***Selah – Christian Food for Thought***

***Gathering Together***

- by Brian Croft, excerpted from *TableTalk* magazine

Here are five important reasons why it is essential that every Christian gather with other Christians in the same local church weekly to hear the preaching of God's Word from the under-shepherds of that congregation.

First, a Christian's faith is fueled by hearing God's Word. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome and plainly said, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom.10:17). This has implications for not just the unbeliever, but for the believer also. We will be most inclined to listen and engage with preaching by being present where it is preached alongside others who have also come for the express purpose of hearing and submitting to God's Word proclaimed. This is clearly one of the reasons the author of Hebrews commands that Christians not neglect regularly gathering together (Heb.10:25).

Second, hearing God's Word from your own shepherd is unique to every other encounter with God's proclaimed Word. It is one thing to hear your favorite preacher expound God's Word to his church or to a random conference crowd. It is an entirely different experience to sit in person and hear God's Word expounded and applied directly to you from your pastor, the man who knows your struggles, difficulties, and doubts, and who will give an account for your soul (Heb.13:17).

Third, never underestimate the power of personal connection. I like talking to my wife on the phone, but a phone conversation can never match the powerful impact of sitting across from her, face-to-face, and talking with her as I look into her eyes. Likewise, there is a powerful connection made between a shepherd and his flock when he preaches God's Word to those he has been thinking about and praying for as he prepared. The Holy Spirit uniquely uses eye contact, facial expressions, and body language in both the preacher and his hearers to create a powerful connection between them during a sermon. A pastor feeds off the visible reaction of his hearers. A congregation is moved by the pastor's burden over their souls conveyed in the sermon.

Fourth, spiritual fruit comes from hearing with others. When the church gathers, the Holy Spirit works in unique and powerful ways that are missing in private gatherings (1 Cor. 14). When a congregation collectively sits under the preached Word, a level of accountability is established and nourished among the hearers to urge each other to go and apply that sermon. A greater obligation to "do something" with the Word preached and to rely on one another for help and strength to obey it exists in this kind of community life that is not present when we listen in isolation or hop churches depending upon who is preaching that week.

Last, public sermons lead to corporate discipleship. Some form of one-on-one discipleship in a local church is essential for our personal growth as Christians. But while personal discipleship is a wonderful complement to the proclamation of God's Word to the communal gathering of saints, it can never replace it, for it is one of the necessary marks of the church (Calvin,Institutes,4.1.9). When the whole church hears God's Word proclaimed, that Word then becomes the basis for further conversation and growth in the one-on-one discipleship conversations that follow. The sermon gets everyone on the same page; personal discipleship expands on the details of that page.

This is only an excerpt, if you are interested you may read the article in its entirety on Ligonier Ministries’ website here: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/gathering-together/>