

## Preachers' Pen Points

### How “Follow ship” Affects Church Growth & Decline



Just as leadership can be a significant factor in church decline or growth, so can the attitudes of the “follow ship”—the members that the leaders are trying to guide, motivate, and equip. Consider with me a set of contrasting attitudes that lead to growth or decline.

#### **Attitudes that help and hurt**

Members of the church must learn to respond maturely to perceived wrongs and disagreements (Mt. 5:21-26). When church members respond emotionally to disagreements about teaching or perceived personal wrongs or congregational actions and leave without proper dialogue with those they feel to be in error, the whole church is injured and demoralized. In many cases, those who leave encourage others to join with them to strengthen their case against whatever source of dissatisfaction they have had. These adverse reactions to disagreements often create tension among members as “sides” are taken and hostility is displayed behind the scenes toward others, rather than fair and constructive discussion of whatever issues and problems may exist. Visitors and weak members run for their lives when they see this kind of rancor in a church. Therefore it is imperative that all members seek reconciliation with their brethren rather than seek to undermine their influence through talking to others.

Each member must cultivate his own personal faith in God and commitment to His work (2 Pet. 3:18). Where these are lacking, there will be little enthusiasm for evangelism. However, where faith is sincere and our relationship to God and one another is encouraging, there will be an excitement in our language around non-Christians. Invitations to enjoy the blessings of God will be abundant and universally given; and outsiders will be curious as to what excites us about the congregation.

Church members must be eager to form new relationships for the purpose of evangelism (Mt. 22:39). The church’s growth comes from the contacts developed by the membership and the ongoing work they do in inviting their associates to hear the gospel and in the follow-up teaching that is done. When church members become content with their present relationships, church growth shuts down because there is no stream of contacts to teach.

It is imperative that all members keep a healthy commitment to the Scripture as the anchoring point for their beliefs and to make their appeal to them for the proper understanding of God’s will and how to apply it (Col. 3:17). However, members, like leaders, must have the ability to see how the church can address the needs of their changing culture without compromising the principles upon which the church is built. The church must continue to evaluate the quality of its actions and look for the most effective ways to reach the lost and edify the church.

Finally, members must listen respectfully and carefully to their leaders and work cooperatively with them (1 Thes. 5:12-13). In our time, it is fashionable to stress individualism rather than respect for the studied judgment of those with far more experience in the Lord’s word and work. This can cause congregational heartache and discord. However, when members develop a teachable attitude and a team spirit, all congregational needs and goals can be accomplished with unity and good will; and the salvation of many souls will be the result.

—Johnny Felker