

Two Ways to Keep Members Faithful

There are two ways to keep members of the church "faithful."

The first way is to be sure everyone is involved. Have a project for each member, and make sure that he feels important in his role. Praise him for the good job he is doing. Make him feel needed; make him feel that the well-being of the whole congregation rests firmly on his shoulders. That will keep him "faithful." There are two problems with this method. In the first place, it encourages the creation of projects that are not remotely related to the work of the local church. One member plays on the church ball team; another leads the Boy Scout troop; another is an active member of the "Dorcas Society"; another plans the program for the men's luncheon. Everybody is busy all right, but in activities that are not authorized in the New Testament.

In the second place, members are often given roles for which they are not qualified. A lady is chosen to teach a class, not because she is qualified, but because she needs to be involved. A man is appointed a deacon to help him to be "faithful." Another man is appointed to serve the Lord's Supper for a month in order to encourage him to be present each Sunday that month. This method thus places "the cart before the horse," for no one should ever be assigned any work in the Lord's service who is not already faithful and qualified for the work to be done (2 Timothy 2:2).

The second way to keep people faithful is to develop within them a genuine love for the Lord. When people love the Lord, they will be faithful, and it won't take some kind of "special" project to keep them faithful. They will also be involved: in worship, in study, in prayer, in godly living, in sharing the gospel with a friend, in helping the needy. I have known literally hundreds of Christians who have never in their lives been appointed to any special work, but whose love for the Lord alone keeps them faithful. There is no superficial faithfulness on the part of these; theirs is a faithfulness that is real.

Special responsibilities are fine for those who are qualified, but the man who requires some special duty to be faithful has never learned what true faithfulness is.

- by Bill Hall

Predestination

The Calvinistic concept of the predestination of men - apart from their will and choice - issues from the false assumption that men are "born in sin" having inherited the original sin of Adam, and, "being wholly inclined to evil," with no good in them, such a condition required an "unconditional election" on the part of God. This election limited the atonement of Christ to the "elect", who are saved by the "irresistible grace of God," and will therefore, never be able to forfeit their right to eternal life. On the other hand, all who are not of the "elect" are completely shut off from the grace of God which He has extended to all men through Christ, and are eternally consigned to damnation and separation from God in the world to come. This doctrine stands opposed to New Testament teaching on at least 5 points:

1. It makes God a respecter of persons in that He has predestinated some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation: this is contrary to the very nature of God (Romans 2:11; Deuteronomy 32:4).

2. It makes God responsible for the loss of souls in hell; but the New Testament teaches that He is not "willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He "would have all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4).

3. It destroys man's power of choice. If my destiny is already sealed, there is nothing I can do to change it; I have no choice open to me, and my will cannot be exercised in any way whatever. However, the Bible says, "Choose I you this day I whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15), and the "Spirit and the bride say, Come . . . and whosoever WILL, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Jesus said, "If any man WILL" (John 17:17).

4. It nullifies the commission of Christ (Mark 16:15-16). If one's eternal destiny has already been determined by the Father, why preach to him?

5. The whole system makes man an irresponsible being. If man is born in sin, if he is a sinner by birth, he is not responsible for those transgressions. But man does not inherit sin -- he commits it (Ezekiel 18:1-24). This passage also teaches that man does not inherit righteousness; he does it.

- by Kelly Ellis

You Finish the Story

There was once a congregation in which every member was just like you.
Each one cooperated and supported every phase of the work just like you.
Everyone worked as hard and attended the same services and gospel meetings that you did.
The elders, deacons and preacher were all as interested in the church as you are.
Everyone put the same emphasis on recreation, business and other material affairs that you do.
Each member contributed monetarily just like you do.
Within a year or so, the congregation.....

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The Building Is Not The Church

It is not uncommon to hear members of various denominations refer to the physical building where their group meets as "the church." They might say, "I was at the church yesterday and I saw John." Or, "We're so proud of our church -- it's been standing there for over 100 years." It is clear that they do not understand the New Testament usage of the word "church."

In our Bibles, the word "church" is translated from the Greek word "ekklesia," which literally means "called out." If you are a Christian, God "called you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12), "called you into the grace of Christ" (Gal. 1:6), "called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). This "call" was not a mysterious, better-felt-than-told sort of thing. It was accomplished through God's simple truth revealed in the New Testament -- "he called you by our gospel" (2 Thess. 2:14).

And, so, the "church" -- the "called out" -- is a term that applies to people, not to structures of wood, brick, and stone. To stress this simple fact, some brethren have taken the extra precaution of altering the signs on their buildings to read, "Church of Christ meets here." The building is not the church, you see, but the church meets here. That seems clear enough. One group we know of went to the extreme measure of adding this explanation on their street side sign: "Christians comprising a New Testament church of Christ meet at this place." OK, we get the point!

While such specificity on signs may not be entirely necessary, it is important to remember that the building is not the church -- the church is the people. And while buildings come and go, we have the confidence that the Lord's church is "a kingdom which cannot be moved" (Heb. 12:28). It is an "everlasting kingdom" (2 Per. 1:11) of which "there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33). Thanks be to God!

- by Greg Gwin