

These mailings are inspired by Mary Baker Eddy's cogent comments in her article "Advice to Students":

"To know the what, when, and how of error, destroys error. The error that is seen aright as error, has received its death-blow; but never until then" (Mis. 299:2).

INFORMATION MAILING #22

FOCUS:

Requirements for church membership

Compiled November 2003

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Nearly three years ago, in information mailing #9, the “sheep” were alerted to the fact that Christian Science branch churches were beginning to respond to the malicious aggressive suggestion that they should change their application forms for church membership, removing all reference to the need for applicants to be free from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and even immorality.

The aggressiveness of the “dragon” in suggesting change in regard to removing all moral requirements for branch church membership is accelerating. Hence another information mailing (#22) on this subject to remind the “sheep” to stay alert in their branches. Some, but not all, of the information in #9 is repeated in this mailing. A review of #9 is strongly recommended for additional facts and ideas based on our Leader’s writings and the Bible. Such information serves as ammunition for the “sheep” throughout the movement who are standing up against this malicious aggressive suggestion in their individual branch churches.

The “dragon” (the Bible symbol in Revelation 12, standing for anything that would attempt to destroy the “man child,” “the woman,” and the “remnant of her seed”) deals in deceit or sophistry. It is easy to counteract this sophistry. All it takes is factual information. That means knowing Mrs. Eddy’s writings and the Bible so well that one can quote verbatim from those sources to show the fallacy of action being proposed. Reports are coming in from churches where the vote on removing all restrictions for church membership has come up and well-informed “sheep,” presenting well-researched information, have stopped this disastrous step from being taken. Branch churches, according to Mrs. Eddy, are “distinctly democratic,” and well-informed memberships make wise decisions.

Erroneous suggestion: The Christian Science Field had already been conditioned to some extent to the error of lowering the standards for church membership when an article in the January 2003 *Christian Science Journal* entitled “What? Me inflexible?” dealt with this issue openly. Its verbiage appears to be designed to lead the reader to feel guilty for having standards and by implication encourages the removal of them. (A copy of the *Journal* article is included at the end of this mailing for those who may not have seen it, as well as for those who saw it but may have forgotten it.)

Although couched in thick sophistry throughout, the thrust of the article is unmistakable to all loyal Christian Scientists who have held to Mrs. Eddy’s standards for many years. Its publication sent a shockwave through the movement, and the result has been that the question of changing by-laws and membership applications is cropping up in branch churches around the world — sponsored by those who in their ignorance feel a necessity to be blind followers of blind leaders.

It is difficult to assess why this article is in the *Journal* unless it is there for the purpose of influencing branch church members to follow the pattern of change and of laxity already set by the Board of Directors for Mother Church membership. (See the Mother Church application form on the Internet.) If this is the purpose (and none other seems logical), then would this not be a case of The Mother Church’s interfering with (erroneously influencing) branch churches — an act which is forbidden in Article XXIII, Section 10?

A primary seductive argument being used to influence branch church members is that Mary Baker Eddy did not put such restrictions in the *Manual*, and that the Board of Directors in the early 1930’s introduced them into requirements for membership. The suggestion is that urging this “fresh,” “new” approach onto branch churches is just an effort to get back to the way Mrs. Eddy had it.

Counter facts: How does one counter that argument? With facts. The fact is that in the early 1930’s four of the five members of the Board (William Rathvon, George Wendell Adams, Annie Knott, and William McKenzie) were either taught by Mrs. Eddy or worked in her home. Can it not be assumed that their decision to make those requirements for membership must have stemmed from what they learned from Mary Baker Eddy? Would the decision of today’s Board to remove those requirements carry the same authority?

Further counter facts: The claim that Mrs. Eddy did not put restrictions on church membership – requirements for abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and immoral behavior – is not valid. The *Manual* states clearly the “Qualifications for Membership” (Article IV):

“Believe in Christian Science. SECTION I. To become a member of The Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Mass., the applicant must be a believer in the doctrines of Christian Science, according to the platform and teaching contained in the Christian Science textbook, SCIENCE AND HEALTH WITH KEY TO THE SCRIPTURES, by Rev. Mary Baker Eddy. The BIBLE, together with SCIENCE AND HEALTH and other works by Mrs. Eddy, shall be his only textbooks for self-instruction in Christian Science, and for teaching and practising metaphysical healing.”

When Mrs. Eddy says to be a “believer in the doctrines of Christian Science,” does that not mean to live according to the rules? If one does not live by the rules, it means he doesn’t believe them. If he does not abide by them, it means he won’t be able to demonstrate Christian Science because Mrs. Eddy says: “Whoever would demonstrate the healing of Christian Science must abide strictly by its rules, heed every statement...” (*S&H* 462:13). *Science and Health* and other works by Mrs. Eddy are full of rules. As she was a “scribe under orders” (*Mis.* 311:26), each of the rules has a “Thus saith the Lord” in front of it. A few that apply here are:

“Christian Science teaches:...abstain from alcohol and tobacco...” (*My.* 114:3).

“...the use of tobacco or intoxicating drinks is not in harmony with Christian Science” (*S&H* 454:2).

“Whatever intoxicates a man, stultifies and causes him to degenerate physically and morally. Strong drink is unquestionably an evil, and evil cannot be used temperately: its slightest use is abuse...” (*Mis.* 288:32).

Mrs. Eddy speaks of alcoholic drinks, tobacco, tea, coffee, opium, as depraved appetites (see *S&H* 406:28), and says that “puffing the obnoxious fumes of tobacco, or chewing a leaf naturally attractive to no creature except a loathsome worm, is at least disgusting” (*S&H* 407:3).

One of Mrs. Eddy’s more pointed statements about how a Christian Scientist conducts his life and one which would deter a branch church from taking in smokers, drinkers,

etc., is found on page 106 of *The First Church of Christ, Scientist and Miscellany*. She says:

“In what sense is the Christian Scientist a ‘pest’? Is it because he minds his own business more than does the average man, is not a brawler, an alcohol drinker, a tobacco user, a profane swearer, an adulterer, a fornicator, nor a dishonest politician or business man? Or is it because he is the very antipode of all these? In what sense is the Christian Scientist a charlatan? Is it because he heals the sick without drugs?” (*My.* 106:22).

Isn't Mrs. Eddy saying that “the Christian Scientist...is not...an alcohol drinker, a tobacco user...an adulterer, a fornicator...”? If that is true, then anyone who drinks alcohol, smokes tobacco, or is immoral is not a Christian Scientist. Doesn't it follow that if a branch church were to change its by-laws and/or its application for membership to allow alcohol-drinkers and tobacco-smokers to become members it would be taking into its membership those who are not Christian Scientists? Why would a church do that? What would be the purpose? And how would it affect future decisions of that membership?

With regard to accepting into membership those who do not rely on Christian Science alone for healing, Mrs. Eddy's statements on the subject act as guidance for the branch churches. She says that “healing the sick through divine Mind alone” (*S&H* 182:2) shows one's position as a Christian Scientist. She says that “a Christian Scientist's medicine is Mind” and that “a Christian Scientist never recommends material hygiene...” (*S&H* 453:29). She says: “We are Christian Scientists, only as we quit our reliance upon that which is false and grasp the true” (*S&H* 192:4).

Again, why would a branch church accept into membership those who are not Christian Scientists according to our Leader's definition?

Erroneous suggestion: Another argument appears to use the Bible as authority because it argues that one should not judge his neighbor, and that putting restrictions on membership is judging. The suggestion is that churches should welcome in all who need healing, whether drinkers, smokers, drug-takers or immoral, and they can be healed as members. But the Bible, which instructs us to “judge not that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1), also instructs us to “judge righteous judgment” (Jn. 7:24).

Counter facts: It is correct to use the Bible as authority. But that does not give us the license to distort its meaning or select something out of context to support a position. Mrs. Eddy says, as the First Tenet of the Christian Science religion, that “we take the inspired Word of the Bible as our sufficient guide...” (S&H 497:3).

So don't students of Christian Science look to the Bible for instruction on this subject of church membership as they do on every other subject? In I Corinthians, chapter 5, there is pointed, strong instruction about not taking into church membership those who do not live according to the rules of the church. Though this particular Bible passage pertains specifically to sexual immorality, it also addresses the problem of drinking and is comprehensive in its denunciation of accepting for church membership those who have not demonstrated obedience. Paul's words to the Corinthian church may seem harsh and too strong for our church body today, but at least it gives us a distinct feeling for the importance of requirements for those who wish to unite with the church. In addition to the inspiration gained from the verses in Corinthians in the King James Version, J.B. Phillips has this translation of I Cor. 5:1-13:

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and immorality of a kind that even pagans condemn – a man has apparently taken his father's wife! Are you still proud of yourselves? Shouldn't you be overwhelmed with sorrow? The man who has done such a thing should certainly be expelled from your fellowship!

“I know I am not with you physically but I am with you in spirit, and I assure you as though I were actually with you that I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done this thing. As one present in spirit when you are assembled, I say by the power of the Lord Jesus that the man should be left to the mercy of Satan so that while his body will experience the destructive powers of sin his spirit may yet be saved in the day of the Lord.

“Your pride in yourselves is lamentably out of place. Don't you know how a little yeast can permeate the whole lump? Clear out every bit of the old yeast that you may be new unleavened bread!...let us 'keep the feast' with no trace of the yeast of the old life, nor the yeast of vice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of unadulterated truth!

“In my previous letter I said 'Don't mix with the immoral.' I didn't mean, of

course, that you were to have no contact at all with the immoral of this world, nor with any cheats or thieves or idolaters – for that would mean going out of the world altogether! But in this letter I tell you not to associate with any professing Christian who is known to be an impure man or a swindler, an idolater, a man with a foul tongue, a drunkard or a thief. My instruction is: ‘Don’t even eat with such a man.’ Those outside the church it is not my business to judge. But surely it is your business to judge those who are inside the church – God alone can judge those who are outside. It is your plain duty to expel this wicked man from your fellowship!”

The Anchor Bible, commenting on I Cor. 5:1-13, has this further elucidation:

“The scandal was not a simple case of sexual immorality, however: the attitude of the church was involved, and Paul chided the church for indulgent pride. The implication is that they were proud in the assumption that their Christian freedom was enhanced by their sympathetic understanding of this unusual sexual relationship. Paul, on the other hand, proposed they should *rather have mourned*, in accordance with a Jewish custom that would have treated a rejected person as one who was dead. Indeed, he proposed that, mourning or not, the man must be removed from membership in the community. [When the term “community” was used at that time, it was in reference to the Christian church community.]...In order to make the church an effective and redeeming evangelistic society...it must be preserved from the kinds of sinful members who bring contempt upon the church from unbelievers” (Vol. 32, pp. 188, 192).

Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament, commenting on I Cor. 5:6, leaves no doubt as to what the church action should be according to Paul's letter:

“A single sin indulged in, or allowed in the church, would act like leaven – it would pervade and corrupt the whole church, unless it was removed. On this ground, and for this reason, discipline should be administered, and the corrupt member should be removed” (p. 708).

The membership of a Christian Science branch church should be encouraged to reason through this whole issue. Some questions can help the members do that:

- Will the church be strengthened or weakened by the decision to take into membership smokers, drinkers, drug-takers, or those who have not yet worked out a moral stand?
- Will the Sunday School teaching of a branch church be weakened or strengthened by the decision to take into membership smokers, drinkers, etc.?
- How will eligibility lists for Readers be made up in view of the *Manual* By-law regarding Readers: “They must keep themselves unspotted from the world, – uncontaminated with evil, – that the mental atmosphere they exhale shall promote health and holiness, even that spiritual *animus* so universally needed” (Article III, Section 1).
- Should the smokers and drinkers on the membership list be eligible to serve as Readers or teach Sunday School or work in the Reading Room? (The *Manual*, on page 63, has this to say about Reading Room librarians: “He or she shall have no bad habits.”) How will eligibility be determined? Will the members have a smoker-and-drinker list and a nonsmoker-and-nondrinker list?
- When positions come up for appointment or election, how will it be known who is a drinker or a smoker, a fornicator, or an adulterer, and who is not? Will there have to be periodic forms filled out by the members to assess their eligibility?
- Worst of all, will the branch church which removes its standards come to the state of thought that no longer feels it is important whether a Reader or a Sunday School teacher smokes or drinks, no longer cares whether children in the Sunday School are taught by people who have not worked out standards in their own lives? Isn’t any smoker or drinker who teaches Sunday School or is First or Second Reader a hypocrite in the Biblical meaning of that word? The Greek word means “actor,” and think of what acting it would require for these individuals to say while serving church: “Yes, I believe in the teaching of Christian Science,” then go home to a cigarette or a glass of wine! Wouldn’t they be proving by their lives that they did

not believe in the teaching of Christian Science?

Erroneous suggestion: Setting requirements for membership is unloving and judgmental.

Counter fact: The fact that branch churches have requirements for membership in accordance with the teachings of Christian Science, doesn't mean those churches are lacking in compassion for those who want to join but still smoke or drink or may be working on moral problems. The most loving thing we can do for our fellow man is to uphold the high standards Mrs. Eddy has set for membership, and then think of our fellow man as able to reach those standards rather than to put the burden on him of believing he can't reach them or will reach them after he joins.

The members of a branch church provide services on Sundays and Wednesdays for the entire community. The purpose of these services is healing. The ones who conduct the services are expected to be consecrated students of the Bible and Mary Baker Eddy's writings, as well as devoted demonstrators of those writings. All are welcomed with open arms at Christian Science church services and are welcome to study in the Reading Room. As each individual grows in his or her study and is ready to stop dependence on those false habits, isn't healing inevitable? Think what contributions one can make to the church when he comes into membership with these victories behind him! The individual joins the church with a strong commitment to the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, and to her inspired teachings. He joins with the desire to serve. And won't that desire strengthen the churches as they continue in their mission to enlighten the world from the basis that God is all and matter is naught?

What? Me inflexible?

Verta B. Driver

OVER THE YEARS certain ways of doing things become habitual, pile up, and finally seem like unchangeable rules. Unless people take time to rethink them, these ways become mindless or rigid in any organization and in individuals' personal lives. Anyone facing years of piled-up, self-imposed rules, and unrefreshed ways of doing things will be familiar with what I'm talking about.

For church members, this tendency takes on an added importance, no matter what denomination they are a part of. After serving on committees, praying together and individually, dealing with church repairs or other crises, people learn a lot about themselves and their fellow members. Probably members of any organization have had to deal with these situations. I just happen to have had a lot of experience at being a church member.

With any organization that people belong to for years, the membership gradually accepts certain ideas about the way things should be done. Some of these ways have gone unquestioned simply because of their longevity. While some rules may have been established by the founders of an organization, others grow up out of custom and habit. For example, the Church of Christ, Scientist, is governed by a slim book called the *Manual of The Mother Church*. These rules never change. But individual branch Churches of Christ, Scientist, have their own rules and customs. Many of them will continue to be useful for years, while others probably will need to be adjusted as conditions change.

And things *do* change. I remember when most people could find *Science and Health* only in Christian Science Reading Rooms; when it was understood that someone taking class instruction in Christian Science probably was a church member; when an applicant for membership in The Mother Church had to give assurance that he or she didn't smoke and didn't

drink alcoholic beverages. These were customs that evolved apart from the rules in the *Church Manual*, but they took on importance because people "had always done it that way." Sometimes that's easier than acting on the fact that the creator, God, is expressed in creativity and freshness.

Often it's difficult to accept or understand when these habits, these "rules" are questioned or eliminated. Things are suddenly different. People may try to hang on to old accumulated habits, feeling that the "new" ways would somehow lower their standards. But to accept and be part of creative changes requires flexibility and a willingness to start afresh in thinking about an organization's activities, to remove the layers of "rules" built up through years of tradition, to earnestly and unselfishly cherish ways to bless the world.

*In any organization,
the members develop
their own customs.
These can be hard
to give up.*

WHEN THESE OLD RULES are stripped away, an organization's activities are suddenly less restricted and everyone feels more freedom. But the opposite is also true. An organization may start out with a lot of freedom, but custom and tradition may begin to stifle it. In Mrs. Eddy's day, for example, more applicants for church membership had already had class instruction than those who hadn't.

From biographies of her life, it's evident that Mrs. Eddy gave class instruction to people who smoked tobacco, who drank alcoholic beverages—and some who knew little about morality. She was free to use her spiritual intuition in making those decisions. But customs evolved that led churches to ask questions about people's personal habits and to judge them by an outward standard. These requirements were never part of the application in the *Church Manual*.

That's why today I rejoice in the new freedom people have to join The Church of Christ, Scientist, even if they aren't perfect. Today a church membership form can be obtained over the Internet. There aren't any questions about smoking, drinking, drugs.



Perhaps some members are shocked or think that standards have fallen. But this point of view may need to change, to be more open to the freshness pouring forth from divine Love, who created everyone.

The requirements on the membership applications in the *Church Manual* are not restrictive although they do make spiritual demands. Here are a few of the phrases that describe the potential member: he or she “loves Christian Science”; “reads understandingly the Bible, and SCIENCE AND HEALTH WITH KEY TO THE SCRIPTURES”; “is Christianly qualified”; and eager to “enter into full fellowship with the Tenets and Rules of The First Church of Christ, Scientist.”¹

IN ANY ORGANIZATION, the members need to determine what is the most important purpose for its existence and what qualities of thought will enable them to fulfill that purpose. With church I found that it is most important to pray and work toward having that Mind that was in Christ; to learn more about the inspired Word of the Bible and use it as my guide; to gain an understanding of the extraordinary love that Jesus has given us; and to follow his example. This spiritual effort blesses all people—regardless of whether they smoke or drink or go to hospitals.

When *Science and Health* is read understandingly, drinking, smoking, use of illegal drugs, and immorality will probably drop away. Maybe they won't be first to go. Perhaps self-righteousness, self-love, or some other character flaw will drop away first. But when people are motivated by love for God, a desire to attain a deeper understanding of Him and to bless all humanity, this longing eventually becomes so powerful an influence that personal flaws diminish and drop away. So rather than focusing on how to stop smoking—or how to stop judging others who smoke—perhaps it's more important to “pray for that Mind to be in us which was also in Christ Jesus; to do unto others as we

would have them do unto us; and to be merciful, just, and pure.”²

THERE IS AN INCIDENT IN THE BIBLE that I find very helpful in this connection. Jesus was visiting an important Pharisee named Simon, and the host didn't provide the materials for Jesus to wash his feet—a custom of that time when people walked along dusty paths and roads. A “strange woman”—that's often the term for a prostitute—came to Jesus and washed his feet and wiped them with her hair.³

The account tells us she had sinned. It doesn't say she had stopped sinning. Yet her love for the Christliness of Jesus was pure and unadulterated. In *Science and Health*, Mrs. Eddy explained that those who wish to be spiritual healers might learn from her example. She wrote, “If the Scientist has enough Christly affection to win his own pardon, and such commendation as the Magdalen gained from Jesus, then he is Christian enough to practice scientifically and deal with his patients compassionately; and the result will correspond with the spiritual intent.”⁴ The Magdalen was a prototype for a Christian healer! How many churches would want to keep her from becoming a member?

Jesus rebuked Simon the Pharisee's self-righteousness. His own life exhibited the healing power of love that embraces, instead of judging, humanity. The Master's example is one that will bless any organization—even one that isn't defined as “religious.” The value of reaching the membership through love and that which is loving is something everyone can agree on. And while genuine love includes permanence and strength, it also is open to new ideas and opportunities to serve all people, just as Jesus did. □

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¹ See *Church Manual*, p. 114. ² *Science and Health*, p. 497. ³ See Luke 7:36–50. ⁴ *Science and Health*, p. 365.

*It's important to gain
an understanding
of Jesus' love
for all people.*

*He that loveth his brother abideth in the light,
and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.*

1 John 2:10