

## Dont' Go To Church Any More

There are many people who don't go to church any more. People who did attend "regular Sunday church", but have left.

"Wicked evil church-hoppers!!"

There are other Christians who are searching. Looking for the "right church".

Why are so many people not going to church?

Perhaps because they have discovered that they ARE the church.

There are many reasons why people are leaving churches. According to some church leaders, "church hopping" is rampant because of the consumer mentality that people in our society have been raised in. This is true in some instances. But in saying this, the church leader is, in a sense, admitting that the "church"--the format and function of church meeting--has a large element of consumerism attached to it.

We've made the church into Macdonalds and Burger King. Pretty buildings with popular (or traditional) functions. A choir, wooden seats, a pipe organ, or, hip-hop rock and roll Jesus parties--and yet, there are a set of rules which are always adhered to...

The "house of God/sanctuary, a "must-have" meeting place used once-a-week for worship and teaching

Must-have offerings (tithe often the amount of the offering) the "dues" that the "congregation" must pay.

Must have the pastor--the sole teacher, decision-maker--the paid professional star of the show.

Many "church-hoppers" find ultimately that the "church" is the same wherever you go. These are the expected, demanded, strictly adhered to things that every "church" is made of.

But there is another, underlying reason why people leave churches. The fact is that this generation is the most Biblically literate generation of Christians ever. In our time, the Bible is available in easy to understand forms and media. It is, for the first time very easy for the common believer to be exposed the Word of God and be exposed to "other opinions" beside that of the closed-off world that traditional Sunday church was for generations.

Most believers today have read the new testament, and when they do, they have some thing pure and incorruptible sown into them. They read about what Jesus did. They read about His followers, imperfect people, following Christ's perfect example.

Someone once said that there is "no perfect church". Well then, the question is this: why does every church act as if it is perfect? Why do churches believe that they have a perfect set of rules, about ministry and authority and the way the church should operate? Rules that seem to be written in stone, and yet why does it seem that the church in the Bible had a different set of rules, and is clearly not our example?

People read the Bible, and don't see "church" they see something else.....

1. "Ye Are The Church....." (1Corinthians 12:27)

In the most basic terms, people read and understand that "church" is not a building. It's not the Sunday ritual. It's not a place, the church is who we are as believers.

The Bible does not tell us to GO to church.

The Bible tells us to BE the church.

Many believers are empowered in this simple knowledge. Many believers are authentically trying to "do what Jesus would do"--in their lives, on a daily basis. Even the "wicked selfish church hopper" is equipped with this knowledge to some degree and realizes that wherever they go, they ARE the church.

Many famous ministers have presented the Gospel in this manner:

Come to Jesus just as you are. Salvation is a free gift (hooray!! Biblical truth!) But now, after you are saved--find the church that God has for you. The magical, mysterious, wonderful "Bible-teaching, Gospel centered church" that is supposed to be out there some where.

So, in other words, receive this eternal, perfect free gift, and then, spend the rest of your life (and be sure to raise your children!) in a dues-paying club and be taught once-a-week forever.

A school where you will never graduate.

This is not what people read in the Bible!

So they leave church.

2. Uh, Excuse Me, But Where Is The Pastor-?

Some people search deeper in the new testament and wonder exactly where the pastor is? They go to church every week and the pastor is very, very, big and important, but where is he in the Bible?

The word "pastor" is used only once in the new testament (and even then it is a plural--"pastors"--??)

Where are all the rules of the church?

Where is all the authority the pastor has?

In "church" these are questions that are never asked or addressed, it would be considered rebellion. But reading the new testament Bible brings these questions out, since we are apparently reading about a different church than we have today.

Now, these problems are explained away officially in many denominations with a lot of long-winded hog wash that no one really understands but everyone supports. "Oh yeah--that information is in the church handbook somewhere. Trust us. We don't do that 1st century church stuff any more, that's what they did way back when--us--we're the cutting edge 21st century church! We do what God wants today!"

Are we? Then how come we look so much like all the other churches?

In many churches, questioning the format or the definitions of authority or ministry is considered a "non-issue"--it just never comes up--it's impolite--please sit down and be quiet. You are a sheep. We are all very happy operating the church on a misinterpreted parable--leave us alone!

People are told this stuff, so they leave church.

### 3. "Ministerial Authority", A Contradiction In Terms

"But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:" (Matthew 20:25-27)

"But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister." (Mark 10:42-43)

Some people read the Bible and see that these parts of scripture don't seem to fit in at all to the traditional definition of "ministry".

They are quite correct.

Some people study Ephesians chapter 4 and read that the "5-fold ministry" are gifts which are "in all and through all" and "given unto every one of us". This certainly is different than the experience of "church" where the ministry of one person is featured over and over and over and over again.

The Bible gives us an example of a church where everyone ministered. Imagine--everyone functioning together as equals in ministry--serving others, focusing on the Gospel. Sounds exciting! Sounds interesting! But then you get to church and--well---it's the same people--week after week after week!

So, Jesus said that "ministry" is NOT authority over other believers. But we go to "church" and see an unteachable, unreachable authority called a "pastor" who has huge authority (the only one allowed to speak, teach, and make decisions for everyone--huge authority!)

“Ministry” in everyone? The Bible says it, people read it. And, deep inside they feel as if the traditional format and rules of “ministry” fall far short of the new testament example.

So they leave church.

#### 4. History

A few believers have gotten into a study of church history. This in itself could become a reason to stop going to church. The institution which in the past called itself “the church” was responsible for wars, inquisitions and persecutions of innocent people (for example, scientists like Galileo). Church history is a big, awful, ugly subject and something which most churches steer clear of.

Take a guess at how those Christians in the past operated the local church. You got it! They met every Sunday--large building, house of God--preordained praise and worship--pastor (the minister) in authority over the congregation (the non-ministers)--a “must do” offering (tithe--”give 1/10th of your crops to the church--or else-!!)

This was the underlying repetitive authoritarian format that gave power and money to fund insane leaders who thought it was God’s will to rid the world of the heathen (and today Christians are so big on Muslim-bashing-we should study our own history!)

Now sure, okay--your pastor today is a really nice guy and you have some kind of election system in place in your church (just in case he gets out of line-!). But, the fact is that we still have the dark-ages function of meeting and definition of “ministry. If we study hard enough we will find that the “Sunday church system” was invented in the 4th century. Did those folks, back then, have some type of “perfect revelation” about how the church should work? Well, if you take the time to study catholic doctrine, you would find that this is exactly what the catholic church believes--very strongly. So they stuck to the format--like super-glue!

Those people, way back then, living under the heavy rule and influence of Roman emperors, set the rules for church meeting. This is an historical fact. The catholic church has stuck with these rules didactically for 1700 years.

Remember what Jesus said about the “kings of the Gentiles”.....

“And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye *shall* not *be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.” (Luke 22:25-26)

Jesus said that Gentile kings (Roman emperors were the Gentile kings who ruled Israel at the time) exercise authority one over another--and He said that we should not do things that way. A good study of history goes a long way to taking finger pointing away from pastors and leaders of today. Maybe, just maybe, we are very influenced by some people who lived way, way, back in time, and we don’t know it!

Pastor--have you studied church history?

Let's jump 1,000 years forward in time to the protestant reformation. Simple, well-recorded history shows us that the protestant reformers did very little to change the local church format and operation of ministry. Need proof? Visit an older protestant denomination--they look more "catholic" than some catholic churches. You see, once these things are put in place, they just never change!

People follow people, who are following people, who are following people, who are... (well you get the idea). Once some "founding fathers" have decided how the church will conduct it's meetings, no one ever, ever, ever, dares to question the format of meeting. Look in history and you might find who we are really following!

Some people do look, and so, people leave the church.

## 5. So, Where Did The Church Come From?

Some people actually take the time to read and study the old testament, and amazingly enough, this is where they find the church!

They read the Bible and see two covenants, two testaments. The two covenants are similar at first.....

Commandments--laws that serve to expose our sin. The old covenant had commandments (many of which are re-iterated in the new covenant) which give us the "knowledge of sin". Both covenants basically agree up to this point.

So, how to be forgiven of sin?

"For the wages of sin *is* death....." (Romans 6:23A)

How to be saved from the consequence of sin?

In both covenants there is a payment, an offering that can be made. In both covenants, blood forgives sin.

"For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it *is* the blood *that* maketh an atonement for the soul." (Leviticus 17:11)

Hopefully, Christians know who died for their sin! (Jesus--! amen!!) His blood is the offering for sin in the new covenant.

BUT--what about the old covenant?

What about Israel?

What did they have to do to have their sin forgiven?

Here is where it gets familiar.....take a look.....

A. They had to build and operate a big building called the House of God/sanctuary (the blood had to be on that altar for it to work).

B. They had to repetitively bring in offerings (tithe was the amount of the sin offering).

C. They entered by the gates of praise and worship.

D. In the temple was an altar (sounds familiar-?) on the altar was the delegated, designated, anointed, appointed, ordained authority who had the right to do the ministry in the House of God--the Levitical priest/pastor.

E. The priest/pastor had the authority over the congregation (the non-ministry tribes).

Well now, at last we have found the church.

The church is in the old testament!

Why should these old covenant principles be so strictly enforced (as if they are law) on Christians? Local churches don't really have any explanation for this--other than to deny it. What is really interesting is that today, many pastors openly teach the new covenant. By doing this they are actually driving people out of the church by teaching different principles than they are operating by!

Have you ever heard the expression "do as I say and not as I do"? When people do what many pastors say, they leave the church!

Well, why shouldn't we use these ideas to operate the church?

Here are some reasons why old covenant laws should not be operating the new covenant Christian church.....

This is sacrificial law, the "stuff" that Israel had to do to have their sin forgiven. Jesus clearly fulfilled the sacrificial laws (He called Himself all the parts of the offering--blood --bread--meat--He demonstrated and commanded non-authoritarian ministry, and He certainly didn't agree with the priests of His day--what a rebel!) If something is fulfilled, it does not have to be done any more. Anyway, we are really not following these ideas as the law truly requires (unless your church has rebuilt the temple in Jeruslaem and is sacrificing animals-!). But we certainly take many of the practices of sacrificial law and enforce them on one another, over and onver and over and over-!

The new testament says point by point that each of these concepts is either done away with or redefined. For example.....

" Now where remission of these *is*, *there is* no more offering for sin."  
(Hebrews 10:18)

"For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." (Hebrews 7:12)

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1Corinthians 3:16)

The temple of the Holy Spirit--the “house of God” is in people. The assembling together is in small groups....

“For where **two or three** are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

The new covenant examples a different way of doing things. Jesus operated in something called apostleship. Small groups, praying and receiving the instructions to carry out the mission (the Gospel--salvation, healing deliverance, feeding the poor) from God the Father. Jesus said he did nothing of Himself but did everything the Father commanded Him. Jesus followed a distant authority who communicated to Him through prayer, and gave Him the specific and changing functions of a clearly defined mission (the Gospel).

Look at the church in the Bible. They also operated in this apostleship ((grace and apostleship)). Small groups, meeting frequently, praying for the leading that the Head (Christ) gave them. Praying and receiving the specific functions necessary to carry on the mission, using the gifts and ministries of every believer to further the Gospel.

That ain't Sunday church!

Some people understand this and so, they leave the church.

## 6. Christ The Head

Many Christians today have done what the Bible says and in fact what many pastors preach--“Pray, pray, pray,--get a real daily relationship with God!” These folks get used to praying and asking God what to do--and not just about their daily lives, but also about their own ministry. Yes, many people who pray and read the Bible realize that they have gifts that God has given them which are meant to serve God and spread His Gospel.

And then they go to church.

They see that “ministry” is all sown up--there is no place for them to function or fit in with their gift (after all, everyone is paying the pastor--he's like a boss--and everyone knows that you can help the boss--but don't ever think you can do his job-!). They see that somehow the “minister” in the church is a ruler--unteachable--unreachable--oh yes--a really nice guy to talk to--but--“functioning together” in ministry?

No way.

You're a sheep.

Sit down, shut up, give money.

That's some of the reasons why people are leaving church.

I think they are right.

One More Reason.....

There is one more reason why people are leaving the institutional churches.

I believe that the institutional churches are in the process of self-destructing.

The reason for this, is again, because the Word of God is being understood by more and more people. As I have said above, part of this process comes from the literacy of the "lay-people" and their own investigation into the Bible. But, interesting enough, a big part of this process comes from the pulpit itself.

In our day and age, many preachers and pastors are very openly teaching the new covenant. When they do this, they are (whether they realize it or not!) teaching release. They are teaching what Jesus taught, which is a non-authoritarian system of operating together.

They are teaching apostleship, albeit through an opposite system of human authority.

They are teaching the new covenant, though we are living out the old.

They are teaching the covenant which is in effect today, while living out rules from a covenant which the Bible says is meant to "fade away".

The new covenant has the power of God, and in fact has the correct rules for Christians to function under. These new covenant rules come into direct conflict with the traditional old covenant rules that the institutional churches follow.

for example:

The new covenant is saying that we ought to be brothers and sisters, and that Christ is the Head.

The old covenant traditions say that we need to be "submitted to authority" and the pastor is the head.

The new covenant says we should all minister the Gospel.

The old covenant traditions say that most are "lay-people" while only a select few are "the ministry"

The new covenant releases the church to focus on saving souls, praying for the sick, and those in need of deliverance, feeding the poor--out in the world.

The old covenant traditions "hold" believers in a repetitive ritual that shuts out the outside world.

The new covenant church met in an un-preordained, Spirit-lead manner.

Old covenant tradition gives rules which preordain all the actions and functions of the meeting.

The new covenant tells us to work together in small groups.

The old covenant traditions keep us locked into an endless parade of praise and worship, pastoral teaching, and give the goal of “assembling” a large group. “Success” is having a large meeting of believers.

The new covenant says that all may speak.

The old covenant traditions say that only the pastor may speak.

The new covenant says that all believers have an equal authority in God.

The old covenant traditions say that only the leadership has authority in the church.

The new covenant says to utilize what you have and be led by God in giving.

The old covenant traditions say “tithes and offerings” are owed to the church leaders.

The new covenant says that the “church” is who you are as a believer. The new covenant church usually met in their homes on a daily basis (a network).

The old covenant traditions turn the “church” into a building, a meeting place which is generally only used once-a-week.

As the new covenant is taught, these truths become revealed, and as people become more and more aware of these contradictions, people leave churches.

Maybe it’s what God wants.

Maybe it’s what He needs.