

Why Do I Feel Spiritually Deserted?

Psalm 38; Canons of Dort 5.5–6

Studies in the Canons of Dort #30

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SPIRITUAL desertion is real. It's the feeling and sense that God's good presence has deserted you. It's found in our Scripture this evening as well as several others. The sensitive believer who knows God, his/her own sins, expresses in heartfelt ways from time to time this spiritual experience of feeling far from God or that he is far from us.

Let's open our hearts as we open our Bibles tonight. Look at Psalm 6. Here this feeling is expressed in an agonizing question: "Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD—how long?" (6:2–3) Look at Psalm 32. Here it is expressed as past pain: "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long" (32:3). Look at Psalm 38. Here it is expressed as deep pain: "For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me" (38:2). Notice how this affects David: "My heart throbs; my strength fails me, and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me" (38:10). Then notice the language of feeling distant: "My friends

and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off...Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me!" (38:11, 21)

The question is why? Several weeks ago I said from Psalm 6 that there are times when we look out at the world and don't see God active, and then we feel like he's abandoned us. Tonight I want to focus on what's inside us and how that affects us.

Because You've Sinned

Why do I feel spiritually deserted is a huge question. But it has a basic "Christianity 101" kind of answer. Recently I went to my dentist. I told him I was having pain near the one filling I have. He x-rayed, drilled out the old silver filling, and did everything to get to the proverbial root of the problem. His answer: "Get back to basics, Danny. You need to floss more!" When we feel spiritually deserted we need to get back to basics: God feels far from you *because you've sinned*. What's the one thing that links Psalms 6, 32, 38, and 51? They all lament sin. Notice how:

- Psalm 6:1: "rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath."
- Psalm 32:5: "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.'"

- Psalm 38:3-4: “there is no health in my bones because of my *sin*, for my *iniquities* have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.” And then again in verse 18: “I confess my *iniquity*; I am sorry for my *sin*.”

Because of Sin’s Effects

Get back to basics. Know that your sins cause the sense of separation from God. And when you feel this way it’s *because of sin’s effects*. Turn with me in the *Psalter Hymnal* to page 110, Canons of Dort 5.5, and the list of various effects of major sin in our lives.

We “very highly offend God.” We talk so much as a society of being “offended.” But do you realize that your sins offend God himself? Psalm 51:4: “Against you, you *only* have I sinned, and done what is evil in your *sight*.” Get over yourself and think of him! Because sin offends God we pray in Psalms 6 and 38, “rebuke me not in your anger nor discipline me in your wrath” (v. 1).

We “incur a deadly guilt.” It’s not only that you know you have sinned against God, but that you know that *he* knows that you’ve sinned! And this leads to feeling mortified and petrified. Psalm 32:3 says, “For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away.” Look at Psalm 38:6: “I am utterly bowed down and prostrate.” Look at Psalm 38:8: “I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart.” Then he says this in verses 13-14:

But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear,
like a mute man who does not open his mouth.
I have become like a man who does not hear,
and in whose mouth are no rebukes.

We “grieve the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit who lives within us and is the down payment of our living with the Triune God in eternity is grieved by our sins according to Paul in Ephesians 4:30.

We “interrupt the exercise of faith.” Notice that. A person who is paralyzed from the waist down still has life within them, but they cannot exercise their legs. In the same way we still have spiritual life within us but there are times we can be spiritually paralyzed like Peter, whom we saw a couple of weeks ago, outside Jesus’ trial and when asked if he was a Christian, he did not exercise faith but was paralyzed in fear and denial (Matt. 26:69–75).

We “very grievously wound [our] consciences.” The prophet Nathan told David, “You are the man,” and then his conscience was wounded. The apostle John assures us in 1 John 3:20 that “whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart.” That’s a promise! But contained in it is the realization that our hearts *do* condemn us because of our sins.

We “sometimes for a while lose the sense of God’s favor.” This is the worst of all experiences! “But you, O LORD, how long?” (Ps. 6:3) “But for you, O LORD, do I wait” (Ps. 38:15). “Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me!” (Ps. 38:21) “Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation” (Ps. 51:11–12a).

Because You Need to Repent

Get back to basics. Our sinning causes us to feel the effects of sin. And the basic response to *why do I feel spiritually deserted* is *because you need to repent*. All those very real and painful effects of sin can cease. They can be reversed “when [we] change [our] course by serious repentance [and then] the light of God’s fatherly countenance again shines upon [us].”

And are there any better examples of serious repentance than Psalms 6, 32, 38, and 51? And as we see their words in our open Bibles, I pray your hearts have been opened to the Holy Spirit’s gracious invitation to return to God as a Father through Jesus his Son. Let us pray.