

If I Were A Visitor

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Introduction:

A. Placing ourselves in the shoes of another person is a great tool that gives us greater insight and understanding into the reality of a situation:

1. Someone once said, "Don't judge another person into you've walked a mile in their shoes"
 - a. We think, "If I was him I would have done it this way..." or "...said it this way..."
 - b. Sometimes we are judging the situation before we really know and we'd understand things much better if we were in their place
2. This morning I want us to wear the shoes of another – the shoes of our visitors!
 - a. **Illustration:** Sunlight loses its brightness as your eyes adjust
 - b. Sometimes we don't see the problems unless we try a new perspective!
 - c. What grabs their attention? What are they impressed by? What disturbs them?
3. What our visitors observe when they enter our assemblies is very important!
 - a. As its been said, "You only have one chance to make a first impression"
 - b. Sometimes these visitors are searching for something – If they don't see in us what they know Christianity is about, they will look elsewhere!

B. The New Testament is full of observations people made when they visited at various Congregations: They talk about what they saw and observed – A visitor's perspective!

1. Barnabas, upon visiting Antioch, observes, "I saw the grace of God!" (**Acts 11:22-23**)
 - a. Barnabas heard people preaching a message of grace, he saw those redeemed by God's grace, & he saw lives changing toward righteousness by God's grace!
 - b. Barnabas & Saul (later named Paul) basically became members there at Antioch!
2. We have several other examples of what people saw:
 - a. Paul remembered visiting with the Thessalonians and recalled their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in Jesus Christ (**I Thess. 1:3**)
 - b. When in Antioch of Psidia he saw a group of people who glorified God's word by their joy, belief, and their zeal in spreading the gospel (**Acts 13:48-49**)

C. So let's step outside of ourselves this morning and ask ourselves the question: "If I were visiting here this morning for the first time... what would I see?"

I. Would I See A Group Of People Who Loves The Lord And His Word?

A. It might seem odd at first but a visitor can tell to some degree how much we love God!

1. When we are doing something we love – It shows! When we are doing something we could care less about, well... that shows too!
 - a. **Illustration:** What's the difference between an Auburn fan at an Ole Miss vs. Miss. State game and an Auburn fan at an Auburn vs. Alabama game?
 - b. It's the difference between doing something we care about & something we don't!
2. In our attendance at any of the services, our love for God shows! (**Mark 12:29-30**)
 - a. What would a visitor think if they visited on Sunday AM then on Wednesday?
 - b. I know what I thought the first time – Do people not care?
 - c. Some say that's not fair! However we make time for and we do the things we love! We don't truly love something, we'll allow other activities to interfere!
3. The manner in which we go about our worship speaks volumes about our love for God
 - a. How much we care about the Lord will be visible in our attitude as we worship
 - b. Is it something we appear to enjoy doing? Is it something we are just going through the motions about?

B. Our love for God's word is something that can be observed!

1. If you were to step into the assemblies of the church at Berea you would quickly notice that they really desired to study God's word! (**Acts 17:10-12**)
 - a. As the preacher preached they didn't just accept whatever he said as being gospel truth but rather searched God's word to make sure it was truth!

- b. They didn't only study God's word but paid it the greatest amount of honor and respect by obeying it! MANY of them became Christians!
- 2. No visitor among God's people in Nehemiah's day would doubt the amount of love and zeal the people had for the word of God! (**Neh. 8:1-6**)
 - a. Notice who was responsible for this: The people REQUESTED it to be read!
 - b. ALL who could hear with understanding were gathered together to hear the word!
 - c. As the words were being read they were ATTENTIVE to the word!
 - d. They showed RESPECT for God's word by standing as it was being read
 - e. They were CONVICTED by God's word: They said "AMEN" to what was said, bowed their faces to the ground, and later obeyed what was read!
- 3. So we ask ourselves the question: What would a visitor see as they worshipped with us?
 - a. What would they think if they came into our bible class and saw only a handful of people and then saw a bunch come in for the start of worship services?
 - b. Does a visitor see people actively participating in the Bible classes and enjoying it?
 - c. Would they see a group of people who followed in their own Bibles during the Lord's Supper, during scripture readings, and during lessons?
 - d. Would they notice that people did not bring Bibles with them? Or would they notice that people did not take their Bibles home with them?
 - e. Would they notice that people were very attentive or would they notice that people were passing notes, reading other books, or doing other things?

II. Would I See A Group Of People Who Understood Worship And Appreciated?

A. Place yourself as a visitor in assembly of the Jews in Malchi's day:

- 1. What was the problem here?
 - a. They were technically going through the same activities as every other Jewish assembly → It wasn't a problem with doing the wrong thing!
 - b. Their problem was a problem of a lackadaisical attitude toward worship!
- 2. You would observe that their worship must not be very important to them (**Mal. 1:7-8**)
 - a. They were offering worship to God that they wouldn't dare give to their governor!
 - b. They didn't prepare themselves for their worship! It seems they hadn't given it much thought at all – It was just something they came and did!
 - c. They brought God sacrifices that were worse than second rate!
- 3. You'd also observe that their worship was characterized by half-heartedness: (**vs. 12-14**)
 - a. You might find them yawning – Worshipping God became tiresome
 - b. They laughed at it! They weren't treating worship with honor & respect it deserves!
- 4. If you were a visitor among this group of people you'd wonder why they even dared show up! In fact, that's what God basically says, "Just shut the doors!" (**vs. 10**)

B. Our attitude toward the Lord and our worship of Him is manifest in the manner in which we worship:

- 1. It is very easy for us to allow our worship period to become nothing more than a checklist!
 - a. We sing some songs, pray, take the Lord's Supper, and then have a lesson
 - b. If we're not careful it can become a mundane activity where we simply go through the motions → We fail to participate in it wholeheartedly
 - c. How often do we find ourselves NOT thinking about what we're doing?
- 2. Worship that pleases God is worship that is wholehearted!
 - a. Just as important as worshipping in truth is worshipping in SPIRIT (**John 4:24**)
 - b. Our singing is supposed to reflect our appreciation for Christ! (**Col. 3:16**)
- 3. So we ask ourselves the question – What does a visitor observe in my worship?
 - a. Does my appearance seem like I'd rather be anywhere but where I am?
 - b. Am I not singing at all or just barely moving my lips? What does that show about my desire to be worshipping?
 - c. Am I filling the worship times by doing things other than worshipping God?
- 4. Someone might say, "That's not fair! I worship in my heart!"
 - a. Question: If we are told to sing and we decide not to sing or to mumble at best

- how can we saying we are giving our best to God?
- b. When someone worships with all their hearts it is both seen and heard!

III. Would I See A Group Of People Who Loved And Cherished One Another?

A. From talking to visitors here and elsewhere, they not only casually notice, but they are looking to see how the members interact with one another!

1. Many people, especially those who are not already Christians, are looking for a place where they can have a sense of “belonging” → This is not wrong at all!
2. They rightly understand that being part of a local congregation should be like a close knit family! (**Romans 12:10-11; 12:2-5**)
3. This is something I feel we do pretty well; however, there's always room for improvement!
 - a. **Illustration:** John commented, “You know what really impressed me when I first visited Trussville? They really seem to care about each other!”
 - b. Some of us do this very well – Some don't do it well at all – Each one of us needs to stop and consider how we can show our love and appreciation!

B. How Christians feel about one another is visible to those who are visiting!

1. They will know whether or not God is living in us! (**1 John 4:11-12**)
2. So ask yourself, “If I was a visitor watching objectively the interaction what would I see?”
 - a. Would I watch myself enter at the last possible moment and scoot out as soon as possible without much interaction? What message does that send?
 - b. Would I see some who obviously ignored one another's existence?
 - c. Would I observe people who I could tell really knew each others, loved each other, and had deep concern for one another?
 - d. Would I watch people weeping together and laughing together – living as one?
3. Finally, don't limit this to how we interact with one another, but they are also looking for how we interact with them!
 - a. We often say, “You are our honored guest!” – And we mean these words!
 - b. It's easy in our hustle & bustle, in catching up with each others activities of the week, and in our closeness to those we know to let visitors slip by
 - c. We must go the extra mile in extending our love to our visitors! If they feel like intruders into some secret society they wont want to come back!

Conclusion: If I were a visitor... would I be compelled to come back? Would I see a congregation I would want to be a part of?