

The Strength Of The Congregation

Unfortunately, because of lifestyle choices, my parents, sister and I had to separate ourselves from a lot of our family. While this was difficult to deal with, there was comfort in having our Christian brethren with us, not only to support us but to fill in those roles we missed. Like-minded Christians became grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters. There are some congregations, however, where brethren are not so close to one another. They attend worship to offer praise and service, but when all is said and done, when the last prayer has been said, the members refuse to communicate and get to know the people around them. This is not healthy for a congregation, nor is it healthy for the individual.

Scripture tells us that no one is perfect, but we also need to remember that no one can go through temptation alone. There will always come a time in each of our lives when, whether you like it or not, you are going to be weak, like everything around you is bringing you to your knees, and you just can't get up. First Kings 18 tells the story of the prophet Elijah, a man of action and dedication to God, and how he challenged and overcame the 450 prophets of Baal as well as 400 prophets of Asherah. He won a tremendous battle for God! Yet, in the next chapter, he retreats in a cave and is pleading for God to take his life because of discouragement. God's response was to get him back to work and offer him the knowledge of a remnant that had not bowed the knee — He was not alone. We are not alone; the church is there to lift us up and help us to not be brought low. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." We also have Ecclesiastes 4:10-12 that tells us, "For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

Furthermore, if a congregation will not speak to one another and will not take the time to know one another, it can be so easy for sin to enter in. We have examples in the Bible such as the corrupt church in Revelations 2, or the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians, who would come together but there were those who were living in sin without remorse. Jesus in Revelations, and Paul in 1 Corinthians both had to rebuke the members and tell them that they must cut off those who are doing wrong and give them over to Satan. Matthew 18:15-20 tells us how we are to deal with a brother in sin. If we are to keep to ourselves with our service to God, then why would there be a need for these verses? A church that comes in together is meant to associate with one another and "stir one another up to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24).

So what's the point? Why discuss how we are to interact with one another? Because we are commanded, that's why. Galatians 6:1-2 tells us, "Brethren, if a man is ^[a]overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." We have an obligation to strive to be like Christ and serve Him, but let us never forget that there are those who suffer, just like we do, and will stand by

our side to get us through the dark times. We also have the obligation, however, that if there is sin, we are the light, and as the light, we are to expose the darkness.

Oren Caskey