

### BUILDING UP THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

November 1, 2015

Sometimes we come across congregations of the Lord's people who are happy to just simply exist. Recall the church at Laodicea, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16). The brethren at that location were not prepared to grow in spirit and number. Anytime that is the case, even when conversions occur, the new Christian is in great danger of falling away. Both individually and collectively, we must prepare to do what we can do to help build up the local congregation.

As a body, we must offer an enthusiastic worship service. That doesn't mean one that has been modernized in order to fit man's view of what worship should be, but it must still be enthusiastic. When a visitor comes for the first time, do they witness a group that appears as if they would rather be anywhere else other than the assembly? Do we mumble more than we sing? Do we concentrate more on balancing our check books than on the prayer being said? We have heard it said, "You only have one chance at a first impression," and that holds true for a first time visitor to the assembly.

We should also be on the lookout for new faces in the crowd and make a point for them to enjoy our friendliness, warmth, love, and our enthusiasm as followers of God. New converts themselves rely heavily on the spiritual nourishment they gain from each worship service. We often quote Hebrews 10:25 in regard to attendance and rightly so, but notice verses 24 and 25. The Hebrews writer explains the importance of our coming together for worship, which is to provoke each other to love and good works! If we are absent, we cannot show our love or assist in good works; and new converts, as well as, visitors notice our absences.

As a body, we must offer encouragement. There may be members on the verge of falling away and a kind word or deed may be all that is needed to keep that from happening; or someone may feel left out of the group and not feel like a part of the family. People face trials and tribulation in this life and often have no one to turn to outside of their church family. Paul wrote, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please *his* neighbour for *his* good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me" (Rom. 15:1-3).

Now, let us turn our attention inward and consider how "I" can help build up the local congregation. First, we must confirm our relationships with God. No matter how strong it is, the relationship we share with God can always improve as we mature as a Christian. Our brethren, as well as those that have not obeyed the gospel, must see in each of us the intimate relationship we have with the heavenly Father. At times, we may get caught up in the "academic" knowledge we have and rely more on that than on the personal relationship we need to foster. Paul understood in his own life that he needed to mature and strengthen his relationship with God. He said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:12-14).

We must then construct relationships with our brethren. The love and unity we share with each other is a key characteristic a non-member must notice in us. The Lord commanded, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:34-35). We all have strong relationships with some of our brethren in that we share things in common. However, we should strive to find common ground with all our brethren.

As a top priority in our service to God, we must concentrate on the lost. Christ pointed out that the light from a candle does no good if it is placed under a basket (Mt. 5:15). If we are ever going to be successful in taking the gospel to the lost, they must first understand that we care for their souls and have a genuine interest in them. We have to spend some time with people building friendships before we can offer them the answer to man's greatest problem, sin. A simple act of hospitality can go a long way in building those relationships. Of course, we would never engage in questionable behavior in order to build a friendship, but if we are not in contact with those in the world, we cannot be a good influence upon them.

As we strive to find our place in the body of Christ, we must be diligent in developing our talents both as individuals and as a congregation and have the attitude of a servant. If we do these things, the Lord's body cannot help but grow in number and in faith!