

Transcript 163-1

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today joining me again is Gwen. She's the administrator of compellingtruth.org and also our volunteer services coordinator, make sure all the answers that are sent out are done so in a quality, biblically based manner. Also, Nelson, our director of video content. A few episodes ago we did an episode on what is the church? What is the purpose of the church? So we thought we would continue that today with the little discussion on what are some of the most frequently asked questions about the church. So consider this our miscellaneous church questions episode. To start off, how about I'll shoot this first question over to you, Gwen. What should I be looking for in the church?

Gwen Sellers

First, I think that's a great question. Not every church you walk into is going to be the same or is going to be a good fit for you. So I think I first start with the statement of faith. You want to make sure that the church is really biblically sound, that they truly are a Christian Church, and that they really value the word. But I think too, not just the statement of faith but what is actually the church culture? Do these people actually really value the word of God? Are they really living as community and loving one another? So do they, do they preach it and then do they actually live it out? And I look at to, spiritual nourishment. Like when you go to this church is it causing you to grow? Is it causing you to be encouraged in your faith, to be challenged in your faith, or is it just stagnant? And then I think of having a place to serve. We've talked in past episodes about spiritual gifts and how the church is the body of Christ. So is there a place in this church where you will be able to use your gifts for the benefit of other people?

Gwen Sellers

Other things to consider are, you know, like your specific families needs and season and even your passions. You know so for instance, if you really have a passion for like the special needs community. Is this a church where you could serve that way? Or if you have, you know, like kids who are in elementary school, is this a church that will support you in raising those kids and in discipling them in the Lord? So those are some general things that I would look at, Nelson, I know that you have counseled a lot of people in searching for churches. What do you suggest people do?

Nelson Domingues

You know, suggestions you gave are are excellent. They're they're all the right things you should look for. And and now with churches online, more and more even having services online and having their doctrine statements online and things like that, before you even walk in the door you can often research those things as you look around for a church in your area. One thing I would suggest is that wasn't mentioned, those are all good things that you said, but in addition to that, the one if you have multiple choices that all fit that criteria you know is one closer. Is it easier to get to? I mean, that's a practical thing to to know about, because if you find a church that's pretty far away from you, you know half hour, 45 minutes an hour away or or further it would be harder for you to get to that church or want to participate in some of the events and the things in small groups and youth groups and whatever they

might have. And a lot of the people that you might enjoy doing those things with will also most likely be that far away too. So even location and how far of a drive it is from you is a consideration.

Nelson Domingues

When people walk in the door to a church, they're looking around and oftentimes like it or not, they've made their decision about that church within the first few minutes through the environment, through the culture that's in that church, and seeing what's available to them right away. And so for church leaders, you know, you want to be as welcoming as possible to these individuals and you want to be put your best foot forward and present exactly what the church is in a very concise, clear way immediately. A lot of times churches will have what they really care about or passionate about, printed and signage throughout the building and and things like that.

Nelson Domingues

And so if I was a new goer to a church and I was walking into a building I would look for those types of things. I would look for, you know, do they proclaim Christ like you mentioned, or is there a place for me to serve and to plug in to right away? Will it fit my family's needs as well? And this is a place where I can grow? A lot of times you can go to church and it might be a really fun message, but perhaps a little too watered down for some believers in the sense where maybe they're serving more milk in the sense of biblical speaking than than solid food. And that's a consideration you know, is this going to be a place where I can grow? And so I encourage people when they visit to look at all those things. Check out all the things on the website. But give the church you know a try or two. Don't just make your assessment right away. Go and listen to the sermon and go back again and see if the Lord is truly calling to that place. I think you'll feel a sense of peace once he found that church body that the Lord is calling you to.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent points, both of you. The things that you both mentioned are things that when my wife and I moved to Colorado Springs over 20 years ago, we're trying to find a new church, we were keeping track of these sorts of things. And me being a technology nerd, I actually had a spreadsheet where I was keeping all these things and even rating the church on the quality of the preaching, the quality of the worship, the were we greeted well, how far away the church was. So all these things for for, for me I need a sort of a mathematical formula. Obviously you're praying, we're seeking the Lord, asking for the spirits guidance, but you can just remembering tracking some of these things. We visited, I think 20 different churches and it's hard to remember all those things, but we're very happy with how the Lord eventually led us. And not that everyone needs to create a spreadsheet. But just remember the things that God's word says the church is to be and to do. And look for a church that fits those things. But it's not wrong to also look for a church that is a practical match for you and your family as well. Question 2 I'm giving this one to Nelson. How should conflict in the church be handled?

Nelson Domingues

Well, that never happens, right? There's never any in churches. Well, of course there is. There's conflict in our families and there's conflict among our friends. And of course, this mean conflict within the Church local assembly as well. And for anyone who thinks otherwise is you're just not being realistic. I pastoring and I know a lot of people who immediately leave the church because there's some sort of disagreement or some sort of conflict between either them and another congregant, or them and the

leadership, or they just don't like the way things are being done, and so they just move on quickly instead of addressing the conflict. And so Scripture is very clear about what to do in conflict scenarios, because Scripture talks about all parts of life. And it gives us the tools that we need and it knows, God knows that these things will creep up. We are sinful human beings in this fallen world, and so we're going to get into these types of conflict, but we need to resolve them biblically.

Nelson Domingues

And the passage I always go to is Matthew 18, very familiar passage for those who understand conflict resolution. It's Matthew 18, verses 15 through 17, and it gives us the step by step instructions of how to deal in conflict. And it mentions in that passage about first addressing it with the individual. And I would say as we do that we need to prepare our own hearts. You need to think about is there sin in my own life? Is there something in my life? Am I contributing to this problem in any way even before I approach that individual about either sin in their life or sin or a conflict in between us? And so we have to check ourselves first, right, and pray to Lord, ask for a humble heart, to see yourself, and to see your own sins and see you as you are as he sees us. And then humbly approach that individual to bring up that issue. And if they don't respond, the passage of Matthew 18 reminds us then, if they don't respond to clear communication from you, that's delivered in a heartfelt, compassionate way, that's built around resolve and built around restoration, if they won't listen, then it asks to bring another believer or two along with you. And this is not about gossip. It's not about ganging up on them. And it's certainly not about proving a point in being right. It's simply about living our lives in the correct way the Lord calls us to do it. And if there is sin in the body of the church or a conflict in between individuals and between you and someone else, you need to resolve these things. And so we bring in other people, other impartial people, not just people on your side and not just your buddies or your friends. It needs to be other strong believers within that church body who know both of you and can be impartial on the matter. And they should be consulted. And that they also see the sin or the issue that you're talking about. You together can approach that individual and try to work things out.

Nelson Domingues

And hopefully at that stage it's done and it's taken care of and forgiveness is offered and love and restoration is all granted and is there and you move on. But if the sin is still continuing, that conflict is still not resolved, and we're called to escalate that even more. And this calls for bringing in the leadership of the church and ultimately the the entire church. To now, we've identified a sin. We've identified an individual who will not repent of that sin. And it's very clear that it is sin. And once the church gets involved, they can decide to enact church discipline, or how they might then move on from there with the leadership.

Nelson Domingues

So conflict resolution and those steps again is to be taken slowly, prayerfully, humbly, with all love and compassion. Casting our pride to the side. Evaluating our lives as well and seeing if we're contributing to that problem. And then asking other believers who are impartial to join in, point to the scriptures and say this is our conflict. Here is the issue that we're having. Here is the sin. Let's resolve these things so we can get back to worshipping the Lord and and be the body of Christ that he's called us to be. United together.

Shea Houdmann

Nelson well said. I agree with you entirely that Matthew 18 is the key passage on this. And if Matthew 18 was followed so much damage could be avoided. I also like what you said about you shouldn't be surprised when conflict in the church happens. I mean, I think it's sad when it happens, because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have the same word that is supposed to be our guide, the same Holy Spirit who's dwelling inside of us. So you, so you'd think, and you would hope that there be more unity. Just remembering, as you said, we are still all sinful fallen human beings. We make mistakes, we commit sins, we make wrong judgments about situations about people. If there's going to be conflict, so we shouldn't be oh no, there's conflict. What are we supposed to do? Like the Bible gives us very specific instructions on what to do, so let's not be so quick to divide. Let's not be so quick to leave a church, which can't, we'll be talking about that a little bit more later. Let's seek after unity, seek after restoration, following the principles that are in God's word.

Shea Houdmann

Next question on our list and I'll actually take this one. Is the priesthood of all believers biblical? And so I'm not going to go so much in history, but this is an issue that really came up during the process of reformation where for centuries, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church built everything around the priesthood. That there are the human priests of your local church congregation is the intermediary between you and God. That you can't go to God directly. You have to go through your priest. You have to confess your sins to the priest. You have to do all these things through your priest. The priest is the one who administers the Lord's supper on and on and on, and it's essentially created a barrier in between believers and God.

Shea Houdmann

Well, that's not what the New Testament teaches at all. The part of the passage that speaks most directly to this is in First Peter Chapter 2. I'm going to read kind of a a summary of versus 5 through nine. You also as living stones are being built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him, who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Some other translations that render it as a kingdom of priests instead of a royal priesthood. Like we are all priests. And since we can all go directly to God, we are intermediaries between a dying world and God. There's nothing and no one, we need to go in between us and God. We do not need a priest to interpret scripture for us. We do not need a priest to do a special ceremony for the Lord Supper. We don't need a priest to oversee every area of our walk with God. It's between us and God, guided by his word, which we are all free and welcome and called to read, to study, to interpret, and to apply to our lives.

Shea Houdmann

Even in some Protestant Evangelical churches, there's a sense in which we view that lead pastor, the teaching pastors, sort of a priest, as he's on a whole nother level than we are. That we we have to go to him for certain things and while the Bible does teach a healthy respect and submission to our church leaders, they are called pastors. They are our shepherds. They there is a degree of authority and guidance and leading involved in that. But they are not someone we have to go through in order to get

to God. They do not stand between us and God in any sense. What Jesus did when he tore the temple veil in two, gave us direct access to God through him. So the priesthood of all believers is simply saying that we all have direct access to God through what Jesus did for us. And through faith in Christ, our sins are cleansed. You can stand before God. We can bring our request to him. We can intercede for others with him. We can have direct communication with him. There's nothing in between us. So that's what the priesthood of all believers is. It's again the theological concept that became very important during the Reformation. But it's also important for us to remember because it has very practical impact for us in the church today.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, it's a great reminder for each of us too to know that we have that direct access to God. And for so long, you know, before that temple curtain was torn, they didn't have access. They they needed others to pray for them. They needed the priests to step in in line for them to mediate between them and God. And and the reality of our situation now that we can talk directly to God is is humbling. And it's amazing. And it's it's incredible. It doesn't take away from the roles that there are at churches with deacons and elders and pastors. Those are all roles with responsibilities and tasks involved and callings. But yeah, having that direct access to God, each individual what an incredible thing that is.

Gwen Sellers

What I love what you pointed out too of how we also help mediate between a fallen world and God. I mean, it's that whole being ambassadors of Christ is part of, like, not only are we reconciled to God and we get to have that direct access, but we help we get to help show other people that they can have the same.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely, Gwen. Next question for you, why is church attendance important? Or put it another way, why should I go to church?

Gwen Sellers

Oh, there's so many reasons. And one actually, you know, Hebrews 10:24 through 25 is kind of like the quintessential verse on this. But actually, if we back it up a little bit, it kind of it goes in line with our priesthood of believers discussion, so I'm just going to start from verse 19. This is from the ESV, it says, therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh. And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart full of assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised, is faithful, and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Gwen Sellers

So that you know, like explicitly says you need to keep gathering together and it's for encouragement. It's part of holding fast our confession of faith. As Nelson talked about in our last episode, like it's also part of, we live in this rough culture in this fallen world, I mean, and the church is our Oasis. Like, why

would we not want to go to get that filling to to be with our family members? There's Act 2:42 is the other sort of, like quintessential church verse, and it says, so this talking about the early believers. And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And in that we see a lot of the purposes of church attendance. So it's teaching. And its fellowship with one another. Breaking of bread, that's often thought of as communion and prayer. And then, you know, I think two of the verses that like all these verses that are instructive to Christians and say you most of those are letters written to like a church body. So these are it's accomplishing the mission together.

Gwen Sellers

So kind of to bullet point it, here are some purposes of why like some reasons why you should attend church. So it's for corporate worship as the people of God, which as we talked about in the last episode, is something we just see throughout the Bible. Like Old Testament believers did this. It happens in revelation. I mean, we also see it happen like in heaven. So there's just this sense of coming together to worship God is meaningful and important. And there's prayer, praying together, praying for one another. There's teaching, and I think this is the one that we primarily think of as church. And it's like a obviously it's a huge and important part because we need to know the truth of God's word. And understand like who we understand who he is by that. And then also understand who we are and how we are to live. And I think this is also the one that is that people bump into when they think, well, I don't really need to go to church. I can just listen to a sermon online. But there's a distinct difference when you're actually with a community of people and when the person who is teaching you is part of your community and is a shepherd over this flock. Like I think of First Peter 5 and the instructions for those elders, or just thinking of local church pastors, they have been entrusted with those people and to shepherd those people. So not like the interpretation of God's word is any different, but it is still like they are there to help you. Where is, you know, a sermon that you listen to from like 10 years ago or two countries over is not really directed to you. So I think that's important.

Gwen Sellers

And it's also the local churches where we interact with other believers. So like, not only do we receive teaching, but we live it out together and we discuss it together and come to understand it together. So there's that. Like, it's not just you watching something or listening to something. Those can be great add-ons, but that purpose of the church is still very much needed in the local context. And I think too of the local church being an important place for discipleship and mentorship. Like we see Paul instructing Timothy, you know what you've heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach also. That's in Second Timothy 2:2. Or I forget where it is, but those instructions for like older women to teach and mentor younger women. Or Paul in Philippians says, you've seen me set the example. Follow it out. So like that happens in the context of relationship with real people and therefore you need to go to church to be with those people.

Gwen Sellers

I also think of the the structure of the local church being important and helpful in meeting needs, because I think that's another thing. Sometimes people are like, well, my Christian friends, you know, like, that's pretty much church. But there's no like authority structure there. There's no, there's also not a bigger support structure. So like if you have a crisis, hopefully your friends help, but like if you're

thinking about the bigger local church that can be so much more helpful. And I think too that's the same of accomplishing the mission that Jesus has given the church in our context, like that gathered body of believers can accomplish so much more than like you and your five Christian friends. So like, it's important to have Christian friends. But the church does bigger things.

Gwen Sellers

And then you know and kind of I alluded to this before of that protection against false teaching, I think that's a danger when we are not connected with the local Church of getting hyper focused on something or getting led astray, where's the local church you're more likely to get the full council of God. And like study all of the Bible and also be protected from some of those false teachings that you might otherwise not be aware of. And I'm, I mean, there's also, I'm sure, like a ton of other reasons, but those are the main ones that come to mind for me. What about for you guys?

Shea Houdmann

I think I mentioned this in the previous episode, the one another of Scripture, the Love one another, encourage one another, spur one another on towards loving good deeds, and rebuke one another in love. There's so many that require believers being together. I think it in the American culture where for the most part we are so individualistic. That's why this question even exists is like, well, why do I need to go to church where I can study guys word on my own? It's like, well, yes, there's more to the Christian life than you just reading your Bible alone, which is a great and fantastic thing you should be doing, but it's not just even you going to church and sitting next to people, listening to the same sermon, singing the same song. So church is supposed to we are the body. We are so be serving alongside one another, to be encouraging others, be teaching one another, be together, be with each other so it's a whole attitude about the church that even brings this question up. But that's what makes it so important is that so much of the Christian life, so much of what on the New Testament epistles teach us what to do describe people serving God, worshipping God, ministering to others together, and that's supposed to be so. Clearly, we need people attending church in order for these type of ministries to happen.

Gwen Sellers

But I think you're right too, like to point out that, yeah, it's not just attending. It's like be part of a local church, which does involve attending, but it's more than just like you don't just come in, sit there and leave. Like there's more to church than that.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, hopefully you're not just going just to sit there and listen. You're going there to make it a priority. And I think some people forget even the example that they're setting for their families, husbands for their wives, wives for their husbands. Mom and Dad for their kids. By prioritizing this time of togetherness, of worship, of meeting other believers, of looking for needs, of fulfilling those needs by giving, of supporting missionaries as a congregation, by doing projects and things like that that you can't do as an individual.

Nelson Domingues

I love the point you brought up about safeguarding against false teaching. I've seen many small groups go astray because they happen to get onto one specific subject. And then begin to follow some rabbit trails and without proper guidance sometimes, not all the time, but there are times where us, even a small group, can go astray listening to false teachers without them even understanding and knowing that the doctrine or the course of doctrine that they're following is leading down a really dark alley. And so yeah, we need that togetherness and Christ called us to it. I mean do we have any other excuse? Christ called us to the church, to be a part of it, to join with one another. They've been doing it since the beginning. And you can see in Act two, chapter 2. Woe is us if we decide on our own to say I don't need it. I can do this all on my own.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent points both of you. So this has been part one of our most frequently asked questions about the church. So tune in next time the Part 2, we'll we'll dive into some of the most other most frequently asked questions. So Nelson, Gwen, thank you for joining me and see you on the flip side. This has been the Got Questions podcast. Got questions? The bible has answers. We'll help you find them.