



Stop 'Going' to Church

The early Christian theologian and philosopher, Augustine of Hippo (November 13, 354 – August 28, 430), in his autobiography, *Confessions*, tells the story of the Roman orator and educator Victorinus. He was a famous philosopher and a tutor to many of the members of the Roman senate. A statue had been erected in his honor in the Roman forum. He was deeply interested in pagan philosophy but had also studied Christian literature.

At one point, Victorinus told Simplicianus, the bishop of Milan, "I want you to understand that I am already a Christian." Without hesitating, the bishop shot back, "I will not believe it, nor will I rank you among Christians, unless I see you in the Church of Christ." Victorinus laughed and replied, "Do walls then make Christians?"¹

Victorinus had grasped an important biblical truth. Walls do not make a Christian. The church is not a building; it is made of "living stones".

"And you are living **stones** that God is building into His spiritual temple. What's more, you are His holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God." 1Peter 2:5 (NLT)

Church is not a building. It is made up of people who have been joined to Christ by faith. Buildings are not essential to the Christian life, but the church is. We have studied this aspect in our opening sermon of the year "Be The Church". With this first message, we began a journey of understanding, what church is not about, in the sermon series, "Breakthrough". This sermon series aims to compare our ideas and popular thoughts about church with what the Bible has to say.

As we continue our journey, the second aspect that must collapse before the biblical comprehension of the church is that the church is not a worship service. Church is not a service you attend! Somehow many people today have come to equate church with the worship service. "How was church today"? How many times have you heard this question from someone who didn't attend or hadn't paid attention during a worship service?

When you think about worship service, what do you think about? What is the first word that comes to mind when you hear "church service"? Share your answer with those around you!

¹ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edward Pusey (New York: Collier, 1961), 117.

1' Countdown

Treality is that for many the word church refers to the Sabbath or Sunday meeting during which the pastor speaks, the worship leader leads some songs, the choir sings, and the offering is taken. Then "church" is over, and they go home.

If we understand church as a worship service, we naturally begin spending more time and resources focusing on the quality of the music, sound system, teaching, preaching and programs. As the church grows, the pressure for a better "worship service" increases and the problem escalates.

Don't get me wrong, I do believe that we must offer our best to the Lord! However, with the mindset of church as a worship service, we have created a 'consumer church culture' in which people come to church expecting religious goods and services, and they are happy to remain spectators. People come to church to be fed, to have their needs met through quality programs, and to have "the professionals" teach their children about God. And if they are unhappy with the quality of the service, or with the ways things are done, they go "shopping", moving their "membership" to somewhere else where they can have their needs and expectations met.

In his book *The Missional Church*, Darrell Guder writes, "Popular grammar captures it well: you 'go to church', much as the way you go to a store. You 'attend' a church, the way you attend a school or theater. You 'belong to a church,' much as you would a service club with its programs and activities."²

Such mindset suggests that we have missed the real significance of the Bible's teaching on the nature of the church. Church is not a destination. Church is not a building, an address or even a worship service. The church, the **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia) is not about worship service, but **κοινωνία** (koinōnia). Koino... what?!?! The New Testament makes use of another word to describe what the **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia), the Church was aspiring to be: **κοινωνία** (koinōnia). **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) means "association," "fellowship," or "close relationship". Max Anders writes about **κοινωνία** (koinōnia), "The basic idea is having something in common, sharing together in something, or sharing with someone."³ In the New Testament, most of the time, **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) is translated by the English word 'fellowship'!

Let me ask you, what kind of fellowship, **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) do you think God expects from His Church, His **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia)? Take this time to think about it. Share your thoughts with those around you.

² Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: a Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 79-80.

³ Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, vol. 8, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 233.

2' Countdown

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit share **κοινωνία** (koinōnia), they have fellowship with one another. As believers, unified by the Holy Spirit, we are to live in **κοινωνία** (koinōnia), loving and serving one another.

"But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship (**κοινωνία**) with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:7 NLT

"Going to church" with hundreds of other people to sit and hear a sermon does not ask much of us. Hanging out on the fringe of the church will certainly never expose us. That is why most folks prefer it. It costs us nothing. According to G. K. Chesterton, "Most churches survive because everyone keeps a polite distance from one another."⁴

Is that what God has dreamed for His church? Of course not! What I can tell you, is that **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) may be the most important word for the church that we can grasp. It should not surprise us, then, to see this **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) DNA in the church from the very start. Take your Bible now and read Acts 2:42-47, and try to understand the biblical meaning for **κοινωνία** (koinōnia). Share your findings with the people around you!

3' Countdown

What we traditionally call "fellowship" involves sharing some time together. But biblical **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) means much more:

- **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) is a **spiritual sharing** - "...they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...to the breaking of bread and the prayers." They shared spiritually.
- **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) is a **social sharing** - "...they devoted themselves to...the fellowship." They shared socially.
- **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) is a **financial sharing** - "...they sold their possessions and belongings..." They shared financially in order to care for people and the gospel proclamation!

The reality is that **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) knows no national, social, racial or economic boundaries. Without **κοινωνία** (koinōnia), there is no church, Without **κοινωνία** (koinōnia) there is no **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia).

⁴ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith*, Updated Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 255.

Professor Dallas Willard writes "The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God Himself at the very heart of this community as its prime Sustainer and most glorious Inhabitant."⁵

If church is a place you go to, stop going. Stop 'going' to church. Church is not a destination. Church is not a building, or an address. Church is not a service you attend. Church, God's **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia), is a communion of persons in relationship with Christ and each other! Church is a lifestyle you live in Christ and one another. Church is doing life together in Christ. Just stop going to church. Start being the church. Let's Be the Church - Loving and Serving.

⁵ Willard, Dallas. Life without Lack: Living in the Fullness of Psalm 23 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 65.