



“Attendance in the Church”

Idea: Faithfulness rather than feelings is the motivation for Christians to gather regularly with the church.

Intro: The most important time to gather with the church is when you do not feel like it. I have no doubt that today there are people sitting in this room who thought about not coming. You contemplated it because you woke up tired, discouraged, depressed, sad, angry, hurt, empty, or any number of other emotions. You have a long list of things to do. Perhaps, there was just no desire or motivation to attend. The thought of gathering with God’s people seemed to be an unsatisfying, unhelpful, or maybe an awkward exercise, but you are here.

Many times, I think we view attending church the same way we view attending a movie. When you go to the theatre, you gather with 200 other people who share a common interest. You are there to watch the show. In doing so, you share an emotional experience. You laugh. You cry. Sometimes, you even scream together. You set through a rollercoaster of ups, downs, and twists collectively. The one thing, however, you do not share together is relationship. While you may know a few people’s names or even engage someone in conversation before or after the show, there is no depth of relationship at the movies. You are just there to watch the show, so it does not matter if you attend or not. No one is depending on you, and no one will miss you. Attending church is different. As we have learned the last two Sundays, the ἐκκλησία are called out and gathered as the body of Christ, the household of God, and a spiritual house (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 2:19; 1 Pet 2:5). The local church is an embassy of the Lord, reflecting His Kingdom on earth. As such, the members of the church represent the King as ambassadors, modeling His love, life, and truth. The strong relational imagery used to describe the local church in the New Testament compels us to see that membership matters. The church is all-together different from a movie theatre. For this reason, it matters that members gather regularly together. Members do so because the church exercises authority over and gives direction to their discipleship. Members participate on both ends of discipleship. Individually, they operate within the body to give shape to another’s discipleship while also receiving the same themselves. Together, as each member grows in Christlikeness and uses their spiritual gifts in the church Jesus is glorified and His Kingdom expanded.

This summer we are studying the role, functions, and structures of the local church. So far, we have discussed mission and membership. Today, we build on these by examining attendance in the church. In doing so, I want you to understand that faithfulness rather than feelings is the motivation for Christians to gather regularly with the church.

[Read Hebrews 10:19-25.](#)

Inquiry: There are only two possible responses to hearing the gospel. Upon hearing the gospel, the person will either believe it and come to Christ or reject it and fall back into apostasy. The words in our passage speak to the one who has believed the claims of Jesus Christ.

As we seek to understand these words, it is important to remember that Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians. The writer's goal was to help his readers understand the connection between the Old Testament and Jesus as the Messiah. In the Old Testament, the Jewish people were committed to a system of religion that kept them out of the presence of God. It was the High Priest, and only him, who could enter the presence of God. He did so on the Day of Atonement as he took blood from the atoning sacrifice into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled it upon the mercy seat. In the Tabernacle and the Temple, there were clear barriers that kept them from approaching God, so when the Hebrew believers read that through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, they now had access into the presence of God themselves, they were confronted with incredible and wonderful truth.

Three different times in these verses we read, "*Let us*" (vs. 22, 23, 24). There is an invitation to enter by way of Christ's blood and draw near in faith. There is a profession we ought to hold fast, which is the gospel. And there is a consideration of how we can and should encourage other believers. This phrase of "*let us*" highlights the importance of attendance in the church. Membership is more than a name on the role; it is regular participation in and with the church. Therefore, attendance must be driven by faithfulness over and above feelings. There are three things about attendance for us to see today.

1. A Real Struggle

As it has already been stated, faithfulness rather than feelings is the motivation for Christians to gather regularly with the church. While this is true, we must also acknowledge our feelings and what lies behind them, understanding that the way we feel at times can create a real struggle for us. For the Jewish Christians who were the recipients of this epistle, the struggle was real. It seems they struggled to leave behind the legalism, ritual, and ceremony of Judaism. Many were participating in Shabbat and attending the synagogue. They had embraced the gospel and the life found in Christ, but they struggled leaving their old life for their new one. As a result, there were Hebrew Christians who were neglecting to gather with the local church.

The Hebrew believers who were neglecting to gather with the church did so because there were real issues hindering their fellowship. The same is true of us today. Gunner Gundersen offers twelve legitimate reasons attending church can be a struggle:

- 1) Physical
Your physical struggle may be due to exhaustion, illness, disease, or chronic pain. There are times when the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matt 26:41).
- 2) Spiritual
You might be in a dark place. Christianity has lost its luster due to your feasting on worldly things, or you are harboring hidden sin.
- 3) Relational
The struggle is due to a marital problem, a broken friendship, an awkward personality, or a disagreement with a leader.
- 4) Logistical
The drive-time to church is considerable. Your work schedule changes from week-to-week. You travel often for work, which puts you behind on home projects. You have little children and things are chaotic.
- 5) Preferential
Maybe your struggle involves your dislike of the music, the service structure, the length of the sermons, or how it is not like another church.
- 6) Cultural
You see yourself as a white-collar person in a blue-collar church. Perhaps you are a racial minority where there are not many who understand your experience.
- 7) Recreational

Due to your busy schedule or desire to give your children every opportunity, weekends are dedicated to hobbies, adventures, and travel programs.

8) Missional

At times people struggle to attend church regularly because they feel there is little direction coming from leadership. They want to engage in the mission of Christ, but it seems the church is satisfied setting on the sidelines rather than being in the game.

9) Doctrinal

The real struggle can result from not being able to find a church that aligns to your beliefs and convictions.

10) Intellectual

You might find yourself struggling to attend when the teaching is too shallow or too deep.

11) Transitional

When you or the church are in a state of transition and things have or are changing, attending can become a struggle.

12) Personal

Your struggle might stem from an experience of abuse or a scandal in the church.

While the struggle is real, our desire should be faithfulness in all areas of the Christian life. God's Word directs us to not neglect meeting together. While we acknowledge and seek to obey this, we also acknowledge that our feelings create a struggle for us, which brings us to a second point.

2. A Real Need

As we said last Sunday, the Bible knows nothing of lone-rangerism. Instead, all throughout the cannon of Scripture we find God's people in covenant community with another. In the Old Testament it is Israel and the Jewish faith. In the New Testament it is the local church. In both, God's people are portrayed collectively as citizens of His Kingdom who need one another.

The images used prominently in the New Testament to portray the local church are that of a healthy family, a body, and a temple. Each image emphasizes togetherness. The church is a family of siblings (1 Thess 1:4). The church is a body with many parts (1 Cor 12:27). And the church is a temple made up of living stones (1 Pet 2:5). The implications of these images are obvious. Families live together. Body parts work together. And temple stones fit together.

Some might use these images to disregard church attendance. Since the church is a *people* and not a *place*, they rationalize that living out the Christian faith is about *being* the church rather than *going* to church. These images, however, highlight the beauty and benefit of gathering with fellow believers. How can you *be* the church without *being with* the church? In the Bible, we discover that God's people have always been marked, known, and renewed by regular, rhythmic, and orderly gatherings. You see, a family that never shares any dinners, trips, or reunions will not be a healthy or happy family. They might not be a family at all. Likewise, a body that is never together is more like a prosthetics warehouse, and no temple stands firm when its quarried stones refuse to stick together.

Understanding this real need, the writer of Hebrews reminds us of our response to Christ's open invitation, our shared faith in the gospel, and our resulting clear objective (vs. 24-25). Christians need one another. As brothers and sisters in a local family, as individual members making up a local body, and as living stones comprising a local temple, we need the stirring of faith and the encouragement that comes to us when the church gathers.

We need the relationships and their resulting effects that Christ graciously gives to us in and through the local church. Consequently, it is necessary for us to acknowledge that relationships require commitment. This brings us to a final point.

3. A Real Commitment

Commitment is the secret ingredient in every healthy family, body, or temple. Healthy families stay close and stick together. Healthy body parts stay strong and move together. Sturdy buildings stay fitted and bonded together. In the local church, this commitment adds depth and breadth to your discipleship. Making membership and participation meaningful through connection, giving, and service creates spiritual depth in you. And loving members who are different than you creates spiritual breadth.

The commitment we are talking about is portrayed in the covenant we have made with one another in this church. A covenant defines the relationship and what is required of participating parties in that relationship. When you think about it, covenants are made for the hard times of life. They are not made for the easy times. Such is the marriage vows many of us have taken. When everything is good, sticking together is no challenge at all. On the flip side, when things become difficult (and they will), covenant communities stand strong because of their shared commitment to one another. Covenant communities hold us up when we are faltering and pick us up when we have fallen. They encourage us when we are weary and wake us when we are sleepy. They draw us out of ourselves and call us to our commitments and responsibilities. They invite us back to the garden of Christian community, where growth takes place.

The most important time to gather with the church is when you do not feel like it. We gather not necessarily because we feel like doing so. We gather because we desire to be faithful and trust God's Word about our experience and discipleship. When you acknowledge there is a real struggle challenging your attendance in the church and when you realize you have a real need to be with the church and when you make a real commitment to be a present participant in the life of the church, then you are positioned in a posture of faithfulness.

3 Descriptions of Attendance in the Church

1) Consistency

"not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some..."

Gathering together around the gospel on Sundays is one of the main ways God grows us. As we do so, our hearts are plowed, sowed, watered, and weeded. These farming activities are never spectacular events. Neither is a roomful of Christians on an average Sunday. Yet full orchards and mature Christians rise and ripen from such wise repetition.

In the Christian life, repetition is vital. Consistency is one of the most underrated weapons in our walk with God. Like an acorn buried in a field, consistency, is not impressive until it is.

2) Joy

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus..."

We gather as a church because we are saved, forgiven, redeemed, born again, unified, and commissioned. We gather because the God we worship is glorious and worthy of the praise of all peoples. We gather because of the joy we have found and experienced in Christ.

3) Purpose

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...encouraging one another..."

We gather as the church not for ourselves but for others. We gather to help others grow in their discipleship. Therefore, it matters that we are in attendance when the church gathers. While it does not matter at all whether we attend a film at the movies, it is eternally important that we are regularly present in the church.

Conclusion: You might not feel like attending church next Sunday. The reasons are real. They might be good, bad, or ugly. As a fellow sheep, loved by the same Shepherd, I ask you to trust God in this grace called the ἐκκλησία. Gunner Gundersen offers a great summation of why to attend. He says:

“Go, because the church gathers every Sunday to remember the death of Jesus for our sins and the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and that is precisely what we all need to remember and celebrate, regardless of what else is happening in our lives.

Go, because like Martha, you have been working all week, and like Mary, you need to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His Word.

Go, because the songs of the saints are the soundtrack of the Bible, and your soul needs to sing and hear singing more than you will ever know.

Go, because the Bible you will hear tells the true story of the world, and the gathering of heaven’s saints on earth is nothing less than the presence of the future.

Go, because the gifts Christ poured into your life did not come with a receipt, and you have the happy duty to use these God-given tools to build up His spiritual house.

Go, because even though your church has problems, your church also has a Savior, a Healer, a Shepherd, and a Friend...

Go, because the world has been seducing your senses all week, but what you most need to see, hear, taste, and touch are the waters of baptism and the body and blood of Christ.

Go, because the rest you ultimately need is not just sleeping in or getting out of town but rediscovering the gospel’s promise that in Christ you are forgiven, new, and free.

Go, because the stone trapping you in the cave of anger or bitterness or despair or doubt or loneliness or fear can be rolled away in a night, and once God does it, no Roman soldier or Jewish priest can stop Him.

Go, because the good news of this gospel is not just that you are reconciled to God but that we are reconciled to each other.

Go, not because your trials are not real, but because that table with bread and wine represents the crucifixion of the worst sins you could ever commit and the worst realities you will ever experience.

Go, and in your going, grow. Go, and in your going, serve. Go, and in your going, let God pick up the shards of your heart and piece together the kind of mosaic that only gets fully crafted when His saints stay committed to His long-term building project – when we speak the truth to one another in love (Eph 4:15-16).”

What motivates your attendance? Is it faithfulness or feelings? My hope and desire for you is that it will be faithfulness to the Lord, His Word, and to your brothers and sisters. Your regular attendance matters because we are depending on you just as you are depending on us.