

## Inside the Text

48% of churchgoers attend an average of once a month. -- *U.S.A. Today*, May 25, 1994.

Gallup's most recent yearly summary is from 2017, but it shows a drop from 42% in 2008 to 37% in 2017 for regular attendees.

Roughly one-in-eight U.S. adults (12%) say they attended religious services in person during the last month, and one-in-three say they have watched religious services online or on television. Participation in both activities is most common among those who said *prior* to the outbreak (as part of a 2019 survey) that they attend religious services at least once a month.

Among those who typically attend religious services at least monthly, one-third say they have done so in person during the last month, and nearly three-quarters (72%) say they have watched religious services online or on TV. Among those who said (prior to the onset of the pandemic) that they do not regularly attend religious services, just 3% say they have attended worship services during the past month and 17% say they have watched virtually.<sup>1</sup>

## Caution about leaving a church amid a pandemic: Stop! Think Twice Before Switching Churches in 2020 SEPTEMBER 29, 2020 | IVAN MESA <sup>2</sup>

In a door-to-door survey conducted by Willow Creek Community Church the question was asked: if you don't go to church, why? The five biggest reasons: 1) Boring, 2) Irrelevant, 3) Asking for money all the time, 4) I'm too busy already, 5) I feel awkward at church. -- Willow Creek Community Church.

### It's not that bad...

"There's a dark side to recent reports of surging church attendance in North America. While countless 'unchurched' people may be flocking in the front door of the church, a steady stream of the 'churched' is flowing quietly out the back. It's estimated that 53,000 people leave churches every week and never come back!" (Mack/Swavely quoting William Hendricks, *Exit Interviews* [1993]).

### Someone once said...

When you were born, your mother brought you to church...When you were married, your wife brought you to church...When you die, your friends will bring you to church...Why not try coming to church on your own sometime?

## I. The Biblical Basis for the Local Church

- 90 out of 110 references to *ekklesia* in the NT refer to the local church (only 17 are clear references to the Universal Church)

Most of the references to the "church" (*ekklesia*) occur in Paul's writings.

### "Local" Church

- 1 Corinthians 1:2 "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth,"
- Galatians 1:2 "And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:"

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/2020/08/07/attending-and-watching-religious-services-in-the-age-of-the-coronavirus/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/think-twice-switching-church/>

- Church at Jerusalem (Acts 5:11)
- Church at Antioch (Act 13:1)

### “Universal” Church

- Matt 16:18 “... I will build my church...”
- Eph 1:22-23 “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”
- Eph 4:4 “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;”
- Hebrews 12:23 “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn...”

## Imagery Used for the Church (Body, Temple, Flock, Household, Bride of Christ)

Most of the imagery used refers to the universal concept of the church.

### Body

- **1 Corinthians 12:27** “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (28) And God hath set some in the church.”
- **Eph 1:22-23** “and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, (23) which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.”
- **Eph 4:15-16** “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”
- **Eph 5:23-28** “...even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the saviour of the body.”
- **Col 1:18** “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”
- **Conclusions/Implications**
  1. **Emphasizes Unity (equality)**
    - 1 Corinthians 12:26;
    - Eph 2:15-16 [no barriers between races; “and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross.”])
  2. **Emphasizes Diversity**
    - The different members have different functions (1 Corinthians 12:12+)
  3. **This imagery emphasizes two kinds of dependence:**
    - To Christ as the head (Ephesians 5:25); Christ cares for the body
    - To other believers as members of the body.
  4. **Emphasizes that Christians are the extension of Christ’s ministry.**
    - The purpose of the manifestations of the spirit are to “profit withal.” (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Remember putting your face above a headless frame painted to represent a muscle man, a clown, or even a bathing beauty? Many of us have had our pictures taken this way, and the photos are humorous because the head doesn't fit the body. If we could picture Christ as the head of our local body of believers, would the world laugh at the misfit? Or would they stand in awe of a human body so closely related to a divine head?

Dan Bernard.

### Temple

- 1 Corinthians 3:16 “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?”
- **Eph 2:19-22** “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus

Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

- **1 Peter 2:5** “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up for a spiritual house, and holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”
- **Elements of the picture**
  1. **Jesus is the foundation of the Church:**
    - 1 Cor 3:10-11 “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”
    - Also referred to as the “cornerstone”
      - Eph 2:20;
      - 1 Pet 2:6-7 “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,” (cf. Is 28:16; Ps 118:22)
  2. **The apostle and prophets are also in the foundation:**
    - Ephesians 2:20 “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;”
    - Their position is due to the fact that they were the recipients of God’s revelation at the beginning of this new age.
  3. **Christians make up the superstructure of the Church:**
    - Eph 2:21
    - 1 Peter 2:5 (**liqoj**; is a usual word for a “worked stone.”; it can refer to a common stone, but is the word that is chosen to refer to a stone that has something distinct about it); as opposed to **petroj**, a common stone

## Conclusions/Implications of the picture

1. **The Church is something founded by Christ; it is not man’s invention.**
  - Christ is the foundation; other foundation can no man lay that that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
2. **Christians have a value and purpose**
  - **Distinct value** (“precious stones”)
    - 1 Cor 3:12 (figurative for building material of the church)
    - Rev 18:12 (the merchandise in Babylon)
    - Rev 21:19 (building material in heaven)
  - **A stone shaped for a particular purpose**
    - Mark 13:1 “See what manner of stones...”;
    - Matt 27:66 “Sealing the Stone, setting a watch...”
  - **Corollary:** All believers are now priests: Previously, the common people had no direct access to God, because they were separated from the direct worship by a layer of human intercessors. Now, there is direct access to God.
    - **Ex. 19:6;** God calls Israel a “kingdom of priests”, but set up a special order of Levitical priests.
    - **Hebrews 10:6;** Now that the veil is rent, all people have access, and are encouraged to draw near to God.
3. **Denotes privilege: God dwells among these people.**
  - Two words for “temple”: **naon** and **ieron**.
    - **ieron** refers to the general temple area (Luke 18:10; Mk 11:15)
    - **naon** refers to the sanctuary portion of the temple area.

- Luke 1:9; Angel appears to Zechariah
  - Mark 15:38; the veil rips at the crucifixion
  - This correlates to Jesus' promise to the Samaritan woman that the day was coming when they would not longer worship in this or that place. Previously, if you wanted to be close to God, you had to go to the temple. When Solomon dedicated the temple, God's presence descended on the place in a dramatic fashion. Now, God's special presence was among his people.
- 4. Emphasizes holiness (being set apart):**
- The use of the temple was distinct: Jesus became very angry when God's temple was misused. (Matt 21:13). The same jealousy is evident in Acts (Acts 5; Ananias and Saphira);

## Flock

- **Acts 20:29** "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."
- **1 Peter 5 1-4** "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."
- **Conclusions/Implications**
  1. **Emphasizes Christ's leadership of/responsibility to the church.**
    - (he guides and feeds; he is the owner; these are *his sheep*)
    - He loves his sheep; (John 10:11, 15)
    - He leads them
    - They know him.
  2. **Emphasized the responsibility of those whom he has appointed to care for his flock.** (cf. John 21:15-17)
    - Responsibility to feed
    - Responsibility to be examples (be not many masters, for to you shall be a greater condemnation [James 3:1])
  3. **Used to warn about the vulnerability of the flock** (Acts 20:29).

## Household of faith/Children of God

- Passages that refer to us as being in a family/household
  - **Galatians 6:10** "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."
  - **Ephesians 2:19** "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God"
- Passages that call us "sons and daughters"
  - **2 Cor 6:18** "And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."
  - **Gal 4:4-6** "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."
  - **1 John 3:1** "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."
- **Conclusions/Implications**
  1. **Emphasizes the nature of the family.**
    - Characterized by love (1 John 2:9-10; loving/hating one's brother); (Rom 16:
    - Characterized by righteous behavior (1 John 3:3-10); we live up to our family name.
  2. **Emphasizes the basis of the unity:** faith

- (we easily find unity based on other, more visible things. Who is cool, wears the right clothes, has at least heard of this or that group/idea/doctrinal emphasis.) Our unity is based on our faith in Christ.
- 3. Emphasizes our hope for the future.**
- Joint heirs (Gal 4:1; Rom 8:14-17). We are not just honored guest; we are heirs! This has a forward looking aspect—there is coming a day when the present time is almost forgotten (Rom 8:18; cf. Luke 12:32 “it is my father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom).
  - We will have glorified bodies (1 John 3:2).

## **Bride of Christ/Wife of the Lamb**

- **Eph 5:22-23** “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;”
- **2 Cor 11:1-2** “Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”
- **Conclusions/Implications**
  - 1. Emphasizes the love which Christ has for the Church.**
    - **It is a giving love.** Christ sacrificed his life for the church. When a man presents an engagement ring, it represents a sacrifice (among other things) of a tremendous amount of himself.
    - **It is a jealous love.** Eph 5:27 “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”
  - 2. Emphasizes the authority which Christ has over the church**
    - “Christ is the head of the church”
  - 3. Emphasizes the love with which the Church responds to Christ.**
    - This love exhibits itself in several ways:
      - **Submission** The church is not setting its own agenda—it is following the agenda of Christ.
      - **Loyalty** The church is loyal to Christ the way a wife is loyal to a husband (“jealous” of his reputation); you can’t slander Christ without raising the ire of Christians.
  - 4. Emphasizes the jealousy of Paul/Christian leaders for the purity of the members of the church.**
    - Few things made Paul as angry as threats upon the purity of the gospel and of those who professed it.
    - This jealousy is exhibited in his attitude towards those who presented trouble for his spiritual children.
    - Gal 5:12 “I would they were even cut off which trouble you.”
  - 5. Emphasizes our hope for the future.**
    - **John 14:6** “I go to prepare a place for you.” The groom would go away and prepare the house where he and his bride would live.
    - **1 Thess 4:16-17** “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”
    - **Revelation 19:7-9** “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”
    - **Revelation 22:17** “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

## I. The Biblical Basis for the Local Church

### A. God's means of modeling the invisible. (Acts 2:47)

- According to Acts 2:47, new believers were "added" to something... (the 120 original disciples found in Acts 1:19). Luke continues to provide specific numbers of who joins the church.
- Entrance into the local church includes a profession of faith and demonstration of faith (through baptism) – Acts 2:47

### B. God's method for supporting and defending the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

#### **Meaning—the local church holds up the truth.**

"Or to put it in more graphic (and perhaps shocking) terms, God's truth is not able to stand without the church." (Mack/Swavely)

The local church holds up the truth? Doesn't this border on Roman Catholicism? Consider the fact that there is no other organization in society that will hold up God's truth in society—not the Republican National Convention, the Lion's Club, the Red Hat Society, etc. If the local church doesn't hold up truth, then who will? You say, "Individual believers." Well, we already established the fact that this passage is about the local church. Therefore, the local church has the God-given obligation to hold up His truth in society. Now will the church ever fail in this obligation? Though individual local churches may fail, ultimately there will always be local churches who will hold up the truth. God's Word promised it—Mat. 16:18.

#### **Specifics**

- Paul's words to Timothy here are designed primarily to highlight the importance of the local church in holding up the truth in our individual lives. How does the local church do this?

Revelation (Gal. 1:1-2)

*[Developed differently than Mack/Swavely] The NT epistles were given almost completely (except Philemon) to local churches or to the leaders of local churches (e.g., Timothy, Titus).*

Proclamation

*"Obviously most gospel proclamation takes place outside the gathering of the church, but in Scripture it is always the church that initiates and sanctions such evangelism."*

*Acts 13:1-3—ordained Paul and Barnabas*

*2 Cor. 8:19—Titus was appointed by the churches to travel with Paul*

*Acts 2:42—"the early church gathered regularly to study the apostles' teaching"*

*Eph. 4:11-12—gifted leaders given to local churches for edification*

Administration

*"God has never provided instructions for how a parachurch organization should function, let alone for how people can worship and grow totally on their own [apart from any attachment with a local church]. But He has revealed an exhaustive plan regarding how the church should function for His glory and the good of its members (1 Tim. 3:15). That plan includes guidelines for baptism and the Lord's Supper (which are ordinances of the church), giving, leadership, worship, preaching, men's and women's roles, and myriad other essential issues" (Mack/Swavely, 13).*

Protection

*Rom. 16:17—judging false teachers*

*1 Cor. 6:1-6—settling disputes between believers*

*Matt. 18:17-18—disciplining sinning brethren*

### The Support of Truth (1 Tim. 3:15)

**Meaning—the local church serves as a foundation for truth (implying stability and permanence)**

“Why did Paul choose this word in his attempt to help Timothy realize the primacy and importance of the local church? He wanted Timothy to know that the church is the one institution God has promised to preserve throughout all time.” (Mack/Swavelly)

Therefore, “we should direct our energies and efforts primarily toward the edification and growth of the local church rather than organizations and institutions outside it.” We can pour our energies into other institutions only as they aid the local church, not as they try to take the place of it.

***Implications (for both images)***

Become a member of a local church.

Pour yourself into the ministry of that local church.

Never minimize the importance of a local church.

***I. The Biblical Basis for the Local Church***

***A. God’s means of modeling the invisible. (Acts 2:47)***

***B. God’s method for supporting and defending the truth. (I Timothy 3:15)***

**II. The Biblical Support for Church Membership.**

**A. Membership clarifies your loyalty.** – It distinguishes between who is in and who is not. (I Corinthians 5:9-12)

Membership in a confessing body is fundamental to the faithful Christian life. Failure to do so defies the explicit warning not to forsake "our assembling together." His understanding of this prompted Martin Luther to say, "Apart from the church, salvation is impossible." Not that the church provides salvation; God does. But because the "saved" one can't fulfill what it means to be a Christian apart from the church, membership becomes the indispensable mark of salvation.

"So highly does the Lord esteem the communion of His church," Calvin wrote, "that He considers everyone a traitor and apostate from religion who perversely withdraws himself from any Christian society which preserves the true ministry of the word and sacraments."

Charles W. Colson, The Body, 1992, Word Publishing, p. 70.

Charles Spurgeon made the following comment regarding believers and church membership some 100 years ago...

I know there are some who say, “Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church.” Now, why not? “Because I can be a Christian without it.”

Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord’s commands as by being obedient? There is a brick. What is it made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is good-for-nothing brick. So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do. – *Spurgeon at His Best (pages 33-34)*

**B. Membership facilitates your accountability.**

1. To one another (Heb. 10:24)
2. To God (Heb. 10:25)

## Poems

### If You Want to Kill the Church

Never go to your church or meetings held there,  
If you do go, be late, it's no one's affair.  
If the weather is bad, either too hot or snowing,  
Just stay home and rest, for there'll be others going.

But should you attend, be sure and remember  
To find fault with the work, each official and member.  
Be sure to hold back on your offerings and tithes,  
The bills will be paid by the rest of the guys.

And never take office if offered the post,  
But eagerly criticize work of the host.  
If not on a committee you're placed, be sore!  
If you find that you are, don't attend any more.

When asked your opinion on this thing or that,  
Have nothing to say, just turn 'em down flat.  
Then after the meeting, shine out like the sun  
By telling the folks how it should have been done.

Don't do any more than you possibly can,  
Leave the work for some other woman or man.  
And when you see faithful ones work themselves sick,  
Then stand up and holler, "It's run by a clique!"

Source Unknown.

3. To ordained leaders (Heb. 13:7 &17)
- C. Membership expands your opportunity.
1. To enjoy God (Eph. 2:14-18)
  2. To serve others (Eph. 4:11-12; I Cor. 12)
  3. To reach the lost (Rom. 11:17-21)

## Apply the Text

## Poems and Songs

### Backward Christian Soldiers - Anonymous

Backward Christian soldiers, Fleeing from the fight,  
With the cross of Jesus, Nearly out of sight.  
Christ our rightful master Stands against the foe  
Onward into battle, we seem afraid to go.



## Chorus

Backward Christian soldiers, Fleeing from the fight,  
With the cross of Jesus, Nearly out of sight.

Like a might tortoise Moves the church of God.  
Brothers we are treading, Where we've often trod.  
We are much divided, Many bodies we,  
Having different doctrines, but Not much charity.

Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane,  
But the cross of Jesus Hidden does remain.  
Gates of hell should never 'gainst the Church prevail,  
We have Christ's own promise, but we think it might fail.

Sit here then ye people, Join our sleeping throng.  
Blend with ours, your voices in a feeble song.  
Blessings, ease and comfort Ask from Christ the King,  
But with our modern thinking, We won't do a thing. -- Source Unknown.

- **Join the Universal Church today!**
- **Pursue membership in a biblically faithful body of believers.**
- **Evaluate your level of commitment to your local church.**