

FIRST PERSON: Does church attendance really matter?

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It was an honest question from an unbeliever I'd known for years. Our recent discussion about following Christ turned to more pragmatic matters born out of his general observations about Christianity in general.

"Why would I give up my one day off in order to gather with bunch of people I don't know?" was his follow-up.

Perhaps you've wondered the same.

Do we really need the church?

If we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, why does it matter if we regularly gather with a body of other believers to worship?

What are we missing out on if we just stay home on Sundays?

To answer these questions, we turn to the book of Hebrews where we find a biblical vision for church participation. These words demonstrate what should motivate us to worship with the saints and how we benefit from doing so.

First, Jesus died to make worship in the church possible.

The book of Hebrews reads like a sermon about the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross, with a main point of emphasis on the access we have to God the Father through Christ the Son. Hebrews 10:19 says we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus. As a result, we are told to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering (Hebrews 10:23). In other words, individual believers faithfully

worship the Lord because Jesus made it possible.

But what does that have to do with the church?

Immediately after assuring that God invites all Christians into His presence, the writer of Hebrews admonishes the faithful to gather in local churches in order to worship God together. Doing so motivates us to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

Thus, we should not forsake our assembling together with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). The progression here is instructive. Because God welcomes our individual access to His presence, the right response is to gather corporately as a unified body in order to magnify His grace toward us.

Enjoying the manifest presence of God fully is impossible apart from private and public worship. Church attendance is not a sacramental means of salvation, but a gratuitous expression of our love for the One who died to take away our sins.

Second, a Christian community makes worship in the church powerful.

As he continues to build his case for our participation in the local church, the writer of Hebrews emphasizes the increased momentum and impact the body of Christ adds to our faith walk. Let us consider, he says, how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24). By gathering with a singleness of purpose, namely the Lord's glory, we are able to admonish and encourage one another in the practical expressions of personal worship without being distracted by our own agendas.

Frankly, the New Testament is full of commands that cannot be obeyed apart from our participation in the family of God. We are told to be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10), to be of the same mind toward one another (Romans 12:16), to build one

another up (Romans 14:19), to accept one another (Romans 15:7), to admonish one another (Romans 15:14), to care for one another (I Corinthians 12:25), to greet one another (I Corinthians 16:20), to serve one another (Galatians 5:13), to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), to be kind to one another and forgive one another (Eph. 4:32), to encourage one another (I Thessalonians 5:11), to pray for one another (James 5:16), and to fellowship with one another (I John 1:7).

And this is precisely what makes corporate worship so powerful.

When we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, our interaction with God grows beyond our personal experiences. Praying together, celebrating together, struggling together, and growing together allows us to worship God for His work in the lives of others just as we do for His dealings with us.

Finally, Jesus' coming again should make worship in the church a priority.

In addition to the direct command that we should not neglect the corporate gathering, the writer of Hebrews tell us the why behind the what.

We should be encouraging one another all the more as we see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10:25). The phrase is a direct reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that just as Jesus ascended into heaven shortly after His resurrection, He will physically return to the earth in the same manner in which He departed (Acts 1:11). One day we will see Jesus face-to-face and give an account for our lives on this earth.

But what does that have to do with our worshipping God in the church today?

Simply this – our future accountability demands that we hold

one another accountable right now!

The support found among the people of God is one of our primary means of perseverance in the faith.

Worshipping together helps us embrace holiness and shun carnality.

Seeing Christ in others inspires us to be more devoted to the Lord. Finding support when we struggle empowers us to remain faithful when we are weak.