

PUBLIC PRAYER.

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public devotions. He represents his church as a whole: neither he nor his family, nor any other individual or family, should monopolize that access to the throne of grace which is common to all. Even when a single person is under such peculiar trials as to entitle him to the special prayers of the church, the pastor should not dwell too long upon his particular condition.

Once more, true prayer is the language of faith. None really pray except those who have begun to feel the quickening grace of God; hence it is unnatural that any one should pray habitually and still remain an entire stranger to the filial affections and hopes of the Christian. Prayer, then, is usually the language of God's children, not of his enemies. The pastor is the organ of the body of penitent believers, not of the impenitent. He should use language suitable to a sinner turning from his ways; for this is always appropriate, not only to the awakened sinner, but to the imperfect and penitent child who is continually renewing his "first works." But his strain should be prevalently filial, believing and hopeful, as becomes God's reconciled children.

Since it is God to whom you speak, and not man, your prayers should not be didactic. Doctrinal truths and the facts of redemption are, indeed, the grounds, arguments and guides of our petitions. This will justify such allusion to them, especially in our pleadings, as founds our requests on their proper reasons; but our reference must be subordinate and brief, lest we should seem to preach to God instead of praying to him. There is a painful absurdity in our going about formally to instruct God of his doctrinal truths: it is his part to

inform us of these; it is our wants and praises which he invites us to tell him.

3. It is of radical importance that the leader of the church's prayers shall present distinct and definite petitions, and these not numerous at one time. One of the constant sins of our prayers is that we are vague, and therefore feeble, in our desires. We scarcely remember precisely what we asked of God; we do not watch and work for the answer. The pastor should conscientiously avoid fostering this wretched vice of the people's devotions: he should put into their mouths always distinct objects of desire. Prayer is the professed language of want; but want is always definite: he who wants, wants some thing—a distinct thing. The leader of prayer should therefore speak as one who has an errand at the throne, a point to press with God. He should eschew loose generalities of petition, and all that stream of indefinite, goodish talk with which so many prayers are filled, which really expresses nothing save a slumbering faith and a heart void of desire. Nor should the emotions and memories of the people be burdened with many points in the same prayer. Sincere devotion is the most arduous exercise of the soul: it should therefore not be too much taxed at the same time. Ardent desire is, moreover, expulsive in its nature: it claims, for the once, the whole heart for its object. No man is strongly exercised concerning many diverse and remote objects at once; hence a few appropriate topics of petition, handled in an orderly manner and enlarged with judicious amplification, until the mind is fixed and the heart engaged by them, constitute the most edifying prayers.