

Pagans in Padded Pews

Appeasing a False God through Church Attendance

By Daryl Wingerd

I recently overheard a conversation between two women. One was proudly describing an act of revenge she had taken against someone who had offended her. When she finished boasting of her clever wickedness, the other woman said, “Oh my! You’ll have to go to church for that one!”

We all know what she meant. Churchgoing is often seen as a way of appeasing God. But if you think about it, attending church for this reason isn’t much different than tossing a virgin into a volcano once a year. Whether barbaric or cultured, religious rituals like these are nothing more than ways of (supposedly) keeping your “god” off your back.



So why do *you* go to church? Let me suggest seven reasons that hopefully won’t characterize you—reasons that by themselves represent little more than Christianized paganism.

1. Guilt or Fear

Some people go to church because they don’t like the way their conscience is disturbed when they stay home—the feeling that God is angry with them.

2. Religious Tradition

Many parents go to church simply because *their* parents attended church, or to set a good example for their own children. It’s a tradition. But religious tradition apart from truth and understanding isn’t far from superstition.

3. Family Pressure

Many people go to church because their wife, or husband, or children, or parents, or in-laws, will be upset with them if they don’t. Were it not for this kind of family pressure, they would gladly stay home.

4. Pressure from the Community

Some people go to church to preserve their public image. Many conservative people think less of you if you’re not “religious.”

5. Music

Many people attend church mainly for the music. For them it’s almost like going to a free concert every week. The only “admission price” is

the unstated requirement of enduring the preaching. But if a person has no interest in *learning* about God, how can he enjoy *singing* about Him? Also, how many churches with simpler music and better Bible teaching do these music lovers drive past each week on their way to the concert?

6. Christmas, Easter, and Other Special Events

Many people go to church at Christmas and Easter, and sometimes for baptisms or other special occasions. Even though they don’t attend week-by-week, they *never* miss these events. Should we commend them for their “faithfulness,” or should we gently remind them that they are only marginally more devoted than the once-a-year volcano god worshipers?

7. Food or Other “Freebees”

I actually heard a man admit that he only goes to church for the free food. “*Man* those ladies can cook!” he said. Amazingly, he seemed to feel that he was doing his “Christian duty” by attending for this reason (and by occasionally helping with the dishes). He discovered a “god” that feeds his worshipers rather than eating them.

Please don’t misunderstand: there is nothing wrong with enjoying good food or good music with other believers as you worship Christ together. Being well-respected in the community is something all Christians should aim for as long as it doesn’t require moral or doctrinal compromise. Christians *should* have an unsettled conscience when they miss the meetings of the church for less-than-essential reasons, and parents *should* instill in their children the habit of attending church, even when they’re too young to understand why they are going.

But there’s a problem if your *primary* reasons for going to church are found in the above list. Your habit of church attendance may look like Christianity, but it isn’t. You may think you’re appeasing God through these religious rituals, but you’re not. God is only appeased through blood sacrifice—the death of His sinless Son, Jesus Christ—and He’s only happy with the people who gather together because they know and love Him.

If anyone does not love the Lord, He is to be accursed (1 Cor. 16:22)
[no matter how often he attends church].