

PILLARS IN THE CHURCH

“James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars,” (Gal 2:9)

Everybody knows what a pillar is. It is a column supporting the weight of a building. These three apostles of Jesus Christ had a reputation for being “pillars” in the church. Correctly understood this does not diminish the role of Christ in any way. The Bible teaches that the church was **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” (Eph 2:20)**. Pillars are rock solid and stable. They are not easily damaged or moved. They are capable of withstanding buffeting winds and storms. It is important for there to be “pillars” in the church.

It is quite understandable that when God desires reform and revival in the church He relies upon His “pillars” to maintain stability. Let us take, for example, the acceptance of gentiles into the church as equal to their Jewish brethren. This was one of the most unsettling issues ever faced by the church. The fact that most Christians in the world today are gentiles may cause us to forget that at one time we were merely strangers and aliens (Eph. 2:19). We were “afar off” and unable to participate in the glories of redemption. The accepting of us gentiles into the church may be the biggest and most significant controversy ever faced by the Body of Christ.

Since Peter was the one Christ chose to first preach to the gentiles let us narrow our focus to him. A brief review of this “pillar” in the book of Acts provides an impressive resume.

- In Acts 1 Peter took the lead in selecting a successor to Judas.
- In Acts 2 Peter was the main spokesman to first preach the Gospel to the Jews.
- In Acts 3 Peter participated in a healing and led thousands more to Christ.
- In Acts 4 he was used by God to rebuke the Jewish rulers and elders.
- In Acts 5 he was used by God to chasten Ananias and Sapphira with death. Peter was such a powerful leader that people wanted his shadow to fall on them as he passed by.
- In Acts 8 Peter was involved in imparting spiritual gifts to the Samaritans.
- In Acts 9 Peter healed the crippled Ananias and raised Dorcas from the dead.

Thus when Peter preached to the gentiles he was not as vulnerable to criticism as a young man or novice would have been. He had paid his dues and earned his stripes. He was a pillar in the church. Acts chapters 10 and 11 inform us that Peter’s mission to the gentiles was confirmed by the intervention of angels, the receiving of visions, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of witnesses. Even though it took several decades to accomplish, the wall of partition was broken down and we gentiles became fellow citizens with our Jewish brethren.

But now let us fast forward to our own generation. Sadly, it seems that many congregations are more rooted in 20th century traditions than Bible teaching and practice. Someone sarcastically said that “we” are 10 years behind the “evangelicals” and the “evangelicals” are 10 years behind reality. We desperately need to obey God more than man. Many young preachers, however, have been permanently scarred by daring to challenge some of these man made traditions.

I remember one young preacher, about 30 years ago, whose feet were being held to the fire because he dared to use an overhead projector in the “sanctuary”. He told me with amazement that one of the leading men in the brotherhood did the same thing in the same place without any criticism at all. True, he was only visiting and would soon be safely out of town. I rather imagine, however, that a more significant part of the explanation was that this visiting preacher was a “pillar” in the church. He was nationally known with a long track record of success.

When the Holy Spirit wrote to the seven churches of Asia, He consistently emphasized the need for repentance (See Rev. 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19). We should not be surprised, therefore, when churches have the same need today. It is true that Timothy was young and that no one was to despise his youth (1 Tim. 4:14). It is also true that Evangelists like Timothy and Titus are to speak with authority regardless of their age (2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 2:15). It is still appropriate, however, for younger preachers to treat the older men as fathers and the other women as mothers (1 Tim. 5:1 - 2). So now, as then, it is both wise and practical for those who are “pillars” in the church to be “pillars” in the church.