



# The Burning Bush - Online article archive

## Continuing Stedfast

Kilskeery Communion Service, October 25th, 2015.

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers," Acts 2:41-42.

As we receive four young people into membership today the question - "What is a Christian" is worthy of consideration.

The answer is given by the greatest of all authorities, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple," Luke 14:25-27.

### Folly

There have been those who have foolishly stated that there is 'no other qualification for membership of and fellowship in the Church of Christ than being born again.' I believe that such a notion is wrong and is born of a desire to widen the "strait gate" and broaden the "narrow way" referred to by the Saviour in Matthew 7:13-14.

There are those who profess Christianity today but who object to the restrictions placed upon them by traditional or 'old-fashioned' Bible-based Christian practices. They wish to exercise a measure of liberty to conform to the world and to adopt worldly fashions, modern habits and behaviour and maintain links with those who defy the teaching of the Bible. That is a dangerous innovation and will open the door to all that will eventually choke the witness of truth and holiness amongst God's people.

### Creepers

It was such thinking which opened the door to the "creepers" referred to by Jude in his epistle. Their profession of faith was not accompanied by the requisite marks of holiness that denote true faith. "These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots," Jude 1:12. They are 'spots', or as the word denotes, 'rocks hidden just below the waves' ready to sink unwary seafarers. They are waterless clouds, fruitless trees. No, mere profession is not enough.

It is true that regeneration is sufficient to get you into the Kingdom of God but fellowship amongst the people of God demands more. Entrance to heaven is dependent alone upon our faith in the righteousness of Christ our substitute and sacrifice.

However, our Christian testimony is dependent upon our conformity to the teachings of God's precious Word. We cannot be indifferent to or defy any principle of truth and be considered a faithful Christian.

Entrance to heaven is by FAITH but the maintenance of a Christian testimony is dependent upon our WORKS! Our works declare our hearts.

Consider these Scriptures. "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation," 1 Peter 2:12. "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and



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art dead," Revelation 3:1 "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot," Revelation 3:15. The works of these churches declared their spiritual state to the Saviour. They were His rule by which He gauged their state. So too must they be ours when gauging our spirituality.

Faith is invisible to the human eye and is only manifested by obedience to the Word of God. "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works," James 2:18. Therefore a mere profession is not enough to gain membership of a Christian congregation. There must be that holiness which springs from conformity to the teaching and doctrines of the Word of God.

It follows on that one who likely will be in heaven may be found unsuitable for membership of a Christian fellowship. Thus Paul says: - "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us," 2 Thessalonians 3:6. Here is a command to remove from the fellowship a "brother" who walks in a disorderly manner. The word "disorderly" means "out of step"! For membership of a Christian congregation there must be the abiding evidence of heart obedience to God's Word producing holiness, a walking in step with the Bible.

I think we have that set before us in the words of our text.

The converts on the day of Pentecost professed faith through baptism but attested the genuineness of that faith by continuing "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

### I. THE PATH THEY FOLLOWED WAS MAPPED OUT BY THE APOSTLES' TEACHING.

**1. Now since the apostles followed in Christ's teaching these disciples were following Christ.** "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen," Matthew 28:19-20. The apostles maintained the teachings of Christ.

**2. The apostles committed their doctrine to writing.** The epistles of the New Testament comprise the teachings of the apostles. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle," 2 Thess 2:15. "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you," 1 Corinthians 11:2.

**3. Obedience was the test of a Christian's genuineness.** "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you," 2 Thess 3:6-7.

### II. SUCH CONTINUANCE WAS NECESSARY FOR THEM TO FELLOWSHIP WITH THE APOSTLES.

This consisted of breaking of bread and prayer. These are the two main acts of fellowship.

In our church here in Ulster, failure to attend faithfully at these ordinances will bring a person's membership into question and if not rectified may result in their membership being suspended.

### III. THE APOSTOLIC CONVERTS STUCK TO THIS DISTINCTIVE PATH.

They 'continued steadfastly.'

**1. Their behaviour was marked by 'endurance'.** What the converts of the Saviour's ministry displayed was continued in the lives of the converts of the apostles' preaching on the day of Pentecost and their later ministry. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the



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mother of Jesus, and with his brethren," Acts 1:14. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word," Acts 6:4. "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving," Colossians 4:2.

**2. Endurance is a grace sadly lacking in a day of apostasy.** This is especially important for young believers to note today. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables," 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

This is an age of "turning unto fables" or 'the inventions of men, falsehoods' as the Greek original suggests. How different will latter-day "Christian" behaviour be from that of the apostolic age as seen in our text!

Dear Christian, we must heed this warning and watch out for the "fable promoters"!

**3. Endurance is especially relevant today.** Please note the Saviour's warning when speaking on the end times in response to the questioning of Peter and James and John and Andrew. "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end (the close of this age), the same shall be saved. But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains," Mark 13:13-14.

Here is when this endurance will be especially needed - the days of the Antichrist. Those days are surely dawning upon us as the apostasy deepens all around. Unspeakable wickedness is sanctioned and practised openly and universally. As it was in the days of Noah - "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11). So it is today. Who can deny this? Who can ignore this?

That being so, young people and believers of all ages, please pray for the grace of Christ whereby we might continue "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."