

## **SPECIAL MEETING FOR PILGRIMS, ELDERS AND DEACONS**

(The sermon directly below is by Pastor Russell from the 1910 Convention Report, starting on page 236.)

This Special Meeting was Called by Pastor Russell, Who Spoke as Follows:

Dear Friends: I am very glad to meet with you this evening—the pilgrims, strangers, foreigners, respecting this world, elders and deacons in the Church of Christ, of all denominations, irrespective of denominational lines. I thought I should like to have a little talk with you, because it seems to me that, in the first place, there is a great work devolving upon you—a great responsibility in connection with the Lord’s harvest work. And, in the second place, because I believe that those who occupy any place of service in the Lord’s household have correspondingly heavy temptations and trials, and every one of us ought to feel the responsibility of the position and the dangers to our own feet. You know it is very easy for us to think about other people, and other people falling, and other people slipping, and other people sliding, but it is a very important matter, I think, to bring it right home to ourselves. When, in looking over the general interests of the Lord’s work, I have seen those who are in danger, and those who are slipping and sliding, I have observed for years that a large proportion of them are those who have had influential places in the Church of Christ—important positions of service in the Body of Christ—and I feel that the Apostle’s words are fully substantiated when he said, “Do not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive a severer judgment.” So while it is a very honorable thing to be a servant in the Body of Christ, it carries with it a very weighty responsibility and danger, lest, after preaching to others, we ourselves should be castaways. In my own personal experience, dear friends—and I expect to say nothing to you I do not feel for myself—I have had this heavily upon my heart and mind for several years. I have noted some of those who slipped away from the truth, and have said to myself, Some of these people have good intellects, some of them at least see matters very clearly, and if they could see clearly at one time and, apparently, be very intelligent in the truth, and then to lose it and have it all become blind to them, might not I, similarly, fall away from the position of favor, and knowledge of the truth, also? And my heart answered, “Yes” and I said to the Lord, “Lord keep me, hold me in thy powerful hand.”

While we are not to attempt to pass judgment on anybody and say, “You are thus, and you are so, and you have too much of this, and too little of that,” yet we cannot be oblivious to some conditions you know, and after one has fallen away, it is not improper at least to say, “On what did he slip?” At the time it might be improper for us to judge that anyone was slipping, or that he was in a wrong condition of heart, because we are not able to judge the heart; but after one has slipped, then I think it is right and proper that we should look to see upon what did that person slip.

I remember as a boy passing along a street of Pittsburgh, one evening, after the snow had fallen, I walked over one of those old, smooth, iron cellar doors when it was covered with a thin shimmer of snow. Just as I stepped upon it I went down that quick (snapping finger). And just as I fell I thought of the Scripture that says, "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." I think I had hardly touched the cellar door when I had that all through my head. I do not know that I had any haughty spirit in connection with that fall, but I concluded that I could learn a good lesson from that. I have watched, and my experience is that there are slippery places along the spiritual pathway, and when we are carelessly walking along, thinking about something else, and not minding our feet, not watching where we are stepping, is the time when we are likely to go down quickly. And the thing, so far as my judgment will enable me to determine, that has proven the most disastrous to those who have fallen, has been a spirit of pride and selfishness. You know what I mean. I think it is often well for us to be so much on guard on that subject that if we find any feeling creeping up at any time of any disposition to sit down on anybody, we had better inquire of ourselves, Why am I wishing to sit down on that brother? Is it simply because it is necessary and proper, or is it some feeling of pride that I have? And whatever may be the matter that comes, we need to keep close watch upon ourselves, upon our own hearts. Of course, we want to keep watch upon our tongues, and upon all the conduct of life, but especially upon our hearts. What is the motive? Why did you say that? Why did you do that? What was the motive behind such an action? And when we thus criticize ourselves, we are doing what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, "See then that ye walk circumspectly." To walk circumspectly means to look all around to see where you step. And so you and I, dear brethren, in proportion as we have service to do for the great King, realize that our adversary, the Devil, goeth about seeking whom he may entrap, and ensnare, and stumble, and that in like proportion he gives special attention to us. I am confident he gives me plenty of attention. Of course, we are glad on the other hand that the Lord also is giving us his attention. Whoever is specially beset by the adversary, the Lord, we may be sure, is also specially caring for, if they are his and loyal at heart, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him and delivereth them."

It would not be my thought to inculcate a spirit of slavish fear, but a spirit of great reverence for God, and an intense feeling that we are in the most important work and that we are simply there as God's servants, and the servants of the Church, and it behooves us to do all in our power to serve the flock of Christ and not to do so from any selfish motive, any spirit of vaunting self, or puffing up self, or exalting self before the people, but, simply, How can I best serve the Lord, and those who are his? And where that spirit is within, I believe there is safety, and if there be any other spirit, if you find yourself looking out for a position, I believe you will find you are in a dangerous place and should pray God for your deliverance.

I am not the only one who has observed this. Some dear brethren have written me along the same line. I think of several pilgrim brethren who wrote me, saying, “Brother Russell, I wish you could put something in the Watch Tower that would serve to help save and protect us pilgrims. When we go places the dear friends make so much of us that I feel,” one writer said, “That so far as I am concerned I sometimes almost feel my head swelling, and you know that is a dangerous feeling.” It was; he was right. It is well that the Lord’s people everywhere should exercise judgment, and not speak in too laudatory terms of anybody, but speak in as laudatory terms as you please about the truth and about the Great One who gave us the truth—the Lord. But do not puff up anybody unduly. There may be some that could stand it, and others who could not stand it, and you and I would be very sorry if we should find ourselves responsible ultimately for having helped to stumble some brother in the way. The very fact they mention this, you see, shows that others besides myself have felt the importance of the situation and the responsibility of the position.

As I was thinking about this little address this evening, a certain text of Scripture came into my mind, the language of the Apostle Paul when he called together the elders of Ephesus, when he was on his way to Jerusalem, and had not time to go to the city. The elders came out to meet him near the ship, and when they were together he said, as the mouthpiece of the Lord Jesus, “Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28) Mark the way the Apostle states it —“Take heed unto yourselves.” That comes in first, my dear brethren, with all of us. God sees it to be more important to you what you shall do for yourself than what you shall do for anybody else, and God sees it to be so with me, and that I must be more particular respecting myself than respecting anybody else, no matter who. It is well I should feel the responsibility of being a servant of the Lord, and a mouthpiece and ambassador, and it is well that you should feel your responsibility in whatever you shall say and in all you shall do and in all your conduct, remembering the influence this will have on others, either for good or for evil, but it is still more important for yourself. God says that this matter should begin with you, in your own heart, and with me in my own heart. “Take heed unto yourselves.” That means, dear friends, a very careful watch of all we do—strict heed—not merely that you took heed last year and took an inventory and saw then just the condition of your heart and found it all right. I have found in my experience it is important for the Lord’s people, especially for those who are in any prominent place, to take inventory of their condition every night. How are you tonight, before you go to bed? What is your heart’s condition? How near are you to the Lord? Have you any spots upon your garments, any wrinkles upon the wedding robe? If so, get rid of these. There is only the one way. He who does not keep rid of the spots he gets and keep rid of the wrinkles he gets, is not in any condition to teach the flock of God anything on the subject. This matter begins with ourselves, dear friends. “Take heed unto yourselves.”

Then secondly, you will be in the proper condition to take heed of the flock of God, which God has purchased with the blood of his own Son. How much heed does the flock need? All your imperfect powers, and all of my imperfect powers. It is a wonderful privilege to be ambassadors for God, as though God was speaking, as though we were his mouthpieces. Oh, if we could only feel this evening as we sit here, and feel it every day, that it is not a plume or a medal, or something to be displayed, but it is a responsibility that we must give an account of! If you have large privileges, you have also large responsibilities. If the Church of Christ has given you a position, then you owe it to God to consider, as the Apostle said, that the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer—not merely that the flock of God has made you an overseer, not merely have they voted for you to be the elder or deacon in the Church, but that God has been behind this matter, and that the whole arrangement is of him. It is that you are to recognize and feel the responsibility, not merely to those brethren who chose you, but also that God was behind the whole arrangement, and that they were acting according to design and arrangement in electing you, and that you in accepting the election were responding not merely to their votes as the votes of so many New Creatures in Christ, but because you understand that the Holy Spirit was acting and moving according to the directions of the Word of God through those brethren who thus voted, and that your responsibility, therefore, is a double one: that as having accepted their votes and as having accepted the service which they tendered, and to God as recognizing that all the affairs of the Church of Christ are under divine supervision. As the Apostle puts it, God hath set in the body the various members as it pleases him, and if we are not faithful to the setting, he is very able to unset and to bring a different arrangement. It is for us to be, therefore, very careful to feel fully and strongly this responsibility to God and to the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made us overseers.

The Apostle goes on to say that the Holy Spirit made us overseers for certain purposes—with a certain object in view. What was that object? Was the object of the Holy Spirit in making us overseers of the flock that we might entertain the world? No. That we should feed the world? No. That we should tickle the ears of the Church? No. That we should show off ourselves, and flash? No. What was the object of the Holy Spirit in making us overseers? The answer of the Apostle is that the Holy Spirit made us overseers that we might feed the flock. What is it to feed the flock? It is to give them the meat in due season, to give the nourishment. Now, there are some who have a feeling that they must give the flock the kind of food which would glorify the giver most, and unless they can find some way of glorifying themselves in connection with that they are not going to feed anybody. That is all wrong. We all know that is wrong. They know that is wrong. They have not thought upon the responsibility of their position.

The proper attitude, dear brethren, I am sure you will agree with me, is this: God wishes his flock to be fed; he has given you and me the opportunity of service in this direction;

he expects us to lay aside self entirely and to devote ourselves with every energy to do all we can to feed the flock, ignoring self. Never mind whether they have any respect for you or not; never mind whether they glorify you or not; go in and feed the flock—let the other matter take care of itself. But my opinion is that the flock will ultimately know whether you have been feeding them or not, and the flock ultimately will appreciate you as a servant. They will not appreciate you as lord and master and as a king over them, and you should not wish to be so appreciated. The proper attitude for all the Lord's people is to be glad to be privileged to be servants of the flock, and, as Jesus said, he that is greatest amongst you, he whom you should esteem the most highly, who was it to be? The one who puffeth himself up? Nay, verily. Who was it to be? The one who serves most—the one who most thoroughly lays down his life in the service of the Lord's cause. Now that is the lesson the great Teacher himself gave to you and to me, that if we would be pleasing to him what care you and I whether we are pleasing to any one else or not. Of course, we should all like to be pleasing to everybody, and especially to the flock of God; that is proper enough; but we should fix first in our own hearts and first in our own minds that we should be pleasing to our Heavenly Father and to our Lord Jesus. And if we find that we are pleasing to them, no matter what else may happen, we have every reason to be thoroughly satisfied with the result. Is not that what we all agree to? I am sure it is.

Therefore, the special exhortation I wish to give is, that we forget self entirely, except to see that self is hard at work, that the “old man” is thoroughly bending his back to help on the New Creature in all the work that the New Creature is engaged in; that you are working him for all he is worth—making a regular slave of him if you please—your old man, the natural man, the human body. I do not suppose there is any danger of anybody here going away and telling a story to the effect that they did not like the speaker because he spoke so disrespectfully of his father when he mentioned the “old man.” We have the thought that our old man is the old nature, and that, as the Apostle tells us, you remember, the old nature has been given to us as New Creatures to be our servant, and whereas some of us formerly lent our powers to sin and wrong doing, so now, as New Creatures, we are to take these bodies and use them for every kind of righteousness, that we may glorify God in our bodies as well as in our spirit which are his.

So then I hope I make clear, and that it enters into all our hearts, the very great responsibility of being representatives of the Church in service—appointed to a service and not to lordship, and, secondly, appointed of the Lord to be his servants to feed the flock of Christ. We will honor our Lord and please him best to whatever extent we forget self and engage most thoroughly in the service of the truth. So that if the thought ever comes before your minds—as it may, or might—if I do this it will not glorify me, if I do that it would glorify me, you are to put such a thought entirely from you as being disloyal and unworthy of yourself as a New Creature. The whole thing you and I must have in mind in respect to our service is, What will please our Master whom we serve and whom

we expect to join shortly, if found faithful, in his kingdom? If we seek to serve ourselves, then be assured that we will not be pleasing to him, and that we will fail of the great prize. We may be sure—I am certain you will assent to this—that the Lord will not have a single one in the kingdom class who is self seeking and selfish; that is contrary to the spirit of our Master; and so the Apostle tells us that God foreknew and foreordained the election of those who would be copies of his Son, and, therefore, if you and I would be copies of Christ and joint heirs of Christ in his kingdom we must be copies in this particular sense that he was servant of all; and to the extent that you and I can be servants of all, or servants of a few, as the case may be, we should be glad of the opportunity.

Now, another line of thought, if you please: When I use the word “preach” do not understand me to mean merely to orate as in a discourse or sermon. We are preaching in the sense of teaching. All public speaking is in the nature of preaching or giving forth the message, whether it be in holding Berean classes, or whatever other way; it is a preaching or sending forth the message of the Lord. And I suggest to you, dear friends, that the thing we are to preach, the message we are to deliver, is a very important one, and that the Adversary would like very much to get our minds diverted from it. Some he might tempt to go off on some side issue that was new, so that the class might think they were getting new light. I do not think you want any new light. I do not think the Lord wants any new light. I do not think there is any new light, my dear friends. Our great light was started 1800 years ago. The difficulty with us has been that that light has become obscured by the traditions of the elders, and we are trying to get the globe washed clean so the light can shine out. We are trying to get things so that the great truths that Jesus and the Apostles enunciated are understood clearly by ourselves and all the flock of God over which he has made us overseers. Hence we should avoid anything like trying to manufacture some new light, dangerous to ourselves and dangerous to the flock. Is there not plenty in the Gospel Jesus preached? Is there not plenty in the Gospel the Apostles preached? How much more do we want, I would like to know? I do not think, my dear friends, that it is necessary for you and me to turn in to be manufacturers of new light, and I think there is a danger in that direction, therefore I am seeking to guard you. I believe that the message of the Lord Jesus, the message that the angels announced, is the message that the world needs to understand—the great love of God, and the great love of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how he died, the just for the unjust, and the class he is now calling, and how we must make our calling and election sure, and how the ransom price that Jesus paid is the foundation for the entire scheme of salvation, that the death of Jesus is the foundation upon which every feature of divine grace is builded. Then all the philosophy connected with that can very well come in; it is all connected; but ransom, restitution, sacrifice, and the divine nature—these are the fundamentals of the Gospel of Christ, so far as I can see. These are the things that Jesus and the Apostles taught and that they set us an example respecting. I believe your course will be the most pleasing to God, and the most successful with his people in bringing them into harmony with the Lord and blessing them with the richness of his spirit, in proportion as you keep very

close with the Master and to those twelve stars whom God appointed to be the circle, the crown, of the Church, as pictured in the 12th chapter of Revelations.

Another thing: Some of the dear brethren seem to find as much about Bro. Russell in the Bible as they find about the Lord Jesus, and I think that is a great mistake. I do not find it there. Some of them say that I am blinded on that subject, that they all can see better than I can. Perhaps they can, I do not know, but I think, dear friends, that there is a danger in that direction, and I would like to put you all on guard. I think it is the Lord's will that we should recognize every agency God uses, but we are not to recognize any agency of God as being in any competition whatever with the Lord or with his divine arrangement. He is the fountain of blessing, he only is most to be praised. I think that is the right sentiment. I believe you all agree with that. And yet I think there is a danger of some dear friends preaching Bro. Russell. Bro. Russell would like for you not to do so. He thinks it would not be to the glory of God. Let me repeat, then, dear friends, that in my opinion we have so much of the Gospel of God, so much of his plan to study, so many opportunities of showing forth his praises, that we should employ all our time in that way. My advice, therefore, is that we give very little attention to anything outside of that. The Scriptures do indeed say that we may render honor to him to whom honor is due, and that is applicable to anybody and everybody; as for instance, we look back and we see Martin Luther, and he did a grand work, and we thank God for him; and we might say the same of John Wesley, and very truthfully; I am glad in God's providence he lived, and that he was a faithful man. And there were others of the Lord's people in the past. Let us be glad and rejoice in every one, and be thankful to God he has used various agencies in helping us, and in helping others, and in bringing forward his great cause; but let us not go into anything that would be at all like man-worship, for I am sure that would be displeasing to the Lord and injurious to ourselves. I remind you again of the Scripture in Revelations where the Church is pictured, which we called attention to, I believe, thirty years ago. John, the revelator, who was seeing things, fell down to worship the angel who showed them to him, and the angel said, "See thou do it not; worship God; I am thy fellow servant." And so, dear friends, if our Heavenly Father and our Heavenly Lord have used Brother Russell in any measure he is very glad and very thankful to be used. And if the Lord is pleased to use him any more, he will be glad to be used down to the last breath, but he does not want any worship, he does not want any undue adoration, he does not want any praise. He is glad to have the love of all those who are brethren of the Lord and to be considered a fellow-servant with all, striving to bring to pass all the glorious things that God has promised, striving to tell the good tidings of great joy to as many as the Lord, our God shall call.

Now I thought, dear friends, after these few remarks, I should give you an opportunity for some questions pertaining to the work, or questions pertaining to the different classes. I think a few minutes thus spent might perhaps be profitable. You need not write them; oral questions will serve the purpose.