

Qualities Of A Healthy Congregation

Ryan Goodwin

We are called to serve the Lord in such a way that we contribute to the growth of the church (1 Corinthians 3:10). Before the growth, though, we must ensure that what we are from the start is healthy soil. Can Christians grow spiritually in this congregation? Does the work seem tiresome or unevenly yoked? Is this a congregation that is open and welcoming, and eager to cultivate the Gospel in new or potential believers? If our congregation is not healthy and fully-functioning, then very little effective evangelism will ever be realized. Just consider the example of the churches in Asia, from the Revelation.

- Ephesus, though it is congratulated for its stalwart determination to preach the truth, lacks passion and fire. *“You have left your first love”* (Revelation 2:4). Do we remember what it was like when we first fell in love with our mates? The excitement, the thrill, that feeling of novelty? Such excitement is also seen among Christians. After time, though, when love is not stoked, it becomes dull and forgotten.
- The church in Pergamum, unfortunately, is described as tolerating evil influences (Revelation 2:14). Few things will halt the progress of the Gospel like toleration of false teachers.
- *“Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of God”* (Revelation 3:2). The church in Sardis was lacking certain qualities of a mature congregation, and such a state of incompleteness led them to be ineffective servants of Christ.

In this series of articles, I want to briefly explore some of the qualities of a healthy congregation. Just to be clear, I understand that the most important quality of a church is to please God by obeying the words of His Son (Luke 9:35), but the focus of this series will be on some of the practical aspects of congregational life, beginning with our elders' view of talent and initiative.

Empowering Leadership

1 Peter 5:2-3 and Ephesians 4:11-16 are both excellent examples of the kind of spiritual leaders we need to encourage in the local congregation. Churches that grow are those that have elders who encourage proactive members. As Mike Wilson puts it in *Tools for Team Preparation*, *“There is a shared vision and mutuality of purpose, because everyone is on the same page. Rather than placing artificial limitations on people, and where they can serve, the leaders encourage each person to fill an expanding role as his faith grows”* (Wilson, 18). It is unfortunate that many church leaders have taken their positions to an unhealthy extreme, *“lording it over”* the flock of God. Instead of being dictators who have a hand in every activity of the congregation, elders should work hard to *“present every man complete in Christ”* (Colossians 1:28).

Instead of stifling initiative or ideas, elders should seek opportunities to empower the members and give worth to their efforts. They should appreciate the enthusiasm of Christians, especially in the cultivation of the entrepreneurial spirit. Often, the most successful churches are those that have many business owners, coaches, school teachers, or entrepreneurs in their ranks. These individuals do not need to be told to

evangelize, or fulfill some other congregational need – they simply see a job that needs doing and they do it. Although we do not all have these qualities, we must recognize that we can learn them and encourage them in others. A church that needs to be told what to do about everything will likely not get very far in its desire for growth.