

# **THE UNDECEIVED AND THE DECEIVED**

## **A SERMON**

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**“Jesus said unto them, If you were blind, you should have no sin: but now you say, We see therefore your sin remains.” John 9:41**

WE have at the head of this chapter an instance of sovereign mercy. Here is a man born blind, and it appears that the Jews thought that it was possible for a child to sin before it was born. Hence the question, “Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” And we have the remarkable answer, that the Lord so ordered it that he took occasion from this affliction in this man to manifest his work, to manifest his sovereign pleasure, for “Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents,” that is, not as the cause of his being born blind. And it does not appear that his parents knew the Lord; they were under, as we see, the fear of man, when they were questioned relative to the way in which the eyes of their son had been thus opened, and it does not appear that the man himself before this knew anything of the Lord. Now, then, we do see instances frequently in the world where the Lord lays afflictions of various kinds upon people, and makes use of those afflictions to bring them to himself, and any one that can look back and see that affliction has been a blessing to him will indeed bless the Lord for that affliction of which he has made such an advantageous use, to the eternal good of the subject of it and to his own glory. Now if, then, a circumstance like this occurred in a family where it does not appear that the parents knew the Lord, or that this man himself knew the Lord, what an encouraging circumstance is this to the people of God; for when those that know not the Lord are afflicted, we know not whether the Lord will sanctify that affliction to them or not; but those of you that fear the Lord, that do believe in Jesus Christ, and that do love his name and blessed truth, you are not left to question whether he will sanctify your afflictions or not; it is a decided matter with the blessed God so to do, for he has declared that all things work together for good unto them that love him, and acknowledge that their calling was not according to works of righteousness which they had done, but according to his mercy has he called them. Mercy took them up, and mercy keeps them up, and mercy will preserve them, and mercy will raise them from the dead, and mercy will keep them in heaven forever. Now there is no doubt, then, that whatever may attend the progress of such, it shall be sanctified to that end, to that good, that they shall appreciate in the Lord's own time. He knows when to put us into the furnace, and he knows what degree of heat is required in that furnace of affliction, and he knows when to take us out of the furnace, and how to take us out.

Now amidst the various questionings, then, upon this subject of the man whose eyes the Lord opened, the Savior takes occasion hereby to set forth one very solemn, and still, in one sense, delightful part of his mission. He says, "I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." The meaning of course, is this, I am come into the world to open the eyes of the poor, blind sinners, and another part of my mission is that those that see might not see; that is, to prove them to be blind, as that Savior did prove the Pharisees to be blind; and they said, "Are you blind also?" and then our text is the answer, "If you were blind, you should have no sin: but now you say, We see; therefore, your sin remains."

We have, then, first to notice *conscious blindness*, for that, I think, is fairly implied in the first clause. We secondly have *the freedom of such from sin*; they have no sin. And then, thirdly, we have *the delusion of the others, with their awful destiny*. "Now you say, We see; therefore your sin remains."

We have then, in the first place here, *conscious blindness*. "If you were blind, you should have no sin;" the meaning, I think, of which is, If you were conscious of your blindness, I think this must be the meaning, because those Pharisees were spiritually so, they were blind; and therefore, when the Savior says, "If you were blind," he must mean, at least, I cannot see that that is not the meaning, If you were conscious of your blindness, you should have no sin; but now you say, We see; therefore your sin remains. Let us, then, enter into this first part of our subject as clearly as we can. Now it is a solemn truth that all of us while in a state of nature, think that we know more about religion than we really do know; we think that we know more about God than we really do know; we think that we know more about the way to heaven than in really do know; so that we say we see, and we think we see, while at the same time we are deluded. I must, therefore, here, as clearly as I can, point out what it is the man who is consciously blind wants to see. His prayer is, "Lord, that my eyes may be opened." And so, with this man here; he was, though blind, a living man, and the Lord gave command what he was to do, and he obeyed that command, and came seeing, and became a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, then, a consciousness of our ignorance is an unspeakable mercy. I will mention some things that if you are made conscious of your blindness by nature you will wish to see, and which you will seek to see, and indeed, in the Lord's own time, which you shall see. I may say they are all embodied in the next clause, "You should have no sin;" but we will leave that clause until we come to the second part. Well, now, the first is, you will wish to see whether your sins are forgiven or not, and you will wish to see how they are forgiven. Now let it be distinctly understood that the Lord does not forgive sins at random; that he does not forgive sins by any indifference towards those sins; he does not forgive sins by any indifference towards the majesty of his law, and he does not forgive sins by any indifference towards the gospel. No; the forgiveness of sins is a solemn matter; and there is only one way in which sins can be forgiven. And in order to be clear we will take the apostle's words, "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man Christ Jesus is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; that by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Well, now, if you are conscious of your blindness you will say, I should like to see that my sins are forgiven; I should like to see that there is mercy for me. And if you want to see this you will seek after it, and you will never be content until you see it in the relational sense of the word. You will not be content with mere theory; there will be the guilt on your conscious, there will be the darkness in your mind, there will be trembling, there will be the sorrows of death more or less, there will be the fear of hell, there will be the dread of eternity, and then in the Lord's own time he

will lead you on, and will by-and-bye bring home the word with power, some word that, if it does not bear directly upon that, will embody that. For instance, suppose the Lord were to speak with power to your soul, and say, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore in loving-kindness have I drawn you;" if that was brought home with power it would make you feel a little of what the woman felt that washed the Savior's feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and anointed them with costly ointment; and she loved much because much was forgiven. Or suppose the Lord should speak home with power, "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins." Or suppose the dear Savior by his Spirit send the sentence into the soul, "Son, your sins be forgiven you." or while under a sight and sense of your unclean and defiled state you are saying with Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this has touched your lips," meaning spiritually that the word is brought home with power, "and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." And then the prophet was free; when the Lord said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? then said I, Here am I; send me." Now, then, are you conscious that you do not see this, and is this what you wish to see? I speak now to those who are just beginning to be concerned; but I will have a word here with you that are Christians. Now, you look back at the time when you did not see your ignorance of the forgiveness of sin, when your non-acquaintance with the forgiveness of sins was no burden to you, when your non-acquaintance with the righteousness of Jesus Christ was no trouble to you, when your non-acquaintance with the love of Christ and the salvation of Christ was no trouble to you. You went on, and you were like one sleeping upon the top of a mask, or like one that lies down in the mist of the seas; you were a careless sinner; you were a careless, pray less creature, and it was no trouble to you that you were not acquainted with these things. Nor was it any trouble to Saul of Tarsus that he was not acquainted with these things, until the Lord took him in hand, and then, when the Lord took him in hand, what a change took place. Up to that point Saul thought he saw. Oh, he says, I can see very well; why, of course I am circumcised, that is one step to heaven; and I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews, that is another step towards heaven; and I am of the tribe of Benjamin, that is another step towards heaven; and touching the law blameless, that is another step towards heaven; and I belong to the strictest sect, even of the Pharisees, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. I can see very well. He said he saw, and thought he saw, but at the same time was blind. Now when the Lord took him in hand, he saw it was all delusion. Like some people now, they think if they have been sprinkled in the church, that is one step towards heaven; and they think that if they have been confirmed by the bishop, that is another step; and if they have come to the sacrament, that is another step. Why, my hearer, I make no hesitation in saying that such things as these have no more to do with the salvation of the soul than a thing that never existed. No; the Savior lays the axe of truth at the root of all these ceremonies when he comes and rolls in the solemn testimony, "You must be born again. Except a man be born of water" that is, the word of God; it does not mean literal water. Oh, fools, I was going to say, oh, fools and hypocrites, to want to push us off with the notion that that water which can reach only the body can have anything to do with the soul. Therefore, when the Savior said, "Except a man be born of water," by *water* he there means the word of God: "Except a man be born of the word of God and the Spirit of God;" not the word without the Spirit, nor the Spirit without the word. And why are these two things together? First, because the Holy Spirit works by the word; and secondly because he never does anything contrary to the word. But do you doubt whether I am right? Notice the language, "He loved the church and gave himself for

it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” Now, said the apostle, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” It is a spiritual defilement, and if it is a spiritual defilement how absurd it is to bring a material, an outward material, to the body to cleanse the defilement of the soul. And thus, it was that Saul of Tarsus thought that from his position, his having been circumcised, and having followed out the national religion, he was on his way to heaven; but he was on his way to hell all the time. And so, when the Lord convinced him of his state, he took from him his natural sight; perhaps to impress upon him more deeply and more solemnly the fact that before that he was blind, blind to his condition as a sinner, blind to what he was by nature, blind to the majesty of God’s law. He had often come to the law of God before, but the law of God had never come to him. There is such a difference between coming to Christ professionally, and Jesus Christ coming to you; there is such a difference between your coming to the word of God, and the word of God coming to you; there is such a difference between your coming to the commandments and the commandments coming to you; there is such a difference between your coming to a gospel chapter and that chapter coming to you. Now, says Paul, “The commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” Now he was made conscious of his blindness; now he wanted to see something. Now, Saul, you are blind? I am. Can you see your sins are forgiven? No; that is what I want to see. Why, you did not always feel that. No, but I do now. I am a poor, blind creature; I feel that I am lost as a sinner, and I want to see Jesus Christ as my Savior. Why, you had not always that desire. No, because I did not know my need of him; but I do now, and I want to see my election of God; whether the great God, in the depths of his counsel, has chosen sinful, guilty me to eternal glory. And I want to know the will of the great God; whether, while the angels sang at the Savior’s birth, “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will towards men,” whether I am included in that good will. These were the things that he wanted to see. Shall the Lord make a sinner conscious of his blindness and ignorance, shall the Lord put a desire into your heart to see this eternal mercy for yourself, and not grant that desire? Never, never. Saul went to sleep, I suppose, worn out; and in that sleep there was a vision; he saw a minister. Why, he says, that looks like a minister of Jesus Christ, I fancy I can hear him say something about Jesus Christ. I fancy I can see by the movements of his lips that he has a message for me, and he seems to look towards me, as much as to say, “I am sent from the throne of grace with a message of grace to you.” And so, he saw in a vision a man named Ananias coming to him; that gave him a little hope. Is it not so with you sometimes? The message comes near where you are. “Ah,” say you, “That is it; this suits, and that suits, and the other suits, but the message is not come yet; it seems to encourage, but it seems at a distance.” By-and-bye, Ananias came, “Brother Saul! Brother! Am I a brother? Am I one of this family? Am I one of the brethren of Jesus Christ? Am I one of those that shall live in the unity of the Spirit, where the Lord has commanded the blessing, even life for evermore? Yes, yes; what do you want to see? Oh, I want to see my election of God. Well, then, “the God of our fathers has chosen you.” I want to know his will. “That you should know his will, and see that Just One, and should hear the voice of his mouth.” The word came home with power, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins. that is, testimonially. His sins were washed away by the blood of Christ; baptism does not wash away sin, it is only the outward symbol of that wonderous death and resurrection of Jesus by which sin is put away. He arose, and conferred not with flesh and blood, but went immediately, and told to sinners everywhere. what an almighty and eternal Savior he had found. Thus, then the blind mean those that are conscious of their blindness and are crying to God for mercy and for help. Then, again, not only conscious that you have not seen your sins forgiven, but are seeking after it, not only

conscious that you have not realized salvation, but feeling your need of that salvation and seeking after it; then you will be conscious of something else. Is election a doctrine of the Bible? "Ah," said one, that is a shocking doctrine; some chosen, and the others left, a doctrine that does not lead to good works, a doctrine that discourages sinners from coming to Christ, a doctrine that is very unjust and very arbitrary. That is your idea, is it? Your humble servant once thought the same, when he was trying to do his part, as they call it. But one day, while thinking over these solemn things, and I thought of nothing else at that time (hardly anything else to think of) this came to me: Is eternal election a doctrine of the Bible, or is it not? I read the Bible, and I looked at Cain and Abel, and saw that one was taken and the other left; I looked at the old world, and saw that Noah found grace and the others were left unacquainted with that grace. I saw that Abraham was called and others left. I saw that Isaac was put as the child of promise, and Ishmael sovereignly and judicially set aside. I saw that Jacob was loved, and Esau was hated. I saw that the Lord chose the Israelitish nation and left the others. I saw that the Lord chose the tribe from which the Savior should descend. I saw that he chose David to be king out of that tribe. I saw that the Savior went up to a mountain, called to him whom he would, and that he chose his own disciples; and that the Savior stands and declares, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." And I read that they were "chosen before the world was, blessed with all spiritual blessings." And I read that "the election has obtained it." And I read that "if it were possible, they should deceive the elect;" implying the elect are a people that cannot be deceived. And I read that "there is a remnant according to the election of grace." I then began to see that there was such a doctrine in the Bible as election; and when I was under this conviction, what did I do then? I will tell you what I did then. I used to hear a great deal said against the doctrine of election; the person said he was older than I was, and I was as young men ought to be, in a sense (if you will allow me to praise myself for a moment); I felt that he was older than I was, and I was modest and retiring, I did not like to talk too much. But I thought within myself, what have I to do with what man says about it? I will read the word of the Lord and see what that says about it; and if that gives a good account of it, I will join with the word of the Lord to give a good account of it too. And so, I went on; and it began in this way, "Him that I have chosen I will cause to draw near unto me." I said, "That is good; if election brings me near to God, that is good; that certainly must be good." And I went on, and I found that David prayed in the following way, "Remember me with the favor you bear to your people; oh, visit me with your salvation, that I may see the good of your chosen." I said, "That is good again; that is good again, certainly it is." And "the election has obtained it;" "That is good." "Elect according to his grace;" "That is good." "And chosen before the world was, and blessed with all spiritual blessings, according as we were chosen in him;" and that "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire;" and that "There shall in no way enter into the city anything that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination, or makes a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Oh, I saw election brought me near to God; I saw election gave me salvation; I saw election gave me spiritual blessings; I saw election made it impossible for me to be fatally deceived; I saw that election would bring me into heaven. Why, electing grace became rooted in my soul; hitherto I had been blind, but now I could say, "Whereas I was blind, now I see;" and that great truth of eternal election I have felt, and you must feel it too before you can get to heaven, that it is essential to your eternal welfare; that if your name be not in the book of life, if you are not chosen in him, lost you must be; and you will never receive election if election has not received you. I speak not unkindly, not unfeelingly, because it does carry with it a solemn thought. Oh, it is a terrible thing, the very thought of an immortal soul being eternally lost! yet we must bow to the sovereignty of the great God, and let the matter be a personal

matter; be guided by what the word of the Lord says, then you will see that if the Lord had not chosen you, you never would have chosen him; and those unfathomable things belonging to the destiny of the others you had better leave. Acknowledge the fact that it is so, but do not attempt to answer questions that people may put to you. They will say, What, then, were the others made to be damned? Don't you answer that question; you turn around and say, You must leave all such questions with Him who alone perfectly understands his own judgments and his own counsel. What! the others will be infallibly lost, let them do what they may? Don't you answer the question; be careful; it is the business of the adversary to draw us by certain ingenious questions, perhaps, into difficulties, and the object is to lower the electing grace of God. So, then, you must not think that the Christian always gets the worst of it because he may get the worst of it in argument. A man may beat me all to pieces in argument, but that will not beat me in truth. Any of you that are ingenious, and can furnish arguments to beat your adversary, why you may do so; but for me, I am glad to take the plain testimony of the blessed God. There it is, that "you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you;" and then, having thus settled the matter, there I rest. Now, then, "if you were blind," that is, conscious of your blindness, conscious you have not seen your sins forgiven, conscious that you have not seen God's salvation, conscious that you have not seen electing grace, conscious that you do not know what regeneration is, this is the first work, thus to make us sensible of our ignorance, and to cry out for the Lord to guide us. The publican had this kind of blindness, that is, conscious blindness, when he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He could not see how God could be on his side, and therefore cried out for mercy, that mercy would indeed pardon him; and mercy did pardon him and set him free. Indeed, all that cried to the Savior while here below had this conscious blindness. The leper: Why, leper, can't you see how you can get rid of your leprosy? Not without Christ. Then you are conscious that you cannot get rid of it without him; you cannot see any other way. Now that is a blessed blindness that can see no way but Jesus Christ.

But I will now assume, then, that most of you are thus made conscious of your blindness by nature, that you have sought to see your sins forgiven, you have sought to realize your election of God, that you have sought the good of his chosen, that you have sought the Lord in this order of things. Now the soul that has thus a concern for eternity, and that is saying, "Lord, you know I want to know what it is to see my sins forgiven, to see my name in your eternal book, that is my concern, and to realize your mercy," such experience proves that that soul is born of God, and if born of God it belongs to the family of God; and these are they that have no sin. God the Father has taken every one of your sins away; he has not an unkind thought; all his thoughts are precious thoughts, all his purposes precious purposes, and all his promises exceeding great and precious promises. Therefore, as you stand in this faith in Christ with God the Father, it stands like this, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Then with Jesus Christ you have no sin; not a sin is left; his atonement has destroyed the whole; not a spot or wrinkle left. You have no sin with the Holy Spirit. No; he is like the rain, that tarried not for man, in his revelations of mercy to you, nor waits for the sons of men. The Holy Spirit is like the wind, that blows by the government of God, and not by the commandment of men; and the Holy Spirit gives to everyone severally as he will. The twaddle we have, that the people of God would have much more of Christ if they did not hinder the Holy Spirit! I know the Holy Spirit in his consolations can be quenched, but not is his sovereignty. I know if we turn away from God's truth and set a lie into the place of that truth, that grieves the Spirit of God. "Therefore, grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption." But are we to hold that Holy Spirit in bondage? No; he does as he pleases. Will the Holy Spirit so dishonor the purpose of the Father, and so dishonor the atonement

of Christ, that the Father has purposed a blessing for you, and Christ has removed every hindrance out of the way, and the Holy Spirit, because of something bad in you, withholds it? I hate such a doctrine. How came the Holy Spirit to quicken you when you were dead, when you were nothing but sin? How came the Holy Spirit to bring home pardon when you had nothing but guilt? How came the Holy Spirit to become to you a Spirit of liberty when you had nothing but bondage? How came the Holy Spirit to be a Spirit of truth to you when you had nothing but lies, until he came and stripped and humbled you, until he made you see that acceptance with the Most High and completeness in the Most High is in Christ Jesus the Lord? "You are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power." I may go on and face death; I shall not see my sins there; they have no business to come; they are not mine; they are not mine; my sins are not mine; the debts are not mine; I owed ten thousand talents, but my Surety has paid the whole. How can the debts belong to the debtor if the surety has taken the whole upon himself, and paid for the whole? The whole is gone. Why, we do not half believe in Jesus Christ; we do not give him one-tenth of the honor that is due to his name. I have been living a sinless life now for pretty well forty years; yes. Why, say you, never! I have. What! in the flesh? No. In the world? No. In the church? No? In self? No. How have you been living a sinless life, then? By faith in Christ, for Jesus Christ is my life, and there is no sin in him: and there is the sinless life I live. As to my sinful life, he took that, and has destroyed it; and I have his pure life, he is my life. I live without sin; no sin in my faith; no sin in Jesus Christ; no sin in my habitation; I dwell on high; my place of defense is the munitions of rocks; bread given me, water sure; no fault found with me; as welcome there as everlasting love can make me; as much right to be there as the work of Christ can give me that right; and there with as much safety as Almighty Power can keep me there. And so, the apostle Paul looks back and gives us to understand that he lived a sinless life. "I have fought," he says, "a good fight;" that is, I have laid hold of Christ's victory, and by the victory he has wrought I have gone on conquering and to conquer; I am now ready to go home; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith." So, I have lived this sinless life. "With my flesh I serve the law of sin," by the flesh being a place for sin; but with the mind of the new man, we live a sinless life. So that when you die, none of your sins can go with you; not one of these wilderness enemies can go over the Jordan with you. So then, if you are conscious of your blindness, and are willing to submit to God's gospel, and to God's Christ, and God's sovereignty, then you have no sin. What a happy people, that are made thus conscious of their blindness by nature and are longing to see into the great mysteries of eternity, where sin is put away, God on their side, and on their side forever.

Now we come to the last. "But now you say, We see, therefore, your sins remain." Now the meaning of this; these Pharisees saw the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures without Christ; they left Christ out of the Old Testament Scriptures, they saw the way to heaven without Christ, they saw that God was their Father without Christ; they saw that is, they thought they did, they said they did, that God was their Father without Christ. Because you say, We see, and as you see without me, therefore your sin remains. Now, my hearer, if you can see your way to heaven without the perfect atonement of Christ; if you can see your way to heaven without the everlasting righteousness of Christ; if you can see your way to heaven without electing grace; if you can see your way to heaven without regeneration, without a sworn covenant, without the mercy of God, without the grace of God, without the yea and amen, promises of God, then your sin remains. Now you say, "We see; therefore, your sin remains." Let us dwell upon this for a moment. It is very trying when bodily affliction remains; but what is that to the continuation of sin? If sin remains, it remains forever. It is very trying when one constant succession of adversities seems to remain with

us; when we get through one thorn hedge, we have to encounter another, and when we get through that we have to encounter another:

“Rough and rugged is the way  
To some poor pilgrim’s feet;  
In all they think, or do, or say,  
They opposition meet.”

But then these must end presently; what is this to our sins remaining? And there are positions of humiliation, degradation almost; some come into positions of dependence upon others; and they have to undergo mortification, great mortification, a great deal of humiliation, and that continues for years. All that is very trying; but all these things will end. The worst thing that can remain is sin. There are thousands of afflictions, as the Lord knows, bitter enough, trying enough, humiliating enough, and distressing enough; but let us trace this out for a moment; what does it mean; “Your sin remains”? When you come to die, every one of your heart, lip, and life sins, though perhaps not conscious before you are in hell, are hung around your neck, coiled around your soul like so many fiery serpents; yet unconscious, perhaps, in the dying hour. The body dies, and the very moment you leave the body, there you are in the presence of all your sins, in the presence of all the threatening’s of the Bible, in the presence of the wrath of Almighty God, in the lake that burns with fire and with brimstone. God give his ministers, and give all his people, great earnestness in preaching the gospel. Oh, what a fearful destiny has sin subjected us to; what unheard of miseries has it entailed, in bringing us thus under the almighty and righteous ire of a sin-avenging God! Can a sentence be more terrible? “Your sin remains.” Oh, I should shudder, what would I give to be annihilated this moment if I thought I stood in such a position as that, my sin remaining! Oh, the purest, I was going to say, the man or the woman who has been the most precise, if their heart-sins were brought to light, they would indeed be as mighty millstones to drag them down into everlasting perdition. Who shall undertake to describe the infinite contrast between the two? the one lifting up his eyes in hell, the other in Abraham’s bosom. Mark this; the saved man is in Abraham’s bosom. Now try and understand that scripture if you can, “in Abraham’s bosom.” To be in Abraham’s bosom means to be in the same secrets that Abraham was to be in Abraham’s secret counsels. Now what were the secrets that Abraham had? I will tell you and leave you to judge whether you are acquainted with those secrets or not. The first secret is, that Abraham was in God’s sworn covenant; that as he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, “In blessing I will bless you.”