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Simple Religion

Earl Clement Davis

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Kext. micoh. 6. F. and what doth Jehow lequine of Thee, but to do justly, and to love Kindness, and to work humbly with they God." In one best woments, when we see wort clearly into the une workings of our life, I farray that we all feel certain that to us at least the religious life is a single nature life, and I unoque that we see try to four olote into a concise fittig exfremin our idea of the simplicity and notwolvers of the religious life. the fresident of our our Muinesetym one of his characteristic expersion to clothed the idea very simply in soying that the religious life is an ethical life vitel = eged by love," Que convot help feeling that the idea book of thre words is the some idea that you and I see clearly swingh at lives, and the sour clea

that the fughet micol is expersing in These words, "and what doth betwooh require of these but to do justly, to love kinches, and to the woch humbly with thy God". Shere love simple expressione statements give exfression to essentially the some idea. The one stolement wor worke 700 years before the birth of Christionity; the other wor wocle within a year. They Each finds a response and in our beart, and is but an ectr of the voice of the ages in woments of clearners. Generation ofter generation, age after age the human the adequotely express in outward form this single idea That the religious lige is a simple lige. But there is a strange inconsistoncy about it all, Each statement suys that the religious lifte is simple, but each implies that in The seture world of activity, one single

conception of religion life is buried deep beneath a mars of mystery and unotical: ners. WE love to confer that this implied condition is a fact, wat only of the earlier days & but of one our generation. In the much of by far the greater fration of our ferfle, religion is a mysterious, monotivel factor of ones life, about which feafle way talk, but about which they actually know withing. Share is a strange incursiting here, WE are fermitted To see the truth of such a simple statement. but we allow our relies to go and do Altervine, It seems about as if me were worde to do the things that we would not finented from doing the things that we would. Inenty Seven hundred years ago the furthet time of suice, what doil Je tovok require of thee, but to do justly, to love kunchan, and to wolk have by with they god," Cined any one state more

clearly, worz beautifully. worz forcefully the simple iden that me like to think is the essence of the Keligions life, and yet me tore done strange things in the meantime, and me are still doing strange things, whore only result con be to alienate our conceptions of religion from one daily life, and force there fait as things to be attended to at far ticolar Times and in faitura flaces. The gunth of reeds, the accumulation of trachiting about the fermality of Jerus, the develope = ment of the herarchy of the Catholie church the washing of a bark by the fistestouts, the Aleculation Doguns of theologians; how unde, have foreign, tow inconsistant all These things seen in the light of the simple words of the old Heben finget, How manual they seen to us in

in the fore of that chershed idea of religions simplicity. But they are facts venerthe less. So far artian from that simple truth box for me wandered that to chy, in spite of our bo astrigs to the contrary, it still re= mains the that religion is regarded as mysteriors, and montume, and the religion nistitutions which ought to command the highest respect are Tooked upn with contempt by many voble feafle, and the froblem of the Church is becoming the threatening. That wory lose heart, and are milling to give up the fight. (what is the course of this incom: sistancy? Why do we see the smill tuch, and yet ignorait? There an

be but one came in any inconsistancy /We are inconsistant, herause me and insurces, hecause me are not truthful pecause me are mot frank. Yet we try to make clean most I mean. We cherisch and Force on great heritoge of knowledge and institutions; me tonor and flaise the noble fersonalities who tore been imfortant factors in develof: . my the civilization which me enjoy. Mr realize four defendant me are ufor all the fast, and me als well to gread care fully there sacred things that have been transmitted from generations to generation until me hold them in trust. But even in This toner, even in this reverance for the fast me are afen to grave charger of insincerity and untruthfullies, live box only

To Thick of the manner in which me treat the great men of a recent generation, yes, even of our own day to realize this truth. Mulie mithin a very per year on great fature workington for been av enclosed, with legend and fiction, that me meel nigh lost the real men, WE way It charged with insurcerity and distrety when me allow our conceptions of our volle a man to become avalistated and fernented that a miter sees fort to fublish a book entitled the True George toshington" of dove any adequale idea of the real wohility of the win, Jam sure that he would rendere any hige of untruthfreener which might the in = vohed in our conceptions of him, of me are to fay a just hi but & to his wontood, and town livin sincerely me must chiconer the two wan, and

not construct a folse one, another neng S: offment illustration of this clanger wor seen in many of the addresses and lectres delinered recently on the life and work of Halfh Wolder Emerson. Many of the. lectudes, indeed, mere very fronts and ofen in fresenting to us the real Emerson, but one bor to achier that others were about disgusting in their attempts to ficture hum in Terms not altigether Truth for and tonest. If there word one thing of muchich Emerson in sisted, it was truth. If we would de him fufer respect, we must toner the real Emerson. There two illustrations woke clear I tope what I want to say. We do wot deal bonertly with the great mon of the fast. We sloth them with an authority which they never bod, and do vot greating the the truthfollow of their utterances. It is This kind of insincenty and untruthfollows

which is keeping religion enveloped in its cloud of mysting and un wateralvers. It is this also Rive of insincerity and un : hutfollows that is keeping religion afant from daily life, and forcing men of deep religions natures to declare againstraligion. of I righty estimate the spirit of there men they would say to us, We tooz hen truthseekers, and if me tore found a buth me are thankful, and are gratefield in the town you for us. you are truth seehers. If you find truth in our lines, take it, but if you find error there, in the name of the common humanity for which me bur worked, in the vowe of God when me love cost it aride. hadeed this some in sincerity is with us in dealing with wistertown which are a fast of our heritoge of the fost. In spite of the fort that we boast of our preadom

from trach him, and assort that me box fort aside are the needlare ontravel forms That in their day served to expers religions iden, it still remains True that in the eyes of wort feight the religions life is looked upon as sugateriors and unvolved. WE bor not been entirely borrest in cast= ing aside the old shell that once contained a truth. We findly assert that we longer do me regard the church as a necessary free of mechonism, though more impoten= ier me way become one of Jack Elect, we claim to born coat aside that dogue, and yet wony of our churches require a state: ment of helief of such poputions, that was a feur dufly religions such would be excluded. We still say along with us a fast of the real sheel which me say for been discarded. The result is me tore a clunch, vot of gols elect, but of woris elect.

The ideo of the church as a flace of roughing is a surrival of the old mythical conception that the goals like men boal farticular duelling flores. We say that we for cost aside that idea, his coustintly office that we worship god wat in a flace, but in our lines. Shit god is even fresent, and by wolle thought, and make deed is god worshifted. Every flore is therefore a place of worky. But as a matter of fort, while me my be wort worshiffvel in our churches, The woment was get outside of them, me we longer for the some spirit. We desecrate the work that we do, by doing it foorly, me desecute on flace of busiven by being dir bonant, me desenst our fellow were, the two temples of god. by on relations with them. If me really believe that god is in energthing, and that me are in touch with him every

woment of one lines, why are me not live accorchingly, We are bold enough to any that the Church is an association of men trying to helf each other to lead a good forme life. but you know and I know that three who for sumed, and sumed deeply get acold stoulder in wort of our churches, be me still the saved elact. I am not saying there Things to be critical and ferrimitie, but singly to show that we are not so survere and Sovert in dealing with our heritage as me sometimes imagine me are. d'am certain that there wer bore been ingenter in fluences in developing they institutions worked unge un to be work frunk and worre sincere, they would use us to accept only what is of volve to om higher life, and die card all ehe, Litur for due respect for their use feelburs

in giving expension to an iden of an earthing age, But lit us the the idea and shith it to suit our own neech and anditions, I tope that above worde myself clean in what I mean when day that the strange inconsistoricy between what in our best woments me unclusteral religion to VE, and what is on achoul life we show it to be, is che to a fearing that insincerity and un truth freehrers. It is this insincerity the terrelofes religion in mystery:

But to go bock fun whence me started in sfitz of affearances to the contrary. I still believe that deefest conception of religion is fully expressed by micoh. what doth Jebouch require of thee but to de justly, and to love kinches, and to woch hundey with thy god." Shot is un ideorf a simple vergins life, and to

free ouselves as much as formible from externel forms, and to interpret that simple Truth in terms of one clarly life is one final interest to night. In the language of today I fancy that working in its bood serve world cover the mean my of doing justly. For do justly would be to lead a lofe in accordince of with mell established Ethicol frincifles. Une would for a clear concionsnue between right and mong, and would live the right, He would revyinge the right of other, and art accorchingly. For line what me call a straightformad maney eige, faithfre in the ferformance of duties, trane in time of clanger, sincere and frank in our relations with each other. That I francy, is what you and I mean by doing justly. Shot is the kind of life me are trying to beach line, or at least it is the kind of left that moved like to live, and that we exfect alhers to live. It is the stored of on strive, connercive and frinate life, Mr at unt realize it, but it is the standard of measure. out daily living

Sich wit much wear eventually the some 15. thing, I'v do justly is to measure the douly would like by the standard of our word ideal. It is single, nature, No one con clusterts from that g Emergone worked wish to be religions and woved town The weigins life on for as during jointly is concerned. Every me petrevas it Life would be well and mechanical of it consisted only in closing justly. The warmith and color, and mariation and hearty of our life is in the foct that me do love kindness, Just as the sur coming up above the eastern brigm in the woning disfels the well and darkness, buiging out the beauty of the world, and shining up it affred nour day quickens all its life, and foring into the most is the evening leaves behind a wred of gloring and aflender, so this love of Kinches coming into our early childs bood disfels the darkness of duty, brings out into frominene the beauties of our charocter, enniches and enlinens om

voordog of bifr, and forsing on into the night of death leaves, one deeds habind multipled worked of glory and splender. It is this love of Kin down That lemfers the wed have realiter of life in Terms of als votlast ideals. a young boy finds that his fleas: me in life is very greatly in reased by dring some little thing to bring a smile of office ciation from his worther. That is sworld, but it is the rising of the sun of Kuichnes, and it wakes the have duties stind out is a new light. He de chees cheerfrely and millingly things That before would have been imformable. Just this simple beginning becomes the impeties to to an even midening kicke of feafle for when he liver to de a kinchen, wat for the some of the affreciation, but for the some of the ferrons. In only this it becomes the mling fassion, his former in dutier, inspiratur ne struggle, his ennege in denger, kanging him through bardship of both, and fieling his old age mich glory and spender. So love Runches is the single noticel

touch of the climic in each human soul. Some the's meanert of goel's chilchen show that to them about it is given to love Knichens, Somewhere somet the sore of the wort degrached exfincts at times into volicity incles the somewing top light of this climic heritogr. It is single and without on the shiring of the sun, he love kniches is enclowed of all. There is no unplay sbort it.

Finally, the old furthet extended us to work hundrey with one god, this is the truth that suffle = nents sel, that reaches shown sharp into our sover and lifter us and transfugines us in glory. The sur: fice of our lies way be filed with doubt and ferfexity, handship and fair, me my hore finish when it seems as if we absolutely equor the existance of god, but down pleif in the steachy under current of our life there is the day connetion that in and though all there is the guiding bouch of an intelligent loving god. Just as in our own life, defeats und its withies

its joys and its fains, with its enicluses of measures and strength, me are enserious that there is a cleep undercurrent which recht its realization in a higher and better life, so in the world with all it's running and suffering, with all the flearnes and stroffines, with it's ferioels of affarent decoy, and inactivity, me are ener centain that these is a cleep for seeing former quicking it towards a better and waklen lite for man. Homena Jen me mog go astray in our cloubts, we come bock in the end to the simple conniction that in and though all all the mannels and wonder of votine, in and though all the intriever workings of the human some there is ever fresent the first of the all formerful god. Deaf beneath all the tur wil of life is the guiding hand of a love of other.

Hot is the stewer truth that is common to in all, and the truth that was fromlechoren hips into single a life of single devont worship in all on thoughts and in all on deeds.

For Ro gently, to love kunchens, and to wolk humbly with on god is the single religion that transforms the sciences of living into the art of life, that wills all the soves of men into one common felowship with each other and will get. and bulks one lines to god's & territy. Sholl me not line the single religions life Hiskerely and bonenily?

It at in the stand hunt that is porcure to E.C. Succes i suit the second the second I monalize it is as a strage 5. and in all Hom 2. beek no For mor guntly, to lave nucloses, and to work hundry with our god is the suifer religion that transforms the person of. living with the art of Ege, that under all the reads of serve into an promore freeworking wint soil other and will ged. and will rear lines to good a larsing. angeler alfine ilt sind tim en iltoff high Thereast and mainthe ?

Simple Religion Earl Clement Davis No Date¹

Text: Micah 6:8, "... and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

In our best moments, when we see most clearly into the inner workings of our life, I fancy that we all feel certain that to us at least the religious life is a simple natural life, and I imagine that we all try to formulate into a concise pithy expression our idea of the simplicity and naturalness of the religious life. The President of our own University in one of his characteristic expressions has clothed the idea very simply in saying that "the religious life is an ethical life vitalized by love.²" One cannot help feeling that the idea back of those words is the same idea that you and I see clearly enough at times, and the same idea that the prophet Micah is expressing in these words, "and what doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God." These two simple statements give expression to essentially the same idea. The one statement was made 700 years before the birth of Christianity; the other was made within a year. Each finds a response chord in our heart, and is but an echo of the voice of the ages in moments of clearness. Generation after generation, age after age the human soul has been trying to express adequately in outward form this simple idea that the religious life is a simple life.

¹ While this manuscript has no date, it is clear from the reference in the first paragraph to "the President of our University" that this sermon dates from Earl Davis' time as a student at Harvard Divinity School. In addition, there is the notation, "(9) Sermons I" at the top, which suggests that this may have been written for a class.

² Charles William Eliot (1834-1926) was President of Harvard when Earl Davis was a student there, indeed he had a very lengthy and consequential presidency from 1869 until 1909. I cannot find the source of this quotation.

But there is a strange inconsistency about it all. Each statement says that the religious life is simple, but each implies that in the actual world of activity, our simple conception of religious life is buried deep beneath a mass of mystery and unnaturalness. We have to confess that this implied condition is a fact, not only of the earlier days but of our own generation. In the minds of by far the greater fraction of our people, religion is a mysterious, unnatural factor of one's life, about which people may talk, but about which they actually know nothing. There is a strange inconsistency here. We are permitted to see the truth of such a simple statement, but we allow ourselves to go and do otherwise. It seems almost as if we were made to do the things that we would not, and prevented from doing the things that we would. Twenty-seven hundred years ago the prophet Micah said, "What doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God." Could any one state more clearly, more beautifully, more forcefully the simple idea that we like to think is the essence of the religious life?

And yet we have done strange things in the meantime, and we are still doing strange things, whose only result can be to alienate our conceptions of religion from our daily life, and force them apart as things to be attended to at particular times and in particular places. The growth of creeds the accumulation of tradition about the personality of Jesus, the development of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church the worship of a book by the Protestants, the speculative dogmas of theologians; how crude! How foreign! How inconsistent all these things seem in the light of the simple words of the old Hebrew prophet! How unnatural they seem to us in the face of that cherished idea of religious simplicity. But they are facts, nevertheless. So far astray from that simple truth have we wondered that today, in spite of our boastings to the contrary, it still remains true that religion is regarded as mysterious, and unnatural, and the religious institutions which ought to command the highest respect are looked upon with contempt by many noble people, and the problem of the Church is becoming so threatening, that many lose heart, and are willing to give up the fight.

What is the cause of this inconsistency? Why do we see the simple truth and yet ignore it? There can be but one cause in any inconsistency. We are inconsistent because we are insincere, because we are not truthful, because we are not frank.

Let me try to make clear what I mean. We cherish and revere our great heritage of knowledge and institutions; we honor and praise the noble personalities who have been important factors in developing the civilization which we enjoy. We realize how dependent we are upon all the past, and we do well to guard carefully these sacred things that have been transmitted from generation to generation until we hold them in trust.

But even in this honor, even in this reverence for the past we are open to grave charges of insincerity and untruthfulness. One has only to think of the manner in which we treat the great men of a recent generation, yes, even of our own day, to realize this truth. Until within a very few years our great patriot Washington has been so enveloped with legend and fiction, that we will nigh lost the real man. WE may be charged with insincerity and dishonesty when we allow our conceptions of so noble a man to become so distorted and perverted that a writer sees fit to publish a book entitled "The True George Washington.3" If I have any adequate idea of the real nobility of the man, I am sure that he would condemn any tinge of untruthfulness which might be involved in our conceptions of him. If we are to pay a just tribute to his manhood, and honor him sincerely we must discover the true man, and not construct a false one. Another very apparent illustration of this danger was seen in many of the addresses and lectures delivered recently on the life and work of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Many of the lectures, indeed, were very frank and open in presenting to us the real Emerson, but one has to admit that others were about [as] disgusting in their attempts to picture him in terms not altogether truthful and honest. If there was one thing upon which Emerson

 $^{^3}$ Undoubtedly the book Earl Davis refers to is *The True George Washington* by Paul Leicester Ford (1865-1902) first published in 1896, and remarkably still available in a $10^{\rm th}$ edition published by Good Press in 2019.

insisted it was truth. If we would do him proper respect, we must honor the real Emerson.

These two illustrations make clear I hope what I want to say. We do not deal honestly with the great men of the past. We cloth them with an authority which they never had, and do not question the truthfulness of their utterances. It is this kind of insincerity and untruthfulness which is keeping religion enveloped in its cloud of mystery and unnaturalness. If I rightly estimate the spirit of these men, they would say to us, "We have been truth seekers, and if we have found a truth we are thankful, and are gratified in the honor you pay us. You are truth seekers. If you find truth in our lives, take it, but if you find error there, in the name of the common humanity for which we have worked, in the name of God whom we love, cast it aside." It is this kind of insincerity and untruthfulness that is keeping religion apart from daily life, and forcing men of deep religious natures to declare against religion.

Indeed this same insincerity is with us in dealing with institutions which are a part of our heritage of the past. In spite of the fact that we boast of our freedom from tradition, and assert that we have cast aside all the needless outward forms that in their day seemed to express religious ideas, it still remains true that in the eyes of most people the religious life is looked upon as mysterious and unnatural.

We have not been entirely honest in casting aside the old shell that once contained a truth. We proudly assert that no longer do we regard the church as a necessary piece of mechanism, through whose mysteries we may become one of God's elect. We claim to have cast aside that dogma, and yet many of our churches require a statement of belief of such proportions, that not a few deeply religious souls would be excluded. We still carry along with us a part of the old shell which we say has been discarded. The result is we have a church not of God's elect, but of man's elect. The idea of the church as a place of worship is a survival of the old mythical conceptions that the gods like men had particular dwelling places. We say that we have cast aside that idea. We constantly affirm that we worship God not in a place, but in our lives. That God is ever present, and by noble thought, and noble deed is God worshipped. Everyplace is therefore a place of worship. But as a matter of fact, while we may be most worshipful in our churches, the moment we get outside of them, we no longer have the same spirit. We desecrate the work that we do, by doing it poorly, we desecrate our place of business by being dishonest, we desecrate our fellow men, the true temples of God, by our relations with them. If we really believe that God is in everything, and that we are in touch with him every moment of our lives, why can we not live accordingly?

We are bold enough to say that the church is an association of men trying to help each other to lead a good pure life, but you know and I know that those who have sinned, and sinned deeply get a cold shoulder in most of our churches. We are still the saved elect.

I am not saying these things to be critical and pessimistic, but simply to show that we are not so sincere and honest in dealing with our heritage as we sometimes imagine we are. I am certain that those who have been important influences in developing these institutions would urge us to be more frank and more sincere. They would urge us to accept only what is of value to our higher life, and discard all else. Let us pay due respect to these institutions for their usefulness in giving expression to our idea in an earlier age. But let us take the idea and cloth it to suit our own needs and conditions. I hope that I have made myself clear in what I mean when I say that the strange inconsistency between what in our best moments we understand religion to be, and what in our actual life we show it to be is due to a persistent insincerity and untruthfulness. It is this insincerity that envelopes religion in mystery.

But to go back from whence we started in spite of appearances to the contrary, I still believe that our deepest conception of religion is fully expressed by Micah, "What doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God." That is our idea of a simple religious life, and to free ourselves as much as possible from external forms, and to interpret that simple truth in terms of our daily life, is our final interest tonight.

In the language of today I fancy that morality in its broad sense would cover the meaning of doing justly. To do justly would be to lead a life in accordance with wellestablished ethical principles. One would have a clear consciousness between right and wrong, and would live the right. He would recognize the rights of others, and act accordingly. To live what we call a straightforward manly life, faithful in the performance of duties, brave in time of danger, sincere and frank in our relations with each other, that, I fancy, is what you and I mean by doing justly. That is the kind of life we are trying to live, or at least it is the kind of life that [we] would like to live, and that we expect others to live. It is the standard of our social, commercial and private life. We may not realize it, but it is by the standard that we measure our daily living.

Did not Micah mean essentially the same thing? To do justly is to measure the daily moral life by the standard of our moral ideals. It is simple, natural, no one can dissent from that. Everyone believes it.

Life would be cold and mechanical if it consisted only in <u>doing</u> justly. The warmth and color, and variation and beauty of our life is in the fact that we do love kindness. Just as the sun coming up above the eastern horizon in the morning dispels the cold and darkness, bringing out the beauty of the world, and shinning upon it at full noon day quickens all its life, and passing into the west in the evening leaves behind a world of glory and splendor, so this love of kindness coming into our early childhood dispels the darkness of duty, brings out into prominence the beauties of our character, enriches and enlivens our noonday of life, and passing on into the night of death leaves the monuments our deeds behind enveloped in a world of glory and splendor.

It is this love of kindness that tempers the cold hard realities of life in terms of its noblest ideas. A young boy finds that his pleasure in life is very greatly increased by doing some little thing to bring a smile of appreciation from his mother. That is small, but it is the rising of the sun of kindness, and it makes the hard duties stand out in a new light. He does cheerfully and willingly things that before would have been impossible. Just this simple beginning becomes the impetus into an ever-widening circle of people for whom he loves to do a kindness, not for the sake of the appreciation, but for the sake of the persons. So it becomes the ruling passion, his power in duties, inspiration in struggle, his courage in danger, carrying him through hardships of life, and filling his old age with glory and splendor.

To love kindness is the simple natural touch of the divine in each human soul. Even the meanest of God's children show that to them also it is given to love kindness. Somewhere somehow the soul of the most degraded expands at times into nobility and beauty under the warming light of this divine heritage. It is as simple and natural as the shining of the sun, to love kindness is [an] endowment of all. There is no mystery about it.

Finally, the old prophet exhorted us to walk humbly with our God. This is the truth that supplements all, that reaches down deep into our souls and lifts us and transfigures us in glory. The surface of our lives may be filled with doubt and perplexity, hardship and pain, we may have periods when it seems as if we absolutely ignore the existence of God, but down deep in the steady undisturbed undercurrent of our life there is the deep conviction that in and through all there is the guiding hand of an intelligent loving God. Just as in our own life with its defeats and its victories its joys and its pains, with its evidences of weakness and strength, we are conscious that there is a deep undercurrent which seeks its realization in a higher and better life, so in the world with all its misery and suffering, with all its pleasures and happiness, with its periods of apparent decay, and inactivity, we are ever certain that there is a deep far-seeing power guiding it towards a better and nobler life for men. However few we may go astray in our doubts, we come back in the end to the simple conviction that in and through all, all the marvels and wonders of nature, in and through all the intricate workings of the human soul there is ever present the power of the all-powerful God. Deep beneath all the turmoil of life is the guiding hand of a loving other.

That is the eternal truth that is common to us all, and the truth that moulds our life into a life of simple devout worship in all our thoughts and in all our deeds.

To do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God is the simple religion that transforms the sciences of living into the art of life, that unites all the souls of men into one common fellowship with each other and with God, and with our lives to God's eternity. Shall we not live the simple religious life, sincerely and honestly?