

"THOU TRIEST MINE HEART, THAT IT
IS WITH THEE."

Many causes can interrupt the secret walk with God. The most mysterious to the pious mind is, that God withdraws his face, in order, by the want of it, to make you thirst more strongly after it. The most common is, that earthly interests so engage the attention and keep it absorbed that the soul is ensnared by them. And the most offensive to the soul is that actual sin came in the way, which not only broke your fellowship with God, but continued to prevent the return to the nearness of the Holy One.

Actual sin alone has mention here. A word, a deed, of which you felt, when you faced it, that it would be a sin to you, and which you failed to evade. A sinful tendency, a sinful mood, especially a sinful desire, can seriously affect the fellowship with God, but the working of it is different. For on this side of the grave this sinful inclination will stay by us, but provided it is not cherished, this by itself will not prevent the secret walk with God. The secret walk with God is always in Christ, from which it is evident that we do not come to God as one who is holy, but as one who in himself is a sinner. But it is different with a sin that has been committed. Then there was consent, permission and the doing of it. Then at once the light of God's benign countenance was gone. Then on the side of God it become dark,

and the inclination to flee from God was stronger than to be near unto God.

We perceive this change in our spiritual attitude clearly, at once and in the most painful way, when it was a sin that tempted us; a sin which, once committed, startled us, and for which we would give anything if the stain of it could immediately be removed from our soul. When, if we may say it in an ordinary way, it was a bad sin. For nothing shows our low moral viewpoint so sadly as our general ignorance of our minor daily sins, neglected duties, unlovelinesses, expressions of egotism, pride and vanity; small untruths, little dishonesties, and much more of the same kind.

This is still entirely different from what David calls "secret faults." They are faults which may stain the garment, but so little as to escape our notice. This refers to unknown sins, and which only with later development of soul, will be recognized by us as such. But we know the sins which we say are "not so bad." We have become accustomed to them and therefore they have ceased to trouble us. Our soul no more reacts on them. And of this sort of sins it is certainly true, that they hinder the secret walk with God, but do not prevent it. They do not break what once existed. But they affect the hidden walk with God to this extent, that it becomes sporadic, remains fellowship from a distance, and that we fail of the fuller enjoyment of the same.

Interruptions by sin in fellowship with God are only possible when, as a rule, you are near unto

God, when you know him in all your ways, and have been initiated into the secret of salvation, and then commit a sin which startles and frightens you, and brings a dark cloud to your sky, and you are thrown back upon yourself, and you feel that you have no more part in the lovely walk with God.

In Psalm 32 David speaks of such a break, and frankly confesses that this condition was continued because he kept silence. "When I kept silence thy hand was heavy upon me day and night." But at length he broke this silence, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." And when he has done it, the break is at once removed. Now he seeks and finds God again, and so he sings: "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found. Thou compassest me with joyful songs of deliverance." Yea, now he meets with God again, and God does not repel him nor hold him back. But he hears it sweetly whispered in his soul: "I will instruct thee; I will guide thee with mine eye."

And in this Davidic experience of soul lies the only true diagnosis, and the only effective medicine. When we were so weak, nay so wicked, as willingly and knowingly to commit a sin, the first impression which it made on us was that we wanted to hide from God, that we were afraid of appearing again before his presence, and that with the bitter remembrance of our sin we drew back within ourselves. Not from enmity, but from

fear. Not from lack of will, but from shame. We well knew that we must get back to God, but we postponed it. We wanted to pray, but we allowed time to intervene. We kept silent. And in this oppressive silence, which so sorely weighed upon the soul, we got farther and farther away from God.

This is the diagnosis, i. e. the explanation of the wound from which at such a moment the soul bleeds. The only true medicine is immediately to break your silence, seek solitude, kneel down, and without sparing yourself confess plainly and candidly your sin before God, call upon him for forgiveness, yea, implore him that he take not his Holy spirit from you.

This takes pains. At such a time you must do violence to yourself. You feel the sharpness of God's anger, and back of it you must grasp his mercy. But the outcome of this is always surprising. It is just as David said. It breaks at once the ban which sin put upon the heart. Something in the soul gives way, and liberation follows, deliverance, reconciliation, and God comes near in faithfulness as Jesus pictured it in the shepherd with the lost sheep. It seems as though in such a moment God draws nearer than ever to convince you of his infinite compassion.

Satan whispered within: "Stay away from God," but your Father in heaven called out to you: "No, come unto me, my child." In this approach of your sin-confessing heart to God, and of God to your soul, the interruption falls away,

and it is good for you, unspeakably good, to be near again unto God.

And what is the secret of this healing work of the soul? Is it not stated in Jeremiah's words: "Lord, thou knowest me, thou seest me, thou triest mine heart that it is with thee" (Jer. 12:3 Dutch version). That which makes the utterances of Psalmist and prophet so striking is, that they interpret all of life within the scope of battle for or against God. Battle against God on the part of Satan. Battle against God on the part of unholy, worldly powers. Battle against God's holiness on the part of every sin. They do not speak the weak, cowardly language of a self-developing and degenerating moral life, but they relate everything to God, as the center of all things. It is all a battle of sin and unrighteousness against God, and a battle of God against all unrighteousness and sin. It is an age-long battle, from the days of paradise on, which will not cease until the end of the ages, when God in Christ shall triumph over the last enemy. And we are all involved in this conflict, and have our part in it. When we sin, it is on the side of Satan against God. When we live by faith, it is on the side of God against Satan.

This is the interpretation of life as given by prophets and apostles. And this should be the profound and striking interpretation of life on the part of all God's children. And what is a sin which we commit? Even this: that in an evil moment we strengthen the forces of evil against

God, and that in co-operation with Satan we oppose God. And if this be the case what is it to make confession of sin, save that so soon as you realize this, you at once step out from among the ranks of Satan and return to the battle lines of God, imploring mercy, that you may be counted worthy again to fight under his banner, and again to join forces with him?

And now the heart appeals to the omniscience of the God of all compassions. Did you mean to desert the ranks of God and to join the forces of Satan? No, no; and once again, No. You did not mean to do it. The thought of such an evil did not rise from within yourself. You allowed yourself to be taken unawares. You slipped without realizing the dreadful wickedness of your deed. And now as you perceive that this is the sin that you committed, you appeal to God. In the inmost recess of your heart there was no desire to desert God. And your sorrow of soul, your remorse, your self-reproach is, that in the face of it, you have incurred the guilt of an act of enmity against God. And, therefore, you plead with him and ask him, the all-knowing, whether as he tries your heart, he does not see, and does not know, that in its deepest depths, as against Satan, it is with him.

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“GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN!”

It can not be denied, that in former times, especially in the middle ages, too much was made

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