

The Importance of Gathering for Worship **Hebrews 10:23-25; Acts 2:42; Rev. 7:9-10**

Is the corporate gathering for worship optional for Christians?

To begin, let's look at Scripture and discover what we mean by the word "Church."

There are three words for "church" in the Bible.

—*kyriakos*, focuses on the facility. Used very little.

—*ekklēsia*, refers to the ones "called out,"

—*synagōgē*, refers to the ones "called together."

So, the church encompasses those who are called out of the world to gather together to worship God and to strengthen and encourage one another in the faith. The facility where the called-out ones gather is called, "the meeting place, or the gathering place."

A DIVINE IMPERATIVE

The book of Hebrews was written to first-century Christians who lived under the relentless threat of persecution. Identifying with Christ and His church was costly. Not unlike the remnant of Israel in former times and millions of believers around the world today, the nascent church "endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction". Hebrews 10:32-33a

Nevertheless, they were not to forsake the assembly to live in spiritual isolation. On the contrary, despite the circumstances (and even because of them), God commanded His people to meet for worship. Hebrews 10:23-25

Christians need to gather to sustain their faith: to participate in the means of grace and they need one another. Faith withers in seclusion. God's people need the means of grace: sound preaching, faith-nourishing sacraments, and earnest prayer, all in the presence of God and His gathered church.

It's what faithful believers have been fiercely committed to since Pentecost. Acts 2:42

Gathering for worship wasn't safe for first-century believers, but it was essential. *It was their chief joy.* (Ask yourself, *Is gathering to worship my chief joy?* If it is not, why?)

There is another reason why gathered worship is so important. Gathered worship, here on earth, is a foreshadow of the heavenly worship we will experience when Christ returns. Gathered worship—regulated by Scripture—is a foretaste of that time. Revelation 7:9-10; Matt. 26:29; Heb. 6:5; Rev. 19:9

THE MEANS OF GRACE

Thomas Boston: "To pretend to believe without using of means, is presumption; to use the means without believing the promise, is lifeless formality."

God normally saves and sanctifies His people through outward and ordinary means. What are those means? The preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. It's in the gathered worship of the church—and not separate from it—that God's people receive Christ and all His benefits through His divinely instituted means. This is Christianity 101 and a central emphasis in Reformed confessionalism.

Worship is the workshop of the Holy Spirit. The means of grace are the sacred tools by which God shapes and fashions us into the image of His Son. They are God's chosen means that, by the Spirit, through the exercising of faith, effect the salvation of the elect. Therefore, to forsake the church's worship is ultimately to presume upon God's goodness and question His divine wisdom.

REASONS WHY PEOPLE DO NOT GATHER FOR WORSHIP

--The first reason that professing believers forsake gathered worship is the growing trend of individualistic spirituality. Please remember that God is your father, and the church is your mother.

--A second reason that Christians choose to forsake gathered worship is that they've had a negative church experience.

--A third reason that Christians choose to forsake gathered worship is busyness; it's not a priority. Corporate worship is one of many choices you have on Sunday morning.

-Parents, especially dad's, I want you to do some searching about all these activities you have your children in that take them away from corporate worship and Christian education.

--A fourth reason is apathy. You are indifferent. Easy come, easy go.

--And, of course, there could be a plethora of other reasons.

The purpose of our streaming worship is to help keep our people connected when legitimate reasons prohibit their being physically gathered with us.

All of us must understand this: God is your Father, but the church is your mother.

AN UNBENDING PRIORITY

My brothers and sisters in Christ, gathered "in person" worship is not optional. It's a divine requirement with holy ends.

Whatever reason you may have for not gathering with God's people, isn't time to return to the sacred assembly, that which God Himself commands and promises to bless in the lives of His redeemed children? Isn't it time to once again nourish your faith through the means of grace? Isn't it time to renew fellowship with the *ekklesia* (the church)—"the assembled ones" who are traversing the well-trod road to Zion?

Make gathered worship an unbending priority in your weekly schedule. May we all joyfully express with the psalmist, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!' " (Psalm 122:1), for "a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere" (Psalm 84:10).