

CONGREGATIONAL COMPETITION

H. E. Phillips

I recently read a report of the growth of churches of Christ in America. How authentic or accurate it was I do not know, but the figures were impressive. Only one sour note appeared in the otherwise perfect progress report: there were nearly seven congregations for every preacher. This suggested the all out effort to educate more preachers. The most exciting part of the report was the tremendous growth of congregations in various cities. One city had only one small church in 1960, but now there are five (small) churches. This is an example of growth!

The unscriptural and antiscritptural views of Charles Holt and Harold Spurlock and associates in *Sentinel of Truth* on the functional entity of local congregations of Christ are fertilized by the greedy competitive maneuvering of some congregations in some areas. Of course, one position does not justify another any more than violence is justified by passive indifference.

To deny the existence of local churches with scriptural organization, is to deny such scriptures as Philippians 1:1, Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5 and others.

No informed person would deny our responsibility of teaching the gospel to every creature and baptizing those who believe and repent (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16). No one would deny that the church should make increase unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16). Every honest Christian desires scriptural growth of both himself as an individual and the body of Christ.

Growth may refer to different things. Growth may be in number, in knowledge, in respect from others, or growth in financial power. The usual measurements by which brethren today tell of their growth is in the number in attendance and in the contribution. This is a false measurement of true growth because it does not take into account all or the most important factors. Some congregations may have many members who are wealthy and give more than others but sacrifice far less. The number of dollars per week does not tell of strength or growth. They may be like the Laodiceans who

thought themselves rich, but the Lord said they were poor (Rev. 3:14-19). Others may gauge their success or failure on the number they can get to attend the various public assemblies for worship. Great meetings are planned with well-known speakers with a view of drawing members from neighboring congregations, and little thought is given to those of the world. Gimmicks are used by some to draw the crowds and then that congregation is on the march.

The great harm done by the congregational competition growing out of these false measurements of true growth is the internal decay in spiritual things, and the friction created between brethren. We forget that we are marching under one Leader against a common enemy: the Devil. Brethren become competitors for large numbers on the congregational level and forget the lost world. An example or two of the competition between congregations that hinders the true growth of the kingdom will serve to illustrate the dangers.

An eager, zealous, young preacher wants to demonstrate his ability to make a congregation grow, so he begins to canvass the community to get all the "strays" (wayward members) back to the assemblies. This is commendable and he receives encouragement from the brethren. Soon he must turn to other fields for numerical growth, so he begins to campaign in other congregations with various appeals to individuals to "transfer membership" to the church where he preaches. He has no difficulty in persuading the zealous "personal workers" of his congregation to assist him in moving in as many from other churches as possible. This proves his ability to make a church grow and convinces most in that congregation that this is the way to enlarge the kingdom of Christ.

Now when several churches in the same city begin this campaign you can imagine what the results will be. Brethren will become alienated because of pressures put upon them by some to move their membership from one place to another. Congregations in the same city develop the feeling of being competitors instead of working toward the same goal of saving souls.

Another example is to build as many churches (buildings) as possible in a community. The prize goes to the church that is responsible for the most

Reverence In The Worship

"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him."---Psalms 89:7.

One of the most vitally needed lessons in the church today is that of reverence. "Reverence" means "profound respect, affection; veneration" (Webster). Worship is not an accidental thing...one must prepare himself for this holy privilege.

God required reverence in Old Testament worship (Ex. 3:5). Likewise, in the new Testament (Christian) worship today God requires reverence. God dwells in the church...not the church building...but in the church, in Christians (Eph. 2:22). No matter where we meet for worship, Christ is present (Matthew 18:20).

How can we manifest reverence for Jehovah in Worship?

1. By entering the worship with joy and gladness (Psalms 122:1). So eager and enthusiastic should we be about the worship unto Jehovah, that we will be on time, with the ushers, the song leader ready to sing, the preacher ready to preach, and the worshippers ready to worship.

2. By being silent. "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silent before him. (Hab. 2:20). Silence is evidence of respect for the Lord. Silence in the presence of the dead indicates respect for that person. Should we not be quieter than we usually are when we assemble to worship God, and not be so noisy and boisterous?

3. By being orderly. Christians are commanded to "let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40). Certainly this should apply to our worship. While worship should not be so ritualized as to destroy the very simplicity and spirit of Christian worship, yet there should be enough orderliness to promote reverence. To be orderly in worship let us be neat in our personal appearance. While attending the funeral service of a loved one or friend, we are careful to dress properly, out of respect for the deceased. How much more, then, should, we dress properly for Christian worship out of reverence for God.

May this brief meditation encourage us to worship the Lord "in spirit and in truth," that we may have the proper reverence for Jehovah, so justly due him.



Never Warn A Friend?

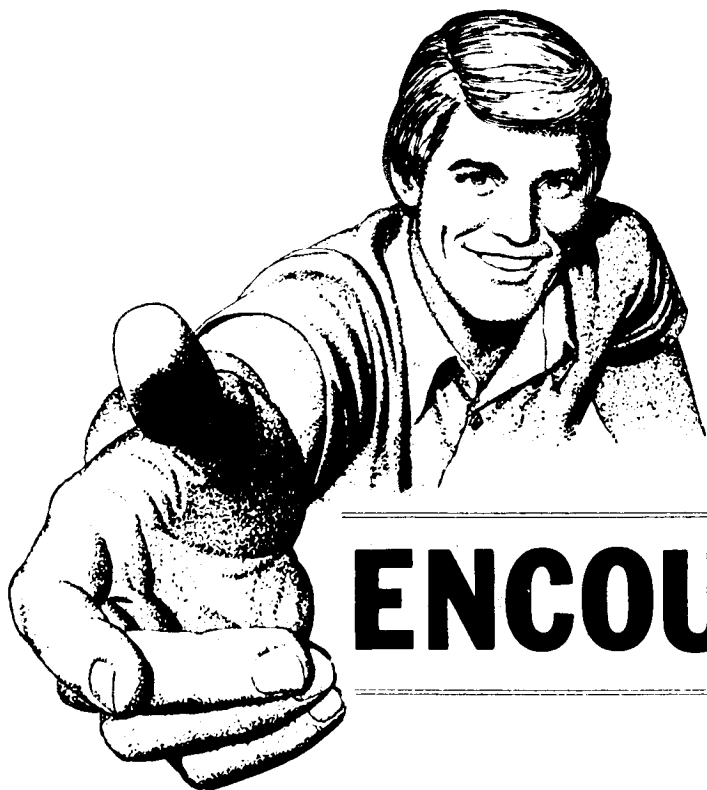
Would someone please tell me why it is that if a lawyer finds a flaw in the title to a piece of property and does not warn about it, he has not done his duty; and if a bank examiner finds discrepancies in the accounts of a bank and does not report them, he is derelict; and if a doctor discovers symptoms of a terrible disease and does not pursue a correct diagnosis, he is a quack; BUT if a preacher sees flaws in one's account of heavenly treasures and reports them or discovers some symptom of spiritual weakness and diagnoses a gospel cure, may think he is just meddling and trying to find fault?

How can we be so blind? If a preacher or other concerned Christian shows enough love for you as to warn of some danger in your path that might cause you to slip from the heavenly way and be eternally lost, he is your best friend! Do not be angry with him, but be thankful for him! "So then am I become your enemy, by telling you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16).

Every child of God has the responsibility of warning those around him of spiritual dangers. You must warn that friend or neighbor of the spiritual danger he faces by trying to live even one more day without Christ. You have weak brethren who need to be warned against lukewarmness in the kingdom or worldly practices which have become part of their lives. The Lord will hold us accountable if we just fold our hands and hold our tongues while people all around us are headed for destruction.

If he is your friend, you cannot refrain from warning him. And, even if he reacts in anger at first, he will be indebted to you for his eternal salvation if he heeds the warning you have sounded.





FEBRUARY 1949, Ben Hogan, the greatest professional golfer in history, was involved in a head-on collision with a bus in which he nearly lost his life. As a result of the accident he suffered a fractured pelvis, shoulder and ribs, a shattered ankle and extreme shock and later in the hospital he suffered from blood clots. Everyone had given him up for dead, but eventually he was up and learning to walk again. He fell time after time, but he refused to give up... until finally he made it one time around the block, but with great pain. Then he started putting, and practicing his golf strokes and in spite of the doubters, and the pain, he in 1950 entered the Los Angeles Open, which after 72 holes of golf, he lost to Sam Snead. However, in June 1950 he entered the U.S. Open Golf Tournament and won by four strokes. Ben Hogan was great to many because he refused to give up and because of his example, and encouragement, many that were handicapped went on to make themselves great, in spite of the handicap.

The word "encourage" means to "inspire with courage," "to cheer, to rally, to hearten."

One who encourages literally "renovates the spiritual powers of another, and gives him strength to venture out, engenders boldness to withstand dangers, fears and difficulties."

To me there is no greater need for the church than to have brethren that can and will encourage. Truly this person renders a great service for he puts the heart back into the disheartened, lights candles that have been blown out or have been allowed to die out.

The discouraged man is a defeated man, a useless man, and it matters not if he is rich, powerful, and endowed with great ability... because a lack of courage will ultimately end in him losing it all. Just as the man with one talent in Matthew 25:25, who went because of fear, and hid his talent in the ground.

Physically and spiritually, no other attitude does as much damage to us as individuals. It hurts our business, our health, our disposition and our outlook. We become wretched, restless, miserable, discontent, with no song,

no sunshine.

Notice David, in I Samuel 30:1-6, because he is an encourager. The Bible says, "...but David encouraged himself in the Lord His God."

Two phrases are important here, first: "David encouraged himself..." Brethren, we can not give what we do not have, we can not sing a song we do not know. David did not ignore the difficulties he was in, nor did he encourage himself by considering his own greatness. Zig Ziglar has said, "Conceit is a weird disease, that makes everyone sick but the one that has it." David was not self centered, but was God centered. He wasn't about to throw in the 'owel, or run away, but sought encouragement.

Second, he sought his encouragement "in the Lord his God." "And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is within thee" Psalms 39:7.

The facts are that David and his men were away from their wives and children who were in Ziklag, and while

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they were away, the Amalekites came and burned the city and took all captives. Everyone was tired when they got home but all they found was a burnt city. The next scene is all the army of David crying until they can cry no more. Then they blame David, they want to stone him. Certainly David's military staff offered no help. David was alone in this. But David shows his strength in depending upon God, the source of strength, the ultimate Encourager.

Certainly we can benefit from David's life. Surely we can see we are not sufficient in and of ourselves, and that we need to depend on the power of God.

In spite of all difficulties, let's be like Paul, who in jail sang and prayed, who in the tempest trusted in God, Acts 27:25. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me," John 14:1.

Let's not allow anything nor anyone to shake our faith in God, realizing that He really is with us, unto the end of the world; therefore let's go with the gospel.

Just Next To Me

Our preacher sure did pour it on, but he just let me be.
He took the starch all out of them that sat just next to me.

You should have heard the things he said, It was true as
could be; He burned the seat from under them that sat just
next to me.

He hit the nail square on the head; With him I do agree.
He trimmed the dead limbs off them that sat just next to
me.

And then I got thinking---I felt as sneaking as I could be---
And when I turned and looked at him, his guns were
trained on me.

churches being started in the community. Usually the pattern followed is to quietly divide over personalities or issues in doctrine and establish another church in a nearby community and declare it to be an effort to spread the borders of the kingdom. In reality the second group started with full intention of all to draw members from other churches nearby and then boast of their efforts for growth. If not, why will they usually select a site in the very heart of a section in which are a half dozen congregations? Why will they not go to some area where there is no congregation within miles and begin the work? It is impossible for scriptural discipline to be exercised because the competing congregations will eagerly take the wicked brethren in, since number is the important goal. Those who tend to be rebellious or indifferent will not repent because they know they will be welcomed without condition by some competing congregations.

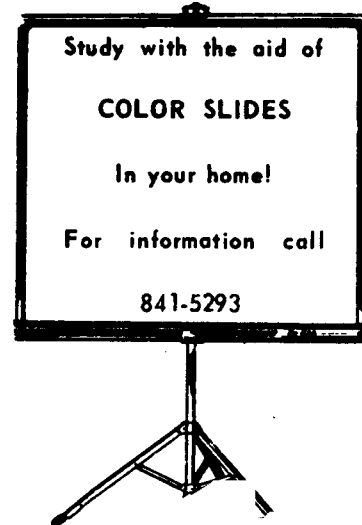
We must destroy this attitude of being in competition with others and begin to look at the fields white unto harvest. The world is full of unconverted sinners and every congregation in the world can develop a healthy growth if each will labor to preach the word to the lost and exhort the unfaithful and weak. We do not need to use every trick and lure devised by man to entice Christians from one congregation to another under any pretense.

In some cases false reports have been invented about elders or some members of one congregation in order to make it easier to proselyte members from it. I know of three cities in which this has been and is being done. Others use the beauty of buildings, distinguished persons who are members and all forms of entertainment to draw from the membership of neighboring congregations.

The elders or bishops are to "feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof . . ." (II Pet. 5:2). Whether this be one congregation in the midst of two or three small cities or a small congregation in the midst of several congregations in a large city. Wherever the flock and whatever its size, the bishops are to exercise oversight and feed that flock.

We have a real work in trying to convert the lost to Christ from the world and those who are caught in the jaws of denominational chaos. This would also include those who have turned away from the faith to the false doctrine of institutionalism and related false positions, whose philosophy is liberal and digressive with regard to the authority of Christ.

At the close of the letter to the Colossians Paul instructed that the epistle be read in the church of the Laodiceans and that the epistle to the Laodiceans be read by the church at Colosse (Col. 4:16). This shows recognition of one congregation by another in regard to common divine instruction, yet they are recognized as distinct groups which function autonomously. Why should we work as competitors when we have the same work to do? We have the same standard of authority. When elders, preachers and Christians in general learn the difference between spiritual growth of congregations and the moving of people from one group to another, we will stop this nonsense of competing for the attention of the crowds and the shifting of brethren from one congregation to another and start converting the lost to Christ.



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