

10 Good Reasons to Believe the Bible

1. Its Unity

Unity of style, brevity, getting to the point, and giving the most important information is the common style of every one of the 66 books that make up God's word. Although the Bible addresses thousands of topics, most of them quite controversial, yet each one of the forty writers, though from different time periods and cultures, come together in complete unity of doctrine: (Genesis 19:5-7; Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10). There is also the unity of the over-all story. Details mentioned early in the Bible, are the same details mentioned in books written thousands of years later (Genesis 3:1-4; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Genesis 19:26; Luke 17:32). Surely this is a book that came from one Mind: God's.

2. Its Historical Accuracy

The Bible mentions real people, real places and real events. Many things that skeptics once challenged and claimed were fiction, such as the existence of the Hittites, writing in the time of Moses, the city of Babylon, Pilate as governor of Judea at the time of Christ, or Gallio, procounsul of Achaea (Acts 18:12-17) have now been confirmed by archaeology. The Bible is also accurate in all the little details. In the book of Acts, Luke, the writer, gives correct titles for the following officials: Thesslonica—"politarchs", Ephesus—"temple wardens", Cyprus—"proconsul", Malta—"the first man of the island". Each one of these titles has been confirmed by Roman usage. In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-

four cities, and nine islands without making a single error. Today, young people are often told by skeptics that the Bible is filled with errors, but what they are not told is how consistently the overconfident skeptics in the past were completely wrong. As William F. Albright noted, *“The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, certain phases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details”* (Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Josh McDowell, p. 65). In other words, the Bible is not a book that becomes less relevant and weaker as new discoveries surface, but only gains credibility.

3. Its Scientific Accuracy

Not only does the Bible contain a lot of good science, it states things as fact long before the scientists discovered it, including the earth being a circle (Isaiah 40:22), the earth being suspended in space (Job 26:7), the ocean currents (Psalm 8:8), or the truth that matter is not eternal and the universe had a definite beginning (Hebrews 1:10-12). While many human theories are in conflict with the Scriptures, and have always been, the Bible and the facts of the universe have always been in agreement.

4. Its Detailed and Fulfilled Prophecies

It would be impressive if the Bible had only one detailed prediction about the future that came true. But what is even more impressive, is that the Bible contains many, not only for nations, but for individuals as well. I have been impressed with both the sheer number and minute detail found in the prophecies. For example, 700 years before Jesus was born, here is what Isaiah said about Him:

- He would be pierced: 53:5
- He died for our sins: 53:5,6
- He was scourged: 53:5
- He was silent before accusers: 53:7
- He was buried in a rich man’s grave: 53:9

- He would be resurrected: 53:10
- Many would be saved because of Him: 53:11
- He was numbered with the transgressors: 53:12
- He interceded for the transgressors: 53:1

Isaiah 53 is just one of many prophecies. The prophecy is all the more impressive when one considers what a daunting task it would be to give only ten specific predictions about someone who would be born seven hundred years from our own time, including such things as how they would die, and what others would say to them during that time (Psalm 22:8), how others would specifically treat them, and what they would accomplish in life. No other book on the planet comes even close to the Bible in this area of fulfilled prophecy.

5. Its Truthful Style

The Bible is not a book of flawless heroes, rather it describes its characters accurately, complete with both their failures and their sins. The adultery of king David is mentioned, the apostasy of Solomon, the fear of Abraham, and even the misdeeds of Moses (Numbers 20:12) despite the fact these are heroes of faith.

6. Its Moral Teachings

The Bible is both very deep and broad in the subjects it discusses. It is far from superficial, and when it comes to morality, it gets right down to the heart of the matter (Matthew 5:22, 28). The instruction on how to maintain happy marriages and other relationships is not dated, and though it is an ancient book, it does not favor one gender over the other. Rather, it is uniquely balanced (1 Peter 3:7; Ephesians 5:22-33; Titus 2:4-5). No other book has a higher level of morality. As someone noted, *“The book that sums up the best morality of all time, is best explained as God’s book”*.

7. The Survival and Accuracy of the Biblical Text

The Bible has survived thousands of years despite repeated attempts by both individuals and empires to suppress and destroy it. The Jewish people were

surrounded by enemies in the Old Testament and were overrun by both the Assyrians and Babylonian Empires, and then subjected to the Persian, Greek and Roman Empires—yet through all this, the Old Testament survived. In 303AD, a decree was issued by the Roman Emperor to destroy all Christian places of worship and to burn the Scriptures—yet the New Testament not only survived, but is the single best authenticated work of the ancient world. We have more than 24,000 ancient manuscript copies or portions of the New Testament in existence today. In second place, are the writings of Homer, of which only 643 manuscripts still exist. What Jesus and others said about the Scriptures still describes the reality of the situation some 1900 years after the New Testament was finished, that the word of God would abide (1 Peter 1:23-25; Matthew 24:35).

8. The Character of Those Who Accept It

Something has to be said about the Bible based on simply looking at the type of people who accept it and act upon it, versus those who either reject it or give it lip service. As was true in the First Century, those who accept and do God's will are noble-minded people (Acts 17:11) and make this world a much better place.

9. Changed Lives

In over fifty years of living I have never seen book or any kind of media so drastically change people's lives for the better than the Bible. This very congregation is filled with living and walking examples of the fact that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16).

10. What Jesus said about it: Matthew 5:17-18; John 17:17; 10:35

Some might consider this circular reasoning, but it isn't. Jesus was not or is not just some relative or man on the street, rather, even many people who do not believe He is the Son of God, would still consider Him one of the most impactful individuals in history, an expert on God and more, and someone whose point of view is not to be lightly dismissed. Jesus has had more impact than any human being on world history. His teachings are simply amazing, containing the highest and uplifting standard of morality and ethics known to the human race.

10 Good Reasons to Believe that Jesus is the Christ

1. His Life Was The Subject of Prophecy

Long before Jesus was ever born, specific prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures had predicted not only the specific circumstances of His birth, but just as precise, many of the details of his adult life. What's astonishing is that fact that Archeological proof substantiates these prophecies actually were recorded, in varying languages, at least 300 years before Jesus Christ was even born. For example, of the Christ it was predicted:

- He would be born in Bethlehem: Micah 5:2/Matthew 3:1
- He would be preceded by a messenger: Isaiah 40:3/Matthew 3:1-2; 11:10
- He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey: Zechariah 9:9/Matthew 21:6-11
- He would be betrayed by a friend: Psalm 41:9/Matthew 10:4
- He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver: Zech. 11:12/Matthew 26:15
- He would be forsaken by His disciples: Zechariah 13:7/Mark 14:50
- His hands and feet would be pierced: Psalm 22:16/Luke 23:33
- He would be between thieves during His death: Isaiah 53:12/Matthew 27:38
- His garments would be parted and lots cast for them: Ps 22:18/John 19:23-24
- Gall and vinegar would be offered to Him: Psalm 69:21/Matthew 27:34
- He would be buried in a rich man's tomb: Isaiah 53:9/Matthew 27:57-60
- Not one of His bones would be broken: Psalm 34:20, 22:14,17/John 19:33

Note:

- This is not a complete list-- there are some 300 such prophecies.
- If Jesus had been a mere man, there would have been many of these predictions over which He would have had no control, such as whether or not He would die between two thieves, or what people would say to Him while He was dying. Or, even more importantly, the fact that not a bone was broken during or after His crucifixion.

- The mathematical probability of one man fulfilling just eight such prophecy's is 1 in 10 (followed by 17 zeros). If we converted that number into silver dollars, one could cover the entire state of Texas up to two feet deep.
- The type of death pictured in Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 (hands and feet pierced—yet no bones broken) did not come into practice until hundreds of years after the prophecy was written.
- The prophecy about what would be done with His garments was fulfilled in a unique way. The garments were parted—except the outer cloak, which was seamless, and for that reason lots were indeed cast for it (John 19:23-24).

2. His Miracles

If God became man (John 1:1,14), then one would expect that He would do amazing things, such as walking on water, instantly exercising control over the weather, healing every kind of sickness (Matthew 4:23), healing the blind and raising the dead. These miracles were so public that even His enemies could not deny their reality (John 11:47; Acts 2:22). The only argument that His enemies had against His miracles was that they claimed they were performed by the power of the devil (Mark 3:22).

3. His Moral Character

If God became man (Philippians 2:6ff), then He would live a sinless life. The disciples, like Peter spent at least three years constantly with Jesus, and yet Peter would write concerning Jesus, *"who committed no sin"* (1 Peter 2:22). Even His enemies had to acknowledge, *"We know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any"* (Matthew 22:16). Pilate, a Roman governor after examining Jesus conceded, *"I find no guilt in Him"* (John 19:6). Even the centurion who was there at His death and watched Him die said, *"Truly this man was the Son of God"* (Mark 15:39). Our culture is used to scandal being associated with famous people that some may be surprised that when it comes to Jesus—there were absolutely no skeletons in the closet. In fact, Jesus even challenged people to try to find something (John 8:46).

4. His Amazing Teachings

If God became man, then we would expect that He would teach the highest moral standard known to man, and Jesus did just that. People then and now are completely amazed at what He taught (Matthew 7:28; Luke 19:48; John 7:46) and if His moral teachings were applied in the lives of individuals or in foreign policies, most the world's problems would resolved.

5. His Ability to Take the Complicated and Make it Simple

Mankind will often multiply words to try to muddy the waters. But if God became man, then He would be able to take the complicated questions or broad principles, boil them down and sum them up in a single, simple statement (Matthew 7:12; 22:36-40).

6. No One Could Stump Him

If God became man then one would rightly conclude that no one could stump Him or beat Him in an argument. The Bible records a number of attempts by His enemies to stump Him. We know that these are not manufactured situations by the gospel writers, for the arguments brought to Jesus were incredibly difficult and real, such as the moral dilemma of whether or not to pay taxes to an immoral leader such as Caesar (Matthew 22:17), and the complicated argument against the reality of a resurrection (22:23-33). Jesus answered these questions without hesitation or apology, modifications, corrections or withdrawing anything that He had taught.

7. He Made the Claim

We are not putting words into Jesus' mouth when we say that He is the Son of God, for that is clearly what He claimed on many occasions (John 5:17-29,23; 8:19,24; 58; 14:6-9). When Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God—Jesus fully endorsed Peter's confession (Matthew 16:16-18). Some have argued that the gospel writers more or less invented the character of Christ, yet this does not square with the facts: 1. Such men gained nothing materially from preaching Christ as the Son of God—they only received great persecution, often to the point of death. 2. How could and why would a group of deceivers invent the greatest moral character and teachings of all time? 3. We know that the entire New Testament was written within the First Century, so it had to pass the scrutiny of the generation that was alive when these events were said to take place. If they were making all this up, then that generation would have clearly rejected and exposed their stories as lies. 4. It was not centuries after Jesus lived that people started believing He was the Son of God, rather, immediately, even very near to the First Century, other documents besides the New Testament prove this point. Writing in 112 A.D., Pliny the Younger wrote that Christians were in the habit of meeting on a certain day and when they did they sang hymns to Christ "as to a god."

8. He Lived at the Right Time

The prophecies were specific: Daniel claimed that God would set up His kingdom during the time of the 4th Empire that followed Babylon (Daniel 2:36-45). That Empire is clearly the Roman Empire. It is also obvious that Jesus would be killed by a method of execution that

would not break his bones, but in which His hands and feet would be pierced. This method ended in the 4th century A.D - a very narrow window in which the prophecy could be fulfilled. The prophecies said that the Messiah would come to God’s house, the temple (Malachi 3:1)—and that Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 and has never been rebuilt. The genealogies that would clearly prove that one was related to not only Abraham, but David were equally destroyed in A.D. 70. Therefore, the Old Testament prophetic window has closed for anyone since A.D. 70 to be able to claim that they are the Messiah.

9. He Left Nothing Undone:

When Jesus was alive some in the crowds said, *“When the Christ shall come, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?”* (John 7:31). That is a telling observation. They knew that Jesus had basically covered all the bases and really left nothing undone when providing His credentials.

10. The Only Real Choice Left

A Deceiver	A Lunatic	Good Man but not God?	The Son of God
Really? Did a deceiver give us the Sermon on the Mount, which itself condemns deception?	Really? Are His life-improving, world-changing teachings the words of a crazy man?	Really? He actually claimed to be the Messiah and good men don’t make false claims.	The only choice left and the one that fits all the facts is that Jesus is truly the Son of God.

If God became man, then we would expect Him to do and be all that He did and was:

- He would have an unusual entrance into life.
- He would be without sin.
- He would manifest the supernatural in the form of miracles.
- He would be acutely different from other men.
- He would speak the greatest words ever spoken.
- He would have a lasting and universal influence.
- He would satisfy the spiritual hunger in men and women.
- He would exercise power over death.
- He would be exceptionally kind, compassionate and confident.

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10 Good Reasons to Believe in the Resurrection

1. Prophesied in the Old Testament:

It is clear that the Old Testament clearly predicted the resurrection of the Messiah. In Isaiah 53 after describing the suffering, death and burial of the Messiah (53:5,9), the text then says, *“He shall prolong His days”* (53:10). David, in the 16th Psalm describes an individual, a Holy One, whose soul was not left in Sheol, nor did His body suffer decay (16:10). Clearly the death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah is a truth found in the Old Testament and not merely something Christians have invented (Luke 24:45-46). In addition, Jesus plainly predicted His own death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21). This prediction was given so clearly and publically that even the enemies of Jesus understood what He was claiming and thus wanted His tomb guarded (Matthew 27:63).

2. The Number of Witnesses.

In First Corinthians chapter 15 Paul gives a list of those who saw Jesus after He was raised from the dead. Far from mentioning two or even ten people, there were over 514 witnesses of the resurrected Christ! Any event that is witnessed by over 500 people must be taken seriously. In addition, this does not include all the people who saw the events on Pentecost (Acts 2) or the miracles of the apostles (Acts 3) which are likewise proofs that Jesus was raised, was seated at the right hand of God and sent the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33).

3. The Honesty in the Accounts.

Far from making things up or trying to make themselves look good, the men who wrote the gospels were very truthful. They clearly admit:

- The apostles all fled when Jesus was arrested: 26:56
- Jesus first appeared to women—not them: John 20:1,18
- They refused to believe and were rebuked for it: Mark 16:11-14
- They were fearful and not courageous: John 20:19

4. All The Historical Details:

From the gospel accounts we learn that:

- The authorities confirmed the fact that Jesus had died before they released the body for burial: Mark 15:43-45
- People handled the body, preparing it with spices and wrapped it—yet detected no life: John 19:40-41
- The location of the tomb was well known: Mark 15:46-47; Matt. 27:61; John 19:41
- The only entrance into the tomb was blocked by a large stone: Matthew 27:60
- The tomb was sealed the authorities and guarded: Matthew 27:65-66
- No one had ever been buried in this tomb, so there could be no mistake concerning which remains were Jesus': Mark 15:46
- Both the Romans and Jewish authorities wanted the body to remain in the tomb and yet their vigilance could not even begin to prevent the resurrection.

5. The Failure of A Decent Alternative Explanation:

There are arguments against the resurrection of Jesus, but these arguments are so very weak, they only tend to only strengthen the conclusion that He was raised.

- The first and original argument was that the disciples had taken the body while the guards slept: Matthew 28:13. Yet it is a sorry excuse, for if the guards were truly sleeping then they could not have known who took the body. It also fails to account for question of why these guards, who were

professional soldiers on a serious watch and under threat of death if someone took the body, would fall asleep!

- Some say the women went to the wrong tomb. Yet the tomb was not out in the middle of nowhere and they had been present at the burial. And even if they did—the body would still be in the tomb and such evidence could have easily been available.
- Some say that someone else took the body, but this was impossible: It was a guarded tomb! Furthermore, if the enemies of Jesus took the body—then why was the body never produced after the apostles started to aggressively preach Jesus and the resurrection?
- I find it very telling, that in the book of Acts, both the Jewish and Roman authorities have no argument or answer against the claim that Jesus was raised. The only thing they do is threaten the truth tellers (Acts 4:2,17). It would be a strange strategy to simply threaten— if they had clear evidence against the resurrection, but never used it.

Thus, all the *feeble* arguments against the resurrection, or others such as Jesus never really did die on the cross, or that the apostles only imagined they saw Him—are, as God would have it, powerful arguments in favor of the resurrection.

6. What the Arguments Admit:

Unbelievers need to be careful when they try to form an argument against the resurrection, for many of the above arguments clearly admit:

- Jesus really did die on the cross and was buried.
- The Jewish/Roman authorities had power and control over the tomb.
- On the third day that tomb was empty.
- The authorities never produced the body even in the face of a rapidly growing Christianity that threatened their influence and power: Acts 6:7

7. The Changed Lives of the Apostles:

Something significant must have happened between the burial of Jesus and the day of Pentecost in Acts 2— a period of about 50 days. On the one hand we have the disciples hiding out because they are afraid of the authorities (John 20:19). Yet some 50 days later, the same group of men are courageously preaching Jesus and the resurrection, defying the authorities (Acts 4:19), willing to be beaten (Acts 5:41), working miracles (Acts 2:43), and giving arguments for the resurrection based Old Testament Scripture (Acts 2:24-32). Most of these men would die for preaching Jesus, yet they never looked back or backed down.

8. The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus:

How does one explain the 180 ° conversion to Christianity of one of the most ardent persecutors of the church? At first Paul is breathing out threats and slaughter (Acts 9:1), and on his way to arrest as many Christians as he could find. Then shortly thereafter, he is instead preaching Jesus (Acts 9:22), and not only preaching, but being very affective in proving that Jesus was the Christ.

9. The Events on Pentecost/Establishment of the Church

Without Jesus, and with just a band of uneducated (Acts 4:13) Galilean disciples, how did Christianity even get off the ground? Their leader was dead. He had died the death of a criminal. Yet all of a sudden the church has 3000 members (Acts 2:41), then over 5000 just counting the men (Acts 4:4), and then multitudes of men and women (Acts 5:14), even including many former Jewish priests (Acts 6:7). This is not a movement that took centuries to form and spread, rather, within 30 years of Jesus' death there are organized churches all over the Roman Empire teaching all the same doctrine. Neither does it take centuries for the doctrine to form, rather it was all there right in the First Century (Jude 3).

10. The Only Alternative Left: Jesus was Raised!

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10 Good Reasons To Be Baptized

1. Because God says baptism saves us from eternal destruction.

Today you will hear countless voices in the denominational world, teaching baptism as the first thing a person should do *after they are saved*. Yet this is exactly opposite of the clear wording that surrounds the commands to be baptized—commands that place salvation, remission of sins, forgiveness, and sins being washed away *after the act of baptism and not before it*.

- Mark 16:16: Salvation is placed after baptism, not before it.
- Acts 2:38: Forgiveness or remission of sins is placed after baptism, not before it.
- Acts 22:16: Having one's sins washed away is placed after baptism, not before it.

Mark 16:16	Faith and Baptism	Saved
Acts 2:38	Repentance and Baptism	Remission of Sins
Acts 22:16	Baptism	Sins Washed Away
Acts 2:41,47	Baptism	Added to the Church
Romans 6:3-5	Baptism	Walking in Newness of Life
Galatians 3:26-27	Faith and Baptism	Being a child of God Putting on Christ

2. Because of the essentiality God places upon baptism.

In Ephesians 4:4-6 we find such assertive statements as, "There is one body", "one Spirit", "one hope", "one Lord", "one faith" and "one God". All these, the Holy Spirit, our hope, our Lord, our faith, our God are obviously and absolutely essential, yet in the mix we also find another essential: "one baptism".

3. Because God says faith in Jesus is not enough.

Certainly faith in Jesus is absolutely essential if one is going to be saved (John 3:16). Yet faith that moves no farther than just a mental conviction never saved anyone, or as the apostle James put it, "...man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (2:19,24). Men who clearly believed in Jesus but did not confess Him (John 12:42-43) were not saved. The same would be true of people who believe in Jesus but refuse to repent (Acts 17:30), or refuse to be baptized (Luke 7:30). To put it another way, faith without baptism is just as meaningless as baptism without faith.

4. Because God shows us that sincerity and prayer are not enough.

In Acts chapter 9 Saul of Tarsus sees Jesus (Acts 9:5) and then spends a period of time praying (9:11) obviously being reflective, convicted and sorrowful (9:9). Yet when Ananias arrives to share with Saul "what he MUST do" (Acts 9:6), Saul had not already been saved even after his sincere repentance, having faith and praying, for Ananias says Paul still had sins that needed to be removed, "*And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name*" (Acts 22:16).

5. Because baptism is the natural response of a honest heart who has heard Jesus preached.

We see this by comparing what Paul preaches in Acts 8:35 with what the Eunuch says in response in Acts 8:36: "³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he *preached Jesus* to him. ³⁶ As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "*Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?*" In the first verse

Philip preached Jesus to a man and in the next verse the same man is eagerly wanting to be baptized. How could anyone then, really "preach Jesus" to a person unless he or she has shared the truth that God says we need to be baptized to be saved. Jesus Himself plainly taught such in Mark 16:16.

6. Because baptism is found consistently in the Biblical cases of conversion.

Mark 16:16	Hearing/Faith		Baptism	Salvation
Acts 2:38	Hearing/Faith	Repentance	Baptism	Remission of Sins
Acts 8:12	Hearing/Faith		Baptism	
Acts 8:36-38	Hearing/Faith	Confession	Baptism	Rejoicing
Acts 9	Faith	Repentance	Baptism	Wash away sin
Acts 10	Faith		Baptism	
Acts 16:15	Hearing/Faith		Baptism	Faithful to the Lord
Acts 16:30-34	Hearing/Faith		Baptism	Having believed in God
Acts 18:8	Hearing/Faith		Baptism	

7. Because of the obvious urgency associated with baptism.

- Peter urged the people on Pentecost—and those convicted by his message were baptized that day: Acts 2:40-41
- The Eunuch was immediately baptized right after Phillip taught him about Jesus: Acts 8:36-38
- Ananias considered a three day delay to be much too long.
- Cornelius was immediately baptized.
- So was the Jailor: Acts 16:33

8. Because baptism is what God uses to unite us with our Savior.

Want to have a personal relationship with Jesus? What could be more personal than the language God associates with the experience of baptism. In Romans 6

Paul says that we are baptized into “His death”, are buried with Him in that baptism and are then raised with Him (Romans 6:3-5). There is the "spiritual experience" that unites us as one with our Savior. (To argue that one is saved prior to baptism does not fit with this or any other passages, for why would one need to be buried with Him if one was, by faith alone, already spiritually alive and walking in newness of life? In Romans chapter 6, walking in newness of life is placed only *after baptism*).

9. Because baptism is essential to being born again and entering the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus spoke of the absolute need of being born again, He mentioned being born of water (John 3:5). When the Eunuch heard about Jesus, he connected being saved with the element of water (Acts 8:36), and Peter commanded Cornelius to be baptized in water (Acts 10:48). Near the very end of the New Testament Peter spoke of being born again by the word of God (1 Peter 1:23-25) and then tied our salvation to the water associated with baptism (1 Peter 3:21).

10. Because Jesus is Lord and is entirely worthy of our love and trust.

If one really believes that Jesus is Lord, there should be no problem in accepting the Lord’s clear statement, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”. (Mark 16:16). If one really believes that Jesus is Lord, there should be no problem in accepting Peter’s statement, “Baptism now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21). If we really want a personal relationship with Jesus then it does not get any more personal than simply and joyfully accepting what He taught, for that is the evidence He Himself has chosen to show how much we love and trust Him (John 14:15).

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Ten Good Reasons To Be in God's Family

Ten Good Reasons

I hope you grew up in a family full of love, peace and joy. If this experience was not among your blessings, many people with similar childhoods have found the spiritual family Christ offers to His followers, to be an opportunity to experience much of what they missed. Like Jesus, they can say, *“My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it”* (Luke 8:20-22).

- Scripture says that Jesus purchased the church at the cost of His own precious blood (Acts 20:28). Is it not rather audacious for any soul to say to God, “I want salvation, but can I opt out on being part of that relationship for which Jesus shed His blood?” Life is about relationship. Life is about loving and being loved. May we always instead respond with gratitude.
- Regardless of how social you are by nature, God created us to thrive in social environments, and thus many commands concerning worship such as singing (Ephesians 5:19), and the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7) are group activities, and thus by their nature, demand participation in congregational worship.
- For your own good, and the good of those in your spiritual family, we are commanded to assemble with other Christians and encourage them (Hebrews 10:24).
- I am to support and encourage the elders—and I can’t do this if I am not a member or not regularly present (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:11-14).
- When one has intertwined his or her life with Christ's spiritual family, one gains relationships with older and experienced Christians willing to keep a loving eye on him or her (1 Peter 5:2). The local congregation helps me if I begin to stray (Matthew 18:15).
- The apostles and the early Christians valued deeply being a part of the local congregation (Acts 9:26).
- I need the instruction gained in the classes that are offered (Acts 2:42). God, in His wisdom, knew that learning in a group is a very effective form of instruction, for we

benefit exponentially from the insights and experiences voiced during such the group gatherings.

- Accountability with others is quite spiritually advantageous, and can be a bit of a safety net and motivational toward doing my best for God.
- As a man, in the group I can develop skills, such as public speaking, personal relationship skills, compassion for the suffering, active listening, serving others and other leadership skills. There are no lone elders or deacons.
- I need people with me during life's darkest times, and to share my joy with during times of celebration (Romans 12:15).

Two Common Ways to View Our Attendance

- The Going Out to Eat View

One writer made this analogy: Some people view their going to services and their level of involvement as being similar to when they go out to eat. They simply show up and everything has already been prepared. They just come, are seated, are served and when it is all over, they leave. At a restaurant you don't come early and help prepare the meal, you don't stay and do the dishes, and you don't hang around and talk with the staff. You eat and leave.

- The Meal with Family View

When you join your extended family for a meal, the level of involvement is far different from the above situation. You actually bring something to share. When you arrive you immediately pitch in and help set the table or assist in the kitchen. After the meal is over, you help with the clean up, and instead of leaving after you eat, you may linger around and talk. The Bible describes the local congregation as a family that I am part of (1 Timothy 3:15) , not just a business I frequent now and then.

“They Just Want My Money”

There are churches that are making constant appeals for money, but many others do not. Jesus had strong words for those who would use His church to "make a killing". "And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." (John 2:15-16). So while God designed the church to sustain itself on the freewill offerings of its members (1 Corinthians 16:2), that financial burden we mutually share, and the fact that Americans have shown themselves to be among the most generous in the

world, there are likely more realistic reasons why many opt not to belong to a local congregation.

“I Don’t Like Organized Religion”

What a person means by this is that they want to commune with God and learn about spiritual things by themselves. They want to pray or talk to God in the woods or contemplate spiritual things at a coffee shop. Sometimes they complain about the internal politics and drama associated with various churches. Yet the same people will often belong to organizations and attend other functions that have plenty of politics and drama. There's no getting around it: where there's people, there's drama. And no one likes drama. So what makes the blessings of being in God's family so outweigh the drama of bearing one another's burdens?

- **It is Healthy**

In describing the internal workings of a local congregation, Paul compared a local church to our own physical bodies. Then he said, *“But that the members should have the same care for one another”* (1 Corinthians 12:25). First, I need people caring for me, but I also need to learn how to care about others. Defining one's relationship with God as quiet times with Him fishing or in the woods is a beautifully romantic notion, but is completely useless in the service to my fellowman. Being a member of a local congregation helps me move away from **“my time, what is convenient for me, and everyone has to work around my schedule”** to adjusting my desires and sacrificing time on my schedule for the good of others. It makes sure my **“I's”** are not **“too close together”**. God created the local congregation as a vehicle for our encouragement and growth. Here is where you can learn how to serve others. Here is where you can learn how to get along with other people. Here is where you can discuss God’s truth in an honest way. Here is where you learn to disagree without becoming disagreeable. Here is where you learn to stand for something and sacrifice. The person who claims to have a relationship with God but does not want to belong to any church—is living in a simulator. That is not real life. Rick Warren made this observation: *“The local church is the classroom for learning how to get along in God’s family. It is a lab for practicing unselfish, sympathetic love...only in regular contact with ordinary, imperfect believers can we learn real fellowship and experience...being connected and dependent on each other...God’s mercy to us is the motivation for showing mercy to others. Remember, you will never be asked to forgive someone else more than God has already forgiven you. Whenever you are hurt by someone, you have a choice to make: Will I use my energy and emotions for retaliation or for resolution? You can’t do both.”*

- **Our Learning is Increased**

My growth will be stunted if I only read, study and think in isolation. I will more likely come to some wrong conclusions. An interaction with other faithful Christians will only maximize my growth (Acts 2:42). The benefits will be that wrong concepts in my head will be exposed quickly (Acts 18:26)—before they can derail my life. There will not be the future regret of, “Why didn’t I hear this years ago?” My life can go from “trial and error living” to simply opting for what is wise. The class teacher will teach a better class when the individuals in the class are prepared. The skills of others are far more effective when I am doing my part. I Increase the effectiveness of others: Acts 6:2-3

- **I Need the Accountability**

Knowing that I will be having people over to my home (Hebrews 13:2), attending a parenting or marriage class, or that my wife and I will be joining other couples for dinner really helps me become and remain the husband and father I need to be. Simply attending on a weekly basis and honestly answering simple questions like, “How are you doing?” brings a healthy accountability. The same is true with helping people move or joining in at a work day. People can immediately see what kind of worker you are, what your attitude about life is, and how you deal with setbacks. It is easier to misbehave when one is rarely around other spiritual people. When I am involved the elders do not have to spend time worrying about or checking on me, but instead can devote their time to other necessary things.

- **I Need the Perspective**

How very difficult to feel sorry for one's self when visiting a shut-in, talking with a widow who has lived years without a husband or finding out about what another Christian has had to overcome in life. Spending time with others long enough to know their hidden struggles, implants gratitude deep within my heart and motivates me to overcome.

- **My Talent is Increased Here**

The disconnected eye or hand from the body can't really do anything. The same is true with our skills. The lone wolf accomplishes very little. Only teams with team players win championships. The same is true in the spiritual realm (Ephesians 4:16).

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