

“THE SPIRIT OF MAN IS A CANDLE OF
THE LORD.”

To be near unto God is a luxury of soul which by grace can be our portion also in unconsciousness. When a child of God that enjoyed the secret walk is put under an anesthetic for the sake of an operation, it does not break fellowship between his heart and God. The same is true of a swoon. In high fever when the heated blood over-stimulates the brain, and delirium ensues, the relation with God remains equally intact. Even sleep, which for many hours deprives us of self-knowledge, may not be taken otherwise, and this entirely apart even from our consciousness in dreams. And yet in each of these conditions, from our side, as far as conscious life goes, being near unto God is inactive. But consciousness of fellowship with God is not, therefore, lost. Being wakened by a gentle touch, it is felt again and resumed. Consciousness of this fellowship has only become inactive. It is with this as with our capacity of sight. This, too, in sleep is not gone, but its at rest. Electric light illustrates this clearly. When the button is turned, everything is light, and when it is turned again, everything is dark. The power remains the same. It only draws itself back from shining.

From God's side, on the other hand, fellowship with the soul of his child operates continually; even under narcotic influence, in a swoon

and during sleep it maintains itself and acts. The knowledge of this imparts rest, as one undergoes an anaesthetic, and no less that peaceful feeling with which at night we lose ourselves in sleep. "Let me sleeping wait for thee; Lord, then sleep I peacefully," as it was sung in Hernhutt. And who can doubt but that the strength-imparting and strength-renewing operations with which our Father who is in heaven favors his children, are yet more manifold and effective in sleep than by day. The third part of our life, that binds us to our couch, by no means serves the needs of the body alone. It meets a higher end. Particularly by night God builds his temple in our hearts.

This detracts nothing from the fact that, "To be near unto God" only obtains its highest significance, when with our clear consciousness of day we hold blessed fellowship with God. When we perceive, observe and know, that the soul is near to God and God near to the soul; when, humanly speaking, there is an exchange of perceptions between God and us; when we, speaking reverently, with the telephone call up God in prayer, and far from on high the answer comes. But consider well, that this calling and answering are not exhausted by the words you stammer and the ideas which thereby operate in you. A mother has tender, affectionate communion with the little one at her breast, apart from any word and outside of any intellectual understanding. That which operates in this fellowship and maintains it, is life itself, the drawings of the blood,

the thrilling of the feeling. And though, when the child shall have become a youth and a young man, this fellowship will express itself in words and in ideas, the root of this communion, even in later years, will reach deeper than the lips that speak the word. What does not the look of the eye convey, the expression of the face, a tear, a smile, and how sweetly does not operate in and under all this the communion of the same blood, the tenderness of hiding love?

All this is not unconscious, but constitutes part of the consciousness. It is as the fragrance of a flower, as an atmosphere of love which we breathe in. It is the perfume and the atmosphere of the heart, which we drink in with full draughts. And truly, you well know what the scent of a rose is, and of an hyacinth; you are perfectly conscious of it, even though the ablest botanist is not able to analyze this perfume in ideas, nor to describe it in words. Thus to be consciously near unto God, means far more than you can understand, or express in words. It is a becoming aware, a perceiving, a feeling, which may not be attributed to the nerves. That creates false mysticism. But it is a perceiving and an expressing of self in a spiritual way, in the immediate union of your inner sense with the life of God.

To make this plain the Scripture distinguishes between the soul and our inner being. It speaks on one hand of the heart and of the soul, and on the other hand of something that lies far behind and deep underneath the two. This is expressed

plastically in several ways, mostly by contrasting the heart and the reins, and also by speaking of the bowels, or as in Proverbs 20:27, by contrasting the soul with "the innermost chambers of the belly." Translating this into our language, "the soul of man" here means our consciousness, and the latter clause what we call: Our hidden inner being. In this sense it is said, that "our consciousness is a candle of the Lord that searches our innermost being." Our consciousness is a searchlight which God himself sends forth across our entire inner being, in order that in its brightness and clearness we should learn to know our own inmost self.

Thus only are these words intelligible to us, and unveil a deep, far-reaching thought, which penetrates and appeals to us. Our consciousness is not of our own making. To become conscious is not our act. But all consciousness is an operation in us which is quickened by God, and which is maintained in us by him from moment to moment. It is on a line with the sun. The sun is the light in the world of nature, by which God enables us to see, to observe and to investigate nature. And in like manner the consciousness is a light which is ignited by God in our personal ego; or better yet, it is a light which God causes to shine in the world of our innermost being, in order that in this spiritual light we should examine and estimate our own spirit. This light of our consciousness is called a candle, because when we go down into ourselves, we begin with a sinking away

into pitch darkness, and in this black darkness of our innermost being, God meets us with the candle of our consciousness.

Of course, our consciousness is no candle, which the Lord uses to search us. God has no need of the light of the sun by which to clearly see his whole creation. In the deepest parts of the earth, where no beam of sunlight ever enters, it is light before God as the day. As David sang in Psalm 139: "Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." What is here true of the light of the world, applies equally to the world of our inner being. There, too, God has no need of a candle, wherewith to throw light upon us. In the darkness of this hidden world also the darkness shineth as the day. But we have need of this candle and it is grace, that by the light of this candle of our consciousness God lightens the darkness of our inner being. We make artificial light. This makes us think. We do this by reasoning. We do this by our representations. And that can have its use. But frequently this artificial light shines falsely. It misleads. It never shines further in than the surface. This artificial light of our own pondering and musing never enters into what Solomon calls, with such plastic, graphic power, "the innermost chambers of the belly." And all too frequently it blinds our eyes, so that we can not see the light of the candle of the Lord with the eye of the soul. Hence the so-called "civil-

ized world" for the most part is blind to the light of God's candle in us.

The light of this candle of the Lord in us does not argue, and does not analyze, but shows what there is in us, lays bare our own being before the eye of the soul, gives us self-knowledge, and cuts off all self-deception. And it is the light of this candle of the Lord which makes us clearly see in the deepest underground of our being, the fibres by which the root of our being has fellowship with God; fellowship by reason of our creation after the image of God; fellowship through the blessed, glorious regeneration of our sin-corrupted nature; fellowship through the Divine indwelling of the Holy Ghost; fellowship through the glorious inworking of ever-increasing grace; fellowship above all else through the tie that binds us to Christ, and makes us members of his body.

The brightness of this light is always the same in degree, but the effect of it gradually increases in strength. At first there is still so much that is wrong in the heart, so much dust of sin, that covers the heart and renders brightest light invisible to us. But gradually this vile dust flies away before the breath of the Lord, and then the eye comes to see what was hidden underneath this dust. And thus it can not be otherwise, but that the deeper the light can shine in, the more gloriously it becomes manifest to the eye of the soul that we are bound to God with all the ties of our life, and that our fellowship with God embraces our whole life.

“I IN THEM AND THOU IN ME.”

The soul's nearness to God and our “mystical union with Christ” belong together. All the apostles placed the emphasis on this; and in their writings the fathers of the Reformation, with Calvin in the lead, always referred to the mystical union with Christ as an indispensable factor in all true religion. The temptation to which, alas, so many yield, of staying on Golgotha, and of there closing off their account with Christ, kills the faith. The course of procedure is, that the conscience awakens for a moment; that the weight of sin burdens the soul; and that fear of judgment strikes the heart. In such a moment the consolatory thought of the cross arises invitingly in the soul. If the atoning sacrifice is accepted, one is saved. Nothing more is needed save only to believe. And one is readily persuaded to do this. To express this as sharply as the case allows: One closes the bargain. And now he deems himself saved. He accepts it as a fact, that he is assured of eternal life. He thinks that the atoning sacrifice is glorious. It brings perfect salvation. Thus Christ has become his Savior. But in his conversation nothing is heard of a closer, tenderer relation of the soul to Christ. In the utterances of his spiritual life nothing is perceived that refers to it. He is now saved, and that is the end of it.

This, however, is nothing but self-conceit. Nothing but spiritual egotism is at play in this. Escape is sought from eternal punishment; one wants to insure himself for eternal salvation. But