

June 1st 2014: 4 Faces Of The Church: The Face Of Worship:
Hebrews 10:19-25

Just recently I happened to be watching the show "Grand Designs" on the TV and I was struck by the comment of a man who had just built himself a very imposing house complete with a volcanic sauna that cost thousands of pounds. He was asked by the presenter whether he thought the sauna was worth the money and he replied: "These days people no longer go to church so we have nowhere to go and relax and put away the pressures of life. Nowhere to think. So that's why I built this sauna. And I think it's well worth the expense".

Now for him to see going to church as simply going someplace where one could relax, put away the pressures of life for a time and think, is to hugely downplay the purposes of Almighty God in calling His people to gather together.

But it wasn't that which caught my attention. It was the way he used the phrase, 'go to church'. He didn't mean go to a church building but to go to a place to be involved in something that is called church.

You see Church for the believer is many things. It is the building in which we meet for it houses the church. It is all believers in Christ, for we are His church. But it is also what we do in this place on the first day of every week. This, what we are doing now, is church, and your non-Christian friend or neighbor would also recognize what we do or go to each Sunday as church.

The problem is that, like the man in his volcanic sauna, they often have completely the wrong impression about church, and what it means to us. Too often they have that particular Face Of The Church, our time of worship, completely wrong to the point of not wanting to experience it. (Michelle's story)

Now to change the assumptions of the non churchgoer about this Face of the Church, ie our time of worship each Sunday, will always be hard. In fact only God can do that!

But what we can do is to understand ourselves what God expects this Church Time to be for His people, and seek to follow those expectations for Him, for our own sake, and for the sake of others in the congregation.

And the major thing we must realize is that this Church Time is for God and His pleasure. Not predominantly to please us.

Over the years I have spoken to many people who have stopped going to a Sunday worship time because they didn't like something about it, or they felt it didn't meet their needs. As though church going was all about them. Not once has someone told me that they no longer go to church because God told them not to. Indeed it's quite foolish to think that God would ever do that.

Right through the Bible we see that for some incredible reason Almighty God desires the worship of His people and even set aside a day for them to gather together and worship Him. I was reading in the Psalms just the other day all about the privilege of praising such a glorious God and read in Psalm 149:1-5

***Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.***
***² Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
let the people of Zion be glad in their King.***
***³ Let them praise his name with dancing
and make music to him with tambourine and harp.***
***⁴ For the LORD takes delight in his people;
he crowns the humble with victory.***
***⁵ Let his faithful people rejoice in this honour
and sing for joy on their beds.***

It is such an honour to come together to worship the One and Only God and to do so at His invitation. But it is an honour that comes with certain demands.

Just read through the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, and you will soon see that because God is so holy and pure, He could not invite His own people into His presence without giving them strong directions about the way they should approach Him in order to bring Him their worship. And those directions are very intensive.

Because of their sinfulness sacrifice is required. They cannot approach Him, even to praise and worship Him, without the required sacrifice.

Then God the Son came into the world and His death and especially His resurrection made all the difference as far as our worship of God is concerned. The One sacrifice needed for us to praise and worship God—to call Him Father—to live one day with Him in glory, has been offered by God Himself on the cross. And the resurrection is proof of God's acceptance of that.

But what we must never forget is that although today we do not need to bring a sacrifice in order to meet together with our God, God Himself has not changed. He is still just as holy as ever. Our Sunday worship is still a privilege we have been given and it is still for God and His worship that we predominantly meet. Consequently we must treat this time as a special honour that Almighty God gives us.

This is what the author of the book of Hebrews is saying in Hebrews 10:19-25.

¹⁹ My friends, the blood of Jesus gives us courage to enter the most holy place ²⁰ by a new way that leads to life! And this way takes us through the curtain that is Christ himself.

²¹ We have a great high priest who is in charge of God's house. ²² So let's come near God with pure hearts and a confidence that comes from having faith. Let's keep our hearts pure, our consciences free from evil, and our bodies washed with clean water.

We do have the courage to come before God together without bringing sacrifices, but that doesn't mean that we should come into this place without the preparation of a heart and a conscience. Knowing on a Sunday that we are about to meet with God as a group means preparing our self for this time in prayer and confession first.

²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

We also come ready to praise God for the hope we have in Christ and to express that in our lives. We testify to others in our coming that our God is Faithful.

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds,

Although our Sunday worship is about praising and pleasing God it is also about encouraging one another in what we do for God. Our love and good deeds as a community of believers is a practical expression of our worship.

²⁵not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

And finally, because our worship time is this special privilege God has given us we must value it so greatly that our place is hardly ever empty. That our church time is sacred to us, and consequently those in our circle of friends and family who do not see worship as important will note how vital it is for us, and maybe God will use that witness to one day draw them unto Himself.