

Why Go To Church?

This is written in love to all those who have been born from above, not of the will of man, nor of the flesh, but of the Spirit. To those who have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the powers of the coming age. To those called to be the sons of God through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus, the Christ. To all who would lay aside their own lives, that they might know Him, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and His resurrection life.

Nothing written here is intended for anyone else, nor to offend.

Going to Church is not for those to whom this is written.

Jesus never told anyone to 'go to church'.

He did say, beware of the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees, which is hypocrisy – play acting - pretence.

Going to church is a universal expression and component of many world religions.

It may not always be called 'going to church'.

It may be called;

'Going to mass.'

'Attending church.'

'Church membership.'

'Christianity.'

'Temple worship.'

'Fellowship.'

'Bible study.'

'Prayer meeting.'

'Communion service.'

'Celebration'.

It can be observed in most major world religions, even if it is called something else.

Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism etc all have their own way of 'going to church'.

Evangelical Christianity is obviously the one that presents the greatest danger and snare to the saints.

An enemy has done this.

The prophetic example in the scriptures of this strategy of Satan is in 1 Kings.

1 Kings 11:28:

- 28 And the man Jeroboam *was* a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph.
- 29 And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two *were* alone in the field:
- 30 And Ahijah caught the new garment that *was* on him, and rent it *in* twelve pieces:
- 31 And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee:
- 32 (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:)
- 33 Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do *that which is* right in mine eyes, and *to keep* my statutes and my judgments, as *did* David his father.
- 34 Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes:
- 35 But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, *even* ten tribes.
- 36 And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there.

- 37 And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel.
- 38 And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do *that is* right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee.
- 39 And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever.
- 40 Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.
- 20 And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.
- 21 And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon.
- 22 But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying,
- 23 Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying,
- 24 Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD.
- 25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel.
- 26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David:**
- 27 If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.**
- 28 Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.**
- 29 And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.**
- 30 And this thing became a sin: for the people went *to worship* before the one, *even* unto Dan.**
- 31 And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.**
- 32 And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that *is* in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.**
- 33 So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even* in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.**
- 1 And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense.
- 2 And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.
- 3 And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This *is* the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that *are* upon it shall be poured out.

So Jeroboam was the first king of the ten tribes, over whom he reigned twenty-two years (B.C. 976-945). He was the son of a widow of Zereda, and while still young was promoted by Solomon to be chief superintendent of the "burden", i.e., of the bands of forced labourers. He fled to Egypt 1Ki 11:29-40 where he remained for a length of time under the protection of Shishak I. On the death of Solomon, because of

Solomon's apostasy in turning towards the foreign gods of his illicit wives, the ten tribes, having revolted, sent to invite Jeroboam to become their king. The conduct of Rehoboam favoured the designs of Jeroboam, and he was accordingly proclaimed "king of Israel" 1Ki 12:1-20 He rebuilt and fortified Shechem as the capital of his kingdom. He at once adopted means to perpetuate the division thus made between the two parts of the kingdom, and erected at Dan and Bethel, the two extremities of his kingdom, "golden calves – worship aids," which he set up as symbols of Jehovah, enjoining the people not any more to go up to worship at Jerusalem, but to bring their offerings to the shrines he had erected. He effectively created two alternative places of worship, one at Bethel – the house of God- sounds a good place to have a worship centre, doesn't it? The other at Dan, in the extreme north, so that the Israelites could choose the place of worship that was most convenient. As the Levites weren't going to play along with this rebellion against the clear commands of Jehovah he opened up the priesthood to any who had a vocation to serve at the new altars.

He also invented his own feasts to Jehovah at times of his own appointing. Thus he became distinguished as the man "who made Israel to sin." This policy was followed by all the succeeding kings of Israel. While he was engaged in offering incense at Bethel, a prophet from Judah appeared before him with a warning message from the Lord. Attempting to arrest the prophet for his bold words of defiance, his hand was "dried up," and the altar before which he stood was rent asunder. At his urgent entreaty his "hand was restored him again" 1Ki 13:1-6 9 comp. 2Ki 23:15 but the miracle made no abiding impression on him. His reign was one of constant war with the house of Judah. He died soon after his son Abijah 1Ki 14:1-20. Effectively Jeroboam, God's appointed King of the 10 tribes of Israel, had laid a trap for the people of God, to draw them into disobedience and idolatry, to see if they would obey God or just 'worship' anyplace, anyhow.

Jesus gave His word on the whole matter in John 4.

19 The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.

20 Our fathers worshipped in this mountain (Samaria); and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

21 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.

22 Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

24 God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.

25 The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

26 Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am *he*.

Very soon after the passing of all the original apostles of the Christ, most of the saints who had began gloriously in the Holy Spirit ended up by continuing, going on, in the flesh. The style of our going on in the flesh may vary tremendously, from pseudo Messianic liturgical leanings to hyper-rationalizing the scriptures, with a wide spectrum in-between.

Eventually pagan emperor Constantine declared the by now very fleshly religion of 'Christianity' to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. He then made it his business to see to it that this religion was viable by attempts at homogenising it and ensuring it had all the trappings of a world religion, with temples, altars, priests, ritual, dressing up, feasts, holy days and new moons. This politically motivated strategy is well documented as a universally occurring way of unifying a state. Right down to the Inquisition, the English Church Laws of Henry VIII, Islam, and other manifestations in all ages and cultures.

As God is the God of heaven and earth, none of this is outside His providence, just as in the case of Jeroboam.

It happened to God's chosen because of their apostasy – rebellion.

Nevertheless God has always kept a remnant of those who worship Him in Spirit and in the Truth.

Very often they have been mixed up with the prevailing culture they happened to have been born into. But usually they eventually 'came forth out from among them'. Often with, or through, great suffering,

persecution and loss. The original 'friends' of the seventeenth century United Kingdom are just one example among many.

Going to Church though, has always endured as the state approved mode of religion, even if it has been 'tweaked' from time to time. The prince of this world loves to have it so.

And so 'Going to church' is always there as a stumbling block to those who desire to know the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Truth. It presents itself as harmless, indeed, as beneficial. It can also appear as a relatively quick and easy way to 'worship' God or to 'fellowship' with brothers. The lack of a clear visible Holy Spirit anointed alternative is also a major challenge to us all at this present time.

So, what is the alternative?

The alternative is to repent of lukewarmness, of going for the easy, the cheap, the attractive, the socially acceptable, rather than seeking first (preferring) the Kingdom of God, which is in the Spirit.

Why did I mentioned at the beginning that 'This is written in love to all those who have been born from above, not of the will of man, nor of the flesh, but of the Spirit. To those who have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the powers of the coming age. To those called to be the sons of God through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus, the Christ. To all who would lay aside their own lives, that they might know Him, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and His resurrection life.'?

Simply because unless and until one is born of the Holy Spirit one cannot see the Kingdom of God. It is not apparent in any way. (John 3.) We remain in the dark.

So if we have indeed received of the Spirit of Christ and so are His, we who have tasted of the powers of the coming age, we can prefer the Kingdom of God. We've had a taste of it. But we have to prefer it to the point of mourning, fasting, craving the reality of immersion in the Spirit day by day. And not accept the sop, substitute, of Going to Church religion. When we are immersed in the Spirit, we are then immersed in the Christ, Jesus, in His death and in His resurrection to new eternal (quality) life. (Romans 6.) Any day we are not immersed in the Spirit, we are continuing (going on) in the flesh. Now we know that the flesh wars with our spirit. And wins. We become like the dog returning to it's vomit, the washed pig back wallowing in the mire, very quickly. At least this has been my personal experience. And I've witnessed it in others I've known and loved.

But we have to pull down those altars that are not of God's making.

We shouldn't sign up for this substitute form of 'worship' which is in effect idolatry.

Brothers and sisters, lets leave the things of childhood behind and grow up into the Christ who is the Head.

Knowing Jesus is worth it. I'm not sorry that He got me out of there alive! I am so grateful.

And, when we are out of this pattern of going to church religion, we become motivated to seek out our brothers and sisters. The love of God shared abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit in us looks for sheep to feed, lambs to care for, feet to wash.

The alternative that Christ Jesus provides is a hundred mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and homes, both in this life and in the age to come!

Mr 10:29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,

Mr 10:30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

But all of this, out of the fruit of the Spirit, not of our own will or devising. If we abide in Jesus, we will bear much fruit. It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.

Please seek the Lord about all of this. Time is short, and we only get one shot at this.

May we all know the unmerited favour and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and our Father in knowing the company of the Spirit as we seek earnestly His mind.

Love,

Colin Thompson. Gateshead. England. (Nobody important.)

Comments welcome by email to colin@followingjesuschrist.co.uk

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