



# WHY GO TO CHURCH?

Is attending a local church part of God's plan? How can I know which church to attend?

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This is a good question. After all what is a church? Which kind of church is "right"? However, the New Testament letters assume that the reader is a member of a church:

*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 1:1-2*

Meeting together as a company or assembly of believers began after Pentecost and continued from then onwards through the centuries. The verses above indicate that there is a difference between a church company in a specific place and other believers (saints) living and fellowshiping elsewhere. This is not generally understood. Many Christians hold that they belong to the worldwide church of believers and that it does not matter who they meet with locally. In fact, there are some, who have little regard for meeting with other Christians at all! This happened even in New Testament times:

*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*

The word "church" is not really a translation of the Greek word EKKLESIA. This word describes a company of people called out (of their houses?) to meet for a purpose. It is used of Christians but also of other gatherings or assemblies:

*If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly [EKKLESIA]. Acts 19:39*

Our Bibles do not consider that faithful Jews would choose to absent themselves from their family and corporate worship nor that faithful Christians would not want to be together with fellow-Christians. The Lord Jesus expected His people to be recognised as a company bound together by love and acting as His Body.

*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35*

(see also 1 Corinthians ch.12:12-31]

In the past, when people hardly travelled further than the nearest market town, local assemblies were exactly that. Christians met together, prayed together and witnessed together. Perhaps this was a little spoiled by the imposition of nationally "approved" worship? The accounts of the Methodist revival show us how new-born Christians met together locally and served God together. Modern life in wealthy countries has brought the sense of freedom to go to whatever church group we feel is best for us. Well, so be it! My contention is that it rarely stops there and we have people wandering from church to church. We have people leaving a church for very weak reasons that disobey the command of Jesus to love one another. There may well be good reasons to leave an assembly of believers in this rather confusing Christian world: false doctrine, false leaders or false prophets. However, the point of an assembly is to work out our salvation together and learn the Grace of our Lord Jesus in order to demonstrate this to each other and to our neighbours.

We need to see that there are other important reasons for consistent and faithful commitment to a church group. How can elders operate if the rest deny them any authority? If

someone feels free to leave at the slightest provocation, then leaders are dishonoured.

*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17*

*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:17*

This aspect of authority and leadership is a big problem for modern people. We see nations in disarray because of a lack of respect for authority. We see this echoed in churches. There is little appetite for doing as one is told! On the other hand, there are church groups that have overdone oversight! We hear of groups where the leader(s) have complete say over the rest of the people. All kind of control is exerted and leaders are elevated to positions that do not allow challenge or question. This verse, And others similar, is quoted to support such a view:

*The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. 1 Samuel 26:23*

We must understand that the church is not a mini kingdom. Every believer is equal and valued and able to serve as a priest of God, offering spiritual sacrifices of obedience and praise. Authority is earned not assumed. However, this must be balanced by a good attitude from everyone.

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21*

Matthew Henry comments on this verse:

*We must be of a yielding and of a submissive spirit, and ready to all the duties of the respective places and stations that God has allotted to us in the world. In the fear of God, that is, so far as is consistent with the fear of God, for his sake, and out of conscience towards him, and that hereby we may give proof that we truly fear him. Where there is this mutual condescension and submission, the duties of all relations will be the better performed.*

There is another Scripture:

*Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.  
Philippians 4:5*

This has a connection with what Jesus taught, that we should live lives of love so that others can see this. Quoting Matthew Henry again, he shows that this word gentleness could be better rendered, "sweet reasonableness".

If only we could check our spirits and submit to God's Spirit when we feel like being disagreeable, or unreasonable, or think of changing churches!

Another, assumption of Scripture is that God's people will **want** to meet together! After all, how else do we convey to the world the better way of true love? This ought to mean that we make some effort to organising our lives so that we have time for fellowship, for assembling together on a frequent regular basis.

A third assumption of Scripture is that we will **want** to serve others. It is assumed that we will find joy in doing something for others - in the assembly and outside. We will want to exercise our abilities and Spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church. It is very sad to find that faithful people get fed up with serving and feel that they are not appreciated enough for their

service to be continued. Some continue serving but with a grudging, grumbling heart attitude.

Let us encourage each other to get together as often as we can. To serve together without grumbling. To enjoy being Christ's Church in this community.

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24*

*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:3-8*

# Finally

The word “church” is used in place of “assembly” in most Bible translations in English. We understand it to mean a building or organisation. However, in the German Bible the word used is different and translates more accurately the original Greek: ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ = ekklesia (assembly)

German = Gemeinde Gottes

the word Gemeinde means “local community”

The problem with the word “church” is that it holds an idea of building or organisation rather than of a fellowship of people. It can leave us thinking in individual terms about our relationship with other Christians rather than understanding that God takes the solitary and places them in families.

*Psa 68:6 God setteth the solitary (lonely) in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.*

Scripture encourages us to see ourselves as part of a whole not a whole in ourselves. We are members of Christ’s Body.

There is another word used of the gatherings of the first Christians:

*Act 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

The word “fellowship” accurately translates the Greek: ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ