

For some of you today it's been a long time since you have come to church. Maybe you find yourself going on the two traditional days of Easter and Christmas. Or maybe you go once every few months. Aside from being with family on those two days or only going to church every so often, do you ever find yourself asking the question:

“Why should I go to church?”

For some this may seem like a ridiculous question. Maybe you grew up in the church or maybe you were always told that you had to go and were looked down upon by others if you didn't go.

For this sermon we want to understand this question in order to help locate our own faith instead of a faith that someone else would want for us. So if any of you have ever found yourself asking the question: “Why should I go to church?” You are not alone.

I have asked myself this question many times. I have sat in the pews and I have stood behind the pulpit and the answer to the question may seem different depending on where you located spiritually. However, the answer to the question

revolves around one central point—and that point is Christ. Church necessarily revolves around Christ.

“Okay” you might say, “I have an individual relationship with Christ, isn’t that enough?” The answer is, “Yes” and “No.”

“Yes,” it is enough just to have an individual relationship with Christ if no other options are available to you. (Yet, there are many, many options available to you in the diverse religious tapestry of America) But the answer of “No” revolves around what church really is. And for this answer we do not turn to life experiences or one person’s opinion, we turn to the earliest witness to the church: the Bible.

So what is church anyway? Some of you may think you have it figured out by saying it’s a building or a specific congregation or even the individual people but all of these answers are only part of the larger answer.

Our passage that was read earlier sheds light on this question of what church really is.

Colossians 1:17-18 ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

Here we read that Christ is the “glue” that holds things together. This would necessarily apply to the church. And the church, we learn, is the body. But whose body is it?

For the answer to this question we turn to

1 Corinthians 12:18-27 ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But

God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. ²⁷ ¶ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Here Paul employs a body metaphor in order to explain our connection to Christ and therefore our connection to the church.

And perhaps that point should be overstated. While it is good and spiritually healthy to have a personal relationship with Christ, we are most connected to Jesus by being part of His church. And the point Paul is making here is that the church is more than just one person. It is communal.

You see, when you are connected to Jesus through the church, you join everyone else worldwide who is connected to Him. And you also join past believers in history who have been connected to Him.

So by this understanding we should all uphold that we are “**Christians Only**,” not Methodists, not Lutherans, not Baptists, and not Catholics. Our faith as Christians transcends denominational boundaries, geographical boundaries, and it will transcend the boundaries of death when we die. Therefore, one thing that I am fairly certain about is that when God asks us what type of Christian we were, he won’t be asking us our denomination.

So Paul answers your question of what church is in this passage. It is Christ’s body. But more than that, we who are baptized are Christ’s body.

Listen again to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:27. This is what his original hearers would have heard when it was read to them in Greek:

^{BNT} **1 Corinthians 12:27** ¶ ὑμεῖς δέ ἐστε σῶμα Χριστοῦ καὶ μέλη ἐκ μέρους.

²⁷ ¶ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

While you all don’t need an hour-long Greek lesson, we do learn from the original language here that we are individually members of the body. And when we come together as one body then we are a church. “Coming together” is of paramount

importance here. We must come together in order to be a church. Otherwise we are just a bunch of individuals. We should also realize that coming together is more than just coming together on Sunday. As Christians we should come together as often as we can! This includes coming together for commonalities on theological issues, congregational events, bible studies, worship, and especially communion or the Lord's Supper. So if we can individually be members of Christ's body—that is, the church, some of you might now be asking yourselves how you become a member of Christ's body—that is, the church? We learn in

Galatians 3:27 ²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

And elsewhere Paul says

Romans 6:3-5 ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ ¶ For if we have been united ⁵ with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

So the point is that baptism places you in Christ. Being baptized gives you the opportunity to come together with other Christians to be part of Christ's church.

Thus, the church of Christ is every one of us who are baptized that come together to worship God.

Fundamentally then, in order to have a church you must have two or more people coming together. In speaking about the church Jesus says in

Matthew 18:19-20 ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

So we have answered what church is:

It is Christ's body and all of us are individually members of his body and form the church when we gather in his name.

So then, returning to our central question: "Why should I go to church?"

We find our answer in what church is.

If we are not going to church we cannot be truly connected to Jesus despite some people's attempts to make Christianity an individualistic religion. It has always been communal and will forever be tied to all of the members of Christ's body throughout history. Now, for some this will be upsetting for a variety of reasons. But the upsetting reasons I am envisioning here come from what I have heard people say about the church.

I have heard some say that they don't like "organized religion." And in part, I understand where they are coming from. I understand that going to an organized activity like a worship service is not something that everyone is always found of. Maybe it's too stuffy for you. Maybe it feels too organized or hierarchical. Maybe you don't like the content, whatever it is, you are not alone.

There are many of us here who have found ourselves in situations where we feel we don't belong to a particular congregation. To use myself as an example, before my wife and I started this congregation, we were only going to church about once a

month for the last several months. Before then, we had not been to church for at least six months. Does this sound familiar to anyone?

The truth is we did not feel like we belonged to any specific congregation here in Iowa. Sure we shared the commonalities that all Christians shared like believing in Jesus and trying to the best of our abilities to follow his commands. But more than this, when we went to other congregations it was always missing something for us. For us that was the worship service. We just weren't found of it. While this does not justify not going to church all those months, I think it is natural for all of us to struggle with our connection to the church or specific congregations.

But the one thing that we must all understand is that going to church is more than just going to worship service. Going to church is being a part of a body of believers. This means you may attend events and activities at many congregations.

I want to emphasize this point so I'll say it again:

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Maybe that body of believers exercises together, or does community service together, or does bible studies together, or does devotionals together. Whatever it is, if the intention is to worship and glorify God, you are on the right track.

And for my wife and I's part, we were not even doing these things. So something was missing for us for all those months. However, we found our hope in the Bible regarding our specific situation. And again, the Bible witnesses to the earliest example of the church.

And we learn from the earliest church two main principles.

First, the central event that took place when Christians gathered in the name of Jesus was to take part in the communal meal that marks the remembrance of his sacrifice on the cross. We of course call this **Communion or the Lord's Supper**.

Second, the earliest church was informal. It took place in houses and did not resemble many of the things that some might now call organized religion. The central purpose of these house churches was to **gather together in Jesus' name and remember his teachings** and of course his sacrifice for them.

So the point here again is that you should go to church to gather in Jesus' name in order to remember his teachings and his sacrifice for you.

But this comes with the following instruction which greatly affected my life and my wife's life:

It is possible to gather in Jesus' name and not go to a "formal" worship service or bible study or fellowship activities. **But to do none of these is to be cut of from the Christian community, to be isolated, to be alone;** which is certainly not what church is nor what Jesus wants for you as representative of his body.

While I wish now to pass on the following message that all are welcome here at Testify, I certainly don't think that you have to go to a specific denomination. In fact, as I specified earlier, we must endeavor to be "**Christians Only.**"

So if you have ever been offend by church and are looking for a new start, I invite you to be part of our family.

The sad truth is that as individual members of Christ's body, the church has failed you. I am sure that I too will fail you. Remember, congregations are made up of people and therefore are imperfect and will make mistakes. They will offend. And **sometimes** they offend in order to challenge you. But it is up to the individual members to be there for you and help reconcile any problems you may have.

So, will going to any church do, or should it be a specific one?

Well, **the most important reason for going to church every week is taking part in communion.** If the congregation does not offer communion every week, I would ask them why. If they say it is because they are worried it will become too ritualistic, I would ask them, "Isn't that up to the individual Christian to decide for his or herself?"

The other suggestions I would have for you is to **look for a church that roots its teachings in the Bible!** While it is nice and comfortable to only hear life stories, eventually these lose track of following the life and teachings of Jesus. They become more about the individual's walk with God than your own walk. And most importantly, individual life stories are by their nature not talking about Jesus' life.

Finally, go to church to be part of something stable. Life is unstable. Day to day events like Children going to and from school, running errands, or that big project at work distracts us from Jesus. Or big life changing events like illnesses or career changes keep us further and further away from gathering together in Jesus' name. Even going to several congregations, as long as it is consistent and you are able to grow spiritually with fellow Christians, will afford you stability.

Be part of something bigger! Be part of the church.

While this specific congregation is new it already has many ministries to be involved in. I hope that you all can find something here to identify with and become involved in with others. But **wherever you go**, whether it is to this congregation or different one, **remember that we are all still a united church, a united body that confesses Jesus as Lord.**

We should not ascribe to any one person's ideology about Jesus. Jesus' life was sacrificed for our sake so you should be discerning when making your choice of a congregation. Whatever choice that is though, it must certainly include being part of something that is greater than just yourself!