

If People Knew What I'd Done, They'd Never Let Me in Church

“If people really knew what I'd done, then they would never let me in church” is the feeling some people have. Because they feel guilty, they offer all kinds of reasons for not attending worship services.

“Church is for good people, and I won't really fit in.”

“Church is for believers, and I have some doubts.”

“Church is for families, and I'm from a broken home.”

“Church is for people with good habits, and I've got some bad ones.”

“Church is for respectable people, and I've messed up my life.”

“Church is for married couples, and I'm single.”

The list of reasons could grow long but the truth is there is no typical church member. No one will check your spiritual ID at the door on Sunday. There are no extensive forms to fill out on your first visit; no references are required; no background checks to check you out. We all had to start somewhere on our spiritual journey. If you are wondering if church is “for you,” let me assure you that it is. The church is for you because:

1. God wants to make something of you, and the church is His workshop. ***Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*** If we are “His workmanship”, then He must have a workshop. Since He puts every saved person in the church (Acts 2:47), let me suggest then that this would be the place He measures, molds, and makes us into masterpieces of His grace.

God took the wishy-washy Simon and made the rock Cephas. He took the persecutor Saul and made the preacher Paul. He took a hair-triggered Son of Thunder, John and made him the tenderhearted disciple of love. What can God do with you?

Have you thought of the simple phrase, God is “for us”? ***Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*** Compare this passage to what the psalmist said, ***Psalms 34:16 The face of the LORD is against them that do evil,...*** It is easier for many to envision God as “against those who do evil” than it is to see the greater truth that God wants us to succeed not fail—to go to heaven and not to hell. The prodigal son was a disappointment to his father to be sure; the father nonetheless ran to him, welcomed him, planned a party, and restored his son's status in the family (Luke 15:11–32).

God offers us the same grace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and opportunity. There is no sin too bad, no deed too awful, no thought too embarrassing to be forgiven. God loves us. ***Ephesians 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*** We cannot keep Him from loving us.

The church welcomes sinners because God welcomes them. The church offers God's forgiveness because its members have received forgiveness. ***Colossians 3:12-13 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; (13) Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*** The church gives us all a second chance at becoming the person God intended for us to be.

People need friends and making Christian friends is important. Jesus is your friend, and in the church is where He meets His friends. While living on earth, Jesus had friends like Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha or on another occasion he referred to the multitude as friends. But after his death and just before his

ascension back into heaven, He identified a new set of friends. ***“You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14).*** Where does He meet them? At church, of course. Figuratively speaking He eats and drinks with us as we all commune together.

Not only does God welcome you, Christ will welcome you to His church. It is as if He greets you at the front door with a smile. ***Matthew 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*** Paul put it this way, ***“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (5) For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; (6) Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” 1 Timothy 2:4-6.*** Notice the word “all” is used twice in the passage and that for certain includes the sinner. On one occasion Jesus told Zaccheus that he came to “seek and save the lost.”

Most churches want to be a welcoming church, and the way they welcome may be a warm greeting, a pleasant smile, a friendly handshake, and a welcome packet. Those things are good, but Christ’s welcome is better. It is salvation (Romans 10:13), reconciliation (Romans 5:10), and reception into God’s family (Romans 8:16).

There are conditions to these wonderful blessings. Christ receives sinners when they repent. He said, ***“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5).*** We do not go to heaven just because God loves us, nor because we love Him. We do not go to heaven only because we clean up our act. Salvation comes to believers who repent and obey Christ’s gospel. In Acts 2 those people were reminded that both God and Christ loved them as was evident by the cross. They asked what to do and notice what they were told in v38 ***Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.***

Culture says that the church must change with the times, tone down talk about sin, and make no demands for life change. Just focus on God’s love and do not mention sin. The world sees only two responses to sinners: either love them and accept their lifestyle as it is or disagree with them and thereby judge them and hate them.

Neither was Jesus’ response-He loved sinners while maintaining holy expectations. He never condoned sin, and He never hated or unfairly judged anyone and the church must embrace his character. ***1 Peter 2:21 ... Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:*** Since Jesus requires repentance, His church cannot offer cheap grace.

The church is not just being old-fashioned. Christians are not backward bigots who refuse to get with the times. Despite what society says, adultery is sin. Racism is sin. Greed is sin. Homosexual behavior is sin. Lying is sin. God’s word is eternal. Peter says in 1 Peter 1:25 that it will stand forever. It does not change because opinions or laws change, nor when its principles become unpopular. God’s judgments have remained unchanged since they were given by inspiration. ***Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*** The Scriptures will read the same at the Judgment as today (John 12:48).

Jesus’ church must meet people where they are and help them go where God wants them. Jesus’ blood ***“cleanses us from all sin”*** (1 John 1:7). Paul preached the gospel to adulterers, thieves, drunkards, homosexuals, fornicators, coveters, etc. and they changed, and God saved them (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). On the Day of Judgment, may no sinner in this generation say of the church, ***“You had good news to share, but you did not share it with me. Ashamed to call sin a sin, you condoned the behavior I’m condemned for.”***

The Spirit anticipated some would say, ***“If people knew what I have done, they would never let me in church,”*** so He put encouraging examples in Scripture. The first church members were guilty of the blood of Jesus Himself; yet they were forgiven (Acts 2:22-47).

In Acts 16 we find a jailer in the city of Philippi. There is no indication that this jailer had ever “*been to a church*” in his life. He was a pagan Roman-not a Jew-so he was uninformed of Old Testament teaching about the Messiah. Paul and Silas taught him to believe on Christ to be saved (Acts 16:31). When they taught him, and he believed he was baptized “*the same hour of the night.*” (16:32–34)

The Corinthians are another example (Acts 18:8). There was no Las Vegas or San Francisco in the Roman Empire, but there was a Corinth. Its citizens were widely known for immorality and ungodliness. Evangelizing in that place struck fear into the seasoned heart of the veteran apostle Paul. ***Acts 18:9-10 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: (10) For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.*** Later in writing to the church in Corinth Paul would write, ***1 Corinthians 2:3 And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.***

Surely, he must have thought, I’m wasting my time here. But the Lord knew what Paul did not. Those who perhaps were previously featured in gossip columns or police records now composed the membership of Christ’s church in Corinth. Notice 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. If you think your unworthy to be in the church notice this passage. ***Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, (10) Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.***

Take heart. You are not worse than those who became Christians in the New Testament. It is as easy for Jesus to save a great sinner as a small sinner. “***Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool***” (Isaiah 1:18). No one was ever saved because his sins were few and no one was ever rejected because his sins were many. Jesus had success at changing publicans and sinners in the first century and His gospel changes people today (Romans 1:16). Those involved in sinful behavior should not judge themselves unworthy of being a Christian because people can change. It may not be easy, but it can be done. Paul wrote, “***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me***” (Philippians 4:13). If you need to make changes, do not use the excuse that you have been this way too long. Take a step in the right direction, and Christ will help you finish the journey.

The devil is against you, and church is the safest place for you. To be blunt, Satan wants to destroy your life and take you to hell (1 Peter 5:8; Matthew 25:41). He is a veteran who has been doing this for thousands of years to billions of people. Do you think you will be able to defeat him on your own - your own wisdom, strength, and willpower? You will not. You need Christ’s help, the Word’s wisdom, and the gospel’s power. You need what is described in Eph 6 as the “sword of the spirit” That’s the word of God; the Bible. These are available in the church through preaching (1 Peter 4:2) and Bible class teaching not to mention the good examples of others. Satan’s tactic is to distract and delay. If he can keep you away from church because you fear what others may say, or because you think you can never change or measure up to expectations, he has you where he wants you. . Figuratively speaking, if he can keep you from the flock, you will not find the Shepherd. Christians are loving people, and church is where you can connect with them.

Many people are looking for a group to belong to, fellowship with, and enjoy their company. There is no better group than God’s people. To become a member of the church you read about in your Bibles, one need to obey the gospel.

Invitation – are you a member of the church?