

Cooperation – Matthew 10:5-15

You know, it wasn't too long ago that churches saw benefits associated with pulling together and working together for a common cause. Just think of how it used to be here on the mountain. Mountain Rest, Double Springs, Bethlehem, Monte Vista and of course MFBC, used to gather in solidarity for the purpose of fellowship and more importantly for the purpose of worshipping King Jesus together. The excuse at the time it stopped was... Covid. But I think the true cause behind things such as this runs much deeper. Yogi Bera once said, "The future... is not what it used to be!" Everywhere we look, everywhere we turn, there are evil forces pulling God's people apart. The true epidemic for Christianity is not some disease such as the flu, or covid, or monkey pox; the true epidemic for us is that most Christian churches view their efforts as stand-alone components of the ministry. The destructive forces of territorialization and self-sufficiency are causing much more harm than pestilence ever will.

In the last thirty years, mainstream Christian denominational memberships have declined more than 20%. When we look solely at our own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, membership dropped over 1.1 million in the past three years. At its apex, the SBC reached 16.3 million members in 2006, but currently stands at slightly less than 14 million. This number reflects the membership. When you consider the members who attend and participate with their church on a regular weekly basis, this number drops to slightly more than 4 million. That means two-thirds of our members are staying away. Are you concerned yet? If not, you should be.

What is it then we can do about it? First, we must change our mentality about belonging to a legitimate Christian organization. Commitment is what I'm talking about. As many of us continue to age and face the inevitable, our churches will be turned over to the younger generations. The current trend of individualism and anti-establishment is already having a drastic effect on all our churches. The work of the church is no longer important, in their eyes, that is. If this trend continues at its rapid rate, soon, we'll look around and even the mega-churches will be wondering where everyone went.

One of the basic considerations of our faith is that of working in cooperation with other followers of Christ. I know up to this point in tonight's message, I've spewed out a bunch of statistics and even some fact-based opinion, but I want to show you in God's Word, why it's important for all New Testament churches to cooperate with one another in carrying out the ministries which work to further the Kingdom.

Let's start by looking at a familiar story found in **Matthew 10:5-15**. This is the point in Jesus' ministry where He decided to begin sending the disciples out into the mission field. Don't focus as much on where they were going as much as you do on the instructions they were given as well as how they were organized. Did they go alone? No. Jesus sent them out together. He knew they would be stronger together and that one's weakness would be compensated for by one of the others' strengths. Consider Jesus' ministry. He included, in some way, His followers in everything He did. With a couple exceptions - the work of the cross and His resurrection.

What did Jesus instruct them to do? Focus on their own and tell them that the Kingdom of heaven was near. He told them to perform many of the miracles they had often witnessed Him

doing. He told them to do it for “free” too! **Why?** Because it is the responsibility of those who already believe in caring for those actively doing the work of the faith. This is why it’s important for us to faithfully tithe and give extra offerings to the ministries of our local church. I know, for me, I don’t want to find myself on the outside of Jesus’ warning found here in verses 14 and 15.

Also consider the things we find in the Book of Acts concerning the church.

Acts 1:13-14 –

“And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”

Acts 2:1 – *“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.”*

Acts 13:2-3 – *“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”*

These are just a few examples from Biblical historical accounts which inform us about the actions of Jesus’ earliest followers. I say, if it was important for them to function in this manner, a manner which promoted unity and cooperation, then we would be well served to follow their lead. Amen! When people see us unified through Christ, working together for the cause of Christ and the Kingdom, then those same people may be compelled in their spirit to join with us. Every believer in Christ has an obligation to seek unity and place the will of our Lord and Savior at the forefront of our lives and at the forefront of the efforts of the church which we choose to belong to.

We have a duty to cooperate with each other, serve those in need, serve alongside other Christian churches, serve our association, our state convention, and our national convention. We must never forget that we are in this fight together! Even though Satan is the ruler of this world, it doesn’t mean we should sit idly by and let him continue his work of destroying our ministries.

Every Christian needs to remind themselves of Paul’s words to the Galatians. Let me share with you **Galatians 1:6-10**.

Paul is holding nothing back. We must remain on guard concerning the Gospel, and we must do everything we can to make sure it is the truly faithful who are spreading the Word of God and not those seeking the approval of man. May God help us in the days ahead and may we remain diligent in our efforts to humbly work alongside our brothers and sisters as we work to advance the Kingdom of God.