

Acts 15:36-40 Amp. "And after some time Paul said to Barnabas, Come, let us go back again and visit and help and minister to the brethren in every town where we made known the message of the Lord, and see how they are getting along.

37) Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark [his near relative].

38) But Paul did not think it best to have along with them one who had quit and deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work.

39) And there followed a sharp disagreement between them, so that they separated from each other, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

40) But Paul selected Silas and set out, being commended by the brethren to the grace (favor and mercy) of the Lord."

So much for unity for the sake of unity. Wimpy, self serving relationships work for church socials, but when you are about the business of God, the reliability and integrity of who you are with is very important.

I had the privilege of observing a former gang member scrutinize a fellowship that I had brought him to, while he was making his decision to follow the Lord. I don't remember his exact words after he met and talked with some of the people, but they were not something I had ever heard before. He inquired why he would ever hang around with anyone in that church, stating that none seemed to have enough integrity to be relied upon if he was ever in need.

You see, he had lived with people who had covenanted to be "for" each other in times of need, no matter what the cost. He stated that he knew hundreds of people, some who didn't even know his name, who, without hesitation, would actually die for him if they were called upon to do so. They were in covenant, one to another because of their code.

When he observed the church, he could see only surface relationships and empty, hollow, greetings of acceptance. ( By the way, this man was pointed to Jesus, not people, and serves Him now. He is one of the most trustworthy friends that I have ever met. I have observed his life and have learned much from him and one other friend, also a gang member, who preceded him to the Lord. Few people have the character qualities of these two friends.)

The church knows little about honest relationships with each other and therefore few people stand with unquestioned love towards the other in times of need. We shoot our wounded and choose our friends for all of the wrong reasons. That will no longer suffice if we are to move with God in the coming times.

Paul understood the importance of trustworthy relationships in the season that he called to proclaim Gods Word. To him it was important enough to separate himself from Barnabas so that he could rely on his partner in the work that he was called to do. (An interesting note. Paul and Silas were commended unto the Lord and prospered. Barnabas simply went off with John Mark and was not mentioned again.)

I believe that discernment of Gods kind of character in those we associate with will be most critical in times to come. Each of us must pray for the wisdom to choose our friends wisely and separate ourselves from those who serve only themselves and live to fulfill their own needs. The work of the Lord will count on our ability to do so.

Needing the character of Jesus to discern proper character – Jim Corbett