

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

administered, where there is no church of Christ, large or small, and where there are not some deeply spiritual souls that live very "near unto God." This makes no secret of the fact however that in thickly-populated centers and even in larger villages the great majority of people are either dead to the service of the Lord, or merely adhere to it outwardly, and attach no single trace of spiritual reality to it. When this lack of religion began to assume ever larger and more unequal proportions, a gigantic effort was put forth to purify Divine service, to reform and to transform it, which at first worked admirably. But now look at the Geneva of Calvin, the Saxony of Luther, or at the Hague of William the Silent, and confess whether we do not face new disappointments, and whether the half of the population of these places is not estranged again from true religion. By means of the Reveille and of the spread of infidelity Christian revival ensued, which fortunately is making progress, but even in the circles that have been revived, we feel troubled again at the coldness, formalism and manifest lack of sacred fire. Even when we confine ourselves to the narrowest circle of the families that is still devoted to the service of the Lord, and examine to what degree of heat the spiritual arose and maintained itself in it, we are constantly disappointed, and we ask again and again whether that is all that is felt for, and consecrated to, our faithful God and Father. And when at last we look at our own family, and closer still confine ourselves to our own heart, and ask ourselves what the inner life for and with God is, in home and heart, and what it ought to

be for this faithful Father, who is not moved to ask in despair, whether constant, inward, tender, ever-in-grace increasing piety has not become impossible for us?

This question can only in part be answered in the affirmative. Sin works effects which enervate and weaken, so that even in the most godly circles true religion is most of the time at low ebb, and only in rare moments of spiritual tension does it rise to the fullness of flood-tide. The result is disheartening. God looks down upon this world morning by morning and evening by evening, and continues his Fatherly care over his fourteen hundred million of children of men, but only here and there does the psalm of worship and pure love arise before him from a tender, devout heart.

But age upon age God continues in everlasting love to entice us by his Word, to call us and to draw us to this full, true and unshakable religion, which finds its terse expression in the supreme command that we shall cleave unto the Lord our God (Deut. 30:20). It is the image of the child at mother's breast, who literally cleaves to her, and hangs on her, fosters himself in the warmth of the mother-life, feeds himself at the fountain of mother's breast, and cries when he feels himself separated from mother. And this supreme command, that we must depend on God, and cleave to him, protests in the name of the Triune God against all mechanical religion, and against every endeavor to reduce it to mere formalism. It does not exclude thinking on God, but declares that intellectual activity with God is not religion. It includes the confession of God, but denies the

right to assert that religion consists of confession. It posits the claim of an holy life, and of abounding in good works, but deprives us of the illusion that true piety can ever be satisfied with this. It certainly demands high esteem for outward forms of Divine service, but resists the error which identifies forms with the essence of religion itself. It is inconceivable apart from zeal for God's kingdom, but it declares that though all of life is spent for God, apart from love, we are mere sounding brass or tinkling cymbals. It tolerates no boast of true religion apart from personal fellowship with God in the secret intimacy of communion. And even when we can thank him for the grace, that at times in earnest prayer this heavenly fellowship with God in Christ was food for the soul, it still declares, that this occasional seeking after and visiting with God is not yet all of true religion, because true religion demands, that without break or interruption we shall cleave unto God, and hang as it were on God. Such dependence upon God implies, that moment by moment, we feel God's presence in the heart, and that with all the powers of our soul we hold ourselves fast by God.

But holiest saints confess, that such inward spirituality is impossible in this life. The heart is not attuned to it, and life round about us is not adapted to it. Simple honesty demands that this be openly and candidly confessed, provided it be accompanied with self-accusation and shamefacedness. Attainment of this highest good has been tried. In every age there have been those who for the sake of cleaving solely unto God have renounced life in the world, and have with-

drawn themselves to cell or hermitage. But though they could banish the world from the cloister, they took their hearts with them, and it was the heart itself that obstructed the way to closer fellowship with God. This was possible in Paradise, and has become such again in the congregation of the saints made perfect above. But it is not within reach here on earth. We may not withdraw ourselves from life. We have here a calling to fulfil, and to do service for our God. We can not separate ourselves from the heart. It is ever with us. But God knoweth what we are made of. He remembereth that we are dust. And he covers our guilt, of not reaching the unreachable, in gracious forgiveness.

Only we are not to rest content with this. We must not resign ourselves to this. We must hold the imperfection of our religion ever clearly before our eyes. We must enter complaint against ourselves, which will itself become the stimulus to seek from day to day, and from week to week, after closer fellowship with God. And here is the difference between superficial and true religion. The superficial worshipper understands that he can never attain unto such an unbroken cleaving to God, and so he continues his life calmly and peacefully, without ever finding the secret walk with God. All deeper and truer piety on the other hand is grieved, that this fellowship of soul with the faithful, loving Father is continually broken. Whenever it perceives that it has lost its hold on God, it trembles. It rebukes itself and courageously strives to restore the broken communion, until in the end, the moments of

life spent with God increase, and the moments of separation from God decrease.

To cleave unto the Lord with all the heart and soul and consciousness is then at first a heavenly joy which may be tasted only once in a whole month. Gradually it becomes a communion of soul without which no week passes. By degrees it becomes an elevation of soul which repeats itself almost daily. Going on this way, this happy joy in God returns several times a day, so that even by night, upon waking, the nearness of the Lord is consciously felt. And though even so, the highest still remains beyond our reach, cleaving unto God begins to occupy ever wider room in our lives. And not intimacy with God in solitude, but intimacy with God in the midst of our busy lives becomes the booty of the soul. Then it is no more a singing after Asaph: "It is good for me to be near unto God," but it becomes a singing like Asaph from blessed experience of heart.

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"SAMUEL DID NOT YET KNOW THE LORD."

When it is asked of a person whether we know him, the meaning can be twofold. Casually, it may mean whether we would know him if we met him. With respect to his character it may mean whether we understand him. He, who on the eve of your departure for Java, entrusts an important document to your care, for some one living there, merely intends by the question whether you know him, to prevent your handing the same to the wrong person. When, however,

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