

Why Believers should not attend Church

[Note. There are many godly people who attend church, and there are many positive things about attending church. Many people have discovered and accepted Christ in a church. This article is not putting down churches as far as a place to gather and hear the word of God, because it does not matter where one hears God's Truth, as long as they hear it! However, this article deals with the topic of "how" we are to worship God, and addresses the belief that one must worship God in a physical building called a church. There is a difference between going to a place to hear God's Word, and going to a place to worship God.]

Dear reader, did you know that there is no command in scripture which says that a believer in Christ must attend a church building in order to worship God? This is true. Also, there are no examples of any follower of Christ going to a church building to worship God. They worshipped God by their obedience to Him in every area of life, every day of their lives. They did not worship Him by giving only one hour of their time every week to some temple made with hands.

A "Church" is basically a temple made with hands. Does God dwell in temples made with hands? Scripture tells us:

Acts 7:48, "Howbeit the most High dwelleth **not** in temples made with hands;"

Acts 17:24, "God...dwelleth **not** in temples made with hands;"

Keep in mind that the real question we seek to ask is not **whether** we are to worship, but **how** we are to worship. Perhaps the question is also where we are to do that. Are we able to do these things only in a building whose mortgage payments are being paid by a State-incorporated ecclesiastical institution, or may we obey them in our homes, or in a context of decentralized, informal, voluntary gatherings? The question before us is, need we "attend church?" Need we hear the "sermons" of special priests in order to obey the Biblical commands to exhort one another and discuss the Scriptures? Can we obey these commands if we only "attend church"?

Hebrews 10:25 gives a straightforward command: Do not forsake the gathering together of ourselves, and exhort one another. It would seem, then, that the question, "Is it our moral obligation to attend church?" receives a fairly straightforward answer: Of course! How, then, can somebody assert that one should not "attend church"?

The command in Hebrews 10:25 (namely, to "exhort one another") is also found in Hebrews 3:13, where it says we are to "exhort one another **daily**". If we claim to obey

Hebrews 10:25 by "attending church" one day a week, do we also fulfill the command to exhort one another **daily**, when we see other believers only once a week?

Moreover, do we even obey the basic command to exhort one another when we simply listen to the polished oratory of a philosopher? Are we really obeying the Biblical commands concerning exhortation, community, and mutual accountability by once a week watching the performance of a seminary-trained entertainer?

Everybody who reads Hebrews 10:25 realizes that isolationism is contrary to God's Spirit. A family which locks its doors to people, withdraws from the world, and neglects the poor, which spends its time alone in reclusive introspection, is violating the clear commands of the Bible concerning hospitality and the communion of people.

But the real question is not whether believers should exhort one another daily, but whether it is required of believers to engage in a certain kind of meeting, with certain credentialed officers, to expose themselves to a specified ritual of acts which are called "attending church." Is this a scriptural command?

Here are four main points that will be covered in this article

1. "Worship" is a **service**, not a **ritual**. Those who "attend church" and imitate Old Testament worship patterns generally neglect the New Testament commands to exhort one another daily (Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25).

2. The Old Testament looks forward to the Age in which all men would worship God **everywhere**, and not just in that "place which the LORD your God shall choose" (Deuteronomy 12:11). The New Covenant priesthood is decentralized and universalized, not restricted to the "ordained" and the church traditions of men.

3. Exhortation is conversational, not sermonic. Preaching means **dialogue**, not a **monologue**. Rather than being equipped by New Testament-style exhortation and service, church-goers can become impotent and dependent upon a credentialed "professional" who engages in statism.

4. Fellowship is best accomplished in **homes**, not in **pews**. In "church" the "dignity" of priestly pomp and "worship" is substituted for the personal, house-to-house communion pictured in the Scriptures (Acts 2:46). A military-style symbol of a meal, and a view of the back of someone's head, is substituted for a genuine meal and a time of face-to-face fellowship.

These four points are very plainly at odds with most every church in the country. But the point is not simply to be different, nor to insult all other churches. The purpose is to analyze apparently "obvious" traditions in the light of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

What is "Worship"?

The basic meaning of the word "worship" is service. To "worship" God is to put every area of one's life under the His Law. Worship in the generic sense is the devotion we owe to God in the whole of life. God is sovereign, He is Lord, having sovereignty over us and propriety in us, and therefore in all that we do we owe subjection to him, devotion to His revealed will, obedience to His commandments. There is no area of life where the injunction does not apply (1 Corinthians 10:31). In view of the lordship of Christ as Mediator, all of life comes under His dominion (Colossians 3:23,24).

In the Old Testament there was also a more specific usage for "worship," namely, the observance of the ceremonial rituals. These ritual observances typified worship in every area of life. Animal sacrifice, the burning of incense, attendance at temple, and other rigors were imposed on the people of Israel, and were but shadows of the worship of the New Covenant.

Jesus spoke of the New Covenant form of worship in John 4. The woman at the well, having been confronted with the ethical demands of the Lord Jesus (regarding her adulterous life), attempts a "doctrinal" diversion: she asks Jesus about "worship." Putting words in Jesus' mouth, she claims that worship occurs in a certain place (John 4:20). Jesus denies that worship occurs in any place, and says, "true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth" (John 4:21-24).

In the common, specific sense, "worship" means attending to the ceremonial requirements of the Old Covenant, going to a certain place. But these acts only symbolized true "worship," and were necessary to prod a Spiritless people to that worship which means obedience to God in every area of life, in Spirit and in Truth.

Can you find one occurrence in the New Testament books of "worship" in the ceremonial/specific sense (going to a specific place to worship) being required of bondservants of Christ? The answer is no. Or are the occurrences of "worship" speaking of obedience in every area of life? The answer is yes. Do any of the Greek words used for "worship" occur in any sense requiring bondservants of Christ to go to Jerusalem, or to any specific "place" to "worship" God? No, they do not. Would we expect centralized ceremonial "worship" to be required today in light of the fact that Jews were doing this because the spirit of God was not yet given them (John 7:39)? In light of the fact that in the Old Testament, God only dwelt in temples made with hands because the Spirit was not yet inside of the people, but today, God says He does not dwell in temples made with hands, because the Spirit of God dwells within our bodies? If you "attend church," have you been trained to search the Scriptures to find the answers to such questions as these (Acts 17:11), or do you need to ask your "pastor"?

The Enduring Old Testament Law

The Mosaic law commanded God's people to gather for worship and to hear God's Word (Deuteronomy 12:5-12; 31:11-12). The Old Testament required travel to a centralized location to hear a special priesthood. The reason is that the Spirit was not yet given to the people under the Old Covenant, and since they had no Spirit to communicate with God, they had to go to a physical building and hear a physical priest to understand what God's Word was. Do we still have to hear God's Word from a special priesthood? Or does the Spirit of God dwell within us today? Compare these commands with Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well (John 4:20-24). Do we still go to Jerusalem? Must we listen to Moses or the priests to hear God's Word?

Obviously, we do not "bring an offering" or "come before Him" in the same way we did in the Old Covenant. Nor do we "hear God's Word" by going to the typological temple and hearing a priest. Scripture says we are all priests now (1 Peter 2:5,9; Ephesians 2:19-22, Revelation 1:6; 5:10; Isaiah 61:6), and God's Word has gone out through all the world (Romans 1:8; 10:18; Colossians 1:6,23).

Old Covenant believers would be astonished at the scope of publication of God's Word in our day. This is guided by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit Himself. Thus, publishers should labor as priests under God, and see their work as having great and special Spiritual significance.

This massive outpouring of Truth works to enable every believer-priest to know and study God's Word and to proclaim it to his neighbors. And it all takes place outside the walls of institutional churches. In fact, the "church" has historically opposed the free dissemination of Scripture and its exposition. The Roman Catholic Church burned Christians at the stake for doing this.

All of this should be understood as the true Spiritual meaning of the Old Testament prophecies. Joel 2:28 is an example of how the world-wide decentralized spread of the Gospel was spoken of by the Prophets. Similarly did Moses speak, when he prayed that God would make all of His people prophets and preachers (Numbers 11:29). Acts 2:17 is a fulfilment of Joel 2:28, when the Holy Spirit was finally given to His people. So you see, we are all prophets, priests, and kings today (Isaiah 61:6; 1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

Thus, no building can be said to be the place to worship simply because of the presence of the special "ordained" priests. **Every Believer is a Priest**. We need not "go to Jerusalem", or to a "temple made with hands" (Acts 7:48; 17:24). This is why, when Jesus died, and confirmed the New Testament, the physical temple was rent in half (Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:34). This is why New Testament believers worship "from house to house", in homes (Acts 2:46), and not in temples made with hands.

Does the Bible say Believers must go to a physical church?

Churches commonly quote Acts 20:7 as a precedent for Church worship, but the whole impression of Acts 20:7 is rather that of a family meeting together in a home than of a modern congregation met in a church. "Family" meaning a group of believers and friends. Is it possible that we may have lost the sense of the congregation as a real family in God?

Psalms 22:22 is also quoted, and it is cited in Hebrews 2:12, as referring to Christ. How does Christ stand in the midst of his congregation and declare His Name? Only in certain buildings at certain times? Matthew 18:20 spells doom for those who would so assert: "For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." His Presence with us is through the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17), who fulfills Moses' wish that we could all be prophets and not have to be dependent upon special priests to teach us (1 John 2:27). God's Presence is not localized "in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48; 17:24). **Our body is now the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells within us** (1 Corinthians 3:9,16,17; 6:19-20, Ephesians 2:20-22), just like Jesus referred to his own body as a temple (Mark 14:58, John 2:19-21). And as believers exercise dominion over the entire globe, Christ is correspondingly present (Matthew 28:18,20).

Does Scripture require this "special" place of worship in addition to "everywhere"? One of the burdens of the first century was the corrupt worship among the Jews, and scripture says in God's advent, that will be replaced with pure worship among the Gentiles in every place (Malachi 1:11; 3:3-4). Worship would no longer be limited or tied to Jerusalem, or to the outward shadows of the Old Covenant, or to a centralized Church. Because once the Holy Spirit is given, shadows are no longer necessary.

How do we worship God in the New Covenant? Do we need an institutional priesthood? Must we journey to a certain centralized location? Must we "attend church"? It is virtually implied that those who do not "worship" in a certain place (subordinate to a priest) do not believe in "assembling" together, or with any appreciation of the Community we have in Christ. This is false. The question is not, "**Are** we to 'gather together'?", but rather "**How** are we to 'gather together'?"

The Judaizers told believers in Christ that unless they observed the ceremonial requirements of the Old Covenant they weren't being faithful. Their purpose was not to make obedient patriarchs out of the new converts, but to **gain power over them** (Galatians 2:4).

We should not localize God:

Acts 7:49, "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?"

1 Kings 8:27, "...behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?"

What does "Preach" mean?

Believers are to Preach God's Word (2 Timothy 4:2; Acts 20:7-9; 1 Timothy 4:6-16). Also mentioned is "exhort" and "teach" in these verses. Far more significant, however, is the entire notion of "**preaching**". There were no one-man lectures (monologues) in the early Church until Greek philosophy was imported into the Church. The traveling philosophers (peripatetics) were popular in the Greco-Roman world, and were too easily imitated among Believers. **What passes for "preaching" in our day has absolutely no Biblical warrant.** Nowhere in the New Testament is there an example of a "sermon" in the Christ's assemblies.

We need to emphasize this point. If the Apostle Paul were invited into one of our meetings and saw only one man give an oration patterned after the Greek philosophers of his day, with absolutely **no interaction** with the "laymen," Paul would demand to know "What's going on here?" This modern pattern bears no resemblance to the New Testament pattern, although it is unwittingly patterned after ancient Greek itinerant moralists. The "sermon" is an unscriptural tradition, imported from Greco-Roman paganism. Some preachers, of course, fail to meet even the standards of the Greek philosophers. Their "preaching" is pure entertainment.

Acts 20 is used to establish many modern practices of the church, and yet it supports none of them. Consider "preaching." The Greek word for "preach" in Acts 20:7,9 is word #1256, *dialegomai*: it's a "dialogue" not a "monologue." *Dialegomai* means "to converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss". It comes from the word "di" which means "a combining form meaning 'two', 'double'." We do not have "dialogue and discussion" in most "churches," and therefore do not obey Acts 20:7. Does the church really believe that Paul gave an uninterrupted lecture -- for twelve hours?!? *Dialegomai* is also translated as "reasoned" in Acts 17:2, where Paul "**reasoned**" in the synagogue out of the scriptures. Paul "**reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath**" (Acts 18:4,19). In church, the preacher doesn't "reason" with anybody, but simply talks with no chance of interaction with those in the audience. *Dialegomai* is also translated as "disputed" in Acts 17:17, where Paul "**disputed he in the synagogue**", and in Acts 19:8 where he was "**disputing** and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God." In Church, the pastor does not give anyone the chance to "dispute" or "question" him. Is this biblical?

For now, note the inescapable fact that there simply was no "preaching" or "sermon" as we popularly conceive it today. When we proclaim the Gospel to our neighbor, we engage in "official and professional instruction" as priest-kings of Christ! The gates of hell are assaulted and overcome by our "informal discussion". Modern churches have replaced the discussion and animated conversation of the New Testament with "sermons," an invention of the Greeks, and a man-made tradition.

As a result, I cannot obey the Scriptural commands as cited in 1 Corinthians 14:26,31 when I "attend church"; I cannot edify and prophesy. Neither can I obey 1 Timothy 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:2 when I "attend church"; I cannot exhort, I cannot "teach", except through hymns (but not of my choosing). Only one person exhorts in a "church"; the whole congregation violates Hebrews 10:24-25, at least when they are "attending church." Perhaps they obey these commands later in the afternoon, when in colloquial discussion they bring all thoughts captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), but certainly not during Church services.

Who is a Pastor or a Priest?

While the Apostle could claim to be a "steward of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1), we wonder what Churches mean when they claim the same thing for themselves, after the age of the Apostles, and denying the duty to all other ("non-ordained") believers. Perhaps they dispense mysteries only when speaking ex cathedra. No, surely whenever any believer shares the Word of God with another, he dispenses mysteries in the same sense as the churchmen might legitimately claim for themselves.

It seems that church preachers are sometimes not as interested in exalting the Apostles or the Gospel as much as their own ecclesiastical power. This seems to be a fairly significant issue, one that underlies the issue of preaching and this entire article: The ecclesiocrat works to "mystify" his "office." He wants a "mystique" to surround his position. He seeks not to exalt the Word of God so much as to intimidate and impress the "laity." Many are unable to think of the work of the elder as attainable, practical, or understandable, because it is invested with an aura of mystery. The every-day function of nurturing younger believers and watching over them, concerned for their Spiritual growth, is converted into a high and lofty ecclesiastical "office" resembling an inscrutable, occultic link between god and man. Rather than rooted in Biblical Law and practical competence therein, this ecclesiocentric authority is esoteric, shrouded in mystery.

In the Priesthood of All Believers, all believers can strive to be mature, wise, and Godly. In denominational churches, the "uninitiated" can never be "mysterious." They are qualitatively (not just quantitatively) inferior. "Religion" is thus removed, and the rest of us must read Ann Landers for "practical" guidance the rest of the week.

In sharp contrast to this mentality, the Bible wants us to think of every believer as one who must dispense divine mysteries (Isaiah 61:6; 66:20-23; 1 Peter 2:9). In fact, the "mystery" which was hidden in the Old Covenant is the fact that all men shall be a part of God's Kingdom of priests, and they shall function fully, obediently, and spontaneously (Ephesians 2, Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 2:5,9; Hebrews 8:8-12) without the rigors of the Old Covenant ceremonial priesthood (Colossians 1:26-27; Ephesians 1:9-10; 3:5-6; Galatians 3:19 - 4:11) and without fear of the principalities and powers which held sway over the nations during the Old Covenant (Revelation 20:1-3). Everyone engages in an

extremely significant and special act when they bring the Word of God to bear on a neighbor's problems. The New Testament tells us that this conversation has cosmic significance; the very gates of hell itself are pulled down and Christ's Kingship extended (2 Corinthians 10:4-5; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25). By virtue of our priestly and kingly office, it is an act of official and professional instruction, and yet this shepherding of another believer or this preaching to an unsaved neighbor should be an "ordinary," every-day occurrence. The hocus-pocus of a clerical religionist is not demanded.

The Godly father does not dangle fatherhood over his son's head as an unattainable "mystery." He seeks to display and explain fatherhood, helping his son to become a Godly father. The Godly "Pastor" does not mystify himself or an ecclesiastical position of power. He models a life of service and obedience to Biblical Law in a practical way, demystifying competence and Godliness so that it might be imitated by all (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Conclusion

To say that we are violating Scripture unless we also "attend church" in the building of an ecclesiastical corporation with a credentialed seminary graduate in the spotlight, is simply preposterous, a remnant of Roman Catholic teaching. There is not a shred of evidence to support such an ecclesiastical requirement, and the whole of Scripture seems to go against it. The movement in the Bible is away from ceremony and limited special priesthood, and toward decentralization, an every-believer priesthood, and a return to direct communication with God through His Spirit.

Our failure as believers to implement this truth comes from our **friendship with the world, and conformity thereto** (Romans 12:1-2; James 4:4). It seems strange to us to think of a household communion. In our culture, Grandparents live in their own house, Aunts and Uncles are likewise separated from their Nieces and Nephews, and it is "trendy" for children to move out of their parents' house as soon as they possibly can. In our day "the Family" has been described as one or two working parents and (maybe) 2.2 children (recently down to 1.8).

If we were to take a first-century believer (or even a modern-day member of a number of non-western cultures) up into an airplane over Southern California, and showed them city after city of single-family dwellings, all packed in like sardines, row after row, with parents in one house, children in another, grandparents in another, aunts and uncles in still another, and the poor and homeless wasting away in the abandoned section of industrial parks and urban ghettos (where the suburban dwellers have coercively zoned them) our passenger would cry. Then he might become enraged: "This is sick! This is an abomination! I could never have imagined such atomism and selfish isolationism!" Little does he know that even among those houses where parents and children dwell together, it is little more than a motel, with students and commuters simply dropping in to sleep at night. In this land there is no property -- genuine property

-- over which fruitful, honest dominion can be exercised unhindered by banks or landlords. It is a nation of slaves. Where in our land is an Abraham, with hundreds of adopted children, hundreds of domestic apprentices, hundreds of the poor and needy receiving shelter, hundreds of illiterate orphans being educated and brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and several generations of Family in blessed contact and harmonious community? Well, if we believe the churchmen, that ideal is clearly unattainable: we live in the New Covenant, and we do not have the Spiritual resources which Abraham had under the Old Covenant. Right?

Does Ephesians 5:19 - 6:24 command anything that cannot be fulfilled in "informal" Family-gatherings? The idea of Family communion is in our (atomistic, self-centered) day rightly ridiculed. We are not Patriarchs; we are children. How we cherish the churchmen, who only require us to "worship" in their church one day each week, and then dismiss us to watch our TV's in isolated silence.

We should always be conscious of Christ's Presence "where two or three are gathered in My Name." Whenever we obey the command to assemble together for praising God, Scripture reading and study, exhortation and comfort, prayer and singing, and remembering the Lord's death in the communal meal, we are clearly engaging in a very special activity.

Remember, **the "Church" does not save anybody, only our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ can save us** (John 3:17; 10:9, Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:31, Romans 10:9,13).

<http://ecclesia.org/truth/church.html>