

Why Christianity Cannot Be Lived Alone

Modern Western culture prizes autonomy almost above all things. People are taught from childhood to think of themselves primarily as independent individuals responsible for constructing their own identity, beliefs, values, and purpose. This instinct toward individualism has shaped nearly every part of modern life, including the way many people now think about Christianity. Faith is often imagined as something deeply personal and fundamentally private: “my walk with God,” “my spiritual journey,” “my personal relationship with Jesus.” While there is truth contained within those phrases, they can subtly distort the shape of biblical Christianity when detached from the larger covenant life of the people of God.

Many modern Christians now consume sermons, podcasts, books, and worship music almost entirely in isolation. Some intentionally avoid churches because of disappointment or distrust. Others insist that organized churches are unnecessary altogether, arguing that believers can follow Jesus faithfully without meaningful participation in gathered church life. The rise of digital media has accelerated this tendency dramatically. A person can now access thousands of sermons and theological resources without ever belonging meaningfully to a local body of believers. In some ways, Christians possess more access to teaching than any generation in history while simultaneously experiencing unprecedented levels of spiritual isolation.

Yet the New Testament consistently presents Christianity as something fundamentally embodied, shared, and covenantal. Scripture does not describe believers merely as isolated individuals who happen to possess similar beliefs. Rather, believers are joined together into one body under Christ. The language of the New Testament assumes gathered life so thoroughly that many of its commands become nearly impossible to obey meaningfully apart from ongoing participation in the life of the church.

The problem begins when Christianity is reduced primarily to information. Modern people often assume that if they possess sound doctrine, listen to biblical teaching, and maintain private devotional habits, they are therefore functioning normally as Christians. But the church is not merely a distribution system for theological content. Christianity involves truth, certainly, but it also involves formation through shared life together under the reign of Christ. The New Testament repeatedly describes believers as people who worship together, pray together, bear burdens together, confess faults to one another, exhort one another, forgive one another, and submit one to another in the fear of God. These are not peripheral activities added onto Christianity after the fact. They belong to the ordinary structure of Christian life itself.

This becomes obvious the moment one begins reading the “one another” commands scattered throughout the New Testament. Believers are commanded to love one another, bear one another’s burdens, forgive one another, encourage one another, admonish one another, receive one another, pray for one another, and provoke one another unto love and good works. These commands assume proximity, relationship, accountability, and covenant participation. One cannot meaningfully practice most of these commands while remaining permanently detached from the gathered life of the church.

This is why the New Testament repeatedly reaches for corporate images to describe the people of God. The church is the body of Christ. Bodies are not collections of unrelated parts functioning independently of one another. A hand detached from the body ceases to function as a hand because it was never designed to exist independently. Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 12 depends entirely upon interdependence. The eye requires the hand. The hand requires the foot. The weaker members are necessary. The body lives precisely because its members are joined together under one head.

Likewise, the church is described as the household of God. Households imply shared life, mutual responsibility, authority, care, and belonging. Scripture also describes believers as living stones being built together into a spiritual house. Stones scattered randomly across a field do not become a temple. They are built together into something larger than themselves. The church is even called a holy nation, emphasizing covenant identity shared among a gathered people under the reign of God. Every major image Scripture uses for the church presses against radical individualism.

This does not mean that every isolated believer is acting rebelliously. Scripture clearly recognizes extraordinary situations involving persecution, scattering, immaturity, discipline, imprisonment, illness, or lack of access to healthy churches. Elijah once believed himself utterly alone. John wrote portions of Revelation while isolated on Patmos. Believers throughout history have sometimes endured seasons where faithful churches were inaccessible or where gathering openly placed Christians in grave danger. The existence of isolated believers in extraordinary circumstances is not difficult to acknowledge.

But extraordinary situations should not be mistaken for the normal structure of Christian life. The New Testament consistently points believers toward gathered covenant life whenever possible. Hebrews warns believers not to forsake assembling together. Acts repeatedly portrays Christians gathering for worship, prayer, teaching, fellowship, and the breaking of bread. The apostles write not merely to isolated individuals, but to identifiable churches possessing leadership, discipline, worship, and shared life together. Christianity in the New Testament is profoundly communal because redemption itself creates a people, not merely disconnected spiritual experiences.

At the heart of this issue lies the nature of salvation itself. Christ does not merely save individuals out of the world. He gathers individuals into a people. The Gospel reconciles sinners not only to God, but also to one another within the body of Christ. Paul writes in Ephesians that Christ has broken down the dividing wall between peoples and created “one new man” through the cross. Pentecost itself points toward this reality as Jews from many nations hear the mighty works of God proclaimed and are gathered into one Spirit-formed body under the exalted Christ. Salvation therefore has both personal and corporate dimensions. Believers are united not only to Christ individually, but also to one another through Him.

This is one reason worship matters so deeply. Worship is not simply private inspiration scaled upward into a crowd experience. The church gathers before God together because believers belong together before God. Christians sing together, pray together, hear the Word together, confess together, partake of the Lord’s Supper together, and stand together as one people before the throne of Christ. The ordinances themselves reinforce this embodied reality. Baptism publicly identifies believers with Christ and His covenant people. The Lord’s Supper is not merely an individual mystical experience, but a shared covenant meal proclaiming the death of Christ together until He comes.

Modern technology complicates these realities in important ways. Online teaching can be deeply valuable. Sermons, podcasts, books, and livestreams can strengthen believers tremendously, especially those who are sick, isolated, persecuted, traveling, or lacking strong local resources. Digital tools can assist discipleship meaningfully. But digital consumption cannot fully replace embodied covenant life because Christianity itself is embodied. The Son of God did not redeem humanity through abstract spiritual transmission, but through incarnation. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Christ touched lepers, ate meals with disciples, washed feet, and rose bodily from the dead. The Christian faith is profoundly incarnational.

For this reason, disembodied Christianity eventually begins losing essential dimensions of biblical life. Online sermons may provide information, but they cannot fully provide mutual accountability, embodied fellowship, shared worship, pastoral oversight, burden-bearing, ordinances, discipline, hospitality, or covenant presence. One may consume spiritual content endlessly while remaining largely unknown by the people of God. Yet the New Testament repeatedly assumes that believers are visible to one another, responsible to one another, and actively participating in the life of the body together.

This does not mean churches must become rigidly institutional or artificially performative. Scripture never presents the church primarily as a corporate machine. The earliest Christians gathered in homes, shared meals together, prayed together, suffered together, and cared for one another in ordinary life. The strength of the church does not arise from polished systems, impressive branding, or professionalized production. The strength of the church arises from Christ dwelling among His people through His Spirit as believers worship, serve, forgive, and grow together in truth.

Many modern Christians remain deeply hungry for precisely this kind of embodied life, even if they struggle to articulate it. The loneliness of modern society has become severe. People increasingly live disconnected from family structures, neighborhoods, and stable communities. In such a fragmented world, the church stands as something profoundly countercultural: a people gathered together not by shared consumer preference, political alignment, ethnicity, or social class, but by the reconciling work of Christ.

This is why the church still matters. Christianity cannot be lived fully alone because the Gospel itself creates a people. Christ gathers believers into one body, one household, one temple, and one holy nation under His reign. The church is not merely an optional supplement added onto private faith. The church is part of the ordinary shape of redemption itself.

Ultimately, the deepest answer to isolation is not merely stronger institutions or more organized programs. The answer is Christ Himself continuing to gather His people through His Spirit and His Word. Wherever believers gather faithfully around Christ in worship, truth, prayer, holiness, and mutual care, the life of the Kingdom becomes visible again in the midst of a fragmented world.