

CHALLENGES TO ACCEPT

Phil.3:13-14

INTRODUCTION: WHAT A WONDERFUL YEAR THIS HAS BEEN! ALWAYS NEED TO KEEP EACH OTHER STIMULATED IN THE SERVICE OF GOD. [An older preacher trying to excite the congregation proclaimed: "This church is going to WALK for the Lord this year!" Amen! Amen! "This church is going to RUN for the Lord this year!" A few more amens! "In fact, this church is going to FLY for the Lord this year!" A lot of amens! "But brethren, if this church is going to FLY, it's going to take money!" One of the deacons muttered so all could hear: "Let'er WALK!"]

- A. I believe that this statement is basically true: we are either going forward, or standing still, or falling behind. [By behind, I mean behind the norm God expects, considering our talents/opportunities!]
1. And I believe that it's true for both individual Christians as well as congregations of the church.
 2. It's **CERTAINLY TRUE** that one of our greatest problems is that it's very easy to become complacent, self-satisfied, contented and comfortable (this is the prelude to standing still).
 3. **And when once we stand still**, everyone starts passing us by and we begin to fall behind, in our---
 - a) – service to God,
 - b) – spirituality,
 - c) – growth activities!
- B. **In our TEXT: Phil.3:13-14-** "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (NKJ)
1. Paul believed in moving ahead.
 2. It is the only way to avoid stagnation and failure, physically, spiritually or intellectually.
- C. As a congregation of God's people, we need to think about what it takes to move ahead.
1. For each of the next four Sunday mornings, I plan to address a different issue involved in helping us to move forward as a church. [**Church Moving Forward:** Enemies to Defeat; Dangers to Avoid; Oppor. to Take]
 2. We must never be satisfied with the past or believe that what we are doing in the present is all that we can or should do.
 3. To achieve all that God will **give us opportunity to do**, we must be ready to stretch ourselves forward in order to be able to meet the challenges of the future, and to be most effective in honoring and glorifying God!
- D. Today, I want you to understand that we have some CHALLENGES TO ACCEPT.
1. I don't intend to list a lot of specific things for you to do.
 2. I do intend to list some of the different KINDS of things we can do.
 3. We really need to consider that the challenges which are before us ARE THERE BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEM, and so He's giving us the opportunities!

I. EVERY MEMBER OF THIS CONGREGATION NEEDS TO "ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE" THAT WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THIS WORLD, BEGINNING RIGHT HERE IN _____!

A. Some verses we need to focus on:

1. **Matt.5:13-16-** "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under-foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

2. **1 Pet.2:9-** “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*” (NKJ)
- B. The challenge to make a difference in “our world” is before us, **and we are an energy force that CAN DO THAT**, SO it’s incumbent upon us to **ACCEPT THAT CHALLENGE!**
1. That difference must come as we live – **rooted in** and **founded on** – the word of God.
 2. Christians have been **silenced** and **made to feel** unwelcome and unwanted by the world.
 3. Well, I have some news that’s not going to surprise you – **WE ARE UNWELCOME AND UNWANTED** by the world, and it probably won’t get any better.
 4. But we cannot let them **shut us up**, OR **shut us down**, OR **shut us out**, OR **SHUT US IN**.
- C. We must not resort to ungodly actions, but we must continue to show the world that we have answers to the problems plaguing mankind.
1. **Prime example** -- we need to **OPPOSE** sins that plague the families around us, seen in the immorality and ungodliness of adulteries, of different kinds of abuses, and of “alternative” life styles, not on a basis that they are **politically** or **legally** unacceptable, ***BUT BECAUSE THEY ARE MORALLY WRONG***, and displeasing to the God of Heaven!
 - a) And the challenge is not only to correct existing inequities, but also to **TRAIN OUR CHILDREN** and to **TEACH OUR NEIGHBORS** what God’s word has to say about such an absence of morality!
 - b) How can any of us miss this point so drastically by thinking it will just disappear on its own?
 2. **OR**, we need to “stick our necks out” as we exemplify the **GOLDEN RULE** of the Bible as we, ***“DO UNTO OTHERS AS WE’D HAVE THEM DO UNTO US!”*** ***“People will take advantage of those who do this”*** – ***but God knew that they would when He specified it to be an attitude of Christians*** – ***SO WE LEARN TO DEAL WITH SUCH THINGS!***
- D. We can change the world the same way God’s people have always changed the world -- by teaching and preaching and abiding in the gospel of Jesus, **AND IN THIS WAY** changing the hearts and minds of those who live around us.

II. EVERY MEMBER OF THIS CONGREGATION NEEDS TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGES OF EVANGELISM: BEGINNING IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY!

- A. Everywhere I have ever been, most people thought their community was not very open to the gospel of Jesus – that it was a “hard place” to reach people with that “good news” about Jesus Christ!
1. Is such an attitude as that **usually based on** the failure of well-planned and well-financed efforts to evangelize the local community? – ***NO!***
 2. Is it because there is so much opposition or animosity to members of the church that no one will listen to them? – ***NO! That’s Not It, Either!***
 3. And it is **NOT** usually because the people **hate God** or **despise His people** to the extent that they won’t even talk with us about religion, or about raising the moral standards of our society!
 4. **MOSTLY**, it is because a **MAJORITY OF MEMBERS** in many local churches **simply do not MAKE** well-planned, or prudently-effective efforts to really share their faith with others! [It’s **NOT** just a **Preacher’s** job! It’s **NOT** just a **PASTTIME!** And it’s **NOT** just a **HOBBY!**]
- B. **Mk.16:15-16-** “*And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*” (NKJ)
1. Coca Cola is so well known, that you can go into some of the most remote places in the world and there you will find Cokes.
 2. The motto-in-action of the Coca Cola Co. is to **THINK GLOBALLY BUT ACT LOCALLY!** They want to be everywhere, but to do it they know they must take care of each location.
 3. The church needs to learn this lesson in order to effectively meet the challenges before us!

4. I was recently reading of a large church that supported seven evangelists in mission fields.
 - a) Each mission point was required to have a 3-year, a 5-year and a 10-year plan, or goals.
 - b) Each mission point was expected to be well-organized & purposeful in their finances.
 - c) Each mission point had to have a definitive evangelism plan that used a variety of media to reach people in their immediate areas.
 - d) Yet this large, supporting congregation had no local plan of work, no budget for local evangelism, and used no media outreach in the community.
5. Something is definitely wrong with this kind of thinking. *[We can't just think on how to **activate others** ... we **MUST BE SURE** to **BUSY OURSELVES** in the different outreaches of our lives of Christianity!]*

III. EVERY MEMBER OF THIS CONGREGATION NEEDS TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT!

- A. Have you EVEN CONSIDERED the thought about who will lead this church in 10, 20, 30 years?
 1. **2 Tim.2:2**- *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* (NKJ)
 2. Paul pledged himself, obliged by the gospel commission, to the training of Timothy. Timothy was to do the same with other faithful men, who would in turn invest themselves in yet others.
 3. Christians and their guides and teachers today are challenged to train and develop future leaders of the congregations of God's people, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN!
- B. Just as there is a responsibility of leaders to train, there is a responsibility of followers to become trained, and to individually face the challenges of their abilities to SERVE THE LORD!
 1. The best leaders have always had good followers.
 2. In fact, effective leaders, most often, first learned how to lead by being good followers.
- C. I might add that the challenge is especially to develop men for deacons and elders!
 1. Women also have definitive roles to fill as **LEADERS**, but **NOT** as elders & deacons!
 2. God has a chain of authority that we must respect and develop if we are going to succeed in accomplishing his will.
 3. **1 Cor 11:3**- *“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”* (NKJ) **Eph.5:23**- *“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.”* (NKJ) **Heb.13:17.**

IV. EVERY MEMBER OF THIS CONGREGATION NEEDS TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF BEING CLOSELY ATTUNED TO AND FOLLOWING GOD'S WORD PRECISELY AND IMPLICITLY!

- A. The effort to move the church forward into the future must not abandon the foundation of Scripture as our authority for what we do.
 1. In recent years, there have been decisions made that threaten to change our worship and our work with unbiblical reasoning.
 2. Some of those are:
 - a) The increased use of entertainment as a replacement for worship.
 - b) Abandoning the model of male leadership.
 - c) Use of instrumental music in our worship.
 - d) De-emphasis on the role of baptism in salvation.
 - e) Compromise of various other doctrinal points for the sake of making Christianity more appealing to the world.
- B. Here's what GOD says about the importance of protecting the sanctity & holiness of His word:

1. **Deut.12:32**- “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.” (NKJ)
 2. **Rev 22:18-19**- “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (NKJ)
- C. Those who are going to believe that the Bible is the word of God, must also believe that God has put in it all that we must believe and do. To go beyond that, people are simply **adding or subtracting** their *OWN **ideas and desires*** in place of God's.
- D. **WE MUST BE A PEOPLE ROOTED IN THE BOOK!**
1. We must know what God's will is.
 2. We must never be so tied to our traditions or customs that we fight against God's will.
 3. We must never be so quick to look for **new answers and methods** that we neglect WHAT GOD says about those **OLD PATHS**, that brought us to **WHERE WE ARE** with the Lord today!

CONCLUSION:

- A. Ultimately, moving the church forward into the future involves every member
- B. Since **the church is people**, this church will move only as its people move!
- C. All these challenges are personal challenges to each one of us!
- D. But we cannot accept any of these challenges if we haven't Devoted and Dedicated ourselves to Jesus Christ by accepting the conditions of His Grace: B + R + C + B.
- E. Someone wrote a short piece titled,

THIS CHURCH IS “MY” CHURCH HOME...

It is composed of people **just like me**.

It will show the friendliness of Jesus – **if I do**.

It will do great and godly works – **if I work**.

It will make generous gifts to many worthy causes – **if I am generous**.

It will bring others into its fellowship – **if I bring them**.

Its seats will be filled – **if I help to fill them**.

It will be a church of loyalty and love, of faith and service.

If **I'M** the one who makes it what it is, **then I am filled with these things!**

Therefore, with God's help, I dedicate myself to the **task of being ALL THESE THINGS I WANT THIS CHURCH TO BE.**

-- Ohio Union Reminder