

Ten Reasons Why You Need to Belong to a Church

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

1. Because you need the regular support and encouragement of Christian fellowship.

The Christian life is not designed to be lived in isolation, and those who try it that way are likely to crash! (see Hebrews 10:25).

2. Because fellowship provided by Christian friends is no substitute for belonging to a church.

You choose your friends because their ideas and style are similar to your own. God puts different people in a congregation so they can learn from each other (see Titus 2:1-10).

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3. Because gifts can only rightly be used by someone who is a member of a congregation.

Gifts are primarily for the congregation, not for the individual and are rightly used to build up the church. The picture of a church as a body tells us that our various gifts complement each other. You don't see a foot or an eye wandering around by itself! (see 1 Corinthians 12).

4. Because God's basic unit is the church, not the individual.

The story of the Bible is that of God making, shaping and refining his people—beginning with Abraham. The lives of individuals like David, Isaiah, the Disciples, and Paul have their meaning because they are part of God's continuous community. This pattern has lasted c.4,000 years and there are no signs that God has changed it (see Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-6; Romans 4).

5. Because you are not paying the price of being a Christian.

The 'solo flight' is a very attractive style of Christianity for some, but it evades a basic element: the cost of Discipleship. Jesus called his followers

to serve their community of faith ... to be 'slaves of all' (see Mark 10:35-45).

6. Because you cannot understand the New Testament properly unless you belong to a church.

I addressed most of the New Testament to churches. If you only read the Bible privately, then you will not be in the right place to hear God's word. You will 'privatise' its message, and so misunderstand it (see most of Paul's letters).

7. Because basic maturity in faith and knowledge is only found in the church.

The Bible clearly teaches that immaturity is found in those who cannot cope with the church 'system' (Titus 1:5; 3:10), and that maturity and fullness of faith is a corporate experience of the Christian community (Ephesians 3:14-21; 4:13-16).

8. Because sharing in Baptism and the Lord's Supper is basic to Christian obedience.

We share in these sacraments because of the command of Christ. They are not private rites but corporate actions of the body of Christ. A 'grab-and-run' approach is wrong; sharing in them means belonging to a church (see 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:17-34; 12:13).

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9. Because submitting to Christian leadership is integral to New Testament Christianity.

'Going-it-alone' is okay in the short term, but eventually we err if we imagine that we do not need structures and human authority. God's provision of order and authority in the church is his realistic way of helping us (see Hebrews 13:17; Titus 1:5).

10. Because fellowship-groups, evangelism teams, Christian societies are no substitute for churches.

Special groups and teams are more exciting than churches because they attract people of similar aims, ideas and abilities. They do good work but are not the same as churches, because they are limited in membership and task-oriented. Churches have to accept everyone, gifted or not, and so they more accurately reflect God's free grace.

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