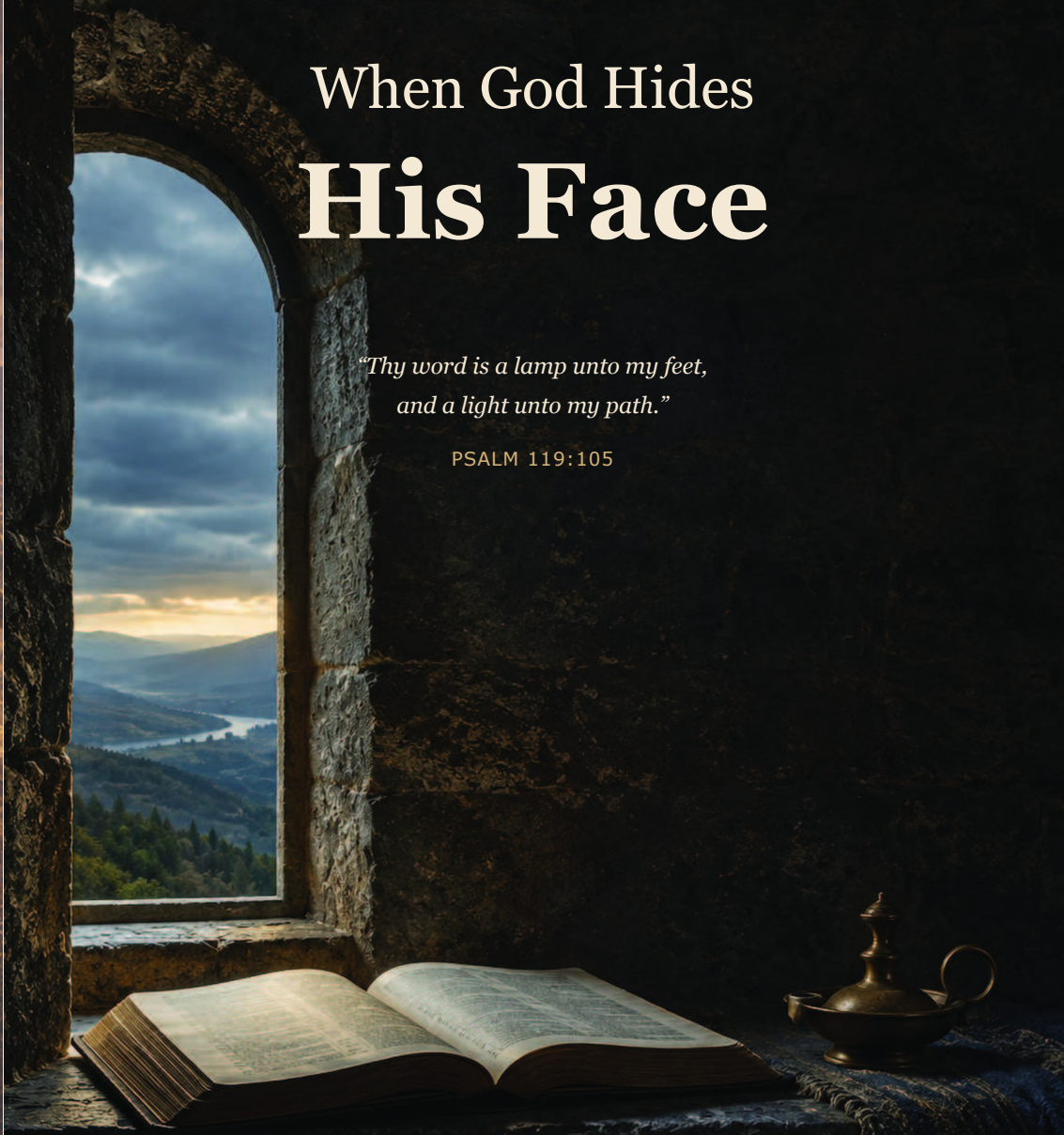
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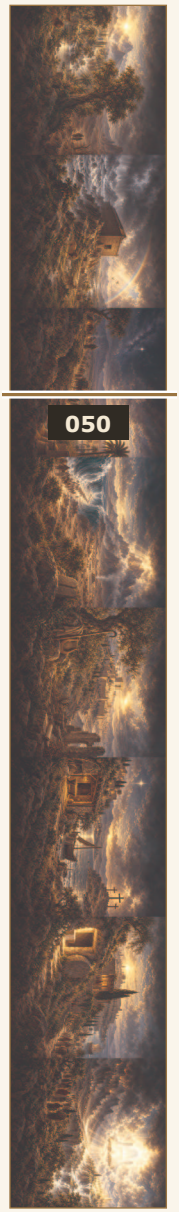


"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105

JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



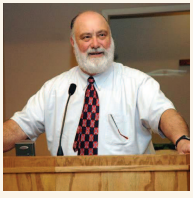
Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?

PSALM 10:1

The experience of God's hidden face calls for honest prayer and careful self-examination. John Weaver considers the biblical meaning of this language and the believer's response in times of distance and uncertainty. These messages invite readers to seek the Lord through Scripture without treating present feelings as the final measure of His care.

"One of the surest ways to experience the hiding of God's face is to take Him for granted and presume upon Him."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

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CHAPTER 1

When God Hides His Face - 1

When God Hides His Face

Let's open our Bibles to Isaiah 59 this morning. We are going to read the first two verses. Let me say at the beginning that I will be starting a message today that I will finish, Lord willing, next Sunday. This is a two-part message entitled "When God Hides His Face."

In Isaiah 59, beginning with verse 1, the Bible says, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear, but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear." Note, if you would, that last phrase: "and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear."

Introduction: The Game of Peekaboo vs. God Hiding His Face

You know, I've often told people there are only two things that will make an absolute fool out of adults, and those are babies and puppies. Now, you just stop and think about that. All of us have played the little game of peekaboo with our children. We would hide

our faces behind our hands, or stick our heads behind the door, and then reappear with the words "peekaboo" on our tongues. It was just a game, not only a game that our children enjoyed, but one that the adults enjoyed as well.

But unhappily, sometimes when children grow up, they become rebellious and disobedient. When they do, sometimes we use different types of discipline, but whatever method we use, we cannot smile upon them as we did once before. Whether we hide our faces by removing ourselves from their presence, removing them from our presence, or simply frowning upon them, at least they know that we do not want, need, nor condone their wicked and sinful attitudes and actions.

When you have to do that, you no longer wish to be around them, nor do you wish for them to be around you. When you hide your face like that, it is no longer a game. It is real, and it is punishment.

Anthropomorphic Language and Synecdoche

The Bible speaks about God hiding His face. Whenever the Bible talks about God hiding His face, you can rest assured that there are very grave implications involved. In fact, Hebrews 10:27 says, “But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and a fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.” Whenever God withdraws Himself, whenever God hides Himself, you can be sure that either judgment or chastisement will follow.

Isaiah 59:2 talks about God hiding His face. Whenever the Bible speaks of God hiding His face, you must remember that it is an anthropomorphic term. Anthropos is the Greek word for man, and morphe is the Greek word for form. Anthropomorphically simply means “man-form speaking.” All God is doing is putting it in language that you and I can comprehend and understand. We know, just from reading the Scripture, that God does not have a physical face.

How do we know that? John 4:24 says it very plainly: “God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” When the Bible teaches that God is spirit, it teaches that God is incorporeal. That is, He does not have a body as you and I have;

He does not have a physical being as you and I would have. So the phrase in Isaiah 55:2, or 59:2, is not only anthropomorphic; it is also a figure of speech known as a synecdoche.

The word synecdoche is made up of two Greek words. Syn is a preposition meaning “with,” and the root word is ekdechomai, which literally means “to take.” Put together, a synecdoche is a figure of speech in which the whole is given for a part, or a part is given for a whole. When the Bible speaks of God hiding His face, it is not just His face that He is hiding. It is the whole person. That is, He withdraws Himself; He withdraws His presence.

God is omnipresent. When we use the term omnipresent, it means that God is everywhere at one time in the totality of His being. There is not a place on this world, in space, or anywhere else where God is not, because God is omnipresent.

The Cause of God's Hidden Face

Omnipresence and Manifest Presence

If God is omnipresent and He withdraws His face, hides His face, or withdraws Himself, does that mean that God is no longer omnipresent? Of course not. How, then, do we explain God hiding His face or withdrawing Himself? That phrase is used in Scripture, which we shall see later. The answer is very simple. When the Bible speaks of God hiding His face or withdrawing Himself, it means that God removes the manifest presence in the sense that He removes His gracious favor, His protection, His blessing, and His grace. It is not that God goes into a corner of a building somewhere and hides, or that God goes into another building somewhere, or that you can find a little place where God is not. No. God is still there. God is still omnipresent. You just cannot perceive Him. There is no manifest presence that would allow you to know that God is there.

Today I want to cover one point and one point only: the cause of God's hiding His face. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear." What makes God withdraw Himself, or what causes God to

hide His face? The answer is given very clearly in Isaiah 59:1-2: it is because of our sin. Three truths should be obvious, lying on the surface of these two verses. First, the reason that God withdraws Himself is because of our sins. Listen carefully: there is no fault in God. It is wholly, completely, and totally our fault—our problem, our sin, and our rebellion.

The Cause: Our Sins (Isaiah 59:1-2)

After saying, "and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear," Isaiah continues in verse 3: "For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth. They trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity."

"They hatch cockatrice eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity. Wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace."

Plainly, God is enunciating the sins of the people. There can be no doubt that this first simple truth is very real: the reason God withdraws Himself, the reason God hides His face, is because of our sins.

The second truth is also made manifest: sin and rebellion merit and draw forth the judgment of God. If you would skip down to verse 9: "Therefore is judgment far from us, neither does justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men." You read on down, and you can see that God judges the people. It is their sins that bring forth the judgment of God. What God is teaching in verses 9 through 14 is that

we have merited, earned, and brought God's judgment upon ourselves.

The third truth is this: in light of these two facts—that it is our sins, and that our sins have brought forth God's judgment upon us—if God has mercy upon a people, it is due only to His grace and goodness. No wicked people can merit or draw forth the grace and mercy of God. If God delivers such a people, He does so purely out of His own grace and for His own glory. You will find that in verses 16 through 21 in this chapter.

Sinners may merit and draw forth the judgment of God, but we can never merit and draw forth the grace and mercy of God. It is like the Apostle Paul explained in Romans 11, verse 6: "And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. And if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

In other words, you cannot have it both ways. If it is works, it cannot be of grace. If it is of grace, it cannot be of works. And so the Apostle Paul says that when God has mercy upon us, it is because of His grace.

This is a broad overview of Isaiah 59; however, it is verses 1 and 2 to which I wish to call your attention particularly. The lack of blessings, deliverance, protection, and providential care is not due to a fault in God. He has not lost His power. He has not ceased to be gracious and kind. There cannot be any fault laid at God's feet. The fault is entirely and completely with His people.

When you consider the context of Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2, you will discover that God not only warns His people about their sins; He also warns them about their hypocrisy, their religiosity, and their ceremonies. There is not only an immediate context, but also a remote context. When you look at Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2, and the verses that follow, that should be obvious. But you also want to consider the verses that precede, particularly Isaiah 58, verses 1 through 7.

Context: Hypocrisy in Isaiah 58

Here Isaiah says, "Cry aloud and spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins." Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

"Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?" God says, "Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with a fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul?"

"Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

In this passage, God is condemning them because of their hypocrisy. They are going through the ceremonies and rituals, pretending that they love to approach God and truly want His ordinances. They say, “Yes, we want justice,” but all of this is pure hypocrisy.

Look back in your Bibles, holding Isaiah 58, and go to Isaiah 29:13. God had previously accused and warned them concerning this hypocrisy: “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” Note what He said: This people draw near with their lips—“Praise the Lord. Glory to God.”—but their hearts are far from Him.

"Amen. Yes, we want the truth. We want righteousness." They draw near to me with their lips. They speak of me with their mouth. But he says their heart is far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men. In other words, God has never worked a gracious work in their heart. They have just been taught externally, and that is all they know. All they know to do is follow the ceremonies.

In fact, if you look in your Bibles very quickly to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 7, you will find a similar illustration of this. I believe it is Jeremiah 7. Maybe that is not the passage. I can quote it; I have it in my mind. In the book of Jeremiah, God tells Jeremiah to go to the city of Jerusalem and run to and fro throughout the streets. He said, if you find one righteous man there, then I am willing to pardon the city. Then he says, though you might find one who says, "The Lord liveth," God says, surely he swears falsely. In other words, all he has is the lingo, the language. He does not have the heart.

That is exactly what God is condemning here in Isaiah 58. He is condemning these people because all they have is the ceremony, the ritual.

Now look at what they ask in verses 2 through 4. God says in Isaiah 58:2, "Yet they seek me daily." You would think, That is a good thing—seeking the Lord every day. "Yet they seek me daily, delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God. They ask of me the ordinance of justice; they take delight in approaching God."

Then look at what they are saying to God: "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?" God, look at us. We are going through the ritual and ceremony. What is wrong with you? Cannot you hear? Cannot you see? We are doing what we are supposed to do. The problem cannot possibly be with us; it has to be with you. They went through all the motions, ceremonies, and rituals, and now they blame God because God does not see, hear, or answer.

Such an attitude demonstrates not only pride, arrogance, and haughtiness, but blasphemy as well. Their concept of God was unbiblical, unreasonable, illogical, and unfounded.

They were saying, “Lord, we’ve been fasting, and You didn’t take notice. We’ve been crying, and You didn’t hear. We’ve been approaching You, and something must be wrong. You’re not taking note of that. God, You must have aged. You must have lost some of Your power. You must have become deaf or impotent in some way, or become unconcerned, for surely otherwise You would have acted on our behalf.”

Modern Application: Blaming God for Calamities

After all, they were doing what they were supposed to be doing. What you can say is, “Poor God, too bad.” It is absolutely amazing how the sovereign, supreme, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, infinite, and eternal God can lose power and compassion. Why, it must be true, they thought. Because God was not hearing them and God was not answering them, He must have lost His power or His compassion. If God were really God, certainly 9/11 would never have happened. If God were really God, the Columbine massacre could never have happened. God must be deaf or blind, or He must have lost some power or compassion, because He would not have let Katrina hit us like that. Surely He would not put up with all the starvation, disease, hunger, and war that are raging. If God were really God, He would do something about it. He would stop it.

When I say those words, I am speaking facetiously, but let me ask you a question: Is that not the way the ungodly think? I have heard people say with their own mouths, “If there is a God, why does He allow war? Why does He allow people to be slaughtered? Why does He allow disease? Why does He allow starvation? Why, if I were God, I would do something about it.”

It never enters most people’s minds that there is a possibility that we might have sinned against Him, trampled His commandments under our feet, despised and rejected His Son, done despite to the Spirit of grace, or refused to bow to Him and worship Him in the way He has ordained. Oh, no, that never enters their minds. Do you know why it does not enter their minds? For the same reason it did not enter their minds in Isaiah 58.

We go to church, at least on Easter and Christmas. We pray when we get into trouble or have special needs. We will give financially, too, when we are forced to, or after we have spent everything we want on ourselves. If anything is left over, we might give just a little bit. Certainly, we are Christians, and we want to be known as a Christian nation. So come on. The problem could not possibly be with us. It has to be with God.

That is exactly what these people were saying in Isaiah 58. God corrects this misconception very rapidly by stating two truths. First of all, He tells us, in Isaiah 59:1, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." First of all, He tells us that the Lord's hand is not shortened. What does that mean?

God's Power and Hearing Are Undiminished

Once again, it is a figure of speech. It is a synecdoche. Remember, God does not have a physical body; therefore, He does not have a hand, and He does not have an arm. But when you see the word hand or arm in the Bible identified with God, it speaks of God's power. What happens when a man's arm becomes palsied? He gets polio or some other disease in the arm. What happens? It usually draws up, or he has a stroke, and he loses the use of that hand and arm.

So this is what God is saying: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened." God has not had a stroke. God has not come down with palsy. No, His power and strength are just as they have always been. Hold Isaiah 59, but go back in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 4. Let me show you several verses—Deuteronomy 4:24.

There is still another verse I want to read. It is a good verse: "For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God." The reference noted was wrong, but Deuteronomy 5:15 says, "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day."

How did God get the children of Israel out of Egypt? By a mighty hand, by a stretched out arm. In other words, it is talking about His power. Deuteronomy 7:19 says, “The great temptations which thine eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched out arm, whereby the Lord thy God brought thee out: so shall the Lord thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid.”

Do you realize that whenever you and I start to do work, strenuous exercise, or pick up something heavy, the first thing we do is stretch out our arm? In other words, we get it ready to do the work. So the Bible, once again, is talking about God's great power in delivering His people. Deuteronomy 9:29 says, “Yet they are thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and by thy stretched out arm.” There it is, the power and the arm put together.

These passages show the same truth repeatedly: the stretched-out arm represents God's mighty power in delivering His people. A couple of other passages make the point. Psalm 136:10-12 says, “To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever: and brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever: with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever.” Isaiah 23:11 says, “He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms. The Lord hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strongholds thereof.” He stretched out his hand over the sea. And what did he do? He shook the kingdoms.

Now look in Isaiah 45 and verse 12. Isaiah 45 and verse 12. God says, "I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded." So whenever God says in Isaiah 59 and verse 1, that the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, He is simply saying this, I retain all the power, all the strength, all the vigor that I've ever had.

I want you to stop and think about this. Several of these verses refer to it. You think of the power that God exercised in delivering the children of Israel out of Egypt. You think of the power that God exercised in smiting Pharaoh and his army. You think of the power

that God exercised in bringing them into the Canaan land. You think of the power that God exercised in subduing all those nations and subduing all those kingdoms and giving Israel their land. What is God saying?

I have not become weak. I am the same as I always was. I still have the power. I'm still omnipotent. The power is not—or the problem is not with God. The problem is with the people. God is still able, listen, to defeat His enemies, to overthrow the wicked, to destroy those who rebel against Him. The problem is not with God. God is still just as able to help as He has ever been able to help.

His hand is not shortened. His power is not abridged. His strength is not straightened or lessened. God has just as much power as He ever had, and it is just as efficacious. It is just as powerful. You know what God asked Moses in Numbers 11 and verse 23—you don't have to turn there—but God asked Moses, "Has the Lord's hand waxed short?" Have I lost any of my strength? You know, the answer to that, no. Do you realize that God—and I'm going to be preaching on this in the not too distant future—God is just as able to save with few or with many, it doesn't matter to God. Because the power is really not man's power. It is God's power as well. God is still able to defeat His foe. God is still able to deliver His people. God is still able to protect us. So He says the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. And then secondly, in Isaiah 59 in verse 1, He says, "neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear."

By the way, the Hebrew says neither is God's ear thick of hearing. I want you to turn to Psalm 115. Let me show you a comparison. Look in Psalm 115.

Some of you, like myself, have lost some hearing ability. Alice says it's selective, and maybe sometimes that's true. Eddie told me at breakfast, "I'm going to go let the horses out." I looked at him and said, "Eddie, since you're going out there, please let the horses out." I never even heard him, and he started laughing. Then Alice started laughing. Don't call me thick-headed, just thick of hearing. You see, that's it. That's what the Hebrew says.

But look in Psalm 115, where God is talking about the idols: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have

mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat." In other words, all of these are nothing more than dumb idols. They can't hear or speak. But God's not a dumb idol. His ear has not grown heavy that it cannot hear. Proverbs 20:12 says, "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye."

"Even the Lord hath made both of them." Why are you able to see? Because God gave you sight. Why are you able to hear? Because God gave you the ability to hear. If you believe that God is the Creator and created us with the ability to see and hear, are you so insulting to God as to think He that created hearing and seeing cannot hear and see Himself? He said, "The seeing eye, the hearing ear, even the Lord thy God hath made both of them." What kind of God would He be if He could make something for someone else, but not for Himself?

When you go back to Isaiah 59 and look at verse 1, remember the context: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear." He says this because, in Isaiah 58, verses 3 and 4, they are complaining that God is not hearing their prayers, seeing their sacrifices, or looking at their worship. They are accusing Him of being thick-eared.

They say, in effect, "We approach You daily. We are asking Your ordinances, fasting, going through the ceremonies, and fulfilling the rituals. Why are You not hearing? Are You hard of hearing?" They were blaming God, not themselves. The truth is that God does indeed hear and answer prayers, but He will not respond to unbiblical, ungodly, and unethical prayers.

This is not a sermon on prayer, but consider three passages. Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call upon me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." God is willing and ready to hear biblical prayers. Isaiah 65:24 says, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." God knows our needs before we express them and knows what we will say before we utter our prayers. He is willing to answer even before we speak.

Our Lord said in John 14, verses 13 and 14, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

The Problem Is With Us

The only reason I quoted those verses is to show you that God is quite ready and willing to hear and answer our prayers. Why would He not hear the prayers of these people in Isaiah 58? Why will He not hear our prayers many times? Do you remember Psalm 66:18? David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Is the fault with God or with man? It is with us. That is why He says, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you." The problem is not with God. The problem is with us.

We can sit around and whine, bellyache, and complain about the oppression, taxation, tyranny, and loss of liberty and freedom in this land. But let me remind you of 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and turn from their wicked ways, and pray and seek my face, then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sins, and heal their land." As much as I despise the wicked in this world, especially the ungodly, reprobate rulers, the problem is not with them. In reality, it is with us. Therefore, says God, your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have caused Him to hide His face.

Applications: Self-Examination and Repentance

There is a time when God hides His face and withdraws Himself. There is a time when you and I can look around and say, "Where in the world is God? Where are His blessings? Where is His mercy? Where is His help? Where is His strength? Where is His power?" We may cry, "Lord, why don't You arise and do something for us?" Read the Psalms over and over, and you will find David crying and praying, "Arise, O Lord, and show Thyself. Make Thy power known. Let man know that Thou art God." Why? Because there are times when God withdraws Himself and hides His face. This is known as the Lex Talionis.

I've given you that phrase before: Lex talionis. It is Latin for the law of retribution. Do you know what God always does? He always makes the punishment fit the crime. What did David say in Psalm 66 and verse 18? "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." If you and I constantly and continually sin against God, violating His Word and disobeying Him, what does that mean? It means we're not hearing God; we're not listening to Him. And what does God do in perfect justice? God says, "You won't listen to Me; I won't listen to you. I'll hide My face. I'll withdraw Myself from you." Then you look around and say, "Where did God go?" Let me give you an illustration.

Some of you can identify with it, and some of you can't. The only hobby I have outside of studying, I suppose, is hunting. I love to hunt deer. Usually I can go hunting and see as many as twenty-one or twenty-two deer at a time. Often I don't even shoot; I just watch them. But deer feed with the moon. They have two major feeds and two minor feeds. When you get that full moon, shining in the middle of the day and bright in the middle of the night, you can look for deer all you want and never see a deer. For two or three days each month, it seems as though every deer has fallen off the edge of the world.

They're there, but you don't see them. We as Christians can go out, and when we're in tune with the Lord and right with the Lord, we see God in creation, preservation, and providence. We see the Lord everywhere we turn. But when we start sinning and become disobedient, all of a sudden we look around and say, "What happened? Where did God go? He must have fallen off the edge of the world." No. It wasn't God that moved.

It was us. God's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, and His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear. It is our sins.

Most of us never fully understand the mischief of sin. Sin brings chastisement, judgment, heartache, and everything that we do not want. But one thing we tend to forget is that sin builds a wall of partition between us and our Lord: “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you.” There it is: a wall. We cannot see where God is, and we think that God cannot see where we are.

One of the penalties of sin is that sin separates. It separates families, it separates friends, and it separates us from our God.

Whenever God does hide His face, and you cannot perceive His protection, His blessings, His grace, or His mercy in your life, put this down: the fault is not in God; it is in you. You need to repent. You need to exercise faith. You need to come back and say, “Lord, I want to be where You are.” What does He say? “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save.”

Would you like to see God jerk a knot in the wicked of this nation? I would. But the fault, and the reason He has not, is with His people. We are the ones who need to get right with Him. And when we do, I do not want to be around when He does the jerking. I want to be around to see it, but I do not want to be in the mob that He jerks, because He shall straighten them out.

Lord willing, next week we will look at the consequences of God hiding His face.

Father, we do ask and pray that Your holy and blessed will would be done in our lives. Each of us has experienced times when You have withdrawn Yourself and hidden Your face. We must admit and confess, Lord, that the fault was not Yours, but ours. Help us, Father, to repent of any known sin or disobedience and bring our lives into conformity to Your Word. Help us to understand how important it is that each of us live a holy, godly, obedient life. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

When God Hides His Face - 2

Introduction and Review

The message you are about to hear was produced by Dominion Ministry. If you would like to support this ministry by becoming a sermon partner or obtain additional high-resolution CDs, DVDs, or MP3s featuring the teaching of Pastor John Weaver, please visit the Dominion Ministry website at www.dominion.org, www.dominionministry.com. This ministry is completely supported by donations, and it is through those donations that we are able to provide sermons for sermonaudio.com. Please visit our website at www.dominionministry.com to subscribe or make your donation today. Thank you. Well, let's open our Bibles to Isaiah 59 today, Isaiah 59. And for those of you who are here visiting today, may I remind you that this is the second part of a message, which, of course, will be full, I think, in and of itself.

And I will take just a few moments to review. But in Isaiah 59, look, if you would please, at verses one and two. And this is the second part of "When God Hides His Face." Isaiah 59 verse 1, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated

between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear."

Now, last week, I began the introductory message and I showed you from Scripture over and over, and we shall see more so today, the reality and the fact that God does indeed from time to time hide His face. And I told you that this teaching had to be understood anthropomorphically and synecdochally as well. Remember the word "anthropomorphic" is made up of the two Greek words, anthropos, which means man, and morphe, which is form. So anthropomorphic just simply means man-form speaking. So all God does is put it in language that you and I can comprehend and understand. And when we talk about a synecdoche, well, we're talking about a figure of speech where the whole is put for a part or the part is put for a whole. So when the Bible talks about God hiding His face, it would be talking and referring to the fact that God is withdrawing His presence. Now, let me point out the fact, again, that God is omnipresent.

That is, He is everywhere at once in the totality of His being. There is no place where God is not, for God is omnipresent. And so, when we talk about God withdrawing His presence or God hiding His face, it is not that God goes into the corner of a house or that God withdraws from some place in the universe. Not that at all. All it refers to is that God refuses to give us a manifestation of His presence.

You and I cannot perceive or comprehend His hand of blessings upon us. It is not that He has ceased to be omnipresent. He has simply withdrawn His gracious presence to the place where you and I cannot discern His presence or His blessing.

The cause of God's hiding His face is plainly stated: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear, but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear." Sin separates. It not only separates families, friends, and neighbors; it also separates us from our God.

God charges the people: "For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity, your lips have spoken lies, your

tongue hath muttered perverseness, none calleth for justice, nor any plead for truth, they trust in vanity, they speak lies, they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity." Again, "For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us. For our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them."

He continues: "In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood, and judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off, truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter." Very obviously, it is because of the sins, wickedness, disobedience, and rebellion of the people that God withdraws His presence.

The Consequence of God Hiding His Face

The consequence of God's hiding His face is the next point. We have seen the cause: our sins and our rebellion. But what are the consequences?

Each of us should have learned by now that all our actions have consequences. You cannot commit an act without there being a consequence to that act. People may jokingly say, "Well, I ought to just slap you upside the head," and the other person responds, "Well, if you can suffer the consequences, have at it." Every action has consequences. The problem with many people is that they wish to live as if there were no consequences to their actions. We want to sow, but not to reap. We want to sin, but not die. We want to dance, but not to pay the piper.

However, we are commanded in Scripture not to be deceived concerning this fact. What does the Bible say? Galatians 6:7–8 says, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For whatsoever man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, and he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever you sow, that is exactly what you will reap. If you sow to the flesh, you will reap of the flesh; if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap of the Spirit.

Romans 2:2 goes further: “But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth.” What does that mean? It means that when God judges us, He does so rightly, because He has the truth of the matter. I may be deceived, and you may be deceived. A multitude of others may be deceived. But God cannot be deceived. When He judges, it is always based upon truth. Romans 2:6 says that God will render to every man according to his deeds. What does that mean?

It means that there are consequences to our actions, and we will reap exactly what we sow. When God chastises us and when God judges us, it will be in truth and according to our deeds. Sin does have consequences. Whether we like those consequences or not is immaterial. Whether we desire them or not is immaterial. Whether we want them or not is immaterial. None of that alters the fact that there are consequences to our actions and that we cannot escape those consequences.

First Consequence: Withdrawal of Gracious Presence

Consider, beginning in the book of Hosea, chapter 5, the consequences of God hiding His face. Hold Isaiah 59, but turn to the book of Hosea, chapter 5, and look at verse 6. These passages are vitally important. Verse 6 says, “They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord, but they shall not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them.” They go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, but what is the result? They shall not find Him. Why? “He has withdrawn himself from them.”

What are they doing? They are going with their flocks and their herds. That means they are going to sacrifice, worship, and fulfill the rituals and ceremonies that God has ordained. But what does God say? God says they are not going to find Him there: “I’ve withdrawn myself.” In other words, once they go there to fulfill their obligations, duties, ceremonies, and rituals, God says they may have all the rituals they want, but He will not be there.

In a sense, they will never discern His manifest presence or His face. The worship, service, praise, duties, ceremonies, and rituals will be dry, parched, and hollow. When I read this verse, I could not help but think of most modern-day churches. They go, they meet, they greet, they eat, and it is over—dry, hollow, parched, with no

praise, no worship, and no discerning of the Lord or His Word; then they go home.

I want you to notice that part of the curses found in the Bible for disobedience relates to this very fact. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to the book of Leviticus, chapter 26. You are also going to be asked to turn to Deuteronomy 28, so you can find Deuteronomy 28 as well as Leviticus 26. Let me show you what God says concerning a curse upon disobedience. In Leviticus chapter 26, beginning with verse 18, God says, "And if you will not yet for all this hearken unto Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins."

Now stop and look at what He said. "If you will not yet for all this hearken unto me," that refers to all the judgments and curses God has already mentioned. If they will not listen to all of that, God says, "I'm going to judge you seven times more for your sins." Watch verse 19: "And I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heaven as iron."

"And your earth as brass. I will make your heaven as iron and your earth as brass." Now look in Deuteronomy 28 and verse 23. You will see the same passage, which deals with curses. God says, "And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron."

I do not know whether any of you know what it is like to try to drill through brass or dig through iron, but some of us in South Georgia know what it is like to dig through dried red clay. Unless you have a couple of sticks of dynamite, you have problems. What does God mean when He talks about your heaven being brass? It means it will be exceedingly difficult for you to get through, if you get through. In other words, God is saying, basically speaking, "I am not going to hear you. I am not going to listen to you."

Each of us remembers the story of Job, and I hope at least most of what he went through. He not only lost his ten children in one day; he not only lost all of his possessions in one day; even his wife turned against him and told him to curse God and die. Then he had three friends come over, and with friends like those, who needs enemies? They sat silently for a while, and then began to accuse Job, slander him, and say all kinds of malicious things about him. Job knew he

was suffering physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially—every way imaginable.

The worms were eating him up. Job knew that he had not done anything to deserve that particular judgment. In other words, he was suffering wrongfully. Let me explain that statement: he had done nothing personally to deserve those circumstances. Yes, he was a sinner. He knew he was a sinner. He admitted, confessed, and acknowledged that he was a sinner. But he had not sinned openly and rebelliously against God. Not only was he suffering, but he was also being wrongly—vilely, I might add—accused by these friends.

Do you realize the greatest hurt in everything that he went through? Everything that he went through was bad, that is true, but Job 19:7 says, "Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard. I cry aloud, but there is no judgment." What was pressuring Job? "Lord, I'm being wronged. I'm being falsely accused by my friends, I'm being judged, and, Lord, I really have not been rebellious. But my problem is, Lord, when I cry to Thee for answers, when I cry to Thee for justice, when I cry to Thee for rectification of this problem, nobody's listening. You don't hear me."

Do you not think Job thought heaven was brass? "I can't get through. I don't know what is going on. God is not listening to me." When God hides His face, He withdraws Himself from us. Then we are stunned, perplexed, and confused, and we too think that heaven is brass. We sit back today and wonder why in the world our services are dry, barren, and empty; we think about our prayer life, our devotional life, and every practical aspect of the ministry. Why are there no blessings of God upon them? What in the world is wrong? At times, it seems God will not look at us.

The Lex Talionis: God's Just Retribution

He will not listen to us. He will not even acknowledge us. Do you remember? I began the lesson last week with the expression peekaboo. We used to play that little game with our children, especially babies: we would cover our face or step behind a door, then come back and say, "Peekaboo, I see you." It was a great game. But when children get older, it is not a game anymore.

Is it not true that there are people in your life—people you have known, perhaps sometimes family members—you do not want to be around? You do not want to see them. They are so wicked or vile, or they have hurt you so deeply. You stay over there on your part, and I will stay over here on my part, and everything will be fine. Have you ever stopped to think that this might be the attitude God displays when He hides His face?

You say, “Come on, that would never be God’s attitude.” Well, we are not really looking at the Scripture. Remember, there is the lex talionis, which I mentioned last week. That is the law of retribution. Three times in the Bible, God speaks about an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, foot for foot, hand for hand, stripe for stripe, burning for burning, life for life. What does that mean? It means God always makes the punishment fit the crime.

What is the most common sin of the average teenager? They will not listen to Mom and Dad; they think they know it all. What is the most common sin of believers? We do not listen to our Father. What is the most common sin of unbelievers? They do not listen to God at all. They disrespect Him, dishonor Him, disbelieve Him, and refuse to listen to Him.

Now, with that in mind, look in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 1. I am going to show you the lex talionis. Begin with verse 10 and look at the complaint that God lodges.

"Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. Give ear unto the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah." Whom is God addressing as Sodom and Gomorrah? If you go back to verse 1, you will find that it is Judah and Jerusalem. He is talking to His people: "Hear the word of the Lord, rulers of Sodom. Give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah."

Now look at the question He asks: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? Why are you continuing to do this?" He says, "I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or lambs or of he-goats. When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts?"

"Bring no more vain," that is, useless and worthless, "oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and the Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I count on no way with it. It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting."

Did not God appoint those meetings? Yes, He did. Did He not appoint those oblations, the new moons, and the feast days? Yes, He did. But He says, "Your new moons and your appointed feast days my soul hateth. They are a trouble unto me. I am weary to bear them."

"And when you spread forth your hands," that is, when you pray to Him, "I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear. Why? Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow."

God began in verse 10 with, "Hear the word of the Lord." What have these people done consistently and constantly? They refuse to hear the word of the Lord. So God says, "When you spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you. And I am not playing peekaboo," says God. "When you call unto me, I will not hear you." Remember, He is talking to His people.

This is the lex talionis of Scripture. God is saying, “You don’t hear me. I will not hear you.” It is right and proper, and just for God not to hear us when we refuse to hear Him.

Isaiah 30, beginning at verse 9, says, “That this is a rebellious people.” Look what He calls them: “Lying children, children that will not hear the law of God, who say to the seers, ‘See not,’ and to the prophets, ‘Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits, get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.’ Wherefore, thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay there on.”

What does God call His people here? Lying children, rebellious children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord. You know what our problem is? I’ll tell you very frankly: our problem is that we

want God to hear us, but we don't want to hear Him. What we want is for God to be our little servant boy, where we can just push a button and God fulfills all our demands and all our commands. What we want is the blessings of God and our sins.

But such is an impossibility. We cannot have both. Jeremiah 14 says, "Thus saith the Lord unto this people. Thus have they loved to wander. They have not refrained their feet. Therefore, the Lord doth not accept them. He will now remember their iniquity and visit their sins. Then said the Lord unto me," that is, to Jeremiah, "pray not for this people for their good."

Now look what He says: "When they fast, I will not hear their cry. And when they offer burnt offering and oblation, I will not accept them, and I will consume them by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence." What's God saying? They will not listen to me, and therefore I will not listen to them. They are a people who love to wander.

God says to Israel in Jeremiah 22:21, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, 'I will not hear.' This has been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyest not my voice." Now look carefully at what that verse says. God said, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity." These were the words God spoke when they were full, when they were receiving the blessings of God on a daily, constant, and continual basis. God spoke to them then, and what did they say?

"I won't hear. I won't listen to you, Lord. You may be blessing me and you may be giving me all these things, but I'm not going to listen to you." God says, "This has been thy manner since thy youth." Seeing and hearing are intimately connected in this passage with obedience. They said, "We will not hear." What does that mean? We will not obey. We will not listen.

Micah 3:4 says, "Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but he will not hear them. He will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings." Isn't it amazing how many times God says this? "They shall cry unto me, but I'll not hear them. I'll even hide my face from them. You stay over there. I'll stay over here."

"You don't want to be around me? Fine," says God. "I don't want to be around you. You don't hear me. That's OK," says the Lord. "I don't hear you. You don't listen to me. Fine. I don't listen to you."

God says in Malachi 2:2, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart."

Why is God sending His curses? Why is God hiding His face? Why is God withdrawing His gracious presence? He is doing it because the people will not listen to Him. They will not hear Him. They will not obey Him. So whenever God refuses to hear us, refuses to favor us, and shuts up His mercies from us, I can assure you that all of our crying, all of our fasting, and all of our praying will be in vain. It will seem as if heaven is literally brass when our prayers go no further than the ceilings. We will seek Him, but He will not be found. We'll call on Him, but He won't answer. We'll try to worship Him, but He won't receive it.

Illustration from Song of Solomon

Now let me give you a very vivid illustration of this truth from the Song of Solomon. The bride is a picture of the church, and the bridegroom is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. The Song of Solomon is a picture of Christ and the church.

In Song of Solomon, chapter five, verse one, He says, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."

Now look: "I sleep, but my heart waketh," says the bride. "It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night."

The husband is knocking at the door, trying to get in. The bride says, “I put off my coat. How shall I put it on? I've washed my feet. How shall I defile them?” In other words, she is preoccupied with herself. Then she says, “My beloved put his hand by the hole of the

door and my bowels were moved for him." In the Bible, the bowels are the deepest seat of affection. She was saying how she loved him.

Finally, she gets up out of bed and says, "I rose up to open to my beloved and my hands dropped with my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh upon the handles of the lock." In other words, here she is in all her finery and sweet smells. "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone. My soul failed when he spake. I sought him, but I could not find him. I called him, but he gave me no answer."

He was knocking, and she did not answer. She continued to do her own thing. When she finally decided to open the door, he had withdrawn himself. He was gone. She sought him, but could not find him; she called him, but he would not hear. When God hides His face and withdraws Himself, we may be left crying and screaming, but He does not hear. We may look and search, but we do not find. In such a state, we will soon realize that it is our sin, disobedience, and wickedness.

Warning Against Presuming on God's Mercy

That has caused Him the withdrawal. One of the greatest sins that we, as children of God, commit is presuming upon His mercy and grace. We think, even as Christians, that we can sin just a little and get by with it. We cannot. God will not allow it.

It is, perhaps, just a little taste of hell not to be able to discern the presence and blessings of God. Stop and think about that. Quite frankly, I do not understand how unbelievers live in this world, in this age that we are in right now—not knowing the Lord, His grace, His mercy, and His blessings. How can you function in an age like ours? Do you believe it is that serious? Oh, yes.

Look in Proverbs, chapter 1. There we have wisdom crying in the streets. When we come to 1 Corinthians, we know that Jesus Christ is wisdom personified; Proverbs 8 teaches us that Jesus Christ is wisdom. In Proverbs 1, wisdom cries in the streets: "She cried in the chief places of concourse, in the opening of the gates, in the city, she uttered her words saying," and this is what wisdom preaches:

“How long, you simple ones, would you love simplicity? And the scorners delighted their scorning and fools hate knowledge.” In other words, how long will it be before you sit up, pay attention, and listen?

Wisdom continues, “Turn you at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out My Spirit upon you. I will make known My words to you.” God says, “I’ll give you understanding. I’ll give you wisdom.” Then He says, “Because I have called, and you refused. I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded. But you have set not all of My counsel, and would have none of My reproof.” God says that you would not listen to Him.

Then comes the warning: “I will also laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh at desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me.” But, “I will not answer. They shall seek me early.” But, “they shall not find me.” Why? “For that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord.”

"They would have none of my counsel. They despised all my reproof. Therefore," says God, "shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices."

I tried to teach my children that all I needed to do was speak one time, and they were to obey me. If you have to speak twice, you are encouraging their disobedience, if you are sure they heard you the first time. Scripture says, "Children, obey your parents and the Lord: for this is right." I expected my children to obey me the first time I spoke to them. Do you think God expects us to obey Him the first time He speaks to us?

Of course He does. You may say, "But I don't want to listen." God says, "If you don't listen, keep going your way. Pretty soon there will come a day when you will be in extreme calamity. Then you will call upon me, and guess what? At that time, I don't want to listen."

That is the lex talionis, the law of retribution. The first consequence of God hiding His face is that He withdraws from us every manifestation of His gracious presence. We pray, and He does not hear. We worship, and it is to no avail. We cry, scream, and fast,

but nothing happens. Heaven is brass, and the earth is iron; we cannot get a blessing from it either. We must remember that the earth is God's earth.

Second Consequence: Judgment

I passed cornfields on the way to church this morning that were ruined from lack of rain. I told my wife, "At least they ought to go ahead and cut it down for fodder while it is still green, because it is never going to make any corn." When God shuts out His blessings and hides His face, we are in real trouble.

The second consequence of God's hiding His face is judgment. This is common sense: if God withdraws His manifest presence, favor, and blessings from us, what is left? The only thing left is judgment. Deuteronomy 31:17 says, "Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us?"

"Because our God is not among us." Two truths are very apparent from a cursory reading of this verse. First, when God hides His face, He does so in such a way that we cannot discern His presence. Israel had to ask, "Is it not because our God is not among us?" They could not find Him anywhere. Where did He go? Where is He? They could not find His blessings, favor, protection, or good providence. Where is God?

Second, the lack of God's gracious presence brings only judgment. Look back at verse 17: "Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day. And I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them." Note: "And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Are not these evils come upon us? Because our God is not among us.'" Then God says, "And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods." What did God say? "I will hide my face."

By the way, Deuteronomy 32, the chapter that follows, is an ode—that is, a song. Moses wrote it at God's command to teach the children of Israel as a witness against them. In Deuteronomy 32:20, speaking of how they would forsake Him and turn to other gods, God says, "I will hide my face from them. And I will see what their end shall be. For they are a very forward generation, children in whom is no faith."

Think about this. God said, "I'll hide my face from them. And I will see what their end will be." There are families with a rebellious teenager or rebellious older child. Some parents, and some grandparents, make a very serious mistake when they always try to bail that rebellious child out of all his problems.

There's a principle in Scripture, and that principle is this: he who sins must suffer. If you try to keep someone from suffering because of their sin, they're not learning the lesson that God intends for them to learn. I believe the biblical attitude toward a rebellious teenager is exactly the one expressed here by God. God said, “And I'll hide my face from them and I will see what their end will be.” Now, what did God mean when He said, “I'll hide my face from them and I'll see what their end will be”?

There was a little bumper sticker I saw in the stores that said, “Teenagers. Take advantage of the fact that you know everything and can do everything. Run away now.” That's what most teenagers think: “I'm my own boss, I'm my own thing.” I told my daughter recently, “I remember when I was a teenager, and for the life of me, I cannot figure out how stupid I really was.” I remember thinking, “I can't wait to get out of this house and get on my own where I can do my own thing.”

Then I stop and think: my daddy bought my car, my gas, and my clothes. He paid for my food and all my bills. Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could go back and say, “Daddy, I'm willing to stay at home and obey you. Just take care of me now”?

What is going to happen when you have these smart-aleck teenagers who are sixteen or seventeen, think they know everything, and want to be rebellious? Let them leave home. Let them do without. Let them find what the prodigal boy found: the pigpen. The

next thing you know, they may be willing to come home and say, “Hey, I've sinned against heaven and I've sinned against you.” But as long as you keep subsidizing them and bailing them out, nothing is ever going to change. God said, “I tell you what I'm going to do. I'll let you alone. I will hide my face.”

"I will see what your end will be," says God. "You want to make it on your own. Have at it. If you think you don't need God, you just try breathing without Him. Try breathing without His air. Try working without His blessing, try moving without His grace. I'll just step back, and I'll see what your end will be." Let us see from the Bible what the end will be if God steps back and lets us have our way.

In Deuteronomy 32:20, God said, "And I will hide my face from them and I will see what their end shall be. For they are a very frail generation, children who have no faith." Verse 22 says, "For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn into the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them, I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction. I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without and terror within shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs. I said I would scatter them into the corners. I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men."

"Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest the adversary should have behaved themselves strangely, lest they should say, 'Our hand is high. Have the Lord not done all this?' For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them." The only reason God does not let them be destroyed totally is lest their enemies exalt themselves and say, "We did it."

What will it be like when God withdraws His face? "You want your way, son, go for it. I'll sit back, I'll hide my face. And I'll see what your end will be."

Applications and Conclusion

I believe there is enough scriptural proof to know that God does indeed hide His face, and that He does so because of our sins. In our rebellion and wickedness, we presume upon His mercy and grace and believe that God will even bless us in our sins. One of the surest ways to experience the hiding of God's face is to take Him for granted and presume upon Him.

When our prayers are cold and hypocritical and unanswered, and it seems like heaven is brass, here is my counsel: Check yourself. The problem is not with God; He is immutable. The problem is with you. It is your sins that have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities that have hidden His face from you.

Here is the second application: God is a God of mercy, and I thank God for that. I have often said if I were God, I would have killed me and others long ago. I am thankful that God is merciful, but the God who is merciful is also just.

In His justice, if we do not listen to Him, He will not listen to us. That is why David said in Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

Thirdly, if we desire God to hear us in times of desperation and need, we need to learn a very important lesson. Do you remember Daniel in Daniel chapter 6? The presidents wanted to find fault against Daniel, but they could find none. They said, “We understand that we’re not going to find any fault unless we find it against the law of his God.” So they persuaded the king to pass a law, according to the Medes and Persians, that could not be changed or altered: for thirty days, no one could ask a petition of any god but the king. Whoever did so was to be thrown into the den of lions.

The law was signed by the king. Daniel 6:10 says, “Now, when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house and as his windows being opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before God, as he did aforetime.”

The way to pray effectively when you are in trouble is to be used to praying before you get into trouble. Daniel simply continued doing

what he ordinarily did. Most people want to ignore God day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. Then, when they get their backs against the wall, they want to scream, cry, and pray and get God to answer them. No. If you want to pray effectively in desperate times, you had better be used to praying before you enter those desperate times. God said, “If you don’t hear me, I won’t hear you.”

However wicked sin is, however awful its consequences, and however terrible its punishment, I can assure you that the greatest danger in sin is the loss of the manifest presence of God. When you are unable to perceive Him by faith, see His hand in providence, and know the comfort of His blessed touch, you are in a real fix. That means we must repent and seek Him for restoration. We must make it a daily habit of listening to Him, obeying Him, and communing with Him. I want it to be with God the way it is with me and my grandchildren. I have two of them here today, and they are good kids.

Lacey's claim to fame is that she's the only grandchild I've never whipped—never had to whip her. I cannot say that about Tripp now. But you know what I like to do? I like to see them doing right. I like to look at them and smile and say, “Those are my grandkids.” And I want God to look at me when I obey Him and say, “That's my child. He's doing right.” I want His smile, not the hiding of His face.

Father, we are thankful for Jesus Christ and for the grace, love, and mercy You have given us. Thank You for these truths—truths of warning and caution. Yet they have practical application. Help us, Lord, to be faithful unto Thee, to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

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