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**Fruitful congregations ‘Show’ (vv. 7-11)**

***Fruitful Congregations move the vision of membership from belonging to church, to longing to be followers of Christ in every aspect of life***

**More than *belonging* to church**

*‘What church do you belong to?*’ It’s a question we often ask others, or are asked ourselves. In answer, a particular congregation and denomination is usually named – *‘I belong to such and such Presbyterian Church.’* For many church members today this means that this is the congregation with which we associate, in whose building we attend worship and whose activities we subscribe to support. It’s not that it is unimportant to be part of a particular congregation which we identify as our spiritual home, it’s just that Christ means the life and witness of His Church to be more than a club to which we ‘belong’ in that way. Our involvement in Church is a crucial way in which He shapes us to be the people He wants us to be, ‘bearing fruit, showing ourselves to be His disciples.’ (v.8)

***Longing to be* followers of Christ**

The life of being a follower of Jesus is described in these verses as being experienced as a mixture of ‘asking and being given’ (v.7), ‘being commanded and obeying’ (v.10). This seemingly strange mixture of intimacy and instruction comes together as an aspect of knowing the love of our Heavenly Father, like Jesus did (v.9). Remaining in Jesus we find our joy complete (v.11).

So, following Jesus isn’t just a whim, a ‘pick it up and set it down when we feel like it’ kind of thing. It isn’t just a ‘Sunday thing’ or something that only occurs in and around the activities of the church. It is a ‘life longing’ born of a conviction that in Jesus we find ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (John 14 v.6). It is a day after day, ‘long living’ into the rhythms of His ways and wisdom in our family, working and social lives. It shapes our attitudes and actions to be like those we see in Jesus, whether in the area of how we spend our money, love our enemies or raise our families.

**Showing in every aspect of life**

This all embracing vision of the Christian ‘life’ is something we seem to have lost sight of today in substituting formal church membership for Christian discipleship. ‘Being on the books’ is not the same as having ‘the Book’ guiding us as to how we live. ‘Being in the pew on Sunday as a church member’ every week, is not the same as ‘being in the world every day of the week as a follower of Jesus’. His call is that we ‘bear much fruit showing ourselves to be His disciples’ (v.8). And that is to ‘show’ in all that we are, in every activity in which we are involved, in every place where we find ourselves, in every relationship that we have with friend, neighbour or enemy. His fruit must ‘show’ in our lives.

So, fruitful congregations get that. They move the vision of membership from belonging to church, to longing to be followers of Christ in every aspect of life and then help members work out what that means for them.

*When you talk about ‘belonging to church’ what do you mean by that phrase? Is it more or less than what Jesus means by being His follower?*

*How do you experience being a follower of Jesus in your life? How do you assess the balance between obedience and joy in your walk with Him?*

*Describe the places in which you find yourself throughout a normal week? What are the challenges and opportunities of ‘showing yourself to be His disciple’ in those settings?*

*How might your congregation help you be better equipped to live for Jesus in your everyday life?*