

PROPER ATTITUDES TOWARD NEW CONGREGATIONS

God's organization for carrying the gospel into all the world is the local congregation (Phil. 1:1; 1:5; 4: 14 - 18; I Tim. 3:15). Each local congregation is to be a light in the community and to the world -- holding forth the gospel. This truth becomes evident when we study Revelation and read about the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1: 20). It is seen when we study Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians when he said, "*For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.*" (I Thess. 1:8). When we stop starting new congregations, we stop the spreading of the gospel. The gospel was to go first to Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria, and then unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). As the gospel went forth to these places local congregations were established to radiate the gospel in the communities, towns, and provinces. We read of churches in Judea, Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9: 31; Gal. 1:22). When the church of Jerusalem was scattered abroad (Acts 8:4), they went "*everywhere preaching the word*". Some of these disciples went to Antioch in Syria, preached the word and planted (or established) a local congregation there (Acts 11: 19 - 26). From this record in Acts we have an example, on the part of the Jerusalem church, concerning the proper attitude we ought to have toward a new congregation. When Jerusalem heard that the church had been established in Antioch in Syria, they sent one of their best men to help this new congregation (Acts 11: 22). The man they sent was Barnabas -- a good "giver" (Acts 4: 36 - 37), a good teacher and an able exhorter (Acts 4: 36 - 37; 11:26; Acts 13:1). The attitude on the part of the Jerusalem church to help, and their willingness to give one of their best men to go help this new congregation should be the attitude of every congregation toward a new one.

Most new congregations start out small in number and are not financially strong. Many times they must meet in inconvenient places. These new congregations need much teaching, and much teaching must be done to the alien sinners in the community -- just as Antioch needed teaching (Acts 11: 36). We know from New Testament examples that it is scriptural for a congregation to send a preacher to preach the word to a new congregation and to others in the community (Acts 11:22). It is scriptural to send financial support to a preacher who might be laboring with a new congregation (II Cor. 11: 8; Phil. 2:25; 4: 14 - 18). So, congregations should ever be interested in the spreading of the gospel in other communities and nations (Acts 14: 26 - 27). They should every be willing to help in the spreading of the gospel in every scriptural way.

"Conservative" churches must be busy preaching the gospel and establishing new congregations to radiate the gospel from community to community. This is the way the gospel spread in the first century, and this is God's way now -- the New Testament way does not change. The more churches we are able to establish the faster the kingdom will grow. The job of building churches that will follow the New Testament pattern in all things rests squarely upon our shoulders NOW. We cannot wait another generation to rebuild churches that will follow the New Testament pattern in communities where many have left the pattern. All the effort, money and time that people are putting in these digressive churches now is not resulting in the building up of pure New Testament Christianity because these churches go further from the New Testament pattern by the year. Twenty-five years from now they will have no resemblance to the New Testament church! I know that sounds like a hard statement to some of you older brethren who have held onto the digressive churches hoping that some way and somehow there would be a turning-back and a slowing-down of the movement, but brethren, digression does not turn back or slow down, it does nothing but grow until it reaches its full-grown stage--denominationalism in its fullness (the Christian church is an example). So, facing the reality of the true condition of the church, we say that the only way the true church can be here for the next generation as well as for this generation is to start again -- to establish churches that will again follow the New Testament pattern in all things.

For new congregations to be established, there must be proper attitudes on the part of all. Larger congregations must be willing to give up some of the best and more mature members to help establish new congregations. They must be willing for the members to go -- and give them encouragement in their going. They must be willing to stand in readiness to supply financial support for preachers to work with new congregations (II Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4: 14 - 18). Those members who go with a new congregation must be willing to make many sacrifices. They must be willing to give up a comfortable building that is well equipped to do the work of the Lord and start meeting in a store building, school house or some other public building. They will have to give up worshipping with many old friends. They will have to get used to meeting with just a "handful" instead of a large number. Many times they must get used to doing about twice the work that they have been doing. They must realize that they will be discouraged from time to time, but with God's help they will be able to make it. They will have to give of their time, talent and money as they probably have never given before. Their families also will have to make some sacrifices. The children's classes will be much smaller, but that does not mean that the learning is any less. And from all this those who have the proper attitudes in starting a new congregation will find a deep satisfaction and gain a sense of responsibility because they know that they are doing something that is needful, that through their efforts souls are being saved, and the kingdom is growing, and that they are helping it to grow. Brethren, what would happen to the church if nobody was willing to make these sacrifices??

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