

"Worship with the Church"

The Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood, because He loves people. But many today think church is unimportant. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a bible study In Search of the Lord's Way. Let's find out what God says about worshipping with a church.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way, where we search the Scriptures to find the Lord's way to be saved and to live the Christian life. Thanks so very much for spending this time with us. We love knowing that you're watching or listening. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

Pew Forum researchers say nearly 60 million adults in America identify themselves as having no affiliation with religion. In all there are nearly 100 million Americans who are "unchurched," that is, they haven't been to church in quite a while. Even though they're not going now, most of the unchurched used to go to church. Many folks feel that you can be a good Christian and not associate with any congregation. The Bible, however, places a high priority on active membership in church.

In Psalm 122 David sang, I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!" David and others would sing this song as they were walking up to Jerusalem to observe the feast. It was a psalm of ascent. Many people would walk for days to worship God. They had no car or chariot, but they wanted to be in the temple in the presence of God.

When brothers and sisters in Christ assemble for worship, they're also meeting with God and with Christ. The church belongs to the Lord; it's His family. Of course, the Lord wants to meet with every member of his family regularly. He loves each of you. And when you stop coming to church, the Lord and His people miss you. We're here to encourage you to live the Lord's way.

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The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Hebrews 10:22 to 25, and explore the need to be an active at church.

Our reading today comes from Hebrews chapter 10, verses 22 to 25. "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Here, the Hebrew writer is encouraging us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

Let's pray together. "Oh Father, we're thankful that You have been faithful, that Your love is everlasting. Father help us to be committed to You always, to stay faithful, and to never forsake being with You. In Jesus name, Amen."

Recent studies say that large numbers of young adults have stopped attending church. Some find church boring or irrelevant. Some say the church is full of hypocrites or filled with judgmental people. Some don't feel as connected as they would like, and others say they're just too busy to go to church. Life can certainly become difficult, but attending and participating in church offers an amazing opportunity to find spiritual strength and help with the most difficult tasks of life. I want to spend some time responding to some of the objections people give for not going to church.

First, they say there are hypocrites at church. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something that he doesn't intend to be. Yes, there are some pretenders at church; but most people come to church because they love God and want to live good lives. Christians are sometimes weak; everyone sins; but that doesn't mean that they're pretenders or actors. It means they're human. Jesus told the apostles at the garden of Gethsemane, that "the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41); and you know that's still true of people today.

Think with me: before we start pointing fingers at others, perhaps we should look at our own lives. Do you really want to let someone else's behavior separate you from God? It seems much wiser to let God deal with the hypocrites and to make sure that we remain right with God. The Lord Jesus had to deal with hypocritical Pharisees during His entire ministry, but He never let their hypocrisy keep Him from doing what was right! He kept right on teaching and preaching in the synagogues and loving people. Don't let someone else's sin infect your heart and turn you away from God.

Second, church is boring or is irrelevant, some say. When people use the word "boring," they're describing their perspective or attitude. Any activity can be boring or exciting, depending on the attitude of the person speaking. People usually get out of worship what they put into it.

Give me the Word of God to nourish my soul. David describes the "law of the Lord" in Psalm 19, verse 10 as, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb." Now this inspired psalmist was speaking about the Law of the Old Testament, which can be found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He found them desirable, valuable, and sweeter than honey. He found them so important because they were meaningful to him.

My friend, the Word of God should be meaningful to you. It will teach you where you came from, why you're here, and where you're going after this life is over. The Bible has the words of eternal life (John 12, verse 50) and the truth that sets you free (John 8 verse 32). The gospel is the message of grace, hope, peace, and love. It will teach you how to live victoriously in this life and how to face God on the Day of Judgment with confidence. The Bible is God's message of love and truth. It will teach you how to avoid the pitfalls of life and will give you purpose and direction. As the Divine book, the Bible will open the Lord's will for your life. And a sincere study of God's Word can never be boring to one who wants to know and to please God.

Third, some say that the people at church are judgmental. It may seem that way, but I want you to think with me. Actually, people everywhere are "judgmental." Have you ever been to a ball game where an umpire made a controversial call? Well everyone gets excited about the call. Was he "in" or was he "out"? One group thinks the referee is blind, while the other group defends him. Conservatives judge liberals, and liberals judge them right back. Everyone makes judgments. And one of the great ironies of our time is the way people view judging. It goes like this: well I can judge you, but don't you judge me!

As for judging, the real basis for making judgments about right and wrong is still God's Holy Word. The Lord Jesus said in John 7:24, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." Now if God calls something sin, it's sin whether we agree with God or not. God knows His will, and He only calls things sinful because they are evil or hurtful. God said through the prophet Isaiah, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5 and verse 20).

Now the people at church love others enough to tell them the truth about sin. That's not being "judgmental"; it's being kind. Sin will cause a person to lose his soul. Romans 6:23 says, "the wages of

sin is death.” Now if I care about your soul, I’ll talk about sin and salvation. Now I don’t say this to be hateful, but because I know how dangerous sin is to your soul. If I didn’t care about you, I’d simply ignore the subject of sin and let you bear your consequences. I’d tell you sin is “no big deal”; “there’s nothing to worry about!” I tell you, to remain silent about sin or to lie about sin is cruel, cruel, cruel, and very uncaring. Telling people the truth about sin is kind. Don’t be so quick to judge your neighbor at church.

Fourth, someone says I’m so busy I don’t have time for church. When I hear people say this, I find it’s usually an excuse. Most people can determine their priorities and their schedules. If you’re too busy to add God to your schedule, just remember one day time will be no more. God will require your soul of you, and you’ll wish you could go back in time to change things.

The Lord Jesus knew people would be busy making a living and needing food and clothes and shelter. The Lord said in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Putting the Lord first means spending time with Him and His family. We’re going to be at church, and you’re going to worship and to serve Him because You love Him.

The Bible says in James 4:13 to 17: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we’ll go to such and such a city, and we’ll spend a year there and engage in business and will make a profit.’ Yet you don’t know what your life will be like tomorrow. You’re just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. And instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” My friend, the right thing to do is to attend worship with a church.

Fifth, some say, “Well I don’t feel connected.” Well some folks find it hard to make friends at church the way that they would like. The best way to make friends is to be a friend. Proverbs 18 verse 24 says, that “A man that has friends must show himself friendly.” If you come to church, and you late and then you leave as soon as the final “amen” is said, you’ll probably never make as many friends at church as you’d like. Instead of waiting until everyone comes to you, you reach out to others. Get involved at church in some good work. Learn people’s names. Attend Bible classes. Volunteer.

People say they aren’t as close to God as they used to be. Well we ask the question, “Who moved?” Did God leave you or did you leave God? People can easily drift away from God and the church. The Bible says in Hebrews 2, and verse 1, that “we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.” You know it’s easy to allow the world and its ways to cause our love for God and His church to grow weak. And I hope that you haven’t done that.

Through the years I’ve grown close to a number of people who came back to church after being absent for a long time. They were always so glad they came back. From the time that they left they felt empty and distant from God. They were miserable and spiritually unfulfilled without Him and they needed to find their way home.

When people return to church, they find that they grow closer to God. The Lord wishes all people “might grope for Him and find Him, though He’s not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our very being” (Acts 17:27 to 28). God is the Father of your spirit (Hebrews 12, verse 9). And He created you and has heard your prayers all your life. God gave His Son Jesus for your sins because He loves you. He gave you the Bible so that you might know Him and love Him. And church will help you know Him even better.

When people return to church, they find that they improve their personal understanding of what the Bible teaches. The Word of God is an amazing book filled with hope and truth. And a lifetime is not

enough to know everything the Bible teaches, but many people waste their minds on everything else, but this great treasure of spiritual knowledge found in the word of God.. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." If you want to know God's Word better, attend Bible classes and worship at church.

When people return to church, they find help in the religious training of their children. Now raising children in our society, that's nearly a pagan society is really tough, and parents need all the help they can get. The church provides an environment where people want to serve the Lord and to live righteous lives. Now churches provide moral and spiritual examples that make a lasting impact on young lives. And every child needs a church family. Churches provide Bible classes, camps, retreats, and youth gatherings with opportunities to be around other Christian young people.

When people return to church, they discover ways of handling daily challenges better than before. The Bible says in 1 Peter 5 and verse 7, "casting all your anxieties (all you little worries) on him, because he cares for you." Now at church you can pray with brothers and sisters in Christ and learn from the Bible how the faithful people of the Bible dealt with their problems. I've found people at church are "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another" (Romans 15 and verse 14).

Now Christians everywhere face struggles. They've found the comfort of God and are able to comfort others and help them through their struggles. The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:3 to 4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

The church is a blessing to us all. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4:9 to 12, that "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if we lie down together, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart." The church can keep you spiritually strong, able to resist all the temptations and pitfalls of life. My friend, you need the church. And if you've wandered away, come home.

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful that You have given us the church Your kingdom, Your family, a temple. And Father we're thankful that we can be a part of it, and to be Your children. Help us to be faithful to you. In Jesus name, Amen."

Hebrews 10:24 to 25 says, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking (now forsaking is not missing, but quitting), not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Church is where people build each other up spiritually and grow close to God. We all need that strength and encouragement that comes from being around the people of God.

Occasionally I hear of someone who's had a bad experience at church. Someone has offended them or overlooked them. They react to this disappointment by quitting the church. Now if someone wrongs you, rather than quitting the church or quitting the Lord, why not try a different approach. The Lord said in Matthew 18:15, that "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. And if he listens to you, you've gained your brother." This is the Lord's way.

When you quit church, you're actually letting something come between you and God. When you push Christ out of your life, you also put your soul in jeopardy. Listen again to Hebrews 10:25 and then

26, “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” My friend, don’t push the Savior out of your life. Who else will shed His blood to save you?

Now God wants to bless you. And if you’re not yet a Christian, come to the Lord in faith and come with love by repenting of your sins, confessing the name of the Lord, and by being baptized. Now in baptism the Lord will wash away your sins and adds you to the church. It could be as a Christian you’ve become one of the unchurched. Come back to the Lord, come back to His church. Don’t let your heart grow hard. Come back and find the love of God, and be right with Him.

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We do ask that you focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. And there’s probably a church of Christ in your area. And if you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one. Well we’ll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.