

The Christian life is not one that keeps you from incurring damage as you go through, but one that teaches you how to survive it. Have you ever seen one of those World War II movies that portray a great naval battle? When a ship is hit, the disciplined crews form damage control parties to go throughout the ship and put out fires, stop leaks, and generally fix what has been broken. The captain then calls each area of the ship for a damage report, and makes an assessment of the ship's operational capabilities.

Out in the middle of the ocean is not a good place to be if there is serious damage, like a hole below the waterline. The repairs may have to be made in transit, as life goes on, so to speak. Sometimes an island is luckily found (I picture the S.S. Minnow on the beach with a hole in its hull), but enough repairs must be made in the water to make it to the dry dock for a complete overhaul and re-fitting.

Sometimes we have to be involved in damage control in our spiritual lives. We all cause pain and hurt (damage) in the lives of others (some of us do this more than others). We try to heal what others do, and someone works on the damage that we cause. Sometimes we have to work with those who can't make it to the dry dock of the church service for one reason or another. Many times this is due to the fact that the damage was caused or allowed by one of the members there.

I learned from a mechanic friend that if you have a crack in a sheet of metal you can provide what is called "stress relief" by drilling a small hole at the end of the crack. This spreads out the forces working to split the piece further, allowing it to flex instead of tear. We can provide this sort of function in the church, putting a stop to a problem before it completely destroys someone. Like the metal, we may not heal the crack but we can save the utility of the whole.

I remember as a young man getting the regular message that we should be at the church building every time the doors were opened. Usually this came from Hebrews 10:25, which exhorted us to keep meeting together to encourage each other (not just to fill out our attendance record). The purpose was to **encourage**. What about those who are so discouraged that they don't make it to the meeting?

I believe that we must occasionally "forsake the assembling" so that we can perform damage control. Now, I don't mean that we just quit going, but that at times our efforts are directed individually. If I am asked why I do not attend a Wednesday night service, for example, I am ready to reply that I am doing damage control. And if I am questioned too closely, I will reveal just whose damage I am trying to control. This may prove a great opportunity to work out another problem.

I know this probably sounds like heresy, but I think of the parable of the Good Samaritan. If you asked him why he wasn't at the temple, he might have said that he was doing damage control. Remember the temple-goers passed by on the other side so that they wouldn't miss their "service" (what an odd word in this instance!). But someone was hurt and possibly dying. What has the highest priority? The 'religious' people wouldn't have even let the Samaritan into the temple, but he was the one caught in the act of healing.

Jesus was actively engaged in damage control. He spent plenty of time in the synagogue and temple, but he also went out personally to touch individual lives of those who had been damaged in one way or another. When the man was cast out of the synagogue by the Pharisees (John 9), he sought him out to reveal himself as the Messiah. When the woman was caught in the act of adultery (John 8:3ff) he dispersed the hypocrite crowd and counseled with her. The woman who anointed Jesus and washed his feet with her hair (Luke 7:36ff) was scorned by the Pharisees but forgiven by Him.

The point of all of this is that we need to be concerned with the spiritual lives of those who have suffered and are in danger of dying. It is our mission to bring them back into the fold, even if we have to leave the fold from time to time to find them. We may have to go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in. Our captain is calling for us to get our damage control parties into action, and one day we will ask for our report.