

Pam 759

Church Efficiency in the Kingdom

VICTOR
I.
MASTERS,
Editorial Secretary

*Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock,
. . . . to shepherd the church of God,
which he purchased with his own blood.---
Acts. 20:28.*

Publicity Department
of the Home Mission
Board of the Southern
Baptist Convention,
Atlanta, - Georgia.



Second Edition.

Church Efficiency in the Kingdom.

Church efficiency in the Kingdom can only be had through a common concern for the welfare of Kingdom interests. It calls for co-operative service looking to the realization of those interests. In rendering it we must keep the door of good will and fellowship open to all the people of God.

But the first step toward its realization, a step without which all steps beyond are stumbling and uncertain, is to make real the co-operative missionary spirit in each denominational body. However much the different religious bodies may lack of realizing this idea in their own internal relations, yet they have in their hands all the organization machinery necessary to develop their component elements into Kingdom efficiency.

First a Responsibility of Each Christian Body.

Each religious group has the confidence of its non-co-operating units and can win them into a larger participancy in Kingdom interests fostered by the group, while outside religious agencies with the same effort would produce only confusion and demoralization. If we do not first have effective order within, how can we hope to approach it without? If we do not have order within the family, how may we hope for order in society at large? If the local church has not demonstrated the spirit of co-operation and efficiency in its own body, how can we hope that it shall influence toward efficiency other churches in its own denominational group or without its own group?

One does not indicate lack of sympathy for a larger fellowship among all the people of God, when he insists that Kingdom efficiency by every mandate of spiritual strategy and common sense must first be sought in terms of the efficiency of each church in its

own spiritual body. The more highly developed brethren, who may fail to be impressed by other restraining considerations, will need to consider in this connection the principle which made Paul refuse to eat meat offered to idols, if it offended the consciences of weaker brethren.

A Great Question for Southern Baptists.

None of the larger religious bodies in America need more than Southern Baptists to give attention to developing the churches for efficiency in the Kingdom. Within the last few years we have come to realize that 10,000 of our 25,000 Southern Baptist churches have no fellowship whatever with the whole Baptist body in the co-operative work of missions and benevolence, that 3,000 others show little more than a casual or spasmodic interest in co-operative service, and yet other thousands higher up in the standard of efficiency are far from being adequately enlisted.

The dawning realization of this situation has brought something of an unpleasant shock, and yet the frankness and earnestness of purpose with which our Baptist people are coming to face it, and to gird themselves for the great task of helping to remedy it, is full of hope and cheer. There are other large religious bodies in which a like survey of undeveloped churches might not reveal a better condition than our own. While we are humbled by a sense of our lack and our nerves quiver at the thought of the bigness of the development work that is open to us, we rejoice that our people have so readily opened their hearts to the need and shown that they have faith and courage to undertake this task.

Baptist Efficiency Institutions.

Let us consider the price of Kingdom efficiency in the undeveloped churches mentioned above. This will not exclude other thousands of churches which, though they are partially enlisted, need similar inspirational

aid toward enlarging their outreach and effectiveness. Beginning with the organized life of our denomination various great agencies have led our Baptist people to pay the price of Kingdom efficiency. The number and power of these agencies have increased with the strength and development of our spiritual body. These institutions have served various sections of our church membership. There are the theological seminaries, denominational colleges, women's missionary societies, Sunday-schools, young people's organizations. The same principle is involved, though it does not serve the whole body, in the Home Mission Board system of mountain schools. These different institutions serve various ends necessary to the effectiveness of our Baptist body. But all of them have this in common that they recognize the obligation of the people of God to develop the new life which is in Christ, as well as the obligation to implant it. They recognize that teaching and training for service and initiation into the doing of it, are as truly a part of the program of our Lord for world redemption as is winning the lost from sin and death.

We cannot obscure either of these principles without injury to our usefulness, for they are both in the Great Commission, in that single sentence of the inspired record in which our Lord commissioned his people to perform the greatest world task ever committed to human hands.

The Whole Body Helping the Local Church to Function.

In the thousands of undeveloped, non-co-operating churches one part of the price of efficiency is such inspirational touch on the part of the whole denomination as shall enable the local church to function properly in its environment. The principle which should lead our denomination in providing this help is the same as that which Baptists have for long accepted in their support of such development institutions as I have named

above, and is set forth both in the Great Commission and the apostolic example.

In order to efficiency in our non-participating churches, we must apply the development principle in missions to the whole body of the local church, and not alone to certain sections of its membership. Salvation is free, but self-crucifixion is the price. Christian culture and growth are free, but study, training, enlargement are their price. Behind the message of free salvation, whether offered through pastor, missionary or evangelist, our churches have put their co-operative impact. Behind the training of the undeveloped we are coming to put this same mighty co-operative power.

We rejoice that we are coming to think of the needs of undeveloped and non-participating churches in Kingdom work, not only as the responsibility of the local pastor, but of all of us. It shows that our sympathy for brethren in struggling, untrained churches abides in strength, notwithstanding their lack of advantages and development. They have heard our ministers as these have preached Christ, and have come into the churches, true believers in Christ. They have gone as far as we have led them. They have failed to participate in co-operative missionary endeavor, but so did the rest of us until we were taught and led. Though distressed that they do not have with us fellowship in service, we rejoice in the sweet fellowship which we have with them in childlike faith in the Savior, which helps us to be better and strengthens us in the great crisis of life.

More Than Once-a-Month Preaching.

Seventeen thousand of our 25,000 churches meet for worship only once a month. Twelve sermons a year, plus what services may be conducted in the annual protracted meeting, make up the spiritual instruction and the outreach of the church. Out of 365 days the church gives twelve to teaching salvation and service.

A price we MUST pay for efficiency in the majority of our churches is the provision of more than once a month preaching. This habit is hoary with precedent, but efficiency in the churches today imperatively demands a change. It was not adequate for the day of homespun and localism, though it served a great and useful purpose. It is positively prohibitive of any satisfactory efficiency in our own day of machinery and intercommunication. Every other means we may use toward greater efficiency in these 17,000 churches cannot but fail of a fruition, if it is conditioned by the meager inspiration and direction that is possible under the once-a-month-meeting regime.

It is greatly to the credit of an honorable group of once-a-month churches and their pastors that, notwithstanding their handicap of so much forsaking to assemble themselves together, they have put themselves into fellowship and participancy with the constructive efforts of the denomination. When one considers how well these have used such meager means for spiritual development and service, he is filled with courage and hope. But we simply must not forget the greatness of the lack which must always be a handicap on the best efforts we put forth toward a larger and more alert missionary co operation, as long as once-a-month preaching in our churches continues to leave 12,500 or one-half of all our Southern Baptist churches closed to preaching service every Sunday in the year.

The Handicap of Absentee Pastors.

Absentee pastors are a corollary of once-a-month preaching. At best a pastor can live in the community of only one of the four churches, which number the pastors of once-a-month churches usually serve. Actually quite often the pastor lives in some town removed from the community life of all the country churches he may serve. In such cases he may be the victim of a bad system and not himself responsible. The Enlistment

Department of the Home Mission Board is seeking to remedy this evil by getting two contiguous churches to build a pastor's home where it will be in touch with both of the church communities.

An absentee pastor is not in any strict sense a pastor at all. The pastor is a shepherd of the flock. But if the shepherd sees the sheep only once a month, if he is absent twenty-eight or twenty-nine days out of thirty, there will be strayed sheep with none to search for them, hungry sheep with none to feed, sheep beset by wolves and snares with none to safeguard and protect. Birth, marriage, death, joy, sorrow, temptation, perplexity, doubt--the whole gamut of human experience is sounded in the community of a once-a-month church without the presence of the shepherd of the flock to admonish, comfort, and inspire. The price of efficiency in our country churches is a pastoral care maintained by a resident ministry.

A Living Wage for the Minister.

Another element in the price which must be paid for efficiency in undeveloped churches is a more adequate support for pastors. The average salary of pastors in once-a-month churches is less than \$100 rather than more. It varies from \$10 and less to \$200 and more. The average salary paid by the more substantial churches of this class is \$150. We know of one pastor whose salary from all quarters was \$13.20 for the year, and there are others, many others.

How shall we break the weary circle of inefficiency, exit from which is closed on the one hand by once-a-month preaching and a pastoral stipend much below a living wage, and on the other by inadequate preaching and pastoral care? Better preaching alone cannot do it and better support alone cannot do it. Better support will tend toward better preaching and better preaching will tend toward better support, but neither, by itself is a panacea.

Enthusiasm for the Commonplace Work of the Day.

The elements mentioned here of the price of Kingdom efficiency in the churches are simple, commonplace. But our present Baptist needs urgently call for the growth of a great enthusiasm for the work of the day; an enthusiasm which is either vigorous enough to clothe the common things with romance, or consecrated enough to work at so immediate and great a task without the adventitious advantage of picturesqueness.

The Home Board Department of Enlistment and Cooperation has been created to aid the churches to Kingdom efficiency. It is the vehicle of the whole Baptist group for the task of the development of all of our Baptist interests. Through it our best and most progressive churches acknowledge their tie of fellowship and obligation to the most undeveloped and weakest body of Christ. Through it in the name of a common faith and hope they ask permission to aid their less favored brethren toward a larger fellowship and service. Through it Southern Baptists profess their loyalty to the principle set forth by Paul that the strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. Through it we are asking the privilege of helping to cultivate an appetite for strong meat, where, at least in the field of active Christian service, so many of our churches have been drinking only the milk of the Word—although in doctrine they are eating as strong meat as any.

Through it our Baptist principles and policies will flourish in the buoyant fruition of those Kingdom ideals toward which we have reached our hands from out of the inefficiency of the past. Through it shall speedily come that great day when the inefficiency of the babe plus the all sufficiency of Christ's great program, as interpreted by our people, shall step forth in vigor and strength, a whole man, such as God would have us be, in meeting the needs of a lost world and of rendering such a service as shall crown Christ King and Lord indeed.