

[R5384 : page 20]

PASTORAL ADVICE ON PRAYER AND TESTIMONY

THE New Creation needs a special meeting of a devotional kind once a week for prayer and testimony. We believe that the friends would find it very profitable to set aside at least one night in the quarter as a prayer meeting in a very general sense. Our suggestion has been that the middle Wednesday evening of the quarter be the one selected for this purpose. This meeting should be devoted to prayer rather than to testimony. It may be opened with a prayer by the leader, who could then call for two or three prayers. Afterward he might read the text for the week, and comment upon it for about three minutes; or if the Class were very small, comment about *five* minutes; if very large in numbers, about *two* minutes. The length of the comment would be according to the size of the Class.

Then the leader might say, This is the evening we have arranged to be especially for a prayer service. We have all found, no doubt, that it is a special privilege for the Christian to worship the Lord, to offer prayer, praise. With the heart, we *believe*; with the mouth, we confess. During this service we prefer not to call by name, but desire that all present participate. If you have only a few words, no matter. Indeed, we would rather encourage the thought that the prayer should not be too long. Now we will give opportunity for three to rise--two brothers and one sister; after that we will have a hymn; following the hymn we will have another opportunity for prayer--one brother and one sister (according to the general make-up of the class), and thus give an opportunity all around.

We find that a great blessing comes to the Lord's people from the exercise of the privilege of prayer. They need to be encouraged, for many of them have not had such encouragement in their earlier life experiences.

[R5384 : page 21]

We think that once a quarter for the special prayer service would serve the purpose better than once a month. More than once a quarter might prove tedious; and if such order has been followed in any Class, we recommend that it be changed.

A MODEL TESTIMONY MEETING

As a rule the mid-week meeting should be set aside for praise and testimony. As before stated, the Christian needs a special devotional meeting, with opportunities for relating his experiences. Up-to-date testimonies are very helpful. All the Lord's people have trials and difficulties, and by hearing of one another's experiences, we learn to sympathize with each other.

Such meetings should begin with a hymn or two, followed by one or more short prayers. The brother who is to open the meeting with prayer, should be instructed before the meeting what to do and what not to do. And the opening prayer should be merely a request for Divine blessing upon the hearts and the minds of those assembled, that they might be in the right condition to receive the Lord's blessing.

Suppose that the text for the evening read, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time." The leader would say something like this: Our text for the week reads thus (here read the text)...Apparently, in God's sight the quality of humility is one of the most important qualities for any one of His people to possess. The entire Scriptures seem to indicate that when we have humility we are pleasing in God's sight; and that unless we have this quality we could never be fit for the Kingdom. We can see the wisdom of this requirement, too; for if God should exalt to a high position those who are not humble, it might

lead to further difficulty in Heaven.

We can see that Satan was not properly submissive to God. After he had gotten into this proud condition he probably thought that he could do better than God; and in his endeavor to show what he could do, he brought his own downfall and brought the human family into sin and death. No wonder, then, that God required Jesus to show that He had submitted Himself to the Father's will. We see the course of Jesus in this matter, and how the Father afterwards exalted Him. It is for us to submit ourselves to everything which God's providence brings to us. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

Now, dear friends, perhaps you may have something to tell us of your experiences this week, along the line of humility, or its opposite--pride. This is not to be a dissertation on Scripture. We already know what the text means. We want you to tell us of your own personal experiences. What experiences have you had that have tended to impress this Scripture on your mind? Let us have some little page from your personal experience. We will begin with Brother A, and then have Sister B, and then will alternate between the two sides of the room, and thus progress. Will you give us your testimony, Brother?

HOW TO GET DOUBLE EFFECT

By following the method of calling upon one here, and one there, we get double effect. If the testimony begins at one end, some who are far away might think: Oh, it will not come my turn for a long time! But if the method is adopted of calling one here, and then one there, and there and here, it makes all more alert, and will keep them awake to the whole subject.

In leading a testimony meeting ourself, we keep the thought in mind that we want a good testimony to begin with and a good testimony to close with. So we start with some one who will give a good, wide-awake testimony, and thus give a good impetus at the beginning. When we are singing the opening hymn, we have in mind Brother So-and-so, or Sister So-and-so, to begin with or to end with. And thus we are sure of having a good beginning and a good ending.

If in the middle of the service there are some who seem to stumble a little, and do not seem to know how to proceed, we say, We understand, then, brother (or sister) that your experience has been thus and so. We would take what we surmise to be his real thought, and state it for him, if we think he is unable to complete it. We should be able to do this. Any leader ought to be able to do so, and thus kindly to encourage him.

We would be careful not to make it so rankly different from the thought that the brother or sister will feel like saying, Oh, *that* is not it *at all!* But we try to give his thought so that he could say, Brother Russell understands my thought! But if we should look sour and say nothing, the brother (or the *sister* more *especially*) might feel too much discouraged to try at all the next time, thinking that she might better keep quiet.

In a testimony meeting, where there are sixty to one hundred present in the Class, there is not the best opportunity for the most helpful meeting. The most profitable number would seem to be twelve to fifteen. Then there is sufficient variety, and none too much time to spare, yet enough time for all to testify.

If the first who testifies has a wrong thought or course of action, he may say: This week I had a conversation with a preacher who thinks that he knows a great deal about Scripture--I asked him several questions, which he could not answer; and all the people could see that he could not answer at all!

The leader might say to him, Brother, I have no doubt that you meant that well, but I am not so sure that you did it wisely. It might have been better if you had done it gently. We are not to be rude, but gentle, in meekness instructing those who oppose. You must remember that it would be a very difficult matter for a man

of years, of standing, of education and reputation to see these things. You should, therefore, be doubly on guard not to arouse antagonism. So I would advise that in a case like that, we would simply drop a little word, and this word would be more in harmony with the suggestions of gentleness, meekness. In speaking as you did, that minister might have thought that you were not humble enough.

There might be another one who would have the thought all twisted in another way. The art of testifying well is one that the leaders of testimony meetings should cultivate in the class. They should have right ideas about these matters, so that the Class would get proper thoughts as to how to deal with what comes up. In this way they have something fixed in their minds.

[R5385 : page 21]

TESTIMONY MEETING NOT FOR A DISCOURSE

If one attempts to give a sermon, the leader might say, Excuse me, Brother, but this is not a meeting for a discourse. This is a testimony meeting. Perhaps at some other time you can speak more at length.

It might be well for the leader to give in advance a definition of what a testimony is, something as follows: Presumably we all know what a testimony is. It is not a discourse or a dissertation on Scripture. This is a meeting especially for testimonies. I will give a dissertation myself on the text for the evening, now, at the beginning; but later we will wish to have the personal experiences of the friends.

We take it for granted that all the friends mean well; anything that is not just in order is not seen by them to **[R5385 : page 22]** be out of order. But by the leader's remarking that he would read the text and give a few words regarding its signification, and would then hear testimonies, they will see what is expected. By the leader's giving his own personal testimony at the close of the meeting, they will also get the proper thought.

Our thought is that it would not be best for the friends to depart for their homes with any unseemly haste, but to tarry for a word of greeting. That is our custom. We do not know any Scripture bearing directly upon this subject, and we would have no right to lay down a rule or law; we merely give the suggestion that nothing would be gained by entering into too much conversation at the close of the service. There is a danger of the after-meeting crowding out the benefits and blessings of the service. Of course, if they leave promptly the friends have not so much opportunity for fellowship, unless they come a little earlier--a little ahead of time--to the place of meeting. If some can do this it would not be amiss for them to have a little friendly interchange before the coming of the leader, and before the hour for meeting. This would seem to be a very profitable opportunity.

PROPER ATTITUDE IN PRAYER

Nothing in the Scriptures limits the Christian as to the attitude of his body when he goes to the Lord in prayer. Standing and kneeling are both mentioned. One would have to be guided by the spirit of a sound mind. If he were out on the street, it would surely be undesirable to kneel. If he were on a stone floor, it might also be undesirable to kneel. If he were in private, it would seem best to kneel in prayer. Some have told us, however, that when they get upon their knees they are likely to get very sleepy. We would wish to be in that attitude which would enable us best to think of what we are doing. If we found that on our knees we were apt to grow sleepy, we would assume some other attitude which would keep us awake and attentive to prayer.

As for congregational prayer, it is our thought that it can generally be best observed sitting, with the head bowed. Of course, the preference of attitude is largely a matter of education, of habit. It has been our thought to say to the friends everywhere, that in public service this attitude would best be observed during prayer. Where the gathering is small and there is a carpet on the floor, it might be as well to kneel.

As for testimony meetings, it is our opinion that unless the class be a large one, it is better that they sit when testifying; for by remaining seated the giving of a testimony is easier. A difficulty with some in giving a testimony is that they rise and, becoming embarrassed, forget what they are going to say. So it reduces the nervous excitement of some to remain sitting. In a large meeting, it would be better for the person to stand, so that the voice can reach all.

STANDING DURING CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

In the matter of singing, we believe that the custom of standing, which prevails in Great Britain, is a very good one. It would seem to be too much to stand during a praise service, where a number of songs follow each other. But standing in singing has its advantages generally. A person in standing is putting himself in a distinctive attitude; and he can sing better because of thus putting his vocal chords in better position. It is desirable, therefore, when a hymn is announced, that the friends stand.

The invitation to rise should always be given in an appropriate way and not in a peremptory manner. The leader should not say, The congregation will rise, but, Let us rise and sing. There might be some who are in such physical condition that they would better remain sitting; hence the invitation, Let us rise and sing, is particularly intended for those who wish to rise. We think it would be a great mistake to say, Let us rise and sing, and then add--as some do--Let us remain standing while Brother A offers prayer. This might in many cases be imposing a real hardship.

TOO MUCH SELF-CONCEIT

But in the closing hymn, if the audience rise, then instead of having them sit down for the closing prayer, it would be well to remain standing, and the prayer should be merely in the form of a benediction, which should not be distressing in length to anybody. If there had been one prayer before, there would not be further necessity for more than could be offered in a few words. Most prayers are too long.

One who is leading in prayer should not interfere with the liberties and rights of the entire congregation by the length of his petitions. We do not read that our Lord made very long prayers. It is true that He sometimes continued all night in prayer, alone; but He offered no lengthy prayers in public. The "Lord's Prayer" is quite brief and to the point. Those people who think they should tell the Lord all about how He should run the Universe, have too much self-concern, too much self-conceit. When we learn how poorly we are able to run ourselves, it should make us very slow to advise the Almighty as to how to manage His affairs.

FORMAL PRAYER OFTEN MOCKERY

A Boston newspaper, in referring to a prayer offered by a prominent minister, stated the next day that Rev. _____ delivered the most eloquent prayer ever offered to a Boston audience! The Editor evidently knew that the prayer was not addressed to the Lord! We need to have much of the spirit of a sound mind. We presume the Lord sees that all our intentions are good. But He has not told us that we are to pray to be heard of men. We are to pray to the Lord.

In private prayer we are told to "enter into thy closet," and we suppose that no one should pray in a tone that could be heard outside the door. Prayer, either in private or in public, is to be addressed to the Almighty, in reverent terms, and should express the desire of the heart appropriate to the occasion. We should know for what we are going to the Lord. It would be better that we should not go to the Throne of Grace unless we have something that we wish to say.

At the close of any meeting we think it would be very unwise for the speaker to pray for ten or fifteen minutes, or even *five* minutes. Two or three minutes would be an abundance, we think. The Lord knows about all our needs, and we should have consideration for the congregation.

It is something of a matter to sit for an hour, and then to prolong the service by a lengthy prayer is unwise. Lengthy prayers should be offered in private. Some Christians, however, need to be encouraged along the line of prayer--some are not disposed to pray as much as they should. Prayer is a most wonderful privilege, but one that should not be abused by endless repetition of the same thoughts.

"We will watch while we pray,
With our lamps trimmed and burning;
We will work while we wait,
Till the Master's returning;
We will sing and rejoice,
While each omen discerning."