



## A Faithful Church Member

Recently I was asked by the young folk to address a fellowship on the topic, 'A Faithful Church Member'. Several said they found it helpful and one asked if she could get a copy of my notes. Being one of the dinosaurs who scribble sermon notes on a sheet of paper there was little from which she or her family could profit in the forwarded scarcely-legible scan. Also due to a technical problem the recording of the address had failed. However the subject is a good one and relevant to all and so I felt it would be profitable to deal with this subject in an editorial. Below I list ten points which distinguish a faithful church member.

### 1. A Converted Church Member

Fundamental to faithful church membership is first of all having faith. Jesus said to Nicodemus who was not just a member but a minister of the church in his day, *'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'* (Jn. 3:3). All of us are born in sin and shapen in iniquity (Ps. 51:5). We enter this world lost and on the way to hell. We have to repent and believe the gospel to be saved. The curse of so many churches is the number of unconverted members. That is especially true of the big, broad churches but do not think that because you are a member of the Free Church (Continuing) then all must be well. Individuals can be deceived and so can kirk sessions.

We enter the visible church's membership by baptism and many do so as infants. However unless that outward baptism becomes an inner reality and we are truly washed from our sins and united by faith to Christ we are children of the devil and cannot be faithful church members. Too many churches receive young folk into communicant membership without any experience of, or evidence for a living, saving-faith relationship with Jesus Christ. Even Baptist churches, which declare that they baptise and receive into membership only professing Christians, have many in their ranks who have never truly been born again.

Being a church member will save no-one. Going forward at a crusade, saying a prayer and being baptised will not save. Even knowing the truth and understanding the gospel and believing it in an intellectual way is not sufficient, for as James states, *'the devils also believe, and tremble'* (Jas. 2:19). Ask yourself, Am I a converted church member? Search your heart before God. Make your calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). So this is the starting point as far as being or rather becoming a faithful church member.

### 2. An Attentive Church Member

Some church members are satisfied with the minimum church attendance. If they attend church once on a Sunday they feel they have done all that is required. It would seem a bind to have to attend twice on a Sabbath and the thought of attending midweek would be an intolerable burden. Others would in theory believe that they should attend all three meetings but in practice it takes only the tiniest excuse to keep them away. There are some who are seldom missing from work but often missing from church. There are those who have a cold or are feeling dreadfully tired on Sunday but are going round the shops on Monday.

Now churches could be more disciplinarian and demand the attendance of their members at the stated meetings of the congregation. That however would simply camouflage the problem. You do not have to legislate to get people to attend breakfast, dinner and tea. Appetite brings them there

at the stated hour. Here is the root of the problem: if people have no appetite then they are either seriously ill or dead. If professing Christians have no desire for a Sabbath evening service or the midweek Bible-study and prayer meeting there is an obvious question as to their spiritual health. Maybe they have never been converted and are dead in trespasses and sins.

The Psalmist said, *'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is'* (Ps. 63:1). His soul yearned for God as dry ground does for rain. Elsewhere he said: *'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?'* (Ps. 42:1-2). Just as the deer in the desert pants for water so the true Christian longs for the water of life, the Lord Jesus Christ. The true Christian hungers for the things of God more than for daily bread. Jesus said, *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'* (Mt. 4:4). Do you have a strong appetite for spiritual food?

### **3. A Godly Church Member**

Godliness is holiness; it is God-centredness and Godlikeness. A godly church member is one who walks with God as Enoch did (Gen. 5:24), living a God-pleasing life. The Lord says, *'Be ye holy; for I am holy'* (1 Pet. 1:16), and *'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord'* (Heb. 12:14). Nowadays many people think that any emphasis on holiness is legalism. The Christian's sins are forgiven and so there is nothing to worry about. Be happy and at peace. But God wants a holy people, Christ died to make us holy and the Spirit comes into our hearts to sanctify us. If we are not holy we will not get to heaven.

Essentially holiness is obedience to God's revealed will. We have been given the Ten Commandments and they are to be the rule of life. God's Word is to be the constant guide. Holiness is separation from sin, and separation unto the Lord.

Our Saviour said, *'By their fruits ye shall know them'* (Mt. 7:20). Paul wrote of the great change, *'But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life'* (Rom. 6:22). James wrote, *'Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only'* (Jas. 2:24). Some claim to have faith but have no good works but James asserts such faith is dead (v 20). A holy life and good works demonstrate that our faith is real. At the end of the world we shall be judged according to our works (Rev.20:12), for saving faith when truly present displays itself in good works. So a faithful church member must be godly.

### **4. A Loving Church Member**

Love is very important in the Christian life. Essentially a Christian is someone who loves God. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *'If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha'* (1 Cor. 16:22). God is love and as John declared, *'We love him, because he first loved us'* (1 Jn. 4:19).

The church is to be a fellowship of those beloved of God who love one another. John saw love as a mark of grace: *'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren'* (1 Jn. 3:14). Jesus stated, *'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another'* (Jn. 13:34-35). Because God is love and Christ is love, the love of church members for one another demonstrates that they are the disciples of Christ and the children of God.

### **5. A Welcoming Church Member**

The church of Christ is not a secret society. The gates of the new Jerusalem and doors of the church are always open. We warmly invite all to come and join with us in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and in worshipping the one living and true God. The faithful church member will be welcoming, open, loving and kind to the outsider who ventures to enter a place of worship. To the

outsider who has never attended church it is an alien environment and it takes courage to walk in. The faithful church member will always be aware of such and try to make them feel as at home as they can be amongst those who belong to another world.

## **6. A Sound Church Member**

Christianity is a revealed religion. God has spoken and set before us what we are to believe concerning God and what duty He requires of us. There are many warnings in Scripture to avoid heresy and to reject heretics. The Westminster Confession of Faith gives to us an excellent summary of the teachings of the Bible. The faithful church member will study the Scriptures and helpful books such as the Confession. They will not be carried away with every wind of doctrine. John wrote, *'These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him'* (1 Jn. 2:26-27). The Holy Spirit teaches the true Christian. They will as Peter exhorts, *'Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear'* (1 Pet. 3:15). Heresy will not be tolerated because, *'A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject'* (Tit. 3:10).

## **7. A Loyal Church Member**

We live in an age when many church members show little loyalty to their own church and rather wander from place to place following the popular preacher or the fashionable congregation. They want to be where the young folk are, or where the families and children are. It is however a serious matter to leave a church, indeed it can be schismatic. One should only leave a church if it has become seriously unsound in doctrine or practice. While pride in self is not to be commended pride in the Lord is, and if one's church is sound and biblical a faithful church member will be 'proud' of their church and loyal to it.

## **8. A Witnessing Church Member**

The early Christian church was evangelistically minded. Wherever the Christians went they spoke of Christ and the way of salvation. At first they only communicated the gospel to those who shared their Jewish background but at Antioch they couldn't keep it to themselves and so the message was proclaimed by them to all and received by the Gentiles. Christ told His early followers that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world. There is no salt or light where Christians fail to function as witnesses. Jesus said, *'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven'* (Mt. 5:16). Following the martyrdom of Stephen and the subsequent persecution the church was dispersed and it is said *'Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word'* (Acts 8:4). They spoke the 'good news' to neighbours, friends, relatives, fellow-workers and whoever they met. A faithful, church member is a witnessing church member. Are you?

## **9. A Joyful Church Member**

One of the fruits of the Spirit's work in a Christian is joy (Gal. 5:22). Paul exhorts the Philippians, *'Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice'* (Phil. 4:4). The devil tries his hardest to keep the Christian depressed and downcast and too often we allow him. No, as Christians we must be optimistic realising that God is in control. Knowing that all works for the best (Rom. 8:28) we should always be happy and thankful. The best is yet to be. Cast all your burdens on the Lord (Ps. 55:22).

## **10. A Persevering Church Member**

A faithful church member must be faithful and keep going, trusting in Christ. It is those who persevere unto the end who shall be saved (Mt. 24:13). The Christian road is difficult. There are many obstacles. It's a fight to the finish. *'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against*

*principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand'* (Eph. 6:12-13). Press on towards heaven keeping your eye on the finishing post (Phil. 3:14). Persecution is to be expected. *'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you'* (Mt. 5:11-12). Are you a persevering church member? Remember there is a great reward awaiting you when you fight the good fight, finish your course and keep the faith – *'a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give'* (2 Tim. 4:8) you in that day.

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