

# Response Ability

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“Membership has its rewards.” That’s how some companies advertise some special promotional they’re running. I like those kind of programs, the ones where you feel like you’re getting something for nothing. You receive benefits, whether its frequent flyer miles or Marriott points, when nothing extra is really required of you. You don’t have to pay a monthly fee, you don’t have to recruit other people to join the group; membership just has its rewards. It pays.

What about membership in the local church? Certainly it has its rewards. From a family of fellow believers to those who will help us bear our burdens, we are benefitted greatly by this relationship. But membership also has its responsibilities. We cannot expect to obtain something for nothing. We have a requirement that accompanies our commitment.

When Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, he mentioned three words that he had famously linked together: “constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father” (2 Thess. 1:3).

Faith, hope, and love. We recognize this trio from 1 Cor. 13:13 as well as Col. 1:4-5. But notice the words which precedes them in this context: work, labor, and steadfastness. Together, they testify to the responsibilities that come with membership.

What must each one be about in the body? What response is required?

“Work of faith.” “In every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything” (1 Thess. 1:8). Paul commended them for their faith, but not a faith that stood still. In fact, their faith had a reputation in other parts of the world. But how would the world have known if it was not something that was put into practice?

Faith is more than mere mental assent. As someone has anonymously said, “Christianity begins in the head, travels to the heart, and exits in the hands and feet.” Our faith must have action with it or it is no faith at all. James 2 was written not to give us something to hand to our denominational friends. It was first handed to the twelve tribes dispersed. What “work” has your faith produced? Membership has its responsibilities.

“Labor of love.” “Having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:6). The word “labor” means “toil” or “work” and can be used in the context of laboring through some difficulty or trouble. Even though the Thessalonians

received the word in tribulation, it was still taken with joy because it was part of their “labor of love.”

Love and labor usually don't go together. Not everyone loves what they do for a living. Some have to work at their jobs because there aren't any other options available. Let's be careful that our labor for the Lord doesn't look that way. Do you love what you do for Him? It doesn't have to look like it's a responsibility. And even when hardship is involved in carrying this work out, consider it all joy and a privilege to labor for the Master.

“Steadfastness of hope.” “And to wait for His Son from heaven... who rescues us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10). “Hope” is looking forward in confident expectation. This hope produces a steadfastness or, as some translations have it, “perseverance” or “patience.” Such was needed as the early saints waited on the Lord for final vindication.

Hope gives us something to hold on to. That's why it's described as an “anchor for the soul” (Heb. 6:19). It comes with the realization that we're not there yet. We've started our journey, we've weathered some storms, but we have not yet reached our final destination. We must wait, patiently and with expectation, that the Lord will rescue us from the wrath to come.

On that day, membership will certainly have its rewards. Until then, let us be about our responsibilities in His service.