

# The Purpose and Plan for the Church Pt. 4

## Acts 2:42-47

### Acts 2:40–47

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,

45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

## Introduction

In a copy of *Tabletalk*, the monthly devotional magazine that's produced by our friends at Ligonier Ministry, and the theme was ordinary. And there was a wonderful article by our friend Michael Horton called "The Ordinary Christian Life." In that article, Michael Horton says this. "Radical, epic, revolutionary, transformative, impactful, life-changing, extreme, awesome, emergent, alternative, innovative, on the edge, explosive breakthrough, whole new level." And then he asks, "Whatever happened to ordinary?" Whatever happened to ordinary? He says, "Ordinary has to be one of the loneliest words in the evangelical church vocabulary. There is this constant call for more experiences that are highly emotional, radical, edgy, relevant, trendy." One other writer says, "There seems to be a growing weariness with the cult of extraordinariness."

I read an article this week written by an evangelical Christian who said, "There is beginning to emerge a longing in the lives of 20- and 30-year-olds for real church. They're worn out on the extremes."

Where does all this come from? Well, the original fountain for this is not the culture. This is a culture of extremes, but that's not the original fountain for this, though all these things are part of the culture, and in an effort to be extreme and edgy and impactful and relevant,..... the most bizarre elements of the culture are imported into the church. But the origin really goes back to American revivalism and goes back to Charles Finney, 1792-1875. It was Finney who decided that religion, to be valid, had to have some kind of high impact, high energy emotional element. It was about methods, feelings,

experiences, sentimentalism, and it all trumped sound doctrine and theology. Gradual growth, by the normal ordinary means of grace, prayer, the study of the Word, fellowship was exchanged for a radical experience, the anxious bench, and there was introduced into the evangelical world a restlessness of those looking for something extreme.

Church, simply living out a form of that today, the church has become mired in restlessness impatience and selfishness. And by the way, that is characteristic of childishness. The church is an adolescent. Wanting to be indulged and entertained, the church is largely superficial and immature and experiences are designed for impatient, selfish, shallow adolescents. The God-ordained ordinary patterns of slow, faithful, thoughtful study and absorption of the Word of God and slow, steady growth in grace and the knowledge of Christ in the midst of a faithful congregation is far too ordinary for the salesmen of adolescent extreme radical experience. There seems to be an endless supply of adolescents to entertain, ready to be fooled.

That first church was an ordinary church. Jesus had ascended, sent the Holy Spirit, by the Holy Spirit placed all believers into the body of the church, filled them with Spirit power, the gospel was preached by Peter, Jesus declared as Lord and Messiah, 3,000 people believed, were baptized, the church was born, 120 plus 3,000 makes 3,120.

## **Review**

- I. Christ is Lord of His Church**
- II. Christ Builds His Church**
- III. Christ Plans His Church**
- IV. Christ Gives Purpose to His Church**

Lesson:

## **I. Christ is Lord of His Church**

## **II. Christ Builds His Church**

## **III. Christ Plans His Church**

- A. Separated**
- B. Saved**
- C. Steadfast**
- D. Teaching**
- E. Fellowship**

**F. Celebrating Lords supper/ baptism**

**G. Praying**

**H. Giving**

**I. Praising**

## **A. Separated**

Ac 2:40

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

**Be Saved** Aorist Passive Imperative

**sózó: to save**

**Original Word:** σώζω

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** sózó

**Phonetic Spelling:** (sode'-zo)

**Short Definition:** I save, heal

**Definition:** I save, heal, preserve, rescue.

**4982 sózō** (from sōs, "safe, rescued") – properly, deliver out of danger and into safety; used principally of God *rescuing* believers *from* the penalty and power of sin – *and into His provisions (safety)*.

[**4982** (sózō) is the root of: **4990** /sōtēr ("Savior"), **4991** /sōtēría ("salvation") and the adjectival form, **4992** /sōtērion (what is "saved/rescued from destruction and brought into divine safety").]

## Perverse

**skolios: curved, winding, hence crooked**

**Original Word:** σκολιός, ά, όν

**Part of Speech:** Adjective

**Transliteration:** skolios

**Phonetic Spelling:** (skol-ee-os')

**Short Definition:** crooked, perverse, unfair

**Definition:** crooked, perverse, unfair, curved, tortuous.

**4646 skoliós** (an adjective, derived from a primitive root, *NAS* dictionary) – properly, crooked (bent) because *dried out* (like a piece of *parched* wood); (figuratively) morally twisted (warped) because lacking the oil of the Holy Spirit – hence, unacceptable to God (His standards); "perverse, unjust" (*Abbott-Smith*).

## **2 Co 6:14–7:1**

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

**15** And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

**16** And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

*“I will dwell in them  
And walk among them.  
I will be their God,  
And they shall be My people.”*

**17** Therefore  
*“Come out from among them  
And be separate, says the Lord.*

*Do not touch what is unclean,  
And I will receive you.”*

**18** *“I will be a Father to you,  
And you shall be My sons and daughters,  
Says the Lord Almighty.”*

**7:1** Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

*The New King James Version. (1982).. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.*

“Here is one of those foundational doctrines, one of those cornerstones for Christian living and ministry that is absolutely essential....

.....this passage identifies two opposing worlds. The terminology is clear.

One of those worlds is marked by righteousness, light, Christ, believers, and the presence of God.

The other is marked by lawlessness, darkness, Satan, unbelievers, and the presence of false gods.

And these two worlds are utterly different and distinct, so much so that they are mutually exclusive.

They cannot work together in common partnership; they cannot fellowship together.

They are not in harmony with one another.

One is old; the other is new. One is earthly; the other is heavenly. One is deadly; the other is life giving. One is wicked; the other holy. One is built on lies; the other is all truth. One perishes and the other lives eternally.

Paul then is making it clear that believers can't live in both worlds. Certainly, John said this in his first epistle,

1 John, when he clearly identified this disparity between the two worlds with these familiar words,  
“Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

Mutually exclusive worlds. You can't be in both at the same time.

Then in James 4:4,

“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

... in verse 8, he says,

“Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded.”

People trying to live in two different worlds.

In Romans 12:1-2, of course that very, very familiar passage that begins the exhortation part of Romans,

“I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship, and do not be conformed to this world.” Make a clean break.

When a person becomes a believer they are transported out of one world into another. And shuttling back and forth is absolutely unacceptable. And that is precisely what the Corinthians were trying to do. Having named the name of Christ, identified with Him, come into the church, they were still hanging on to their own idolatry, their old pagan ways.

They had come to Christ out of idolatry, as it says in

1 Thessalonians. They had come to serve the living and the true God from idols, but they didn't make a clean break.



They had been wooed back into the old idolatry, back into the old pagan culture because it was so pervasive and so dominant, and it was so on display and so woven into the fabric of their life, family life, social life, community life.

Corinth was dominated above the city by an acropolis, a high mountain on top of which was the temple to the false deities which engaged itself in pagan ritual and worship and priestess prostitution.

This temple not only was the center of that religion, but from it disseminated its religious viewpoints and ideologies through the entire culture of Corinth.

It was a part of everything in life. Holidays, festivals, celebrations and so forth. And it was a constant pull to the Corinthians to fall back into those old patterns. And they did.

Additionally, the false teachers had come in and they had brought a quasi-Christian syncretism and eclectic religion which took Christianity, a little bit of Jewish legalism and some pagan religion, and melted it all together and offered it as the truth.

And that compromise had found its way into the Corinthian church and found an audience and some of them were listening and believing and accepting it.

You see, the false teachers wanted to make Christianity more popular, less demanding, less distinct, less narrow, less offensive, less different, less exclusive so they'd get more people in on it, so they could get more money, which is always what false teachers want.

And so here is the Corinthian church, new and fresh and being assaulted by pagan religion around it. You couldn't separate the social life from the religion. You couldn't separate the historical life of that village in terms of its patterns from the religion. And that village that became a city bore all of the signs of the religion

that moved in its growth. It was a full-blown pagan system down to the very core. And it was hard to sort it out.

To be involved at all in the life of the culture was to be involved in the paganism, unless you made a very clean break. The Corinthians didn't do it. ...then add to that the confusion of the false teachers. and you can understand why Paul says to them, "Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers."

It's very much like modern Christianity today, by the way, that seeks to blend Christianity with popular culture, wants to make Christianity more popular, less different, more palatable, less offensive, less narrow, less exclusive. And the result of it is that true Christianity and the purity of God's Word gets corrupted by compromise, and the church can become useless and shameful and blasphemous in mocking the truth.

For believers there can be no compromise. We cannot engage ourselves with unbelievers in any spiritual enterprise. That's the issue. "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." That is the command that sets this text in motion. And it is an unmistakable call to believers to separate from unbelievers. No one could miss that that's what it's saying. The question is; what does it mean? And as I said last time, it is essential to understand what it means, but first of all what it does not mean.

1. Paul is not saying, cut off all contact with non-Christians. He's not saying that because we have to reach them with the gospel. That is not the issue. He's not saying don't evangelize the unconverted; don't confront people in false religions. He's not saying that. We must do that.
2. Secondly, he is not calling for complete isolation on the part of the church. We are not to become isolationists. We are not to be monastics. We are not to go hide somewhere and pull apart from the world. Quite the contrary. We are to find unbelievers

and love them and be their friend and set a model of spiritual example for them.

**3. he is not saying you are to divorce your unsaved partner, or to sever all unsaved contacts.** Or all contacts, I should say, with unsaved people in your family.

**4. He is also not saying that you can't work or play or do business or be engaged in common earthly enterprise with unbelievers.** He's not saying that. Of course you can.

**What he is saying is you cannot link up with unbelievers in religious causes or religious enterprises.** You cannot go to their worship and become a part of it; you can't make them a part of the kingdom of God. You can't engage them in anything that involves ministry, teaching, or worship. Where there is ministry, teaching and worship there has to be absolute separation.

So he's referring in actuality to harnessing up believers and unbelievers in any common religious, spiritual enterprise. . But that is precisely what the Corinthians were doing.

They were going to the feasts that were involved with the idols, and they were trying to still befriend the people in the world and in their families and in their society by attending and being involved in idol festivals.

And such compromise is intolerable.

At the same time, they had invited into the church forms of pagan religion and that was equally intolerable.

There can be no harmony, no fellowship, no partnership, no participation between believers and unbelievers in any religious enterprise. That is the issue. Pagan religion, false teaching ruins those who listen to it. It leads to ungodliness. It spreads like gangrene and it upsets the faith of people.

Paul directed all of that to Timothy and warned him to warn the church. The issue then is religious cooperation, religious compromise with false teachers and with heresy and error.

We can have nothing to do with the people involved in that when they are so involved. And we can allow them to have nothing to do with enterprises that involve the advancement of the kingdom of God.

And yet, through the years the church has continued to do this. Sometimes it's called cooperative evangelism where an evangelist will come into a city and bring together Christians and non-Christians, those who believe the Word of God and those liberals who would openly deny the Word of God, in a common evangelistic enterprise.

That is in direct violation of what this text is teaching. It happens all the time in common efforts at evangelism.

It happens in educational institutions where those institutions that would claim to be Christians would have on their faculty those who believe the Word of God, those who were born again, and those who are not.

And they are illegitimately linked together in a common spiritual enterprise, to the detriment of the church, to the debilitation of the believers and the false assurance of the unbelievers.

True Christians have to separate from unbelievers in matters related to ministry, teaching and worship. And when I say teaching, I'm talking about teaching that relates to God and His truth." *GTY 2 Corinthians 6*

A Very current example of this just occurred Friday and Saturday at the inauguration of the 45th President of the United States of America

Starting Friday at the inauguration swearing in ceremony  
 A Roman Catholic, A Jewish Rabbi, a couple of Charismatics,  
 one Evangelical, and Charlatan and false teacher Paul White  
 all prayed

Darkness and Light

Truth and Error

The True God and many false gods

The Children of God and the Children of Satan

all on the same stage praying

as if all were the same

Then we move to Saturday Morning where we have the  
 interfaith Inaugural Prayer service

President Trump, first lady Melania Trump, Vice President  
 Pence and Karen Pence continued a long inaugural tradition  
 Saturday morning, attending a prayer service that was notable  
 for the diversity of faith participants.

While most who led prayers and offered readings at the  
 service at the Washington National Cathedral were  
[overwhelmingly evangelical](#), the long list of participants also  
 included leaders from the Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish,  
 Mormon, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Bahá'í faiths. The service  
 opened with a Navajo blessing. NPR

From pulpit and pen

“There’s a supplicant from the **Navaho Nation**. A  
 few...faith of **Judaism**. There are **Roman Catholics**.  
 There’s at least one **Hindu**. Mormons are represented, as

are Baha'is of the United States. Islam and Sikh's will be there. Episcopalians, Greek Orthodox, Presbyterians, independent charismatics, and Buddhism have a place in the line-up too. And, because no event of ecumenism could possibly be complete without them, so too will **Southern Baptists** be involved.

This year will find former Southern Baptist Convention Presidents **Ronnie Floyd and Jack Graham** engaged in the prayer service for the newly inaugurated President. They will be joined by Greg Laurie, David Jeremiah, and a granddaughter of Billy Graham, along with the many other interfaith representatives. Jack Graham and Greg Laurie will be offering a prayer. Jeremiah and Floyd have been picked to read Scripture.

But, do you see the problem? The problem is not about praying for the new President. Scripture commands us to do that.

The preeminent problem is that those who should know better ... Graham, Floyd, and Jeremiah, for example ... are serving – to those who know what Scripture teaches on such matters – as a clear example of willful violation of Scriptural commands. To engage in a spiritual enterprise with non-believers is unequivocally forbidden by our God.

We don't get to make the rules on this. God does – and has. We are not to ferret out “exception” clauses from Scripture that allow for professing believers to join hands with professing unbelievers in an intentional spiritual endeavor. There are no “exception” clauses. There's no

“well, it’s America” clause that justifies it. There is no “it’s an honor for us to be notably featured” clause that permits it. There is no “we’ll get to speak to Truth” clause that allows it. There is no “Trump” clause that allows these high-profile evangelical leaders to “trump” what Scripture teaches and clearly forbids.

As a result of this intentional, willful violation of Scripture, not only will faithful, onlooking evangelical believers be served up a poor example of “situational obedience to Scripture,” so too will the unbelieving world looking on see what the God-less, Gospel-less world already thinks it sees – that all religion is the same, in just different garb, with different lingo, and with different words. The world sees a synthesis of choices that all point to “God.” It reaffirms the deception to the observant unbeliever that there are many paths up the mountain.

And this is why God has forbidden it. He is the One True, Living God. Ours is “the faith ... once delivered.”

“When Paul then says, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers,” he is calling for separation...listen carefully... at the religious level. That’s what he means. At the spiritual level. He’s talking about in a spiritual enterprise. You can’t...you can’t play with false religion. You can’t yoke up true teachers and false teachers. You can’t take true Christianity and link it to a false, damnable demonic lie. You can’t do that. You have to separate yourself from all of that. ” John MacArthur ([Source](#))

What he is saying is you cannot link up with unbelievers in religious causes or religious enterprises. You cannot go to

their worship and become a part of it; you can't make them a part of the kingdom of God. You can't engage them in anything that involves ministry, teaching, or worship. Where there is ministry, teaching, and worship there has to be absolute separation." John MacArthur ([Source](#))

When Ronnie Floyd reads from the Bible, he'll be following behind a guy who may have just offered a Native American prayer to the spirit god of the eagle. (Carlyle Begay, the Navajo Nation representative, is also an Arizona state senator, who, according to [Wikipedia](#), "was raised under the teachings of his ancestry, instilling in him the importance of remembering the story of his people and carrying it on to his descendants.")

**When Jack Graham and Greg Laurie take their respective turns praying, they will be following a Muslim who will have offered prayer to a false, dangerous, demonically-conceived deity. The Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has forbidden such alliances.** We are to be obedient servants to the Word and faithful stewards of the Gospel.

It does nothing to advance the Gospel – in the event that it is even shared. Indeed, it dilutes the gospel as an also-ran among other, perhaps culturally palatable, flavors of religion.

Ours is a narrow path. Increasingly the superficial church in America is more about the sovereignty of Americanism than it is the sovereignty of God. And, correspondingly, the church has fewer and fewer leaders who will exemplify obedience to the Word. It's far easier and far more popular



to exemplify tolerance to the world, to acquiescence to calls to “co-exist,” and settle into the smorgasbord of religious ecumenism, grateful to the secular and pagan powers for a seat at the ecumenical spread.

We must not forget that never has our God needed any person or any nation to advance His agenda. Instead, by grace, He has chosen to use individuals to declare His manifest revelation to the world. He has not needed His people to forge alliances with the false gods of foreign nations to propel His mission, His Kingdom, or His Truth forth. But He has chosen us as stewards of His gospel of grace that, by our faithful proclamation of it to the nations, He might save whom He will.

*Pulpit and Pen*

## **1. The Church was Separated**

## **2. The Church was Saved**

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

## **3. The Church was steadfast.**

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

v.42 And they continued steadfastly — —

**Pres Active Participle**

**46 So continuing daily — same word, and parsing**

**proskartereó: to attend constantly**

**Original Word:** ΠΡΟΣΚΑΡΤΕΡΕΩ

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** proskartereó

**Phonetic Spelling:** (pros-kar-ter-eh'-o)

**Short Definition:** I persist

**Definition:** I persist, persevere in, continue steadfast in; I wait upon.

**4342** *proskartereó* (from **4314** /*prós*, "towards, interactively *with*" and **2594** /*kartereó*, "show steadfast strength," derived from **2904** /*krátos*, "prevailing strength") – properly, to consistently showing strength which *prevails* (in spite of difficulties); to *endure* (remain firm), **staying in a fixed direction.** [**4342** /*proskartereó* means "to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty – 'to devote oneself to, to keep on, to persist in'"

One application of this is that it proves true conversion

**Jn 8:31**

**31** Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

## Col 1:21–23

- 21** And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled
- 22** in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—
- 23** if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,

## 1 Jn 2:19

**19** They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

***But that is not the primary interpretation and application I want you to see.***

## 2 Pe 3:17–18

- 17** You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;
- 18** but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**Heb 10:23–25**

- 23** Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful.
- 24** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,
- 25** 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.

**Ac 20:7–10**





















- 7** Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.
- 8** There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together.
- 9** And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.
- 10** But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing *him* said, “Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.”

Is it possible to live a faithful Christian life without being a faithful part of a local church? I’ve heard many people make the argument that it is indeed possible—especially if there are no good churches around. I disagree.

At the bare minimum, there are forty different commands in the New Testament to live life in some sense with other

believers. While certainly it is possible to do some of these with Christians in general, the weight of this list should convince you of the necessity of having on going relationships with other believers.

And those relationships are only strengthened by the fellowship of the local church. In fact, I submit that some of this list is simply impossible to obey if you do not have the kind of ongoing and ever increasing fellowship with other believers that only comes through ministry in a local church:

- 1 Stimulate *one another* to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24 )
- 2 Confess your sins to *one another* (James 5:16 )
- 3 Build up *one another* (1 Thess 5:11 )
- 4 Be of the **same mind** as *one another* (Romans 12:13 , 15:5 )
- 5 Comfort *one another* in the face of death (1 Thess 4:18 )
- 6 Employ your spiritual gifts in **servicing** *one another* (1 Peter 4:10 )
- 7 Pray for *one another* (James 5:16 )
- 8 Be **devoted** to *one another* (Romans 12:10 )
- 9 Be at **peace** with *one another* (Mark 9:50 )
- 10 Encourage *one another* (1 Thess 5:11 )
- 11 Greet *one another* (2 Cor 13:12 )
- 12 Don't become **boastful** in **challenging** *one another* (Gal 5:26 )
- 13 Be **kind** to *one another* (Eph 4:32 )
- 14 Abound in **love** for *one another* (1 Peter 1:22 )
- 15 Live in **peace** with *one another* (1 Thess 5:13 )
- 16 **Love** *one another* (2 John 5 )
- 17 Fervently **love** *one another* (1 Peter 1:22 )
- 18 Have **fellowship** with *one another* (1 John 1:7 )
- 19 Don't **judge** *one another* (Romans 14:13 )

- 20 Take **communion** (the Lord's Table) with *one another* (1 Cor 11:33<sup>L</sup>)
- 21 **Accept** *one another* (Romans 15:7<sup>L</sup>)
- 22 **Regard** *one another* as more important than yourself (Phil 2:3<sup>L</sup>)
- 23 **Bear** *one another's* burdens (Gal 6:2<sup>L</sup>)
- 24 **Admonish** *one another* (Rom 15:14<sup>L</sup>)
- 25 **Serve** *one another* (Gal 5:13<sup>L</sup>)
- 26 Do not **lie** to *one another* (Col 3:9<sup>L</sup>)
- 27 **Bear** with *one another* (Col 3:13<sup>L</sup>)
- 28 **Forgive** *one another* (Col 3:13<sup>L</sup>)
- 29 **Teach** and **admonish** *one another* (Rom 15:14<sup>L</sup>)
- 30 **Care** for *one another* (1 Cor 12:25<sup>L</sup>)
- 31 Cloth yourselves with **humility** toward *one another* (1 Peter 5:5<sup>L</sup>)
- 32 Be **hospitable** to *one another* (1 Peter 4:9<sup>L</sup>)
- 33 Do not **complain** against *one another* (James 5:9<sup>L</sup>)
- 34 Show **forbearance** to *one another* (Eph 4:2<sup>L</sup>)
- 35 **Speak** to *one another* in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19<sup>L</sup>)
- 36 Give **preference** to *one another* (Rom 12:10<sup>L</sup>)
- 37 Don't **bite** and **devour** *one another* (Gal 5:15<sup>L</sup>)
- 38 **Submit** to *one another* (Ephesians 5:21<sup>L</sup>)
- 39 **Seek the good** of *one another* (1 Thess 5:15<sup>L</sup>)
- 40 Don't **forsake** assembling with *one another* (Heb 10:25<sup>L</sup>)

We've all heard how church attendance is declining in America. The religious "nones" are rising in number. Nominal Christians are falling away.

But even more disturbing: fervent believers are becoming irregular in their church attendance, too. (Ask any pastor if this is happening).

When my father-in-law was growing up in the Bible belt, you attended church three times a week, 52 weeks a year. You did not miss church unless you had a fever of 102. If you were traveling on Sunday you were expected to visit a local congregation in your denomination. There was no skipping a Sunday – no sleeping in. Church attendance was the barometer of spiritual health.

My generation relaxed the attendance rules a bit – especially if we had to travel or work over the weekend. But we still made it to church almost every Sunday.

Our children have become even more casual about weekly worship attendance. I recently interviewed the leaders of a large church in Arizona. They surveyed their young families and discovered they attended church an average of 1.6 times per month (out of a possible 4.3 weekends/month). In addition, only 20% of their members attend at least 3 times a month. And just 4 percent are “full attenders” like my father-in-law – in the pews at least 48 weeks a year.

I am curious how churchgoing changed from being foundational to optional in the minds of many Christians. Let me offer nine possible reasons:

**1 Social expectation and pressures have lightened.**

People used to live their lives according to social convention. Those who strayed from accepted norms were ostracized and shamed. Churches used this power to “guilt” people into a variety of behaviors, including weekly church attendance. Obviously this doesn’t work any more.

- 2 Church is no longer the best show in town.** For centuries, Sunday morning was an entertainment desert. Shops were closed. Sports commenced at noon. There was no cable TV or video games. Church was literally the only thing happening on Sunday morning – so people went. Sunday now presents lots of attractive options and everyone – including Christians – is taking advantage.
- 3 Increased mobility.** People travel as never before, so more and more churchgoers find themselves out of town on Sunday. Relatively few see the need to visit a nearby church.
- 4 Weekend work.** Blue laws used to keep businesses shuttered on Sunday. Now many people work on the Sabbath, which makes attendance difficult or impossible.
- 5 People need a day of rest.** For stressed-out couples Sunday may be the only pajama morning of the week. Can we blame families for wanting a little downtime with each other? After all, aren't we supposed to take a sabbath?
- 6 The rise of do-it-yourself Christianity.** The Internet and various media offerings allow believers to tailor a spiritual life to their own liking. They get Christianity without the challenge of having to interact with other Christians.
- 7 The expectation of choice.** Modern Americans are used to getting exactly what they want. Amazon.com offers more than 200 million items. Petco sells more than 100 varieties of dog food. Christians shop for pastors they connect with. Megachurch attenders often have favorite teaching pastors – and will skip a Sunday if “the other guy” is preaching.
- 8 The most faithful saints are burning out.** I know a number of very committed Christians who no longer



attend – or do so sporadically – because their churches worked them so hard in the past.

**9 Churches increasingly model individuality in weekly worship and teaching.** We've trained people to pursue Christ on their own – so that's what they're doing.

Let me spend a little time on that last one. One of the hallmarks of 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelicalism was the focus on individual uncton: personal salvation, a personal relationship with Jesus, personal devotions, etc. Pastors taught people to dig into the Bible themselves; to self-feed by reading Christian books and listening to Christian radio; and to share their faith with others – all without much support from the church. But by placing the individual in charge of his own spiritual life the church unwittingly de-emphasized the importance of community. This produced a generation of spiritual James Bonds – lone wolf agents who imagine themselves serving God without much help from headquarters.

Contemporary worship is feeding the trend. These hip worship services mirror the individualism we see in the wider culture:

- The service has a starting time, but people show up whenever they want to.
- We simply stand or sit as we feel like it. No one tells us when to sit, stand or kneel.
- Many churches have jettisoned the creeds and unison readings.
- Some churches place communion elements on small tables and let folks partake as they “feel led.”

I know a number of very committed Christian men who have turned their backs on weekly worship – not because they are angry or lazy – but because they believe they

can serve God better on their own. It started when they skipped a week. Then another. Then another. Nothing bad happened. In fact, sleeping late felt good. Seeing their kids felt even better. But over time they became disconnected from regular Christian fellowship – and their families with them.

**WHY IS CHURCH ATTENDANCE DECLINING – EVEN AMONG COMMITTED CHRISTIANS?**

March 7, 2016 by David Murrow

## **IV. Christ Gives Purpose to His Church**