

SO WHAT IF I SKIP CHURCH!

The main part of this study is written to people who have trusted Christ for salvation. Going to church never saved anyone. It is by trusting Christ that a person is saved. John 3:18 states: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (NIV).

Good deeds include going to church and therefore do not save anyone. Titus 3:5 declares: "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (NIV)." Ephesians 2:8-9 goes on to say: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (NIV)."

However, if we continue to read in both of these passages, it is obvious that God saved us to do good works. Titus 3:8 reads: "This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (NIV)." Ephesians 2:10 expresses a similar concept: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (NIV)."

Certainly, as we will see in further discussion, going to church is one of many good deeds that a Christian is supposed to do. The first passage that is often used by pastors is Hebrews 10:24-25: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (NIV). We are commanded to consider or think of ways we can spur one another to practice love and good deeds. To accomplish this, we are commanded to not give up meeting together. Additionally, we are told to encourage one another to do these things. All of these are in light of the fact that the day Jesus Christ returns is drawing closer. I am convinced that many Christians focus on the portion of this passage which says to "not give up meeting together." They drag half-heartedly to church which is better than not going at all but is far short of experiencing the abundant life that Christ desires for each child of God. We need to also emphasize the portion of the command that tells us to be considering ways we can spur and encourage other believers to practice love and good deeds. When you go to church, do you think of one believer there whom you can encourage? Do you take the time to say something to them? Even a scripture that God has used in your life can be helpful. Reminding them that you are praying for their hard situation or struggle is another way you can help. You can also share their joys over something God has done in their life. Along with that comes sharing their sorrow and setbacks too. Romans 12:15 reminds us: "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (NIV). In short participation in the life of the church is more than just showing up and marking time. It is also attending to the positive commands God has given us to obey when we meet together.

Many believers have complained to me, "But, I just don't get anything out of church when I go." Our Lord explains in Acts 20:35 the attitude we as believers need to show: "The Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (NIV). We do not meet with other believers to receive. We meet to give because this is where the greater blessing lies. It is

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important to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and be there to serve not to be served. The question we ask ourselves should not be, “What did I get out of church?” Rather, it should be, “What did I give?” I am not speaking of giving from a financial standpoint although that is clearly commanded. I speak of giving yourself and all that Christ has equipped you to do. Jesus gave the model for this in Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NIV).

Some have said, “I am burned out with church. We are here Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night as well as other meetings. Why do we meet together so often?!” The early church was so in love with the Lord that it says in Acts 2:46: “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,”

Hebrews 3:12-13 gives even stronger reasons for meeting frequently: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” It is too easy to let our thought life become overrun with sin and unbelief in neglecting to fellowship with God. We are commanded to encourage one another daily. The reason is that sin is so deceitful and will eventually harden us so that we become unresponsive to God’s word. When we quit meeting together with other believers, we do not intend to become this way. However, it happens slowly but surely just like a frog boiling to death slowly in a kettle. For this reason alone, regular fellowship with other believers is important.

There are other considerations for meeting together. Matthew 18:20 is a promise for us when we meet together as believers: “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” To be sure, Christ has promised in Matthew 28:20 that He is always present with us as believers: “And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. However, Matthew 18:20 would seem to indicate that Jesus is present with us in a special extraordinary way when we meet together. If we met together for no other reason than to have Him present in this special way, that would be sufficient. How do we know Christ is present? He Himself has said so in His word. I may not feel it, but it is real nevertheless based on the testimony of God’s word. It is His presence which gives us the light or understanding of God’s glory as it says in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” The glory of God is clearly explained in Exodus 33:18-19: “Then Moses said, ‘Now show me your glory.’ And the LORD said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence.’ ” Notice how “your glory” is used interchangeably with “all my goodness.” The glory is God is all of His goodness. So when we experience this special presence of Christ by meeting together, we experience an understanding of all of God’s goodness.

Still another reason for meeting together is hidden away in Ephesians 4:11-12: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ

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may be built up.” Each believer has at least one spiritual gift as it says in 1 Peter 4:10: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” Our main passage in Ephesians 4 tells us that different gifts were given to different believers. It goes on to explain that the purpose of these gifts is to prepare us for works of service so that the body of Christ, i.e. the church may be built up. To be built up means to become increasingly like Jesus Christ. If we fail to go to church, we fail to experience the ministry of the spiritual gifts of other believers in our life. As a result we lack the preparation to help other believers become more like Christ. We also rob other believers of the ministry of our own spiritual gifts to help them be prepared to serve so that other believers including ourselves may become more like Christ.

Another passage that is instructive is 1 Corinthians 5:1-5: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” When the church disciplined the man who was involved in sexual immorality with his stepmother, he was put out of the fellowship of the church and was said to be handed over to Satan. When we take ourselves out of the fellowship of the church, we hand ourselves over to Satan. Think about it. God’s word commands us to meet together. If we do not submit to God, look what He has to say in James 4:7: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” We are told to submit to God before we resist the devil. If we do not submit to God, we are in no position to resist Satan and fall into his trap as mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:26: “And that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

Another important reason for meeting with other believers is given in 2 Timothy 2:22: “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” We have a command to not only flee evil youthful desires but to be pursuing the positive character qualities mentioned in this verse. However, take careful note that it is not to be done alone. It is to be done “with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” We cannot escape the plain message of God. We need the help of spiritual-minded people in our lives to live out a life pleasing to God. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 reminds us: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” This passage makes it clear that together we have more effective service for the Lord. As believers we are able to help restore each other, promote zeal in each other’s life, and more readily defend ourselves against spiritual attack.

Another important point is that there is no substitute for face-to-face fellowship. 2 John 1:12 declares: “I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I

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hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.” This tells us that face-to-face fellowship promotes a fullness of joy. Therefore, when we neglect it, we short ourselves on joy.

As believers, we are commanded to follow godly examples. Consider what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:17: “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” Notice it explains that we are to join other believers in this matter of following godly examples. It is rather hard to do this if we are not meeting together. Not only are we to follow godly examples but to set a godly example for other believers. We read in 1 Timothy 4:12: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”

We need to ask ourselves, “Is my habit of church attendance and participation something I would like others to imitate? Would it lead them toward greater Christlikeness, or would it lead them toward spiritual indifference and sin? Would I want my children to follow this example?” Ponder the awfulness of Jeremiah 7:31: “They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.” As you read this verse, you are probably asking yourself what it has to do with setting a godly example. We are commanded in Ephesians 6:4: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Consider that when we speak of disciplining and teaching our children that part of teaching involves setting a godly example. If we neglect to do this, our children and grandchildren may end up not trusting Christ. As a result they will end up in hell to burn forever. We look at Jeremiah 7:31 and we think how cruel these people were to burn their kids in the fire as offerings to this idol. Yet how much more cruel are Christian parents, who fail to teach by example and instruction the truths of God’s word. How would you feel if your example helped send your teenage child or grandchild or even niece or nephew to a Christless eternity? Do you think you would ever get over it?

However, you say that you are tired of all the hypocrites and pretense in the church. Reflect on Jesus’ parable in Luke 18:9-14: “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ‘The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ‘But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’ Here a despised and evil tax collector went to the temple to pray. There he encountered a pompous Pharisee hypocrite, who prayed about himself. Yet this tax collector did not leave in disgust. He remained there and called on God for mercy and went home a justified and saved man. When we give into our feelings in the face of hypocrisy and pretense and do the natural thing and walk away, we end up missing anything God would have had for us. Jesus Himself often encountered hypocrisy when he entered a synagogue. Yet the scripture testifies in Luke 4:16: “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he

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stood up to read.” Notice the words, “as was his custom.” Jesus made habit to meet with God’s people including the hypocrites among them. If Jesus felt this was important, shouldn’t we?

1 John 2:6 says: “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. Jesus had a few things to say about the hypocrites in Matthew 24:51: “He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” As you can see the destiny of the hypocrites is not pretty. It is that bleak wasteland called, “Hell” where the emotional and physical pain will be unbearable. When we are aware of hypocrisy in the church, God’s word is clear as can be seen in the following verses: Matthew 18:15: “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” Luke 17:3-4 adds: “So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” Galatians 6:1 adds the following instructions: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” Then if he does not repent, we are to follow the steps in Matthew 18:16-17: “But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” What should you do if you are in a church which does not follow this model? The solution is to get in a church where the Bible is believed as God’s word, Christ is preached, and that obeys the command of Matthew 18:15-17. It is never a solution to simply quit meeting with other believers.

Imagine this scene. A man announces to his wife that he is going to move two states away and leave her behind. He does not want to continue doing the activities that they do together. Rather, he wishes to do his own thing. He sends her money occasionally and sees her at Christmas and Easter. Other than that, he spends no time with her. He continually would assure everyone that he loves her very dearly. How believable is this guy to his wife? Each one of us knows the answer to that question. 1 John 3:14 says: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.” One of the ways we know that we have really trusted Christ for salvation and have experienced eternal life is by our love for believers. 1 John 3:18 goes on to declare: “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” This love is more than talk. It is about action. If you don’t meet with Christians on a regular basis, how believable is your love for them. Moreover, how are the lost of this world going to see that you are really Christ’s disciple? In John 13:35, Jesus reminds us: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” In Matthew 22:35-36 Jesus was asked a very important question: “One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’” In Matthew 22:37-38 we read our Lord’s answer: “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” Jesus’ answer makes it clear that we are to love God with our whole being. Yet if we fail to show love for our fellow-believers, what does that say about our love for God. Read this challenge from 1 John 4:21: “And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” Notice how inseparable our love for God and for fellow-Christians is. God’s word explains that loving fellow-believers

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always means we are obeying God's word. Read what 2 John 1:5-6 tells us: "And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another." If you love your fellow-believer, you will be obeying God's word and meeting with them regularly.

Sometimes believers drop out of church because they believe they cannot forgive certain people in that church. God's word is clear in Ephesians 4:32-5:2: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." We are commanded to forgive. It is not an option. It is not a matter of feeling. Rather, it is a matter of faith and obedience. Ask yourself, how much did God forgive you? In light of this, forgive your fellow-believers. When we do this, we imitate God as His child. We also follow the lifestyle of our Lord Jesus who sacrificed Himself to please God. Can't we sacrifice our pride and our feelings?

Sometimes, it is not a sin issue between us and another believer. It is one of those issues in which it involves a difference with another believer in the church regarding something the Bible does not specifically command nor forbid. In such situations the scripture is clear that we are to practice forbearance. Ephesians 4:1-3, that great passage of Christian unity says: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Observe that it tells us to bear with one another in love. To show this love we must bear with one another regarding differences arising over issues not commanded or forbidden by scripture.

Others, when dropping out of a church or leaving a church for unbiblical reasons, will often state, "You just don't understand how I feel!" My question is, are we to let our feelings determine our behavior? Jeremiah 17:9 very clearly tells us: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? God's word tell us that our hearts or are feelings are deceitful. Therefore, we cannot trust or depend on them. God's word goes on to say in 1 John 3:20: "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." Hebrews 11:17 states: "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'" Do you think that it was easy for Abraham to even begin to offer up Isaac? Yet that is what he did in faith and obedience to God until God intervened. Do you think that Abraham felt like offering up Isaac? How would you feel about it? Yet, we see that he did so by taking God at His word by faith. Faith requires that we let God and His word make our choices rather than our feelings.

Perhaps, you are still thinking that you are not going to meet with fellow-believers. You need to consider 1 Corinthians 11:31-32: "But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world." When we, as believers, fail to judge sin by confessing and forsaking it, God disciplines us. If you have been continuing to lay out of church and have not been experiencing God's discipline, consider carefully God's warning in Hebrews 12:8: "If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and

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not true sons.” You can clearly see that if a person claims to be a Christian and does not experience God’s discipline, he is not really God’s child. He has never really trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. However, if you have experienced God’s discipline, you know that you are still God’s child. Hebrews 12:7 tells us, “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?”

If you have been skipping church, what you need to do is to practice 1 John 1:9 and Proverbs 28:13. 1 John 1:9 states: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Proverbs 28:13 tells us that we need to also renounce, i.e. forsake or quit the sin or sins being confessed: “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

Concerning people who leave Bible-believing churches and quit going, 1 John 2:19 has a very solemn warning: “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” Unless you are experiencing God’s discipline in your skipping of church, you need to carefully follow the instructions given in 2 Corinthians 13:5: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” If you find that you have not really trusted the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, your first need is to trust Christ for real as in John 3:18: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” Then you need to return to a Bible-believing church and openly confess the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior. Matthew 10:32 states: “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.” Open confession of the Lord Jesus Christ is the initial evidence that one has experienced a faith that saves. My prayers for those who read this and who have been laying out of church, is that you will prayerfully make the decision that God’s word commands you to make.