

Why Should I Go to Church?

October 6, 2025

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Have you ever asked someone or been asked by another, “Why should I go to church?” It is a question that I have seen many people struggle to answer. Christians who are faithful to a church know that they should go to church, but they sometimes are not able to give a reason why. This is an important question and we need to learn to answer it well as we want thriving churches in every community because the church is the visible body of Christ through which the Gospel is proclaimed and disciples are made. While there are many more reasons to faithfully attend a church, I will give five biblical reasons why every Christian needs to be in a local congregation.

Are you a Christian?

The answer to this question changes depending on the whether the person who asks is a Christian or not. Have you trusted in the person and work of Jesus Christ? By that I mean, have you trusted that He is the Son of God who became man, suffered, died, was buried, and was raised from the dead for the forgiveness of your sins? If you have not, you are not a Christian. So why should you go to church? You should go to hear the Gospel and to speak with someone about salvation. The grace of God will cover all of your sins, even those sins you have buried deep in your heart that you cannot bear to think about. Please trust me when I tell you that He will forgive that darkness, because He has forgiven me of my own. God calls us to believe, repent (turn away from our sinful life), and be baptized. Do not hesitate, go to a church near you and speak with someone.

If you are a Christian, why should you go to church? Those who reject the church will commonly say, “I do not have to go to church to be saved.” This statement does bear truth to it. Going to church does not get you into heaven because justification, or our sins being made right, comes by faith in Jesus Christ. So, it is true that we do not receive justification by going to church. I would say it this way, “You do not have to go to church to be justified, but if you are justified, you *must* go church.” You must go because you have been saved into the church. It is part of the Christian nature to gather with other Christians on a regular basis. It is something you need in your own soul. I want to be clear that you will not become more justified because you attend a church,

but to deny the church is to deny an essential part of the Christian life. Let us consider five reasons why you *must* go to church.

Reason 1: God is Holy

In Isaiah 6, God gives Isaiah a vision where he sees seraphim and each were calling to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”¹ This cry of God’s Holiness is repeated in Revelation as creatures are gathered around the throne and they ceaselessly shout, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”² God is a holy God. He is above all other beings in the universe. There is no one and no thing that can measure up to God in any way. Because He is holy, holy, holy, we are to worship Him. When the church gathers, the primary reason we do so is to worship our Holy God. Is God not worthy of your worship? Do you think yourself above God? You may respond by saying you can worship God outside the church. That is only partially true. For us to truly worship God, we must do so with our entire lives.³ Obedience to God is a major part of our worship as we are to present our entire body as a living sacrifice to the Lord.⁴

As I will show in reason five, God calls His people to gather for worship and we oblige because He is holy. If you rebel against the church when God is calling you to worship Him, how could you consider your life a life of worship? Because God is Holy, our chief end is to glorify God in everything we do. The Holiness of God beckons us to gather with our fellow believer and give God all that He is due.

Reason 2: Christ Loves His Bride

Men, if one of your friends despised your wife and spoke ill of her, what would you do? Ladies, if one of your friends hated your husband and could not stand being around him, what would you do? If you are not married, imagine for just a moment you are. Would you want to continue to be around that person? Would you not warn them? Would you deny their friendship if they persisted to speak ill of the person God has united to you? Why do you think you feel this way? It is because you love your

¹ Isaiah 6:3, ESV.

² Revelation 4:8, ESV.

³ See my essay, “What is Worship?”, for more information at <https://ponderingthefaitth.com/pondering-whatishworship.html>.

⁴ See Romans 12:1-2.

spouse and you think that your friends should love them, too. You have been made one with your spouse and when someone insults them, they are insulting a part of you.

The church is the bride of Christ. No man has ever loved His bride the way Christ loves the church. Jesus' love for the church is the standard we men are striving to live up to in how we love our own wives. He became man, taking on flesh and blood, and faced death on her behalf. Paul describes it this way, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."⁵

Do you love Jesus? How then could you not love His bride? If you have been baptized into the church, do you not realize that you have been baptized into Christ's death and raised in new life with Him and made part of this very bride?⁶ To reject the church is to reject yourself as a member of the bride of Christ and to call hideous that which Christ is making flawless and beautiful. Christ will not reject His bride, how could you?

Reason 3: For Your Sanctification

In the Protestant view, there are three stages of salvation. Justification is the salvation which is given to us through our faith in which God declares us righteous through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In justification, we are fully righteous in Christ, yet we still live in the sinful flesh as flawed creatures. Sanctification is the second stage of our salvation in which God forms us into righteous beings by transforming our hearts and minds so we may live in a godly way. Sanctification is a lifelong process which God works in us through His Spirit that we may be changed into the image of Christ. The process of sanctification is completed in the final step of our salvation, which we call our glorification. Glorification is when God finishes our salvation by stripping us of sin completely and allowing us to share in His glory and live forever in His presence. When you hear a modern Protestant speak about salvation, it is likely their thoughts are centered on justification, but our sanctification and our glorification are equal parts of our salvation. When God saves us, He is not just saving

⁵ Ephesians 5:25-27, ESV.

⁶ See Romans 6.

us by declaring us righteous, He is saving the whole person. God gives us righteous status and then transforms us into righteous people. The longest and most painful part of this salvific process is our sanctification.

The vast portion of our sanctification comes from within the walls of the church. While you will spend more time outside of the church and in the world, we process our lives weekly in the gathering of the Body of Christ. We are *not* justified through the church, but the Holy Spirit sanctifies us through the church and uses the means of grace in our worship to change our lives. Our forgiveness is confirmed in our Baptism as we receive a clean conscience, the preaching of the Word pierces heart and mind, our faith is strengthened through the eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper, and we speak directly to God for His will through our prayers. We are also strengthened through fellow believers who gather with us as we sing to one another and fellowship⁷ together for mutual edification.

The Apostle Paul gives us a good way of thinking about this when he says,

*"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load."*⁸

Do you believe that you do not need the church? Are you some sort of super-Christian who can withstand the evil forces of this world alone? If so, you are deceiving yourself. God has given you the church for your benefit, not to burden you. The church is one of His many gifts of grace that He gives to the believer to aid them in their lives. If the church was established by God, do you think yourself above what God has given for

⁷ Fellowship is sometimes seen as shaking hands in Baptist congregations, but this term has a much deeper meaning. To fellowship together is to communicate to your fellow believer that you love them and are of the same body, all of which is represented in the fellowship element of worship.

⁸ Galatians 6:1-5, ESV.

your sake? Do not continue in such folly and step into this beautiful body of people who love you and want to help you.

Reason 4: For the Sake of Others

We do not gather only for our own benefit. We also gather for the sake of other Christians. To reject the church is to reject your fellow believer and to turn inwardly on oneself. Every proclaiming Christian who rejects the church does so for reasons that revolve around themselves. Have you ever considered how your presence might benefit another believer? Scripture tells us,

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”⁹

How can you love your fellow Christian in this way if you refuse to be with them? You have not been saved to focus on you. As God’s chosen people, we have been given the opportunity to pour ourselves into other people and to help them in their faith.

In 1 Corinthians 12, we are given an analogy between the physical body and the spiritual body (the church). The Apostle Paul tells us that God has given each one of us gifts and “arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.”¹⁰ Just as our eyes, ears, head, and feet all are different parts, they are parts of the same body. Each part needs the others for the body to function in the way it was intended. The entire body is connected and when one part faces injury, the whole suffers. You have a similar role to play within the church and God has given you gifts for you to use in the

⁹ Colossians 3:12-17, ESV.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:18, ESV.

service of your fellow Christian for “God has so composed the body... that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”¹¹

Do you see yourself above your fellow believer? Maybe it is the opposite, and you see yourself as less than others and believe that others would not benefit from your presence. Either way, you have placed yourself above God’s design because God has sovereignly organized his Body to work the way He intends. He has given you a role to play. Just as you need your fellow Christian, they also need you. No longer continue in selfishness but give yourself to the church for the sake of others out of the love of Christ within you.

Reason 5: God Calls His People to Worship

One of the elements that the modern Baptist church has lost in their worship is the “Call to Worship.” The Call to Worship is the opening element of a worship service in which scripture is read that reminds us that we gather because of the Word of our Lord. One may be tempted to say, “Did God actually say”¹² that we are supposed to gather in churches?” Let us see.

Gathering in the Old Testament

We will begin in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God chose a pagan man out of all the people of the Earth to be His covenant people. God gave that man a new name, Abraham, out of which would descend the mighty nation of Israel. The Old Testament revolves around this chosen nation. They were the people with which God chose to establish a covenant. When laying down the rules of that covenant relationship, God instructed Israel that He would choose a location where the temple would be built. The Lord chose Jerusalem to be the place where His name would dwell and they should bring all the sacrifices, offerings, tithes, and contributions that God commanded them.¹³ There was to be no where else that Israel was allowed to place any temple of worship. God was establishing a place where His covenant people would gather to worship Him. When Israel would later forsake God’s covenant and be scattered throughout the world through military defeat and forced deportation, God promised to one day gather His

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 12:25, ESV.

¹² Genesis 3:1, ESV.

¹³ Deuteronomy 12:10-11.

people back together.¹⁴ The sad overarching story of the Old Testament is that sin torn asunder the people of God, but the hope that we are given is that God would bring them back together.

Gathering in the New Testament

Just as God calls His people to gather in the Old Testament, God calls His chosen people in the New Testament to do the same. There is a shift that takes place from the old to the new, however. No longer is Jerusalem the center location of their gathering. Worship is now in spirit and truth,¹⁵ but God still calls His people to assemble. The word for church in the New Testament is the Greek word, ἐκκλησία (èkklesia), which means “an assembly, gathering, community, or congregation.”¹⁶ Jesus built the church, the èkklesia, Himself.¹⁷ He did not build a bunch of individuals all separate from one another, but a congregational community of His followers.

The entirety of the New Testament speaks to the assembling of Christians. Of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, only eight of those books were not written to churches.¹⁸ The first four of those eight, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are what we call the Gospels. They were written to tell the story of Jesus and contain in them the words of Christ as He speaks about establishing His Church. The Book of Acts was not written to a church, but instead describes the birth and early development of the Church. Paul wrote 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus to the individual men each book is named after, so we cannot say that these books were written to a church. What did Paul write to them about? These three short letters were exhortations to these men about how the church is to function and how they are to lead the churches that Paul left them to oversee. While they were *not* written to churches, but they were written *for* churches. Outside of the Gospels, there is not a single book in the New Testament that is not

¹⁴ Ezekiel 11:17.

¹⁵ John 4:23.

¹⁶ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303.

¹⁷ Matthew 16:18.

¹⁸ Two books not included that I think might raise a question in some minds would be Philemon and Revelation. In Philemon 2, Paul says that he is writing to Philemon but also that he is writing “to the church in your house.” Revelation was a letter written to help the churches of the first century as we see in Revelation 1:4.

written to a church or about the Church. The New Testament speaks not to individuals, but to the Church that Jesus Christ built.

There are also explicit calls to gather within the New Testament. In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus speaks about the church having disciplining authority. When someone sins against us, we are to take it to the assembly (the church). If they refuse to listen, they are to be cut off from the assembly like an outsider. In Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, and Ephesians 4:1-16 the Apostle Paul tells us to make use of the many gifts that God has given us to function together as one body. These gifts are to be practiced in the assembly.

In 1 Corinthians 11:17- 34, Paul writes to correct the errors at the church in Corinth. In verse 17 he warns them that their coming together is not for the better as it should be, but is making things worse because of their practice of the Lord's Supper. This is not Paul's way of telling them to stop gathering, but instead to repent and assemble properly. He asks them, "Do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not."¹⁹ In verse 33, he concludes his exhortation by telling them, "When you come together, wait for one another."²⁰ They are to gather, but are to congregate well.

The entire letter of Ephesians is about the unity of those in the church. Paul says that it is "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."²¹ It is the assembled people of God that will make Christ known. Paul also calls for God to have "glory in the church."²² Paul commands us to address "one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."²³ It would be hard to address one another in song and to submit to one another if we are not gathered as a church.

One final example is Hebrews 10:24-25 which says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:22, ESV.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:33, ESV.

²¹ Ephesians 3:10, ESV.

²² Ephesians 3:21, ESV.

²³ Ephesians 5:19-21, ESV.

habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Could the Holy Spirit be any clearer? Some were in the habit of abandoning the gathered body just as people do today. The Spirit exhorts us not to fail to meet together, but to gather and encourage each other. We cannot escape the clear calling to gather by our Lord through His Apostles.

Gathering in Heaven

We must also consider the gathering of God’s people in heaven. The Revelation of John gives us a detailed account of what worship looks like in heaven in several places. In each account, the heavenly creatures and the saints congregate around the throne in worship while praising the Lord. In Revelation 4-5, the scroll is given to the Lamb who is worthy to receive it. Around the throne had gathered “myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands” of angels and “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea.”²⁴ In Revelation 7, a multitude so great that it could not be numbered was gathered from all the people of the earth to worship God. In Revelation 19, a great multitude gathered and cried out the praise of God at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb where the bride of Christ is gathered to Him.

Through out all of human history, God has been calling His people to assemble themselves to worship Him. As we can see in Revelation, God will continue to call us to congregate around His throne in worship of Him. To separate yourself from the church is to ignore this call of God. Submit yourself to God and go to church.

Consideration 1: What if you have been hurt by a church?

There is no doubt church hurt is real and is painful. The church is full of people who are justified yet not glorified. They are still sinful and at times make grievous mistakes or let the desires of the flesh consume them. Being hurt by the church is painful because we are supposed to be able to trust other Christians. When that trust is broken, especially in cases when the pastors break that trust, it is devastating to our hearts. Let me encourage you in one thing, you are not the only person to have been hurt greatly by church people. You may not know this, but some of the people who have been hurt the worst in churches are pastors. Even the Apostle Paul had been hurt by the church. We get a taste of Paul’s church hurt in 2 Corinthians. Paul poured himself

²⁴ Revelation 5:11-14, ESV.

out for the church at Corinth, but it seems that on some level they rejected him for what he calls “super-apostles”²⁵ and insulted his appearance and speaking abilities.²⁶ After all that Paul went through for the churches,²⁷ we can understand the heartache that he would have felt to be rejected by them. Yet, what did he do? He continued to pray for them, exhort them, and love them. He did not do this by his own power, but by the power of Christ working in Him.²⁸

Even if you have been hurt by the church, God is still calling you to be faithful to His church. It may be that you need to seek reconciliation with those who hurt you in your congregation. It may also be that the hurt caused was too great to continue in that church and that you may have to look for another place to gather. Either way, God is still calling you to His church. Take it slowly and open yourself up little by little, but do not continue to reject the church. God can and will heal that pain and in the process teach you how to glorify Him even in the worst of situations.

Consideration 2: What if you have sinned greatly?

Shame and guilt are not bad emotions. They serve a great role in helping us to know when we have done wrong and need to seek reconciliation. However, shame and guilt can sometimes enslave us and control our lives. There are times when the shame of grievous sins keeps people away from church. They are too embarrassed by what they have done to show their faces in the congregation again. Sometimes the gossip of church members helps to fuel that shame.

One of my favorite passages of scripture comes from the first chapter of John. John says, “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”²⁹ There is a wonderful song by Kings Kaleidoscope called “Felix Culpa.” The bridge applies this verse in an extremely powerful way:

And still I'm a wicked, wretched man

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:11, ESV.

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 10:10.

²⁷ See 2 Corinthians 11:23-29.

²⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:14.

²⁹ John 1:16, ESV.

*I do everything I hate
I am fighting to be God
I seethe and claw and thrash and shake
I have killed and stacked the dead
On a throne from which I reign
In the end I just want blood
And with His blood my hands are stained
See the God who reigns on high
He has opened His own veins
From His wounds a rushing torrent
That can wash it all away
Grace upon grace
Upon grace upon grace
Grace, oh!³⁰*

The grace of God is greater than your sins. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ covers them. You may have to face the pain of seeking reconciliation with those who you have wronged, or you may have to find a new congregation; I do not know your situation. Do not allow yourself to be dominated by the bond of shame and guilt. Do not turn from Christ but instead turn toward Him and participate in His Body. Repent of your sins, trust Christ to forgive those sins, and faithfully commit yourself to a church.

Conclusion

It is evident to us from the scriptural testimony that the calling to gather in the church is great. We go to church not because it is a command (even though it is a command), but because God loves you and Jesus shed His blood to make you a part of His bride. These callings to gather are not callings to simply be present at a church, but to belong to it and to participate faithfully in the church. I can promise you there will be difficulties being in a church, but let God sanctify you in those challenges. Do not reject and resent the bride of Christ for which He died. The church is a gift for you from God which He has given because He loves you. Do not deny this great gift of God any longer.

³⁰ "Felix Culpa," track 4 on Kings Kaleidoscope, *Becoming Who We Are*, Rainbow Records, 2014.