

Is Church Attendance a Big Deal?

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3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Corinthians 12. Now as you're opening to 1 Corinthians 12, if you're a guest or a visitor with us, you may wonder why is it that we're in this place, at this time, on this day, and that is simply because we as a body of believers are walking through the Scriptures typically one chapter a day for about a three year period and when we gather on Sunday morning, we look back at that which we have read and sometimes we look at the entirety of the passage, sometimes one specific passage, but today I want to deal with an issue that I think that we would all claim is important to our lives but oftentimes get relegated to the former thought of our lives, I want to talk about is being a part of a group of believers, is being a part of a church, is doing what you did this morning at this time, at this place, is it really that big a deal? You see, many of you could have been in many other places doing something else, but this morning you set your clocks back and you arrived here at this place, you weathered the cold because you thought that today and doing this was important. Is it really that big a deal?

You see, today I'm preaching to the proverbial choir and here we are talking about is being a part of a body of believers, is it important, is it critical, how does it benefit our lives, how does it help others, and in 1 Corinthians 12, allow me to remind you we're dealing with a group of people who are carnal at best. In fact, as you read through 1 Corinthians, you'll discover that the struggles of our society today are not new to us, they have been repeated for thousands of years even within the "walls of the church," which leads to this last introductory point, when I use the word "church" today, I am not referring to walls, buildings and locations. Oftentimes we say, "Well, we went down to the church." By definition, the church of Jesus Christ is not sticks and bricks, it's not a building, it's not even a specific GPS location. When I use the word "church" today, I'm using the word in the form of it is those who are gathered together as believers in Jesus Christ who are doing so collectively together.

So when I ask the question, "Is church attendance a big deal," do not limit that question to a specific time, a specific place and location, that means it is a big deal for you and I to make it a priority in our lives that we gather with other believers in Jesus Christ, and in 1 Corinthians 12, beginning in verse 12, we read these words,

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? 18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 19 And if they were all one member, where were the body? 20 But now are they many members, yet but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. 22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: 23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. 24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: 25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. 26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

And so we see by definition here the Lord is using the Apostle Paul to say that the body of Christ, that the church of Jesus Christ cannot be limited to a specific date, time and location, but are those who are the members of or his body.

So today I want to address several things that I think are brought forth in this passage that address this question about is church attendance or is gathering with other believers, it is really a big deal? Well, the first thing you need to know according to verse 12 is that according to Scripture it is critical. Now that's a word that we don't like to hear in a medical situation, do we? If someone says they are critical, that means that life or death is at stake.

Notice verse 12, "For as the body is one and hath many members," some of the members of that body, no, most of the members. No, what does it say? "All of the members of that body." Now you and I would testify today that due to the rapid adoption of what you and I may call technology, that gathering with other believers is easier on Facetime than it is face-to-face, gathering with other believers is easier by podcast than it is by worship service, and I think unfortunately our technology is hindering us because it says that we as the members, all of us should be one. Now Hebrews 10:25 is addressed to a group of people who were struggling with issues of their faith, makes this statement, "Do not forsake the gathering of the believers." In other words, we should not allow technology,

we should not allow distractions, we should not even allow divisions to keep us of gathering as believers in Jesus Christ.

Now I know what some of you may be thinking, "Well, what happens if, or what about?" And so allow me to address a few things that naturally come up in conversation. Sometimes people will say, "Well, what about that church down there and those people down there, they've got a guy down there and you know what he does? Or do you know what she's involved in? Or I heard about..." Now by the way, I've also learned there's three sides to every story: there's your side, there's their side, and somewhere in the middle there might be the truth. But that being said, did you know that a few chapters earlier in 1 Corinthians 5, there is a man in the church who is in open blatant sin, I mean, you can't gloss over it, he is living in rebellion. What does the Apostle Paul say to do? Deal with it. Address it. Remove it. But never does he show up and go, "You know what? You've got somebody who's acting a fool, I guess we should just not get together." Nope. In other words, we don't have the excuse of saying, "Well, they're not perfect down there, I don't want to get together with them." Well, guess what? You're not perfect either and so, therefore, we can't use the excuse of there are people with messed up lives, they are hypocrites. Allow me to share with you, the church is not a country club. The church is a hospital where sick people come together to get well.

Now some of you and I've heard this before say, "Well, I don't necessarily believe all or this or that, or I struggle with some things," when the book of Jude, the second to the last book of the Bible, it says that they're in that congregation there were a certain group of men who had crept in, they were teaching heresies, they were teaching fallacies and the Lord commissioned them to root it out. The Lord said, "You need to address it. You need to silence the bad teaching," but never did he say, "You know what? Because you've got bad teachers, don't show up." So if we've got bad living and we've got bad teaching, the Bible tells us to address those but never do we have the excuse of saying, "Well, they're just a bunch of messed up folks and I guess I should just stay by myself, utilize my podcast or whatever access I have." The Bible says that being among believers is critical.

The second thing and this is found in verse 13, is that gathering as believers, the church is a picture of grace. Notice what it says, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." It's interesting that we live in a culture and it doesn't matter where you're from or where you think you're headed, that we love to allow the stratas of life to come into our life. They have more. They possess less. They know more. They know less. And we tend to categorize people by what they've achieved, what they've earned, how far they've gone or how little ways they've traveled. Yet notice what it says, in the body of Christ there are Jews, there are Gentiles, there are bond and there are free, and that is an incredible picture of grace.

You see, back in the book of Ephesians 5, there is this illustration and oftentimes we hear it spoken of in what you and I know as a wedding ceremony, that Christ is the church is the husband is to the wife, and it talks about the different roles and responses and reactions, and essentially what we see in Ephesians 5 is that that marriage union between a husband and a wife is to be a picture of our personal relationship with the Lord, but

what we see here in 1 Corinthians 12 is that the illustration of a body is the picture of our corporate relationship with the Lord. We've got "body parts" that we like to show off. We've got some we like to hide. We've got some where we question how they even got to be a part of it, and others that we don't remember a time without them. You see, that's the beauty not only of Jesus Christ but his bride, the body of Christ, is it doesn't matter what your background is, it doesn't matter what your story is, your back-story is, it doesn't matter what your reputation is, it doesn't matter how high or how low others see you, every single one of us, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, enters the body of Christ the exact same way, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. We don't enter the body because of our bank account. We don't enter the body because of our reputation or a lack thereof. It is a picture of the grace of God because it doesn't matter what the world thinks of you or how little they think of you, we enter the body of Christ all of us through the exact same path, the life, the ministry, the death and ultimately the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So the body when it gathers together, no matter what the size may be, not only is critical but it testifies to the world of the grace of God. You say, "Well, how does it testify?" Because you find for me other places where those individuals would sit next to each other for any elongated period of time. They have different interests. They have different backgrounds. They have different this. They have different that.

It reminds me of one of my favorite restaurants in all of the world and I'm gonna go ahead and give a shameless plug because it's a thousand miles away, Jasper's Barbecue. Jasper's Barbecue is right in the heart of Waco, Texas and you eat family style. You will see people who live under a bridge sitting next door to surgeons. I mean, they're just sitting right by each other. Why? Because it's this collective table that they've all gathered around some unbelievable dead cow, but that's a whole other story. But you and I are the same. We've got people from all demographics gathered together under one common theme and it's a risen Savior, and it is the picture of grace.

But beginning in verse 14, there is this elongated testimony that almost sounds like an anatomy and physiology course. You've got the hands, you've got the feet, you've got the ears, it even talks about smelling, they throw in the nose there, all the different body parts. And one of the things that I want to share with you is because I think we'd all agree that being among other believers is critical and we do picture the grace of God as we gather together in the commonality of the resurrection of Jesus, but did you know that being a part of other believer's lives and them being a part of your life is actually beneficial to you?

Now you would expect the pastor to say that. You would expect "the church" to say that, but what if the secular academic world is in absolute complete agreement with this? That which I'm about to show you, there's five things I want you to know that benefit your life by being intersected with the lives of other believers. None of these statements and none of this research comes from a "Christian source." This comes from secular academic America. Are y'all ready? Here is how being a part of a church can actually benefit you.

1. Did you know that those who attend church, who gather with other believers typically have stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure and they live longer? You say, "Well, yeah, I'm sure the Southern Baptists made that up." No, we didn't. Harvard did. In other words, you can't kill us off when we get together. We are actually in better health than mainstream America because when we gather as believers, it's supposedly strengthens our immune system, it lowers our blood pressure, and we live longer. There are some physical health benefits to "being with other believers."

However there's a second one that may be even more critical, is those who gather together as believers tend to have stronger emotional communal bonds with each other. In other words, they support each other. They help each other. They come alongside each other.

You know, at the end of the service today even though we've collected our regular offering for tithes and offerings, at the end of the service as you exit the room, this is the first Sunday of the month, this is the day that we collect what we know as our benevolence offering. For those of you who have never been a part of this, almost each and every day on our campus there is somebody that we help physically whether that's getting them food, clothes, paying bills, shelters, whatever it may be, and we gladly do so with those resources so that we can have a spiritual conversation with them. What's interesting is rarely does anybody come here needing physical assistance who says, "Hey, I really need some help. Now I'm really active in another church but I thought I'd ask y'all." No, what happens is because they're not connected to other people, because they don't have people to undergird them when they're struggling, and I'm looking at the eyes of some of you here and you understand what I'm talking about, there are some of you here, you didn't walk in off the street needing a bill paid but you shed a tear in Sunday school and what did they do? They rallied around you, didn't they? They not only emotionally supported you, sometimes they financially supported you. It is very rare to find somebody who is struggling emotionally and financially who is doing so as they're an active part of other believers in their lives.

You know, one of the most revolutionary books that I've read in recent days, it's not a "Christian book" by any means, it's called "Hand to Mouth: Living in Bootstrap America." It's the story of a woman who actually wrote these posts as part of a community college course who was in abject life-long perpetual poverty. She couldn't get out of it and she began to speak about why they made the decisions they did and why they went the paths that they did. What's interesting is you'll allow me to sum up this entire book in just a few sentences, she made this statement. Now this was someone who was living in poverty. She said that people live in perpetual poverty not because of a lack of money, but because of a lack of real relationships.

Do you know that our government has thrown over \$20 trillion at the poverty problem? Hasn't fixed anything, has it? It's because it's about relationships. It's about when something happens and you don't have the finances to get your car fixed, you have somebody in your Sunday school class that says, "Hey, we've got an extra one. Use mine until you can get the problem addressed." Or the pantry is bare, I don't know how I'm

gonna feed the babies, someone who's a part of the fellowship says, "Hey, I'll take care of that. I know somebody." You see, what you discover is those who are part of the body of Christ whether a large group or a small group, they're more emotionally connected because when things fall apart, they have each other as a safety net just like the body. When you have a knee that is not functioning properly or a shoulder, it doesn't mean the whole body shuts down, you've got to depend on the rest of it to help you.

Believe it or not, according to the secular surveys, those who regularly are a part of a gathering of believers tend to be less depressed than the world at large. Now you may be thinking, "I know a lot of believers who are depressed." Can you imagine what the rest of the world's going through? Now I mean, I understand we're just the less of, but less depressed than what the world is walking through.

4. I cannot wait until the 11 o'clock service when the students are sitting up in the corner. Did you know that the survey says that teenagers who regularly are a part of a "church" actually make better grades? Now I want just to sit out and camp on this for just a moment because I've got three teenagers and I've been raising some children for a while and I've heard it once, I've heard it a thousand times, "We can't make Awana or youth group Wednesday, we've got too much homework." Well, you may have a whole lot of homework but do you realize that if you want your kid to have better grades, they need to be a part of a church more than that. Their grades actually go up when they're a part of other believers who are encouraging them and I can state for the fact my kids have had homework, my kids have struggled, but never once in my life do I know of when the Meyers family, by the way I'm gonna take my pastor hat off and put my dad hat on, have we ever said, "Do you know what, guys? Too much going on at school. Don't worry about going to church. Just make sure you get physics right." I've got news for you, if you don't get it right with the Lord, what does it matter how much physics that you know? And so therefore even GPAs go up when church is a priority. Now we might have to rearrange how we study. Instead of doing, I got it, 11th hour, last minute, we might actually have to plan our schedules a little bit better, but students who are active, a part of a church actually have higher GPAs.

And last but not least, some of you may be surprised but supposedly according to the secular world and the studies they've done, we as believers are actually happier than the world at large if we regularly are a part of each other's lives. Yes, we can be a believer by ourselves, I get that, and we can hide in the corner and we can watch our podcast, but these five findings by the secular world have nothing to do with that and everything to do with us becoming interactive in each other's lives.

But do you know what? It's not just beneficial to us, you know it's also beneficial to others? You see, maybe you're here this morning saying, "You know, I'm all those five things. I've pretty much got it together. Life is going down the right path." Well, congratulations because I promise there's someone within a stone's throw of you that that's not the case, and when you as a part of the body are walking in strength, you actually can help those who are struggling.

It's interesting when you get to verse 23, it talks about the less honorable parts or the less beautiful parts, the ones that are struggling, and then in verse 24 it says God has tempered the body together. Now when you temper something, you take that which is incredibly strong, that which is not so strong, and you fuse them together so that the strength can be synergized, so to speak. Now the illustration all throughout the text is on the body and it talks about the hands and the feet and we could discuss all the details there, and by the way, maybe you're here today saying, "You know, when it comes to the body of Christ, I feel insignificant. I understand verse 23. I kind of feel like I'm that little toe, you know, the little toe that, you know, you don't pay a whole lot of attention to." You do realize without the little toe we would lose our balance, right? And so what the Bible is saying is every part is critical and if something is damaged, if something is hurt, if something is bothered, it's the strength of the other parts that bring them along.

Now I could use 100 different illustrations so just put up with me this morning. I want you to imagine that you are the left leg and you are strong and you are firm and you are muscular and you've got everything going together, but somebody sitting next to you or somebody in your Sunday school class or somebody sitting in front of you, happens to be the right leg and they're struggling right now. They're battling temptation. They're struggling with addiction. In spite of what the surveys may say, they're depressed and they're not real happy. Do you know what happens when you intersect with their lives? You as the strong leg take a step and you're able to bring them with you. You're able to go forward and say, "Come on, we got this." We don't leave them behind just because they're struggling like we would not leave a hurting body part at home when we go to run an errand.

So it is the strength of the good parts that comes alongside and assists those who are struggling, and so maybe today you say, "Well, I've got it all together. I'm going the right way." Do you know there are others around you who need your strength in this hour, they need your faith in this hour. And you may be thinking, "Well, gathering together, I've got this. I've been a believer for decades. I got this." Yeah, but maybe somebody else doesn't and they need your strength, they need your health to bring them along the journey.

Last but not least, beginning in verse 25, it says there should be no schism or division in the body but that the members should have the same care one for another, and whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it, or one member be honored all the members rejoice. You are the body of Christ and members in particular. Last but not least, what does being a part of other believer's lives, what does being a part of church do for you? It allows you to rise above the culture. Notice it says we suffer with each other. We rejoice with each other. It says there should be schism or division in the church because of this.

Now I think we can all agree today that we live in a culture of great division, do we not? We live in a culture of great divide. We live in a culture of inflammatory rhetoric where it's us and them and those and they, and we love to put divisions up, and we love to create great gulfs between those individuals and these individuals, that group and this group. Why is that important? Because the body of Christ, those who have a personal

relationship with Jesus Christ, it is the only entity in the world that rises above the rhetoric of the culture.

Now I know some of you may say, "Well, you're about to go to meddlin'." So here it goes, enjoy. I don't understand why you've got "preachers" who want to lower themselves to politics. I don't get it. We should rise above all that mess, not get down in all of that mess. And a couple of years ago, I found myself not in this location, not this particular church, but in a community that was greatly divided. It was a community that was struggling to communicate with each other. Tempers were raised. Emotions were high. Because we happened to have the largest "venue" in the county, they came to me, both sides and even those who didn't have a side, and say, "Would you be willing to allow a public forum to discuss this issue?" Can I just go ahead and tell you it was one of those hot-button issues? You know what I'm talking about, one of those issues where everybody gets upset. Some people say, "Well, I'm gonna go just because they're having it." Others say, "I'm not going because they are having it." One of those. They said, "Would you be willing to have it? Would you be willing to allow those who are greatly divided on issues to gather in one common place and to discuss it?"

I said, "Yes, I will on one condition." They said, "Well, what's your condition?" I said, "Both sides can gather here if the only person discussed is Jesus." They didn't have the meeting. Why not? Because they really didn't want to be united. They really didn't want common ground. They just wanted to win the fight. Jesus is the only one who allows us to rise above our differences. Jesus is the only one that allows us to rise above our divisions and so when people say, "How can you go to church with them?" You say, "Because Jesus is greater than them and he's greater than the issue." Jesus and his church is the only entity in the world that rises above the culture.

So when we gather, we take all of those divisions and all those struggles and guess what? They should become "lesser issues of life" because the fact of the matter is that if you're a believer and I'm a believer and we have differences of opinions even on hot-button issues, we're still gonna have to live eternity with each other in heaven and we might as well get along when we're in Sunday school on earth, is my opinion. But it's the only entity that rises above the culture.

So maybe today, I know I'm preaching to the choir, but maybe you know somebody or maybe at the same time you've had issues as well and say, "Is it really that big a deal?" Sure it is. The Bible says don't forsake it. It's a picture of grace. It helps you. It helps others and all that rhetoric out there that just drives you insane, this is the one entity that has its purpose to rise above it.