

The Way of Perfection

Part 5: Our Father

Chapter 41 Fear of God; Venial Sins

(summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 41 Speaks of the fear of God and of how we must be on guard against venial sins.

It is a delight to speak about the love of God. What will it be like to possess it? ... Let me not leave this life, O my Lord, until I no longer desire anything in it; neither let me know any love outside of You, nor let me succeed in using this term “love” for anyone else.

All is false as the foundation is false, and so the edifice doesn't last ... Your love for the world will afterward punish you and wear you down ...

Now let us deal with the **fear of God**. This **trait** is easily recognized by the person who has it and by those who approach him. Understand that it is not so **developed** in the **beginning** ... It is therefore **not** discernible in everyone at the outset. It increases daily. It is recognized though because in the beginning one starts to **turn from sin** and its occasions as well as from **bad companions** ... Once the soul has reached **contemplation** ... the **fear of God**, as with **love**, becomes **manifest** ... You will not see these people become **careless** ... the Lord keeps them ... and so they will not inadvertently commit a **venial sin**; **mortal sins** they fear like fire...

Let us beseech God always that the **temptation** may not be so strong as to make us **offend** Him ... The **fear** is what is **important**; it is what I desire may never be taken from us, for it is what will help us.

2. What a great thing it is to have **resisted** offending the Lord ... In the end **all must serve him** ... Those in **hell** do so by **force**, whereas we do so willingly. If we please the Lord, those in **hell** will be kept **bound** and not harm us however much they might draw us into temptation and set secret snares for us.

3. Be careful and attentive... until you see that you are **strongly determined** not to offend the Lord by committing a **mortal** or **venial sins** (by accident) ... May God deliver us from

any very **deliberate sin**, however small ... What's more there is nothing small if it goes against His immense Majesty and we see He is looking at us... It is serious, very serious...

4. Consider, Sisters, if you want to **gain fear of the Lord**, it is very helpful to understand the **seriousness** of an **offense** against God and to reflect on this frequently; it is worth our life and more to have this **virtue** rooted in our souls.

Until you have it, you must turn from every occasion and companion who does not help you to grow closer to God. We should take care in all to **bend our will**, take care our speech is edifying; we must flee places where conversation is not of God.

It is necessary that this **fear** be deeply **impressed** within the **soul**. It is easy to obtain if there is true **love** and great inner **determination** ... Yet when we are more **determined**, we are less confident of ourselves, for **confidence** must be placed in God... He will protect us and the **habit acquired** will be a help against offending Him.

The need will be to go about with a **holy freedom**, conversing with those who are good, though perhaps worldly. For those who before you had the **true fear of God**, were a poison ... will now be a help to your **loving** and **praising** God more because He has **freed** you from what you recognize as a **glaring danger**.

If you at one time played a part in contributing to their weaknesses, now your mere presence contributes to their restraint without them realizing it.

5. Often a **servant of God** without uttering a word prevents things from being said against God ... It seems that there is always some **restraint** so as to not offend an absent person in the presence of his friend.

So it is with a servant of God: his friendship wins him respect ... and others avoid offending God.

So do not be **tense**, for it can be harmful to everything good ... it will not bring many souls to God for this constraint is frightening to others and they **flee** though they know yours is the more **virtuous path**.

6. **Judging others** is another **harm** that comes from this attitude. There are those who

advance with greater holiness ... but since they do not travel your path, they seem to be imperfect. If they have holy joy, it will seem to be dissipation ... So to think that if all do not proceed as you do, in this constrained way, they are not proceeding well, is extremely wrong.

There is yet **another harm**: in some things you must speak of, you do not dare to for **fear** of going to extremes...

7. So strive as much as you can, Sisters, without offending God, to be **likeable** and **understanding** so that all you speak with will **love your conversation**, desire your **manner of living** and **acting**, and not be frightened and intimidated by **virtue**.

The **holier a religious**, the more **sociable** they are with their Sisters. And though your conversations with your Sisters may not go as you would wish, **never turn away** from them if you want to **help your Sisters** and **be loved**. We must earnestly strive to be **likeable**, **agreeable**, and **pleasing** to persons with whom we deal.

8. My daughters strive to think rightly about God for He does not look at trifles as much as you think. Do not allow your soul to be **constrained** (tense) as many **blessings** could be lost. Have the right intention, a **resolute will** not to **offend** God. Do not let your soul **withdraw** into a corner, for rather than **sanctity** you will obtain many **imperfections** and not be then of much benefit to others.

9. So with these two virtues – **love and fear of God** – you can advance calmly and quietly on this road, but not carelessly since fear must always take the lead.

As long as we live we will **never** have **complete security**; that would be dangerous. This is what Jesus, our Teacher, understood, when at the end of this prayer He spoke these words to His Father. He knew how necessary they were. AMEN