

“You Don’t Have to Go to Church to Be a Christian”

The Background and Origin of the Cliché/How the Cliche Gets Used Today

Unlike the first two clichés we looked at, this one has no biblical basis. There is *no encouragement or modeling in the Bible to avoid worship of God*.

In short, this cliché is largely used to justify not attending worship or being an active member of congregation. Many reasons are given, chief among them is the unwillingness to live a corporate life of faith, opting instead for a personal faith that is private and individual. This way, the person may *feel* the comfort of salvation at death but not the burden of having to live according to a discipleship of Jesus, found in the Church, located in a church body.

In What Way Is This Cliché True?

- ❖ Going to church *in and of itself* doesn’t make one a Christian or make one righteous with God. One can’t merit salvation through Church attendance.
- ❖ If there are situations in life when people are prohibited from worship or unable to go, then the Christian can rest secure in the promises of Christ.

The Third Commandment, Anyone?

Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

Let’s turn this around. What does the devil want you to do?

Forget the Sabbath Day, because it’s the same as any other day.

What does this mean? Don’t fear and love God, in fact, despise preaching and His Word, because theoretically, you can get it anywhere, which means it’s not that important. Don’t bother about learning more about it. You’re all you need. You got this!

Points for Discussion

1. What does it mean *be a Christian*? What are the defining characteristics of following Christ? In what ways does a Christian make their confession?

The practices of the very first Christians:

Acts 2:42 and they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 20:7-8 *On the first day of the week*, when we were *gathered together to break bread*, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered.

2. What does it mean to *go to church*? What does the Bible say about worshipping God?

The marks of worship:

Colossians 3:15-17: And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and

admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Is there a sense, then, where worship of God extends *outside* the Divine Service? Certainly. Our active lives of faith are part of a broader worship, where we live lives devoted to Jesus and serving our neighbor. We are to pray, read our bibles daily, teach our families. But it flows from the located, proper, worship of God.

Sometimes, the phrase “going to church” is unhelpful. It makes it sound as if this is something we do for God, something we can choose to do or not. Think instead about worship. So, then, what does it mean to *worship Jesus Christ*? Who is serving whom?

- a. Receive His gifts: forgiveness extolled; hear the Bible read; hear the Gospel preached; the Sacrament received for forgiveness, life, and salvation; the congregation reproved, rebuked, exhorted (taught). *God delivers His gifts through worship.*
- b. Praise and thanksgiving. This is our *response* to what God has given.
- c. Encourage the faithful in the gathering of the saints.

3. What is a *proper* application of a Christian worshipping God?

Luke 10:38-42: Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, *who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching*. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but *one thing is necessary*. Mary has chosen *the good portion*, which will not be taken away from her.”

Where is Jesus uniquely present and where is His “good portion”? How do we encounter Jesus?

- ❖ The “locatedness of God” as a gift to His creatures.

4. In summary, what does the Bible teach us about a life of worship/?

Hebrews 10:23-25: Let us *hold fast the confession* of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, *not neglecting to meet together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Do you have to go to worship?

Do you get to go to worship?

Do you need to go to worship?

The answer to all of these questions is “Yes.” Your *need* as a sinner drives you to go to where God *makes Himself present to you*. This is reflected in the command of God, so yes, you *have* to because God has said so. But as God continues to give you His gifts, there is a deep sense of appreciation of what God does in worship. *Sick sinners need their holy medicine.*