

## Spiritual Unemployment

By J.J. Turner

[Editorial in *Christian Bible Teacher*, Abilene, Vol. 42, No. 3, March 1998, p. 76; besides editing that fine Gospel journal, brother Turner is the Director of Bear Valley School of Preaching, P.O. Box 36225, Denver, CO 80236; (303) 986-5800.] Unemployment is a perpetual concern for most Americans. A daily watch is kept on the local, state and national unemployment indexes. Thankfully, in recent months the number of unemployed people has dropped. This contributes to a more stable economy. Unemployment is also a perpetual concern, and problem, for most church leaders. The number of people spiritually unemployed in many congregations is staggering; in some churches the number is as high as 80 percent. The national average of unemployed church members is estimated to be between 70 and 80 percent.

Why is there so much unemployment in the church? It is not because of a lack of work, nor the overabundance of workers. As a line in the song says, "There is work to do . . ." Jesus said ". . . Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35).

The Bible makes it clear that members of the church must work. Paul wrote: "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). James wrote, "You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

Since it is not possible to attribute unemployment in the church to a lack of work, there must be other reasons for its occurrence. Before we note some of those, we need to be reminded about God's attitude toward laziness and idleness, which are contributors to unemployment. In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus taught a powerful parable about idleness. The question is asked, "Why stand ye here all day idle?" (Matthew 20:6). Good question! In the Old Testament, God rebukes Jerusalem for the sins of idleness (Ezekiel 16:46). The Proverb writer makes it clear that laziness and idleness are unacceptable to God (Proverbs 19:15; 31:27).

There may be a number of reasons why a member of the Lord's Body is unemployed. First, he may be a voice who is unaware of the mandate to work. Second, he may not have been trained to do good works. Third, he may have worked at one time, and because of discouragement, joined the ranks of the unemployed. Fourth, he has a bad attitude about being involved in the work of the church. Fifth, he feels like it is someone else's responsibility. Sixth, he may be too busy doing other things; it is a failure to put the kingdom first (Matthew 6:33). Seventh, laziness may be a habitual part of his lifestyle. Eighth, he may believe the work is not really all that important. Ninth, he was hurt once before when he attempted to do a task, and failed. Tenth, a lack of confidence causes unemployment. Eleventh, there may be a lack of love for the Lord and his work. Twelfth, he plans to "get-around-to-it" tomorrow (classic procrastination).

How can we reduce the unemployment problem in the church? There are several positive things we can do:

1. Admit that we have the problem.
2. Pray for wisdom to handle it properly (James 1:4-5).
3. Teach and preach a series of lessons on the Christian work ethic in the Body.
4. Through special programs identify and display the various work opportunities in the congregation.
5. Have a congregational "Job Fair" where members sign up for good works.
6. Praise, encourage and reward the workers.
7. Constantly stress that "we are workers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9).
8. Develop and maintain a curriculum for training workers.
9. Leaders must model commitment to good works.
10. Approach members individually and encourage them to join the work force.

There are other things that may be done to reduce the unemployment ranks, these ten will get us started.

The challenge to enlist, encourage and train workers is a never ending need in most congregations. As teachers and leaders, we must always be mindful of this need and prepare to respond accordingly (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58).

**[Editor's Note:** It has long been my personal observation that usually fewer than 25% of any congregation are all upon whom the Lord can depend to finance the church's existence and work in the Gospel, do whatever it is that gets done and otherwise maintain the presence of the Lord's church in any community where it meets. Those who fail to help one another make the pilgrimage to the heavenly horizon simply are not making the journey with us. Regrettably, many brethren have bought homesteads on planet earth and no longer consider themselves pilgrims! We simply **must** re-convert our brethren to the cross and re-introduce them into the march forward. ~ Louis Rushmore]