

FIRST WORDS
TO
YOUNG CHRISTIANS

by

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CHAPTER FOUR -
DUTIES IN THE CHURCH

DEAR READER, I take it for granted that you are now a member of CHRIST's church, and that it has been your happy privilege to sit down at the table of the Lord.

His first communion season is a time never to be forgotten by the Christian. Not that he is to attach any saving efficacy or superstitious importance to that ordinance above others, but because from its very nature, it brings his blessed SAVIOUR directly before him, saying: "**Do this in remembrance of Me.**" It was instituted by the Lord's direct command, and for the express purpose of commemorating His dying love, and to be promptly and faithfully observed till He comes in His glory.

It is sometimes the case that Christians stay away from the Lord's Table because their feelings are not as lively as they could wish, or because there is some darkness upon their minds.

I hope you will never be guilty of this great sin; for such it undoubtedly is.

It is making our own feelings the rule of duty, instead of the positive command of CHRIST. It is setting our own notions up as the standard of what we should do, and what we should not do, instead of the positive and express will of the great Head of the church. The same rule, carried out, would lead us to neglect prayer, the reading of the Bible, attendance upon the means of grace, and, in short, everything that we did not feel happy in doing at the time.

Why should Christians stay away from the very means which CHRIST has instituted for their spiritual profit, because they can discover many imperfections about themselves? It is as absurd as staying away from the fire because you are cold, or from the table because you are hungry, or refusing to take medicine because you are sick.

In the keeping of GOD's commands there is great reward, and in waiting upon GOD, in the means of His appointment, the obedient soul renews its strength.

There are others who stay away from the Lord's Supper, because they are offended with some of

their brethren, or see in them some wrong.

When you turn your back upon the Lord's Supper, and refuse to commemorate what your SAVIOUR did for you on Calvary, you should remember that one of these days He is going to

ASK YOU REASONS

for so doing. And He will not be satisfied with excuses, but must have reasons.

Will it be a reason to say that you did wrong because some one else did wrong; that you deliberately concluded that you would neglect one plain duty because some one else neglected another duty? If that brother has done some great evil in the sight of GOD, will it mend the matter for you to do another wrong by despising CHRIST's ordinances?

You say that a certain brother has offended you, and that you will not come to the communion while he is there. Has CHRIST offended you also? If not, why do you seek to revenge the wrong upon your Lord and His ordinance? He bids you come to His table in remembrance of Him, and you reply:

"Lord, I will not remember Thee because this brother has done wrong."

Such conduct is sinful and unreasonable.

It is sometimes the result of ignorance, but for the most part it is

THE INDULGENCE OF BAD TEMPER,

under the plea of conscientious motives. It is like Jonah, who professed to be angry on principle, and had the assurance to tell GOD to His face: **"I do well to be angry."**

In vindication of such conduct the passage is often quoted:

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

This has no special reference to the Lord's Supper, and if it had, it would be no excuse for the conduct we are condemning. It says: **"If thou... rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee"**; but such persons act as if it read: "If thou rememberest that thou hast aught against thy brother." The passage means that it is so essential that brethren should dwell together in unity that even if at the place of worship you remember that you have given your brother some cause of offence, you are immediately to go and remove it by confession, and until this is done GOD will not accept your worship. But in this case it would be a brother having something against you, and not your having something against a brother, that would be a cause of staying

away until reconciliation had taken place.

My dear reader, when CHRIST spreads His table, it is your duty to be there - whoever is there. Of course you are to use your influence for the purity of the church, and the Master has laid down the proper way in which this is to be done; but forsaking the communion is not that way.

And now that you are a member of the church, let me earnestly exhort you to be

PUNCTUAL IN YOUR ATTENDANCE;

on all her appointments.

There are some who make a small thing an excuse for absenting themselves from the house of GOD upon the Lord's Day. Out about their business on Saturday and on Monday, whatever may be the weather, they will stay at home on Sunday, and urge excuses that they ought to be ashamed to present to their fellow-men, and that they will be ashamed to present to the great JUDGE.

If a man has an important note to meet at a bank, he will not neglect it because the weather is a little too cold or too hot, or because the clouds threaten rain. No, he will go forth with energy and attend to his business. And yet the same man will make these things an excuse for not going to the house of GOD, and paying his vows to the Most High.

I have known a lady to excuse herself from going out more than once on Sunday, on the plea that she could not go out evenings, and yet be out to parties, or concerts, or lectures, two or three evenings in the week.

Do such people think that GOD is going to be mocked in this way?

Listen to the language of one who had erred in this way, but repented:

"A Sunday at home, how unlike one spent in the courts of the Lord! I become restless - feel that something is wanting - my mind wanders - weariness pervades the body, and I am tempted to seek relief in sleep. I am unusually troubled with worldly thoughts, and find a strong temptation to read something not appropriate to the day, to engage in worldly conversation, to repair to my business, or to visit my neighbor.

A Sunday at home is to me a Sunday lost. I tried it once and dread its influence. But I have learned something.

Other men are like myself. Now I see why some of my fellow-Christians have so little religious enjoyment, knowledge, and influence. They are frequently absent from the house of GOD. Who can afford to lose a single Sunday? And yet how many, many such precious days are lost, and worse than lost, in this land of Sundays!"

MAKE A RIGHT BEGINNING

in this respect. Be punctual in your place at the house of GOD on Sunday, and at the prayer meeting during the week. Every pastor has members of his flock that he can calculate with certainty upon seeing in their places regularly. He can depend upon them. They make their arrangements with a view to the appointments of the church, and make everything else bend before the calls of duty. If, on the evening of the prayer meeting, visitors call, they will ask them to go with them, or beg to be excused for an hour, so that the precious opportunity may not be lost.

There are others whose attendance is fitful and uncertain. They permit every trifle to act as a hindrance in their way.

If some notable lecturer is to speak, or some popular singer is to appear, or a political meeting is to be held, they are off in full pursuit of the novelty, while the prayer meeting is left to get on as it may.

If the pastor acted in this way, they would be the first to complain. But is there one Bible for the pastor and another for the member? If it is the pastor's duty to preach, it is the duty of the members to be there to hear him; and if he is to lead the prayer meeting, it is the duty of every member to be there to sustain it. The same precious blood was shed for both, and they are both laid under the same law of love.

Such persons little know how much they lose by their neglect of the means of grace. An old Christian lady was noticed to be very regular in her attendance at church, and when asked why she was always there before the service began, she said that the Lord had promised to be there and meet with her, but that He had not said in what part of the service He would come - in the first hymn or in the first prayer, in the reading of the Scriptures or in the sermon; and therefore she resolved to be present the whole time, that she might not lose the blessing. She also remarked that she did not like to come late to the house of GOD, for it was a part of her religion not to disturb the worship of other people.

What a blessing Thomas lost by not being present with the other disciples, in the upper room, when our Lord appeared to them, after His resurrection, and said: **"Peace be unto you!"**

Of course we do not know the reason why he was not there, but as he was evidently in a dark, unbelieving state of mind, it is likely that he could have been there had he wished. He lost a most precious blessing to his soul by his neglect, and when the brethren next met him, and began to tell him, in glowing terms, what a good meeting they had, and how the Lord had appeared to them, he cut them short by refusing to believe a word that they uttered, and sullenly said:

"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Another thing that I would urge upon the young convert is to

CULTIVATE A SPIRIT OF LOVE

toward every member of the church.

This is a mark of true discipleship. **"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."** **"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."** Be it yours to promote the spirit of love by the display of a loving and an affectionate disposition. I would not be the man to disturb the harmony of a church of CHRIST, for the globe upon which I stand. Woe to the man by whom such offences come!

There are persons who are very sensitive and suspicious, and are constantly taking offence at their brethren where no offence was intended. They will say harsh and bitter things, but do not you imitate them, nor contend with them. It takes two to make a quarrel, and by showing them a more excellent way, you may win them to a more lovely spirit. **"Ye who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness."**

I was much struck with a remark made by the Duke of Wellington in one of his letters:

"I am not in the habit of deciding upon matters hastily or in anger; and the proof of this is that I never had a quarrel with any man in my life."

This is a remarkable statement, coming from one who had passed through such a long and public career, and who had been brought in contact with all kinds of men.

If Christian faithfulness requires that you should notice offences committed against the laws of CHRIST by a member of the church, be sure that you go to work according to the rules laid down by the Lord in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew.

- Do not whisper the offence to some one as a great secret, who, unable to keep the secret himself, will get some one to help him, and thus the matter be talked about all over the church before you have an opportunity of seeing the offending brother himself. I have known a world of trouble brought upon churches by such blundering.

- Go to the offender at once, and let the matter be talked of between him and you alone. And do not go in a haughty, magisterial, supercilious spirit, else you will be sure to fail in winning your brother. Like begets like, and a bitter haughty spirit on your part will beget bitter haughty retorts on his.

- Go in the spirit of love and of prayer, remembering that you are yourself imperfect and liable to fall.

- Should you not succeed, then you must take another brother with you, and let him be the most spiritual, loving, and prayerful spirit you can find in the church.

- If you both fail in bringing the offender to repentance, then you must bring the matter before the church. But be not ready to take offence. Do not constitute yourself a kind of detective or spy in the church. Prevention is better than cure; and let it be yours to keep up the spirit of vital religion, so as to prevent backsliding in your own heart, and in the hearts of others.

Permit me to enjoin upon you another point before closing this chapter, and that is, to make it a matter of conscience to bear your share of the pecuniary burdens of the church, according as the Lord has prospered you.

To build churches, and keep them in proper repair and order, to pay the pastor's salary punctually, and to tarry on the benevolent enterprises of the church, costs something; and every member is under obligation to bear his full proportion of that cost. To unite with any organization, and enjoy the full advantages of it, and yet do nothing to help sustain it, would be regarded as supremely mean, even by worldly men.

A gentleman being told of a certain rich man, that he was converted, asked:

"IS HIS PURSE CONVERTED?"

And the man who is really consecrated to CHRIST, will be willing to make pecuniary sacrifices to promote His cause.

What you do for the support of the cause of truth, let it be done spontaneously and promptly. Do not require the officers of the church to ask and urge you again and again.

Do not require them to waste their time in finding you. These brethren do the collecting of the funds for carrying on the affairs of the church voluntarily, and none but those who have tried it can tell what a laborious work it is. It is often made more so than it need be by the carelessness of some brethren.

I have known a deacon call at a brother's office four times to collect his subscription without finding him in, and yet that brother passed the deacon's residence every day, and could have saved all this trouble by handing in what was due.

When the collection is made for the missionary society, and you happen to be absent that day, do not let the cause of missions suffer from the fact. Act from principle, and give as in your Master's sight.

The following statement by a pastor illustrates this point:

"A short time since, Mr. A. presented to my people the claims of one of our great benevolent societies, and on Monday I called with him on several members of the congregation. Entering the office of a merchant, the following interview in substance occurred:

"Mr. A. - Good morning, Mr. B. Our openings for usefulness are multiplying, and all that the churches will entrust to us, we can most profitably employ on the field of our labors.

"Mr. B. - I am always glad to see you, Mr. A., and to do what I can for your noble society (handing him a liberal donation). We all ought to feel that we are but stewards, and be diligent in doing good while we may.

"Mr. A. - Thank you, thank you, Mr. B. We know you are a steadfast friend, and so is your partner, Mr. C. Is he in this morning?

"Mr. B. - No, sir; he is in Europe. He was unexpectedly called to France on business, and sailed in the steamer some weeks since, to be absent about six months.

"Mr. A. - Then I suppose we shall lose his subscription this year?

"Mr. B. - No, sir; one of the last things he did before sailing, was to request me to attend to his charities with the same care as to his other business, and to give for him to the various objects of benevolence, as they might come before our church, about the same that he gave last year, or, if anything, rather more, as this year we have been prospered. Do you remember what was the amount of his subscription last year?

"Mr. A. - One hundred dollars.

"Mr. B. - Well, here is a check for \$150.00, which, I think, is about what he would give if he were at home."

Were all professing Christians thus to act under the eye of the SAVIOUR, remembering that they are but stewards of His money, and give according to system and principle, there would soon be no lack of funds to carry out the plans of the largest benevolence!

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