

Seminars and Specialized Conferences

Today evangelicalism is being inundated with extra-church opportunities for learning God's Word and how it relates to daily living. We are told that we must take advantage of "experts" who are qualified to train us in the area of their specialty. The procedure is for several churches to get together to sponsor such a conference or seminar or for believers to attend some mega-conference held in some large city. Of course, there is much variety in the kind of conference that could be held. There are Family Life Conferences, Biblical Counseling Seminars, Basic Youth Conflicts Seminars, Spiritual Life Sessions, Promise Keepers gatherings (with emphasis upon developing men), Evangelistic Conferences or Congresses just to name a few.

Much of what is said in these conferences is very helpful. Biblical principals are sometimes set forth in fresh and exiting ways. God's teaching regarding the home and family are explained, often with the result that people return to their homes with a renewed interest in improving family relationships. People sometimes leave these seminars with new insight and with blessed hearts. Often, they pay \$20 or more for a notebook, which may be jammed packed with helpful information.¹

¹On the other hand, some seminars and conferences can have a detrimental impact upon God's people as a result of erroneous teachings, ecumenical leanings, worldly approaches, and other philosophies that remove us far from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor. 11:3). May we be discerning in these days.

In spite of all of the good that may be accomplished by participating in such para-church activities, are we really following the pattern set forth in the New Testament? God's Word teaches us that the local church is totally sufficient for the edifying and equipping of God's people (Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 1:28). Through the God-ordained ministry of the local assembly, believers should have access to everything that is profitable for life and godliness, even the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 27). God has even gifted men (Eph 4:11) for the purpose of totally equipping each believer so that he is ready for every good work and ready to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12). Herein lies the genius of the assembly!

However, today we are told that the local assembly is not enough. We are told that the Pastor-teacher is very deficient in some areas. He is not really able to fully equip the saints that must have something extra! The only answer is to go to specialists--experts who can equip us in needed areas of neglected truth. The local church is not sufficient to train its people regarding husband and wife and family relationships, so we must go to a conference. The local church is unable to instruct us regarding our duty to confront men and women with their responsibility in light of God's Word, so we need to attend Biblical Counseling sessions. The local church is not adequate for the equipping of our young people with Biblical principals for living, so we must send them to listen to an expert on basic youth conflicts. The pastor struggles to raise up godly men who are governed by Biblical principles so the men are encouraged to attend Promise Keepers meetings to make up for this lack. No longer do we need gifted men who will declare the whole counsel of God but we need specialized experts who will flood our souls with a particular subject that will hold us until the next conference rolls along.

Such a situation has arisen simply because of the failure of the local church to do its God-given job--namely, to equip the saints (Eph. 4:12) and to teach them all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us (Matt. 28:20). May this serve as a strong

rebuke to us. People are not being fed in our churches, and so when a Bible conference or seminar comes along they flock to it because they are hungry for teaching. They long to understand simple Biblical principles that they can implement in their daily walk. They cry out for God's Word to be real and practical and relevant and living for them. It is God's design that the local assembly should totally meet the needs of God's flock with the result that the sheep are well fed and satisfied (Acts 20:26-32; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). In fact, the faithful feeding of the flock is the primary way that the pastor can show his love for the Saviour (John 21:15-17).

There is a needed place for special times of encouragement and teaching; there is even a need for qualified men of God to come to speak on subjects for which God has prepared them in a special way. How we rejoice in the New England Bible Conference and the Independent Fundamental Bible Conference and the blessing and encouragement that these have been to us as our minds have been baptized and immersed in the Word of God. But we must never forget that God has ordained that the local assembly of believers should be self-sustaining and totally sufficient to meet the spiritual needs of God's people.

"WHAT THE CHURCH NEEDS TODAY IS A NEW CONFRONTATION WITH THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD, PROCLAIMED IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITH AUTHORITY AND LOVE, BY MEN WHO KNOW THEIR GOD AND WHO HONOR HIS ONLY WRITTEN REVELATION. Then, and then only, may we expect our deepest needs to be supplied, and God's purpose for His Church to be accomplished in our day" (Dr. John C. Whitcomb, *Does God Want Christians To Perform Miracles Today?*, pp. 12-13).

"Make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe **all things** whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

"I kept back **nothing** that was profitable unto you, but have shown you, and have taught you." (Acts 20:20)

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." (2 Tim. 4:2)

"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ....From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."
(Ephesians 4:11,12,16)

"I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you from the counsel of God. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock...to FEED THE CHURCH OF GOD."
(Acts 20:26-28)

"Give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."
(1 Tim. 4:13)

"FEED the FLOCK OF GOD which is among you." (1 Peter 5:2)

"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." (1 Timothy 4:15-16)

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