

No Longer Just "Having Church"

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It occurs to me that many churches "do church" pretty well: warm greetings are given, God-honoring music is played, soul-stirring singing is enjoined, concerns are shared, prayers are offered and God's word is set forth. And, oh yes, I almost forgot, an offering is taken too. (Imagine that, a pastor almost forgetting the offering! That would be an occupational hazard.) Indeed, with all those elements in place, I would say that settles it, most local gatherings of Jesus' disciples "do church" pretty well.

It also occurs to me that one could come faithfully to Sunday morning gatherings, have gotten involved in "going to church", consistently be there when they "have church" - when those infamous "doors are opened" - without behaving as a vital member of the church.

Notice I did NOT say become a member of church, as in "join a church". Instead, I wrote of "behaving as a vital member of the church." Simply put, that means "being the church".

Sadly, its not rare for someone to be faithful in "going to church" without functioning as an active part of the church. Most sadly of all is that many faithful church people seem sufficiently satisfied to exist as faithful church attendees with no more input or contact than a shared Sunday morning "worship / church experience".

An analogy from the theater world may help show the difference between attendees and vital participants. At a play, no one would confuse the audience with the cast. Seeing a play - even dozens of times - is quite different from learning lines, designing costumes or painting sets. Going to a play does not make you a vital member of the production - as important as an audience is.

Unfortunately, this is a troublesome analogy as many times our Sunday gathering ("church") is now evaluated by how well we "put on the show" on Sunday morning. "How was church" has come to mean "did the choir sing nice, did the preacher go long, was the room stuffy, the music too loud.?". The church is the people, not the program.

A better analogy might be the difference between being a hat and a hand. The hat is a nice addition and adornment to one's body. The hand is a vital attachment, a crucial functioning part. So too simply being a mere faithful attendee versus being an integral part in a local body - more than just Sundays and church held programs.

The passage most often used to exhort faithful attendance from God's people is Hebrews 10:24-25. Who has not heard this "forsake not the assembling of yourselves together" passage countless times? Yet, the plea in the text is for faithfulness in showing up so that we can all encourage one another - and even more as we see His return getting closer.

We have lowered the bar. We have set sitting as a sufficient - and for some -supreme standard. Yet, this Hebrews passage asserts that we are to give careful thought as to how we can spur on one another to love and good deeds. Just think if we gave this as much careful consideration as we did what we wore, where we sat, and where we would eat after church.

More than just being "in your place on Sunday morning", we are to take our place of mutually edifying and exhorting one another (see Ephesian 4:11-16; 1 Corin 12:12 ff, Rom. 12, Acts 2:42-47).

Hats abound - per my last analogy. In fact, we celebrate how many hats are present at "church". However, "hands down" - sorry - it is the hands that count.

Here is a challenge: instead of simply requiring of yourself that you "go to church", demand from yourself that you function as part of the church. This will still include going to church, but it will include so much more: serving those in need, using your Spirit-given gifts to build up the body, being in growing relationships with other followers of Jesus, spurring others on in their walk... To further mix the metaphor, it is time for all "hands" on deck.

The church is those people who have been called out of the world by God to Himself. Church is not something you have, a place you go or a service conducted on Sunday. Church is something you are. We are to "be the church", to the glory of God, not just go to church or have church.

Want to spice up your conversational life? Instead of asking people what church they go to, ask which church they bless by their faithful ministry.