**CHURCH MEMBERSHIP OR ATTENDANCE**

***Romans 1:19-32***

Sunday School Lesson 8

*Answers to Questions & Misconceptions About Salvation*

09/08/2019

**Introduction:** There are certain denominations that teach that church membership is a necessary part of their salvation.

Sadly, in most of these cases, this requirement has been adopted as a means to fill church attendance rolls and coffers. After all, attendance and giving are more likely to go up if people believe that these things are mandatory in order to have eternal life. Unfortunately, when it comes to this matter of reliance upon church membership or attendance for salvation, it is not just those who are a part of these denominations that believe this way. There are even those who attend Bible-preaching churches each and every week, and yet they somehow believe in membership-based salvation. In fact, we may currently have people attending our church this morning who believe that their attendance to this morning’s service qualifies them for eternity. One of the most common answers I hear while witnessing to people is that they are saved because they go to a specific church or because they grew up in a specific church. A good indicator of what we are putting our faith in for salvation is found in the answer we give when asked why we believe we are going to Heaven. If we say the reason is that we are Baptists or regularly attend a Baptist church, that indicates that our faith is based on our membership association. Being a Baptist is not what saves us. If I were to meet someone who stated they were saved because they were a Baptist, I would not accept this answer without further inquiry. Here is how we can witness to those who may be holding to a membership-based salvation:

1. WE CAN ASK THEM WHAT THEIR DENOMINATION TEACHES REGARDING SALVATION.
2. **Since they have placed an emphasis on their church, we can examine what direction they are being led by their church (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:7).** As mentioned in the introduction, not everyone who holds this position belongs to a church that teaches the same. Consequently, our first step in witnessing should be to determine whether they have been taught this by their church leaders or whether they have come to this conclusion on their own. Their answer will direct us down different avenues. For example, some will not know what their church teaches for Heaven. In this instance, there is no reason to further discuss their current church, as it is not the source of their belief. Others may give a specific answer. In those cases, it is best to address those specific beliefs first and then move forward with tearing down the relationship of church membership to the Gospel. Most of those answers will fit into another lesson in this series. Lastly, there will probably be many who speak of some type of relationship with Jesus Christ. While we know that faith in Christ is the right answer, we must be careful to understand that their knowledge of their denomination’s belief is not a direct reflection of their own. Salvation is individual, not collective.
3. **We can ask them if their denomination teaches the importance of following the Bible (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Matthew 5:17-19; 2 Timothy 3:16).** Obviously, this question is setting the stage for us to use the Word of God to show the true plan of salvation. The vast majority will agree that their denomination stresses the importance of following the Bible. If there are those you meet that state their denomination does not stress following the Bible, you can then ask whether they personally believe that following the Bible is important. The great majority of people who are trusting in church membership or attendance will tell you that they believe the Bible. The problem is mostly that they do not fully know what the Bible says. They may have grown up in church or frequented the pews, but they are somewhat dull of Spiritual hearing. They often have an idea of what it means to be a Christian in practice, but they don’t really understand it in application.
4. WE CAN SHOW THEM THE PLIGHT OF THE PHARISEES AND OTHER “RELIGIOUS” PEOPLE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA.
5. **We can show them the rigorous faithfulness of the Pharisees and Scribes, and how the Lord viewed that faithfulness (Matthew 23:13-24; Romans 11).** There is no greater parallel to illustrate the church-membership based salvation than to look at the Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees. These people were very, very religious. Many of them, like Paul, were raised from their young childhood into these various religious groups. If you were to ask them if they had eternal life, they would answer with utmost certainty. After all, they were Pharisees. Everyone, in that day, knew how dedicated the Pharisees were in upholding the Law. Of course, they also were relying upon their Jewish heritage as their personal assurance of eternity. They were God’s chosen people. As far as they were concerned, they would be the only ones who would be saved. Knowing all of this, it must have been extremely painful for them to hear all of the woes that Jesus cried out against them. Today, it seems like we are on course to repeat the same mistake that Israel made. They took the Lord and His blessings for granted, and they reached a point that they relied more on their heritage and basic rules that governed them than on their personal relationship with God. We presently have a generation of “Christians” who may not actually be Christians. They claim the Godly heritage. They sit on the church pews, yet they don’t know Christ. We must help people awake out of their slumber and realize that they are making the same mistake as the Pharisees.
6. **We can show them that the Bible warns that not everyone inside of the church is actually a true believer in Jesus Christ (Jude 1:4; Revelation 2:12-16).** The person you are witnessing to may object to the comparison to the Pharisees, as the Pharisees did not believe in Christ. The person may say that their reliance on church membership is different because their church emphasizes Christ. Yet, the Bible also warns us that there will be those who creep into the church unaware. These are people who are not actually believers. The Lord reproved the church in Pergamos because they willingly allowed unbelievers as active members in their church. There are other examples that can be given as well, such as Judas. He was a member of that first church that Jesus established. Judas seemed normal for most of Jesus’ earthly ministry. There were very few signs to indicate that he was not onboard. Yet, his actions make it clear that he did not truly believe on Jesus Christ. Being numbered among the twelve did not guarantee that Judas would see eternal life in Heaven.
7. WE CAN REVEAL THE NEED FOR AN INDIVIDUAL FAITH OVER A COLLECTIVE FAITH.
8. **We can show them that the Lord emphasized a personal faith over and over again (John 3:16, 6:35; Matthew 8:29; Romans 1:16; 14:12).** There are multiple examples of Jesus’ personal evangelism. The woman at the well is one such example. Jesus was only concerned with her faith. It did not matter what the Samaritans believed. It only mattered what she believed. One day, each of us is going to have to give an account for ourselves. The preacher is not going to be able to speak on behalf of all of the church flock. Providing membership and attendance records are not going to suffice before an almighty and all-righteous God. While the Lord preached to great multitudes at a time, His message was meant individually for the heart of each person there.
9. **We can show them the dangers of a collective faith (Matthew 27:20; John 2:23).** The best example of this is what happened with the multitude during Jesus’ ministry. When they saw the miracles that Jesus did, they all agreed that He was the Son of God. Many people travelled around with Christ because they wanted to see more miracles. Yet, when Christ was brought before the multitude, their faith in Him was not very strong. The chief priests were able to easily persuade the people that Jesus needed to be crucified. People will do things when they are in a group setting that they otherwise would not do individually. Unless a group of people are bonded together by an individual belief among each of them, they are likely to give into the whims of everyday life.
10. WE CAN EXPLAIN THAT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS THE NATURAL RESULT OF SALVATION.
11. **We can commend them for their faithfulness and commitment to church (Hebrews 10:25; Proverbs 20:6; 1 Corinthians 4:2).** While they are misguided in their reliance upon church membership, they can at least be commended for their faithfulness and commitment to church. As you are witnessing to these people, you do not want to minimize the importance of going to church. They just need to understand why they are going to church. Of course, through this commendation, a person may feel inclined to admit that they have not quite been as faithful as they should be. In those cases, it further weakens their belief in membership or attendance for salvation. If it were necessary for salvation, they would strive to never miss a service.
12. **We can show that people are added to the church after they have put their faith in Christ (Acts 2:47; 11:26).** In conclusion, we can show them that the church is made up of believers. It is simply the local assembly of believers. Its purpose is to strengthen the individual believers in their service for Him. As a result, the church collectively will reach the lost and disciple new believers. Our identity as a church is secondary to our identity in Christ. Without a common faith in Him, the church is not even a church. It is just a club or organization.

**Conclusion:** As we are witnessing to people, let’s make sure that we do not give them a false sense of security in thinking that salvation is found in their specific church membership or attendance. Let them know that being a part of a church has absolutely no bearing on whether they are saved or not, no matter which church they belong to.