

## **“The Ideal Member”**

**By Vernon Teagarden**

Proper attitudes are needed if we are to enjoy a proper relationship to the local church. The ideal member of any local congregation will try very hard to develop the proper attitude. It is easier to do what is right when we are thinking right. Therefore, attitudes are extremely important.

Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defines the word “attitude” to mean, “1. Posture; position assumed or studied to serve a purpose; as, a threatening attitude. 2. Position or bearing as indicating action, feeling or mood; as, keep a firm attitude; hence, the feeling or mood itself; as, a kindly attitude.” The word attitude is comparable to disposition, outlook or approach that one demonstrates toward a subject or principle that confronts him.

The word attitude is not found in the scriptures; yet, there are a number of principles that involve attitude. Jesus involved attitude when He spoke the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12. Every one of these statements refer to the person’s attitude. In Mark 12:34, Jesus detected the proper attitude when He told the lawyer, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” The Savior saw that the lawyer answered discreetly, showing a readiness of mind in perceiving and accepting the truth. Commenting on this verse, J. W. McGarvey says, “It would be strange if such a man did not immediately enter the kingdom when it was preached by the apostles on and after Pentecost.” In addition, Paul referred to the proper attitude of citizens in the kingdom in Philippians 4:8. Surely thinking on such things as mentioned by Paul in this passage would produce the proper attitude. We can see the value of having the right attitude when we understand that attitudes govern actions. We cannot expect our actions to be in harmony with God’s will unless we develop and maintain the attitude He demands. We can never experience the joys of Christ’s kingdom without the proper attitude. This accounts, at least in part, for the indifference, murmuring and lack of joy exhibited by some members of the church today. They simply haven’t developed the proper attitude toward what they have professed to be or professed to have accepted. Local churches would have far fewer problems, and be more as God wants them to be if every member would develop the proper attitude toward God, self, our work, and our brethren.

### **ATTITUDES TOWARD GOD**

Matthew 22:34-38 teaches that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. In other words, God just doesn’t want part of man in service to Him; He demands and deserves the whole man. One who has completely given himself to God will have little trouble in trusting Him, or being thankful to Him for all things (Heb. 11:6; Eph. 5:20). One who loves God with all the heart, soul, and mind will have little trouble developing the proper attitude toward the truth, self, our work, or the brethren. One who develops the right attitude toward God will grow to be what God wants them to be, an ideal member.

### **ATTITUDES TOWARD SELF**

Pride and arrogance will destroy the oneness or unity among God’s people in a local congregation. There is no “class” distinction among God’s children. Of course, the antithesis of pride and arrogance is humility, a characteristic that is needed if one is to be an ideal member. Humility includes the willingness to serve, to do even the “menial” tasks in a local church. Lawrence D. Bell said, “Show me a man who cannot be

bothered to do little things and I'll show you a man who cannot be trusted to do big things." We are "members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). This means that the Christian's relationship to other Christians is one of dependence and service. As we have learned before, the idea here in this passage is that we, in the body of Christ, are so united as to be mutually dependent. Each one is of service to the other. As one paraphrase states it, "Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others." An understanding of this great principle should serve to help keep us humble as we "serve" one another in the local congregation. As the apostle Paul has said, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

The ideal member is one who demonstrates an eagerness to learn and grow. Therefore, he is teachable, and is able to learn from correction, constructive criticism, and advice. The apostle Paul understood the importance of this principle. Please read Philippians 3:2-17. It seems clear that in these verses Paul had not yet reached his goal of perfectly knowing Christ and being all that Christ wanted him to be. Therefore, he pressed on toward that goal. In putting forth his best effort in reaching his goal he understood that he would receive that crown of life in the hereafter. Each member of every local church must strive for the same goal, "marking" Paul and other faithful members as our "ensamples." We do need the help, instruction, correction, advice and criticism of others in achieving the goal. Where would any of us be if it were not for the efforts of other older, wiser, and more mature Christians who have helped us along the way? Correction, criticism, and advice are not always easy to take. However, if given in the right way, with the right attitude, these things are not only needed but essential if we are going to be an ideal member.

Finally, the ideal member will be honest with himself and others. When mistakes are made, they will be admitted and corrected (cf. Jas. 5:16).

### **ATTITUDES TOWARD OUR WORK**

The apostle Paul was thankful for being put into the ministry (1Tim. 1:12), and we likewise need to be grateful for the privilege to work in the kingdom. Each member needs to approach the work that God has given the local church with enthusiasm and eagerness. Nothing is so easy but that it becomes difficult if done with reluctance. Like those in Nehemiah's day, we need to be people who have a mind to work (Neh. 4:6). Someone has said that some people are like blisters, they never show until the work is done. This should not have to be said of any member of any local congregation. There needs to be a willingness demonstrated by each one to do what is right, and that, without having to be told. It is unfortunate when someone has to be constantly reminded of their responsibilities. The ideal member will demonstrate a readiness to render service to the best of their time, opportunity and ability. Furthermore, he will carry his share of the load without complaining and murmuring about it. No one denies that there will be legitimate complaints, and these can and should be handled in a scriptural manner (Acts 6:1-7). However, the constant complainer and the perpetual pessimist are obstructions to the work of any congregation.

### **ATTITUDES TOWARD OUR BRETHREN**

Peter sums up what our attitude should be toward our brethren when he tells us that we are to love the brotherhood (1Pet. 2:7). Jesus said, "By this shall all men know ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:35). In a local church this love will be shown in a number of ways. First, it will demonstrate itself in an attitude of cooperation and willingness to work together (Cf. 1Cor. 2:21; Phil. 1:27; Heb. 13:17). Also, we will appreciate others and their work (1Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; 1Thes. 5:12, 13). True appreciation for others will eliminate destructive criticism, gossip, factions, and a multitude of other problems. We will strive to the best of our ability to live peaceably with our brethren (Rom. 12:18; 14:19; Eph. 4:3; 1Thes. 5:13). Due to our efforts there will be an atmosphere of hospitality, courtesy, warmth, friendliness, and openness (Acts 28:7; Heb. 13:2; 3Jn. 5-8; Acts 2:44-4). Gentleness, meekness, forgiveness, forbearance, patience, and long suffering will prevail because we, as ideal members, have developed the proper attitude toward our brethren. (Cf. 2Tim. 2:25, 26; Eph. 4:2, 32).

In conclusion, ideal attitudes make for ideal members, and ideal working conditions among members of a local church. As we contemplate our individual duties to the local church, let us strive to develop the ideal attitude. Perhaps a good place to start would be emulate the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5).