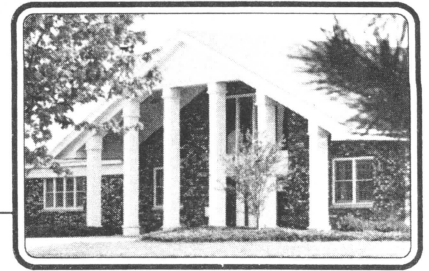


Faith Pulpit

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Helping Your Local Church to Prosper

by George Houghton, Th.D.

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Often when church growth issues are discussed, they are looked at from the perspective of the pastor. The responsibility for a church's prosperity, however, rests with each church member as well, and we want to look at ways that all of us can be of help to our local churches.

Actually, church growth is not the ultimate goal — having a spiritually-healthy church should be our focus. Growth is often the result of a church being in good spiritual condition so that God can bless it. Such growth may sometimes happen “naturally,” or it may be the result of careful planning. It is not wrong to want to see the Lord's work prosper and to plan for it — just as long as this is done in ways which are honoring to the Lord. In what ways, then, may people in their local churches respond so that God will be at work and cause His churches to prosper?

I. Reaffirm Your Commitment

As a member of a local church you have already made a commitment. This commitment is first to Christ, having trusted Him to be your personal Savior. Then there has been your decision to allow Him to control your life so that you can live in obedience to His will and so that His cause will prosper. You expressed this in your decision to obey the Lord through believer's baptism. You also are committing yourself to the Lord's work and His people each time you partake of the Lord's Supper in your church.

When you joined your local church you also made a commitment. Often this commitment is expressed in a church covenant. These are vows or promises to your church which should be reviewed and renewed on a regular basis. In many church covenants the church member promises to support one's local church as an institution, to keep one's personal life in tune with the Lord, and to assist other members of the local church. As one church covenant expresses it, we are promising to “strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to attend its services regularly; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines; to give it a sacred preeminence over all institutions of human origin; to give faithfully of time and talent in its activities . . .” Since these are commitments which we have already made, we can help our churches to prosper by regularly renewing these promises.

II. Remember Your Obligation

Your obligation to your local church has several aspects to it. First, we must recognize that the local church as an institution has been established by our Lord for the purpose of carrying out His work in this present age. The Bible refers to the local church as “the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28b), “God's husbandry . . . God's building . . . the temple of God” (I Corinthians 3:9, 16,

17), and “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15). Thus, as people of God, we are Scripturally obligated to acknowledge this and to be willing to support our local church in whatever way possible.

Second, we have an obligation to the pastoral leadership of our local church. Scripture admonishes us to “know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord” (I Thessalonians 5:12). This concept of knowing involves more than mere intellectual awareness of one's pastor. It speaks of having a love and appreciation for him. Scripture then underscores this obligation by saying we are to “esteem them very highly in love” (I Thessalonians 5:13). Further, we are to “obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves” (Hebrews 13:17). While it is true that there may be times of exception to this, the Bible is very clear as to the church member's general obligation to the pastoral leadership: obey and submit! As church members we need to ask ourselves, How well are we meeting this Biblical standard?

III. Recognize Your Opportunities

Develop a mindset which continually looks for practical ways to help the Lord's work to prosper. Here are some suggestions: First, be supportive of ALL of your local church's services and ministries (not just your favorites). You can demonstrate your personal support through your 1) presence — attend the public

services (Sunday school, a.m. & p.m. services, midweek prayer meeting) regularly, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25a); 2) prayers — pray regularly for your pastoral leadership, other workers in the local church, your Sunday school teacher, the church’s public ministries etc. Ask God to bless, meet needs, give decisions, and cause His work to prosper; 3) comments — your comments about the Lord’s work and His servants will reflect your attitude. Be positive, assume the best, and guard your lips. What you feel and express to others will often shape and impact their attitudes and desires. Let your influence be one of uplifting the work of God and not tearing it down; 4) presents — give systematically and regularly to the Lord’s work with your time, talents, and treasures: “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21); 5) expectations — what do you expect the Lord to be doing in your local church? If you pray specifically for God to be at work in your church, then be looking for those prayers to be answered in specific ways. Come

to church expecting God to convict sinners of their need for a Savior, bless the hearts of those walking with Him, teach those who desire to know His Word, and encourage those who bring their heartaches to Him.

Second, be willing to participate personally in your church’s services and ministries. You can participate in many different ways. 1) Use your gifts and abilities (such as singing in the choir; helping in VBS, Sunday school, children’s church; calling on visitors; teaching a class; providing special music; serving as pianist/organist or church officer; being an usher; helping plan socials etc.). Be willing to get involved. 2) Seriously consider all opportunities for ministry which come your way — even if these are not your “gifted” areas. Who knows how God might use you? 3) Get to know all of the people in your local church. You will learn to love and appreciate them for their unique qualities. Avoid cliques. Spend time after services talking and fellowshiping with various people. Get to know newcomers. Search out those in the congregation who might not be noticed by others. 4) Consider

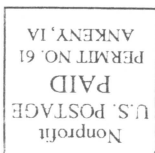
discipling a young Christian. You do not have to have a graduate degree in Bible to do this effectively. There are several good booklets and support materials published which could serve as a guide for such an occasion. Reviewing the basics will help you, and discipling a young Christian will give you a wonderful sense of being used by God to build into someone else’s life. 5) Think of ways to build up the Lord’s people and the Lord’s work. Share these with your pastor. Open your home to visiting speakers, missionaries, your pastor and his family, the youth group, your Sunday school class, and others. Drop your pastor an encouraging note from time to time. Thank him for his ministry to you and your family. Visit shut-ins. Encourage those going through times of difficulty and crisis.

Your local church will prosper because of godly leadership. But its prosperity should not depend on its leadership alone. Each church member can play a vital part in helping to see one’s church become (and continue to be) spiritually alive and healthy.

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