

The Church in Action

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1

As Individuals

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). These are the words with which our Lord Jesus Christ indicated to His followers that when He was gone, the gospel was going to be presented to the world by Christian people. And there is a sense in which the people of the world will know about the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel only by what they see in the actions of Christians.

Of course, the gospel is spoken in words. Men tell the story of the Lord Jesus Christ; they tell about receiving Him and the promises that belong to those who believe in Him. This is what we call evangelism by the preaching of the gospel. Yet the very words often have more or less significance according to who speaks them. If the words are spoken by a complete stranger they may or may not be believed; but if the words are spoken by the representative of a well-known institution or organization, they have more weight. So the local church in a very real sense sets the standard for what is Christian in the eyes of the public. If the local congregation in your community has a good testimony in the community, then the gospel influence is strong. But if it has a weak testimony, then the gospel is weak in that community.

Since a believer is to be a witness, the local congregation is to be a witness also. If I want to witness to the general public, then I would in one way or another join in with the local congregation, because that would strengthen my approach to the public. A believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will want to join the other believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the local community.

It is important, then, to belong to the local church. The public expects this and finds it hard to understand when a Christian remains apart from other believers. Every one of us can share in this public witness to Christ. You and I together can have a part in helping to make the gospel clear and powerful in the minds of other people.

One might very well ask, what could I do in order to be a witness? First of all, join the church in your own local community. Now different congregations accept members in different ways. But I like to think of joining the church as being a matter of public notice. And I think that the congregation that receives new members in the presence of the congregation is adding to its witness and testimony.

Joining the church is like getting married. I know that you can get married in private and many times marriages are just private affairs. The couple comes to the minister with witnesses, and the marriage counts and is real. But there is something to a public wedding. There is something to being openly and publicly recognized as having gone through this ceremony in which you belong to each other.

And so it is with reference to the church. Even when new members are received only in the presence of the officers, the matter of public announcement in the congregation can be made. If you have anything to say about it when you join the church, I hope you will encourage the pastor to publicize the fact that you belong to the local church.

The next thing, if you want to be a witness, is to go to church. Go to your own church primarily, but not necessarily exclusively. You may want to visit some of the other churches in the community. But it's a good thing to be known as a person who is regular in church attendance. It is a good witness to everybody. Chances are, you have your own place in the church. You probably sit on the left hand side, down near the front, or you sit on the right hand side near the back, or perhaps in the middle. Whatever the case may be, you will find some pew, some location for yourself and your family. Now I can tell you that that is a very definite witness and testimony if your particular place is always filled. Just as regularly as the church is open, you and your family go to church. Don't think for one moment that people don't notice it. They do.

The next thing I would say in this connection is to get acquainted in the church that you belong to. If you're just coming into the church, it may take you a little while, but get to it as soon as you can. If you're a member of the church, try to get to know who your fellow church members are. You will, of course, get to know the people who sit near you; don't hesitate to get acquainted with them.

I understand very well if you have the feeling that whispering and talking in the church sanctuary is not a good thing. I think perhaps with reference to children and others, you must set a good example. When you're coming into a church service you may not want to go over and talk to your neighbors. But this will not hold when the church service is over. There's no reason. when the church service is over, that anybody should hastily run out of the church. I'd like to commend to you that if you're the one nearest the door, don't leave in a hurry. Stay around a little bit. Let some people get to know you and you get acquainted with people. If you have seen people there several times, make a point to get to know them. All of this spreads the atmosphere of good will.

Remember that a good many people will get an idea of what the gospel is like just by being in the fellowship of people in a Christian church. If a person comes into a congregation where people are friendly, it will give the feeling that that's the way it would be with the Lord. And it's true. That's the way it will be in the very presence of God Himself.

I would also urge you to get to know your pastor. I know you know who he is. He has his name in the bulletin and he has probably called in your home, or you have probably been to see him at one time or another. That's fine as far as it goes. But there is something more than that. The pastor is a human being. Chances are, he has a family. Chances are, he has a home. And I know that there will be formal occasions when you will visit there, when a large group of people is around. But you will do yourself a real service and you will be a real blessing to your pastor if you do something with him personally.

Maybe you have the feeling that there's nothing you could do. But it's not quite like that. Your getting personally acquainted with him will be good for you and for your children. I would suggest that you do something for him. Get something for him at certain seasons of the year. If you have little children in the home, let them carry something into the pastor's home and let them meet the pastor and his family. It will be good for you.

One more thing I could say to you with reference to your church as a whole is that you help to put over the church program, whatever it is. If you personally believe a certain aspect of your church is not strong enough, you may be able to add your witness to make it more honoring to the Lord. You can't do that if you stay away. Of course, you may not be able to take part in everything, particularly in large congregations. But between you and the Lord, you can be faithful and known as a faithful member in your church. If you definitely have a part in the local church program, this will be a strong influence as to what people will feel about your personal witness as a Christian. Consider again the public worship services themselves. In addition to the Sunday morning service, perhaps your church has other services during the week. Go to the public worship services regularly, and go whenever the meetings are held. Overcome the habit of going to one meeting and not to another. If you are able bodied and well, be present at every service for your own sake, as well as for the sake of other people.

And when you do go to these church services, if it is at all possible be there promptly. If the church service is called for 7:30, try and be there not later than 7:25. Get there five minutes ahead of time.

I had an experience some years ago in a country church in South Carolina that greatly impressed me. I was waiting with the pastor for the beginning of the evening service which was at 8 o'clock. At about five minutes to eight he said it was time for us to go in. I told him we still had five minutes. Looking at me with a smile, he said, "You know, if we go in now, there will not be more than two people come in after this time." Well we went in and you know that there wasn't one single person who came into that church after 7:55. And the service was called for 8 o'clock. I have an impression of that congregation to this day – they acted like they meant business.

Arrangements for Services

"He that receiveth you receiveth me" (Matthew 10:40). The Lord Jesus Christ did not hesitate to associate His disciples with His own personal name. He expected that wherever His disciples were to be found, that's where people would learn to know about Him. And, according to the way the disciples acted, that's what people would think about Him. In a very real sense the people in your community will get to know about the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ as they watch how you live.

Your own personal participation in your local church services is very important to your witness and testimony. If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ you would like, if possible, to do something that would bring people's attention to your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Even in your own home your personal testimony as a Christian will matter to all the children in the home. The impression made on outsiders is definitely part of our witnessing to the Lord Jesus Christ. As I commented before, an important matter is to be prompt in going to a church service. If the church service is set for 7:30, there is a habit you can develop as to when you are going to arrive at the church. It is not wise to plan to arrive at the church at 7:30. That's too precise. If everybody came at that time they couldn't get in the door. Someone is going to have to come early. I would commend to you that you come early because it will be good for you and for all the people that associate with you, including your own family.

The matter of coming to a church service is very much like people sitting down at the table for dinner. It is good when people come to the table in an orderly way and promptly, so that when the meal is served the folks are there and ready to eat. This shows your gratitude and courtesy toward those who have prepared the meal. But on the other hand, if there is always somebody slow, always somebody lacking, whether adults or children, it makes a bad impression. This is the same with reference to the church. There is a courtesy and respect shown in being prompt.

This matter of coming into the church service also should be done in a friendly way. I mentioned it before, but when you come to church you could be prepared to smile at people. Many of us might very well keep in mind that there is no particular virtue in a frown. Now I know you may have things on your heart and mind. You may be sober and serious because things are burdening you. But you can make it a practice that so far as you're concerned you're going to contribute to the atmosphere of good will and friendliness by deliberately remembering that a cheerful heart doeth good like a medicine. The same is true in reference to your personal attitude as you come into the public service of the church.

Let me make some comment about your participation in the worship service. There'll be singing going on and you should participate as a member of the church and as one of the team, so to speak, open the book. Even if you've got a bad cold and you can't sing, open the book. And if you do sing, open your mouth. You may wonder, what difference does that make? People notice it. They notice whether you share in these things.

Now comes the time for prayer. The pastor says, "Let us pray." Bow your head. It's important. Shut your eyes. The children will watch you.

I wonder if I need to say this next thing for anybody. If I don't need to say it for the first ten people, maybe it is important for the eleventh. I almost feel like whispering it to you . . . don't chew gum. Remember you're in a church service, and you must be very careful to avoid doing anything that could be considered disrespectful to the pastor, to others and to the Lord.

So far as the preaching is concerned, *look* at the preacher. If he is preaching and you're going to look anywhere, look at him. Show some interest in your face as you look. You'll be setting an example to other people.

All of this is part of the overall testimony that you have. Remember that the atmosphere you help

to create in that public worship is going to have some influence on the stranger when he is there. When he comes in among Christian people, he will be impressed if you act as if you were in the very presence of God, and you act as if you belonged there.

I can remember when I first began my ministry I was involved with some people in the church who felt that when they came to church it was their own private business. They didn't want anybody to invite them. They didn't care whether anybody greeted them. They didn't care what anybody did. They came to church to worship God. Well that sounds commendable to a certain extent, but it's definitely inadequate. When you meet with other people for the public worship of God you're not alone. Your personal attitude and conduct matter to other people. They're watching these things.

Then, what could you do if things are not what they should be in that local church service? Well, in addition to your personal participation as discussed, you could keep in mind the physical arrangements and appearance in the church building. The ventilation in summer and heat in winter are very important. I know that you can't have individual persons getting up and attending to these things, but if you are one of the members of the church, you could on occasion make constructive suggestions and, if necessary, help in these things by being careful about it. It makes a lot of difference, because it affects the people who come to worship.

The same thing is true with reference to the lights. Care should be taken to avoid a bright glare and yet many a church has lights too dim. Other things that come to mind include having adequate and accessible water fountains and rest facilities, and keeping the church clean and neat with the paint in good condition, the yard well kept and papers picked up. When you leave a service, put the hymn book and the Bible back in the pew rack. Take the bulletin with you; don't leave it lying around. You could keep it with you during the week to remind you of activities and things to pray for in your church. By the way, does your church have Bibles in the pews? It should: aren't you to be known as people of the Word? And isn't your preacher to open up the Word of God to the people? Having Bibles in the pews fits right in with this.

Your church should seek to demonstrate a care for those who attend by being concerned how they are provided for in a practical way.

You can come to a church that is cold and distant and unfriendly, and it makes an effect upon your heart and it inclines you in a certain way. So remember, your local church is actually a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, and the stranger coming into this local church and moving in there will get an impression of whether or not there is a welcome for him, whether there is consideration for him, whether there is thoughtfulness about him, whether it looks as though the congregation wants to have him come. Mind you, if the congregation is glad to have this person come in and worship with them, he could even get the impression that God would be glad to have him come and to worship Him. These things all fit together in our public witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ.

As an individual member, you cannot run around and tend to all these items personally. But you may have opportunities to help or to make suggestions. And if you are an officer in your church, you can certainly help to see that everything about the arrangements for services will be done in such a way as to add to the witness for the gospel.

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Conduct of Services

The Apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 14:19, "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." That gives us some idea of the importance Paul attached to the matter of conducting the public worship of God. He wanted people to understand that they might come to know about God.

Read the 14th chapter of I Corinthians and see the practical suggestions that the Apostle makes with reference to the public services. Actually, that is where the visitor, and in some respects the man who does not know the Lord, gets an impression of what it means to be a Christian. When such a person comes to the church service he actually is there to watch us Christian people as we worship God. There is so much conveyed by the reception that is given to the visitor. It has a lot to do with preparing his heart and mind for whatever message the preacher will give.

Normally speaking, an alert congregation will have some one at the door to meet the people. This is really a very significant thing. It's the first impression made on the visitor when he attends the worship service of Christians. If it were possible to have an important man stand there to welcome people, that would be good. You could get the help of men who have made some success in business or public life, and whose personal activities are known to others. A contribution they can make would be by being there to greet people who come to that local church. It will be a good thing if they are wise men, sensitive to the feelings of people, because if the worshiper is greeted in a friendly and sincere way, the heart is helped toward the church service.

I remember, in a church where I was pastor one time, there was a man who had an unusual ability to greet little children. He had a way with him that affected their minds and hearts and gave them a disposition to look with appreciation and with expectation to coming to that church.

If you should be asked to serve in this way, then by all means be willing to do it. You will have the opportunity of watching over the comfort of people as they come in; make sure that they are made as welcome as if they were coming into your home. And by the way it isn't just men alone who can serve here. One or more of the women of the church, acting as hostesses, is very important.

You could also be helpful as people leave. I think many churches that have ushers and greeters ready at the door when the people come in often do not follow through at the close of the service to watch.

There can be various other things about which you will need to be careful. If your church has steps going up to it, then you should certainly have someone on hand when people are coming or leaving, so far as those stairs are concerned. Especially would this be true in a case of older people, or little children, or where people are carrying little children. That kind of thing needs to be watched. Don't wait until something unfortunate happens. Have someone there.

If you have a guest book, somebody could spot visitors as they come in and be sure to have them come over and sign the guest book. I have gone to many a church and, because I am naturally interested in those things, I often go over and look at the guest book. Sometimes I am shocked to see how long it has been since anybody has written his name in there, or how seldom it is done. There are visitors coming to the church, but many times visitors do not feel inclined to force themselves. At this point they need encouragement to share in this.

So far as your hospitality crew is concerned in the church, they should be on the job and active at least 15 minutes before the church service and stay around until some four or five minutes after the last person has gone. It's never a happy experience to be the last person out of the church and have everybody gone.

Then, there is the matter of ushering. This is a courtesy. It shows consideration, and there is

something about it that is worthy of the gospel. You could easily ask those you are seating whether they want to sit near the front or near the back, or if they have a preference if they are strangers. If they are not strangers, you will soon get to know where they ordinarily sit. Go down there with them. No matter how well acquainted a person is in the church, there are very few people that wouldn't appreciate courtesy shown to them at a time like that.

Now, there are other things that the ushers will want to watch. It's customary in some congregations to make it a point not to seat people during the reading of the Scriptures. The person just coming in may not know the point to which the order of service has progressed. The ushers will have to watch, and they will have to be diplomatic. I have seen it done very simply. Sometimes you have doors that you can close to shut the foyer off from the rest of the congregation. If you don't, let me suggest to you that two ushers standing shoulder to shoulder in any aisle will stop almost anybody from coming down that aisle. And if you want to stop people coming down during the reading of the Scriptures, have the ushers line up so they stand at the end of the aisle, two by two. This will take care of it and yet it adds an order to the whole matter. If you are to close the doors entering the sanctuary, suggest that certain ushers stay outside the door to greet the latecomers.

And remember with reference to anybody that is coming late to church, you still are glad to have them come. You don't really want to discipline them because they are late. You're glad that they just didn't stay home. Show them courtesy and consideration and remember that the person who is late is very likely very sensitive, and feeling awkward anyway. If they are now met by a cordial friend, they may have a different attitude toward the whole situation.

Again, consider the old folks. They may not like to be ushered too closely, but watch over them. They'll need help. Children may get lost and may need to be helped more than they understand. Alert ushers will help families keep together. Notice where people sit. Be ready to give the husband guidance as to where the wife is sitting or the wife guidance as to where she could be with her husband. That's the kind of thing the usher can watch to the benefit of the whole church service.

Ushers are to be on duty throughout the church service, and I would recommend that you arrange for some of the ushers to sit at the back of the church. You never know what is going to happen, so be prepared for emergency. Someone may be taken ill suddenly. A dog may get into the church. This is the kind of thing that alert ushers will watch.

You may wonder if this actually has something to do with the gospel. Yes, it has, because the church is the witness of the gospel and the care that you show each other in the church should indicate how God cares about each one of us.

Congregational Music

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). With these words the Apostle Paul encouraged the Colossian Christians to cultivate among each other a strong spiritual tone by singing.

"Sing unto the Lord a new song" is what you read in the Bible. And all over the world the record is clear that the singing of a congregation has always been a sign of the spiritual condition of that church. At such times in the history of the Church as God's Spirit has moved in the hearts of the people to any great extent there has always been great singing. It is something to think about, that the sound that will be heard in heaven will be the sound of music.

You and I can do something about this very condition in our own experience and in our own churches. You know it works both ways. When your heart is full you really want to sing. And when you sing, it fills your heart all the more.

Some years ago it was my privilege to visit in Brazil. I recall on one occasion I was riding in a train. Now the people all spoke Portuguese, which I do not speak, so of course I was largely left in isolation. I was with a few missionaries who spoke English but all around me was a strange language.

I watched the people with much interest. One little scene impressed me. Right across the aisle from where we were sitting was a family, apparently a father, a mother and two daughters. The girls looked like young college girls, and they were dressed in a certain type of uniform such as the girls wear to school in that country. They were riding along quietly, but soon I heard them singing a song to the tune of "In The Garden." I was very much interested of course, and from then on for more than an hour this little family group sang hymns together. It occurred to me that what I was witnessing was a father and mother taking their two girls off to college. And, almost by way of preparation, they were singing these Christian songs. My heart was warmed at the very thought. I'm sure that most of the people on that car were not of the same church as this family; yet there was a respectful interest on the part of all the people in that section of the car. They heard sweet music from this family of four that were quietly singing some of the well known Christian hymns.

Quite a number of years ago I happened to be at a retreat with a group of ministers. I was in a certain cottage with about six or seven other men and I recall that I woke up early in the morning. I was just awake when I heard the sound of a hymn being played on a harmonica. I listened and for about fifteen minutes first one hymn, then another, then another was being played softly by one of my fellow ministers. He was in the next room, but the walls were not sound proof and I heard the sound coming through the walls. It was such a blessing to my heart and soul. These things come to my mind when I think about how much is gained from singing.

Right now I can recall certain congregations that were strong singing congregations. I never knew one of them that wasn't a strong church. It's a matter of history, too, that the great church leaders, men like Martin Luther, John Wesley and Charles Wesley, were very much interested in songs. They have given us some of the greatest hymns that we have.

With all this in the background, I want to set before us how singing in the local church can witness to the Lord. The local congregation where you are a member actually can increase the value, the power of its testimony, if in that church there is a real experience of singing the gospel among the congregation.

I think congregations generally should be led in their singing. I am not sure that it's necessary to lead them at the time of the morning service, but some time during the week I think it would be a wonderful thing if members of the congregation could be together at a time in which they would be trained to

sing. Of course, it's quite a normal thing to have a choir to lead the singing. But the congregation should participate actively also, and a good song leader is a real help.

Even if you do not have a trained voice and even if you ordinarily are not inclined to sing much, I would like to suggest that you do take part in the singing. You set an example by opening the book when the hymn is called and following it along through and, if possible, sharing in the sound that is being produced.

By the way, take good note of the people who are standing next to you. If there are not enough hymn books to go around, share the hymnal with somebody. And what you do that way with hymns, I would like to suggest that you do with the responsive reading. I want to say that you can actually contribute to the testimony of the gospel by the way in which you take part in such things as this.

Maybe you are not in the choir, but you'll have a choir. And your attitude toward it will have a lot to do with the kind of choir that you have. Of course, the choir will have to have a choir director, and the choir director is an important member of the team. I think it is very, very desirable if the choir director could be a witnessing Christian. If you had a choir director who actually understood that the work in the choir contributed to the testimony of the gospel, that would be a wonderful thing.

As far as choir members are concerned, for the most part they are volunteers. Most of us who ever sang in the choir never got paid for it. We did it just because we wanted to, although bearing in mind that being a member of the choir calls for a better than average quality of performance.

Actually, as a member of the choir you have some extra things to do. For one thing, in the course of the church service the members of the choir have to sit differently than other people. Usually they are in sight of the whole congregation. Their conduct does make a difference. And then, if you are a choir member, let me urge you to keep several other things in mind. For instance, be just as regular as you can in your attendance. The choir director is expecting you to be there. I'm talking of the participation of the choir in the church service, but let me remind you that if you belong to a choir with any kind of organization at all, you'll have choir practice. There, too, you can actually contribute to your witness for the gospel. You can increase the appreciation and respect of others for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are a member of the choir you come to choir practice on time. Be there ahead of time. If you know that you must be absent, let your choir director know ahead of time. It helps the work along. You're doing it for the Lord's sake. And if by some chance you're taken away when you couldn't help it, if an emergency arises, then let him know just as soon as possible, because all those things contribute to the good will and the good testimony of your choir.

Many churches are learning that in the choir they have a wonderful opportunity to reach different groups of people. A program can be developed in such a way that an adult choir will carry the major load of the singing; but you can have a young people's choir, too. If they sing only once a month, they still take a great interest in it. You could have a children's choir . . . and this does wonderful things for the children and for their parents. Every time the children sing you will have more people in church than at any other time. And in the same way you can have a men's choir.

Everything you do along this line, this singing unto the Lord, is just simply that much more testimony for Him. If you participate in the work of the local congregation you are actually contributing to the strength of the testimony about the Lord Jesus Christ. The more people that take part in the local church, the stronger it is as far as talking about the gospel to a new man is concerned.

You can help in this way.

Sunday School

"Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence" (Matt. 19:13-15). In these words we are brought face to face with a wonderful truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the friend of little children. Little children came to Him naturally. We understand that He took the little children upon His knee and held them in His arms. He often used them as illustrations of the sort of spirit you need to have if you are to enter into the kingdom of God. Except you become as a little child you cannot enter in.

One of the most wonderful things about the gospel is its appeal to little children and I am sure that everyone of us at one time or another have noticed the interest and the joy of little children as they hear the Bible stories. Maybe you've had them in your own home, and if you have, then you know this to be true: they want the story the way it is in the Bible. They want it all just exactly the way it is. They don't want anything left out, and even if there are things they don't understand, they marvel about them.

One of the greatest tributes to the Church is what the Church has done for little children. Among all the various organizations that mankind has produced there is none that has done more for little children than the Christian Church. Christian orphanages are to be found all over the world. Children who don't have a good home to be in and who are being ignored and neglected by people all around them become the objects of the tender love and affection of an ordinary Christian church. No matter what kind of congregation you belong to, you will find that the hearts of Christian people are more open to the children perhaps than to almost anything else.

Then, too, we find this concern not only in connection with orphans but also in dealing with such things as crippled children and wayward children. The church always shows a great interest in anything that has to do with children.

However, Sunday School is a relatively recent development in the history of the Church. Probably some of us might think there has always been a Sunday School, but that's not true. The Christian Church has been going on for something over nineteen hundred years, but the Sunday School is just a little over two hundred years old. This means that for many, many years the gospel was just taught in the family, when parents would teach it to the children. But now on account of changes that have taken place amongst us, we have developed the Sunday School to teach our children, just like the public school.

Actually in Sunday School you can be more definite in your teaching than you can in your own home. Teaching the things of the gospel is the prime and specific purpose of the Sunday School: people accept it, expect it, and with a trained teacher it is often done better than in the home. Now, the Sunday School itself is a very great influence for good. Maybe your attention has been drawn to this, but people who make a study of it have noted that seldom do you find a Sunday School student who winds up as a juvenile delinquent. Very seldom. Once in awhile we have a few people who went to Sunday School but never did get under the influence of the gospel, but generally speaking, no matter what sort of way in which a person has felt previously, or how a child has been brought up. when they start coming to Sunday School, they're inclined to walk in the ways that are right and in the ways that are good.

And now a word about the teacher. I can remember when I was a pastor I took great note that the very people that I thought were outstanding and good examples turned out to be Sunday School teachers. Many times that was true, but I never did ever find out for sure whether they were Sunday School teachers because they were really spiritually interested or whether they were spiritually interested because they were Sunday School teachers. I didn't know, but I can tell you one thing: they were a fine crowd of people.

One of the best ways to share in the Sunday School is to attend, to actually be a part of it. There will be some class in that Sunday School into which you can fit. You can participate with them and share with them so far as the work is concerned. If you are enrolled in a Sunday School class, let me urge you to do a few simple things.

Be there regularly. Let them count on you. Of course it's voluntary. Nobody is going to pay you for going. No one is going to pay you for teaching. No one is going to pay you for anything that you do and yet you can do it regularly to the glory of God.

If you have a family, get into the habit of trying to get to the Sunday School a few minutes ahead of time. If your Sunday School is set for 9:30 in the morning, don't plan on getting there at 9:30, because then you'll get there at 9:35 or 9:40 the first morning and it will become a habit. By the way, it wouldn't be a bad idea to invite the neighbors. The more you have in your car the better it will be; and get there on time.

Then take part in the Sunday School program in any way that you possibly can. You can always pray for it, but apart from that you can help it in various other ways. So far as those teachers are concerned they can stand a good word from you every now and again. And so far as those officers are concerned at the Sunday School, they are not always real sure that they're right about things. They like to feel that they have the confidence of the people around them in the things that they are trying to do. Help them in any way that you possibly can. Encourage the workers and the teachers.

There are various things that will encourage them. One way is to bring your children and bring yourself regularly: I've already mentioned this. Another thing you can do is to greet the teachers and the Sunday School secretary and the superintendent – with a smile. That will be helpful and it will add to the good humor and to the good feeling on that particular Sunday morning.

In the same way, be very careful and cautious if you have the responsibility of leadership. One thing we want to keep in mind is that any Sunday School is only as strong as its teachers and the teachers need to be checked. I hope whatever church you belong to has a system worked out where somebody will check to make sure that you get the kind of teachers that you need. This is a free country. People can be anyway that they want to be, but don't let them be any way that they want to be in your Sunday School.

I can remember that every now and again we found cases where people were teaching in the Sunday School and in young people's groups, but didn't really believe the Bible. Sometimes people teach who don't really believe the gospel. You wonder why they teach, but they do. You wonder why a congregation would receive them. Why would the Church Board permit it? It just causes one to be conscious of the fact that it's important that you have teachers who can be depended upon.

The way a teacher acts makes an awful lot of difference. Here again, the truth of the matter is that if a teacher is on time, ahead of time, and comes there cheerfully prepared to go on with the work, the class will tend to follow the teacher's example. Then in addition to that, a teacher should be faithful to everything that's in the church. If you're participating in Sunday School, don't let Sunday School keep you away from the church services. Because you're active in the Sunday School, don't let yourself think less of the church services; or if you're active in the church service don't think that you don't need to go to Sunday School. They work together.

The same is true in supporting the work. Set aside a certain amount for the church and another separate amount for the Sunday School.

One more word I'd like to say so far as the Sunday School is concerned and that is if you happen to be one of the workers, be particularly careful about folks when they are absent. Any number of times people get their feelings hurt because they are members of a class, and yet when they happen to be out for a day, a Sunday or two, maybe for two or three weeks, nobody called them up. It gives them a strange feeling, a lost feeling, and they will tell you. I was away from a church for six weeks because of sickness and do you know they never even missed me. So you be very careful to watch for the absentees and for the

ill and help them in every way that you possibly can. In other words, make much of your Sunday School connections, because the teacher-student relationship and the student-to-student relationship is very close. This is a real opportunity to develop and to demonstrate your Christian personality.

6

YouthActivities

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" (II Samuel 18:29). This was the concern of David when the messengers came back to tell of the battle in which David's own soldiers had fought against the soldiers of his son Absalom. It's true that Absalom had been rebelling against his father and actually was following a course of action which could have killed his father, but that didn't change the concern in the heart of the father. He still loved his son.

Carelessness, indifference and even rebellion against parents doesn't lessen the concern of most parents as they see their young sons and daughters go out from home into the hectic activities of youth and into the world at large. This is especially true so far as Christian people are concerned. We can't help but wonder whether the young people are going to see the way of the Lord plainly before them.

It's a common thing to exalt youth. Perhaps you don't realize it, but we are inclined to be extravagant in the amount of time and money we give and the attention we devote to young people's problems. I'm speaking of the fact that we spend more time on youth than we do with children and certainly more than we do with adults. And yet the period of life that we commonly call "youth" is relatively short. Ordinarily, a person probably would be 12, 13 or 14 years of age before you would think of them as "young people." When they get to be 19 or 20 you think they are past the young people's stage. So actually we are talking about a 5 or 6 year period, maybe from 14 to 20. And yet they lived 14 years before, and you hope they're going to live 50 years after.

We are inclined to give a lot of attention to the period of youth and perhaps it is a good thing because of the special reasons that exist. For instance, at that age – between 14 and 20 – young people are at the point of making important choices. Young boys and girls actually are making the kind of decisions right then that will decide the people they are going to marry and will decide the kind of homes that they're going to have. And there are various other things involved. They have their whole life ahead of them and the direction they take may very well be determined by what they will do just at this time.

And yet, it's a good thing for us to remember that these young people are really only human after all. They are no more important in their own souls than anyone else, whether they are children or whether they are adults. But, it is an important aspect of life and I am going to point your attention to it now a little bit more closely.

It's an easy thing to assume that young people don't want to be serious, and that if you're going to be serious you'll lose the young people. The result of this kind of thinking is that you'd better not have too serious minded a program because if you do, they'll not come. Nothing could be more misleading than that. Actually, among young people there are Christians whose manner of life is most inspiring; they challenge us, and even almost put us to shame. You can find young people who seek fellowship with God, and they are serious about it. There are young people who can pray and will pray. They can study the Bible and they will study the Bible. And these young people can consecrate themselves to God and some of them do consecrate themselves to God. They can witness for God and they can give of themselves and of their money to God. This is happening in various parts of the country. It isn't true that American young people won't turn to Christ. Actually, American young people can be as earnest and sincere in their relationship to Christ as anybody can be.

It is very important to be wise in the planning and promotion and control of your young people's work. Young people can win young people and young people will come to young people's meetings when they don't want to come to anyone else's, and that can lead into winning others. So don't think that young people cannot be led spiritually.

If you do have young people's work, it's such a foolish thing to suppose that you've got to have an

athletic program or a social program and that's the main thing. Athletics, recreation and social activities – I have nothing to say about those things as such, but you're missing it by far if you think that these young people who come to our churches are not ready to talk about the Lord. It's a shame to plan their program around recreation.

Sometimes I have been present at young people's conferences where the young people have traveled long distances to get there, and then when they get there the program is largely given over to what games they are going to play in the afternoon and what amusement they're going to have at night. And then, perhaps, in addition to that there may be movies shown or something like that. The actual amount of time spent on spiritual things is very, very small.

I can tell you right now that in my own judgment I think the young people can entertain themselves very, very well. They don't have to drive 50 to 100 miles, way off to some strange place and spend money in order to have some games. They can play games at home. It is a mistake to think that they are not interested in learning about the consecrated life or in committing themselves to God. You can find this out right in your own church. Let me start with the Sunday School. I would say with reference to the Sunday School class in the church, so far as your young people are concerned, that it would be extremely important to have a good teacher and a popular teacher. And it would be more important to be popular than to be so very well trained as a teacher. If it's a man or a woman, someone that the young people themselves are attracted to, that's a very, very important thing. However, that teacher must be one who will definitely lead them into a study of the Bible. No bigger mistake could be made than for anyone to suppose that those young people would not be interested in Bible study. That's simply not true.

Now, when you come to the evening meeting, that's probably even more important. The young people's fellowship in the evening is sometimes the only service that some churches have in the evening. So a young people's fellowship should meet in the evening, by all means. It lends itself more readily to fellowship and to association with each other in an informal way and I'm all for that.

But without fail, above everything else, promote prayer in that group. These young people will pray. They will enter into a program of prayer. They will rejoice in having specific things to pray for. You could choose some matters around the church that actually need to be helped and get the young people started praying for them. You'd be surprised at the inspiration and the joy that the young people will have when they share in a program of prayer right there in your church, not only on Sunday evening but there could be special prayer programs.

You could have such a situation in your church that your young people's group might want to meet on a week night, perhaps on a Tuesday night, perhaps on Saturday night. And they will come together for the express purpose of praying for the church and for the things that concern them. This would need leadership, but it can be done.

In addition, you could have special witnessing programs. You could, if your congregation is big enough, have special young people's services. You could have special evangelistic services among the young people. You could have a young people's retreat. You could arrange to take all the young people out to some place away from the church where they would spend time on spiritual things, but by all means have them spend that time on spiritual things.

Let me say one more time, I think it's quite unnecessary for the church to take the time or the money or to bother itself with the responsibility of planning a program of recreation for a group of young people over a weekend. Generally speaking, they have had recreation. They have had everything they need along that line. What they want and need now is to know something about the Lord; that's what they're not getting and that's what you can give them – and time is very short.

You can have certain missionary projects. For instance, you can have the young people meet in your church and decide what to do. They may pick an orphanage where they will carry out some project, or they may go down to one of the mission churches, say in the Latin quarter of a city, or someplace where

they go among people of another age, or another race perhaps, or another nationality. Have them go among the Italian Presbyterians, or among the Chinese Presbyterians, and share something spiritual with them. There is nothing like activity to generate interest in your young people's programs. And remember, just as physical activity develops the muscles, and mental activity sharpens the brain, so Christian activity will strengthen the spiritual fiber of your young people. And, believe me, your church will become more alive and the whole community will benefit from your Bible-centered, Christ-centered young people's program.

Men's and Women's Work

"And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:55-56). In all the Gospel accounts the part that women have played in worship and in service and devotion is very glorious to the Lord. Wherever the gospel is preached the story of faithful women is told. Have you ever considered how much we would miss if we did not have the parts in the Bible that tell about the women?

For instance, how much we would miss if we didn't know about the woman at the well. Wasn't that a wonderful event? Or think of the woman with the issue of blood; she pressed through the crowd and touched the hem of His garment. Isn't that a stirring thing? Or the woman who kissed His feet because her sins were forgiven.

What if we didn't know about Mary the mother of Jesus, or about Mary of Bethany who sat at His feet and heard His words and who brought the precious box of ointment and anointed Him before His death? What if we didn't know about Mary Magdalene out of whom went seven devils? It has been said with reference to the stories of the women in the New Testament that they were reported to be the last at the cross and the first at the grave. Yes, we would certainly miss very much if we did not know about the women.

So let's raise a question now about the special activities for women in the church. Should the local church have special groups for women's work? Women are involved in Sunday School work, and they help out in young people's work, and they take part in all the congregational activities. So why have a special program or special activities for them and why should the church be especially interested in the woman as a woman?

The first thing is to ask ourselves what are we trying to do in the church anyway? Are you not expecting that you would come to your church and bring your family to that church and bring your friends to that church and that there in that church someone would tell about the gospel, tell about the Lord Jesus Christ, so that you would be able to think on these things and worship Him and have fellowship with others who worship Him? Isn't your church actually concerned about the Lord Jesus Christ and what He did for you and what you can do for Him? Isn't that what your church is about? I think it is.

Well now, with reference to the women folks, the whole idea of having special activities for the women is just that the work of the church could be advanced among them in this way. If you arrange to have activities among the women, you are opening an opportunity of going out to bring new ones in. Sometimes you may think about bringing them to church on Sunday, but you may not be able to do it. You may be too busy. You may have some personal responsibilities, or so many family responsibilities that you might not have time to go down the street and bring that neighbor to church. But you could bring her to a circle meeting. If you had a group of women meeting in your church or in someone's home you could invite the people in the community who ordinarily don't go to church.

In other words, it provides an opportunity for bringing people along and for telling new people the story of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to that, when women get together in this way and study as they do and meet in various homes, there is an opportunity for them to learn because someone can teach them the things of the gospel. They can have study programs. They can have lessons outlined in actual study. The women who are active in women's work learn more about the Bible than the women who are not active, because the Bible is taught in this way. The same is true with reference to guiding them into activity. I'll tell you right now, the woman who attends activities in the church – or takes part in women's work, and perhaps is a member of a circle – is doing more things in the church with reference to

the gospel than she would normally do outside.

Another advantage is this: if you get the women to come to the circle meeting you might get their children to come to Sunday School. And you might eventually get the man to come to church. Thus, a whole sequence of events might result from some activity in your church that is designed especially for the women.

My own opinion is that the strength of women's work is in the circles, in the home meetings, where the individual people can get closer to each other. And it would be a marvelous thing if your circles as they meet, would definitely keep in mind the inactive members of the church. You probably have some on the roster of your circle and I would suggest that you don't give up on them. A woman might not be able to come to the public meeting of the group, and yet she could share in the spiritual purposes and designs and aims of that particular group, to her benefit. If you could get her to come and share in those things, she would be better off.

In the same way I'd like to raise a question about the men. What would you say about men's work? Would you expect that in your congregation some special attention should be paid with reference to men?

Here we can think to ourselves right away that so far as the average man is concerned, if he is an active member of the church, willing to work and serve, they usually have something for him to do. Often-times, he is made a church officer or a Sunday School teacher or a worker in some fashion like that and that's all very good. And if they were all Sunday School teachers and they were all elders and deacons we wouldn't need to think so much about men's work.

But suppose you have members of the church, men who are not now serving as officers and not now serving as Sunday School teachers, should there be any reason for them to come together? I would say yes, primarily because it's in the church. I would have them meet in the church and be part of the church program. When you bring them together that way, have in mind that they are to consider what the church is about.

In that connection I would like to give a warning. Of all things one should be careful about when you're having men's meetings of this sort, be careful that you don't turn them into something like a social club. Most of the men you know have places to go to. Some of those who live in the bigger cities belong to various organizations. Some of them belong to service clubs and some of them belong to fraternal organizations, and they've got places to go. They really don't need to have another social club at the church. Even if they are living out in the country and don't have these organizations, they still have their own fellowship along those lines. The average man who comes to church doesn't need a situation in which he is going to have some amusement presented to him. He doesn't need to be entertained.

Now mind you, I've no objection to entertaining the men. I've no objection to saying and doing things that are attractive because we want to get the men to come and share in the program. So whatever you use for bait to get them to come I've no objection to that. You can use bait of one sort or another but don't let the whole thing be just that particular thing.

Be very careful that the program of the men's meeting is a spiritual program, led by men who believe in worshiping the Lord, who can talk about the Lord . . . led by men who believe in being born again, who can talk about such a thing as being born again and serving the Lord.

I know there will be men coming to the congregation who are not converted and I know that having such men come to the men's meeting could be helpful. They could learn, and that would be all right. I have no objection at all to opening the doors wide to anybody that wants to come, but let them find out as soon as they come that they have come to something worthwhile, with the kind of program that points directly to a person's relationship with the Lord.

Now, I don't think it's any great help to have the men come together and then tell them what needs to be done in the church and make it an occasion for loading them with responsibilities, and giving them tasks to perform. I know there are tasks to be done around the church, and those things are handed out in

various ways. But I wouldn't load the project of men's work with these tasks. I would promote the idea of fellowship between the men in relation to learning something about the Lord. This fellowship should be kept on a very spiritual level and that's another reason why leadership of the group is so important.

So when you're planning your men's work in your church, take time out to pray about it and to be guided in it, and prepare a program that will definitely set forth something about the Lord Jesus Christ for the individual men. You will see God's hand of blessing in it and on the men as they go along. Certainly, so far as your church is concerned, attention should be given to men as a group and also to women in their own special programs. This is an opportunity to encourage spiritual growth among the members of each group. It is also a means of reaching out with the gospel to touch individuals who might never be witnessed to in any other way.

8

Church Officers

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." These words are taken from the Epistle to the Hebrews and they accent something that is repeatedly mentioned in the New Testament: Christian people should pay particular attention to those who are their leaders in the church. That's just as natural in church life as it is in anything else.

As human beings we don't all know the same. We haven't all got the same confidence about things. We tend to follow some person in whom we do have confidence, some person to whom we look for guidance and leadership. It's a normal thing when a group of people are together, to wait until somebody steps out in front and starts off, and the rest of us will follow along. Usually, when a person takes the office of leader and pays attention to the extra effort that is necessary and makes a good job of leading us along the way we should go, we usually honor that person. Normally speaking, when folks are chosen to a place of leadership, someone is elected chairman, someone is elected president, someone is elected captain, and there's always an honor attached to it . . . and, of course, a lot of hard work.

So far as our churches are concerned, we have certain persons chosen who lead the church and I am going to raise the question as to whether it makes any difference about their conduct. Perhaps you may be just such a person and I will hope I will say something useful to you. Or perhaps you are the wife or mother of such a person and you can be a guide or influence yourself. Or you may be the friend of a church leader. Or you may be a young person who is looking forward to the day when some day you might be in the position of being a leader in the church. In any case, I want you to know that while I realize you may already be a leader, there is a greater chance that you are not.

Normally the man who is up in front is understood to be the minister of the gospel; and right there is an important idea. He is to be *a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ*. Yes, he is the man who makes public talks, and he probably is the outstanding teacher in the church. But all too often I get the impression that he does many things without specifically coming back to really deal with the gospel and really deal with the things of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me be a little more specific as to what I think we have a right to look for in our ministers. For one thing, there is the minister's attitude toward God. We would expect him to be reverent. I know that everybody should be reverent. Irreverence at any time is a blemish. But I want to tell you that a light word spoken about God or a careless statement using the name of God is very, very poor to hear from a minister's lips. And the same thing is true if when they use Him in illustrations and they talk about Him as if they would bring Him down from His high and holy place and treat Him as if He was no more than one of us. None of that is good.

Then with reference to providence, I would think that if a minister were going to really have the greatest testimony in the community and be of the greatest help to the church he should be a man who can demonstrate some sort of open trust in God. There ought to be something about him that makes you feel he is trusting God. Usually it shows up in time of trouble, when he has some calamity befall him or some disaster comes to him. If at that time this man can be helped by the grace of God to be quiet and at peace, and to put his whole trust in God – if he doesn't get excited, and doesn't blame anybody else for what happens, but just accepts it as from the Lord, the testimony of that man ranges far and wide.

When you think about your minister I would expect you to associate him with the Bible. We Protestant people are inclined to think that the minister ought to carry the Bible. A minister with a Bible in his hand is certainly not out of place. A minister with the Bible in his pocket is certainly right. With his

Bible on the desk and with the Bible in his speech, we probably feel right about him. And with reference to the Bible, there may be other people who question the Bible, there may be others who find fault with it and other people who doubt it and other people who have questions about it, but we don't expect that in the preacher. We think the preacher should have been through with that. He should know by now that he can and does believe the Bible. We expect him to step up there and manifest to us that he personally has confidence; and we would be awfully glad to have him give some reason for that confidence, because so far as we are concerned everyone of us wants to believe it too. There may be some of us who don't believe the Bible as much as we want to, but we wish we could. I don't know of a single person who is sorry he trusts the Bible as much as he does. Usually we are sorry we don't trust it more and we look for the preacher, whoever he is, to lead us in that, but his own attitude toward the Bible must first be one of confidence and trust.

Another thing we look for in a minister is his attitude toward the sinner. Regardless of what the circumstances are, we would expect him to have compassion on the sinner, and to be generous to the poor. Now, the poor may take advantage of him, I know. They may come and ask him for help when they really don't deserve it, or need it, but if he is going to set a good example as a minister, he will tend to make his mistakes on the side of generosity. He will tend to make his mistakes on the side of compassion. He will be inclined to be conscious of the poor, especially of the women and the children and the old and the sick and the sorrowing and the troubled. Those are the ones that he will watch.

With reference to his congregation, we expect his fidelity toward them. I don't want to use this language exactly, but for myself (I was pastor of a church for nearly nine years) I used to call myself a watchdog. I felt it was my responsibility to watch over the sheep. Any time I felt something coming along that would disturb the sheep I used to tell the people I felt just like a watchdog with the hair on the back of his neck standing up when he could smell a wolf. I always was ready to fight if I thought somebody was going to disturb the faith of my people, because I wanted my people to walk with the Lord. Associated with the minister are the people we commonly call church officers. In the Presbyterian church we have elders and deacons. In some other churches we have stewards. There are still some other churches that have only deacons and then some churches have vestrymen. And there may be other names given to these persons – laymen who are called up to take the place of leadership together with the pastor. In I Peter 5:2-4 you'll see a very fine word there, spoken very plainly to church officers and that is "feed the flock." So far as you're concerned, make sure that you help the congregation turn to the gospel, turn to the Lord, turn to the Bible. Get to know enough about the Word that you can use it. Get to know enough about it that you can offer it to people, and whatever you do, feed the flock.

Here is where personal example is so very important. I think that we might well keep in mind the line that comes out of an old English poem. Perhaps you remember studying Chaucer. He was a poet who wrote many hundreds of years ago and he was one of the first men who ever wrote anything in English. The poems that he wrote then were written in language that you and I can hardly understand now. But here is a line that we can understand: if the gold rusts what will the iron do? And that's the way Chaucer felt about his leadership. That would be true of the minister. It would be true of the elder, true of the deacon and true of the steward, true of the pastor and true of the bishop. It would be true of anybody who stands in front and leads. If the gold rusts what will the iron do? We need to be faithful and we need to set an example in obedience and in our personal activity and faithfulness and in our stewardship of ourselves and our time and in the work that we do.

Those who lead us in the church can bring us nearer to God by the very way in which they act toward our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Community Witness

How do you feel about church activities during the week. Do you think they could be of any help? "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." In these words the writer to the Hebrews encourages Christian people to band themselves together in public fellowship and worship. This is very important.

Every believer in his joy wants to share with others. The moment a person becomes a Christian and receives the blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ, it always spills over. It's always as though you'd like to tell somebody, just anybody, everybody. It is as though you already knew that word in Scripture that says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Ps.107:2). You want to say so. You want other people to have the same experience. The more that other people have it, the more it's a blessing to you. And for this reason you want to win people in any way you possibly can. You try to attract their attention and win their confidence. You want them to come to what you have and to trust what you're putting before them and to believe in the gospel which you teach.

One very strong attraction at any time is this common word that is spoken by a number of people – when all say, as it were, the same thing. And certainly you can say, so far as the Christian Church is concerned, there may be many different congregations, and there may be many different denominations, and there may be many different ways of emphasizing and accenting what each believes about the Christian gospel, and yet when all is said and done, whenever you see the name *Christian*, wherever you see the name *Christian church*, you can expect that you'll see people there who believe that Christ Jesus died for them. They believe that their salvation is through the Lord Jesus Christ. They believe that Almighty God will save them because Christ Jesus died for them. They believe that God is gracious and merciful and that they have received His grace and His mercy, and are rejoicing in it.

This is common to us all. This common ground makes our fellowship very important. We can say to the world outside with one voice, "Come thou with us and we will do thee good." And by the way, that's one thing we like to promote in this particular work. This ministry we call *The Bible For You* is not a matter of belonging to any particular church. We simply declare what we think the message of the Bible is, and we hope that any denomination and every denomination that has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will find that the words we teach and the words we preach here are the kind that they can agree to. We're asking people to come to the local churches. We want the ministers and the church officers and the people in each church to conduct themselves and go about their business in such a way that the visitor will see and understand that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. We want strangers to see that they're invited to come and put their trust in the Lord.

Now in this connection, while you're thinking about your own congregation, let me draw your attention to a number of the activities in your church which are meaningful in this way in the community.

Of course, there are the public worship services, and they are naturally open to all people, and they can be a real help. There is the usual Sunday morning service, I suppose at 11 o'clock. Sometimes we have to have more services than that, and for many years and in many places there was an evening service at 7:30. Many of the churches that now do not have an evening service at 7:30 have young people's activities at that time. Generally speaking, something is going on in the evening and it will vary in different church in different ways. But I want to talk about some others.

Let me draw your attention to a common activity in the church we call *visitation*. The church undertakes to go to the people in the community with an invitation for them to come and listen to the gospel. This matter of having the people invited to come to church is good, but the matter of the church

going to the people is better. When you stop to think about it, the Christian is to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. And one of the ways we do it is in going to their homes.

Visitation is always done by pastors who are ministers or shepherds of their people. They go to the people. They go to the homes and they visit among their members and among visitors. It has often been said that a home-going pastor makes a church-going people. I think that's very true.

But also there is the visitation by the officers. In many churches the church officers assume a responsibility along this line, and they visit in the community. And then there are other members of the church who visit as friends with other people. And there are different sets of people that do visit in this way. Your congregation could do it, even if they haven't been doing it before and even if you don't have any formal organization. For instance, if there are new arrivals in the community you could go to that new family and tell them about your church. Tell them what the nature of it is and what the facilities are; that you have a Sunday School and a young people's work. Tell them about the church.

Someone will say, suppose in our community a new family came in, and in the first week they were there, the second week they were there, three different churches called on them? Well, that would be no shame. I want to tell you it's a whole lot better than nobody calling on them. Stop and think about it. So if three churches called on them, what would be wrong about that? You know how those people would feel? They would feel they are in a good community. That's good.

But now in addition to new arrivals, every congregation must have in it some shut-in people, people whose health is such that they cannot come to church. They could be visited regularly. I mean every now and again. Consider the invalids who cannot come to church; how wonderful it would be if the church was to go to them.

And by the way, when you speak about shut-ins, you should not forget that there are some people that are shut out. They are just shut out by work. They have responsibilities. For instance here is a home where there is someone who is bedridden and cannot come. Well, of course, that invalid is shut in, but probably somebody has to take care of them and can't come to the church; that person is shut out by circumstances.

And then there are those people who are sick on occasion. When a person is sick and at the time they are convalescent, to have a call from the local congregation, that's good. And there are families that have unusual events. Maybe it's the birth of a child, or maybe one member of the family is elected to something, or has some great honor come to him, or maybe there is a great tragedy, maybe there is a great calamity. Visiting people at all times and at special times is good.

Then, also, perhaps you may have noticed that there is a certain family that hasn't been at church. Perhaps they haven't been at church for a month or six weeks. They should get a visit. Somebody should go to see them. I remember one time hearing somebody say with a real hurt feeling, "I went to church for years and years, and they always told me to come and they always said they wanted me there. Then I got sick and I had to be out for six weeks and nobody came and when I came back I found out they hadn't even missed me. And that was the part that seemed to hurt the worst. They didn't even miss me!" Keep your eyes open for your fellow members. And so it is all the way through in this matter of visitation.

Another activity to which we should invite people from time to time is prayer meeting. Your local church should have prayer meetings: the regular prayer meetings, and special prayer meetings. There can be prayer meetings of special interest groups, like men or women or young people, and if you're having a special project of some sort, special services, you can have cottage prayer meetings, and the like of that. That's good in the congregation. If you hear about it you support it. These cottage meetings can be very important. Have people meet in your home; invite people from the community to meet in your home.

We can always invite neighbors, and this can be done for fellowship, it can be done for prayer, and it can be done for Bible study. This is being done in recent years. You can start a group of people coming into your home who will listen, who will come there for Bible study. Some of our friends have ordered

tape recordings from us and they have had a listening group meeting regularly in their homes. On a certain day in the week people come at a certain hour, say Thursday evening at 8 o'clock. The people come and listen to a tape recording of Bible teaching. That kind of thing can be done. All of these activities that get the congregation to meet together and have fellowship with each other are all good because they increase the brotherly feeling. When you belong to the Lord you are members one of another, and this spirit should prevail in every way it possibly can.

10

Community Services

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy: That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." This is what Paul, in writing to Timothy, urged Timothy to tell the people.

In everything that you do, do as much good as you possibly can. Use your money and your time and your influence to help people.

I have been talking to you about how the local congregation could advance the cause of the gospel. People get an impression of what it means to be a Christian, according to the way the local churches act. People look to the local churches for an example, whether they realize it or not.

You will remember in Bible times the lame man was brought to the Beautiful Gate of the temple. It was the common judgment of the people living there in Jerusalem that there was more likelihood that people would be generous coming out from the worship of God than at any other time. And that's the way it is even to this day. When people are in need they feel they can look to the church for help. They may not want to come to the church. They may hesitate to come, but if the church doesn't come to them and help them they'll feel it.

I suppose the reason why they have that feeling is because all over the world, wherever the name of Jesus Christ is known, it is pretty clear that He went about doing good. And so, even to this day, when a local congregation helps a needy family, everybody that hears about it just feels that's the way it should be.

I have often begrudged in our American society where we have tended to take the administration of charity away from the church and give it to impersonal organizations. I used to be an agnostic. I used to be an unbeliever altogether. I was out in the world as a whole and I looked at the church from a distance, but I did admit – and it was one of the things that impressed me – that the church did have a lot to do with charity and I used to wonder why I couldn't be more confident about it with that in mind. So naturally afterwards, when I became a Christian and got into the church, I was disturbed by the tendency to take the works of charity away from the church and emphasize with almost a kind of a pride that charity is non-sectarian. When they say this word *non-sectarian* they make you think that sectarianism is nowhere really good. And yet, of course, when you come to be realistic about it, the thing that strikes you is that most of the money supporting charity comes from sectarian people.

If you belong to the Methodists you're not a Baptist, and if you belong to the Episcopalians you're not a Pentecostal. And with that in mind are they going to call you non-sectarian? Or are they going to find fault with you because you *are* sectarian? That used to bother me. It doesn't bother me so much any more. I began to realize that the Lord will never get His full credit so far as the world is concerned, but I just want to say to you let's not lose out just because of things like this.

In the course of the history of the western world, hospitals were begun by the church. Schools were begun by the church. Orphanages were begun by the church. And so you have old folks' homes. They were begun by the church. All these things were done by the church people. So let us not falter in our day and time, and let us be generous. It just looks good – it is a good witness – when the local congregation is active in things like this.

We have certain agencies in the community that I suppose you would call philanthropic, operating on behalf of mankind. For example, there's the Red Cross. Do you know that the Red Cross has our banner all over it? That's why it's got its badge. I don't suppose there's a person in the world who doesn't know what the Red Cross means; it means the cross of Calvary. It means the Lord Jesus gave Himself for others,

and so we in the same spirit give our substance for other people.

There are many variations of the Red Cross, as you know. The White Cross does a great deal in rolling bandages for the foreign field and things of that nature. And many of the early attempts made to help the poor and unfortunate are derived from Christian activity. I wonder if you have the Home of the Good Shepherd. Everybody knows who the Good Shepherd is. He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I say with reference to such organizations as that, it's always a good thing when a Christian person is active in those things. And it's a good thing when a congregation is active in those things. It never does a congregation any harm, if in the course of the week, the women gather together to roll bandages for White Cross. That's good. Or you go down to the Red Cross to do some work. That's good. Or you encourage the women to take some service such as being a Gray Lady at the hospital. That's good, and so is anything you can do that bears out the impression that you'd be willing to help the poor. That's adorning the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know we can't help all the poor people in the world. We know we can't fix it so that everybody gets help. We would like to, but we're not that strong. We don't have that much money. We don't have that much time. But let us show that disposition.

And now there are other agencies, not just for people in distress. There are community projects for help. For instance, there's the Boy Scout Association. That organization was begun in a patriotic setting. It was done for the sake of the country as a whole I think, and yet it is an organization that does a remarkable amount of the character building for young boys. It's not a bad idea when a congregation has a boy scout troop. It's not a bad idea when they have two boy scout troops. And when a man is known to be a scoutmaster, a good scoutmaster, that's no harm to his Christian testimony. So with the other agencies that are similar to that: Girl Scouts, Girl Guides, Brownies, Cub Scouts, all of these – they are all good. Or the boy's club and the girl's club.

There are many and various enterprises along this line – and in here you will have to put, in years gone by, the YMCA and YWCA. It may be that in your own community these things exist to this day, actually rendering a service in the community in giving help to people who are in need.

There are still other organizations and functions. Let me suggest to you that there can be joint projects in the city, such as city wide evangelism. Now no matter what you may think about the way in which it is done, and no matter what you may think about the particular evangelist they have, I just have an idea it would be a good thing if your congregation took part in it. Don't be afraid you're going to get hurt if you're with other people, and don't be afraid that the light that shines in you is going to be spoiled because someone else doesn't seem to have as much light as you have. You can afford to share with them.

The darkness will never hurt the light. If there is more light shining from your congregation than from others, join in with them and let them share in the light. If they will have you, take part in the activity, even if they don't let you run it. Mind you, as long as they are willing to share anything at all concerning the gospel, take a part in it. Even such activities as a community religious survey. Now you may think that that just isn't really going to win anybody. No, it may not directly win anybody, but it won't do anybody any harm to have people going around to find out where people belong. It always might lay the situation where somebody might be attracted into some church. So with any kind of projects along this line.

Perhaps you know of an organization that is active among high school students over the country: it is called *Young Life*. And then perhaps you know of *Youth For Christ*. They hold rallies for young people. I know in different communities it is handled differently – in some places more wisely than others – but I want to tell you right now that I can just believe that if young people were to spend their time on Saturday night in the Youth For Christ Rally down at the auditorium, that's a whole lot better than some other places where they can be, and I think you'll agree with me in that. And it wouldn't be good for your congregation to hold back on a thing like that. I think you could share in it, unless you have something a lot

better. I think I would take part in it.

I have recently come across something going on in the colleges called *Campus Crusade* and what I see about it is good. Take, for instance, this organization called Christian Athletes that we hear about over the country. That's good.

These organizations are general. I mean by that they don't belong to anyone denomination. They are Christians that get in and do things. And right now, when I mention that, perhaps you might even think for instance of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, which is an organization that works especially for some very unfortunate people. That's an excellent thing, and for your congregation to house such an organization, to give it a place to meet in your church, that's all good. Another big organization in the universities is Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. That's done a great deal of good. I realize that we have denominational activity, but these joint activities are very helpful. It used to be the student volunteer moment that did a tremendous lot. There was the Christian Endeavor of bygone days. That did a tremendous lot.

I am in favor of my local congregation doing what they can in terms of community service. I am in favor of my denomination doing it, but I am also in favor of everybody doing it . . . in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren; ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:35-40).