

Not Go to Church, But Be the Church

Ron Roberts

Religious people are often referred to as "**churchgoers**". Because of their faith they do not go hunting, fishing, or golfing on Sunday. They do not sleep in, work out, or travel around. They "**go to church**" on the first day of the week.

It is not wrong to go to worship if you are going to the right place and doing the right thing. But I am concerned by what people mean when they say "**going to church**".

The world means you are going to a building when they use the phrase. The Bible does not use the word "church" in that way. The building is owned by the church, but the church refers to the people not their building. The phrase "**going to church**" does not bother me when people mean they are going to the assembly to worship. This is a way the term "church" is used in the Bible. As we have been studying in our adult Bible class on Sunday: the term church refers to the "*called out*". We are called away from the sinful world and into His kingdom. This is the church used in a **universal** sense (all the saved as in Acts 2:47).

The church is also used in a **local** sense. What we would refer to as a congregation. Paul wrote to a church in Corinth, one in Thessalonica, and one in Rome. These congregations consisted of members of the universal church who banded together because they lived in the same vicinity.

The church can also refer to the **assembly** of the saints when they gather in worship. They are called away from their routine business to engage in holy worship. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul is dealing with division and confusion that is taking place in the congregation because people see spiritual gifts as a means of self aggrandizement instead of a means to build up the church.

1 Cor 14:34 says, *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.*

Is Paul saying a woman must be silent from the time she is baptized into the **universal** church? Or is he saying she cannot speak once she has placed membership in a **congregation**? No, Paul is using the term "churches" to refer to the **assembly**.

Notice 1 Cor 14:23. *If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad.*

Also 1 Cor 14:26. *How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*

The Apostle is concerned with the confusion that is taking place within the assembly. He tells them things should be done decently and in order. God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:40, 33). The assembly is a time of edifying one another. This can only be done by doing things logically and scripturally.

My title is not condemning going to the assembly of the saints. This is commanded in the New Testament (Heb. 10:25). It is in this assembly that we partake of the Lord's Supper, give of our means, pray together, teach the Gospel, and sing praise. It is a good thing to go to the church's assembly. My concern is when people get the notion that this is all the church is. Our relationship with God and the congregation does not stop with the final amen in the assembly. We are the church! We continue to **be** Christians when we go home, go to work, or go to play. If I am merely a "**churchgoer**" then I am in a lost condition.

The church member is not done when the assembly ends. This is why when the congregation of Jerusalem was dispersed by persecution they did not quit.

*Acts 8:3 As for Saul, he made havock of **the church**, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. 4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*

Notice Saul persecuted the **church** by entering into every house. These people were the church whether they were assembled or dispersed. As they were driven from their town, homes, and their congregation they continued to preach. Even though the assembly was not in session, the congregation was driven apart, they still remained in the church universal. They maintained their saved relationship with Christ and therefore they behaved the same way in Jerusalem and out. Too many Christians **go to church** and then **go from it** when the assembly ends. They put off their Christianity when they put off their Sunday clothes. They separate from their commitment when they drive away from the parking lot. They see no reason to identify themselves with the church when they are not sitting in the pew.

This attitude is revealed by the conversation of many brethren. I cannot count the number of times I have cringed when I heard a member of a congregation refer to their church as "**they**". The member will say, "**They** withdrew from a certain brother, **they** are holding VBS, or **they** are having problems." Our congregation is not a "**they**". It is "us". We are having a Gospel meeting. We are trying to reach the lost. We have made a commitment to Christ and to this body of believers. We are tied to one another by faith.

This detached view comes from thinking of the church as a building or only an hour long assembly. Remember we do not just go to church. We are the church!