

Social Relationships in a Local Congregation

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Introduction: The local church should be a powerful tool in the building of Christians.

- A. The Lord described the relationship of Christians as being far more than just attendance at assemblies.
 - 1. When Paul became part of the church at Jerusalem he was with them “coming in, and going out.” (**Acts 9:28**)
 - 2. The church at Jerusalem was known for their association in the homes. (**Acts 2:46-47**)
 - 3. How can we possibly come to know each other if we only associate at the times of our assemblies? Many refuse to open their homes and lives.
- B. When you deal with people and their relationships, you are dealing with a sensitive area.
 - 1. When you become a Christian, the Lord must be master of all, including your relationships! Are you willing to let Him lead you in this area?
 - 2. We need the help from the Lord to know how to best work with one another.
 - 3. Why would Paul give attention in the letter he wrote to the Philippians to a disagreement between two women? (**Phil 4:1-2**)
 - 4. I have found that one person with the wrong attitude or one problem left unresolved can, in time, affect an entire church. (**Heb 12:15**)

I. The Ideal versus the Real

- A. The Lord wants us to be a close knit, loving group that is acutely aware of the needs of each other. (**1 Cor 12:22-26**)
 - 1. How can we accomplish this in our rushed society?
 - 2. The only way this can be done is for each of us to be crucified. (**Gal 2:20**)
 - 3. When we identify ourselves and those who are Christians by the cross, then all other human distinctions and advantages becomes rubbish.
- B. You will not open your hearts to one who does not care about you.
 - 1. That was true in your becoming a Christian! Each of you met someone who had a genuine concern for your soul.
 - 2. In our growth as a Christian, this same love is essential to our growth and edification.
 - 3. Our Lord described that love, above all others, as the identifying mark of His people. (**John 13:34-35**)
- C. In practice, this love is hard to build and difficult to maintain.
 - 1. Paul had to admit the difference between the unselfish love of Timothy, and the attitudes of other preachers. (**Phil 2:19-21**)
 - 2. How would the Lord describe you? Are you selfishly satisfied or are you looking to serve others?

II. On the Outside Looking In

- A. Humans have used the social arena as a source of power and punishment.
 - 1. Excluding others from can provoke all kinds of reactions in them.

2. Paul knew that Satan wants to separate a Christian from others and then to fill him with anger, bitterness and even guilt. **(2 Cor 2:6-11)**
- B. We should do everything we can to reach out to others.
1. The first time I visited a church in college was a memorial one.
 2. Sometime people make it impossible for you to reach out to them.

III. Some Common Problems that Churches Face

- A. The haves and the have-nots.
1. The early church had several occasions where this became a problem.
 2. One of the problems with the Corinthians was in this area. **(1 Cor 11:20-22)**
 3. James described attitudes within the assembly. **(James 2:1-8)**
 4. I have seen churches where groups of couples go on trips to ski resorts, cruises and other expensive trips. It is not wrong to do this, nor should one stop this because others cannot afford it.
 5. If you exclusively associate with the rich, then you do not have the heart of our Lord **(Mt 11:5)**. (Ex – Wal-Mart)
- B. The satisfied.
1. Because we are happy might lead us to neglect others. (Ex. Visitor to services)
 2. What would Jesus do? **(Phil 2:3-4)**
- C. Attitudes from parents to Children.
1. We need to teach our children to include others that are “difficult” in our activities because that is exactly what our Lord wants us to do! **(Mt 5:46)**
 2. There are Parents who became bitter towards another couple or even towards a child, and in both spoken and in unspoken actions encouraged their children to snub and exclude other children.
 3. If this is not corrected, a church will stand in danger of losing an entire generation.

IV. Be quick to identify and resolve these kind of problems.

- A. When problems arise in a local church in the relationships between Christians, it is crucial that the leadership address these issues with haste.
1. If ignored, they will only grow until the assemblies of the church become contrary to the encouragement it ought to be.
 2. Have you ever been distracted in your worship because of these things?
- B. The early church successfully faced challenges like this.
1. The neglect of the Greek widows in the church at Jerusalem was quickly recognized and corrected **(Acts 6:1-7)**.
 2. The apostles were quick to point out occasions of neglect and preference.
- C. Learn, like David, to look to God for deliverance. **(Psa 31:11-16; 2 Tim 4:16-17)**

Conclusion: Where do you see yourself?

“Christians state glibly that they love the whole world, while they permit themselves animosities within their immediate world. World love is a philosophical credo. But loving the world at large can only be done by loving face to face the world that is not so distant.”

Social Relationships in a Local Congregation by Larry Rouse

The Lord's design for His people is that they be "knit together in love" (**Col 2:2**), and that "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (**1 Cor 12:26**). We cannot serve God and be separate from people, but rather we are called to serve others. The power of love was such a firm purpose of our Lord that He described this characteristic, above all others, as the identifying mark of His people. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (**John 13:34-35**).

Only the gospel has the power to bring Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, the rich and the poor into the same local congregation and make that group a close-knit, loving family (**Gal 3:28**). When men are humbled and see the gospel as their only identity, then educational differences, racial differences and any other man-made distinctions, will be laid aside as rubbish, so that they can view their brethren, not just as equals, but as better than themselves. It is in this spirit that service to others becomes a privilege! "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (**Phil 2:3-4**).

The Ideal Versus the Real

There have been times in my life where the congregation that I attended was approaching this spirit of service and love. I have also learned that it is a great challenge to find and maintain that spirit. There are so many pitfalls and temptations that can easily turn a church from a place of edification to a place of discouragement. Consider some common problems that we face in working with our brethren.

On the Outside Looking In

It is crucial that every member understands that he truly belongs and is cared for. When a Christian believes that he is an outsider among the brethren he assembles with, then that person is vulnerable to many temptations. It is easy in that situation to give into jealousy, bitterness or to be overwhelmed by guilt (**2 Cor 2:7-11**). Good people can become careless and fail to see the needs around them, especially when they are satisfied with the associations they have.

Certain Visitors not Welcome!

A few years ago I was working with a couple that showed great interest in the gospel. They started attending services where I preached and also began a home Bible study with me. It was not very long until they privately began referring to the church as "the clique." This concerned me, since I had a good relationship with them. At the end of one service I decided to step back and observe the interaction of others with this couple. At the dismissal of services, I watched as this couple waited for some time near the back of the auditorium at the place where everyone would exit. My heart ached as I observed how on that day very few spoke to them, while most Christians were rushing to visit with the ones they always talked to after

services. My brethren, while not realizing it or meaning this, nonetheless communicated very clearly that this couple was not welcome.

The Haves and the Have-Nots

The divide between those who are “rich in this world’s goods” and those who are not can provide a great challenge to a local group. It is far easier to associate only with those who have your tastes and can do the things that you do. It also is very easy to look down upon those who have less and even harden your hearts towards them. “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him **(1 John 3:17)?**”

I have seen churches where groups of couples go on trips to ski resorts, cruises and other expensive trips. It is not wrong to do this, nor should one stop this because others cannot afford it. It is important, however, to make every effort to do things that will also allow you to association with those Christians who have less than you! If you exclusively associate with the rich, then you do not have the heart of our Lord **(Mt 11:5).**”

Attitudes from Parents to Children

Unfortunately children too can display a cruel tendency to exclude and even punish those who are different. Christian parents must always keep alert to these attitudes and challenge them and correct them. What a great lesson for a parent to teach their children concerning giving to “unlovable” people the love that they need. It is in the home that we teach our children to include others that are “difficult” in our activities because that is exactly what our Lord wants us to do! “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same **(Mt 5:46)?**”

Sadly, I have also seen where a mother became bitter towards another couple or even towards a child, and in both spoken and in unspoken actions encouraged their children to snub and exclude other children. It is a far greater hurt for a parent to consistently see their child excluded from group plans than if that same action was taken towards them as adults. It becomes very difficult for a parent to instill faith in their child when the actions of others are so contrary to the gospel of Christ. When this scenario occurs and is not corrected, that congregation will likely lose an entire generation of young people.

Putting a Wet Blanket over the Assembly

When problems arise in a local church in the relationships between Christians, it is crucial that the leadership address these issues with haste. When these problems are ignored, they will only grow until the assemblies of the church become stressful and strained and in some cases contrary to the encouragement it ought to be.

The early church successfully faced challenges like this. The neglect of the Greek widows in the church at Jerusalem was quickly recognized and corrected **(Acts 6:1-7)**. The apostles were quick to point out occasions of neglect and preference by strongly rebuking are correcting these attitudes **(Phil 4:2-3; 1 Cor 11:20-22)**.

Let love reign in the place you assemble! Why not make plans now to include a brother that is not in your normal group of associates? You will find that the more you give and involve others, the greater blessing you will receive.