

## Challenge For A Growing Congregation

Most of our conclusions concerning a growing congregation are based on our visual perception. Spiritual growth in a congregation is not always seen with the physical eye. Nor is it as rapid as we think or want. Growth varies from member to member. The congregation is always changing.

We are adding new members and losing some members. Some have come to work with us and others have gone to work with other congregations. There are those who are experiencing spiritual growth. There are those who are lacking spiritual growth. Even some who may be regressing spiritually and need encouragement. The dynamics are constantly changing.

Could we be doing more in our spiritual growth? The simple answer is “Always.” And yet, we may not be aware of the ways that we are growing. We may not be aware of the influence we are having on others. Some influence for good like Dorcas (**Acts 9:36-42**). Some influence is not for good like Peter on Barnabas on one occasion (**Galatians 2:11-14**).

Some will or may never be where we think they ought to be (**Romans 15:1-3**). However, remember that we are not the judge but Christ is (**Romans 14:4; James 4:11-12**). They may be there also to help us develop as we should. We are to constantly have compassion and patience for one another (i.e. **Romans 14-15**). It hurts when we recognize that we are not where we ought to be (at least in our thinking) (**Matthew 26:75**).

Have we considered God’s perception of the congregation? Do we understand what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power (**Ephesians 1:18-19**)? Jesus asked His people how long should He bear with them (**Matthew 17:17-21**). Evidentially a lot longer than we probably would have. God is long suffering, patient, compassionate not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (**James 5:11; 2 Peter 3:9**).

God looks at the heart not the outward appearance (**1 Samuel 16:7**). He sees the tender heart that can be molded into a vessel of His choosing (**Jeremiah 18:1-6**). When the vessel is marred, He can reshape it into another vessel for His service (**1 Corinthians 12:18**). It is through the blood of Jesus that God is not ashamed to be called our God (**Hebrews 11:16**).

The solid foundation of the congregation is based on God’s Word (**1 Corinthians 3:11; 2 Timothy 2:19**). Whatever we face, God already has the answer for it (**Matthew 6:8**). God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (**Ephesians 3:20**). It is the peace of God that is able to guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (**Philippians 4:6**).

Why were we given the Scriptures? Through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope (**Romans 15:4**). To be a mirror to reflect the thoughts and intents of our heart (**Hebrews 4:12-13**). To show ourselves approved unto God (**2 Timothy 2:15**). Again, God is looking at the heart. Is our heart right with God?

Do we thank God daily for what He has provided for us in the body of Christ? Are we grateful for each member of the body (i.e. **1 Corinthians 12:12-27**)? Or, do we think it would be better if

only this one (person or situation) was different? Are we like Peter concerning John (**John 21:20-23**)?

Remember the expression of old “A better world (congregation) begins with me.” Are we willing to trust the Head of the church (**Ephesians 1:22-23**)? Are we willing to let the Savior of the body do His job (**Ephesians 5:23**)? Do we truly believe that the blood of Jesus washes away our sins and continues to wash away sins as we confess them (**Acts 20:28; 1 John 1:7-9**)? Do we believe that the entirety of God’s Word is truth (**Psalms 119:160**)?

Something to think about!

David B. McElwain