

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES TITLE: CHURCH ATTENDANCE | SERMON TITLE: REASONS NOT TO ATTEND

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Last week we began looking at the issue of Church Attendance. I said then that I'm calling for the members to be as regular in their attendance as possible. I encourage the same for the non-members as well. Today I want to try to address some of the reasons people attend less than they should. Before we get to it let me make a qualification.

In calling for regular church attendance, and warning against anything less, I am not rebuking those who miss church for legitimate reasons. If you are sick, it makes sense to stay home. If you have to work, it make sense to miss service. If you have to take care of a sick loved one, it makes sense to be absent. If you are travelling, it makes sense to be absent.

And there are other justifiable reasons for missing church. When I give warning about missing church, I don't have the preceding examples in mind. The scenario of working on Sunday I plan to address more fully next week, since that is more complicated.

Let me give you just a brief review of the importance of church fellowship, and then we'll deal with some of the reasons people don't attend.

The Importance of Coming to Church

Church fellowship encourages right thinking, feeling and lifestyle. It is a detoxification from our time spent in the world all week. Missing this detox removes an important source of spiritual purification.

Church is a time for the Word of God to wash over us, in prayer, song, preaching and conversation. The Word counters the world's lies and perverted ideas. Less church means less Word. Less Word means more influence from the world.

Church affords a time of focused worship of God. This opens the believer's heart to God and weakens the hold of sin upon us. Have you considered that some of your sin-struggle may result from not attending church as much as you should?

Church is a center for equipping us to live holy that we might evangelize outsiders. This is the mission Jesus gave us. Missing church disconnects us from the aim of our lives which is living holy in the world that we might glorify God and turn men to righteousness.

Well, that's just a quick reminder why we need to take church seriously and be here as much as possible. My real purpose in this sermon, though, is to address a number of reasons people don't attend church as much as they should.

Reasons people don't regularly attend church

1. They aren't born again

This is the first issue we need to deal with. Let's be honest: The more you absent yourself from church the more doubt you cast on your spiritual condition. Is salvation really so unimpressive a process that it leaves people lackluster for God's redeemed assembly?! I think not. New birth means new life. New life is lived in God. God is in his church. How can we love God but not his church? We know we've passed from death to life because we love the brothers. If you don't love the brothers you are still dead.

Do you have confidence that you belong to God? Are you certain heaven is your final destination? I tell you plainly: To the degree you absent yourself from church, to that degree you must doubt that you belong to God. I would not affirm anyone's salvation who absents himself from church.

What is the solution here? Repent of your sins and turn to Christ. Admit your corruption, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. Then do the deeds of a saved man, not the least of which is active participation in his redeemed community.

2. They have a low view of church in general

This is sin. Refer to the last sermon for this one. The church is not a lowly reality. If we don't look so impressive at the moment, just wait until Jesus comes back and the Sons of God are revealed. Read through the Bible and look for the reality of the people of God from covenant to covenant; it is a messy and a glorious reality. Don't despise God's people; God doesn't! He rejoices over us with loud singing! He loves us like a young man loves his new bride. Do you despise what God loves so much?

3. They have a low view of this church in particular

Then join a better one and be faithful there. Can't find a better one? Then make the best of this one. Do you see things wrong with this church? Then pray for God to supply what's lacking.

Don't just complain about the church; rather lend a hand to improve it. Part of spiritual growth is learning to live with things we don't like; it is learning not to demand perfection of our job, our spouse, our city or our church.

4. They don't like the music

Our lyrics are true as the Gospel itself; I hope you wouldn't complain about that. Don't like the sound? I sympathize; I have never really liked the sound of hymns. But years ago I decided what I wanted from church music was primarily the Word of God. The rest I'm ready to deal with. I encourage you to do the same.

5. They don't like the preaching

What part do you not like? The content? That would be bad; every teaching I have heard in this church has been biblical. I am a miserable sinner, but I know myself to be a sincere preacher of the Word. I hope you don't object to the content, as that would not bode well for you.

Perhaps the manner of the preaching bothers you? Let me be the first to confess failure. But as with church music, I strongly encourage you to ignore the manner and style of the preaching as much as possible. Focus on the truth of what's said; let your heart meditate on that and be grateful if you are getting truth.

6. They don't like the people

I don't know of anywhere we are commanded to like each other; I know of many places we are commanded to love each other. Church is a place with sinful people, and that means personal irritation. You cannot let this keep you away. Relationships are hard work, but it's a work you, as a Christian, are called to.

7. They are unspiritual

This just means you invest all your time in worldly, passing endeavors. Your job, your hobby, even your family to some extent. You are forgetting the things that matter, the things which are unseen. You are living as a Christian in theory, but an atheist in practice. You are carnal, fleshly, and worldly. Repent of your focus on this passing world and live for the one to come. That means active participation in church.

8. They are in sin

If you are compromising with sin your desire for church will die. Your heart will grow cold toward God; you will want to avoid the light. And church is a Lamp-stand. There's no answer but to cut it off and turn around. The only way back is back. Beware lest you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Practicing sin will make you callous to the influence of the Holy Spirit. It will make you want to avoid church.

9. They have a grievance and are responding by checking out

If you have something against someone, try to overlook it in love. If you cannot overlook it, address the person in private and seek restoration. Don't nurse your personal grudge. Maintain your church relationships. If you have a problem, address it. Don't respond by absenting yourself.

10. They are too tired or busy; they would rather sleep or get other things done

If you are too busy to obey Christ, bad news, Christ is too busy to save you. If you are too tired, get more sleep. Work less. Minimize distractions. Get to bed on Saturday night; don't overload Wednesday. Don't eat and drink too much on these days lest you come to meeting sluggish and sleepy. Prepare your heart to seek God.

If sometimes you just want a day off from church, I worry about your soul. I remember Jimmy telling me how his wife once said the church was their life. When Melody and I were first converted we met with the church 7 days a week. If the doors were open we were there. Where else would we want to be? Coming to know God changed everything for us. Our whole life was now bound up with God and his people.

If you bristle when you think of the free time you are losing by coming Sunday morning, be worried. You may be lost. Take it seriously and examine yourself. Rather, if you are a Christian, you should bristle when something keeps you away from church. It should frustrate and bother you. You should want to be here, from the heart. If not, you have a real problem requiring attention.

Summary

I want to make it clear that, apart from justifiable absences, missing church is not a mark of strong spirituality. It is an indication of a serious problem in your life with God. It is

disobedience, it is coldness toward God, it is negligence in your duty to other Christians. It cannot lead anywhere except to trouble.

There is only one answer here: Repent. Retrace your steps and return to the love you had at first.

There are varying degrees here, of course. Maybe you are a member who barely comes all year long. Maybe you are a member who could easily come twice as much as you do. Maybe you are a member who comes pretty frequently but you often miss a meeting without good reason. Maybe you are a visitor who remains a visitor just so that you can be free from the obligation to come regularly. Maybe your situation is something else. In most cases, you know very well whether you are attending as much as you reasonably can.

If you are not attending as much as you reasonably can and should, then under the Lordship of Christ, I call you to repent.

Conclusion

I've tried to give some of the reasons we use as justifications for missing church. The reason we try to justify ourselves is that we know we are in danger of wrongdoing. Some justifications are valid; many are not. If you are guilty of despising the church, the solution is not to try to justify yourself. In Christ, self-justification is Anathema. The only justification God will allow is the justification God performs.

The simple truth is our church-despising is entirely unjustified. We have no defense. We are guilty as charged; we have despised God's church, either in heart, or worse, in action. The Divine Court would not go easy on us. It would sentence us according to what we deserve. We need justification but it cannot come from ourselves. So don't try to justify yourself.

The solution is for God to justify you. And he can do that on the basis of Christ. Christ never despised God's church, and never will. Christ has a perfect record of loving and tending to God's church. Jesus never missed a Sunday, he never offered some lame excuse for being absent. He played his role among the people wonderfully, spotlessly and blamelessly.

And whoever believes in him receives his perfect record of honoring and loving God's church. In Christ, God does not deal with us according to our church-despising sins. He deals with us according to Christ's church-honoring righteousness. The believer is covered with that righteousness like a garment. Our filthy church-despising can no longer be seen under the blinding whiteness of the Righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The lost man turns to Christ and sees him as a Savior; in this way the lost man is saved. The Christian who has sinned, likewise turns to Christ and still sees Him as a Savior. In this way the Christian continues being saved.

So, church-despiser, do just that. Look at Christ and see in Him a covering for your church-despising. See a blood-atonement powerful enough to wash away even this heinous sin. Refresh your memory of the marvelous preciousness of Jesus, the Lamb of God. When your admiration for Jesus is restored, your love for the church also will be.