

Faith, Fellowship and Fealty

BY

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BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

Becoming a Christian

It is a good thing at times to get back to first principles and say over again the things which we are supposed to know. As a teacher, whenever we began a new subject, I liked to brush up the class's remembrance of the facts which lay at the foundation of it. When we began Logic, we spent a little while freshening up on Psychology—and so on. There was no thought of saying anything new, but of calling to mind again the things already known. I found many times that confusion had arisen where I supposed everything was clear, that some who had seemed to know the facts knew, instead, a good many things that weren't so. Students have come to me on the third or fourth review of a matter to say that they had never understood it

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that way. And there were always some who had never gotten the foundation facts at all.

We talk a good deal about being a Christian or becoming a Christian. And some of us who are Christians, and have been for some time, find it difficult to say to ourselves or to others just what we mean by it. We know it is a real fact and that it means a great deal to us, but we cannot word it to suit us. Then there are some who are simply in error about what it is to be a Christian. They think they know, and they are glib in wording it, but the idea they express is their own and not God's idea. One common phrase is: "Well, *I think* a Christian ought—" or, "*My* idea of a Christian is that he is a person who—." Now it is important what we think about things, even about the eternal life. But our opinions

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are not very weighty unless they are backed up by God's opinions. It really makes very little difference what we think Christians ought to do or be, except to ourselves. Other people might differ from our opinion and not be hurt by it. We want to know what Christ Himself thinks it is to be a Christian.

Then, there are a good many people to whom this whole matter of being a Christian is vague and unreal. There seems some kind of mystery in it. They do not know what it means and they do not pretend to know. Some of them have put it aside as out of reach, and have concluded to leave it to another time or to God. Others are eager to know what it is to be a Christian, because they want to become Christians and live the Christian life.

Let us take it easily, step by step, so that we may not be confused:

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First of all, it is evident that being a Christian means having some sort of relation to Christ. The word means that. A Christian is a Christ-man, as an American is an America-man, or a politician a politics-man. A Christian is a man who holds some sort of relation to Christ.

Well, then, a Christian is not simply a man who does the best he can, or tries to do right all the time, or does the best he knows how, or treats his fellowmen right. A good many men do that who are not Christians. It is like saying that an American is a man who votes at elections and does business under a free government. Those are true things, but they are not what makes him an American. There are others besides Americans who do them. And of course a Christian is expected to do the best he knows how, or the best he can, or as near right

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all the time as possible—of course. But that doesn't make him a Christian by any means. Others than Christians do that, and one might be a Christian and fail in that. Because, being a Christian consists in holding some sort of relation to Christ.

And then again, it will not cover it to say that a Christian is one who believes in the Bible and lives up to it as well as he can. Belief in the Bible as the Word of God is very important and helpful in the Christian life, and it might lead to one's becoming a Christian, but it is possible to believe in every word of the Bible as the Word of God, and *not* be a Christian. And it is possible to be a Christian and know very little about the Word of God. It is dangerous, but it is possible, to be a Christian and not believe in all the Bible. Because, being a Christian

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does not consist in understanding a book or reading it or accepting it; or we might be called Bibleians—Bible-men. In the Bible we learn of Christ, and in so far it must be believed, but we are not Christians except as we hold a certain relation to Christ.

It is a mistake, too, to say that a Christian is one who enters a church and lives up to its rules. Some people cannot be held down to talk about being Christians, because they think you mean to have them join a church. Now joining a church and becoming a Christian are two very distinct things. They must be kept clear apart in our minds. Most Christians will at once want to join a church, because they will see that Christ approves it, but there are probably people in the church who are not Christians, and there are probably people not in the church

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who are Christians. No one knows that better than church people do. When a man sneered at a pastor that he thought he had as good a chance of heaven as some of those in the church, the pastor replied sadly: "That is true. You have no chance, and neither have they." We are not now talking about becoming church-men, but Christians—not about having some relation to the church, but about having some relation to Christ. It is no excuse for a man's not becoming a Christian that he does not like this or that thing in a church. No one likes everything about a church, and no one is expected to, but Christians can put up with a great many things, and are willing to do it for the sake of others and of Christ. And then when anyone speaks of living up to the rules of the church, it is plain he does not understand what he is

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speaking of. There are no rules binding church-men except those which belong to Christ-men.

Sometimes it is said that a Christian is one who believes in God, in a Supreme Being. But the devils believe in God—and are not Christians. All men believe in God when they are thoughtful. The earliest traces of humanity reveal assurance of the fact of God, and a groping wish to obey Him. But all men are not Christians.

Nor is a Christian a man who is sure of the future life or certain of heaven. Most men believe there will be a future life. Only once in a while do you find anyone who doubts it. No thoughtful man would think of denying it. All true Christians are no doubt going to heaven. The only authority we have on the matter gives us no ground for knowledge that others are, but that is

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God's affair, and is safely left in His hands. Men are not Christians because they are going to heaven. They are going to heaven because they are Christians. We are talking now about men who hold a certain relation to Christ, not about men who hold a certain relation to heaven.

A Christian, then, is not the same as a duty-man, or a Bible-man, or a church-man, or a deity-man, or a heaven-man. It is a good thing to know what is *not* true, at least, and there are some other common ideas of a Christian which are just as mistaken as those, but we need not now examine them. Let us keep it clearly in mind that a Christian is one who holds some relation to Christ. He is a Christ-man.

Now what is that relation? Well, it is worded in several ways in the Bible, and our experience includes several ways of putting it.

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When Christ called His disciples, He said: "Follow me" (Matt. 8: 22; 9: 12). Once He said: "If any man will be 'my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8: 34). He told the rich young man to dispose of his goods and come and follow Him (Luke 18: 22). Being a Christian must mean, then, following Christ, letting Him be our Leader.

Another time Jesus said: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7: 17), and so called His disciples to obedience. He calls Himself the Shepherd (John 10), and speaks of leading His flock in and out according to His own will and not theirs. We are told in the Hebrews (Heb. 5: 9) that He has given eternal life to as many as obey Him. Being a Christian must be, then, obeying Christ, letting Him be our Master.

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When the Philippian jailor came to Paul, asking what he should do to be saved, he meant what we mean by becoming a Christian, no doubt, and Paul replied very briefly: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16: 31). And in the familiar verse in John it is said that whosoever believeth on Christ has everlasting life. Another familiar expression is: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life" (John 3: 16, 36). That is another word, then, to put with following and obeying. A Christian is one who believes in Christ, considers what He says is true, accepts His claims for Himself, and counts His promises safe and secure.

Another way of wording it is that a Christian is one who accepts Christ. "As many as received him,

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to them gave he power to become the sons of God'' (John 1:12). The condemnation of the cities of His own day was that they rejected Him (Luke 12:34). Stephen made the difference between himself and his accusers to be that he accepted and they rejected Christ (Acts 7). That implies that Christ offers Himself to men and they either accept Him or reject Him. Those who accept Him become Christians—Christ-men.

Here are certain ways, we find, in which the Bible describes a Christian. He is one who follows Christ, obeys Christ, believes in Christ, accepts Christ. They are not four different things. They are simply four ways of saying the same thing. They are meant only to take this relation to Christ and turn it around so that we can see it clearly.

A moment ago we noticed that accepting Christ implies that He

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offers Himself to us. Well, all four ways of wording it imply the same thing. If we are Christ-men, it must be that Christ does something or is something for us, and that we do something or are something for Him. And sure enough Christ is and does three things and we accept Him in those three things or we do not, and we follow Him in them or we do not, and we obey Him in them or we do not.

First, a Christian must accept Christ as his Saviour. That means that he must know himself a sinner. We dare not judge other men, but we know our own hearts, and we are sinners. A sinner, of course, is one who has broken a law, who has done what he ought not to do, or has failed to do the thing he ought to have done, and a Saviour is one who keeps him from part or all the penalty and helps him make up the

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wrong he has done, or makes it up for him. Knowing that he has broken God's law, and done what he ought not, a man finds that Christ has offered to bear the penalty and make him right with the law which he has broken, and he accepts His offer. Then he becomes a Christian. He may not understand at all how Christ does that. His idea of the death on Calvary may be very vague. He may not understand the atonement, except that it is an *at-one-ment* between himself and God, whose holy law he has broken. He is no longer counted an offender against God. I have known Christians who have said: "I cannot see any explanation of Christ's bearing my sins, of the innocent bearing the sufferings of the guilty, but I am depending upon the fact of it, and am accepting Christ as my Saviour."

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But He is Saviour in another sense. He offers to save not only from the penalty for sin already committed, but also from the sin itself. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their *sins*"—not from hell and punishment only. He offers to bring such an influence to bear upon us that we will not do the wrong thing even if we want to, and that we will come not to want to do it. He is not simply ready to forgive us for losing our tempers and speaking harshly. He is ready also to keep us from losing our tempers at all. And this He is ready to do with all our sins.

Accepting Christ means, then, letting Him be our Saviour from punishment which we deserve, and from the sin which we would commit. Whoever accepts Christ in that way is, so far, a Christian. He need not be perfect to do that. If he were

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perfect, why should he have a Saviour? Put these two facts side by side: No man is good enough to be saved; Christ is good enough to save any man. Whoever waits until he is rid of this sin or that before he accepts Christ, is refusing the only method there is of getting rid of sin.

After offering Himself as a Saviour, Christ offers Himself as a Teacher. You remember He is called the Word of God. He is the Message and the Messenger of God to men. There are some things which we greatly need to know, and He tells us. Whoever will read His teachings and accept Him as a teacher can find what his inner life ought to be at any time. Those who followed Him on earth were called His disciples, and the word means "learners." He takes a man who is ignorant and teaches him. It is no excuse, therefore, to say that

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one does not know enough to become a Christian. There are always a great many things which one does not know, but every man who knows he is a sinner, knows enough to be taught. It is the people who do not know, but are willing to be taught, who are wanted in Christ's school. If any man is willing, therefore, to accept Christ as his teacher, and to learn from His word and by prayer what He teaches, he is a Christian. He may be ignorant of a great deal, but he can be taught.

After being Saviour and Teacher, Christ offers Himself as a Master. He said to His disciples: "Ye are my disciples, if ye do whatsoever I command you." The Bible has a good deal to say about the will of God. It was the ideal of Christ's own life to do that will. Whoever obeys that will of God as a follower

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of Christ is a Christian. But you must notice how the expressions are progressive. We do not do the will of God once for all. We are continually doing it; we are continually doing it better than before. And if any man will say: "By the grace of God, I will do the will of Christ as I see it day by day," he is a Christian. And it is no excuse to say: "I fear I may not hold out to-morrow, or, I fear I may fail to do as I ought." You can obey the will of Christ only one act at a time. You cannot hold out to-day for to-morrow. It is a fair prayer:

"Lord, for to-morrow and its needs I do
not pray;

Keep me, my God, from stain of sin just
for to-day."

The daily obedience—that is the hope of the Christian life, to take Christ as a daily Master. And if we fail, is He not still the Saviour?

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And now we have done our simple thinking. The steps by which we become Christians are very simple: repentance of sin, acceptance of Christ as Saviour and Teacher, obedience to Him as Master. That is all. The rest is God's part. Nothing that we can ever do could possibly make us Christians. That is the work of the Spirit of God. But He is under solemn covenant to forgive the man who repents, to receive the man who accepts Christ, and to save all who follow Him. It is by no merit of ours that it is accomplished. It is not to repay us for the repentance, or the acceptance, or the obedience. It is because He wants to save us that He makes such simple conditions that we can accept them. And if we still feel that we cannot, then He is ready to make us able.

Here are four facts and four ques-

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tions which have come out of the little talk we have had together. Will you face the facts and answer the questions?

1. You have sinned, and are now a sinner. Will you now repent your sin and turn from it?

2. Christ offers to be your Saviour. Will you accept His offer and let Him save you?

3. Christ offers to be your Teacher. Will you now become a disciple of His?

4. Christ offers to be your Master. Will you now accept His offer and obey His will as He reveals it from day to day?

If you say "I will" to those questions, you are a Christian, and have a right to the name and fellowship. The matter need not be delayed. You can decide it all in this moment. Will you do it?

BECOMING
A CHURCH MEMBER

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It will be worth while on two accounts to have a simple little talk about uniting with the church. In the first place, there are church members who are not entirely clear what they have gained from church membership. They are perfectly willing to continue as members of a church. They are sure, at least, that it does them no harm; only, they feel a little restive under obligations which come to nothing. They go to the pastor with many apologies for seeming unappreciative, and say: "We are church members, but just what is the value of it?" Or else they say nothing at all about it, but you can see that church membership means very little to them by the way they act. They gradually drift away from church duties. They

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always count themselves Christians, but they do not make anything of their connection with any one church. Within a few blocks of our own church I have found six men who were formerly Sunday School superintendents, who now never go to church. I know one man who was an active church worker in England, who has been in church less than six times during his thirteen years here. And even if such Christians do go to church, it is not to any church of which they are members. They go about where they "can hear bright men," or "can find an attractive service," or "can hear good music." You seldom hear them express any wish for the real service which the church aims to render.

You may be ready to say that people like this are not Christians at all. Certainly I am not ready to say that. But it is perfectly certain

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that they have no fair estimate of the church and its value. They appreciate neither what the church is meant to do for them nor what the church has a right to claim from them. They have shaken off their sense of obligation to the visible Kingdom of God.

On account, therefore, of unappreciative church members, it ought to be worth while to talk a little while about church membership.

Then, there are men who show every sign of being Christians, who may be regular attendants upon the church, but who will not unite with it. If you ask them about the fundamentals of Christian faith, whether they accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and are seeking to follow Him, they can answer favorably at once. But if you ask them about joining a church, they are not so ready. There are various reasons. They are "not

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good enough"; they "do not accept all the doctrines of the church"; they "do not care to make any professions"; they "do not see what is the use of it"; they "think when you get to heaven's door you will not be asked what church you belonged to, but how you lived"; they are "already about as good as some people in the church"; they "have put it off so long now" that they "do not care to do anything about it." Mind you, we are talking about men who are fundamentally Christians; men who believe in the elements of the Christian faith and are seeking to follow Christ. The reasons they give are genuine.

But all the reasons come out of mistakes as to the church and its purpose and value. And because the men are candid, the matter may fairly be talked over. The church needs just such men, not for their

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money, they give that already, but for themselves and the personal strength they can bring to it.

Well, let it be clearly seen that being a Christian and joining a church are two things. Each is possible without the other. Being a Christian has all to do with being saved. Joining a church has nothing to do with that. It does not make a man a Christian to join a church; it simply shows that he counts himself one already, somewhat as joining the Republican party does not make a man a Republican, but simply shows that he counts himself a Republican already.

One marked difference between the two things is that you can become a Christian on the instant, without delay or ceremony of any sort; you can accept Jesus Christ as your Master in presence of no one else, and under leadership of no

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one else. But, of course, joining a church involves a place and a time and some observance of very simple forms. These forms are much exaggerated in the minds of men outside the church, and their simplicity is overlooked. There are men kept out of the church by dread of the ordeal through which they suppose they may have to go. Some have joined lodges and have passed through ordeals ranging from the very impressive to the ridiculous, and they think of the church as having similar tests. They suppose the officers ask all sorts of trying questions and subject the candidates to severe inquiry. I have been asked several times whether one could not enter the church without "meeting the session," and several men have said that they could not unite with the church because they "could not stand the examination."

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Now the fact is that this so-called examination before one joins the church is just such a friendly chat as men can have in a parlor or business office. The officers of the church care to learn only that a man has accepted Christ as his Master; they ask only such questions as are common among men. There are few doctrinal tests.

There are no inquisitions into matters which belong in a man's own heart. Are you a sinner? Is Christ your Saviour? Are you seeking to follow Him? Are you learning to pray, to read His Word, to serve Him? Only that. I recall one old-time friend who dreaded "meeting the session," but who finally came to my house where the session was meeting, found himself shortly talking familiarly with his friends and with the pastor, and looked at me in amazement when it

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was voted that he be received into the church. He had told us all we had any right to ask. There are no tests of church membership which go beyond the tests of following Christ.

When anyone suggests that he is not good enough to be a church member, one wonders what he means. If he is an out-breaking, unrepentant sinner, then he ought not to join a church, nor even claim to be a Christian. But if he means that no one ought to be in the church who is faulty and far from perfect, then he is using a standard which would empty the church at once. The church is not made up of people who are pretty good, but of people who want to be better. They may not be any better than people outside, but they are trying to live a better life than they have lived before. Any man who is "good

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enough" to follow Christ, is "good enough" to join a church. Church people say to those outside the church: "We are not setting ourselves above you at all; we simply realize that we are not what we want to be, and we are seeking to become better; we invite you to join us for the same reasons."

And so, if some one insists that he can be a Christian without joining a church, there need be no zeal to deny it, except to insist that one cannot be so good a Christian outside as inside the church. The odds are very great that every Christian owes his faith in Christ to the church or a church-man. Certainly the faith of Christ would not have been maintained in the world all these centuries if all men had been willing to stay outside and not cast in their lot with those who believe as they do themselves. Whoever refuses

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to add his strength to the church makes it just so much less probable that the knowledge of Christ will come to someone else. It came to us directly or indirectly through the church; is it quite fair that we do less than our best for the church?

And, when anyone suggests that there are so many faulty church members now, that there are so many hypocrites, that there are so many who abuse their church membership for professional or other ends, that again is probably true. But the objection goes deeper. These people are faulty and hypocritical Christians, not simply church members. It is their pretending to be Christians that vexes an honest man. If their condition is argument against being a church member, it is better argument against being a Christian, but no sensible man will

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blame Christ for His faulty followers. They do not make it unwise to accept Him as Saviour and Master. Hypocrisy, religious or otherwise, is not peculiar to the church. There are no doubt more hypocrites outside the church than inside it. And one cannot forget a Scripture word that seems to belong here: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." Probably God knows all the hypocrites, and He continues to bless and love the church in spite of them.

The objection is often urged that there are so many churches and they are so different, a man cannot tell which one to join. There are a good many, that is true. The religious life plays a pretty large part and all men do not think or see alike. But the churches are not so different as is usually made

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out. Their members are honest in saying:

“We are not divided,
All one body we.”

There may have been men once who thought you must join one church or be lost. The ease with which members pass from one church to another now reveals that there are not many such opinions to-day. The churches agree on the fundamentals of the Christian faith and they require only those fundamentals for membership. No church holds across its entrance the system of doctrine which it may hold in its organized capacity. Acceptance of Christ as Saviour and Master, and honest purpose to follow and serve and imitate Him—that is all the church asks of its members.

This answer will hold against the objection that one does not believe enough, or that one's belief in certain matters has changed or has

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become unsettled. So long as one's faith in Christ holds, and one is still a Christian, the church is his proper place. The systems of doctrine are of great importance, but they are matters of hard and long study, not to be lightly accepted nor lightly rejected.

All that has been negative rather than positive. There are several good reasons for uniting with the church, which are good also for faithfulness in membership.

First of all and most of all, there is no better way of "confessing Christ." It is His desire, it is our duty, that He be acknowledged by His followers. There are many other ways. There is no better way than this. The Christian life outside of the church is like the paintings in a gallery in the twilight; they can be seen, and one can guess

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their beauty, can even see it dimly if one is near enough. Uniting with the church is like letting the sun in on the gallery. The paintings may be no better in themselves; they are, at least, easier to see, more clear-cut, more distinct. Joining the church is confessing Christ in a clear-cut, distinct way. If it makes one no better, it makes one's confession so much the clearer. Surely Christ deserves it. He was not crucified secretly; He did not bear His shame under cover; He did not save us so quietly that no one knew it. The cross crowned a hill where roads met, and He hung on it for us.

“Under an eastern sky
Amid a rabble cry
A Man went forth to die—
For me!”

It is not fair to Him that we should accept that Saviourly and Masterly work and keep our accept-

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ance from any distinct expression we can give it.

Not only does He deserve it, He desires it. He sent His disciples out to blaze abroad His truth. He has left no witness of Himself but His followers. They may be very faulty, they may witness badly and inaccurately—very well, He has no other. And if these fail Him! if these find reasons for not acknowledging Him before men! if these shrink from claiming Him publicly!—still, He has no other.

The church is His own. Its visible form is only an effort of His people to realize His life on earth. The church is not a great machine. It is the organized life of Christ on earth. He deserves and desires all His people to be part of it.

Another item of importance: joining a church is the only way of being regularly and steadily counted

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on Christ's side. The commonest occurrence is that men estimate the success of Christ by the number who are enrolled in the churches. They usually discount that number because of the famous "hypocrites" who are part of it. Then they quietly count as on the other side, the non-Christian side, all the remainder. That means that the Christian who is not a church member is publicly, definitely, counted against his Master. If that seems hardly fair, there is a very simple way of correcting it. If a follower of Christ wants to be counted for Him, let him come out plainly on the side of Christ. Then he is sure to be counted by people who never saw or heard of him by name, as by those who do know him, on Christ's side. Even a recreant, neglectful church member is part of that larger testimony to Christ, even he is counted on the

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side of his Master in the large way. But his very recreancy reveals that he does not realize his opportunity to testify to Christ.

Add this: the church needs recruits constantly. It consists of members. It needs new members all the time. It needs new life. No man has a right to adopt an attitude toward it which would destroy it, if all men assumed the same attitude. One believer in Christ is no more obligated to join the church than any other. Admit that the church has been very defective, say even that it has done some harm (though that would be hard to prove), it would be folly to deny that the balance in favor of the service it has rendered the world in behalf of Christ is enormous. But the church would soon die if members did not join it. It cannot be kept up by money, however generously that may

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be given. It cannot be kept up by Sabbath audiences, whoever attend. It will die if it does not receive members steadily from among those who accept its Head. There must be men and women who will accept its responsibilities. No doubt there are some who join no church just because they do not want to assume any obligations. But do they want other people to bear the burdens while they receive the benefit? Are they willing to have others undertake responsibility for their spiritual lives while they do nothing?

Everyone who goes into a church strengthens by much or by little the whole movement in behalf of righteousness. The remark of the President of Cornell University is often quoted: "Few things seem to me to be of more practical consequence for the future of religion in America than the duty of all good men

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to become identified with the visible church." Read it, "the duty of all Christian men," and it has an even larger meaning. The church needs all the re-enforcements it can secure. No man ought to refuse it his name and his aid while he accepts its Head.

Another reason for church membership is that it furnishes a great safeguard for the spiritual life. Accepting Christ is the great thing, but it is a secret, unseen act. One is more liable to disloyalty to it than to the more public acknowledgment. Joining a church is going on record. We grow exceedingly virtuous about this sometimes. We will not sign pledges, we will not make promises, we will not bind ourselves. We are afraid we may not keep the pledges. But it is always in moral matters. We never praise the man who has borrowed money from us, but refuses to bind himself to its payment by a

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note. If a young man applies at our business offices to be employed, but will not promise to be faithful for fear he may not continue to desire to be so, we do not laud him.

Going on record does not ensure faithfulness. It furnishes tonic for weak hours. It furnishes some point to which we can come back when we have wandered. It would be folly to wait to join a church until we could be assured that we will never do anything unworthy the church. There is no relationship of our lives of which we are not at times unworthy. But those better relationships are our safeguards, they are points of departure, and so they become points of return.

It is true that we care much more for the opinion of God than for the opinions of men. But men are far less apt to ask our relation to Christ than to ask our relation to the

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church. Nine out of ten men whom I ask, "Are you a Christian?" answer by telling me whether they are members of a church. That is not simply confusion of mind. It is a testimony to the value of the church as a safeguard of the Christian life. It is very difficult to bring an elderly man to an acknowledgment of Christ, if he has never before acknowledged Him. It is usually not difficult to secure a return to a neglected profession.

Then, there are some doubtful deeds which a secret Christian may permit himself to perform, with the plea that he is not injuring his Master, nor setting a bad example, from which he is liable to be restrained by his public profession. No man is strong enough to disregard any restraining influence in behalf of a better life. And if any comparison is run between men in the church

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and men out of it, to the discredit of the church, let it be remembered that you cannot know how much worse the insiders would be without the church, nor how much better the outsiders might be with it. No man is any better than he ought to be, and an honest church profession would help every man to be better than he would be without it.

Take one more suggestion in favor of church membership: it puts one in the way of growth. The great purpose of the church is spiritual development. It brings people of similar spirit together that all may gain strength. Few men can grow in spiritual strength without the public ordinances of worship. Of course one can attend church without being a member of it. But anybody knows that being unattached makes it easier to slip away. It is ordinarily when a church member moves out of

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reach of his own church that he becomes indifferent. Church membership is not theoretically essential to the Christian life. Practically it is essential to a healthy, hearty spiritual growth.

Then, it is the thought of most that church membership admits properly to the sacraments, which are so important in spiritual growth. Not many churches or church-men would refuse access to these sacraments to one who is not a member of some church, provided he acknowledges Christ as his Saviour and Master. However, not many outside the church are accustomed to partake of the sacraments. An outside Christian ordinarily neglects his Lord's command to "take, eat in remembrance" of Him. And no Christian life comes to its best without that obedience.

Our days are crowded full with

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other than spiritual work. Some men work so hard during the week that they are worn out on Sunday and think they cannot go to church. Yes, but the things that wear them out are material, temporal tasks. The spiritual life gets scant attention from the man who is too tired to go to church on Sunday. Now, the church has for its chief aim the development of spiritual life. It is not, first of all, a social, benevolent organization. It is, first of all, a spiritual body, with a spiritual purpose. There is nothing which so nearly insures a man's care of his spiritual life as does honest membership in the church of Christ. Without it, spiritual life is seldom cared for. Without it, temporal things become more and more absorbing.

Do you, friend, believe in Christ as your Saviour and Master? Do you

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believe in Him, in spite of your faults, in spite of the faults of others, in spite of the many things which you do not believe? If you do, you have a place and a right in the church of Christ. These are some of the reasons for uniting with it and for thorough loyalty to it:

It is the wish of Christ that we acknowledge Him in this definite way. The church is His own. Shall He save you, and shall you hide your faith in Him?

It is the only way by which you can be regularly and steadily counted on Christ's side. Are you willing at any time to be rated against Him?

The church needs you. It lives by the coming of just such ones as you are. Your faith came through the church; shall it suffer for lack of you?

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Your spiritual growth requires the church. Whatever you may be outside it, your highest life will gain by fellowship with the people of God. Will you check your spiritual life by neglect of the duty it requires?

But all this is only talking about it. What will you do about it? What will you do just now?

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Dear Friend:—You are now a member of the church. It is a fact for very great joy. You are, for the first time, definitely and clearly on the Lord's side. You have become part of His working force on the earth. The church is a magnificent body, whether you consider its Head, or its history, or its present numbers, or its present equipment and power. You do not yet feel ready to claim any large part in that magnificent body, but you are part of it, that is sure.

I wonder if it seems to you, as it did to me at the first, that joining the church is not a very great thing after all. There has been no marked change in you. There is a disappointing commonplace in it. You may feel as a college boy did when

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he said to me on the afternoon of his graduation day, "I have looked forward to this for years, and I am thoroughly disappointed in it. I do not feel in the least different from the past, though I am now a bachelor of arts." Yes, but he was very different, and his graduation had been a great fact. It is what an event means that measures its greatness. The mere act of joining the church, like the mere ceremony of graduation, is very simple. It is short and soon over. But it was a simple thing in itself years ago for a little group of men in Philadelphia to sign a Declaration of Independence. They went out of the room not markedly changed since their going in. But the simple act meant a great deal. Its meaning grew as they went on. Not one of them realized it at the time.

Now, it is just the great meaning

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of the simple fact of your new membership in the church that concerns us in the little talk we are to have. You have certain new obligations, very easy to to bear, very delightful, but very real; and you have certain new opportunities, very inspiring, very great, and equally real.

Obligations—don't be afraid of that word. It is a good thing to face one's duty, the thing one ought to do. The marked thing about these church obligations is that the church does not impose them on you nor enforce them. These are obligations which you must impose on yourself because you are a follower of Christ. No one could make you do any of the things which are your duty as a church member. They depend on yourself and your loyalty to Christ and His church, which is now your own church.

You have joined the church, not

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for your own sake only, but for Christ's sake. Well, make yourself worth while to the church, then. That is the best way to make it worth while to yourself. You expect the church to bring strength to you, and it will do it; but its value to you will depend in large part on the strength which you bring to it. I mean strength of all sorts.

In my pastoral calling I find people who have left what we call the evangelical churches, and have gone into some new-light, higher-revelation, deeper-meaning new church or society, and they are generally enthusiastic to a high degree. In this new faith they have found exactly what their souls have longed for; they are so happy; the old never satisfied them; they never got much out of it; they spend all their time reading the literature of the new faith, studying the Bible in the

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light of the new book they have found. Ah, yes, and most of them would have found quite as much in the sturdy old faith which has stood the test of centuries if they had been as faithful to it, if they had given it the enthusiastic attention which the novelty is receiving. One thing may be just whispered to you as a new church member: don't itch for novelties, don't chase every new notion, stand for the faith which has done the world's work and has borne the burden of the centuries. Let others find their satisfaction in notions that are current. Do you lay yourself out for the church which has taught you of Christ.

Make yourself worth while to the church, I said. It is now your church as truly as anyone's. There is no more reason for other members to notice and pet and coddle you than for you to do so to them.

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Don't sulk because people do not seem so attentive as you expected. Before you joined the church you missed certain traits in other members. Put those traits into your own life. Do not be self-centered. Think of the church as a place of service, a place where you can do something as well as get something. There is one of the school-ground games, which you have not forgotten, I am sure. We called it "Black-man" in my school. One boy was catcher at first. When he caught another, the two became catchers. As each one was added, he threw himself into the work of that side. No one was caught to be petted and taken care of. All were caught to help catch. That boyhood game is a parable of the work of the church. You have joined the church, not to be taken care of, but to help, to serve. And so you must learn at

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once to speak of "our church." Do not speak to the pastor or officers about the needs or the work or the benefit of "your church." There are several members of our church who speak as though I, the pastor, owned it. Learn to say "our church," or "my church." It is as much yours as anyone's.

That suggests a very brief word on your obligation to the finances of the church you have joined. Find out the system by which your church is supported, and take your place in it. Do whatever is your share. Some people are stingy about it. Some people chafe under the calls for money. Do not allow yourself to feel either way. Decide your own share. No one in the church has any right to decide it for you. Learn to give regularly. You may not feel you can do much, but you remember it was the man with the one

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talent who did nothing. People who can do a good deal are more apt to do it than people who can do only a little. The weak point in the financial plan of many churches is that the small supporters are left out. Fall in with the methods of your church. You may not altogether like them, and after a while you may want to help change them. At first, just do your share. Don't fret over not being able to do more. Don't be mean enough to think you are not welcome, because you cannot do a great deal. That is a judging of others which is hardly worthy of you. Make yourself welcome by doing what you are really able to do. No one does any more, and that is your share. But do not go on week after week doing nothing for the support of the church.

You have an obligation, also, to care for the good name of the church

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among people who are outside. There are plenty to criticise your fellow members. There are plenty ready to point out the defects of the church. You are sure to hear that the church lacks cordiality, that the poor are not welcomed, that the pastor does not recognize people when he meets them the second time in less than six months. Just let other people do all that talking. Of course you must be honest about it. You cannot fly to the defence of the church by denying all of it. Your fellow members and your pastor have faults. You have a few faults yourself. If it were not impolite, you could even find an occasional flaw in the critic who is condemning. But never mind that. You are now part of the church, and its good name is committed in part to you. It is right that you be doubly cautious when unbelievers

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are about. Don't wash dirty linen in the middle of the street. Be loyal to your church wherever you are and whatever you say. The members of your church are your brethren. Are you accustomed to take part in the condemnation of your family by people entirely outside? Or do you tend to defend them against charges?

Then, you have a special obligation in regard to the various services of your church. Be to the church all that you think any member ought to be. Perhaps you cannot attend all the meetings. But don't be limped-backed about it. You can stand two services on Sunday, and the Sunday School, and the midweek prayer-meeting. You may have special duties which will prevent your going, of course. But don't be so ready to take care of your precious health or your comfort that you are missed

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from the expected services. You need them all for your spiritual growth, and they all need you for their enlivening and strengthening.

My brother tells that he was once in a church service wherein the pastor in course of his sermon spoke of the recent addition of twenty-one members, but there were only sixteen persons at the service! That is all I know about it, but it does not sound right. When fifty members were added to our church one Sunday, a brother pastor insisted on knowing how many of them attended the Wednesday evening prayer-meeting. I told him, "a good many," and when that did not seem to satisfy him I rebuked him for his inquisitiveness.

And while we are speaking of the prayer-meeting, add this: you ought to learn to take part in it. I do not know what part you ought to take.

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I think there are people who need not offer public prayer or give testimonies. You ought to go to the meeting whether you take individual part or not. You are helping just by being there. The sight of you does your pastor good. You can be a Christian, and a good one, too, without taking part in the meeting, but you will be a better Christian for being active in such things.

The church has a great many kinds of agencies for work. Become part of one or more of them. Go into the Sunday School for work. Be a pupil or a teacher. Help in the missionary meeting, the young people's meeting, the various societies or clubs. Don't just hang on. Get up an interest in anything that concerns the advancement of your Master's Kingdom. Don't try to do everything. Leave a little for other people. But never allow yourself

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to declare that you are "not interested" in something wherein the church is at work. Maybe you think you are not interested in missions, or you have no interest in foreign missions. Yes, but can you afford to leave out of your concern so costly, so great a part of the work of your church? You think you are not interested in foreign missions because you are so concerned with your own land and its needs. But that is not the real reason. The church is interested in the home land, as interested as you are. You do not know the facts about the foreign work, that is the real reason. And as a member of the church you cannot afford to see your fellows lay down their lives and not be interested in what they are doing. Take a church paper. Keep yourself posted. Don't let the church run clear away from you. You cannot

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do everything. You can be interested in everything.

Let me urge in just a few words your duty of growth. You have all the faith you need for beginning the Christian life. You have come into the church on a very simple declaration of faith. But that is only a beginning. You have not yet touched bottom in the gospel of Christ. Study the creed of your church, the more open-heartedly since you are not asked to accept it. Be a learner. Paul commends some of his converts for studying to see whether what he preached was true. The reason some preachers do not preach better is that they have no encouragement from their people. It is tonic to a preacher for a hearer to say: "You said this; I do not believe it; where's the proof?" Very likely he has the proof, but any speaker is apt to

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grow careless if his hearers are careless.

The growth of your faith must be matched by growth in your personal life. For this there are three very simple means at your disposal. If you grow in spiritual life and power, it will be, first, by prayer. Your soul must be fed by God's Spirit. Get Andrew Murray's "With Christ in the School of Prayer," or Dr. McClure's little book on intercessory prayer, which he has called, "A Mighty Means of Usefulness," or some other book like these, and study your duty of prayer. Perhaps you are troubled about the theory of prayer; it may seem to you mere speaking into the air; you may have the notion that praying means fine phrases and many of them. Your best relief from any such difficulty is the experience and habit of prayer itself. When you accustom yourself

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to thinking of your Father as interested in all your affairs, and so become used to swift, short petitions and thanksgivings, your problem of prayer will be solved. You will always be a stunted, poorly-developed Christian unless you learn to be a praying Christian. Pray for yourself, but more for others, and for the kingdom of Christ.

The second means of personal growth is the study of Scripture. There are good and inexpensive books which your pastor will gladly mention, which will help your spiritual life, but let your study center on the Word of God itself. Don't be too busy to read it. You will be helped by taking a verse of it every day for a working motto. Keep a notebook of passages that have attracted you, with your own comments on them. No one else's way of studying the Bible will just suit

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you. Have your own way, but study it.

The third means of growth is service for Christ. You need not expect to become spiritually strong without the exercise and training which come from working for Christ. You will grow weaker if you are inactive.

We need not talk longer about the obligations of your church membership. Turn now to your opportunities. Before, we have thought of the service you must render the church. Think now of the service the church renders you.

For one thing you have now a fellowship with all God's people. Dr. Trumbull has a book which he calls, "Friendship the Master Passion." Well, you have now a right to the friendship and fellowship of all the immense working force of God. You

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have a claim on the whole brotherhood of the Gospel. Most of us do not ask an old soldier what particular engagements of a war he was in. If he was honestly part of the army, then its accomplishments were his, its glory is his. And all that the splendid church of Christ everywhere is accomplishing is of your concern. You are brother to the great men, the heroes of whom you read. You were not brother to them before. They would have felt, and you would have felt, that you were not quite in sympathy. But now you are in one family. It is not "their" cause, not "their" triumph. It is "our" cause, "our" triumph. And that is no small thing.

But you have that fellowship in a nearer way, with those who are of your immediate church. You may make much or little of it, but you will make a great mistake if it does

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not mean much to you. There are your church officers, for example. There are the persons in the church who are most influential. You do not know them all so very well, it may be. But you have a right to enter into a kind of fellowship with them that you have never known. You have large interests in common. You meet them on equal terms by reason of your church membership.

Another special privilege is, that you have now a voice in the advancement of God's kingdom. You have become a determining factor in its future. It is just exactly you, and people like you, who will set the kingdom forward or hold it back. You could not do that so well from the outside. The kind of life you live, the kind of work you do, will enter into the whole church. By being Christly yourself, you help to give the whole church a Christlier

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spirit. The boys in my old college won a great victory one day over another college. They put the three winning debaters in a carriage, tied a long rope to the tongue and ran with it over the campus, and through the town, until they were tired out. And every pulling, shouting, perspiring boy had part in the conquest, because he was part of the institution, and had helped to make the spirit of conquest. You may now have an active part in making the kingdom move forward. You are only one, but the church would be one weaker if it were not for you. If you will be aggressive, the church will gain in aggressiveness. If you will be enthusiastic, the church will gain in enthusiasm. If you should be negligent and ineffective—but you are not going to be either. You have a voice now in the world-wide conquest. You do not simply wish

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it well—provided someone else will do the work. Your very membership adds your weight, whatever that is, to the force of the advancing kingdom. The list of the forces of God will hereafter always include you in the number. You are definitely and explicitly on the side of Christ. It is worth while to join the church for that one result.

Then, as a church member, you have a peculiar right to the sacraments. You were baptized, of course, before you united with the church. So you have been sealed for Christ. But you are now admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. You can hardly lay too much emphasis on your privilege with reference to it. If you will use it aright, it will come to you with much help. In it you will be reminded of your own weakness, and of Him who came to bring you His strength.

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Each time when you partake of it in the right spirit you will be able to renew your resolves for a godlier life and a holier walk. It is your duty to partake of it, but it is peculiarly your right to partake of it. The obligation becomes an opportunity.

I do not want to say any minute word about the method of your partaking, but there are some very practical pastoral words which you will let me say. Some church members come to the sacrament without real preparation for it, not carelessly, but without the serious thought that will make it mean most to them. Let me urge you not to approach it so. It is a very happy service, in no sense a sad one. But it commemorates a death for your sake, and it ought to mean a great deal to you. During the days of the week before the service, find time to read the account of the death of Jesus and

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His institution of the Supper. It is in the latter part of each of the Gospels. Paul's account of the Supper is in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Let it be a week of clearing yourself of unworthy things. If you have committed an offense, make it good so far as you can. If you have been bearing any grudge, rid your heart of it. Let your prayer turn often upon your own heart and its need, but let it take in others, especially those who are not following Christ. Guard your speech and action with special care. Let nothing keep you from the sacrament. You will not come to it sinless; you are not "fit to come" in that sense. But you need it especially if you have failed and fallen. It is meant for weak people. Whatever else you have lost, you have not lost your need.

When you have received the morsel of bread, pause for a moment of

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silent prayer, in which you confess yourself a sinner, and voice your honest desire for holiness. After you have partaken of the wine, let your prayer be one of thanksgiving for the grace of God, which has provided supply for your need, for Christ whose death means life for His people, and one of petition for the advancement of His kingdom. Do not let all this make your observance formal and stilted. Have your own way, being sure that it keeps your heart tender and brings you most out of the sacrament itself.

And now you must let me renew my congratulation that you are a member of the church of your Master. You will grow into appreciation of your obligations and opportunities. They are not irksome, but inspiring. They only hint at that more glorious membership, which you may

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claim in the one universal church, unseen of men, wherein are the saved of all the ages, awaiting the completion of its numbers in the glad day when it is gathered before the throne to be forever with the Lord. May He, your Master, Head of the church, keep you faithful to Him and to His church until that day!