

Do I Need a Church to Grow

by Tim Conway

This sermon emphasizes the importance of the church in the life of a Christian, highlighting how God created the church with a purpose and integral role to play in believers' lives. It discusses the need for believers to be actively involved in the church to prevent falling away from the faith, to encourage one another, and to grow in love and good works. The sermon also stresses the significance of utilizing spiritual gifts for the common good within the church and participating in missions as a united body.

Scripture: Hebrews 3:12, Hebrews 10:24, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:7, Acts 2:42, Matthew 28:18

Topics: "Importance of the Church", "Active Participation in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

I'm going to do this one. Is the church necessary to grow? That was sent out by Anonymous. Is the church necessary to grow? And I just had six verses pop in my mind.

I'm sure we could look at a lot more, but maybe we'll just follow these in the order they came to my mind. Hebrews chapter 3. The question is, how important is the church to each of us as Christians? We could ask the question another way. If I'm not meeting with the church, if I'm not involved with the church, is it detrimental in any way? And I would say it absolutely is.

One of the things we have to recognize is that God created the church. God created this institution. He created the family, He created government, He created the church, and He created it on purpose.

It has an integral part to play. I mean, God doesn't do things for no reason. God created the church, and you can be sure that He did so with a purpose.

Hebrews 3. Now notice, here's one of our brother verses. Take care, brothers. This is Hebrews chapter 3, verse 12.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God. Now, before we go any further, if your theology is not right, you won't even hear this. Some people have the idea that, well, if you're writing to brothers, they can't lose their salvation.

So case closed. So people feel no weight from this. After all, you know, once saved, always saved, we can't lose our salvation.

Well, the fact is, nobody who's genuinely saved can lose their salvation because it's just a fact. If God justifies you, God is going to glorify you. That's the chain of events that you find in Romans 8. There's no breaking that chain.

But do people fall away? Do people lose faith? Do people make shipwreck of their faith? Yes, that happens all the time. People believe, but just because somebody believes doesn't mean it's saving faith. Faith without works is dead.

The kind of faith that you see in the soil where, you know, they sprang up very quickly and then persecution comes and they have no root and they wither away, that kind of thing happens all the time. People can't lose their salvation, but people can lose their faith. People can tentatively believe something one day and not believe it another day.

Notice this. The reality of falling away, the author of Hebrews does not think it's fiction. He thinks that there's a very likelihood that this can happen.

And that if you don't take care, it very much is likely to happen. Take care, brothers. So how do you do it? Verse 13, exhort one another every day, as long as it's called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

And for we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Now, here's what you want to see. The author of Hebrews, this is a warning.

He tells us we need to make it to the end. But the verse right in between tells us how we make it to the end. One of the ways we make it to the end is by being in the church.

You say, but I don't see the word church here. No, well, no, you don't. But you see the word one another, or the two words one another.

You see, if you isolate yourself from the church, it's not just a matter of, is it necessary for me to grow? The church is necessary for me to survive. People who avoid the church, they avoid the one another exhortations every day that keep people from being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Do you recognize that one of the things that the church does, one of the things God designed the church for, is for us to be held accountable to each other when it comes to sin.

Not only accountability, but so that we would be exposed to each other and keeping each other from being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. In other words, you see what's happening? Sin is deceitful. I can be deceived by it, but you see what's happening to me, so you come and exhort me and you save me from being hardened by the very deceitfulness of sin that leads people to fall away from the living God, so that in the end, I hold my original confidence firm to the end.

That's clearly what these three verses are saying. To get away from that, to get away from that church element and try to just say, I'm going to be the lone ranger, I'm not going to come to the meetings, I'm not going to meet with the church, I can do this on my own. Brethren, this is one of the reasons why this is so concerning what's happening all around the world with regards to this coronavirus thing and people not meeting together.

It is detrimental and I guarantee you, it will cost people their souls. So how can that be? What can be just like those three verses say it can be? Here's another thing. Go over to Hebrews 10.

This is the second verse that jumped to my mind. Hebrews 10, and again, this is about holding fast on our way. Verse 23, Hebrews 10.23, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for He who promised is faithful.

How do you do that? Is that just independent? Is that just maverick style? Do I do this all by myself? Do I do this? I can be a Christian and I can stay at home and I don't have to be involved in a church. I can just, you know, I can do home church the rest of my life and I can avoid the gathered assembly of God's people. No, that's not how you do it.

And the author here says, verse 24, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together. Why? Well, because if you neglect to meet together, you can't stir up one another to love and good works. If you want to talk about growth, I can't think of any Christian growth that doesn't involve those two things, love and good works.

What growth can you possibly describe that doesn't involve those two things? It's really difficult to show how there can be growth without that. Love and good works, how are they going to happen? They don't happen in isolation. That's not how the, in fact, this author is so convinced they don't happen in isolation that he says, do not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some.

And you see, 2000 years ago, some people had the habit of not meeting with the church. There were real people with real names who did this back then, just like there are today. And it's not good.

He says it's the habit of some, but it's not what you should be doing. Remember, he's under inspiration. This isn't just some guy that decided to give his opinion.

This is a man who's being guided by the Spirit of God to give the living word to Christians all through the ages. And he says, whatever age you live in, you don't want to forsake to meet together. And you need to encourage one another, and all the more as we get towards the end of this age, as you see the day drawing near.

In other words, situations and conditions are going to be such in the world that our need to meet together is only going to get more urgent. There's this love-quenching, good work-destroying element or influence in this world. And how do you overcome that influence? By meeting together.

You see, good things happen. There's a dynamic that happens when the church meets together that cannot be reproduced in the life of a Christian any other way. Family doesn't do it.

This doesn't say not neglecting to have family together. That's not what this is. This is church meetings.

And what happens in church meetings, we stir up one another and we encourage one another. And we need to be doing it all the more as the second coming of Christ approaches. That means that we need to do that.

And we need to do that despite what governments tell us. Governments may tell us not to meet. Our God tells us not to forsake meeting.

And so, you know, is our growth affected? Obviously our growth is affected. Ephesians 4 would be the next verse I would point to. Ephesians 4, of course, has to do with Christ giving gifts.

This is also key to our growth. Ephesians 4, and we read that grace, verse 7, chapter 4, verse 7, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.

Then you go to verse 11, you see what some of these gifts are. He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers. Now this is key, because, okay, is the church necessary for growth? Well, why are apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers given? For growth, to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

See it's for our equipping, that certainly is growth. Again, work of ministry, good works. For building up, that's growth, that's maturing, that's up-building the body of Christ.

Why are shepherds and teachers given? Why evangelists, prophets, apostles? Why are they given? Equip the saints, build up the body of Christ. There's an end, unity in the faith, knowledge of the Son of God, mature manhood, not being blown about by every wind of doctrine. And you know what happens when people isolate themselves? If people isolate themselves and don't involve themselves in a church, what they do is they isolate themselves from the first-hand impact of these gifts that Christ has specifically given to the church to equip it, and to grow it, and to up-build it.

And so you suffer in proportion as, you can say, well, I can watch that guy on the internet. But you know what? Lloyd-Jones was hesitant to even put his material on tape in his day, because he recognized something. He recognized that if he put his sermons on tape, it might tempt somebody to stay at home and simply listen to his tapes.

And he didn't want that to happen, because he knew that where two or three gather together in my name, Christ promised there am I in their midst. He recognized something happened in the gathered church. Something happened when people actually came to the building and sat under his preaching.

There was something, something happened that did not happen when people simply listened at home by tape. And I know that. So things happen within the gathered assembly of God's people that don't happen when somebody just stays at home and they listen by Zoom, or they listen to a message.

And I'm not saying those things can't be profitable, but I really do believe that some aspect is lost there. And if somebody isolates them from the church, they're isolating themselves from their own pastor. You see what I'm saying? Somebody stays at home and they say, I'm going to listen to John Piper, John MacArthur, Paul Washer.

But those guys aren't their pastor. Those guys don't even know them. If you don't have a man involved in your life who's a pastor, who knows you and is holding you accountable and pastoring you, shepherding is

not just being in a church in California and preaching sermons that get put online and you listen to them.

That's not shepherding. And the idea here is shepherd. He's given shepherds.

But nobody shepherds you through online sermons. I mean, they may impart some truth to you, but they're not personal in shepherding you. And so that aspect is lost.

And then there's 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Corinthians 12. This, of course, is the chapter that has to do with spiritual gifts. And there's just one verse here that I really want to point out.

And it's the fact, it's just these words, common good. Notice 1 Corinthians 12, 7. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit. What manifestation of the Spirit? Well, I mean, you see in verses 4, 5, and 6, you've got varieties of gifts, varieties of services, and varieties really of energy levels.

That's what activity is. Different level of gift. To each Christian is given these gifts, these services, these energy levels for the common good.

It's not given, Christ does not give gifts to men and the Spirit of God does not give gifts to men for our individual good. It's for the common good. If somebody is gifted and they just stay at home, guess what? The church that they should be a part of is being robbed of their spiritual gift.

I mean, even if that's what sometimes we in this world count as the most mundane, whatever that might be. I mean, we know from 1 Corinthians 12 that the body has some parts that aren't so visible and we cover them up. Not everybody has the same gifts.

Not everybody's an apostle. But you know what? It doesn't matter if your gift is serving. It doesn't matter if your gift of encouragement.

You see, those things are absolutely vital in the church. And if you don't bring them to the church, then you're not using them for the common good. Basically, what you're doing is you're taking what the Master has given you and you are that servant who's burying them in the ground.

And that's not too highly viewed. It's frowned upon. Two more verses, very quickly.

Acts 2. One of the things that you will notice when the Spirit of God came upon these people in that early church is things were happening. One of the things that definitely jumps out at me is found in Acts 2 in verse 42. You see their lives.

Acts 2.42 is just a beautiful picture of life in the early church and what they do. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship. You know what? If people are involved in a church, there goes that.

And the breaking of bread. Typically people not involved in a church, are they really observing the Lord's Supper? And the prayers. Now, there is an article there.

It's the prayer times. It's not just prayers like I do in my closet. This is actual like a prayer meeting.

That's what, there's an article there. The prayers, the designated times. That's what they did.

They gave themselves to being in the prayer meeting. And notice this. Verse 44.

All who believed were together, isn't that interesting? Not separate. Not scattered. And they had all things in common.

They were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. I mean, one of the things, brethren, one of the things you'll find out is the early church was very free with their possessions. You know, brethren, you know what Scripture says? This is one of those brother texts again.

If you see a brother in need and you don't give to their need, how can you say that the love of God is in you? One of the things we all ought to be able to say as Christians is we're involved in a church. We're involved with God's people. We meet together to devote ourselves to the Apostles' teaching and breaking of bread and the times of prayer and also that our resources are at each other's disposal.

I mean, they better be. My money better be at your disposal. If one of you gets sick, if something happens, my money better be.

Now look, I'm the steward of what I have. So it's for me to decide whether your need actually warrants me emptying my bank account. But we ought to be in that place.

If Scripture says if you see a brother or a sister in need and you harden your heart against them, that's not what they did in the early church. And that's one of the things that happens. That's one of the areas that somebody doesn't grow.

If somebody's not involving themselves in a church and in the needs, they just isolate themselves and they're all about themselves. It's very selfish. And so just one other one, and this is, of course, the Great Commission.

The Great Commission is to go. And what you find in the book of Acts is when God's people were gathering together, finally they got to the place where they sent people. And you know what? Typically, the guy who sits at home with his family and doesn't involve himself in a church, he's not involved in missionary endeavors at all.

Matthew 28 says that we better, I mean, that's the Great Commission. In verse 18 of Matthew 28, Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.

And so you know what? The church here in Manchester, we come together, we function together. And one of the things that we want to be doing is taking this commission very serious. That means we pool our resources, we pool our manpower.

And in the course of time, we figure out when to go, where to go, who to send. And we do that as a body. We do that, I mean, you get some people who are going to stay by the stuff and they're going to go continue to work and they're going to make money and they're going to be able to support this thing.

And they're going to be people that are going to stay at home with the church and pastor the flock here. And people who are going to take care of distributing the Lord's Supper on Sundays. And there are going to be other people that are out there on the streets and they're preaching or that are going even further to other parts of the Great Britain or they're going out to the uttermost parts of the world.

And you know what? People who exit the church, they don't grow in that capacity. That just being an integral component in this worldwide evangelistic endeavor, this commission that Christ has sent us on. So those are the six verses that just popped into my mind when that question was posed.

I mean, we could look at all the one another passages. We can look at all the different ones that showed the church functioning. Clearly, church discipline is something that submitting oneself to is very good and healthy, having that kind of accountability.

But anyway. I know we've gone over two hours, so. Amen.

Thanks, brother. Well, OK, everybody want to enjoy their Friday night? We already have, brother. We already have.

Good. That was great. Thank you, Tim.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Tim.

Thank you. Thank you, Tim. Thanks very much for that.

Well, thank you all. Good to see you all. You too.

Have a good weekend. Thank you. Hey, brethren, pray for me.

I had a horrible migraine almost all of today, and I really haven't hardly started on the sermon for Sunday. And so I really need the Lord's help tomorrow. So if you remember me, I'd greatly appreciate it.

I'll pray for you. Thank you, brethren. Thank you, brothers and sisters.

Guys, we can't wait to see you all again on Sunday. And Tim, we're looking forward to meeting you. Great.

See you guys. Have a nice weekend, everyone. See you on Sunday.

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