

"Christians and Church"

Hebrews 10:25

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Hebrews 10:25 Let us not be 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.

Last week we talked about how going to church does not make someone a Christian, anymore than walking into McDonald's makes someone a hamburger. This is true because we receive God's salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, not because of anything the church provides.

Yet, we also noted that it is important, really essential, for Christians to be part of a local church. Following Jesus is not something we are to do as an individual, but as part of a community of believers. Our spiritual growth and spiritual health depend on us being a part of a church, a good church. And yet there are many believers in Jesus, at least people who say they are Christian believers, who are not involved in a church at all. That is a problem.

Our goal at Chisholm Baptist Church is to see more and more lives transformed by the gospel across the Iron Range. I am concerned that the lives of believers in Jesus who are not part of a church, are not being transformed by the gospel as they should be.

So yes, we want to see our friends and family members who are not believers in Jesus, place their trust in Him. We even want to see people we consider to be our enemies turn to the Lord Jesus. But we also want people we know, who profess to be believers in Jesus, to become part of a church.

Friends, if you don't share that desire, we should have a chat. If you didn't hear the sermon last Sunday, you might want to listen to that. The Bible basis and theological foundation of what we are talking about were spelled out in that. But a chat would be good, because I don't want you to just listen to what I have to say today. If you are a believer in Jesus and are part of Chisholm Baptist Church, I want to enlist you to encourage other believers in Jesus, who are not part of a church, to become part of a church. You can ask them to join

us here at Chisholm Baptist Church, or to become part of another congregation where the triune God is worshipped, the Bible is taught, the gospel is proclaimed, and Christian believers have an opportunity to grow and serve.

Especially if you have friends, family members, co-workers, neighbors, who profess to be Christians, but don't go to church, the Lord may want you to talk to them about that. "Oh, Pastor Dan, I cannot do that. I don't want to offend anyone. It would be kind of scary to do that." Sorry, I don't buy that. If your neighbor is an atheist, lesbian, psychology professor, yes, it might be kind of scary to talk to her about Jesus. Or if your co-worker is a hard drinking, foul mouthed, 6 foot 4, 300-pound, motorcycle guy, it might be kind of scary to talk to him about Jesus. But to talk to someone who says he/she is a believer in Jesus, about the importance of being part of a church. That should not be scary. Oh. I'm not pretending it is always easy, but it should not be scary. You can do it.

To help you encourage believers in Jesus who are not part of a church to become part of a church, I am going to tell you about some conversations I have had with folks I know who are in that category, Christians who don't go to church. Let's pause and pray the Lord would use this time to encourage and equip each of us for what He is calling us to do.

Okay, let me tell you about some people I know. Oh, you have never met any of these folks. I can guarantee that. But I can almost guarantee that you do know someone like them.

Let's start with Don and Paula, a couple who avoid being part of a church because of a past, negative experience. They both grew up going to church and are believers in Jesus. They read the Bible and pray together every morning, but Don and Paula have not been part of a church for the past 20 years. They stopped going to church when there was an ugly conflict in the congregation to which they belonged. Both of them felt very hurt. And the reality is neither of them trust churches or pastors. They are afraid, afraid of what might

happen if they got involved in a church, afraid of getting close to people who might turn against them, afraid they might get hurt again.

How can I help Don and Paula? I can tell them I am sorry they went through that horrible experience. Churches are not supposed to be like that, but I know sometimes they are. That is why our faith needs to be in Jesus, not in a pastor or any human being, but in Jesus. Then I can remind them that Jesus is the one who says we should be part of a church.

Folks, there are many people out there like Don and Paula. Yes, they are Christians, but because they believe they have been hurt by a pastor or other people in a church, they just want to stay away, because the fear getting hurt again. The words I suggested may not have much of an impact.

Probably the most important thing you can do is pray for people like this. And you can show them the love of Jesus whenever you have the opportunity. And I hope you can truthfully tell them we experience real love frequently at Chisholm Baptist Church. John said, **John 13:35** **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.** Friends, the love we demonstrate toward each other is a big part of what will make us a magnetic fellowship that will draw in people who, whether they admit it or not, hunger for genuine Christian love, and healing in their lives.

Next, there is Linda. She is not part of a church because of her social anxiety. Linda too is a believer in Jesus. She reads her Bible and prays almost every day. But she tries not to go to any place where there are more than three or four people. Linda will go through the McDonald's drive-thru, but she doesn't go to restaurants because there are people there. She is certainly not going to go to a church service where a couple hundred people are packed in the room.

Why does Linda have this social anxiety, this desire to avoid groups of people? I don't know. I am not aware of any trauma she experienced at church or anywhere else, but obviously things in her past have contributed to this desire to avoid groups of people.

Because this is a deep-rooted issue there may be nothing anyone can say that will enable Linda to simply overcome this anxiety. But for the good of her soul it is something that needs to happen. What can we do?

Prayer is always a good strategy. We could also suggest Linda see a counselor that might help her. You could suggest she come to the 10:45 service at Chisholm Baptist Church, since there are usually not as many people as there is at 9:00. And if she sits by me in the front row there probably won't be anyone else near her. Actually, being able to sit by a trusted friend at church is important to many, so inviting someone to sit with you can be a way of helping that person feel more comfortable.

Folks, in recent years I have come to realize that there are a lot of Linda's out there. No, not people with that name, but people who choose not to be part of a church, not because they don't care about the Lord, but because they simply have a hard time being around other people.

For a variety of reasons social anxieties are becoming more and more common. If the lives of more and more are going to be truly transformed by the gospel, we need to work on helping people overcome these anxieties, so they are able to be part of a church. Because remember, a church is where they will find other Christians who will enable and encourage them to trust and follow Jesus. A church where they can serve and be served.

Now, you may be thinking, "Pastor Dan, isn't there a pretty easy answer for Linda and people like her? She can just stay home and watch the livestream of the Chisholm Baptist Church, without any other people around."

Well, that might be a good place for Linda to start. But I also think of Ned. On Sunday mornings at 9:00, he sits down in his recliner, often in his bathrobe, and watches the Chisholm Baptist Church livestream. Ned doesn't have social anxiety or anything, it is just more convenient for him to do church that way. And if for some reason he doesn't see the worship service on Sunday morning, he can watch it anytime during the week.

Livestreams of church services have become popular over the last five years, starting during Covid. Actually, it has been possible to watch a recording of the Chisholm Baptist worship service for almost 30 years on cable access TV. Does watching the worship service on a regular basis make someone a part of Chisholm Baptist Church? Probably not.

Now, watching the worship service is a great thing to do in many situations. If you are a part of this church but cannot be here on a particular Sunday because of your work schedule, illness or traveling out of town, etc., it is wonderful that you can watch and stay connected that way. For those folks who are homebound and unable to get out and attend a church service, watching church on a screen is a great option. If you happen to live in a community where there is not a good Bible believing, gospel-centered church and it is impractical to travel to one on a regular basis, then online church maybe the best choice.

But in most situations being at a worship service in person is a better choice than watching online. Yes, you can probably listen to a sermon as well in your living room as we can in these pews. Yes, you can sing along with the worship songs in your living room, but it is usually not quite the same experience as when you are here.

But fellowship, encouraging and being encouraged by other believers in Jesus, is a big part of what church is about, and it really cannot happen when you are sitting in your living room. You seldom can use the gifts you received from the Lord to serve other believers from your recliner. The biblical commandments to love, serve, forgive, bear with and confess sins to one another, can really only be obeyed when you gather with other Christians, that is why Hebrews 10:25 says not to neglect doing that.

Now, I know there are online churches which try to replicate "fellowship" with "chat rooms." But I don't know if that works. You could replicate that type of fellowship with AI and have spiritually encouraging conversations with a computer. But it is not the same as face-to-face conversations with real people, real people who can pray with you, maybe cry with you, maybe give you a much-needed hug.

So, the bottom line is online church worship services, virtual church, can be very beneficial in some situations, but it is usually not a good substitute for what happens here on Sunday mornings... or on Wednesday evenings, or other times during the week.

So, for Linda, who is overwhelmed by the thought of sitting in a room full of people, I think online church may be an okay place to start. She should not be satisfied with that, but hopefully it will help her overcome her fear of being part of a church. If you know folks like Linda, be patient with them. But encourage them to take steps, even baby steps, of participating in a church.

For Ned, who just finds online church more convenient, you might have different words for him, "Get up, get dressed and join us on Sunday morning so you can really become part of the church and experience the benefit of encouraging others and being encouraged by them." So, if you are watching this morning, and are pretty much like Ned, I would be delighted to see you next Sunday.

Okay, then we have Ron and Sue. They don't watch the Chisholm Baptist Church livestream, but their idea of church is to sit around their kitchen table and watch their favorite TV preacher. Ron says, "Pastor Dan, you are an okay guy, but face it, you cannot really compete with Pastor Smith (not his real name). He has thousands of people in his church, and he is such a great Bible teacher. He is so interesting to listen to, and he makes us feel so good. Don't worry about us. We get all the spiritual nourishment we need right here in our own home."

Well, I am not going to worry about Ron and Sue, but I will pray for them, because I think they are a little confused. And if they can listen to Pastor Smith all the time and never hear that they need to be part of a church fellowship, he is not a very good Bible teacher.

And, again, if it is just the two of them sitting alone in their house, how can they do the things the Lord says are so important? Love one another, serve one another, encourage one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens.

Yes, preaching is important in a church. One reason to come here on Sunday is to hear the Word of God taught and explained in a clear, practical and compelling way. But a church is about much more than preaching and listening to sermons. It is about encouraging and being encouraged by others, by the brothers and sisters whom you gather with on a regular basis.

Okay, I have one more couple to tell you about, Jeff and Lori. They are really nice people and are church members. But they are not really part of a church. They only attended worship service twice last year, Christmas and Easter. Why? Because they are just too busy, too busy with other activities. They have three kids aged 16, 14, and 10 who are involved in all sorts of youth athletic activities. Almost every weekend and many Sunday mornings they find themselves at a gym, rink, or field. They think it's great their kids are getting all these experiences, they think it is important to be there to support them, and they enjoy the time they spend with other parents. But it makes for a very busy schedule. And church, well unfortunately there is just not enough time for it.

Folks, I am convinced that participation in youth sports can be very positive and beneficial. But any activity or hobby that keeps us from being part of a church is not healthy. And remember what Tim Kellor said, "Good things make the best idols." Anything or anyone that becomes more important to you than the Lord poses a danger to your soul. There are seldom easy answers, but we need to be very careful about allowing our schedules to become so full that we don't have time to be part of a church.

I always remember a conversation, not with Jeff and Lori, but with another couple. They said, "Pastor Dan, we are sorry. We are going to be out of town for 12 of the next 13 Sundays with hockey." This was a family that wanted to be involved at Chisholm Baptist Church, but the hockey season just didn't allow it.

I also remember the conversation a few years later, with the mom. Her son, now in college, no longer playing hockey, was kind of struggling with life. She said, "I sure wish we would have had our kids in church youth group instead of hockey."

Now, I don't want to pick on hockey. Some of my favorite people have been hockey players and hockey moms. But if you have to choose between church and hockey, church and some other sport, church and a hobby, church and any fun activity, church and a job, church and a career, church and whatever, the right choice is almost always church.

Now, I am not suggesting you need to be in this room 51 of 52 Sundays a year. But, if, for example, you work shifts and can only be here every other Sunday, then you probably should be doing some other things to be part of the church. Fortunately, at Chisholm Baptist Church we have life groups, Bible studies and other groups almost every day of the week of which you can be a part, and which allow you to participate in this church even if you are not able to be here on many Sundays.

I would also suggest you evaluate priorities and consider what role church plays in your life. There are folks who have left the Twin Cities at 8:30 on Saturday night, so they can be home by midnight and at Chisholm Baptist by 9:00 Sunday morning. Maybe some here did that last night. Some have even left the Twin Cities at 7:00 am on Sunday so they could make it to the 10:45 service.

Is there some special reward in heaven for people who do that? No. Are these folks spiritually better than someone who is having a leisurely brunch in Minneapolis right now before she drives home this afternoon? No. Will Pastor Dan like you better if you drive home just to be at church? Probably. *Just kidding.*

No, I don't expect anyone to do that. But those who make sacrifices to be in church are usually people who really value their time with their spiritual family. They find it a joy to be here and experience worship and fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ. These are not folks who gather with a particular group of Christian on a regular basis because they *have to*. They do so because they *want to*, because they love to.

Folks, this often seems like a confused and kind of dark world. There are a lot of broken and hurting people out there. These folks need Jesus. The gospel, God graciously providing salvation through Jesus Christ to all who turn to Him, is the

answer to what is wrong with us and to what is wrong with the world.

But something else that would really have a positive impact on both individuals and the world around us, something that would transform lives, is if all those who profess to be believers in Jesus would be part of a church, a good church that worship the triune God, teaches the Bible, and celebrates the gospel. I am so thankful for all of you who are part of Chisholm Baptist Church. I ask all of you listening today who are not really part of a church to get involved here and Chisholm Baptist or in another congregation. And whenever you encounter someone who is a believer in Jesus, but is not part of a church, encourage that person to become part of a church. For the sake of his/her soul, for the good of the church of Jesus Christ, and for the glory of God.