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## A MEETING OF THE "CHURCH"?

When a "local institutional church" meets together, what does that mean specifically?

Are they "*worshipping?*" Are they "*having fellowship?*" Are they "*obeying the scriptural command to do so?*" What exactly are they doing?

Can a meeting or fellowship with just one other professing Christian be considered a "church meeting?" For example, when two believers meet together for fellowship, is this a meeting of Christians and thus "*a meeting of the church?*" Didn't Jesus say, "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst.*" (**Matthew 18:20**) What did He mean by that?

### A PROPER UNDERSTANDING

When you look unbiasedly into the Scripture, the early believers gatherings were never a formal liturgical event nor a ritualistic ceremonial "*worship service*" that was passively observed by a congregation of spectators.

Notwithstanding the pious pronouncements and false teachings in the local institutional church of today, there is no mention in the Scripture that the "*early church*" (the believers) held any regularly scheduled meetings of any kind! They didn't meet just on Sunday (and mid-week prayer service), like "local institutional churches" do today. The believers met together "***daily!***" Acts 2:46; 5:42; 6:1; Heb. 3:13

For those who might have trouble understanding, let me make it clear that **“daily”** means every day of the week and not just Sunday! That doesn't mean that every single Christian showed up at every single gathering every single day but that they were having fellowship one with another on a daily basis.

Remember too that Jesus never *“held regularly scheduled meetings”* with His disciples either. They all went about together with each other every day. Just as an aside, many local institutional churches resort to the false teaching that *“the church”* only came together for *“worship services”* on Sunday, the official **“Christian Sabbath” meeting**. This ridiculous teaching wasn't established until 321AD by the decree of the Roman Emperor. These people use three Scriptures for their rationalization: Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; and Rev. 1:10, referring to *“the first day of the week”* and the *“Lord's day.”*

Two of these verses (1 Cor. 16:2 and Rev. 1:10) are not even referring to any meeting of any kind. The *“Lord's Day”* that the apostle John mentioned in Revelation was not a **code-word** for some sort of a weekly meeting. Of course, believers met on *“the first day of the week,”* **just as they did every other day of the week!** If people are going to use this sort of explanation, there is just as much “proof” that believers met on Saturday too! Acts 13:44; 16:13; 17:2

And let me remind you again that **“daily”** (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 6:1, Heb. 3:13) includes Saturday and Sunday as well as every other day of the week. And remember as well that believers did not meet daily because of any written command. They met daily because that is what was natural in regards to having fellowship with one another as they were led by the Spirit.

## **SAD CONSEQUENCES**

The monstrosity of what *“local institutional churches”* display is mindboggling – not so much of what they do in their so-called *“meetings”* (which is bad enough) but what they **DON'T DO!**

Almost without exception, believers in these institutions will never function as priests and rarely share their *“spiritual gifts”* in the so-called meetings. In many of these *“places of worship,”* doing this is actually forbidden by official rules and would be **quickly censured!**

The churches meetings are specifically designed and structured so that these things **do not happen**, which is also evidenced by the fact that they do not happen.

The believers inside of these local institutional churches are merely spectators; pew sitters. They are being limited to the knowledge, gifting and experience of just one member of the body - *“the pastor.”* Where, in this so-called *“meeting of the church,”* may God give a fellow believer a word to share with the whole congregation?

**Nowhere!** The pre-planned and strictly ordered “*meeting*” that has been arranged by “*His duly-authorized representatives*” allows for no such thing, and like I said, deliberately so!

Some “churches” might put on the face and purport to believe in the “*priesthood of all believers*” and the theoretical existence of spiritual gifts, but you won't ever see them happening in **their meetings**.

## **THE ISSUE**

The root problem here is not necessarily that of the meeting but of the people – a matter of the heart. People are not being led by the Spirit. **They are being led by men!** They are being led by men who purport to be “*duly-authorized*” by God. They are being led by men who love to be in authority; in control; in rulership over you! If people's hearts are not right, all the meetings in the world cannot be right regardless of the structure.

Practically all “*local institutional churches*” view their church as a meeting; a service of sorts. Some might even realize and actually admit (though not all) that the “*church*” is not the building, but instead view the “*church as the meeting inside the building.*”

The “***main event***” occurs once a week, only on Sunday, with a morning and evening service, one or two hours each, while “*their church is in session.*” They operate as “*the church*” only while their “services” are taking place and this meeting at the main event is what connects them all together.

Outside of this main event, many of these professed believers do not have much, if any, actual fellowship with one another.

**Under this religious system, the primary duty that is expected of the members in these local institutional churches is ATTENDANCE!**

Since the local institutional church functions in an attendance-based environment, it is of utmost importance that the church members be at the meetings when they occur. With only a few meetings each week, the meetings themselves become most critical.

Obviously, there is a big, big difference between walking together in daily fellowship as described in the Scripture and “*attending a meeting at church.*” When you think about it, showing up at church meetings costs very little and accomplishes very little. All you have to do is sit still; be a spectator for an hour or two, and then when “you are dismissed,” you go home and that's it!

Ask yourself: *“Is this submitting to one another – Eph. 5:21; Bearing fruit in every good work – Col. 1:10; Being members one of another – Rom. 12:5”* or are these people just attending an impersonal meeting?

When the meeting is over and you are dismissed, everyone goes their own way, regardless of anyone else. These actions are completely foreign to the Scripture where *“if one member suffers, all the members suffer”* (1 Cor. 12:26; Rom. 12:15).

**Attendance-based religion is entirely nonsensical as far as the Scripture is concerned.**

These meetings may appear to be spiritual and wonderful, but where is the daily fellowship, sharing of spiritual gifts, sacrifice? And just where exactly is any of this found in the New Testament?

Where do we read about the *main event; the pre-planned meetings, attendance records; the one-man show; “the pastor?”* The early believers certainly had meetings, but they certainly did not meet in this way! The *“institutional local church services”* of today are completely contrary to what we read about in 1 Corinthians 14. **They don’t even come close!**

They are not functioning as priests where *“each one having received a gift serving one another as good stewards”* (1Pet. 4:10), for the members sit passively as if it were a spectator sport.

There is not open participatory sharing where *“each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation”* (1 Cor. 14:26), for remember, the church members ***“microphone time”*** is entirely closed. They do not share their lives together and *“exhort one another daily”* (Heb. 3:13) in intimate fellowship, for they attend impersonal meetings once or twice a week.

Here’s a thought: why are *“church leaders”* so careful about the instructions regarding the Lords supper in 1 Corinthians Chapter 11, yet a chapter or two later, when it comes to the clear instructions regarding the aspect of meeting together in which the apostle Paul clearly writes of in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14, **his words are almost totally ignored?**

As a result of the local institutional churches attendance based religion, the members become ***“meeting-enslaved”*** instead of Christ enslaved. Their whole Christian existence is centered more around *“church meetings”* and *“services”* rather than a daily personal relationship with Christ.

For some as well, their Christian life as a whole can become somewhat irregular as the majority of their *“spiritual activity”* only occurs during the meeting times that are posted by the church officials! In reality, *“their church”* only lasts as long as they are in a

meeting. When the meetings are over, how much spiritual activity actually occurs in their lives?

As someone has suggested, if you took a video camera and only recorded them every Sunday at their church services until they died, you would just about capture all of their spiritual activity! Church members merely attend a few services each week, and then the other 313 days of the year they live their lives out on their own in the world.

Of course, some may “*go to church for the mid-week service*” but their Christian life is still self-contained inside these meetings – events that are merely arranged into their schedule. Those who consider themselves really “*spiritual*” may jump from services, to seminars, to retreats and conferences but they are still experiencing “**staged Christianity.**” The only way they seem to feel themselves spiritual is to simply attend more meetings! Can this at times be edifying? Perhaps, but just not something to be dependent upon in place of an intimate relationship with Christ himself.

**“Meeting-enslaved”** Christians are often some of the most dependable “*church goers.*”

When a “service” or meeting starts, you can usually count on them to be there. But being attached to “*church meetings*” is not the same thing as being attached to Christ.

There are people who have a great attendance records, but very little spiritual intimacy with Jesus. Some may faithfully be “at church” every time the doors open, but as alluded to before, this only amounts to about 2 percent of their time each week. They might feel good and spiritual about “*attending church*” for a few hours each week, except that Jesus wants them to walk with Him every minute of every day. Scriptures such as “*be filled with the Spirit*” (Eph. 5:18) and “*pray without ceasing*” (1Thess.5:17) are not once-a-week commands! Jesus said to “*take up your cross daily*” (Luke 9:23).

These commands do not take effect just when there is a “*church meeting*” but are to be obeyed all the time. Many “**meeting-enslaved**” church members do not walk as 24/7 Christians, but more like a 4/2 Christians.

Just think of what would happen if you ran your marriage the way that many professing Christians approach their man-based; attendance-based religion?

You would pursue your own interests and other loves six days a week and then only meet with your spouse once a week for a couple of hours on Sunday. How would you rate this kind of marriage? Is this the type of relationship that Jesus wants?

**“Going to church”** to experience staged, preplanned, superficial worship is like scheduling a time to be with your spouse! Yet this is exactly the type of relationship that many professing Christians have with Jesus.

Do you not know that we are the Bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2,9; 22:17)? Marriage (a good marriage) will hopefully involve things like passionate love, caring, devotion, truthfulness. There will be no phoniness, deceit, or hypocrisy of any sort. It will not be sustained solely through ceremonial rituals and putting on your mandatory weekly performance. Professing Christians who only relate to the Lord Jesus in this shallow way are merely religious adherents, and not true lovers of God.

Over time, local institutional church members begin to develop a form of meeting dependency as they learn to wait until Sunday to have their spiritual needs met. They go to their weekly meeting or "service" to get serviced, like a car pulling up to the gas pump in order to get "filled up" for the next week. Without a meeting to prop them up, their spirituality would become stagnant if not cease completely. They rely on one meeting to give them enough spiritual boost to last them throughout the week.

As a result, their perceived relationship with Christ is heavily tied to attending their church meeting.

Many people living out their Christian life this way are easily manipulated into a temporary emotional high during a meeting and then they try to run as long as possible on the fumes. They might feel excited during a particular time of worship. They might feel moved by the singing, or they might feel stirred by the sermon. These things are all external to them, yet they supposedly make them feel closer to Christ.

If the meeting has gone well, the members will generally go home and feel nice about themselves and have a sense of satisfaction. These feelings deceive them into thinking that they themselves are now indeed somehow more spiritual. The meeting was said to be "blessed," and so they now feel "blessed." The sermon was anointed, and so they now feel anointed.

But while attending a meeting may make them feel more spiritual, the reality is that in most cases, if not ALL cases, they are not any more spiritual than when they walked in.

The church member feels spiritual without having done anything spiritual!

Maybe somebody else heard a word from the Lord, but did they hear from the Lord? Many of them just sit passively through an hour-long meeting.

Meetings such as this do absolutely nothing except to produce generation after generation of **religious adherents**. That's it!

Someone might say, "I'll grow cold and even perhaps perish if I don't attend the church meetings." Ironically, that's what "**your church rulers**" always tell you, isn't it?

But, if someone is really afraid or think of the possibility of that happening, do you know what this actually means? It means that they **are not carrying their own oil**, let alone, possibly **not even having any!** A very telling and tragic sign indeed!

## **THE ANSWER**

Is it any wonder that many “*church members*” are not enjoying their life as a Christian? There are some things in life that you cannot just hide, no matter how much you try. You can tell it when you visit with them. You can see it in their eyes. The spark of life is gone.

Their attitude betrays them. In the sermon on the mountain, Jesus told us what it would take to be *blessed* (happy). We need to go back to the mountain. We will not find the *institutional church* there. Paul tells us to rejoice always under any and all circumstances, but it's difficult when you labor under great bondage and wonder if you are obeying all the requirements that men have laid upon you.

The answer my friend is not “*church meetings.*” It is freedom in Christ Jesus!

It has all been so, so simple. It began with Jesus. Then, His disciples. They believed in Jesus. They followed Jesus. They lived like Jesus. His Spirit permeated them. They told everyone they met how knowing Jesus had changed them from the inside out.

They spent as much time together as possible. Every day, they congregated from one home to another. They shared stories about what had happened to each of them. They prayed together. They helped each other to become stronger, by teaching and encouraging each other. They ate a full meal together. When one had a need, the others supplied it out of what they had. When needed, they even sold what they had to help others. They shared all things in common. They were a community of believers.

And thank God that Christ has never stopped building ***His true ecclesia***, His true assembly, nor has He needed man to restore His works. No “*organization*” or “*institution*” rests upon Him.

### **Just who are the ecclesia anyway?**

They are those who realized they were in sin and were helpless to do anything to save themselves; who heard the story of Jesus and His redeeming blood and have responded; who put Him first in their life; who, because of their mutual love for Christ, have a love and concern for one another to the point that it is an identifying characteristic that “*ye may know them.*”

Simply, they are God's people, the followers of Christ. He is their High Priest and nothing or no one stands between them and their Savior. They are not “*devoted*” to nor

serve institutions, organizations, meetings, or men who love to label themselves as "*duly authorized*," but they serve their God and their fellow man through love.

It is an Ecclesia whose existence does not depend on meetings, forms, services, ceremonies, clergy, churches, pulpits, pews, vestments, organs, endowments, money, kings, governments, or any act of favor whatsoever from the hand of man. It has lived on and continued when all these things have been taken from it.

It has often been driven into the wilderness, or into dens and caves of the earth, by those who ought to have been its friends. Its existence depends on nothing but the presence of Christ and His Spirit; and they being ever with it. This Ecclesia cannot die.

This is the only Ecclesia of which no one member can perish. Once enrolled in the lists of this Ecclesia, sinners are safe for eternity: They are never cast away. Not one bone of Christ's mystical body shall ever be broken. Not one lamb of Christ's flock shall ever be plucked out of His hand.

This is the Ecclesia which does the work of Christ upon earth. Its members are a little flock, and few in number, compared with the children of the world. One or two here, and two or three there; a few in this community and a few more in the next.

These are they who shake the universe. These are they who change the fortunes of kingdoms by their prayers. These are they who are the active workers for spreading the knowledge of pure religion and undefiled. These are the life-blood of a country, the shield, the defense, the stay, and the support of any nation in which they are passing through.

Why would anyone want to clutter that picture with *institutions, organizations, meetings, and services*?

*"That which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."* Luke 16:15

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