

WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE PRAYER-MEETING !

The prayer-meeting ought to be one of the best, most interesting and most helpful of all church meetings. It ought to be attractive. It ought to be a meeting which all will love to attend who have burdens on their hearts, who are in any perplexity, who are passing through conflicts or struggles of any kind. Those who are faint because of the toilsome way along which their feet have come ought to know that in the prayer-meeting, as they wait upon God, they will renew their life, and strengthened by what they get there will mount up with wings as angels. Those who have been yorsted in the battles of the week should be sure that in the prayer-meeting they will be gently lifted up again and new hope put into their heart.

In short, the prayer-meeting should be an oasis in the hot desert, a friendly hospice on the cold mountain, a place for restoring souls and feeding the hungry, and comforting the sorrowing, and lighting again lamps that are going out, and kindling again the altar-fires that are smouldering, and truly renewing all Christian hearts.

But is it such a service in most of our churches? Is it considered by many people the best and most interesting meeting of the week? Now what is the matter with the prayer-meeting? Let us look at the matter very frankly.

For one thing, many prayers are too long. There can be no objection to long prayers in the closet; we may wrestle all night with God alone. But in a social meeting our prayers should be short. They should never exceed two or three minutes. Yet the other night in one meeting the pastor prayed thirteen minutes and one of the brethren prayed seven minutes. No wonder people do not throng to that meeting.

For another thing many pastors talk too much in the prayer-meeting. The truth is, most of us do not go to prayer-meeting to be talked to; it is not instruction, but devotion and help that we seek there. There should be a subject announced and a few words should be spoken by the leader in opening it; but a twenty or thirty minute talk or lecture kills the meeting as a prayer-meeting, whatever it may be as a preaching service. It is far better to have four or five or ten persons rise and speak,

each of them four or five minutes, than for any one person to speak twenty or thirty minutes.

But it is not long talks and long prayers alone that makes the meetings dull. Many of them lack warmth and tenderness. They are conducted in a stately, formal manner. They are made grave and solemn. In a word, they lack heart. A recent writer says on this subject:—"Never so broken an exhortation, tenderly uttered, is worth more in a prayer-meeting than the most polished speech coming from the intellect alone. A merely intellectual prayer-meeting is a spiritual farce." We have only to make a meeting fitted to help people and people will come to it.

This suggests a thought about the best preparation for the prayer-meeting. The topic having been selected, one fitted to give spiritual help to the people, the pastor, should get one or two thoughts to give in opening. The subject should be known to the people in advance if they are expected to take part. Sometimes a meeting may be all prayer, Scripture and song, with no speaking whatever. A promise meeting now and then—every one bringing a promise—is profitable.—*Phil. Pres.*

A quaker was once advising a drunkard to leave off his habit of drinking, intoxicating liquors. "Can you tell me how to do it?" said the slave of the appetite. "Yes," answered the quaker; "it is just as easy as to open thy hand, friend." "Convince me of that, and I will promise upon my honor to do as you tell me," replied the drunkard. "Well, my friend, when thou findest any vessel of intoxicating liquor in thy hand, open the hand that contains it before it reaches thy mouth, and thou wilt never be drunk again." The toper was so well pleased with the plain advice that he followed it.

A course begun with God is sure, in the long run, to prove a triumphant one. There may be failure, difficulty, temptation, sorrow, clouds, and darkness; yet in the end it will be made manifest that he who begins it in the sanctuary will end it in glory. "They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God."

If we would bring holy life to Christ, we must mind our fireside duties as well as the duties of the sanctuary.—*Spurgeon.*