



## **SFCNA News and Views**

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“...in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the spirit” (Eph. 2:22)

This brief article is the first of a series of articles under the title “Sharon Fellowship Churches of North America: News and Views.” I thank God for the pastors and members of the Sharon Fellowship Churches here in the United States. Though there are thousands of Sharon Fellowship Church members from India in the United States, we have only a few local churches in the U.S. that have stood together as a fellowship. It is my privilege to work with all of them with the same vision the Lord gave to our founding leaders.

### News and Views

Our news is the good news of the forgiveness of sin and salvation for all, which is the basic teaching of the Holy Bible. In other words, the word *News* has to do with the written word of God, the Bible and *views* means the interpretation or the correct understanding the word of God. Thanks to Brother Sam Thomas, our web master for making these articles available to all our readers. I encourage the members and friends of SFCNA to become regular readers and to introduce others to SFCNA News and Views.

Over 50 years ago when I was a small boy, Pentecostals had only a few Christian publications or literature available to them in India. Now we have plenty of good writers and a great deal of inspirational, Christian material at our fingertips. But still, the “Church” as a whole is facing a number of challenges. Unfortunatley, most of those challenges come from within. The second and third generation of Pentecostals from Kerala origin are facing a number of problems. Most of them do not see the difference between scripture, tradition and culture. Because of this, there is a wide gap between our children and their parents on a number of issues. On top of that, many Christian leaders operate out of their selfish interests and our children have lost their trust in those leaders. I hope and pray that the following paragraphs will help readers understand the Biblical concept of the church and try to live accordingly.

### The Dwelling Place of God

According to our text (Eph. 2:22), the church is the dwelling place of God. Bible scholars have written volume after volume on “The Church”. My intension here is to remind my readers that the Church truly is the dwelling place of God. This is according to St. Paul, a man who clearly understood the mystery of the Church by revelation.

Pastors and believers must work together on a regular basis to make their gathering the dwelling place of God. The New Testament does not give us an official order of service

for a Sunday morning, or a list of things to do during other services. Our Lord Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that the "...true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23) When sinners are made free from their sins by knowing the truth and allowing the Holy Spirit to control their lives, the worship services will be in order. When Peter, James and John were on Mount Tabor, they beheld the glory of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14) In the dwelling place of God, there is the proclamation of the word of God, prayer, songs of praise and worship, time of fellowship, exercising the fruits and gifts of the spirit, etc. This is done in an orderly fashion pleasing to God...not necessarily "in a specific order." Through these acts of worship, there can be healing in the body and soul.

In the Garden of Eden, God came down to fellowship with Adam and Eve. (Genesis 3:8) In the book of Revelation we read about the Tabernacle of God with man. (Rev 21:3) The ultimate purpose of creation was for God to dwell with his people. (Eph. 1:4) Yes, the Church is the dwelling place of God, as revealed in the Bible.

### The Lordship of Christ

Upon St. Peter's confession of his faith that "Jesus Christ is the son of living God," Jesus made a public declaration that *He* will build *His* church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mathew 16:18). There is no need to elaborate the above point, because, all Bible believing Christians believe that the church belongs of God; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Our problem today is that instead of being good stewards of the Lord for the Church, Christian leaders act like they own the church and almost become dictators. Our Lord Spoke in future tense that *He* will build the church. Though apostles like Peter were instrumental for great conversions like that of 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost, they never claimed ownership over any of it. Peter addressed himself as a bond servant and an apostle, just like St. Paul did (11 Pet. 1:1). Similarly, pastors, evangelists, or even t the SFCNA do not own the body of Christ. We are only a tiny portion of the church at large, and we truly believe that God is Lord over every individual, family, local church and denomination as a whole.

### Being built by the Holy Spirit

After the great declaration that "I will build the church," Jesus promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit from the Father to be with us until the end of this dispensation (John 14:16). St. Paul tells us that we are being built together. In theory, Christians accept the fact that the Holy Spirit is the builder of the church, but not in practice!

We must not forget the truth that the Holy Spirit will never contradict the written word of God. When the Holy Spirit speaks through an individual in the world, he will remind or explain the written word of God. We must also remember that the spirit of God dwells in the hearts of every born again Christian. God is not a God of confusion. God will not tell

me something, and say just the opposite to another Christian. This has been a major problem in Kerala among the Pentecostals. We experience a lot of fighting and division among our people and pretty much all of them will say that the Holy Spirit directed them to act in certain ways. When the spirit dwells in individuals and churches, the fruits of the spirit will be manifested. The Spirit of God does not divide us, but rather, brings His people together.

As a result of having the fruits of the spirit, there is unity in the church. Paul speaks in the present tense that “we are being built”. It is an ongoing process. Christians who are filled with love, joy, peace, and longsuffering always strive for unity and team work, rather than alienation and division. Please remember that the word of God has authority over every man-made gap, whether it has to do with age, generation, tradition, or culture. Without sacrificing our fundamental faith, we must always work hard to bring unity in our homes and churches. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to build us together!

### Two stages in the Building Process

For the last two thousand years, the Holy Spirit has been using men and women from all walks of life to build the church. It happens in 2 stages. First by the proclamation of the gospel, sinners are being born again into the kingdom of God. Secondly they are being disciplined to observe all things whatsoever that the Lord has taught us. On the day of Pentecost all those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ received baptism, followed by the confession of their faith. They sat at the apostles’ feet to study the scriptures and experience growth. The early Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit having both the fruits and the gifts of the spirit. God wants every Christian to be a soul winner, although, some people have the special gift of soul winning.

When believers experience spiritual growth, they are to be more and more like Jesus. Saint Paul asks the believers to have the mind of Christ in them. (Philippians 2:5) In this building process, both pastors and believers are deeply involved. Several of our believers in SFCNA had the vision and have taken initiative in starting new churches. I thank God for all of our pastors and believers who are serving as board members. Several of our lay people are excellent administrators. Our desire is to extend a right hand of fellowship to all who want to join us. Because the Holy Spirit is the builder, our commitment is to work with other fellow Christians as much as possible. We will find the ways and means to be joined together, rather than to be alienated.

In conclusion let me quote a line from a beautiful hymn, which should be familiar to us all, *Have Thine Own Way*:

“...Thou art the potter and I am the clay”.

Let the holy spirit build us and mold us more and more into the image of Christ. Then, and only then, will He use us to build His kingdom here on earth. In the building process we do not want to leave anyone behind. Together let us move forward!