

cultivate with young and old the supreme reality of life with God.

This requires effort. We must live in the world. God only calls us out of the world at death. And almost everything in the world draws us away from God. Not only wealth and temptation, but also the incessant activity of life, labor that is strenuous, multiplicity of interests, much trouble and sorrow. Among confessing christians there are all too many, therefore, who count themselves christians and can live for hours and for days at times without a thought of God, who are distracted in mind even in their prayer, and who are scarcely aware of what it means to be "near unto God" and with him to live in constant fellowship of the Spirit. This lack can not be made good by sound creeds, nor by constant bearing witness. Life with God in the world can not be replaced by much activity and good works. The lamp can not burn unless it is continually fed with oil. Not in us, but in God alone is the power and the might, that can break unbelief in the world. And in this conflict we can only be instruments in the hand of the Lord, when his power inwardly animates us, when his Spirit inwardly impels us, and when "to be near unto God" and in the midst of the world to live with God, has become our second, our regenerated nature.

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### "I WILL WALK AMONG YOU."

Vital fellowship with God can not merely be personal. It must also be collective. Whatever touches merely the world of our own heart is personal. And whatever we go through with others, who are

connected with us by fixed ties, is collective. There is a collective life of the family, of the church, of callings and professions, and of nations. And that there is vital fellowship with God in the secret places of the soul, is not enough. In the family also, in the church and in social life fellowship with God must be a power. And it must be expressed in this: that God walks with us and we with God. Not only the first, but also the second. It is not enough that personally and collectively we have blessed experiences of continuous outgoings of the soul after God. This can always be the practice of communion with God from afar. Walking together the highway of life demands on the contrary that we go to God, that God comes to us, that the holy meeting is mutual, and that hand in hand with God we continue the journey of life. When it has come to this with us personally, we are in a christian way. When it has come to this in our family, we have a Christian home. When this is the case in our church, we enjoy a church life, which is not merely Christian in name but in fact. And when in social or state circles we have the same experience with those who are of like calling or conviction with ourselves, then here also the Christian banner not merely has been raised, but the cause for which, together, we suffer and strive is truly Christian.

To Moses and Israel the Lord expressed this as follows: "I will walk among you" (Lev. 26:12). In the case of Abraham it is only said personally, that he walked with God. But with Moses there is mention of collective fellowship of God with his people. Hence it does not say: "I will be

with you, as shepherd of my people," but far better: "I will walk in the midst of you" (Dutch version). The Lord going forth with his people, and at every step of the way the people being conscious of his nearness and of their fellowship with God.

This can be fellowship from both sides, a walking together of the way in holy love. But it can also be a walking together in sin on the part of man and in indignation on the part of God. "If . . . ye will walk contrary unto me" said the Lord, "then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins" (vs. 23, 24). Contrariness is what we call antipathy. We can walk with a man who is antipathetic to us, whose presence is not agreeable, and whose company is not desired. He who feels and observes that God walks with him on the way, and still inclines unto sin, feels constrained by the presence of the Lord. Even as a child, that is bent upon mischief, does not dare to do it, as long as father or mother is close by, but takes his chance the moment father or mother is gone, so a Christian man does not dare to carry his sinful design into execution, so long as he feels that God is near. If only he could outrun God. But this is impossible. He can close his eyes so as not to see God, but even then the Lord continues to reveal his presence in the conscience. This gives rise to the unholy strife of willingness to sin, and of inability to do it, because God stands in the way. And if sin is not abandoned, contrariness to God springs up in the heart, even the deeply-sinful antipathy to the nearness of God. And since there is nothing that so angers God, as the

desire, the tendency of the heart, not to seek, but to be delivered from, God, the favor of God to usward turns into holy antipathy. Thus the pathway of life is walked with God in enmity and in bitterness, and the Holy Spirit is grieved.

This does not happen with a child of the world. He does not walk with God. He walks alone. He perceives nothing, feels nothing, sees nothing of the nearness of God. Hence he can not fall into sin in this way. His sin bears another character.

But if we belong to the company of the redeemed, if we walk with people in whose midst the Lord walks, all sinful living must be stopped, or else, if it is yet continued, the terrible sin of contrariness, of antipathy to God will spring up in the heart. The inner life of the soul will be corrupted, and presently all of the after-life on earth. And the ill-omened deception is, that this contrariness, this antipathy only shows itself, at the point of some special sin. This gives rise to these monstrous conditions, that in all other ways a man may seek after God, may be zealous in Divine service, may maintain devout habits of prayer, but as often as this particular sin comes in question, may lose at once all self-control, and perceiving that God continues to walk with him, may feel no longer comforted by this blessed nearness, but merely hindered thereby in his sin. And if the sin is still persisted in, the most terrible contrariness follows, even the dreadful contrariness of God.

The case is not the same with sin that is committed from lack of strength. For then when tempted, the heart will seek refuge with God. We are well aware at such times that Satan plans to

undo us, and we hold ourselves fast by God for protection against evil. And we may stumble, but even in the act of it, refuge will be taken with the unseen Companion who walks at our side. He will be invoked for forgiveness and help. And he who knoweth whereof we are made, will show mercy and keep us from self-destruction. Of course we must be fully bent upon following God whithersoever he leadeth, and choose no paths of our own with the expectation that God will follow us. The goings of God, both past and present, are altogether such as lead to the kingdom of heaven, and result in making his Name great.

What then are the goings of our life? What is our aim in life? Whither doth our pathway lead? As children of God we pray every day: "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done;" and if this three-fold prayer is not a mere form of words, but the compass of our life, our goings will be identical with the goings of God. Then we and God walk the same way, in the same direction, with the same end in view. He in infinite greatness, and we in the insignificant littleness of our quickly-passing life. But as individual drops we move along in the wave-beat of the ocean of God. All of life then moves itself in the direction of the mighty appointment of God, and in this way we can walk with God, the whiles he walks with us, and from both sides it is continued in the bond of holy love.

But this is almost only possible in collective fellowship. One only has ever trodden the wine-press alone. Every other hero of the faith has

been upborne by the example, sympathy and fellowship of what is called the people of God. This is a sacred appellation, which no single group may arbitrarily appropriate to itself, and which is only real where God himself walks in the midst of those who share his favor. We are at once aware in family, in church and in society, whether purposes and endeavors coincide with the goings of God, or whether they are mere exhibits of outward forms of piety. These mere outward forms do not satisfy, they lend no support, they do not bear one up. Rest is only found when it is perceived that the presence of the Lord is a spiritual reality in the family, in the church, and in society, and that God himself walks in the midst of them.

Then it is not enough that God walks with us and that we walk with him, but we feel that the same is true of the wife, the husband, the children, the brother or sister, the preacher, church officials, societies and associations. We know it of one another. We make the nearness of God clearer and more real to one another. We are not silent about it. We enjoy it together. Collectively we receive from him the sacred impulse with united forces to continue in his goings, and to hold his name high. The Lord is then not only close to the heart, but he is in the midst of us. He is the common center of all our interests and the tie that binds us together. It is then not merely a pious frame of mind but a godly life, a consecrated purpose, and zealous co-operation from which that holy activity is born, which in every department of life overcomes the world and makes virtues to go out, which are not from us, but which flame out in us from him who walks

in the midst of us, because he is the source of our light, of our strength and of the inspiration of our life.

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“THAT THOU MAYEST CLEAVE UNTO  
HIM.”

Sin nowhere makes more rapid advances than in religion. Religion is the service of the Triune God. It is the highest and best that enriches the human heart. But the best is always the first that is exposed to corruption.

Outside of Europe and America the Almighty created and supports a thousand million persons who continually die and are replaced, but who in this coming and going are utter strangers to the secret of salvation. Missions have done something, but what are they compared with the thousand millions of Asia and Africa, and the united forces of Islam and Heathendom? These millions, especially in Asia, are by nature very susceptible to religious impressions, much more so in fact than most of the nations of Europe. But they choose their own way, and are dead to all true knowledge of the way of the Lord. And as often as God from his Throne looks down upon those millions in Asia and Africa, there is never an echo among them of the songs of worship and praise of the heavenly hosts. They kneel down before all sorts of things, but they never worship the Triune God.

Compared with this darkness of night in Asia and Africa, in Europe and America it is light. There is scarcely a village in these parts of the world, in which the sacrament of Baptism is not