

"I'm Not Included!"

"I am just not included at church - I am given no part." That is really sad - if true. It is not God's intent. God designed a local church to depend upon each member. He expects every member to contribute to the body - "...the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share" (Eph.4:16). Thus, in God's design "every part" "may grow up in all things" (4:15). The ultimate aim is to "present every man perfect in Christ" (Col.1:28). If such work is not in progress, something is seriously wrong.

If a church excludes some members from the edifying process – excludes them from either the giving or the receiving - drastic changes must be made. Without doubt, it does happen. The poor are given a corner. "Odd" brethren are hidden away to prevent embarrassment. Those with an ugly past - and scars still evident - are shunned. The "not very smart" are dismissed as unimportant. Inexcusable! They are God's children; he made a place for them in his church. Woe to those who deny God's sons their rightful place and their inheritance in God's household! God himself has designed a place - and a job for you. "God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" (1Cor.12:18). There are no unnecessary or useless body parts. However, maybe you misunderstood what that part is! And maybe you want the part that "pleases" you rather than the part that pleases Him!

"I am not included" often means "I do not lead the singing." Wait! Who said you must lead singing to be involved? Is plain pew singing not involvement? Is the voice in the crowd not "included." Are the people with poor musical endowment not included? They sing poorly - they sing quietly, but they sing! - as God expects. They are not excluded because they do not lead singing? What about women? They never lead singing. Are they excluded?

Did "I am not included" mean "I was not asked to lead public prayer"? Must all lead public prayer? Surely not! Must all participate in prayer? Absolutely! This explains the need for everyone to understand each prayer and to be able to say "amen" (1Cor.14:16). Their "amen" is the door for their involvement in that prayer. Again, women do not lead public prayer; are they uninvolved?

"I am not involved" may translate "I am not asked to preach." Where did such an idea originate? Are you only involved if you are "up front?" Is learning not a part? Is a listener not included? Does comment or question from a classroom pew not qualify as involvement? Not all preach. God excluded women from preaching (1Tim.2:12) - new converts should not - the ill informed should not - unskilled public teachers should not - those with bad attitude or character problems should not. Yet all these must be included in the church's instruction process.

"Running things," is often confused with being involved. Being "up front" - "in the public eye" - "the center of attention" becomes all important. Well, get over it! Such attitudes absolutely disqualify for any leadership role. Remember: every member of the body does not have the same job. "Up front" may not be your job! Because you are not the "boss" - or the "mouth" does not mean you have no part! Be a "helping hand." Consider a role like the family of Stephanas - who "devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (1Cor.16:15). They were involved. Who prevents you doing that? Get involved like widows who "washed the saints' feet, relieved the afflicted" (1Tim.5:10). Who objects? What about imitating Dorcas who was "full of good works and charitable deeds"(Act.9:36ff), or Phoebe who was a "servant of the church in Cenchrea" and who was "indeed ... a helper of many"(Rom.16:1,2)? Is that being involved? Mend and heal those "overtaken in a fault" (Gal.6:1). Who excludes you?

Maybe we just expected a different involvement! Is only a high and honored part suitable? Watch out! Beware of pride that disdains the small and unglamorous roles. Get over climbing the ladder. Do what you can - no matter what it is. There is plenty you can do and no one will object. Do what you are asked to do - no matter what. They will surely ask if you volunteer to help! Participate in assemblies – whether leading or following. Contribute to Bible studies - from a seat or the podium. Exhort and encourage brethren whether privately or publicly. Support the weak (Act.20:35), comfort the discouraged, reprove the wayward, uphold the weak (1Thes. 5:14). There is a lot of important work for you to do. I guarantee there is room enough to be involved - up to your ears even.

- by Joe Fitch

We Dare You To Try This For One Month!

1. Resolve not to miss a single service of the church. No excuses!
2. Read and study your Bible every day, even if it means turning off the TV for a little while.
3. Try praying every time you have a problem or a decision to make. Pray for others, even pray for your enemies.
4. Make it your responsibility to bring at least one visitor to the services.
5. Take at least one night to go visiting -- visit the elderly, the sick, recent visitors to our services.

Try this for a month. You'll be surprised at the results.

- selected

Unhappy Marriages

In the news recently a Tennessee man held up a bank at gunpoint. Nothing new there – but what he did afterwards was really odd. After the teller gave him the money, he went over and sat down in the lobby. The police, of course, came and arrested him. His explanation? He said he would rather be in jail than have to live with his wife! This man's actions confirm Solomon's observation: "It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop (or a jail cell – gg), than with a brawling woman and in a wide house" (Proverbs 25:24).

Sadly, many husbands and wives continue to live miserably in contentious relationships that manifest no love and offer no peace. Further, they keep on violating the clear and direct commands of God – and thus fail to enjoy the blessings that God designed into the marriage relationship.

The Scriptures give clear instructions that – when obeyed – will bring marital success and true happiness. Consider: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church . . . Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church . . . let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Ephesians 5:22-33).

"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22). But this is only true when both husband and wife observe God's wisdom in the marriage relationship. Think!

- by Greg Gwin