kadesh-Barnea (where God condemned them to wander until everyone over 20 died), and that entire generation died off in 38 years, that's an average of 72 deaths every single day. That's a lot of carcasses scattered in the wilderness, and a lot of human misery.

And that's what Moses says in verse 3 of our psalm. The New King James Version says: "**You turn man to destruction, and say, 'Return, O children of men.'**" The word "destruction" there is a Hebrew word that speaks of something that is pulverized. Literally, "dust." That's exactly what the English Standard Version says: "**You return man to dust and say, 'Return, O children of man!'**" God himself had said to Adam in Genesis 3:19: "**By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**" That's what this verse refers to. God is sovereign over life and death. We're nothing but dust, and our bodies will eventually go back to the dust.

But (v. 4), God dwells outside of time. Time does not occur to Him. "**For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.**" In 2 Peter 3:8, Peter says it works vice versa, too. "**With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.**" God

Himself is timeless and is not bound by time. He dwells outside of it.

But Moses' point here is about human mortality. He knew, of course, that some of the patriarchs had lived nearly a thousand years. It's hard to imagine living that long, but Moses says even a thousand years is nothing to God.

Notice how Moses sees God as utterly sovereign—eternal, almighty, (and according to verse 2) the One who "**formed the earth and the world.**" He is the one who turns us back into dust. So Moses realizes that human mortality and human misery are under the sovereign control of divine Providence. God is the One who sweeps men away into the sleep of death (vv. 5-6): "**You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.**"

Furthermore, Moses recognized that God was ultimately the source and the cause of all their distress, because every evil that had come upon them was a fruit of sin and the result of God's displeasure over sin. Verse 7:

For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed.

8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

9 For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

10 The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

11 Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?

That's a description of what life felt like to the Israelites in the wilderness. By the way, that is all true of life in general. Human misery, and calamity, and sorrow, and death are all the fruits of sin. That's not to say that every sorrow you endure is a direct result of a sin you have committed. But it is true in general that every human sorrow, up to and including death, results from the curse of sin. Romans 5:12: "**Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.**"

And if it sometimes feels like our days are few and full of trouble, it's because that's the nature of this earthly life. The earth itself is cursed. Verse 9: "**all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.**" In the King James Version, the second half of that verse says, "**we spend our years as a tale that is told.**" The Hebrew expression actually means, "**We finish our years like a groan.**"

And that's true, isn't it? Life ends with a groan. The end of life is like an extended sigh of pain. Life doesn't necessarily get more pleasant as you get older. At the end you die, and even if you're fortunate to live long enough to die of old age,

the end of your life will be like a drawn-out groan of agony. Meanwhile, this life is filled with moaning and affliction. All nature groans. Paul recognized that in Romans 8:22-23. Life is short, and full of trouble—seventy, eighty years at the most. (Moses himself lived to be 120, but after this, the normal human life span was shortened—perhaps because God is merciful). Eighty years tops, **"Yet their span is but toil and trouble."** Eighty years of sweat and tears—**"[But] they are soon gone, and we fly away."**

All of that leads Moses to reflect on the reality of divine wrath against sin. Verse 11: **"Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?"** In other words, no matter how much we might *fear* God's wrath, His wrath against sin turns out to be more than equal to the worst thing we could ever imagine. Consider the biblical descriptions of hell. God's wrath is infinitely worse than anyone really fears.

But notice: that doesn't cause Moses to despair. Because he knows the goodness of God as well. And that's what launches him into the petition phase of his prayer. Verse 12: **"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."** In other words, help us to keep both the brevity of this life and the realities of eternity in perspective, so that we can be truly wise people.

And then Moses pleads with God for compassion:
"Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants! Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

Moses realizes that even though he can't erase the *consequences* of his sin, his life isn't hopeless. He's not dreading what's ahead or seeing the future with a grim outlook at all. He knows the mercies of God are inexhaustible, and God abundantly pardons. God can restore even the years that the locust has eaten. So Moses prays for a special outpouring of God's blessing. Verse 15: **"Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. [In other words, "Give us blessing at least equal to our trouble.]"** **Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!"**

By the way, God answered that prayer. The work of Moses' hands was certainly established, right? His life's work was by no means wasted. And he wasn't kept out of the Promised Land forever. Because at the transfiguration, when Christ revealed His glory, Moses and Elijah were there, talking with Him. Moses got blessing equal to his trouble—and infinitely more. After all, God was His dwelling

place—and God is a better dwelling place than the land of Canaan.

That's the whole point of this psalm. We are dying creatures. Our earthly comforts are few and they are only temporary. This life is going to end shortly. And even if you die of old age, it's a long process of decline to get to that point. The very best you can hope for is that your life will end like a drawn-out groan.

But if God is your dwelling-place then you have an eternal habitation, because He Himself is eternal. Not only that, if God is your dwelling place, then He can bless you even in this sin-cursed world. He will even bless you more than the days you have been afflicted. Certainly, the blessings of heaven are infinitely greater than all the miseries of this life combined. Romans 8:18: "**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**" There's a lot for the believer to look forward to, no matter how miserable life gets. That's really a wonderful truth, isn't it?

So that's the message of this psalm. All of that is introduction, and our time is already more than half gone. What I want to do in the remainder of our time is focus on verse 8, where Moses says, "**You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.**" The Hebrew word used there implies the Lord's immediate face-to-face

presence. In the King James Version, it's translated this way: **"Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."**

This whole psalm is about seeing things from the divine perspective. If we would simply try to see things as God sees them, and see God as He really is—then everything in life (and life itself) would look completely different to us. What *seems* like a long time to us turns out to be no time at all. What *seems* important in an earthly context—even entering the Promised Land—is ultimately of no consequence whatsoever in the perspective of eternity. What's really important is having God as your eternal dwelling place.

And on the other hand, some of the things we think aren't really important in this life are a much bigger deal than you would ever imagine. Our sin, for instance.

Moses reminds us in verse 8 that even our secret sins are fully known to God. God doesn't ignore those sins. We may think they are secret, but they don't escape his notice. On the contrary, **"[He has] set our iniquities before [Him, Even] our secret sins in the light of [His] countenance."** Everything we might think we do in secret, we are actually doing those things right in the face of God. He sees them all. And that is no trivial matter.

Now, I want to look closely at this idea of secret sins. I think if you'll do quick a self-inventory, you'll probably have

to acknowledge that the very worst sins you struggle with are secret sins—things you don't want to be known to others, things you would be ashamed to have uncovered or exposed. Naturally, whatever you are most ashamed of, you want to keep secret. So in all likelihood, your *worst* sins are the *most* secret ones.

So I don't know about you, but to me, this verse (v. 8), is a frightening verse. I think it's fitting that it comes in a context where Moses is talking about the awesome, terrifying power of God's wrath against sin. Because nothing is more terrifying than the thought of "**our secret sins in the light of [God's] countenance.**"

And having already looked at the larger context of this whole psalm, I want to make three observations about verse 8. This will be my outline if you want to take these down. Here are three truths that emerge from verse 8 that ought to make us terrified to sin in secret:

1. SECRET SINS ARE NOT AS SECRET AS YOU MIGHT THINK

You can sometimes keep your sins secret from other people, but there's no way to keep a sin secret from God. You can't put a fig leaf over it and pretend it never happened. He knows about it as soon as you do it. He *sees* you do it—even if it's just an evil thought. First Chronicles 28:9: **"The LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought."** In Jeremiah 17:10, the Lord speaks: **"I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."**

Of course, God sees everything we *do*, as well. Job 34:21 says, **"His eyes are on the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps."** In Jeremiah 23:24, God Himself asks, **"Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth?"**

Psalm 139 is all about God's omniscience and His omnipresence. The whole point is that there's nowhere you can go where God cannot see, and nothing you can do to hide any secret from Him.

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

Verse 7:

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"

12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you..

So you can't hide your sin from God. Numbers 32:23: "**Be sure your sin will find you out.**" There's really no such thing as a secret sin. All our sin is known already, because it is already known to God. Even the sins we try our hardest to cover up are naked and open before his eyes. Hebrews 4:13: "**No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**"

Not only that, but all your secret sin will one day be exposed. In Luke 12:1-3, Jesus said, "**Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that**

will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops."

Why do we sin secretly? Why would we ever think it's morally any different to break the law of God in secret than to do it openly, in the sight of everyone? In a way, secret sin is *worse* than open rebellion, because the sin we do in secret is compounded with hypocrisy, and the secrecy of the act also becomes an impediment to true repentance—because it's pretty hard to repent of something while you're trying to cover it up.

Now, think about it: if we're ashamed to have other *people* know our sin, shouldn't we be even *more* ashamed by the realization that God already sees and knows the deepest secrets of our hearts? Why do we do that? Isn't it because we don't fear God the way we should?

If you think it's OK to sin because God is rich in mercy, that's the sin of presuming on His grace. That was the sin of the evil false teachers described in Jude 4, "**who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality.**" Jude describes them as damned without hope—"wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever." In other words,

the idea that grace grants us permission to sin is a hellish doctrine.

If you think sin is OK if nobody sees it—if you imagine that there's no real evil in an act no one ever discovers—then you don't understand the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Or if you think God will automatically disregard your sin or excuse it just because He is merciful; then you don't have the first idea what God thinks of sin. He *hates* sin. Sin cost God's Son His life. God is more displeased than anyone, every time we sin.

In fact, have you ever realized that those who deliberately practice secret sins are practical atheists? The person who willfully sins in secret has atheism in his heart.

If there's anything you indulge in secretly that you wouldn't ever dream of doing in front of me (a wicked word you wouldn't use in my presence, or something unwholesome you would never look at with me looking over your shoulder, or whatever)—and yet you can do it knowing that God is looking at you—that's atheism. The person who does that is showing more respect and reverence to other creatures than he is showing to God. **"There is no fear of God before his eyes."**

You couldn't behave like that if you genuinely *feared* God. Psalm 10 says this is one of the characteristics of the wicked. Verse 11: **"He says in his heart, 'God has forgotten, he**

has hidden his face, he will never see it." Verse 13: "He has said in his heart, '[God] will not require an account.'" But, the psalmist says, God *has* seen it already, and He *will* call us to account.

Now, again, that ought to provoke us to fear. That's the very thing Moses is writing about in the context of our psalm. Verse 7: "**by your wrath we are dismayed.**" The word means "terrified, utterly chagrined, undone—horrified."

And that brings me to the second observation I want to make about this verse. Point 1: Secret sins are not as secret as you might think. Here's point 2:

2. SECRET SINS ARE NOT AS *SAFE* AS YOU MIGHT THINK

As Moses is writing this psalm, he realizes, of course, that many of his troubles are the direct consequences of his own sin. The whole nation is suffering the just fruits of their own rebellion. And of course, Moses understands that *all* our earthly troubles are ultimately the fruit of our fallenness. That's why he says in verse 7, "**We are consumed by Your anger; we are terrified by Your wrath.**" That's the Holman Christian Standard Bible, and it captures the sense of the text well. The ESV says, "**For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed**"—but the Hebrew words are powerful: "**We are annihilated by Your anger; we are terrified by Your fury [against our sin].**" He's very conscious of the relationship between sin and suffering, and he is acknowledging the righteousness of God's wrath. He's not complaining that God is being unfair. He's actually seeing his sin from God's point of view and simply acknowledging his own mortality, frailty, and sinfulness.

I want to stress again that this doesn't mean that all calamity is direct retribution for sin. It doesn't mean that every time something bad happens, God is punishing you for a specific sin you committed. Remember when we studied the healing of the blind man in John 9, Jesus explicitly taught (John 9:3) that the man's blindness was not a punishment for his sins or his parents sin, but it had a higher purpose: "**that**

the works of God might be displayed in him." Sometimes, like in the experience of Job, calamity comes to us for good reasons, not directly related to any chastisement for our sin—to test us, or perfect us, or conform us to the image of Christ.

But still, calamity in general *is* a result of the curse brought on this world by Adam's sin. There would not be any sorrow at all if there were no sin. Sickness and trials and the drudgery of life are all part of the curse of sin. And the reason we have so much trouble is because we *are* sinners. Therefore *all* our troubles ought to serve as a reminder to us of how much God hates sin. As much as we hate the *curse* of sin—God hates sin itself even more.

Now, Moses *realizes* that God thinks worse of our sin than we do. If God's judgments sometimes seem harsh, it's because He is perfectly righteous, and He understands better than we do the depth of evil in sin. God sees our sins as they really are. That's exactly what he means in verse 8: "**You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.**"

If we could see our sins the way God sees them—if we could really understand the blackness and monstrosity of our sins, the multitude of them—if we knew the vast measure of evil that exists in every sin—we wouldn't be able to endure the horror of the reality.

And yet we somehow imagine that evil is OK—that it's safe for us to sin—as long as no one on earth ever finds out about it. *What harm could there be in something no one else even knows?* But what makes sin evil in the first place is that it is rebellion against God. And He does know. No sin is "safe."

And if you make a practice of sinning in secret, eventually your sin will betray you in public. Proverbs 13:21: "**Disaster pursues sinners.**" Isaiah 3:11: "**Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him.**" First Corinthians 4:5: "**the Lord . . . will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.**" Numbers 32:23: "**Be sure your sin will find you out.**"

You can't keep sin secret. You can't contain it by covering it up. You can't put a leash on your sin and control it. That's why the only remedy for sin is to mortify it—put it to death completely.

Spurgeon said,
You may labour 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 [jacket], 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; you cannot keep the evil [animal] still. Your sin

will gad abroad; and what is more, [someday] you will not mind it. . . . A man who indulges in sin privately, by degrees gets his forehead as hard as brass.

Spurgeon was right. Sin is inherently destructive, and the more you try to keep the lid on it, the more it will eat away at your soul. David described his attempt to cover his sin in Psalm 32:3-4: **"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah."**

That's the very reason most of the Pharisees were damned: According to Luke 11:39, they **"cleanse[d] the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside [they were] full of greed and wickedness."** They had practiced hypocrisy for so long, keeping their sin inside them, that their hearts and minds and consciences were utterly corrupt, completely hardened—and that's why they hated Christ.

Secret sin is destructive to the soul—there's nothing "safe" about it. Did you know that in virtually every case of serious spiritual failure I have ever seen in the church, the failure goes back to secret sins? Every time I have ever known someone who showed a lot of spiritual potential, but they fell into some disqualifying sin; just about every case I know of where we have had to exercise church discipline by excommunicating someone; and virtually every instance I

have ever known when someone who once professed to love Christ fell away from the faith—the cause is traceable back to some secret sin in the person's life. *Hypocrisy. A double life.* A secret sin they practiced, thinking no one would ever know. It's the most destructive thing you can do to your spiritual health. If ever disqualify yourself spiritually, it will most likely be because of your secret sins. That's a good reason to mortify *those* sins in particular, isn't it?

If you find yourself thinking you can safely sin when no one is looking, you desperately need to cultivate the fear of God. Secret sin is not as safe as you might think.

Now, I have one more point. If you're taking notes, here's a review. Point 1: Secret sins are not as *secret* as you might think. Point 2: Secret sins are not as *safe* as you might think. Here's point 3:

3. SECRET SINS ARE NOT AS *SATISFYING* AS YOU MIGHT THINK

One of the reasons people harbor secret sins is because those types of sins often promise satisfying pleasures. People indulge in lust, fornication, pornography, or whatever other secret sins they do—usually because they have bought the lie that those things offer real satisfaction. Some people who by all outward appearances are clean and sober take drugs or indulge in drunkenness in private, because they imagine they can get some kind of satisfaction from it.

Now Scripture acknowledges that there are certain pleasures in sin, and those pleasures may last for a short while, but they never really satisfy. Hebrews 11:25 says this about Moses, the author of our psalm: that he chose **"rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin."**

The pleasure of sin *never* lasts long. Job 20:5 says, **"the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment."** Proverbs 23:32 says this about the pleasures of too much wine: **"In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder."** James 5:5 says to the rich: **"You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter."** But now, James says in verse 1, it's time to **"weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you."**

The pleasures of sin never last, and sin cannot satisfy. That's the big lie of the serpent. He always promises satisfaction, but never delivers.

What *can* truly satisfy? Moses knew. Verse 14: "**Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.**" Only God can make us truly glad (v. 15). Only if we make Him our dwelling-place will we be assured of *eternal* satisfaction. Listen to David from Psalm 36:7-8: "**How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.**" And Psalm 17:15: "**As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.**" And the psalmist means: "I'll be satisfied when I bear your likeness—when I am perfectly conformed to the image of Christ."

That's the only true satisfaction. Real satisfaction can never be found in the shadows of some secret sin. Real satisfaction is only found in the bright light of God's countenance—and only for those who by faith have made the Lord their dwelling place.

Isaiah 55:1 is an open invitation to all who thirst to make God your dwelling-place: "**Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why**

do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food"—spiritual food; "every word that comes from the mouth of God."

How does a person who secretly indulges a love for sin find forgiveness and spiritual healing? Still in Isaiah 55, verses 6-7: "**Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**"

Jesus said (John 6:35), "**whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.**" In John 7:37, He said, "**If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'**"

The very last chapter of Scripture has a similar invitation—Revelation 22:17: **The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.**

That's what can satisfy. That's the *only* thing that can truly satisfy.