

When Church Becomes a Problem, These 4 Reminders Will Help

It is tragic but too often true: If you want to start a fight among Christians, just start talking about church. One says, "I'm following Jesus, but I don't do church." Another says, "My church is right, and yours is wrong." Yet another says, "I pick and choose—church when I feel like it, not when I don't." What are we supposed to do about church anyway?

The whole church thing could be considered dangerous. Denominations can become silos. God's truth can get distorted. Authority can be misused. Leaders can fall. Fads can become confused with values. Personalities can obscure eternal realities. People can get hurt.

I've seen the good, the bad and the ugly about church. But you don't stop eating because food poisoning exists. And you don't stop church because of a bad taste in your mouth.

The church is Jesus' idea. It's His church (Matt. 16:18). He gave Himself for the church (Eph. 5:25). His prayer is that His church be one (John 17:21-23). And can you imagine a prayer of Jesus *not* being fulfilled?

The church doesn't belong to me—or you. It's not our idea. And remember that when we say "church" we're not talking about institutions, buildings or a weekly service. We're talking about the body of Christ. And who are you or I to say His body is unnecessary or outdated?

I'm talking strongly in part because of my own journey. There are certain things I don't like about church. But it's not up to me. Or you. So let's get over our pride and get with Jesus' program. And that includes church.

That being said, what *are* we supposed to do about church?

Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

Styles of worship differ. Emphasis on certain doctrines or teachings differs. The focus of outreach differs. There's nothing wrong, in itself, with having preferences. It is a problem, however, when style, emphasis, focus and preferences eclipse the main thing.

What's the main thing? Based on the New Testament, here are my basic questions to suggest.

1. Is the gospel preached—Jesus as the way, the truth and the life? (John 14:6).
2. Is God's presence welcomed? (Matt. 18:20).
3. Are baptism and the Lord's Supper practiced? (Acts 2:38, 1 Cor. 11:23-25).
4. Is the purpose the same as Jesus' purpose: the Great Commission? (Matt. 28:18-20).

This is not exhaustive, nor by any means a full exposition on the doctrine of the church. But this is the main thing.

God Plants You

This was a challenging lesson for me. It's not which church necessarily "feels" good to you, or teaches what you want it to. It's where God wants you to be planted—connected to His body for your own growth and for theirs.

Don't fall into the excuse, "Well, God just hasn't planted me. So I don't need to do church." And don't confuse authority figures' mandates with God's direction. God always wants you deeply connected with believers in an ongoing way. House church, small church, big church, traditional church, contemporary church, high church, low church—you must be planted somewhere. If you're not planted, you won't grow. Take the time to get God's input on where He wants you planted.

That doesn't mean you like everything about where you're planted. Remember, it's HIS church, not yours.

Church Is for Growing You

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than writing prescriptions makes me a doctor. But being part of a church is one of the things Christians do. Remember, not our idea; it's Jesus' idea. This is not about a social club or a charity. It's not about a weekly production. It's about being in the place God designed for you to grow.

Some church experiences are toxic. If that's the case for you, don't stop eating; seek God's guidance in finding healthier food. Sometimes God transplants you. It takes time for a plant that is transplanted to start growing again; moving to a new church may be necessary and healthy, but be sure it's God's idea before uprooting yourself.

Church Is for Stretching You

Can we get this through our thick heads: *It's not all about you* (or me!) First of all, part of what you need to grow is giving of yourself to others. You can't grow without it. And you will never become all that God designs you to be if you remain focused on your own enjoyment or well-being. You must minister to others. That's reason enough to be connected to His body in a church.

And more than that, others need you. They need your example, your encouragement, your loving correction, your discipling, your growth. While God can use one person, as John Maxwell says, "One is too small a number to make an impact." A body of believers working together can accomplish exponentially more for God's kingdom than you—or anyone—alone.

The kingdom of God needs you! We need you! Stay connected for your benefit—and for ours!

Your Turn: *Has church presented any problems for you? Are you*

planted where God needs you to be? Leave a comment below.
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