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WHAT A SUDDEN INCREASE IN ATTENDANCE MEANS

EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

We usually sit up and take note when a congregation reports a sharp increase in her attendance. There is something about it that we ordinarily like to hear. What does a sudden up-swing in attendance mean?

It can mean that:

1. There has been an increased effort of the members to get people interested in attending the services of the church.
2. The people of the community are awakening to the need for spiritual development.
3. More people are getting tired of the world and its ways and are seeking the "kingdom of God and His righteousness."

However, it can mean that:

1. Appeals are being made to the sensation-seeking public in the form of carnal gimmicks - such as games, parties, banquets, shows, give-aways, etc. This may get some to a gathering - but only the gospel can draw men to Christ and His kingdom and hold them there (Rom. 1:16).
2. Standards of conduct are being watered down in order to appeal to more people.
3. An appealing personality has been placed into the "limelight" (preacher, teacher, lecturer) around whom a balloon of temporary interest is being built. When

more attention is paid to the "messenger" than to the "message", then any growth from such is at best a veneer. While we should love and respect those who preach, we must not build upon them. (I Cor. 1:10-13; 3:5-10)

Of course this is not all that an increase may mean. I would like to see every congregation of Christ outgrow her facilities -- but only if her growth is attributed to building upon the proper foundation, which is Jesus Christ. T
R

THE SHADY DOZEN

"I heard..."
"They say..."
"Everybody says..."
"Have you heard...?"
"Did you hear...?"
"Isn't it awful...?"
"People say..."
"Did you ever...?"
"Somebody said..."
"Would you think...?"
"Don't say I told you..."
"Oh, I think it is terrible..."

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sundays:

Bible Classes 9:45 a.m.
Worship. 10:45 a.m.
Worship. 6:00 p.m.

Wednesdays:

Bible Classes 7:30 p.m.

HOW TO SUCCEED AT GRIPING WITHOUT REALLY TRYING

EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

After several years of observing successful griper, I have concluded that maybe I am qualified to offer some tips to those who might want to succeed in the art of griping. Here are some proven hints that I have collected (having learned them purely from observation of course) which should make you the most successful griper in your congregation:

1. Learn as little as you can about the Bible. This will help you not to get too disturbed about such passages as: "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." (1 Cor. 10:10). One that passage really gets to you, your griping days are over.

2. Learn to apply what you do know about the Bible only to the other person. This allows you to know enough about the Bible to answer some of the questions people might ask you -- but allows you to still use all your faultfinding time on other people.

3. Do not get disturbed about sin among members of the church. Do this and you can maintain a wide target area for your gripes. You can gripe about those who are concerned enough for the souls of men and women to "rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith." You may talk about how "hard" and "unchristian" the reproof is.

4. Accept no responsibility in carrying out the work of the church. It is much easier to gripe when when you are sitting on the side line without any responsibility. You see, it kind of works like the old maid telling folks how to raise their children.

5. Get as few facts as possible before passing judgment. Facts only serve to confuse and might even take away your old spunk to gripe. Let our motto be: "Speak now, think later."

6. Feed regularly upon gossip. Never let a telephone ring pass without swallowing at least a mouth full of gossip. You will be surprised at how many big complaints you can make from the smallest morsel of gossip.

We suggest that you clip this handy

reference and attach it to the inside of your phone book, your TV guide, or the *outside* cover of your Bible. Then it can be seen easily and often, and you can be assured of being a successful griper -- without really trying.

T
R

(*Editor's Note:* The preceding two articles first appeared in the bulletin that we published in Charlotte, TN over 20 years ago. They have appeared in various bulletins since then. With the passing of time we have seen no reason to revise them.)

There's a hypocrite in the church!

David Thomley

For a time perhaps, the zeal of the new convert blinds him to any weakness or fallacy among his brethren. After all, "they" believe the same gospel and led him to salvation. The new convert did not initially question whether or not everyone was as dedicated and sincere as he was. He just naturally assumed they were all strong, fruitful soldiers of the cross.

But after a while, the new convert began to notice some things which were difficult to explain. He was dining at an area restaurant, and saw some members of the church sitting in the bar area drinking alcoholic beverages. In Bible class, he heard some young people endeavoring to justify drug abuse and immodest apparel. And there was this one member who constantly told him all the "garbage" about everybody in the congregation.

There are two reactions which are likely to follow such circumstances for the new convert, and both will cause him to lose his soul. First of all, such conduct coupled with superficial religion may be repulsive to the babe in Christ. As a result, he is likely to reason, "If that's what Christianity is all about, I don't want any part of it!" As a result, he leaves the Lord.

Or, he may be one who has a background of worldliness and immorality. As the temptations lure him to return to the pleasures of sin for a season, the new Christian may point to the hypocrite in order to justify his own sinful activities.

How can Christians cope with this crisis for new converts? First of all, congregations need to be committed to Paul's instructions to "purge out the old leaven" (1 Cor. 5:6,7). Secondly, the new convert should be further educated in the doctrine of Christ. He was converted to Jesus Christ - not to a particular group of people. Jesus will not fail him, nor forsake him. If every member in the entire congregation apostatizes the new convert should be able to maintain his trust in Christ. Also, the new convert needs to understand that no member of the church is perfect (1 John 1:8-10). Just as the young Christian will stumble and fall on occasion, other Christians will have similar experiences. The answer is not to overlook the sin, but to maintain a proper attitude of loving brethren who are struggling to please the Lord (Gal. 6:1).

One of the best ways to help the new convert is to live a pure, godly life, and do not give him occasion to stumble. The problem of hypocrites in the church is not imaginary - it is all too real! Let's be sure we are not contributing to the problem, causing someone else to lose his salvation.

T
R

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE:

Is it a church dilemma?

Dennis Abernathy

In the *Baptist Standard* appeared an article by Jim Lowry concerning a conference taught by John Sullivan who is "pastor" of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, LA. The article is entitled: "Sullivan: Church Can Be Hospital, Firing Squad." In this article Sullivan said he tries to approach problems (Divorce and Remarriage) "on the basis of love, mercy and forgiveness rather than legality." He further said: "The church has to deal with the problems of the family. When dealing with persons who remarry, the church becomes either a hospital or a firing

squad." Sullivan said: "It's interesting, we are willing to forgive everything but divorce." "In your church you have to answer if whether you are as ready as Jesus to forgive and reclaim the divorced and remarried persons." "People are going to marry, even within the church, so they can fit back into society. We need to learn to have a forgiveness that releases from the bondage of guilt and helps us to live in a forgiving community." Jim Lowry states that "Sullivan performs marriages between divorced individuals and holds the opinion, 'If they ask forgiveness for the sin of divorce, they are not living in adultery.'"

A "dilemma" is "a situation involving choice between equally unsatisfactory alternatives." It seems to me that not a few of our brethren, and a considerable number of churches, are in a dilemma on the matter of divorce and remarriage. A couple is divorced (not for fornication) and then one or both remarries and seeks to be a member of the local church. Here is the dilemma. The church must inform the couple that they are living in adultery and cannot be in fellowship as long as they remain in that condition and that they must repent of the sin (which means to cease the relationship they are in). Realize, too, that there may be children involved and if these people are turned away from the church, the children, more than likely, will grow up alienated from the church. Facing the reality that not many will cease from such a relationship, many of our brethren feel this choice and course of action is too harsh, being void of love and mercy, and is legalistic, therefore unacceptable. On the other hand, they realize what the Bible says concerning divorce and remarriage. To accept divorced and remarried people into fellowship (when the divorce was not for fornication) also seems unacceptable. Hence, the dilemma. Brethren, these situations just do not go away. They must be dealt with in a scriptural way. We must know what the Bible says on this matter and have the courage and conviction of heart and love for the souls of others, to tell them the scriptural course to follow.

I'm afraid that too many members of the church have taken the course out-

lined by John Sullivan, "If they ask forgiveness for the sin of divorce, they are not living in adultery." But one cannot be forgiven of adultery until one repents of adultery. And one cannot repent and at the same time continue to live in adultery. If one is living with another that he has no lawful right to, he cannot just say that he is sorry and then go on living with the one he has no right to live with.

Understanding what Jesus said on divorce and remarriage is not the problem leading to the above dilemma, but applying it to ourselves, our friends, and our loved ones is the thing that causes the dilemma.

Jesus is very plain on this subject. It involves those who did the "putting away" and those who were "put away." A key question is this: Was fornication (adultery) involved in the "putting away"? Why that question, you ask? Jesus said in Luke 16:18 that one who puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery. He then says that "whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery." The only exception to this is when the "putting away" was for fornication (Matt. 19:9). Then, the one doing the

putting away (the innocent party) can remarry, and the one who is put away (for fornication) cannot.

But brethren facing the dilemma, will say that two people can divorce for reasons other than fornication and then later when one of the parties remarries, thus committing fornication, the other party can then put that one away (in his mind or in the eyes of God) and be free to remarry. I freely admit brethren, that I have never read that in the Bible. Will you please read it to me?

Jesus said when people divorce, where no fornication is involved, both the one who does the putting away and the one who is put away are living in adultery if they remarry.

In conclusion, all who love God and their fellow man should be willing to forgive another of any sin when the sin is repented of and forgiveness is sought in God's way. But to say that we as individuals, or the church as the church, should set aside God's laws on divorce and remarriage because it is difficult to apply in some situations is not tenable. Brethren, think on these things. T
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Consider:

One of the devil's temptations is to occupy our minds with the past and future, so as to neglect the present.

Blessed is the person, who having nothing to say, does not say it.

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