

Bedford Bulletin

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**“GOD
Made us
Alive...”**

**Together
with Christ**
Ephesians 2:5

Did You Know Wool Shrinks?

There was a time when I got into a lot of trouble because I tried to help ease some of my wife's workload. When she had back surgery and I would do the laundry for her. I was careful with everything, doing it just the way she told me. I separated the whites from the colors, I washed the colors in cold water with the "colorfast" detergent and the whites I washed in hot water with the appropriate detergent and a touch of bleach. I dried all the garments and brought them up to be folded and put away, and that's when it happened. I won't say she yelled at me, she never does, but she was obviously not happy with me. It turns out that I washed one of her wool garments and dried it along with everything else not knowing that it was wool and that drying it in high heat made it shrink. I actually was amazed that it shrunk so much that it wouldn't even fit one of our little granddaughters. I thought it was pretty cool that it shrunk that much, she didn't.

That story is true, and it is just as true with many local congregations in the Lord's kingdom. I have spoken to a few preacher friends that I know are working with churches and I know that their preaching is "rock" solid from the rock, God's word yet membership is still shrinking. So, one must ask why? Why are so many once strong congregations shrinking? There are a few reasons for this, and they fall into two basic categories. Physical and spiritual. The lesser reasons for shrinking churches

Knowing & Doing God's Will

Proverbs 11:14

are based upon physical things that happen and for the most part are outside of our control. The greater reasons for shrinking churches are spiritual which are the most destructive, yet they are things that are manageable.

For example, of the physical things that affect congregations what tops the list is people moving away. Fact is people get better jobs or their company needs them elsewhere and they move away which reduces the size of the body at that local church. Of course, that doesn't reduce the size for the universal church because faithful members will identify with another congregation in the area where they move. Another physical reason for dwindling membership could be that a company closes its doors, people lose their livelihood and move to another town to find a way to work and provide for their family. Then there is Hebrews 9 and 27, that is we will all die and that is a physical truth that we have no control over.

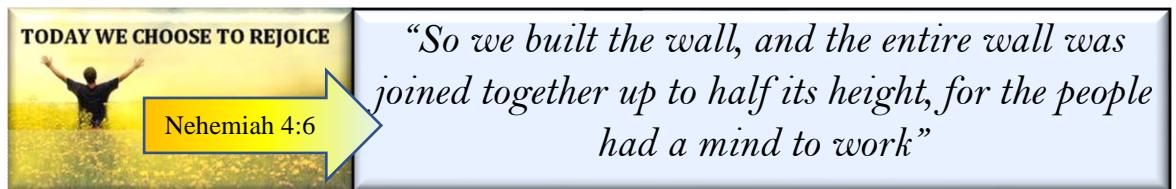
As for spiritual reasons here are a few that we must constantly watch for and correct. The first is lack of good leadership. Many small congregations find themselves "un-scripturally organized". That is often they don't have enough qualified men to appoint as Elders and Deacons. Peter wrote they are to, "*Shepherd the flock of God...serving as overseers...being examples to the flock*" (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Jesus is "*great Shepherd of the sheep*" (Heb. 13:20), we are all His sheep, and when we don't have shepherds, good leaders, we "shrink" like wool. The lack of good shepherds in every church (Acts 14:23), sometimes leads to a lack of grounded teaching, and work. Not so in every case, many small churches have strong teaching, preaching, work, but when the local church doesn't have "overseers to shepherd the church (Acts 20:28) certain other spiritual things often are overlooked, and the door for error is a little bit wider. Without qualified elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7) who "*by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict*" (Tit. 1:9) the work of planning, teaching, discipline and execution falls on the men of the congregation. Sometimes there are men who are great teachers and preacher and the church still thrives, but more often it fails and shrinks.

As a preacher myself, I am fully aware that I might be the reason for a congregation shrinking. If my preaching is dull, and if I ramble on without rhyme or reason, if I am a hothead or self-indulgent people will be discouraged and will go elsewhere, or God forbid it, just stop going all together. Paul withstood Peter to the face when he was playing the hypocrite (Gal. 2:11-17). Peter went on and held no grudge against

Paul, he even referred to Paul, “*as also our beloved brother*” (2 Pet. 3:15). If I error, or I am putting you to sleep you would be my best friend by telling me. Not saying anything will allow the problem to continue and slowly cause the congregation to shrink.

As I understand it, the greatest spiritual reason why the churches shrink is spiritual atrophy when it concerns evangelism. Jesus established His church (Matt. 16:18) and gave divine work to do and evangelism is 1/3 of that work. What will happen to your job if you

only do 1/3 of your work? What good is 1/3 of a car?



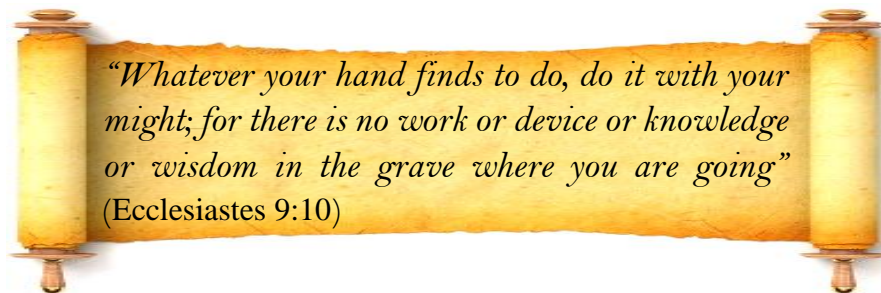
What if your boss decided to pay you only 1/3 of your pay? What if your contractor stopped all work on your new home at 1/3? What if the church only does 1/3 the work? Evangelism is that 1/3 that most often lacks and no congregation, regardless of its size, will survive without it. The church can be great at edification (Eph. 4:11-12) and benevolence (1 Tim. 5:8, 16) but if its members fail to evangelize, fail to reach out to the lost in the local community, it is a selfish act doomed to failure. Selfish I say, because we’ve forgotten that in the past, before us, someone had to be out there doing the work so we can assemble, enjoy worship, singing, prayer, giving and participating together at the Lord’s table. Have we become settled in, unconcerned about the necessity for every member to be involved in evangelism? Are we selfishly enjoying all the blessings, including the padded seats, air conditioning and heating, indoor restrooms etc., and forgetting to seek and save the lost? If so, there is but one conclusion, 1/3 the work means the eventual shutting of the doors. When we selfishly withhold from others the gospel essential to their salvation we will shrink. When the appeals from elders, or from the preacher are but dust in the wind—never considered beyond the exit sign we will shrink. But remember the appeal for every member of the body to evangelize came first from the Lord Jesus Christ Who saved us: “...*The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*” (Luke 10:2; See also Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Beloved doing only 2/3rds the work will surely kill a church. Keeping the afore mentioned in your mind I ask, is your church a strong church? So was the church at Sardis yet the angel of the Lord said, “*I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*” (Rev. 3:1a).

It is a matter of simple spiritual mathematics. When a church of 50 works and baptizes five people a year, but 6 people have moved or have died, that church is shrinking by

1 each year, thus at the end of 50 years there will remain zero members. Brethren, the early church grew and multiplied for one reason, because the people had a mind to work (Neh. 4:6; Acts 8:4, 12, 15:35). If I am truly thankful for Jesus, and the blessed gospel then how could I refrain from telling everyone who listens? Do not be hoodwinked by the “blame the times” rumors. The truth will set us free, and the truth is that if we work like they did, the church will grow.

Another spiritual lack in many churches is “no church discipline”. There isn’t enough room here to teach this but know this; When churches have members, who are living ungodly lives and their unfaithfulness goes uncorrected, that church will shrink because even faithful members will be discouraged. (Read: Exod. 32:28; Num. 14; 16; 21:5-6; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 5: 5; Matt. 18:1-17; 1 Tim. 5:8; Rom. 16:17-18; Gal. 2:9-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). Church discipline is a sign that we care about the souls of struggling brothers and sisters. When elders withdraw fellowship, they do so with hearts of sadness and sorrow because of their love for the brethren. Those who will not follow the doctrine of Christ cease having fellowship with God and we are to cease having fellowship with them (2 John 9). The purpose of withdrawal is to save their soul and keep the church pure.

In Love
dave



Welcome One and All!

Our faithful Creator is worthy to be praised in this assembly. All praise to Him who reigns above in majesty supreme! He gave His Son to die, for all mankind, that He might redeem all. Our blessed Redeemer suffered and died for our sins and is now risen and sitting at the right hand of God as Head of the church. Let us offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, knowing that He is the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him. (Hebrews 5:8-9) *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”* (Isaiah 6:3)

Please Come Visit Us

Times of Our Services

Sunday Morning Bible Study	9:00 AM
Sunday Morning Worship	9:50 AM
Sunday Evening Worship	6:00 PM
Wednesday Evening Bible Study	7:30 PM

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

1. Hear the gospel----- John 6:45; Romans 10:17
2. Believe the gospel ----- John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6
3. Repent of sins----- Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30
4. Confess Christ ----- Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10
5. Be baptized----- Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38
6. Remain faithful unto and until death ----- Revelation 2:10; Matthew 10:22