

The Lakeview Lamp

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” – Psalm 119:105

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Social Compatibility or Scriptural Compatibility?

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Many who read this article will immediately know about what I'm going to describe. You are members of a small congregation somewhere in the United States. Due to the economics and mobility of urban life and suburban careers, your membership has dwindled and the budget is strained. Yet, you still do everything you are able to do to provide edification for all the members and teaching arrangements in keeping with the needs of families.

From time to time a young family will visit. You give them an encouraging welcome, and you are delighted in the prospect of their permanent presence and work. Then, after a few visits you see them no more. When you call them or see them later, their explanation is given with some apology: “We were looking for a congregation with more people our age, and with children the same age as ours. Sorry.”

Personally, I am not inclined to spend much time chasing after these folks. I can explain what my convictions are, try to teach them what is valuable, and answer questions about our work as a congregation. But I cannot provide what they are asking for. When these folks want children the same age as their children, how can we respond to that need on demand? When they express their desire for more couples in their own generation, we cannot answer that need. Local churches – according to the Bible – are not in the business of providing prospective members with their preferences, favorable circumstances, and social compatibility! This is not our work. So I refuse to chase after folks who make such demands.

And though my opinion is not always well received, I have said this: If all the young families and couples expressing these desires HAD STAYED HERE, we would now have the compatibility they demand! So far I've not seen much patience in waiting for other couples and families or numerical growth. So they come and go – and actually contribute to the problem they complain about.

It will be argued that people have a right to their personal preferences where no violation of scripture is committed. Certainly there are choices people can make about which local church to be a part of which fall in the realm of judgment, and no sin is involved. And it would be reactionary and presumptuous to argue that everybody who doesn't place membership “with us” is guilty of sin and participating in error.

I would simply like to raise some questions about the typical choice many young couples make away from the smaller churches with fewer or no children. Consider:

(1) Local churches accused of not “providing” this compatibility will never be able to do so, as long as young people visit a couple of times and leave. It becomes a vicious cycle – we don’t have kids, so we can’t get kids because we don’t have them! Nobody seems to be willing to stay around long enough to break the cycle.

(2) There are things which in God’s sight take priority over our personal convenience. When we search for favorable personal circumstances above conviction and conscience, we do our families and children no favor. We all know that some of these couples and families reject good, sound churches and join the larger, more socially compatible churches in spite of the unscriptural work involved. These are “mainstream” churches with programs of work which are attractive and emotionally exciting, but without scriptural substance! This is the real tragedy. This goes beyond poor judgment. This is wrong (**Acts 2:42; Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9**).

(3) Even if the church young parents migrate to is both large and scriptural in their work, shouldn’t they consider the potential blessing involved in contributing to the smaller, struggling local work? There is something positive to be said about going and staying where you are needed (**Phil. 1:12**).

(4) Instead of seeing a large, socially compatible church as reliable for saving the children, perhaps the parents need to take on more of that duty. {And incidentally, there are many grown Christians today who are faithful, mature and active – elders, preachers, and godly women – who grew up in small churches without many peers. It can be done.}

What should matter? One thing: Are these people devoted to doing what the Bible says, in everything they believe, teach, and practice? It may be convenient and comfortable, but it is not necessary to have so many people your age in a local church in order to worship God and do what’s right! It might be easier if there are children the same age as your children. It might be advantageous to have a Bible class arrangement that is exactly in harmony with your preferences and learning style. In fact, wouldn’t it be pleasant to find a congregation where every detail of the work (building design, number and age of people, Bible class topics, location, etc.) is perfectly in keeping with just exactly what you want. All of this would be no pledge of edification and soundness. Why not focus on one thing? Are these people doing the work of the Lord, preaching the gospel and organized according to New Testament teaching? Regardless of their size, age make-up, and all the other things I would prefer – Are these God’s people who are doing His work? Are they continuing steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine?

News and Notes

* Ray and Karen Moore will be having a singing at their home after worship this evening.

Members:

- * John Moore is still having pain and may go back to the doctor tomorrow.
- * Thelbert Frizzell goes back to the doctor tomorrow and hopes to get the staples out of his leg.

Friends and Family:

* Peggy Ridings, **Sandra Boyd's mother, died Thursday after a bout with pneumonia.** Her graveside service will be today at 2pm.

Absent: Jennifer, Michaela, and Macy Nicholson (PM only).

New Reports: Gary Hunt (NY), Bob Nichols (Japan).

How refreshing it would be for a young couple to come into a small church composed mostly of older folks with this attitude: "We are not here to check on your age or find people socially compatible. It is not essential that you provide children the same age as our children. We are here to join with you in doing the Lord's work. We want the influence of your maturity, and we offer the energy of our youth. Even if the church a few blocks away has 200 people and children the same age as ours, they are not committed to New Testament authority; and we will not join them just to meet our social needs. We are here to join you in doing what we believe is good and right before God."

May God help such upright people find their way to the "smaller" and "older" congregations.



"I have chosen the faithful way; I have placed Your ordinances before me." –

Psalm 119:30