

What Does the Bible Teach About Consumerism in Religion?

(The Contemporary Practice of Church Shopping -- Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. We live in a religiously pluralistic society steeped in relativism.
 - 1. Americans advocate freedom of religion and toleration of all religions.
 - 2. Truth is considered relative, affected by ones background and beliefs.
 - 3. This has led to an attitude that it does not really matter what one believes or where one worships, including the choice to believe nothing and attend nowhere.
- B. This state of affairs generates several questions:
 - 1. Does it really matter if we assemble with others for religious purposes?
 - 2. Are there any real differences between churches?
 - 3. Why can't we just go to the church of our choice?
 - 4. Isn't what I need from the church service more important than where I go to church services?

I. IS ASSEMBLING NECESSARY?

- A. Disillusionment
 - 1. Weary of liturgical worship; uncomfortable with formality.
 - 2. Hurt by hypocrisy and self-righteousness.
 - 3. Infatuated with contemporary cultural influence on religion, generating fashionable faiths.
 - 4. No longer attend worship or join with some community church or house church movement with no expectation of attendance.
- B. Why do we assemble?
 - 1. We assemble first to honor and worship God.
 - a. John 4:23; Matt. 18:20; Psalm 40:9-10
 - 2. Second, we assemble because God commanded it - Heb. 10:25
 - 3. Third, we assemble to edify and encourage others.
 - a. Heb. 10:24; 1Cor. 14:12, 26
 - 4. Lastly, we assemble to be edified and encouraged ourselves.
 - a. Psalm 122:1; Isa. 2:3
- C. Parallel concept: the Sabbath - Mark 2:23-28
 - 1. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.
 - 2. We were not made for the assembly; the assembly was made for us.

II. ARE ALL CHURCHES THE SAME?

- A. Most denominations, while having distinctive belief systems, have worked hard to "agree to disagree," and to not only tolerate one another but also accept one another in fellowship.
 - 1. They reduce or eliminate any emphasis on doctrine and choose a set of core beliefs common to all.
- B. While many churches are similar, it is not true that all churches are the same.
 - 1. Eph. 4:4 - There is one faith and one Body.
 - 2. Col. 1:18 - The Body of Christ is the church.

3. 1Tim. 3:15 - The church is the pillar and support of the truth.
 4. 2John 9-10 - The church is not to tolerate error or immorality.
- C. The church that Christ recognizes:
1. It will be one and united.
 2. It will accept and promote only the truth.
 3. It will reject all error.
- D. Do all churches meet these Biblical criteria? Then not all churches are alike.
1. Matt. 7:21-23

III. CAN ONE ATTEND THE CHURCH OF HIS CHOICE?

- A. Contemporary America has developed cafeteria Christianity.
1. One can shop around for churches, looking for a church like one would look for a car, and try to find the best fit.
 2. More often than not, the basis of that decision will be about how entertaining the worship may be, or how many youth services are offered, or how big it is, and less about that congregation's practice of what God has said.
- B. Religion is not about what we want, but rather what God authorized.
1. John 4:20-24
 2. In the end, the true criteria ought to be whether we are going to the church of God's choice.
 3. We should be seeking to associate with Christians who will help us in our walk with God.
 4. We should be seeking to associate with Christians who love God's word as much as we profess to love it.
 5. The focus is not on us, but on God.

IV. "WHAT DO I GET OUT OF IT?"

- A. More often than not, the question asked is, "what can the church do for me?"
1. That is often the reason why some members of the Lord's church go "church hopping." Some are looking for a place that has other children to interact with their own, others are looking for a preacher who delivers entertaining, short sermons, while others are looking for a congregation where they can feel more casual, comfortable, and complacent.
 2. In point of Biblical fact, their preferences and personal comfort are the last consideration in choosing a congregation with which one assembles. In the first century, Christians sacrificed their personal comfort for the wellbeing and growth of the local church. They understood that our first obligation is to the Lord and our second obligation is to His church and the needs of those who are members.
 3. Mature, unselfish Christians, whether young with children or older with none, whether educated or blue collar, whether wealthy or impoverished, will remain and labor to build up the local church; they will seek to meet the needs of the Lord and His children wherever they assemble with them.

4. Immature, selfish Christians will shop around for a congregation that meets their needs, forgetting that their needs come after those of God and His children.
 5. 1Cor. 10:24; Rom. 15:1; Phil. 2:3-4
 6. A critical aspect of Christian development is the need to no longer have our own desires satisfied, but to work for the well-being of others.
 - a. It takes maturity to grow into this attitude.
 - b. Some never grow into it; others don't want to.
 - c. They are the complainers that do little to help it get better.
 - d. These are the ones who get upset and leave, acting as if the problem was with the congregation; in truth, the problem follows them because the problem is in them.
 7. The question ought not be "What can the church do for me" as much as, "What can I do for the church?"
 8. A true servant of the Lord will find happiness and fulfillment in the service he brings to the assembly.
- B. If we assemble with others who do not hold to God's truth, or whose interests are not God's priorities, then we run the risk of losing our souls and becoming disillusioned with religion.
1. If worship is more about us and less about God, we will soon err from the faith and lose interest in our salvation.
 2. If we worship in a church of our choice rather than God's choice, we will not please Him, and we will be lost.
 3. We are not ordering in a restaurant; we are not choosing a program to watch on TV; we are not buying shoes; we are not putting together a fantasy religion team; we are honoring our Creator and Judge. Please Him, not ourselves.