

Title: "Why should I go to church?"

1Cor 12:12

A pastor and a young man were talking after confirmation class. The young man asked "Why do I have to go to church?" I can read the bible by myself. I listen to Christian music I pray. "Why do I need to go to church?" The Pastor answered: "Why do you need to go to church?" He paused as he searched for the words that the young man needed to hear. I know why you need to go to church. We all need to learn to love people we don't like. You need to go to church to learn to reflect the love which God has for them. You need to go to church to learn to love as God loves. That's why it's important to go to church.

Many of the books I read about church growth say that one of the problems with membership in today's church is that "people do not what to commit themselves to a single group. "They want the freedom to pick and choose whatever organization meets their particular needs. They think that the concept of church membership is old fashion, unnecessary, is dead. I think they are wrong. There are many good reasons for being a member of a church, even for people today. In fact, people who do not want to tie themselves to a single congregation ROB themselves of many gifts which God offers through His church.

In our epistle lesson 1Cor 12:12 St. Paul speaks of a unity that we have in Christ. We have unity because of what God has done for us, through Jesus Christ. The very thing which brings us eternal life, is the thing which establishes within us a relationship with God the father. The very thing which brings us eternal life, is the very thing which establishes our unity with each other. And it was important to note that just because sometimes *we don't live out that unity*, that doesn't mean that "That unity is not there." But being a member of a congregation gives you a chance to live out the unity that we have. And living out that unity is actually a gift from God.

What do I mean by that? There are three ways that our unity is lived out. There in fact are three gifts which membership gives. The first gift that you get, as members of a church, is the experience of being part of a family. Through faith in Christ, we have become children of God. We have become part of a family. Sounds cool, but it is not without its problems. One of the characteristics of a family is that "not everyone is perfect." Many times we have to put up with "less than ideal" people and "less than ideal"

experiences. We may look at the people in a church and say, they are not very nice people. “I’m not sure I want to be part of that family.” We may look at the people in a church and say, that person is kinda weird... “I’m not sure I want to be part of his family.” Or maybe... Ah, sure we’re part of the same family... but I’m not sure I really need to spend any time with them. Yet, just as the Pastor said to the young man, “our job” is not only to love people we like but “our job” is also to love those people who we don’t like. In fact, God commands us to love even our enemies.

Now this may not sound like a gift. But it will be precisely because we make a commitment to this group, a church body, with its imperfect people, that we will receive a great blessing. We experience something very powerful. When we learn to love people-we-don’t-like, we get to experience what it means to serve. We get to experience what it means to care for someone in need. We get to experience what it means to love someone who is not perfect. We get the experience of reflecting the love which God first gave us. Paradoxically, when we experience these things, we find that the blessing we extend returns back to us. As the body of Christ, sooner or later, we will receive the experience of being served. We will get the experience of receiving someone’s care when we are in need. We get the experience of giving forgiveness and receiving it. We get the experience of knowing that we are loved, not because of what we are, but rather, despite what we are. And as a result we develop confidence! Over time, we develop a confidence from knowing that people love us, even when we aren’t perfect. None of these can be experienced in any deep way, except between those who are bound together in a deep family relationship. It is this deep sense of confidence, of knowing that you are loved. That is the gift received in having membership in a church. For those of you who have always had this, I cannot tell you the value of the confidence you have. There are so many people out there in this world who do not know that feeling, who do not know they are loved or who may have never felt love, from one another,... from God. You know it. You know God loves you. You know what it feels like to receive the love of God reflected by a fellow Christian. You know that feeling and are blessed.

Now, if that is the work of the church, then how come more people aren’t doing it? Some people just don’t seem as loving as others. But what I want to share today is that we don’t all experience love in the same way. People do not express love the same way. If you don’t understand their love language, it can be easy to think that they are unloving. But you might be

wrong. For example, there are many ways to show love. It is important to realize that there are many ways which love can be shown. It is important to know some of the ways people express love, so that we can be aware of the love which is shared in our congregation. When we understand the love languages of people we will know how and when to respond. I have discovered that we can learn about expressing love, by watching animals. Take Dogs and cats. There are some people who are like dogs. One of the cool things about Dogs is that they love you all the time, any time. He will play with you in the morning. He will play with you in the evening. You could wake him up at 3am in the morning and he will be so glad to see you and will be quite willing to play with you. You can do no wrong. Dogs show their love all the time. Some people show their love like dogs. They show their love for you openly and respond lovingly at a drop of a hat. In fact, they show their love for you, even when you don't want it. That's the dog people.

Then there are the cat people. Cats are very proper. Cats do not show their love openly to just anyone. But it doesn't mean they don't love you. (pause) Deb's parents used to have a cat named Bandit. For a few years we lived next door. Whenever I came to the house, Bandit would have nothing to do with me. Oh, he would tolerate a scratching of the head occasionally, but in general wanted nothing to do with me. However, one week, the Needhams went on vacation to Nebraska and I was the only one at our house. During that week Bandit was so desperate for attention he actually came to me for petting. --- What was the point? He loved me. I was family. Suffice it to say, however, that when the family came back, he reverted back to ignoring me. But the point of the story is that, though he was aloof most of the time Bandit still considered me to be family. Some people are like that... Some people are cat people. Some people show love like dogs. But the bottom line is that, when we are members of a church, we know that we are all family. Now it is important to remember that the love you receive from other humans will always be imperfect. But even knowing this, it is still far better than anything else you can get in this world. The reason is because the human love you receive from a brother or sister in Christ is a reflection of a perfect love from God. You are loved. You are loved by God. You are loved by your brothers and sisters in Christ. So, the first reason for membership in a church: it is there that you will receive the love of God and the love of a family.

The second reason for membership in a church is that it is a confession and witness. When you join a church, you are also confessing that you believe what the Bible reveals about God and about Jesus Christ. When you are a member, you are taking a stand, you are making a confession, you are making a witness to all around you about certain truths about Jesus Christ. In particular, that through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ you have become a child of God. When you become a member, it is a witness to all around, that you believe what that church teaches about the bible. It is a witness. And finally, one of the reasons why God gave the church to his people, why He established this relationship amongst his people, was so that they could encourage one another to faithfulness. By ourselves the challenges of this world can weaken our faith. But together, as we encourage one another, we can keep our faith strong. Because we have committed ourselves to following the same Lord, because we desire to live lives pleasing to God, God provided each of us to encourage one another in our walk with Christ. We are a gift to one another. If you don't want "help in your Christian life," if you don't want people "interfering with your life," then church membership is not for you. One of the best ways of avoiding a commitment to live a Christian life, is to avoid committing to a church group. But if you do want help with your Christian walk, if you know that you "can't do it by yourself," if you know that putting your faith into action needs help, then church membership is for you.

In summary, through membership in a church, through committing to a congregation, we get to experience the love of God in a concrete way both giving and receiving. In membership, we make a witness to all around us that the teachings of the bible are true. In membership, we make a commitment to encourage others and to receive encouragement from others to follow Jesus. These are great things to have. These are the gifts which God has given his church. Membership in a church is NOT dead, It is a great gift.