

**BLOG: “Possession of faith leads to profession” (Rev John Zuidema)**

One of the things that church councils need to deal with is to maintain the purity of the bride of Christ. One way church councils can do this is by encouraging members and those who attend to live lives worthy of the calling they have received in Christ (Eph 4:1). In light of God’s calling and the work of redemption through Jesus Christ as well as the quickening to new life by the Holy Spirit, we encourage people to live lives that are pleasing in God’s sight, or if you will, more and more Christ-like.

Another way church councils can endeavour to keep the bride pure is by ensuring that anyone who wants to be a full communicant member does a credible profession of faith. And it is precisely at this point that things get a little tricky. When a church council refuses to allow someone to do their profession of faith, it can cause all sorts of difficulties, both from other family members as well as friends of the person involved. Sometimes the church council is challenged about their right to judge whether someone can do their profession of faith or not and are quickly reminded of Matthew 7:1, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (NIV).

We need to be careful in making condemning judgments about anyone. However, this verse doesn’t mean that we are not called upon to judge. As people living in this world, we have to make judgments all the time. We make judgments about career paths, marriage partners, where to live and retire, where to worship and umpteen other things. Church councils also need to make judgments about whether someone should do their public profession of faith.

So how can those who are responsible make right decisions about this? How can we really know that what is being said really lives in a person’s heart and life? Thankfully, Scripture gives us some guidance as does Jesus himself. To some extent we can tell whether people are true Christians by the fruit they show in their lives (Mat 7:20). It’s worthwhile to consider this before someone does their public profession of faith. Where is the fruit in their lives now? Has there been a godly change in behaviour and attitudes?

There have been occasions (perhaps far too many) when we have heard professions of faith, sometimes even with tears, yet time has proven that they never possessed saving faith in Jesus Christ. It’s a strange thought isn’t it? That you can be allowed to do a profession of faith, without possessing the faith you falsely profess.

There are many reasons for it. Sometimes our history is to blame or pressure from families and church councils that ‘expect’ people to do their profession of faith at a certain age. Whatever the reasons, church councils and individual ministers and elders have probably been guilty of allowing ‘easy-believism’ in the church of Jesus Christ.

Please, I understand why it happens. We so want people to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour that on occasions we err on not putting in place proper checks and balances and asking whether there is fruit in someone’s life.

Of course, there can be times when someone seems to start well in their Christian life only to not finish well. Sad. The Parable of the Sower comes to mind. And then there are people who start well, fade for a season and then return with greater vigour and excitement than ever before. Wonderful. So how do we know for certain someone possesses the faith they wish to profess? Look at the fruit in their lives is a great way to start. Yes, that means making a judgment, but to allow someone to do public profession of faith without possessing the faith is unloving, uncaring and not keeping the bride of Christ pure as much as it is humanly possible. JZ