

## **10 Arguments for Attending**

### **Introduction**

The trouble really started with a Roman Catholic theologian named Karl Rahner. And it started when he coined a term that most people have never heard and yet describes what most Christians believe: the “anonymous Christian.” Rahner was troubled by “good people” that had never heard about Jesus but whom he believed would be saved because of their works. Such people, Rahner said, were “anonymous Christians.” They were Christian; they just didn’t believe they were, and they didn’t do any of the things Christians normally do, like worship and commune with and on their Lord.

Of course since Catholics already believe we are saved in part by our works this concept makes perfect sense. You would expect Catholics to believe this sort of thing. What’s surprising is how many Protestants and even Lutherans believe in the idea of the “anonymous Christian,” the person who doesn’t go to church but is still a believer. How can this be?

I believe the problem is, and you can correct me if I’m wrong, that we are “too” Protestant. We have come to believe that “faith” and the “fruits of faith” are separable. That someone can be a Christian “anonymously” in their heart, even though we never seem them in church, and even if their “pastor” has no idea they’re one of his sheep.

Nothing could be further from the truth. And so this morning I give you not one, not two, or even five, but 10 REASONS or ARGUMENTS why the only Christian is a WORSHIPPING and COMMUNING Christian.

### **1. Argument By Invitation to Commune**

Maybe the simplest argument and the best one, the one you should all know:

*The argument by invitation to commune*

**Do you love Jesus?**

Yes I do

**Jesus calls you to take and eat his body and blood in remembrance of Him.**

*And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19)*

**Will you do as your Lord commands?**

No, I’m too busy

**Then you don’t love Jesus, because if you did, you would do as he asks.**

## 2. Argument from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment

One that may appeal to the more logical among you, or the more Judge Roy Moore type people, is the argument from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment.

Good for people who believe they keep the commandments

*Do you believe Christians ought to keep the 10 Commandments?*

Yes I do

*Can a murderer who keeps murdering be saved?*

No (5<sup>th</sup>)

*What about a thief who keeps stealing?*

No (7<sup>th</sup>)

*What about someone who continues to live in adultery with someone else?*

No (6<sup>th</sup>)

*What about someone who breaks the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment?*

***“Remember the Sabbath Day by Keeping It Holy”***

***What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.***

*Are you sorry for breaking this commandment, and want to do better?*

No

*Then you're not a Christian, because you're willfully breaking God's commandments.*

## 3. Argument from “The Father’s Will”

Here's one that's a little like the first, but more subtle. You might call it “the argument from the Father's will.”

I'm a Christian, I just don't go to church.

*Oh – what's a Christian?*

Someone who believes in Jesus.

*But Jesus says:*

***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)***

*The Old Testament makes it clear it's the Father's will for you to worship.*

***Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! (Psalm 96:8)***

*Will you bring an offering and come into his courts?*

No.

*Then Jesus says you are simply saying “Lord, Lord” and not doing the will of his Father. You're not really a Christian.*

## 4. Argument from Definition of a Christian

Another argument that I always like is the argument by definition of what a Christian does after they're baptized. Yes, the Bible tells us what a Christian does after they're baptized. It's in Acts 2:42.

*<sup>40</sup> With many other words [Peter] bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> And they 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.' (Acts 2:40-42)*

*In other words, they devote themselves to joining together to hear the Bible, take communion, and pray.*

## 5. Argument from Hebrews 10 (Forsaking the Assembly)

If you like that sort of simple "quote the bible" argument, here's another good passage. It's from Hebrews 10.

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> 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.*

*This is the call for the baptized – "**bodies washed with pure water**"  
To come to worship – "**enter the holy place...through his flesh**"  
Not "**neglecting to meet together**"*

ILLUS: Olivia – "what happens when you throw the spoon / get off the bed / etc."? Have to rehearse the consequences with her. And so does the writer of Hebrews:

*<sup>26</sup> For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.*

*The law of Moses – the 10 Commandments – including famous number 3!*

<sup>29</sup> *How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?* <sup>30</sup> *For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”* <sup>31</sup> *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:19-31)*

***Profaned the blood of the covenant – which is, “Take, drink, this is my blood of the new covenant shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do THIS in remembrance of me.”***

***In other words, if after being baptized you neglect to meet TOGETHER to share in the new covenant of Jesus’ flesh and blood, you deserve worse punishment than those who have broken the 10 Commandments. You are worse than a murderer, an adulterer, and a thief. You have (and I quote from Hebrews) “Outraged the Spirit of Grace.”***

***And for good measure, we’re reminded of what a fearful thing it is to “fall into the hands of the living God.”***

## **6. Argument from the Small Catechism Preface**

If you’re a good Lutheran, the Small Catechism may be more up your alley. So here’s argument number 6: an argument from the preface to the Small Catechism. Hear, Lutherans, the words of the great Gospel preacher Martin Luther:

*“Those who refuse [to be taught] **are to be told** that they are **denying Christ and do not belong to Him**. They are not to be admitted to the Sacrament, accepted as sponsors at Baptism, or allowed to exercise Christian liberty in any way. They should instead be simply directed back to the pope and his functionaries, yes, even to Satan himself. (Preface to the Small Catechism, p.248 2005 Edition)*

***Another of Luther’s argument may sound really familiar at this point. But let’s hear it anyway:***

*Finally, now that the pope’s tyranny is over, people no longer want to go to the Sacrament but despise it. Here again urging is necessary...The way to go about this is to tell them that if anyone does not seek the Lord’s Supper at the very least four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises the Sacrament and is not a Christian, just as **no one is a Christian who does not believe or hear the Gospel**. For Christ did not say, “Omit this,” or “despise this,” but **“This do, as often as you drink it.”** He most certainly wants it done and does not want it left undone and despised. (Preface to the Small Catechism, p.251, 2005 Edition)*

## 7. Argument from the Confessions

Now if you're REALLY Lutheran, you might do a REALLY Lutheran thing, and appeal to our confession of faith, the *Book of Concord* or *Harmony*. In the defense of the Augsburg Confession, the Magna Carta of the Reformation, Philip Melanchthon reinforced to papal theologians that:

*“The openly wicked and the despisers of the sacraments are excommunicated [from our churches]. We do this according to both the Gospel and the ancient canons...The (church law) [we subscribe to] says...this: “If any enter the church of God and are found never to commune, let them be admonished. If they still do not commune, let them come to penitence. If they commune, let them not be permanently expelled. If they do not commune, let them be expelled.” (Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article XI:4-5)*

***The assumption here is that the people were at least coming to church. It's just that they weren't communing. So even in the case where the people are coming and BEING INSTRUCTED (which is not our problem – I never get a chance to instruct people who are never here!) they could still be excommunicated for despising the sacrament. In the Lutheran Church. The Church of the Gospel.***

## 8. Argument from Dogmatics

And if you're REALLY, REALLY, “dead orthodox” Lutheran, you might even give an argument (this would be number 8) from our texts on Lutheran doctrine. Here's a passage from the chief theological text of the Missouri Synod, Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*.

*“Martin Luther [wrote]... ‘In the Church the sinners are publicly absolved in the same manner when they produce true fruits of repentance. For those [people] dare not publicly be absolved who manifestly persist in their sins and do not show that they have repented.’ (St. L VII: 1460). **The Church must demand of its members that they prove the faith of the heart by good works.** The church insists on a justification by works. ”*

***Not “request.” Demand. Insist. Why? What will happen if we don't, as a church, demand that our members SHOW they are really Christian?***

*The further a Christian congregation departs from this practice, the more will license abound in her midst, [and] the less will she fulfill her calling of being a light to the world and the salt of the earth. Let her never forget that **Scripture calls for this justification by works.** John 13:35: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one to another.” Matthew 12:37: “By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Pieper, Vol. 2:542)*

## 9. Argument from the Constitution

And so we come to argument number 9. If you're a good Missouri Synod Lutheran, you know that sometimes the Bible and the Confessions are not enough. You need to appeal to the word that puts fear in the heart of every Canadian: "The Constitution." (I'm being sarcastic here. Of course the Scriptures and Confessions are enough!)

St. Mark's has a constitution. Every LCMS congregation's constitution has to be approved by our District and Synod. If it's not, we could lose our tax exempt status and even our right to call ourselves a "church." If we violate that constitution, the same thing could happen. And so I quote, once again, our constitution as an argument (although a legalistic one) for attendance at worship to qualify us as Christians. Those eligible to receive communion and be called "communicant members" are those...

- 2. who accept all canonical books of Old and New Testaments as the only divine rule and standard of faith;*
- 3. who are familiar at least with Luther's Small Catechism and declare the acceptance of it;*
- 4. who attend divine services faithfully;...*
- 6. who partake of the Lord's Supper frequently after their confirmation;*
- 7. who contribute regularly and faithfully, as God has prospered them, toward the building of Christ's kingdom in the congregation and throughout the world;...*
- 8. who devote time and talents to the extension of the kingdom of God;...and*
- 9. who permit themselves to be fraternally admonished and corrected when they have erred;*

***Don't do those things and won't allow yourself to be admonished and corrected? According to the constitution, you are not a member.***

## 10. Argument from the Gifts

At last we come to argument number 10. Really, this one is the best of all. It should work in every circumstance and in every case. It is the argument from the gifts.

ILLUS: Child commanded to open their Christmas presents. "Do I have to?"

True Christians don't need to be "told" to come to worship. They come of their own accord, because they know that it is here that Jesus gives his gifts. One who follows Christ does not have to be commanded to come and get their presents. The very idea makes no sense to them.

They WANT to hear the GOSPEL.  
The KNOW they NEED IT

They HUNGER and THIRST for their Lord's BODY and BLOOD  
So that HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS may be THEIRS

They're desperate to be reminded of the promises made to them in BAPTISM  
That they have been cleansed of their EVIL CONSCIENCES  
And made a NEW CREATION

The most precious words in the universe to them are the words:  
"In the stead and by the command...I forgive you all your sins."

They can't STAY AWAY from CHURCH  
Because it ACHES INSIDE them to do so

## Conclusion

So let us put to rest the idea of an "anonymous Christian."  
There is simply no such thing.

That does not mean there are no sinners in the assembly of the saints  
The wheat and the tares are sown together

But you can see the harvest growing:  
There is no "invisible harvest"  
Or "invisible response" to God's Word

The gifts are here, being offered.  
The table is prepared.  
The feast is laid out.

And that leads me to one last story, one last argument, again from the words of Jesus himself. Let's let him have the last word:

*<sup>2</sup> "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, <sup>3</sup> and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup> Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.'<sup>5</sup> But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup> while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. <sup>8</sup> Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup> Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'...<sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen."(Matthew 22:2-14)*

O Son of God, we hear your invitation,  
And we come,  
Just as we are.  
Bless us with your gifts of forgiveness and eternal life.  
Amen.

## Summary

1. Argument By Invitation to Commune  
*Jesus invites us to commune on him. A Christian cannot refuse to come.*
2. Argument from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment  
*No Christian willfully and repeatedly breaks the commandments.*
3. Argument from “The Father’s Will”  
*Christians obey their Father who calls them to worship and give offerings.*
4. Argument from Definition of a Christian  
*All baptized Christians gather regularly for communion, teaching and prayer.*
5. Argument from Hebrews 10 (Forsaking the Assembly)  
*Forsaking worship outrages the Holy Spirit and brings God's vengeance.*
6. Argument from the Small Catechism Preface  
*Anyone refusing to be taught by the Church is no Christian, and must be told so.*
7. Argument from the Confessions  
*Those who will not commune after admonition are excommunicated.*
8. Argument from Dogmatics  
*The Church insists on seeing the fruits of good works from its members.*
9. Argument from the Constitution  
*A member communes and gives regularly and is open to admonishment.*
10. Argument from the Gifts  
*Christ offers his gifts of forgiveness in worship!*

"There is a way that seems right to a man,  
but in the end it leads to death."  
*Proverbs 14:12*