

Q5: Is Church Attendance Required In The Bible?

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Q5 this week might start us off on the wrong foot because it has the word “required” in it. Last time I used words that were even remotely close to “required” I experienced a melt down by a few believers. Don’t shoot the messenger..., these summer teachings are an attempt to answer questions that have been asked not by me but by others who are believers. Let’s get started and look into the bible for contextual patterns that will answer Q5.

Although there is no direct, specific command in the Apostolic Writings (N.T.) that Christians must attend *formal Sabbath* services in a church building, we do have numerous strong examples from Jesus and His apostles that attending synagogue (church) on the Sabbath with fellowship and breaking bread that followed was the pattern for church (Rom. 11).

I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard someone make these statements.

1. You don’t have to go to a building to worship God.
2. The New Testament church was never in buildings it was in homes.

Both of these statements do not reflect the historical or biblical examples set by Israel, Jesus, original Apostles or the first century churches. To *not* follow the biblical patterns is never wise. “Stick to the biblical patterns.” If someone tries to influence you to do differently take a step back and think twice. Contextual bible patterns rule over Greco-Roman-Western theological sound bites like statements one and two listed above.

Are home gatherings good? Yes. But they always fall short of meeting the real needs of families, worship and transformation. Even the most successful home church movements with thousands in them *have or will* resort to monthly and quarterly corporate gatherings. Those who don’t become islands to themselves.

The Biblical Pattern of The First Century Church

It was the custom of Jesus Christ and His apostles to attend Sabbath services either at the Temple in Jerusalem or at a synagogue if they were away from Jerusalem. Let us look through the Apostolic Writings (N.T.) and see what Jesus and Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles did.

1. Acts 13:14-15, 42-44: *“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”*”

In this passage Paul preaches the gospel to them. *“And when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath”* (verse 42). Since Paul was preaching “the grace of God” (verse 43), here is his opportunity to explain to these Gentiles that they didn’t need to go to synagogue (church) but that they should just meet him at a **“home meeting instead.”** But he does no such thing. Instead the ancient and current Sabbath (church) precedent continues, *“And the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God”* (verse 44). This precedent was also upheld by the Jerusalem Church Leaders and is recorded in Acts 15:19-21.

2. Acts 15:1-2, 14-21: At the conference in Jerusalem James gives the decision: *“Therefore I judge that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood”* (verses 19-20). He simply prohibits four common practices of Gentile pagan religions and refers them to the *reading of Moses on the Sabbath* for a detailed explanation of what these four practices mean. James continues, *“For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath”* (verse 21).

Attendees both Jew and Gentile heard God's law expounded every Sabbath in the synagogue. The first century church apostles wrote this concise judgment, *because* Gentile converts attended synagogue (church) on the Sabbath and then broke bread in homes and discussed the Word of God many times well into the first day (Sunday). The believers of Asia (Antioch, Ephesians, Colossians etc.) followed Jesus and Paul’s examples.

3. Acts 16:12-15: Paul and Silas arrive in Philippi. *“And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And she and her household were baptized.”*

Here again Paul and his companions went on the Sabbath to a place of worship and preached. The passage says it was *customary* to meet there on the Sabbath, just as it was Paul's custom to go to a place of prayer and worship *when* the Sabbath day came.

4. Acts 18:1-11: *“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And found a certain Jew named Aquila, with his wife Priscilla, and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.”* We see here that Paul worked weekdays, but went to synagogue (church) and taught Gentiles as well as Jews every Sabbath.

To these Gentiles of Corinth, Paul commanded: *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (I Corinthians 11:1). *“Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures”* (Acts 17:2).

It was his customary practice to go to synagogue (church) on the Sabbath. The Bible proves this by recording *eighty-four* different Sabbaths Paul kept.

Here are a few examples of how Jesus set the precedent for the *Apostles*. They in turn followed this pattern and it became the method that Jewish and Gentile believers practiced for more than three hundred years (Acts 17:1-2).

- ✧ *Mark 1:21 - Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught.*
- ✧ *Mark 6:2 - And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue.*
- ✧ *Luke 4:16 - So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.*
- ✧ *Luke 6:6 - Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught.*
- ✧ *Luke 13:10 - Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.*
- ✧ *Acts 17:1-2 - Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures....*

Today, we tend to think of the Jerusalem Temple and the synagogues as strictly Jewish places of worship. Although the Israelites' relationship with God and their practices had become defiled by the time of Jesus', their Temple and synagogues were still the official places of worship for the **only people** who were remotely attempting to worship the true God at that time. Even though things were not biblical right they still honored these places of worship. Today many have difficulty with what goes on in churches just like Jesus did but it doesn't mean it is no good, listen to Jesus' perspective about this; *"Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."* Matt 23:1-3

As the first century progressed, the leaders and members of the church realized that believers in the Messiah (Jesus Christ) were not welcome in the synagogues so they began to meet for Sabbath worship (gatherings) and for non-Sabbath "Bible studies" in other locations, at members' homes, in rented rooms, and even, when weather permitted, in outdoor locations. At RHM we meet on Sabbath in a rented building and in member's homes on non Sabbath days to break bread and fellowship around the Word of God.

Christians should take every opportunity to fellowship on any day of the week, but distances between member's homes plus work, family, and other responsibilities often only allow meaningful church fellowship on the Sabbath days and attending a fixed location with combined resources for equipment, teachers, helpers etc. is a blessing not a hindrance (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Finally, notice God's command in Leviticus 23:3: "*Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.*"

Convocation literally means "*formal assembly to speak together.*" In this case, God commands a sacred assembly on the Sabbath for instruction and fellowship with other believers. *So, yes, the Bible does require attendance at worship services on the Sabbath whenever physically possible.* The patterns are clear and simple. It will take the acceptance of an elaborate "sound bite" of "gobble gook" to miss the biblical pattern of synagogue (church) on Sabbath, going out and joining house to house breaking bread and discussing the scriptures sometimes well into the first day (Sunday).

Paul commanded the gentiles to; "*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*" (I Corinthians 11:1). It was his practice to keep the Sabbath by attending the synagogue, as the Bible proves by recording *eighty-four* different Sabbaths Paul kept.

Did Paul imitate Jesus in this? Yes! Jesus, "*as His custom was went into the (church) synagogue on the Sabbath day*" (Luke 4:16). Keeping the Sabbath was Jesus' custom. Paul followed Jesus' example, and then taught the Jewish and Gentile converts to follow him, just as he followed Christ.

Shouldn't we follow the biblical pattern also?

Blessings, Pastor Bob Hill

Additional Scripture References: Acts 20:8 - Acts 28:30 - Acts 16:13 - Acts 13:42-44