

Can I Get A Ride?

Acts 2:46-47 NIV

Using verses 46 and 47 of Acts chapter 2, I want to continue with the theme of devotion to the Lord and to one another.

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46-47)

Notice the action and locations; continuous action in the temple courts and in their homes. Hospitality extended to those who were being added to the Church; a sense of belonging to a family with a common goal and purpose.

How many of you were dragged to church as a child? Was there a time when you resented being forced to go and rebelled?

There are those in our society who think that forcing children to go to church should be classified as child abuse.

I remember somewhere around my teens telling mom that I didn't want to go to church anymore. Dad didn't go, so I wasn't forced.

I have been accused by my kids of dragging them to church every time the doors were open.

So, do we have two extremes? One group says that it is important to take your children to church and at least teach them who God and Jesus are, while another group claims that forcing this on them should be illegal.

I heard an illustration on the radio last week that at least one more group exists labeled "ecclesiastical hitchhikers."

Author Kent Hughes' in his book, [Disciplines of a Godly Man](#), in his chapter on the church, describes the widespread aversion to meaningful church membership. He calls the phenomenon "ecclesiastical hitchhikers." He writes:

"Church attendance is infected with a malaise of conditional loyalty which has produced an army of ecclesiastical hitchhikers. The hitchhiker's thumb says, "You buy the car, pay for repairs and upkeep and insurance, fill the car with gas — and I'll ride with you. But if you have an accident, you are on your own! And I'll probably sue." So it is with the credo of so many of today's church attenders: "You go to the meetings and serve on the boards and committees, you grapple with the issues and do the work of the church

and pay the bills —and I'll come along for the ride. But if things do not suit me, I'll criticize and complain and probably bail out — my thumb is always out for a better ride."

This putative loyalty is fueled by a consumer ethos — a "McChristian" mentality — which picks and chooses here and there to fill one's ecclesiastical shopping list. There are hitchhikers who attend one church for the preaching, send their children to a second church for its dynamic youth program, and go to a third church's small group. Church hitchhikers have a telling vocabulary: "I go to" or "I attend," but never "I belong to" or "I am a member."

So today, at the end of the twentieth century, we have a phenomenon unthinkable in any other century: churchless Christians. There is a vast herd of professed Christians who exist as nomadic hitchhikers without accountability, without discipline, without discipleship, living apart from the regular benefits of the ordinances...

"...membership in an invisible Church without participation in its local expression is never contemplated in the New Testament."

So we conclude that church hitchhikers, ecclesiastical wanderers, spiritual Lone Rangers, Christians who disdain membership, are aberrations in the history of the Christian Church and are in grievous error.” (end quote)

Drag them to church or don't force them to go? Or go to church, but teach your children that it is not important to get involved. Hit the takeout window and have it your way.

There are those in times past who said that the answer to all this is to have a New Testament Church. Now we must clarify; which one would you like to have?

Do you want a church like the one at Ephesus with its false teachers? Or the church in Galatia that wanted to hold on to the Old Testament law? How about the one at Corinth filled with division, arguments, lawsuits, and immorality? There was confusion about marriage, food sacrificed to idols, worship, the Lord's Supper, the Resurrection, giving, and spiritual gifts. Some people thought they were more important than others because they had some pretty spectacular gifts.

The answer is-none of the above. We know that what is meant by “New Testament Church” is God's plan for the church in the New Testament. God's ideal church; His perfect plan for imperfect people.

Why is it important to pursue God's plan for the church? We know that there

is no such thing as the perfect church on this earth and we are not given detail as to “how to” do church for any given generation.

Why is it important then to pursue God's way; the way of accountability, discipline, and discipleship under God's plan for the church?

Paul, writing to the Ephesians about the mystery of God concerning the Gentile and Jew becoming heirs together, we read in chapter 3 verses 10 & 11:

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ephesians 3:10-11)

God's eternal mystery; his manifold, multi-colored, multifaceted wisdom accomplished through Jesus is the church, the bride Christ, made up of Jew and Gentile. Why is it important to pursue God's plan for the church? Because, this is where we become family.

Most in the heavenlies marvel at this, but not all.

Revelation chapter 12 gives us a look into what was actually happening around the time of Jesus birth in the heavenlies; that is, the spirit world that we know exists, but can't see with our earthly eyes.

Matthew tells us in chapter 2 of his Gospel account that King Herod tried to kill Jesus. But in Revelation 12, John writes that it was an enormous red dragon that he identifies as **—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. (Revelation 12:9)**

Are Matthew and John telling two different stories here? No. Paul helps us understand what is happening in the 6th chapter of Ephesians: **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12)**

Satan was using evil King Herod to kill Jesus. And when Satan's attempt failed, John tells us in Revelation 12:17 -**Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 12:17)**

Guess who that is; who are the offspring who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus? God's family- that's usins.

Do you realize that during the hot spell that we just went through, when you were enjoying the comfort of the AC, that you were engaged in a war?

This is so important to understand. When I first became a Christian, I missed

this class, or just wasn't paying attention when this war was explained.

The war between God and Satan didn't end when Jesus gave his life on the cross, it just heated up. Now Satan is going after Jesus family; his bride and offspring. This is why it is so important to do what we do as close to God's plan for the church as possible; it frustrates Satan and his cronies.

Take just the basics for example: repentance is important because there is more going on than meets the human eye.

Confession is important because there is more going on than meets the human eye.

Baptism is important: symbolic burial and resurrection; raised to walk in a new life, because there is more going on than meets the human eye.

Being connected and committed to a local body of believers is important because there is more going on than meets the human eye.

Paul writes to the Corinthians: **For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we**

take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

It's important to fight this war God's way because there is more going on than meets the human eye.

Satan wants to keep mankind spiritually dead. But when one becomes born again; made alive spiritually, the battle heats up. Satan and his evil forces begin to look for ways to gain an advantage. They want to keep us in or drag us back to our old way of life. If they can, they gain a hold on us; a stronghold that needs demolished.

Satan seeks to lure Christians out from under any ordained authority; to become just as he is. This is what got him kicked out of Heaven; rebelling against God's authority.

This is why it is important to pursue accountability, discipline, and discipleship under God's plan for the church; to stay under ordained authority so that true freedom can be enjoyed-not the counterfeit that the world offers.

One of the counterfeits that the world offers is the religion of humanism: man thinking that he can be his own god. I can do it myself; everything depends on me; a me-ism lifestyle; it's all about me and what works for me.

On their 50th wedding anniversary, a couple summed up the reason for their long and happy marriage. The husband

said, "I have tried never to be selfish. After all, there is no 'I' in the word 'marriage.'" The wife said, "For my part, I have never corrected my husband's spelling."

Satan and his buddies are on a mission to steal, kill, and destroy. And they can certainly accomplish their mission through the 'I' in humanism.

The McChristian that buys into the lie that he can have church his way comes to the takeout window and says, "Let me have a small order of repentance, hold the confession and baptism please. And hurry; don't make me come inside."

In 1977, I drug my wife and kids to Bible College. I wasn't satisfied just dragging them to church.

The college was about an hour's drive from home. Mom was widowed, so we tried to get home as much as possible; at least ever other weekend. Just a few miles from Mom's, there was a McDonald's. At the time, they had a dozen hamburger special that worked out to be about a quarter per burger. On our budget at the time, this became a regular stop: drive through, burgers, then off to Mom's.

One time, for some reason, we pulled into the lot and into a parking place. One of the kids, I think Curt, who would have been about 5 at the time, said, "You mean we can go inside?!"

Our routine at the drive through had planted a false idea in a young mind.

When it comes to church, what is this generation non-verbally saying to the next generation with the McChristian mentality? That you can have it your way? That you don't have to be accountable to anyone but yourself? That discipline and discipleship are not important? That you can be a Lone Ranger Christian, riding in and out of church whenever it suits you, never making the commitment that we read about in Acts chapter 2, and playing right into the Devil's hand.

A man was coming out of church one day, and the preacher was standing at the door, as always, ready to shake hands.

The Pastor grabbed the man by the hand and pulled him aside and said to him, "You need to join the Army of the Lord!"

The man replied, "I'm already in the Army of the Lord, Pastor." The Pastor questioned, "How come I don't see you except at Christmas and Easter?"

He whispered back, "I'm in the secret service."

Is this going to be the attitude of the next generation? Will the ecclesiastical hitchhiker; the spiritual Lone Ranger be the membership of an invisible Church without participation or commitment in a local body?

Will accountability, discipline, and discipleship be removed from God's ideal church; His perfect plan for imperfect people?

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46-47)

The Hebrew writer encouraged his readers:

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

Why is this so important? Why is it important to pursue God's plan for the church? Because, when it comes to God's family, there is more going on than meets the human eye.