

## WHAT A CONGREGATION MAY DO.

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IT is not saying too much to affirm, that the possibilities of congregational life and activity are not comprehended by the majority of Christian congregations. We might even be bold enough to say that very few have the least conception of the reason of their organized existence.

They may take in the facts that are patent to everybody, such as, the public worship of God, the administration of ordinances, the mutual help and fellowship of the professing people, but beyond these their minds do not usually move. These are important parts of a congregation's activity but they are not all of it. It stretches far beyond these. It goes out, or rather, ought to go out into regions, where its presence will be as the river of Ezekiel flowing from the threshold of the Temple of God bearing blessing in its bosom; hope for despairing hearts, light for minds in darkness, cheer for disconsolate souls, peace for troubled consciences, and salvation for the lost, so that "everything shall live whither the river cometh." Our Lord's representation of the Church under a variety of figures intimates this, not only with great clearness, but also with strong emphasis, "Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." How much is the light hidden? or how low do we keep it burning? So low that it is neither a blessing to ourselves nor to any one else. It should be strong enough, brilliant enough to shine out, but it hardly shines in, it hardly assures the soul, which is its upholding candlestick, that it has any illuminating power. How can men be the light of the world, who are hardly lightened themselves? How can men impress the advantages of a Christian life upon their godless fellows when they scarcely feel its blessedness themselves? And how is the world to be saved if the professed followers of Christ recognize no self-sacrifice for the good of others in his example?

The Church of God is by the very nature of it an evangelistic force. Being saved itself, it is to seek to save others. It is to make the life that is in it felt, it is to impart its light and peace and joy and blessedness to others. It is to let its light so shine that men may see it. A congregation that holds its own merely, will soon lose its own. Advances must be made upon the ungodly element in the place where it is planted. The saved ones should look upon the unsaved around them as the field God has given them to recover from worthlessness and waste. They should move in and possess it. God plants a body of his people in a city or town or country region, and they may meet stately for worship, and think that when they open their church doors, and have the gospel preached, and lift up their voices in praise and prayer, that they are doing all they should for that community. Or they may cast a dime into the collection plate to assist in keeping up a mission Sunday school or a mission preaching service among the godless, and with that their interest in them and their care for them, ends.

Is that all that is expected of a body of Christians? No! In acting so, they are evading their duty, they are losing a great privilege, and they are injuring themselves. Instead of proclaiming themselves Christians, they are proclaiming themselves baptized worldlings. They are discovering themselves to the world as having a name to live, while they are dead.

A Christian congregation is to be a fount of blessing to its entire community. It is to act upon it with the silent but powerful efficiency of the light. It is to reach everybody in it, not in any methodized missionary effort, but in the easy, unobtrusive, effective manner of kindly Christlike neighbourliness. At the first blush this seems to be a startling position to take. And the question rises; How can this be accomplished? Is it feasible? Can it be carried into effective operation?

It certainly can in certain conditions, and these are such as the congregation of faithful men and women should at all times be in. Conditions, quick with spiritual life. Conditions in which self decreases and Christ increases. Conditions of holy, i.e., loving and ready obedience to the Lord. Conditions of self-sacrifice for the good of others. Conditions that throb and thrill with the spirit of Christ Jesus.

Ah! but we are so dead, we can hardly crawl ourselves far less help others. We can not keep the peace ourselves far less communicate to others. The graces in us are spent, even before our own wants are met far less giving to others of our oil. We ourselves need quickening. We need a fresh discovery of duty, and a thrusting forth into the harvest of souls. And how can we get this? That brings us to the crucial point in congregational life; the realizing of our individual obligation to save the lost. How can that be done? There may be different methods. Here is one: The holding of special meetings for united prayer and meditation on those truths that deal particularly with this duty. Let the minister and the elders lead night after night in dealing with the topics that have been chosen. Have some choice pieces sung as solos or duets or quartettes. Do not be afraid to have this attractive influence to play. Never suffer the service to be prolonged beyond the hour. Give as much liberty as possible to those present to bear testimony to God's dealing with them. If any say, but what if all our elders cannot lead, some have never done it. Then put one who has no experience with one who has some, and give him the lighter part, such as the announcing of hymns, the reading of the Scriptures, while the other takes the short address. Let the congregation meet this way to call down on itself fire from heaven, to burn up its dross, and to refine its gold, and make it a living witness for the Lord. Have no outside help of any kind to take away the minds of the people from God.

A congregation with its pastor is fully equipped for the work of the Lord. The weakest congregation may do this, and in doing it, it will quickly gather strength; "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

The work of congregational waiting on God should go on till the fire burns so on the hearth of the heart that its heat is felt afar.

Mr. D. L. Moody tells a story illustrative of the point I am striving to make: "Now, I have just come here, (New York) and I confess I have seen nothing in America like what has pleased me in Princeton. I think they have a revival there, and the President of the College told me he had not seen anything like it. One of the faculty told me he didn't think there had ever been anything like it in the history of Princeton. Of course I enquired into it, and I found that they had sent for different ministers to come there, and had been disappointed, and they got together—the Christians did—and prayed God to bless them, and one of the faculty asked them to pray for him, and right there the work broke out, and there have been about fifty quickened and brought back who had wandered from Christ and it looks now as if all Princeton was going to be blessed." That is the right course to pursue.

When the congregation as a congregation meets for the purpose of waiting on God for revival and strength to obey His word, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Then they each in his and her little world of five or ten or fifty families witness for Christ Jesus. They spread through the community, lighten up its moral and spiritual darkness with the knowledge of Jesus the Saviour from sin, and they draw near to the House of God, and to the Christ of God. Living holy and consecrated lives, they are God's witnesses. And the work of the congregation is a well of life, to the entire community. No congregation should be content till it reaches every unsaved person in the place where it is and works earnestly for their salvation.