

Church and the Believer

Dr. Alexander Kurian

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:23-25).

One of the great blessings of salvation is our being called into the fellowship not only of God, but also of other believers in Christ. Church is the body of Christ, and we are all members of that body, spiritually united to one another. “In Christ we who are many, form one body, and each member belongs to all others” (Romans 12:5). We need one another. To give up meeting together for worship, fellowship and edification (building up one another) would spell disaster in our Christian life. In meeting together we find mutual encouragement to keep going. That is how God has designed our Christian life. It cannot be lived in isolation.

Why Go to Church?

In the New Testament, the word *church* is never used of a building or denomination. The church is a “called out company,” “a gathering,” or “an assembly.” Church is a gathering of believers in Jesus Christ who regularly meet together in fulfilling their mission to worship God, to serve one another, and to make disciples.

As Christians, God has designed our life and spiritual growth in the company of our fellow believers. That is why God wants His children to meet with other believers on a regular basis. Believers are exhorted to be faithful in attendance at the meeting of the church for teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25). These meetings will nurture one’s spiritual growth and maturity. Paul wrote to Timothy, “that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Some believers think they don’t need to go to church, because they can worship at home. Good Bible teaching and preaching is available today on our radios, web and television (electronic church). Many Christians are tempted to think that we can “do church” at home.

Worship and Bible teaching are not the only reason we are commanded to meet. Church fellowship is necessary for our spiritual safety and health. The writer of Hebrews says it is a safeguard against drifting and backsliding. Fellowship provides the ideal context in which encouragement can happen. Evil forces, temptations, trials and persecutions can blow us off course. We are spiritually strengthened and edified by worship, fellowship, listening to one

another's experience, to see the grace of God work in the lives of others, to listen to one another and learn. In meeting together we find mutual encouragement to keep going. God molds and transforms us through these means and we cannot disregard them.

The writer to the Hebrews exhorts us to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together...." We are spurred on to faithfulness and fortitude through assembling together. "Let us draw near," "let us hold fast," let us consider....." (Hebrews 10:22-25). Your active involvement in a local church protects your personal fellowship with God. It is also a safeguard against missing out on the manifold blessings God has for you. Church is not just the place where you worship. It is the place where you get your spiritual batteries recharged. The teaching, fellowship and worship of the church challenge your character and behavior. It encourages you to remain faithful and will hold you accountable in your walk with the Lord. There is an increasing tendency among many believers today to blend into a "mega church" and "get lost" in the crowd, so that they don't have to be regular in attendance or in giving and there is no need to be accountable to anyone. You can just "play" the church at your convenience!

Going to church is also an integral part of the discipline of spiritual growth. The teaching, fellowship, and worship of the church challenge your character and behavior. Finding and using our spiritual gifts should first happen in the context of the church; not camps and conferences. It has to start first in the ministries of your local church under the guidance and mentoring of your elders. In the church, others will be able to encourage, watch, correct, guide and evaluate us in relation to our giftedness. Our ministries and spiritual involvement should begin in our local assemblies and then spread to other areas of service. In today's "conference syndrome", there is a big rush and haste to neglect the church and to be active in organizations, camps and conferences. This is not sanctioned by the Scriptures. "I will build my church" (Matt.16:18), the Lord said. This must be our focus and first priority. Our ministries outside the church should build up the church.

Are you committed to a local church and its ministries? Do other things keep you away from the fellowship of the church: family, friends, hobby, pleasure, studies, work, business, and sports? Do you miss meetings frequently? Do you really understand the place of the church in God's program?

"The accountability and fellowship found in church fellowship anchor us against the tides that work to sweep us away. We can develop a network of relationships with other believers that works to ensure we don't abandon our faith when the pressure is on to do so. To neglect the regular assembling with other Christians is to miss out the essential element in the development of our faith" (Charles Stanley).

The Lord's Day

The Lord's Day (the day that belongs to the Lord) is the first day of the week, Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection. This was the day specifically set apart by the early church for assembling together for worship (corporate worship of the church). This is the pattern Christians around the world follow even today. The first day of the week has always been a special day for the Christian Church.

Since Sunday was not a holiday, the early Christians met together in the evening for worship. It was the most convenient time for them to gather after working during the day. The majority of Christians around the world enjoy the freedom and opportunity to gather for public worship on Sunday. But the world is trying to make Sunday like any other day. It has been made into a day of regular work, recreation, sporting events and business. Too many forces in the world try to capture our time and attention on the Lord's Day.

It is quite unfortunate that many Christians also have lost sight of the significance of the Lord's Day. Even Christians prefer to work and travel on this day even at the expense of local church gathering, observance of the Lord's Supper, worship and fellowship. Of course, there can be exceptional circumstances or situations beyond our control. But to make it a regular practice (out of your choice) of abstaining from the fellowship and worship of your local church because of work or other things which you choose to do on the Lord's Day is not a good example. It will be detrimental to your spiritual health and growth. Let us remind ourselves constantly that disregarding the Lord's Day is not pleasing to the Lord. As Christians we must prayerfully strive to do everything within our power to regularly attend church on the Lord's Day. Always make it a high priority to begin the week with the Lord and His people.

Remember, we are not bound by any legalistic regulations concerning the Lord's Day. We are not forbidden to work, shop or play on the Lord's Day. But we must always treat it as THE LORD'S DAY. This is a day in which we find our greatest delight in our Lord – in corporate worship and remembrance of Him, to be in the company and fellowship with His people, and to hear from His Word. "Not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some....(Heb.10:25).

Many of us always harp on the noble traditions of our fathers. But have we paused to think how they treated the Lord's Day? Why are we silent about that? Have we slipped into a theology of convenience?

"To neglect the Lord's Day is to slight Him, to blunt the testimony to His resurrection, and to miss the benefits of the ministry and protection of corporate worship" (Charles Ryrie).

“Sunday is nature’s law as well as God’s. No individual or nation habitually disregarding it has failed to fall upon disaster and grief” (Daniel Webster).