



4050 80th Avenue North, Pinellas Park, Fl

SKYVIEW BULLETIN

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WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CONGREGATION, OR HOW TO BE A MEMBER



In last week's bulletin we explored the question, "Which New Testament Church Would We Join?" We examined some of the congregations in the New Testament and found that they all had some problems. In fact, had we lived then, we probably would not have chosen any of them. At best, we would have perhaps looked at the one that had the least problems.

We realize that today we are not going to find a perfect congregation to be a part of. So, rather than perfection, we must look for other criteria in making our choice.

We used Corinth as an example in last week's study and I would like for us to consider this congregation again. I am sure that this would not have been our choice had we lived in the 1st Century. We need to be reminded of some of their problems. We all know that there was serious division in that congregation. In fact, the church was probably in danger of splitting. They were divided over preachers and it was serious enough that Paul devoted a good portion of his first letter trying to correct this problem. A man in the congregation, apparently a well-respected individual was living with his father's wife and it was public knowledge. Paul even stated that it was a sin that pagans would not even be guilty of. This sin was a reproach to the congregation and to unbelievers. Furthermore, this congregation was suing one another in pagan courts of law. They were not partaking of the Lord's Supper in a proper manner. They were filled with jealousy over the spiritual gifts. They even had false teachers among them who were teaching error about the resurrection. If we had lived then and were looking for a congregation, Corinth would not have been our choice would it? If we had been a member at Corinth, we probably would have left, started another group or moved our membership to another church.

There are some things we need to understand when it comes to church membership. First, local churches are made up of sinful people. Congregations should not be thought of as resort hotels for the saved, but hospitals for souls that are lost. The pews of any congregation will be filled with imperfect people. Some members have weakness, some have challenges, some have flaws. Churches are made up of people who are at different levels of spirituality. There are new born babes, (new Christians) there are those who are at different stages of growth, there are those who have been Christians for many years who are stronger than others and then there are those who are in-between. We will fall somewhere into one of these categories. The thing we need to think about is not what a congregation might be able to offer (and what a church can offer is important) but rather, what can we offer the congregation? Will our being a member make it stronger or weaker?

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ELDERS

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PREACHER

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MEN WE SUPPORT

*William Stewart--Kingston, Canada
Bob Owen — Trip to Europe
Mike Mendez —trip to Cuba*

WORSHIP TIMES

SUNDAY

Worship.....9:30 A.M.
Classes.....10:50 A.M.
Worship.....6:00 P.M.

WORSHIP PLACE

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Being a member of a congregation has responsibilities. There are things that we must do, whether we are already a member or are looking for a place to call home. Consider some of these responsibilities.

Being involved is one. If I am not willing to be a part of the congregation and use my abilities, talents and time in its work, then I would be happier in a dead church where nothing is going on except worship three times a week. Everyone has some ability in some area. We must all be willing to do what we can. The New Testament compares the local church to a physical body with each member doing its own work. A local church is made up of eyes, legs, arms, eyes, feet, legs, etc. Each member is connected in some way to the other members. If we are not willing to do what we can then we might be more satisfied in a church where nothing is required but assembling with the saints. We can “fall through the cracks” and feel very comfortable doing nothing but assembling.

Being a member of a congregation has responsibilities.

Understand that Satan is at work in all congregations—except those he has already won over to his cause. Will churches have members who have succumbed to the devil? Certainly! Will churches have some hypocrites as members? Certainly. The devil wants to fill the church with ill feelings among the members with each other. He wants to infiltrate the congregation with false teaching. He wants to fill the members with bad attitudes resulting in quarreling, pettiness and a lack of knowledge. We should resist the devil where ever we are and in any congregation we choose to be a part of.

We need to understand why the church exists. I mentioned earlier that the church is a hospital for lost souls. Our purpose is to save people. We do not exist to provide comfort zones or to cater to the whims, opinions and wishes of the members. Our purpose is to fulfill the mission of evangelizing the world, beginning with our local communities. Obviously, when lost people are converted, they will bring into the fellowship of local churches certain baggage. When

we become a member of a congregation we are going to bring in our own baggage, whether we realize it or not.

We should realize that we may not always be comfortable. We must be uncomfortable with error and practices that are not scriptural. But to choose a church that makes us feel comfortable is missing the whole point of our purpose for existing.

Going back to the Corinthian church for a moment. We certainly would have probably felt uncomfortable with them. We would probably have concluded that they were practicing unscriptural things. We would have concluded that we could not partake of the Lord’s Supper with them in the proper way. We certainly would have thought that our children would not have been under the proper influence in this church. In fact, we most likely cannot think of one single good thing about this congregation.

But, there was something good. When Paul pointed out their error, they repented and corrected it! What a wonderful trait. Even though things were bad enough that we would not have wanted to be a part of this group, they had this great characteristic. They had to change things that are far more significant than things that divide brethren today.

Brethren divide today over the most insignificant things. Many towns have congregations within a few miles of each other, not because these congregations have outgrown their meeting houses, but because someone had a disagreement with a brother and left the congregation to start another group. Years go by and many do not even know why they divided in the first place. We often must choose between one of these groups.

What should we look for in a congregation? A group of people who love each other, who respect the authority of God’s word and try to follow it to the best of their ability. We should look for a group of people who want to go to heaven and want to take others with them. We should search out a group of people who do not have social or racial prejudices, but who realize the gospel is for all. We need to look at what we can offer to help solve the problems that may exist and not look for perfection. Perfection can only be attained in the life to come. Let’s strive for that.

CEM



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Repent—Luke 13:3
Confess—Rom. 10:9
Be Baptized—
Mk.16:16, Acts 2:38,
1 Pet. 3:21**