

them with ease and power into the ways of righteousness and peace. Men throng to him as to a banquet. He is the people's preacher. The other churches are respectable but cold ; their galleries are very often thin, and the spirit of life and of power does not seem to be in them.

SEC. 19. *Conducting a Prayer-Meeting.*

As a Christian body, depending upon common aid, looking for common blessings, working for a common object, bound by common hopes, the Church of Christ feel an instinctive drawing together in the exercise and expression of their devotional desires. To worship together once a week in the sanctuary is not enough. Among many Christian denominations disciples are constrained to meet often in the name of Jesus, relying on his clear promise.

The prayer-meeting is important, because it is one of the chief means of maintaining the Church's life ; and the meeting is difficult to sustain, because the spirit of prayer is the expression of the spiritual life of the Church, and because certain reasons beyond the prayer-meeting itself—beyond the power of the pastor—are constantly at work to deaden the faith of the Church.

Yet much may be done to render the prayer-meeting attractive and efficient for good.

In the first place, the pastor should indoctrinate his people, or they themselves should be thoroughly established, in three fundamental truths.

- I. In a perfect faith in the power, duty, and privilege of prayer.

**Faith in
prayer.**

Prayer is both the natural and appointed means of spiritual life ; it is a real communion with the source of all spiritual life ; it is the necessary demand whose supply is in

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God ; and it brings the human heart into a condition to be blessed ; as says Jeremy Taylor, the spirit "ascends and dwells with God, until it returns laden with the dew and blessing of heaven ;" and it follows that a Christian, or a Christian church, that neglects this means of intercourse with God, cannot expect to live or have power. There should be no lingering unbelief here. The power of prayer may be seen in this, that, as we cannot doubt, something besides the mere mechanical regulation of the material world has entered into the purpose of the Creator, and that the physical is subordinated to the spiritual. God is, above all, a moral and spiritual ruler. He is the source of law and of right. He must be ever on the side of goodness, and of religious truth and life ; and if a man or a church lives in the power of this truth, with perfect trust in God as his helper and guide, he will go to God in prayer, and his wants will have God's attention. Prayer is the expression of the Church's faith in and union with God, and of the using of this power. The church accustomed to pray, like a plant is always receiving the dews and refreshings of heaven. The essence of prayer, then, is spiritual, and not in the forms of words. Filial trust, faith, love, conscious dependence, unbounded confidence in the Father's promise, accompanied by personal holiness and harmony with the holy will of God—these make prayer, and make it effectual. Dean Stanley says of private prayer, and this may apply to the prayer of the whole Church : " We acknowledge the duty, we have learned it from our earliest years ; the very practice carries us back to the best days of our childhood. Once lose the habit and it may be hard to begin again ; but once get a firm hold of it, and you will feel that to have left it off, for a single morning or a single evening, is like dropping one of your daily employ-

ments, like striking off one of your supplies of daily strength, like throwing away one of your best opportunities of being what a Christian ought to be and wishes to be."

2. **In the need of unity of the spirit in prayer.** This unity is created by the Holy Spirit, who brings discordant spirits into one, in the will of God.

Unity of the Spirit. Differences of will in the Church are occasioned by unbelief, pride, jealousy, ambition, indifference to truth, in fine, the working of the selfish principle; such differences prove the absence of the Spirit, or of the spiritual mind. Personal controversies, strifes for precedence, sectarian conflicts, doctrinal errors and discords, all human things that separate, abound where the life of the Spirit does not abound; but when Christians are brought into one mind, with one accord, there is the uniting work of the divine Spirit, and prayers become the inspiration of the Spirit, the utterances of the desires of Christ's heart, and are powerful with God; and that is the place, above all others, which draws the assimilating love and power of Heaven to it. This unity of the spirit of the Church implies also true repentance, the humble, obedient, and holy mind, brought into one with the mind and spirit of God and of his holy kingdom and people. Instead of many centres, as in the world, where every individual will is its own centre of life and purpose, there is one common centre of life in Christ;¹ and this is the work of the unifying Spirit.

3. **The cultivation of a spirit of constant prayer and supplication.** Christians, we are told, should "pray always with all prayer;" they should "continue instant

¹ See Maurice's Letter to Palmer.

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in prayer." The whole life of the Christian should be, in Origen's words, "one great continual prayer," for this is the expression of an abiding faith in God as the real Strengthen-
Spirit of constant prayer.
 er, Vindicator, Redeemer of the soul. The church member, therefore, should not expect to be made prayerful at the prayer-meeting if he carries thither no spirit of prayer; but he should live in such a prayerful state, that to meet his brethren to pray is but giving an opportunity for the manifestation of this spirit, and is therefore the greatest of privileges. Christians coming together without the spirit of prayer, with cold hearts, will kindle no new life, but will help to freeze one another; while, on the other hand, the concourse of truly believing, praying, loving hearts, will produce a more powerful flame of devotion, so that each and all will glow with increased ardor, and advance more rapidly in holiness.

The pastor should also set forth the reasons or motives which should draw Christians to the social prayer-meeting, as to the most profitable of all their meetings and services—such motives as the love of a common Saviour, fidelity to covenant vows and obligations, and the attainment of higher spiritual life. **The pastor's responsibility.** A constant attendance upon the meeting of social prayer will tell powerfully upon a Christian's life and character, as will a constant neglect of the prayer-meeting. As disciples of Christ, we cannot live alone: we are born into a household; and there can be, as a general rule, no great advance made in holiness, away from the common life, the common hope, the common love. One cannot well grow holy entirely by himself. And, lastly, he should urge the motive of advancement of Christ's work. This must come, and can come only, through common prayer and striving. What