

Is Attendance Necessary?

Of all the questions which arise among Christians, one of the most common is the question of attendance. Every congregation has members who attend maybe one service during the week, while neglecting all the other opportunities the saints offer for assembly. When we ask the above question we mean, "Is church attendance really necessary for salvation?" We are naturally asking this question in regard to those who are able to attend church services. This discussion is not intended to apply to those who by reason of sickness, or other circumstances beyond their control, are not able to attend. We want us to discuss those members who are able to attend but simply refuse to do so.

Hebrews 10:25 commands us NOT to do something: we are NOT to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. While this passage does not specify any particular assembly that we are not to forsake, but that we are not to forsake assembling, we are willing to grant to it a particular application to the assembly on the first day of the week. Our reason for this is because God has specified an assembly on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). We realize that other assemblies were conducted by the early church and that these services were important. However, today we are persuaded that these services are left more in the realm of human judgment than the assembly which has been specifically commanded by the Lord on the first day of the week.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, gave a specific order or command to be fulfilled on the first day of the week. Christians who do not attend services on the first day of the week and consequently do not give have failed to do God's will.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, He said, "*Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me*" (1 Corinthians 11:24). This is referred to in the New Testament on several occasions as the "*breaking of bread.*" We read that the early church continued steadfastly in the "*breaking of bread*" (Acts 2:42; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:16). The early church met on the first day of the week to perform this command (Acts 20:7). This demands a weekly observance of the Lord's supper since every week has a first day.

Also, the church conducts other services besides the one to observe the Lord's supper. Do these assemblies have any authority in the Bible? Every Bible student recognizes that other assemblies were conducted by the early church besides the assembly on the first day of the week (Acts 2:46; 1 Cor-

inthians 14:26). The fact that these assemblies were conducted by the early church under the apparent direction of the apostles shows the need and importance of such assemblies. I am convinced that it would be very difficult for the church to carry out the work which God has given it by meeting just one time on Sunday. The time and frequency of these additional services is not specified in the New Testament. This is left in the realm of judgment as we endeavor to carry out the Lord's commands to save the lost and edify the saints.

These assemblies are certainly not without scriptural precedent and are designed to fulfill a divine purpose and meet the spiritual needs of Christians. There are many in the church today who regard these services lightly. They feel that they have done their "duty" by meeting on the first day of the week to observe the Lord's supper. Regrettably, these people are overlooking four great Bible principles which would urge their presence at all services.

First, they must seek first His kingdom (Matthew 6:33). All Christians know that the "*kingdom*" is the church, and "*His righteousness*" is the salvation that is now found Christ. This means that the church and salvation must come first or have the greatest prominence in our lives. Every church service is designed to help the church grow and to further our salvation. If we neglect these services, we are not seeking His kingdom first.

Second, they must make the most of their time (Ephesians 5:16). To "*redeem the time*" is to realize its value and use it to the best possible advantage for eternal matters. The Christian is to make his time count for God. A Christian must decide how he will spend his time. Here is some time that he can spend with other Christians in the study of the Bible or worshiping God. On the other hand, he can spend the same time sleeping, reading online, traveling, watching television, visiting with friends or in some other secular activity. Which of these would be the best use of time? Choices of this nature must be made every time there is a church assembly.

Third, they must be zealous for good works. One characteristic of a Christian is that he is to be "*zealous of good works*" and "*ready for every good work*" (Titus 2:14; 3:1). All Christians will admit that the various periods of worship and study arranged by the members of the church are "*good works.*" To be indifferent toward these services is to disregard divine teaching to be "*ready for every good work.*"

Fourth, they must be lovers of worship. Coupled with all this is the fact that every faithful child of God through the course of history has been a lover of worship (Psalm 42:1-2, 4; 84:1-2, 10). Here is a person who finds great joy and satisfaction in worship. He realizes his need for God and his heart and

soul cries for the privilege of worshiping God. He can hardly wait to get to the place of worship. He would rather spend one day there than a thousand elsewhere. What a contrast this is with the attitude of some today! Rather than looking for an opportunity to worship they are looking an opportunity to avoid worship.

From all indications they propose to love and honor God at one service while they completely ignore Him at another. It does seem strange that people would avow great devotion to God at one service and then disregard and ignore another service for the most trivial of reasons, or for no reason at all. If you receive blessings, strength and help from one service, will you disregard the same blessings in another period of worship? It is not always possible for every member to attend every church service, but many members of the church deliberately miss services when it is possible for them to attend. For a person to attend one assembly and then deliberately forsake another is to cast great doubt on whether they have the proper attitude toward the service that they do attend.

From all that has been considered, it is now time to make some observations on what your absence from worship services accomplishes.

To God, you show improper reverence and respect. An assembly is being conducted in His honor, but you do not attend. You also show that you prefer the presence of others. Who would not want to be in the presence of the Almighty God? However, many make that decision every week! Furthermore, you rob God of glory and honor. The service would have been more glorious if you had come and participated. Finally, you show a lack of appreciation for your blessings. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Here is a service to express your gratitude to God. Will you fail to attend?

To others, you hinder the salvation of sinners. When sinners see you absent yourself from worship they can only conclude that worship must not be very important and that the church and the gospel are of little consequence. Second, you make it harder for the preacher to preach, for it is difficult to preach to empty pews. The preacher is told by your absence that what he has to say is not very important. Third, you discourage other members. Weak members are encouraged to stay away by the fact that you do. Even those who are strong are discouraged by your absence.

To yourself, you take a step on the downward path. When you miss one service you make it easier to miss another. You also hinder your prayers to God. You cannot pray to God to help you live as a Christian when you deliberately forsake those services which are intended to strengthen you. Furthermore, you make it harder to overcome temptation. Worship and study

are designed to help us draw us closer to God. We need all the help we can get to defeat Satan (James 4:7). Finally, you rob yourself of growth. Growth cannot be obtained without the proper diet, and missing assemblies will rob you of critical nourishment.

These are solemn words. Those among us who forsake our assemblies (and there are some out there) must make some tough choices. If you love the Lord, then why do you miss services when you could be here? By your presence the members will be encouraged to take the work and service of God more seriously. Many who are lost will be awakened and restored to their first love. The influence of the church will be increased because it will be taking a definite stand against indifference and showing its desire to be truly consecrated to God. We need to be a people of zeal with power from God and enthusiasm to strengthen the local work and proclaim the gospel. We need you here!

Kyle Campbell