

*For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. Psalms 36:2*

Nowadays pretty much everybody has a smoke detector in their home. Now the smart thing is to get a carbon monoxide detector as well. Some people have intrusion alarms, too, just to give that extra bit of security from things that would sneak up on you. The most interesting things of this nature are car burglar alarms. You know, the ones which announce, "Get away from the car," or just beep their horn continually. My dad built one many years ago before they became popular. I'll never forget when it went off in the motel parking lot of a quaint little Mexican village. Noisy Americans!

The usefulness of all these devices is that they alert you to the presence of something that is unwanted and dangerous, but that is hard to see. We all know that sin is a lot like that. The verse quoted above indicates the trouble that all of us have seeing our own faults. Christ talked about those who saw the speck in the eyes of another when the beam in their own eye was unnoticed. Perhaps what we need is a personal sin detector. It could hang around our neck and give off a beep whenever we did something wrong. The only problem I would have is that mine would be sounding off all of the time.

The great king David had problems seeing his own failings. There are two occasions recorded in the Bible where someone had to use a sort of parable to tell him that he had done wrong. The first was when he committed the sin of adultery with Bathsheba, and had the husband killed in an attempt to cover it up. In 2 Samuel 12:1-14, we find the story where the prophet Nathan came to David with a horrible story. Nathan told of two men who lived in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had everything, but the poor man had nothing except one little lamb. He was very attached to it, as if it were a pet. When the rich man had company, he took the poor man's lamb instead of one of his own. How arrogant and selfish this was, and David exploded with anger and pronounced judgment on the man. Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" What a drastic change! David had to switch immediately from offense to defense. Imagine how humiliating this was! Here was a man who was known for his love of God's law, being asked, "Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?" And yet David was convinced of his guilt. David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Very shortly afterwards the same sort of thing happened to him again. Not that he had committed a great sin this time; Absalom had been the one to do this. But Absalom wanted very badly to return home from his exile and got Joab to help him. In 2 Samuel 14:1-21, Joab has a woman act as if she is in mourning and present to David a heart-rending tale of family troubles. She told him that she was a widow, and that her two sons had gotten into a fight in which one died. Now the family was demanding the life of the living brother, thus wiping out her entire family. David, the man of action, immediately gave the woman his kingly support. But then the woman showed him that he in actuality convicted himself.

These instances show the lengths we have to go to sometimes in examining our own nature. You might wonder why Nathan and Joab did not just tell David straight out what they wanted from him. Because of his self-blindness, they had to first sell him on based on the principles involved, then show him the nature of his own involvement. The second story did not relate to David's sin, but it still illustrates how the presentation had to be made to effect a change in David.

We all have short-sightedness when it comes to our own sin. There is no sin detector that we can buy; we can only study the word of God with all of our heart and keep testing ourselves. And we have to realize our sinful nature. Any of us can commit any sin.

The best part of the first story that we considered is when Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin." The punishment wasn't taken away, but the everlasting stain of the sin was. That is the good news for us as well, for Christ cleanses our sins continually as we come before him in humility.