

# Congregational Challenges

(Zeke Flores, Adapted from outline by Gary Henry)

**Intro:** *There are challenges to be faced if we are to hold fast to what we have.*

- A. Jesus warns churches to hold on to what they have.
  - 1) **Ephesus - Rev 2:4-5**
  - 2) **Smyrna - Rev 2:9-11**
  - 3) **Pergamum - Rev 2:13-14**
  - 4) **Thyatira - Rev 2:19, 25**
  - 5) **Sardis - Rev 3:2**
  - 6) **Philadelphia - 3:11-12**
  - 7) **Laodicea - Rev 3:15-16, 19**
- B. To all the churches is also a promise, if they overcome.
  - 1) Satan would love to hinder us in our work.
  - 2) He's intelligent, crafty, & dectieful
  - 3) He works on us individually knowing that affects us as a body.
- C. Let's look at the challenges any congregation faces in order to serve the Lord faithfully.

## I. Remember what our work is:

**Sowing the seed of God's Word. - 1 Tim 3:15**

- A. A preacher must always remind people of this basic thing.
  - 1. *"You shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you." Jer 7:27* *"But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious."* Ezek 2:7
  - 2. Same in NT:
    - a. **2 Ptr 1:12, 3:1-2, 1 Tim 4:6**
- B. We must plant & water & allow God to cause the growth.
  - 1. **When we plant a seed, we expect growth.** One old farmer at a church service said, *"I may not make much progress but I'm established!"* One spring his truck got stuck in the mud. A member of the church happened by & said, *"Brother Jones, you're not making much progress, but you're established!"*
  - 2. We must prove ourselves DOERS of the word!
    - a. **Jas. 1:22**
  - 3. Be like the Thessalonians - **1 Thess 1:2-8**
    - a. You're here because someone planted the seed!

## II. We must live above pettiness.

- A. We are from different backgrounds, situations, & temperaments. (It contributes to our uniqueness!)
  - 1. Impossible to never offend one another in some way.
  - 2. The important thing is to remember we are brethren working TOGETHER!
- B. Selfishness, gossip, factionalism, personality conflicts, grudges are the scourge of congregations everywhere.
  - 1. It affects our worship - **Matt 5:23-24**
  - 2. Paul urged brethren to avoid strife
    - a. **Phil 2:1-4, 4:2-3, Gal 5:13-15, Rom 14:19**
- C. "Majoring in the minors" causes us to think small - to lose our focus on the larger priority.
  - 1. **Eph 2:19-22, 4:16**
  - 2. Let us never forget that we are fellows in fellowship, sharing, working, and participating together in a spiritual work that is larger than all of us!

## III. We've got to believe we can make a difference in our town.

- A. It requires constant discipline & diligence, not to mention confidence.
- B. We begin here with one another - **Heb 10:23-25**
  - 1. *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."* Prov 27:17
  - 2. We do whatever we can to encourage one another to practice what we preach.
- C. Then we take it to our little corner of the world.
  - 1. **Matt 5:16, Phil 2:12-16**
    - a. My flashlight sat in a drawer unused for months. Batteries got all corroded by the acid. It was made to be used not forgotten in a drawer!
  - 2. You will never know what influence you can have on a person unless you try!
  - 3. A woman who came to know Christ as her Savior returned home full of joy. After a few weeks, she expressed a desire to leave the

community in which she lived because it was so sinful. When her minister heard this, he said with some severity, "How would you like it if the city removed all the lights from the dirty, dangerous streets and left lights only in the good ones where no crimes are committed? Didn't Christ say, 'Ye are the light of the world?'" (Matt. 5:14). The woman accepted the rebuke, and some time later said to the preacher, "Now there are two lights that shine in our street." She had led a soul to Christ.

4. We may not like the world around us. What are we going to do about it? Let's start by influencing one person at a time.

#### IV. We've got to maintain an "attitude of gratitude!"

- A. We've got to remember Thanksgiving isn't an annual holiday, it's a way of life!
  1. Some folks act as tho they were weaned on a dill pickle & baptized in vinegar!
  2. Some forget our salvation & complain about everything!
- B. Paul had lots to complain about but instead he gave thanks & encouraged churches to.
  1. **Col 3:15-17**
  2. *"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*  
**1Thes 5:16-18**
- C. So did Peter
  1. **1 Pet 2:9-10**
- D. Folks want to see something that adds joy & happiness to life, not grumpiness & melancholy!
  1. Let us not be like those in **Rom 1:20-21**
  2. Instead, let us say *"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit!"* Psalm 51:12

#### Conc. Our future, our very souls depend on meeting these challenges successfully.

- A. Like Paul, we can *"do all things through Christ who gives me strength."* (Phil 4:13)
- B. We must believe that *"greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."* (1 John 4:4)