

# THE IMPORTANCE OF GATHERING TOGETHER

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Video entitled "Holiness" by The Bible Project can be seen by using the following link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9vn5UvsHvM>

Wow! What a great video! It really explains the concept of Holiness very clearly. It also shows how the Old Testament is connected to the New Testament. To understand one, we really need the other. We do not have full understanding if we rely on only one.

Our Text today will be Romans 11: 17 - 21.

When the Apostle Paul was in Corinth, he wrote the book of Romans as a self-introduction to the Christians in Rome. He also used it to explain that all humans are sinners in a desperate situation, and how Christ solved the problem. Paul needed to explain to the Roman Christians that both the Jews and the Gentiles are included together in GOD's plan.

Paul used the example of an olive tree to explain the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. A farmer will take his olive trees and cut off any branches that do not bear fruit. He will then graft on branches from a wild olive tree that is bearing a lot of fruit so that the tree is more fruitful. This then makes for a healthier and more productive olive tree.

Let us read our first scripture: Romans 11: 17 - 21.

"<sup>17</sup> If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, <sup>18</sup> do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. <sup>19</sup> You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." <sup>20</sup> Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. <sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either."

Now the Jewish people, the Israelites were the "chosen people", the apple of GOD's eye, the first-fruits of HIS love. HE rescued them out of Egypt where they had been held captive for generations, and they left Egypt with all sorts of goods and trinkets along with all their own possessions and livestock.

They knew they could trust Moses because obviously all these things had been done just as Moses said they would be done, and just as GOD had empowered him to do them.

But it didn't take them too long after their leaving Egypt all happy and celebrating, to start to lose faith in GOD. We know this happened, and this particular case, what they did was this.

Moses left them for a time to go up the mountain to meet with GOD, and while he was gone, it did not take them long to lose faith in GOD and fall away. In fact, they brought their gold to Aaron to make an idol. Later, Aaron told Moses that they just threw it in the fire, and it came out like this calf. Now we know it didn't, because scripture tells us that, in fact, he fashioned the calf out of the gold. So, we know that's what happened, that Aaron made the calf, and was just trying to cover his back with Moses.

They lost faith in GOD. They had unbelief. So GOD gave them a spirit of stupor. "But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear." Deuteronomy 29: 4.

So, now the church of Jesus Christ has been around a while, and we've gone through some things. We've grown, and we've become complacent. We can even forget some parts of The Holy Spirit, which can fill us and make us better people. We must be careful about that!

We are starting to hear people say, "Where is the promised coming of The Saviour?". This was prophesied in 2 Peter 3: 4 - 8 that people would say that! "4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." "5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

The sad thing is, today we are hearing these doubts being spread by believers! There is a report out that says some factions, and maybe all of the Roman Catholic Church made an announcement saying, "Don't look for Jesus, HE's not coming back!" Wow! That's completely against what the scripture says! That is just another reason why we must always be looking at the scriptures!!

But my talk today is about the importance of coming together, and some of the reasons why it is so important.

Now let's have a look at Hebrews 10: 22 - 25 "22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 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."

And our key verse is going to be verse 25 "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."

Now I realize that I am preaching to the choir here, that you are all faithful and here every week. I understand that, but I think we all need to be reminded of some of the reasons why we do this, and we do know that some people do fall away from this eventually. First, they have a good reason to miss one Sunday, then it is easier to do it again, and then it becomes a habit.

People will say, "I don't have to go to church to worship GOD.", and that's absolutely true. The Word does not say you can't worship and praise GOD on your own. You don't have to come to church to worship and serve The Almighty GOD, you can do it every day, in fact it's recommended! Scripture tells us we should do just that! In fact, the Bible tells us to pray without ceasing! "19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 5: 19 & 20.

Now you can do that, and the Bible does not say you can't do that. But the Bible does say, not to forsake the "gathering together as some are in the habit of doing". I think that part of this text is proof for us that it is also for us today because at the end of that it says, "but encourage one another" (Hebrews 10: 25b). Now how can you encourage one another if you're not part of the church of Jesus Christ? It's kind of hard to encourage one another if you're not meeting together to do that. And it says, to be "encouraging one another all the more as you see the Day (of Christ's return) approaching". We have never been as close to the second coming of The LORD Jesus Christ as we are today! And the Bible is telling us to keep on with that!

It seems to us that The LORD is a long time in coming, but the Bible says GOD is not taking HIS time, as we understand it. "8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3: 8 & 9.

Now this is well known to us, and quite frankly, less than a hundred years and most of us have moved on, so it does seem long. So, don't forget the gathering together. Why?

We are GOD's people, just like Israel. Israel is GOD's first-born as I mentioned, the first fruits, the apple of HIS eye, as I said before. Israel is the natural branches, and we are the wild branches, and we have been grafted in. So, we also are the people of GOD.

Israel lost interest, mostly in what GOD's plan was. We too can lose sight of GOD's plan. We must be so careful not to let this happen to us!

Have you ever heard this? "Well, that's your interpretation!" I've heard that more times than I can count! You can say, "There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4: 12), and someone will say, "Well, that's your interpretation!"!! No, it's NOT my interpretation, that's what the Bible says! It's like when people say, "Many roads lead to heaven.", or "I'm a good person". Many roads DON'T lead to heaven. Many roads lead to destruction! There's only one road that leads to heaven and only one gate by which we can enter! "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it." Matthew 7: 13. And there is only ONE who ever walked on the earth who really was good, and that was Jesus Christ! "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." Hebrews 4: 15.

Many religious leaders are saying Christ is not coming back, as we've talked about. That was prophesied again in 2 Peter 3: 3 "Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires."

See, part of the problem is when we're out in the world we hear the scoffers, and if we don't get to the people who, quite frankly, function on faith we can fail. Now, I want to put a little plug in here for our people, because, quite frankly, this bothers me. I'm glad that we have faith and that our GOD is invisible. That can only be good for us because, you can't please GOD without faith. If GOD were standing right there, in front of HIS throne, you could not deny that HE was GOD! Now, some of the scoffers that scoff at us, here's their belief, and I'm not knocking them, they have a right to their own religion, but they believe that there was a dot out in nothing, a black hole so far away that you can't see it. They believe that one day this dot exploded and out of it came everything that you can see in this world! And you think that we have faith! How can you believe that? So, you understand what I'm saying? This is what we are bombarded with every day! Day and night, if you watch any science show, it's all about evolution! Evolution is just a theory! A theory that has never, ever been proven! As a matter of

fact, I don't think anyone has ever actually seen a black hole which they put their whole faith in! I say that not to knock them, but that is what we are bombarded with constantly! And there's a real problem with that because then we start slipping! We start slipping and getting a little closer to that darkness! We get pulled a little more this way, and that way!

My concern is that we get so close to that darkness that our eyes start adjusting to it! And that's what's happening! And we've got to be careful not to get too far from the light! We've got to be on the ball, ready to be discerning and realize what is happening around us and fight it! GOD's Word says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Ephesians 6: 12. They are influencing the people that want you to not believe in GOD!! They want you to believe in the invisible dot that blew up and created all things!

Chances are you won't hear such things in the congregation of believers, will you? You won't hear those contradictions to the scriptures. The beautiful thing about our faith and our belief is that after this we'll go have a cup of coffee and come back and discuss it. If I said something that's wrong, or if I said something that's right, we'll discuss it, and explain it and correct it. We're not hiding. We're not telling people not to understand the WORD of GOD and the scripture. We encourage you to read the WORD, talk to GOD, and have the Holy Spirit teach you! Don't just have somebody else teach you! A good reason to get together is to study and discuss GOD's WORD and avoid false information, to correct all the propaganda that bombards us every day!

You know, the Devil had the audacity to tempt Jesus with The WORD of GOD! (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13). That is the audacity that the Devil had! How much more will he come after you and me?

Not only that, but after he finished tempting Jesus, he waited for an opportune time to tempt HIM again!! The Devil is just relentless in his battle against us. "For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord." Jude 4: 4.

Another risk is prosperity gospels that some proclaim. They tell us that if we believe in Jesus all will be happy and well, that our finances will increase, and so on. We must beware of having our ears tickled. I am not here to tickle your ears.

The WORD says, that as an active part of the church, we are to be discerning. You will find this in Jude 20-23 "20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. 22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.". You will see it again in Matthew 7:1-15 and Acts 17:15 to name just a few places. Acts 20: 29 warns us that there are many wolves in sheep's clothing out there. "29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears." We have to be aware that there are some people who just may come in and try to lead us astray. Or there may be those who believe, but don't understand the truth. The idea is that we must be discerning and that's why we must get together and study The WORD and pray for understanding and wisdom. We have a wonderful

pastor who is devoted to The WORD and encourages us to exercise our discernment because of this. And if there is that much danger inside the church, how much is outside the church?

I have an example for you. I've said it many times before, and it breaks my heart. We have had many youth groups, and seen many, many people come through the Youth Groups, raised in the church, and they are young and enthusiastic, vibrant and happy and praising GOD, and then they meet somebody. That somebody is not a believer, and they become unequally yoked in faith. This is a dangerous thing. That person may come to church at first, to woo the one who believes, but all of a sudden something comes up and everyone is going to someone's house for a party or to watch a game on Sunday and have some fun. It's only one Sunday, but then there's another time, or a late night out on Saturday, and slowly they are serving GOD less and less, and gradually they fall away. The believer loses their enthusiasm for GOD. Then they get married, have children, and psychologically, maybe not even intentionally, one of them is going to make sure their kids don't go to church. It's too inconvenient, it's a bother, it's trouble. That's the trouble with getting too close to that darkness! We have seen this a lot!

I know I'm beginning to sound like a fear-monger, but we must be aware that there is a battle going on out there. We are warned in Romans 11: 20, "Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble." I don't think he means to be afraid. Lots of times I say, "I fear GOD". That does not mean I am afraid. It means I am in awe. I respect GOD. As we know, HE is holy! HE is so good and pure that we can't just approach HIM without the purifying touch of Jesus. That's what is meant by fear, a reverence!

Now that's one thing about gathering together. Then there is encouraging one another. How would I know who was struggling with circumstances or illness unless I am gathered together with other believers, unless I were a part of the church? It helps me learn to come to GOD first when I am sick or ill, or facing some challenge. Then I can go to the doctor or wherever to get some help, but I know GOD is using these people and resources to help me. I have to give this testimony. I was going to fly out to see my son a few weeks ago, and I had a very severe pain that caused me concern. Most pain does not concern me, but this pain did. So, at prayer meeting before I left, I called the elders together and had them anoint me with oil. Knowing I had done my part, I went home. I could not even sleep in my bed. I sat up all night in my recliner, wrapped in a heating blanket. I prayed all night for GOD to heal the pain. I knew if I went to the doctor, they would tell me I could not fly out to see my son because there was no way I could hide the pain, but praise be to GOD! In the morning it was better! I knew it was not the heating blanket. It was the healing touch of GOD! So, we would not learn to do this outside the church, that's just my point! You won't learn that if you don't fellowship with believers. You won't get those truths if you are not gathered together in the church.

In the church you will find testimonies, heart-felt prayers, encouragement, requests, and you will learn truths like in Colossians 1: 15 -18 "15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."

In case you forgot, we are the body of Christ. And remember, GOD is the head of the body, and HE gives us our good gifts. Rejoice in HIM with thankfulness for whatever gift HE has given you. We thank each of you for using your gifts of service to this church. So many offer gifts of service to this church unseen, behind the scenes, and never receive thanks. I thank you now.

Going back to GOD being the head of the body. HE is not referring to an individual body, though Christ should be the head of each person individually. HE is referring to a body that is collective. HE is referring to the body of Jesus Christ! Together, we are the body of Christ.

When I first decided to come to this church, I was walking by and praying, and GOD stopped me dead and talked to my heart. I won't say there was a bright light and booming voice from heaven, but a quiet voice in my heart spoke and said, "You need this." I said, "I do?" and basically I turned around and HE said, "That's where I want you to be." I don't think HE meant necessarily the Nazarene Church, but it was clear to me. If you have a problem with those people, you've got a problem with ME! Because we believers are the body of Jesus Christ! So praise GOD! I am now a part of the body of Christ! And I rejoice in that!

The Israelites forsook GOD and took on other gods. The Jewish Christians, because of persecution were tempted to revert back to Judaism. Don't revert back, folks! No matter what you find, despite persecution, don't revert back!

John has said in revelations. "The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name." Revelation 3: 12. And Ezekiel 20: 5 says, "and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: On the day I chose Israel, I swore with uplifted hand to the descendants of Jacob and revealed myself to them in Egypt. With uplifted hand I said to them, "I am the Lord your God.'"

There is going to come a day when we will have to stand firmly. We will have to stand and not be cowards. GOD hates cowards. "So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth." Revelation 3:16.

Romans 15: 9 "And so I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to you." Romans 15: 10 "Again, it says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people."

Romans 15: 11 "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him."

Isaiah 11: 10 & 11 "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious. **11** In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean." We are the fulfilment of that prophesy! You and me! That prophecy is true! It should be true for every one of us! Those who heard it said, "What?", but we are the fulfilment of that prophesy!

I should say this first. In corporate worship, spiritual gifts are there to serve and build up the church. Enjoy them on your own, but they are there to serve the church. Each and every person has been given a special gift of The Spirit so that he/she can make a unique contribution to the body of Jesus Christ! Not everyone is a preacher, not everyone is a healer or all the big things that you see out there. Some people are the doers. Praise GOD for the doers! Romans 12: 4 & 5 "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." You can't do that outside the body of Christ!

Paul goes on to say, "6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving,

then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”  
Romans 12: 6 - 8

Romans 15: 13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

And I will add to that “Do not forsake the coming together as some are in the habit of doing.” (Romans 11: 21)

AMEN!