

holiness of God. In order to come nearer unto God, the child of God must take service under Christ in the warfare which God himself wages against Satan and his works, and thus obtain a twofold result: that whereas hitherto he suffered defeat, now he conquers, and that whereas he thus far wandered away from God, now he knows himself to be near unto God.

“LIVE IN PEACE.”

When Asaph wrote: “But it is good for me to be near unto God,” and thereby expressed in words a deep utterance of soul, which age upon age has found an echo in thousands of hearts, life had many more advantages for those who sought the Lord than it has for us now. In the East, where Asaph lived, it is still the custom that every event in life is put into relation with God; that in everything God is remembered, and the name of God is named. There is so much that draws us away from God, and therefore, pious usage prescribed, that from early infancy the child should be trained to remember God in every event of life. This is still the custom under Islam, where it is overdone, even to the extent that it must give rise to abuse.

But there is something attractive in the habit. The call to prayer from the pinnacle of the minarets has the same tendency. Where there is so much that draws us away from God and keeps us far removed, a counterpoise was sought in life by which to bind the soul to God. The Christian church did the same in the middle

ages. The ringing of bells, the stations of the cross, crucifixes, and so much more, all tended to quicken the thought of Christ. And in the age of the Reformation our fathers tried to reach the same end by putting prayer in between everything, by multiplying church services, and by the effort to sanctify every event of life in God. Not only testaments, but also contracts of rents were begun in the name of God. On coins the words appeared, "God with us," or, as in the United States of America, "In God we trust," and wherever it was possible God's holy name was brought to remembrance. An atmosphere prevailed in this which was pregnant with something of the holy, sometimes even too much so. To this was added that in the days of Asaph and of our fathers the religious undulation was far stronger, and religion occupied a far broader place in life.

But we have everything against us. In society life the name of God is scarcely ever mentioned. No bells are rung. An entirely different world of thoughts fills minds and hearts. He who tries to keep up sacred usages is criticized as being old-fashioned, if he is not scorned. A life divested of God and his name is most desired. And as regards religious undulation, it still continues in small circles, but the tidal wave of life goes, purely materially, for money and sensual pleasure. In such a time "to be near unto God" requires a double effort, and nothing should be neglected, neither positively nor negatively, that here may have effect. Positively every means should be persistently applied to engage the soul with God each day for a longer period of time and with greater intimacy; and negatively by opposing and

resisting everything that hinders or prevents our communion with God.

Does the church of Christ understand the great interest that is here at stake? Can it be said, that an effort is in evidence, at least within the church, to pursue this exalted aim? As one means "to be near unto God," the Apostle indicates a "life in peace." His exhortation runs: "Be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and of peace shall be with you" (II Cor. 13:11). And yet this peace is continually broken. Let us be well understood. It does not say, that there may no differences arise, nor that with every difference safety must be sought in indifference. Paul did not do this. No, the point in question is the spirit in which differences are faced and settled. A twofold impulse may have play. On one side the holy impulse, in the face of differences to be doubly on our guard, that love shall suffer no loss, and that no unholy word shall escape our lips or pen. But also on the other side the unholy impulse, in the face of differences to allow one's bitter mind free play, to give one's passion to annoy free rein, and to inflict whatever pain one can. With the first, one puts himself in an atmosphere of love and peace. With the second, one breathes an atmosphere of bitterness and anger.

In the church it is the same as in the family. Between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between children among themselves, differences continually arise. It can not be otherwise. Interests, insights and endeavors run in opposite directions. But see the difference between one family and another. In the family

that is of a noble mind, a limit is put upon these differences, a spirit of love prevails, which of itself opens a way of escape. And where love dwells, the Lord commands this blessing, that hearts remain united. But next to this, alas, how many families there are in which pains are not spared to measure out the difference as broadly as possible, to put the sharpest arrow, as long as it is not poisonous, on one's bow, and where again and again husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters face one another like furies. This is always the same antithesis which we have indicated. This sinful earth brings us no world, no family or church, without differences or disputes. But it all depends whether a dispute in family or in church finds an atmosphere of love and peace, or one of bitterness and anger.

And now the Apostle points out that cherishing the atmosphere of love and peace is not only a Christian duty, which brings gladness and comfort into life, but that it is also a necessary requisite for the cultivation of life in fellowship with God. A child of God can, and indeed must, be near unto God, and live in communion with God, even amid conditions of restlessness and strife. He who perseveres obtains this blessed end. But, O, it is made thereby unspeakably much more difficult. Where the atmosphere that surrounds us is charged with evil electricity, and the tongue can not be held in leash, and discord rends the robe of love, and the passion of strife breaks loose, everything draws the heart away from communion with its God. There the peace of God, that passeth all understanding, can not fill the soul. There is no calm there and no in-

ward restfulness to lift oneself up from this earthly sphere into the world above, and to enjoy the bliss of nearness unto God. And then in two ways harm is done. First, you fail of one of the most precious means of being near to God; and again you become subject to the dominion of an element that inserts itself with separating effect between you and your God.

A gently tempered mind can, with respect to this, be a blessing to a whole family, to a whole community; and a mind that is poisoned with the bitterness of gall can spoil the tone and spirit of an entire family and an entire community, and make godliness therein to suffer bitter loss. Of every thoughtless and unholy word, and also of every bitter and irritable frame of mind, account must once be made before God. For do not forget, that nothing trains the mind and heart so effectively as the custom and the habit which form and govern the condition and the mood of heart and mind.

If you have once acquired the habit of holding yourself back and of self-control, and when Satan places poison into your hands, at once to reach out for the alabaster box of precious ointment, the struggle becomes gradually easier, the effort to encourage stillness more lovely, and the joy of having cultivated peace and love increasingly rich. If, on the other hand, you give way to your sharpness, to your passion, to your bitterness of mind, you lose more and more the power of self-control, and create for yourself and your surroundings unspeakable harm and wrong.

The peace of which the apostle speaks has nothing to do with sentimentalism, with lack of cour-

age to speak, with being blind to wrong practices. Mere sentimental goodness is no sacred art, but cowardice. But this is sacred art: to stand strong and courageous, in everything, and yet so to take hold of things, deal with them, and settle them, that no unholy spark starts fire in your own mind, and that you do not disturb for a moment the inward peace of those who are around you.

He whose piety is more appearance than reality, cares for none of these things. But he who strives unto the end in every way to keep sacred his secret walk with God, and to be continually near unto God, can offer no resistance to the stress of this apostolic word. He feels in his own soul that the atmosphere of love and peace makes him dwell near unto God, and therefore he flees from the sphere of strife and unrest, because it draws him away from God.

“A DECEIVED HEART HATH TURNED
HIM ASIDE.”

The world, our environment, our business, yea, and what not, as a rule leads us away from God. This means that it takes definite effort, in the midst of daily activities, to keep our thoughts and utterances of soul directed toward God. There have even been whole days of which at night on bended knee, it had to be confessed that the mind and soul had not once been lifted up to God. To picture this in brighter colors than the case warrants, will not do. Thus and not otherwise is the sad reality with many whole days of life in which God has had no remembrance. We were