

An Inside Job

by Bryan Gibson

We've been reading and hearing so much about outreach lately that we thought it was time to balance the scales a bit and talk about INreach. There's no such word in the English language, of course, so let's see if we can explain. We're talking about the efforts of Christians, both collectively and individually, toward those who are "inside" (1 Corinthians 5:12), "of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10), "our people" (Titus 3:14)—in other words, fellow-Christians, or fellow-saints.

Paul wrote two letters to Timothy, one to Titus, both of whom were evangelists. We can't help but notice the great emphasis given to INreach in all three letters. Great effort and much teaching is required to "set in order the things that are lacking" (Titus 1:5)—to appoint qualified men to serve as elders and deacons (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-13); to keep the church pure from false doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3-11; 2 Timothy 2:14-18; Titus 1:10-14); to instruct brethren how to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12); etc. Neglect this INreach for very long, and you're sure to have a mess on your hands. Give it proper emphasis, and the fruits will be many, including a people better prepared to reach OUT to those who are lost.

Turning to the rest of the New Testament, it sure says a lot about our individual responsibilities to "one another." Love one another (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12); be hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9); admonish one another (Romans 15:14); weep and rejoice with one another (Romans 12:15); restore one another (Galatians 6:1); comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18); etc. So in all your efforts to reach out, don't forget to reach in, because your brethren need you and should be the objects of your special attention. "As we have opportunity, let us do go to all, **especially** to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). Not surprising, then, that we read such commendations as these: "God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Hebrews 6:10). "The household of Stephanas...they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (1 Corinthians 16:15). Brethren in Thessalonica received strong commendation for "brotherly love," but were then urged to "increase more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4:9). Ministering to the saints takes time, and a lot of it.

Local churches, then, should seek to strike the proper balance between outreach (teaching the lost) and inreach (teaching and strengthening the brethren). Again, as stated earlier, successful inreach leads to better outreach—Christians become better equipped to teach the lost. As to individual Christians, it seems that lately some have criticized them for their lack of outreach. Remember, they've got their hands full, so don't judge them too harshly. It's a big enough job just to take care of their families, and then they've got all these responsibilities to their brethren. Excuse them for not devoting themselves to the material and social needs of their community. If Christ is living in them (Galatians 2:20), they will be

compassionate toward such needs as they interact with non-Christians, but this is not their main mission. They want those on the outside to come inside, and the only way to accomplish that is to teach them the saving gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16).