

## UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God*  
**IN KING JESUS.**

(Philippians 3:13-14)

#01-0728

by – Stuart H. Pouliot

December 11, 2007

### ***Stimulate One Another to Love***

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate [encourage, promote, provoke] one another to love [to show love] and good deeds [to do good things, good works], not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25 NASB [GW, HCSB, KJV])

An article was posted about a rather well-known and influential "church" that I never heard of, so they were not that well known or influential to me. After reading the article, I concluded that it was a good thing for us that we had not been influenced by them. I don't care to mention their name because it is not my intent to bring attention to them or to be directly critical of them. My purpose is to use this article as an illustration or, if you will, a springboard for what scripture tells us about assembling together.

Evidently, this influential church had a vision of what the "church" should look like that was modeled after the methods of secular business. Their vision was "big, programmatic, and comprehensive." It sounds like they practice what could be called "cafeteria-style church"; that is, they try to have a little something for everyone and attempt to get as many people as possible involved in as many programs or activities as possible. They are driven by programs and measure their success by participation in these things, thinking that the more people participate in the programs, the more spiritual or the more of a disciple of Christ they will become. As any good business would do to measure their success, they did some qualitative research, and lo and behold, as if it were some great revelation, they discovered that their programs did not necessarily produce or predict whether people would love more or be better disciples. They also discovered that the things that they sunk millions of dollars into (that's right, millions!) were not much help, and the things that they didn't put much into were actually the things for which the people were crying. Their conclusion: they need to go back to some of the basics, like reading the Bible and developing relationships; they need to fundamentally change the way they "do church" and replace their old assumptions with "new insights that are informed by research and rooted in scripture." I am all in favor of Bible reading and relationships, but I am not so sure about the research thing. I find it sad that they needed a research study to discover something that the word of God could have told them. It sounds like the business model may still be part of their thinking. Well, may the spirit of God lead them in all truth and change hearts to be willing to give it all up for the sake of Christ and one another.

This leads to the point of this issue, and that is the purpose in our assembling together as the Lord's people. It is amazing that the church of our day places so much emphasis on meetings and "doing church", and, yet, the very reason for meeting has been lost. If you do not regularly attend or are not a "member" of a "church," you are branded as "unchurched," a term that is unscriptural and very misleading. If I had any doubts about this term *unchurched*, they have vanished, for as I was editing this issue, I took a break to read the daily newspaper and, as if right on cue, there was an article staring me in the face. It started with these words: *Reaching 4.5 million unchurched*. It then went on to define the *unchurched* as "those who say they don't belong to any church." Notice that it has nothing to do with believing, but everything to do with membership.

What is going on? Why do so many Christians think this way? Part of the answer lies in the fact that what many call *church* has become nothing more than an institution or an organization patterned after the businesses of the world. Salvation itself has been linked to being part of this institutional church. The very essence of the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ, a spiritual body of love that nurtures and cherishes itself and builds itself up in love, has been replaced with activities, programs, committees, and a myriad of things to propagate a distorted vision of Christ's vision of His ecclesia (church) that He is building.

At its core, the body of Christ is a vessel of love (Ephesians 5:22-32), and assembling together is all about love as discovered in the epistle to the Hebrews that is quoted above. The exhortation not to forsake assembling is nestled between the hope and the day that is approaching. The hope and the day speak of the coming of our Lord to assemble all His people unto Himself. It is this hope and day that we are to have set before us that will stimulate us to love. The so-called *church of our day* is out of focus and has lost the vision that was held by the embryonic ecclesia. Some have lost sight of the very purpose and plan of God that kicks into high gear when our beloved Lord Jesus comes to assemble His body. In fact, this is the very assembling together that is spoken of in Hebrews 10:25.

**According to scripture, the reason for assembling together is to encourage, promote, provoke, or stimulate one another to love and good deeds.** The success of anything that we do is to be measured by how much love is manifested toward one another in fulfillment of the Lord's command to love one another. This is to be the measure of all assembling together, whether it is for worship, prayer, singing, fellowship, meals, or whatever we do when together.

Assembling together is not for the purpose of meeting for the sake of meeting, but it is for the purpose of stimulating one another to love and good deeds outside of the meetings. Loving one another is to be so integral in our daily lives that it is like breathing. This is really where the love and good works are to take place.

**We must be love-centered, not meeting-centered.** When we gather together, **we must be stimulants of love to one another.** When we depart from one another, we should be encouraged in our hearts to do the good deeds or works that we were created for *in Christ*. In fact, our hearts should be filled with love and ready to walk in love. Paul wrote: *And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor* (Ephesians 5:2). *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10).

We are to walk in love and in good works, and this is done because we love as Christ first loved us and continues to love us. Again, Paul wrote: *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."* Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8-10). *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality* (Romans 12:9-13). *And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased* (Hebrews 13:16).

We need to examine ourselves to see if we are living up to the command to love. Many seem to emphasize meetings almost in a superstitious way, as if they are required of the Lord to bring Him pleasure. But how can they please Him if love is absent?

Let us begin to encourage one another and throw out all these programs, strategies, and business-like plans. Perhaps the spirit of God will do a new thing that transcends the institutional meetings, and true sacrificial love will fill the ecclesia in such a way that it will flow daily throughout our communities in living, practical ways.

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds! Let us walk in love!