

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 25, 2017 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

freedom  
THE GRACE OF CHRIST IN GALATIANS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF GALATIANS  
The Value of Acceptance and Affirmation – Part 2  
*Galatians 2:1-10*

**CASE STUDY:** *I ran into an old friend the other day. We went to high school together and used to be good friends, but it's been years since we've seen each other. She got to telling me about her life, and she has had a really rough time of it. Her husband was abusive, and struggled with drugs and alcohol, before for his death. They had two children, but lost one of those in a tragic accident, the other has followed in the footsteps of his dad and now struggles with the same problems he had. She has since with deep depression, been in multiple relationships, and has bounced from job to job just trying to make ends-meet. It was so sad to hear her story. I tried to encourage her and told her about my faith and the difference it had made in my life. We talked about the Lord and she seemed very open, but when I suggested that she try getting involved in a good church her response was one I will never forget... it has, in fact, haunted me ever since. She said, "Church? Why would I want to go there? They would just make me feel worse about myself. I already have enough problems and feel bad enough about myself!"*

**CASE STUDY:** *I have the same memories as many evangelicals who grew up at the same time I did: felt-board Bible stories, Sunday school donuts, praise chorus lyrics on overhead projectors. Even before I was old enough to do much beside doodle during sermons, church was a fixture in my life. I was sometimes bored and sometimes enjoyed myself, but going to church wasn't a choice – it was just what everyone did. As I got a bit older, I realized that not everyone went to church, but I gathered that being someone who did was a moral imperative. It meant I was taking my faith seriously, being a good person and making God happy (or avoiding God's anger). By the time I was old enough to join the youth group, other factors reinforced my involvement: church was where my friends were, where the cute boys (or girls) were and where much of my social life took place. Heading off to college meant that my parents no longer took me to church, and my social life was no longer headquartered there, but I still saw my attendance as a basic requirement of following Jesus. Where else could I grow in my faith and find spiritual community? Over the next few years, however something strange happened. I followed Jesus right out of church and into the streets, communing with homeless people over slices of pizza and hearing sermons in the*

*words of the people who lived in the shelter or skid row where I served breakfast on Sunday mornings. Jesus showed up in all sorts of unlikely, unofficial places. I continued to journey alongside other Christians, but I no longer understood the important of attending church. I occurred to me that perhaps what was more important than how often I showed up for a Sunday Service was how often I showed up for people who were in need: quietly listening, crying with them, sharing my food and time and space and joining my voice with theirs to demand justice. The more I learned about poverty and systemic injustice, the more frustrated I became with churches whose weekly programming is disconnected from the world beyond their sanctuaries. I was tired of prayer without action; simplistic spiritual formulas without any mention of the Gospel of Jesus preached: good news for the poor, freedom for the captives, sight for the blind. I lost hope that most of the Church would ever get its act together enough to closely resemble Jesus. So yeah! I gave up on the church and am one who walked away!*

**CASE STUDY:** *I grew up in the church. You might say my parents took me to church every the time doors were open. We never missed a Sunday! And I even liked church as a kid... most of the time. I got bored in the church services, but I liked Sunday school as a kid and the fun stuff we did, even the Bible stories. I can still remember the day I asked Jesus to come into my heart and life to be my Lord and Savior. It felt so good to know that that Jesus loved me and gave Himself for my sins and that one day I would be in heaven with Him. It filled my heart with a peace then and it still does. I've really never doubted my salvation. I know I'm a Christian. I just don't feel like I need to go to church to be one... so I don't go to church. I do church in my own way. I worship God in my own way. I can every worship God in my back yard, looking at God's big beautiful world and all He has made and worshipping Him there. I can remember something I heard the preacher say many times when I was growing up, "Being in church doesn't make you a Christian, any more than being in a garage make you a car!" Well, I certainly think that is true! You don't have to go to church to be a Christian. I am a living example of that!*

We began our study on the book of Galatians several weeks ago by looking at some of the background information and laying the ground work for this important book. Just for review let me remind you of at least four important background facts that we have been looking at regarding the book of Galatians.

#### **4 Important Background Facts on the Book of Galatians:**

(1) **Written by the Apostle Paul** – Paul wrote a large portion of the New Testament. This particular book/letter may have been his first letter. Also interesting to note is that some scholars believe that Paul have penned this letter himself, with his own hand (all of his other letters/writings were done through/with a personal amanuensis [scribe, secretary, recorder]).

(2) **Written as a circular letter** – Most of Paul's letter that we have in the New Testament were written to individual churches (i.e. Ephesians, Philippians) or to individuals (i.e. Timothy, Titus). This letter is different because it was written to a number of churches, and was meant to be passed/shared or "circulated" to each of these churches.

(3) **Written to churches in the region of Galatia** -Galatians is written to a number of different churches that Paul established during his first missionary journey in the region of Galatia in Asia Minor, which would be located in present day Turkey. This area was particularly important in the advance of the gospel and the New Testament church because it represented the movement of the good news/gospel further toward the west and to the rest of world, something Jesus had commanded from the very beginning of the New Testament church in Acts 1:8, "8 *But you shall receive power*

*when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

**(4) Written to oppose and expose false teaching of the Judaizers** – After Paul had left the region of Galatia, following his first missionary journey and the establishment of these new churches, false teachers came in and began to expose these churches and new believers/Christians to false teaching. These false teachers were known as “Judaizers” and they taught a “work-righteousness” system of salvation. Their teaching essentially said that in order to become a Christians you must first be circumcised and become a Jew, by obeying and following Jewish laws and customs. This was in direct contradiction to the good news/gospel Paul preached, which was salvation by grace, not by works.

### **11 Characteristics of False Teaching, False Religions and Cults:**

**1. New Truth – Christians principle: Any teaching must be subjected to the Scripture test. Does it contradict Scripture?** - God’s Word is truth and if a “new teaching” contradicts God’s Word it is not truth. Much false teaching (even those in the church today) promote the false idea that God has revealed something special to them. This is usually truth that has never before been revealed and supersedes and contradicts all previous revelations. However, as members of the orthodox (traditional, mainline, genuine) Christian churches, we can and should test all of our teachings and practices objectively and independently by God’s infallible Word, the Bible, and history.

**2. New Interpretations of Scripture – Christians principle: There is only one correct interpretation of God’s Word, God’s! The interpreter of God’s Word must use good hermeneutical principles in correctly understanding Scripture** (*type/kind of literature, context of the passage, plain/obvious meaning, understand writer’s intentions, grammar/language, theological themes, God-centered perspective*). Some false teachers and their teaching make no claim to new truth or extra-biblical revelation, but believe they alone have the key to interpreting the mysteries in the Bible... no other is “correctly” interpreting this passage. The Scriptures are their only acknowledged source of authority, but they are interpreted unreasonably and in a way different from that of orthodox Christianity. They testify that the historic beliefs and interpretations of Scripture are based upon a misunderstanding of the Bible or were pagan in origin. An example of this may be the popular notions of the “health, wealth and prosperity gospel” and prosperity preachers (Joel Olsteen) **Prosperity theology** (sometimes referred to as the **prosperity gospel**, the **health and wealth gospel**, or the **gospel of success**)<sup>[A]</sup> is a religious belief among some Christians, who hold that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth. Prosperity theology views the Bible as a contract between God and humans: if humans have faith in God, he will deliver security and prosperity,

**3. A Non-biblical Source of Authority – Christians principle: “Sola scriptura” (Latin, "by Scripture alone") is the Protestant Christian doctrine that the Bible is the supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. God’s Word is our sole source of authority.** We have no other extra-biblical writings that tell us what to do that are authoritative. Some false religions, including cults have sacred writings or a source of authority that supersedes the Bible. The Mormon Church says, “We believe the Bible to be the Word of God in so far as it is translated correctly...” (Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Article 8). Although this sounds like the Mormons trust the Bible, they, in fact, believe it has been changed and corrupted. Listen to what the Mormon apostle Talmage has said: *“There will be, there can be no absolutely reliable translation of these or other Scriptures unless it is effected through the gift of translation, as one of the endowments of the Holy Ghost... Let the Bible then be read reverently and with prayerful care,*

*the reader ever seeking the light of the Spirit that he may discern between the truth and the errors of men (James E. Talmage, The Articles of Faith, Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1968, p. 237)."*

Such a statement opens the door for their additional sacred books, like "The Book of Mormon," "The Pearl of Great Price," and "Doctrines and Covenants," as greater authoritative sources. Thus, the Bible is not truly their final source of authority. In Christian Science, the Bible is characterized as being mistaken and corrupt and inferior to the writings of Mary Baker Eddy.

The Unification Church believes the Bible to be incomplete, while Rev. Moon's "Divine Principle" is the true authoritative source.

Other groups such as the "The Way International" and "The Worldwide Church of God" claim the Bible to be their final authority when in actuality their authority is the Bible as interpreted by the religious leader. Regardless of whether the Bible is superseded by other works or reinterpreted by a cult leader, a sure mark of a cult is that the final authority on spiritual matters rests on something other than the plain teaching of Holy Scripture.

**4. Another Jesus** – **Christian Principle: A basic, indisputable teaching/doctrine of orthodox Christianity is that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. That Jesus Christ is God, become a man (in the flesh).** One characteristic that is found in all false teaching and especially cults is false teaching about the person of Jesus Christ in light of historical biblical Christianity. The Apostle Paul warned about following after "another Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4) who is not the same Jesus who is revealed in Scripture. The "Jesus" of the cults is always someone less than the Bible's eternal God who became flesh, lived here on earth, and died for our sins.

The Bible make it clear that Jesus was God in human flesh, second person of the Holy Trinity, who lived a sinless life on earth and died as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Three days after His crucifixion, Jesus rose bodily from the dead. Fifty days afterward he ascended into heaven, where He now sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding on behalf of believers. He will, one day, return bodily to planet earth and judge the living and the dead while setting up His eternal Kingdom.

The Jesus of false religions and especially the cults is not the Jesus of the Bible. According to the theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus did not exist as God from all eternity by was rather the first creation of Jehovah God. Before coming to earth, He was Michael the Archangel, the head of all the angels. He is not God.

The Mormon Church does not accept the unique deity of Jesus Christ. He is, to them, one of many gods, the "first-born spirit child," spiritually conceived by a sexual union between the heavenly Father and a heavenly mother. He was also the spirit-brother of Lucifer in His preexistent state. His incarnation was accomplished by the physical union of the heavenly Father and the human Mary. No matter what the particular beliefs of any cult may be, the one common denominator they all possess is a denial of the biblical teaching on the deity of Jesus Christ.

**5. Rejection of Orthodox Christianity** – **Christian Principle: In classical Christian usage, the term *orthodox* refers to the set of Biblical doctrines which were believed by Christians (*the deity of Christ, the inspiration and infallibility of God's Word, salvation by grace, the resurrection of Christ, monotheism/one God, Jesus as the only way to salvation, the virgin birth, the trinity, etc.*)** Characteristics of many of the false religions, false teaching and cults is a frontal attack on orthodox Christianity. They argue that the church has departed from the true faith.

**6. Double-Talk** – **Christian Principle: Those claiming to be Christian, but maintain an orthodoxy and orthopraxy that is consistent with Scripture/God's Word and the doctrines of orthodox Christianity.** A feature of false religions is that they will be caught in double-talk. That is,



they say one thing publicly but internally believe something totally different. Many organizations call themselves Christians when in fact they deny the fundamentals of the faith.

**7. Non-biblical Teaching on the Nature of God (Trinity) – Christian Principle: A basic Biblical doctrine of Christianity is that God is one yet three, a triune God identified in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the trinity.** Another strong characteristic of all non-Christian groups, false religions and even cults is either an inadequate view or outright denial of the Holy Trinity. The biblical doctrine of the Trinity, one God in three Persons, is usually attacked in some way.

**8. Changing Theology – Christian Principle: Christianity does not have a changing theology but a theology based on the unchanging Word of God.** False teaching will have a changing doctrine and doctrines which will be in a continually in a state of flux and have no sure foundation on which to anchor their hope. For example be wary of those groups today, some of whom profess to be Christian, who will claim that God’s Word changes from “culture” to “culture” or that some things that the Bible teaches as sin or wrong don’t apply today because we are living in a different time (i.e. homosexuality)

**9. Strong Leadership - Christian Principle: Jesus Christ is seen as the head of the Church, and while God may provide strong leadership within the church those leaders are not to be worshipped, exalted or held on up a pedestal. We worship and follow God alone.** False teachings will usually be characterized by a central leader, figure or person who may be a very persuasive and charismatic leader/preacher/speaker... very convincing and likeable, magnetic and popular. Since the leader has such a special relationship with God, he can dictate the theology and behavior. Consequently, he exercises enormous influence over the group.

**10. Salvation by Works – Christian Principle: Christian orthodox teaching and a basic doctrine of the Christianity is that salvation is by grace through faith alone, and not by works so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8-9).** One teaching that is totally absent from all false teaching, false religions and cults the gospel of the grace of God. False teaching will always hinge on a works-based type of salvation or redemption.

**11. False Prophecy - Christian Principle: Biblically speaking “false prophecy” is seen clearly in Scripture and among Christians as being distinctive evidence of “bad/false fruit” and therefore not Christian but false, and to be rejected.** Remember that the word “prophecy” is not only fore-telling but also forth-telling. That is, what they say and teach, whether it involved fore-telling coming events or forth-telling truth will contradict God’s Word and what it says at some or all points.

*Special Observation - While not every group that possesses these characteristics can be labeled a cult, beware of a group that embraces some of these features. The sure mark of a cult is what it does with the person of Jesus Christ. All cults ultimately deny the fact that Jesus Christ is God the Son, second Person of the Holy Trinity, and mankind’s only hope.*

Let me remind you again of Jesus’ teaching to us in Matthew 7:15-23 on the subject of false teaching and false prophet. He give us the best teaching on the subject, with the best indicators and warnings. Here it is in Matthew 7:15-23, “*15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. 21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your*

*name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*

John R.W. Stott was correct when he wrote, “The bane of Paul’s life and ministry was the insidious activity of false teachers. Wherever he went, they dogged his footsteps. No sooner had he planted the gospel in some locality, than false teachers began to trouble the church by perverting it... in order to discredit Paul’s message, they also challenged his authority.”

Such troublemakers have not left the earth’s scene. There are still many who are much quicker to reject than to accept. These are swifter to condemn than to affirm. From several significant men Paul received encouragement and comfort. Men like James (the half-brother of Jesus), Peter, and John endorsed him early in his ministry. Besides these there was Barnabas, who believed in him when no one else did.

### **I. A BRIEF VISIT TO JERUSALEM (Galatians 2:1-10)**

In the writing of the Galatian letter, Paul recounted the details surrounding the endorsement he received in a Jerusalem “summit” meeting. Paul, along with his traveling companions, Barnabas and Titus, met with the reputed pillars of the church headquarters there. NOTE: This even occurred either fourteen years following his conversion, or following his first visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion. This “summit” may have been the same one recorded in Acts 11:27-30 (convened while Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem bringing famine relief money from Antioch), or that which is recorded in Acts 15:1-35 (the Jerusalem Council held around 49 AD which debated the matters of circumcision and law observance as acts related to man’s salvation). Whichever, the outcome was significant for Paul because he carried with him the endorsement of those who made up the spine of the Christian church. Telling of the even, Paul named his companions... briefly identified his message... recognized his critics... and described his endorsement. SITUATION: Titus served as a test case for Paul’s message. Was the converted and uncircumcised Gentile to be circumcised or not? If so, Paul’s message to the Gentiles had been declared in vain. If not, it was authentic. Only those in Jerusalem were qualified to decide on the matter.

#### **Some Important Facts of Paul’s Visit to Jerusalem:**

**1. His Companions (v.1)** – Paul mentions his companions in verse 1, “*Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also.*” One was well-known and the other was unknown.

#### **Paul’s 2 Travel Companions:**

**(1) Barnabas (Acts 11:19-26)** – Barnabas was a “circumcised” Jew, actually a Levite, was known, proven, and respected. The meaning of his name best describes his character, “son of encouragement.” The Jerusalem church had commissioned him to travel north to Antioch to evaluate the work of men from Cypress and Cyrene who were preaching there. He was the appropriate person for the assignment, as he was spiritually astute, wise, disarming, and encouraging. Notice how he responded to these men to whom he had listened so carefully in Acts 11:23, “*23 When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*” Luke goes on to say about Barnabas in verse 24, “*24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*” What he was to these men... he was to Paul also.

**(2) Titus** – By contrast, he was an uncircumcised Gentile who had come to faith in Jesus Christ. Judaizers were saying that he should submit to circumcision. Paul disagreed and Titus concurred with him.

**2. His Message (vv.2-3)** - Paul says in Galatians 2:2-3, “*2 I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. 3 Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.*” In private, before men “of reputation,” he submitted the Gospel he had been preaching. Essentially, he wanted to know whether he was wasting his time by declaring it. Apparently, Paul’s critics said his message could not stand under scrutiny.

**3. His Critics (vv.4-5)** – Paul speaks of his critics in verses 4-5, “*4 This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. 5 We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*” Paul did not classify them as weak brethren (like those named in Romans 14:1-11), but as “false” brethren. Their gospel was a perversion in that it was adding conditions to salvation which were unacceptable... those being circumcision and observance of Mosaic Law... works. He turned his back on these. He did not yield to them or answer them. The style of the “false” brethren was to sneak in among Christians in order to “spy out” their liberty (v.4). Their objective was to put Christians back under bondage.

**4. His Endorsement (vv.6-10)** - THE men who evaluated Paul’s message... James, Cephas (Peter), and John... were the nerve center of the early New Testament church. After listening to Paul’s presentation they gave him “the right hand of fellowship,” approving his ministry to Gentiles. Three actions prove their endorsement of him.

### **3 Actions of the Early Church Leaders Endorsing Paul:**

- (1) They **saw** his distinctive contribution to reaching the uncircumcised (v.7)
- (2) They **accepted** him in the same way they accepted Peter (v.8)
- (3) They **recognized** the grace given him... thus they affirmed him (v.9)

## **II. WHY PAUL NEEDED TO GO TO JERUSALEM AND WHAT IT TEACH US ABOUT US, THE CHURCH, AND OUR OWN WALK?**

There is something very practical and relevant in this passage that we in the church today need to hear, and heed/practice in our own walk and life... perhaps to avoid our own drift into false teaching or false understanding and deception, but also to protect us from error ourselves, or discouragement, or drift, or sin. It may be helpful to probe the question of why it was necessary for Paul to go to James, Peter and John... pillars and spiritual leaders in the early New Testament church... at all? Why did Paul need to go to Jerusalem, and what might it teach us about the church, and our own walk?

Why is the church important? The Bible tells us we need to attend church so we can worship God with other believers and be taught His Word for our spiritual growth. The early church “*devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*” (Acts 2:42). We should follow that example of devotion—and do the same things. Back then, they had no designated church building, but “*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*” (Acts 2:46).

Wherever the meeting takes place, believers thrive on fellowship with other believers and the teaching of God’s Word. From the very establishment of the church at Pentecost, the church has been of utmost importance... that is why the Apostle Paul gave himself to the establishment of churches throughout the ancient world on his missionary journeys. Everywhere he went, that God

sent Him, Paul was planting, establishing and starting church. It was the forefront for the advancement of the gospel message... the good news of Jesus and changed lives. Paul's letter was written because the church was of paramount importance to him and its mission and message (the gospel) was being jeopardized by the false teaching of the Judaizers.

Now, we've heard the case studies shared, and we've all heard knocks on the church, but what does it say? Why is the church important? Let me give you some good Biblical reasons you need to be in church and why the church is so important for you, and worth the fight, and worthy of defense.

### **3 Good Biblical Reasons You Need to be in Church as a Christian:**

1. **Church is God's will for believers (Hebrews 10:24-25)** - Church attendance is not just a "good suggestion"; it is God's will for believers. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, *"<sup>24</sup> And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."* That is actually stated in the form of a command in Scripture... literally in verse 25, "Do not forsake the meeting of yourselves together!" Command! Even in the early church, some were falling into the bad habit of not meeting with other believers. The author of Hebrews says that's not the way to go. We need the encouragement that church attendance affords. And the approach of the end times should prompt us to be even more devoted to going to church.
2. **Church is essential for the spiritual growth, maturity and edification of the believer** - Church is the place where believers can love one another (1 John 4:12, *"<sup>12</sup> No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."*), encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13, *"<sup>13</sup> but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."*), "spur" one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24, *"<sup>24</sup> And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,"*), serve one another (Galatians 5:13, *"<sup>13</sup> For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."*), instruct one another (Romans 15:14, *"<sup>14</sup> Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."*), honor one another (Romans 12:10, *"<sup>10</sup> Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;"*), and be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32, *"<sup>10</sup> Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;"*).
3. **Church is the body of Christ, His hands and feet for ministry to others** - When a person trusts Jesus Christ for salvation, he or she is made a member of the body of Christ as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:27, *"<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."* For a church body to function properly, all of its "body parts" need to be present and working (see, 1 Corinthians 12:14-20). It's not enough to just attend a church; we should be involved in some type of ministry to others, using the spiritual gifts God has given us (Ephesians 4:11-13). Furthermore, a believer will never reach full spiritual maturity without having that outlet for his gifts, and we all need the assistance and encouragement of other believers (1 Corinthians 12:21-26).

Read:

1 Cor. 12:14-20

1 Cor. 12:21-26

For these reasons and more, church attendance, participation, and fellowship should be regular aspects of a believer's life. Weekly church attendance is in no sense "required" for believers, but someone who belongs to Christ should have a desire to worship God, receive His Word, and fellowship with other believers.



Jesus is the Cornerstone of the Church (1 Peter 2:6), and we are “like living stones . . . being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). As the building materials of God’s “spiritual house,” we naturally have a connection with one another, and that connection is evident every time the Church “goes to church.”

Dr. John Piper says “Be a part of a cluster of Christians. I do not say that you can’t be saved without belonging to cluster of Christians. But I do say, and I believe it is the word of God, that if you have no such cluster of comrades in the faith, then you are neglecting one of the means appointed by God for your preservation and endurance in faith. And to neglect the means of grace is very dangerous for your soul.” What is he talking about here? What do you think he is saying, and how might this relate to Paul in Galatians 2:1-10 and why his trip to Jerusalem was important? The text we are looking at is a simple and profound illustration of what needs to happen in the ongoing fight of faith... as in Paul’s case it was in response to false teaching that was threatening the advancement of the gospel and the lives and growth of believers. Paul trip to Jerusalem to get in the presence of these other spiritual leaders of the church, and pillars of the faith may illustrate at least four lessons about helping each other fight the fight of faith.

**4 Lessons from Paul’s Meeting in Jerusalem: (Why we need each other? Why the “church” is so important? Why you need to be in church?)**

**1. Lessons 1: Everyone’s Need for Christian Camaraderie** - The deepest saints and the strongest leaders need Christian comrades to strengthen their hands in God. Paul was deep, Paul was strong, and Paul needed Barnabas, and Titus, and James, and Cephas (Peter), and John. Christian camaraderie is not just for the new recruits. It is for every believer. We never grow out of our need for the ministry of other Christians. If you think you are beyond the need for daily exhortation in the fight of faith, then probably your heart has already fallen prey to the deceitfulness of sin. Don’t ever think that a man is so strong that he does not need to be strengthened in God. Paul did and so do you! And don’t ever think that someone is so far above you that you can’t be God’s instrument to give strength to him or he Charles Spurgeon spoke for many Christian leaders when he wrote, “Some years ago, I was the subject of fearful depression of spirit. Various troublous events had happened to me; I was also unwell, and my heart sank within me. Out of the depths I was forced to cry unto the Lord. Just before I went away to Mentone for rest, I suffered greatly in body, but far more in soul, for my spirit was over whelmed. Under this pressure, I preached a sermon from the words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” I was as much qualified to preach from that text as ever I expect to be; indeed, I hope that few of my brethren could have entered so deeply into those heart-breaking words. I felt to the full of my measure the horror of a soul forsaken of God. Now that was not a desirable experience. I tremble at the bare idea of passing again through that eclipse of soul; I pray that I may never suffer in that fashion again. (*Autobiography*, vol. 2, p. 415)” I mention this to drive home that the greatest saints, the most valiant warriors, are not above the need to have their hands strengthened in God. In fact the devil’s attacks on them may make their need even greater. So the first lesson from our text is that you never outgrow your need for daily exhortation. The deepest saints and the strongest leaders need comrades to strengthen their hands in God.

**2. Lesson 2: A Conscious Effort** - The second lesson is that strengthening a person’s hand in God involves conscious effort. It is intentional. You don’t just do it on the fly; you rise and go down to Jerusalem. Galatians 2:1-2, “*Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. 2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.*” What a difference it would make in our churches if, when all of us

woke in the morning, we would PLAN to strengthen someone's hand in God! Paul did not accidentally go to Jerusalem. He PLANNED to go, he needed to go, for his benefit, for the benefit of the church and the gospel, for the good of the believers he was reaching with the gospel, for the advancement, protection and growth of the New Testament church, but also for himself. The mark of Christian maturity is that you build into your life the intention and the occasions to strengthen someone's hand in God and be strengthened at the hand of others but worshipping and fellowshiping and learning and growing in the cluster of other believers. Are you making a conscious effort to get in the presence of other believers who are good for your own faith and growth.

**3. Lesson 3: Strengthening Each Other in God** - That is the third lesson. The strength we are to give each other is strength in God, not in ourselves. This is the difference between Christian camaraderie and all other support groups and therapy groups and self-help groups. The whole point of Christian camaraderie is to point each other to Christ, not man, for help and strength. There is a kind of paradox here: On the one hand I say, I need you. God has appointed you as a means of grace to help me endure to the end. But on the other hand, I must say that the only way you can really help me is by saying something or doing something that will cause me to depend on God and not you. Here we are again with our most common theme it seems: a radical Christ-centeredness in all we do, even in our human togetherness, our camaraderie, our friendship. It must be a friendship FOR Jesus. Every Christian group that exists ought to exist to strengthen each other's hands in God and not in man. That is the third lesson in our text: "Paul went to Jerusalem and went to "those who were of reputation" to be encouraged, strengthened, accountable, for growth and advancement of the truth of the gospel." I love verse 9 in our passage, "*9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship...*"

#### **4. Lesson 4: Reminding Each Other of the Promises of God**

Finally, how did he do this? How do we do it? This whole passage is Paul, seeking out other like-minded believer to encourage, support and gather around him in reminding each other of the promise of salvation give them through Jesus Christ, that we are not saved by the law, or works, or what may does but by grace through faith. And so it is with us. We strengthen each other's hands in God by reminding each other about the promises of God that are especially suited for each other's needs. If you steep your mind in the Word of God and meditate on it day and night as Psalm 1 says, then you will be a fountain of living water and will strengthen the hands of many in God.

### **III. A NEEDED WORD FOR ALL TO APPLY**

There is much to be learned from the action taken by the "pillars" of the church in Paul's time. Pillars like James, Peter and John. We must recognize, as they did certain important facts that are essential for the growth and ongoing ministry of the kingdom of God.

#### **3 Important Things to Remember for the Good of Ministry and Growth:**

**1. Every member in God's family is important no matter how bad the past** – Paul's life itself reminds us of this truth. It would have been tempting to distrust Paul given his past, to question whether he had really "changed" or if this might be a trick, to question is ability, knowledge, grounding to lead. God doesn't hold our past against us when He welcomes us into His forever family, but we in the church aren't always so accommodating. At times we seem to want to continue to hold a person's past failures and question their ability to be used by God based on those failures. We need to be mindful of the fact that if Paul's past as a "terrorist," who was insidiously tried to stamp out Christianity didn't disqualify him, neither should we allow the past "forgiven" and "redeemed" failings of others to disqualify them. Every member in God's family is important and furthermore useful and useable a part of the body of Christ.

**2. Everyone is gifted, distinct, and called to reach a certain segment** – This is such an important truth because there are some that you will be able to reach with the good news of Jesus Christ that I or another will never be able to reach. God has gifted each person in the body the Christ... every believer/Christian, with a distinct and individual personality, gift, and sphere of influence and opportunity. Paul has a special calling that would take him into areas where the gospel had never been, reaching out to Gentiles and Greeks who had never heard. His gifts enabled him to be effective in these areas and God had thoroughly equipped him for that calling. The same is true for you and every member of God's family. There are those you are called to minister to and reach that God has thoroughly equipped you to reach. Every believer is gifted, distinct, and called to reach a certain segment.

**3. Everyone needs our acceptance and affirmation** – As Paul put it in Ephesians 4:29 (NIV), *“29Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths (that tears others down), but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”* In other words, the genuine believer will be about the business of not destroying those trying to minister and reach others for the kingdom, but will be encouraging, cheering on those like Paul who are being used and trying to reach others for Christ.