

Publishing Editor's column

IN CONTRAST, for example, to the USA, Britain is not a very religious country. Although most still profess to be Christian, relatively few attend a place of worship regularly. Attitudes amongst professing Christians to doing so vary widely, but here are three typical views I have come across over the years. A middle-aged woman stated, "You don't need to go to church to be a Christian; I'm just as good a Christian as those who go to church regularly". An elderly man claimed not to be able to understand what the Bible is about, and to have never thought much about a future life, yet insisted on going to church on Christmas day and Easter Sunday, despite never going otherwise. A middle-aged couple, regular attenders at a nonconformist church, on hearing that their daughter, a convert to the Truth, intended to go to a Bible class at the local ecclesia when on holiday, asked, "Don't they let you off when you're on holiday?". Such attitudes are surely what the Apostle Paul was writing about when he spoke of "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5).

We get a very different picture from the account in the Acts of the Apostles of the early ecclesia at Jerusalem. Consider what is said about those who heard the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, and were baptized, having "gladly received" his teaching: "they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers . . . And all that believed were together, and had all things common . . . And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people" (2:41-47). Problems arose later, both doctrinal and practical; the Judaisers claimed it was vital to salvation to keep the Law of Moses (15:5), and the support of the poor brethren and sisters was not carried out fairly (6:1). But these problems were dealt with by the ecclesia getting together and taking action. There was nothing wrong with the concept of the ecclesia being together often and sharing things together, even though the extent to which this was done in the early stages was, it appears, too intense to continue or to serve as a model for later times.

We will, however, not be rewarded at the judgement seat for the number of ticks which appear against our name on the ecclesial attendance register, but in accordance with the way our characters have developed for good during our time in the Truth. Our characters develop in three environments: the home, the world and the ecclesia; but of these three environments it is the latter which is the most prominent in Scripture. Thus the Apostle Paul says: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Active involvement in the life of an ecclesia, which is more than just attending the meetings, is therefore something which should be an important part of the life of every believer wherever possible, though there will, of course, always be those who are unable to do this through no fault of their own—because of illness or isolation, for example.

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Publication of articles in The Testimony does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine, as defined in the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith.