

Beliefs Concerning The Church

- x Church is where you go to listen to sermons on hellfire and brimstone.
- x You should never forsake going to church for the sake of a job.
- x My church is the only one going to heaven.
- x Boys are considered men once they're baptized.

Church Is Where You Go To Listen To Sermons On Hellfire & Brimstone

I've attended churches where "hellfire and brimstone" sermons were the preacher's weekly fare. Other preachers never mention the subject. Between these two extremes should lay a reasonable priority. Christians coming together each Sunday involves more than hearing sermons on eternal damnation. That subject should be reserved primarily for unsaved sinners since they are the ones in danger of hell. Non-Christians will come, mainly because of invites from Christian friends. And since salvation infers a saving *from* something as well as *for* something, a peek into the consequence of not obeying the Gospel should always part of that message.

You, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. (Jude 20-23)

Jude implied that any unsaved persons in the meeting place had to be snatched "out of the fire." Even so, the church's primary reason for meeting is stated in Acts 20:

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

The gathering to "break bread" means they were meeting on Sunday—the first day of the week—to take the Lord's Supper. They came together to remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for them on Calvary. Paul severely chastised the Corinthian church for meeting for all the wrong reasons: "When you meet together, it is *not* to eat the Lord's Supper." (1 Cor 11:20) While many churches think taking the Lord's Supper every Sunday makes it seem too commonplace they never miss a chance at passing the collection plate every chance they get. I sat in a Pentecostal service many years ago, where the preacher screamed at the congregation for the anemic contributions laying in the collection plate. So, he had the deacons pass it around the second time. The church was located on the poor side of Tacoma.

Bottom Line: Church is where Christians gather once-a-week to get "recharged," so to speak. Ephesians 4 gives a clear outline of our goals and purpose as congregations.

You Should Never Forsake Going To Church For The Sake Of A Job

This pious belief—usually touted by those who work a Monday-thru-Friday schedule—is based partly on Hebrews 10:25, where it admonishes Christians not to forsake the assembly. We've been taught that this means “don't skip going to church.” The argument then follows that forsaking the assembly means you can't partake of the Lord's Supper, worship with other Christians, etc. Many see these as matters of faith, and if not carried out weekly invites wrath from the Lord. But is God more concerned with church attendance rather than taking care of one's family?

The gist of Hebrews 10:25 has little to do with Sunday morning worship service but was written in the context where Jewish Christians were under tremendous pressure to forsake Christianity and return to the Mosaic system. It was unbelievable what those early believers had to endure. To infer missing a Sunday morning was the gist of their problem is to blindly ignore the context of that period.

In today's job market, where Sunday has become another workday, Christians are faced with a tough choice. To answer the dilemma, most churches offer evening and mid-week services. Yet because some think that the Sunday morning worship service counts more than the evening service, they see a job as “serving mammon instead of serving God.” B bogus nonsense that usually comes from someone working a cozy Monday-thru-Friday schedule. What about the military, where a person is technically on the clock 24/7?

During World War II, when America was working like crazy to support the effort, churches came up with the Sunday “evening” service. Prior to that event, night services did not exist. So this gave folks a chance to still attend on Sunday after working all day in some factory. The evening service has remained ever since, and there are those who think that you must attend both, especially if you are the preacher.

God wants you to take care of your family first. Note:

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim 5:8)

If providing for your family means working on Sunday, so be it. Go to the evening service instead. Yet I've sat in meetings where certain men said, “If your employer won't let you come to church on Sunday mornings, find one who will!” Paul addressed this very issue, where folks were looking down their noses at others for not worshiping on days they thought were “more holy”:

Who are you to judge someone else's servant?... One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord... You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? ... So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. (Rom 14:4-13)

In the Old Testament, God even allowed people to miss certain mandatory feasts, allowing them to make up for it on another day. (Numbers 9:10)

Christianity is not about church attendance, though it should be a part of every Christian's walk. Nor were the New Testament letters written in the context of Sunday morning worship services. Ninety percent of what is written there is for everyday living.

There are many who think everyone should be at church on Sunday morning so that the flock can hang onto every spoken word and more importantly, the collection plate remains robust.

My Church Is The Only One Going To Heaven

It isn't one's worship system that determines their eternal reward, but what is in their heart. As to the question of the 400+ denominations that all claim Christ, most think that God will sort it all out in heaven. They think that all "Christian" churches are equally legitimate, even though none of them would dare fellowship with one another.

Some teach that all denominations (except their own, of course) are hell-bound. Among these are Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Catholics, to name a few. Calvinists, who make up several denominations, think they're chosen by God to be saved, while the rest are likewise chosen to be condemned. The Church of Christ, where I cut my teeth and later preached, maintains that they are the One True Church, although the criteria used are legalistic, subjective, and totally bogus.

Some churches have the idiotic notion that if women wear pants or put on make-up, they and the church that supports them are condemned. "Look at me, Lord! I never grew my hair long! I'm ready to enter heaven!" How fleshly-minded we have become!

Folks cannot fathom that it isn't what one *does* or *doesn't* do; it isn't what one eats or doesn't eat that matters with God. (Col. 2:16-19) Jesus said that many who thought they were Christians, and who were mightily engaged in what they considered Christian service, will find themselves rejected on Judgment Day. (Matt 7:21ff) In the context, the great qualifier of who gets into heaven will be *whoever does the will of the Father*. The Father's will has very little to do with a church's worship model and much to do with a person's motives and love for their fellow human beings. (Matt 25:31ff)

It isn't what creed you hold to, what version of the Bible you thump, or what name is painted on the church sign—it's the one who does God's will. The old verse, "not my will, but Your will be done," is what will separate us at the Resurrection.

Jesus summed it up best: "Unless you humble yourself and become like a little child, you will not even see the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 18:3)

Boys Are Considered Men Once They're Baptized

I once heard a young man tell his mother, “You can't teach me anymore; I've been baptized!” Later on, in a men's meeting, I asked about it, and the others there confirmed this belief: Once a boy has been baptized, his mother (or, God forbid, any other female) can no longer exercise authority over him since God now considers the boy to be a man. Part of their reasoning comes from Paul's admonition to Timothy:

I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.
(1 Tim 2:12) NASU

There's nothing in this scripture that says a boy suddenly turns into a man at baptism. The scriptures do teach that children are to honor their father and mother, with no qualification on age. That would include any advice forthcoming from those parents. Whether or not they heed that advice is another story. The point is, with certain exceptions, parents have authority over their progeny.

I asked these guys in the men's meeting, “So what happens when a young girl gets baptized? Is she all of a sudden a woman?” They became quite annoyed with me at this point.

The point is, certain churches have entrenched male chauvinism in their camps, where women are considered only fit for cooking up the potlucks and cleaning the building. This is unfortunate and contradicts the New Testament's teaching that there are no longer gender differences in the church. (Gal. 3:28) This doesn't mean women can preach to or teach men. We all have our roles in the kingdom, and no one should seek to usurp someone else's authority. (1 Cor 11:10)