

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, January 22, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

## **BUILDING, BUILDING, BUILDING** **“Dropping Your Guard in Congregational Relationship”** **Getting Closer, Growing Stronger** *Selected Scripture*

We are drawing some relevant analogies from the ancient Hebrews. In the process, we are discovering that even though centuries separate us, some of the same struggles, solutions, attitudes, and principles fit our situation perfectly. The people who entered the land of Canaan – the “new generation” of wilderness wanderers – were forced to pull together by the sheer determination to survive. They locked arms and linked hearts, as they took on the challenge of invading the land under Joshua’s leadership. After being sufficiently briefed by Moses before his death, the people committed themselves to the tough task of conquering Canaan, which they accomplished with the sovereign assistance of Jehovah God. Divided, they could never have done it... unified, they were strong. The same is true today.

### **I. CRUCIAL ISSUES WE MUST FACE**

There are some decisive concerns that we must address if we are truly going to build a strong, growing church... build a strong body of believers. It doesn’t just happen by chance. It’s not something we magically fall into. As a matter of fact there are some crucial issues that we must take a look at as we begin the conversation.

#### **3 Crucial Issues We Must Face: (if we are going to build a strong growing congregation... church)**

- 1. The issue of the unhealthy consequences of isolationism** – It’s easy for us to focus on our own demands and pressures and feel that we have too little time to get involved with others... with each other. We don’t see how we can take the time to spend with them beyond our Sunday corporate gatherings. So what happens is, we tend to come to church on Sunday and drift back in our own lives the rest of week... back to church on Sunday and back out for the rest of the week and we never connect... we subtly isolate ourselves. We find ourselves very much alone. Such isolation usually leads to greater “diseased” states. Just because we bear the name “Christian” or our gatherings form a part of the Church does not mean we are safe from that plague... the plague of isolationism. Listen, Christians are never meant to be “islands” isolated out away from the mainland. As a believer you are meant to be

connected. You are a part of the body of Christ, and if you are not connected you are an unhealthy Christian and not a growing Christian.

### **Why Is the Church So Important?**

Can a Christian survive apart from a church? Some Christians have no choice. They are trapped in a hospital bed, or working in an isolated area where no church exists. And God is certainly sufficient to care for their needs. You can still get to heaven if you can't go to church. But even though it's technically possible to live the Christian life in isolation, it's certainly not the norm.

When you become a Christian, you are called into a relationship with God as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:9, *"<sup>9</sup> God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."* But 1 John 1:3 makes it clear that we enter a fellowship that goes two ways: with God and with other Christians. Listen to it in 1 John 1:3, *"<sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."*

The New Testament never divides Christians into the church members and the non-church members. All the way through, it assumes that everybody... every Christian or believer participates in their local assembly. It gives no samples of Christians who belong to the "universal church" but have no link with a local church. One scholar has said that "any idea...of enjoying salvation or being a Christian in isolation is foreign to the New Testament writings" (Alan Stibbs, *God's Church*, p. 92). Wherever Christians are within range of each other in the New Testament, they meet. Every time the apostle Paul comes to a town in the book of Acts where there are no Christians, he wins a few converts and immediately organizes them into a small group - a little church. Acts 20:7 reveals the practice of the early church, *"<sup>7</sup> And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them."*

So in your estimation why is the church so important? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Why is the church so important?**

- (1) **Christ loves the church** – Ephesians 5:24-25, *"<sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."* Paul compares the marital relationship between a husband and a wife to that of Christ's love for the church. As a matter of fact, Paul goes so far to tell husbands that they ought to be willing to die for their wives like Christ, loving his church so much, was willing to die for the church. As believers, we ought to love what Jesus Loves. If the church was that important to Jesus so ought it be to us.
- (2) **God's Word commands our involvement in the church** – Hebrews 10:24-25, *"<sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* The write of Hebrews clearly tells us that we are

not to forsake the assembly as some translations put it, thus commanding our involvement and commitment to his church.

- (3) **Believers grow in the context of the church** – Acts 2:42-47, *“<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

2. **The issue of the essential benefits of relationships** – In our study the term “relationships” refers to the opposite of “spectatorism,” where we come to sit, listen, watch and leave. A relationship is the contrast to aloneness. Solomon put it in the following words,

*“<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: <sup>10</sup> If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. <sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”* –Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIV)

The point is clear! Alone we are prone to drift... we are more given to such things as depression, conceit, doubt, panic, and dogmatism. Churches ought not to be about personal agendas, individual wants and wishes, selfish advancement and power grabs. When that happens there are always... always problems and the church is unhealthy and facing decline, not building, growth and spiritual development and maturity. Remember that the church is a body. Listen to Paul’s description in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27...

*“<sup>12</sup> Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For we were all baptized by<sup>[c]</sup> one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup> Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. <sup>15</sup> Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>19</sup> If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, but one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with*

*special modesty,<sup>24</sup> while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,<sup>25</sup> so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.<sup>26</sup> If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”* 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NIV)

3. **The issue of the absolute necessity of assimilation** – A practical working definition of assimilation is this – *“being absorbed into the function of the Body of Christ as participants so that we relate to, work with, and care for others we know and love”* – The primary need in the church is not to attract more people, but rather to draw them into the functioning process of Christ’s Body, whereby they shed their spectator mentality. This is what the ministry is all about. The point is that we should be far more concerned with growing deeper and broader than with growing bigger. In brief, the thinking we need to cultivate is as follows... (1) I belong to them, they belong to me, we belong to each other. (2) We support one another because we are learning about one another. (3) We are meeting with one another, and loving one another as well.

## II. SOME DANGERS THEY INEVITABLY OCCUR

In casting and developing any ministry, we face real dangers. In considering these, let’s keep in mind where the Israelites were historically at this time. The old generation had passed off the scene, nearly 40 years had slipped by since the Exodus, and the people were again on their way to Canaan. Living on borrowed time and knowing that he himself would not be entering the promised land, Moses preached his farewell message in Deuteronomy. With a heavy heart, knowing that he wouldn’t be going on with them, Moses spoke the following words which also target our areas of concern.

### 4 Dangers To Watch Out For As We Grow

1. **Falling more in love with the leader than with the Lord (Deut. 6:4-5)** – Moses writes, *“<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.<sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”* (Deut. 6:4-5 NIV) Moses was indispensable in some people’s eyes. But in God’s eyes, he was dispensable in the Canaan project. Although he was absolutely significant in moving the people from Egypt to Kadesh-Barnea, the Lord chose another person, Joshua, to move the people from Kadesh-Barnea into the Promised Land. The overriding individual through it all was Jehovah God, as it should be in every ministry. Yet your temptation is to fix our attention on one person whose style and message fits our tastes. This fixation shuts out all those others God could use to stimulate our spiritual growth. Thus, we suffer. Keep in mind that we’re all dispensable in the flow of God’s work. **A Personal Note:** *If you’re one who has an imbalance loyalty to someone, ask God to handle your pedestalizing inclinations.*
2. **Fixing our eyes on our immediate convenience, rather than on our ultimate objective (Deut. 6:6-9)** – Moses writes, *“<sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.<sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them*

*when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* <sup>8</sup> *Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.* <sup>9</sup> *Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”* (Deut. 6:6-9 NIV) In other words, a link with the Lord is to be a link of the heart, hand and home... not merely of the head. Our heads favor convenience. When pressure moves in upon us, we turn to that which is comfortable or traditional. We can easily suffer from tunnel vision, looking at things only from a temporal perspective. God’s ultimate objectives include the building of relationships. When we look to immediate convenience, we lost the awareness that somebody is sitting away from us, near us, behind us... somebody in need of our care and involvement.

3. **Assuming that we’re stronger because our assembly is larger (Deut. 6:10-12)** – Moses tell us, <sup>10</sup> *When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, <sup>11</sup> houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, <sup>12</sup> be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”* (Deut. 6:10-12 NIV) Size and strength don’t always go hand in hand. In fact, size can create a false sense of confidence. In the Body of Christ, ministries are most often effective because of the people involved in behind-the-scenes activities. But it is easy for those kinds of people and activities to be viewed as insignificant or optional, while putting all the importance on what happens in our worship services. Strength comes from the Lord, who uses people, visible and behind-the-scenes... both are essential.
4. **Living in the glow of yesterday instead of challenge of tomorrow** - Actually, this danger surfaces in the book of Joshua, which we will turn to in our next study. There, a good look at the people gives us the idea that many would love to have erected a monument to Moses in commemoration of all the good things he’d done on their behalf. But no shrine exists... God didn’t allow one to be constructed. The people could have fixed their attention on the glow of their past twenty or thirty years of wilderness life; instead, they focused on the challenge ahead of them to conquer Canaan. In our churches and in our lives, we must also be prepared to accept the challenges God places before us and to shift our emphasis when God chooses to point us in a new direction.

### III. SO WHAT? HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO US?

The point of this study can be summarized in three statements

#### **3 Summary Statements on Getting Closer and Growing Stronger:**

1. **To go on, we must get closer** – This is a major need in churches of all sizes, but particularly large ones. This counteracts isolationism.
2. **To get closer, we must pull together** – There is an urgent need for us to develop close relationships.
3. **To pull together, we must grow deeper** – This is achieved through a commitment to assimilation.