

Do You Go to the Prayer Meeting?

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name.”

—Malachi 3:16

“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.”—Acts 1:14

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.”

—Hebrews 10:25

Readers! Is there a prayer meeting in your neighborhood? If there is, do you attend it? If you do not, have you good reasons for staying away? Perhaps there is one just by your door, or at least within a few minutes' walk of your dwelling. Do you go to it? I have known people walk many miles every week to a prayer meeting. They did not grudge the distance. The way seemed short and pleasant. No wonder. They were in earnest about their souls! And if you neglect or despise such meetings, it is to be feared that you are altogether unconcerned about eternity and the kingdom to come. If you were thirsty for the water of life, you would be glad of such opportunities of drawing it out of the wells of salvation.

I ask then again, do you attend the prayer meeting? If not, what are your reasons? If they are good reasons, you need not be ashamed of them either before God or man, and they will serve you at the judgment seat of Christ. If they are not, the sooner you give them up the better. Very soon the last sermon will be done, the last Sabbath will close, the last prayer meeting will be over, the last message of salvation delivered, the last warning sounded, and the last invitation given! Then, what bitter regret and agonizing remorse! What will you think of your excuses then? Oh, you will give the wealth of worlds for another prayer meeting, another day of hope. No more making light of such precious opportunities, nor scoffing at those who prized them! The follies and vanities of earth are all over then; and invisible realities are seen to be all in all. Will the memory of your days and scenes of pleasure or sin be soothing to your soul when they have passed away like a vision of the night? Will the remembered hours of carnal levity, the idle word, the thoughtless jest, the gay smiles of companionship, the halls of gaiety, or the haunts of sin (all of which you once preferred to the prayer meeting), will these breathe comfort to your dying soul, or bear you up when giving in your account before the Judge of all? Laughter shall then be exchanged for burning

tears; nights of harmless merriment for ages of endless woe. Oh, waste not then one precious hour—one precious moment! Thy eternity may hang on it! It may soon be too late to think of prayer. Up, sleeper, up! Turn, sinner, turn! Thy days are but an handbreadth—flee! oh, flee from the wrath to come!

Let me speak to you, with all kindness, for a little, about your reasons for not attending the prayer meeting. Let us weigh them in the balances of the sanctuary; and may the Holy Spirit, in this respect, convince you of sin!

a. Do you not care for prayer meetings?

Do you not like them? Do you count them a weariness, or do you call them fanaticism? Is this your reason? If so, can your soul be in a right state with God? Can that man be a child of God who dislikes either private or social prayer? Can there be real or living religion in that soul that does not relish such meetings? Is it not strange and sad that you should relish the things of the body, the things of time—and yet turn away from the things of the soul, the things of eternity? Is it not awful that you should love the society of sinners, the friendship of the world; and yet dislike so much the companionship of saints, the fellowship of God. If you prefer worldly company or pleasure to a prayer meeting, this shows beyond all doubt that you are not a child of God, or a follower of the Lamb.

b. Have you no time to attend prayer meetings?

Is this your reason? Ah! Think for a moment, is it really true that you have no time to spare for them? Can you say so honestly before God? Will you be able to plead this with the Judge in the great day of account? Do you never attend other meetings which take up more of your time? Or do you not waste more time idly, or in foolish company, than would be spent at the meeting? What? Have you time to eat, and to drink, and make merry, but none to pray? Have you time for business, for company, for folly, for pleasure, for lusts, for sin, but none for prayer? Have you time for the shop, the market, the ballroom, the card table, the public house, the political club—but none for the prayer meeting? You can spare days and weeks for the things of time. Can you not spare an hour for the things of eternity?

c. Are you ashamed to go to a prayer meeting?

Would your companions laugh at you? Is this your reason? What? Ashamed to pray! Afraid to be laughed at! You are not ashamed to be seen in idle, foolish company, yet you are ashamed to be seen in the society of the people of God! You are not ashamed to saunter about the streets, nor to “stand in the way of sinners,” nor to “sit in the seat of the scornful” (Psa 1:1), yet you are ashamed to be seen at a meeting for prayer! Perhaps you are one of those who are not ashamed to be seen in a public house—who are not ashamed to swear, nor to get drunk—yet you are ashamed to attend a prayer meeting! Ashamed of God’s service, but not ashamed of the devil’s! Ashamed to pray, but not ashamed to sin! Will God accept such an excuse at your hands in the day of reckoning? “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels” (Mar 8:38).

d. Do you think it is being too religious?

Now let me ask you what you mean by “religious”? Does it not mean loving and serving God? And can a man love God too much? Can he serve Him too constantly or devotedly? Was the apostle too religious when he said “whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31)? Or was he too religious when he commanded us to “pray always”? (Eph 6:18). To “pray without ceasing”? (1Th 5:17). Was David too religious when he praised God seven times a day? (Psa 119:164). Are the angels and the redeemed saints in heaven too religious, who serve Him “day and night in His temple”? (Rev 7:15). With such a feeling as you have about prayer meetings, it is plain that there is far too much religion in heaven for you ever to think of going to such a place, or even to wish to be there. The man that has no relish for a prayer meeting, could have no relish for heaven. He is utterly unfit to be there. He would be wretched there. An eternity of prayer and praise would be hell to a man who is wearied with an hour of a prayer meeting on earth.

e. Are you better employed at home?

Can you honestly say so before God? If you can, I leave you to answer to God for the time thus spent at home or elsewhere. He will take a strict account of those hours. If you are one who loves to read the Bible and pray at home, I am sure you will not object to a meeting for prayer. If you are not, can you really say that you are better employed, or even half so well? Oh, no. You cannot be half so well employed as in preparing for eternity, in praying with God’s people, in hearing of His dear Son, in making ready for the coming of the Lord.

Reader, are these your reasons? Then I ask you, are they sufficient? Does your conscience say they are? Or do you not see that the real reason is just your “carnal mind which is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7)? You do not love to pray, therefore you do not like the prayer meeting. You do not love God, and therefore you do not desire fellowship with Him. You do not love His saints, therefore you do not wish to join with them in prayer. You do not care about forgiveness of sin, and therefore you do not go to hear how “in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7). You have no relish for the things of Christ, no sense of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and therefore you do not desire to join His people in singing the new song—Worthy is the Lamb that was Slain!

“The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer”—1 Peter 4:7

“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving”—Colossians 4:2

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”—Ephesians 6:18

“Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching”—Hebrews 10:25