

"The Omnipresence of God"

by
James Yonge

"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

The universal presence of God is one of those fundamental doctrines on which the fabric of religion rests. Take it away, and the building cannot stand. By "religion" is meant the relation in which man stands toward God together with all the duties arising out of it, such as dependence on God, prayer in all its aspects, the regulation of the heart and ordering of the whole life with regard to the will of God, and the seeking of his approbation in all things. All of these necessarily imply a belief in the omnipresence of God.

We should have no encouragement or motive to live such a life if we were not persuaded of our being always under the observance of the divine all-seeing eye. I might say that the very life of religion consists in an abiding sense of God's presence. The more fully we realize it and the more constantly we meditate upon it, then the more cautious and circumspect shall we be in all our conduct, the more strict in devoting ourselves both soul and body to his service, and the more anxious we will be to avoid whatever may be displeasing in his sight. On the other hand, the less deeply or the less frequently we reflect on our being under God's inspection, then the more inconsiderate and careless shall we naturally be in all religious matters, the less restraint shall we place upon our inclinations, and the more freely shall we seek our own pleasure and worldly interest in all things.

One who is perpetually thinking of God as a Being who understands man's thoughts even before they have been conceived in his mind, and as a Being who searches out a man's path and is acquainted with all his ways, can hardly be so presumptuous and daring a sinner to deliberately defy Him. Quite the contrary, we would find him living under a constant feeling of reverence and awe towards this Divine Being whom he is ever beholding with the eye of faith. Such a man would not willingly do anything to offend even a powerful individual of the same frail nature with himself; how then could he venture to sin and draw down the displeasure of that omnipresent God whose loving kindness alone is the source of every good thing?

But the sinner must either forget God or think that God forgets him in order to feel even a momentary security and satisfaction in the transgression of God's laws. He must encourage himself in wickedness by saying that no one shall see him. He must say in his heart either that there is no God or that God does not care. And as far as his own thoughts are able to banish God from existence, he lives without God in the world.

God's omnipresence is so indispensable and essential a part of religion, that forgetfulness of it opens the door wide to all ungodliness of living. Therefore, I do not know that I can address you on a subject that may more profitably engage your attention. Nevertheless, I do not think it necessary to begin in the usual way by proving that the doctrine is contained in the Holy Scriptures. None of you need information in that regard. You know how often it is directly expressed, how universally it is implied throughout the whole Bible, and you know it is always understood in every word that is said on the subject of prayer.

But there are two kinds of people who make objections to this great truth of God's omnipresence. And though the objections are made upon different grounds by men of opposite characters, the same answer will serve for both--though it will be a way of comfort to the one and of rebuke to the other.

The first man is fearful and dejected. He desires nothing more earnestly than to be an object of God's favor and fatherly care, yet he can hardly persuade himself that the great Creator of the world will stoop to behold so insignificant a creature as himself. He remembers those words of David: "*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?*" The thought disheartens him. He fears he is overlooked and disregarded, and that God will never condescend to take an interest in him or his trifling concerns.

The other man comes to the same conclusion but with very opposite feelings. He is happy to be disregarded, for he knows that if God takes notice of him he will be found an offense in His eyes because of his sinfulness. Therefore he satisfies himself that it is beneath the dignity and majesty of the Most High to care about what such an insignificant creature may be about. Consequently, he may go on securely in sin, for God is engaged in affairs of so vast an extent as to remove any fear that He has time to observe him. "It does not matter what I do," he says. "God turns his face away and will never see it."

I might reply to both from the Scriptures, but as the fears of the one and the hopes of the other come from a lack of faith, I will instead refer to what mere human reasoning might respond.

First, this opinion that God does not take notice of such insignificant men, actually tends to the denial of God's existence, to atheism. We might ask, Where is God? In what point of space, in what part of creation can He be present which is *not* utterly insignificant compared with his immensity? He is not present with you, you say, because you are so unimportant. Then he is not present with your nearest neighbor for the same reason. Nor is God present with the next one. And so you may go on until you have banished Him from the visible world. And if this earth is not important enough to attract his attention or to be honored with his presence, why should the next planet be more worthy of his

superintendence, or the one after that? Thus you may proceed from one globe to another applying your argument of insignificance to every part of every one and thus expel God altogether from the universe. The conclusion must therefore be, *that if God is absent anywhere, then He is present nowhere*. Now, if you are shocked at the thought of maintaining an argument which would leave the world without God, then you have no choice but the wiser conclusion, which is, *that if He is anywhere, He is everywhere*. He is present with you, as well as with what you may consider the grandest and most important part of creation.

Second, consider that whatever God condescended to create you have every reason to suppose He will uphold and superintend. He has created this earth and all its inhabitants for some wise purpose. Why then should He desert them? Why fling them from his hand and leave them to shift for themselves?

Third, surely you cannot imagine for a moment that either yourselves or anything in the world could continue without God's constant care? We are cognizant of second causes, and we are sometimes so blind and foolish as to rest in them. Nevertheless, it is the one great first cause--God himself--who employs them. Try going back through a succession of natural causes as far as you can trace them. What is the result? You cannot discover why any one of them acts as it does, except that it is by God's will and appointment. Therefore, *God is everywhere, and is engaged in everything that is going on throughout his creation*. You, consequently, are not excluded from his presence nor beyond the range of his attention.

Fourth, and last, when you suppose that you are exalting God by thinking it beneath him to notice such insignificant beings as yourselves, you are actually doing the very contrary. You are embracing a low opinion of his greatness, for you imagine either that he is not present anywhere or he is unable to superintend all the parts of his creation.

Let us have a much higher opinion of the power and knowledge of God. I believe that while he is directing the greatest operations of this world, he is also busily engaged in keeping the most minute parts of it in order. If no planet and no solar system escapes his notice, no more does the smallest insect. If a world could not fall into ruins except by his will, neither can a sparrow fall to the ground without his permission. God not only supports angels and archangels in their existence, but he provides food for the fowls of the air. And while he adorns the sun and moon with light and glory, while he calls all the stars by name, he also knows the number of the hairs on each one's head. Is not the greatness of God more exalted by my opinion than by yours, you who think that some things are too insignificant for him to attend to?

Fancy not, then, that you honor God by thinking yourself as out of his presence or beneath his watchful care. You degrade him. You diminish his infinite perfection and reduce him to being the governor of only part of the world by thrusting him out of the throne of his universal dominion.

But let us be done with these arguments. They were calculated to allay the gloomy fears of some and to undermine the presumptuous hopes of others. But most of you have no thought of calling in question this great truth of God's omnipresence. You need chiefly to be *reminded* of it, to be persuaded to contemplate it, to consider the practical consequences that should result from it, and to be prevailed upon to live as if you believed it. Oh, what a difference would this make if it were more diligently practiced in the life of even the best Christian. How sin would be scared or shamed out of his life if he could always set before him the presence of that holy Being who hates all iniquity and has proclaimed eternal war against it! How all sinful thoughts and imaginations would fly away if this pure light of heavenly truth shone upon his heart.

The saints in heaven will never sin because they behold God face-to-face in Jesus Christ. And we would even now resemble them in innocence if we could always set him in his power and majesty before us and observe his eye turned upon us in every direction. But we must walk by faith and not by sight. Though God's eye watches over us by day and night, though it reads the secrets of our hearts, and though there is neither time nor place in which we can escape from its observation, yet God is concealed from us. Unless we keep him in our view by constant meditation, we shall soon forget that he is watching us at all.

It is a great advance in piety to have arrived so far as to have a perpetual and abiding sense of God's presence always being with you. How few have been so happy as to reach it! Let me share with you a few illustrations of how even the most sincere Christian manifestly proves that the presence of God is a fact which often escapes his mind.

First, God's presence is forgotten when a Christian practices any of the thousand arts of malicious slander, such as when he tells something to the discredit of his neighbor by magnifying his faults and diminishing his better qualities and actions. But if God's presence were remembered, that man would see written on the wall in the clearest writing, "*Speak not evil of another,*" and "*with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged.*"

Second, God's presence is forgotten when a Christian is ready to indulge in some witty remark at the expense of a serious and sacred subject. It is forgotten when he seeks to raise a laugh by some impure story which would shock the ears of any woman of modesty and delicacy. But if he could see the eye of God turned upon him, would he not be confounded and abhor himself for such an abominable intention?

Third, God's presence is forgotten when a Christian eats and drinks to excess. A Christian is to mortify his fleshly lusts, not revel in sensual pleasures. If God's presence were remembered, would not this intemperate feasting appear a gross and hateful sin?

Fourth, God's presence is forgotten when a Christian businessman gives an untrue account of the value and quality of his goods. It is forgotten when false balances are used, or by using any other means to take advantage of his customer's ignorance. What would be his

consternation if at that very moment he were overwhelmed with a lively sense of God's presence beholding his every act?

Fifth, God's presence is forgotten when a Christian puts on any outward show of piety that contradicts the real state of his heart, such as kneeling in prayer while his thoughts are upon everything else but God, or using humble expressions of repentance without the least conviction of sin. Would he not be alarmed as well as disgusted by this mockery, expecting to have his portion appointed with the hypocrites?

Sixth, God's presence is forgotten when a Christian is afraid to confess his faith before men for fear of ridicule or inconvenient consequences, or when he complies with the ways of the world against his conscience out of regard for human opinion. If God's presence were remembered, such a man would recall those words of Christ, "Whoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven."

How important it is that we should always be striving to realize God's presence and set him before us! I cannot give you more weighty advice than to make this a continual study, an exercise of habitual meditation, the subject of constant prayer.

Now you cannot actually address God in prayer without believing that his presence is with you and that he hears you: *"He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."* Allow yourselves a little time to meditate on this subject before you begin your petitions. Allow time that you might behold him steadfastly by an inward and spiritual perception. It may be difficult to acquire a vivid perception of the presence of an invisible God. It requires much thought and reflection, and I would not have you think that it is a light work to pray or an exercise of no mental exertion. It calls for the best powers of the mind, and is truly worthy of them, for it is the highest and most honored employment in which the mind can be engaged.

But let me suggest one thing that may perhaps afford some little assistance. People in general, when they pray, are apt to think of God as a great way off, in some undefined, unimaginable place they know not where. In consequence, I think they must lose much of the comfort of prayer. Rather, consider God as in the same place, in the very same room with you. Consider him even nearer still, in your very heart. Perhaps the best way is to combine both these ideas of God--to consider him in heaven for the sake of elevating our minds and placing them in a state of humble adoration, and at the same time to bring him near, as dwelling in your own hearts. God himself gives us authority for regarding him in this twofold character: *"For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'"*

We will receive a reverence and awe by looking up to God enthroned in his glory above the highest heavens, and a solemnity, confidence, and happiness will be diffused over your

mind by the conviction of his immediate presence. This is no extravagant or enthusiastic thought; it is also an express promise of Christ: "*If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.*"

May we, my Brethren, daily advance nearer and nearer to perfection through the help of the Holy Spirit. This happy communion with God will be our best safeguard against sin and the most excellent preparation for our introduction into those blessed regions where we shall behold him face to face and enjoy the light of his glorious presence to all eternity!

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Note: This sermon has been condensed and moderately rephrased for clarity.