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AN IDEAL MEMBERSHIP

By Rev. J. Franklin Fisher

In seeking for pastors churches usually attempt to secure ministers in whom all the perfections reside. Granted that their task is hopeless from the start, still they continue to look for the ideal man, that one who by nature, grace and attainments they think will adorn the church which he serves.

May we be permitted to turn the tables and attempt as a pastor to discover an ideal membership? If we could pick from the churches we have served and bring together in one flock all those select members we have in mind now we think we would have a group par excellence, the ideal church.

The first qualification these spiritually elite possessed in common was that they knew Christ. Their religion was not theoretical but personal and experimental. They were not just good people doing the best they could, but they were God's people living in the strength and light of the Divine. They were twice-born men and women. Through the new birth they had entered into the supernatural and had contact with sources of power and wisdom of which the world knows not. More than that, they had a glorious assurance of salvation. They did not live in the fogs of doubts and fears but on the heights of fellowship and confidence. They knew Him whom to know is life eternal.

Churchmen like these, whose citizenship is in heaven, are the true religious experts. Training in colleges and seminaries does not of itself give knowledge of heavenly things. Men may not be one whit nearer to an understanding of spiritual realities after graduation from institutions of higher learning than before. But those who have sought and found the Lord and tasted of His grace have their spiritual faculties quickened. They know the way and are able to guide others who are lost and blind into the way.

A second distinction of those whom we choose for the ideal church is that they were upright and honest in their life. Sometimes we have had non-Christians point to a certain member of the flock and say scornfully, "There goes one of your good members!" On the other hand, there are Christians in whom the world has confidence, men in whose spirit there is no guile. They reflect the light of the Sun of Righteousness to a darkened world. They commend the religion which the minister preaches and demonstrate its transforming power. They build respect for their church and confidence in the Christian faith. Every pastor knows that loud profession cannot take the place of convictions and personal integrity. Our ideal membership is made up solely of those whose lives measure up to their teaching.

Moreover, they were Spirit-filled disciples of Christ—those whom we would include in our dream church. From the age of the apostles until the triumphant church has been the church

filled with the Spirit of God. The redemption of humanity is not to be achieved by the wisdom of this world. Only God-possessed men, men vibrant with supernatural power, can advance the kingdom of God. The lives of the saints are not, as some assume, repelling and forbidding, but are oases in the deserts of sin which beckon men to the privileges and delights of the sons of God.

Another quality of those making up this church was their dependability. They were pillars in the true sense—they were always every man in his place—and they bore burdens. Of all the virtues in a pastor's eyes, dependability is near the head of the list. A church is strong, not in proportion to the brilliance of its minister, but according to the trustworthiness and loyalty of its members. Loyalty to Christ, loyalty to the leadership of the church, loyalty to the service and doctrine of the church is the foundation of all success. What kind of an army would America have if our soldiers felt free to do as they pleased, go where and when they pleased, and fight when they pleased? In the same way the army of the cross must be subject to leadership and assume responsibility if Christ is to win victories.

Again, the people who have made glad the heart of the pastor are those who have learned the strength and joys of co-operation. In religion as in politics are to be found those who take profound pleasure in being "agin" something. They assume a dignity in being on the other side of the question they could not have otherwise. All honor to those who will not yield an inch on issues of right and of truth. But the whole Christian program is one of co-operation. "We are workers together with God." To work with God and with God's servants requires a willingness to subordinate personal plans and preferences, to give in for Christ's sake and for the peace and unity of the body of Christ.

Still another virtue of "the chosen people" was that they were boosters of their church. They loved it so well and believed in it so thoroughly that they became enthusiastic about it. They built up their pastor, their evangelist, their services, their Sunday school, their denominational interests in the eyes of their friends until many of these friends became interested. With respect to their church they had all the talking points and enthusiasm that the advocates of the Townsend Plan have for Dr. Townsend and his program. One member of this type is worth as a builder ten ordinary members.

One more admirable quality possessed by our excellencies is that of vision. "Lift up your eyes," Jesus said to His disciples, "and see the fields, that they are white unto harvest." Christ calls for men of vision—men who see the needs of the world, the possibilities of the church, the open doors about them; men who are not tied to the past like the ancient Pharisee but are reaching forth unto the things that are before; men who see their own deficiencies and Christ's adequacies, and men who can see good in other people. This brings us to our last eminence for which our idealistic members are noted.

The final virtue is charity for others. In almost every flock are the weak and the strong. There are some who have to be helped and coaxed and urged perhaps, and then there are those who, thank God, are able and ready to help. How prone we are to hold others to our own exacting standards! But the Christian most like unto Christ has Christ's charity and compassion for the weak. Instead of criticizing and speaking evil, he covers that weak one with the mantle of his charity and supports him with the strength of prayer.

Is there such a congregation having all the qualities we have described? We do not know. But we do know the possibility of every Christian becoming, through divine grace and careful cultivation of the soul, an ideal member of the body of Christ. In fairness to the congregations we now serve we are glad to say they approximate as nearly as any we know the idealism we have pictured.

Seattle, Washington.

UNHEEDED ADMONITIONS!

By Rev. R. A. Kerby

The study of the origin, progress and latter end of the church at Ephesus is one which abounds with interest, instruction and solemn warning. Paul's first visit to this great commercial center was on the return trip of his second missionary journey. He tarried there but one Sabbath, but left Priscilla and Aquila in charge. These were the devoted people who led the eloquent Apollos out into the full light of the Messiahship of Jesus. After a time Paul re-visited this city and conducted a short holiness meeting in which the entire congregation, about twelve men, received the Holy Ghost. Such was the willingness of these disciples to walk in the light that only the shortest of exhortations was needed to lead these men out into a sunlight experience of entire sanctification. The great apostle remained in this great center of idolatry for about two years, going from house to house with tears, and in this comparatively short space of time saw a flourishing church established. When passing near this place of so much toil and tears on his last trip to Jerusalem he paused at Miletus, a few miles distant, and called for the elders of the church. At this time he delivered to them his last charge in words so stirring that they have moved the hearts of Christians all down the centuries. After thus reviewing his labors among them and warning them of dangers to come he committed this church to the charge of Timothy, his son in the gospel. After due process of time in which Paul was bound at Jerusalem, and after many months found him in prison at Rome, he took pen in hand to write to this church at Ephesus. In his epistle, in many respects his greatest, he admonishes them to "walk in love," to be "rooted and grounded in love," to "be filled with the Spirit," to be continually "giving thanks always for all things," to "put on the whole armour of God," "to pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit," and "having done all, to stand."