

hood, do we not learn that by far the largest part of mankind are still strangers to the knowledge of the Gospel; that heathenism and superstition hold them in chains; that it is too true that the whole world yet lieth in wickedness—in the grasp of the Wicked One? Surely, then, there is much occasion for us, and all who are in Christ to pray fervently, “God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us, that we may be saved, that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.”

Such social devotional meetings as are now recommended, may be enforced by a number of arguments. It is obviously proper and right that they who have assumed a profession of godliness, and are consociated in that profession, should exhibit some peculiar marks to distinguish them from those who are without God in the world. But a mere attendance upon Christian ordinances on Sabbath will not constitute the requisite distinction; for many even of those whose transgressions say that they have not the fear of God before them, are in the habit, from custom, for the sake of appearances, &c., of going to church more or less regularly; and they come unto God as his people come, and they sit before him as his people sit; and they hear his words, but will not do them. Some additional evidence, then, is necessary, in order to free his people from the charge, “What do ye more than others?” And what more fit for this than their meeting together as often as possible, for religious exercises, to strengthen each other’s hands, and encourage each other’s hearts? It was thus that the primitive Christians showed both their brotherhood and piety; and we should be followers of them.

Further, the meetings now advocated have the express sanction of God in the Scriptures. Thus, it is said (Mal. iii. 16) “then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.” The prophet is describing the conduct of those who remained faithful to God, at a time when religion had woefully declined, and the majority of the Jews said, “it is vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?” In those days of backsliding and spiritual declension, the remnant that existed had frequent meetings, to converse upon the low state of piety, and to pray for each other’s stedfastness, and for a revival of the work of the Lord in the midst of the years. And is not this an example to saints at all times, and especially when, because of iniquity, the love of many waxeth cold? The prophet adds an ample encouragement to those who exercise themselves in the manner of which he is speaking: “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I made up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his son that serveth him.” Such is the honorable mention made of those who unite for social religion; and such the high felicity to which true and humble worshippers among them shall be raised. The Apostle Paul also says (Heb. iii. 13): “Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Now, surely this implies that they should take specific measures for giving mutual exhortation and counsel. And what better measures can they take than expressly to come together, in order to pray for one another, and to endeavour to speak to each other words in season?

But still more, we have our Lord’s own sanction of the meetings we are considering, in Matt. xviii. 19, 20: “Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Thus we have the blessed Redeemer’s own words as a most explicit warrant for our social prayer meetings; and as an assurance that, if properly held, they shall be productive