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FREE PEWS.

“SHALL our pews be free or rented?” is a question which will meet the minister sooner or later in whatever parish he may be placed; and if he has clear and decided views in reference to it he can, usually, with the exercise of tact and prudence, carry his congregation with him. Some of our students may, this summer, bear the responsibility of settling this matter for the congregations to which they minister. Affecting, as it does, the relation of the Church to the outside world, as well as the relation of the brethren, rich and poor, to one another, the problem is an important one and deserves our careful attention. The question involved is not as to whether we should contribute to the support of ordinances, but on what principle we should do so. When pews are rented, the amount of a man's contribution is determined by his pew. The sittings in the church are classified; the more eligible costing more, and the less eligible costing less. On this system the amount which the head of a family is expected to contribute to the support of the congregation is determined by the number of sittings he requires, and the part of the church in which these sittings are located. On the free pew system particular sittings are chosen by families and individuals and held by them as on the other system; for if things are to “be done decently and in order,” each worshipper should have an appointed place in the sanctuary. But what of his contribution to the support of the sanctuary? That is determined by his *ability* to give and not by his *pew*. If he is a rich man he gives more, if a poor man he gives less. Thus, in the one case, he simply pays a rental, which is more or less, according to his *pew*; in the other case he presents an offering, which is more or less, according to his *ability*.

We express our very decided preference for the latter method; and we give a few reasons.

(1.) It is *fairer* than the pew rent system. Take an illustration which can easily be duplicated by those charged with renting church pews. The sittings in a church cost, per year, from three to six dollars each. A poor man requiring six sittings and wishing to be independent, must pay at least eighteen dollars a year; while a rich man requiring but two sittings need pay, at most, but twelve dollars; and the twelve dollar man takes a rich man's place, while the eighteen dollar man takes a poor man's place, thus suffering a double injustice.

(2.) Again, with free pews, we can more easily reach the masses. And this is our mission. The Church of Christ is not a joint stock company whose great business is to look after the interests of the shareholders. The

Church is a missionary institution; and her business is to “go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.” These care little for the Church or the gospel, and often make pew rent and its accompaniments their excuse for not entering a place of worship. They resent accepting a free pew where others pay for theirs, but are quite at ease in giving little or nothing to the voluntary contributions. However inconsistent, this is a fact. Admit them, however, to the gospel feast, literally without money and without price, and when they have tasted and seen that God is good, they will see things differently. Having freely received they will freely give; and thus the work will go on. Again, pew rent is a real difficulty with many spirited, independent, but poor people who love the house of God.

(3.) The free pew is more scriptural than the rented pew. As children of one family the word of God would have “the rich and poor meet together, the Lord is the maker of them all,” and it requires each one to offer for the service of the sanctuary “as God hath prospered him.” But with the classified pew rent we virtually say to the rich man, “Sit thou here in a good place,” and say to the poor “Sit thou here under my footstool;” and thus we “have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, with respect of persons.”

The pew rent method in the more mechanical one, and is more readily understood by worldly people; but the Church of God must conduct her affairs on a Biblical basis; and, to do this, her officers must have the moral courage not only to enlighten men's intellects, but also to deal with their consciences on this as on other matters. If a man will not pay for his pew when he is able to do so, the officers reason with him and instruct him, and, if need be, they are likely, as a last resort, to put him under discipline by depriving him of his pew. Why not put him under the same discipline if he will not give according to his ability? Is it right for the officers of a church to deal with a man for breaking a by-law of a congregation, and allow him to go on openly setting at nought a divine precept?

These remarks, of course, apply to the members of the Church. In the case of outsiders, careless people, we are glad to have them come in and hear the word of God that they may be saved; but when a man professes to be a child of God and is received as a member of the Church, he should be asked to contribute for its support according as God has prospered him. “Behold this is the law of the house.”

ECCLESIASTICUS.