

Membership Class 2

South Grove Free Presbyterian Church Tuesday 20th April 2010

Texts: Philippians 4:8; Ephesians 5:11, 25-33

Last time Rev. Ferguson looked at the importance of membership and we saw how from Scripture and also from practical examples there is a need for it. Membership carries with it responsibilities but also many privileges and blessings.

This week I want us to think about two general but crucial areas that naturally come before us when considering membership: *what life should I live as a member? What Church or fellowship ought I to join in membership?* Therefore, these two questions will prompt us in thoughts as to what is required of us and what we should recognize as being a faithful, Biblical Church.

This study will not be an exhaustive one and in the future, time will be spent on particular issues and subjects that relate to the Free Presbyterian Church. It is important to remember that what we will look at today should not be viewed as peculiar to the Free Presbyterian Church. A life consecrated to God and attending a faithful, Gospel preaching Church is the instruction we receive from God's Word and what is required of all believers.

Also, some of what I shall say has been dealt with in our studies in 1 Timothy. I've made the point on previous occasions that the characteristics of the elder and deacon are not to be alien to every other professing believer. What Paul outlines before Timothy, God lays before each of us to "*be conformed to the image of his Son*" **Romans 8:29**. The challenge is ever before us in Scripture: "*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*" **Romans 12:2**

Before we turn to these two areas that relate to the individual life and the Church, I want us to keep in mind two basic but fundamental truths:

A Church Member must be before anything else a born again Christian

This is not an unnecessary point to make for the simple reason that throughout the world many wrongly rely upon their Church membership for their salvation. The Free Presbyterian has always held a strong position upon this and for a very good reason: the Bible expressly teaches that God's salvation cannot be merited by sinful man; it is the gift of His grace through faith in the finished work of Christ. **John 3** is a key chapter that shows us Nicodemus and his error in trusting in his own background and religion. He needed to be born again.

Church membership is not the final piece in a jigsaw that means *now we will go to Heaven and not Hell*, rather it is the natural and scriptural step a born again believer takes in his Christian life.

In contemplating what is required we are *not* teaching sinless perfection

This must be stressed in case anyone becomes disillusioned or discouraged and thinks that church membership requires perfection. In 1 Timothy the Holy Spirit uses the word "*blameless*" and not "*sinless*" in connection with the elder and deacons (**1 Timothy 3:2, 10**). The same principle is true of Christians and consequently Church members. What the Lord desires of us is to strive to live a life that will not bring a reproach upon his name. Christ said in **Matthew 5:48** "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*". That means *strive to be Christ like*. The very fact that we told to confess our sins demonstrates that sinless perfection is impossible.

All this will never and can never be done in our own strength. As we have been saved by grace we must live for God by grace.

1. What life should I live as a Church member?

Again I reiterate that this is what is required of every believer whether member or non-member – a Christian life is to be a consecrated life. In joining membership we are making a public confession and openly identifying ourselves with a particular church and furthermore submitting ourselves to the oversight of that Church. Becoming a member displays spiritual maturity in that we recognize that God in His Word has put structures in place. It means that we understand and appreciate that the minister (or pastor) and the elders care and watch for our souls (**Hebrews 13:17**).

a) The private life – it goes without saying that the private walk with God in our own life and the worship of God in the home forms one of the most integral pillars in God's House. Paul outlines this throughout **Ephesians 5 & 6** as well as other passages. Our daily devotionals in prayer and reading and our family worship are indispensable. If we want to gauge how important these are then let's ask the question: *what is the hardest area of my Christian life to maintain? Or where am I attacked by Satan the most?* The answer to this for most is prayer and Bible study. **William Cowper** said "*Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon their knees.*" A close walk with God in heart and family will bless the Church as a whole.

b) The public life – we are moving onto personal standards and this will be discussed in more detail at a later date. The booklet "**Separated unto the Gospel**" deals with this on page 25 under the heading "Personal Separation". "*Christians are to walk in the light, as he (God) is in the light (1 John 1:7). Holiness is to be the hallmark of their lives...Separation unto God is the essence of personal holiness.*"

Now this impacts both the private and public life but for now we shall say that there are certain places and certain behaviour that is incompatible with holiness and godliness. The public life within the Church is also very important. Again we will probably mention this in another study but every member will be required to attend the Church services and the midweek prayer meeting. Clearly where there are urgent needs or necessities in regard to employment the Church will not be expecting the impossible. We expect that Church members have a *desire* to be in God's house and are not there by way of obligation.

2. What Church should I join in membership?

This is a vital question to ask and answer. In **1 Tim 3:15** we looked at how in joining a Church we must identify a faithful body of believers that both preserve and promote the truth of God.

So what is the Free Presbyterian Church? By way of a summary (the terms will be looked at in more detail) it is an historic Christian denomination. It is **Presbyterian** in Church government (pp 2 & 3 of SUTG booklet); it is **non-ecumenical** (pp 23 -25) **and non-charismatic** (6-8) and is separate from all bodies that have compromised and denied the faith. It is thoroughly **Evangelical** in its outreach and **Reformed** in its teaching and worship.

Is there a perfect Church?

The answer is a resounding no! Every church will have its faults and blemishes but what is important is that the Church attempts to purge itself from these. Because there is no perfect Church does not mean that God's people can become lackadaisical when it comes to doctrine and practise – we are to reprove error (**Ephesians 5:11**). A faithful Church will be Christ centred, it holds to the Bible as the only source of authority and will not tolerate any direct or indirect influence that diminishes the person or work of Christ in any way. It will worship God in a decent and orderly fashion (**1 Corinthians 14:40**). As a denomination we strive for these principles and this is not a popular pathway but we believe it to be a Scriptural one.