

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**SERIES TITLE: CHURCH ATTENDANCE | SERMON TITLE: REGULAR ATTENDANCE****DAVE WAGNER**

I wonder if you've ever heard of a really stupid book called "So you don't want to go to church anymore?"? It was written a decade ago and was somewhat popular at the time. It's a fiction about a modern man named Jake who encounters the Apostle John. John basically teaches Jake that he need not go to church anymore since that's not what God really wants.

Now apart from the nerve of the author to resurrect John the Apostle and put anti-Christian words in his mouth, it's obvious to everyone here that such a book deserves a place in the wood-burning stove around Christmas time. I'm guessing if any of you picked it up you wouldn't get through a few pages before tossing it in the garbage. After all, who could possibly take such a book seriously?

Well, lots of people, actually. In fact, in our church at the time, one of the families got hold of that book and later informed us that they wouldn't be coming to church anymore. They were a large, lovely Christian family with servant's hearts; they were an important part of our community. And that book took them out of fellowship.

Now again, I think we would be tempted to ridicule the whole thing. How foolish could anyone be to let themselves be taken from church attendance by such an obviously un-Christian book?

But let me turn that question back around: How foolish might some of us be for knowing better and yet regularly missing church fellowship? That family had faults, but I believe there was some real ignorance in their case; I don't think their motive was purely sinful, though there was certainly sin.

But are we ignorant? Are we naïve? Do we not know the Scriptures when it comes to the issue of regular church attendance? I dare say we are not ignorant. We have knowledge. The question I want you to ask yourself is whether that knowledge is of any use in your own situation. You know you should be in church regularly. But are you in church regularly?

I don't think any of us can plead ignorance at this point. And yet, just to be sure, I intend to preach a series of messages on Church Attendance. My goal in this series is to make sure I have

done my duty as a pastor in explaining the Christian life, making plain the expectations of membership, and giving warning to any who are not being careful to come to church regularly.

There are a handful of scenarios to address on this topic, as well as a number of objections someone might raise after being called to account for regularly missing church. I'm going to try to cover all I can think of. I do ask you to bear with me and hold your fire until you hear everything I have to say, which will take around a month of sermons. If you're going to get mad, at least wait long enough to make sure I'm talking about you 😊

What I'm calling for, and some Definitions

So what's the big picture in this series? It's this: I'm calling for the members of this church to be as regular in their church attendance as possible. Let me define what I mean:

First, this series mostly concerns members, since it is the members who have made an agreement to be active participants in this church; that active participation includes attendance at the three basic meetings of this church: Sunday School, Sunday Service and Wednesday Evening.

Second, when I say "church" I'm referring to the three basic meetings I just mentioned. Of course it's great for members to get together for informal fellowship as well; the more the better. But I have in mind the primary meetings of the church. So it wouldn't exactly work for someone to say, "I see Christians every week, so I'm always in fellowship whether I come to the basic meetings or not." This is an unacceptable response for a number of reasons, which I'll be giving as we go along.

Third, by "regular attendance" I'm referring to coming to our three basic meetings every week, as a norm. So if you usually come to these, but one week you miss some because you are sick, you are still a regular attender. On the other hand, if because of work you can only be here every other meeting, or a few meetings a month, that is not completely regular attendance. Of course it's not a sin to work on Sunday morning or Wednesday evening, but it does make your attendance less than regular. I'll have more to say on that subject in a few weeks.

So I'm calling for members to be as regular in their attendance as they can.

And visitors should be, too. Almost everything I say in this series will apply equally to visitors. I want everyone, whether member or visitor, to examine their life to see whether they are as regular in their attendance as they should be.

The Importance of Regular Church Attendance

So let me draw some evidence from the Bible that our church attendance should be regular.

Hebrews 10:23-29 ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. ²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

This is the classic text, wielded like a weapon against Sabbath-Breakers. The writer says not to neglect meeting together. Irregular church attendance is often, not always, a neglect of one's duty to the Christian community, and to God. But the sentence is plain; If you take Hebrews to be divine revelation you have no choice but to carefully avoid irregular attendance, as much as possible.

But I do want you to notice the context of this oft-quoted verse. Do you see what the writer is after? He's actually right in the middle of threatening the Hebrew Christians with divine punishment for apostasy! So his warning about irregular attendance is connected with an overall warning against falling away from Christ and being judged by God.

Does this mean everyone who attends irregularly is falling away from Christ? No; some are justified in their irregular attendance, for example, some, not all, of those who work on Sunday.

But of course there are many others whose neglect of church does indicate a process of apostasy; they are in the middle of falling away and their neglect of church is part of the bad fruit of that falling away. Do not assume that this can't be talking about you. This very well may describe you; you may be falling away from the Lord; you may be like the Hebrew Christians, some of whom spurned the Son of God, and went on to suffer a worse punishment than the Law of Moses.

The point is that we should all take irregular attendance very seriously. We may have a good reason; then again we may not. Examine yourself with the Bible, not with your own opinions and preferences. Where do you stand?

Philippians 2:19-21 ¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Okay. Here's a question for the bible students: Based on this text, what is the interest of Jesus Christ? The welfare of the church.

But look at what Jesus is concerned about: The wellbeing, the spiritual health, the safety and strength of his community of believers. For Jesus, the church is high on his list of priorities and concerns. Is it high on our list? Please tell me how it could be high on your list if you barely come? In that case it is indisputable that your priorities are not aligned with Christ. I think you know that would require repentance.

Actually, Paul reveals the alternative in the text. If we are not as regular in attendance as we can be, we show ourselves to be out of step with Jesus. Specifically, we are seeking our own interests in a sinful, selfish, and un-Christian way. And Paul says this is what all men do; right enough. Men in general ignore God and his Son and his Spirit and his Scripture. But God forbid such a thing be said about any of us. And God forbid it actually be true.

This also reveals that we should see ourselves as obligated to seek the wellbeing of the church. Every Christian has a role in the community; that role is to care for other members as they are able. Encouragement, prayer, fellowship, even just an ear to listen; if we love what Jesus loves, if Jesus' interest is our interest, we will not fail to be regular in our attendance that we may contribute to the wellbeing of the church.

Acts 2:46-47 ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Some people are afraid to draw lessons from the church in Acts, but I'm not. I think they are mostly the model church, except that we don't have apostles today. That's different, but there's no reason our zeal should be any different. If it is, it doesn't mean we are more mature and developed than they; it means we are colder in heart than they, and we should repent.

And notice the effect of their zeal on their church fellowship. More than once in Acts we find the Christians described as being together, not every week, but every day! Doesn't that put us to shame if we find it burdensome to be regular two days a week?!

We have fallen far short of our fathers. Interestingly, one of the repeated themes in times of revival is prolonged meetings; Christians meeting in the evening for prayer and continuing until sunrise, full of passionate pleas for forgiveness and conversion and faith and repentance and outpouring of the Spirit! One person has said that in a revival, time doesn't exist; people care nothing for the clock and they have nowhere else to be.

On the contrary, ministers would often come to church and be met by a crowd of people anxious for their souls. They had been waiting for hours for the minister to arrive and then they don't let him leave until he has preached and prayed himself to exhaustion! And can we not be regular twice a week?! God have mercy on our cold and un-revived estate.

Hebrews 3:12-14 ¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

How often should they exhort each other? Every day. Daily. But he must assume they would be together quite a lot for that to happen. Let me be clear: I don't believe every early Christian went to church every day of the week. I suggest there was so much zeal that every day of the week at least some Christians were together. Neither do I propose that we begin meeting every day of the week.

What I'm proposing is that we simply be faithful to meet together two, two days of the week. A modest request, I think.

But again we see in Hebrews a passionate zeal to be with Christians; to engage in meaningful fellowship. This is more than food, fellowship and fun. This is direct speaking into each other's lives for our growth and preservation in Christ.

And once again, notice the context of this statement. Like chapter 10, the writer is warning against apostasy. He even speaks of apostasy in v12: "falling away." The purpose of the daily exhortation is to prevent each other from falling away. And the writer's basis comes in v14: Do we share in Christ? Only if we continue in Christ firm until the end, not otherwise. If we don't

continue to the end, then we are not presently sharers in Christ; actually we are self-deceived. We do not know ourselves.

But the point for us is that daily, Christian, mutual exhortation is prescribed to prevent us from falling away. The implication is that the less of such exhortation a person gets, the more likely they will fall away. Do you see now, why I'm anxious for us all to attend church regularly?

Revelation 1:10-13 ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." ¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

Where was the Son of man located when John saw him? In the middle of the lampstands. And what are the lampstands? The churches. Many have commented that this fact expresses that Jesus is present in his churches in a special way. For this same idea look at Matthew 18 and 28. The point is that Christ is with his church in a way he is not with us individually, and not with any other body of people.

Many, many saints through the centuries have described the rich blessing of the presence of Christ, which they experienced, in church. I once read a book entitled "Knowing Christ Together." The author is not a man of wisdom, but the title was a good one. What if, in order to know and experience Christ fully, as I ought to, I need you? And you need me? What then? Are you willing to be regular in attendance then?

Because it's undeniable that lack of love for church is often or always nothing other than lack of love for Christ. Whoever hates the wife hates the husband. We don't want to come to church because we don't much want to come to Jesus. The Son of man walks among the golden lampstands. Will that draw you to the lampstands?

If Christ came to live in Minnesota, guess which state I'd move to? If Jesus came to live in Albuquerque, guess which city I'd move to? If the Lamb of God resided in Portugal, guess which country I'd get a visa for? Are you with me?

Okay. But if Jesus has made his home in the living, breathing, flesh and blood temple of the church, why don't we want to be here?

I hope you know I'm calling for much, much more than regular church attendance. I'm calling for an examination of your heart. The real question, after all of this has been said, is this: Why do you love God so little? Why do you love the Savior so little? Why do you love the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb, so little? Is the church of God really such a small thing? Are we really so worthy of being despised?

But God bought us with his own blood; does that mean nothing to you? We, the church, are being changed from one level of glory to another, back into the very image of God in Jesus Christ; we are the holy temple, we are the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. We are the living stones, we are the redeemed, we are the subjects of the kingdom of heaven. We are the elect, the predestined, the forgiven, the Spirit-filled. I speak to the person who disregards this church: Does none of this mean anything to you?

Truly, if those realities move you not at all, I certainly have nothing left to say.

I call upon the members of this church, and the visitors not much less, to attend church regularly.

This subject reveals our sinful lack of love for God and his church. These sins are inexcusable; they are not a light thing. For these very sins Christ was executed outside Jerusalem. That execution simultaneously reveals the heinousness of our sin, and pays for it. We know our sin is very black because it brought about the death of the Son of God. We also know we've been made white as snow because of the death of the Son of God. The death which shows sin for what it is, cleanses that same sin. Such is the marvelous Gospel wisdom of God the Father.

And the solution to our sin of despising God's church is the same as the solution offered to us the first time we heard the Gospel. Confess your sin of church-despising to God. Ask his free forgiveness. Turn from that sin and don't return to it. Then go on believing that the blood of Christ covers that specific sin, just as God promised it would. Confess, request, turn and believe. And then have peace. Whoever believes is assuredly forgiven.