

Msg #138 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

“Are You Frustrated With Church?”

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today let's talk about churches. There are good churches and, of course, there are also bad churches. The church you go to may be a real good church, or it might be a kind of so-so church, or it might be kind of bad. There's all kind's of Churches out there. However, it's important to know what kind of church you're attending, and to also know how God looks at your church. Does God look at your church as a good church, a so-so church, or a bad church? You know, what you think about your church is important to you, but then, we're not put here on this earth to focus on what's important for us. We're actually put here on this earth to serve the living God, not the living flesh. Sure, we're important, in the sense that we are God's people, but our focus should not be on what we like, but on what God likes.

So when you take a close look at your church, do you make an assessment of your church from the standpoint of how comfortable it is for you, or do you make an assessment of your church from the standpoint of how well your church lines up with the word of God. Also, do you ask God if your current church experience is accomplishing what he wants for your life? You may not have ever thought of it this way, but if you're a member of a church, you're not a member of it just for your own sake, but specifically for the sake of God. If you are having trouble lining up your church doctrine and your church programs with how you see and understand the Bible, then maybe it's time to reassess your involvement with that church.

Now, hold on a minute. I'm not church bashing. I'm not trying to discredit your church. I'm not trying to get you to leave your church and go somewhere else. I know that there's a lot of that

stuff going on out there in today's church world. There's a significant attempt at trying to draw people away from one church in order that their own church can grow bigger. But that's not what I'm getting at today. However, what I am trying to do today is to try and get you to think.

So, think about this. When you go to church, what are you looking for? What is it that your church has that will gain your approval? Is it because the furnishings are appealing? You know, does it have padded pews? Does it have stained glass windows? How about the programs? Do they have up-to-date programs for your teenagers that give them lots of interesting things to do? Do they have the latest activities for your kids? Also, do they have lots of activities for the adults, including a lot of social interaction seminars? When you go to church do you always hear announcements concerning potluck dinners and senior outings? Well, all these things may have their place in the social environment of Christians, but what does it have to do with the Word of God, and what does it have to do with the calling that God has placed on your life?

You know, I don't think there's anything wrong with Christians socializing, but I definitely feel that Christians are experiencing a spiritual crossroad which is taking Christians away from sincere Bible study and replacing that endeavor with a social activity schedule which emphasizes social interaction more than it emphasizes God's Word. Certainly, Christians do need social activity with other Christians. However, I believe the church today is in danger of losing their emphasis on the word of God. Sure, we know there are Bible classes, and we also know that you get a sermon every week. But, what I want to ask you is, "are you beginning to lose your first love for the Word of God, and are you beginning to replace that first love with a social environment which emphasizes love toward you instead of you emphasizing your love toward God?"

The basic concept of church is good, but only if church maintains a pure purpose to glorify God. Now, we can't spend all our time blaming the church when they come short of doing this. However, we can certainly take a look at ourselves and see if we have replaced a love for the truth of God with a comfortable residential atmosphere in the neighborhood church.

What are you doing in church today? When you go to church, what do you have on your mind? Are you looking to learn more, seriously? If you're seriously looking for more from God when you go to church, then for sure you will also be looking for more from God when you are home. When you're at home, do you search the Scriptures? Do you really look for greater understanding every day of the week, or do you just use your daily devotional booklet and read your daily Scripture, and then go about your day? Or even worse, do you lay your Bible down, and only pick it up when you go back to church the next weekend?

Some of you don't even go to church. So, in this case, we're not even talking about whether the church focus is proper or not. In this case, we have to look deeper than the local community Church, and we need to find out if we are really seeking anything from God at all? Now, I think there are many people who are Christians, but who are not attending the church. This may be for many different reasons. One reason might be because you think churches are full of hypocrites.

Of course, we know that's true. Where else do you think hypocrites would go? We're all hypocrites, some of us are bigger hypocrites than others. But you know, the Bible tells us in Hebrews 10:24-25 that we need to provoke one another to good works, and that we should do this even more so as we see the last days approaching, and that as these last days approach we should assuredly not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as some others do.

You know, some people go to church without caring whether they really get something out of it or not. Some people just want a comfortable place to attend church so they can feel good about themselves. These people have the wool pulled over their eyes. They have forgotten who they are and what they were called to be. These people need to think twice about why they're in church. Another group of people are those who don't attend church at all for one reason or another. Sure, I can well understand the frustration that churches bring to Christians. Yes, I know that many people stay home from church because of ill health. And, I know that many people stay home from church because the church is full of hypocrites. And, I know that many people stay home from church because of the frustration they feel because the rest of the people seem to be in the first group which just wants a comfortable place to attend church.

However, no matter what the church is like, we cannot use that as an excuse to ignore Hebrews 10:25, when it tells us to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Now, am I telling you to run down and to the neighborhood community Church every weekend just so you can fulfill the Scripture? Absolutely not! I'm not suggesting that you should attend church just so you can attempt to fulfill that Scripture, but I am telling you that not coming into fellowship with other Christians on a regular basis will keep you from fulfilling the call that God has put on your life. Jesus Christ came into your heart, not so that you could sit at home by yourself. He came into your life to make a difference in both your life and in the lives of those around you. In order to do this you have to come into fellowship with other Christians. The local church may or may not accomplish that for you. I'm not telling you that you've got to find a church, but I am telling you that you need the fellowship of other Christians. And, other Christians need your fellowship also. God has called you to be part of the bride of Christ. God has called you to be part of his body. You can't fulfill your calling by remaining in your cave. You can only fulfill the calling God has placed on your life by coming out of your cave and getting involved with other people.

So, if I'm not telling you to join the local church, then what am I telling you? I'm telling you that you are responsible to fulfill God's call in your life and to join in fellowship with other Christians so that you can encourage them while they can be encouraging you. If you can't find fulfillment in a local church, then you will have to find a way to accomplish Christian fellowship some other way. God doesn't say that church, the way they're doing it today, is the one and only way to do church. But God wants you to do whatever it takes to gain fellowship with other Christians. How else will you stir others in their quest for Jesus Christ, and how else will they stir you up in your most noble faith? What you need to do is to set yourself in prayer, asking God to take down the barriers that are hindering you from Christian fellowship. Sure, I know that everywhere you go people will tell you that you have to be in church whether you like it or not. But you know, it isn't important what other people think, it's important what God thinks. And, it's important to

be where God wants you to be, and to be doing what God wants you to be doing. Some people have forsaken the mainstream churches. They have forsaken the organ music, stained-glass windows, and padded pews, and have chosen instead to meet together in small groups in their living room, or in storefronts. This can be good, and, it can be bad. However, whether it is good or bad will not depend on the location, but will depend entirely on the heart of those who are gathering together.

However, the worst thing you can do about gathering together is to not do it at all. And once again, no, I'm not suggesting that you should get back into a regular church. If you have a church, and it's a good church, and you can really fulfill the call of God on your life in that church, then by all means you should be in that church. But, if you just can't do it, or if you're just so frustrated from trying to find a good church, then there is one thing that you can still do. And that's praying that God would open a door that would give you an opportunity to join with others in spiritual worship and Bible study.

We can't just sit back and complain about the churches. We need to put our money on the line, so to speak. If we complain about the churches, but never do anything about it, then we are wasting our time. You know, maybe some of you out there have a talent for Bible study. And maybe there's someone else out there who is not timid about leading out in songs of worship. But if you don't have any other talent that can benefit a group worship, either in a church or out of a church, you can still pray. There is not a Christian on this earth that is not able to pray.

So, if you're not going to church, but you can say with confidence that you are a Christian, then you are under obligation to God to do something about it. If you're attending a church at this current time, but are completely dissatisfied with it, then you can pray. Whether you're attending a church or not attending church, if you are dissatisfied with your situation, then you can pray that God would change your situation, and you can start looking for an opportunity to do something about it.

Now, I know that just about every church pastor would probably claim that what every Christian needs to do is just stop complaining, get into their church, and start following the leader. In fact, I've heard this viewpoint expressed several times before. It's not unusual for a pastor to think that the members of his church are there to support his ministry so that he can do what God tells him to do. But, the Bible clearly tells us in Matthew 23:9, that we should call no man father on this earth. In this context, the term father, is referring to someone else having the authority over you in spiritual matters like a father would have authority over you in family matters. God is our father in spiritual matters. He is our authority. It is God who we must obey, and it is the call of God on our life that we must answer. If God is encouraging you to support your pastor as much as you can, then I encourage you to do just that. However, it is so easy to fall into the deceptive practice of religious obedience to church hierarchy, even to the place where we forget to seek God to help us answer the call on our own lives.

Now, as I said before, I'm not looking to find fault with churches. If you love your church, and you love your pastor, and you love God with all your heart, then you are most fortunate. However, I'm talking to the people who are either in a church and are totally frustrated, or are in no church at all because of the same total frustration. God doesn't want you sitting in that pew, unable to learn or worship freely because of your frustration. Neither does he want you sitting at home, unable to learn or worship freely because of that same frustration. If you're in a church that is not feeding you, and if you're staying there just because you think it's wrong to leave the church, then you need to start praying. Yes, I'm aware of the negativism spread by the church, which accuses everyone who leaves the church as being unspiritual. Yet, there is a large and growing body of believers who are not unspiritual at all, yet they have come to feel that the church has gone astray from the path of righteousness and is leading Christians either into a social religion, or into religious dictatorship by the leaders who are power and money hungry. In some cases, this may be true, and in other cases it isn't. But, the result of frustration even to the point of ceasing to attend church at all is becoming more common than probably most people realize.

I get calls every week from people who are frustrated with their church, or who claim not to be going to church at all because they have been so disappointed with the churches. Of course, it's easy to point the finger at the churches, but, it's also easy for the churches to point their fingers at these people and accuse them of having no religious zeal. However, I've talked with lot's of people who have plenty of religious zeal who are either totally frustrated with their current church situation or are not attending church at all. Sure, I know that there are plenty of complainers in the church today. But the mistake that we can too easily make is to claim that everyone who complains is just a negative person. I think it's time that the church wakes up and realizes that not every complaint is invalid.

When I talk to one person after another, and I get the same story over and over again, my heart goes out to them. I used to think that if you complained, or you stopped going to church, that you were automatically just a backslider. I don't think so anymore. I've talked to too many people which have proven by their spirit in their conversation that they love the Lord with all their heart, all their soul, and all their strength. Yet, the frustration level is still rising.

It is evident to me that the church is rapidly approaching crisis. It is evident to me that it is time for the churches to wake up and stop using the sheep to support the leader. It is time for the leaders to care for the flock. But even more importantly, it is time for the flock to stand up and begin to press toward the mark that God has set for their lives. It is not time to blame the church, but it is time, if necessary, to find another way, because it is not time to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. There's not enough time left for that.

Some say that the era of the public church is over, and that the future for Christians lies in the home church. But I don't think so. We know that on the day of Pentecost there were 3000 souls saved in one day. Just try putting those in someone's living room. Christians weren't invented

by church buildings. Church buildings were invented by Christians who needed a place to hold services for large crowds. Sure, I hear reports of home churches that have 150 people attending. I don't buy that. If you have 150 people attending church in a home, that home just as a title of home, but it is still a church building. It may still be used as a home also, but it's no different than having a church building where the pastor lives in the basement.

We Christians are fighting apathy in the church. We are fighting dictatorship among our church leaders. But even worse, we are fighting the tendency of Christians to just stay home. Christians, if you are just staying home, for whatever the reason is, then please start praying that God would send you someone for the purpose of assembling together to worship. Five people is better than one. 15 people is better than one. And in fact, 50 people is probably better than 500, because with 50 people you can communicate with one another. With a small group you can give and take when it comes to Bible study, when it comes to hearing the word of God. But, the worst thing we can do is sit at home and do nothing. I don't care who you are, God has given you talents, and there are others out there who need the gifts that God has given you. You can take your talents and you can bury them in the ground if you want to, but I think you know how that story ends. God will not be pleased.

Christians, if you are frustrated with your church, or even if you are frustrated with all Christian churches, I still encourage you not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together. The writer of Hebrews indicated that this was the manner of some people, but it certainly should not be the manner of Christians to go away into your cave and be alone. If there is anyone who has a tendency to withdraw into their cave, it is me. I have a great tendency to remove myself from Christian social circles because of frustration with the religious systems. However God will not allow me to live my life that way, and he won't let you live that way either, at least not with his approval. You not only need Christ, you also need other Christians. It's time we find a way to enter into fellowship one way or another, because time is growing short. As it says in Hebrews 10:25, we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, especially as we see the day of Christ approaching. Let's find a way to do it, either in our churches, or in our homes, but certainly never alone. We need one another, especially in these last days.