

means alone the depriving of the body of food and drink, but the withdrawal of self by generosity from the dominion of money, by sobriety and simplicity of life to liberate oneself from the power of self-indulgence, and certainly also by seclusion to escape the mastery of environment.

This is what the Lord declared, when he extended fasting to loosening the bands of wickedness, and to feeding the hungry. From time to time the soul must set itself free, cast away all bands and become entirely itself. Then the gates lift up their heads, then the door of eternity is opened, and God makes his approach to us, and our soul its approach to God, and the knowledge of God, which is eternal life, blossoms in the sanctuary of the heart.

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### “NO PRAYER COULD PASS THROUGH.”

When a child wants to ask his father for something, he first seeks him, and only when he has found him, can he ask for what he wants. To state his request before his father is found is folly on the part of the child. Is not this an instruction in prayer?

He who as a child of God would pray to his Father in heaven, and in faith ask something from him, must first make his approach to God. He must first seek the Divine Presence. And only when he has found the Lord, can he ask for what he wants. This is little thought of in prayer. We frequently observe that in our

prayers, and in those of others, there is more speaking in the air, than prayer and address to the living God. Can it be denied that in extemporary prayer before others, and even in public worship, there is more argumentation and reasoning, than real appeal to the most High, who is clothed with Majesty.

Less can be said about secret prayer. Each man knows only his own prayer, and what others may tell him of theirs. But though we confine ourselves to this, the complaints uttered in a brother's ear about the barrenness of prayer, are such, as to justify the fear, that the recital of words begins, before the soul has consciously entered the presence of God. Frequent and long prayers encourage this habit. The eyes close, the hands are folded, and one begins certain known formal prayers, which though not irreverent, are out of harmony with the very deep reverence which is God's due.

The Scripture repeatedly shows that not every prayer counts as such with God. It speaks of moments in which our prayers are hindered. It makes us hear the word of the Lord: "When ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Is. 1:15); and it records the complaint of the prophet: "that no prayer passed through unto God" (Lam. 3:44). Then heaven is as brass; there is no opening and no disclosing; there is no access and no entrance, and no spirit of prayer and supplication.

In Zion there was "an oracle of God's holiness." When a godly Jew wandered in the mountains, or dwelt by the Jordan, he turned himself in prayer toward this oracle (Ps. 28:2). When Israel was in

exile, they prayed with their faces toward Zion. As an after effect of this habit we still find in many countries, that people do not pray at home, but in churches. Such churches are open all day, and in the solemn stillness of such stately edifices one kneels down, unobserved and unknown, in the expectation that in these impressive places the presence of the Lord will make itself felt more effectively.

This is unquestionably a great privilege for those who live in crowded cities. He who has a room at home, where he can lock the door, in order to be alone with God, has no need of it. But the great masses of people are not so fortunate. At home they are almost never alone, it is almost never quiet, and seclusion which is so helpful to prayer, can almost never be found.

Apart also from this difficulty, it must not be forgotten, that in Israel God himself had appointed such an oracle of his holiness, and had directed the souls of the faithful toward it. It was a means of cultivating real prayer. It every-time reminded the godly Jew that in order to pray he must first look to God with the eye of the soul, and that before prayer, connection must be made between the soul and God. To pray without first finding God, and knowing that one speaks to him, is really a caricature of prayer. If we would pray we should know, that at that very moment God attends to the voice of our prayer; that he inclines his ear to our prayer; and that he listens to the voice of our supplication. And this spiritual perception can not be awake in the soul, unless, before prayer, we consciously place ourselves in the Divine Presence.

God's child always prays in Jesus' name. He must do this, because irreconciled and unredeemed, he would find no listening ear with God. But even prayer in Jesus' name becomes a word without meaning, when one does not first place himself before the face of the Holy One, and feels that of himself there is no approach to God, and that he only appears before God in Christ.

In this connection the difficulty is God's omnipresence. The very perception of faith that God is not bound to either time or place, but that he is everywhere present, accounts for the fact, that one inclines to speak without first concentrating his thoughts upon God, placing him before the eyes, and seeking his presence until it is found.

In his Word God teaches us otherwise. For though the Scripture reveals to us in most glorious terms the omnipresence of God, in behalf of prayer it can only mean, that wherever we are, we are always and everywhere able to find God. But it reveals with equal emphasis that in whatever place we are, we have to do with the living God, who besets us behind and before, who compasses our path and our lying down, and who is acquainted with all our ways (Ps. 139:5, 2). In addition to this it always points us upward. We must lift up our soul in prayer. Our prayerful thoughts must direct themselves to the heavens, where is a throne of grace, glorious with Divine Majesty. It is the palace above whither our prayers ascend. It is the living, personal God who inclines himself to us and toward Whom our praying soul must turn.

The imagination can lend no help in this, for God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must

worship in spirit and in truth. But he who knows God as his Father who is in heaven, also knows that in prayer he has no dealings with a force that extends and spreads itself everywhere, but with his covenant God, his Lord and King, and that he can not rest content until, in order to pray, he has resumed his secret walk with God and has obtained anew communion with his Redeemer. Before the days of telegraph and telephone this seemed far more mysterious than now. From experience we know that there is communion between people at immeasurable distances, which is supported by nothing but a weak metal thread. And even this thread has been ignored. There is now a telegraphic communication without thread, which in its wondrous working has become a beautiful image of prayer. So-called telepathy also comes to our aid. The authenticated facts that persons at far distances can have fellowship of soul with soul and communication of thoughts, is an indication, that our soul can have like fellowship with God, because, when the human soul is able to do this, the means of spiritual fellowship are infinitely much greater with God.

The point is that with respect to prayer we must regard the indispensableness of this fellowship, and that we must not pray, until we have obtained this connection and fellowship with, and approach to, God. When Jeremiah complains that his prayer did not pass through, because God had covered himself with a cloud, he shows that he had sought this fellowship, and that he had perceived his inability to obtain connection. As when one stands before the telephone, and rings up central, and gets no hearing because the wire

is broken, so he who prays stands at the gate of heaven, and calls upon God for a hearing, and seeks connection of fellowship, but gets no sign of life in return. This but shows, that real prayer can not begin until a hearing is obtained, and connection has been established, and we know that God has disclosed his face to us. If this fails, prayer is hindered. The fault lies with us, either because of sin, or because our thoughts wander, or because we are engaged with worldly concerns, or because the heart is not rightly attuned, or because of the superficiality and externality of the condition of the soul.

This does not disturb the man who prays from sheer habit. He prays anyhow, whether he has any feeling or perception of connection or not, and even though he is aware that his prayer does not pass through. He has said his prayers, and that is the end of it. But the truly godly man at prayer does not behave like this. If he feels that there is an hindrance, if he is aware that there is a cloud between himself and God, he turns in upon himself, he humbles himself before God and seeks cleansing in the blood of his Savior. And then connection follows, the gates of heaven swing open to him, and in the end his prayer passes through and ascends before the face of the Holy One.

This is the sanctifying power of the conscientious practice of prayer. At first there is no prayer. But one does not rise from his knees until prayer comes and access to the throne of grace has been obtained. And in this very struggle sin is broken and grace in Christ is restored.

## "TO WHOMSOEVER THE SON WILL REVEAL HIM"

When we read in Romans 1:20 that "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made," and in Matthew 11:27 that "no one knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him," these two passages seemingly contradict each other, but not in fact. Every man can know God in all sorts of ways. This was not only so in Paradise, but still continues so in this fallen world, even in those parts that are under the curse of heathendom. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork, Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor country, there is no people known, even unto the world's end, which does not hear the voice of the heavens. And not only does nature, which pulsates with life, pour forth speech for every one who does not purposely stop his ear; but there is a speech of God in the conscience, that goes forth to every people and nation. It is not recorded of the first created human pair in Paradise, but of the heathen in the corrupted age of the Cæsars that they "shew the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness. and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:15). The form in which the knowledge of God and of his Will expresses itself, may be idolatrous and oftentimes offensive, but the im-