

21. We believe in keeping the Lord's Day as a matter of privilege, rather than law.

(Transcript of message preached by Pastor Rick Minett on September 4, 2005 at Grace Community Church)

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

This fundamental truth reminds us of the importance of keeping the Lord's Day, not out of obligation, but out of privilege and joy and expectation. But in order for church not to be drudgery, we need to understand that we play a very important role in the success of our local church as well. That is why the writer to the Hebrews tells us we are to be faithful. And what are we called to be faithful to when it comes to the church?

Let's Be Faithful To Attend Our Church

The verses we just read are very clear. It says, *"Don't forsake assembling together with other believers in church..."* Someone once said that there are five things related to the church that one should never do: (1) Never ask an usher to break a five dollar bill. (2) Never do a cannonball into the baptismal tank. (3) Never bungee jump off the church steeple. (4) Never tell the pastor, "We love your church and we might even come back *next Easter*." (5) After a soloist of impressive size sings "Love Lifted Me," never follow with the hymn, "It Took A Miracle." Now I don't know about those six things, but I'm convinced the writer to the Hebrews would add this to the list: "Never, ever miss church!" The Contemporary English Version of Hebrews 10:25 says, *"Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that."* And the New Life Version says it this way, *"Let us not stay away from church meetings. Some people are doing this all the time."*

Rick Warren, pastor of the great Saddleback Church, states the church exists for five primary purposes: First, to COMMUNICATE God's Word. Here, he said, our goal is to "evangelize our mission field." Second, to CELEBRATE God's Presence. This has to do with corporate worship. Psalm 34:3 says, *"Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together."* Third, to INCORPORATE God's Family. This has to do with encouragement. Ephesians 2:19 says that we are *"fellow citizens and members of the household of God."* There's a reason we are called, "The Family of God." We belong to God and to one another. Fourth, to EDUCATE God's People. This has to do with discipleship and training. Ephesians 4:12-13 in the Living Bible says that we are to build up the church, *"to a position of strength and maturity...until all become full grown in the Lord."* And fifth, the Church exists to DEMONSTRATE God's love. Does the Bible say that people will know we are Christians by the bumper stickers on our car? Of course not, it says by our love!

I agree with Pastor Warren; however none of those things can be accomplished in a local church without the faithful attendance and participation of its church family. In order to effectively accomplish those goals it takes everyone using his or her own particular gift. And what happens when we do? What happens when we are faithful to the admonishment of Hebrews 10:25? Let me make a few suggestions:

First, it's a witness to our community, a visible expression of our faith. I think that's important. I think it is important for your neighbors to look out their window on Sunday morning and see you dressed up, loading up the kids, Bible in hand and heading for church. Now they may look across the street and see another neighbor loading up the boat with fishing rods and driving off, or another neighbor loading up the golf clubs and driving off. But when difficulty comes their way, trouble knocks on their door, when they become sick or their child is in trouble, I just have the feeling they are going to come knocking on your door instead of the one across the street. When they are in trouble, they don't look for a fisherman or a golfer; they look for a person of faith. Therefore, don't hide the fact that you go to church. Be bold, not self-righteous or smug, but bold enough so that people will know that there is a person of faith that they can turn to in their time of need. Remember, you are the light of the world! Don't hide that light.

Second, it's an act of obedience. Nowhere in the Bible does God speak about church attendance as an option or choice. It's a mandate. It's one of the sacred duties of the believer. James 4:17 says, *"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."* Is it always easy to be faithful in your church attendance? Of course not! There are times I don't "feel" like coming anymore than you do, but God has called us to be faithful, and if faithfulness hinged on feelings we'd all be in trouble. It's like the little old lady who had this incredibly nice young man as her neighbor. He was always there to help her in anyway he could. So one day she asked him how he became such a fine young man, and he said, "Well, I guess it's because I had a drug problem when I was a boy." She was shocked, "A drug problem?" He said, "It's true. When I was young, every Sunday morning my parents drug me to church." When we were kids there were times our parents had to drag us to church, especially as teenagers! And even as adults, sometimes we have to pick ourselves up by the collar, look in the mirror, and say, "Okay buddy, you're going whether you want to or not." And when we do, what happens? We are glad, because we know that it is an act of obedience and when we are obedient, it ultimately makes us glad in our heart.

Third, our faithfulness to church provides us with the needed fellowship of other believers. Our Christian experience is as much a horizontal relationship as it is a vertical one. 1 John 4:21 says, *"And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God must love his brother also."* 1 John 1:7 says, *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another..."*

Fourth, the church provides us with needed accountability. Why do people lose more weight on programs like "Weight Watchers" than when they simply try to it on their own? Accountability. When they know they have to stand up before their group and give an account for what they've eaten in the past week, it provides them the incentive that they might not have on their own. Accountability is a good thing;

especially in our spiritual lives. If you know anything about John Wesley and the beginning of the Methodist movement, you know that he was an ardent proponent of personal accountability and small accountability groups. Every week his followers met in small groups and asked tough questions.

Fifth, our faithfulness to church builds our spiritual strength and faith. The Bible says that *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17). When we come together as the family of God and open our hearts to the ministry of His Word, may it be in a worship service or a Sunday School class or in a small group meeting; it adds "spiritual meat" to our bones. Our opportunities to not only listen to the Word proclaimed, but to share our insights and questions with one another in smaller groups helps us in ways that no television program can.

Sixth, when we are together it brings a special visitation of the Lord's Presence. Now I'm not suggesting that we don't experience and feel the Lord's presence when we are by ourselves, we do, but there is a special dynamic that happens when we link our hearts together in worship as a body of believers. Matter of fact, even though Jesus resides in the heart of every believer, the Bible makes it clear that He honors the gathering of people in His name by coming in their presence with special power, awareness and anointing. The Psalmist tells us that *"God inhabits the praises of His people."* And in such a setting, the Holy Spirit will often manifest spiritual gifts that minister to the body of Christ. And Jesus said, *"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them"* (Matthews 18:20).

Seventh, in corporate worship we open the door to move mountains in prayer. The Bible tells us that when we come together and join our hearts in prayer, it moves the Hand that moves the world. Jesus said, *"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven"* (Matthew 18:19). There is multiplied strength in the combined faith of God's people, and it clear that gates of hell are torn down through corporate prayer and worship. The Bible says, *"Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight..."* (Leviticus 26:8).

Eight, assembling with other believers gives us true joy even in times of trouble. Even when the circumstances of our lives are far from perfect, we can still discover the *"joy of the Lord is our strength"* when we come together as the body of Christ. Every time we come together, each of us has a very special opportunity to encourage another brother or sister in the faith; we have the opportunity to "speak faith" into someone's heart and help them discover the true joy that the Lord can give. John Bisango, former pastor of First Baptist Church here in Houston, tells the story of coming to First Baptist years ago to candidate for the position of pastor. He said that as he entered the worship service the auditorium was dimly lit with just a few people huddled around singing some slow song that he said was very depressing. He called it a "funeral song." Later that day, he took a walk through downtown Houston and ran across the jewelry store that was having a grand opening. There were refreshments and bright lights, people were laughing and talking and having a good time. He was greeted at the door and welcomed in with a smile. He said, "Had the jewelry store offered me a job, I would have joined the staff of the jewelry store instead of the church." Church should be a place of joy and encouragement—a place where people want to be!

I wish I had more time to add to this list, but I don't. If I did, I'd talk about the fact that faithful church attendance disturbs our complacency, chastens our pride, illuminates our sin, kindles our devotion, activates our gifts, challenges our courage, empowers our discipleship, broadens our sympathy, and perpetuates our heritage.

Do you remember a product called "Brylcreem"? It was a men's product you put in your hair—sort of like kitchen grease. Years ago they had a famous commercial that everyone knew. Their slogan was, "A little dab will do you." Sadly, some Christians have that attitude toward church. But Hebrews 10 argues against it. It says: Let's be faithful to attend!

Let's Be Faithful To Defend Our Church

Thankfully, we don't live in a society that really oppresses or seeks to negate our gathering together to worship the Lord. Some societies, some countries, do. But there is someone that would like to stop us from gathering together; someone that would like to do all that he can to hinder us from experiencing the corporate presence of the Lord; and his name is Satan. He hates the fact that we are gathered together here in the name of the Lord and he will do all that he can to keep us from it. He will do all that he can to cause dissension and difficulty and disorder in the church, and that is why it is so important that we defend our church. How do we do that?

First, we need to commit ourselves to faithful attendance, whereby, we are essentially saying, "Devil, you are wasting your time trying to stop me. Whatever discouragement or trouble you send my way will not stop me from walking through the doors of my church." Our attitude should always be that of David when he said, *"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'"* (Psalm 122:1).

And second, we need to commit ourselves to pray for one another. The greatest way that we can defend our church against the gates of hell is by using the spiritual authority that was won for us at Calvary. We need to pray for one another. We need to pray for our Sunday School teachers, our music team, our deacons, the pastor... That's how we "defend!"

Let's Be Faithful To Commend Our Church

Everyone is looking for the "perfect church." But as soon as one of us join it—it become "imperfect". There are no "perfect" churches. Hang around long enough and you'll find something to criticize. Matter of fact, some folks think that's their job! But that is totally contrary to scripture. Our call isn't to tear down—but to build up. Our call isn't to criticize—but to commend. Our call isn't to discourage—but to encourage. That is why I love Barnabas so much. He is called the "Son of Encouragement" and that is what he did! Wherever he went and whomever he was with, he encouraged them in the things of the Lord and helped them to believe in themselves as he did with John Mark after John Mark failed on his first missionary trip.

Let's Be Faithful To Extend Our Church

I have a very solemn task as pastor that I take very seriously and that is my responsibility to love, care for, feed, and equip the sheep. I'm not perfect; but I honestly try to do those things the best that I can. But you have a responsibility as well, and that responsibility is to "extend your church." Remember, shepherds don't reproduce sheep; sheep reproduce sheep. Luke 14:23 urges us to *"Go out into the highway and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."* The Great Commission is a mandate to all believers—not just clergy.

It's true; Jesus set us free from the Law. We don't have to worship on Saturday as they did in the Old Testament, we now worship on Sundays. But the day isn't the issue. Matter of fact, I look forward to the day when we can offer worship services both on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings. Yes, we are free from the bondage of the old law; however, the New Covenant doesn't invalidate the relevance of the Ten Commandments, does it? As much as it remains God's desire for man not to kill, steal or commit adultery; God still wants us to set aside a day for Him—out of love for Him and out of love for His people. So let's remember the Sabbath and keep it holy—by attending, defending, commending, and extending our church!