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THE SECRET OF THE LORD

Notes of a sermon preached by Mr. J. Kemp of Biddenden, 1896

*The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant.
Psalm 25:14*

Not every person knows what real, vital godliness is, for it is only those who are taught by the Spirit of God who know it savingly and experimentally. It cannot be attained by human effort, neither can natural abilities bring a person into vital acquaintance with these things. It is only known by the effectual working of the blessed Spirit. I am convinced of this more than ever; and I believe every child of God will be more confirmed in this, for, as he grows in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus, he is made to feel there is a solemn secret in religion – a real secret in it. How different that is to the noise and bustle in the outward show of religion in the present day.

- First: we have to speak of the character: *them* that fear Him;
- Secondly: *The secret of the Lord*, which is with them that fear Him;
- Thirdly: *He will show them His covenant*.

First, then: I did not know what to speak from this morning, but it struck me, whilst I was on my knees, what a great thing the fear of God is in prayer, and I hope, as I drew near the Lord, I felt a little of it giving me a solemn frame of soul, humility and tenderness, such as I love to feel. You and I might go on our knees with fleshly boldness, and irreverent lips, with a hard heart, defiled hands, and with no true humility. All that would amount to nothing at all before the Lord, who requires heart service, with holy reverence. I am sure this godly fear will make the child of God feel what a great thing it is for a poor dependent creature to approach the throne of grace – almost **too great** for a poor worm of the earth to approach God in prayer, for *God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.* (John 4:24)

Have you ever felt your nothingness at a throne of grace? Have you ever felt what a poor thing you are before God, and tremble in yourself before Him? I know one who has, and one too, who has often been lacking this blessed fear of God in exercise at a throne of grace. The best of men – I do not mean myself as the best by speaking thus - are apt to get into a fleshly boldness, even in that most important exercise, prayer, and approach God with a fleshly familiarity without due reverence.

But this godly fear; how it will bring us to a throne of grace with confession, contrition, guilt and nothingness. Then how we feel to need God's mercy and blessing. This godly fear will make the mercy of God very great in your eyes; and you would be afraid of expressing what you do not feel in your heart. You say it is **real** prayer? Is it **real** thanksgiving? It is one thing to **say** you are thankful; but another to be **really** thankful. *God trieth the hearts and reins.* (Psalm 7:9) One says:

*Never, never may we dare,
What we're not to say we are.* (Gadsby's 706)

It has been said by some that you can judge best of a man's religion by hearing him in prayer; and I believe there is a great deal of truth in that remark, though you might misjudge one. There are some people you cannot hear in prayer, because they cannot speak in prayer in public, or even before their wife and family. You would not condemn such, because all have

not the same gift of speech or boldness. I have sometimes felt it hard work to speak in prayer before those who are connected with me by the ties of nature, and grace too.

But this godly fear – do you know anything of it, when you have to do with the things of God? When you talk to others, do you know anything of it? It is easy to talk; but when this godly fear is in exercise, you feel it is a great matter to talk about religion, and you desire grace that you may not say too much, or too little – that *your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.* (Colossians 4:6) When you attempt to speak of the Lord's dealings in your soul, you desire to testify of His mercy in a right way, that it might glorify the Lord, while you lie in the dust with proper humility before Him. There is that pride in our hearts sometimes, that we want to be before others; we are proud of our prattle, even in soul matters. O these wretched hearts! But this godly fear causes one to speak out of the dust. This is an excellent thing in the pulpit, for when this godly fear is reigning in the heart, we neither court the smiles, nor fear the frowns, of any; for *the fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.* (Proverbs 29:25)

The fear of the Lord is profitable; it is a blessed grace. I wish I possessed more of it, though it is an unspeakable mercy to possess a spark of it, for it is true that –

*No big words of ready talkers,
No dry doctrine will suffice;
Broken hearts, and humble walkers,
These are dear in Jesus' eyes.* (Gadsby's 719)

What a knitting of soul, when your heart is made tender, and you feel to others who have godly fear! The Psalmist said: *I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, of them that keep Thy precepts.* (Psalm 119:63)

When you look into the Bible, this godly fear is a very profitable companion, for you know what it is to read in an irreverent way – and that is no godliness – but if you know what it is to have this godly fear, you have felt the written word to be the voice of God; and you desire the Lord to speak to your heart, to give you the portion that belongs to you, whether it be for comfort or reproof. This is the effect of godly fear. O how I love to read it so! But I have to confess my want of it, and to implore the Lord to give me a love to it. If the word of God does not stand out prominently, before other books, I should question whether you have this godly fear. Some people are so tender in this fear, that if they find a leaf of an old Bible on the rubbish heap, they cannot destroy it, but would rather treat it as Hagar did her son, when she said: *Let me not see the death of the child.* (Genesis 21:16)

How I have esteemed the Word of God! Though this godly fear is not always in exercise, do we know what it is to feel we dare not trifle with God's precepts? We are apt to twist them; and were it not for this fear, we might trifle with the ordinances of His house, with the throne of grace, with the service of the sanctuary, and everything that is good. Do you know what it is for this godly fear to mould you? When this fear is in exercise there is a walking in His precepts, honouring Him, and showing forth of His praise; and instead of ignoring His precepts by being "willing ignorant" of them, as many carnal professors are, you will want to know His will concerning you, so that you may, as far as possible, walk in all His ordinances blameless. If you fear God, you will feel it a great thing to take part in any of the services of His house. You will feel it a great undertaking, and ask, "Do I know the thing for myself?" – either in standing up to preach, to read a hymn, to sing, pray, or converse.

The God-fearing man feels God's service, and the things of God, a great matter. It is so weighty that he feels *Who is sufficient for these things?* How he desires to be guided by the

blessed Spirit not to think his own thoughts, not to speak his own words, not to walk in his own strength, or act in his own judgement in the things of God. I do not mind whether it is the minister, clerk, or hearer – it is all of a piece. Godly fear causes one to look up to the Lord for help, to seek His honour before our own. We should not talk to much, sometimes, on worldly things, or even on spiritual things, if this godly fear were more in exercise. Some people’s tongues hang loosely, and swing easily; but godly fear will make one careful what one says. O the vanity it would keep them from, if this godly fear were in exercise!

Some of you may have known what it has been to labour with others – ungodly people – and perhaps, up to a certain time, you have been the life of the party; but now you have been brought to take heed of your conversation, and how afraid you have been lest you should say anything to encourage your companions in sin. I am sure this godly fear will bridle a man’s tongue, especially when with the wicked. They wonder what has come to the person. Why, godly fear has come, and it has made that person feel: *Thou God seest me*; for this godly fear will bring him to have to do with God in thought, word, and act. We are far from perfection, but where there is this fear of God, it will incline a man to what is right before God as well as man. It will make a man honest – he cannot call black what is white. It will make an honest workman; and when this godly fear is in exercise, he will not serve with eye-service. It is *Thou God seest me*. O to have this fear in one’s heart! How it will help in one’s everyday movements.

I have cause to speak thus, because I served like that, with a measure of eye-service, and when I saw my master coming, how frightened I was. When this godly fear possessed me, it made a difference in this matter, so that, if my master were away for three weeks, as he was sometimes, it made no difference to my work. Some do not know that it is the fear of God in the heart – and they do not want to know it; but they like to have those who fear God to do their work. Say they, “I can trust that man; I like his work, and he keeps others somewhat in their place; but I do not like his religion.” *The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him*; and this fear of God will keep you from many things with which the world mixes, whether it affects your business or anything else, for when the fear of God is in exercise, one has to act before God, in His fear.

Secondly: We have to speak of *the secret of the LORD*, which is *with them that fear Him*. There is a **secret** in vital godliness into which this God-fearing soul is led – a secret that the world knows nothing of. For as there are secrets in a family or household which a servant or stranger knows nothing of, and a secret union between parent and offspring peculiar to themselves, so it is in divine things. The *secret* lies between the Lord and His children. One might worship as an outer-court worshipper; but this God-fearing soul comes into the inner court, and has fellowship with God u=in some small measure.

One of you may be saying, “I desire to come into this secret, but do I?” I do not suppose you always desired it. There was a time when you were contented without it. Others loved this *secret*, and what you saw in them condemned you, as your judgement told you that you were destitute of it; but you desired it not, and did not want to hear of it. **Now**, you are no enemy to it. Say you, “I desire the experience that God’s people are brought into. I fear there is a secret God’s people know that I do not.” Perhaps you are favoured with fellowship with the Lord Jesus in some small degree, only you feel to need more of what you have only tasted. You see how some come to the Lord’s house, as the door on its hinges, quite contented with the outward form; but you, poor soul, who fear God, now and then drop into the secret. You say, “Was there not unction in that sermon? How I left everything at the foot of the mount! Truly, the Lord was in that place!” Why, beloved, the world cannot enter into this; but, poor soul, if you have once tasted it, you will want it again.

Do you know what it is to be led into the secret love of God, and to have that love shed abroad in your heart? If you have not felt it to that extent, it has at times humbled you, or you may have been humbled and softened with the fact that He has come to bless His people. But this has been a piercing thought: "What if you feel a sweetness in the mercy conferred on others, and possess it not yourself?" But can one be thus humbled under God's goodness, and yet be out of the secret? May not this small measure be as genuine a great measure, though not so satisfactory? You taste that the Lord is gracious, and that is *the secret of the LORD*, which draws out the affections. The servant does not understand that; it is the son, or daughter, who is thus favoured to partake of the Father's grace. At times you have meat to eat the world knows not of – you have a secret support; and do you not know what it is to hang on the dear Redeemer in a time of distress, so that the thing that is calculated to crush one, and sink one in despair, becomes bearable? It is because that poor sinner is favoured with *the secret of the LORD*.

When there is trouble on every side, there is a secret something that will sweeten all your bitter cup; you have a measure of the spirit which the Redeemer had without measure, and you say, *The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?* You desire to drink it in submission to His holy will; you could not say He has dealt hardly with you. There is a sweetness in taking the cup in that way, and there is a sweetness in the chastening of the Lord, love being felt in it. Look at two persons whose circumstances are about alike in a way of worldly prosperity and blessings, crosses and trials – one a worldling and the other a saint. O the differences in their experiences! The worldling frets against God in trouble; and receiving God's mercies he waxes fat and kicks; but with the child of God, though he may fret at times, beneath the cross, there is a bearing it, more or less, with patience, and a feeling, however heavy the cross, that the Lord has dealt with him in compassion and love. He says:

*My Father's hand prepares the cup,
And what He wills is best.* (Gadsby's 70)

Is not this a secret visit the Lord pays to His friends when He discovers His face and His blood? O when you view Him with the eye of faith, what a *secret!* This is what the worldling never comes into. It is this which makes Christ precious, whilst the Holy Spirit lifts Him up in your affections.

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him. There is a secret in the things of God the worldling never comes into, for *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things (1 Corinthians 2:14,15)* It is by divine light and unction that the Christian looks into the mystery of the deep things of God's grace, and the great and glorious work of redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus. A secret beauty which lies hidden from the world is seen and felt by the God-fearing person.

Thirdly: *He will show them His covenant* – the covenant of grace. The Lord, speaking by the prophet Jeremiah of divine teaching in the heart, says it is *the new covenant*, that is, not according to the first covenant which was broken: *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33)* This *new covenant* is made manifest in the New Testament dispensation, which clearly reveals how sinners are called by grace through the quickening and indwelling of the Spirit in their hearts in a sovereign effectual way. What a covenant it is! There are no conditions in it for the creature to perform; so different from the covenant of works, by which, if they did what was contained in it, they lived; and vice versa, not so in this new covenant, for everlasting love, redeeming blood, and saving power are revealed. It is the Lord's purpose of grace to save a people, and

to save them to the uttermost. The great Jehovah has decreed it, and covenant favours fall like rain and dew upon them from the everlasting hills.

He will show them His covenant. The child of grace is tried in his beginning about this covenant, the doctrine of election, and such things. They are big things, and trouble him much because he fears he is not elected, not in the covenant; and if so, he must be lost. The Word of God speaks to the coming sinner in a way of encouragement; and it is not so much for him to be concerned about election, but more as to whether he is **called**. The Word of God speaks as to his **present** case: If he thirst, let him come unto Me and drink; if he hunger, he shall be filled; if he is weary, here is rest; and if he *call upon the LORD, he shall be saved*. But presently, the Lord shows him His *covenant*, how a people were given by God the Father to God the Son, who has redeemed them from death and hell by His blood, and justified them by His righteousness, and intercedes for them at His Father's right hand. And these are quickened by the Spirit in due time, for that is the fruit of election. None are called but the elect; they are all brought to repentance and prayer, faith, hope, and love are fruits of the Spirit, and fruits of election, and are connected together with Christ's redemption and power to save.

He will show them His covenant. He will show them that their security does not depend on their comfortable feelings – that He is faithful to His promises, that –

*Whom once He loves He never leaves,
But loves them to the end.* (Gadsby's 351)

They may not always see this covenant, and their interest in it, but now and then the Lord gives them a glimpse of it.

*Though God's election is a truth,
Small comfort there I see,
Till I am told by God' own mouth,
That He has chosen me.* (Gadsby's 31)

I know it is so, but when the Lord gives a glimpse of His covenant, how sweet it is! When one feels his interest therein, through the inward witness of the Spirit, he sees that all the church, and all their concerns, are in the covenant, and were so from everlasting. It is like Peter's sheet, *knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth*, and containing *all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things and fowls of the air*. (Acts 10:11,12) This represented the covenant of grace containing the Jewish and Gentile church coming down from heaven in God's purposes, and taking all the saints to glory. If this covenant is revealed to you, you will see an unspeakable beauty in it. It is the groundwork of salvation; and here is your trust, when you find that with Him there *is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*. (James 1:17)

O, I have found the Lord's faithfulness a true thing, because sometimes one is walking in darkness, in felt deadness, but then to be able to anchor in God's covenant and stability is to anchor in firm ground, which will hold one fast in a storm. He will show them, as He did David, that *He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure*. (2 Samuel 23:5) This takes in our concerns. David doubtless had many things in his family, and in his own soul, not to his liking. Many things went contrary to his wishes within and without. And in verses 3 & 4 he speaks of what would be a prosperous state of things, and then adds: *Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure*. That took in all David's experience in his family and kingdom. It took in Absalom's rebellion, and Ammon's vile act, not omitting David's sin, and the pardoning love and mercy made known to him. And David could look into the

covenant, and see the chastening rod in it, and God over-ruling, bringing good out of all this evil and wickedness, thus bringing him in the dust before God. Do you not see that his experience was that this covenant took in everything and every minute particular in everything too?

Poor child of God, this covenant takes in all your business matters, and all that perplexes from time to time. Has the Lord shown you in this covenant that he is making all your troubles and bitters work together for good? "Ah," say you, "I cannot always get a glimpse of this covenant." But God says, *He will show them His covenant*. You can only take comfort from it as the Lord brings it home to your personal case. When you lose sight of this covenant you blame everything else but yourself for any trouble arising from the creature that may assail you, and everyone is wrong but you. Now, when the Lord shows you His covenant, you feel:

*All must come, and last, and end,
As shall please my heavenly Friend.* (Gadsby's 64)

What a different appearance this puts on everything! I am sure does. However wrong the creature might be, you look above them and say:

They are the sword, the hand is Thine. (Gadsby's 473)

Has the Lord ever shown you this covenant? Do not lose sight of this – that it is *ordered in all things, and sure*. "What?" say you, "that thing which so worried and perplexed me the other day?" Yes, for He says: *Ordered in all things*. He sometimes shows His people that all their sorrows, and all their mercies are taken into account. You must not think that one trial, or one mercy, comes by chance, for *the very hairs of your head are all numbered*, and your –

– *life's minutest circumstance
Is subject to His eye.* (Gadsby's 70)

Great and small things are in His hands, and at times you may see and sweetly feel that some great thing that concerns you is under His control. But you lose sight of the fact that the small things are under His control, for *the very hairs of your head are all numbered*, and not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's notice. (see *Matthew 10:29,30*) These little every-day things are as much noticed by Him as the greater. O how sweet it is when He shows you His covenant! Your troubles, little or big, are then swallowed up in mercy. Blessed soul, to whom the Lord has shown His covenant in such a way that you are enabled to suck honey from it!

Amen.