

What Am I Worth To The Local Congregation?

Answering this question requires some honest introspection. It also assumes that all members of a congregation have some interest in whether they are of any value to the accomplishment of the congregation's purposes. This is a question that is easily avoided by those who may be afraid of the answer.

A congregation, according to the New Testament pattern, is made up of Christians who have agreed to three things: (1) to be a congregation whereby the many may act together as one in worship and work; (2) to submit to a common oversight; and (3) to pool their resources together to accomplish mutually agreed upon work. Such a covenant is effective only when "the whole body, joined and knit together by which every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share" (Eph. 4:16).

To some what the congregation does is something, apparently, just to watch sort of like a spectator sport. They come to services, but hardly participate in the worship. They don't sing, and we can only wonder whether they join in the prayers. They seem to have little interest in the sermon and may sleep through most of it. The Lord's supper seems to be observed perfunctorily. There would be no worship if it were up to them, but fortunately, others find joy and strength in participating in divine worship.

Some folks, I'm reluctant to say, view the local congregation only from the standpoint of what it does for them. The question they most frequently ask is: 'What is the congregation worth to me?' They seldom stop to realize that the congregation can give to them only what someone else has contributed to it. If they are learning, it is only because someone else is willing to teach. They meet in a clean building because someone else has cleaned it. They profit from the singing because someone is willing to use his talents to lead it and others wholeheartedly join in. If all of these "someones" were to be like them, nothing would be done.

What am I worth to the church? Can I be counted on to help when there is work to be done? Do I accomplish what I commit myself to do? Am I carrying my share of the financial burdens of the congregation's work?

Am I willing to do my share in the teaching program? Do I faithfully attend the services of the congregation? Is my membership in the congregation worth something to the other members, or am I looking at it only from the standpoint of what they can do for me?

Am I of negative value to the congregation; that is, as a constant complainer, a critic of the efforts of others, as one who selfishly insists on having it his own way all the time, or a pessimist who discourages everyone else?

Am I one who helps solve problems that come up in the congregation, or am I a part of the problems?

Instead of avoiding the answer to the question, "What am I worth to the congregation?" let me try to answer it introspectively and honestly. To paraphrase a former president, "Ask not what the congregation can do for you; ask what you can do for the congregation."

- by Ben Shropshire

"He Looks Natural"

Often when we pass the casket of a friend or loved one, someone will remark, "He surely does look natural." This is a tender, thoughtful and concerned expression. It is one that may be said over you and me sooner than we think. What will it take to make us look natural? Think about it for a moment.

At a recent funeral I noticed that the deceased had his Bible tucked under his arm. One of the family members explained that it made him appear natural and that she believed it would have been according to his desire. This was impressive to me, for it suggested his attitude toward the Bible, and indicated that he had spent much time with it while he was alive.

On another occasion the one who had died was buried in a casket made from planks he had set aside in his garage for the purpose. He was dressed in a pair of blue overalls. The man had lived a simple life and was never seen in anything other than such overalls. He had given

instructions for his burial before he died. He did not want anything done that would look "unnatural."

How would you need to be dressed to look "natural" at your funeral? Would you look natural with a Bible in your hand? What kind of dress would make you look natural? A short skirt? A low-cut blouse? Shorts? A swimming suit or bikini? What about a pack of cigarettes in your shirt pocket or a cigar hanging from one corner of your mouth? Maybe a can of beer in your hand?

What about the place where your funeral would be conducted? Would you appear natural in a church building? Or would it seem strange to see you there since you seldom if ever attended the service? Is it not unnatural to read the Bible, sing spiritual songs, and pray over a person's dead body who never participated in such acts of worship?

Do you really think about death? Do you prepare for it? One thing is for sure -- DEATH IS COMING TO EACH ONE OF US. Just how the body is prepared will be of no importance to us then. But consequences of how we lived our lives will matter greatly (2 Cor. 5:10). May God help us to stop, think and turn to Him through faith and obedience before it is too late.

- by S. Leonard Tyler

Repentance

Jesus said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Repentance - true repentance - is surely one of the hardest things God has commanded us to do. It is important that we understand true repentance.

Repentance is not:

- Simply quitting your sin. A man might stop drinking because he can no longer afford it, or stop beating his wife because she has him, or stop cursing because he lost his voice. The sin has stopped, but no repentance has taken place.

- Hiding your sin. The fact that a person tries to conceal his sin does not prove he has repented. Remember how David tried to hide his sin with Bathsheba?

- Being sorry. Many are sorry for the consequences of their sin, the results of their sin, the pain their sin has caused for themselves or for others. But this sorrow is not real repentance.

Repentance is:

- A change of heart that leads to a change of action. Jesus illustrated repentance perfectly in two of his parables. In one He described this situation: "A certain man had two sons; and he came to first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not but afterward he repented, and went" (Matthew 21:28,29). Do you see it? Clearly there was a change of thinking followed by a change of conduct. Again, Jesus told of the prodigal son who had ruined his life but "came to himself" and "arose and came to his father"(Luke 15:11-32). His obvious change of attitude prompted him to return to his father's house and confess his unworthiness. This is repentance.

What about you? Have you had this important change of heart that has caused you to turn to God in obedience? Remember, God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Act 17:30).

- by Greg Gwin