



God's Secrets – The Believer's Comforts

God's wisdom is seen both in the way in which he reveals himself and also conceals himself. A perfect economy is exercised by God in the degree of his self-revelation and self-concealment. Just enough of God is revealed to leave us '*without excuse*' (Rom. 1:20) if we choose to ignore him; and enough is revealed for those who believe in him to be fully assured of him. By this arrangement, God's wisdom has left room for doubt in all who prefer to doubt him, and room enough for sure confidence in all who trust him.

God is glorified in this manner, because in this way he places all mankind under a life-long test as to whether we shall trust him or not. The nature of all God's dealings therefore in this life is to place us always in a situation in which we are required to take him on trust. We are on trial in this life in all that we do. Every decision we make is a test of our moral character and indicates, more or less, what we think about God. The friendships we make, the places we go to, the plans we form are all more or less an index of our attitude towards God. Even our inward doubts and fears about situations in life reflect the way we either believe and trust God, or else doubt and distrust him.

God has constructed man's life on earth in this way not accidentally but purposely, because in this life, all through life, we are on probation. The final Judgment Day will be the assessment of how we have lived and it will announce to all the world both what we have thought of God and what, as a consequence, we deserve to enjoy, or else suffer, in eternity.

The way in which God has chosen most especially, to reveal himself is by a spoken and written revelation of his will for our life. Whilst it is perfectly true that something of God is seen and known in the created universe, not enough is known by that means to tell us how to live. The created world is full of evidences of the existence of a great and good Creator. But of itself the created world does not explain how, in detail, I am to live my daily life.

The glorious sun and sky, the beautiful earth and the expansive sea excite the mind to admiration and delight; but they do not inform me as to how I should live and behave, worship and pray, think and speak. The universe was intended by God to be a *general* revelation of himself – a startlingly wonderful evidence of his Unseen Being. But the universe does not tell me where I may find this great God that I may love and enjoy him forever. In addition to this general revelation a *special*, verbal revelation was needed.

The first verbal and special revelation of himself which God gave to man, was in the form of a command, giving him permission to eat of all the trees in paradise except one. The penalty for eating of *this* tree would be death (Gen. 2:16, 17). Having given to man this revelation of his will, God withdrew and concealed himself. Not only so, but more importantly still, he exposed man to temptation to test his obedience to what had now been said.

The form of man's first temptation is full of instruction for us still because temptation always takes this form. Man had a sure word from God. The question was: would he, in the absence of God and under the pressure of Satan's evil suggestion, keep to what God had commanded, or not? It was of course possible for God to have protected man from this temptation or to have greatly reduced the force of the temptation by revealing himself to Adam while Satan presented the temptation. But it was God's will to leave man to face the pressure of Satan's suggestion without the comfortable felt presence of God. The intention on God's part is plain to see. He conceals himself to test man's obedience to the word which has been spoken: '*Thou shalt **not** eat*' (Gen. 2:17).

This first temptation is the pattern, or paradigm, of all temptations which we ever face. The main elements are all here: a word from God, pressure from an alien influence to disobey, and a profound moral choice to be faced up to by man. God conceals himself for a time to observe how we shall act in such a situation.

A moment's reflection will assure us that this statement is true and accurate. The temptations of all whom we read of in the Bible are the same in form and character. Lot's wife had a word from God: *'Escape for thy life; look not behind thee'* (Gen. 19:17). But under the weight of her own carnal affections she disobeyed and looked back and so became a pillar of salt. David knew the seventh commandment, but under the power of his own lust, he swept aside all restraint and both sinned and suffered afterwards. So, too, Christ felt the temptation to turn the stones into bread in his hour of hunger. But a perfect obedience to God's revealed will gave him a perfect restraint.

In all temptations the issue is the same: 'Shall I go by the word of a God whom I cannot see or by the word of some other being?' The acutely sharp focus in temptation is on this one thing: 'What do I think of God? Is what he has said true? Is there some way round what he has said or must I take him at his word when he is invisible and 'far away'?

The history of Old Testament Israel and of the New Testament Church is one long, detailed and extended commentary on the first temptation of mankind. In proportion as Israel and its leaders lived by faith in the invisible God whose Book they had in their hands, they were blessed and made progress. In proportion as they allowed other influences to shape their life and conduct, they declined and fell back. Those who are commended in God's Word are said to have *'endured as seeing him who is invisible'* (Heb. 11:27). Others are held up as a warning in that they *'forgot God'* (Ps. 106:21). The same is true of the New Testament churches and of ourselves to this day.

It is amazing, considering how much light we have on the evil of forgetting God and his Word, how hard we find it to remember God and to live by faith! The theory can be stated in a few words. But the practice we find intensely difficult. Even when we profess to believe in an infallible Bible, we are far from an infallible practice!

That this is so is a reminder to us of how little we really believe in God or in the Bible. If we fully believed that the unseen eye of a holy God is always upon us, we should care nothing for the praise of men or for their frowns. Perfect faith says that it must obey God even if it has to displease near friends and family. *'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me'* (Matt. 10:37).

It is for this reason that Christ stated: *'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.'*

(Matt. 10:34)

The unbelieving world can tolerate those who will go so *far* in their practice of religion. But it hates those who put God and his words before *all* considerations of happiness in this world. The believer does just this because he lives *'as seeing him who is invisible'* (Heb. 11:27). In this spirit, the young child Jesus said to his mother, *'Wilt ye not that I must be about my Father's business?'* (Luke 2:49). To upset a loved parent is permissible for duty's sake; to offend God is never permissible for any reason.

The claims of God are remote to one who thinks of him as little better than a polite fiction. But these same claims are imperative in the conscience of one who remembers who and what God is. It is this factor which explains the paradox of Christ: *'He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it'* (Matt. 10:39). Put Christ first, and the world's easy style of life vanishes at once. The wholehearted Christian becomes dead to many of the common comforts of this life. But he will find heaven at last and all its superior comforts will be his forever. Put yourself first and you may have the name of 'Christian', but you will lose your soul. It is the universal rule always.

If all this is so, how can any Christian be happy in this life? If a believer experiences *'the loss of all things'* (Phil. 3:8) here below, what is the explanation for his present comfort and joy? The answer is in the words: *'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him'* (Ps. 25:14). Just as God himself is hidden from our eye in this life, so are his inward comforts hidden from the eye of all who are not his people. The believer has from God in this life more joy in his heart than the unbeliever has from all his outward pleasures (Ps. 4:7).

Hidden from the eye and ear of unbelievers but revealed to the soul of those who love him, God's comforts are his secrets to his children. So the apostle puts the matter:

'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.'

(1 Cor. 2:9-10)

All the doctrines of Scripture bring joy and comfort to a believer in one way or another. The words of the unseen God are a wellspring of joy, a treasury of hope, an encyclopedia of encouragement to him to persevere in the life of faith so that he may *'inherit all things'* (Rev. 21:7).

O what secrets God has revealed to his children! He has shown them how a loving Saviour became *'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh'* (Eph. 5:30) that he might wash us from guilt and make us his Bride in eternity to come. He has expounded to us the mystery of imputation that we might know how the Christ who *'became sin for us'* is now *'the righteousness of God'* to us (2 Cor. 5:21). He has told us of the coming glories of heaven and informed us that a place is even now being prepared for us there. He has revealed to us that though our body be burnt to ashes it will rise again at last in glory, honour and immortality.

In this world, God has been largely invisible to man. The rule of life in this present world is that we *'walk by faith, not by sight'* (2 Cor. 5:7). This is the way ordained in this lower world. But it will not be the way we shall live in the world to come, which Christ will introduce at last. There, in the rejuvenated universe, righteousness will be the character of all the redeemed. Not only so, but they shall *'see his face'*, and his *'name shall be in their foreheads'* (Rev. 22:4).

This beatific vision of God in Christ is the prize which he has throughout the ages revealed in the hearts of all who have loved him. The Bible will not be out of date till that day. Meanwhile, let us strive to walk by it as our only rule *'till the day dawn and the day star arise in our hearts'* (2 Pet. 1:19).

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