

LESSON SEVEN

THE ALTAR SERVICE

A. THE ALTAR CALL:

To be able to give a successful altar call is a ministry that calls for a special anointing. Not everyone is able to give an earnest invitation. One must have a real love and compassion for souls. One must be fully persuaded that the unsaved soul is eternally lost.

The invitation should be simple, earnest, direct and personal. It is at this point that decisions are made. Therefore nothing should interfere nor interrupt this part of the service. The saints should be in prayer and believing God for the salvation of souls.

If there is anywhere the evangelist needs a special anointing it is here. The evangelist must plead with the sinner with tears and love, but it must not be a sham. The earnestness and anointing must be real.

B. THE ALTAR SERVICE:

In some churches the altar service may be in a prayer room; in other churches the altar service may take place at the altar in the front of the church. Both places have merit and one could argue for either one.

The prayer room has merit in that it removes the noise of the praying away from the unsaved visitor. It also leaves the unsaved behind in the auditorium where they can be dismissed and the evangelist may have the opportunity to shake their hands, invite them back, and to further deal with their souls.

The church altar has merit in that a stranger will find it much easier to make his way down to the altar than to walk out into another part of the building. Also strangers are sometimes interested in seeing what is happening at the altar. Here they can see everything and many of their questions answered and doubts removed. However, in this case they should be instructed that all visiting should wait until the altar service is finished.

There are many ways in conducting the altar service. The evangelist should consult with the pastor and have a perfect understanding just how it should be handled.

A good way is to have a class of instruction with the altar workers before the revival effort begins. Altar workers should be appointed and instructed how to pray with seekers. Many saints with the best of intentions do more harm than good at the altar.

Here are a few recommendations:

1. Have men pray with men, women with women, young people with young people. However, this principle should not be too rigid. Sometimes a person of different age and sex can be the one who will really help the seeker. The Holy Spirit should definitely be in charge here.

2. Workers must really be anointed and have a genuine love for the soul they are dealing with. It must not be a formal thing.
3. Seeking will generally fall into the following classes:
 - (a) Sinners coming to the altar to accept the Lord and to seek repentance.
 - (b) Backsliders coming to the altar for repentance, confession, restoration and refilling.
 - (c) Christians needing help and encouragement to solve problems and get victory in battles with temptation.
 - (d) Believers coming to the altar to receive the Holy Ghost.
4. In most cases the worker knows the seeker and understands fully the purpose of him being at the altar. As a result he immediately can begin to pray with the seeker and to encourage him to pray through.
5. In the case of the stranger and sinner, the worker should quietly approach him with a Bible in his hand and courteously enquire concerning his need.

C. DEALING WITH THE SINNER AND STRANGER:

Many come the first time to the Pentecostal altar knowing very little about the gospel message. To them everything is new and they need some clear instruction.

As a rule these are very easy to deal with. They are so anxious to find the Lord as their Savior that they will do almost anything they are told. If they are told to raise their hands, they will do so; if they are told to shout, they will shout. However, first they must understand the plan of salvation and why they do certain things at the altar.

If the seeker is a stranger and has come to the altar for the first time, the worker should take a Bible and quietly kneel at his side. He then quietly speaks to him, and asks him a few questions. Questions similar to these may be asked: "Friend, have you been born again?" "Brother, do you know Jesus Christ as a personal Savior?" The object here is to determine the seeker's need. Refrain from the question; "Are you a Christian?" for many will answer "Yes" simply on the basis of church membership. The questions should be carefully worded and specific.

If he has accepted Jesus Christ, then questions like this may be asked: "Have you been baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ?" "Have you been baptized with the Holy Ghost?" "Have you spoken in tongues?"

If these questions are all answered in the affirmative, then you may proceed with such questions as: "Are you living a victorious life?" "Do you have victory in your soul?"

If the seeker is a sinner at the altar for the very first time and has had no experience with God, then the worker should ask him whether he understands the plan of salvation, and proceed to explain carefully. This he may do by using the Bible. He should open the Bible on the altar bench and allow the seeker to read for himself. Two Scriptures that the writer has used many times successfully are John 1:12 and Acts 2:38. Turning first of all to John 1:12 and after reading this Scripture, ask the seeker, "In this verse what are we told to do?" Receive Jesus and believe on His Name. "If we do these things, what are we promised?" Power to become the son of God. "Have you receive Jesus? Do you believe on His Name? Then what are you promised?"

After the seeker understands this Scripture, then turn to Acts 2:38 and develop similarly as with John 1:12.

After the worker is satisfied that the seeker understands fully these two Scriptures, then he tells the seeker he is going to pray. After he prays earnestly for the sinner that he might be granted repentance and that in faith he might accept Jesus, he now asks the seeker to pray. If he is unable to pray, it might even be wise to have him repeat a prayer of repentance after the worker.

In all of this the worker is earnest, sincere, courteous and fairly quiet. Largely the seekers own reactions and response will guide him.

D. POINTS TO REMEMBER:

There are a few things to remember:

1. There must not be anything offensive such as body odor or bad breath.
2. There must not be any familiarity. Hands off are a good policy to remember. There is a definite ministry of the laying on of hands but this is not just for everyone. There are times when the worker will put his arm around the seeker, place his hand upon his head, etc. but the right person must do this at the right time.
3. Remember that it is the Lord who grants repentance, and it is the Lord who fills with the Holy Ghost. It is impossible to shake the Holy Ghost into people.
4. Two or three earnest workers with one seeker are sufficient. A crowd can confuse more than help the seeker.

E. PRAYING MEN AND WOMEN THROUGH:

Everyone is anxious to see the seeker receive the Holy Ghost, but there must not be any superficial, surface experience.

The writer is aware that many will disagree with him at this point, but he is firm in his conviction that true repentance and saving faith cannot be hurried. Much harm can be done by a premature haste. It is like trying to bring on the birth of a baby premature before time, or helping a chicken out of the egg before time. **THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE TO PRAYING THROUGH!**

The new babe in Christ will cry out, "Abba, Father," he will speak in tongues. He needs no help here. It is the Holy Ghost who will take over his tongue and speak through him. Moreover the newborn babe in Christ will know it. The Holy Spirit will bear witness to his spirit. He will be satisfied. If he is not satisfied, he should be encouraged to continue praying until he is satisfied.

For years now, the writer has refrained from telling the newborn babe whether or not he has been baptized with the Holy Ghost. Almost every time the Holy Ghost bears witness to everyone at the same time when the work has been completed. Workers should be encouraged in praying seekers through to the real experience, and not be passing judgment upon whether or not someone has received the Holy Ghost. The Lord Himself keeps the true record and will make no mistake.

COURSE: EVANGELISM I

LESSON SEVEN

SELF HELP TEST

A. Write a paragraph comparing the merits of a prayer room with that of a church altar.

B. Give FOUR points to remember in conducting an altar service.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

C. Write a paragraph on this subject: "Praying Men and Women Through."

D. Explain just how you would approach and deal with a stranger at the altar.

If you wish to obtain your AIS Bible and Theology Certificate or work toward your B.A. Degree from Indiana Bible College, complete this Self-Help Test as completely as possible and return it to: AIS, P.O. Box 47917 Indianapolis, IN 46247 or email it to: ais@apostolic.edu or fax it to: (317) 781-7700.