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**Esteeming the Presence**

I have for a long time now been secretly irked in my inner man with the growing preoccupation of many of God's saints to desire the felt 'presence' of God. It is somehow implied that this is the summum bonum of faith, the high water mark of true spirituality; and that in this exalted realm, supposedly, lies the key to revelation and anointing in all that could be coveted for successful ministry. My own disposition is to receive His presence as a surprise and not something sought for in itself lest this become the final hiding place of self now safely ensconced in the guise of ultimate spirituality itself!

How much then do I appreciate Oswald Chambers' remark that "The abiding consciousness of the life is to be God, not thinking about Him." In this state, one looks at "everything in relation to God, because the abiding consciousness of God pushes itself to the front all the time" whether felt or not! This characterized the apostle Paul and especially Jesus Himself when ultimately tested at the Cross. The cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" is not the statement of a momentary lapse of the Father, but the supreme moment of the Son's sonship in an obedience that does not falter whether it is present or absent. It might well prove to be our own supreme moment.

This kind of abiding consciousness of God is the province, I suspect, only of those whose whole life, purpose and reason for being is the Lord's. Those who are yet independent entities with their own designs, however spiritual and consecrated will prefer a 'presence' to augment that spirituality and confirm them in their dedication. Can it be that many of the spurious revivals of our time have given opportunity to the enemy to duplicate in the soul-realm of the naïve and unsuspecting those coveted experiences the result of which has neither fostered maturity nor been enduring? Better, I think, to have one's secret life hid with God in Christ with that "pious mind that views all things in God and God in all things." The one who is anxious to obtain the 'presence' risks haunting doubts about himself should he fail, and forfeits the very peace where "the abiding companionship of God" waits to be enjoyed.

"The reality of God's presence is not dependent on any place, but only dependent upon the determination to set the Lord always before us". The need to feel or experience God presupposes ourselves as separate from Him rather than in Him, needing, therefore, to confirm in our experience what our faith should already attest. While the Lord in His grace might bestow the same, the enemy is equally alert to the opportunity to duplicate or counterfeit the thing desired. Our principal problem is an inadequate knowledge of God for the want of which we tend to make Him an accessory to our own will "imagining God to be a vague extrapolation of our own desires".

Some thought ought to be given to the danger of a presumption that encourages the seeking after of an 'experience'. The consequence of disappointed expectation of the sincerest believers can result in a sense of rejection and of self-condemnation, inwardly ascribed to some lack in themselves in which they could not 'qualify'. This is not to imply that the experience of God's presence is neither to be desired nor to be enjoyed when it comes. But to make it the object of willful quest as something to be obtained at human initiative or intent is to detract from the sovereignty of God and to give undue emphasis and dependency on what originates and issues from man.

How much better to be surprised by God in moments of His own choosing than to determine a time and place where He is obligated to meet us. In this way, we walk the walk incumbent upon us undistracted. To seek God's face is indeed commended to us in Psalm 24, but the motive is not what we might hope to enjoy from that seeking, which, ironically, may well equate to "lifting up our souls unto vanity," but rather the better knowledge of Him unto reverence and fear. So to, intercession for revival ought to be for the outpouring of His Spirit unto repentance for the unregenerate, and remorse and return for the callow and faded believer and not what would otherwise be an experience for its own sake.

As I have already hinted, our bravest and most significant moment might come as it did for the Lord in the absence of the felt presence of the Father, ("My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"), upheld by the faith of a true knowledge of God the Father that does not require explanation, and that at the very moment His presence is so crucially desired. That faith crowned Jesus at the zenith of His sonship and waits, I believe, to crown ours.

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