

Good Churches Have Problems

“No internal problems,” the man said. And our first reaction was that of admiration for this “ideal” church that knew no problems. It seems that everyone is looking for a congregation with “no problems” so we thought we had hit a gold mine! But with further observation our thinking changed.

The Bible speaks of a church that had “no problems.” The church at Laodicea was “rich, and had become wealthy, and had need of nothing” (Revelation 3:17). On the other hand the Jerusalem church was faced with several problems. They had to witness the death of a hypocritical, lying couple (Acts 5:1-11). There was murmuring because of neglect of the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1-7). There were doctrinal problems over the question of circumcision (Acts 11:1-18; 15:4-5). Jerusalem had its problems while Laodicea was “free of problems” — yet every Bible student knows that Jerusalem was the approved church while Laodicea was nauseating to the Lord. He said, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16).

Further, when one observes the problems of the Jerusalem church, he recognizes the problems were a direct outgrowth of the work and activity of that congregation. Had there not been the spirit of benevolence that prevailed among its members, there would have been no occasion for Ananias and Sapphira’s lie or for the murmuring over neglect. Had there been no evangelization among the Gentiles, there would have been no problem over circumcision. Jerusalem had problems because they were a working, active, thriving, and growing church. And it may well be that Laodicea’s absence of problems was a direct outgrowth of its lukewarmness and lack of vitality.

We conclude that a lazy, “do nothing” church may well be free of problems, but an active, working church can expect certain problems. A church that succeeds in converting alcoholics, drug addicts, divorcees; that seeks a “Samaritan woman” of our day, or a “Simon the sorcerer,” or a “Mary Magdalene” can anticipate some problems. But that church which chooses the alternative, preaching to and converting only the morally good who fit well into their own social and economic circles, while avoiding some problems, faces the greatest problem of all in their failure to obey the commandment of the Lord and to follow His own personal example (Mark 16:15). A church that develops thinking people who objectively study every Bible question for themselves can expect some differences to arise in their earnest search for truth. A hospitable church must be prepared for charges of neglect in their show of hospitality. True zeal for the Lord will beget problems but woe to that church that neglects the Lord’s work in order to avoid problems. The Lord’s anathema or curse is upon that church.

It is not the existence or non-existence of problems, then, that determines the strength of a church, but how the church deals with its problems. Love for one another, mutual concern, longsuffering, humility, love for truth, determination to do God’s will -- these are

the qualities that make for a strong church. They cannot stop problems from developing, but they can enable a church to bring its problems to God-approved solutions.

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