

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

OFFICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PUBLIC SERVICES OF THE CHURCH.

BRING THE SUBSTANCE OF AN ADDRESS BY REV. H. M. PARSONS, OF KNOX CHURCH, TORONTO, BEFORE THE PRESBYTERY OF TORONTO.

This theme is of such vast and present importance to the advancement of the kingdom of God, that it is worthy of the utmost attention from all who are interested in the mission of the Christian Church. The preceding speaker (Rev. Mr. McIntosh) has well and ably set forth the office of the Holy Spirit on and through the minister as leader and instructor of the people. The gifts thus promised are : (1) wisdom, knowledge, and direction in discerning the mind of the Spirit—both in the Word and in providence ; (2) skill in selecting, preparing, and rightly dividing the Word as presented to the people ; and (3) the gift of utterance when before the people.

These channels of thought may include all the operations of the Paraclete on the preacher and minister of the Church.

The part of the subject to which, perhaps, there is more need of directing our minds for immediate results in the sanctuary services, is the office of the Holy Spirit in and through the *members of Christ* who are present in the congregation. We must not omit to emphasize their appointed relation to all results accomplished by the preaching of the Word. Believers are called, "the light of the world," "the salt of the earth," "the witnesses for Christ." This undoubtedly distinguishes the individual standing and obligation of every Christian. But in a collective capacity the Apostle Peter declares (1 Peter ii. 9) that Christians are a "chosen generation," a "royal priesthood," a "peculiar people." I select but one of these offices for special consideration.

Christians are a "royal priesthood." This includes, by the statement, power and intercession. A king has authority in some sense ; a priest has intercession and prevailing power in some sense ; and that this is the purpose of Christ now is plain from the response of the Church to the salutation given in the opening of the apocalypse, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and His Father." Here we have the office of the Church. It may be well to trace this to its covenant source, so as to impress more clearly the definite business God has laid upon the Church in this age.

In Exodus xix. 5, 6, we have this covenant promise to the Jews : "Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people ; for all the earth is Mine, and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Often after this God threatened to destroy Israel for their disobedience. By their rebellion and idolatry they had forfeited many a time the great promise of this covenant. But the long-suffering of God continued in abundance until they rejected His Son, their promised King, and Head over all the nations of the earth. Then Jesus said unto them (Matt. xxi. 43), referring to the above quoted promise, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given unto a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

The Lord Jesus soon after this retired to His Father's throne in heaven, and sent down the Holy Spirit to gather out this nation, this "kingdom of priests," and this is the sole business of the Holy Spirit working in and through the Church in this age. For this we are commanded to preach the Gospel to every creature. For this the Spirit strives with every sinner. For this He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. I have drawn these statements from the Scriptures to shew that God has laid upon His Church, and necessarily upon every member of His Church, a *responsible official work*. We consider this now in the single relation of the public services of the sanctuary.

What gifts does the Spirit confer on the members of Christ for this service ?

1. *There is preparation for this official work needed in private.* No one can come into the sanctuary prepared to fill his personal responsible office in the economy of the Spirit without a previous interview and acceptance with God. While this is confessed by all who believe, there is much reason to fear it is neglected by most. In this act of previous consecration and

prayer for the Spirit to fulfil His office of intercession within the believer, there must be prevailing petitions for the minister, and the members, and adherents that may be present, in the expectation of accomplished results for the glory of God, when the congregation is assembled. Thus the mind is led by the Spirit into the appropriate channel for receiving the blessing.

2. *There is need of a fresh and definite search of God's Word for promises* appropriate to the persons who are to be recipients of blessing that day. God acts by system and by law. The soul of a believer must have as definite and clear conceptions of God's way of converting and sanctifying sinners, as of the methods essential to successfully accomplish any earthly work. To this end the believer must feed on the Word of God for sustenance, and for knowledge in regard to reaching and saving others. Neglect here often produces spiritual palsy in God's children.

3. When thus prepared in word and spirit, there is work for every believer in the house of God, while the service of the sanctuary goes on. This is found in a spirit of prayer and personal intercession for others. All parts of the service need this appointed and suggested help for actual results. Thus in praise there is an individual offering which God regards. The true out-going of the heart, must recognize divine gifts and dealings, so as to present personal and real thanksgivings in the offering. In the prayers which are offered audibly by one, each member has a definite part. This is not in merely listening and assenting or approving mentally. Each member can pray mentally the distinct petition of desire to the Lord to hear and answer, or apply to the heart of another. This ejaculatory prayer keeps the soul engaged with Christ, while holding the thought of the leader in prayer. But much more is the official relation of the believer essential to the effects of truth on the heart of others who listen.

This is an office and exercise of personal faith which are so greatly ignored or omitted, as to account in great degree for the very meagre returns of spiritual services on the Lord's day. We should expect, if we read the New Testament aright, that when the truth is preached *in faith*, and the members of Christ present are praying *in faith* and in the Holy Spirit, that many in the congregation who are unsaved would receive the truth in Jesus and avow their faith in Him. But what is the fact ? Many faithful ministers, every Lord's day, preach His truth in the earnest desire to see sinners convicted and converted—saints edified and sanctified by the truth. They have sought the Holy Spirit for this, they have prepared truth in prayer for this, they have yielded themselves to the Spirit's sway with fullest acquiescence ere venturing into the desk.

But they are greatly disheartened at seeing no adequate return. To be told that the *sermon* is "excellent," "able," "spiritual," "refreshing," "delightful," "powerful," is not enough. They want to hear the cry of returning sinners. They desire to see the saints growing in life, and all the fruits of holy living. What is the trouble ? What hinders promised results ? Not the hardened sinners ; not apostates nor hypocrites ; not Satan himself. All these are nothing in the way of the wonder-working Spirit of God. But the same thing hinders now as when Jesus walked among men. "He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." The unbelief of the members of Christ, in the pews, is one cause why sinners are not converted, and believers not sanctified, every Lord's day in the sanctuary. And this, doubtless, is the result more of ignorance and thoughtlessness than of wilfulness. But when we are under obligation to *know* and to *think*—not to *know* and not to *think*, are sins. When Aaron and Hur upheld the hands of Moses, the battle favoured Israel ; when they slackened, it was adverse. Many a congregation want to change their pastor because in their esteem he is not eloquent or interesting or intellectual—or even because they think he does not preach the truth they think he ought to preach. But change will not remedy their failure. Let all who pray in any congregation, the next Sabbath, come from the closet to the sanctuary, ready as soon as the pastor announces the text to ask God mentally for instant blessing and power ; ready to lift up the heart, as some truth is spoken, for its immediate application by the Spirit to some person whom they name to God in their petition ; ready to invoke divine help for the preacher if he wanders, or misses his aim ; ready to intercede for some one who is rapt

in attention. That service will not end without some result for the glory of God in those—which shall indicate inquiry, conviction, and conversion. When God is willing and present, when the truth is prepared and presented, when dead sinners are under its utterance, when believers—kings and priests of God—are fulfilling their office, then the fire burns, sinners are converted, and Satan routed.

4. Connected with the office of kings and priests in intercession, is the after work of observing those impressed, and rendering help. It was the practice in Shephard Church, in Cambridge, New England, more than a century since, for the members to be on the outlook, as they were praying for their pastor, Thomas Shephard, while preaching, for those who appeared to be affected and impressed under the truth. As soon as the congregation were dismissed they instantly sought in a friendly way those whom they had observed, and endeavoured, often with immediate success, to point them to Christ. This state of constant watchfulness was attended by constant conversion to God every Lord's day. The spiritual state of the members was also so quickened that they were ready to every good work.

Not only are the gifts of the Spirit held in abundance for believers to appropriate and exercise in this way ; but they may come also on the *unsaved* to reach and bless them. When we who preach are stirred and filled with the Spirit of God in preparation, then the promise of God is seen fulfilled in the *impression of the thoughtless and unconcerned*. In the church referred to above the pastor, who was an excellent preacher, took great pains in his *preparation* for the pulpit. One of his sayings reported is, "God will curse that man's labour who goes idly up and down all the week, and then goes into his study on a Saturday afternoon. God knows that we have not too much time to pray in, and weep in, and get our hearts into a fit frame for the duties of the Sabbath."

With all preparation of heart and head and body God says to us, "according to your faith be it unto you," and sinners will be impressed. And when the members of Christ accept their high privilege as mediators, for those who are listless and careless and far from God, then to them He says, "according to your faith be it unto you," and sinners will be immediately convicted to the glory of God. And when thus the Spirit of God has the free heart of God's people, in the power of the Holy One, sinners turn from their evil ways and are converted to God.

Thus upon the unsaved the gifts of the Spirit may come in the sanctuary every Lord's day through the faith of the preacher to *impress* ; through the faith of members to *convict* ; through the *faith* of their own hearts on Christ to convert and lead them in the way of holiness and peace.

PHILALETES AND TRUTH.

MR. EDITOR,—I do not suppose it is of the slightest use to remind "Philaletes" that the expression "however widely he may diverge from her standards," was *never used*, either by myself or by Principal Grant, though he pertinaciously insists on attributing it to both. He knows perfectly well that he deliberately misquotes me, and the omission of the inverted commas this time does not save his honesty. Nor is it of any use to remind him that Principal Grant said nothing whatever to imply in the faintest degree that a divergent from the standards should "not be disciplined by the Church," but quite the contrary ; as "Philaletes" can easily find out by applying to the proper source. Though, if he was himself present at the Council, he ought to have known this as well as I.

But "Philaletes" need not remain in his present painful suspense a moment longer than he wishes. The authorized report of the proceedings of the Council is now to be had by him, or any one else interested in the matter, for the sum of *one dollar*, including of course, a full report of the discussion in question in which Principal Grant says so explicitly just what he means, that it would be difficult even for "Philaletes" to profess any further doubt on the subject. If he will not take this very obvious and common-sense way of finding out what he is so anxious to know, he need not attempt to sign himself "Philaletes" again. It was hardly worth while for the Council to issue a carefully corrected verbatim report of the whole proceedings and discussions if individual speakers are still to be called upon by anonymous writers