

“THE SECRET OF THE LORD IS WITH THEM THAT FEAR HIM: AND HE WILL SHOW THEM HIS COVENANT”

(The discourse below by Pastor Russell given 10:30 a.m., Sunday, August 19, 1906, at the St. Paul Convention. 1906 Convention report, starting on page 94.)

Pastor Russell discoursed this morning from Psalm 25:14, “The secret of the Lord is with Them that Fear [reverence] Him, and He will Show Them His Covenant.” He considered first the proper and improper kinds of fear and then delved into the “secret.” He said:

The emphasis of our text is upon the word “Him.” “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.” Many other Scriptures agree with this, and assure us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Prov. 1:7). Other fears, however, are discountenanced among the Lord’s people, who are exhorted to be of good courage and to fear not the fear of others, but to let the fear of the Lord be their only one. (Isa. 8:12, 13.) The Scriptures not only declare that all other fears are tormenting, but assure us that the fear or reverence of the Lord is comforting and helpful and safe for us. And to these testimonies our experiences fully agree. We are repeatedly cautioned against the “fear of men, which bringeth a snare” (Prov. 29:25); and our Lord, emphasizing this matter, declared the reason for this to be that man can do no more at worst than take from us our present life, while on the other hand our hopes respecting eternal life are with God. (Matt. 10:26-28.) The world, by reason of sin and its binding effects, is more or less under the control of “the prince of this world,” Satan, and more or less committed to principles of unrighteousness, iniquity, in thought and word and deed. On the other hand is the Divine covenant and law, and those who recognize these are to seek to think, speak and act so far as possible in accord with their spirit and intent. These, however, are the few addressed by our Savior, saying, “Fear not, little flock; it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the dominion.”—Luke 12:32.

It is this little company of the Lord’s consecrated ones that is addressed in our text as those who fear Him. Under present circumstances it is a question of whether we will fear the world or fear “Him.” The Lord is, in a general way, believed in by all civilized people, but He is realized by but few—only a few recognize His real power and authority and their responsibility to Him. Consequently these few are, as respects the world in general “peculiar people,” zealous of good works—zealous both for righteousness and for all the ways of the Lord as they see them. The majority of mankind, on the contrary, recognize the Lord but vaguely, and pay little heed to the spirit of His instruction, being governed more by the god of this world, by self-interest, by the ideas of the majority, by Mammon.

The Fear of Mammon

Remarking on this condition of things, our Lord forewarned us: “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” (Matt. 5:24.) And since the majority are serving Mammon, fearing to displease Mammon, seeking to have the approval of Mammon and the emoluments paid by Mammon. (Matt. 6:31.) And since then only a few are properly fearing and serving the Lord and looking to Him for the honors and emoluments which He has promised to His faithful ones—not in the present life, but in the life to come, Mammon controls in business, leads in every social function, and manages all the finest churches and religious functions. Mammon is Confucian where Confucianism is in the ascendancy; it is Mohammedan where the followers of Mohammed are most numerous; it is Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc., according to the locality and the influence. Mammon is too crafty, too wise, to be irreligious. It is well known that there is a religious element in human nature which must be satisfied with something, else the present order of things would collapse forthwith.

Thus seen, Mammon’s empire is the world—mankind in general—and from this standpoint we can readily see the force of the statement that the fear of man bringeth a snare, for the fear of man is the fear of Mammon. To go contrary to Mammon’s laws in any part of the world is like rowing against a strong tide—it is very wearisome to the flesh, and the progress is so small that were it not for the encouragements which lie beyond the present life none could endure the strain.

Our text tells us of the “secret” of the Lord being with those faithful ones who hearken to His Word, and have respect thereto, with reverence, fearing to such an extent to displease Him that they dare brave the opposition of the world. This secret is to this class the power of God working in them to will and to do His good pleasure, regardless of the sneers and disapproval of Mammon and his more or less blinded devotees. They must resolve first to be true to the Lord, to reverence Him rather than man and human institutions, and to trust to Him for the strength, the courage, to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, the great Leader whom He has appointed. After they have thus manifested their loyalty of will, of purpose, of intention, and after He has to some extent tried them—not suffering them to be tempted above that they are able, but with the temptation also providing ways of escape—He gradually makes known to them His “secret” which so illumines and transforms and strengthens them, and develops in them His spirit of perfect love, that His word is fulfilled in respect to them, namely, that “perfect love casteth out fear.” Thus it is that those who have the fear of the Lord, and who are granted an understanding and appreciation of His secret, gradually lose all fear of man, and become more and more courageous, strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, so that they are able to say in the words of inspiration, “I will not fear what man may do unto me.”

“The Secret of the Lord”

We cannot hope to explain the “secret of the Lord” to any others than the class for whom it is intended; but since there is a measure of fear of the Lord in many hearts that have a still greater fear for Mammon and the opinion of the world, we may hope to be able to make clear the Lord’s “secret” just in the same proportion that each of our hearers possesses the “fear of the Lord.” Those who have a little fear of the Lord, a little of the proper reverence for Him, may understand a little about this secret, but they will be hindered from understanding much respecting it by their fear of Mammon, of sectarianism—the fear of man that bringeth a snare. These ensnaring fears will be continually suggesting to them that the way of the Lord is not agreeable to the flesh; that it is not popular with the world; that it would constitute them a peculiar people; that it would hinder them from sins and follies in which they are fond of indulging; that it would break their influence with many of their friends in Churchianity; that it would make them practical nonentities in the world; because, according to the worldly proverb, they “might as well be out of the world as out of fashion.” Hearts thus ensnared cannot hope to see, understand and appreciate the secret of the Lord in any considerable measure, but in proportion as the fear or reverence of the Lord stands out boldly beyond all fear or reverence for man or human institutions, in that same proportion it is the privilege of each of us to appreciate and enjoy the “Secret of the Lord.”

He Has Covenanted to Show Them

The latter part of our text is not the best translation of the original. The whole text should read, “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He has covenanted to show it unto them.” However, the translation makes no real difference in the matter, because the Lord’s “Oath-bound Covenant,” which we discussed this afternoon, is really the kernel or pith of this “Secret of the Lord.”

To some it may seem peculiar that the Scriptures should intimate that God has secrets—that some are privileged to understand the divine plan, while others are not so privileged. Such will perhaps say, Where is the revelation of God’s secrets? Surely it is not in the Bible, for if it were in the Bible it would not be a secret, since the Bible is open, accessible to all the civilized world today. We answer that the Bible is accessible to all civilized men, but it is not open to all. To the majority even of professed Christians it is a sealed book, and to none more so than to the ministry. The Scriptures themselves so portray the matter, saying, “And the vision of all is become unto you that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed. And the Book is delivered to one that is not learned saying, Read this I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned. Wherefore saith the Lord, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men. Therefore, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the

wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” Isa. 29:1-14.

Our Lord spoke in the same strain at His first advent, saying respecting the humble ones whom He chose for His apostles, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent [scribes, Pharisees, Doctors of the Law], and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for thus it seemed good in thy sight.” (Matt. 11:25, 26.) At the first advent the Pharisees were too self-satisfied, pleased with their own theories, proud of their attainments, and boastful of their progress and of the divine favors, enjoyed; the scribes were too learned to be associated with such as constituted the Lord’s companions, and, besides, they were becoming more and more filled with the “higher criticism” views of the Greek philosophers; the Doctors of the Law were too proud and too pretentious. All of these were hindered from becoming the Lord’s disciples and learning from Him the “Secret of the Lord,” because they were all under the influence of Mammon—the great institution of their time which would condemn and ostracize all who would not support it. In an earthly way they had everything to lose and nothing to gain by becoming followers of the lowly one. On the contrary, those who did come to Jesus and became His disciples had very generally less to lose of an earthly kind, and hence were the more attracted by the future prospects which our Lord held out to them. From the worldly standpoint they were foolish babes to place so much reliance upon things unseen as yet and to measurably ignore the prospects and opportunities held out to them by Mammon in the present life.

“The Mystery Hid From Ages”

That which is spoken of in our text as “the secret of the Lord” is in the New Testament called the “mystery of God.” The thought is the same, namely, that God—while revealing His plan through the law and the prophets in the Old Testament, and through the words of our Lord and the apostles in the New Testament—has so expressed the matter that it can be understood only by those who come properly into accord with the Lord—that fear Him. The worldly man in reading the Scriptures fails to understand His secret, and only those that fear and reverence Him to the extent of making a full consecration of their all to Him can comprehend it. The apostle clearly sets this forth in his letter to the Corinthians, saying, “Your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God ... but we speak of the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden vision which God ordained before the world unto our honor, which none of the rulers of this world knoweth ... As it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him; but God hath revealed them unto us by His spirit.”—1 Cor. 2:5-15.

St. Paul speaking of this mystery or secret of the Lord, intended for His people, but not for the world nor for the merely nominal Christian, declares, “I am made a minister

according to the dispensation of God, which is given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God; even the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to His saints.”—Col. 1:25-29. Speaking of the church in the same strain, he continues, “That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love and in all riches and full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.”—Col. 2:2, 3. Continuing along the same lines, he exhorts, “Withal praying also for us that God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ.” Col. 4:3. In his epistle to the Ephesians the apostle also speaks of this mystery, saying, that God’s grace in Christ “hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself; that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ.” Again in the same epistle he writes of God’s favor to Himself, “That by revelation He made known unto me the mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit ... to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.”—Eph. 1:9, 10; 3:5-9.

St. John, the Revelator, speaking as the mouthpiece of the glorified Lord tells us of this mystery also (Rev. 10:7), saying, “In the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets.” Thus we see that the mystery has been in operation from the beginning of the world and is still a mystery so far as the world is concerned, and will continue to be a mystery until the end of the present dispensation and the opening of the millennial age, the only exception being the revelation of the mystery granted to the saints—to those who are fully consecrated to the Lord, the class mentioned in our text, “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; he has covenanted to show it unto them.”

“He That Hath an Ear Let Him Hear”

It was for this reason that our Lord speaks in parables and in dark sayings that are not yet understood by the world, neither appreciated by any except the few, His “little flock,” the consecrated. Thus it is written, “All these things spake Jesus unto the multitudes in parables, and without a parable spake He not unto them; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. 13:34, 35.) The apostles came unto Jesus privately, saying, Lord, declare unto us the parable; and Jesus said unto them, “To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without [outsiders ensnared by the fear of men] all these things are done in parables; that seeing they might see and not perceive, and hearing they might hear and not understand.” (Mark 4:11, 12.)

Now, dear friends, we will do our best to make plain this secret, this mystery, hidden from ages and dispensations, remembering, however, that only in proportion as our hearers have ears to hear can we succeed, only in proportion as the fear of God predominates over the fear of man; only in proportion as perfect love casts out the fear of man and makes us truly freemen in Christ Jesus—only in that proportion can we hope that our message on this subject will be understood and appreciated. From our Lord’s words and from the Apostle Paul’s words already quoted, the mystery is uncovered to those who have the eyes of their understanding opened and the ears of their hearts unstopped. It is the message of the coming kingdom—the message of the “Oath-bound Covenant” discussed this afternoon.

This message explains all the difficulties and perplexities which have hitherto confused us. It shows us how sin entered into the world through Adam’s disobedience, how death has been the penalty of that sin, resting upon the whole race of Adam, degrading us mentally, morally and physically to the tomb. It tells us of God’s love for us while we were yet sinners, which led to His sending His Son to be our redemption price, “that we might live through Him”—that we might be recovered from death through Him. It shows us that Christ Jesus by the grace of God tasted death not merely for a few, but for every man; and that not merely a few, but every man shall have a resultant blessing from that great sacrifice for sins, and a full and fair opportunity for returning in heart to the Lord and for receiving back again all that was lost through Adam’s disobedience, with superadded blessings and everlasting life if obedient. It shows us that this one purpose of God to eradicate sin from the world, and to utterly destroy all who will not come into accord with His righteous arrangements, has never been changed; and although the time for the accomplishment of these promises seems long to us, it is not really long from the standpoint of Him with whom a “thousand years are as one day.” It shows us that in the dawning of the seventh day of the Lord, the millennial day—at the close of man’s 6,000 years—these blessings are to be realized by the world through the establishing of a glorious kingdom of God under the whole heavens, which will enforce righteousness and shower blessings upon every creature.

Church’s Identity With Mystery

The unfolding of the mystery shows further that during the Jewish age God dealt with the house of Israel as a typical people, giving them a typical law, a typical “Day of Atonement,” typical sacrifices, shadowy promises and during that period selected a few faithful souls from that Nation to be His special servants in the earth during the millennial age. These are particularly described by the Apostle in Hebrews 11, all of whom “having obtained a good report through faith received not the [blessings] promised.” (vs. 39.) It reveals to us further the Lord’s object in respect to the promulgation of the Gospel during the period since our Lord’s death, namely, that the preaching of the mystery to the Lord’s

consecrated people who fear Him has been with a view to selecting a little flock from among all kindreds, peoples and tongues, to be Christ's bride and joint heir in the kingdom, to be associated with Him as members of the seed of Abraham for the blessing of all the families of the earth. The Apostle's words, we recall, are very explicit on this subject. He declares, "If ye are Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."—Gal. 3:29.

Not only is the message itself called a mystery, but the church class, the "little flock," now being selected from the world, is Scripturally designated "the Mystery of God," and the false systems "the Mystery of Iniquity." "The Mystery of God" is the class associated in the divine plan, and, therefore, a part of that which is mystery or mysterious to the world. As the Apostle declares, "The world knoweth us not, even as it knew Him not." The secret of the Lord is with this class. It is their joy, their strength; it is the power of God working in them to will and do His pleasure. The more they comprehend this mystery the more of this power of God do they possess, and progress in the mystery implies progress in obedience and reverence and service. These in turn mean progress in the graces of God, as the Apostle, explaining and speaking of our advancement as Christians, says, "I pray God for you that the eyes of your understanding being opened [gradually as we lose the fear of man and increase in our reverence for God] you may be able to comprehend with all saints the lengths and breadths and heights and depths [of the mystery], and to know the love of God which passeth all understanding."—Eph. 3:18, 19.

The Church as a Secret Society

From the foregoing it will be discerned that the Lord's saints constitute the most exclusive and most secret society on earth. No one can be fully inducted into this society and its mysteries except as the reverence of the Lord abounds in his heart, and as he becomes free from human bondage, sectarian bondage—free in the liberty wherewith Christ makes free indeed those who are truly His. This secret society needs not to hide its books, neither to withhold its secrets, neither to speak quietly, for while telling the good tidings of great joy to all people, the limitations are upon those who hear—for none can hear the secret of the Lord; none can understand this mystery except in proportion as he has revered the Lord and His Word and made a consecration of himself thereto.

I wonder how many of my audience this morning are members of this society? How many are able to comprehend with all saints the lengths and breadths and depths of the Divine plan? I am sure that all such have love for the brethren in their participation in the fellowship of this mystery. I am sure that all such have the hopes set before us in this mystery as an anchor sure and steadfast, entering into that which is within the vail. I am sure that all such realize that the blessings and favors thus conferred upon us no man can take from us, and that they shall continue to be ours so long as we shall continue to have fellowship in this mystery, which is: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."—Col. 1:27.

I wonder further how many of you are still blinded in greater or lesser degree by the god of this world and the creeds of the dark ages which he assisted in formulating, and has since fostered, so that you are unable to appreciate what we have just been saying respecting the mystery of God. I wonder how many such are desiring to have the eye-salve of truth, which our Lord specially commended to this Laodicean stage of the Church, saying, "I counsel thee to buy of Me eye-salve to anoint thine eyes that thou mayest see." (Rev. 3:17, 18.) The eye-salve must be bought by the individual who desires to use it; it cannot be bought by one for another; even as we cannot have experiences one for another. The cost of eye-salve is the spirit of self-sacrifice—the willingness to make a full consecration of ourselves to the Lord. Our Lord expresses the matter thus, saying, "He that doeth the will of My Father which is in Heaven, he shall know of My doctrine." Whosoever will resolve that he will no longer fear man, neither be in subjection to the creeds of the dark ages, but that he will accept the Lord as his Shepherd and be a true sheep, and listen only for the voice of His Word, and walk only in accordance to the directions of that Word, fearing God and not fearing man—he shall be blessed. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; He hath covenanted to show it unto them."

I trust, dear friends, that some who have heretofore felt indifferent respecting the Divine plan—the mystery of God kept secret from the world, intended only for them that fear Him—may become so deeply interested, so desirous of cooperating with the Lord in their hearts, in their thoughts, in their words, in their actions, that they will make full consecration of themselves to Him. Just now is the moment to make this resolve, accepting the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins through faith in the blood of Jesus, and at once starting on the way to a clearer comprehension of the mystery, and ultimately to a participation in some part of the glorious work which the Lord is preparing us for.

From this standpoint we realize that the great work of God is future; that our special work in the present time is to be the Lord's witnesses before men, to endure hardness as good soldiers, to crystallize character, to learn obedience by the things which we experience, and to be squared and fitted and polished, and thus made meet for participation in the glories of the Kingdom, and for usefulness as members of it in the blessing of all the earth in the millennial age, and for the enjoyment of our Heavenly Father's favor to all eternity.

This was a most impressive service, at the close of which the beautiful hymn, No. 208 Dawn Hymnal:

Thy Grace Impart

1. O Lord, thy promised grace impart,

And fill my consecrated heart.
Henceforth my chief concern shall be,
To live and speak and toil for thee.

2. While joyfully in thine employ,
The thought shall fill my soul with joy,
That my imperfect work shall be
Acceptable through Christ to thee.

3. Renouncing every worldly thing,
And safe beneath thy shelt'ring wing,
My sweetest thought henceforth shall be,
That all I want I find in thee.