

A FORMER MEMBER

Recently a friend of mine read me some of the saddest and most terrifying words I have ever heard. The words were from an obituary for a funeral he was about to preach. The obituary told of a woman who lived an active, good life. She had a loving family and a good job, but it was the closing statement that cast a shadow over the summary of her life. "She was a former member of the church of Christ."

If a person understands that salvation is in the church, the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23), there are no more tragic words. I was immediately reminded of the words of Jesus when He said, "*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*" (Matthew 16:26).

I do not profess to know the reason she was a "former" member of the church of Christ. It may be that she joined a man-made church, a denomination. It may be that she abandoned her faith and left the church. Regardless of the reason, the word "former" says it all. Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that this is not an isolated incident. This woman is just one of many throughout the centuries who have fallen away. I have no doubt that we can all recall those in our own congregation who have left their first love.

The Lord and His inspired preachers warned of the danger of leaving Him and rebuked those who had. "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins... Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*" (Hebrews 10:25-26, 29). "*For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*" (2 Timothy 4:10).

If all of the former members of the church of Christ were to return this Sunday our buildings could not hold them. Please do not let your obituary say you, "were a former member of the church of Christ" but a "faithful member."

The Elders- to the congregation! West Side Church of Christ, Salem, VA

