

# FUNERAL PROCEDURES

## ***ATTITUDE:***

Death is not pleasant. Sadness prevails over those who were closely associated with the deceased. At this time, the minister is called upon to conduct the final rites. What is the minister's attitude? That of genuine warmth and appreciation for the opportunity to be of service; service to the ones who have called the minister to be in charge and an opportunity to shed a light of truth to those who have never really heard the truth.

Remember, the minister is in charge. Usually the undertaker director assumes this and will be very cooperative. Only occasionally is the minister confronted with a director or associate director who will try to assume the minister's position by trying to make all the minister's decisions for him. This is easily solved by calmly but firmly being more persistent than the director in those things which are your responsibility.

## ***DRESS:***

From the black hearse and soft, dimly lighted chapel to the clothing worn, darkness permeates a funeral. The old "rule of thumb" of wearing a dark blue suit for public ministerial duty certainly holds true for funerals. Black suits are equally appropriate; *gray* suits are not as fitting but can be used in an emergency. A dark well-pressed suit, white shirt, reserved tie, and shined shoes will be appropriate dress for the occasion.

## ***BEFORE THE SERVICE:***

Plan to arrive at least fifteen to twenty minutes before the funeral. If it is your first funeral, allow twice that time. Upon arriving, immediately contact the funeral director. Usually he will meet you near the entrance.

If you are carrying a Bible, the director will surmise that you are the minister in charge before the formal introduction. If at all possible, lead in the introduction. This gives you a chance to introduce yourself as Mr. So and So. By doing this, the director may catch on and address you as *Mister* rather than Reverend. If the director speaks first and knows your name, as he usually will, you are doomed to be addressed as Reverend during the remaining of the funeral. Use your judgment in informing him that you do not assume the title "Reverend." Normally this can be done tactfully and simply. With few exceptions you will find the funeral director very anxious to conform to your desires.

If you have met the family of the deceased, you may wish to meet them before the service begins. The director will be glad to take you to them. (Many times the director will ask the minister if he wishes to meet the family.) There may be questions you will want answered by the family before the service, or there may be final arrangements to make in which they are involved. If there has been a major arrangement made by the family that you feel should be altered, don't make the alteration until the family has been consulted. If you know there is considerable antagonism among the family because a Philadelphia

Church of God minister is in charge, it may be wise not to meet them until after the funeral. Many times those who are antagonistic will mollified after they have heard you speak.

It is this period of time just before the service begins that the funeral director may present you with a check or cash. In some cases the funeral home presents all officiating ministers with a check. This is policy of the funeral home and is not a payment from the relatives of the deceased, although theoretically the family is probably paying for it in overall cost of the funeral. At other times, the family will give the director the money to give to the minister. Sometimes this will be done after the funeral. In each case you will have to handle the situation accordingly. There are some cases where unconverted people would actually be offended if the money were not accepted. This is rare, but try to prevent offense if at all possible.

### ***TWO TYPES OF SERVICE:***

The funeral service will come under two basic classifications: (1) chapel, and (2) graveside. If possible and weather permits, recommend the graveside service. This type of service is generally better for every one concerned

### ***CHAPEL SERVICE:***

After meeting the director, ask him what arrangements have been made by the family concerning the service. If a song or songs have been chosen, then make an outline for the entire service and present it to the director either on paper or verbally. Be sure the director understands all details.

Usually the minister will be escorted by the director to his seat behind the pulpit just before it is time for the service to begin. In most cases, organ music will be playing. Use this time to examine the room. Try to locate the family of the deceased. They will probably be in a little room to your right or left, with a thin veil in front of them to hide their mourning. This prevents direct eye contact, but concentrate on addressing them as much as the audience in the main part of the chapel. As the organ music fades out, this is your cue to rise and begin; or if there is a song, it will be the soloists' cue for the solo, after which you will begin the sermon. The sermon is concluded with a brief prayer.

As soon as the minister is seated, the funeral director will give instructions pertaining to the viewing of the body. As the body is viewed the minister may remain seated, or he may rise and stand by his chair. I personally prefer to stand. After the general public has viewed the body and has been ushered outside, the veil will be drawn where the family of the deceased is sitting. They will then view the body. This is not a pleasant experience, but the minister should use his judgment about standing with the family at the time the body is viewed. At this point the minister may be of help to the church members, especially if there is only one or two members among antagonistic relatives. The family will then be ushered outside and taken to the cars for the ride from the chapel so the grave site.

The minister remains with the corpse while the lid of the coffin is closed and the flowers are taken to the flower truck. The pallbearers then carry the coffin from the chapel to the hearse, with the minister leading them. The minister may elect to ride in the hearse or drive his own car to the grave site.

At the grave site, she minister leads the pallbearers from the hearse to the grave. It is expected that the minister stand at the head of the corpse. Usually the director will inform the minister at the grave as to which end is the head. The immediate family will be seated on the front row. The general public will stand. After the committal prayer, the minister is generally expected to shake hands with the immediate family seated on the front row. After this, the director will give instructions for the family to leave. This completes the service. Some directors will have the pallbearers march by and place their boutonnières on the coffin immediately after the committal prayer. Each director seems to have a particular ritual that he prefers.

### ***GRAVESIDE SERVICE:***

Normally the minister will go to the funeral home and check on arrangements, as mentioned above in the case of a chapel service. The same general procedure is followed. The minister will take the lead from the hearse to the grave site. Standing at the head of the corpse, the minister delivers the sermon, ending with a committal prayer. Again the procedure is the same as mentioned above. Only under rare circumstances will the coffin be opened at the grave site.

The minister is given an opportunity to serve the living, not the dead, at a funeral. He is given an opportunity to be of great help to members in the church, as well as being able to inform unconverted people of the truth concerning death and eternal life. This may be the first and last time some will ever hear the truth on this subject during this age. Consider it a wonderful opportunity to serve as a representative of God.

## **FUNERAL SERMON OUTLINE**

### **By Herbert W. Armstrong**

The system I have used is a series of small folded sheets of paper, each containing the notes associated with the scripture in which each note is found. The notes I have used are on pieces of paper, four of which can be made from one 8 ½ x 11 sheet by folding and creasing it in half, and then tearing off, and then folding in half and creasing and tearing off each half. Then the ¼ size is in turn folded in thirds. Usually I wrote my outline in pen and ink, and in so doing I used my own system of abbreviating, and even leaving out words such as articles, etc.

So that in the future use I know where it begins, I start the first note with name of deceased and date of funeral. Then, underscored, I write, “*START.*” Usually there were at least two of these note-pieces required at the start before turning to the next scripture. In

the case I have chosen as a illustration, all three of these slips would be inserted in between the pages where Isaiah 57:1 is found. These notes end with the notation of Job 14:14. The next note has at the top "Job 14:14" and is inserted in between the pages in the bible where Job 14:14 is found. You will find you can turn instantly to this scripture with this note inserted. The three thicknesses of paper in each of these notes is sufficient to cause the bible to open at that place, but not thick enough to become apparent to the audience. They never see the notes.

Now, when you turn to Job 14:14, *first* read the first sentence of this verse, then the note gives you what you have decided to say in comment on it, and at the bottom of the little page (or reverse side if your notes require both sides) you have plainly written and underscored the next text. Then you have your next note with that text (John 5:28-29 in this case) underscored at the top, inserted between the pages where this text is found. You turn to it, first read the next text, then the comment on the note, and so on from text to text.

The following is a sample outline I have used. At the beginning is where I desire to use Isaiah 57:1. Sometimes I do not use it, but shortening it by going directly to Job 14:14, as I will outline below.

*FIRST NOTE:* At top, name of deceased and date of funeral. (This also preserves a record of funerals and which sermon outline was used.) Then the word, large and underscored, "START." Then write on the note as follows: We are sobered, this (afternoon) (morning), in the presence of death. Surely life and death are the most important of all questions and the ones to which we devote the least study and thought And so it is fitting that we pause from our restless every-day hurry, and consider the solemn significance, to each of us personally, of the most certain thing in every life: death!

The popular teaching today represents death as our *best friend* by virtually denying it altogether through the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which teaches that the dead are not dead, but living. Of course, this teaching continues in a futile effort to comfort the bereaved, yet it has never, in fact, softened grief. It is only the truth that can make us free from grief and give real comfort, and truth is revealed from God. God reveals death as an enemy, the last enemy to be destroyed through Christ in God's great plan. Yet it is appointed unto men once to die, but after *this*, the resurrection. It is through the resurrection that God will destroy death. The real truth is comforting. Many do not realize what God has recorded for us concerning life and death.

### **Isaiah 57:1**

(Next note, with this same passage underscored at top): We are in, now, a time of world trouble, the prophesied crisis at the close of this age, a time of world war and fear of war, famine, and disease epidemics, and this, according to prophecy, is the beginning of sorrows, of far more terrible trouble in the world. The end of the present civilization is near. So God mercifully takes away some from the evils we may have to live through. We cannot bring the dead back to us in the unhappy world, but we can be with them in

the kingdom of God which is to come. And so, it is not for the dead but for you *still living*, that we are concerned this (afternoon) (morning). Job asked the question,

**Job 14:14 (first sentence)**

(Next note, with this text underscored at the top): There are many *ideas*, many teachings, about this question. And most people have blindly accepted and assumed whatever they have been taught. (Following omitted from most funerals, but used if atheists or skeptics are known to be present):

There are two general schools of thought: 1) atheists, who believe “death ends all,” no life, no hope after death, and 2) various religious who accept the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul, with their various theories as to how and where the soul continues on after death.

But *truth* on such a subject must be *revealed*. There is no other possible source of knowledge. Unless there is the Divine Almighty Creator who brought it all into being, who guides and controls all natural and spiritual laws, and who has revealed this knowledge, then we must, if rational, plead *ignorance*. This question has never been answered by science. It cannot be learned through test tubes, microscopes or telescopes. Neither the atheist nor the pagan conceptions have any *basis*, neither is, nor can be, *proved*. We are left two alternatives: Accept what God *reveals* in the Holy Bible, or else profess and admit total ignorance. If we reject God’s revelation and we cannot prove it false, we cannot sit in condemnation of those who accept it, for we automatically confess total ignorance. The only possible source of knowledge, then, is God’s revelation in the Holy Bible. (*All this may be omitted here.*) (This is what I used at the funeral of Mr. Christianson, all but two of whose family were atheists who came to ridicule and pick to pieces what I was to say. The above left them speechless. They had nothing to say, after the funeral).

God *reveals* the *truth* on this most important of all questions: Job answers his question:

**Job 14:14, 15**

...and Jesus said,

**John 5:28-29**

So, the Scriptures reveal the truth of the resurrection of *all* who die.

When man was first created, God revealed knowledge of His spiritual law which He set in motion to regulate human relationships, and to produce happiness, peace of mind, the abundant, joyful life, and life eternal. This law is merely the basic principle of love, love to God, and love to fellowman. What *is* sin? Few today seem to know. Sin is the transgression of this inexorable eternal spiritual law, according to I John 3:4. All have sinned. The penalty for sin is death....*Not* eternal life in some place of torture, but

DEATH. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed in God's plan. And so, as we read in I Corinthians 15:22, as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall *all* be made alive...The present life is not *really* life, not eternal or immortal life, *not* life *inherent*, it is a mere fleshly existence, which is temporary and mortal, and is so revealed throughout the Bible. God reveals that man is flesh, made from the dust, *of* the earth, earthly.

### **Genesis 2:7**

Then, verses 15-17...God here revealed to the first man that the wages of sin is death. Sin is the transgression of God's law, of God's government. Sin is going the way that seems right to human minds. Twice the scriptures emphasize, "There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Adam and Eve did what seemed right...*Genesis 3:6*...And what was the *result*?

### **Genesis 3:22-24**

...and Jesus revealed this truth that man is only mortal *flesh*.

### **John 3:6, 3, 5**

...man, now is flesh, "Dust thou art," said God. There is no eternal life inherent in himself.

### **I John 3:15**

...nowhere does the Bible teach the immortality of the soul. There are no such words, no such language or expression in the Bible. (Use following if desired, and if there is time but usually omit):

The word "immortal" occurs only once, and there refers to *God*. The word "immortality" occurs five times: 1) Christ, only, has it; 2) He brought it to light through the gospel; 3) we are told to seek for it; 4) and we put it on at the resurrection.

The Bible plainly says the soul can die; twice it says, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die."...So, man is helpless, mortal, unable to give himself eternal life, doomed to death, eternal death, *eternal* punishment, through sin; for *all* have sinned, and the wages, or punishment is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life, and this we receive through Jesus Christ our Lord. We do not now possess it, it is a gift from God, by His grace. Man was made mortal, of material elements from the ground, but he was made in the image of God, of the same form and shape, but not of the same substance or composition or nature. In John 4:24 we read that God is spirit. And so,

### **John 5:26**

...and through Him, the Son, we may receive the gift of life eternal.

### **I John 5:11-12**

...Now how may we gain this precious gift? We are sinners from birth. Sin is the way of life that has led to all unhappiness, misery, pain, suffering, and death. Jesus did not come that we might have eternal life *only*. He came that we might have life *more* abundantly, Living forever in suffering and unhappiness would *not* be desirable. Eternal life is desirable only in peace, happiness, and joyful, abundant life. So the first condition to having the gift of eternal life imparted to us is *repentance*. We must repent of the way that leads to unhappiness and empty, miserable lives. We must to the way of the happy, peaceful, abundant, joyful life, and that is the way of God's law. Second, we must *believe* on Christ as personal Savior, we must believe His gospel, the good news of the Kingdom of God, the government, the family of God, which we may enter by being born again. Upon these two conditions, God has promised the Holy Spirit, which is the impregnation of eternal life, the imparting within us of God's nature, His life.

### **I Corinthians 15:50-54**

...and (a word or two comment)

### **I Thessalonians 4:13-18**

...(word or two comment if desired, and if there is time.)

### **John 14:1-3**

..."Come again." Time of the resurrection. When He comes, He is here! Notice the place prepared:

### **Matthew 25:31, 34**

...God's object is to have us begotten, and then born into His very divine family, as separate individual entities, possessing, each of us separately in himself, holy, divine, righteous, perfect character. To this end, it was necessary that we be given free moral agency, that we ourselves decide the way we shall go. God has made it possible. He adds what we lack. He *imparts* His nature, His character, His righteousness, His perfection, *if* we come to want it, to turn from the other way, to recognize, the true values, and voluntarily embrace them. What a wonderful purpose God is working out here below! Let us take one final glimpse into the glorious kingdom of God, the place prepared:

### **Revelation 21:1-4**

...My friends, *all* have sinned, *all* have come under the death penalty, But God has a plan of salvation, and imparting divine grace and eternal life that we may be born of Him, as His children, members of His divine almighty family! Soon, now, Jesus is coming to perfect and to complete that divine purpose, to complete the *spiritual* creation, as he

completed the physical creation 6,000 years ago! He is now selecting a tried and tested people to reign with him in His kingdom. Few understand this, today. But we *shall* understand! Soon Jesus shall return, and we shall be united with our loved ones. Therefore, let us not grieve, but be comforted, and rejoice in the divine wisdom of God's plan.

Let us pray: (Then a brief closing prayer, asking God to comfort the bereaved among other things.)

**END**