

## THE RECOGNITION OF GUILT

### INTRODUCTION:

- A. Arnold Uleyn in his book Is It I, Lord? points up the basic responsibility in preaching:

"The preacher must awaken men to a sense of their guilt. Without the experience and the confession of our condition as sinners, there is no possibility of salvation. Indeed, in the Christian perspective, salvation consists essentially in being pardoned and rescued by a redeeming God. But sinful man stubbornly refuses to recognize his guilt. To the very degree that he sins, he separates himself from God, makes himself blind to the truth and hardened of heart. He must be flushed out of his imaginary covers and helped to reach the sunlit regions of the earth...Only the man who realizes that he lives under oppression and in slavery can be freed. Only the man who is aware of his need for pardon and grace is capable of accepting the proffered reconciliation with relief and gratitude." (pp. X, XI, 6.)

- B. St. Augustine in his De Trinitate, I., 3,5 said:

"You who read this,  
where you arrive at the same conviction, walk with me;  
where you share my hesitation, seek with me;  
where you observe your error, recall my explanations;  
where you discover my error, call me to order.  
So that together we may follow the road of charity  
and turn our steps toward  
Him of whom it is written:  
always seek His face.

So with this sermon.

### I. THE PURPOSE OF APOSTOLIC PREACHING WAS TO EXPOSE MAN'S GUILT AND OFFER GOD'S GRACE.

- A. Paul could write to the Corinthians:

"It was God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us (i.e., the apostles) the work of handling on this reconciliation. In other words, God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not holding man's faults against them, and He has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled. So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: he reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

- B. Paul's appeal before Agrippa contained his commission from Christ:

"But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." (Acts 26:16-18)

NOTE: In other words, he regards it as his essential task to get men to recognize that they are guilty and have no choice but to throw themselves on God's mercy and generosity.

1. Uleyn says again:

"A repressed guilt feeling poisons the whole system. It grows and gains ground like some anonymous power, causing an ever increasing distress in a man's effective life and ultimately disrupting his inner balance...Christian peace grows out of a humble confession to God that we remain sinners and that we put our trust unreservedly in His Son, Jesus Christ, who bestows His grace upon us. 'The holier a person becomes, the further he knows himself to be from his goal, and yet he is more and more confident, more and more balanced.'" Ibid, pp. 43-44.

II. THE BIBLE REQUIRES AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PERSONAL GUILT.

- A. Numbers 5:6-7: "Speak to the children of Israel: 'When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the Lord, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged.'"
- B. Daniel 9:5-6: "We have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land."
- C. Joel 2:12-13: "Now, therefore," says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm."
- D. Proverbs 28:13: "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."
- E. Psalms 32:1-5: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah."

III. EVERY MAN INSTINCTIVELY FEELS RELUCTANT TO SEE HIMSELF, IF ONLY FOR A BRIEF MOMENT, AS HE REALLY IS.

- A. Proverbs 27:19: "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man."
- B. James 1:23: "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."
- C. Psalms 19:13-14: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the

medications of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer."

1. We all need to see ourselves in God's mirror.

- (a) Are we possibly The Prodigal Son?  
Elder Brother?  
Rich Fool of Luke 12:?  
Rich Man of Luke 16:?

NOTE: Sin is like shifting sands - the more we try to extricate ourselves by yet other sins, the deeper we are sucked in.

D. Most men try to justify their sins rather than admit their guilt by:

1. Blaming God or Others:

(a) Heredity: "My father had a bad temper and I can't help it." "Half my ancestors were women so I'm effeminate."

(b) Adam blamed Eve - and indirectly God.

Saul blamed the people.

Aaron blamed the people.

2. Some try to balance their bad deeds with good ones.

(a) Sort of bookkeeping system - "I've done more good than bad things."

3. By comparing themselves with others.

4. By trying to hide sins from others.

#### IV. THE GUILTY PERSON SUFFERS CONSTANT REMORSE AND UNHAPPINESS, AND INSTABILITY.

A. St. Augustine uses a striking analogy to describe the guilt-ridden soul:

"My heart, or conscience, is my dwelling, in which I live and feel at home. A serene conscience, which does not accuse me, is a spacious dwelling in which I can move at will and where it is pleasant to live. But remorse and the experience of guilt turn it into a stifling chamber, in which I am unable to breathe. A house which for one reason or another becomes uninhabitable puts its occupants to flight.

"The guilty man whose heart is assailed by violent remorse is in the position of one whose house threatens to collapse, or whose dwelling is filled with asphyxiating smoke, or who lives under a leaking roof. Men who live under such conditions flee their homes to seek rest and shelter elsewhere - away from their own hearts, in material pleasures. When I am uncomfortable in the intimacy of my own conscience, when my heart gives me no rest, then I try to live comfortably away from home."

B. Uleyn has an excellent quotation concerning man's conscience:

"It is no accident that the pangs of conscience are compared to an accusing voice. These metaphors borrowed from the realm of acoustics emphasize our powerlessness

to escape from conscience, since it is far harder to shut ourselves off from importunate sounds than to eliminate undesirable visual impressions. To make matters worse, the source of the sound, in the case of remorse, is deep within ourselves. My conscience is like a power plant, producing feelings of guilt and anguish which cannot be escaped. We carry our torment around with us like a shadow. We are - literally guilt-ridden, as in a horror story in which the werewolf or the witch pounces on the victim's back and will not be shaken off. Or again, a guilty conscience might be compared to a pilot's earphones: as soon as he strays from his route, the device emits a shrill, whistling sound which continues until he corrects his direction." Ibid, p. 96.

V. MANKIND EMPLOYS FIVE PSYCHIC DEFENSE MECHANISMS WHEN HE TRIES TO HIDE HIS OWN GUILT:

A. First: He resorts to Rationalization.

Norman L. Mumm defines rationalization thusly:

"This is the attempt to justify one's decisions, after they have already been made, by finding "good" reasons for them. A student knows that he should study, but wants to go to the movies. He tells himself that too much study will ruin his eyes, that he needs a rest anyhow, or that he'll be able to study even better the next day. Likewise, a married man who carries on affairs with other women than his wife justifies his conduct on the grounds that 'a man is by nature polygamous' or that his wife doesn't really appreciate him anyway. Why doesn't he tell his wife about his unfaithfulness? If he did so, 'she would feel unhappy' and 'what she doesn't know won't hurt her.'"

"Rationalization is thus a form of 'kidding oneself' as to the real motives for one's conduct ... The girl who says, 'Oh, I didn't want that man anyway - he'd perhaps have turned out no good,' or, 'Who'd want to join that sorority?' is belittling others, but she is also rationalizing. It is obviously a compensatory phenomenon, easing the sting of defeat."

"Rationalizing often begins at an early age. A three-year-old who did not want a neighborhood child of five to visit him because this child monopolizes his 'fire engine' was told that he must invite the other child to come over and have a ride. He said that the other boy might be having his nap. When told that the other boy was up, he said the sky looked as if it might rain. When he was told that it would not rain, he said that the boy's mother might not want him to come. He made one excuse after another, and never did get around to giving the child an invitation."

"A child confronted by the alternatives of taking his teddy bear to school and being thought a 'big boy' did not take the bear, but his excuse was that the bear might get a cold." Psychology, pp. 250-251.

NOTE: When we don't want to do our Christian duty, we resort to all kinds of rationalizations without giving out the real reason.

B. Second: Another Excuse or Defense Mechanism is Projection.

"Projection is a reaction to feelings of guilt or feelings of inadequacy. In essence, it is the imputing

to others of one's own thoughts and desires. Projection is very often an indirect wish-fulfillment. Thus, the girl whose desire for response from men is frustrated may imagine that men have designs upon her. A college girl accused men of chasing her while she went home through the park. Upon investigation, however, it becomes apparent that she had not been chased. As the psychiatrists put it, "She wished that men would chase her, the wish was father to the thought, and her imagination got the better of her."

Projection comes sometimes from feelings of guilt. If one has done something of which he is ashamed, he may imagine that people have found it out, and he may see relevant significance in their actions. A person who "felt like spitting on himself" got the idea that men whom he passed on the street wanted to spit on him.

Sometimes a person who feels guilty lessens this feeling by imagining that others are guilty too. For example, the married woman who carries on a flirtation may accuse her husband of unfaithfulness, and the college student who cheats may say that all students cheat when they get a chance to. Many inmates of mental hospitals are there because they attribute their desires, their thoughts, and even their acts to others. One man said that his every act (even crime) was 'the will of God'. Another had shot at a girl whose impending marriage was just announced in the paper because, for the year or so that they had been passengers on the same streetcar, she 'had deceitfully led him on by her actions.' The girl hardly knew of the man's existence and had never given him any reason for the accusations, but her every act had been interpreted as having amorous reference to himself." Ibid, p. 250.

NOTE: Projecting our guilt to others will never get ourselves righted with God or our fellowmen.

C. Third, Repression is another device used to deny our own guilt.

"Repression is 'putting out of mind' or attempting to ignore or forget motives or situations. Extreme repression is sometimes the basis of amnesia, sleep-walking, multiple personality, and functional sensory and motor disorders.... In repressing, therefore, you close your eyes to reality.

St. Augustine says on this point:

"The more a man tries to justify his sins on the basis of his own merits and refusing to recognize his iniquity, the more he undermines his strength and his energy. The strong man is one who relies not on his own strength but on God's."

Martin Luther has said:

When my conscience accuses me, and I confess my guilt, then Jesus Christ becomes my Defender. And because He takes my defense, I need no longer take my own. When I come forth from behind the thick shrubbery and frankly confess my sin, the God who demands a reckoning becomes my Saviour who absolves me."

Gregory the Great compares the man who conceals his guilt to a hedgehog:

"First you see its head, its feet, and its whole body. But as soon as you stretch out your hand to grasp it, it rolls up in a ball, tucks in its feet, and hides its head; at the same time, its quills bristle. That is how the dishonest soul protects itself when confronted by its fault. Let us say that we have discovered the capital sin which has led the sinner to all other vices. We have uncovered the paths of iniquity which he has followed. But the perfidious sinner hides his head and rolls up in a ball like the hedgehog. He makes all sorts of excuses to conceal his misdeeds and his failings. Rolled up in a ball and turned in on himself, he takes refuge in his impenetrable conscience behind the quills of his self-justification." Liber Regulae Pastoralis XI.

1. David refused to see his sin until Nathan pointed it out.

- (a) How we in the church refuse to face up to our indifference, complacency.

- D. Fourth: Compensation is another method employed to hide our own guilt.

1. We accomplish this compensation in two ways:

- (a) By Belittling Others:

"The person whose ego is badly deflated often inflates it, so to speak, by thinking of or pointing out the faults of those who have succeeded where he has failed. Thus, the girl who fails to get into a sorority may point out that those who do so are a lot of handshakers, that they think more of politics than of scholarship, or that they are too cliquy a bunch anyhow. This makes her feel a little more happy with her lot. It may go to such an extreme that she is 'glad' she didn't get in with such a bunch.:

NOTE: Look how we try to belittle our brethren in the church for what he is doing to try to compensate in our minds for what we are not doing.

- (b) By Blaming Others:

"Students who fail courses, for example, often say that they had a 'punk' teacher, that the text was beyond comprehension, or that their class came at a bad hour. Sometimes they are right. In the majority of instances, however, such students are attempting to maintain self-respect at a high level by refusing to recognize their own faults." (A student once said that the teacher's chief weakness was an inability to make up exams that students like her could pass.)

"Blaming others is a dangerous reaction. Like excessive unrealistic day-dreaming, it may lead to insanity. Mental hospitals contain

many people who place responsibility for their troubles on others."

(c) By Over-Compensation:

"This is associated with efforts to overcome threatened inferiority or threatened loss of self-respect. It is associated with conflict due to personal defects. As the name implies, over-compensation is a tendency to do more than remove the defect."

"A form of over-compensation, but in reverse, is self-repudiation. The individual says, 'Oh, I'm terribly dumb.' 'You know, I'm awfully homely,' or, 'I'm just not good for anything.' The answer they desire is 'Of course you're not dumb,' 'I think you're beautiful,' or, 'You may not be able to cook, but you're a sweet little woman just the same,' In many such instances, the individual does not really feel inferior, but is merely 'fishing' for compliments. He is rudely disappointed if the other person says, 'That's right, you are dumb.'"

"Self-repudiation sometimes develops to an extreme degree. In mental hospitals, we find people who accuse themselves of sins which they may or may not have committed, and who spend much of their time weeping and wailing."

Augustine says again:

"Conversion and the confession of your sin involves a struggle against yourself. Not only against the devil, but against your bad habits; against the years of your previous bad life, which draw you down into your rut and hold you back from change... You are burdened with the load of the past."

E. Fifth: In an effort to justify ourselves, we employ minimization.

(In other words, to admit our faults - but minimize them.)

"I did flunk that exam, but I'm nevertheless blessed with a host of other abilities which more than make up for this quite unimportant diploma."

"In other words, if our feeling of personal worth, our flattering representation of ourselves, our situation, condition, or ambitions are threatened, and if the tension between what we are and what we should like to be becomes too painful, we resort to all kinds of stratagems and defensive maneuvers. We protect our ego against negative feelings of helplessness and inferiority for fear of suffering a defeat. We believe that these experiences will become intolerable and that to live with a diminished personality will be impossible if we admit and face up to reality."

Augustine says:

"Just as God hates the man who defends his sins, so he raises up the man who confesses them."

As Nietzsche puts it:

"I have done that," says my memory. "I cannot have done that," says my pride, and remains inexorable. Eventually - memory yields."

1. When we employ any of these devices, it is an indication of Spiritual weakness.

VI. GUILT COMPLEXES COME AS A REFUSAL TO ADMIT THE SIN WHICH HOMES IN THE HEART.

A. Uleyn well says: "Guilt is obviously repressed out of vanity, pride, and self complacency: I simply cannot recognize and acknowledge myself to be what I now am, for that would mean a radical conversion and the restructuring of myself."

B. The Answer to our Problem is:

"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin... If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." I John 1:7-9.

C. We had better not make the excuse at the Judgment: "Lord, when did we see you in need .....

D. Every man rises just a little higher when he puts his selfish price aside and recognizes his constant need for God.