

Sunday, March 26, 2023 am

WELCOMING VISITORS

With our upcoming gospel meeting in 2 weeks, I would like to address a subject that we should think about from time to time. What do we do when we have visitors?

The truth is, even in our small congregation, we very frequently have visitors, even some who attend with us regularly. While it ought to be obvious, let's talk about some things to consider when we do have visitors.

I. The church and evangelism

- a. We have noted in times past that the church has a part in evangelism, both locally and abroad.
- b. Churches were involved in teaching the gospel.
 - i. What is the gospel? The message of salvation – Romans 1:16, 10:15-16, 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Ephesians 1:13 – “the gospel of your salvation”, etc.
 - ii. Churches taught that gospel – cf. 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 3:15 – the church is described as “*the pillar and ground of truth*” and in so doing grounded the saints (Ephesians 3:11-16) and even introduced the gospel to the lost (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 – where in teaching, an “unbeliever” is convicted by the message).
 - iii. 9 of Paul's letters were addressed to churches grounding them in the gospel. 3 others (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) were to preachers in congregations with instructions about what to teach and do.
- c. Churches supported the preaching of the gospel by supporting preachers, both locally and abroad (cf. Philippians 1:5, 4:15-17, etc.).
- d. But they also grew locally by converting souls.
 - i. We see that in Jerusalem in Acts 2-5 where their numbers kept increasing.
 - ii. 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9, from within the word of God had sounded forth.
- e. In parables, Jesus spoke of the kingdom spreading the seed (Matthew 13:24ff – parable of wheat and tares; Also, Matthew 13:31-35 – mustard seed & leaven – both indicated the kingdom growing). As you study scripture, you find the church is God's kingdom, and each local congregation (which consists of the saved) does its part to enlarge that kingdom by winning souls.
- f. My point is that we understand the local church has a part in reaching the lost. Obviously, if we are seeking to reach others in the community then we want them to visit with us and we need to be prepared to welcome them in our midst. So, let's talk about visitors for a few minutes.

NOTE: Much of what I am saying is obvious, but it is always good to be reminded of these things.

II. There are different types of visitors.

- a. Christians from other congregations
 - i. Some and just visiting – e.g. on vacation, visiting with family in the area, etc. They had made efforts to assemble with God's people even while away from home. This is certainly commendable and shows love and respect for God and His word. We know that this is also an encouragement to us, as a small congregation.
 - ii. Others may be searching for something, possibly a move from one congregation to another.
 - iii. As the church engages in edification (strengthening the saints), they ought to be strengthened by this (cf. Ephesians 3:11-16 again, 1 Corinthians 14:5, 12, etc.)
 - iv. According to recent visitor's cards, this comprises most of our visitors.
- b. Those from the community searching – in the times we live in, many are searching for answers.
 - i. Occasionally, we have a visitor from the community that is “checking us out”.
 - ii. Sometimes, we have invited our friends, neighbors and family and they show up. It is my hope that we do this regularly and especially during efforts like gospel meetings.

- iii. This is an opportunity for evangelism – seeking and reaching the lost with the gospel message.

III. **Some considerations when we do have visitors.**

- a. NOTE: As I was preparing this lesson, I sought input from some of my online preacher groups. The following is based upon: 1) Some of my thoughts; 2) materials I have accumulated dealing with evangelism; 3) suggestions from others – in the preacher groups, online articles about visitors and recent online studies based on this topic. I say this because these are REAL observations and recommendations that have been made concerning visitors.
- b. Visitors today are different than in times past. The older among us remember times when gospel meetings would regularly draw crowds from the community. For many it was something to do. Today, we are competing with EVERYTHING just to find a prospect. And that contributes to why there are fewer who are interested. BUT consider this: If someone is visiting with us they are here because they CHOSE to be here and that is a plus to consider. We may not know the reasons but realize that likely they are searching for something. Keep that in mind as you meet and greet them.
- c. They could be some of our best prospects for teaching.
 - i. Realize that everyone has a soul. That ought to be first and foremost in our minds. Hebrews 9:27, 2 Corinthians 5:10-11
 - ii. Remember that if they are visiting, likely they are searching for something – hopefully it is the true gospel.
 - iii. Perhaps they came at the invitation of someone here.
- d. We need to let them know they are welcome
 - i. If this is their first time, they are likely nervous. We need to let them know we are glad they are here and work to put them at ease.
 - ii. IF we have community visitors, worship leaders should keep this in mind. They may not understand what we are doing or why. Song leaders can explain that we sing congregationally and invite them to join in. Explain the Lord's Supper – not only why but what we are doing, etc.
 - iii. Be interested in them. Smile and greet them. If we have time before services welcome them and try to put them at ease. Find out what you can about them WITHOUT being overly inquisitive.
 - iv. They are important and that applies to all of them. Remember James 2:1-10 and warnings against partiality. They are watching to see if you are really glad they are here.
 - v. NOTE: We have visited many congregations where few, if any, took the time to greet us. That makes a difference. THIS CONGREGATION is exceptional in greeting our visitors and the result is, MOST come back more than once (which is where your opportunities are going to increase).
 - vi. Do NOT ask them uncomfortable questions or pressure them.
- e. What are they observing about us?
 - i. Are we genuine? Do we love each other? Do we care about the truth? John 13:34-35.
 - ii. Is worshipping God important to us, or is it a chore or “check list” item?, Etc.
 - iii. John 4:24 – our worship to God is to be “in spirit and in truth”. Every act of worship should come from the heart and be participated in with enthusiasm. Titus 2:14 of being His own special people “zealous for good works”. Is worshipping God properly a good work? Consider 1 Corinthians 14:15 – both prayers and singing are to be done “with the Spirit and with understanding.”
- f. Do NOT assume they have Biblical insight or a correct understanding.
 - i. Do not assume they know what we are doing and why. That is why we might take time to explain what we are doing. IF we have community visitors, may I suggest, as announcements are made, giving the order of services. This will give direction.

- ii. Be careful in the wording of your discussions. Visitors may not understand Biblical terminology, even things we take for granted. Examples: “Lord’s Supper”, baptism, sanctification, beatitudes, etc. Remember that we, as seasoned Christians, have learned what these means (hopefully).
 - iii. Do not pressure someone into obeying the gospel, or even a Bible study. I am not saying that you cannot offer, but be diplomatic and simply explain what we offer (NOTE: Our options are made clear on the back of our visitor’s cards).
 - iv. Do not treat a visitor like someone who has been a Christian all their lives. Don’t be concerned about their clothing (unless you are dealing with gross immodesty) or appearance. Before you cleanse the outside, you have to take care of the inside first (cf. Matthew 23:25-26 – while addressing the corruption of the Pharisees, Jesus is implying that when we cleanse the inside, the outside will fall in line (Mark 7:18-23 where Jesus noted it is what comes from within that defiles (and purifies)).
 - v. Preachers and teachers need to know their audience – don’t assume that when you mention Joseph fleeing from Potiphar’s wife that they know what you are talking about, etc. Take time to explain if necessary.
 - vi. NOTE: This may also apply to Christians who simply have not been taught the “whole counsel of God”. Christians may be babes in Christ or simply never taught the truth on given subjects. Don’t assume those from other congregations know what you are talking about – e.g. what do “liberal” and “conservative” mean? What is “institutionalism”? What is their perception of the “work of the church”?, etc.
- g. They come with their own background – we live in a very diverse society. People come from different cultures with their own customs. To whatever extent we can be, we ought to consider such – remember Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 – Paul adapted to win as many as he could.
- h. They come with baggage – some are hurting and searching for answers. Not everyone is perfect (actually we know that No ONE is perfect). We know that this world is a messed up place. People struggle with broken homes and relationships, addictions, bitterness, being lied to and betrayed, etc. That may be WHY they are here.
- i. Jesus dealt with those who were hurting often. Matthew 9:36 – He saw the multitudes and was moved with compassion, 15:32 – He feed the 4000, 18:27ff – he taught about compassion and forgiveness, 20:34 – He healed the blind, etc. Recall Luke 7:36-50 where at the home of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus forgave the “sinner” who wiped His feet with oil, her tears and hair. Matthew 11:28-30 – His tender invitation.
 - ii. We need to be patient, compassionate and gentle in dealing with those who are struggling.
- i. Follow-up – if we have made our visitors welcome, we can invite them back.
- i. Show hospitality to them beyond the services.
 - ii. Send them a thank you card or note.
 - iii. ARE they aware of what we have to offer? Spiritually of course.
 - iv. NOTE: We do keep records of our visitors via visitor’s cards – these can provide opportunities in the future to reach out and follow up. Invitations sent for gospel meetings, etc. If it is your friend, find out what they thought about it.
- j. Do not be critical of the church – both during services and if you follow up later. We are a family and we have problems, but we need to keep those from others? It is challenging enough to try and convince people about the true church without filling your teaching with criticisms about other brethren. Again, we are to love and prefer one another – Romans 12:10-11.
- k. Don’t be disappointed if they do not come back – in the parable of the Sower, there were different types of hearts (Luke 8:11-15). They ALL heard the word, but only the good and honest heart received it and bore fruit. You job, as always is simply to plant and water and let God give the

increase – 1 Corinthians 3:5-7. BUT, do not substitute that truth as an excuse to not try and reach them.

- I. Pray for them – we emphasize the importance of prayer in all things – 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ephesians 6:18. We are praying for open doors –Colossians 4:3 (1 Corinthians 16:9). Why cannot that be a SPECIFIC door?

These are some considerations when we have visitors. I am sure many others could be added to these, but I share these in the hopes that when we are presented with visitors, we will do our best to help lead them to God, and that ALWAYS will start with the way we treat them.

Remember, our goal is to grow and snatch as many souls out of the fire as possible (Jude 22-23). And with that mind, realize that while we visitors are an opportunity, they are not the MAIN opportunity. Recall the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:15-24), where after the invited guests made excuses and refused to come, the servants were compelled to “go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in”. Most of our work is going to be done OUTSIDE of our assembling together. May these thoughts help us to take advantage of a resource that presents itself from time to time.