

13. Building up the Church by Attending the Services

William Wordsworth—one of the great romantic poets of the 19th century—said:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.

In the 21st century, we are still getting and spending in the most materialistic world ever. In our effort to get material things—homes, clothes, cars, and entertainments—we often forget Jesus' admonition in Matt 6:31-33:

31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Being Where the Lord Is

If one were to say, “Come to this place and see the Lord, for he is there.” Would not we all drop everything and go. We are so busy with our lives that we cannot go where the Lord has said that he will surely be. In Matt 18:20, he told us where he will always be, “20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” We all have a responsibility before our Lord. Will we let getting and spending get in the way of our spiritual service? The Lord has promised that where two or more come together, there He will be. Should we not come and bring our children to be there with him. There is no better way to build up the Lord's church than to be there when the Lord is.

Attending Services—a Command of God

Of course, we should desire to be at the meeting of the church because the Lord is there. However, we should attend these meetings because it is a command of God that we attend. In the middle of all our getting and spending, we often put our spiritual service on the back burner—letting everything else come first. We hustle here and there; meet all our appointments for recreation, entertainment, and work. Yet, we often neglect the most important meetings of our life—those at church with our fellow Christians and our Lord Jesus Christ. God commanded in Heb 10:25, “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.”

Actually, this command is two-fold: do not give up meeting together, and encourage one another. It would be difficult, indeed, if not downright impossible, to forsake the assembly after we have encouraged others to attend. If we forsake the assembly, we miss out on those aspects of study and worship that see us through the trouble, strife, and heartache of life. We are less for it; the church is less for it; our weaker brethren and children are less for it.

The Lord's Supper—a Communion with the Lord

We miss those things that refine and define our spiritual existence. One of these is the Lord's Supper. It is at his supper that the Lord promised to partake with us in his kingdom. In Matt 26:27-29, the Lord instituted the Lord's Supper:

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

It is in this supper in his kingdom that we participate and fellowship with the Lord. Paul taught in 1 Cor 10:15-17:

15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

During the Lord's Supper, we declare the Lord's death until he comes, and we examine ourselves. In 1 Cor 11:26-28, Paul taught:

26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

To miss the services of the church is to miss the Lord's Supper. To miss the Lord's Supper is to miss communing with the body and blood of Jesus, to miss proclaiming his death until he comes again, and to fail to examine ourselves. A failure to attend hurts us and hurts the church

The Breaking of the Bread of Life—the Word of God

When we miss the meetings of the church, we miss the "breaking of the bread of life," which is the word of God. John recorded the teaching of the Lord in John 6:44-48:

44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life.

The early Christians came together to break bread as in the Lord's Supper, but they also, at the same time partook of the word of God. The very first Christians immediately began and continued in this practice. In Acts 2:42, Luke recorded this practice: "42 They devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and to the fellowship, to **the breaking of bread** and to prayer." In Acts 20:7, Luke also recorded how those at Troas followed the same practice: "7 On the first day of the week we came together to **break bread**. Paul **spoke** to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight." (Emphasis added).

It is at these meetings of the church that we are to teach and admonish one another. Paul instructed us in Eph 5:19-20, "19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." He repeated this teaching in Col 3:16, "16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Without your presence at the meetings of the church, can you teach and admonish your fellow Christians? Can they teach and admonish you? Can the church be built up?

Conclusion

The damage caused by our failure to attend hurts us all, and it hurts the church. But beyond the danger it presents to us and our brethren, think of damage it causes to our children, our neighbors, and our friends. It is sad to see the lives of our young people fly fleeting by with parents who are not bringing them to the services and to Bible study. We should remind ourselves repeatedly of Paul's teaching in Eph 6:4: "4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." As for our friends and neighbors, let us be reminded of the Lord's own teaching in Matt 5:14-16:

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.