

A GOOD CHURCH MEMBER

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Hebrews 10:25.

A New Testament church is a congregation of baptized believers in Christ, equal in rank and privileges, who are voluntarily united in the belief of what He has taught, and covenanting together to do what He has commanded in perpetuating His ordinances and propagating His gospel to the ends of the earth.

I. Pre-requisites To Church Membership.

1. Regeneration.

Only born-again people are qualified for church membership. If one has not been regenerated or saved, he ought not to be a member of a church. If one has been saved, he ought not to stay out of the membership of a New Testament church. Only people who have heard the Word of God, repented of their sins, believed on Christ and been saved are eligible for membership. Since they must be disciples, no infants can be included in scriptural church membership.

The members of the first church in Jerusalem heard the gospel of Christ from the lips of a Spirit-filled preacher, were convicted of sin when they heard the sermon, repented of their sin, believed on Christ as their Saviour, and were gloriously saved or regenerated. Before one can unite with a New Testament church today he must profess to be saved.

Regeneration or the new birth is made necessary by the natural state of man. Scripture represents him as being destitute of spiritual life, hostile to God, dead in trespasses and in sins, and having a corrupt heart, "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." "Ye must be born again" is a message from Christ to all because of a sinful nature. It is easy for us to see its necessity in the life of the drunkard, the harlot and the thief, but we must recognize that it is necessary for all.

The man to whom Christ said, "Ye must be born again" represented the flower of Judaism. He was religious, conscientious and upright. He was a great scholar, but was stone blind spiritually. He possessed what many today believe to be sufficient—culture, honesty and refinement. But, he lacked spiritual life.

2. Confession.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:9-10.

3. Baptism.

Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Christ upon a profession of faith in Him as Saviour and Lord, in obedience to Him and by the authority of a New Testament church. Of course, it is personal and voluntary.

A person may join a church for three reasons:

(1) For profession.

He thereby makes a public profession of his faith in Christ as Saviour. He confesses before the world that he is changed relative to his sins and that Christ has become his personal Saviour.

(2) For protection.

The ministry and services of the church enable him to be a stronger and better Christian.

(3) For service.

We join a church for the purpose of helping others to carry out the great commission. We are to worship and to serve Him. Our service for Him will be far more effective if we put our strength with that of others who are likeminded.

II. Duties Of Church Members.

1. Loyalty.

Our loyalty to Christ is proved and measured by our loyalty to His church. It is impossible to be loyal, faithful and true to Christ and indifferent to His church. A true Christian will be loyal and faithful to the church because he loves its Founder, principles, purpose, message and members.

2. Support.

Good church members support their church with:

(1) Their presence.

David said, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple." It is right for church members to attend the services of their church.

A pastor of a church soon learns that there are different types of members in his church. There are "Once-in-a-whilers," "Up and Downers," "Ins and Outers," and "Old Faithfuls." The spasmodic member presents a peculiar problem. Now you see him, and then you don't. That which is novel attracts him. By directing him to something new one can use his spurts of enthusiasm; otherwise he is not worth anything to a church. Some are zealous, but incompetent. Some are pessimistic, and they usually appoint themselves to visit the sick and tell them how many others they have known who had the same illness and how they suffered so much and so long before they died. Some are gossipers and delight in going out of the way to visit newcomers to the community and new members of the church and report to them what they have heard plus all that they have imagined.

Then, there are the "Almost Nevers," who attend church services on New Year's Day, if it comes on Sunday, on Easter, on Mother's Day, on Sunday during the revival, and occasionally when their children are on the program.

Some people merely join a church and that is all. To them, as they see it, membership confers on them at least partial immunity from hell. It is just like being vaccinated. They think their vaccination must be renewed, or that they must get a booster shot on New Year's, Easter or Mother's Day, so that is about all the church going they ever do. Some church members attend spasmodically. They have a church-going spasm which lasts for some weeks, then something comes up and they quit and stay quit for an indefinite period. People who join the church and never come with any regularity never understand what it is all about. They miss the connection on everything. They never learn much about the Bible, never grow to any size as Christians, and never do a worthy part in helping to spread the gospel. I never knew a church member who deliberately neglected church attendance to amount to much as a Christian. He is like a dead battery. Attending Sunday School, Training Union or Woman's Missionary Society is not a substitute for the period of worship. To neglect church attendance is to please Satan, to give satisfaction to Christ's enemies, and to grieve the Saviour, no matter who does it.

One of the most priceless privileges of the American people is freedom of public worship. This privilege is denied many peoples in the world today. A most important duty of Christians is public worship. By public worship is meant the reverent honor and homage paid to God as a sacred personage by the individual soul in

public assembly. An alarming situation presents itself in the comparatively small number of church members who attend the churches with any degree of regularity.

In both the Old and New Testaments we find precepts and examples for observance of public worship. The Psalmist said, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Psalm 96:9. "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." Psalm 122:1. In the New Testament we have the exhortation, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Hebrews 10:25. We also have the example of Christ in attendance upon public worship. The place of worship in Nazareth was almost as familiar to Him as His home. Through the days of His boyhood and early manhood, He had gone there as regularly as He had to the toil of the carpenter's shop during the other six days of the week. "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read." Luke 4:16.

The fact that the Bible enjoins and Christ practiced public worship should be sufficient grounds for any of us being regular in our church attendance, but there are other reasons for our doing so. God has ordained that we shall worship Him in public for our good and for His glory. One man wrote his wife one Sunday afternoon saying, "I went to church this morning, tired, indifferent, and discouraged, but came away feeling like a new man because I had experienced a spiritual bath." After spending six days in the midst of a world that is materialistic in thought and conduct, we need the spiritual atmosphere of God's house and people to rid our eyes of its dust and our souls of its spirit. The tug of the world is so strong that we need every bit of information and inspiration we can get to offset its pull.

Worship renews the spirit as well as sleep renews the body. Our souls, as well as our bodies, get drained of available energy. Just as our bodies grow physically tired, so do our souls grow fatigued when neglected. True worship brings us into communion and fellowship with God. Communion and fellowship beget likeness, and no Christian desiring to grow into the image and likeness of Christ can afford to overlook the value of worship as a means to that end. The early disciples had such close communion and fellowship with Christ that the world "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."

Great benefits are to be derived from regular church attendance. It is in church that we meet the Lord. Christ said, "Where two or more are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them." When I meet with God's people for worship I have the claim and consciousness of Christ's presence in a way that I cannot possibly have anywhere else.

God's children should go to church to worship Him, to obey His commands, to get biblical instruction, to get food for the soul, to set a worthy example for others who will be influenced by them, to help maintain the church, and to serve God.

When church members are regular and faithful in their attendance upon the services, and not just "oncercs," they prove to others that they regard their spiritual welfare as a matter of great importance. Their attendance makes them stronger, encourages the brethren, helps the pastor, causes others to see that they practice what they profess, and pleases the Lord.

Christians should attend church services every Lord's Day without fail unless

providentially hindered. This is true even when they are away from home. Why act like a heathen just because you are visiting? When you are absent from church, you miss a blessing personally, you disobey the Lord, you say to others that you regard your spiritual welfare as a matter of small concern, you turn your back on what Christ died for--His church, you weaken the effect of the church service, you make it harder for the pastor to preach, you cause others to stay away from church, you encourage yourself to think that you can get along just as well without the church as you can with it, which is not true, and you help Satan to minimize the importance of the church in your community. The person who hurts a church the most is one who professes an allegiance to it and gives nominal assent to all that goes on in the house of God, but who rarely attends.

(2) Their prayers.

Prayer is a duty that every Christian owes to God, to others and to himself. It is also a precious privilege. It is the greatest resource of any life. The greatest thing any member can do for his church is to pray earnestly for it. Prayer accomplishes so much. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Through prayer we harness God's omnipotence to our impotence. Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which is outside the will of God. In the prayer life of Christ, it was not just asking the Father for something, but it was also an attitude of putting Himself in harmony with His Father's will. Hear Him in Gethsemane as He prayed that if it were possible the cup might pass, but in the next breath He added, "Not My will, but Thine, be done." Prayer is necessary to Christian obedience. "Men ought always to pray." Success in the Lord's work is impossible without prayer. No praying means no results which are pleasing to the Lord, little praying will mean a few results, and much praying of the right sort will mean great results. Prayer has been and is a real force. It changes things. It changes despair into hope, drudgery into loving service, formality into reality, indifference into enthusiasm, and seeming defeat into glorious victory. Prayer is a great power.

(3) Their purses.

There has never been any worthwhile institution that operated without expense. It is so ordained that we must pay the price for that which we possess and enjoy. If people could experience possession and joy without paying the price, they would grow selfish and unappreciative. Too many feel that, when they have joined the church, they have met all their obligations to self, to God, and to humanity.

It is true that salvation is a gift from God. It is all of grace, unmerited and unearned, but the publication and proclamation of it to a world without Him is costly, and churches must realize the cost is their opportunity and obligation. It costs money to run a church although a lot of church members do not know it. Many church members across the land accept the privileges and blessings of their churches, but never contribute a cent toward their maintenance. They let others do all the paying, and then they either boast about how much our church gave last year, or they find fault because the church failed to give. But, complaining and paying never go together. On the other hand, love and liberality are found together. Since love and liberality characterize God, He certainly expects it of His children and approves it in their lives.

3. Service.

Good church members always find something to do for their church. They delight to do something for their Lord in person, and not merely take it all out in talking. They are willing to work anywhere to glorify their Lord and to advance the interests of His kingdom.