

wholesome fruit. Alas, how widely neglected is this inward cleansing! How generally is external reformation substituted for internal mortification. And why is this?—because we are far more concerned about the approval of our fellow-

creatures than we are to obtain the approbation of our Creator. Our actions come beneath the gaze of man, but the springs from which they proceed are under the scrutiny of God. He who “weigheth the spirits” (Prov. 16:2) demands purity of heart. We are required to judge the motives which actuate us, to make conscience of evil lustings and vain imaginations, to take ourselves to task for wandering thoughts when engaged in Divine worship.

Fourth, to manifest godliness in the family circle: “let them learn first to show piety at home” (1 Tim. 5:4). Here is another God-appointed “first” which is most necessary for us all to heed—but we would specially press it upon the attention of those who are so anxious to engage in what they term “service for the Lord.” The “service” which God requires from all of His people is not a running about here and there, asking impertinent questions of total strangers and prattling to them about Divine things, but to be in subjection to Himself, to walk obediently to His Law. To talk to people about Christ is far easier than the task He has assigned—to deny self, take up our cross, and follow Him. Actions speak louder than words: it is by our conduct we are to make manifest Whose we are. Christians are to “show forth” by their lives (rather than tell forth with their lips) “the praises of Him who has called them” (1 Peter 2:9). And they are “first to show piety at home,” then in the Church, and then in the world, for if there be no piety in our home life, then all our seeming piety in the Church and before the world is but humbuggery and hypocrisy.

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First Things First

by Arthur W. Pink

The dawning of a new year is a fresh call unto each of us to put first things first, and it is only by heeding this call that we are prepared to start it aright. The greatest tragedy of life is that the vast majority of our fellows are dissipating their energies on secondary things, spending their strength for that which satisfies not. Alas, how much time have we wasted in the past! But a new year affords us another opportunity to mend our ways: how much of it, then, are we going to improve and conserve for eternity? The answer to that question will be determined by how far we put first things first.

It is one thing to recognize and realize that it is both our duty and wisdom to put first things first, and quite another to actually do so. It is much to be thankful for when light from above makes plain the path wherein we should walk—yet something more than illumination is required in order for us to traverse the same. Strength, power, enablement, is indispensable—and that we have not by nature. Have we not already been made painfully aware of this fact? Then have we humbly acknowledged it to God, and sought from Him fresh supplies of grace? Let us say with Jehoshaphat, when the enemies of Israel assembled against them, “O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us: neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee” (2 Chron. 20:12).

What is it to put first things first? First and supremely to give God Himself His rightful place in our lives and render to Him that which is His due. “Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the LORD of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last” (Isa. 44:6). The great “I am” is self-existent and self-sufficient. Because He is the First, He should be first served. The world had its beginning from Him; we had ours, and therefore at the beginning of the year,

and of each day, it deeply concerns us to take Him along with us. God is the sum of all excellence, being inexpressibly blessed in Himself. How He should attract us! God is possessed of infinite benevolence, which is guided by unerring wisdom, and He has all-mighty power at His disposal. What an Object for our most fervent affections! Shall, then, every glittering toy become a rival to this transcendently glorious Being and rob Him of our hearts?

Let us form the habit (if we have not already done so) of directing our first conscious thoughts unto Him who has preserved us through the night. Begin the day by definitely bringing the Lord God before your heart, contemplate His wondrous attributes, prostrate your soul before Him in worship, adore Him for His glorious perfections. Say with holy David, "My voice shall Thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee" (Psa. 5:3). Nor will this be either difficult or irksome if we turn the eyes of our souls unto Him: it is beholding the beauty of the Lord which puts in tune the strings of our harps, and enables us to make melody in our hearts unto Him. Nor is this all: by doing obeisance we promote obedience. By solemnly paying homage to God and rendering to Him the honour which is due His great name, we strengthen the obligations that we lie under to observe His statutes and keep His commandments. By our humble and frequent adoration of His perfections, conformity to His will will be easier, for His authority over us will be more strongly felt.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). God is to be given the preference above all others. Let not any business prevent our seeking communion with Him nor hinder the maintenance of it. There are many things we would like to do, but other things deter us. We wish to visit a dear friend, but the pressure of other concerns thwarts us. But this must never be the case with our seeking unto God: that is the "one thing needful" to which everything else must

be made to give way. It is not at all necessary to our highest good that we be great in the world or advance our estate in it to such and such a pitch—but it is absolutely essential that we obtain God's favour and keep ourselves in His love. No worldly business whatsoever can serve to excuse our attendance upon God; nay, the more important our worldly business be, the more need have we to apply ourselves to God by prayer for His help in and blessing upon it. The closer we keep to God in prayer, the more likely are our affairs to prosper.

Second, to yield ourselves up unreservedly to God. Of the Corinthian saints we read that they "first gave their own selves to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:5), which should be done by us at the beginning of each day. This means that they (1) gave their hearts to Him, being won by His loveliness; that they (2) surrendered their wills to Him, to be governed by Him; that they (3) devoted their lives to Him, seeking His honour and glory. "In the way of Thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for Thee; the desire of our soul is to Thy name, and to the remembrance of Thee. With my soul have I desired Thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek Thee early" (Isa. 26:8, 9). Our desire must be not only towards the good things that He gives, but towards God Himself—His favour and love, the manifestation of His name to us, and the influences of His grace upon us. Our wills are to be surrendered to God, as the servant is yielded to his master's pleasure, in everything consulting his desires and interests. God's will is to be our sole rule, His precepts the regulator of all we engage in. Our lives are to be devoted to His glory: acknowledging

Him in all our ways, following Him fully as Caleb did.

Third, to keep our hearts with all diligence (Prov. 4:23). It is not enough that our outward conduct be proper—the springs from which it issues must be right. "Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matt. 23:26). The stream itself cannot be sweet if the fountain-head be foul. A corrupt tree will not bear