

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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"Dangers of Growth"

By Steve Niemeier

The Lord is true to His promises (II Cor. 1:18; Titus 1:2). Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit stated in I Cor. 3:5-11 that if one plants and waters the seed of the word of God – the increase then is up to God. Acts 9:31 relates how the churches in Judea, Galilee and Samaria grew. They had peace and were edified. They walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit they were multiplied. Acts 16:5 states the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.

How could there be in any danger in growth? It seems that it is the Lord's plan – we plant and water – He gives the increase – we continue to be edified – we continue to teach – He continues to give the increase! What a plan! While we are planting and watering we are being edified and growing spiritually doing His will. How can there be any danger in this?

Acts 14:23 is an encouraging passage stating that elders were appointed in every church. Isn't this what Paul states was the plan for the church in Ephesians 4:11-15? Today we do not have apostles or prophets but we are to strive to have faithful members, elders, deacons, evangelists, teachers (Phil. 1:1). How could there be any danger in doing what the Lord wants us to do as far as the organization of the local congregation?

Now we know about the seven churches of Asia listed in Revelation 2 & 3. We have studied about how some of them needed to change their ways immediately. Yes, they had fallen away BECAUSE they were not doing what they were supposed to do according to the inspired instructions. Now that is a danger. However, what can be a danger when a congregation is striving to do what God has instructed them to do?

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When a congregation is planting and watering and focused on doing the Lord's work – IT GROWS! Sometimes it is spiritual growth among the members and then sometimes it is both spiritual growth and numerical growth – they do go hand in hand together.

There are some dangers in spiritual and numerical growth. One danger is that some members will be left behind. They are neither involved nor trying to grow spiritually and as a result are left behind in their state of apathy.

Another danger is the danger of frustration. A congregation is growing and seating can become tight. Members who have sat in the same pew for years are being "closed in" and may at times even find their beloved seat taken. It has been noted that if this happens the one who has set in the same place for years may look at the new ones and even state "You are in my seat!" This of course is very discouraging to the visitors or new members.

Another danger is that a visitor may look at the attendance and the challenge for seating. They may note that the congregation has elders and a

preacher or maybe even two preachers. They observe that the congregation is very active in the work of the Lord. They then reason they are not needed in this congregation.

These dangers are easily avoidable – the first danger is avoidable by all members fulfilling their responsibilities to the Lord and growing spiritually as they should. The second is avoidable by all members realizing they do not own a particular seat on the pew. When one comes to worship services they can do so by sitting in any seat in the auditorium. One should be glad to give "their seat up" to accommodate a visitor or a new member. The third is avoidable by realizing that no matter how strong a congregation is – it needs to continue to get stronger and grow spiritually by doing the work of the Lord. If all had the idea "this congregation doesn't need me" then it will not be long that this congregation will be struggling.

To all of us who are members here – let us examine our attitudes towards growth. The Lord has blessed us – are we going to complain about it or embrace it and work harder? There is room in the kingdom of

God and there is plenty of room in this congregation for those who want to be workers for the Lord!

Competition for the Mind

By Dee Bowman

In **Ephesians 4:26-27**, Paul commanded, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil." This passage is variously translated. Phillips renders it, "Don't give the devil that sort of foothold." Goodspeed's translation says, "You must not give the devil a chance." The Twentieth Century New Testament gives it, "And give no opportunity to the Devil." The thought in all of these is the same: mainly, don't give the Devil residency in your mind.

Someone has said, "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair." In the same way, you can't keep the Devil from making periodic trips through your mind, but you don't have to give him a place to stay. In this age, there is a constant bombardment of the mind by the Devil. He is seeking a place to stay. And one of the ways he does it is by advertising. Our society is addicted to it. Its

influence in our lives is astounding.

This competition for the mind is relentless and indefatigable. Just as the means is subtle and effective. Secularism is disguised as success; materialism wears the mask of excellence; free love is passed off as freedom of human expression. The result is indifference toward God.

Those who give over to this cunningly devised plan will find it hard to leave. Once they enter this world of "let me do it my way," they quickly become so mired that only the strongest will can divorce them from their predicament. The appetite for such loose activities cannot be satisfied and calls for an ever deepening, always increasing evil just to top the last "satisfaction" they enjoyed.

Such careless subscription to the devil's ploys results in disaster. The giving of oneself to a life without restraint results in a cluttered, undisciplined mind, one difficult to penetrate and often without much feeling for others. Such thinking dampens the spirit of purpose, causes its adherent to be tentative in his plans, temporary in his judgment. It restrains the inclination to

grow—intellectually, spiritually, or any other way.

It is short-sighted, foolish to listen to promises of the sort we see everywhere displayed by our adversary. Three things stand out to me as necessary to guard against the Devil's efforts to capture the mind:

- 1. Make sure your focus is right.** Where are you looking? In what direction are you heading? Like Paul, we must "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (**Philippians 3:14**). The Hebrew writer said of Jesus, ". . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross . . ." (**Hebrews 12:2**). We need to set before us the hope of heaven.
- 2. Develop a determination toward self-regulation in your life.** Paul said it was necessary. "But I keep under," (buffet – ASV) my body and bring it into subjection: that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (**1 Corinthians 9:26-27**). The life that is not managed properly vacillates, is tentative, not fixed on course.
- 3. Return to a regular association with truth.** It is just so that we are influenced by our companions. When you tolerate associations with the Devil, you are just apt to be like him. But when you are in constant contact with the truth, it will be the pervading influence in your life.

There is a battle raging—a serious, eternal life threatening battle. We can lose it if we are not careful. The mind is the battleground. Choose your associations carefully and well.