

## Making Improvements To The Church

Joe Slater

For a few weeks now we've enjoyed meeting in our newly renovated facility. Many would say that with new flooring and cabinets along with ceiling repairs and a fresh coat of paint we've made great improvements to the church. I know what they mean, and I doubt that calling the meeting house a "church" is as huge a problem as some make it. Nevertheless, however desirable sprucing up our meeting place might be, we ought to be far more concerned about improvements to the church.

Church properly means assembly. It includes, but isn't limited to, the things we do when we're together. The most obvious improvement would be for everyone to show up! Hit-and-miss attendance insults the Lord and drags the church down. When sports and recreation take a back seat to Jesus, the church will improve.

We publish assignments a month in advance to let worship leaders know what to expect. The church improves when each leader prepares carefully and prayerfully, well in advance, to fulfill his role. Our God planned and prepared from eternity to save us. Can we not plan and prepare to honor Him in worship?

The church, Christ's spiritual body, improves only as each individual member improves. You are responsible to read and study God's word, laying it up in your heart that you might not sin against Him (Psalm 119:11). You must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts while striving to live soberly, righteously, and godly (Titus 2:11). You must not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2).

This scarcely scratches the surface of what we need to do to improve the church. Let's be thankful for a fine place to meet and commit ourselves to making improvements to the church!

## The Sword Of The Spirit

Our Savior's earnest prayer on the night of His betrayal was for the unity of those who would believe in Him through the word of His apostles (John 17:20). He prayed that they might be one even as He and the Father are one so the world might believe that the Father sent Him (v. 21).

The pursuit of unity in Christ is commanded throughout the New Testament. What does it mean, then, to speak "the truth in love"? (Ephesians 4:15). If "*all things [are] done for edification...*" (1 Corinthians 14:26) and, if only such words as are "*good for edification*" come forth from our lips (Ephesians 4:29), then where is the place for correction? Keep in mind that the same inspired writer told Timothy to "*preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction*" (2 Timothy 4:2). Biblical preaching both encourages and corrects. Reconstruction may require demolition before rebuilding on a proper foundation. Spiritually speaking, this requires both correction and encouragement.

Be careful of preaching designed to offend no one; for it is powerless to save anyone. When unity is abused as a deterrent to truth, we become "*forgetful hearers*" who deceive ourselves (James 1:22-25). Unity is not the same thing as unity. Unity is based on a common standard (1 Corinthians 1:10; John 12:48). Unity is achieved by watering down our preaching so as to find common ground with those holding conflicting views. But, in doing so, we lose Biblical distinctiveness and cease to be "*the light of the world*" (Matthew 5:15); instead, we become a reflection of the world. But God's word is designed to set us apart to a distinctively different path. For this reason, Jesus said, "*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*" (Matthew 10:34). God's word is the "*living and active*" sword – "*the sword of the Spirit*" (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17). Let us lean upon its truth, obey its directives, and rest on its promises.

--Glen Elliot (Greenbriar, AR) adapted

## For Whom Did You Pray?

As you look at the content of most church bulletins, you'll find a list of people who need prayer. Most of the time these folks are sick, battling a serious disease, shut in and unable to leave home, or in nursing facilities. Some may need prayers of encouragement as they go through a difficult time. The prayer list can be quite long, with some names staying on it for many months. Sadly, we may become so accustomed to the list after seeing the names reappear each week that we don't give it much thought. Even worse, we may not look at it at all.

New Testament Christians are instructed by the scriptures to pray and pray often. Jesus said we are to pray to our Father in heaven (Matthew 6:9) and thank Him for the blessings of life (Colossians 4:2). We are to come boldly before God with our requests (Hebrews 4:16), yet with an attitude of humility (James 4:10). Christians are to pray for each other, and also pray for the sick and unfortunate. "*The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*" (James 5:15-16)

What a great privilege is to be able to go to God firsthand and pray on another's behalf. So, who did you pray for today? Remember, our prayer life is to be constant and consistent, so let us all "*pray without ceasing.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

--Jay Launius (Maud, TX)

## You Think This Couldn't Happen?

At age five I identified as a pirate. My parents took me to the children's hospital where a surgeon removed one of my eyes and fitted me with a patch over the socket. Then they amputated one leg below the knee and put on a peg leg. Finally, they cut off my right hand, replacing it with a hook. My pronouns are P and irate. Arrgh!