

How To "Get the Very Best" Out of Our Conferences.

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The four-monthly General Conferences of the Old Baptist Union were designed for the spiritual refreshment of all the ministers and members of the Society. Cheering reports of progress and blessing, given by those our ministers who have reaped in the Lord's harvest fields, are undoubtedly a source of inspiration and encouragement to others, whose labours have perhaps been mainly confined to the tilling of less fertile fields.

Sound spiritual advice and instruction, from those whose long and varied experiences have rendered them capable of helping their younger brethren, may well be gratefully acknowledged and carefully considered.

And by no means the least of the blessings to be derived from these periodical meetings of brethren engaged in the same work, is—"the communion of saints"; a source of comfort and strength which should be cultivated and enjoyed to the full.

There are, happily, very few servants of God who are so self-contained and sufficient, that they feel well able to carry on their work without the sympathy, encouragement, and assistance which are to be derived from periodical gatherings of men and women who are their fellow-workers together with God.

If any such there be, they will probably—as time passes—learn the value of the blessings which they now despise, in the hard school of failure and disappointment; and as far as *they* are concerned, although it will certainly not be so well for their Master's flocks, that experience will do them good.

But to those who have already suffered in the loneliness of isolation, the lack of brotherly kindness and sympathy, and the need of the Godly advice of experienced brethren,—to all these, the Conferences are as oases in the desert, and seasons of "refreshing from the presence of the Lord," greatly to be prized.

I ask myself then, and I hope all our workers will ask themselves, "How can we make the very best of our Conferences, and get for ourselves the highest good which the Master can confer upon His disciples, by their means?"

Does it depend at all upon ourselves? If we are careless in our preparation for the Conferences; if we won't take the trouble to join our brethren in fasting and prayer for God's blessing to be richly poured upon us; if we go up to the Conferences with a spirit of fault-finding, or conceited unteachableness; or if we take part reluctantly, rather than joyfully, with the expectation of neither giving nor getting any good; if, in Peter's plain words, our "hearts are not right in the sight of God,"—then, the Conferences will be impaired for others, and not at all blessed to ourselves; and that, *through us*.

For all who attend the Conferences are a part of them, and *their very influence tells, for good or evil*. Even a warmth-giving, cheerful fire will lose its power for good, and be in danger of going out entirely, if

it be "banked up" with lumps of slag and slate. And the devil's mission of dissension and discouragement is always looking for tools among unspiritual ministers and Christian workers, and too often finding them.

We are warned by the Holy Spirit against "A root of bitterness" springing up, "whereby many may be defiled"; and against "a little leaven" of evil thought, or discontent, or indifference, which may leaven "the whole lump." And our Lord Himself pronounces a "Woe" upon the man "by whom offence cometh."

Let us therefore draw very near to God before we go up to the Conferences; and watch against the spirit of evil all the time we are there. Let us seek not only to be blessed ourselves, but used as clean, humble, and efficient channels of blessing to others.

If we can say to our neighbours, "Be of good cheer!"—and tell of blessings received at the hands of the Lord, whereby the faith and joy of all may be increased, let us do it, for God's glory.

Let us be willing to take any place or part in the Conference to which we may be assigned by its leaders; or even to be as the poet says:—

"Willing, should He not require me,
In silence to wait on Him still."

This is not an impossible dream, but an oft experienced reality, when, as at Pentecost, the people of the Lord are gathered, "*All with one accord,*"—and that unanimous agreement is to get all the blessing God designs to give, and be fully used by Him to the good of others.

May no fault lie at our door, if the forthcoming Conference, and those in the future, are not "all," and "more abundantly beyond all, that we can ask, or even think." Depend upon it, it will not be the fault of the Divine Head of the Church, if they are not so.