

"IS GOING TO CHURCH WORTHWHILE?"

I Cor. 11:22

Many persons will remember in the 1960's, a decade of disenchantment, when people were often disinterested in the church. And one begins to wonder about the '70's. When we notice how much of the current religious fervor is being developed outside of the church. Some people are saying that the church is no longer filled with the refreshing, dynamic approaches. But the church is busy feeding vitamins to its ailing programs.

George Connell, in a report, in the Associated Press talked about the reasons why Christianity in Hitler's Germany could have allowed the Nazi's to talk over. He concluded that the modern church suffers from some of the same weaknesses that characterize the Germany Christians in Hitler's time.

Now even this criticism about the church is not new. And we ask seriously the question, is it worthwhile?

The attitude that one bears toward the church is a matter of very large monument in the earthly life. One of the (most) arresting questions asked in the Bible is asked of the Apostle Paul concerning our attitude toward the church. This is a ringing surprise. Despise ye the church of God? Now Paul asked this question concerning the church, you will recall, in connection with the Lord's Supper. It was a matter of importance that they have the right view on the ordinance of the supper.

And Paul saw the Christians perverting their doctrines and their faith, in connection with the observance. And he came forth with this question, despise ye the church. Would you go on and satisfy your appetite and misuse the church.

Now that questions shocks us today -- can it be possible that Christians would abuse this sacred institution.

The word despise is a far reaching word in meaning. We discover that when we turn to the word in the dictionary that it means to under value, to neglect. Now we can pervert under value, neglect. And Paul uses this forceful word - despise.

What can he say - what can be said of the church. It is the only institution fashioned and founded by our Lord, Jesus Christ. He said, the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. And they have not through the long centuries. The church has been persecuted. It has endured fire and sword. It has been despised, by multitudes.

You might say, well preacher, how has the church been despised. How has it been neglected and under valued. What ways can a person despise the church.

I want to suggest some various ways that are very elementary - and yet profound. For our moments of reflection this morning.

I. WE DESPISE THE CHURCH BY OUR NON-ATTENDANCE UPON ITS SERVICES

Every one of us should be the most conscientious person concerning the habit of church attendance. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, says the word of God. People ought to go to church and they ought to go by a habit marked of conscience.

A man misses the way of duty if he neglects the high privilege of habitually

attending the services in God's house.

It is a tragedy that many people never darken the doors of a church. Say to attend a funeral or a wedding.

Children of these people are being brought up without contact with the one institution which Christ deemed of such importance that he fashioned it and left it for our edification. When he went back to his eternal home, he left it for people.

How distressing it is that people anywhere should neglect habitual attendance at worship. It is a terrible impression upon children for people to be absent from church.

We might use the wonderful story over in the book of Acts 3:1-10, in which Peter and John were on their way to church. And most of these people, that they met along the way, were in some way related to the temple.

But they came to worship - not as a matter of ritual or routine. They came as a matter of conviction.

Peter and John and the early Christians didn't have to muster up excitement. They didn't have to plan a "Jesus Rally" to boaster up their spiritual feelings.

Acts 4:20 - we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. This was the overflow.

Is going to church worthwhile?

It is when we preachers bow before Jesus, before we stand before our congregations.

When Deacons have cleansed themselves in the prayer closet, They serve, when Sunday School Teachers have bathed in the pools of righteousness. When Choir Members have heard the voice of Heaven before they sing. When the crowds that gather will come and they will take knowledge that they have been with Jesus.

Van Havener says of the little community in Scotland, when the fires in every home have gone out, only one humble home on the hillside had a fire. Where the fireplace glowed with a flame. Everybody else in the valley came with their cold basket to get a glowing ember, from the home to light their fires again.

What is the first step toward coming back and making church attendance worthwhile. It is for the church member to catch afire. With a new devotion and a dedication to Christ and to enjoy the warmth of the church services. They will take on new meaning. The result will be for miles around we will spread the fire and the warmth and we will touch other people.

When we think about non-attendance at church, we think of the boy who was down on his grandmother's farm. She sent him to coop the 8 old hens. And as he ran through the door - he counted them all eight. To his surprise, he counted 9, 10, and more. He discovered soon that a board was missing off of the back of the coop. And the hens were getting out as fast as he put them in. Now this symbolizes the activities of the average church. And the enlistment of new members - there are so many who are in non-attendance. They come through and go out the back. And I wonder sometimes, as I read an article, that every businessman was supposed to have at least one ulcer. Several reasons were listed. The labor problem. The keen competition. High over-head. Several other things. When I read that article, I could not help but think how many uclers the poor businessman would have if he worked under such trying circumstances as a pastor of a church. Suppose the businessman was over-seer of a

thousand and more workers - about the membership of many churches. And suppose only 50% of them only showed up for work (at any one time). And of the remaining 50%, only about half of them with any degree of regularity. And suppose that only one out of every 5 of your workers showed up after lunch. That is, like our evening worship service. And every time one of them had a slight headache or company to visit them, they took off that day. Every time it thundered, or even a slight flash of lightning appeared, in the sky - 75% of your workers pulled the covers over their heads and never appeared for duty that day.

Suppose your workers only worked when they felt like it. And still you had to be sweet and never fire one of them.

To get them to work, you had to beg them, plead with them, pat them on the head, pet them, tickle them under the chin, and use every means under the sun to try to get them to do the work.

And suppose you were in competition with the Devil, who had the use of such attractive things and were far more clever than you were. Suppose he used fishing rods, soft pillows, T. V., carnivals, water skis, boats, ball games, parties, pleasure drives, and a thousand and one other things to hurt your business.

Suppose your firm were heavily obligated to meet certain responsibilities and you had to depend upon your people to give as they felt led - to carry out the biggest business in the world.

So you think you have ulcers, Mr. Businessman. You ought to be in the shoes of a preacher for awhile. Under God, Southern Baptists, ought to undertake to do something about the tragic loss of man power that could be used for the glory of God, through non-attendance.

The man who is always at the switch is the owner

II. WHEN YOU FAIL TO PREPARE *for worship*

People despise the church when they fail to prepare for a worship service. Some people say that a preacher ought to prepare for his message - and they are correct. He ought to pray, he ought to study, he ought to think of God and the people and look over the Scriptures and seek to expound, counsel, and lead the people.

The congregation should prepare for public worship in God's House. There is all the difference in the world in congregations. It is like going into a very cold room - or into a warm comfortable room. People who are unsympathetic, prayerless, indifferent, critical, can create an ice-box atmosphere.

Jesus calls upon us to take heed how we hear and you can hear with a sympathetic mind and heart. If you have prepared your heart.

How often have you heard people say, well, I didn't get anything out of that message. That sermon didn't mean a thing to me. I went to church today, and I didn't get a blessing. Well, then you begin to question such a statement. Did I go seeking a blessing? Did I

prepare my heart for that service that as we feed upon the word spiritually atuned with the preacher subject be divinely appointed.

And if we prepare, we will
Everybody in the service is in
is a pardoner in the church service
and whole-heartedly enter into

Reporter
Then he came into the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee to visit World War I hero, Sgt. Alvin York. After dinner that night Alvin York, getting the Bible from the mantel, or fireboard, said to the journalist: Sir, it is our custom in this household before we retire to gather the family around and read the Bible together and pray together. Would you like to participate with us? The journalist joined the circle and listened. They read the Bible. They talked about the affairs of the day. They discussed the family needs. They shared and they prayed together.
When he left the next morning, the French journalist told Alvin York: I have traveled the country over to find the secret of America's greatness. It is not in her wealth. It is not in her industries. It is not in her natural resources. I have found it right here in the God-fearing family and the open Bible and the solidarity of this family reflected here around that family altar.

That is still the basis of our society and, yet, that family unit is being threatened today.

Just this last week the U. S. Census Bureau released the figures on what is happening to the American family:

Marriage itself is on the decline, having dropped three percent. Fewer marriages. Then illegitimacy -- 11 percent of the babies born today are illegitimate. An increase of 800 percent in the last decade of people just moving in and living together without the seal of marriage at all. Thirty percent of the children today are not living with both of their natural parents. One divorce for every three marriages. The home is threatened!

III. INCONSISTENT AND WRONG LIVING PROVES THAT WE DESPISE THE CHURCH

When our lives do not tally up to our professions that we have made, the church is always to hold up a standard and an ideal. Ye are the salt of the earth. But if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in Heaven.

The best argument for Christianity is some Christian who lives it. And our lives should be lived for Christ. And we prove, we despise the church, when we are inconsistent. Gladstone, the great British leader, went to church every Sunday. Somebody said to him, you know more in one hour than the rector in the pulpit can tell you in a year. Gladstone replied, I would not agree to that. I would not agree to any of that for I need the public service of God's house--and I would like for all of England to know that for all the dominions of the British empire to know that I count the religion of Jesus) the one most important for man's attention. And I want all men to take knowledge that I count the will of Christ and the work of his church supreme in men's lives.

Yes, church attendance is worthwhile but by our inconsistency, you prove that we despise it.

Gen. Robert E. Lee said I want my soldiers and my neighbors living around me and my students whom I am teaching, to know that the chief thing in my thought is my adoration and in the life I'm living to know the will of Christ and to carry out his will. He was a great Christian. And he proved that he did not despise the church of God by his inconsistent life.

Some people have made the church an end in itself. You remember in the book of Acts, Peter and John were on their way to church. Hoping to be there at the 9th hour -

about 3 o'clock. In fact, they were right on time when a beggar asked them for alms. Now if they hesitated, they would be a moment late. But they stopped - this person was important to them. Now I am a pastor who loves his church and his denomination. And like some little boys who were asked what he would be if he was not a Southern Baptist. He answered, "I would be ashamed." So in the sincere love and honest concern, I suggest that one of the greatest needs is that we become a people that are no longer inconsistent about our churches. But become people-centered. And church is less exciting because members get the idea that the work of the church is just done in the church. And we get so concerned about meetings and other things that we refuse to witness.

Someone told a story about the church being like a luxury-liner going through the ocean. Thousands of people were drowning - holding up their hands and screaming for help. And those on board, the passengers leaned over and cup their hands, and yelled we wish all of you would be quiet. We are studying about how to be concerned for drowning people. Now that might be far fetched. But sometimes in our churches we are so indifferent to the point, that we cannot hear the cry.

A little town out there in East Texas consolidated the school with the school in a nearby city. The cheerleaders of the little town felt cheated - however they received uniforms and pom poms - and they insisted that they use them even though they didn't have a football team. The principal of the school finally gave the cheerleaders permission to have a pep rally on Friday afternoon, after school. They invited all of the former students to the little town, to attend the pep rally. Four girls dressed in the uniform of the old school leading cheers in the auditorium for persons who would attend. They soon had a rather exciting pep rally. Only one thing was wrong, they never played a football game.

Now church going is worthwhile as long as we remember that in the sense, the worship services are not just pep rallies to get us excited about winning people

to Christ, but we never go out and play the game of life. It is easier to cheer than it is to pick up the cross, and follow Jesus.

It is a lot easier for somebody to pick up and read, and tell a story about a missionary, who has hardships. And who loves Jesus. Than it is to be a missionary and go out and witness for Christ and share the message.

One of the most inspiring words in our language is the word - friend. One of the rich things in life is to have a worthy, true friend. One is poor if it has no true friends. Jesus said, ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.
John 15:14.

Friendship, therefore, is a two-sided affair. The highest possible honor on this earth is to be truly called a friend of Jesus. And if we are friends of Jesus, we are trusting him for our personal salvation. And we are persuaded that this is his will.

And if we really are friends of the Lord Jesus, we will not be absent for long periods of time from his church.

How can a man love the church and love the Lord Jesus and be his friend and be inconsistent in the way he lives.

I might insert another thing here, if we really would discover that church membership and church attendance is worthwhile, we would trust and obey him. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you," Jesus said. And that is a great test. Why call ye Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say. If we love him, we will keep his commandments. The Christian wants to obey.

wants to know what Christ wants done. The indifferent, inactive, disobedient Christian suggests that he despises the church.

If the Druggist looks over a prescription by a Doctor and says, here are some elements I would discard - I would cast aside. I will fix the prescription as I please. That would be serious. And very serious behaviour indeed if we say to Christ, I hesitate here, I delay there, I refuse here. You are not much of a friend of Christ.

IV. UNWORTHY GIVING

We can despise the church in this way. Stewardship is everything in a man's life. A great preacher once said that I would say that your gift through the church will go farther than through any other channel in the wide world.

Jesus knew what he was saying when he set the church a right example in the method of giving.

A man cannot - he needs a principle by which to give. Not give as he feels. A young man wounded in the war World War I, after a period of two or three years, the government gave him a lump sum pension of \$4,000. He came to a preacher and he said here is \$400. He asked him what for - he said, it is my tithe. He says but you are married, you are young, you are wounded and crippled. And he hesitated to take it. And the man said you are taking \$400 out of your \$4,000 as your tithe and I want this church to have it. Then he went on to say, what was I spared for, why am I alive, why did not the gas kill me, why did not the war put me in the grave. I am here to serve God. Certainly you will take it. I entered a solemn pledge back

yonder to give God 10% of my income - please take it. And he became a joy and a benediction to that church.

There is great joy in people who steadily prove that God's appointed way of giving is a pleasure. Heaven has blessed many who have given out of their meager incomes. A young girl who supported her helpless mother and father. Always brought her tithe, and she said "this is the best way I can serve Christ." And how marvelous it is, the angels of God must rejoice to see that there - a young girl helping to support a helpless mother, brings to the church of God a certain percentage of what she makes as a principle of life.

I am not a critic of welfare as such for there are circumstances and situations that need the support and help of society. There are those in distress who do need help. But there are the abuses. There is a concept that is threatening the foundation of our society - and it is not all on the side of the recipient.

A recent television documentary showed the other side. A New York clinic was cited for exploitation of the medicare program by doctors and clinic officials. These doctors openly admitted what they called "ping-ponging" the patient. A person on welfare came in for a simple test -- let's run him through a dozen different tests to run the bill up -- from \$25 to \$1200! When one of the younger professional men was asked, Why do you do this -- don't you know this is dishonest -- it will wreck this system of medical care for the indigent -- his answer was, I don't have any conscience about it. I think it's time we ripped off the Establishment, and this is the way I can rip it off! There is this kind of conscienceless about the whole system - I'm going to get what I can!

Good

When Peter and John gold have I none but such lame begger that he had and asked him if he preferred you. He would have to beg.

and
man
onger

Why did he not ask for that in the beginning because simply he didn't know that he would be able to walk again. And that is why we need to be giving out the Gospel. There are those who do not know what the power of the Gospel can do for them. If people do not know what must I do to be saved, the church must ask it for them. And it must not leave this message out for the lost. Those that are crippled by sin, God can help these people through the church.

Dr. Campbell Morgan said, the business of the church is not to discuss theories or indulge in speculations or formulate philosophies. It is that of seeking and saving that which is lost. It is out to find men lying at the beautiful gate, excluded

from worship, and putting them on their feet and making them worshippers of God.

A father walked with his son up a long stairway that wound its way up to the top of a large tower like building. At the very top, the father leaned over the rail and yelled "Jesus saves". Those words began to echo. Jesus saves, Jesus saves, Jesus saves - they vibrated against the walls. They seemed endlessly to echo over and over again. The little boy looked up at his father and said, Daddy, you can't stop it can you?

Well, the church cannot today be stopped. Even though some people despise the church. With the message of Jesus Christ, that Jesus saves, we cannot improve upon it. Whether in Sunday School or in Jesus saves.

Shall we whose souls are light
Shall we to men be nighted, th

Is going to church worthwhile
Yes, it is worthwhile. As long as
what man thinks what it ought to be
unworthy. A church like this should

THE CHURCH

If you stand and look at the church -- it stands for a free church in a free state. Two thirds of the world today do not know what it is to worship God freely, according to the dictates of their own conscience. Freedom of worship!

Yet, how many of us have taken this to mean a freedom from worship. This church and this open Bible and the faith of our fathers stand as the ultimate foundation of freedom -- because it stands for the freedom of conscience -- the freedom of worship -- that freedom from which all of these other freedoms stem -- that freedom that gives concept to the other freedoms of the worth of the individual.

It is based on fact and truth. It has happened around the world. It happened in Vietnam. A former member of this church and Seminary student went out to Vietnam and wrote a letter back to the Seminary:

When the North Vietnamese reached a church near Danang the soldiers marched into a worship service. Some 80 or more people were present. The soldiers demanded that those present renounce their faith in God -- that they declare themselves atheists and declare themselves loyal to North Vietnam.

When some of them started refusing to do this, the soldiers lined them up and shot them. (Only about 40 escaped) -- the rest were killed inside the church. They were not free to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience. And it happens again and again around the world!

The great freedom that we have is the freedom to worship according to the dictates of our conscience.

block. To those who are spiritually lame and struggle in sin.

Worth While - Come to see
Bill Jones told about his wife Paul 1 yr ago
called each child in & talked - she told going diff
small boy, Baby Boy when she told going diff
Mother, But I don't want you to die, you'll be so far away
No son - I'm going he will Jesus &
The Chorus you live to Jesus
The man you will be to me!
It is a church where people prepare their hearts before they attend.
It is a church where people are not inconsistent when they go on the outside. It is
a place where people give. It is a place where people honor the Lord, Jesus Christ.

It is a place where the message of salvation is proclaimed to all people.

Remember Ch. assistance is worth while -

1. Interest of The Father!

No pleasure in death of Church -
Blasphemy Church, world with message sal -

2. Investment of The Son!

Sacrificed life for church - loved the church.

3. Intercession of The Spirit!

Prays for us -
Church helps solve problems -

4. Inspiration of Christian Members -

Fellowship of congregation sweet.

" That Care - Concern -

Choice: Respire ye? - Love ye The Church!
cast whole life in the Church Today! Do it Now!