

## “Problems in the Church...”

In my first “full-time” preaching stint, we moved to work with a congregation that: had a split (in which brethren had stood and shouted at each other during services) that ultimately resulted in about 45% of the members leaving (some even after we arrived- though they made it clear their departure had nothing to do with us!); had fired the previous preacher (and some still wanted to “withdraw” from him when we got there about a year and a half after he left and though he had been preaching for another congregation 90 miles away for almost a year); and, one of the three Elders had resigned (after we agreed to come but before we arrived) because he was caught embezzling money from a company owned by another brother for whom he worked as Comptroller. When we left ten years later, we had successively lost (resigned due to infirmity or moved away) and been able to reappoint Elders two (or three?) times, had sufficient Deacons to handle the work; and had a stable congregation that was almost twice the size with which we started.

All of which made us very attractive to the next congregation with whom we worked, who: had a split (in which a member threatened bodily harm to a former preacher {who was still in the congregation} if he tried to get back in the pulpit); had lost roughly half of the congregation; fired the preacher; and, had NEVER had Elders (and the two ultimately appointed had never been in a congregation that did). When we left fifteen years later, the congregation had appointed three additional Elders (one died and another moved away), had I think six Deacons, was roughly twice the size it was before, and, had bought and paid for adjoining land to expand because it had outgrown its facilities. **What’s the point?** That “Philip is a great preacher”? Hardly! Several colleagues have asked over the years about my “secret” to success. It is simply this: **Get people back to the Book and understanding and doing what it says!** Big “secret,” huh?

**So really, what’s the point?** The point is: **I know a little about “church problems.”** Therefore...

**If you tell me there is a “problem in the church,” then:**

- 1. You have to mean the *local* “church” or congregation/collectivity, because the *universal* “church” doesn’t have “problems”!**
  - It has a *perfect Head*, Eph.1:22-23;
  - It has a *perfect Law*, Jas.1:25; and,
  - It has a *perfect Membership*, Acts 2:41 for God determines its membership (He *adds/writes* and has and uses an *eraser*, Rev.3:5 to keep it that way!).
- 2. Don’t tell me “It’s just personal, not doctrinal.”** Both Scripture and experience have taught me that, regarding “church problems,” the *personal* will become *doctrinal* and the *doctrinal* will become *personal*, cf. 1Cor.5:1ff; 3John 9-10. “Problems” are “problems” whether they are “personal” or “doctrinal,” and must be corrected or some, most, or all involved will be lost, 1Cor.5:6-7.

3. I can tell you what the “problem” is: Someone(s) in that church has a **connection to Christ issue!**
- a. Someone(s) is/are not **thinking** like Jesus Christ: **Mark 8:33** (minds on *their interests* rather than *God’s*), cp. Mark 5:15; **Acts 2:46** (disciples were of *one mind*); **Rom.8:5-7; 12:3,16; 15:5**; 1Cor.1:10; 2:16; cp. 2Cor.11:3; Eph.2:3; 4:17; Phil.3:19; Col.2:18.
  - b. Someone(s) is/are not **feeling** like Jesus Christ: **John 13:34** (loving *compassionately* and *sacrificially* always with God’s and your brethren’s interests taking precedence over your own, cf. Phil.2:1-12)
  - c. Someone(s) is/are not **acting** like Jesus Christ: **Eph.4:1-3**. Christians are supposed to *imitate* God and *walk* (i.e. *act*) like Christ, **Eph.5:1-2**. Therefore, to “*walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called*” in **Eph.4:1** is to *walk/act* like Christ and *imitate* God. Now note what that means more specifically from **vv.2-3**: with *humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance* all in *love*, **v.2**; and to do so with a desire/intention of *diligently preserving unity and peace* (which are inherent within the *body* as created), **v.3**! If there are “problems in the church,” then someone(s) are NOT *acting/walking* like Jesus Christ!

#### Applications:

- **Little problems quickly and inevitably become BIG problems if/when they are not handled/corrected initially, cf. Gen.4:1-8** (if make a mistake, just admit it and back up and do the *right* thing).
- **People- generally and specifically, inadvertently or intentionally, become either problem *causers* (in and through the ways given above) or problem *solvers/solutions* (by being *humble, gentle, forbearing, patient, and loving*); DECIDE and BECOME the latter rather than the former!**
- **We (*individually and collectively*) can be a church “with problems,” or a church that *enjoys peace*, that *edifies* itself and others, *goes on in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit*, and *increases* (rather than *decreases*). One is easy but unpleasant and destructive; the other requires work but is joyous and constructive. We can be a congregation full of people like *Barnabas* (**Acts 4:36-37**) or *Diotrephes* (**3John 9-10**; cp. **3John 12** and *Demetrius*). Each must decide for themselves... for the Lord... and for the congregation.**

Let’s be a congregation like Thessalonica, **1Thess.1:2-3,6-10!**