



# SUNDAY READING

## SERMON.

The Philosophy of Church Going: Why Some Attend and Others Do Not.

By Rev. Dr. J. K. CAMPBELL, Minister of the First Presbyterian Church, St. Louis.

"And let us consider one another to provoke into love and good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is."—Heb. x, 24, 25.

This is said to be an age of earnest inquiry, an age when almost everything is subjected to the fires of a keen scrutiny, a rigid cross-examination. Almost everything is now thrown into the scales of reason, and forced to give an account of its origin, history, and usefulness. Institutions, the most venerable and venerated by our sires, are inquired into; and if they fail, or have failed, to justify their existence the axe is laid to their roots, and they are cast down as cumberers of the ground. We do not object to any amount of earnestness, if inspired by right motives. We rejoice in any radical movement which has for its object the advancement of truth and righteousness in the earth. But we object to everything of the nature of mob law or blind force. We object to the principle of the ancient sophists who said that "Man is the measure of all things." We object to the measure of actions of those who ever assume that the powers of natural reason are as the Pillars of Hercules, or as the *ne plus ultra* of the ancient Spaniards. Men who are wise in their own conceit, and strong with the spirit of self-sufficiency, are in our day among the most dangerous characters we have to deal with. Many of them are sufficiently educated and clever to make their actions and arguments plausible to the unwary. Many of them occupy positions of responsibility and influence in society, and these do often more harm than infidels and practical atheists. The secular and worldly spirit of the press, not merely our daily and weekly newspapers, but several of our monthly and quarterly magazines, is the spirit that animates these would-be wise men, and we know how people who read these are likely to be influenced by them. Even men who are sent for the defence of the gospel can hardly be said to be free from blame. Some of them, instead of earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints, have by their writings traduced it, and made the profession of christianity to many a scandal. Well might the church say of such men, "My foes are they of my own household." (Matt. x. 36.) Notwithstanding, however, the influence of false teachers and false doctrines in these latter days, I believe that the churches of our country are as well attended today as they ever were. Give the people everywhere a faithful gospel ministry and they will hear the word gladly. But they hate a sham ministry, and will not be mocked with a false gospel. Notwithstanding their moral depravity and spiritual deadness, they are quick to detect the folly of those who offer them stones for bread and a scorpion for a fish. Before we deal with the questions which constitute the theme of our discourse, let us first consider some facts bearing upon the origin and purpose of the church.

### The Origin of the Church.

The origin of the church. The church as the visible body of believers had her origin in the Tabernacle of witness in the wilderness. The various tribes of Israel who had hitherto been slaves in the land of Egypt, who had been as those in every age who serve the world, the devil, and the flesh; whose moral and spiritual powers had been as the letters of the alphabet, when you see them scattered about in all directions, without order, unity, or meaning, and who had lost their idea of the unity, power, and goodness of Abraham's God among the gods many and lords many of Egypt; these tribes when brought into the Tabernacle, were brought into harmony with the will of God and called His people. When they entered the Tabernacle they began to realize their unity as a nation, their unity as a favored people, and the blessings which had been promised unto their fathers. In the land of Egypt their life had been without meaning, without any prophecy or promise. But in the Tabernacle, with its mercy seat, its Holy of holies, and other solemnities, faith, love, and hope began to animate them. This was the beginning of that localization of Deity which was realized in the Person of Jesus Christ in the fulness of the time. When the Tabernacle in the wilderness and afterwards at Shiloh had served its day the temple at Jerusalem became the place of worship, and when the temple and its services came to an end the synagogue became the place of worship, and the body of believers the visible church. "Wherever," says Augustine, "is worshipped and praised, there is the church of God." Jerome of Jerusalem says, "the church is the collection of all God's people." "I do not call the place a church," says Clement Alexandrinus, "but the collection of Christ's people within the place I call a church." Hence we read of different churches in Judea, Galatia, and Asia Minor. But notwithstanding the number of churches, ancient and modern; there is, after all, but one church, even as there is but one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

### The Purpose of the Church.

The purpose for which the church was planted in the world. It was evidently designed that the church should be a centre of attraction to God's people and a symbol of the divine presence. She was exalted as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel. She was to be not merely a house of refuge for the weary and heavy laden, but as a nursery for the training of Christ's servants for the duties of the present life, and for the inheritance of the saints in light. Unbelievers were committed to the Oracles of Divine truth, and they were

charged to make these oracles known to every succeeding race. The ministers of Christ are appointed to explain the unsearchable riches of Christ. They are appointed for the work of the ministry, for the editing of the body of Christ. Their duty is to preach the gospel and the whole counsel of God, which contains the demands of God for the repentance and return of all His revolted subjects. They are not at liberty to preach what they please, or any other gospel than the gospel revealed in the scriptures. That gospel and no other is the "power of God unto Salvation to every one that believeth." "Faith," said the Apostle "cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." "Fear, said the Lord and your soul shall live." Men should therefore attend the church that they may hear, and hearing that they may believe and obey.

### The Sentiment of Worship.

The principle or sentiment of worship in man. It will not be doubted by those who have considered the subject that all rational creatures are gifted with the sentiment of worship. Even those who say that man's only law is his moral consciousness, and his only God the moral order of the universe, do not gainsay the fact that man is a creature of religious instincts, and must worship something. Even men like Shelley and Hegel, who declare that God and the human mind are identical; that man is the mode of the Divine Being, readily admit that man often betrays the sentiment of worship. Positivists, whose worship is the worship of humanity, admit that the sentiment of worship is universal.

That rapture of the soul, that strong and irresistible outburst of feeling, that heavy sigh and silent sobbing, or that exclamation from the heart in presence of the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime is an evidence of the existence of the sentiment of worship. The natural sentiment, which is more or less common to all human beings, more or less strong in all men—reason, education, and culture exalt it into a conviction, and revelation exalts it still further into a duty and privilege. This natural sentiment, though exalted into a rational conviction and otherwise purified, may be perverted by evil habits, foolish companions, and the environment of social circumstances. But in those in whom it is not perverted, is not crushed, but graduated into christian faith and love, it becomes the mainspring of life and action. This leads us to the fourth point of our argument, viz., the philosophy of church going.

### The Delight of Worship.

Why do some men attend the ordinances of God's house? It has been pointed out as a remarkable fact that the positive injunctions for going to church in the New Testament are few. We think it would have been more remarkable had such injunctions been many. Why so? A man who lives requires no injunctions to breathe, and a man who is hungry requires no injunctions to eat. Children, because of their ignorance, may require a certain measure of compulsion to get them to attend school in order to become useful citizens; but parents require no legal enactment to compel them to love their children or to attend to their physical comforts. Much less do Christians require any other law than "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus," by which they are animated to attend the means by which they grow in grace and in the knowledge of God their Saviour. They love the Lord's day and the Lord's house because they love the Lord Himself. They are glad when it is said unto them, "Let us go up into the house of the Lord." In all ages and in all lands they love the habitation of God's house, the place where His honor dwelleth. The *ought* of obligation to attend the church or the means of grace is a principle or law, not of the letter that killeth, but of Spirit that giveth life. As desire springs from life, as heat from fire, and water from the fountain, so love to the Lord leads every Christian to His house. That house may be upon a lonely moor, or a mountain summit, in a grand cathedral or in a humble barn, in church, or chapel, or peasant's cottage—the Christian is sure to be there, for Christ himself will be there. "Whenever two or three are gathered together in My Name," He says, "there am I in the midst."

The early Christians, when refused toleration for their gatherings in the towns and villages of the Roman empire, met in dens and caves of the earth and worshipped God in spirit and in truth. The catacombs of Rome and Pagan history bear witness to the fact. The younger Pliny, in his letter to the Emperor Trajan, tells us that "the Christians met on a certain day for religious worship, that their meetings were held in the morning before daylight, and that they worshipped Christ as God."

The spirit that animated these early Christians is with us still. Thousands and thousands in all lands within the area of civilisation need no other injunction, no other command or force, than their love to God, and their sense of need to assemble themselves together for prayer and praise and the ministry of the Word. The spirit that animates them is expressed in the words of the song:

How lovely is Thy dwelling-place,  
O Lord of Hosts to me!  
The tabernacles of Thy grace  
How pleasant, Lord, they be!

Some men may attend the church who are not thus animated. These men may not be without certain measures of intellectual light, scientific knowledge, and literary culture, but God's spirit and ways are not yet in their hearts. They have little or no capacity for the appreciation of moral evidence or spiritual doctrine. They are not as those whose hearts have been broken or are regenerated, or who have been trained in christian homes. They cannot yet understand the things of the Spirit of God as those who have known the scriptures from their youth, and have been under the influence of things spiritual, things unseen and eternal, more or less constantly all their days. These men may

have been strangers to the prayers and christian example of godly mothers. For years they may have been engaged in worldly business or been devoted to physical science, or they may have lived where the means of grace were far beyond their reach. It is pleasing to see such men at length coming to the house of God. Their mental culture, scientific knowledge and business habits may fit them for the highest positions of the world; and they may feel that the occupants of the pulpit are not always their equals, but they go to the church because they know that God is and that He ought to be worshiped. They go to the house of God not only because it is right to do so, not merely to render the homage which the creature ought to render to the Creator, but also because church attending is an antidote to the worldliness of the world during the week. As medical men prescribe a change of diet and a change of air for the health of their patients, so the house of the Lord and His worship are helpful for soul-health. This, in brief, is the philosophy of church-going. What is the philosophy of non-church-going?

### Reasons For Non-Attendance.

Why do some men not attend church? We need not refer to the state of men by nature as a reason for the absence of a large number. We need not remind you of the fact that "the carnal mind is enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be." If we have no classes of men called Amorites, and Hittites and Egyptians in our midst, we have such men in heart and life.

(1) Some men do not go to church because of their self-conceit. A self-conceited man is a hopeless man; there is more hope of a fool than of him. "Conceited men," says Dryden, "are stiff in their opinion—always wrong." "The obstinate man," says Pope, "does not hold opinions; they hold him." The conceited man lives within the narrow limits of his own intellect, and can neither see or hear any other greater or wiser than himself. All things beyond the limits of his intellect are only imaginary spectres, and the world to come is but a misty cloudland. The church is for old wives and feeble-minded men! "Those who think that the intellectual battle against Christianity has been fought and won," says Mr. Gladstone, "are reckoning without their host. Human thought is not yet divorced either from the vital essence of Christianity or from the cardinal facts and truths which are to that essence as the body is to the soul. Christianity, even in its sadly imperfect development, is, as simple matter of fact, at the head of the world. As the first creating power, it rules the earth." Those who have it in their power to attend some place of worship, and do not, are neither God's friends nor man's friends; and they may live to learn that they are not their own friends. They are practically declaring that they are wiser even than God, and that they will not have Christ to reign over them. Such men are morally insane.

(2) Some men do not attend church because they are indolent. Indolence is said to be the guardian angel of the Oriental throne. Hence the barren desert which might have been turned into a fruitful field, hence the peoples as paupers and men everywhere as on the dunghill of circumstances. Indolence is mental and physical inertia. It leads to poverty, misery and ruin. It leads men on the Lord's day to say, "We are tired, a little more sleep and a little more slumber, and thus God is robbed of His honor, and their souls of spiritual benefit."

I read the following story, in effect, in a periodical the other day. A poor man went to a friend to ask the loan of some money. He told the friend that he was greatly in need of six pounds. The friend frankly told him that he had only seven pounds, and that if he gave him six he might be in straits himself. He gave him the six pounds, however, to meet his urgent needs. Shortly after the man who had got the six pounds broke into his friend's house and robbed him of the seventh. Could anything have been more mean or shabby? It was a morally vile action, you say. I say so, too. Well, what are we to think of those to whom God hath given six days in which to labour and do all their work, and yet must needs rob Him of the seventh? The indolence which leads a man to neglect the means of grace leads him at the same time to rob God of His honor, and His own soul of many blessings. A man has but to neglect his business to make him a bankrupt, the farmer has but to neglect his fields to make himself and others poor and hungry, parents have but to neglect the education of their children to unfit them for the duties of life, and men have but to neglect the means of grace to make them obnoxious to God and unfit for heaven. As surely as neglect brings ruin to a house, poverty, wretchedness and rags to a home, so surely will indolence, non-church-going and Sabbath-breaking bring ruin to the soul. All that I know of men and things in general, and all that I have experienced, lead me to say that these words are true:—

A Sabbath well spent  
Brings a week of content,  
And prepares for the toil of tomorrow.  
But a Sabbath profaned,  
What'er may be gained,  
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.

"Let us," therefore, "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is."

### A Revival Service on Mount Calvary.

The other Sunday a "revival" service was held on Mount Calvary, and an address given by Mr. Moody, the American evangelist. About 400 persons—guides, and nurses from the hospital—gathered outside the Damascus gate of Jerusalem, on the round green hill which is believed to be the spot where Christ was crucified. A number of boys and girls from the mission school led the singing, and Mr. Moody, standing on a chair, gave a characteristic address.

### What Not to Lose.

Don't lose courage; spirit brave  
Carry you on to the grave.  
Don't lose time in vain distress;  
Work, not worry, brings success.  
Don't lose hope; who lets her stay  
Goes forlornly all the way.  
Don't lose patience, come what will;  
Patience outwits all skill.  
Don't lose gladness; every hour  
Blossoms for you some happy flower.  
Though he failed your dearest plan  
Don't lose faith in God and man.

### Little Things.

If we will only rightly use little things, it is surprising how much may sometimes be done with them. A vizier, having offended his royal master, was condemned to life-long imprisonment in a high tower, and every night his wife used to come and weep at its foot. "Go home," said the husband, "and find a black beetle, and then bring a bit of butter and three strings—one of fine silk, one of stout twine, another of whipcord—and a strong rope." When she came provided with everything, he told her to put a touch of butter on the beetle's head, tie the silk thread around him and place him on the wall of the tower. Deceived by the smell of butter, which he supposed was above him, the insect continued to ascend till he reached the top, and thus the vizier secured the silk thread. By it he pulled up the twine, then the whipcord, and then a strong rope, by which he finally escaped. It was a little stone that slew Goliath; it was a common basket that saved the life of a great apostle; it was a spider's web spun across the opening of the cave in which the great Scottish patriot was hid that made the soldiers not think of searching for him there. Let us never despise small instruments, for by them God sometimes works in bringing about great results. There were only two small fishes, but from them Jesus fed the multitudes, so that it says, "Likewise of the fishes as much as they would."

"Great things from little ones are born;  
So little ones treat not with scorn."

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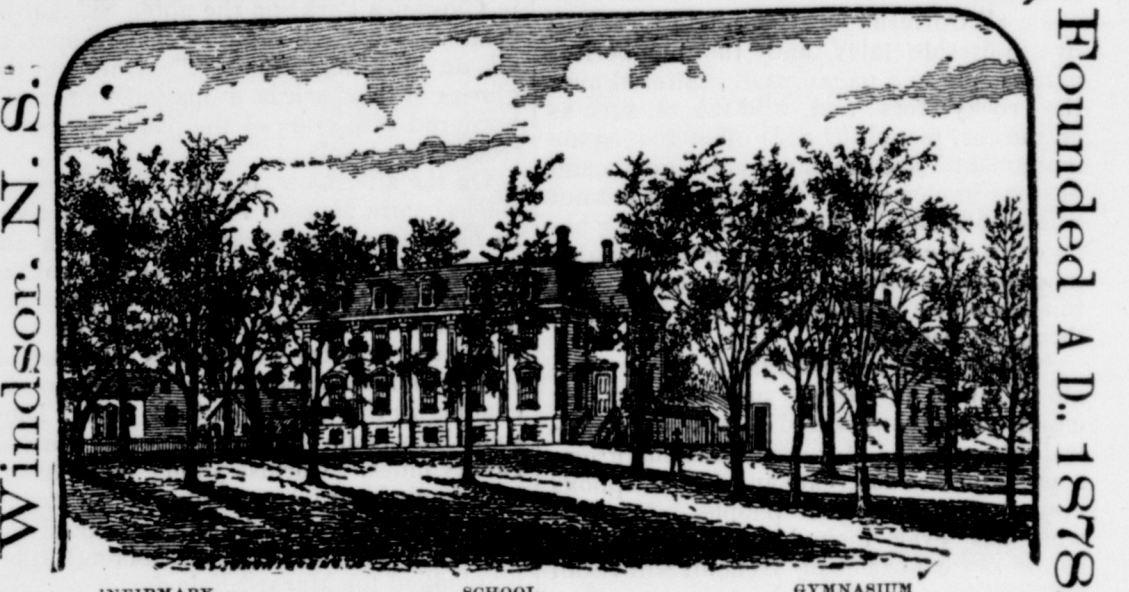
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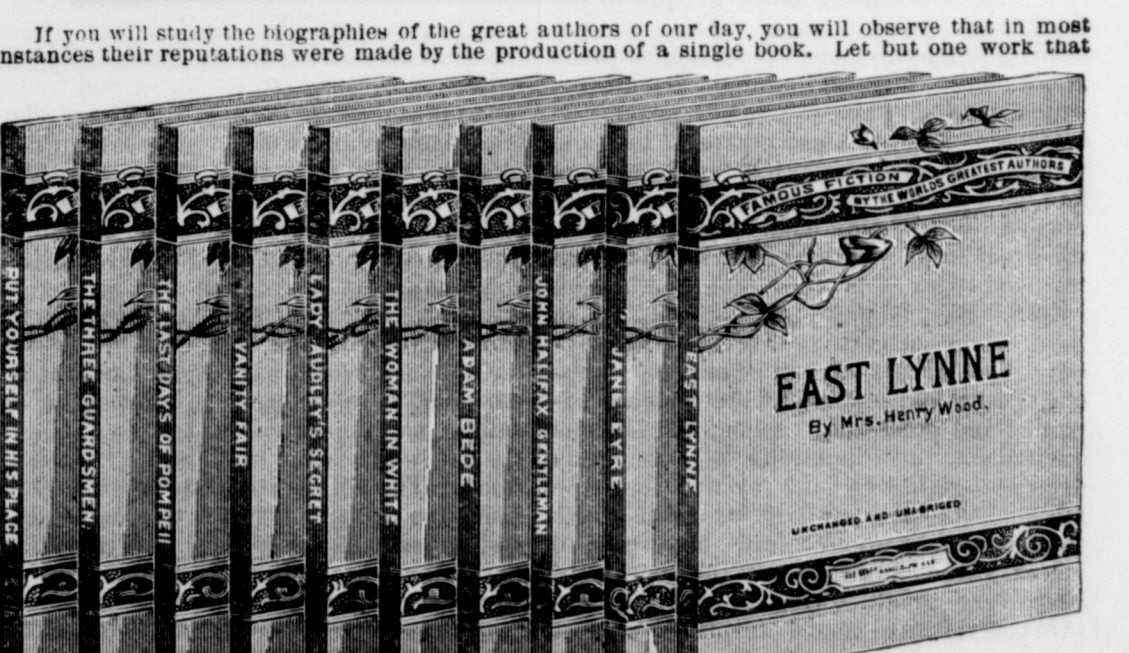
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