

Barriers to Building

by Larry Ray Hafley

The first ten years of Asa's reign over Judah were characterized by peace and prosperity (2 Chron. 14:1-8). However, he did not permit idleness walled; towered cities with barred gates were built to withstand the savage siege of future fierce conflict. "So they built and prospered."

There is again a great need for building within the ranks of righteousness, but as always there are obstacles to be overcome. What and where are the barriers to building? They are within the camp. This is not readily received. It has ever been easier to point at the enemies of God on the horizon "out yonder," than it has been to recognize and realize that hindrances to truth are attitudes within the hearts of us as God's soldiers.

1) Undue Concern About Personal Matters. In the post-Babylonian captivity years, the Jews were eventually allowed to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, but because of their private affairs they neglected the house of the Lord (Hag. 1:4). So today God's house is stranded and abandoned. Elders, deacons,

preachers, and saints are overwhelmed in the frothing mad rush for luxurious living. The wicked wax worse and worse, the feeble faint, and the rebellious remain unrestrained because brethren must try their five yoke of oxen. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things entering in have stifled the saints and choked the church. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4).

2) Lack of Love for the Erring. It takes something and somewhat more than courage to talk to a person about his soul. It takes love. The synonym for that word is concern. The shepherd did not leave ninety-nine sheep to seek for one he deplored, detested, and despised. As his search was the expression of love for the lost, so our neglect manifests indifference if not ill will. Churches often wither because erring members do not receive nourishing and cherishing

from brethren who love them "even as a nurse ... her children" (1 Thess. 2:7). "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:19, 20).

3) Church Becomes Content to "Keep House." Congregations that possess no interest in spreading the gospel are freaks when compared to the New Testament. The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas over three hundred miles to preach the gospel (Acts 11:22). Philippi sent Epaphroditus, their "messenger," to Rome to tend to Paul in Prison. They had more than once sent to relieve his necessity (Phil. 2:25; 4:15, 16). A plurality of churches sent assistance to Paul in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8). Self-centered churches cannot build, prosper, and grow. To be carbon copies of New Testament activity, churches must, like "the church of the Thessalonians" sound "out the word of the Lord not only"

in the local area, “but also in every place” (1 Thess. 1:8). It requires initiative and energy to SOW the gospel seed outside the local field, but lacking our modern modes of mass communication and destitute of overseeing or sponsoring elderships, New Testament congregations brought forth fruit in faith, by the faith, and for the faith outside their immediate geographical area (Phil. 4:17). The lesson is ours and ought to be learned. To the souls of men we must carry the message of immortality.

4) **Church Becomes a “Speak Easy.”** Within the cozy confines of some church buildings it is thought to be the apex of impropriety for the preacher to raise his voice, indict error with his index finger, or to call names. The preacher in such an unsanitary situation generally has a wet wash rag where his backbone ought to be. He is a gospel invertebrate. Such a one is just as much at home at a sectarian supper or a

denominational dinner as he is during a gospel meeting where he mouse-meekly mouths a “return to the old paths.” He can live with brethren and with ecumenical aliens. He therefore classifies as a religious amphibian. What’s the cure? I recommend a heart transplant. Attitudes source forth from the heart to deprecate and defile (Matt. 15:18). Churches that are beacons, bastions, and bulwarks of the truth will react in rebuke to those whose course is characterized by compromise rather than conviction with courage. Those who err from the truth are to be labeled and their mouths stopped shortly and sharply (Titus 1:10-13; 2 Tim. 2:16-18). Elders should lead the fight (Titus 1:9).

5) **Love of This World’s Goods, Gold, and Glitter.** The words ornate, lavish, and plush have replaced sound, forceful, and uncompromising as descriptions of churches. Elaborate emphasis is pressed

on the material rather than the spiritual, so the physical prospers and the spiritual suffers. It is assumed that “quiet, air-conditioned sanctuaries” with “spacious fellowship facilities” are certain symbols of spiritual strength. If so, then we might as well not oppose wealthy Catholicism, for her splendor and grandeur make her the true church of God. Wherever the church meets, in a private home, a rented gymnasium, or in an empty warehouse, it exists as God’s house, the Spirit’s temple, and the Son’s purchased possession. Will a man rob God of glory in his highest, finest, noblest spiritual creation by bestowing awe and homage upon the place of worship?

Barriers to building have their origin in attitudes, their effect in error, and their result in apostasy. Such hurdles are a summons to service, an arousal to arms. In the battle array of God’s armor we must join the fray for the faith. “Awake thou that sleepest!”

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