

No Substitutions

Scripture: Hebrews 10:23–25

Code: B130218

In the last several years, the proliferation of specialized ministries and parachurch organizations has been astounding. Today there's a separate ministry for every biblical viewpoint, theological perspective, or practical interest, not to mention all the pseudo-Christian groups focused on social and political activism. It's likely that if you have got a particular spiritual itch, you can find a ministry that will scratch it, or you can find someone eager to launch a new organization to appeal to like-minded people.

The problem with the plethora of parachurch organizations is that so many of them exist outside the authority and influence of the church. The term *parachurch* ought to indicate a cooperative relationship, but often that's not the case. Some pay lip service to the church; others are openly indifferent to it. Few of them—perhaps *very few*—are actually accountable to the church, adhere to biblical guidelines for leadership, and have a strong commitment to biblical doctrine and theology.

That's particularly dangerous as these organizations and ministries pull believers' attention, loyalty, and financial support *away* from their local congregations. Rather than devote their time, energy, and support to life and ministry in their local body, believers are segmented off from the rest of the church, focused only on the issues and concerns that appeal to them. Too often, the parachurch organization becomes the central spiritual focus, while the church is pushed further and further to the sidelines. That defies the Lord's design for His church and cripples the Body of Christ, which can't properly function if its members are all headed in different directions, pursuing different priorities.

You see a similar trend on Christian college campuses, where many young men and women are preparing for lives of ministry without a strong connection to the church—if left unaddressed, that disconnect only deepens with time. In fact, much of the full-time ministry work going on in the world these days—whether in charity groups, missionary endeavors, Christian education, or some other parachurch activity—happens outside and apart from the church.

And while plenty of those parachurch organizations are doing valuable, necessary work, the trend away from the church—the only institution the Lord established and promised to bless—is still a serious cause for concern.

The solution is to be thoughtful about the ministries you're supporting, and aware of their influence in your life and participation in your local congregation. One of the key points we consistently stress at Grace to You is that we cannot replace the church in the lives of our listeners and readers, nor do we want to. We can't possibly fulfill your spiritual needs for worship, fellowship, accountability, and discipleship. We're a complement to your local church—not a substitute.

The same should go for every other ministry or parachurch organization, and you should be wary of the ones that are comfortable being disconnected from and unaccountable to the church. Instead, look for ministries that prompt you toward greater involvement and service in your

congregation—that prompt you to be more committed and connected to what the Lord is accomplishing in your church.

Our series on the importance of the local church officially comes to a close today, but it's clear this is a topic that will continue to come up throughout the life of our blog. The church is at the heart of every believer's life, and it's related—whether directly or indirectly—to everything we discuss in this digital space. In fact, we're already prepping more in-depth series on some of the topics we've recently touched on, including baptism and the Lord's Table.

For now, we want to give John MacArthur the last word on the importance of the local church. His words focus on attendance and membership, but they encompass the spirit of everything we've discussed over the last several weeks about the necessity of involvement in your congregation.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2024 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).