



HINDRANCES TO CHURCH GROWTH

By Pastor Hollis Partlowe, Phoenix, Arizona

WHY DO some churches move along and accomplish their goals and others do not? Instead of pointing out what causes a church to grow, it is our aim in this article to point out what causes it to stand still in its tracks. Everyone wants to move forward, so the writer would like to "stir you up by putting you in remembrance" (2 Pet. 1:13).

The first hindrance to church growth is complacency (self-satisfaction). Many feel that since they have joined the church and attend the services that is all that is required of them. This is simply not true. It is our responsibility to take the message of life to others. We are "stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). We cannot sit down on the job until the last person has heard the gospel. Far too many in the church are satisfied with doing nothing.

Indifference is the second hindrance and is perhaps the greatest danger to church growth. There are so many without Christ, the world is becoming more wicked every passing day (2 Tim. 3:13), the end is rapidly approaching, but the majority of Christians are unconcerned. They are neutral; they would not do anything to keep one out of the church, but neither would they do anything to bring one to Christ.

The story is told of a railroad company that decided to discontinue a money-losing train. A farmer opposed it, saying that it was a necessity to the area. A lawyer for the company asked him, "How long since you have shipped anything on this line?" The farmer answered, "Never have." "How long since you have ridden the train?" the lawyer wanted to know. The farmer answered, "Ten or fifteen years." To that the lawyer replied, "Well, what difference does it make if the line is abandoned?" The farmer replied, "We walk down every night to see

the train come in." Many feel that way about their church. It is a familiar old landmark. They would miss it if torn down and moved away, but they do not use it.

The nominal church, instead of being a goal to prod people along, is at peace with society. Jesus meant the church to be the yeast that leavened the whole loaf. Not all churches deserve this criticism, but many do. Let's face it! The disease of indifference is widespread. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light . . . It is high time to awake out of sleep" (Rom. 13:12, 11). If we are to "Enlarge Our Borders" we must be aroused from indifference and sleep and be alert to the opportunities before us.

Lack of vision, moreover, is a hindrance to church growth. Jesus often pointed out in His parables the endless opportunities that come our way and the use we make or fail to make of them. The first thing to do with an opportunity is to see it, recognize it, and call it by its name. The second thing is to seize it and press it home.

When Mr. Khrushchev was head of the Communist Party, he said, "There can be no onlookers." The Bible, in effect, says as much of the Christian. Failure as an individual witness is a hindrance to the cause of Christ. If we are Christians, let's unfurl our flags and show our colors in some tangible way.

In the next place, lack of consecration prevents the church from accomplishing its purpose. Many under the Christian banner fail to put Christ and the church first. They are often last. Isn't that often sadly true? Christians are to present their bodies to God as living sacrifices; they are not to be conformed to this world. (Rom. 12:1, 2.) Causes of most Christian failures can be traced to disobedience of these two verses. The great enemy that we must all avoid is being like the world. There is nothing unreasonable about complete dedication of the believer to Jesus Christ. We are not our own but we are bought with a price. Furthermore, we are not to remain babes in Christ but "go on unto perfection [maturity]" (Heb. 6:1). Many today are carnal babes (still on the nursery bottle) when they should be spiritual giants. They profess Christ but do not possess Him.

Lack of faith is another impediment to church growth. Nothing is more discouraging than a faithless people.

Consider the twelve spies in Numbers 13 for example. Two of them reported that the Israelites were capable of taking the land of Canaan, but ten said it was impossible. The ten saw only the giants and the well-fortified land; the two saw God. Needless to say, the people listened to the ten with their evil report. The people were at Kadesh-Barnea and could have gone right in and taken the land. Instead, they marked time for another thirty-eight years until the older generation died. Too often we are like the ten spies, but we must not be afraid. We cannot "Enlarge Our Borders" with an outlook like that. Many have gone back to Egypt in their Christian experience. No doubt Jesus would say to them as He said to the Pharisees: "You do not enter yourselves, and when others are entering, you stop them" (Matt. 23:13, N.E.B.).

Failure of parents to teach their children the Christian way is another thing that prevents growth of the church. (Parents, read some of your duties in Ephesians 6:1-4 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9.) If the church keeps its children it will grow pretty fast, but some parents do not seem to care. Scripture says, "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov. 29:15). How many times have we seen this verse fulfilled! Statistics show that few delinquents come from church backgrounds. Jesus Christ is the answer to juvenile delinquency. What a challenge to the church!

Once more, lack of unity also checks the growth of

God's family. The Lord has given different talents to different members of the body of Christ. These gifts are "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in *the unity of the faith*, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13). Too many cut themselves off from their churches and conferences. They isolate themselves. This weakens their testimony. "We can do so many things together that we cannot do alone," is a slogan well known to readers of *THE RESTITUTION HEARLD*. The experts tell us that one thing that causes more failures in every field than any other is failure to get along with people. This is especially true in the church. One is worth very little anywhere, regardless of his qualifications, if he cannot get along with others. Christ is not looking for lone wolf Christians, but for those who endeavor to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Finally, lack of sacrifice is a hindrance to church growth. Christianity is the religion of sacrifice; we must learn to put "first things first." Moreover, we will enlarge to the extent that we are willing to sacrifice and dedicate ourselves to Jesus Christ. Do you really want to enlarge our borders? Back of all real success must be an honest desire for accomplishment and a willingness to sacrifice for it. *(Please turn to page 14)*

SIMPLY TRUSTING

By Rosalie Ficken, Festus, Missouri

PETS soon learn to grow dependent on you if they know you will feed them. We have counted as many as four squirrels at a time eating at the foot of our big tree where Ed has fed them cracked walnuts. Early one morning I was sitting in the swing on our front porch reading. Something caused me to glance up and I gasped in surprise, for there peering over the edge of the steps was a small gray head. I knew that if you tossed them a nut and it fell short of where you meant it to go, they would come close enough to grab the offering, but I had never before known them to come that near or be so bold.

Holding my breath, I stopped swinging and watched the squirrel as he peered around with his little bright eyes, then hopped up on the porch floor. There he paused, took in his surroundings, switching his fluffy tail, then he took a few steps toward me. As I remained motionless, he advanced a few steps at a time, till he had covered half the distance to me. I wanted Ed to see him, but was afraid to

call lest I scare the squirrel. Finally I took the chance. When Ed answered I called out, "Come quick." The urgency in my voice caused him to hurry to the front door, where he saw the little gray squirrel sitting on his hind legs, twitching his tail and whiskers at me. As Ed opened the door the squirrel scampered off to the nearby tree where he patiently waited until Ed had cracked the walnuts he was waiting for.

The squirrel, though wild, had learned to trust us even to the point it was willing to chance climbing the porch steps to let us know its needs. As the hungry squirrel trusted us to supply him with food, we too have learned to trust God to supply our daily needs. The song "Simply Trusting" came to mind as I looked on. Like the hungry squirrel, first we must approach God and let our needs be known, then trust that He will supply them. Had the little gray squirrel not climbed the porch steps and boldly approached me, we would not have known he had missed his breakfast when the rest were fed.

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(Continued from page 5)

The Church of God has a great message for the world. If there was ever a time when the world needed it, it is now. Think of the people in bondage of sin, and the gospel alone can free them. Our message is the best reason why we should enlarge. The good news of the Kingdom must go around the world before Jesus comes. (Matt. 24: 14.) The gospel can rescue the perishing and care for the dying. Where it is not preached, people perish. So long as men continue in unbelief, the score of sin stands against them. Our understanding of the biblical doctrine of redemption gives us a mission to fulfill. We are a people of the Book; we cannot be silent.

"I think of my blessed Redeemer,
I think of Him all the day long;
I sing, for I cannot be silent;
His love is the theme of my song."

We are concerned about the lack of emphasis upon Bible teaching in modern Christendom. There is a tremendous job ahead of us. Do you care enough to help? Christ will open a door, but He will not go through it for us. Let us dedicate ourselves completely to Him and let our lives match our message.

WHALES

(Continued from page 10)

and strength. In glorious compassion, He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:25). Wonderful rest from your labor, lifted to new horizons, you can cast your every care on Jesus our Lord. "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1). How soft and warm and penetrating are those words of our Lord. They give assurance like the blast off of a space rocket lifting us up and up in faith till we see across the mountains of hope, and faith becomes reality.

Why are we not to be troubled? Again his voice, like a trumpet, in Matthew 28:20, says, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Oh, the joys and delights of this affirmation! You cannot go under or over or around or through. Remaining always fixed, we can know He is with us in sunshine or shadow, in joy or in sorrow, living or dying. For Him be praise and glory, for He is worthy.

"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from evil and let him get aboard the ship of salvation. As we sail life's rugged sea, let us be assured and know dogmatically that our Redeemer lives and will stand in the latter day upon the earth. We are His because He is ours in that we receive Him as our Lord and trust in Him to bring

us into our desired haven, which is the coming Kingdom of God to be established in its glory here upon the earth.

Let us say with the Psalmist, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me" (Psa. 138:7). Until the day break and the shadows flee away; until then, we will trust in our Lord and in God His Father and our Father.

RESURRECTION BODY OF JESUS

(Continued from page 9)

That the righteous will have spiritual bodies at the resurrection all the prophets have foretold. Job said, "Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" (19:26, 27). Job has been dead these many years. He has returned to the dust from whence he came. Yet his eyes shall see God in the resurrection. He said, "In my flesh shall I see God," and he did not lie, for he spoke by inspiration. Immortal Job shall see the Redeemer with his own eyes and in his flesh.

Isaiah said, in 26:19, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." Israel's dead men shall live, and Isaiah's dead body shall rise. How? Immortal, with eternal life, never to die again! The very teaching of resurrection is that that which dies shall be made alive again.

Here is a question to ponder: In the second resurrection, when the wicked are raised, judged, and cast into the lake of fire, what shall be cast into the fire, spirits or real people? The Scripture says it will be the wicked people themselves.

God Himself has a person, according to Hebrews 1:3, for Christ is the express image of His Father's person. In the beginning, God made man in His image, after His likeness. We look like Him. When we are made immortal, if we are accounted worthy, we will be complete children of God in every respect, being the children of the resurrection. (Luke 20:35.) Today we are God's children by faith, and our faith is contained in earthen vessels. (2 Cor. 4:7.) In the resurrection, we shall be the children of God in body also, being given the divine immortal nature by God's own Son. Yet if we fail to take Christ as our Saviour, we shall never have eternal life, not even in the lake of fire, for the wages of sin is death.

Since Jesus now has a glorious body (Phil. 3:21), and since we shall be like Him when He comes (1 John 3:2), we have the assurance that our natural body will be made into a spiritual body at the resurrection when He comes (1 Cor. 15:44).