

THE DANGER OF SECRET SIN

Revelation 3:1-6

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

- a. We often talk about the importance of repenting of sin at Church Acadiana. We talk about the importance of turning from sin to a holy life.
- b. Today I want us to deal with a type of sin is that is especially hard to overcome. It is a sin that many in our church are very possibly committing right now. It is possible that many in our church are holding on to this sin, and refusing to repent.
- c. What sin am I talking about? Secret sin. Hidden sin. Sin that nobody sees but you and God.
- d. There are pastors out there who are super-successful in the eyes of the world. They are expert communicators; they are expert administrators; their churches are huge; everyone is impressed; but behind closed doors, when nobody is looking, they are holding on to a secret sin.
- e. Do you remember the story of Ted Haggard. He was the founder and pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs. He founded the denomination, Association of Life-Giving Churches. He was the President of the National Association of Evangelicals. Then in 2006, his secret sin was exposed. It came out that he was seeing a male prostitute and using crystal meth over a three year period. As you can imagine, his whole life came crashing down. The danger of secret sin.
- f. Many Christians in the church look holy on the outside, but they are holding on to secret sin. They look healthy on the outside, but they are spiritually sick on the inside. They look like they have it altogether, but behind closed doors it's a different story. They look successful; they look moral; they look righteous; they talk a good game; but in reality they are none of those things.
- g. There are many Christians who have a lot of Bible knowledge; they are highly involved in church; they give a lot of money to the church and to other charities; they volunteer; they are at church every time the doors are open, but they are harboring a secret sin.
- h. Today we are going to look at a passage that talks about secret sin.
- i. I hope today will be a wake up call to some of you. A warning. I hope it will motivate you to stop holding on to your secret sin and to repent.
- j. Remember that we are studying the book of Revelation. In chapters 2-3 we find seven letters to seven churches. Jesus is the author, speaking through the apostle John. The seven churches were seven real churches in Asia, or what is now Turkey. Today we are studying the letter to the church at Sardis.

II. TEXT: Revelation 3:1-6

- a. “Write to the angel of the church in Sardis: Thus says the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.
 - i. Remember that the word “angel” can simply mean messenger, and in this context it refers to the messenger to the church, or the pastor. The letter is sent to the pastor, who is supposed to relay the message to the church.
 - ii. Jesus describes Himself in two ways:
 - 1. “The one who has the seven spirits of God.”
 - a. There is no consensus as to the meaning. Possibilities:
 - i. Seven angels.
 - ii. The Holy Spirit in His seven-fold operation. The letter was written to seven churches, and the Holy Spirit was actively working in all seven churches. He was aware of what was going on in all seven churches.
 - 2. “the one who has... the seven stars”
 - a. In chapter one the seven stars are identified as the angels, or the pastors of the churches. In other words, Christ is in complete control over the seven churches. He can either bless them or punish them.
 - iii. “You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.”
 - 1. This is a description of secret sin. There were many in the church who had a reputation for spiritual health, but they were sick. They had a reputation for holiness, but they were harboring secret sin. Jesus was letting them know that He was aware.
- b. 2 Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before my God. 3 Remember, then, what you have received and heard; keep it, and repent. If you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you have no idea at what hour I will come upon you.
 - i. This is a warning to repent or face judgment.
 - ii. The command is to “be alert,” to keep in mind always the watchful eye of God, and that if you persist in sin, He could come in judgment at any moment.
 - iii. It is not referring to the Second Coming, but to Christ’s unexpected judgment against sinners.
- c. 4 But you have a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their clothes, and they will walk with me in white, because they are worthy.
 - i. There were a few people in the church who were living holy lives. They were not holding on to secret sin. They walk in close fellowship with Christ.
 - ii. If you want to have a close, intimate relationship with Christ, you must be holy. You must repent of your sins. Sin puts distance between us and God.

- d. 5 “In the same way, the one who conquers will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before my Father and before his angels.
 - i. A two-fold promise to those who conquer sin:
 1. “Dressed in white clothes.” This is a symbol for forgiveness on the day of judgment. When you die and stand before God, your sins will be forgiven.
 2. “I will never erase his name from the book of life.” The Bible talks about the book of life as a book that has the names of all those who are saved. When you die, if your name is found in the book of life, then you will go to heaven; if not, then you will go to hell. This means that if you are one of those who conquers sin and strives for holiness, you will go to heaven.
- e. 6 “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.
 - i. So, the main indictment against the church in Sardis was secret sin. There were a number of church members who showed up to church looking holy, and clean, and spiritual, and religious, but Christ knew that behind the scenes there was a lot of sin. They were harboring secret sin.
 - ii. Today many Christians live in secret sin. They fake holiness. They fake devotion. But in secret, in the dark, when nobody else is looking, they are holding on to sin. It could be...
 1. Stealing from work.
 2. Lying to your parents.
 3. Looking at pornography.
 4. Making pornography.
 5. Prostitution.
 6. Lustful thoughts.
 7. Getting drunk or high in secret.
 8. Disobeying your parents behind their back.
 9. Committing adultery without your spouse’s knowledge.
 - iii. Let’s look at what this passage says about secret sin.

III. 4 INSIGHTS ABOUT SECRET SIN

a. You can get away with it for a season.

- i. **Revelation 3:1** “You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.”
- ii. They had a reputation for being alive; for being spiritually healthy. This means that at the time they were getting away with their sin. There were no immediate consequences. Nobody knew. Nobody was condemning them. God wasn’t raining down fire from heaven.
- iii. This is what makes secret sin so seductive. You can get away with it for a season. Other people have no idea, so they still treat you the same. You are able to maintain our social status. Your wife is still happy. Your kids still

respect you. Your job still sends you paychecks. Your church family still praises you as a good man. God hasn't struck you down death yet.

- iv. You can get away with secret sin for a season.
- v. Samson got away with his sinful relationship with Delilah for a while before she seduced him into giving up the secret to his strength. David got away with his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba for a while until she discovered that she was pregnant. Jonah got away with his disobedience for a while until God caught up with him on the boat to Tarshish. Saul got away with his persecution of the church for a while until Jesus blinded him on the road to Tarsus.
- vi. Just this week, David Lloyd Walther, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Round Rock, TX, was busted for downloading and distributing child pornography. He now faces 20 years in prison if convicted. Do you know how he got into that evil? The devil whispered to him, "Nobody will know. You can keep it hidden. So he took his first, tested the waters, and lightning didn't strike. He didn't wake up with leprosy. Nobody knew. Everything carried on as usual. He assumed that he would continue to get away with it, so he carried on. And he did get away with it, until he didn't. The danger of secret sin.
- vii. Consequences are rarely immediate. God's discipline is rarely immediate. Usually there is a season when it seems like you have outsmarted everyone, including God.
- viii. Because there are no immediate consequences, secret sin is harder to give it up. There don't seem to be any consequences. And God doesn't seem to care. It is very tempting to continue in sin.
- ix. But also remember that there are some immediate consequences to sin:
 1. God won't answer your prayers.
 - a. **Psalm 66:18** "The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous."
 2. You will feel miserable. If you are truly saved you will not be able to enjoy your sin. You will be under intense conviction.
 - a. **Psalm 32:3-4** "When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat."
 3. You will be distant from God.
 - a. **Isaiah 59:2** "But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen."

b. God knows.

- i. **Revelation 3:1** "I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead."

- ii. Because God isn't responding with immediate punishment, because negative consequences aren't immediate, it may seem like God doesn't know. But God knows your works.
- iii. You may be able to fool people, but you can't fool God. God knows what you are up to.
- iv. **Hebrews 4:13** "No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account."

c. God is displeased.

- i. **Revelation 3:2** "Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before my God."
- ii. In other words, you are not completely pleasing to God. Your obedience is incomplete. Your holiness is incomplete. God was not pleased with the church at Sardis.
- iii. Since God is not immediately punishing you, it may seem like He doesn't care, but He does. It may seem like your sin doesn't matter to Him, but it does. God hates sin.
- iv. **Psalms 5:5** "The boastful cannot stand in your sight; you hate all evildoers."
- v. Don't mistake God's patience for pleasure. Don't mistake His patience for apathy. Don't mistake His patience for approval.
- vi. If you are holding on to some secret sin, be assured that God knows about it, and He is displeased.

d. You will be punished if you don't repent.

- i. **Revelation 3:3** "Remember, then, what you have received and heard; keep it, and repent. If you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you have no idea at what hour I will come upon you."
- ii. This is a promise of unexpected judgment. If you don't repent, you will face God's wrath. You cannot get away with sin.
- iii. **Galatians 6:7** "Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap."
- iv. Do you know the laws of the harvest?
 - 1. You always reap what you sow.
 - 2. You reap more than you sow. Plant a kernel of wheat and harvest thirty kernels. The pain of sin will always outweigh the pleasure. It is never worth it.
 - 3. You always reap later than you sow. Consequences are rarely immediate. But in time they will come.
- v. We like to talk about God's love and forgiveness. But that's not the whole picture. Don't forget that the Bible calls God a jealous God, and a consuming fire.
 - 1. **Deuteronomy 4:23-24** "Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you, and make an idol for

yourselves in the shape of anything he has forbidden you. 24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”

- vi. **Hebrews 10:31** “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”
- vii. Don’t you remember the story of Lot’s wife who disobeyed God and looked back, and was turned into a pillar of salt? Don’t you remember the story of Jonah who ran from God and was swallowed by a fish? Don’t you remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira who lied about their donation to the church, and God struck them dead? Don’t you remember the story of Saul who was traveling around, persecuting the church, until Jesus confronted him and struck him with blindness? Don’t you remember the story of Zechariah, who didn’t believe that God would give him a child in his old age, and God took away his voice and made him mute? Don’t you remember the story of King Nebuchadnezzar who refused turn from his sin, so God struck him with insanity? Don’t you remember what happened to Miriam when she rebelled against Moses, and God struck her with leprosy? Don’t you remember what happened to Korah who led a revolt against Moses, and God caused the ground to open up and swallow him alive? I could go on and on. The Bible is clear that you will be punished if you don’t repent.
- viii. **Numbers 32:23** “...be sure your sin will catch up with you.”

IV. CONCLUSION

- a. So, my message today is to repent. Do a 180. If you are harboring a hidden sin, a secret sin, then today is the day to let go. Today is the day to turn away from sin, and turn back to Jesus Christ in obedience.
- b. And I want to warn you not to delay. Don’t procrastinate. Because God’s wrath comes like a thief in the night.
- c. In the book *Autopsy of a Dying Church*, Thom Rainer tells about a man he knew named Frank, a member of the first church he served at. Very small and rural church. Everyone knew everyone. Frank began to develop symptoms of his sickness several years before his death. He was occasionally exhorted to go to the doctor, but he refused. He got sicker and sicker and still refused help. His condition deteriorated for over two years before he sought medical attention, and he only sought it because his illness was so severe that he could not work. After two days of tests, he and his wife got the grim results. He had developed an illness that, when caught in time, can easily be treated. Some patients had the disease for a year before they sought treatment, and they are fine today. But he waited over two years. He waited until he was very sick. He would be declared terminal a year later, and then he died. He would be alive today if he had just seen a doctor earlier.
- d. If you are living in sin today, then you are spiritually sick. But today is a warning of mercy. God is giving you a wake up call. He is shouting, “Repent! Turn back! You are headed for disaster.” Don’t delay. Don’t procrastinate. There will come a day,

and it may be today, it may be tomorrow, when it is too late, because judgment is at the door.