

## WHY GO TO CHURCH?

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Hebrews 10:25.

In both the Old and New Testaments we find precepts and examples for our observance of public worship. David said, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psalm 122:1). Of our Lord Jesus Christ we read, "And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught" (Mark 1:21). "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read" (Luke 4:16). The fact that the Bible enjoins and Christ practiced public worship should be sufficient grounds for all to be regular in church attendance.

When the epistle to the Hebrews was written, the Christians were accustomed to meeting stately for the worship of God and to receive the word of exhortation.

It soon became the habit of some to neglect this practice of meeting together regularly. The parties mentioned in our text had forsaken their former practice of assembling for Christian worship.

Today there are three kinds of church members. No matter where the church may be — whether large or small — you will find in it these three kinds of folks. Its power as a church and the work which it is accomplishing for the Master will be determined by the proportion of members in the different groups.

There are the "Old Faithfuls" — heaven bless them! They are present at practically every service. If they are not, you know there is a real reason for their absence. They attend prayer meeting, contribute regularly, have a missionary vision, have an evangelistic passion and carry most of the official responsibilities. When the pastor has a task that someone must perform, he knows that if he cannot get anyone else to do it one of the "Old Faithfuls" will assume the extra burden. We need more "Old Faithfuls." Enough of them will make any church a great power for God.

The "Once-in-a-Whilers" come next. They are also known as the "Up and Downers" or the "In and Outers." They come one Sunday and stay away five or more. They come in different styles — plain, assorted, indifferent and "touchy." The indifferent ones just do not seem to care. The "touchy" ones are the critical folks. "I was sick two days and the pastor never came near." "They didn't elect me president of my class, so I'm not going any more. I'm through with the church anyway." When they are approached about their church responsibilities they are full of promises, such as, "Oh yes, I'm going to get started regularly some of these days. I'll surprise you yet." Oh, if they only would!

Then there are the "Almost Nevers." They never go to church. Perhaps I should not have said "never." They do attend Easter Sunday morning or when little Willie has a part on a special program or darling Malissa performs in the choir. But nobody can grow a soul that way. These "Almost Nevers" resent any suggestion that they should support their church by attendance, service or giving. They say that they do not "believe" in missions. They say, "The church has all it can attend to at home without bothering about the heathen." It is easier to deal with a man who has never heard the gospel of Christ than one of this group, for he seems to think that his name on the church roll is enough. To him, church membership confers at least a partial immunity from hell. With him it is just like being vaccinated. He thinks perhaps his vaccination should be renewed, or he should have a booster shot, so he goes to church on Easter, at Christmas and maybe on Mother's Day, and that is all the church going he does.

Some members have a church going spasm which lasts for several weeks, then something comes up and they quit and stay that way for an indefinite period. Other members will attend church if it is convenient for them to do so. If the weather is good, and they do not have anywhere else that they are desirous of going, they will attend church services, but they are determined that they are not going to be regular.

One of the most priceless privileges of the American people is freedom of public worship. This privilege is denied many peoples in the world today. Why is it that so many neglect church attendance? Of course, they enumerate all manner of excuses, which are mere falsehoods. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews suggests some real reasons.

One of the reasons is thoughtlessness. That is why he said, "Let us consider." If we could only get people to think on the eternal issues of life, they would crowd our churches. They would realize fully that it is utterly impossible for anybody to do his best for God and humanity without the strength which comes from divine worship and Christian fellowship. If people would only "consider," they would go to church.

The writer's exhortation, "Let us consider one another," reveals the fact that another reason for the neglect of church attendance is selfishness. The man who thinks logically and practically will think socially. He will attend church for the sake of others.

The explicit reason for non-attendance at church services, according to our text, is sheer bad habit. It was a mere matter of custom with them. Doubtless they had just drifted into this bad habit, as so many others have.

Apparently it has not dawned upon the person who does not attend church that he is a sponger. By a sponger is meant one who appropriates benefits from some person or institution and avoids any share in the cost involved. Every person who does not attend church services benefits from the church but does not share the responsibility of maintaining it. For anyone possessing health and having a church accessible to him to fail to attend its services and share in its work and responsibilities while living in its midst and sharing its benefits is simply to place oneself in the category of a sponger.

Sometimes it is good for us to sit down and ask ourselves a direct question. It helps us to understand what we are doing and why we are doing it. Today one frequently asks, "Why go to church?" Some do not deem it necessary to ask the question at all but have already ceased to attend church services, thus indicating that they do not consider it worth while to do so.

## I. Why Go To Church?

### 1. To obey God.

Obedience to God's Word requires regular church attendance on the part of the believer. Loyalty to His will and Word makes it both a duty and a privilege to attend the services at His house. Loyalty is one of the biggest words in our language. Our loyalty to Christ is measured by our loyalty to His church. It is impossible to be loyal to Christ and unfaithful to His church. Any true Christian will be faithful and loyal to his church.

### 2. To worship God.

If there is any place where we can worship God in spirit and in truth, it is in the church. The songs we sing, the prayers we offer, the Scriptures we read and the sermons we hear are to help us to worship God. Those who do not find any pleasure in the worship of God in the company of His people on earth could scarcely hope to be happy in heaven, even if they could get there.

Worshiping together in the house of God does something for us which, though we cannot explain, we can experience and enjoy. With heads bowed in prayer, and through the singing of inspiring and challenging hymns, the reading of God's Word and the preaching of the sermons, we may become the recipients of the divine power which enables us to live victoriously, even under the most difficult circumstances.

Occasionally somebody says he can worship God just as well elsewhere as in the church. The first thing about the statement is, it is not true, and the second is, he will not. You can worship God in your home at the church hours on Sunday, but you don't. You can worship God anywhere, but you don't.

3. To thank God.

What a privilege it is for one to go to the house of God and publicly express to Him the genuine gratitude of the heart for the blessings received from Him!

4. To get a spiritual bath.

Writing to his wife one Sunday afternoon, a man said, "I went into the church this morning tired, indifferent and discouraged, but came away feeling like a new man because I had experienced a spiritual bath." Nobody who thinks right has much respect for a person who deliberately refuses to take a physical bath with soap and water. Neither does our Lord have a high regard for one who refuses to take a spiritual bath in the services at His house. After spending six days in the midst of a world that is materialistic in thought and conduct, all of us need the spiritual atmosphere of God's house and people to rid our eyes of its dust and our souls of its spirit. The tug of the world is so strong that we need every bit of information and inspiration we can get to offset its pull.

5. To hear Biblical instruction.

Worship services offer instruction in the Scriptures. Some people give as their excuse for not attending these services the fact that they do not get anything out of them. People frequently go into a large department store, look around, buy a handkerchief and walk out. That was all they went for and it was all they got. The handkerchief represented all they wanted or all they had the capacity to possess. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." When we attend worship services with a spiritual hunger instead of a desire to be entertained, the services will not seem dull and useless.

6. To enjoy Christian fellowship.

There is nothing more wholesome than fellowship with faithful Christians. All of us sorely need the refreshing fellowship of kindred spirits. After all is said and done, the best people in any community are faithful church members.

7. To receive spiritual inspiration.

Worship renews the spirit as certainly as sleep renews the body. Just as our physical bodies are drained of energy, grow tired and become subject to physical diseases, so do our souls grow fatigued when neglected and become subject to spiritual lapses. True worship brings us into communion with God, and fellowship with Him begets likeness. No Christian, who desires to grow in the image and likeness of Christ, can afford to overlook the value of worship as a means to that end.

Many have been the worshipers who have gone to the house of God on the Lord's day downcast, blue and discouraged, but through some song, prayer, scripture or sermon have found that which strengthens, encourages and comforts, and have gone out and succeeded, whereas, otherwise they would have failed.

8. To prepare for service.

Church attendance affords the best possible means of enlarging and enriching one's life for loving service to God and His children.

9. To set a worthy example.

A little boy was heard to say, "Mother, why do I have to go to church? Daddy doesn't have to go." A mother said to a preacher, "No, we don't go to church. Why should we? No one else in our block goes."

The stewardship of influence is a serious obligation. We must stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of ourselves.

There is something that the individual worshiper can take to the service that no one else can take for him. There is a prayer which only he can breathe, a thought which only he can think, and a blessing which only he can impart. If our relationship to God does not mean enough to take us to His house for worship, counsel and fellowship, we need not expect anybody to be impressed favorably by our profession of salvation. We are making impressions upon our loved ones, friends, acquaintances and strangers either by our attendance or non-attendance.

## II. What Will Your Absence From Church Do?

1. It will deprive you of personal blessings.

The Lord is in the assembly of believers. "Where two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." There one meets Him in a way and under circumstances which are not possible in private devotions or elsewhere. Fellowship with God in the midst of His people is a rich experience. This is impossible if one neglects church attendance. Every church member needs the instruction from the Word of God which comes from the pastor.

2. It will declare to all who note your absence that you regard your spiritual welfare, and that of others, as a matter of no concern.

3. It will proclaim to all that you think you can get along just as well without the church as with it, which is not true.

4. It will advertise the fact that you are a covenant-breaker.

When you united with the church, you covenanted with the Lord and the church that you would be faithful.

5. It will make it harder for you to meet the temptations of the week.

6. It will help Satan to minimize the importance of the church in your community.

7. It will make it harder for the pastor to preach.

8. It will weaken the effect of the church service.

9. It will cause others to stay away from church.

Others look to the Christian for an example. The non-church-goer is a baneful influence on others who do not read the Bible, but read him. Among those who are injured worst are the children. God bless all parents whose example in church attendance children can follow! The best and most useful people in every community go to church.

III. What Will Your Presence At Church Do?

1. It will cause people to have confidence in your profession of faith in Christ.
2. It will prove to others that you regard your spiritual welfare, and that of others, as a matter of great importance.
3. It will encourage the other church members.
4. It will help the pastor to preach better.
5. It will have a wholesome effect on the service.
6. It will make your life stronger for another week.
7. It will cause others to come to the house of God.
8. It will please the Lord.