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## Thee Pastor at the Bedside of the Unbeliever

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## The Pastor at the Bedside of the Unbeliever.

If we are called to the bedside of a patient who has no knowledge of the Word of God, to the bedside of the unbeliever, this is done in most instances not at the request of the patient, but upon the suggestion of one of the family or a friend. It cannot be otherwise. How can any one have a desire to hear concerning Christ of whom he knows nothing and in whom he does not believe. It is a sad fact that many, though they are at death's door, in spite of all are filled with hatred against the Word of God, against Jesus, and against every one that accepts Him. They do not hesitate to express their opinion on this subject, as every devout follower of Jesus will know. For this reason members of the family or friends often hesitate to inform the pastor and to request him to come. When they finally do, you will often hear them say: "But, pastor, do not tell the patient that I requested you to pay him a visit," or they will possibly express grave fears as to the conduct of the patient upon the arrival of the pastor. The patient may be unwilling to accept his services, yea, even insult him.

What are we to do? It is quite evident that an immortal soul is at stake, a soul bought with the precious blood of Jesus. We must therefore do all in our power to gain the confidence of the patient. True, sometimes the reception is most cordial in spite of the grave fears of family and friend. But even if at our first visit we were not well received, even if we did find our patient disinterested or antagonistic, can we be offended or grow impatient? Can we really expect a different reception on the part of one who does not know his sins and the fearful consequences of the same, one who knows nothing of Christ and His redeeming love? "Natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Cor. 2, 14. Let us not forget that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," Rom. 8, 7. It is enmity against God and against everything that is of God, against His Word and those that preach it.

How necessary is it, then, that we commune with God even before we visit an unbeliever! God will surely hear our prayer. Will not that very God who is preparing the opportunity to rescue this perishing soul give ear to your supplication as you draw near to ask Him to guide you, to banish all timidity from your heart, to fill you with burning zeal for the stricken one that you might be able to speak that word which will touch his heart and ultimately work his salvation? Trusting in the Lord, you wend your way to the bedside of the patient. You will not fail to express your interest in his well-being and, with a few well-chosen words, your sympathy and your hope for a speedy recovery. In most instances the patient cannot refrain from telling



you all concerning his physical condition, of the pains and aches he is suffering. Do not grow weary and impatient and never forget the purpose of your presence. Watch for your opportunity to present sin and grace, for both are necessary, especially with one who does not know of that one thing needful.

At the opportune moment you might say: "Yes, dear friend, you have been stricken with illness. But did you ever give it a thought that all in human life is in the hands of our heavenly Maker, our life and everything in life, our health and sickness, or anything that might befall us? Yes, there is a God, a God who made all things and upholds them all. To Him we, too, owe our life and everything we have. It is He who blesses us with all things we need and enjoy. It is He who at times sees fit to withhold such blessings from us. In His wise providence He at times permits sickness and other tribulations to come upon us. In this manner He desires to attract our attention and to cause us to stop and think and look over our past life. This we seldom do when all is well. In the hour of sickness and tribulation He would have us ask ourselves as to what we have done, whether we are worthy of the blessings He bestowed upon us. True, there are many that believe that they merited all the blessings they enjoy and even more. For did they not live an upright and honest life? Did they not try their best? Can any one accuse them of murder, theft, or adultery? Alas, they do not realize that our Lord and God is not satisfied even if one had tried his best to keep His Law. He explicitly states that 'whosoever shall keep the whole Law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all,' Jas. 2, 10. God demands a perfect fulfilment of the Law. Never an evil thought should have entered our hearts, never an evil word have passed over our lips, never an evil deed been committed by us. This is what He meant when He said: 'Ye shall be holy.' And since nothing less than a perfect fulfilment of His Law can satisfy His demands 'there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.' And therefore all are under the wrath of God, as He Himself said, Deut. 27, 26, 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this Law to do them.'

"But God has no pleasure in the loss of man. In His loving-kindness He Himself planned and prepared a way of salvation. He sent His own Son to become as one of us, a real human being, that He might be our Substitute and in our stead do for us the things we because of our sinful nature were and are unable to do: to keep the Law perfectly, to take upon Himself the punishment we deserved. All this He did by His suffering and death. He that believes this, he that accepts Jesus as his Savior, will not be lost, but will have everlasting life. This is plainly and most clearly stated in John 3, 16: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting



life.' 'Whosoever believeth': mark well there is no restriction whatever; whosoever believeth shall not perish. For if He loved the *world*, He included all, also you, my dear friend. Will you not allow me to pray for you?" (Do not say "pray *with* you," unless you have the assurance that he has accepted the message presented; we cannot encourage one to pray who is not yet a Christian.)

And what might be included in the prayer spoken aloud? We might thank God that He so loved the world that He sent His own Son, thank Jesus for His suffering, thank God for all the temporal blessings He bestowed upon this patient during his past life, and pray that if it be in accordance with His will, He might alleviate his anguish and pain and grant a speedy recovery and that He might be a real comfort and help to those near and dear to the patient. Above all, let us ask God that this patient might come to understand more and more how necessary it was also for him that God sent His Son to redeem him and that he, too, might come to Him and accept Him as his Savior.

True, we must be careful not to bore the patient with long dissertations. We cannot touch upon all phases of the Christian doctrine during our first visit; yet, as we visit from time to time, we ought to gradually present those things which necessarily must be known for the soul's salvation. For this purpose pertinent Bible-stories might be selected, also Bible-verses, the *sedes doctrinae*. Thus the patient will gradually be led on to deeper knowledge of his sinful condition and of Christ and His meritorious work. This work will naturally require careful planning and preparation.

But be not dismayed if in spite of all your efforts no change of heart is discernible and if, on the contrary, you meet with ridicule. True, to some we are the savor of death unto death, 2 Cor. 2, 16. True, we shall not gain every unbeliever. Yet *we* are innocent of his blood if we have done our duty. On the other hand, we must not forget that the Word of God is at all times a power of God, even if it does not always like a hammer, a fire, a sword, produce immediate results. This living Word is also compared to a seed, which requires time to bring forth fruit. The Word sown may sooner or later bring forth fruit an hundredfold. Let us perform our pastoral duty even though it may seem that all our efforts are in vain.

But if the patient, in addition to his disinterested and antagonistic attitude, is a member of a Christless organization, the lodge, should we, knowing this, accept an invitation to visit him? Yes, indeed. It would however be a grave mistake "to take up the lodge question" at the first sitting. It might make further visits impossible. Yet, we should not hesitate to touch upon this question if an opportunity presents itself, and this especially if we have gained the confidence of the patient. Let us trust that the Word of God, full of



life, vigor, and power, is no less effective at the beside of the patient than elsewhere over against the sinister workings of Satan in the Christless organizations. Let us with tender love, yet unflinchingly and most earnestly, depict the sins of lodgery and continue to present Christ, whose will we are to do and in whose footsteps we are to walk, as long as we are privileged to do so.

Chicago, Ill.

F. O. STREUFERT.

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### Jubiläumspredigt.

(Zum fünfundsiebzigjährigen Jubiläum der Immanuelsgemeinde in Chicago,  
3. November 1929.)

2 P e t r. 1, 1—11.

Geliebte Festgenossen, insonderheit Iwerte Immanuelsgemeinde!

Wer zählt und erzählt alle Güter und Gaben, die Gott während der vergangenen fünfundsiebzig Jahre über diese Gemeinde ausgeschüttet hat, oder wollte gar deren ewigen Wert abmessen und schätzen? Es ist nicht möglich, eine vollständige Geschichte aller Ereignisse zu schreiben. Gott allein weiß es, menschliches Vermögen übersteigt es, das zu fassen oder auch nur zu wissen, was in dem Herzen und Gemüt der Tausende und Zehntausende vorgegangen ist, die unter dieser Kangel gefessen haben. Wie kann man sich nur eine Vorstellung machen von den tiefgehenden, oft für Zeit und Ewigkeit entscheidenden Eindrücken, die gemacht worden sind durch die Predigten der Pastoren Schmid, Müller, Beher, Körner, Lange, Hölter, Vater und Sohn, und deren Gehilfen und Vertreter? Wer schätzt den Einfluß ab auf den Charakter, den Drang zum Glauben, zu Liebe und Hoffnung, der ausgeübt worden ist, durch deren Belehren, Warnen, Ermahnen, Ermuntern, Trösten?

Wer nennt alle die Kinder, die zur Taufe gebracht worden sind? Wer zählt die Stunden des Unterrichts, die die Scharen von Kindern in der Gemeindeschule genossen haben von der Reihe der treuen Lehrer, seit dieselbe von meinem seligen Vater eröffnet wurde? Wie oft wurde wohl der Kleine Katechismus Luthers aufgesagt? Wer erinnert sich all der Konfirmanden, die nach gründlichem Unterricht Treue geschworen haben? Wir denken jetzt an die vielen, vielen Abendmahlsgäste, denen Beherung auf den Weg durch den Leib und das Blut Christi im Abendmahl gereicht worden ist, an die reumütigen Sünder, die Absolution empfangen, an die Brautpaare, die glücklich gemacht wurden, an die ungezählten Tränen, die durch Gottes gepredigtes Wort abgewischt worden sind von den Augen der Trauernden am Sarg.

Wer könnte genügend zu Protokoll geben alle Beratungen in den regelmäßigen und außerordentlichen Gemeindebersammlungen und in den Sitzungen des Vorstandes und der mancherlei Komiteen und Vereine,