

CORPORATE WORSHIP NOURISHES THE HEART
Hebrews 10:25

INTRODUCTION:

Do you know anyone who, at some point in his or her life, made a decision to become a Christian but who does not attend church with any frequency or any regularity? I know many. And I know that many are members of this church.

Sometimes people will tell me that they can be just as good a Christian without going to church – but when I dig beneath the surface, I find that they have created their own definition of what it means to be a Christian and, guess what: that definition perfectly describes...THEM!

I am reminded of the man who was visiting an old farmer and saw a barn with targets painted on the sides and every target had bullet holes in the bull's eye. The visitor was so impressed that he just had to ask the farmer how he had become such a crack shot. "Oh, t'aint that hard," that old farmer said. "Let me show you." And with that, he took his rifle, shot a few bullets into the side of the barn and then proceeded to paint a bull's eye around them.

Sometimes that's what people do when they define what it means to be a Christian. In essence, what they are saying is, "A good Christian is whatever I am." And in their definition of Christianity, there is no expectation of regular and frequent attendance in worship.

There is a coming Day when the Lord will judge all the people of the earth. In the Day of the Judgment, your definition of a Christian and my definition of a Christian will not make any more difference than your definition of speeding or my definition of speeding makes if we get stopped by an officer of the law. God's definition of a Christian is the standard by which we will be judged.

So that begs the questions, "Does God care if I attend church? Does He care if I worship Him? And if so, does He care how I worship Him?"

The clarion response from God's Word is, "Yes. God cares if you attend church. He cares if you worship Him. And He cares how you worship him."

If we look at the first pages of our Bibles, one of the first activities in which we see man engaged is the worship of God. Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, offered sacrifices to God. I cannot find a record of God telling them to do that. Perhaps He did and it is just not recorded in the Bible. Perhaps God did not need to tell Cain and Abel to worship Him; it

may simply have been instinct. But however they knew that they needed to worship God, they knew and they did.

But in that account, we can clearly see that God really does care about how we worship Him. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God while Cain's was not. God cared about what they offered as worship and how they offered it.

In Hebrews 10:24-25, the author of that letter says that God still cares about the way we worship. Hear these words from the Lord:

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Apparently, at the time this letter was written, there was a problem developing because some people had stopped attending church on a regular basis. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this letter exhorts Christians not to miss church. And there are some compelling reasons to attend church. Chief among those is that our attendance in church is a source of encouragement both to us and to other people.

We, along with others, will draw encouragement from:

I. OUR PRESENCE – the author urges: “do not give up meeting together”

On the last day of April, the elders and I met for about six hours to consider the work of this church and how best to shepherd the flock. We acknowledged that we have an attendance problem. If everyone who is a member of Clay City Christian Church would come on the same day, we would have over 200 in attendance (right at 211, in fact). But we don't. Why not? Is the preaching so bad that they won't attend? Is the music so bad that they won't come? Are their hind-ends so sensitive that they can't sit on a padded pew for an hour? Why won't people encourage us with their presence?

I think in some cases, it may be that they were never converted. They joined a church, much like you might join a club or an association but they were never converted from living for themselves to living for the Lord.

And in that, we may very well be to blame because I'm not sure that the church has always done a very good job of telling people about the cost of discipleship. Do you remember that when people told Jesus they wanted to follow him, he often told them that it would require sacrifice (not just donations) and that it would cost them everything? Many, upon hearing this, walked away and decided not to follow Jesus because he demanded too much of them.

Today, we seem to be so desperate for names to write in a book and to print in a newsletter that we soft-peddle the demands of discipleship and leave the impression that a person can become a Christian by saying “Yes” to a handful of questions and then taking the plunge without ever having to change the way they live. It is no wonder, then, that many do not attend church. They never intended to because no one ever taught them that corporate worship is a part of being a disciple of Jesus.

Sometimes people tell me that they don’t attend church because they don’t get anything out of it. I question that. I really do. How can you sing these hymns and songs with such powerful messages, how can you participate in the Body and Blood of Jesus during the Lord’s Supper, how can you give His tithes and your offerings, how can you listen to God’s Word read and preached and not get anything out of any of it?

But here’s the deal: even if you do not get one thing out of being in attendance when the church worships, you should come anyway. The reasoning of the writer of the Book of Hebrews is that your presence is an encouragement to the other people in the church. Don’t just think about yourself but think about the other brothers and the other sisters. Your presence is an encouragement to them – and your absence discourages them.

Not only is our presence an encouragement to ourselves and to others, so is our participation.

II. OUR PARTICIPATION – the author commands: “*consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds*”

The Greek word translated to “spur one another on” literally means irritating, stimulating or inciting. I suspect to the horse, the spur is irritating. It will stimulate him to move and incite him to run. The author of this epistle says that each of us ought to be thinking about how we can “spur one another on to love and good deeds.”

It was Finley Peter Dunne, a Chicago-based author, writer and humorist who, commenting on the role of the journalist, said “the newspapers...comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable...” That quote has been adopted and adapted in a number of ways including being applied to preaching. And I think it is true that good preaching comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

One of my tasks is to consider how to afflict the comfortable...to incite them to love and good works. Sometimes you will find that a sermon rubs you the wrong way. When that happens, you need to examine the Scriptures to see if what you heard is Biblical and if it is but it is rubbing

you the wrong way, then you need to turn around. That, by the way, is the definition of repentance: to turn around and go the other way.

Worship is not a spectator sport. It is an activity in which the Christian must participate. When the songs are being sung, you are to make a joyful noise unto the Lord, too. When the prayers are being led, you are responsible to pray, too. When the Lord's Supper is being served, you are supposed to share in it.

There is an audience for worship but it isn't you: it is God. For you not to participate in the worship of Almighty God is to insult Him. If I invited you to our house for a meal and an evening of fellowship and you just didn't show up, I would be hurt and disappointed. And if you came and refused to eat with us and refused to talk with us and refused to listen when we spoke, I would be insulted. Yet some people treat God that way every Sunday.

I can't help but wonder if that isn't part of the reason that there is so much discord in some churches: people are watching when they should be worshipping. And I can't help but believe that's the reason some people are so hard to please in any church: they are in the bleachers when they need to be on the field.

Worship will be an encouragement to ourselves and to others when we invest it with our presence, our participation and our partnership.

III. OUR PARTNERSHIP – the writer to the Hebrew Christians challenged, “let us encourage one another.”

This is not a new theme. Paul said the same thing in I Thessalonians 5:11 where he wrote *“And so encourage one another and help one another, just as you are now doing.”*

Robert Schuller tells a story about a banker who always tossed a coin in the cup of a legless beggar who sat on the street outside the bank. But, unlike most people, the banker would always insist on getting one of the pencils the man had beside him. "You are a merchant," the banker would say, "and I always expect to receive good value from merchants I do business with."

One day the legless man was not on the sidewalk. Time passed and the banker forgot about him, until he walked into a public building and there in the concessions stand sat the former beggar. He was obviously the owner of his own small business now. "I have always hoped you might come by someday," the man said. "You are largely responsible for me being here. You kept telling me that I was a 'merchant'. I started thinking of myself that way, instead of a beggar receiving gifts. I started selling pencils -- lots of them. You gave me self-respect, caused me to look at myself differently." Doesn't that sound a little like the message of

Hebrews 10:24-25? ²⁴ *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.* ²⁵ *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*” The author connected encouraging one another with coming together each week to worship God.

I said before that worship is not a spectator sport and it is not strictly a solo performance. Worship is a corporate activity as the family of God gathers to tell our Father that we love Him.

We need your presence, your participation and your partnership to make our worship complete. We don't want anyone missing when the family gathers.

IV. OUR PERSISTENCE – Hebrews 10:25 concludes that we are to encourage one another “*all the more as you see the Day approaching*”

“As you see the Day approaching”. What day? The Day of the Lord.

The Bible speaks of The Day of the Lord as The Day when Jesus returns to claim his own and take them home with him to heaven. Those who are not his own will be cast into the lake of fire, which is hell.

Have you considered the fact that you are 8,760 hours closer to the Lord's return than you were last May 16th? You are 168 hours closer to the Lord's return than you were last Sunday morning. You are an hour closer to his return than you were when this service started. The Day is approaching and it is closer now than it has ever been. This is no time to give up!

CONCLUSION:

Do you know what the most expensive piece of furniture is? It is not, as you might expect, the throne of a king. It is a chest called The Badminton Cabinet. It took thirty experts six years to create this piece of furniture. In 2004, it sold at auction for \$36.7 million.

Do you know what is the most expensive piece of furniture in our church? It is not the pulpit. It is not the piano, the Clavinova or the organ. The most expensive piece of furniture in any church is an empty pew.

An empty pew can cost your preacher his enthusiasm, his energy and his joy in the work of the Lord. An empty pew can cost the other church members their confidence, their enthusiasm and their zeal for worship. An empty pew can cost your family the model of a good example to follow, a faithful witness to observe and a Godly pattern to apply. And if it is yours, ultimately, an empty pew can cost you your Christian nurture, spiritual growth and even your very soul...for eternity. Without any question, an empty pew is a mighty poor response to an empty tomb!

It is no wonder, then, that the Bible says:

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The Day of the Lord's return is fast approaching. This is no time to give up, to give in or to give out. To finish strong, we need each other so please, for your sake and for the sake of your church family, do not give up the practice of meeting together.

INVITATION: #246 (brown hymnal) – “*The Family of God*”