

## Remember Our Guests

I used to be in Toastmasters. I loved it. The speeches were usually enlightening. The table topics were always fun. The grammarian kept us in check. We practiced the sandwich critiques that made hearing criticism easier. It was wonderful. But here is the problem. Most of you reading this have almost no idea what I'm talking about. That's not your fault. You haven't learned the lingo. No doubt, if you think about it and work through it, you can figure it out. But who wants to work that hard just to have a conversation with someone? It would just be easier to talk to someone who you can understand.

What's going on here? The problem is I'm using insider language. I was talking to you like you had been in Toastmasters and knew what it was all about. I acted as if anyone should know what a table topic is. By the way, that is when you are given a topic and you have to speak for 1 to 2 minutes off the cuff. A grammarian monitors your grammatical gaffes during the meeting and reports at the end about the serious mistakes any of the speakers made. Sandwich critiques are starting off with something positive, then providing the negative criticism, and then ending with something that was good about the speech. The corrective criticism is sandwiched between statements about what was done well in the speech. Now you are an insider. But before I explained it, you were a frustrated outsider.

I'm sure you can guess I'm not really concerned about Toastmasters. Sadly, in a congregation we can easily get trapped into insider thinking. We spend so much time with each other we forget what it is like to be a guest. When we do that, guests don't feel like guests; they feel like outsiders. Paul talked about this problem in **I Corinthians 14:23-25**. As insiders who understood what speaking in tongues was, the Christians in Corinth were just confusing the guests who came into their midst. The insiders could see the working of the Holy Spirit in the tongues. They could see the presence of God in the tongues. The guests could only see insanity.

What did Paul tell the Corinthians to do? Did he tell them to just keep it up because you can't expect outsiders to get it anyway? Did he tell them the guests were just ignorant and not to worry about their perspectives? Did he tell them to not worry about the guests who were turned away by this insider mentality? No. He told them to quit letting their tongue-speakers loose during their assemblies. The tongue-speakers were to keep silent unless an interpreter could make sense of what was being said for the benefit and edification of all, including the guests (**I Corinthians 14:27-28**). He actually told them to decide how to structure their assembly based on the perspective of their guests.

We need to spend some time looking through the eyes of guests at every aspect of what we do in our assemblies. What message do prospective guests get as they drive past our sign each week? What message do they get as they pull into our parking lot? When they see the state of the lawn or the building, what message do they receive? As they enter our building, what do they learn from the way we are treating each other, from the way we treat them? Can they see how important worshipping and serving God is by the obviousness of preparation by the teachers, preacher, song leaders? When the Scripture is read, can they tell that we respect the Word of God because we act like it is important? Can they tell that we respect them by the way we explain what is going on so they can be on the inside? What are they learning by the way we discuss God's word in class?

Then we need to think about insider lingo. We say things like "separate and apart from the Lord's Supper." Do they even know what that means? We like to tell people they need to "obey the gospel." That is certainly biblical language, but before we can just encourage people to do that, we have to explain what it means. As the preacher I have to ask, do they get what I'm saying when I quickly say, "Come forward as we stand and sing"? Even worse, when someone is giving the invitation, talks about some spiritual topic, then without any warning suddenly says, "If anyone is subject to the gospel call, come forward as we stand and sing." Subject to the gospel call? What does that mean? We might even need to ask, what are the real chances of any of our guests ever even deciding to come forward as we stand and sing? Are we simply hanging on to a tradition that used to work but no one even understands anymore? Why do we hang on to it? Do we only offer the invitation because it makes us insiders feel comfortable? It's what we've always done.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying we should stop offering the invitation as we always have. But then again, maybe I am. Why do I feel the need to make you as an insider feel comfortable about this issue? Why do you feel uncomfortable about it? I'm simply suggesting we pay attention to the point of Paul's commands in **I Corinthians 14:23-25, 27-28**. We need to consider our guests and not let them feel like outsiders. We shouldn't do things simply because they make us comfortable. We should do things because they edify and build up even the guests who come in among us. We need to be willing to give up anything that can be scripturally abandoned if it doesn't edify even our guests. We need to be willing to change anything that can be scripturally changed if it will make it more edifying even for our guests. We need to be willing to add anything that may be scripturally added if it will help our guests see God's presence.

Let's not become a big gigantic clique or club. Let's drop the insider lingo. Let's look through the eyes of our guests. Let's make sure we remember to edify even our guests. And if you are our guest reading this, we hope you have been made to feel at home and inside. We believe God is present among us and we hope you can see that as well. If not, please feel free to let us know. Just send an e-mail to [minister@brownsburgchurch.info](mailto:minister@brownsburgchurch.info).

-Edwin L. Crozier