

HOW TO BEHAVE

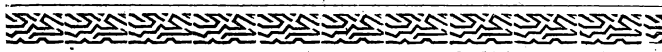
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How to Behave

—AS A—

Church Member.

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THIS DISCOURSE WAS PREACHED IN THE
REGULAR COURSE OF MY MINISTRY, AND IT IS
PUBLISHED BY THE CHURCH, FOR SPECIAL
USE AMONG THE MEMBERS.

T. T. EATON.

LOUISVILLE, KY., JUNE 30, 1891.

HOW TO BEHAVE AS A CHURCH MEMBER.

“How men ought to behave themselves.”—

1 Tim. 3:15.

It means something to be a church member and it ought to mean more. What it means is seen when we consider what is the object of a church. For what purpose does a church exist? It is not a social club. It is not a lodge of a benevolent order. It is not intended for any special grade of society into which only “our sort of folks” are to be admitted. A church of Jesus Christ exists for two purposes—to win souls to Christ and to build up Christians in their spiritual life. To these two objects every church member is most solemnly committed; just as every soldier is committed to the cause for which the army is organized. Many church members, like Saul, are “hidden away among the stuff,” and show no sign that they feel any sort of obligation to promote either of the two great objects for which churches exist.

According to the New Testament, only those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit should be members of churches. One

reason for the inefficiency of so many church members is that due care has not been exercised in seeing that applicants for church membership give evidence of having experienced a change of heart, and thus many come into the churches who have never truly repented. Baptism means that the person baptized has passed from death unto life, is dead to sin and risen to walk in newness of life, is enlisted as a soldier of Jesus Christ, has entered the vineyard of the Lord for service. If you did not mean this when you were baptized, then your baptism was a farce. There is no obligation resting upon one member which does not equally rest on all the other members. All are to be active workers.

In carrying out the work of a church, the preaching of the Gospel must be maintained, and each member must support it with heartiness and energy. Houses of worship must be provided and kept in repair, and each member is under obligation to see that this need of his church is supplied, and as well supplied as may be. Then meetings for worship must be kept up, and each member must support them by his, or her, presence, and in every right way.

The great essential qualifications for

church service is love. If you truly love your church you will be able to give it proper support. If we love the church we will love its work. A church is the abode of love. In it God's love is manifested, and there Christians love each other. No duty is enforced with more emphasis in Scripture than this great duty of love, and no service can be acceptable to God which is not permeated by love. Christians should love one another, and especially is this true of those who belong to the same church. Do you say that some church members are unlovely? Yes, but none the less should you love them. The command is, "love your enemies"—how much more those of the same household of faith. It has been well said, "God loves all but admires few." We are not commanded to admire the brethren, though we are to have charity for them in forming our opinions of them. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

This love will show itself—

1. In courtesy. You will seek to know the members of the church, that you may learn ways of making yourself helpful to them. You will greet them as brethren in Christ, and will be interested in their growth in grace. You

will greet them in the spirit of Christ, and will manifest to them in many ways your interest in their well-being.

2. In sympathy. Their sorrows will sadden and their joys will gladden you. You will "rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep." Two boys once seemed very happy as they sat together, and to a lady inquiring the cause one of them said: "I saw Jim sitting here very sad and I thought I'd try to make him glad and in making Jim glad I got glad myself." And this is ever the way. Look around and find the Jims and Marys, and make them glad if you would rejoice yourself. There is no happier work than seeking to "Lift the earth crushed heart to hope and heaven."

3. In help. You will co-operate with the other members in efforts to do good. No member has a right to refuse service because others refuse. Indeed, the refusal of others puts upon you the greater obligation, lest the service go undone and the cause of Christ suffer. You should help the Pastor, and so far from making demands on him, should do all you can to lighten the demands of others. If his whole time and energy be taken in look-

ing after members, he can do nothing on the great outside world. See to it that you cause him no extra care or labor, and that you help him with those who need his personal attention. Help the deacons. Familiarize yourself with their work, and aid them in the important service to which you have called them. Help the treasurer. Do not make him run after you to secure or collect subscriptions. Do you help him run after others, that the finances of the church may be kept in a healthy condition. Help the committees, the Sunday-school superintendent, and all who are trying to do good. These brethren mentioned, occupy these positions because you chose and called them, and they have the right to expect your help in the work to which you have called them. Your pastor, your deacons, your treasurer, your Sunday-school superintendent, etc., did not volunteer to occupy their respective positions. You selected them and called them to the service, and it is cruel in you to fail to co-operate with them. I wish each of you would solemnly put to your own conscience these questions:

How many members just like me would it take to make an efficient church? What sort of congregation would we have, what sort of

a prayer-meeting, of a Sunday-school, what would be raised for church support, for missions, for charity, and how many souls would be saved if all the rest of the members were just like me? Put these questions to your own hearts, in the fear of God, and you will get plainer views of duty. You will have to give an account at the Judgment for the sort of church member you have made.

Being helpful thus will greatly help you to love your brethren and the church. We always love those to whom we render service rather than those who do service to us. You love those to whom ye have done favors far more than those who have done favors to you. Did you ever know a man to love the friend who had paid a security debt for him? I know of no surer way of making a life-long enemy than to become security for a friend and then to pay the debt. God, knowing weak human nature, has ordained that we shall do good to others so that we can love them. Think not what the church or the brethren might do for you—but rather consider what you can do for them; then and then only will you love them rightly.

There are three sorts of support each member is bound to give the church of which he is a member :

1. *Mental.* He must seek to increase in all right ways the influence of the church. He must think about the church and its work, and even dream about them. A prominent business man, who had begun poor and become rich, was asked how he achieved his success. He replied that he took his business to bed with him and dreamed about it. Ah! if I could only set all the members of this grand old church to dreaming about it—what a great revival we would have. Give the church your best thought. Nothing more needs your highest wisdom than the service of the highest ends, and the highest end is the service of God. Nowhere is wisdom more needed than in winning souls, and nowhere is it better shown.

Study human nature that you may learn how to get hold of people in general, and study individuals that you may know how best to reach them. This is to be done both outside and inside the church, outside that sinners may be won to Christ, and inside that the characters of Christians may be built up.

Study the doctrines of your church that you may be able to give a reason for the faith that is in you, and that you may be able to teach others. If our doctrines are true, they are worth studying and worth advocating.

Others who hold to different beliefs will not advocate our doctrines, you may be sure, hence their advocacy depends upon us, and if we fail, what we believe to be the truth will perish from the earth. If those who believe error advocate it, while those who believe the truth will not advocate it, then truth will perish and error will prevail.

And especially should you make of yourself an argument for your church, that seeing you people may be convinced.

2. *Financial Support.* Every member is under obligation to contribute to the financial support of the church. We enjoy the sacrifices others made to erect this house of worship. How many of you contributed anything to build this house? It is the least we can do to take good care of it and to maintain the worship for which the house was erected. Do you say that you have sacrificed to build churches elsewhere? Then the same argument applies there. It costs to maintain public worship and to carry on the work of the church, and no one has any right to claim exemption more than others. Everybody else has as much right to refuse to contribute as you have. If you decline to contribute to what costs other people money and what is for

your benefit as well as theirs, or if you fail to contribute your fair proportion, *you make yourself to that extent an object of charity.* You have as much right to demand that other people feed and clothe you as that they shall pay their money to furnish you church privileges, while you refuse to contribute your fair proportion. Shame on the church member who refuses to bear his part, according to his ability, in providing for the expenses of the church. Are you in any sense an object of charity?

All ought to be glad to give. It is a privilege and it should be a pleasure. The Bible has so many promises to givers, "God loveth a cheerful giver," "The liberal soul shall be made fat," "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Jesus sat "over against the treasury" and watched the people give, and His eye is on us all to see how we give. What costs nothing is little valued. The reason many of our members care so little for the church is because they give so little to it. If they would contribute liberally, they would love the church better. Giving is left voluntarily, not that it might be avoided, but that it might be done freely and from love to Christ. Instead of seeing how little we can

get off with giving, our aim should be to get all given possible for us, the more the better and the happier. It is a compliment to be asked to give, and yet there are persons so ignorant as to become offended when they are asked to subscribe to a good object. If the cause presented has no claims upon you, you may rightly decline to give, but you should never dream of taking offence at being asked. It was a favorite saying of John Wesley :

“Get all you can,
Save all you can,
Give all you can.”

3. *Spiritual Support.* To give spiritual support is the chief obligation of a member to his church, and when this duty is faithfully discharged, it includes all the rest. Each member should pray for the pastor, the deacons, the treasurer, the Sunday-school superintendent, and others in positions of responsibility. All of these occupy their respective positions by vote of the church, and they have a right to expect the hearty co-operation of all the members. Pray for them. Pray for the church-members also. Then only can you love them as you ought to love your brethren.

Work to lead sinners to repentance. “Can you sell goods?” asked a merchant of a young

man who asked to be employed as salesman. "Yes," said he, "I can sell to those who wish to buy." "Any fool can do that," replied the merchant; "we want salesmen who can sell to those who do not wish to buy." It is easy to explain the Gospel to an earnest inquirer, but we have to deal with careless and impenitent sinners, who do not wish the Gospel. We are to "go into the highways and byways" and bring them to Christ. We must also go after the wandering sheep who have gone astray. Our Lord and His apostles did not sit down and wait for the people to come. It is written, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," not what somebody else finds for you. You are not to wait for work, but to stretch forth your hands and do "the next thing."

Do you think you can do but little, and are you ashamed to do that? If there is but little you can do, so much the less reason for your neglecting it. Are you ashamed to do your duty? You ought to be ashamed to neglect it. Action is needed—vigorous and hearty. Religion that is mere sentiment does not transform character, and it soon evaporates. And we should be willing to do whatever service "our hand findeth to do." Love is not choice

of service. If you are not qualified, go to work at once and qualify. No soldier is a veteran without drill and experience. You will never become qualified by holding off. And the best way to learn how to do anything is to do it, just as a child learns to walk by walking.

Nothing should be allowed to interfere with your service of God. Religion is not a matter to be attended to at one's convenience, it is the chief concern of life. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," first in order, as well as in importance. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy soul and with all thy strength." When ever the service of God conflicts with our interest or pleasure we must not hesitate a moment to follow that service. Ralph Erskine says that when he sees a dog following two men in a road, he cannot tell which of the two owns him, but when the road forks and the men separate he can tell the owner by noticing which one the dog follows. It is so with the professed Christian when the world and our Lord separate. Here is an easy test you can apply to yourselves. I know a young man, a church member, who last year spent more than a hundred dollars for tobacco, and yet he refused to give anything to

support his church. When a church member has money for fashion, for baseball, for excursions, for amusements, and none for the cause of Christ—how dwelleth the love of God in that heart?

When an issue comes, and you must decide which road you will go, stop and think which Christ would go, and remember his great command, "Follow thou me." Following Christ includes all duty. He "went about doing good." He made personal efforts to lead men from darkness to light. He lived a life of self-sacrificing obedience. To follow Him is the supreme need of your soul. What sort of a Christian you are is a matter of infinitely more importance than what sort of a lawyer, or doctor, or business man, or society woman you are.

Personal effort is necessary. We can not lose ourselves in the mass. The commands are, "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not," the "thou" singles out each one of us. We can not transfer responsibility, even though we are ready to pray for it. We need to come in personal contact with those we benefit. "Instead of saying, 'Here am I, send me,' men in these last days are ready to say, 'Here is my check, send somebody else.'" Wholesale business depends entirely upon retail business.

The same is true in religion. Whole communities are reached by the gospel only by reaching individuals. If we take care of retail religion, the wholesale will take care of itself.

“Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye did it unto me.”

Note the “unto one.”

I lay the question on your consciences, how can this church be made all that it ought to be? It can be accomplished only by the efforts of those who are active. The workers must enlist the rest. Do not scold them nor complain of them, but take hold of them in love, and enlist them. They will never be enlisted until this is done, and it is gloriously worth doing.

Think of the associations which cluster around this church. Think of the noble souls who have loved and labored here and have gone to their reward, leaving to us this sacred heritage! Think of the opportunities for service this church enjoys! Think of the mighty work for God it could do if all were faithful! Brethren, shall not this grand old church put on her strength, and, arrayed in her beautiful garments, go forth in the service of God “fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners?”

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