

Living a Fruitful Life Getting Rooted by Assembling with the Saints

Intro: In our last two lessons, we've focused on getting rooted in the word of God by assembling with the saints. So far we've seen five important reasons to assemble with saints every time they meet:

- To grow in our personal knowledge
- Show our love and gratitude to God
- Give encouragement to our brethren
- Work in cooperation with the church's leaders
- Help our families build knowledge and faith

Any one of these would be good reasons to make it a personal goal to attend all the services. But I want to wrap up this topic today by suggesting four more reasons to assemble with the saints.

Fulfill our role in the body of Christ

Perhaps the most common picture of the NT church was the picture of a functioning body. The church was a single body composed of many members, each of which had a function in the body.

But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. (1 Cor. 12:18-20)

...from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph. 4:16)

The Biblical picture is a diverse group of people, all of whom want to contribute what they can to a common goal.

Unfortunately our society is dominated by the consumer mentality. Americans tend to see every organization and institution around them as suppliers of goods and services; and they are the consumers. And so the mindset is, I go to church to get something. If I don't get what I want or need, I don't go, or I go somewhere else. If it's not convenient for me, I don't go.

The church was designed in part to defeat this kind of self-centeredness that people may often have. It teaches us to discipline our lives not only for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others--to work for a cause greater than ourselves, to make that cause more important than our own personal desires and convenience, and to give to the effort rather merely receive from it. We begin to see that it is not about the individual, but about the body and what we can accomplish together. Every member has part in the work of the body.

Send a more powerful message to seekers who come among us

One way the NT church grew was by visitors coming into the meeting places of the saints.

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you. (1 Cor. 14:24-25)

Those who study such things still say that the best opportunity we have for reaching the lost is by inviting people personally to come to our services and then to make that experience as spiritually encouraging as possible for them. Imagine a non-believer is given the invitation to come to services and he has an interest in doing so but must work into the late hours of the morning on Sunday morning. So he decides to come on Sunday night. And he comes to the building at 5:45 and he sees three cars in the parking lot. And he walks in and by 6:00 a few dozen people scatter throughout the building with huge gaps in-between. What will his impression be? How will we convince him that this is where he needs to be when the members of the church don't even think it is the place to be? This often happens. Many of our visitors come on Sunday nights and Wednesday nights and what they see is about 50% of our usual crowd.

Several years ago I visited the Expressway church in Louisville and I noticed the attendance record for that week was something like this. The Sunday a.m. attendance was 200. The Sunday night attendance was 198. The Wednesday night attendance was 204. All the members had committed to be present for all the services; and at no time would a visitor go there and not see the whole support of the church in the effort at hand. Why can't we do that?

Encourage those who preach and teach

I spoke earlier in the series about the various teaching opportunities available to those who attend; but now I want to see this from another perspective—the impact of our attitudes on those whose work is to lead and teach.

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. (1 Thes. 5:12-13)

How would our attendance reflect the appreciation and esteem we have for our preachers and teachers? Imagine how it feels to spend many hours studying the Scriptures and planning lessons and writing class material, preparing to deliver it and you stand before a room mostly of empty seats and empty pews. How do you think that makes a preacher feel? Or a teacher who has similarly put in many hours of study after work each week to get ready for a Bible class?

Imagine a woman announces that she is fixing up Thanksgiving Dinner and invites the whole family over and the hour arrives for the meal. She has worked hard for two days trying to get everything cooked and added every possible touch of perfection to each dish. She stayed up late the night before to get things ready to prepare in the morning and got up early to get things finished up. And places are all set for the expected guests. Some of the family doesn't show up and offers no reasons for their absence. Others come and quickly devour what is put before them and hasten out the door to go on to

other places. There are no comments about how good the food was, maybe someone offers a suggestion for improving the meal, "I think you put too much salt in the mashed potatoes." Another talks on at length about what a great cook Aunt Sally was and how no one could ever match her skill in the kitchen. Maybe no one pauses to give her a hug or word of appreciation as they go out the door. How will she feel?

Now that lady may have the remarkable grace to say in her heart, "They're my family and I'm glad to keep serving them whether they appreciate it or not."

But I can't help but believe that such a woman would have appreciated an acknowledgement of the time she put into cooking, a little more appreciation for the dishes she made, a little more expression of enjoyment in eating what she prepared.

Provide an example to the unbelievers around us

And the Scriptures again remind us of the importance of our example:

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12)

People around you will watch your habits. Attending church sends a message to the unbelievers around us.

Imagine that an unbeliever lives in the house between two religious people.

He notices that one of them goes to church occasionally; but often misses for various reasons. He notices that the other attends like clockwork. He knows that he'll see them leaving the driveway consistently at the service times. He sees a commitment to the church and its work. He sees a devotion to family that wants them to learn as much as possible about the Lord.

Which one is more likely to have a positive impact upon his neighbor? Whose invitation to church will seem more natural? Which invitation will have the proper example behind it for it to be taken seriously?

Conclusion: I have spoken at length about reasons for attending because it is an important part of what we do as a church. Our interest is not in improving the count on a stat board. It's about growing people and about bearing fruit for the Lord. We need to get rooted by assembling with the saints!