

# Is it Necessary to Go to Church?

Many people who believe in God, read their Bible, and pray to the Lord see no reason to go to church. It seems like an optional activity.

In considering the place the church has in Christianity, perhaps the best place to start is by defining "church." When I was a young Christian, the first thought that popped into my head when I heard the word, "church," was a building or a place where we went to Sunday school and worship. Later, I thought of the church as an institution that performed many good functions.

The biblical concept of church is quite different than this. What does the word, "church," actually mean? Let's take a look at what the church is according to the Bible.

## 1. Christians are part of the church.

In New Testament times the word church meant "assembly." The church of Christ was an assembly or collection of people who were Christians. It did not refer to a building or an institution the way we think of it, but to a body of people.

This means that all those who have been baptized and have become Christians are part of the church.

*"And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).*

*"But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household" (Ephesians 2:13-19).*

*"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ..." (1 Corinthians 12:13).*

These passages remind us that becoming a Christian is also becoming part of the church of Christ, which the Bible also refers to

as the body of Christ and God's household, among other things. All Christians are in the church, which is made up of all Christians.

This leads us naturally to the next point the Bible makes about the church.

## **2. The church is not man-made**

*Many believe the church is merely a human organization. However, while it is made up of humans, its origin is not human. Notice these passages.*

*"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18).*

*"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).*

Jesus said "I will build My church." This is why the Bible sometimes refers to the church as the "churches of Christ," as in Romans 16:16. The church belongs to Christ because he bought it with his own blood. He died on the cross in order to redeem people to God. He calls these people the church.

This is a reminder that the church is not a man made institution, but was established by Christ himself.

## **3. Christ loves the church**

Jesus purchased the church with his own blood and loves the church. Notice what this passage says.

*"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their*

*own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body" (Ephesians 5:25-30).*

Jesus loved so much that he gave himself up for the people, the church. He loves his church as his bride, nourishing and cherishing her, dying for her. He sanctified" her, which means he has set her apart for himself. Truly, he loves the church.

### **But what about "going" to church?**

So far, we have established that Christians don't go to church, but in actuality are the church because the church consists of the people. We have established that it is not man made, but established by Christ himself through his death on the cross. We have also established that he loves his church. But this doesn't answer the question, "Is it necessary to assemble together every week?" Does this answer the objections people raise about the necessity of going to church?

Well, lets look at the objections. There are basically two main objections to "going" to church.

#### *1) The church doesn't save you*

This is a true statement. The church does not save you. Jesus is the one that saves through his sacrifice on the cross.

*"For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).*

Salvation is through Christ. The church is made up of the saved. The church can be an agent of salvation by teaching people about the one who saves. However, the church itself does not save.

#### *2) One does not need to go to a church building to worship God.*

This is also a true statement. One does not need to go anywhere to worship God. Jesus himself taught that worship is not tied to a place. Worship of God used to be tied to a place, but that has now changed. Notice this conversation Jesus had with a woman at the well in Samaria.

*" 'Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ... But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers' " (John 4:20-23).*

Jesus clearly taught that worship would no longer be confined to a place, but would simply be in spirit and truth. This means anyone can worship anywhere and anytime. In a sense all of life is worship.

*"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Romans 12:1).*

Worship and service to God is not confined to a place or time. It is daily. So it is very true that one does not need to go to a building in order to worship God.

However, this objection assumes that the purpose of assembling is for worship. Does the Bible teach this? It does not. Nowhere does the Bible teach that Christians are to come together for the purpose of worship.

This is because worship is not confined to a time or place for Christians.

So what is the purpose of assembling?

## **The Unique Purpose of the Assembly**

1 Corinthians 14 gives instructions for the Christian assembly and is very clear about its overall purpose. At least six times in the chapter, it speaks of the edification or building up of the church. The purpose of the assembly was for mutual edification.

*"What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26).*

All things are to be done for edification. If worship happens but edification does not, then the purpose of the assembly has not been met. In order to edify and be edified, the brethren must come together and meet. Notice this passage:

*"...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" (Hebrews 10:24-25).*

This passage explicitly instructs Christians not to make a habit of forsaking assembling together. Christians are to meet regularly in order to edify, stimulate, and encourage one another. In other words, the assembly is for mutual edification. This is why the Bible speaks of our singing in the assembly as singing "to one another."

*"...but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" (Ephesians 5:18-20).*

*"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).*

Notice how our singing is not just directed to God, but to one another. We teach, and admonish one another in our singing. In other words, we edify one another in our singing.

When you take all of these passages together, it becomes clear that the unique purpose of the assembly is not to worship. You can worship at any time and in any place. The unique purpose of the assembly is mutual edification. These passages mention activities such as teaching, encouragement, singing, and expressing thanksgiving in our assemblies together for the purpose of mutual edification.

## **Conclusion**

While it is true that you do not need to go to church to worship God, you cannot be involved in mutual edification if you do not assemble. Mutual edification is the unique purpose of the assembly, which is why we must meet to edify, "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another..."

Do I have to go to church? The scriptures give a resounding "yes" to this question.