

Fellowship - Why Church is Important

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[0:00] Hebrews chapter 10, verse 24 it says, And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, ! Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, ! As the manner of some is, but exhorting one another.

! And so much the more as you see the day approaching. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you tonight for everybody that is here. Lord, that your Holy Spirit is here.

But you are here, as it says, where two or three are gathered in the presence of your Son. Father, we thank you for your presence here today. We thank you for your Word. Help us, Lord, to have ears to hear what your Word is speaking to us today.

That we'll be receptive to it in Jesus' name. Help us, Lord. Help me as I speak it. That I might have clarity of voice and that it might be clear and understood. The message tonight we pray in Jesus' wonderful name.

Amen. The author of Hebrews, likely Paul, is telling us about fellowship. He's writing to the Jewish Christians. And it applies just as much to us today as well.

[1:11] Going to church doesn't make anybody a Christian. It's like, as someone has said, any more than taking a wheelbarrow into a garage makes it an automobile.

That's what Billy Sunday said. Why go to church? Why go to church? Why should we bother? We know that there's some not here today that could have been here and missing out.

And yet, you that are here are preaching to the converted because you're here tonight, fellowshiping. But reasons why. Why should we fellowship? Why should we get together with God's people? You could have stayed home in front of that nice warm heater in front of the television set tonight.

Why not instead go and worship God down at the sports field, some would say. Or why not worship God sitting under a tree? Why should we fellowship?

Why should we be with God's people? Why should we get together with God's people? It's talking here about a habit. It's talking about a habit. We can have good habits and bad ones.

[2:12] I'm sure we could all think of some bad habits. Some habits that will harm our health and will be hurtful to us. But there's some good habits. And fellowshiping, getting together with God's people, is a good habit.

Joining together and meeting with God's people is a good habit. Paul says that some folk were making the mistake of the bad habit of neglecting assembling together.

Maybe it was persecution. It could have been in those days. It could have been come to church.

You might cop some abuse or persecution. You might get sent to be tortured to death.

And sometimes in bygone days, that used to be a reality. And in some countries still today too.

Maybe it was laziness. Maybe it was just something else was more important than getting together with God's people.

There's an urging here. There's an urging for you, for me, to be in fellowship. To get together. To regularly get together. It's a good habit. Not to neglect it, but to keep on encouraging one another.

[3:16] Here's a letter that a pastor received. It's a letter to a pastor. I'll read it out to you. Dear pastor, you often stress attendance at worship as being very important for a Christian.

But I think a person has a right to miss now and then. I think every person ought to be excused for the following reasons and the number of times indicated.

Here's the list now. The list of reasons why you've got a good excuse to miss church. Christmas.

That's a good reason, isn't it? The Sunday before or the Sunday after.

It's a busy family time. So that's one. Number one Sunday. New Year's. New Year's. The party lasted too long. New Year's around that time. Easter.

Had to get away for the holidays. So that's three so far. Australia Day. It's a national holiday after all. That's another one. Labor Day. You needed to get away. Anzac Day.

[4:14] Had to visit someone. School closing. The kids needed a break. Too busy with the kids. School opening. That's another Sunday. Family reunions.

Could be mine or my wife's. Sleeping late. Saturday night activities. You've got to give yourself four for those Sundays. Four of those for sleeping late.

Sleeping in. Missing church. Deaths in the family. Maybe allow four for that. You've got quite a few relatives. An anniversary. Second honeymoon.

One Sunday for that. Sickness. One for each member of the family. There's five. Business trips.

Sarah and us. Three of those. Vacation. Going away for holidays for three weeks.

Bad weather. You know, it's raining tonight. That's a good reason. Bad weather. Storm, rain, clouds. Must be six Sundays for that. And then there's the ball games. The ball games.

[5:08] We talked this morning about Baal, didn't we? And this guy makes a bit of a joke of it. He talks about, as we know, in the Old Testament days, they worshipped Baal. The idol.

The idol. They used to sacrifice to her and sue. The false idol. The false image. And here he says in the letter, there's five Sundays you can miss because of ball games. He says, football.

Football. Baal. And baseball. And basketball. Of course, it's like a god, isn't it, today? The Baal God. The God Baal. It's the ball games that are more important than God today.

It's like the modern day Baal is ball games. You know? Unexpected company. You can't walk out. Someone just rocks up. Why don't you bring them to church? Could be five Sundays for them.

Well, time changes, you know, when they turn the clocks back or forward. It's confusing. So you miss church a couple of times for that. And then maybe there's something special on TV. Could be the World Cup. Could be the Olympics.

[6:06] Or something really important that you really want to watch. That you're really excited about. Miss three Sundays for that. So the letter goes on. Pastor, that leaves only two Sundays per year.

So you can count on us to be in church on the fourth Sunday in February and the third Sunday in August. Unless providentially hindered. Sincerely faithful member.

It's a joke, of course, but you can think of lots of reasons why it's too hard to get to church. But, friends, there's some good reasons. Some good reasons to fellowship.

And the writer of Hebrews in this verse that we just read gives us a number of reasons. And number one is be considerate. He says consider one another. Consider one another. We're in church not just for our own benefit, but because we want to consider one another.

We want to consider our brothers and sisters, others around us. He doesn't say consider yourself and what you want out of church. He says consider one another.

[7:06] One another. Each other. To paraphrase a popular saying, ask not what your church can do for you, but rather what can you do for your church. What can you do?

It's like I said before. Well, some people, they come to church, what can I get out of it? Maybe you can come to church and want to put something into it, to make a contribution.

You know, we could do with some help in this church. Come to this church with something to give, with something to offer, with something to serve the Lord here. There's lots of opportunity to be a part of the work.

So ask what you can do for his church, rather than coming with a gimme, gimme attitude like many do. They come to church, so once again, it's like a bless me club.

And if they don't get blessed enough, they go and find somewhere where they're going to get blessed a bit more. It's not like that. It's about considering one another. And meeting with God's people shows that we care for each other.

[8:02] For each other. To be thoughtful, to be caring, to be concerned, to take care of people. And when we meet together, there's also an opportunity to provoke. The writer of Hebrews 10 here, he says to provoke

one another.

Consider one another to provoke. Now that's got the sense of stirring up one another. Now, none of us like to be stirred up. But if you want to be stirred up to do something good, that's a good thing. Sometimes we need that alarm clock to stir us in the morning.

To get up and do something important. We need to be stirred. We need to be provoked. We need to be urged. And it's a stirring, a provoking, not to hatred, but to love and to good works.

That's what the writer is saying. To provoke unto love and to good works. Does your consideration for others show through? Do you come and meet with God's people only with yourself in mind? What's in it for me? What's in it for me? Or do you think, how can I be a blessing to others? How can I bless the others that are here today?

[9:04] Maybe a word of encouragement, of cheer, of prayer, of counsel, of comfort. Whatever it might be. There might be people hurting here tonight that need you to urge them, to encourage them, to comfort them.

Instead of what's in it for me being selfish? Okay. How can I be a blessing to somebody else here today? How can God use my ability to lift another up? Are you considerate or inconsiderate?

We need to work at this. I know I need to. I'm inclined to be selfish. I'm sure if we all were honest, we'd all say the same. But God wants us to be unselfish.

To be considerate, not inconsiderate. And if God has given you an ability, a talent, it's given you for a reason. It's given for you to share. To use a ministry, a talent.

Don't bury it. Use it. Use your abilities. There might be some people here with musical abilities. We could sure introduce a new song leader tonight. We need some people that have got abilities to serve the Lord.

[10:06] That can step into the gap and stand up. And I was encouraged that David prayed tonight. It's good to stand up and do something for the Lord. Even if it's just something that seems insignificant.

That's a blessing. You're blessing others by that, David. Well done. Praise God for that. And we all need to come to church to give, to bless. And if you've got a God-given talent, a gift, use it for God's glory to bless another.

We're told, let all things be done unto edifying. So when we come to church, we want the church to be a place of building up, of edifying people. A constructive place that we meet together to build each other up.

Ask yourself, have I come here today with that aim? What can I contribute? What can I give to be part of the church building program? And we're not talking about some earthly building of bricks and mortar.

We're talking about the church building program. God's interested in building up people. God's interested in building you up, to making you stronger, to build up your faith, to build up your love, to build up your zeal and service.

[11:11] And what can I contribute to God's building program in this place? To be able to lift up another, to be able to bless another, to be able to take the time to care, to consider, to help another to grow, to help utter a word of cheer, of faith, of comfort.

Be considerate. It says to consider one another. That's the first point, to consider one another. The second point, a good reason why we come and fellowship is secondly, to be together.

To be together. It's talking here about not forsaking the assembling, the gathering, the meeting together. As I said, it's not the place that we meet. It's the meeting.

It's the gathering of one another together. Not forsaking the assembling. It's a being together with God's people. That's the greatest place that we can be. With our brothers and sisters in Christ and with others maybe that are searching, that we can encourage and point in the direction of the Lord. Someone noted a small child in church one day that was turning around smiling at everyone. He wasn't gurgling, spitting, humming, tearing the hymn books or rummaging through his mother's handbag.

[12:23] He was just smiling. Suddenly, his mother jerked him around and in a stage whisper that everyone could hear, said, stop grinning, you're in church.

Now you've got to be, it's like as if you've got to be somber and solemn and sour faced when you come to church. God's church is a place to enjoy.

It's a place of blessing. It's a place of encouragement. Bring a smile that you can give to another. And with that, she gave him a slap on his hind side and as the tears rolled down his cheeks, she added, that's better, and returned to her prayers.

You know, she had the wrong attitude. You know, we don't mind kids making a bit of gurgling noises and people smiling. You know, I'd like you to smile at me sometimes. I'm not here to please men, of course.

You know, and maybe you need to be grimacing and uncomfortable because the word of God needs to penetrate sometimes. It might make us feel uncomfortable. We might not always be smiling when the word of God is preached because it might convict.

[13:25] It might challenge us and it might challenge me. Certainly it does and should do. And so being together with God's people isn't meant to be a ritual to be enjoyed, but a relationship to be enjoyed.

Getting together with God's people is a faith-building time. It's an encouraging time, an uplifting time for our faith. And there's some great things about being together.

When we're together, there's a strengthening. There's a strengthening. I know I need to be strengthened. You know, it's not that I'm doing all the encouraging. I come to church to get encouraged. Whoever's preaching, whoever's talking and ministering, they need encouragement just as you do as you receive it.

And when we're together, there's a strength, there's a service, there's a blessing, there's an opportunity when you're together with God's people that you'll miss out if you're not here. So be encouraged in that.

And it says we can join in doing a number of things. It tells us in the verse here, it tells us about exhorting one another, exhorting one another. We can exhort our fellow believers.

[14:30] I'd like some folk to exhort me every once in a while. I know I can do with learning new things. I can do with some helpful feedback. Maybe someone might disagree with me.

That's healthy and helpful if we can study the Word together and come to an understanding together of God's Word. It's helpful. It's encouraging. It's edifying when we can search the Scriptures together and see if these things are so.

We can exhort our fellow believers. You can exhort your fellow believer, Peggy, to pray. You can encourage others. Nicole, to have faith. David, you can encourage others to meet together.

To hold on to the Lord. To walk with the Lord. To do good works. Exhorting is something that we can all do. Exhorting can also mean that we comfort one another. That we can find an opportunity to comfort.

It's got the same word meaning there in the sense of exhorting. It talks about encouraging or comforting. We can find an opportunity to comfort. There could be people here, as I know often happens, who might have lost a loved one.

[15:35] It could be someone sick in the family. Or you might be unwell yourself. You might need some comfort here tonight. Then this is an opportunity for us to care about one another. Instead of fellowship.

I know I've heard this said before. In some churches you just get hello-ship. Hello-ship. They just say hello at the door and hello at the end if you're lucky. But that's not how church should be. I'd like to think that we can be a warm place. We've got people. It's more than hello-ship. It's more than just some kind of shallow, hi, how are you. But it's something, and I know we all can be rushed, as we can be often.

But that it goes deeper than that. It goes further than that. I pray that it will. I pray that it can. I know in the mornings when we have refreshment time, there's that opportunity to have a cuppa and a chat and just get to meet people and get to know people.

That's important. We want to show compassion, to show brotherly love, to show support, to help carry a load, to help reassure. I know there's folk running through the week and said, please pray for me.

[16:38] I'm going through some trouble. I'm going through a doubt in time. And that's what fellowship is all about. It's about caring for one another. When there's difficult times, when there's troubled times, that

we can call on our brother, our sister, and have some encouragement, some uplifting.

And that can be mutual too. And you know what? When you do some exhorting, you get blessed too. Amen? When you give, God blesses you too. As you give encouragement, you receive it yourself.

And exhorting can also mean an encouraging of one another. The devil wants to load you down with discouragement. Discouragement and fear and despair. Maybe there's a brother here today, a sister, who's stumbling under a heavy weight that we can help to lift.

Now, I read this somewhere. I want to say this tactfully. That churches are built with the FAT people.

Okay? F-A-T. That's how someone put it. There's three things about God's kind of people. But we all need to be F-A-T. Okay? What it stands for is faithful, available, teachable.

[17:49] That's what God wants in his people. Amen? God wants us to be faithful, available, teachable. These are the people who will serve the Lord. I pray that God will send us much more people who are faithful, available and teachable.

Every member is vital to his body. And when you're not here, the body doesn't function as well. I know, as the picture tells us in Paul's illustration in 1 Corinthians, he talks about the body of Christ. It's been like we've all got a part to play. We've all got a function. We've all got a role. We've all got some responsibility as a part of the body. If you cut a part of the body, it doesn't function as well. If you're part of the body, malfunctions, it affects the whole body. And you'll miss when you're not here. When people are not here, the body doesn't function as well. A preacher was talking on faithfulness in attendance and he put it like this.

He said, consider these examples. If your car started one out of every three times, would you consider it faithful? If the paper boy skipped Monday or Thursday, would they be missed?

[18:57] If you didn't show up at work two or three times a month, would your boss call you faithful? If your refrigerator quit a day now and then, would you excuse it and say, oh well, it works most of the time.

If your water heater grinds you with a cold shower one or two mornings a week while you were in the shower, would it be faithful? If you miss a couple of mortgage payments in a year's time, would your bank say, oh well, 10 out of 12 is near enough.

If you miss worship and attend meetings only often enough to show you're interested but not often enough to get involved, are you faithful? We can all be challenged. I know I can be challenged. But I need to be more faithful. We need to be more faithful, available, teachable. And there's encouragement here. There's a mutual support. Not putting people under bondage where if you happen to miss church, you're under condemnation and you're under a cloud, it's not like we're in a bondage or a legalistic sense.

I'm not meaning to put that on anyone today. But God wants you to be blessed. And you miss out on that blessing when you're not in fellowship because there's encouragement, there's support and there's strength here when we meet together.

[20:07] And it goes on, the writer of Hebrews says, not forsaking the assembling. So don't forsake each other. Don't forsake each other. Support one another and be together.

And just lastly, we've looked so far, we've talked about to be considerate. Be considerate. It's being considerate when you're fellowshiping with God's people.

He says, be together. Provoking, exalting, encouraging, comforting, supporting. And lastly, number three, be ready. Be ready.

Because he says, do it because you see the day approaching. He says, not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another. And so much the more, as you see the day approaching.

There's a day coming, brother. There's a day coming, sister, when Jesus is coming back to this world. He's coming back to this planet. Are you prepared? Are you ready?

[21:04] Are you ready for Christ's coming? When he comes back to take over planet Earth, friends, get ready. Get ready. Because Jesus Christ, our Lord, is coming back.

And there's going to be a lot of people caught out. They're going to be caught napping. They're going to be caught by surprise. And it says of some that some are going to be ashamed before him at his coming.

They're going to be ashamed before him at his coming. We don't want to be ashamed. We want to be serving, living, growing, and learning as a Christian.

And ready, waiting, watching, working, looking for the coming, the great appearing of our great God and our Saviour. Friends, the day is approaching.

There's a day coming. I don't know. Look, I've got a diary in my back pocket here. And I try to plan what I'm going to do next week. I might not get to see next week. I might not get to see tomorrow.

[22:05] We may not have another day. We may not have another week. And, you know, we plan ahead. And then we get a new diary for the next time. One day, the diary's not going to be any good because the day's going to come.

We don't know what day that is. The day is approaching. One thing's for sure. We know it's approaching. It's coming soon. It's getting closer. It's closer today than it was yesterday. The day is approaching.

The day of the Lord, as the Bible says. The day of his return. It's the day of reckoning. The day of reward. Friends, today, I want to tell you that every minute, 156 people, there's probably more than that since this quote, every minute, 156 people in the world die without hope.

They die without Christ. They die without faith in Christ. 156 people every minute. And it says that Matthew 16, For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then shall he reward every man according to his works.

Now, of course, I'm not meaning, of course, to say we're saved by works. We're saved by faith, by God's grace. It's only his salvation, salvation through faith, by his grace, that we can receive eternal life by his goodness and mercy.

[23:20] And I urge you tonight, for anyone here today, to trust him. To trust the Lord for his salvation. Trust him for his work on the cross. That he died for our sins, to pay the penalty, the ultimate price, the absolute price of his very death.

As the Bible says, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God, the free gift that he extends and offers for you to receive and invites you to partake of, it's free tonight.

The free gift of eternal life is through Jesus Christ our Lord. It's one or the other. The wages of sin, which is death, or the gift of God, of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And friends, we want to be found ready, waiting, saved. And more than saved, we want to be found faithful. We want to be found serving. Friends, every Sunday morning, without fail, an elderly man could be seen walking to church.

Everyone in the block knew he was deaf. He was unable to hear a word that was said. He couldn't even hear the songs, let alone the preacher, the choir music or the sermon.

[24:25] And a cynical neighbour wrote to him a note. Why do you spend your Sundays in church when you can't hear a single word? He answered, I want my neighbours to know which side I'm on.

He wanted the world to know, I'm a believer and I'm going to be faithful. I'm going to be serving and fellowshiping. Friends, the day is approaching. The day is approaching.

D-Day. D-Day. Judgment Day. The Great Day. It's called the Day of the Lord. The Bright Day. The Day of Days. The glorious day of our Lord's return in glory.

The day is approaching. How should we so much the more exhort one another? How much so much the more should we not forsake? How much so much the more need we to be part of God's work?

Representation of His kingdom, in effect. On earth, the gathering together of His people. It's important. It's important. And on that awesome day, there's going to be a great gathering together of all of God's people down through the ages.

[25:28] The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we which are alive and remain will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.

And He says, encourage one another. Comfort one another with these words. There's a song that goes like this. There's going to be a meeting in the air. In the sweet, sweet by and by.

I'm going to meet you. I'll meet you over there in that home beyond the sky. Such singing there you'll hear. Never heard by mortal ear. It will be glorious, I do declare.

And God's own Son shall be the leading one at that meeting in the air. Another hymn we could say is, When the roll is called up yonder, will you be there?

Will you be there? We know it's based on the scriptures that talk about that our name is written down in glory. Our name is written down in the Lamb's book of life.

[26:25] And one day the angel is going to take a look at a book and is going to look for your name. Is it there? Is it there tonight? It talks about the Lord talked to His disciples.

He said that your names are written down. Your names are written down. Friends, your name can be written down today if it already hasn't been. And it's not. The angel or whoever writes the name in the book, Presuming an angel.

The angel doesn't write it down because you've been to church today. Sorry. If the angel doesn't write it down because you've given all your money to the poor. Or you've gone to church every day of your life.

Midweek. Noon and night. The angel's not going to write your name down because you've tried and tried and tried to be a really, really good person. The angel's going to write your name down because you said, I trust Him.

I trust Jesus. I trust Jesus Christ for my soul's destiny. I trust Jesus to take away my sin by His act on the cross for me in dying for my sin.

[27:32] That is why I can be saved. And the moment, that moment, your name is written down. It's recorded for posterity, for eternity, forever in His book.

And you can have that assurance today that your name's written down. If you haven't, please talk to a believer. Talk to another Christian tonight. And they'll encourage you. I'd like to encourage you that you can trust Him today for that wonderful step of trusting Him.

To as many as received Him. To then gave you power. To become the sons of God. Even to them that believe on His name. One Sunday morning, a mother decided to play a joke on this person's sister by phone.

Dialing the number, she's heard someone pick up the receiver. Her cue to say in a deep voice, This is God speaking. Why aren't you in church? To mum's horror, she had dialed the wrong number. She dialed the wrong number. Someone got a bit of a shock there that Sunday morning because they weren't in church. Friends, but seriously, a challenge here tonight. If we can't be found faithful here below, what of eternity?

[28:40] What of eternity? When we give account for how we spent our life below. We know the Word tells us to redeem the time. Make the most of it. Because the days are evil. Will you be ready?

Will you be found faithful? Friends, 1 John 2, it says, And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. Here's another bit of a tongue-in-cheek story. Imagine a red-faced, sleepy-eyed Christian, a lover of the gospel of St. Mattress. They love their mattress.

They love lying in bed instead of going to church. And imagine this red-faced, sleepy-eyed Christian. He was freshly raptured out of his bedclothes, standing before his master, trying to explain how Sunday was his only day of rest.

Think of the embarrassed believer there with the fishing pole in his hand, trying to tell the Lord of glory how he could worship Him just as well out in nature. And the story goes on.

[29:42] Humorous, not really. For if this should happen to you, it would be a moment of disgrace. But isn't it just that? Whether Jesus comes or not, dear Christian, live each moment of your life here on earth as though in the next instant you'll hear the shout and the trump of God.

Be found faithful, whether it's fellowshipping, whether it's serving, whether it's reading your Bible, praying, witnessing. Be found faithful. Faithful, available, teachable.

I wonder who will be ashamed before him. Some will be saved, but for some, they'll be saved, but there'll be a loss of reward. The Bible talks about some of whom their works were burnt up. All the things that they thought they were going to get some credit for, they're just burnt up in a puff of smoke. Word, hay and stubble. Things that they've done just of their own fleshly, their own self. And there was a loss of reward. They neglected the opportunities that the Lord had presented to them. Miss church and you miss so much.

[30:52] And friends, there's eternal blessings that you miss when you're not in fellowship, of getting together, of getting the word, of getting the encouragement, of giving the encouragement. There's going to be a meeting in the air.

There's a meeting. We don't know when it is. I don't know. Maybe it's tonight. You know, maybe it's this week ahead. Let's not be ashamed before him that he's coming. How we should love to meet with the brethren now, here below, whenever and wherever we have the opportunity, as we have the ability to.

Will you forsake the assembling? Or take every opportunity to meet, to be blessed, to bless, to be considerate? Consider one another. So be together, exhorting, encouraging, provoking, and to be ready, as you see the day approaching.

The signs are all about us. We know the coming of our Lord, draweth nigh. The Lord is coming soon. The signs are evident. They're everywhere. The day is fast approaching, as I say. Tomorrow is going to be even closer than it is just now. We're going to be one day closer tomorrow, if we see it. The day is approaching. And how much the more we should exhort one another. It's closer than it was yesterday.

[32:05] What do we do when we see the day approaching? Shouldn't it make us want to serve him more? Shouldn't it make us want to love him, and please him, and honour him, and follow him, more fully, more deeply, more earnestly, more urgently?

Consider one another. Fellowship. Get together. Make it your habit. It's a great habit. It's one you're not going to be ashamed of. It's a habit that, well, I mean, the world might try to make you ashamed of it.

See you wanting to be here today. But make it your habit. All the more, and so much the more, as you see, the day approaching. You're not going to be here today.