

June 13, 2021

Am I a Servant of God

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is anyone sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins one to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed...Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." James 5:13-20

What is our relationship with the church and other believers in the church? Do we go to church or are we just members of the church or do we see ourselves as essential parts of the body of Christ? Our answers to these questions really defines the nature of our own person relationship with the church and decides in no small way how successful we will be in our efforts to mature into true servants of God.

For a lot of us, church is just a place we go. We go to church and when church is over we leave church. We are no more changed by the experience than we are when we go to a basketball game or to a movie. Church is not who we are but just a place where we sometimes go. For many of us this is the totality of their relationship with the church and sadly it shows in our spiritual lives.

When we keep our relationship with other believers segregated to a few visits to a particular building for brief periods of time we really have no functional relationship with other believers and our lives reflect that surface-only faith. When we develop a deeper relationship with others in the body of Christ we will find that our spiritual lives will come to reflect Jesus more and more perfectly.

One of the challenges we face in understanding much of the deep, personal, life-changing message of the New Testament is our limited views of church. Luke describes the original Apostolic church in Acts 2:42 and following with these words. ***"They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the Apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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 2:42-47)

The life-changing relationship the believers in this very first church shared turned the world upside down. Their shared faith changed everything in their lives. Their unity became the functional light of their world. I am more and more convinced that the shrinking number of believers in our culture has more to do with the failure of the church to realize God's design for it than it does with a complete rejection of the God of heaven.

The simple truth is, we do not live as lights before a lost world, neither individually nor through our churches. Our surface-only relationships with church reflects, I fear, our surface-only relationship with God.

In the final words of his letter James addresses our relationship with the church. He has bluntly challenged us through his letter to become true servants of the God of heaven and he challenges us finally to fully realize the nature of our relationship with one another as we labor to mature becoming all the God has called us to be.

So he teaches us that when we are in trouble we immediately respond in prayer. When we are happy and fulfilled we naturally praise God. When we are sick and struggling we turn to the church. And, when we are facing sin we confess our struggle to our fellow believers and we pray for one another. This intimate relationship with other believers in the body of believers called the church becomes our natural habitat. We do not, in fact we cannot, create this level of intimacy by our own efforts. Rather, God adds us to this intimate relationship as he saves us and this intimacy changes everything.

