

WHY CONGREGATIONS

DWINDLE

Connie Adams

It is not uncommon to see congregations that once were large and active in the Lord's work gradually dwindling. The natural question is why? I believe the following reasons must be considered:

PEOPLE MOVING AWAY.

Sometimes workers are transferred, or lose jobs and must move elsewhere. This reduces the membership of the congregations where this happens. Sometimes a congregation will “swarm” and start another one (whether peacefully or otherwise) and this reduces the membership of the churches from which they came.

INEFFICIENT LEADERSHIP.

Elders are to be appointed in every flock and are to take the oversight (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). They are to possess godly characters and to be able to teach the word of God (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:9). There are elders who do not know the flock or what is going on in the flock. Their concept of the work of elders is to hold a business meeting now and then and decide who to get for a meeting and how to spend the money on the physical property. Instead of

being out front leading the flock, they must be prodded by the flock to feed them. The work of the Lord requires planning and execution. Congregations need realistic challenges set before them. They need to be inspired to greater service as they behold elders who are leading the way. When a congregation begins to dwindle, it is time for the elders to do some soul-searching.

INEFFECTIVE PREACHING.

Preachers are not without blame. Much of the preaching done in some places is dull and manifests a lack of study. Rambling discourses without rhyme or reason, hotheaded and intemperate statements discourage people and cause them to want to go elsewhere if there is another congregation nearby.

SELFISHNESS. Evangelism, whether at home or abroad, is the primary work of the church. Congregations which make no attempt to reach the lost in their own community and which are unconcerned about the need for such work abroad are selfish. They withhold from others what they say is essential to salvation. The appeals for help from worthy men are often not even considered and sometimes not even answered. Then, there are others who will offer token help when they could take on a much greater part. Every so often

there are elders who are afraid that a congregation with several thousand dollars in the bank is going broke and will institute an austerity program. If they would present the case to the church and give the brethren a chance to respond to a given need, they just might be surprised at the response.

Then there are congregations which do not want the local preacher to even hold a meeting somewhere else. If he does, he must forfeit his vacation time to go. They think nothing of inviting a preacher to leave his local work to come hold them a meeting, but that is just a one-way street. They seem to feel that they own the preacher body and soul. All of his teaching and preaching must be only to them. This will kill a church.

LACK OF DISCIPLINE.

When churches are filled with ungodly members and unfaithfulness goes uncorrected, that congregation will dwindle. Worldly members will lose interest, and faithful members will be discouraged.

CONTENTIOUS SPIRIT.

Some know how to do little more in a congregation than quarrel and argue. They are never happier than when they are embroiled in some kind of fuss. They delight in questions which gender strife and make

each Bible class a virtual battlefield. Each business meeting becomes an occasion for contending for his own way. Even talks at the communion table, announcements and yes, even prayers, become opportunities to press the contention. Congregations where such is not checked will be forced to devote time and attention to internal struggles and will lose interest in the real work of the church. Let the sinner die and go to hell! We must have our contests and conflicts!

GLORIES OF THE PAST.

Most congregations which have been around any length of time have had their moments of glory and exultation. Some have developed quite a reputation among the brethren far and wide so that the mention of their name conjures up visions of devotion, and great activity in righteousness. The church at Sardis had a name that it lived while it was dead (Rev. 3:1). Sadly, this is true of some of the "great name" churches at the present hour.

It is fine to rejoice in good accomplished, but it is wrong to

allow it to fill us with vanity and pride. Yesterday is gone. It cannot return. What of today? What of tomorrow?

When a sizable church works a whole year and baptizes five or ten people, then that is not enough to even offset deaths and those who move away. Such churches are dwindling whether they know it or not.

Brethren, the early church grew and multiplied because the people had a mind to work. They were so thankful for the saving gospel that they could not refrain from telling it to everyone who would listen. When we work as they did we will see results. We will not dwindle either in numbers or in spirit.

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TAKE TIME

John Edwards

Today is the beginning of a new day. God has given us this

day to use as we will. Let's use the time allotted us the best way possible. Paul wrote, "*Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time*" (Col. 4:5).

TAKE TIME TO BE HOLY.

We often sing, "Take Time To Be Holy" based upon the words of Hebrews 12:14 which says, "*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*" The Lord says to each of us, "*Be ye holy; for I am holy*" (1 Pet. 1:16). Being holy takes time.

TAKE TIME TO PRAY. Set aside time today for prayer. "*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God*" (Phil. 4:6).

TAKE TIME TO STUDY. The Lord commanded, "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God...*" (2 Tim. 2:15). Bible study requires time.

TAKE TIME TO SEEK THE LOST. We can't expect the lost to come to us, but must take time to seek the lost. Be an Andrew today (Jn. 1:40-42).

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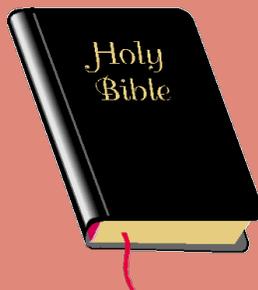
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