

REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

(Part Five – series on Baptist Distinctives)

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

INTRODUCTION: The church pays an awful price when it becomes like the world around it. The late Alan Redpath, British pastor and author on the subject of the victorious Christian life, rightly said about the membership of the average American church in the late 20th century:

“5% don’t exist. 10% can’t be found; 25% don’t attend. 50% show up on Sunday. 75% don’t attend prayer meeting. 90% have no family worship, and 95% never share the gospel with anyone.”

How can this happen to a church? It happens gradually when the “back door” of the church is shut, and the “front door” is left wide open to virtually everyone.

Baptists have historically insisted upon a regenerate church membership maintained by carefully examining all prospective members and faithfully exercising church discipline. It is most disturbing that Baptists in America today are – for the most part – reluctant to practice these two safeguards. We have capitulated to philosophical and societal pressures, and we are reaping the results. We must return to our Baptist roots in this matter!

OUTLINE:

- I. The Biblical Imperative of Regeneration** (John 3:7)
 - A.** A once-and-for-all work of God (John 1:13)
 1. Living members
 2. Growing members (still imperfect)
 - B.** The condition of faith/repentance (vv. 37, 44)
 - C.** The character of regeneration ones (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18)
 1. The tests of First John
 2. The tension between the ideal and the actual (v. 47 “*were being saved*”)
- II. The Church’s Responsibility to Maintain Purity** (Acts 5:11,13; Jude 4)
 - A.** A realization of the church’s spiritual nature and destiny (1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Cor. 6:3; Rev. 3:4)
 - B.** An awareness of the ever-present threat of false doctrine and worldliness
 - C.** A deterrent to “closet Christianity” (Mark 16:16)
 - D.** A call to church discipline (1 Cor. 5:12,13)

1. A matter of church authority (Matt. 18:18)
2. A mandate for faith (Heb. 12:11)
3. A spiritual purpose (three-fold)
 - a. To restore and reconcile to God (Gal. 6:1,2)
 - b. To keep sin from spreading (Heb. 2:15)
 - c. To avoid the appearance of sanctioning sin
4. A scriptural process
 - a. Privately attempting to reconcile (Matt. 18:15)
 - b. Bringing in “two or three witnesses” (Matt. 18:16)
 - c. Informing of the whole church (Matt. 18:17a)
 - d. Withdrawal of fellowship (Matt. 18:17b)

III. Practical Concerns in Light of this Distinctive

- A. Are we demanding a true public confession?
- B. Are we adequately examining candidates for church membership?
- C. Are we placing an overemphasis on numbers?
 1. Membership
 2. Attendance
 3. “Decisions”
- D. Are we advocating “easy believism” and mechanical soul-winning?

CONCLUSION: Baptists in America today seem reluctant to emphasize and enforce this distinctive of insisting that only regenerate people be received and retained as members in the local church. We should fear God more than we fear the loss of revenue or the threat of litigation. Unregenerate church members can become the Trojan horse that destroys the integrity and purity of the church.