



Secret Sins
in GOD'S SIGHT

EDWARD PAYSON (1783-1827)

SECRET SINS IN GOD'S SIGHT

Contents

1. God's Perspective on Our Sins	3
2. Our Visible Sins in God's Sight	6
3. Our Secret Sins in God's Sight.....	8
4. Our Sins of Omission in God's Sight	10
5. Conclusion.....	12

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

© Copyright 2016 Chapel Library: annotation and compilation. Original text is in the public domain. Printed in the USA. All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version. Chapel Library does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal positions of the authors it publishes. Permission is expressly granted to reproduce this material by any means, provided
1) you do not charge beyond a nominal sum for cost of duplication;
2) this copyright notice and all the text on this page are included.

Chapel Library sends Christ-centered material from prior centuries worldwide without charge, relying entirely upon God’s faithfulness. We therefore do not solicit donations, but we gratefully receive support from those who freely desire to give.

Worldwide, please download material without charge from our website, or contact the international distributor as listed there for your country.

In **North America**, for additional copies of this booklet or other Christ-centered materials from prior centuries, please contact

CHAPEL LIBRARY
2603 West Wright Street
Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

Phone: (850) 438-6666 • Fax: (850) 438-0227
chapel@mountzion.org • www.ChapelLibrary.org

Please see also Free Grace Broadcaster 209, *Secret Sins*, available from Chapel Library. The *FGB* is a quarterly digest of six to ten messages from prior centuries, all on one theme, with a different theme each issue. Request a subscription

- worldwide, eBook sent via email: www.ChapelLibrary.org/broadcaster/fgb-subscriptions/
- in North America, printed copy sent via mail: write us
- in a country with a distributor, printed copy sent via mail:
write to them directly
www.ChapelLibrary.org/broadcaster/fgb-distributors/

Cover image used by permission: Igor Zhuravlov on 123rf.com.

SECRET SINS IN GOD'S SIGHT

*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 extraneous¹ 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.

1. God's Perspective on Our Sins

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 malignity² and desert³ 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

¹ **extraneous** – coming from the outside.

² **malignity** – wickedness; harmfulness.

³ **desert** – entitlement to punishment.

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,⁴ 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 irradiated⁵ 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 insufferable⁶ 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. 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 meridian⁷ day, far and wide through the regions of ethereal⁸ space. Passing swiftly onward through this flood of day, the songs of heaven begin to burst upon our ears. Voices of

⁴ **in fine** – in summary.

⁵ **irradiated** – illuminated.

⁶ **insufferable** – impossible to endure.

⁷ **meridian** – pertaining to the power of the sun at midday.

⁸ **ethereal** – heavenly; celestial.

celestial⁹ sweetness, yet loud as the sound of many waters and of mighty thunderings, 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 tenements¹⁰ 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 perceive 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 nicest¹¹ accuracy. [You perceive] a Mind that wills with infinite ease, but Whose volitions¹² 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

⁹ **celestial** – pertaining to heaven, as the abode of God, of angels, and of glorified spirits.

¹⁰ **tenements** – habitations; bodies.

¹¹ **nicest** – most precise; exact.

¹² **volitions** – acts of will and choice.

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 archangels—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 retinue¹³ 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 unsullied¹⁴ 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 seraphic¹⁵ 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.

2. Our Visible Sins in God’s Sight

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,¹⁶ 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

¹³ **retinue** – group who attend an important person.

¹⁴ **unsullied** – unstained; free from blemish.

¹⁵ **seraphic** – related to the seraphim, an order of angels.

¹⁶ **impious** – ungodly; not showing due reverence for God.

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.” Oh, what an aspect of shocking, heaven-daring impiety¹⁷ 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. Oh, 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 do you think 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 imprecated¹⁸ fall upon you? Oh, be assured that it will, unless deep, timely repentance and faith in Christ prevent.¹⁹

Have any of you transgressed the command that says, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exo 20:8)? 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

¹⁷ **impiety** – irreverence toward God; ungodliness.

¹⁸ **imprecated** – called down.

¹⁹ **prevent** – come beforehand.

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 part in the lake which burneth with fire” (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?²⁰ 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.

3. Our Secret Sins in God’s Sight

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.

²⁰ **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, oh, 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.

4. Our Sins of Omission in God’s Sight

Having thus viewed our actual sins of heart and life as they appear in the light of heaven, let us take a similar view of our sins of omission. Should we neglect to do this, we should see but a small part of our sinfulness; for our sins of omission are by far the most numerous and by no means the least criminal offences of which we are guilty. But before we proceed to take this view, allow me to remind you once more where you are, and in Whose presence you stand. Recollect all that you have heard and seen of God’s infinite perfections—of His unapproachable glory, of the offices that He sustains, of the works that He has performed, of the blessings that He has bestowed upon us and upon our fellow creatures. Look at Him once more as He appears when seen in the light of heaven, as He appears in the eyes of the angels and archangels around you, and then say what He deserves from His creatures. Does He not deserve—can you avoid perceiving that He deserves—all their admiration, love, reverence, confidence, gratitude, and obedience? **Does He not...deserve to be loved, feared, and served with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength?**

This, you are sensible, is what His Law requires of us; and can any requisition²¹ be more just and reasonable? Can we refuse to comply with it? Can we withhold our affections and services from such a Being as this, without insuring great and aggravated guilt? Yet this, my fellow sinners, is the Being from Whom we have all withheld our affections and services. Our whole lives present one unbroken series of duties neglected, of favors not acknowledged.

And, oh, how do they appear when we review them in the light of God’s countenance! When we see before us our Creator, our Preserver, our Benefactor, our Sovereign, and our heavenly Father; when we see in Him, to Whom all these titles belong, infinite excellence, perfection, glory, and beauty; when we see with what profound veneration, with what raptures of holy, grateful affection He is regarded and served by all the bright armies of heaven—and then turn and contemplate our past lives and reflect how they

²¹ **requisition** – demand; requirement.

must appear in His sight, can we refrain from exclaiming with Job, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6)? “I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?” (Job 7:20). Must not each of us say with the Psalmist, “Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me” (Psa 40:12)?

Nay, more, when you see what God is and how He is worshipped in heaven, and then look at the coldness, the formality, the want of reverence with which you have often approached Him in prayer and listened to His Word, must you not feel conscious that should He call you into judgment, you could not answer for one in a thousand of the iniquities that have stained your holy things, even your religious duties?

But the duties that we owe to God are not the only duties that we are required and that we have neglected to perform. **While His Law requires us to love Him with all the heart, it also requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev 19:18; Mat 22:37-40).** And this general command virtually includes a great number of subordinate precepts—precepts that prescribe the duties of the various relations that subsist between us and our fellow creatures. And how far have we obeyed these precepts? How far have we performed the duties that God requires of us as husbands, as wives, as parents, as children, as masters, as servants, as citizens, and as members of the human family? When we spread our lives before God and look at them as they appear in the light of His countenance, can we fail to perceive that we in all these respects have been grossly deficient, that we have left undone many, very many, things that we ought to have done, and that we are far from having discharged the duties of a single relation that we sustain? Oh, how much more might we have done than we actually have done to promote the temporal and eternal happiness of all with whom we are connected!

Nor do our sins of omission end here. **There is another Being Whom we are under infinite obligations to love, praise, and serve with supreme affection.** This Being is the Lord Jesus Christ, considered as our Redeemer and Savior, Who has bought us with His own blood. We are required and sacredly bound to feel that we are not our own, but His—to prefer Him to every earthly object, to rely upon Him with implicit confidence, to live not to ourselves but to Him, and to honor Him even as we honor the Father. Every moment, then,

in which we neglected to obey these commands, we were guilty of a new sin of omission. Nor have we the smallest excuse for neglecting to obey these commands, for He is most worthy of all that they require. Even the angels, for whom He never died, regard Him as worthy to receive everything that creatures can give. Much more then may it be expected that we, for whom He has done and suffered so much, should regard and treat Him as worthy.

But how grossly have we failed in performing this part of our duty! How must the manner in which we have treated His beloved Son appear in the sight of God? How does it appear to us when we contemplate Him as He appears in heaven; when we see the place that He there fills; when we recollect that in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells (Col 2:9), and that to Him are unceasingly ascribed wisdom, strength, blessing, honor, glory, and power (Rev 5:12)?

5. Conclusion

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 heaven 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, [and] lay open the

inmost recesses of your hearts. [All this] while the flood of pure, celestial light that pours itself around Him will by contrast cause their blackness to appear seven-fold more black.

Then all disputes respecting the depravity of mankind and the demerit of sin will be ended forever. Then no more complaint of the strictness of God's laws, or of the severity of the punishment that it denounces upon transgressors, will be heard; for every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world stand guilty before God (Rom 3:19). 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. Oh, then, my hearers, be persuaded now to come to the light that your deeds may be reprov'd and set in order before you (Joh 3:20-21)!

