

Why I am not in Church this Morning

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The title of this talk, *Why I am not in church this morning*, may be inflammatory to some of you. It may offend your religious sensibilities for me to tell you why I am not in church this morning. There are, of course, unbelievers, who would not darken the door of a church building. They are quite open about why they are not in church. Many professing Christians have been wounded by their church experience, some severely, and so they too are clear as to why they are not in church this morning. But that's not me. I am a believer, and a loyal son of the church, and so it is not because I reject Christ, nor because I have been wounded by my church experience that I am not in church this morning. Let me simply, clearly lay out several reasons why I am not in church this morning.

- 1) It is my love for the body of Christ that compels me *not* to be in church this morning. The historic model of the church is clergy centered and exists for the benefit and personal interests of the clergy and not those of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:19-22). In this model, the body of Christ is in name only. In this model, the sheep exist for the benefit and interests of the shepherd.
- 2) Attending church does not equate to attending fellowship (I John 1:3). How many of you can actually say that you experience fellowship when you attend church? Oh, there are the people sitting next to you, the routine pleasantries are exchanged, the liturgy is read, and then you all exit and return home. It is not my intent to sound cynical; I am only trying to awaken you to the reality. Some of you may experience genuine fellowship, and if that is true for you, rejoice! Cling to it. Give thanks.
- 3) One other reason I am not in church this morning is that we have been conditioned to think God is pleased when we attend church, and displeased when we do not. Do you remember as a child getting a "gold star" for Sunday School attendance? Yet, what pleases God is that you are *in his Son*, and not in church, and being in church does not equate to being in Christ. Beginning with the early church fathers, attention

- was slowly turned away from being in Christ and instead to the merit of being in church. By the 8th century, salvation was no longer in Jesus Christ, but in the church of the Pope. And this medieval mentality has never fully left us precisely because it is the default of the flesh. Many of us now as adults remain “gold star” attenders. What the Bible defines a Christian to be is far different than the modern church goer.
- 4) The church as we know it today is an entrepreneurial effort, an organization, a state chartered, tax exempt institution designed to attract and secure new members who support it by the great lies tied to tithing and financial blessing. But Jesus did not begin his ministry by renting or purchasing a worship center and advertising for members; rather, he went to the people, where they were. He died owning nothing but the cloak on his back, which was stripped from him; he was buried in another’s awaiting tomb. Jesus was by all contemporary measures, was a failure at ministry.
 - 5) Church facilitates denial. Many people with issues of unresolved trauma, codependence and even active addiction hide in the pews. As a pastoral counselor, I can testify to this tragic reality. People use their church attendance and involvement as a cloak of denial, and the organization facilitates the maintaining of appearances.
 - 6) We need teaching not sermonizing and inspirational messages. And teaching ought to be interactive, engaging, even demanding upon the Christian mind; the battle is, after all, for the Christian mind (II Corinthians 11:1-3; Romans 12:1-2).
 - 7) The building is not the church. The Old Covenant temple stood until Christ fulfilled its purpose and declared his own body as the new temple (John 2:13-21). Afterward the temple served as an antithesis to Christ’s own ministry, and was destroyed by divine judgment in 70 A.D. But men since then have never ceased to rebuild that temple-like structure, even calling it the “house of God,” and they then return to the practice of thievery and robbing which came to characterize the Jerusalem temple. Some today even teach a new temple will one day be built in Jerusalem! What is this but a backdoor denial of Christ?
 - 8) Finally, Hebrews 13:9-17 calls believers to go outside the camp to where Jesus is, not to recreate the camp that sent him there. It was the temple centered, clergy-ran,

religious structure of Jerusalem that crucified Jesus outside the city walls, and today their contemporary heirs now invite you to join them within their “camp.” Where will you be found standing on that great Day of Christ’s return? Will you be with Christ outside the camp, or will you be within the same spirit and characteristic religious structure that rejected Jesus then, and continues to do so, today?

Summary

I am not in church this morning because the Bible calls me to be in Christ, not just in church, and the modern entrepreneurial church is not about the interests of Christ, but about the personal interests of the clergy. I am not in church this morning because church attendance does not equate to fellowship, and it is the fellowship of the saints to which I am called. I am not in church this morning because the present model of church facilitates wholesale denial of mental, spiritual, and relational sickness. In short, I am not in church this morning because Satan, the grand counterfeiter, has pulled off a masterpiece in presenting a false church with an alternative Jesus, gospel, and spirit (see II Corinthians 11:1-4). These are perilous times in which we live primarily because the church has been redefined as the religious arm of the culture and not “the pillar and support of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15).

But I will be in fellowship each Sunday we can gather our group together for interactive teaching, prayer, song, communion, and mutual care. The church has not disappeared, the church is alive and well everywhere and every time two or three, or more, gather in his name. It is a little flock, as Christ called it, but it is Christ’s flock, and it is they for whom he will soon return. **AMEN.**