

## **Church Membership**

The New Testament clearly sets forth strong reasons for being a member of the Lord's church. In the church one serves under the headship of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18) to give glory to God (Ephesians 3:21). In Christ, His spiritual body the church, we enjoy all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), where there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). Each of these, I believe, refers to the church universal, to being a member of the body of Christ. There are duties which cannot be obeyed, blessings which cannot be received, unless and until one is also a member of a local congregation, such as the church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1), Smyrna (Revelations 1:8), etc.

The New Testament also sets forth strong, clear reasons for being a member of a local congregation. There is no such thing in the New Testament as a "member at large." Saul of Tarsus "assayed to join himself to the disciples" (Acts 9:26). To the immature, nominal ones who 'play church' all of the things to be mentioned may not seem like blessings. To those who truly want to go to heaven, the blessedness will be seen. Consider, with me, some blessing associated with membership in a local congregation.

### **Fellowship in Worship**

When we meet together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, as the spiritual children of the Heavenly Father, to offer worship to God, we can draw strength one from another. Our God recognized this need, and such is shown in our worship. When we are "making melody with y(our) heart(s) to the Lord" we are also "speaking one to another" (Ephesians 5:19), we are "teaching and admonishing one another" (Colossians 3:16). When we partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, we "proclaim the Lord's death" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Working alone, worshiping alone, standing alone, and serving alone are discouraging (see Romans 11:2-4). We ought to recognize the blessing of being able to worship with others.

### **Fellowship in Work**

The basic meaning of "fellowship" is "joint participation." Fellowship in work means that all are working. If you are not working (there is more work to be done than there are willing workers) you are not in this fellowship. Surely it is good, is a real blessing, to be able to share the work (consider 1 Corinthians 12:12ff). There are some people whom I cannot reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ, but you can reach them. For this, I thank God, and see a great blessing in having others (you) to work with me.

### **Being Able to Do Work Afar**

Few of us could individually support a gospel preacher . . . but together (in a local church) we can help with the Lord's work in other states, in other nations. Few of us could afford to preach over the radio, through the newspaper, publish a bulletin, etc., but together (as a local congregation of God's people) we can and do. Our little bit, in comparison to the great need, is multiplied and the work is being done. There is, beloved, much more to do.

### **Blessings of Brotherly Love**

In times of physical problems, thank God for brethren who care. In times of a spiritual crisis, some care enough to be there. Some love enough to "reprove, rebuke, exhort" (2 Timothy 4:1-2), when it is needed. "Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden" (Proverbs 27:5). It even helps when one says, "We missed you." When someone is there when we must cry "Help!" we have received a great blessing from God.

### **Watchful Care of Elders / Brethren**

If you are working, serving in a congregation that is fully organized, having qualified elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) who are concerned for your soul, you are enjoying a blessing from God, found only in being a member of a local church of Christ. The work of elders is limited to a local congregation (1 Peter 5:2). Elders must give account for your soul and how they worked for its salvation (Hebrews 13:17). Your obligation is to obey (Hebrews 13:17a); this is done only in the local church.

When an elder, as God's appointed shepherd of the flock, comes to you, as one of the lambs entrusted to him, to encourage, to strengthen, to reprove or to rebuke he is a blessing to you. Those people who are determined to live as the world will see such as meddlers or busy-bodies; but those who want to go to heaven will see a blessing from God. This blessing is given only through local church membership.

### **Church Discipline**

This, too, is a blessing. So many times when corrective discipline is mentioned someone will say, "It will drive them away." Such is not the purpose. We strive to bring the erring back to God's fold (2 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 Corinthians 2:5-9), thus the blessedness.

### **Conclusion**

We need to be thankful to God for all of his blessings to us. We need to be thankful for the blessings associated with being a child of God, a member of the body of Christ, which is the church of Christ. We also need to be thankful for the blessings associated with being a member of a local congregation.

**- by William V. Beasley**

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### ***Evasive Maneuvers***

We have a friend who has been telling us for a long time, "I'm not overweight; I'm just 6 inches too short!" When we learned that he was scheduled for an annual physical check-up, several of us predicted that the doctor would put him on a "no salt, no sugar, no nothin'" sort of diet.

After the doctor's appointment we were quick to ask, "Did he put you on a diet?" No! What a shock! How could this be? A little prying produced a confession. The reason the doctor had not ordered a diet was because our friend had volunteered at the very beginning of the exam that he was already trying to lose weight. No need for the doctor to give diet instructions when you tell him you're already on one, right? Pretty clever evasive action, wouldn't you agree?

Our friend is not the first one to stumble onto this method of escape. In fact, sinners have been doing it all through the ages. It is accomplished like this: if someone seeks to admonish you about a sin in your life, simply admit that you are already aware of the situation. For instance, when some brother comes to you because you are not attending the services regularly, just say, "I know I ought to do better", even if you have no plans to improve. It will disarm any attempt to restore you, but it does keep folks off your back. After all, you already know what you should be doing, right?

The point is this: you can try to evade the problem of sin in your life, but it doesn't solve anything. True repentance does. Try it!

**- by Greg Gwin**