

Dear Faithful Followers of Christ,

A fellow Christian wrote that what believers need to do as we mature is ***“take off the bib and put on the apron.”*** What he was saying is that we need to get past the point where we always depend on others to do everything for us (like a spoon-fed child with a bib), and instead put on the work apron, i.e., step up to the counter and actively serve others. We don’t just look to get, we learn to give.

In these words from Dt the Lord tells his people what he expects from them. They were people who had received many blessings from God’s hand. He chose them, redeemed them, and delivered them from earthly and spiritual oppression. And now, the Lord is saying, it’s time to ***“take off the bib and put on the apron!”*** In other words, ***“God Has Great Expectations for His People”*** (1) *God does great things for us*; (2) *God expects great things from us*.

1

We read from Dt. 10:12-13: ***“Now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?”*** An elderly Moses spoke to the Israelites as they came to the end of their 40-year odyssey in the wilderness. 40 yrs. before this, Moses had led God’s people out of Egypt to inherit the Promised Land (Canaan). But they had doubted God’s ability to protect them and grumbled and complained. So for forty years they wandered as nomads in the wilderness. Yet God protected and provided for them every step of the way.

God did great things for them! He fed them manna and quail; he provided water even from rocks; he defeated their enemies, including the most powerful army on earth at the time -- the Egyptians. He also fed their souls with his Word.

God has also done great things for us! We admit each week as we confess our sins that we deserve nothing good from the Lord because we are rebellious and stiff-necked just like the Israelites. However, instead of condemning us as we deserve, God gives us beyond our wildest dreams. He gives us Jesus: God who became man to live perfectly for us and credit that perfect life to us. He gives us the cross for that God-man to die and forgive our wickedness, rebellion, and sin. He gives us Christ’s empty Easter tomb to assure us of unending life. We have been well fed in our bibs -- gorged on God’s goodness. God is 100% committed to you and me and our well-being.

What is more, in a world filled with uncertainty and doubt, we have the immovable Rock to stand on. We’re not walking through life alone on slippery mud or sinking sand. The Lord God Almighty has us by the hand! He tells us ***“the best is yet to come.”*** Because of Jesus, you have a bright future -- and it will never end.

2

God’s salvation through Christ and his loving, daily walk with us are free -- all by grace. However, just like the Israelites, God asks or expects certain things from his people. With joyful and grateful hearts, we want to live up to those expectations. ***“In view of God’s mercy,”*** we want to ***“offer our bodies as living sacrifices”*** to thank him. We want to go beyond the bib and strap on the apron...put our faith into practice.

Here’s what he said to Israel: ***“Fear (respect) the Lord... walk in his ways...serve the Lord with all your heart and all your soul...observe the Lord’s commands.”*** He’s telling them to keep God first in their lives, and to use their bodies, minds, and mouths as tools in service to the Lord.

An expert in time management spoke to a group of business students and included this illustration. He set a wide-mouthed gallon jar on a table. Then he put about a dozen good-sized rocks in the jar one at a time. When the jar was filled to the top, he asked, ***“Is this jar full?”*** Everyone said nodded. Then he reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of pea gravel. He dumped some in the

jar and shook it, causing the gravel to work itself down into the spaces between the rocks. ***“Now is the jar full?”*** Catching on, someone said, ***“Probably not.”*** ***“Correct!”*** the man said, and produced a bucket of sand -- which he poured into the jar and shook into the rocks and gravel. ***“And how about now? Is it full?”*** Now the class was unsure, so the presenter answered, ***“No!”*** He pulled out a pitcher of water and poured it in until it was full to the brim. ***“Now, what’s the point of this illustration?”*** he asked. One eager student raised his hand and said, ***“The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, you can always fit more in if you really try hard.”*** The presenter responded, ***“Good try, but that’s not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don’t put the big rocks in first, you’ll never get them in at all.”***

Priorities! That’s what our Christian life is all about (1st Commandment). Put the big rocks in first -- the truly important things in life: the Lord, time in his Word, prayer, serving your family and others. Those things need to be first in our lives every day. Otherwise we’ll do all the other stuff in life that are ultimately meaningless (pebbles and sand), and there will be no room for the rocks. How did Jesus put it? ***“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”*** (Matt 6:33).

This weekend 20 young people are becoming communicant members of the congregation through the rite of confirmation. When they were baptized, the Holy Spirit made them children of God committed to the cause of Christ and his gospel. This weekend, in becoming not just baptized but also communicant members, they are recommitting themselves to Jesus, but also to their fellow members. Church membership, just like family membership, if properly done, is always unselfish. It’s not about *me*, it’s about *us*. It’s not just about *my* child, but about *our* children. And it’s about moving from **bib** to **apron**.

What does God ask of me concerning church membership?

- 1. God wants me to foster the unity of my church.** I do that by acting in love toward my fellow members, by using my mouth to build up rather than tear down and destroy. I also promote unity by learning God’s Word better so I keep his teachings pure.
- 2. God wants me to serve the ministry of my church.** I do that by praying for my church and fellow members; by honestly evaluating my gifts and developing a servant’s heart to use those gifts. As Peter wrote, ***“Each of you should use whatever gifts he has received to serve others”*** (1 Pt. 4:10).
- 3. God wants me to support the testimony of my church.** We do that by our faithful attendance; by seeking to live a God-pleasing life that matches his Word; and by bringing my first-fruits offerings with great joy as God says through Paul, ***“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income”*** (1 Cor 16:2), and ***“God loves a cheerful giver”*** (2 Cor 9:7).

Fellow Christians, all these things are not mere suggestions; these are God’s expectations of his redeemed people. And as God’s people, none of these things are burdens. They are a great privilege and honor: the work of a grateful people to thank a gracious God. You look good in an apron. Let’s put ours on and gladly serve the Lord together!

Amen.