

Body Life Problems and Solutions

Over the years, I've encountered a number of questions regarding the principles in this book. As I have met pastors and concerned laymen from place to place, they have often asked how these biblical concepts might be put into practice in a local church, under varying conditions. Typical questions and the answers we have found through experience at PBC are given below in order to help you to put these principles into effective practice in your church.

Q. "In a church which has for years followed a more conventional approach, where should a pastor begin to implement these concepts?"

A. The proper place to begin is with an exposition of the Scriptures from the pulpit, over a period of time. Expositional preaching will help the church see that the Bible does teach these principles, and that they have behind them the weight of biblical authority. The pastor must be gracious and loving, not lashing at his people, but gently leading them to the place where they will be ready and enthusiastic to embrace these changes.

Q. "What can be done by laymen when a pastor resists these scriptural principles and refuses to consider them?"

A. This is a delicate situation, though unfortunately it is met all too frequently. Perhaps a church board can send its pastor to a conference where these principles are taught, or ask him to meet with other pastors who have experienced these concepts at work; or perhaps a copy of this book may help him. A thoughtful and patient approach will usually work wonders in this type of a situation.

Q. "If these principles are so clearly taught in Scripture, how come I was not taught them in seminary?"

A. That is a difficult question to answer. It is easy for a seminary to begin to train men to fit what the churches are looking for, rather than to hold closely to the biblical pattern. Tradition is a powerful force, and seminaries, like individuals, can succumb to the pressure to conform. In the course of church history, it is the seminaries which are reformed by the spiritual awakenings among the churches, rather than vice versa. Many seminaries, however, are moving strongly toward a renewed emphasis on these biblical principles.

Q. "I agree that what you've presented is scriptural, but it demands tremendous motivation to get a congregation moving in this direction. How do you supply this motivation?"

A. Motivation can come from three sources: an awareness of the desperate condition of the church today; the hungering of individuals after excitement and challenge in ministry; and the conviction, arising from the Scriptures, that God will act as He has said. Try a bit of all three.

Q. "How would you recommend that we start a Body Life service?"

A. First, do not try to borrow a few techniques of leadership and expect the service to go. A Body Life service must emerge from the deep conviction of a congregation that they have a responsibility before the Lord to "bear one another's burdens." They must be helped to see the need for sharing, for honesty, and for mutual acceptance. When they respond to these with conviction, then it is time to try a Body Life service. Keep the service as simple as possible, and above all, don't over-organize or attempt to manipulate it. Also, be aware that many of the features of an effective Body Life service--authentic caring, vulnerability, accountability, acceptance, confession, and forgiveness--can be performed in the intimate setting of a small group or home Bible study.

Q. "Aren't you afraid that exhibitionists will take advantage of such a service to relate sordid or scandalous matters?"

A. Despite the openness of Body Life services at PBC, nothing like this has occurred. If it did, the leadership would welcome it as an opportunity to teach the congregation appropriate ways to share about certain kinds of problems. The individual involved can also be invited to meet with a pastor or elder afterward. If this is done graciously, it will turn an embarrassing moment into a tremendous congregational learning experience.

Q. "Is it not unwise to share your innermost secrets with other people? Isn't it better to keep them entirely to oneself?"

A. No, it is not better to keep them to yourself! Christians are explicitly instructed in Scripture to bear one another's burdens, and are equipped, through various spiritual gifts, to do so. Of course, some selectivity should be observed as to the trustworthiness of those with whom one shares, and certainly deep dark secrets should not be aired publicly, but no Christian should have to struggle on alone, wrestling with some terrible habit or overwhelming situation. He is cheating himself of the help of the rest of the body if he does not share with someone.

Q. "What spiritual gifts should I have to be a pastor?"

A. Of course you should have the gift of a pastor-teacher. This is fundamental. It is manifested by compassion toward those in need, and an ability to teach the Scriptures in such a way as to see people delivered by truth. Other gifts are helpful, such as gifts of wisdom and knowledge, discernment, prophecy, showing mercy, and the gift of faith.

Q. "Should all our Sunday School teachers have the gift of teaching?"

A. By all means! Sunday School teachers should not be selected because they are willing, or because no one else will do it. They should show some ability to improve the spiritual life of others through teaching before they are entrusted with a class. Molding the lives of young people through teaching is far too important to trust it to the unqualified.

Q. "What if a congregation is so small that it does not have qualified teachers for the Sunday School?"

A. Then it would be much better to have the children taught at home by their parents. Also, the Scripture instructs a church to "pray the Lord of the harvest that He might thrust forth laborers into the harvest field" (Matt. 9:38). We have filled many a vacancy in our Sunday School by this method.

Q. "Is it wrong to give an invitation in a church service?"

A. It is not a question of being wrong but rather of being inappropriate. There are occasions when it is most appropriate, if done graciously and sincerely, without undue emotional appeal. But in general it tends to weaken a church to make this a continual practice, for time must then be taken from the work of equipping the saints unto the work of the ministry. There is very little time available for this anyhow in the usual church service, and that is surely a far more important matter when the makeup of the congregation is essentially Christian.

Q. "How long will it take to get a congregation operating on Ephesians 4 principles?"

A. That depends entirely on the individual congregation and its pastor or pastors. It will probably take much longer than one would at first think, for Christians often require much thought and time before they accept new approaches. But if only a few in a congregation catch on and start exercising their spiritual gifts in resurrection power, it will be a spark that will ignite others and gradually pronounced change can occur. Remember, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness" (2 Tim. 2:24).

Q. "Is there any word of encouragement you can say to a pastor who is just beginning to put Body Life principles to work?"

A. Yes. Here it is, from 1 Peter 5:2-4--"Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory."

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