

WHY JOIN THE CHURCH?

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Heb.10:19-27

It has occurred to me that the reason some people do not join the church is because no one ever took time to give them really good reasons why they should. Assuming this to be so, and assuming that you are one of those that has not yet joined the church, let me make a few suggestions which may help you determine what your relationship to this amazing fellowship should be.

To begin with, you ought to be clear about the importance of the church to the world around you, the plan of God for you, and the experience of his presence in you.

As Dr. Curtis R. Nims points out --

At the church is no small, cheap, peanut-stand enterprise. It is no small thing to change ignorance, superstition, and cruelty into faith, hope and love. But that is the job of the church.

At it is no small thing to leave home, comfort and loved ones to face a hostile, ignorant, indifferent crowd of strange people with strange customs and strange faces in a strange land across the sea. But that is the job of the church.

At it is no small thing to change swords into plowshares, soldiers into civilians, savages into civilized human beings. But that is the job of the church.

At it is no small thing to surround children with beauty, provide youth with a challenge, give adults a holy commission, offer older folks security and a sure hope of heaven. But that is the job of the church. @

The church is a wee colony of heaven on earth. Its task is to bring heaven-s hope, health and healing to the wounds and woes of the world.

I love what the late John Snape once said,

AI enjoy my lodge and luncheon club. I know the all the hand grips and passwords. But when the black-robed messenger stopped his chariot at my door and took away the one I loved the most, I arose, not to go down to the lodge or luncheon club, but to stumble into the out-stretched arms of the Christian church.©

I repeat: The church is no small, cheap, peanut-stand operation. It is engaged in the most important enterprise on earth, that of bringing heart-peace and soul-rest to a sin-sick society.

There are three reasons why you should join the church, and the first is that --

You Need The Church

Only the church offers you the opportunity of public worship in the presence of Almighty God, and where Christ can be felt and known. Only the church offers you the teachings and preachings of Jesus which add new dimensions to life. Only the church offers you God-s blessings on the most sacred events of life: birth, death, marriage, baptism and communion.

Only the church offers you instruction in the written word of God. Only the church offers you Christian fellowship with those, who, according to Jesus, are,

AThe salt of the earth,© and ATthe light of the world.©

Only the church offers you the opportunity of losing yourself for God and man. Only the church offers you the most effective means of fulfilling Christ-s last and great commandment to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel.

You see, my friend, you need the church because only the church can meet so many of your personal, emotional, social and spiritual needs.

You need the church because you want to be better than you are. Oh, I know you are a moral and ethical person. I know you live by the Golden Rule and seek to be kind and helpful to your neighbors. But none of us has yet outgrown the need to keep on growing, and it is the church, with its message of the cross, that enables you to gradually grow better than you are.

The church is not a museum of masterpieces. It is not made of people who think they are perfect, but of people who know they are imperfect and want to find salvation. It is comprised of people who are conscious of their need and are seeking aid. You do not go to a hospital to see well people. You go to a hospital to see people who are sick, and know it, and have gone to the one place where they can expect to find help and healing.

The same is true of the church. It is not made up of people who are perfect, but of people who are imperfect, and know it, and are seeking to find spiritual help and healing. And, because you want to be better than you are, you should join the church. Yes, you need the church. A second reason why you should join the church is that --

The Church Needs You

It needs your life. It needs your influence. Your enthusiasm. Your ideals. Your goals. It needs your time. Your tithe. Your talent. It needs all you can give it in terms of service, sacrifice, and self-giving. The church needs you!

It needs you to help fortify the strong people who are already in it. It needs you to strengthen and encourage the weak who have turned to it for aid. It needs you to offset the few rascals who have wormed their way into it. It needs you to reach out and help win and woo those who are lost. Yes, the church needs you.

You would not want to live in this city, nor would you care to rear your children in this community, if there were no churches here. Then why not get them to the church of your choice in this community, and cast your lot with those who are sacrificing and struggling to provide that

which you not only concede is good, but necessary for better living.

And, is it not selfish, inconsistent, even wrong for you to benefit, as you inevitably do by the presence and ministry of the church, while you refuse to join and sustain it? Is it fair for others to pay freight while you hitch-hike your way into heaven? Is it fair for others to bear the burden while you enjoy the benefits?

The church is not a dormitory for sleepers. It is an institution for workers together with God. It is not a rest-camp behind the lines. It is the front-line trenches in a holy war between good and evil. And, if you are on the side of good, you should join the church for the church needs you.

It's great to be out where the fight is strong
Out where the heaviest troops belong
In this fight with God for man.

Oh, it sears the body and racks the brain
It pierces the heart until man's friend is pain.
Does this fight of God for man.

But it is great to be out where the fight is strong
Out where the heaviest troops belong
In this fight with God for man. @

In a very important conversation with his disciples, Jesus said, *He that is not for me is against me.* @ He was making it clear you cannot be neutral. *You are either for me (and my church),* @ he said, *or you are willingly, if not deliberately, throwing your influence against me.* @ There are only two alternatives, and you must choose between them.

My friend, are you a believer in Christ? Do you have any social concern for the community? Is your heart full of love for the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for you? Then stop making

excuses and get into the life of some church in this city, where you can join with others in fighting the forces of decadence and disease which would destroy our town. The third reason you should join the church is that --

The World Needs What You And The Church Can Give It Together

There are many people, perhaps you are one of them, whose decision for Christ and the church can have tremendous influence over many others. It may be that you are a parent. A husband or wife. A son or daughter. Or, just as important, a leader among your teenage friends. What you do with Christ and his church, the importance you place upon obedience to Christ's command, may very well affect the salvation of those who look up to you.

If there ever was a time in the history of the world when Christians ought to hang out their flag and let the world know on which side they stand, it's now! Almost half of the populated world has been inoculated by the deadly virus of communism. How desperately we need born-again men and women, boys and girls, who will take their stand courageously in the ranks of Christ.

The struggle which is going on in the world today is not between democracy and totalitarianism. It is not between free enterprise and socialism. It is between Christ and anti-Christ. Between light and darkness. Between heaven and hell. Between God and satan.

The lines are clearly defined and tightly drawn. If the church is to survive and grow and win this struggle, all who truly love and honor our Lord must join in this fight to the death.

Answer me this --

If you fail to stand up for Christ and his church *now*, by what right do you expect Christ to stand up for you on judgment day?

If you fail him *now* and if you refuse to be obedient to his simplest commands *now*, If you deny him *now*, if you fail to align your life with his *now*, if you shirk responsibility for his cause *now*, how in heavens name can you hope that he will assume any responsibility for you in

eternity?

Jesus said, *¶He that confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. He that confesses me not before men, him will I confess not before my Father in heaven.*@

You need the church and the church needs you. But the most important reason why you should be a member of, and active in a church in this community, is because the world needs what you and the church can give it together.

In that regard may I commend to you this church? We do not claim to be perfect. We do not claim to have all the answers. We do not claim to be the one true church. We are not so arrogant or ignorant as to assume that people of other denominations are outside the border of the society of the saints.

Not at all! We thank God for all our fellow Christians whatever their denominational blood-type. But may I also say that here is a church which stands foursquare upon the word of God. A church that is endeavoring to the best of its ability to be true to the New Testament. A church which seeks to proclaim with vigor and vitality, a message which is applicable to life as you have to live is seven days a week.

We are proud that, as Baptists , we are a part of the fastest growing denomination in the world. We invite you to join us in carrying on a warm, evangelical witness in this community. As Baptists we stand for:

- The Lordship of Christ.
- The priesthood of all believers.
- The authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice.
- The separation of church and state.
- The freedom of the individual conscience.

The redemptive power of the cross.

And the hope of the resurrection.

Because the New Testament church was a simple church, we are a simple church. They had no ecclesiastical hierarchy. Neither do we. Our church is controlled by its lay members, and is led by a pastor who has no magical or special powers. He is simply a layman ordained to preach.

We hold that baptism is a confession of faith and is something a person does, not to become a Christian, but because he or she is already a Christian. Jesus said,

Believe and be baptized.®

Belief always precedes baptism. It is an outward expression of an inward experience. We do not baptize babies because infants and small children are incapable of making an intelligent decision between right and wrong. They do not possess the maturity to accept or reject Jesus. For that reason, we reserve that rason for believers only.

We are a missionary church, and every year we give tens of thousands of dollars to Christian missions. We are an evangelistic church. At the very heart of our fellowship is a compassionate concern for the spiritually unenlisted.

We are a Bible-believing church. Without apology we stand for the great truths and doctrines of the Christian church.

We are a singing church. Under the direction of our ministry of music we have twelve choirs offering everyone in every age group, an opportunity to praise God in song.

And, we are a growing church. In the past four years, hundreds of members have been added to our fellowship.

Perhaps this is true because we are a family church. We have programs designed to meet the

need of every member of your family, from Gram and Gramps on down to the smallest child. In other words, we have something for you and all of those who are dear to you.

You say, *AI* like to join this church, but I don't know how long I will be living here.[@] May I respond by saying, neither do I, but I am a member. I hope the good Lord makes it possible for me to stay here for a long time. But none of us know for sure how long we will be here. *That's* the biggest reason for joining today -- the uncertainty of tomorrow!

You say, *AI* don't know anybody here.[@] Well, you never will unless you come into the family. I know that if you'll give us a chance we'll like you and I feel that you'll like us. You'll want to come on in and share our fellowship.

You say, *ABut I hate to leave the old church home.*[@] Of course you do. The place where you received Christ and grew up in the faith will always have a special place in your heart. But I have news for you. You already have left the old church. The fact that you keep your name on the roll there does not help that church one bit, and the fact that you are not actively engaged in the life of the church where you now live, casts a shadow upon the depth of your Christian commitment.

You say, *AI* haven't got time.[@] Well, tell me, whose time are we talking about? Your time or God's time? I know you're busy, but are you busier than Dwight D. Eisenhower? When he held the most demanding, time-consuming job on earth, he was a church member and attended church regularly. When he could not be there, he took time to call his pastor.

ABut I don't have any talents or money or leadership ability.[@] In that regard I like Dr. Ni'm's reminder that in the army we have tall soldiers, short ones, fat ones, skinny ones, brave ones, fearful ones, well-trained ones, ill-trained ones, but they're all soldiers. They're all in the army. When the call comes for battle, and the general issues the command, *ACharge,*[@] they all do their share however small it might be.

Beloved, the battle for Christ is on, and all of us must get into the scrap. We must stand shoulder to shoulder. Life to life. Heart to heart. Hand to hand. And, together we must march forward to overcome satan and all the hosts of hell.

My friend,

AI give you a watchword for the hour.
It is a thrilling word, a word of power.
A battle cry, a flaming breath,
That calls to conquest or to death.

The cry is given,
Ye hosts arise!
Our watchword is *evangelize*.

The glad evangel now proclaim
Throughout the earth in Jesus= name.
The cry is ringing through the skies,
Evangelize, evangelize.

To dying men, a fallen race,
Make known the gift of gospel grace.
The world that now in darkness lies
Evangelize, evangelize.

You see, my friend, whatever objection you offer, fades into insignificance in the light of God=s will for your life, and the desperate urgency for the times. Souls are dying without Christ. They need your witness through your church!

To be sure, it will call for sacrifice and service. It will mean putting Christ first, instead of

yourself. But believe me, it will be a great adventure.

Nothing worthwhile is ever accomplished without sacrifice and upheaval. The other day I drove out to watch the progress of the new freeway which will soon cut through our city. Talk about pandemonium and upheaval! The place was a shambles. A stranger to our area would have thought the area had been struck by a tornado.

A few days later I had dinner with a group of laymen who were discussing the tremendous cost involved in building such a freeway. Believe me, it is no small sum. But, you see, there is no inexpensive, undisturbing, easy way to build a new super-highway.

And, there is no inexpensive, undisturbing, easy way to get right with God. There is no inexpensive, undisturbing, easy way for the Kingdom of God to come on earth. It cost Jesus heavily, and it will cost you, too. Count on that. But, it will also provide you with some of the deepest joys and satisfaction of your life.

Right now, will you cast your lot on the side of God and good? Will you say wherever you are,

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord! I'll make room in my heart for
Christ!@

If you do, I can promise a new sense of joy in life as Christ makes your heart his home, and all things pass away and all things gradually become new. I can also promise a new sense of purpose in life. You will get out of the meaningless rut of getting up in the morning to go to work, to earn some money, to buy some food, to get some strength, to go to work, to earn some money, to buy some food, to get some strength. Even the humdrum, tedious, routine tasks of life will take on new meaning when you begin to do them to the glory of God, with eternity's values in view.

Back during the early persecution of Christians, a little boy stood beside a stalwart Roman soldier in the great coliseum. Down on the floor of the arena Christians were being mauled by the lions.

The little boy bit his lip and said nothing, until a particular woman who was kneeling in prayer was attacked by one of the beasts. Then, in his childish voice, he shrieked, *AI, too, am a Christian!*@ With a single motion the soldier standing beside him gripped his clothing, lifted him up and tossed him over the railing into the arena. There the little boy was struck down and killed beside his mother who had died while praying.

We have not yet been asked to die for Jesus. But it is clear beyond any shadow of a doubt, that we have been challenged to live for him. Right now will you cast your lot on the side of Christ and his church? Will you say, *AI, too, am a Christian. And, with his help, I can't do it alone, but with his help I am going to live a Christian life!*@

God bless you as you do.