

LESSON TEN

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP

A. PENTECOSTAL SAINTS SHOULD UNITE TOGETHER TO FORM ASSEMBLIES.

The problem often arises when the gospel is preached in a new community whether or not the new converts will be able to continue worshipping in their former churches. The argument is put forth that if the newly baptized Pentecostal saint continues to worship in his previous church home, he will be letting his light shine in darkness, and through his testimony will win others. However, it has been proven over and over again that it simply does not work like this and also it is contrary to the will of God. The babe in Christ who tries to keep fellowship with his previous church soon finds out that if he testifies of his new found joy and victory that he is no longer wanted, and that he is quite out of place among them. If he continues trying to maintain that fellowship he is bound to yield to pressure, to compromise on truth, and it will be only a matter of time before he has lost out with God.

When believers have received the Holy Ghost, it is wrong to bury themselves in congregations where they are not accepted, where they will receive little or no spiritual help. There is little or no fellowship between Pentecostal Saints and the cold formal churches. *"What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness? ...Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord" (II Corinthians 6:14-17).*

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost places the believers into one body and calls them out of the world to form an assembly or as Paul calls it in the twentieth chapter of Acts, a "flock." He also states that the Holy Ghost has set over the flock, overseers or bishops, to feed the church. The work of forming assemblies and setting these assemblies in order with a pastor or shepherd in charge is definitely the work of the Holy Ghost. It is definitely not the work of man and this part of the work can be left completely in the hands of God.

B. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS NECESSARY IN LARGE CHURCHES.

In rural or small churches the pastor may not find it necessary to take steps in organizing or setting the church in order other than teaching the saints the Word of God. However, many problems arise in large and urban churches, which makes it necessary for the church to be thoroughly set in order and to be well organized. One of these steps necessary to be taken is the forming of a Church Roll or the having of a Church Membership.

There are many strong arguments against church membership, but it will be necessary to consider only the most outstanding and strongest of these. The strongest argument against church membership is that the pastor is trying to do God's job. To have one's name written in the Lamb's Book of Life is the great necessity and is quite sufficient. Membership cannot save. The pastor cannot know absolutely for a certainty in every instance just who is ready to meet the Lord or who isn't. This is God's business and the pastor should leave it in His hands.

All of this is very good and cannot be denied but on the other hand much can be stated on behalf of church membership.

C. MANY REASONS MAY BE GIVEN FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

Here are a few reasons why a church should have a membership roll:

1. Every local assembly membership roll should only be a copy of a part of the Roll in heaven. It is definitely not an attempt to duplicate the work of God, but rather to know His mind that the pastor might labor more effectively for Him.
2. By being a member of a church the Pentecostal saint brings practical encouragement to fellow believers of like precious faith and testifies to the world that the church is united in faith and doctrine.
3. Church membership places spiritual and financial responsibilities upon the entire body, which will be shared among all and not born by a few.
4. It confines various forms of Christian service to recognized and responsible members.
5. Membership brings the personal benefit of spiritual care by the pastor to each member. Each pastor should know the souls under his charge. Without a membership roll it would be quite difficult for a pastor to always know the souls over which he is placed as an overseer. In every church there are adherents and people who drift from church to church and the pastor naturally will give all the time he can afford to this group without showing respect of persons. Nevertheless it is the "members" of his "flock" that he is definitely responsible for before God.
6. Church discipline becomes almost impossible without a membership roll. This question is dealt with elsewhere in this Bible Study.
7. Church membership safeguards the public testimony of the assembly. Many times a backslider or a sinner who occasionally attends service is said by the public that he is Pentecostal or that he belongs to the assembly. If there is no membership, there can be no answer to the charge for he attends the services, which are for the public. However, if there is a membership roll the correction can easily be made and the testimony of the assembly safeguarded.
8. Every child of God should be a member of a "flock" and have a spiritual home where they can receive proper and prayerful spiritual shepherding. A believer who wanders around without a spiritual home never gets too much help for his own soul and certainly he can not be much of a help to anyone else. Church membership helps to prevent this evil and causes the individual to be stable and not just a "rolling stone" or a "Pentecostal tramp."

D. FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY ARE ESSENTIAL TO AN ASSEMBLY.

Saints do not lose their individualism when they are converted. They still have their own tastes, likings, personal desires and ambitions; they still have their own cultural background, home training, education and personality. The Holy Ghost baptized them into one body and places every member in the body as He sees fit. People coming from different walks of life are thrown together continually in church. Is it any wonder that sometimes there is disunity? The Apostle Paul, realizing this, exhorted the Ephesian church to "endeavor" to keep the unity of the Spirit. It is something that every saint must work towards. It will take real effort and labor many times to keep this unity. It is something that every Pentecostal pastor should watch carefully, and

through careful teaching instruct his flock along this line.

Fellowship and unity go together. Unless there is the unity of the Spirit in an assembly, there can be little fellowship among the members. Fellowship is an intimate relationship in which there is a common sharing and spiritual communion. The fellowship of the saints is in the Lord; their unity is of the Holy Spirit. This can only be a reality as we surrender our lives to God and live a holy life in the Spirit. *"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." (1 John 1:7).*

This then is the basic truth underlying all thought of fellowship and unity. There can be no fellowship between light and darkness, righteousness and sin, good and evil. To have true and lasting unity the sin question must be dealt with, and every known transgression repented of, confessed and placed under the blood.

E. THE PASTOR MAY REMEMBER SOME SIMPLE RULES IN PRE- SERVING UNITY.

It is part of the work of shepherding a flock to carefully foster the spirit of unity and to be on the watch for any sign of anything, which would break the spirit of fellowship existing in an assembly. Here are a few simple rules to remember:

1. Give the assembly regular teaching on unity.
2. Keep the saints busy working for Jesus.
3. Never show favoritism.
4. All signs of divisions and difficulties should be carefully and prayerfully dealt with immediately.
5. Keep all finances and business in a straightforward manner.
6. Visit the assembly regularly and faithfully.

LESSON TEN

SELF HELP TEST

A. Why is church membership necessary?

B. Give FIVE rules that a pastor may remember in preserving unity in an assembly:

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