

O God, our heavenly Father, with whom is grace and much forgiveness, be merciful to us who were born in sin and cannot but sin and fall short every day. Forgive us our many transgressions and account them against us no more, but make us Your heirs through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, who was delivered into death for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, Ps. 32, CPH, p.79)

[Jesus said,] “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

In Christ Jesus, who paid for all our sins, even those well hidden in the secrets of our hearts, dear fellow redeemed:

Based on the words of Jesus in our text about plucking out eyes and cutting off hands, are you not surprised that there are any Christians who can see, hear, talk, walk, work or play? Well, no doubt there have been a few over-zealous followers of Jesus who at least seriously considered such an approach to curb their sin based on Jesus’ hyperbole here. But in addition to making a startling overstatement to get our attention, it is not a bodily member that causes us to sin. Yes, they are used in our sinning for sure, but the cause is much deeper. We have a sinful heart, which is the seat of our lust, greed, hatred, etc. It is our sinful flesh, which causes us to sin.

But knowing this, we as Christians might assume that sins we can hide from neighbor are nothing much to be concerned about. We may assume that if we can hide our sins, like our thoughts, or acts privately done behind closed doors, or among those we think will readily overlook them, or committed with strangers or non-Christian persons, it is all okay. But Jesus addresses our secret sins in our text and we should

know that there is **No Security in Secret Sins, only in God's Holy Son.**

I

It is true we can say with David when confessing his sin to God: "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults." But these are sins that we commit and do not recognize as sins, or forget when it comes to our prayers of making confession. David is not assuming that these sins are hidden from the Lord. But because of his frailty he did not remember all of his many sins especially of heart and mind. The same holds true for you and me today.

So Jesus reveals to us the sins we do know about but can keep hidden, He says: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Previous to our text, Jesus spoke of sinning against neighbor in the heart through anger. It is anger tainted with hatred that is tantamount to murder before God as the Apostle John puts it in his first letter: "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

The scribes and Pharisees referenced by Jesus in the Gospel lesson were known to have such a superficial understanding of God's holy Law. They fed the narrative that they among all the Jews of Jesus' day were the most righteous in keeping God's Commandments. But Jesus said no one would enter the kingdom of heaven unless their righteousness exceeded that of those holy appearing men.

You see, these pompous religious leaders thought, since they did not literally murder anyone, nor committed adultery against their wives by having a sexual relationship with another woman, they were sufficiently righteous. Or when they plotted and schemed behind the scenes with coconspirators against our Lord with their slanderous accusations, they may have hidden themselves from public view, but their unrighteousness was clearly seen by God. As Jesus points out we break the holy commandments in our hearts, which our neighbors cannot see. However, we stand guilty before God who sees and knows all things.

We may even think we can hide our sin, like getting a divorce for a reason, which is acceptable to the world around us, but before God is not permissible. Or we get so use to hiding behind taking unnecessary oaths against the 2nd Commandment, so that, if we fudge the truth a bit, no one would think anything about it, since we are often found calling upon the all-knowing, all-seeing God to be our witness to what we say.

II

Security in hidden sins can only be found among our neighbors.

All our sins are open before God in heaven, our perfect Creator, who will in the end judge every thought, word and action. Therefore at the beginning of Rite Three we pray:

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify Your holy name.

There is another psalm of David in which he acknowledges the inability to hide sins from God, he writes: "I acknowledge my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." There is no fear in laying wide open our sinful lives of thoughts, words and deeds before God in heaven, He promises to forgive all our sin. Instead of hiding our sins from Him, David confesses later in that same psalm "You, Lord, are a hiding place for me; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with shouts of deliverance."

It is because of our Savior Jesus Christ, that we find God a hiding place from all evil, even the evil that is so easily generated by our own sinful natures. You cannot come up with even one sin you think is so neatly hidden for which Jesus did not suffer and die. As we read in 1Jn. "the blood of Jesus [God's] Son cleanses us from ALL sin." The word "all" is very comprehensive. Now how is it that such a thorough job of cleansing could take place? This is the perfect Son of God and Son of Man who was sent as our Substitute, as we read in 2Cor. – "for our sake, [God] made [Christ Jesus] (who knew no sin) to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

All sin of the entire human race has been charged by the heavenly Father against His Holy Son. And not only was He punished for them, He lived the holy life which is credited to sinners' account. In Him we find true security from the wrath of God toward all our sin and our sinful lives. We are hidden in Christ, who became the sinner in our place and produced the righteous life we need to enter heaven.

So my fellow redeemed, as tempting as it is to imagine that working hard at keeping your sin hidden, watch out for the trap that is set in pursuing such a life. You can and will never hide your sin from God. Make it a regular practice, often throughout every day, to make confession before God of all your sins. Expose them in your prayers to Him and trust that He forgives you all your sins for the sake of the blood and righteousness of His Son. Ask Him regularly to create a clean heart in you and renew a right spirit within you.

Again David spoke of the trap of trying to hide his sin: "For 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.” The devil loves it when he can convince us to hide our transgression against the Lord by putting on a show of piety before our neighbors. Rather, as David joyfully realized: “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.”

Rest secure in Christ, not in your hidden sins before your fellowmen. You are hidden securely in Christ in His life and in His death forevermore (cf. Col. 3:3ff). Amen.