

The Problem Of The 90/10 Rule

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Since the beginning of Christianity the Lord's people have had to deal with problems. Our Lord faced problems during His three year ministry (Matt. 22), the apostles faced problems throughout their lives (Gal. 2:11-13), and congregations of the Lord's church have had problems from the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-12) down to present day congregations. The assigned topic for this manuscript is the fact that there is a problem in the church today--the problem of the 90/10 rule.

The Problem

What is the 90/10 rule? Stated, it is the unfortunate fact that ten percent of the congregation does ninety percent of the work. When thinking about this topic, the thought came that it should not be called the 90/10 rule but instead it should be called the 99/1 rule! Getting Christians to put their belief into actions has always been a problem within the church.

Most, but not all, of churches of Christ today are full of idleness and indifference. It seems that the will and dedication that filled the first century church is all but lost in many congregations. One could but wonder if many within our pews truly believe that which they profess. Members of the Lord's church used to be "Bible quoting, Bible toting" stalwarts, now it's standing for nothing and making no difference in the world. What brought about the fact that so few are attempting to carry on the Lord's work? What is the reason that so many congregations today are stagnating and even folding?

The Perusal

It must be realized that the fact of so few doing the work and so many doing nothing is not the problem, but is a visible symptom of several underlying problems. The Bible implores us to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5), and thus, to solve any type of problem, a perusal, or careful examination, is in order.

Note the problem: as a rule only ten percent within a congregation of the Lord's church are fulfilling the work of the church. What are the problems within the Lord's body that is bringing about this fact? A careful examination of most, but not all, of congregations of the

Lord's people will show, that a severe lack of the meat of the word is to blame. It shall be seen that an improper spiritual diet will result in spiritual diseases that will ultimately result in spiritual death (1 Cor. 11:30). Let us take note of some of the diseases of which many Christians are ill.

Apathy - Webster defines apathy as a "lack of emotion; a lack of interest". So many members of the church today just do not care! Negligence, which is carelessness, will cost many a saint his or her soul. We live in a world today which has no interest in spiritual matters, and that disinterest is flowing over into the church. "I don't care!" is the call of the day. The only unanswerable argument against Christianity is "I don't care", there is nothing to which one can appeal to counter such. Many in the church have placed their cares in the wrong area's of life. It seems that the cares of this present world are more important to many Christians than a godly concern for the spiritual (Matt. 6:20,21; Luke 8:14). Too many worldly things are capturing the interest of God's children, and this is something that causes our Lord to grieve. In so many ways we are like the rich fool who proclaimed "...I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19).

Mediocrity - The apathy of the church has led it into mediocrity. Mediocrity is a half way state, it is the stagnation of satisfaction. Far too many church members are satisfied, they are doing just enough to get by. God expects great things out of us! The church of our Lord should be pushing forward with fervor, and zealously obeying the commands of Christ; however, like Laodicea, so many churches have stagnated and become lukewarm (Rev. 3:15-17). Brother Andrew Connally has pointed out a very pertinent passage regarding mediocrity:

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12).

In other words, we have become too comfortable. The largest cult in the world is the cult of the comfortable. We must arise out of mediocrity and get out of our comfort zones. So many congregations today have been so mediocre for so long that to see a brother practice true Christianity is considered abnormal!

Lack of commitment - Apathy and mediocrity both will cause one to have a lack of commitment and conviction. As brother Wendell Winkler once stated, "More commitment, not committees, is the pressing need in the church." We should be able to say with the apostle Paul:

“For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

What is it that the Lord expects of us? He wants our all! Winkler stated:

Commitment begins when we sincerely want to know what to do to be saved and ends when we finish the last mile of the way. Christianity is something we eat, sleep, drink and breathe. It is not like our Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. Such commitment is the remedy for ‘how little can I do to get by?’, divided allegiance, non-involvement, worldliness, and Sunday morning religion. The commitment of which we speak, involves solely, surrendering self.” (Winkler, 24).

Paul stated “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Jesus said “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). What was the cross in those days? It was not a decoration to be adored like it is today, it was a form of execution! What Christ was saying is to follow Him one must put oneself to death! It would be like our Lord telling us today to take up our electric chair and follow Him!

C.S. Lewis stated regarding Christ’s request

Give me all. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here a branch there, I want the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked--the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself instead; my own will shall become yours.” (Lewis)

However, commitment is nothing without conviction. Christians today need the backbone of a telephone pole and a resolve that stands like the rock of Gibraltar. Paul encouraged “Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). We live in a politically correct society that cries “Everything is alright”, and “You have your values and I have mine.” In our society today the only sin that exists is the horrid evil sin of judging! It is truly sad when God’s children are too afraid to stand for what is right. An inspirational poster

hung on a high school classroom wall which proclaimed “Stand for what is right, even if you are the only one standing.” Brethren need to stand, and do all to stand (Eph. 6:13)!

Lack of knowledge - Apathy, Mediocrity, no commitment or conviction will cause a lack of knowledge. God declared “My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:8). The church is so weak today because of a lack of spiritual food. Were people to eat physical food the way church members today eat spiritual food the sight would be sad indeed. We are to “grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Paul exhorts “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Sadly, Christians today are not receiving the proper spiritual diet.

Lack of growth - All of the above has contributed to a lack of growth. When considering the 90/10 rule, the lack of growth that results from the problems that bring it about is to blame. Far too many Christians are still on milk and not on meat! This has brought about carnality. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 is a main text for this study:

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men?”

The 90/10 rule exists because far too many Christians, spiritually speaking, are still on the bottle! Instead of growing through knowledge, pushing ahead with fervor, and standing committed and convicted, this lack of growth has caused so many to sink into the morass of mediocrity and the awfulness of apathy.

Biting and devouring one another - The carnality brought about by such illnesses as apathy and a lack of growth can be deadly. When brethren are not fighting the forces of evil they will soon begin fighting one another! The church at Corinth is an excellent example of this. The Bible states “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15). Using a line from former president George H.W. Bush, we need a kinder and gentler brotherhood! Because of many of the above named illnesses in the church, the bride of Christ is being torn asunder, not from without but from within! Instead of busying themselves in the work of the Lord, many brethren have busied themselves in the work of tearing other brethren down. Gossip, slander, backbiting, being busybodies and the such like characterize so

many in the Lord's church--these things ought not so to be! Notice again that Paul pointed out that strife and division is a result of remaining on milk too long (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

Such has led to sundry other problems as well. Many brethren have just gotten too busy! It has been said "If the Devil cannot make you bad, he will make you busy." Brethren have gotten too comfortable, we need to get out of our comfort zones and start serving the Lord again! When the spiritual is not first priority in any Christians life the carnal will become so.

The Prescription

One thing about any problems is the fact that there is always a solution. After a close perusal of the problem it is evident that the majority of Christians have become apathetic, mediocre, non-committed, unknowledgeable, and are biting and devouring one another, all of which is a result of not being on the meat of the word. What is the prescription for the 90/10 problem?

The church must wake up! The Bible states "wherefore he saith, awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. 5:14). We need to wake up! There is work to do and heaven to reach, and most are not taking the right road. We must be doers of the word and stop deceiving ourselves (James 1:22). We must be a light on a hill showing compassion for our fellow man (Matt. 5:14; 1 John 3:7). We must be fervently about the work of winning souls (Acts 5:42). The Lord's church has been asleep far too long, it is high time that she wake up and go about the Father's business.

Repentance and confession of sin. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of action. Many Christians and congregations need to change their direction and their mindset. John states "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Simon the ex-sorcerer was admonished "repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22).

Move on to solid food. The church needs to begin growing again. Growth will not take place until a proper diet is maintained. Like the Psalmist of old the church needs to cry "My heart standeth in awe of thy word" (Psalm 119:161). How long has it been since we could not wait to get home from work or school so we could study our Bible? Are we really hungry and thirsting after righteousness? The church must move from the carnal to the spiritual and be that

great example of the multi-colored wisdom of God it was meant to be (Eph. 3:10,11). Let us heed the words of the Hebrews writer

“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as are in need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belonged to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:11-14).

The church needs:

The courage to care. Instead of being careless and indifferent toward spiritual matters, the church must get her priorities straight (Matt. 6:33). We must care about eternity, our souls depend on it! We need the courage to care about the truth (John 8:32), to defend it when the time arises (Jude 3), and to preach it at all times (2 Tim. 4:2). We need the courage to care about each other (Heb. 13:1), and to try to help brethren, not hinder them. We need the courage to care about the lost, and to realize that they are eternally doomed unless we caringly show them the way (2 Thess. 1:6-9; Gal. 4:15).

The Dare to Dream. The church needs to have great visions of the Lord’s work throughout the world. God meant for the Kingdom to accomplish great things, not to just exist till the King returns. Those with visions of greatness are often mocked and scorned, but such should not be! Think of many of our brethren who dreamed great dreams and they accomplished so much in the Kingdom, brethren like Thomas B. Warren, Foy E. Wallace, Gus Nichols, N.B. Hardeman, and so many more. Great things begin with a dream, the church needs to dare to dream.

The willingness to work. The church must put forth its best efforts in all it does. Jesus stated “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37,38). The Lord’s church is not a place of inactivity, but a place of work. The idea that the preacher is the one to do all the work is wrong. The whole congregation is to do its part in working for the Master (1 Cor. 12:12-27). There is to be a willingness to work, not grudgingly or out of obligation but because we love our

Lord and desire to please Him. No matter the outcome of our work we will be blessed for it (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

The church must have:

Enlightened Elders. The church must have shepherds who oversee and feed the flock, not CEO's who view their job as simply to hire and fire preachers (Acts 20:28). Too many congregations have elders who are elders in name only. Churches need godly men who meet the qualifications laid out in the scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-7). A church with a qualified, enlightened, and caring eldership is a growing church. Look at all the congregations that are making a difference in the church today, they all have one thing in common-- a working eldership. Churches must have enlightened elders who dare to dream to push forward the work in the community in which the church resides.

Dedicated Deacons. The church must have working deacons. Deacons are an important part of a growing congregation. However, many are deacons in name only. Some do not even know what a deacon does. Deacons are special servants who help get the work of the congregation accomplished. Godly deacons who meet the qualifications laid out in the scriptures have a good work (1 Tim. 3:8-13), and will help a congregation to thrive and abound in the Lord's work.

Mighty Ministers. The old saying goes, "As goes the pulpit, so goes the church." Preachers have such a vital role in the work of the church. Preachers can motivate a congregation to arise to the work. Preachers have so much potential to solve the problem of the 90/10 rule. If preachers will boldly preach the truth and challenge the congregation great good will result. Paul exhorted young Timothy "Preach the word, be instant in season out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Note that preachers are to rebuke. Such is not popular in our culture today, but to help stem the tide of the 90/10 rule some rebuking must be done.

Faithful Followers. A working, godly leadership will produce a working and godly congregation. Faithfulness is so necessary and needed. God does not demand perfection, He only demands faithfulness. No marriage is perfect, yet spouses can still be faithful one to another, such is all that God demands (Rev. 2:10). A faithful congregation with a faithful leadership can accomplish so much good in an evil world.

Conclusion

The problem of the 90/10 rule is a serious problem indeed. Apathy and mediocrity has lead to a lack of knowledge and commitment among members which ultimately leads to a lack of spiritual growth due to the fact that many are not on the meat of the word, but are yet still carnal. This will lead to fighting among the body of Christ. The 90/10 rule is a problem that will result in eternal consequences unless the church wakes up, repents, and begins to fervently carry out her work. This whole manuscript can be boiled down to one question and answer: Does the church today need a revival? Absolutely! (Hab. 3:2; Psalm 85:6; Hosea 6:2; 14:7).

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