

LESSON 8

SUNDAY-SCHOOL WORK.

SUNDAY-SCHOOLS have become an almost universally diffused means of religious culture, in connection with church work and Christian activity. The true relations of the school to the church and of the pastor to the school, should be better understood and more clearly defined than they seem to be. That serious and more frequent difficulties do not arise in connection with them, is due to the mutual good sense, good feeling, and forbearance of Christian workers engaged in church and school, rather than to the want of occasion.

Suggestions, few and brief only, can be offered respecting the matter, in this place.

1. A church school should belong to the church. It should be supported by, and under the control of the church. While the church should not ordinarily or needlessly interfere with its operations, it should maintain the right to its general management. A mission school holding no vital connection with the church, and not sustained by it, cannot be controlled by it.

2. The pastor, as pastor of the church and all its work, is also pastor of the Sunday-school, its general overseer and adviser. And the officers and teachers

stand in their own light, and are exceedingly unwise, who do not often seek his counsel and co-operation. But many Sunday-school workers seem purposely to stand aloof from, and almost if not quite in antagonism to both church and pastor.

3. The pastor should frequently visit the school, if but for a few minutes at a time, making such suggestions as he thinks are needed, and encouraging both teachers and pupils.

4. He should also, as far as possible, visit the parents of the pupils in their homes, and secure, if practicable, their attendance on the services of the church, in public worship.

5. It is not, however, wise, save in exceptional and pressing cases of necessity, for the pastor to become the acting superintendent of the school, admitting that he may be able to fill that office much better than any one else to be had. It imposes an amount of labor he ought not to perform; his ministerial and pastoral services are likely to deteriorate; and his relations to the people may become complicated and vexatious.

6. Nor is it wise for the pastor to become a teacher in the school. Many, especially young pastors, attempt this, but have to abandon the effort. All his thought, vigor, and energy should be given to his own appropriate ministerial work on the Sabbath. He would probably lose as much effectiveness from the pulpit, as he would furnish to the Sunday-school or the Bible Class.

7. But if he can have charge of a teachers' meeting or a Bible Class for the study of the Scriptures, some

time during the week, he will do an important and substantial service.

8. The pastor will materially further Sunday-school work, and perhaps correct mistaken ideas concerning it, by occasionally preaching on the subject.

9. One of the peculiar dangers to which this department of Christian work is exposed, is to superficial study, and to a superabundance of light and trifling entertainments. This is on the plea of interesting the children. But it easily invades the sphere of real religious work, and is liable to prevent rather than to further Bible study. It is the pastor's duty to watch the drift of things.

THE CHOIR, AND MUSIC.

STILL more intimately does the pastor stand related to the service of song, as a part of Christian worship; and consequently to those who lead that service. The people ought to sing the praises of God in worship, and not permit that department of devotion to be performed wholly by a few selected singers.

Observation and experience extending over a pretty wide field, have generally decided that congregational singing can be promoted better by the use of a chorus choir to lead, than by either a quartet or a precentor. A choir therefore, under ordinary circumstances, would constitute the best leadership of song-worship in the church.

Singers are proverbially sensitive; stand a good deal on the dignity of their position, and on their capability, and are liable at times to become a little factious. Churches have been not unfrequently agitated, and sometimes thoroughly rent by choir troubles. Of course similar results have come to pass—and perhaps quite as frequently—through trustees, deacons, and even ministers themselves. So that choirs should not have to bear undeserved blame.

1. As the pastor is the conductor of worship, the services of the choir should be directly under his control. There cannot be two heads, two directing

wills, and of course two methods which may become diverse, and even antagonistic to each other, without difficulty resulting.

2. The pastor should use great discretion in his intercourse with the singers, avoid arbitrary dictation, encourage and commend them where it can be done, show an affectionate interest in them, and when they differ in opinion, take kindly counsel with them. A minister kind and wise will seldom have any serious difficulty with a choir.

3. Singers should, so far as practicable—and the leader always—be Christians. It would be as incongruous to appoint an unconverted man to lead the prayer meeting, as to lead the service of song for worship.

4. Volunteer choirs, recruited from the material which the church itself can furnish, are more in harmony with the genius of Christian worship, than hired singers engaged as mere performers would be. The true idea of singing in church, is, not that of a performance for the entertainment of an audience, but that of worship in song. And yet, if the leader, organist or others, devote to this service time and talent valuable to them, and have need, there is no reason why the church, if able, should not give them some compensation.

5. If practicable, every church should secure competent instruction in the elements of vocal music, during a part of the year—the winter months, for instance—for the benefit of the young particularly. This would very much further the purposes of congregational singing in church worship.

6. Praise meetings, so called, are now quite in vogue, as an attraction to religious service. If they can be made really praise meetings, and not a light social entertainment for the sake of drawing people together, they may become spiritually profitable, as well as attractive.

7. So great and so beneficent a power is sacred song, as a means of grace and an aid to devotion, that every pastor should labor, by all legitimate means, to promote its best uses and its highest culture in the church.

8. All that has been said as to the importance of singing in public service, applies with even more force to song in the social meetings for worship. Appropriate singing is almost the life of the prayer-meeting. No effort should be spared to make it effective there.

END LESSON 8