

LESSON ESSENTIALS

THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

LESSON 2: MEETING TOGETHER: WHY AND HOW

The Word of God instructs the followers of Jesus to meet together regularly. Why is that? Is it optional? Isn't it possible to follow Jesus alone without depending on other believers for support and community? What is the purpose of meeting as the Church?

Psalm 133: 1-3: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!"

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Hebrews 10:25

These few verses teach that gathering together as believers in church gives us an opportunity to hold and to make public confession of our hope – something you can't do alone in your own home.

Hebrews 10:25 gives a very clear instruction about the need to meet together as believers. It reads, “...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.” Clearly, some believers felt that they did not need to gather together as the church, in a group, in order to be followers of Jesus. They obviously thought that what they were looking for in their relationship with Christ could be found apart from the body of Christ.

There are many reasons why people may ‘neglect to meet together’. For example, perhaps they are Bible scholars in their own right and the pastor at their local church is less skilled than they are. They may feel like they are getting adequate teaching on their own. Perhaps they are shy or timid in groups of people, or they have a personality that makes it difficult to easily connect with others without anxiety. Perhaps they are too busy to attend church, too far away from church to attend regularly, or any number of other reasons that may seem sufficient to their minds.

However, the context of that verse in Hebrews gives us greater indicators as to why it is so important that believers meet together regularly regardless of their reasons for staying away.

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as

you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:23-25)

Without consulting the whole cannon of scripture, even these few verses teach that gathering together as believers in church gives us an opportunity to hold and to make public confession of our hope – something you can't do alone in your own home. Church puts us in position to stir up others to love and good works, and to be stirred up by them. It creates relationships in which we can encourage one another and support one another at all times, but especially more so as the Day draws near (that is, the day of trial and tribulation). When you are in a period of suffering and discouragement, who will you confess your hope in Christ to? Who will support you and encourage you to keep going? Who will come alongside of you in your trials? If you are intending to ‘do Church’ alone, you will have no one to help point you back to Christ. Similarly, who will be there for the other believers in your area if you, and many others, determine that they can be a Christian without going to church? Even if you somehow have convinced yourself that you do not need anyone, please know that there are people in your church who very much need you! Do not shirk the wonderful gift and privilege of being available to support the saints through the service of the Church. It will bring joy to both you and the whole community of believers.

What this passage does not highlight is the need for accurate teaching from the Word, the sacraments, church discipline and accountability,

corporate worship, service opportunities, and the good and pleasant unity of brothers and sisters dwelling together in a church community! If you are making excuses of being too busy or too introverted, please pray to the Lord to reignite your first love for Him and to help you make communing with His followers in His Church a priority in your life again.

On the other hand, you may desperately want to be connected to a church and may be physically unable to attend. If you are truly isolated by geography, health, safety, secrecy, or lack of local church, you are not without hope! There are still ways to get connected to a distant group that, with intentionality on your part, can still function as a church family in your life. You can get connected to other believers through a radio program. You can contact them by mail, or by email. You could interact socially through the internet community they may have established. But do not be merely a consumer of online sermons. Diligently seek out human connections and conversations through the various media options available to you. If you know even a few Christians near to you, connect with them and 'join' these distant churches together. Also, pray for the universal Church and for the worldwide advance of the gospel to remind yourself that you are part of a bigger movement. While you may feel very isolated and alone, the Lord has not left you. His Church is vast and you are one member of a very large family! Regardless of any of our current church scenarios, we can all rejoice as we look forward to that day when we join with the multitudes: "... and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!'" (Revelation 5:11-12)

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IN REVIEW

- The instruction to meet together as believers is clearly made throughout scripture, and is a good gift to us, not a duty that we ought to resent.
- All of the excuses we make for not being part of a church need to be erased, and our priority must be worshipping and serving the Lord with the Body of Christ.
- For those who are quite physically hindered from joining a church, there are good options available to try and connect as best as possible, until that great day when we join with people from every tribe, every tongue, and every nation to worship the Lord as the complete Body of Christ!

HAVE YOUR SAY

- How do you feel about gathering as a church? Do you eagerly anticipate the corporate gathering or do you look for reasons to stay home? Pray for the Lord to deepen your love for His Church. Renew your commitment to His universal Church as well as to your local church.

- What are some ways we benefit from meeting together? What happens to our faith when we give up meeting with one another?

- If you are physically hindered from joining a church, take time now to pray that the Lord will provide a church for you, whether physical or virtual, so that you can benefit from, and serve, the Body of Christ.

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