

Three Things

(excerpts from *The Sparkling Stone*)*

John of Ruysbroeck († 1381)

Prologue

The man who would live in the most perfect state of Holy Church must be a good and zealous man; an inward and ghostly man; an uplifted and God-seeing man; and an outflowing man to all in common. Whenever these four things are together in a man, then his state is perfect; and through the increase of grace he shall continually grow and progress in all virtues, and in the knowledge of truth, before God and before all men.

Through Three Things a Man Becomes Good

Hear now three things which constitute a good man. The first, which a good man must have, is a clean conscience without reproach of mortal sin. And therefore whosoever wishes to become a good man must examine and prove himself with due discernment, from that time onward when he could first have committed sin. And from all these sins he must purge himself, according to the precept and the custom of Holy Church.

The second thing which pertains to a good man is that he must in all things be obedient to God, and to Holy Church, and to his own proper convictions. And to each of these three he must be equally obedient so shall he live without care and doubt, and shall ever abide without inward reproach in all his deeds.

The third thing which behoves every good man is that in all his deeds he should have in mind, above all else, the glory of God. And if it happens that by reason of his business or the multiplicity of his works, he has not always God before his eyes, yet at least there should be established in him the intention and desire to live according to the dearest will of God.

Behold, these three things, when they are possessed in this way, make a man good. And whosoever lacks any one of these three is neither good nor in the grace of God; but whenever a man resolves in his heart to fulfil these three points, how wicked soever he may have been before, in that very instant he becomes good, and is susceptible of God, and filled with the grace of God.

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Through Three Things a Man Becomes Inward

If, further, this good man would become an inward and ghostly man, he needs must have three further things. The first is a heart unencumbered with images; the second is spiritual freedom in his desires, the third is the feeling of inward union with God.

Now let every one who thinks himself to be ghostly observe himself. He who would have a heart void of images may not possess anything with affection, nor may he cling to any one, or have intercourse with him with attachment of the will; for all intercourse and all affection which do not aim purely at the honour of God bring images into a man's heart, since they are born, not of God, but of the flesh. And so if a man would become spiritual, he must forsake all fleshly lusts and loves and must cleave with longing and love to God alone, and thus possess Him. And through this, all imaginations and all inordinate love towards creatures are cast out. And this loving possession of God makes a man inwardly free from ungodly images; for God is a Spirit, of Whom no one can make to himself a true image. Certainly in this exercise a man should lay hold of good images to help him; such as the Passion of our Lord and all those things that may stir him to greater devotion. But in the possession of God, that man must sink down to that imageless Nudity which is God; and this is the first condition, and the foundation, of a ghostly life.

The second condition is inward freedom. Through this, the man should be able to raise himself towards God in all inward exercises, free from images and encumbrances; that is, in thanksgiving and praise, in worship, in devout prayer and fervent love, and in all those things that may be done by longing and love with the help of the grace of God and through inward zeal in all ghostly exercises.

Through this inward exercise, he reaches the third state; which is that he feels a ghostly union with God. Whosoever then has, in his inward exercise, an imageless and free ascent unto his God, and means nought else but the glory of God, must taste of the goodness of God; and he must feel from within a true union with God. And in this union, the inward and spiritual life is made perfect; for in this union, the desirous power is perpetually enticed anew and stirred to new inward activity. And by each act, the spirit rises upwards to a new union. And so activity and union perpetually renew themselves and this perpetual renewal in activity and in union is a ghostly life. And so you are now able to see how a man becomes good through the moral virtues and an upright intention; and how he may become ghostly through the inward virtues and union with God. But without these said points, he can neither be good nor ghostly.

Through Three Things a Man Becomes God-Seeing

Further, you must know that if this ghostly man would now become a God-seeing man, he needs must have three other things. The first is the feeling that the foundation of his being is abysmal, and he should possess it in this manner; the

second is that his inward exercise should be wayless; the third is that his indwelling should be a divine fruition.

Now understand, you who would live in the spirit, for I am speaking to no one else. The union with God which a spiritual man feels, when the union is revealed to the spirit as being abysmal—that is, measureless depth, measureless height, measureless length and measureless breadth—in this manifestation the spirit perceives that through love it has plunged itself into the depth and has ascended into the height and escaped into the length; and it feels itself to be wandering in the breadth, and to dwell in a knowledge which is ignorance. And through this intimate feeling of union, it feels itself to be melting into the Unity; and, through dying to all things, into the life of God. And there it feels itself to be one life with God. And this is the foundation, and the first point, of the God-seeing life.

And from this there arises the second point, which is an exercise above reason and without condition: for the Divine Unity, of which every God-seeing spirit has entered into possession in love, eternally draws and invites the Divine Persons and all loving spirits into its Self. And this inward drawing is felt by each lover, more or less, according to the measure of his love and the manner of his exercise. And whosoever yields himself to this indrawing, and keeps himself therein, cannot fall into mortal sin. But the God-seeing man who has forsaken self and all things, and does not feel himself drawn away because he no longer possesses anything as his own, but stands empty of all, he can always enter, naked and unencumbered with images, into the inmost part of his spirit. There he finds revealed an Eternal Light, and in this light, he feels the eternal demand of the Divine Unity; and he feels himself to be an eternal fire of love, which craves above all else to be one with God. The more he yields to this indrawing or demand, the more he feels it. And the more he feels it, the more he craves to be one with God; for it urges him to pay the debt which is demanded of him by God. This eternal demand of the Divine Unity kindles within the spirit an eternal fire of love; and though the spirit incessantly pays the debt, an eternal burning continues within it. For, in the transformation within the Unity, all spirits fail in their own activity, and feel nothing else but a burning up of themselves in the simple Unity of God. This simple Unity of God none can feel or possess save he who maintains himself in the immeasurable radiance, and in the love which is above reason and wayless. In this transcendent state the spirit feels in itself the eternal fire of love; and in this fire of love it finds neither beginning nor end, and it feels itself one with this fire of love. The spirit for ever continues to burn in itself, for its love is eternal; and it feels itself ever more and more to be burnt up in love, for it is drawn and transformed into the Unity of God, where the spirit burns in love. If it observes itself, it finds a distinction and an otherness between itself and God; but where it is burnt up it is undifferentiated and without distinction, and therefore it feels nothing but unity; for the flame of the Love of God consumes and devours all that it can enfold in its Self.

And thus you may see that the indrawing Unity of God is nought else than the fathomless Love, which lovingly draws inward, in eternal fruition, the Father and the Son and all that lives in Them. And in this Love we shall burn and be burnt up without end, throughout eternity; for herein lies the blessedness of all spirits. And therefore we must all found our lives upon a fathomless abyss; that we may eternally plunge into Love, and sink down in the fathomless Depth. And with that same Love, we shall ascend, and transcend ourselves, in the incomprehensible Height. And in that Love which is wayless, we shall wander and stray, and it shall lead us and lose us in the immeasurable Breadth of the Love of God. And herein we shall flee forth and flee out of ourselves, into the unknown raptures of the Goodness and Riches of God. And therein we shall melt and be melted away, and shall eternally wander and sojourn within the Glory of God. Behold! by each of these images, I show forth to God-seeing men their being and their exercise, but none else can understand them. For the contemplative life cannot be taught. But where the Eternal Truth reveals Itself within the spirit all that is needful is taught and learnt.



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