



*Do I HAVE TO
"GO TO CHURCH"?*

As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
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DO I HAVE TO "GO TO CHURCH"

SO, DO YOU HAVE TO GO TO CHURCH TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

Many of us grew up having religious experiences that gave us a certain perspective of "church." We concluded, "This ain't nothing. This doesn't mean anything. It's just a bad organization. The organization I go to and attend on Monday morning from nine to five is far more organized, far more professional, with far more intelligent people performing their functions far more proficiently (and usually with more integrity) than what I see in this thing called 'church.' But I know I'm supposed to do this 'church' thing because it's in the Bible." Somewhere in the back of our minds and hearts we have different memories of our religious experiences. One of my memories, for example, is of my "pastor" coming over to my house and getting drunk on Saturdays while watching football with my dad. We all have our own stories that somehow discredit this thing called "church", don't we?

As a result, somewhere in the back of our minds we lost respect and awe for this thing called "church," and in a sense, rightfully so, because most of what we saw didn't really deserve respect. It was a contradiction. If you ask the average pagan or unbeliever to tell you everything they know about church, they could usually sum it up in one word: "Hypocrites." Or, "Boring", Both words are the same thing, really. Those words would be the very first things on the average unbeliever's mind.

And for most of us, we grew up with those same sorts of concepts about the “church.” If we were on the inside because our parents were, then we would see the hypocrisy but think that maybe we could just fix things from the inside. And, you know, you can get accustomed to just about anything. You’d feel guiltier for not going than for going, so you begin to accept the hypocrisy as normative. You tolerate it and explain it away with “we’re only human” or “we’re all just sinners saved by grace.” You just create a theology to explain it all.

SEEING GOD AFFECTS THE WAY YOU SEE CHURCH

But in truth, God means for the Church, the Body of Christ, to be viewed with an awe, and if we aren’t viewing it that way, then we aren’t seeing it properly. In those who first saw the Church, there was a transition that took place. It was reported that those early believers “were filled with awe” when they saw the Church. Something very dramatic happened in their lives to the extent that they all abandoned their separate lives and were together and had everything in common. It’s not just, “Yeah, yeah, I know. They loved Jesus. They gave their life to the Messiah who they realized had come. They repented of acts that lead to death.” Something else happened, too. They were devoted to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to prayer, and to the breaking of bread—all these things have to do with other people and have to do with the Church. They instantly had a regard for the Household of God as something much more than a loose-knit affiliation of people who each believed in God. It was not just about praying in their prayer closets and then acknowledging these other people, “Well, they are Christians, too. I’m going to live for God, and they are going to live for God. So, we ought to at least try to get along and attend something together regularly.” That isn’t how the believers 2,000 years ago viewed the Church.

Instead, the way they viewed the Church affected every ounce of their being. When they saw the House of God, the gate of Heaven, something radical happened in the way they began to function with one another. They now saw their lives as actually belonging to each other, rather than themselves. It wasn’t just simply, “I believe the Messiah has come.” Something happened in the way they viewed other people. Something about Christ with His Head in heaven and His feet on earth was awe-inspiring to them and had a dramatic effect on their lives. It was a dreadful thing, not in the negative sense of course, but there was

something very awe-inspiring about who Jesus was and is in His People on this earth. They saw it and they responded to it.

WHAT IS CHURCH? WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

From Jesus’ standpoint, for us not to discern the Body, is also not to discern Christ. For us to persecute the Church or minimize the Church or not esteem this thing called the Church is in turn doing the same to Christ. As I said before, we all grew up not esteeming the thing we called “church”. But the thing we were not esteeming was an institution. It was an organization. It was a religious group with some “belief system” that drew them together. But, in the average “church”, more than half of the attendees were not even new creations! If you were to go down any street in America, you’ll find that probably very few people in these “churches” who profess Christ and claim to be Christians are truly Christians, if measured against the Bible’s definition of a Christian.

The Bible defines Christians as ones who have forsaken all in order to be His disciple. They’ve lost their lives in order to find it. They’ve turned from sin and therefore can come to be called new creations because the old has been given away. They’ve died to sin and then buried it under the water. Most people wouldn’t come anywhere near a description like that. They want to live for themselves. They love the world and therefore the Scriptures say that they are enemies of God. They love the world and have not died to sin, therefore they are children of the devil (1 John 3). So, most of what we’ve historically called “church” really isn’t Church, from a biblical standpoint.

But, it’s not a measurement of maturity. It’s a measurement of what is the standard. Is the standard the Word of God? Is the standard the Life of Christ and the teachings of Christ? Is that what we live for? Is that what we are willing to die for? Or are we going to make little loopholes for ourselves? Are we going to try to create some other standard? “Well, let’s not take that too seriously. That’s not practical. If we live like that, someone might not like us. We might get sued.” Those sorts of human reasonings (which are wisdom from below, unspiritual, and of the devil—James 3:15), are what most religious bodies are built on. At the very least, most make great room for worldly wisdom.

THE CHURCH AND CHRIST ARE INSEPARABLE

If you say you love God desperately, don’t you dare try to undermine or

underplay the relevance of loving the House of God, loving the work of God's hands, loving the extension of God's heart, loving the visible of the invisible God (as Paul said in Colossians).

It's essential that you see the connection between loving God and loving His Body. Don't pompously think that you love God, but loving His Body is secondary in importance. "I can be a Christian, but I don't need the church." Wrong. Because God in His infinite wisdom said that Jesus Christ is the head of His Body, and IN His Body He has chosen to invest HIS SON as "the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way." COULD there be someone who says they love Jesus, but wouldn't want THAT?! Unless you are a daily part of a local body of true Heaven-Born Believers, a Lampstand (not simply an "attendance-based" clergy-laity organization), you are missing SO much, for yourself and your family. A REAL Church is to be a daily Christ-honoring, Christ-centered, Bible-believing people who are walking in obedience to God—not just talking about it.

TRUE LOVE EXPRESSES ITSELF

If there is someone you love desperately, what do your mind and your heart want to do? You have to find some way to express that love. If I love someone, my mind is going to be creatively finding ways to express it by always thinking, "How could I do something special for them that would make them smile or take a load off their shoulders? How could I creatively find a way to get into their heart, into their life and to just do something special, with no need for anything in return? I just want to give." When you really love someone, you just want to give. That's the way it is with God, too. If you really love God, there is no way you can draw some line between loving Him and expressing that love in His House—with a zeal, a passion for the House. If you really want to serve Him, there aren't a lot of ways to do that with a God whom you can't touch, and whom no one has seen or can see, as the Scriptures say—the only immortal, invisible, great, and awesome God. How can you wash His feet? What other ways do you have to love Him if you don't love His House and are not consumed with zeal for His House as was King David and Jesus?

So, loving His House is not an irrelevant point. But you being captured by the vision of loving His House is not a replacement for loving God. It is the overflow of loving God. Don't you dare replace loving God with loving His Church, but understand that they are inseparable. Loving His Church is the overflow of loving God. If you are really a worshipper

of God, you will worship Him like David did (as you can see throughout the Psalms) and zeal for God's House will consume you. There is no way to separate that.

The Church must be built on the right foundation of obedience to Jesus and lives that are devoted to following Christ. These are not lives that claim absolute perfection, but they are striving for it and accepting nothing less while walking in the transparency with God and each other between here and there. So, if I see a particular sin in my life, it's not the end of the world. If that sin has occurred in my life today, it is the end of the world, spiritually speaking, if I say, "I don't care. That doesn't matter. Mind your own business. Get the log out of your own eye." When I refuse to walk in the light (honest transparency with real people who know God), refuse to humbly submit to the Word of God, and refuse to turn to God and the other believers around me in God's Family, that's when it's all over. This is the verdict, Jesus said: Some love the light; some love the darkness. That's the issue that divides.

When the House of God is built on a foundation of walking in the light and a willingness to hear the Word of God and respond to the Word of God with Jesus as the standard, then there is nothing in heaven or on earth that can hold us back. If, however, at any point, regardless of how mature we may be, we decide that we don't really need the standard of the Word of God and the teachings of Jesus, when something less than the character and the full measure of the stature of Christ is acceptable to us, when we push away from any light that shines on the discrepancy between where Jesus is at and where we are—that terminates our existence as the people of God, at least as a Church, as a foundation that God can build His House on. That reverence and awe for the Church, the Head in heaven and the feet on earth has to be restored. That's the point.

It's a very simple Biblical idea. It's not a deep, far-fetched concept, but people despise this revelation of the Body of Christ. They despise this idea of being joined one to another, being members of one another. These are gruesome terms to people who want to live selfish lives. They have no desire for the House of God. Zeal for themselves consumes them and they are not going to lose their lives. In fact, that's a repulsive idea to them. They want to have what they want. They want to be gods who control their own destiny and perhaps others' destinies as well. But to lose their lives as Jesus did, to make themselves nothing, to become a slave to others even to the point of death if necessary—those are

despicable, scandalous ideas. Not only will they not do it, but they will also mock and blackmail anyone else who desires to live that way.

If you see this revelation of the Body of Christ in your lifetime, and give your life to this heart that God has for His House, you will be mocked and persecuted beyond belief. You will be called every name in the book. It is something very supernatural because satan despises that sort of agape love. To lose your life for the sake of others is a terrible idea to those who will mock and persecute. They think, "You can believe what you want to believe, but don't you dare love people even to the loss of your own personal identity, possessions, and even life. Don't you dare do anything terrible like that. But, if you want to believe a certain set of things, that's fine. Just make sure you live selfishly, loving a worldly sort of lifestyle like everybody else does, and it will be fine. Just stay plugged into this socially acceptable, cultural, normative, satanic, American, matrix lifestyle...and don't you dare ever love anybody. Then, you will be fine."

However, if you'll embrace this revelation of the Body of Christ in your lifetime, you will also experience the Reality of the Fullness of the Life you were created for. No more empty, striving, peace-less living. But, the Real Life you were created to experience, revealed in along with others who have also sold themselves completely to Jesus and His Church.