

THE CHURCH

By Pastor Mike Murrell

Why is it so important to go to church? After all, you can watch the television ministries and get a message. Why should it really matter if you go into a building or hold membership in a local church fellowship?

Psalms 73:12-20

Hebrews 10:25 “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Paul considered it important that we be together in a church setting and especially as we come closer to the return of Christ. It is so we can exhort or encourage one another. The writer knew that times would get hard in the last days and he knew we would need our brothers and sisters in Christ more than ever before.

You cannot talk to a television. If you have a favorite media evangelist, that is great. However, do not forsake your local church. The local church will be the place you get spiritually fed. When you need help or when you are in the hospital, it will be that local pastor that will make the visit. You need the fellowship and the friendship that you can receive from one another. You can be encouraged and uplifted when you are in need.

Jesus considered church attendance important. He is recorded as going to church in Matthew 12:9, Mark 1:21, and Luke 4:16. Also, the apostles were noted as going to church in Acts 13:14 and Luke 24:52-53. Even in Biblical times, church attendance was a normal part of life. In fact, it is thought there were home study groups going on every day.

In the Old Testament, God gave the command that people must come to the house of the Lord (the church). Deuteronomy 12:5 “But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come.” There was no doubt how God felt about attendance at the church. The Israelites were not given a choice, they were commanded to go to church.

In Psalms 84:4 David gave blessing to those who went to church as he said “Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee.” When we come to church and enter His presence and enter with our brothers and sisters, our songs of praise will ring out in a unity of worship.

The church is a place we can go in times of trouble. When King Hezekiah received the threatening note from the King of Syria, he showed this fact. The king of Syria not only belittled Hezekiah and Israel, but he also belittled God. Hezekiah's response is found in Isaiah 37:1. "And it came to pass, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord." Hezekiah came to the church in the time of trial and said "Lord, you see what this king of Syria has said about you? I am laying this letter upon your altar, now you deal with it." When morning came, thousands of Syrian soldiers were dead and the Syrian army was defeated by the Hand of God. When you need answers or you need help, the church is a place you can go to find those answers and help.

Micah 4:2 "And many nations shall come, and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths..." The church is a place of learning. We can hear the word of God, sing the praises of God, fellowship with the Saints of God, and get direction from God.

It is very important for you to go to church, but it is also very important for you to go to the right one. Let's look at some guidelines you might want to follow in choosing your church. There are many more things to consider, but these will give you a starting ground.

1. **THEY NEED TO PREACH THE UNCOMPROMISING WORD OF GOD:** There are a lot of churches that preach ear tickling messages. They make you promises they cannot back up and God will not back up. Go to a church that preaches the truth, even if the truth hurts sometimes. That is a place where you will grow. The reason for you to go to church is to grow in your relationship with God. You can only do that if the truth is preached. Your relationship with God is your number one priority, not having an ear tickling message once a week.

2. **A TRUSTWORTHY AND CARING PASTOR:** Do not get in a crisis to find out if the pastor is caring or not. You need to watch for a pastor who has compassion and concern about his people. He may preach really hard, and that is fine, but watch what kind of relationship he has with the people after the preaching is done. You also want a pastor who is trustworthy to tell you the truth. I am one who tells my people to get the Bible out and check the word to see if what I am saying is true. You should do that. If a pastor is telling you the truth and he knows he is telling you the truth, he should not be concerned about you looking in your Bible or checking what he says. It should not bother him if you ask questions. However, if you have to walk out of every service wondering if you have been misled, then you do not have confidence in the minister. You may want to find a different church.

3. **WHAT IS THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE CHURCH:** A church will have an attitude and personality about it. You need to find one that has the right personality for you. Some important questions to ask yourself: Is the Spirit allowed to move freely or do we have the

service ordered by the bulletin? Are people permitted to go forward to pray and weep about their sins and shortcomings or must they wait for someone to tell them it is okay? Is the pastor able to preach the word without fear of being voted out? Do the people have the freedom to worship God freely or must they remain silent and deadened to God's movement? You should consider all of these things. Going to church is great, but you are not going to grow if it is lifeless and cold. If the church puts more emphasis on anything than people getting saved, there may be a problem. People getting healed is important and true to God's Word. However, it is not more important than people being led to Christ. Make sure the spiritual nature of the church is Christ oriented and Spirit led.

4. A LOVING PEOPLE: I Corinthians 13 says if we have all the gifts and all the power and we do not have agape love, it is all meaningless. I have always been a King James Version person. However, the use of the word charity in the King James used to bother me because it is obviously talking about love and I couldn't figure out why the translators used charity. However, when you consider the word charity, it makes perfect sense. Perfect love is love that is given with the understanding the lover will get nothing in return. That is charity. It is charity when we give to someone realizing they will never be able to give anything in return. This is the kind of love the church needs to have toward one another.

You want to look for a church where people care about one another. If you see a lot of groups that go off by themselves and refuse access to anyone else, this is probably not a loving church. We all have friends we are close to and that is fine. However, when we exclude others at church from that friendship, we are then not following Christ's example. Even Christ had His inner circle of twelve, but He never rejected anyone the opportunity to be around Him.

Watch the people as you visit. Do they come up to you and make you feel welcome? Do they shake hands with you and introduce themselves without being told to? If they are not friendly to you as a visitor, they probably will not change if you continue to go there regularly. Look for people who are friendly and loving. These will be people you can fellowship with and grow with.

5. A SERVICE YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH: There are many different types of services. All tapes can have merit. You want to find one you can be comfortable with. Before I go on with this point, let me say one thing. Do not be too quick to judge what you are comfortable with. Attitudes can change as you mature spiritually. I started out being a very quiet church person. Now, I go more for the open more loud services. Take your time in determining what you feel comfortable with.

Some churches are very quiet and rarely even say amen. There are other churches who are very loud and shout continually. There are churches who get up and dance in the aisles,

and there are churches who would not dare to get up even to go to the rest room. There are churches in every form in between the extremes we have mentioned above. God has use for all of these places as long as they preach His word. None of us are exactly alike. We all have different tastes and different needs. Seek out a church that matches your personality or that ministers in the style you need. Simply put, go where you can grow.

Never forget that your spiritual walk is more important than anything else. As soon as you start putting other things in front of God, you will fail. Just remember, no matter how much you like that television program, it is more important that you get in church and get fed from the Word of God.

Remember, it is not the church's job to entertain you although some may try. It is the church's job to get you saved and develop you into discipleship. That should be the kind of church you seek after.

All churches have faults. Regardless of that fact, God makes it very clear in His word that you need to be a part of it. It is clearly His institution to spread His message and He says the gates of Hell will not prevail against it Matthew 16:18. Get in, plant your roots, and make a difference. Your fellowship with other Christians will make you stronger in your walk with Christ.

