

Men in the church;

an address

by

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MEN IN THE CHURCH

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BY ✓

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MEN IN THE CHURCH

IN discussing the subject of the relation of men to the church, it should be borne in mind that in different churches different conditions prevail, and that while in some the conditions are good, yet generally men are not in the church in large numbers and many of those who are therein are far from living the life and exerting the influence they should. I do not propose this evening to dwell at length upon the question, "Why men do not go to church?" except so far as the answer thereto relates to the character and conduct of the men who are already there.

Possibly I can find no better text for my discourse than that which I incorporated in the report made by me as Chairman of the Standing Committee on the Brotherhood to the last General Assembly. It was the definition of the Brotherhood given by Rev. Maitland Alexander, D.D., at one of the popular meetings, and is as follows: "The idea of the Brotherhood is to arouse the conscience and to stimulate men to perform the duties and fulfill the vows which they voluntarily took upon themselves when they united with the church."

By way of introduction let me say that pastors and elders have worried themselves because more men do not go to church, and have resorted to vari-

ous measures to induce them to come, but often without success. The church has been acting on the principle that it cannot get along without men, and appeals to them to come in. Would it not be better to make men feel that they cannot get along without the church, and so fill them with a sense of the advantages, temporal as well as spiritual, to be derived from membership that they will be anxious to unite with it? The time will never come when the church will have a waiting list like the Union League or Presbyterian Social Union of Philadelphia, but it would be refreshing to see men become spiritual aviators and "fly as a cloud and as the doves to their windows." Possibly the reason that there are not more men in the church is because Sessions are unable to control and direct the men they already have, having failed to develop to any extent their spiritual nature. Some people have just about as much money as they are able to take care of. Some parents have just about as many children as they can properly raise. So it may be with a church. Take one in which there are one hundred men. Suppose that suddenly this number should be doubled and that the new comers had just about as much piety as the original one hundred, I am afraid the pastor would say, with Job, "Oh! that I were as in months past."

We might quote the language of the Saviour as in some sense applicable to the case: "If therefore

ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon who will commit to your trust the true riches?" "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

What I want to plead for to-night is more thought about and more work for the men who are at present in the church. Not quantity, but quality, and how to improve it will claim our attention. My idea is that the more we can awaken the conscience and stimulate men to perform their duties and fulfill their vows, the more can they be used for the bringing in of others and for the advancement of Christ's Kingdom in the world.

At the present there are too many standards of Christian conduct by which men are judged. The pastor represents one type of Christian manhood. He must be intellectual, moral, spiritual, circumspect in all his ways, a man of large sympathies, with a Christ-like spirit, ready to rejoice with them that do rejoice and to weep with them that weep.

The elders, it is true, must be pious men given to prayer and are to be examples to the flock, but then if they do things which the pastor dare not do, their conduct is condoned or overlooked, possibly because they give their services voluntarily. If the elders were employed by the church in the same sense that the pastor is I am afraid many of them would lose their positions and be known as W. C.'s [Without Charge]. The way the church thinks as

regards the every day life of the pastor and elder is well illustrated by the old story of the minister from Scotland, who while in London went to the theatre, and there met one of the elders of his church. They both expressed surprise at seeing each other in such a place, and when the elder asked the dominie, "What will the people say when I tell them I saw you in the theatre," the pastor replied: "They will say, 'Jimmie, you're a liar.'"

As to the trustees, some of them seem to be of a different order of religious beings from either the pastor or elders. They are often selected because of their business ability or their wealth. It is not at all necessary that they should be even professing Christians. They can (I do not say they all do) play cards, go to the theatre, indulge in intoxicating drink, provided the financial affairs of the church are well managed. My point is not that all trustees are worldly-minded men, but that if they are, it is no bar against their holding that office. Why should it be considered right for trustees to indulge in questionable amusements or to gratify certain of their appetites, and wrong for the pastor or elders to do the same things?

And then as to many of the church members, it is a kind of "go as you please" performance. Discipline is a dead letter, and the parable of the tares and wheat is appealed to as a Scriptural reason why nothing should be done to the inconsistent Christian,

for does it not say, "Let both grow together until the harvest." There is some wit and some truth in the story of a man who was invited to become a member of the church. He declined on the ground that there are too many hypocrites and liars in the church now. His friend said, "Don't let that hinder you; there is room for one more." Be it far from me to say that the men in the church to-day are mostly hypocrites or to do anything to discourage those of little faith. Rather let us imitate the Saviour, of whom it was said, "A bruised reed shall he not break and smoking flax shall he not quench."

In my opinion the church will never exert the great moral force in the community that it should until the standard of living is so raised that there will be a clearer distinction between the men of the church and the men of the world. Ask any business man to-day and he will tell you that church membership is not equivalent to integrity and uprightness, and that in many instances the men making no profession are solid to the core in their business dealings. Why should the Church Register not be a better book than either Dun or Bradstreet to consult as to a man's credit or character?

The last recorded words of Peter's great sermon on the day of Pentecost were: "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." As a result the same day three thousand were added to the church.

These "ate their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." It is well to notice what followed: "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." I do not look for any great ingathering in our time until the men now in the church are revived and quickened by the power of the Holy Spirit in the use of the means within their reach.

In developing the men in the church, I would begin wherever possible with the Sunday School. John S. Hart said: "The Sunday School is the agency beyond all others for increasing and developing the working talent and the Christian graces of the church." The Sunday School to-day, as never before, is appealing to men not only to become teachers but students. I have in my library a number of books, some twenty, thirty, and forty years old, relating to the Sunday School. Looking through them, I find little reference to men in the Sunday School. The former generation considered it a place for children and called it the nursery. To-day it is more than a place for little children. Men's Bible Classes organized for work are now much in evidence, as well as Adult Bible Classes, some of the latter containing more men than women.

One of our problems is to hold the boy in the Sunday School, but if he finds that men are attending it—his father or big brother perhaps, he will not be so likely to drop out and, to use his own language,

say, "It is only a place for kids." If the large boy is retained, it is likely he will continue after he becomes a man. Men who attend Sunday School will attend church, and they will be likely to bring others with them.

The modern front line Sunday School has in it a Teacher Training Class, and this class or classes, being composed of men as well as women, will in the course of time produce stronger and better equipped teachers, who will make the instruction in the Sunday School amount to more than it has in the past.

Then there is the Home Department. It is true this department is made up largely of women, yet there are some men connected with it, and this number can be increased. Attendance at the Sunday School or membership in the Home Department means Bible Study, and this means growth and development.

I see in the Men's Organized Bible Class, in the Adult Bible Class, in the Teacher Training Class, and in the Home Department, an advance in the quality of Christian manhood now to be found in the church.

Another agency that augurs well for the men of the church is the Brotherhood. No church to-day is fully alive to its mission that has not in connection with it some kind of a men's organization, call it, Club, League, Brotherhood, or what you will.

Though there may be social features connected with them, the ultimate aim should be to lead the members to live Christ-like lives, which will be manifested in their interest in other men, both inside and outside of the church, in prayer, in missionary effort, and in personal work for the Master. Undoubtedly the most helpful work done by the Brotherhood is through the meetings for prayer and conference. They not only cultivate the devotional spirit, but they also give opportunity for the exercise of the gifts of prayer, song, and speech.

In the development of the moral and spiritual life of men much depends upon the preaching. It must be scriptural, manly, free from cant, nothing that is far fetched, not pedantic, but earnest, practical, and helpful.

In the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, to which special attention has been called lately because it is mentioned in the five-foot book-shelf of President Eliot, we have an interesting page showing the effect of preaching on Franklin. Doubtless most of you have read his experience, but as the preachers were Presbyterians, and reference is made to the Synod, which is now our General Assembly, it seems appropriate to refer to it here. He writes:—

“Though I seldom attended any public worship, I had still an opinion of its propriety and of its utility when rightly conducted, and I regularly paid my annual subscription for

the support of the only Presbyterian minister or meeting we had in Philadelphia. He used to visit me sometimes as a friend and admonish me to attend his administrations, and I was now and then prevailed on to do so, once for five Sundays successively. Had he been in my opinion a good preacher, perhaps I might have continued, notwithstanding the occasion I had for Sunday's leisure in my course of study; but his discourses were chiefly either polemic arguments or explications of the peculiar doctrines of our sect, and were all to me very dry, uninteresting, and unedifying; since not a single moral principle was inculcated or enforced, their aim seeming to be rather to make us *Presbyterians* than *good citizens*.

"At length he took for his text that verse of the fourth chapter to the Philippians: '*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, or of good report, if there be any virtue, or any praise, think on these things.*' And I imagined in a sermon on such a text, we could not miss of having some morality. But he confined himself to five points only, as meant by the apostle: 1. Keeping holy the Sabbath day. 2. Being diligent in reading the holy Scriptures. 3. Attending duly the public worship. 4. Partaking of the Sacrament. 5. Paying due respect to God's ministers. These might be all good things; but as they were not the kind of good things that I expected from that text, I despaired of ever meeting with them from any other, was disgusted, and attended his preaching no more. I had some years before composed a little liturgy or form of prayer for my own private use (in 1728), entitled 'Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion.' I returned to the use of this and went no more to the public assemblies. My conduct might be blamable, but I leave it without attempting further to excuse it; my present purpose being to relate facts and not to make apologies for them."

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"About the year 1734 there arrived among us a young Presbyterian preacher, named Hemphill, who delivered with a good voice, and apparently extempore, most excellent dis-

courses, which drew together considerable numbers of different persuasions, who joined in admiring them. Among the rest I became one of his constant hearers, his sermons pleasing me, as they had little of the dogmatical kind, but inculcated strongly the practice of virtue, or what in the religious style are called *good works*. Those, however, of our congregation who considered themselves as orthodox Presbyterians disapproved his doctrine, and were joined by most of the old ministers, who arraigned him of heterodoxy before the synod, in order to have him silenced. I became his zealous partisan, and contributed all I could to raise a party in his favor and combated for him awhile with some hopes of success. There was much scribbling *pro* and *con* upon the occasion, and finding that though an elegant preacher he was but a poor writer, I wrote for him two or three pamphlets and a piece in the *Gazette* of April, 1735. Those pamphlets, as is generally the case with controversial writings, though eagerly read at the time, were soon out of vogue, and I question whether a single copy of them now exists.

“During the contest an unlucky occurrence hurt his cause exceedingly. One of our adversaries having heard him preach a sermon that was much admired, thought he had somewhere read the sermon before, or at least a part of it. On searching, he found that part quoted at length in one of the British reviews from a discourse of Dr. Foster’s. This defection gave many of our party disgust, who accordingly abandoned his cause and occasioned our more speedy discomfiture in the synod. I stuck by him, however. I rather approved his giving us good sermons composed by others than bad ones of his own manufacture, though the latter was the practice of our common teachers. He afterward acknowledged to me that none of those he preached were his own, adding that his memory was such as enabled him to retain and repeat any sermon after once reading only. On our defeat he left us in search elsewhere of better fortune, and I quitted the congregation, never attending it after, though I continued many years my subscription for the support of its ministers.”

Now I do not want to excuse or justify Franklin for his conduct, but suppose the preaching had been of a different kind, and that such a brainy man as he had been reached by the gospel through the preached word, what a power he would have been in the world.

As I am addressing many preachers, I would like to say to them on behalf of the laymen that we are a little tired of Browning. His meaning is hard to fathom when reading, but much harder when quickly recited.

All honor to the preachers and to the preaching of to-day, but is there not room for improvement? A strong man in the pulpit will produce strong men in the pew.

Again, to stimulate men to perform their duties and fulfill their vows, work must be planned for them and judicious use made of the talents which the men possess; and here I can but throw out but a few hints. Some will make elders. Go slow at this. "Lay hands suddenly on no man" is the Apostolic injunction. The character and attainments of every man in the church should be studied and an effort made to locate him where he can be blessed and be a blessing. It is more difficult to find a niche for some men in the church than it was to find a place for the statue of Quay in the capital at Harrisburg. If you cannot assign the man where he can do good, be sure and put him where he can do no harm.

I think we have not made as much use of the men's ability to speak and sing as we should. In some churches there are men who can speak well in the Prayer Meeting whose voices are seldom if ever heard outside of their own church. Push such men out. Prisons, asylums, rescue homes, Young Men's Christian Associations, &c., are calling for men to help in the services, and some men need to be encouraged to go. Lawyers, judges, professors, and other talented men have been going to church Sabbath after Sabbath and they will not seek opportunities to speak, having perhaps too much humility. The pastor can place them, but then how often he feels that their presence would be missed in his services, and that he cannot spare them. There are too many men in the church to-day who for years have been receiving and have failed to give. They have forgotten the words of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive," which will apply to other gifts besides money.

And then some men have the ability to sing. How seldom do men with good voices consecrate this talent to the Lord, except in the church to which they belong. If a layman has any ability as a speaker he will go from place to place and speak without compensation, but if another can sing, he must be paid for this service. We want consecrated singers in the church as well as consecrated speakers. Moody and Sankey were both laymen. It is true they made

speaking and singing their life work, but are there not some minor Moodys and Sankeys who on the Sabbath days or nights during the week would volunteer their services for the spiritual uplift of their fellows?

Lastly, the Layman's Missionary Movement affords a fine opportunity to enlist men in the interests of the Kingdom. J. Campbell White says that "this movement presents to men the greatest possible spiritual challenge; it makes the largest possible demands upon men; it presents to every man the largest opportunity of service; it satisfies the deepest spiritual ambitions of men; it presents the speediest and surest method of saving the churches, and it helps to restore the unity of the church." This Movement, although only three years old, has done much to persuade men that they are needed in the business of the church, especially in the work of evangelizing the world.

Now that I am about through I hear some brother say, "Oh! it is so easy to theorize about men in the church." "Talk is cheap." No one appreciates that more than the speaker. Let us see if we cannot agree as to certain facts, backed up by Scripture.

First. That there are some grand, noble, and earnest Christian men in the church. These are described by Jethro as "Able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness."

Second. That there are many men in the church who are not fulfilling their vows. They are like the members of the Laodicean church, "Lukewarm and neither cold nor hot."

Third. That there are many men in the world not in the church and have no desire to be in it. They are like Gallio who cared for none of those things.

Fourth. The strong men in the church are somewhat responsible for those who are living at a poor dying rate as well as for those who are spiritually dead. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." I am my brother's keeper.

Jacob had twelve sons. They represented different types of character. They did not all have the traits of Joseph and yet they could all say, "Thy servants are twelve brethren the sons of one man." "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." Having a common father, it devolves upon us to love all men and so to influence their lives that from the heart they can say, "Our Father who art in Heaven."

The problem of the men in the church is a difficult one and hard to solve. But if the men of the world like to do hard things such as the discovery of the North Pole, why should the man of faith, the man of God, shrink from the discovery of some way to bring men into the church and hold them there.

We are living in an age when the cause and cure of disease claim the attention of men of medical science. Thousands of dollars are being spent and many men are devoting their lives in research as to what produces cancer, for instance, in the human system. Thus far without result, but one thing we know, that in the last analysis the cause of this as well as all other disease is sin. We are living in an age when the State is disturbed by questions arising between capital and labor, socialism, anarchism, municipal corruption, &c., and associations are being formed and millions of dollars are being spent to benefit society and free it from its ills. In seeking to know the cause of this unhappy condition in the State in the last analysis it is sin. As regards the church, when the question is propounded as to why men do not go to church, and as to why men who do go are not interested, the answer in the last analysis is sin. Just so far as we can eradicate sin from the body human, the body politic, and the body ecclesiastic, there will be increased health and life. The battle is on. Satan is leading his forces and his recruiting stations are to be found at the saloons which are in existence in our State and in other States by permission of the Christian people, yes, and by permission of Presbyterian Christians.

What is the church doing to enlist men in the war against sin and unrighteousness? Compared with Satan's emissaries, precious little. It is almost as

hard to get men into the church now as it is to obtain recruits in the regular army of our country. Every day at Independence Square, in Philadelphia, there stands a sergeant of the United States Army endeavoring to get young men to enlist. He tells them what are the necessary requirements, what is the pay, and what is expected of those who are mustered into the service. Let us as soldiers in the army of Jesus every day act as recruiting officers to bring in not only the young, able bodied men, but the sick, the aged, the debauched, the outcast, remembering that our Captain has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

What the church needs is a revival of religion, not a man-made revival, but a God-given revival, such as some of us remember in 1858. One of the noble young ministers deeply interested in that revival was the Rev. Dudley A. Tyng, who died suddenly as the result of an accident. Almost his last words were: "Stand up for Jesus." These words have been immortalized by Rev. Dr. Duffield in his hymn for men, the second verse of which is:—

"Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
The trumpet call obey;
Forth to the mighty conflict
In this His glorious day:
Ye that are men now serve Him
Against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose."

We are living in a record-breaking age. Steamships are crossing the Atlantic in less time than ever before; railroads are shortening the time between the great cities; automobiles are smashing all previous records, besides smashing other things; airships are going faster and staying up longer it would seem at each trial; the North Pole has at last been reached after years of effort. Is it not time for the church to do some record breaking both at home and abroad? How can this be done unless the men of the church come "to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord, against the mighty."

"We are living, we are dwelling,
In a grand and awful time;
In an age on ages telling,
To be living is sublime.
Hark! the waking up of nations,
Gog and Magog to the fray:
Hark! what soundeth is creation's
Groaning for its latter day.

"Worlds are charging, heaven beholding;
Thou hast but an hour to fight;
Now, the blazoned cross unfolding,
On, right onward, for the right!
On! let all the soul within you
For the truth's sake go abroad;
Strike! let every nerve and sinew
Tell on ages, tell for God."

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