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The Christian Visitor.

SAINT JOHN, FRIDAY, JUNE 17, 1863.

Prayer and Self-Examination.

It is satisfactory to know, that amid the doubt and confusion that exist on various subjects connected with the religion of Jesus, some things are fixed and settled. Amongst these, by universal consent of those who fear God, are prayer, watchfulness, and self-examination, so far as their obligation is concerned. The Old and New Testaments alike enjoin these exercises upon the faithful, and by precept and example, as well by the happy effects resulting from their observance, enforce the duty of perpetual performance. No man can claim to be a Christian who does not devote a part of his daily life to these solemn and edifying privileges. It is said of Rehoboam, that he did much evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. Self-examination, fasting, and prayer, in theory or practice, formed no part of his religion. Ezra, on the contrary, prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it. "I know, O my God," said David, "that Thou triest the heart, and hast great pleasure in uprightness." Private prayer and self-examination are indispensable to a personal realization of the promised blessing of salvation.

Jesus taught his disciples by a parable, that they ought always to pray, and not to faint. The Apostles exhorted those whom they converted to Christ, to pray everywhere without ceasing; not merely in the Jewish synagogues, or public places of worship, but in all localities where they might sojourn. Because the Saviour whom they had confessed, and into whose name they had been immersed, is both omnipresent and omniscient; and therefore, his disciples are exhorted to realize this fact, to cast all their care upon him, and in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to let their requests be made known to God, "and the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, will guard the heart and mind through Christ Jesus." This, then, is the appointed means of peace and safety to every disciple of Jesus. "I will," said Paul, "that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath or doubting." Now with whatever latitude such general instructions are received, certain it is, they are unmeaning, or they cannot mean less, than that prayer is of perpetual obligation upon every Christian. They cannot, by any system of fair interpretation, amount to less than a solemn duty to pray in all places appointed for worship, to make known at all seasons, our desires to God; and, like soldiers who have their respective watch-words, to be known as fellow-soldiers by the watch-words of prayer and thanksgiving in the name of the Captain of our salvation. Such should be our abiding sense of our own infirmities and weaknesses—such our knowledge of the divine power and goodness—that we should readily embrace every fit opportunity of asking the protection and blessing of God upon all our ways.

As the morning and evening sacrifice among the Jews was called "the continual burnt offering" throughout their generations, (Ex. xxix. 42,) so the regular and constant offering of our prayers and thanksgivings, may be regarded as "praying without ceasing." We do not once pray, and ever after cease; but, as our necessities are continual, our prayers should be habitual. Paul, in allusion to the offerings of the Jews, says of the twelve tribes, "that they instantly served God night and day." (2 Tim. i. 3.) He is the best exponent of his own commands; and if instant service is a morning and evening offering—a nightly and daily prayer—we cannot understand anything less by the injunction, "pray without ceasing." Indeed there is more in it than these allusions to Jewish customs would signify. There is habitual cherishing of such views of the being, cha-

acter, will, and presence of God—such an obligation to place the affections upon things above, and especially upon God and Christ, as the highest objects of veneration and love—such a disposition to submit our will to God's will, our plans to His direction, and our undertakings to His guidance and control—as comports with the cultivation of an inner spirit of prayer, as well as the regular morning and evening sacrifice. But as an indispensable means to secure these habitual devotions, care and regularity in the performance of the distinct duty of prayer is enforced. And thus while it is true, that in spiritual rather than in a legal religion, any hour may be an acceptable hour of prayer, at the same time, any particular period thus unappropriated, that will secure the habitual disposition, ought to be redeemed and used for that purpose. Hence we say—

I.—*That the morning is a proper season for prayer.* It is not only sanctioned by the example of the greatest and best men that ever lived upon the earth—Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and the Son of God himself—but even nature points it out as a proper season for offerings to the Deity. The mind is most free from care and excitement in the morning. The violence of the fever of life has been allayed by the soothing influence of "nature's sweet restorer;" for ten or twelve hours in the twenty-four, the mind has been free from the hurry and tumults of life, and the stern hold which the world has upon us. The hour is quiet, the attention undivided, and more tranquility reigns within the inner temple than at any other period. Now, then, let us seek a repast for our spirits. Look we out upon creation's morning spectacle: behold its wakening life, as it arises from the gloom and silence of that apparent pause in nature we call night. Behold the flood of light that pours upward from the orient sky with fresh, and bright, and glorious rays, as if it just received its birth from the plastic hands of its great Creator! There is a blessing appears in the sun, as his beams ascend—there is a cheerfulness over the earth, as the dampness and darkness of night are dispelled; and glowing glances, as if lit by the beams of "far-off Paradise," and brightening fields of dew, assure us that God has set a tabernacle for the Sun,
Who resembles a bridegroom coming out of his chamber;
Who rejoices as a strong man to run a race;
Whose goings are from the ends of the heavens,
And his circuit is also from the end of them,
And there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

[Psalm xix. 4-7.]

Look at that sun and those heavens, and the consciousness of frailty and imperfection will insensibly spring up amidst all our emotions of wonder, admiration, and delight, which the opening skies excite. How pride is humbled, unholy passions banished, and the pure love of God shed abroad in the soul, and the whole heart inspired to ask the Author of the moving and the morning developments, to bless us, and raise us higher than the heavens.

Whilst beholding these bright displays of wisdom, power, and goodness, how do we feel our helplessness and mortality! Exhausted by labor, we had laid down to sleep. Our minds were sluggish, and wearied in thought even upon the most interesting subjects. We sank into insensibility—our eyes were closed, our limbs were motionless, and our thoughts were suspended or moved in the aimless efforts of dreams. Our friends, the world, God, and even ourselves were forgotten in sleep, so much akin to death. But the morning has arisen, and we have arisen with it, and death-like sleep has given new life to all our powers! The closed eye is opened and bright—the spirits are strengthened as with new braces—and the mind from the land of forgetfulness and dreams, returns to its deserted throne—and family and friends are met and greeted again. Does not the morning furnish us with gratitude? We must be dull and brutal indeed, yea, we are fast sinking into the sluggishness of the animal man, wholly given up to the senses and passions, which inevitably ends in that spiritual death which bars to man the kingdom of heaven, if it does not. But let us try to be devotional. Who preserved us during the insensibility of sleep? Who granted the return of renewed intellectual and physical powers? Who slept not while we slept? Who watched over us, and fixed his sleepless eye upon us when we could not watch over ourselves? Who guarded our prisoned faculties, and broke the chains of sleep asunder which were not suffered to destroy our vital powers? It was the Father of our spirits, the Preserver of men.

"O Jehovah! in the morning thou shalt hear my voice: in the morning I will direct my prayer unto Thee and look up."—(Psalm v. 3.)

The eyes which God has opened should be raised to him—the arm which he has strengthened should be pledged to justice and virtuous effort—all the powers which he has renewed should be consecrated to his service. Thou hast loosed my tongue, therefore will I praise thee: thou hast preserved my breath, and I will speak of thy kindness. Let the ungodly forget thee, but my thoughts and my affections, let them rest upon thee, oh God, my deliverer and my joy!

Again: The morning opens a new day. We start afresh in life each morning—in that life which has so often been a life without God. We return to that world which has so often led us astray. We know not what that day may bring forth. We may perform actions in it which will never be forgotten. We will qualify our character either for heaven or hell. It may be a day of dangers and of death—a day of opportunities to serve God or of temptations to deny him. Is it not fit, then, that entering upon a day of uncertainty and dangers, we should commit our ways to him who presides over all days, and ask not to be abandoned to temptation, but to be delivered from evil, to be encouraged in doing good, prospered in all our undertakings; and as the day will bring us one day nearer the end of our lives, ask that our preparation for the spiritual and undefiled inheritance may be advanced by one day. He that thus rests upon God in the morning will not forget him in the day, but he will recognize him as encompassing his path, and this thought is the greatest of all preservatives from sin. He who begins right, is apt to end right. If God is in our thoughts in the morning, it is not likely he will be absent during the day.

It is proper, then, and useful, that we should pray in the morning. No ordinary circumstance should be allowed to prevent it. If it be said that business presses us early, let us rise still earlier. We can rise early to meet a loved friend, shall we not rise to meet the Almighty Benefactor? We can arise at an early hour for a business call, or a day of entertainment and pleasure; can we not prevent the dawn, as did David, to return thanks to God and invoke his blessing? If we have not time in the morning, it is not likely that we will find an appropriate time during the day. If the worldliness of our disposition cannot be checked at this quiet and tranquil hour, we may expect to be overwhelmed by it during the day, and return at night to regard the thought of God as an intrusion. He that commences the day without God, need not expect to close it without guilt, and if his spiritual soul is not deadened, without condemnation.

II.—*The evening is also a fit time for prayer.* The labors of the day are ended. The shades of night are enveloping our habitation and shutting out all the mighty spectacles of creation, except the starry heavens, which also lead to thoughts of God and immortality. The busy confusion of life has gone by, and we have time now for composure, seriousness, and meditation. The scenes of the day may pass in review before us. Happy are we if there are not some things to be regretted and confessed. Impossible but that we have occasions for gratitude in the review of God's goodness in the day which is passed. Had we strength for our duties—had we food for our bodies—was the friendship of our companions continued—did we meet with the expected pleasures of life—and now are we safely returned to a loved home? What reasons these for sincere gratitude! But have we met with unlooked for successes—with unexpected concurrences of favorable events formed new friendships, or witnessed the rising prosperity of others that were worthy? What causes these for peculiar thankfulness? Shall we retire, ungrateful as the thankless brute? Reason, and nature, and God, say that we should not.

But the evening is a proper time for the review of life. Another day has dropped from our lives. What report hath it borne to the Lord of those lives? Perhaps if we commenced the day by committing ourselves to the divine direction, we may look back upon the general tenor of it as spent innocently, and it may be in useful and necessary duties. But there are few days that do not bring a report of some wrong, of improper desires, of surprises into passion or sin. And shall we lie down with the consciousness of guilt un-

confessed? Shall we leave these stains unpurified by the blood of our propitiation, when we are assured that it waits for our forgiveness when it is confessed?

There is no duty so neglected as self-examination. We are hurrying onward in life as though we had a thousand years to live. Important interests are always at stake in a life of trial. We are always in danger of deceiving ourselves, and we should therefore seek opportunities to obey the divine command, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith." Our affections should be compared to the will of God. Have we endured affliction in a proper manner? Has it worked for us patience, and approbation, and well-grounded hope? Are we engaged as laborers with God? Are we urging forward the salvation of our fellow-men? Are we holding forth the word of life? Are we denying ourselves of worldly lusts? Are we conscientious, industrious, and faithful in our professions? A religious examination of our lives after this manner is absolutely necessary to our piety and growth in grace. No day should end without something like it; for if we take no account of our conduct, how can we hope to watch against the sins of tomorrow, or obtain that help and strength which we will not improve?

Night is, then, a fit time to seek divine protection. We are about to sink into the unconsciousness of sleep. How appropriate that we should recommend ourselves to the care of him who never sleeps nor slumbers. How well to ask him, that should we awake no more upon the earth, we may awake in his likeness, and see him in his glory.

The Rev. C. Leonard, agent for the "AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSIONARY CONVENTION OF COLORED CHURCHES," has requested us to insert the following from his Circular to the Ministers of the different churches,—and to add, that he wishes all collections that may be taken up in the churches, to be forwarded to the Editors of the *Christian Visitor*, by whom such sums will be acknowledged in their paper. Our brother earnestly, through us, begs the aid of all before the end of July, by which time he has to pay in what he has collected. We have had frequent opportunities of conversing with this brother, and have heard him preach several times, and we believe him to be a man worthy the confidence of the brethren:

The American Baptist Missionary Convention of Colored Churches.

Dear Brethren,—We ask your attention to a subject of great importance, to the interest of the cause of Christ. Believing it a duty enjoined upon us as stewards of our Master, to establish the cause of Christ in our midst, by making known the glorious plan of redemption to fallen man; we formed ourselves into a Missionary Society, for the purpose of supplying feeble and destitute churches with the gospel, rearing new churches, wherever God, in his providence, should supply proper spiritual materials, and sending out, and sustaining missionaries among the poor and destitute heathen of Africa.

Already has this work begun, and hundreds have been made to rejoice in the glad sound of the gospel. Missionary labors have been performed in most of the free States; several churches have been reared, whose condition and prospects are very encouraging. Thirty churches have been connected with this body, with a membership of twenty-eight hundred; and, including society, nearly twenty thousand. Still much remains to be done; many of our churches are in a feeble and destitute condition. During the past two years, several have decreased in numbers and strength, through the operation of the Fugitive Slave Bill, which has driven many members from their churches and their homes. Four are sustained by the Convention as far as our means will allow, and others will be assisted as soon as funds can be raised.

The means and not the men are wanting. Already a few self-sacrificing brethren have left all the comforts and pleasures of home, to labor in the home field, and also to establish the gospel on the shores of Africa, while others are still waiting to be sent out by this Convention, as soon as there are funds in the treasury to sustain them in the field.

We therefore ask a share in your sympathies, and your hearty co-operation in this work. We believe that if it once be known,