

What It Means to be a Church Member

Sermon by Elder A.T. Jones, March 29, 1903
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In this sermon, delivered to the entire General Conference in Session in 1903, Alonzo T. Jones taught the Biblical teaching that Christ is the head of the church; so we are therefore only in this true church if we are truly in Him—and if, day by day, we are putting away sin and working for souls. Here is the complete message that he delivered that day. —*vf*

“Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

That, as says the Word, is the church that Christ will present to Himself when He comes. He loved that church, the church and gave Himself for it; and whosoever will be of that church when it shall be the glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, must love the church and give himself for it.

That is the church by whom God will give His last message to this world “in this generation.” But He cannot have that church by whom He can give that message, until He shall find a people who will love the church and give themselves for it.

This is in the philosophy of things as well; for is not it written, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”? And when that mind in Him led Him to love the church and to give Himself for it, what will that mind do in any other person? I need dwell no longer upon that.

The church is the body of Christ in the world. It is Christ manifested in the world; it is Christ Himself incarnate in the world.

And that church, being His body, being Himself manifested, to love that church and give Myself for it, is nothing less, and cannot be anything more, than to love Him and give myself for Him.

Membership in that church, then, comes not by belonging to the church in order to belong to Christ, but by belonging to Christ in order to belong to the church. And the difference between these two things is the difference between Christianity and the mystery of iniquity. The difference between these two things is the difference between the mystery of God and the mystery of iniquity. The mystery of iniquity exalts the form, the name, the idea, of the church, and then calls, and sweeps, and forces, all the world into that church, in order that it may be what the mystery of iniquity designs,—not for salvation, for salvation is not in it; not for righteousness, for righteousness is not in it. The people are the same as before, though they bear a different name. They conform to different forms of things than they did before; but in character, in life, in all that they ever were, they are the same as though they were not members of the church at all.

But the church, the church of Christ, is Himself manifested. Therefore to belong to this church we must belong first to Him. And membership in this church depends altogether upon our membership of Him. And being in this

church depends altogether upon our being in Him.

Then when we come into the church by coming into Him, and be in the church by being in Him, that makes a new people. That changes the individual into another man. That makes him a Christian, such as is Christ, Christ manifest.

Then we need to consider ourselves daily, each one for himself, and ask, “Am I a member of the church? Not because I am enrolled on the books of the church. Not, I am a member of the church because I have joined the church, and that is my dependence. But, Am I a member of the church because my name is in the book of life? Am I a member of the church because I have given myself to Christ, and belong to Him, and live and move and have my being in Him?” Such as these are the only members of the church that there are on this earth. It matters not how much we have our names on the church books, nor how long we have been members of the church by joining what is an idea of the church in form, a collection of individuals. It matters not how much we do that, nor how long it be done. We will never be members of the church that way.

And though it should be that opportunity or circumstances prevent your name from being on any book on earth, or in any collection of individuals on the earth, yet if you are joined to Him, and live in Him, you are a member of the church, though you be the only soul on earth. That is the only true membership of the church of Christ, and that is the only way to membership in the church of Christ.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it in order that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word; in order that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Therefore this same mind must be in every one, in order that we should be Christians. The only thing for us to do is to love the church and give ourselves for it, that we may be sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the Word, that we may be presented to Him, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. We are familiar with the thought that Christ “loved me and gave Himself for me.” And we read in that, with other scriptures to the same purpose, that, in loving me and giving Himself for me, He loved me and gave Himself to me.

It is the same with the church. He loved the church and gave Himself for the church; and in loving the church and giving Himself for the church, He has loved the church and given Himself to the church. Then when I, from Him, with His mind, and by Him, love the church and give myself for it, I love the church and give myself to it, so that I literally belong to the church.

A few words upon that. It is a common expression, “Such and such person belongs to the church,” “I belong to the church.” The question for us to ask nowadays is, Do I belong to the church, or do I belong to the world? Do I belong to myself, or to the world; or am I possessed, owned and held by the church, so that I literally belong to the church? Have I surrendered myself to the church? to Christ?

That is the kind of church that Christ left when He went

2 away, or at least, that He had in a few days afterward, when He bestowed the Holy Spirit. That is the kind of church, in other words, that He sent into the world to begin His great work on the earth. And that church of that kind, few in numbers, reached the world with Christ's message in that generation, that was half gone when they began. It is not a question of numbers, not of the size of the world, nor anything of that kind that is for us to consider today in giving this message to the world. The one thing for us to consider is, Do the Seventh-day Adventists all belong to the church? That one question settled, with the seventy-five thousand Seventh-day Adventists today,—that these seventy-five thousand, each, individually, for himself, belongs to the church. —The easiest problem that could ever occur on the earth would be to give the third angel's message in this generation.

There were one hundred and twenty Christians to begin with that day when Pentecost fell. There are now enrolled not less than 75,000 Seventh-day Adventists. The world is not as much bigger today than when it was when the apostles began from Pentecost, as the numbers of Seventh-day Adventists are more than the number then. Then when that little company could preach the gospel to the world so that the Scripture could say "to every creature under heaven," in the generation that was then half gone, because they belonged to the church, so, today, it is perfectly easy for this number to reach the world in the rest of this generation, if only we shall all belong to the church.

There is abundant means. Seventh-day Adventists have plenty of money, but it does not all belong to the church. That is the trouble. There is enough money amongst Seventh-day Adventists today to give an impetus to this message that would reach the world in the rest of this generation, if only that money can belong to the church. There are enough facilities, there is enough talent, there is enough ability, all the supplies that are ever needed, or ever shall be needed, if only those facilities, this talent, those faculties, shall belong to the church.

And it is a question worth asking, If my money belongs to the world, do I belong to the church? If my talents, my abilities are put into the work of the world, as of the world, and not into the work of the church, as of the church, then the question is worth considering, Do I belong to the church myself?

That turns our attention to the question, How much does it take to compose me? How much is there of a man? Could you have a man here, and his faculties yonder, his abilities in another place, and the fruit of his faculty, the fruit of his abilities, the results of his life and endeavor, in yet another place? Could that be, and the man be here,—all of him?—No sir. All my faculties, all the fruit of my life, must be where I am, if I myself am to be there. We cannot escape that. Then do I belong to the church? Do I? That is the question. Do these 75,000 Seventh-day Adventists belong to the church? Do we? That is the question.

To illustrate: Suppose that I have my name on the church book, belonging to the church. I am a schoolteacher and I spend all my time, all my endeavor, all my ability, and all my faculty as a schoolteacher in the world's school-teaching; and, teaching in the world's school, in the world's way, in the world's education. It is worth asking, Do I belong to the church? Am I loving the church and giving myself for it?

Whatever I may profess, my faculties, my life, what I am in the ability which God has given me, I am giving it to the world, for the world's work, and to the world's purposes.

That is so. Then am I loving the church and giving myself for it? Do I belong to the church?

Suppose I am a physician, and I give my ability, my talent, my faculties, my life, and my endeavor to the world's way of what is called medicine, the world's way of treating disease. I stand as a member of the church, as belonging to the church, and I am to be sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the Word of God. And in that Word of God there is given to the church the divine, the true system of medical treatment, the true philosophy and treatments with regard to health, disease, right living, and all these things. I belong to the church, to be sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by that Word. Instead of doing what that Word gives to me, to which I am committed as belonging to the church, I take what the world gives, and devote to the world that which I get from the world, and I belong to the church. Do I?

I belong to the church for the purpose of being sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the Word of God, to the church.

There is in that Word, and that Word itself is, a system of education.

That is the true, and is the only true, education. I say I belong to the church, but I am satisfied with the world's education, with the world's system of education, with the world's philosophy of education, and I devote my life to that. I want to know, Do I really belong to the church? It is precisely so also as to medical or any other profession.

I am a man of other affairs in the world, whether it be business, or farming, or carpenter work; I mean the everyday, commercial, business world. I stand as belonging to the church, and in the efforts which I put forth of thought, of endeavor, the blessing of God upon it all, increase comes. I put it in the worldly bank. I am nor a speculator; I belong to the church. But here is the means God has given to me as a member of the church, and I put it into the worldly bank; I loan it to worldly men to be used in worldly business, instead of in the work of the church, to which I belong. Then it is a fair question for me to ask, Do I belong to the church?

These references are enough to illustrate. And now there is not one here of these delegates who cannot look all over this land and see thousands upon thousands of Seventh-day Adventists who stand in a position as belonging to the church, which leaves a wide-open question for each one to ask. Do I belong to the church? And every one here knows that if all the Seventh-day Adventists in the United States, from this day and forward, would really belong to the church, you yourself will confess that there is no question at all but that this message could be given to the world in this generation. You can all say amen to that. You know that that is so. Then you see, brethren, the problem is not difficult. It is just this question to be decided, by each one, for himself, Do I belong to the church?

And now shall not I, finding myself, my faculties, or my means wrapped up in the work of the world, used in behalf of the world, or engaged in the world's work,—shall not I, will not you, whirl it away from there, and put it into the church's work, enlist it in the cause of the church in the earth, to which I belong? Let that be done, and you know that spiritually it would shake this world out of its place.

Think of it! If all the Seventh-day Adventists in the United States would really consider this, and love the church, give themselves, with their children, for the church, and to the church, how would our school work stand? It would stand

where it ought. And such consecration as that would bring such power from heaven that the teaching would be easy. The lack of teachers would not be such as it is now.

And so, with all the rest, if all the Seventh-day Adventists in the land would turn their families unto Christian education unto the education that becomes the church, and that the world is calling for the church to give, and for the want of which, and because of the lack of which, the world itself is saying that the church in education is a distinctly diminishing quantity. —If this were done, the world could easily be reached in this generation.

It is time that there should be one church in the world that would arise and be, not a diminishing quantity in education, but be the whole thing in education. If the Seventh-day Adventists would really give themselves to the church, loving it and giving themselves for it, with all their talents, and all their means, and all their powers, then the whole problem would be solved. The world's facilities are abundant. In Brother Daniell's discourse last night, that was presented to us all.

Brother Conradi today showed how the fields are open and all ready unto the harvest. The prophecies, so abundant, showing that now is the time have been presented. Oh, let this people present ourselves to Christ today, loving the church and giving ourselves for it! Let this people, I say, present ourselves to Christ as His church, to love that church, to give ourselves for it, and to give ourselves to it, with all our effort and all the fruit of our effort, of whatsoever kind. Then, oh, it will be as it was before; this will be a holy church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

The church is the pillar and the ground, the support and the stay, of the truth in the world. The only means by which this world can ever obtain truth is by the church. It may be that the church, like the church of Israel and Judah, will not of itself voluntarily spread that truth abroad to the world. The people may, like Israel and Judah, shut themselves within themselves, and turn the truth of God awry, put other things in its place, and shut themselves away from the world, and thus fail to give it to the world. But if that must be so, then that church will be scattered, as was Israel and as was Judah, amongst the nations of the heathen; and there, in oppression and in bondage, the nations will find the truth through the church. So, whichever way it may be, the only way that the nations can get the truth is from the church. The only way that God's truth can reach the nations is through the church.

Therefore this is how it is that the church of Christ, which is the body of Christ, is the pillar and the ground, the support and the stay, of the truth in the world. It is that which keeps alive the truth in the earth.

How, then, can the world obtain the truth from me, as of the church, when all my efforts are enlisted and spent in the world's occupation and in the world's philosophy of occupation? Can that be done?—No, sir. The world cannot see the church in me in that condition of things. In order for the truth to reach the world by me, who am of the church, it is essential that I shall do the work as the work of the church. If I am a farmer, I farm as of the church. If I am a teacher, I am a teacher as of the church, a representative of the church. If I am a physician, I am a representative of the church, and I do my work as the work of the church. Therefore this call that every one of us who professes to belong to the church shall so really belong to the church that everything in our lives, in our actions, everything that comes into the course

of our lives, shall be distinctly of the church, shall relate to the church, and we will hold it up to the glory of God as of the church.

Then, oh, then, that the church will be so filled with the truth, and will be so sanctified by the truth with which she is filled, that the glory of God which is in that truth will shine forth, and the world will see her, that glorious church. The glory of the Lord shall be seen upon thee, and the Word will be fulfilled that she shall arise and shine, for her light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon her. You know that that is so.

Now, all this is only to have said, in other words, that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished as He hath declared to His servants the prophets.

That mystery of God finished is the gospel preached to all the world, that the end may come. That mystery of God finished in the world is the work of God finished in preaching the gospel to the nations.

And it is more than that. Along with that, the mystery of God is God manifest in the flesh. The finished mystery of God is the completion, the perfection, of the manifestation of God in the flesh, in the believers in Jesus who belong to the church.

Thus there are two places occupied in the finishing of the mystery of God. One place is the world itself, to which the gospel is to be preached; the other place is the lives of the believers of the truth.

We might preach and proclaim in words to the ends of the earth, to every soul on earth in our generation, so that phase of the work would be completed, and would be finished; yet if the manifestation of God in the lives of those who preach that is not completed also, we could preach that thing ten thousand years, and the end would never come. It is not simply that the gospel shall be preached to all the world, and fill all the world; but it is that when that is done, there shall be a people ready to meet Him at the end. Without the finishing of that manifestation of God in the flesh of each believer, there can be no finishing of the mystery of God. That mystery finished, God manifest in the flesh—mark it—means that only God is to be seen in every act of life of the believer; so that in his life God is manifest. Only that is the finishing of the mystery of God, in the way that it counts. And you know that if that way were wide open, and God were to take possession and fill the lives of the 75,000 professed believers today, it would be the easiest thing in the world to reach all the nations, so that the end should come.

Again: You know that the mystery of God is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Then the finished mystery of God is the finishing of the growth, the manifestation of Christ in the believers, so that we shall stand in this world in the image of Jesus Christ, reflecting only Him, that when the believers shall be seen, only Christ will be seen:

Everything that is said, everything that is done, every tone of the voice, all that we are, will tell only of Christ. Only that is the finishing of the mystery of God in truth, in the way that it counts.

And that is what has to come before the end can come. That is the church that He presents to Himself.

But more: The gift of the grace of God and of His Spirit is to the church "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building of the body of Christ," the building up of the church, till we all come—do not forget it—"till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge

4 of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;" that we shall stand in this world as Christ stood when He was here. Only that is the finishing of the mystery of God.

But this is not difficult. It need not take long, because Christianity is creation, not evolution. God speaks, and it is so. It takes not a long series of ages to develop, to evolve. No. We are His workmanship, created in Christ unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. All that is needed is surrender.

All that is needed to put this denomination, this whole collection of people, into the church, and to make us of the church that the work shall be finished in this generation, is unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ, and that surrender everlastingly maintained.

And this finishing of the mystery of God is only, in another way, the story of the cleansing of the sanctuary. When the angel talked on the subject of the twenty-three hundred days, he did it differently from the way that I used to present it, and from the way that I have heard many others talk. When the angel of God came to talk to Daniel on the subject of the two thousand and three hundred days, he began thus:

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city."

They will begin at the "going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem" and will continue "sixty-nine weeks, unto the Messiah the Prince;" and then, after that, eighteen hundred and ten and one-half years, which will bring it to 1844; and then shall the sanctuary be cleansed. That is in it, but that is not the angel's sermon here.

Listen: This is what the angel said, and this is what he preached in the twenty-three hundred days: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy." Any preaching of the sanctuary, any study of the sanctuary, any proclamation of the sanctuary, that does not preach and proclaim the finishing of transgression in the life of him who preaches it; that does not mean, and manifest itself in the making an end of sins in his life; that does not include the making of reconciliation of iniquity in him who gives the message; that does not bring everlasting righteousness into the life of him who is preaching; is not preaching the message of the cleansing of the sanctuary at all.

The messenger leaves out the very thing that the angel of God, in presenting it, makes the substance of the whole story.

Yet brethren are in this audience today who know of men who could run the gamut of the twenty-three hundred days, giving by rote every chapter and every verse, yet who did not know in their lives the finishing of transgression, that did not know the making an end of their sins, who knew no reconciliation for their own iniquity, and had no everlasting righteousness brought in to keep them back from sinning.

You know that that is so. Then that kind of preaching of the sanctuary and of its cleansing will never bring the cleansing of the sanctuary, and will never bring us to the end. No, sir.

There is a cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven. That is true. And while that is going on in heaven, and there is the making an end of sins there, and a reconciliation of iniquity

there, and finishing of transgression there, and all that, yet if that is not also done in the saints and believers on the earth, then that cleansing of the sanctuary can never end. We never could, in that case, come to the end of this world. So the cleansing of the church of the saints on earth must keep equal pace, must be exactly in proportion with the cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven, or that church will not be up to date.

Now let me put it the other way: Though I preach the finishing of transgression in the lives of individuals; and though I preach the making an end of sins, and the making of reconciliation for iniquity, and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness, in the life of the individual; and yet do not preach with it the sanctuary and its cleansing, that is not the third angel's message. That great day cannot come till the sanctuary is cleansed. The sanctuary cannot be cleansed until transgression is finished in your life and mine; till an end of sins is made in your life and mine; and reconciliation made for the sins that have been committed; and then, oh, then, in place of it all, everlasting righteousness brought in, to hold us steady in the path of righteousness.

You know what difficulties we have had of keeping righteousness in the life. We love it; we give ourselves to it, in surrender. But this comes up, and that comes up, and the other, and we grow feeble, and fail, and lose the power of that righteousness out of the life that alone can make it everlasting righteousness. Oh, then, in this Seventh-day Adventist Church, amongst these people who stand as belonging to the church, there is need of such a cleansing of the sanctuary, such an idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary as will finish transgression in the life of every Seventh-day Adventist, will make an end of sins there, and will make reconciliation for all the sins that have ever been there, and bring in, oh, to bring in everlasting righteousness,—a righteousness that comes to stay, a righteousness, that comes to abide, a righteousness that comes to rule everlastingly, and to keep us unto that everlasting inheritance and to take us to everlasting mansions!

Your hearts and minds witness that only that can be any true cleansing of the sanctuary. And your hearts and minds will witness also to this, that if there can be such consecration, such surrender, as that; if there can be the receiving of such cleansing as that and belonging to the church, indeed as this is; the giving of this message, the finishing of this work, with delay no longer, can be accomplished in the generation that remains.

And, brethren, your hearts will testify, also, that without these things we can talk, and talk, and talk, about it, and it all be true; but we can talk it all, and it will not finish in this generation.

Then here we are. Now shall we not, oh, shall we not, truly give ourselves to belong, literally to belong, to the church, loving the church, giving ourselves for it, giving ourselves to it, that thus we may be cleansed in this day of the cleansing of the sanctuary, with the washing of water by the Word; that Christ may present it to Himself, as He has been longing, longing, all these years to do, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish?