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I GREW UP going to church” is a popular saying of those who used to go to church but no longer attend. This saying is popular and is repeated by many churchgoers—people who attend church services in body only, without their lives or beliefs being changed at all. Churchgoers are what some call carnal Christians, people who have professed to have faith in Jesus but choose to live their lives controlled by their sinful natures instead of by the Holy Spirit of God. Churchgoers are people who hear the Word of God but they are not doers of the Word. Churchgoers are not the same as true worshipers whom the Bible describes in John 4:23-24, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father is seeking such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that true worshipers worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Jesus said that the Father seeks true worshipers. Worship must not be just a tradition; neither should it be about a particular location you have to worship in. What is important is that the worship must be in spirit and in truth—which means worship has to be real! Worshiping God

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begins with having the proper respect for God. God must have first place in the hearts of those who are his worshipers. In the Bible, the heart means the mind.

Churchgoers are people who make it a habit to attend church services in buildings all over the world. In most churches you find worship, prayer, praise, preaching, teaching and studying God's Word, as well as singing hymns and spiritual songs and giving tithes and offerings. Some services include dancing and giving testimonies and thanksgiving to God for his mercy, grace, and goodness to his people.

It's not about a building

Although a churchgoer makes it a habit to go to the church building, he or she refuses to hear and obey the teachings from the Word of God. Because of this refusal, the churchgoer is like a foolish man, who builds his house upon sand. When the rain descends, the floods of life's adversities come, and the winds of trouble blow and beat upon that house—which represents one's life. The house built on sand will fall and be a great loss. We read in Matthew 7:24-27:

Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that hears these sayings of mine, and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

In Matthew 13:15 Jesus talked to his disciples about the sad spiritual condition of the great multitude of people who had gathered on the shore to hear him teach.

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For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Jesus taught many things in parables. These people were similar to the churchgoers of today. As Jesus said, they had ears to hear, yet they refused to hear. They couldn't hear because their ears were dull when it came to hearing spiritually. They had closed their eyes, meaning they couldn't see the spiritual applications of Jesus' teaching, which would have shown them the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. If they had been willing to receive the teaching, and to hear and see its truth, they would have been able to understand and obey his teachings.

Sin and rebellion had caused their spiritual deafness and blindness. Their rebellion had prevented them from hearing God's Word and seeing and understanding it with their hearts. At any time, they could have changed their deplorable spiritual condition. Had they been willing to see with their spiritual eyes, hear with their spiritual ears, and understand the Word of God with their hearts they would have been able to see the truths Jesus was teaching and been converted. He would have saved them and healed them spiritually.

The knowledge that comes from God's Word is like hidden treasure and those who are willing to seek after it will find it. God's Word gives wisdom to the hearer who listens with his heart.

Out of the Lord's mouth comes knowledge and understanding. Proverbs 2:6 says, "For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

Churchgoers are sin-sick people who need to be healed spiritually. I used to say, "I grew up in the church." I was raised going to church. When I was nine years old, one Sunday morning

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at church, I heard Pastor Austin preaching that Jesus had died for my sins. I believed what he said, so I accepted the invitation of salvation, and I invited Jesus to come into my heart and become my Savior. I joined the church, and I was baptized.

I attended Sunday school sometimes, but it wasn't until many years later that I came to understand that I had to put into practice what I was being taught in Sunday school. I had to learn how Jesus wanted me to live. When I was young, I didn't understand how important obedience and spiritual growth were to my spiritual success.

The Sunday school lessons seemed to be just nice-sounding Christian stories. I knew that the prophets told of Jesus coming as the Messiah, to save his people from their sins. His birth was prophesied long before he was born. The prophecies revealed that God had chosen Mary, a virgin and a woman highly favored of the Lord, who at that time was engaged to be married to Joseph, to be his mother. Isaiah 7:14 says, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Matthew 1:18-25 says,

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

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Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

I didn't understand that the spiritual principles of these Bible stories were to be applied to my life. When I got older, I joined the usher board and became an usher—a doorkeeper in the house of God. During that time, I lived a unholy, ungodly lifestyle. I had no idea of the spiritual meaning of being an usher. As Psalm 84:10 says, "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." But that's exactly where I was dwelling—in the tents of wickedness, living a dirty, unholy lifestyle, living a wild and rebellious life.

Even though I professed to believe in Jesus, this contradiction seemed quite normal to me at the time. I thought as long as I was going to church I was all right and, because I saw and knew so many of the other churchgoers doing the same things I was doing, I felt that I wasn't a bad person because I wasn't hurting anyone.

But I was wrong. A doorkeeper, as described in the Bible, was the person who had the responsibility of standing at the door of the temple, or the place of worship, and guarding the door leading in and out of the temple. The doorkeeper was there to protect the integrity of the worship service and prevent any unruly interruptions or disturbances of the worship or the worshipers.

That description didn't fit who I was as an usher in the house of God because I was the one causing a disruption in the worship by my unholy lifestyle. There I was, standing in God's house on Sundays as a hypocrite, pretending to be something I was not.

Yes, "I grew up in the church," meaning that I grew up going to the church building, but I was not a genuine member of the

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true body of Christ for many years because of my continual lifestyle of sin.

New life

Then a day came I will never forget—the day God revived my spiritually-dead soul. The revival of my spirit and my soul caused God’s Word to come alive in me. I began to see with my spiritual eyes and hear with my spiritual ears. I began to understand God’s Word with my heart.

About sixteen years after my days as an usher, I started attending a Bible study. After about a year of attending the study, I experienced a profound spiritual awakening. My blinded eyes and my deaf ears were opened, and my heart began to hear, receive, and understand the divine revelation from God’s Word. God touched my heart with his Word in a way I had never felt before during all those years of churchgoing. God’s Word warmed my insides and enlightened my mind so that I could clearly see with spiritual eyes and a new, receptive heart, recognizing the deadly deceitful trap I had been in for so long.

As I look back now, I can see that even today this deadly trap entangles and snares many churchgoing carnal Christians. Romans 8:14 states, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Your obedience to the teachings of Christ will prove that you are being led by the Spirit of God and that you love God. If you truly love God, your love will be demonstrated by your obedience to his Word and your efforts to do that which pleases God. Your faith, obedience, and love toward God are requirements of being part of the body of Christ and a genuine member of his church.

Yes, many churchgoers recite the statement, “I grew up in the church,” but what they are really saying is, “I used to go to the church building.”

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So what about you? Are you just a churchgoer or a born again, obedient Christian? Galatians 5:16 gives a guideline for the Christian lifestyle. It states, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Living in the Spirit simply means that you allow your life to be guided by the will of God, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit of God. Galatians 5:19-21 provides a description of the lusts of the flesh—sins that churchgoers who are carnal Christians not led by the Spirit of God can fall into. These works of the flesh are sinful, and they are unacceptable for those who claim to have faith in God and profess to be members of his family (his body)—his church.

The works, or acts of the flesh are:

- adultery
- fornication
- uncleanness (dirty or impure thoughts or actions)
- lasciviousness
- shameless immorality (conduct shocking to public decency)
- idolatry (anything that you put ahead of God, anything that takes God’s rightful place in your heart or in your life, whether it is possessions, people, or positions, or anything that you give more of your time to than you do to God)
- witchcraft
- emulations (ambition to excel or be better than or surpass others)
- wrath
- anger
- uncontrolled tempers
- strife
- bitter disagreements
- conflict

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- sedition (conduct or speech that incites rebellion against authority of a state or ruler)
- heresy (any teaching of the Scriptures that is not based on sound biblical doctrine)
- unbelief
- envy
- murder
- drunkenness
- reveling (to party noisily)

This passage goes on to say that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. They will be excluded from heaven.

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus taught the people, saying, “Except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” And in Matthew 18:3, Jesus said, “Verily, I say unto you, except ye are converted and become as little children you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus was speaking of being humble and teachable, meaning that what you have been taught, you do. What happens is that churchgoers believe and accept the concept of Jesus dying on the cross for their sins intellectually, but spiritually, they don't understand the principles behind the concept of salvation.

God is a forgiving God; he understands that you and I are not perfect, but he will not accept any excuse for our choice to sin against him and disobey him. God's requirement is the same for all who profess faith in him and it's really quite simple. Your love for him equals your obedience to him. You can't see, neither can you understand the spiritual kingdom of God through your natural understanding (your natural mind). God's kingdom is of the spiritual realm, and it commands us to be born again so that we will be able to see it with spiritual eyes and then enter into it.

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First Corinthians 2:14 states, “But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Religion or relationship

Churchgoers who go to the church building without ever becoming born again—changed—will remain locked into a tradition of churchgoing and religion. Their religion will be empty, powerless, dead, and boring, which is quite different from a relationship with Jesus, which is alive, exciting, vibrant, fun, challenging, and life changing. Churchgoers will never be part of the congregation of the righteous. Like following a popular fad, churchgoers go to the church building out of tradition and formality, which is no more than a show or pretense. Sometimes it’s done to fit in with the Charismatic Christian crowd, so that you appear to be a really good Christian. Sometimes it’s done to make others think you are part of the crowd of Christians who really do know Jesus.

But Colossians 2:8 states, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Going to church gets you no favoritism with God, even though the churchgoer may think it does. I’ve heard people say of churchgoers, “At least they go to church,” and I say, so what? Evil, unclean spirits, demons, and the devil go to the church building also, every time the doors are open. They catch a ride in by way of any rebellious person who has opened the door of his or her life for him to come in and use that person’s body, mind, heart, and attitude.

God is not impressed with churchgoers—he’s interested in transformed, changed lives. He wants people who have been born again spiritually, have changed attitudes, renewed minds,

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godly desires, characteristics, and emotions that are controlled by the Holy Spirit of God.

These kinds of people possess strong determination to remain faithful and obedient to Christ while working out their own salvation. They make their prayer life and study of the Scriptures an important priority in their spiritual growth. They choose to be faithful and devoted to their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. They do not conform to the ungodly system of this world. Their relationships are centered in the will of God. They know and understand their calling, purpose, and commission from Jesus. The winning of lost souls to the kingdom of God is their first priority.

These dedicated saints give of their time, talent, and tithes for the benefit of building up the kingdom of God and for the support of the church they attend. They are more than just churchgoers. They are ambassadors for Christ, vessels of honor that Christ can use in his work of building his kingdom of light and truth in the hearts of sinners. Ambassadors are Christ's witnesses here on earth. They share the gospel, which is the good news of faith, salvation, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life through Jesus the Christ, the Savior of men's souls.

Churchgoing is nothing more than a modern day fad, if your life has not been changed by God. Living a born-again spiritual life of godliness, by letting Jesus live his life in you and through you, is the desire that Jesus has for all those who profess to have faith in him.