

*Parenting Tools:*

**Can You Be a Christian  
and Not Attend Church?**



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**Parenting Tools:** *Can You Be a Christian  
and Not Attend Church?*

Some Christians have no choice. They are trapped in a hospital bed or working in an isolated area where no church exists, and God is certainly sufficient to care for their needs. You can still get to heaven if you can't go to church. But even though it's technically possible to live the Christian life in isolation, it's certainly not God's plan.

When you become a Christian, you are called into a relationship with God, but 1 John 1:3 makes it clear that we enter a fellowship that goes two ways—with God and with other Christians. As the text instructs us, "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."

The New Testament never divides Christians into the church members and the non-church members. All the way through, it assumes that everybody participates in his or her local assembly. It gives no samples of Christians who belong to the "universal church" but have no link with a local church. Wherever Christians are within range of each other in the New Testament, they meet. Every time in the book of Acts when the apostle Paul comes to a town where there are no Christians, he wins a few converts and immediately organizes them into a small group—a little church.

Acts 20:7 reveals the practice of the early church: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." For Christians in every location, regular gathering was a part of life.

It's illogical to say that you are merely part of the worldwide, universal church, yet refuse to gather with the segment of that universal church that exists in your geographic area. It would be like claiming you have a car when the right fender is in Phoenix, the engine is in Tucson, and the wheels are in Paradise Valley! You don't have a car—you have the beginning of the inventory for a junkyard. In the same way that a car can't function unless all the pieces are put together, neither can the church. The church must be together to carry out many of its purposes. Here are some irreplaceable elements of the Christian life that cannot be practiced when you live in isolation from the church:

### Use of Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12 makes it clear that God has given spiritual gifts to every Christian. And verse 7 states unmistakably that these abilities are not provided to make you feel good; they are abilities to minister that should be used for the common good! First Peter 4:10 commands us to use spiritual gifts to help each other. The same passage makes it clear that we meet with other Christians so they can use their gifts to strengthen us. God's gift of a preacher or teacher is wasted if no one comes to hear the preacher speak.

### Mutual Ministry

The church is depicted as a body in I Corinthians 12, and Paul explains that each part of the body exists to meet the needs of other body parts. In the same way, God intends each of us to meet the needs of other believers, using our strengths to help in their areas of weakness. First Corinthians 12:21 expresses it this way: "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you." In the same way, neither can a Christian today claim to be self-sufficient without the body. The New Testament is full of "one another"

commands. We are to comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18), build up one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11), confess our sins to one another (James 5:16), pray for one another (James 5:16), and many more. How can we obey these directives if we stay away from the gathering of believers?

### Accountability

God designed the church as a place where believers could watch out for one another, as a shepherd guards the sheep (1 Peter 5:1–4; Hebrews 13:17). A Christian who answers only to himself can easily rationalize sinful attitudes or actions; regular contact with other Christians can keep us "sharp."

Church attendance is important if we are to grow into mature disciples of Jesus who worship God, connect with others, grow in God's Word, and go take the Gospel to our world.