

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

BENDING THE KNEE

by the Rev. Morley D. Rich

We seldom think about how important our knees are to us, of how many things they help us to do—walking and running, to name two of the most important. When we study the human body, we may be greatly impressed with the wonder of their construction, and how intricately and perfectly the various nerves, muscles, and joints are put together to make our bendings and turnings possible.

For a simple and easy way to see their importance try walking stiff-legged, without in the least bending or turning the knees. Pretty hard, isn't it? And it is almost impossible to run in that way. Also, if you keep at it for any length of time, you find your upper legs and hips becoming very tired and sore, since they and their joints have to do all the work.

When we stop and think about it, we can think of a number of other things our knees enable us to do in our work and in our play. Walking and running are two of these. But a third one which is just as important is their use in worshipping the Lord, as in kneeling down to pray to Him. Have you ever wondered why we do this, why we kneel to do this?

In olden times, people “bent the knee” to their kings. This was a sign of their respect for the king, and of their willingness to follow and obey him. And from this ancient custom came also the practice of kneeling in prayer to our Lord who is King of kings.

But there is a much deeper reason for kneeling than the ancient custom. For this custom came from a thing of the spirit. The Lord tells us that bending the knee is a natural sign of holy fear, and so of humiliation and adoration or worship. Let us think of this in more common words.

Perhaps you have some time had a strong feeling when looking at a beautiful scene in nature, or perhaps in listening to a moving lesson from the Word; maybe you even have had such a strong feeling when you looked at the wondrous way in which the nerves, muscles, and parts of the knee have been put together and work together.

Such a feeling may have been so strong that you felt that all you wanted to do was to fall on your knees and worship the Lord. The kneeling then becomes a natural expression of your spirit, of the feeling and desire that you have. It is a perfect sign of your feeling and worship of the Lord. And the words of prayer which you then say, especially if they are the Lord's prayer, also perfectly correspond to your inner mind or spirit. You feel humble and wish to humble yourself before the Lord; you pray for your Heavenly Father's Love, that He may help you to put away your faults and do better; and you are telling Him that you really do want to obey His commandments. To use a common expression, you are suiting your words to your action of kneeling, and your action to your feeling and thought.

There is another wonderful thing that can happen to us when we kneel to pray. You may say that many times you kneel down without feeling that way, and without having thought about it beforehand. Just the same, it may happen afterwards.

For, when you kneel, you feel that bending in your knees. This may remind you of some of the things you have thought and felt in worship before; and something of the same feelings of awe, of humbleness, and of worship will then come back to you—and with no effort by you except the simple one of kneeling. The Lord does this for you, from His love for you.

These are the reasons why even the Lord Himself, while He was on earth, knelt down to pray—as an example to us. And it is why He invited us in the same words that are most often used by our ministers and leaders: “O come, let us *worship* and *bow down*; let us *kneel* before the Lord our Maker” (Psalm 95:6).

And finally, it is why the Lord also tells us “the signs of charity (that is, of love toward the neighbor) are all things of worship” (Charity 173).

Text: Psalm 95