

WHY YOU NEED THE CHURCH
I Love Jesus, But I Don't Like Church – Week 1
Hebrews 10:24-25
By Andy Manning

INTRODUCTION

The title of this sermon is “Why You Need the Church.”

It's probably no surprise to you, but church attendance is down in the United States.

Many Christians no longer attend church at all.

Those who do attend are doing so less and less.

Most Christians who attend are uninvolved in the church – they just show up and then leave without building relationships or volunteering or contributing.

And the majority of Christian young people today leave the church after high school, never to return.

The sentiment of many Christians today is the title of this series: “I love Jesus, but I don't like church.”

So starting today we're going to spend three weeks talking about the importance of the church, and why you should not only attend, but be a committed, participating member of the church.

Here's the big idea of the entire series: **If church is not a priority in your life, then God cannot be a priority in your life.**

As a Christian, God is supposed to be your top priority. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt 6:33). Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk 12:29-30).

And too many Christians seem to think that it is possible to keep God first without the help of the church.

In fact, some might even claim that the church keeps them from prioritizing God. That would certainly be true if you were in a false church, but not a true church.

In this sermon series I'm going to show you why you cannot be fully-devoted to Jesus without being committed to the church.

And I want you to know my heart.

The purpose of this sermon series is not to boost our church attendance.

And it is not to fuss at any of you.

My goal is to help you become fully-devoted to Jesus Christ. As well, my goal is for you to be happy in Jesus – to experience God's best.

And I know for that to happen you need the church. Now I just have to convince you.

REASONS FOR NOT GOING TO CHURCH

Why are Christians today attending church less and less? These are some of the most popular reasons that I hear.

1. "The church is full of hypocrites." Translation, "There's no church that is good enough for me."
2. "I had to work." This is legitimate. It's true that you cannot attend church on Sunday if you have to work on Sunday.

I don't want to condemn you for working on Sunday, because many people don't have a choice.

But know this. Just because you have a legitimate excuse for missing church, that's doesn't mean that missing church won't affect you. It will.

That's why I encourage you if at all possible to not work on Sundays, and I encourage young people to choose a career that will not interfere with church attendance.

3. "My kid had a game."

If you want your kid to grow up to follow Jesus, then don't let them miss church to play sports.

When you let them miss church for sports, you are communicating that sports are more important than church.

4. "I had something else to do."

This is the attitude of too many people, to attend church if there's nothing else to do.

If there's anything else to do, anything at all – study, wash the truck, hunting, fishing, camping, catch up on sleep, hangover, birthday party – then they will do that instead of church.

Church is just something to do when there's nothing else to do.

5. "Someone in the church hurt me."

This is a common reason people give for leaving a church, or for dropping out of church altogether.

The problem is not that someone hurt you, but that you have unrealistic expectations of the church.

The only way that you can belong to a church for a long period of time without getting hurt is if the church is full of perfect people, and there's no such thing.

In a church full of imperfect people, eventually you are going to get hurt; your feelings are going to get hurt.

But that's not a good reason to stop going to church.

When your spouse or your kids hurt you, do you leave them for good?

When someone at work aggravates you or lets you down, do you quit?

If someone hurts your feelings at school, do you drop out?

When Popeyes messes up your order at the drive-thru, do you stop going to Popeyes? Of course not. You keep going back, more often than you should.

But people have unrealistic expectations for the church. They leave as soon as they see someone in the church do something wrong.

6. "I didn't get my way."

This one is all too common.

Sometimes people leave the church because the church made a decision that they didn't like.

Maybe they wanted to start a new ministry and the church leadership said No.

Maybe the church wouldn't let them use the Fellowship Hall for their wedding because they were going to have alcohol.

Maybe the church painted the walls a color that you didn't like.

The church did something that you disagreed with, so you left.

Once again, people like this have unrealistic expectations of the church.

When you don't get your way in your marriage, do you leave?

When you don't get your way at work, do you leave?

When you don't get your way on the team, do you leave?

But people treat the church as if it is always supposed bend to their will and to their preferences.

7. "I can just watch from home."

Some people think they can get everything they need from church by just listening to the podcast, or watching the sermon from home.

But there's a lot more to church than that.

Church is not just an event to attend, or a product to consume. It involves participation, relationships, giving, receiving, etc.

8. "My wife and I have church at home."

It is possible for a church to meet in a home. That's how Church Acadiana started out.

But just because a couple of believers are meeting in a home to pray, or to read the Bible, or to have coffee, that does not mean they are having church.

Some people quote Jesus in **Matthew 18:20** "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them."

They are taking that verse out of context. The point of this verse is that there is more power when two or more Christians pray together for something than when just one person prays alone. The point is the power of corporate prayer.

But a couple of Christians meeting in a house for prayer and Bible study is not necessarily a church.

For a group of believers to constitute a Biblical church, it has to have several marks: Expository preaching; Qualified leadership (1 Timothy 3 & Titus 1); church discipline; communion; baptism; and a commitment to the Great Commission.

9. “Church is optional.”

Finally, many Christians don’t go to church, or don’t prioritize church because ultimately they think church is optional.

They think you don’t really need church to be a committed, healthy, growing Christian.

But as you’ll see this morning, church is not optional.

SCRIPTURE

This morning I want us to study **Hebrews 10:24-25** and see why we need the church. Why you need church. Why I need church.

24 And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works,
25 not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

This passage is about the church.

It’s not talking about watching out for your neighbor, or for your family; those are good things to do, but that’s not the point of this passage. This passage is talking about watching out for one another in the church.

How do we know? Because in verse 25 it says “not neglecting to gather together.”

So what does this passage teach us about church?

WHY DO WE NEED THE CHURCH?

We need the church so that we can watch out for one another.

This is the big idea of the passage, and the big idea of the sermon: God wants us to participate in church so that we can watch out for one another.

First of all, notice that this is not optional.

This is a command.

We are commanded to watch out for one another.

How are you going to obey that command if you are not involved in church? It's impossible. You have to be involved in church to obey this verse.

One Bible version translates Hebrews 10:24 like this: "Let us consider and give attentive, continuous care to watching over one another (AMP)."

Another version says, "Let us consider each other carefully (CEB)."

Another says, "Let us keep paying attention to one another (CJB)."

And still another says, "Let us be concerned about each other (HCSB)."

In other words, the Christian life is not just about me and Jesus; it's about us and Jesus.

It's very important to have a personal relationship with Jesus, but you also need to have personal relationships with people in your church.

It's important to have a right relationship with God, but it's also important to be rightly related to the church.

You can't just mind your own business and be a good Christian; you need to mind the business of your church.

You can't just be concerned with yourself, and only pay attention to yourself; God wants you to be concerned with and pay attention to others in the church.

This verse explains why church isn't optional, and why you can't just watch church on TV.

Church is more than an event to attend, or a program to observe, or a product to consume. It's about relationships. It's about watching out for one another. It's a family, and families watch out for one another.

This verse contains a very important truth.

A command is not just what you should do, but what you need to do to be a healthy and growing Christian.

So this verse isn't just saying that we ought to one another; it is saying that we need to watch out for one another.

In other words, you are not strong enough to live a successful Christian life apart from the church.

This is not Roman Catholic teaching. You don't need to go through the church to get to God, and to go to be saved. For that you need a personal relationship with Jesus.

But this verse says that you cannot live a successful Christian life on earth without the church.

PRIDE

One of the reasons that so many Christians are not active in church comes down to pride.

Many Christians think they can make it on their own.

They don't need church. They don't need anybody else. They can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

But this verse tells that you can't. You are not strong by yourself. You need the church.

A Christian without a church is like a child without a family; a quarterback without linemen; a soldier without a platoon.

You cannot make it alone. The Christian life is not meant to be, nor can it be, lived in isolation.

DISOBEDIENT AND MALNOURISHED

In other words, if you are not involved in church, then you are both disobedient and malnourished.

You are disobedient because you are not obeying the command to watch out for other believers in the church.

And you are malnourished because you are not receiving the nourishment that you need and that you would receive from the church.

TWO THINGS YOU NEED FROM THE CHURCH

This verse says that you need two things from the church in order to be a successful Christian.

You need to receive something, and you need to give something.

You need others to watch out for you.

And you need to watch out for others.

If you not watching out for your church, and if your church is not watching out for you, then you cannot be successful as a Christian.

Let me be very blunt: Without participating in church life, you cannot be a fully-devoted follower of Jesus.

Why? Because you need your church to watch out for you. And you need the blessing of watching out for your church (It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35).

An isolated Christian is a weak, sickly, and unproductive Christian.

So this is why we need the church: We need the church so that we can watch out for one another.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF WATCHING OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER?

What is the goal of watching out for one another?

Is it to make sure everyone's physical needs are met? That's one of the goals. We see this over and over in the New Testament. When one member of the church is suffering, the other believers come to their aid, offering comfort, and counsel, and financial aid. And that's part of what it means to watch out for one another.

But **Hebrews 10:24** tells us the central meaning and purpose of watching out for one another. "And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works." To provoke love and good works.

Love refers to your relationship with God, and good works refers to your relationship with people.

That's what the Christian life is all about. That's the Great Commandment. Loving God, and loving others (Mk 12:29-31). So the central meaning and purpose of watching out for one another is to help each other grow in loving God and loving others.

This is one of the main reasons the church exists. The church exists to reach out and save the lost. But it also exists to reach in as we watch out for one another to provoke love and good works. This is why we gather and assemble. To help each other grow in love for God and others.

The word “provoke” is powerful. It can also be translated stir up, stimulate, incite, spark, spur each other on, encourage, rouse, motivate, and inspire. That’s what we’re here for. To motivate and inspire each other to keep growing in love for God and others.

Church involvement has two benefits: It helps you to love God more and more, and it helps you to love others more and more.

When a church is healthy, at least two things will happen: The people will be growing in their love for God, and they will be growing in their love for people.

This is why you need church. Without the church, you will not fully mature in your love for God, and you will not fully mature in your love for others.

Without church involvement, you cannot obey the most important commandment in the entire Bible – loving God and loving others.

HOW DOES THE CHURCH WATCH OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER?

How does the church watch out for one another, thereby provoking love and good works?

Verse 25 gives us the answer – two answers: “not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

We watch out for one another by gathering, and by encouraging.

1. We watch out for one another by gathering.

Notice what it says. “Not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing.”

Even in the first century Christians were tempted to neglect church attendance. Nothing’s new.

One Bible version says, “not forsaking our meeting together as believers for worship and instruction (AMP).”

To forsake means “to abandon.”

That’s what many Christians have done – abandoned the church.

And that’s what this verse is commanding us not to do. Do not abandon the church.

Remember what the church is – the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the family of God, the temple of God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

How can you say you love God and then abandon something so important to God?

Another Bible version says “Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship.”

Church attendance should be the habit of your life, not the exception.

It’s been said that we first make our habits, and then our habits make us.

If you want to become a fully-devoted follower of Jesus, then you need to make church attendance your habit.

If we were to take a record of your church attendance, how many times a month do you go to church?

If went to church twice a month, then that means you miss church 50% of the time.

That means that out of 52 Sundays, you missed church 26 times.

If you went to church once a month, then it’s much worse. That means you only went to church 12 times in the year.

I think most Christians would be shocked if they were shown how often they miss church.

Church Attendance is like anything else. Consistency is required to reap the benefits.

Eating healthy every once in a while doesn't lead to a healthy body. You have to be consistent. Exercising every once in a while doesn't lead to a healthy body. You have to be consistent. Going to work every once in a while doesn't pay the bills. You have to be consistent.

If you want the benefits of church attendance, you have to be consistent.

And for you to be consistent, it has to be a priority, because it's always easy to find excuses not to do something.

One Bible version says, "This is not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together, as some have formed the habit of doing, because we need each other (TPT)!"

I love that. This is not the time to pull away.

Think about the times in which we live.

Think about where our country is. Our country is more sinful than ever before – divorce, adultery, pornography, drug abuse, abortion, murder, promiscuity. We can't let our kids out of our sight, for fear that they will be abducted. This is not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together. America needs a strong church more than ever before.

Think about your children and grandchildren. They are watching your every move, and your actions speak louder than words. They can see what's important to you. This is not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together.

Many times when I prepare a sermon the Lord will put one person in the church on my heart; it's as if the Lord wanted to speak through me a

personal message to that person. And the when Sunday comes around, they don't show up. They miss a word from God, a word that God had specifically for them. This is not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together.

Notice that it says not to neglect to gather together.

Again, it's not enough to watch church on TV, or online, or to listen to the podcast.

The command is the gather. The need is to gather.

To get the benefits of the church, which is to help you love God and love others more and more, you have to gather.

You have to meet together. You have to assemble. You have to congregate.

What does it mean to meet together as a church?

The church has two primary gatherings, both of them are important if you want to get the benefits of church life.

The first is corporate worship, when the entire church gathers on Sunday morning for worship.

The second is Home Group, when the church gathers in small groups in homes for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship.

Why do you need both?

Because remember, we need the church so that we can watch out for one another.

You need to be watching out for others in the church, and people in the church need to watch out for you.

If you just attend corporate worship, it is hard, if not impossible, to build the kinds of relationships that you need to watch out for one another.

To watch out for one another you need to know and be known. You need to know others, and be known by others. It's hard to get that if you just attend corporate worship.

So the first way that we watch out for one another to prove love and good works is by gathering. The second way is by encouraging.

2. We watch out for one another by encouraging.

Let's look at **Hebrews 10:25** again. "not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other."

The second way we watch out for one another in the church is by encouraging each other.

I love the Biblical word "encouragement." It is filled with meaning.

First, of all, this is a command.

We are commanded to encourage other believers in the church.

Once again, it's hard to encourage others in the church without going to Home Group.

Encouragement requires rubbing shoulders with each other; getting close; intimacy; connection; conversation.

This is not the only place where we are commanded to encourage each other. **1 Thessalonians 5:11** "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing." **Hebrews 3:13** "But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception." We are commanded to encourage each other.

If encouragement is a command, then it is also a need.

We cannot become fully-devoted to Jesus Christ unless we are both giving and receiving encouragement to others in the church.

What does encouragement mean?

The Greek word is *parakaleo*, and it has many shades of meaning.

And that's why it's a great word to describe how we are to watch out for one another.

The word literally means to call to one's side. It's the idea of coming alongside someone and helping them to become fully-devoted to Christ.

Let's look at the various ways the word *parakaleo* can be translated, and what those words mean.

Parakaleo can mean to encourage, or to give support, confidence, or hope to someone; to give support and advice to someone so that they will continue to do something.¹

So we are to give support, confidence, and hope to each other; to support and advise each other to keep following Christ and not give up.

Parakaleo can mean to admonish, or to warn someone of something to be avoided.² So we are to warn each other of the dangers and consequences of sin.

Parakaleo can mean to exhort, or to strongly encourage or urge someone to do something.³ So we are to strongly urge each other to go all out for Jesus.

¹ Google Dictionary

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Parakaleo can mean to comfort or console, or to ease the grief or distress of someone.⁴

Christians aren't immune from trials.

And trials can tempt you fall away from God.

So we need to comfort each other in the hard times; we need to cheer each other up.

Dr. David Jeremiah said, "Our faith isn't a luxury intended for periods of smooth sailing and neither is our fellowship. When trouble comes along that's when it's wonderful to be a part of a faithful, bible believing body of people who will rally around you; they'll pray for you, support you with their resources, and encourage you and counsel you in tough decisions. The devil is the only one whose opinion it is that you should take a sabbatical from in hard times."

Parakaleo can mean to instruct or teach.

So we are to teach each other God's word.

The preaching and teaching of the Word is one of the best ways to give and receive encouragement.

2 Timothy 4:2 "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and *encourage* with great patience and teaching."

Parakaleo can mean to help. We are to help each other to grow spiritually.

Parakaleo can mean to counsel, or to give advice. So we are to give each other advice about how to apply the Bible in our daily lives.

How important is encouragement?

⁴ Ibid.

When you encourage other believers, you are acting like your heavenly Father.

2 Thessalonians 2:16 “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope by grace.” God has given us eternal encouragement.

2 Corinthians 2:3-4 “3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort (*paraklesis*). 4 He comforts us (*parakaleo*) in all our affliction....”

In fact, encouragement is so central to God’s heart and character that Holy Spirit is called the Encourager.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit several times as the Paraclete, which comes from the word *paraklesis*, or encouragement.

The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete, or the Helper, the Counselor, the Teacher, the Comforter, the Advocate, the Intercessor, the Strengtheners, the Companion, the Encourager.

How does the Holy Spirit encourage us?

John 14:26 says He teaches us and reminds us of the teachings of Jesus.

Philippians 2:13 says He gives us the strength and desire to do God’s will.

Galatians 5:22-23 says He helps us to become like Christ.

Romans 8:26-27 says He prays for us.

These are all things that we can and should do for one another in the church.

So God commands us to encourage, to *parakaleo*, to come alongside one another to help each other grow in Christ.

And there are many ways to do that. But it starts with getting involved in church.

Only in the church can we both give and receive all the encouragement that we need to live the Christian life.

CONCLUSION

So let's review.

Why do we need the church? We need the church so that we can watch out for one another.

What does that mean? To provoke, motivate, inspire each other to love and good works – to love God and others more and more.

And how do we do that – how do we watch out for one another, provoking love and good works? By gathering, and by encouraging.

Throughout your life there will be seasons when you will be tempted to neglect the church.

When you are really busy.

When you go to college and your parents aren't making you go anymore.

When you are sick or discouraged.

When you have failed.

When someone in the church has let you down.

But don't give in to that temptation.

Remember, the purpose of your life is to love God and love others more and more. And you can't do that alone.

That's why God created the church. So plug in and get involved.