

Which Church?



Week Twelve

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Ephesians 4:11-16

DIGITAL CHURCH

With the increasing prevalence of digital worship services and sermons, the temptation to stay home for church is getting harder to resist, especially for those who have younger children, difficult-to-awaken family members (or yourself!), or high-intensity schedules through the week. Whereas societies in the past were based on small communities, these building blocks are slowly eroding away, at least their pew version of them. Ironically, with the rise of megacities and the aggregation of people, we are more isolated than ever before. Through digital means, we can choose our spiritual communities and forms of worship based on our personal taste. Though there are clear benefits to the digitalization of worship, one must clearly compare the practice with biblical principles and use the best of both worlds to develop our spiritual relationships further.

Though we have digital communities, they are customizable and can be turned on or off at any time. Though we have online churches, they are now competing in the marketplace of other venues. Though we have streaming sermons, they are packaged, labeled, advertised, and billed amidst a plethora of other forms of spoken word. These resources are beneficial and not to be seen as the result of technology's malevolence. Rather, this shift brings an opportunity to reassess our understanding of worship altogether.

In the digital age, why does one even attend church? How does one choose a church? Is the pew preferable to the mouse? What is God's will concerning our interaction with church? And why is church important for our spirituality? These are the questions that will be addressed in this lesson.



inScribe

Write out Ephesians 4:11–16 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, outline, or mind map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?



Memorize your favorite verse in Ephesians 4:11–16. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

What further horizontal principles of church gatherings are found in Ephesians 4:11–16?



Read more at www.inverseible.org/will12-3

CROSS CONNECTION

“You don’t understand, my church is so boring. It’s become irrelevant. I don’t know why I have to get up so early to attend something that has no impact on me. I can get a better blessing by watching my own stuff and chilling with my friends.” For some, in an era of social media and crowd activism, sitting passively through a one-to-two-hour service can be painful. Perhaps the sermon sounds like a dull lecture, the order of worship a meaningless ritual, and the music a repetitive, mind-numbing experience.

American evangelist D. L. Moody stated that “church attendance is vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man.” What is it about church attendance that is efficacious? Surely not the attributes mentioned above. What does the Bible say about it? Many passages talk about the power of church, but in short there are two broad principles about attending church in person.

1. Jesus Christ is the Lord and head of the church

The person to which we need to be calibrated is Jesus Christ! He is the Lord of all creation, of heaven, of earth, and of the church! Too often we get sidetracked into thinking we go to church either for the community, for the pastor, for our parents, for meeting our future spouse, or for our peers. But Scripture directs and ascribes all worship to Jesus, the Son of God (c.f. Ps. 150:6; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 10:31).

Although praising, serving, and glorifying can be done alone, the point is that the emphasis is on God, not the needs or preferences of the worshiper. Too often in a conventional worship society, the plea to attend church takes on the form of an infomercial. Churches try to sell their unique points, customizing their services to meet specific needs. But we find none of these elements in Scripture.

When attending church, are we there to judge the sermon and the preacher? Are we waiting for the congregation to do something while we sit passively? Do we plan to “rate” the church, its services, and the people? Or are we waiting with bated breath for the moving of the Holy Spirit, for the conscience to be spoken to by the Word of God, for an encounter with God through humble human agencies, for our souls to surrender before the Creator?

The church is not merely an organization or a human community. It is the body of Christ. In other words, Christ is in charge of this grouping of people, so it should be different from any other social institution. Ephesians 3:10, 11 goes so far as to say that the church is the theater in which the fundamental issues of the universe and sovereignty of God are played out. How much loftier is the biblical understanding of church than just a place to worship God!

2. The church is the body of Jesus Christ

Not only do we need a vertical spiritual calibration with the divine, but there is also a horizontal spiritual calibration with fellow believers. Hebrews 10:24, 25 says, “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Though the temptation is to have an esoteric and monastic experience with God, the weekly connection with others prevents extremism and isolation while promoting a stronger and more viable faith. Human beings need encouragement, empowerment, accountability, and inspiration from other human contacts. “As is the manner of some” denotes that this is an age-old tendency to avoid assembling, but Scripture encourages us to assemble more, “as you see the Day approaching,” emphasizing its benefits as the second coming of Jesus approaches.

SEARCH PARAMETERS

More than rituals and observations, it is the deepening of our relationship with God and His people that takes precedence in our church attendance selection. With the plethora of churches, leadership styles, and worship philosophies, the decision to choose a church is like deciding what to eat for lunch. Some people like Thai food the way others enjoy “high” church. Just as God grants principles to know His will to help in other life decisions, there are similar principles for “church shopping” that transcend personal preferences and luxury options. Some of these principles include:

1. Revelation 12:17. Find a church that worships God and has Jesus Christ as its head. The message of the pulpit should revolve around the life, teachings, ministry, and gospel of Jesus Christ. In the context of Revelation, the “testimony of Jesus Christ” not only refers to the “spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10), but the Holy Spirit who inspired individuals throughout history. Prophets not only predicted the future but pointed the people of God back to the commandments of God. These commandments can only be kept by the power, pardon, grace, and Spirit of God. Biblical churches revere the commandments of God, the entire Bible as the foundation of faith, and the Holy Spirit as its interpreter.

2. Luke 4:16. Find a church that follows the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus preached and taught on the Sabbath day. Worshiping and communing with God on the day that He established, and Christ also observed, is imperative for His disciples as well. More than following rules, Sabbath keeping is abiding in the holiness that God injected into the fabric of time from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.

3. 1 Corinthians 12. Find a church that is mindful of the gifts of the Spirit. More than a church that gathers, performs, worships, and leaves, a spiritually active church is one where the gifts of the Spirit are prayed for, developed, honed, and used. Church is equally a place of in-reach as well as outreach. Moreover, in-reach feeds outreach and outreach feeds in-reach. Church leadership isn’t merely for conducting services, but to lead and mentor in discipleship and “fruit” development “in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1 Tim 4:12).

Even before the creation of social media church intertwined humans’ lives, helping to fulfill real heart needs, manifesting hospitality, providing spiritual encouragement, warning of the world’s dangers, teaching principles from the Bible, and reflecting the mercy of Christ to the inner and outer communities. All this was made possible by spiritual gifts.

4. 1 Corinthians 13. Find a church that is mindful of the fruit of the Spirit. More important than the activity of the church is the character of the church. As Paul iterates, though we should desire spiritual gifts, the more excellent way is love. Through love in fellowship, accountability, and true spiritual relationships we see the character of Jesus Christ.

Church is much more than a praise and worship session; it is more than outreach and evangelism; it is more than a gathering and a potluck. It is where burdens are borne (Gal. 6:2). It is a place where individuals look out for each other spiritually (Heb. 13:17). It is a place where Christ’s servants serve within His love.

An adage says, “The perfect church does not exist; if it did, it would cease to exist when you joined it.” The reality is that these are ideal principles, and the perfect church indeed does not exist. But some churches yearn to espouse these principles, and perhaps they need your help to become more like Christ in the process.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/will12-4

Which Church?



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Acts 2:42–47

Matthew 28:18–20

Colossians 3:12–17

1 Thessalonians 5:11–15



What other verses/promises come to mind when thinking about church membership and attendance?

Review your memorized verse from Ephesians 4:11–16.

THE MEETING

In the theophanies (encounters with the supernatural deity) of the Bible, there are five common elements of the meeting. Some theophany passages are Isaiah 6, Revelation 1, Acts 9, and Exodus 3:1, 2. Not all five elements are found in every theophany, but these five together create the composite template for our worship services.

Gathering. Just as with any other important ceremony, showing up in person at church reveals the importance of the meeting. Imagine a wedding where the bride chimed in through a video conference. Imagine a funeral where mourners watched a live stream online in their pajamas. Of course, one can think of extenuating circumstances when attendance in person is not possible. But overall, showing up and gathering with other people imposes a certain importance on the event. Whether it's the removal of shoes or the blowing of the trumpet, a line demarcates the beginning of the encounter.

Surrender. Immediately after the divine revelation, one sees an immediate attitude of unworthiness and surrender. In the worship service, we see elements of surrender in the monetary sacrifice, musical offering, and/or familial dedications. We surrender our hearts as we listen to the sermon; we offer our prayers and bodies as a response in worship.

Hear. In every encounter, God speaks and His people listen. There are always words of encouragement, rebuke, admonition, and inspiration. Transcending the eloquence and erudition of the preacher, it is the Spirit who convicts and guides each heart to follow the will of God.

Respond. More than an educational seminar or an entertaining musical concert, worship services are an opportunity to respond to God, especially after considering the message. Usually done through song, prayer, service, or other form of offering, the worshiper gives thanks, acknowledgement, and reception of the message and the One who inspired the message.

Dispatch. Once the congregation has gathered to meet Jesus, surrender to Jesus, hear from Jesus, and respond to Jesus, this same Jesus inspires His disciples to go out. It is one thing to spend time at the top of the mountain; it is another thing to go down and spread the message of what just transpired. God's heart always expands outward, desiring to seek the lost and bring them back to Him.



inVite

Where is Jesus in the
midst of the prophecies of
Ephesians 4:11-16?



Where is Jesus most tangible in
your worship services?

What does He say to you through
your church experience?

After this week's study, how do
you see Jesus differently or see
Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to
seeing Jesus in this way?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/will12-6



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?



After this week's study of the
chapter, what are personal
applications you are
convicted of in your life?

How can you improve and
contribute to your local
church more?

FAR MORE OF HIS PRESENCE

“God does not mean that any of us should become hermits or monks and retire from the world in order to devote ourselves to acts of worship. The life must be like Christ’s life—between the mountain and the multitude. He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine. When men take themselves out of social life, away from the sphere of Christian duty and cross bearing; when they cease to work earnestly for the Master, who worked earnestly for them, they lose the subject matter of prayer and have no incentive to devotion. Their prayers become personal and selfish. They cannot pray in regard to the wants of humanity or the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom, pleading for strength wherewith to work.

“We sustain a loss when we neglect the privilege of associating together to strengthen and encourage one another in the service of God. The truths of His word lose their vividness and importance in our minds. Our hearts cease to be enlightened and aroused by their sanctifying influence, and we decline in spirituality. In our association as Christians we lose much by lack of sympathy with one another. He who shuts himself up to himself is not filling the position that God designed he should. The proper cultivation of the social elements in our nature brings us into sympathy with others and is a means of development and strength to us in the service of God.

“If Christians would associate together, speaking to each other of the love of God and of the precious truths of redemption, their own hearts would be refreshed and they would refresh one another. We may be daily learning more of our heavenly Father, gaining a fresh experience of His grace; then we shall desire to speak of His love; and as we do this, our own hearts will be warmed and encouraged. If we thought and talked more of Jesus, and less of self, we should have far more of His presence” (*Steps to Christ*, 101, 102).



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
www.inverseible.org/will12-7



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



What does a horizontally unbalanced church look like? What does a vertically unbalanced church look like? Which is your church?

To attract more attendees, how are some churches sacrificing biblical principles? To project faithfulness, how are some churches sacrificing the appeal, charm, and invitation of Christ to people?

Why do you go to your church? If you don't go, why not—seriously?

Which of the five elements are strong in your worship service? Which of them are weakest? Do you experience Christ as Lord, King, Savior, and God in your worship service?

How are you trained more effectively as a disciple of Christ through your local church?