

Column

In view of Jesus' words "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," no Christian would want to be accused of being a legalist. The Christian faith is certainly more than a checklist of do's and don'ts. The English poet William Blake was right when he said: "If Christianity was morality, then Socrates would be Saviour."

With that said, however, many Christians over the years have found adopting what is called a "rule of life" helpful. Such guides are intended to keep the Christian pilgrim on the right road.

Certain behaviours encourage growth, while others stymie it. We can learn what these are from scripture. Wise pastors and mature Christians can also give us guidance, as well as having a rule of life.

One such is entitled "A Guide to Church Membership" drawn up several decades ago by English church leaders. This rule calls upon all members of Christ's Church:

- To follow the example of Christ in home and daily life and to bear witness to Him;
- To be regular in private prayer day by day;
- To read the Bible carefully;
- To come to Church every Sunday (unless providentially hindered);
- To receive the Holy Communion faithfully and regularly;
- To give personal service to Church, neighbours and community;
- To uphold the standard of marriage entrusted by Christ to His Church;
- To care that children are brought up to love and serve the Lord; and
- To give money for the work of the Church at home and overseas.

None of these nine are terribly profound or go beyond what we already know, yet, if put in practice, what a change there would be. Local churches and the communities would be different and better places. How much more effective the local church's witness would be to those who are not yet believers. How much sweeter the fellowship among those who already claim Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

As the light of a single candle held by a solitary person increases when amassed with those held by others, so the light of the church would burn brighter and shine forth farther. If this were to happen, Jesus, the Light of the Word, would be seen through believers more clearly than ever before.

More than that, those who hold these lighted candles would find their own lives emblazoned, making the path before them clearer. Instead of going down false paths in search of happiness and fulfilment, they would find themselves on the road leading to emotional and physical wellbeing.

We now find ourselves in the season of Lent, a time for refocusing our attention on things that are of ultimate importance and casting off those that keep us from being our best and God's best. Why not give these nine guides a try, not in order to earn or merit salvation or to add anything to the victory Christ achieved on the cross, but as a response of love?

A Morning Resolve

I will try this day to live a simple, sincere and serene life, repelling promptly every thought of discontent, anxiety, discouragement, impurity, and self-seeking; cultivating cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity, and the habit of holy silence; exercising economy in expenditure, generosity in giving, carefulness in conversation, diligence in appointed service, fidelity to every trust, and a childlike faith in God. In particular I will try to be faithful in those habits of prayer, work, study, physical exercise, eating, and sleep which I believe the Holy Spirit has shown me to be right. And as I cannot in my own strength do this, nor even with a hope of success attempt it, I look to thee, O Lord God my Father, in Jesus my Saviour, and ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen. (Forward Movement Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.