

7 THINGS ON WHICH WE MISS OUT WHEN WE WILLINGLY ABSENT OURSELVES FROM THE GATHERING TOGETHER OF THE SAINTS

Introduction

1. When you come together as a church.

a. Shortly before His death, Jesus instituted a memorial that came to be known as “The Lord’s Supper” (**Matthew 26:26-28**). Jesus’ intention was for all His disciples to partake of it on a regularly basis after the church had been established. Indeed, the first Christians “continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread [i.e., the Lord’s Supper]” (**Acts 2:42**), of which they partook every first day of the week (**Acts 20:7**). This is not something we do at home, it is something in which we share when we “come together” (**1 Corinthians 11:33**).

b. Those sincere Christians that love the Lord will not willingly absent themselves from meeting together with the saints on the first day of the week; they desire to meet and partake of the Lord’s Supper because they understand that (i) it is a memorial of the Lord’s suffering, death, and shed blood, (ii) a proclamation of faith in the efficacy of His death and His return, (iii) a time for reflecting on one’s spiritual condition, (iv) a time of fellowship in the blood and body of Christ, and, (v) a means of building fellowship (**1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-34**)².

2. A sincere Christian will have a strong desire to meet together with the saints at every opportunity (cp. **Psalms 122:1**), not only to partake of the Lord’s Supper, but because of the several benefits afforded by such meetings (cp. **1 Corinthians 14:26**). We shall now consider these benefits by asking, “What do we miss when we willingly absent ourselves from a meeting for no good reason?”³



“It is an eclectic club. Some of its members have only ever come one service per week, whose perceivable spiritual progress has been hard to measure. Others, perhaps more tragically, have waned from greater faithfulness in the past to the more tepid attitude toward the assemblies at which God is always present. The Bible makes it clear that those who fail to put Christ first have put something in that place. This is an unenviable position to be in. Yet, these who neglect faithful attendance deprive themselves of so much” – Neal Pollard.

7 Things On Which We Miss Out When We Willingly Absent Ourselves From The Gathering Together Of The Saints

1. We miss an opportunity to increase in knowledge (**1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 4:11-15**).
2. We miss out on the benefits that associating with one another affords (**Acts 2:42, 46; 4:32**).
3. We miss out on mutual encouragement (**Romans 1:11-12**).
4. We miss out on much needed provocation (**Hebrews 10:24**).
5. We miss the opportunity to edify one another (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**).
6. We miss an opportunity to immunize ourselves against sin (**1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 13:20**).
7. We miss out on times of rejoicing (**Romans 12:15; 15:13**).

¹ This sermon is based on an article by Neal Pollard. <https://preacherpollard.wordpress.com/2015/12/02/what-does-the-sunday-morning-only-christian-miss/>

² See Mark Copeland’s sermon outline: www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/why2/why2_08.htm

³ Just to make it clear, we are not talking about those that miss a meeting due to some legitimate reason, but those that absent themselves for no good reason. Such may offer an excuse but an excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie.

7 THINGS ON WHICH WE MISS OUT WHEN WE WILLINGLY ABSENT OURSELVES FROM THE GATHERING TOGETHER OF THE SAINTS

1. We Miss An Opportunity To Increase In Knowledge.

- a. Solomon writes, “It is not good for a soul to be without knowledge” (**Proverbs 19:2**), which is why he goes on to say, “The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge” (**Proverbs 15:14**) and “Wise people store up knowledge” (**Proverbs 10:14**). The apostle prayed that his brethren might “be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (**Colossians 1:9**).
- b. The benefits of knowledge are well known and here are just a few: (i) Knowledge is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (**Psalms 119:105**) and without the light of knowledge we walk in darkness (**Hosea 4:6**), (ii) Knowledge prevents us being led astray (**Ephesians 4:11-14**), and (iii) Knowledge is essential for spiritual growth (**1 Peter 2:1-2**). It is essential, of course, that we apply that knowledge (**James 1:22**).
- c. Whenever we gather together with the saints, it is an opportunity to increase in knowledge. We impart knowledge to one another through sermons, Bible classes (**1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 4:11-15**), and even our singing (**Colossians 3:16**). To deliberately absent ourselves from a meeting is to deny ourselves of knowledge and to deny others the benefit of our knowledge.

2. We Miss Out On The Benefits That Associating With One Another Affords.

- a. The first Christians were instructed to meet together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord’s Supper (**Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34**), but they actually assembled together on a daily basis (**Acts 2:46; 5:42; 6:1; 19:9; Hebrews 3:13**).
- b. It was through this regular association that (i) the disciples grew in their love for one another; evidenced by their sacrifices in order to provide for the needy among them (**Acts 2:42-45**), (ii) spiritual joy was heightened (**Acts 2:46; cp. Romans 15:13; 1 Peter 1:8**). “They were full of gladness, spiritual joy and happiness; and singleness of heart, every man worthy of the confidence of his neighbor; and all walking by the same rule, and minding the same thing” (Clarke), and (iii) genuine unity is cultivated (**Acts 4:32**). Commenting on the terms “one heart” and “one soul”, Gill says, “There was an entire consent and agreement in doctrine, in matters of faith they were all of one mind and judgment, and there was a perfect harmony in their practice, they all performed the same duties, and observed the same commands and ordinances; and all pursued the same interest, and had the same ends and views; and there was a strict union of their affections to each other; their souls were knit to one another; so that there was, but as it were, one soul in this large body of Christians.”
- c. If one truly loves his brethren and rejoices at the thought of gathering together with the saints, then he will never wilfully miss an opportunity to share in this association (**Psalms 122:1; 42:1-4**).

3. We Miss Out On Mutual Encouragement.

- a. We are not of the world (**John 15:19**), but we have to live in it (**Matthew 5:14-16; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10**). Jesus said that in this world we will have “tribulation” or “troubles” (**John 16:33**).
- b. It is easy to see the need for encouragement, and, for Paul, encouraging the brethren was always on his mind: (i) He encouraged brethren wherever he preached (**Acts 16:40; 20:2**), (ii) He desired to visit the brethren at Rome to enjoy mutual encouragement (**Romans 1:11-12**), (iii) Paul sent Timothy to the brethren at Thessalonica to establish them and encourage them concerning their faith, which they needed because of the discouragement that persecution brought upon them (**1 Thessalonians 3:1-3**). The church here is often blessed with visits by friends that encourage us in our faith through their preaching. You would miss out on such encouragement if you chose to stay at home that week.
- c. There are three wells from which we can draw the water of encouragement: reading the scriptures (**Acts 15:31**), hearing the word of God preached (**Acts 11:23**), and from one another (**Romans 1:11-12**). We can draw from all three of these wells when we meet with the saints. In deliberately missing a service, we not only deprive ourselves of encouragement, we deprive our brethren of much needed encouragement.

“We need our spirits lifted. Others need us to lift their spirits, too (**Hebrews 10:24; cp. Philippians 2:3-4**). In worship we can get our spiritual batteries charged. Coming together helps us each face the world. We are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds (**Ephesians 4:23-24**). The assemblies aid us in this” - Neal Pollard.

4. We Miss Out On Much Needed Provocation.

- a. Throughout the New Testament there are exhortations to abide in Christ (**John 15:4; 1 John 2:28**), abide in the doctrine of Christ (**2 John 1:9**), abstain from fleshly lusts (**1 Peter 2:11**), be doers of the word (**James 1:22**), be given to hospitality (**Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9**), be holy (**1 Peter 1:15-16**), be of one mind (**Romans 12:16**), be strong in the Lord (**Ephesians 6:10**), et al.
- b. In Hebrews it says, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (**Hebrews 10:24**). The word “provoke” is from the Greek word *paroxusmos*, which is defined as, “(1) an inciting, incitement (2) irritation” (Thayer). The word “provoke” conveys a bad sense and so a better word is “motivate”; as used by the ISV: “And let us continue to consider how to motivate one another to love and good deeds.”
- c. The numerous exhortations throughout the New Testament coupled with the fact that we are commanded to “provoke” or “motivate” one another unto love and good works, proves that we do indeed need motivating. Love can grow cold because of lawlessness (**Matthew 24:12**) and one’s zeal for good works can easily wane. If we choose to miss a gathering of the saints, we could be missing out on some much needed motivation. Also, our absence means that we are not fulfilling our responsibility to provoke our brethren (**Hebrews 10:24**).

5. We Miss The Opportunity To Edify One Another.

- a. We meet together on the first day of the week for several reasons, but, whatever we do, Paul says, “Let all things be done for edification” (**1 Corinthians 14:26; cp. 14:12**). The reason the Lord has provided preachers and teachers is for the edification of the church (**Ephesians 4:11-16**). We not only assemble to *be* edified, we meet to edify others. In other words, it is a *mutual* activity. Writing the Thessalonians, Paul says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**).
- b. Here’s an interesting verse: Paul says, “Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (**Romans 14:19**). We all have a responsibility to *pursue* the things by which one may edify one another. The word “pursue” here means “to seek after eagerly, earnestly endeavour to acquire” (Thayer). In other words, we do not just *wait* for opportunities to arise to edify one another, we must *create* opportunities to edify one another.
- c. Those that wilfully absent themselves from meetings not only miss out on an opportunity to be edified, they are failing to obey the command of the Lord to edify their brethren.

6. We Miss An Opportunity To Immunize Ourselves Against Sin.

- a. John says, “We know that we are from God and that the whole world lies under the control of the evil one” (**1 John 5:19 ISV**). We are not, therefore, surprised when John says, “For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world” (**1 John 2:16**).
- b. We have to live in the world and the danger we face of being drawn under its influence is very real. Paul says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’” (**1 Corinthians 15:33**). Do you remember Lot? When he separated from Abraham he went to live in Sodom. Peter describes him as “a righteous man”, and how did that righteous man feel about living in such wicked surroundings? Peter says he was “greatly distressed by the immoral conduct of lawless people - for as long as that righteous man lived among them, day after day he was being tortured in his righteous soul by what he saw and heard in their lawless actions” (**2 Peter 2:7-8**). Now, was Lot influenced by such wickedness, were his good habits in any way corrupted by such bad company? Consider: when the angels went to the city, Lot took them into his home. It wasn’t long before the citizens gathered at his door and demanded, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have *relations* with them⁴” (**Genesis 19:5 NASB**). Lot replied, “Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof” (**Genesis 19:7-8**). So you can see the influence living among those wicked people had upon him.

⁴ The ISV reads, “They called out to Lot and asked, ‘Where are the men who came to visit you tonight? Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!’”

- c. If evil company corrupts good habits, then good company must encourage good habits. The closest I came to finding a verse that says this is: “He who walks with wise men will be wise” (**Proverbs 13:20**). Many congregations find themselves in circumstances that permit them to meet only twice a week, and so those times need to be treasured. Let the times we meet inject us with strength and faithfulness and, as it were, immunize us against the influence of the world.

7. We Miss Out On Times Of Rejoicing.

- a. For some brethren, assembling with the saints is a chore and a bore. They find the sermons and Bible classes irrelevant and boring, the songs don’t stir their thoughts and emotions, they only put a token amount into the collection, and the Lord’s Supper is just a meaningless ritual. And they certainly don’t sense the brotherly love flowing from heart-to-heart when worshipping together in spirit and truth.
- b. For a sincere believer, meeting with the saints is a joyful occasion. David said, I was *glad* when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of Jehovah’” (**Psalms 122:1**). It is a joy to hear the word of God, to sing praises to God, to give into the treasury of the Lord, and there is even joy in partaking of the Lord’s Supper as we remember the price paid for our salvation and consider our standing before God in Christ. Is there anything else about which to be joyful? Certainly:
- ✿ We rejoice at seeing brethren walking in the truth (**2 John 1:4; 3 John 1:3-4**).
 - ✿ We rejoice together in our salvation (**Luke 10:20; Romans 5:2; 15:13; 1 Peter 1:8**).
 - ✿ We rejoice when a sinner repents and obeys the gospel (**Luke 15:7**).
 - ✿ We rejoice when a sinning brother repents (**2 Corinthians 7:9**).
 - ✿ We rejoice with those that have a reason to rejoice (**Romans 12:15; 1 Corinthians 12:26**).
 - ✿ We rejoice at hearing the gospel is preached (**Philippians 1:18**).
- c. In missing a service, one might miss an occasion for rejoicing. But do we think of the discouragement and sorrow we cause our brethren when we absent ourselves without reason?

“There are some brethren for whom assembling with the saints is something of a chore; they find no joy in being with their brethren and simply sit and endure the regular activities. The only joy they experience is when they finally get home. Only they know what motivates them to keep coming” (David Collins).

Conclusion

1. When we absent ourselves from the meetings – whether four weeks in a row, two weeks in a row, or just one – we miss the things we need most, and we miss the opportunity to give others what they need most. As Paul says, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (**Philippians 2:4**).
2. The aims of the lesson:
 - a. To invite those that choose to absent themselves from meetings for no good reason to examine themselves and seek spiritual counsel.
 - b. In having highlighted the things we miss when we absent ourselves from meetings, to provoke or motivate one to faithful attendance henceforth.
 - c. To remind faithful attendees that there is an obligation to give as well as receive.

“The many, many principles of scripture lead to an unavoidable conclusion. We should want to be together with Christ and His people at every opportunity. If we do not want this enough to make it happen, maybe something is terribly wrong with our ‘affections’ (cp. **Colossians 3:1-2**)” – Neal Pollard.