

**FOR CHRIST AND
THE CHURCH**

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For Christ and the Church by Charles M. Sheldon

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CHARLES M. SHELDON

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PROLOGUE

The minister had just come home from his prayer meeting, and he was very much discouraged.

He had gone at once up to his study and was sitting down at his desk looking hopelessly at his Sunday morning sermon, which was half written.

"I can never finish it. I have not the heart to go on with it," said the minister, speaking out loud, a habit he had acquired while in college and seminary.

"Of course not," said a voice so near by that the minister was very much startled. But the minute he heard the voice he knew it was the Devil's. No one would ever mistake such a voice; and the minister as he wheeled about in his chair and saw his visitor sitting on the edge of the table where the religious papers were kept, recognized his old enemy, and his heart sank lower than ever as he noted the triumphant sneer on the Devil's face.

"Of course not," he repeated, "especially when you know that more than half your entire church membership are liars."

"What!" cried the minister, indignantly.

"Your church is full of liars," repeated the Devil

calmly. "Let us see. You have a membership of three hundred?"

"Three hundred and fifteen," corrected the minister.

"Three hundred and fifteen. One hundred of them are men. Seventy-five of them business men. All of them, when they joined the church, solemnly vowed to support the church services and to love the church more than the world. Isn't that so?"

"It is," replied the minister anxiously.

"Now, then," continued the Devil triumphantly, "how many of these men ever go to the church prayer meeting?"

"How many?" faltered the minister.

"Yes, how many?"

The minister made a rapid calculation, as his memory called up the appearance of his church chapel room on prayer meeting nights.

"About twelve."

"What!" cried the Devil incredulously. "Are you sure?"

"Maybe it is a little larger number than usual," the minister stammered.

"Well, never mind. Call it twelve of your seventy-five business men attend the prayer meeting regularly. The rest never come; or at least very seldom. How many of the women go to the prayer meeting?"

"About forty or fifty," said the minister, brightening up a little.

"Forty or fifty out of two hundred. Say a possible sixty-five attend prayer meeting out of a total

membership of three hundred and fifteen. And yet all of them vowed solemnly to support the church in all its services. Minister, I said your church was full of liars. Isn't it so?"

"A good many of the members are so situated that they can't get out in the evening," groaned the minister.

"Did you ever know of any of them to stay away regularly from an entertainment or party if they were invited out on prayer meeting night?" the Devil questioned remorselessly.

The minister was silent.

"Did you ever know of any of your business men refusing to attend a political convention or a business convention because they hadn't time to go?"

Still the minister was silent. He had grown very pale and sad.

"I made a canvass a while ago of your church and I found that more than half your members, preacher, spent an average of two nights a week all the year around in going to parties, receptions or entertainments. When prayer meeting night came, they said they were too tired, or something, to go. But if they could go to an entertainment don't you think they could go to prayer meeting if they wanted to?"

The minister made a gesture towards the Devil almost as if he appealed to him to leave the study, but the Devil put his foot farther across his knee as if he intended to be more comfortable. In doing so he knocked the minister's favorite religious weekly upon the floor.

"Did you ever have half your church membership out to prayer meeting at one time?" asked the Devil ironically.

The minister smiled faintly. It was too absurd an idea to entertain for a moment.

"How large an Endeavor Society do you have?" asked the visitor, with a smile.

"About a hundred members in all. Eighty-five active members." The minister looked apprehensively at the Devil as he wondered what the question meant.

"Let's see. Your young people have a pledge or something that they take when they join, don't they?"

"Yes. What have you got against that?" demanded the minister, half rising from his seat and speaking as fiercely as a minister ever has the right to speak.

"Nothing; oh, nothing," chuckled the Devil. "But isn't there something in the pledge about the Endeavor members going to the church prayer meeting? Isn't the motto of the Endeavor Society 'For Christ and the Church'? And doesn't the pledge say: 'I promise that I will make it the rule of my life to support my own church in every way, especially by attending all her Sunday and mid-week services'?"

The Devil paused, and the minister added: "You have not finished the sentence in the pledge—'Unless prevented by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Savior.'"

"Exactly. I forgot that part of it. But now, preacher, how many of your young people attend the church prayer meeting regularly?"

"I don't know just how many," replied the minister doggedly.

"Oh, yes, you do. Don't join the noble army of liars in your church. You know about how many of the young people attend."

"Forty or fifty, maybe," said the minister, but his voice sounded rather faint.

"Isn't that a high average?"

"Maybe it is," replied the minister slowly.

"Isn't it true that not more than twenty-five or thirty of your eighty-five Endeavorers regularly attend the church prayer meeting? Don't try to get out of it, preacher. I've been to a good many of your meetings and enjoyed them. They are so dull and stupid, and it does me so much good to look around and see the empty seats and know that most of your people are somewhere else. But about your young people. Aren't they liars, too? How much does their motto amount to? How much is their pledge good for?"

"Some of them have good reasons for not attending;" the minister roused up a little.

"Reasons they could 'conscientiously give to their Savior'?" asked the Devil sarcastically, as he hitched himself farther over the edge of the table, knocking another religious paper on the floor.

The minister was silent. He was growing faint at heart as he reviewed the situation.

"Now, there was an average of one entertainment a week last year," continued the Devil contemptuously, "which I noticed more than thirty of your Christian