What is Involved in Church Membership.

CIRCULAR LETTER READ AT THE N. S. EASTERN ASSOCIATION.

The Baptist churches of the Maritime Provinces contain over 43,000 members. Such a membership should represent great spiritual influences. The advancement of God's kingdom upon the earth should be correspondingly great. We rejoice in the measure of prosperity enjoyed; we regret that there is not more. Such a body of people are capable of being a greater power, and accomplishing greater things. How this may be, is worth a serious thought. The matter is purely a personal one. The Convention comprises the Associations, the Associations include the churches, and the churches are composed of individual members. An advance in each member means an advance of the body as a whole. No church is better than its individual membership. With the individual members of our churches, therefore, the whole question rests. Better, greater, wider work will be done by the denomination at large, when better, greater, wider work is done by every individual member. Our appeal, therefore, is directly to the individual membership of churches, singly and separately, soul by soul. This leads us to the very necessary inquiry, What is involved in church membership? Our answer is—

1. *It involves individual Christian life.* This necessitates vital contact with the Lord Jesus Christ. Union with Christ must come before union with the church. The church is impotent to impart vital energy. It may be the means of nourishing and developing it; but not of creating it. The bestowment of spiritual life is the divine prerogative. Each member of the church should be a *living* member, living through the quickening breath of the Holy Spirit; living by faith on the Son of God; or he has no right to be counted by man, even as he is *not* counted by God, 'among the living in Jerusalem.' Let each church member see to it that he has spiritual life within his own soul. Life he must possess himself. No profession or relationship can take its place. He that *has* this life will *feel* it; it feeds on the bread of heaven; it delights in holy duties; and is "hid with Christ in God." He who has this life, loves Christ; loves holiness; and loves the brethren. This love is the proof of life. Where this love is lacking, "the life of God in the soul of man" is lacking too. Each church member should possess spiritual life.

2. *It involves individual Christian testimony.* It has been said that "God has no dumb children." The touch of Christ makes the dumb to speak. Testimony is needed in every age, in every country, and in every place where man is found. The pastor has only one voice; the church has many; and every voice in it should testify of Christ. "Let him that heareth, say come." When a church ceases testifying, she loses power; ceases to receive converts; or becomes worldly. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord." The church can only testify through its members. Each may testify according to his ability, bearing this rule in mind, "Let all things be done unto edifying." Many who are not able to argue in defence of Christianity, can testify of its power. The world needs testimony more than it needs arguments. Broken, tearful pleadings have often been the means of breaking hard hearts and melting flinty ones when eloquent discourses have utterly failed. It is not a task, but a privilege to speak for Jesus. It is a joy to tell of His love; a blessing to utter His name. It was never easier to speak for Jesus than now. Opportunities, both in public and in private, are frequent. Souls are hungering for the word. Those who cannot give a loaf can give a crumb. All who know the way of life can speak of it. Musing on holy themes, the fire will burn. The saved should be anxious about the unsaved. No opportunity of exalting Christ or directing the sinner to the Saviour should be thrown away. Do you want a theme? Declare what God hath done for your soul. "It is a day of good tidings, and we do not well to hold our peace." Every church member should be a faithful witness for Christ.

3. *It involves individual Christian beneficence.* We use the word beneficence where we might use a stronger one. The cause of God does not ask a charity, but demands its dues. The Saviour does not petition, like a pauper, for an alms; but like a prince, He claims His own. Not for His own advantage asks He anything, but for the good of man.

We owe the Redeemer even more than we can ever acknowledge for the *indirect* blessings of Christianity, apart from His saving grace; and for *that*, we owe infinitely more. Nothing develops largeness of heart like the love of Christ. Blessings are withholden because of man's ingratitude. Payments we cannot make; offerings we can. What eagerness there is to take! What slowness there is to give! Yet the Lord honors by receiving anything at our hands.

What is Divine requirement? "Bring an offering, and come into my courts." Plain as this duty is, it is little understood, and practised less. Many leave the house of God empty in heart because they enter it empty in hand. The work of the church is continually being hindered through lack of means; and the lack in the church's treasury is a lack to the Redeemer's kingdom. "Bring ye *all* the tithes into the storehouse, . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

The duty of meeting church expenses and extending religious work is not restricted to the few, as many seem to suppose. In just proportion it devolves mutually on all. Yet some do nothing at all. The church gains naught from them. "Whom none can love, whom none can thank, creation's blot, creation's blank." For such a character there is no room in the church of God. Those who are unable to give anything *to* the church should receive something *from* it. But most can give something; and some, even more than they do. Self-indulgence is everywhere more common than self-denial. There are those who give more to the tobacco grower whom they do not know, than they do to the Saviour whom they profess to love. There are those who in other ways pamper the flesh at the expense of the soul, and who live like the earthly while they profess to be heavenly. How they can answer for these things, it were hard to say. The law of Christ is this, and on this is laid the greatest stress, "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself." The lack with them is here. Self-indulgence is a sin; self-denial a mark of grace, and a means of increasing it. Giving to the Lord's cause, according to one's ability, is the duty and privilege of every church member.

4. *It involves individual Christian obligation.* Joining the church is something more than crossing a threshold. Among other things it means responsibility. It is more than submission to an ordinance; more than the enrollment of a name. It is entering upon covenant engagements lasting as life, and sacred as inviolable law. It is partnership with the people of God in all their worship and work. It is fellowship in moral liability as well as common faith. Never, perhaps, more than now, did the church require the steadfast love and faithful labor of all its membership than at the present hour. He who withdraws his heart, his hand, or his help, should first of all obtain a permit from the Lord. Whatever assistance outside organizations demand or deserve the church should be regarded as having the first and strongest claim. It is "the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Other organizations may possibly offer, for the passing moment, greater novelty, or even greater excitement; but novelty and excitement are not essential to Christian life; or, if they are, why not have the novelty, divine and spiritual, and the excitement, sacred and saving, within the church itself? There is room for the exercise of every gift and talent there. Can you preach? The church requires fresh heralds of mercy. Can you sing? The church requires your gifts of song. Can you teach? The church requires your labors in the Sabbath school. Can you give of your substance or your savings? The church can wisely utilize your beneficence. Can you exert a gracious influence over others? The church would welcome all the influence you can wield for the immediate and direct advancement of the Redeemer's cause. So, in every phase of Christian service, the church of God has the first claim upon its members, and this, for the simple reason that the church has the first place in the heart of God. The church is the bride of Christ. Those who slight the church slight the Saviour; and those disparage the church disparage Him who is "the head of all things to the church;" "from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which *every joint* supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of *every part*, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." The church is entitled to receive the hearty and continuous co-operation of all its members. Resident members weaken or strengthen the church in proportion as they ignore or realize their personal obligations; and members absent, who do not see their way clear for early fellowship with a sister church should feel themselves under obligation to correspond with, and render financial assistance to, the church at home; thus showing that its various interests have a place in their affection. At home, or away from home, every church member should be a "fellow-helper to the truth." There is no escape from this obligation.

5. *It involves individual Christian character.* None are born into the church, save such as are born from above; such only are able to "see the kingdom of God." The possession of wealth or culture gives no right of admission, and their absence no ground for exclusion. The right of entrance depends on spiritual grounds—repentance for sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and the existence of these is known by conduct and by character. There is nothing saving in church membership; let none think there is. All that one member expects another member to be in Christian character, he should be himself. Older members should be a help, a comfort, and an example to the younger; and the younger should be an inspiration, a strength, and a joy to the older. None can neglect the duties and privileges of the church without actual spiritual loss. It is not good for any Christian to live his Christian life apart and alone. It is needful for himself, and for the exercise of his gifts, and the development of his own character, that he should be in actual church fellowship. Only in this way can Christian love be tested, Christian talents exercised, and Christian patience perfected. There can be no mutual separation without mutual suffering and loss. Mutual effort results in mutual gain. "We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

Every member of the church should adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. For this purpose, let each one study carefully, and with much prayer, word by word, the church covenant, a copy of which each one should own, and frequently examine in order to test his state and condition in the sight of a holy and all-seeing God. And, better still, let each one measure his character severely, yet justly, not by fellow members, but by the scriptures of truth. And, best of all, look steadily at Jesus Christ, the perfect pattern, who has left us an example that we should follow His steps. Character is perfected only so far as it resembles Christ's. We should make it evident in these last days that church membership is a pledge of Christian character, in accordance with the apostle's words: "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Every individual that hopes to be *with* Christ in the next world must resemble Christ in this. Self-evidencing Christian character is required of every church member.

Thus, as each member of our churches possesses spiritual life, gives gospel testimony, consecrates his substance to the Lord, recognizes his obligations to the brotherhood, and exhibits true Christian character, our churches will occupy higher ground, wield a greater influence for good, win greater conquests over the world, and bring greater glory to our Saviour and our God.

— Queen Victoria has a remarkably fine head of hair, for a lady of her age; but her son, the Prince of Wales, is quite bald. Had he used Ayer's Hair Vigor earlier in life, his head might, to-day, have been as well covered as that of his royal mother. It's not too late yet.

Things By Their Right Names.

"Another way of keeping the tarnish off our moral sense is to call things by their natural and simple names. The real name of a bad thing regularly stigmatizes the thing, and so stirs in us an antipathy to the name. There is much in a name. A fit name not only keeps things distinct that are different, but keeps the snarl out of our ideas of things. A certain amount of distinct thinking is necessary to the maintenance of a conscience that shall work promptly and speak definitely. The Lord never compromised Himself or the truth through the attenuating words employed by Him to state matters He had in hand. The whole Bible is a tonic in the method in which it meets situations and squares itself to facts. A long name for a short sin argues either poltroonery or moral obliquity. We can play with words, but words will take their turn and play with us. An ambiguous name given to a bad thing saps from the bad thing its essential ugliness. The craggiest Sierra relaxes not a thing of green when the cloud-mantle has been folded into its gritty creases. 'Lie' is better than 'prevarication,' 'adultery' preferable to 'conjugal infidelity,' 'theft' cuts closer to the marrow than 'embezzlement,' though less specific; which last example reminds me of two stanzas I met with a while ago, hardly poetic in spirit, nor elegant in form, but moving to the point by straight step and breezy swing; and with an ample commentary furnished them by recent events:

"In olden times when people heard
Some swindler huge had come to grief,
They used a good old Saxon word,
And called that man a 'thief.'

"But language such as that to day
Upon men's tender feelings grates;
So people smile and simply say
He—'rehypothecates.'"

"The safest words are always those which bring us most directly to facts. If we want to keep good and evil apart from each other in our acts, we cannot be too careful to keep them distinct in our thought; and distinct thinking waits on precise and honest wording."—*Dr. C. H. Parkhurst.*

The Two Ways.

The one way is narrow, the other broad—that is to say, the course of conduct which belongs to the disciples or subjects of the kingdom is one of restraint and limitation, constant self-denial, and abstinence, while the path of the worldly man is pleasant to the ignobler self, and permits him to go whithersoever his inclination carries him. "Do as you like" is a broad road. There is ample room to expatiate with such a charter. It is down hill too, and the down grade is always easy traveling. There is a pleasant swing when we shut off steam at top of the incline and let the train run down by its own weight, very much unlike the laborious puffing of the locomotive on the up-track. Self-indulgence is an easy prescription for conduct, and self-denial is always hard to the worser self who is denied. It would be very pleasant if the roads led nowhither, but what if the delightful desert stops short at the top of a cliff and the whole rushing train is sure to go over? It will not be quite so pleasant then. So, our Lord puts the third contrast in regard to the respective ends. The narrow path goes up. That makes it hard, but it leads at last to the broad tablelands where God is the light, and life the possession of the dwellers. The other road is "a primrose way," going merrily down, but to "the everlasting burning." Life and destruction are opposed. The nature of the one defines that of the other. Life is the blessed being of the spirit united to God, not mere existence. Destruction is the miserable being of the separated from God—a living death.

Awful and strange, then, is the last point of contrast between the crowds on the one, and the few on the other way. The tragic fact that there are few who choose the harder path of duty and discipleship rather than the easier one of self-indulgence gives the real sombreness to life as seen by a thoughtful mind. It is not so much that men are miserable and mortal as that they choose to be sad, which makes their history such a bewilderment and mystery. That is true to-day—as it was when Christ looked with His sad heart on the multitudes torn and wandering like lost sheep. It should touch all Christian hearts with Christ-like pity; it should stir them to efforts which would put to shame the feeble work of the church as we know it. Above all—it should quicken to renewed diligence that we follow not the multitude to do evil, nor ever be ashamed to be in the minority which aspires and endures, and denies self for the kingdom of heaven's sake.—*Dr. Maclaren.*

The Touch of Christ.

One of the sweetest pictures in Mark's story of the wonderful Being with whom everybody felt at home, is that of the group of little children brought to Him that "He should touch them." Whether it was superstition or faith that presented them, we know not; but the homeless, childless Nazarene took the darlings in His arms and blessed them.

Any one might be willing to caress a sweet babe; but who could care, or even dare, to touch a loathsome leper, whose very breath was deadly contagion? One of these wretched outcasts, with disease running riot over his horrid countenance, approaches our Lord and kneels to the ground. No wife, or child, or kinswoman could give the poor wretch a kiss, if he were dying. "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!" What a model prayer for us all! With a yearning of divine pity, Jesus puts forth His clean, pure hand, and touches the living putrefaction. In an instant the leprosy is gone: Christ's hand has opened all other lands to a hitherto deserted outcast. Here is an object-lesson for us. What a rebuke that touch of the leper gives to our hateful, selfish spirit of caste and pride! Shame on us, that we are so willing to touch jewelled hands and sit beside silks and seal-skins, and yet shun the ill clad, ill-colored outcasts as not fit to be touched! This is the curse and shame of our professed Christianity—it is above touching the lepers. And to-day the only practical solution of the great burning problems of how to reach the neglected masses, and how to reform the drunkard, and how to cleanse the vile, and how to evangelize the heathenism of our huge cities, lies in two words—Christian contact. The personal contact of culture, piety, and love with ignorance, vice, and misery—that's the remedy. Soul must touch soul. The loving hand must not refuse to touch the leper's. If we do, Christ is not in us. O, blessed Jesus, give us Thy tender compassion, that we shrink not from stretching forth the helping, healing hand to every sinning, suffering creature in our path!

O strengthen us, that while we stand
Firm on the rock and strong in Thee,
We may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea!

—*T. L. Cuyler.*

The Imitation of Christ.

It is reported in the Bohemian story, that St. Wenceslaus, their king, one winter night going to his devotions in a remote church barefooted in the snow and sharpness of unequal and pointed ice, his servant Podavius (who waited upon his master's piety, and endeavored to imitate his affections) began to faint through the violence of the snow and cold, till the king commanded him to follow him, and set his foot in the same footsteps which his feet would mark for him; the servant did so, and either fancied a cure or found one; for he followed his prince, helped forward with shame and zeal to his imitation, and by the king forming footsteps for him in the snow. In the same manner does the blessed Jesus; for, since our sway is troublesome, obscure, full of objection and danger, apt to be mistaken and to affright our industry, He commands us to mark His footsteps, to tread where His feet have stood, and not only invites us forward by the argument of His example, but He hath trodden down much of the difficulty, and made the way easier and fit for our feet. For He knows our infirmities, and Himself hath felt their experience in all things but in the neighborhood of sin; and therefore He hath proportioned a way and a path to our strengths and capacities, and like Jacob, has marched softly and in evenness with the children and the cattle, to entertain us by the comforts of His company, and the influences of a perpetual guide.

He that gives alms to the poor, takes Jesus by the hand; he that patiently endures injuries and affronts, helps Him bear His cross; he that comforts his brother in affliction, gives an amiable kiss of peace to Jesus; he that bathes his own and his neighbor's sins in tears of penance and compassion, washes his Master's feet; we lead Jesus into the recesses of our heart by holy meditation, and we enter into His heart when we express Him in our actions; for the apostle says, "He that is in Christ, walks as He also walked." But thus the actions of our life relate to Him by way of worship and religion; but the use is admirable and effectual, when our actions refer to Him as our copy, and we transcribe the original to the life.—*Jeremy Taylor.*

A Miner's Persistence.

Canon Wilberforce, whose recent visit to this country was a source of good to many, was dwelling, in the course of one of his addresses, on the importance of the word "now," and related the following incident in point: A miner having heard the Gospel preached, determined that, if the promised blessing of immediate salvation were indeed true, he would not leave the presence of the minister who was declaring it, until assured of its possession by himself. He waited, consequently, after the meeting to speak with the minister, and, in his untutored way, said: "Did'nt ye say I could have the blessing now?" "Yes, my friend." "Then pray with me, for I'm not goin' awa' wi'out it." And they did pray, these two men, wrestling in prayer until midnight, like Jacob at Peniel, until the wrestling miner heard the silent words of comfort and cheer. "I've got it now!" cried the miner, his face reflecting the joy within; "I've got it now!" The next day a terrible accident occurred at the mines—one of those accidents which so frequently shock us with their horror merely in the reading of them. The same minister was called to the scene, and among the men dead and dying was the quivering, almost breathless, body of this man, who only the night before, big and brawny, came to him to know if salvation could really be had "now" for the asking. There was but a fleeting moment of recognition between the two, ere the miner's soul took flight, but in that moment he had time to say, in response to the minister's sympathy, "Oh, I don't mind, for I've got it—I've got it—it's mine." Then the name of this poor man went into the list of "killed." There was no note made of the royal inheritance to which he had but a few hours before come into possession, through faith in Christ, and all by his believing grip of the word "now."

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS.—Moses was the son of a poor Levite; Gideon was a thresher; several of the apostles were fishermen; Zwingli was a shepherd; Melancthon, the great theologian of the Reformation, was an armorer; Luther was the child of a poor miner; Fuller was a farm servant; Carey, the originator of the plan of translating the Bible into the language of the millions of Hindoostan, was a shoemaker; Morrison, who translated the Bible into the Chinese language, was a last-maker; Dr. Milne was a herd boy; Adam Clark was the son of Irish cotters; John Foster was a weaver; Jay, of Bath, was a herdsman.—*Selected.*

SYMPATHY OF CHRIST.—They tell us that in some trackless lands, when one friend passes through the pathless forest, he breaks a twig ever and anon as he goes, that those who come after may see the traces of his having been there, and may know that they are not out of the road. Oh, when we are journeying through the murky night and the dark woods of affliction and sorrow, it is something to find here and there a spray broken, or a leafy stem bent down with the tread of Christ's foot and the brush of His hand as he passed, and to remember that the path He trod He has hallowed, and that there are lingering fragrances and hidden strength in the remembrance, in all points tempted as we are, bearing grief for us, bearing grief with us, bearing grief like us.—*Maclaren.*

— "We have never sold a medicine that has given such general satisfaction as Burdock Blood Bitters," says Joseph Coad, of Frankville, Ont.

Getting up Sermons.

Many of our readers will be interested in the following particulars, given by Dr. Maclaren, of his method of pulpit preparation:—

I write my sermons in part. The amount of written matter varies. When I can, I like to write a couple of sentences or so of introduction, in order to get a fair start, and for the rest I content myself with jottings, fragmentary hints of a word or two each, interspersed here and there with a fully written sentence. Illustrations and metaphors I never write: a word suffices for them. If I have 'heads' I word these carefully; and I like to write the closing sentences. That is my ideal—a sufficiently scrappy one you will think—but I seldom attain to it, and am most frequently obliged to preach with much less preparation. The amount written varies from about six or seven pages widely written with short lines, each line holding only a word or two, to the barest skeleton that would go in half a page. Of course, I do not adhere to what is written, as there is very little of it sufficiently consecutive. I make no attempt to reproduce more than the general course of thought, and I constantly find that the best bits of my sermon make themselves in preaching. I do adhere verbatim to my introductory sentences, which serve to shove me off into deep water, but beyond that I let the moment shape the thing. As to preparing expressions, I do not. Aaron described his procedure precisely as I should describe mine—he put all the stuff in the fire, 'and there came out this calf.' If I can get the fire well alight, that is what I care for most. I began my ministry with the resolution that I would not write sermons, but would think them and feel them; and I have stuck to it ever since. It costs quite as much time in preparation as writing, and a far greater expenditure of nervous energy in delivery; but I am sure that it is best for me, and equally sure that everybody has to find out his own way himself."

It is understood that, with all his freshness and vigor Mr. Spurgeon's method is closely akin to that of Dr. Maclaren.

Trusting in the Dark.

"I need great faith to see through the dark clouds before me," wrote a friend. She forgot that here we are to walk by faith, and not by sight. We do not need to see through the dark clouds. We have only to lie in Jesus' arms and let Him carry us along. He knows the way. To Him "the darkness and the light are both alike, and the night shineth as the day."

A mother took her baby in her arms to carry her upstairs to bed. Through a long hall, and up the circular stairs, without any light, she wended her way. The baby clung closely.

"Darkee, darkee," she lisped; "baby 'faid."

"Baby needn't be afraid; mother knows the way," mamma said, cheerfully, hugging the little one still more closely; and the baby was quiet; there was no cry or word of alarm. When the door was opened into the light, pleasant bedroom, the little one clapped her hands with delight. "Mamma knows the way," she repeated; "baby no more 'faid."

In the simple trust of the little child, let us contemplate the dark clouds before us. We would prefer sunlight, it is true; but if our Father sends clouds it is not to alarm us, only to test our faith. It is that we may get the sweetness, and comfort, and real joy of trusting. If clouds never shadowed our way we should never need to trust, and should lose one of our highest sources of enjoyment. To lean on Jesus singing,

"All the way my Saviour leads me,
What have I to ask beside?"

is far pleasanter, and brings deeper, richer peace to the soul than to walk in the light of undimmed prosperity. When we open our eyes in the bright shining of the better land, we shall thank God for the clouds through which He carried us so tenderly and safely. "I would rather walk in the dark with God than go alone in the light."—*Word and Work.*

— In an incisive and witty address, at Northfield, Dr. Gordon, of Boston, referred the dearth of spiritual power in the church, to the prevalence of worldliness and the employment of unspiritual and unscriptural methods of doing God's work. He unsparingly condemned costly choirs and money-making entertainments, and told of a canvass of ten churches in a certain quarter of Boston which revealed the fact that their music cost them $19,500, while their combined gifts for foreign missions equalled but $6,000. "For one," he exclaimed, "I consider the unsanctified church choir to be only a church refrigerator to keep dead piety from quick corruption;" and again, he said wittily, in speaking of church fairs versus church work. "I had rather have the widow's mite than the widow's muffins."

Silk Needlework.

The latest edition (1890) of that series of instructive and entertaining books on Home Needlework, published yearly by the Corticelli Silk Co., is now ready. It will repay any lady interested in fancy work to send to their address (St. Johns, Que.) six cents in postage stamps and receive one of these books. The 1889 edition had many novelties in designs and patterns which are so useful in the Home Circle, and, as in all the work done by this company, this edition is fully up to the standard. The advice given as to the selection of silks alone will save time and disappointment to many. Both editions can be had, we understand, by addressing the Company as above. The Corticelli Silk Co. are selling the well-known Wash Colors Art Silk made by the Brainerd & Armstrong Co., United States.

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are unusually attractive.
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