

I Believe in the Church

Acts 20:28-32

Longer passages are not quoted in the study sheet, but they can be read in the accompanying transcript.

Many people think you can be a good Christian without being a _____ of any church. Is church really necessary? Today, we're exploring how _____ regards the church. We know the Lord's way is the _____ way, the right way, and the holy way of life. The best way to know the Lord's way is to _____ the Scriptures. They are God's _____ to us today. They were true when the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and prophets to write them, and they're true for all time.

When you mention the word "church," people _____ in a multitude of ways. Some think of the church as something good, but _____. Some think of the church as an institution. Some think the church is made up of prejudiced hypocrites. Some think the church needs reinventing in a style more like the _____ of our times. Everyone seems to think they know what the church should be like. Even folks who've never read a Bible or have not entered a church door in many years have an _____ about what the church should be.

You've probably noticed religion in America has _____. Many groups have become religious entertainment venues and others have become like shopping malls. Some think the primary purpose of church is to _____ to our wants and desires. We've become self-centered, thinking Jesus ought to be our _____ rather than thinking we ought to be His. It's no wonder some see the church as optional and others as a _____ of time. Few want to know what Christ envisioned for the church that He built or what place it has in His heart. The Lord never thought of the church as an option; it's necessary in His eyes.

Our reading today comes from Acts 20:28-32. Paul is meeting with the elders of the church at Ephesus. It is a very sad occasion as he's saying goodbye to them.

Yes, the Lord Jesus considered the church as _____. He wants everyone to be a member of His church and to _____ with the church regularly. The idea that you can be a good Christian and not be a member of the church is not from the heart of God. A close look at the New Testament reveals that the church is quite necessary to our relationship with the Lord.

The church Jesus built doesn't _____ to you or me; it belongs to the Lord. He _____ it! After Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus said, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (that is, the confession) I will _____ My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18), Yes, Jesus built His church, and not even His _____ could prevent it.

The church belongs to the Lord because He _____ it. **Remember what the apostle Paul by inspiration told the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:28.** Since Jesus loved the church enough to die for it, how can we think so _____ of it? The church must be precious, very precious, to the Lord. The Bible reveals how closely related Christ is to the church, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as _____ over all things to

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the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23). Just as your head is inseparably connected to your body, so Christ is inseparably connected to the church. Just as your body does your will as it’s conceived in the brain, so the church does the will of its head, Jesus Christ. The church is the _____ of Christ. We must never separate Christ from His church or the church from Christ.

The church is extremely precious to the Lord; in fact, He considers the church as His _____. **Read what the Bible says in Ephesians 5:25-27.** Jesus has gone to great lengths to _____ and to sanctify the church. He wants her to be radiant with glory. Jesus _____ the church. When people slander the church or make it trivial, they mock and they insult Jesus Christ. They’re saying Jesus is foolish to sanctify and glorify the church. If you wish to make a man _____, just slander his wife. Do you think the Lord Jesus will look kindly on anyone who slanders His bride?

I want to distinguish the church that the Lord Jesus calls His bride from what people today _____ when they hear the word “church.” What I’m speaking about is the Lord’s church that’s _____ in the New Testament. Many religious groups who call themselves “churches” are _____ like the New Testament church. They _____ in name, in organization, in doctrine, in mission, and in worship. They’re often more a reflection of our culture than what God _____ for the church to be. Some groups have so _____ spiritual value and content, it’s no wonder people see it as unnecessary.

This difference confuses and causes people to _____ from the will of God. More than ever, people need to know the _____ revealed in God’s Word about the church. They need to think clearly about what God _____ rather than be pulled into some false hope by something that calls itself church but differs greatly from the church Jesus that built as found in the New Testament. The Scriptures clearly make the church that Jesus built a necessity for us if we wish to _____ God.

Why is the church so necessary? There are several reasons. First, the Lord _____ those He saves to His church. When the Jews at Pentecost heard Peter preach, they were pierced to the heart and they wanted to _____ what to do. Peter replied that they must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their _____. Acts 2:41 says, “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about _____ thousand souls.” In verse 47, the Bible says, “And the Lord was adding to their number (or “to the church”) day by day those who were being saved.” The Lord forgives us at _____ and adds us to His church. Baptism is the time that we are forgiven or saved.

When a person is saved, the Lord adds him to His church. To be in the church means the Lord has saved you. The Scriptures never contemplate a person who is saved as a person who hasn’t been baptized or a person who is not in the Lord’s church. The apostle Paul told the church at Colossae, “For He (that is, God) rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the _____ of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14). Just as the Lord grants forgiveness when one repents and is baptized, so the Lord adds the baptized to His church. The church is the _____ of Christ!

When John wrote to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 1, he revealed to them what Christ had _____ for them. **Read what the Bible says in Revelation 1:4-6.**

The book of Revelation addresses the people who had come into a kingdom and were _____ to God. John taught that “we” Christians “are of God, and the whole world lies in the _____ of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). There are but _____ kingdoms, just two: the domain of darkness and the kingdom of His beloved Son. To enter the church is to enter the kingdom of the beloved Son.

The Lord Jesus Himself spoke of the church as a kingdom. The Lord said, “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My _____; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the _____ of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18-19). Why would the Lord build one thing and then give Peter keys to something else? He doesn’t do that. The church is the kingdom of God today.

How do I know that? In Acts 20:28, the Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own _____. We have no record anywhere in the New Testament that the blood of Jesus ever purchased anything but the church. But the twenty-four elders sang this new song to the Lord Jesus, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a _____ and _____ to our God; and they will reign upon the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10). The same blood didn’t purchase two things—the church is that blood-bought kingdom.

Second, being in the church means you’re blood-bought, but there’s no promise of being blood-bought to those _____ the church. The church contains the cleansed, but the others outside are still in _____. The kingdom contains priests to God, but outside there are no priests to God. The Bible says, “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). Being in the Lord’s church is _____ to our eternal salvation.

Ephesians 2 contrasts the difference between people who are in the _____ and outside of Christ from those who come into Christ and His church. The apostle Paul reminds those who came out of paganism at Ephesus of what they were _____ they became members of the church or the body of Christ. He says, “remember that you were at that time _____ from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no _____ and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the _____ of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12-13). In verses 19 to 22, Paul describes them after they became Christians. He says, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow _____ with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy _____ in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” Before, they were strangers without hope and without God. Now, as Christians, they’re God’s family and fellow citizens in God’s kingdom, the church.

Third, the church is necessary because being in the church means that you are a member of God's _____. Paul told Timothy, "but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to _____ himself in the household (or family) of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support (or ground) of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul identified the _____ as God's household or family. The children of God are in the church. If you claim to be in God's family but say church membership is unnecessary, you're confused and may be deceiving yourself.

The very act that puts one into the family of God is what puts one into the church. Compare Galatians 3:26-27 with 1 Corinthians 12:13. Galatians 3:26-27 says, "For you are all sons of God through _____ in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were _____ into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Baptism is an act of faith that makes us _____ of God. First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one _____, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." This verse says that we're baptized into the one body. Ephesians 1:22-23 teaches the body of Christ _____ the church. Therefore, baptism is what makes one a child of God, and baptism is what puts us into the body of Christ, the church.

When we realize the church is God's family, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the saved, those bought by the blood of Jesus, we see why the church is so very important in God's eyes. Being a member of the Lord's church is not _____. Are you a _____ of the church that Jesus built? I hope you are.

Many people claim to be members of the church, but they aren't _____. They've stopped worshiping at church or supporting it. By their actions they've actually abandoned the church and in that sense they've abandoned the _____. The Bible says, "let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging _____; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25). The Lord wants us to encourage each other to love and good works and to not forsake assembling with other Christians. You can't encourage other Christians to stay faithful if you quit going to church altogether.

I know some of you can't attend worship because of your _____. The Lord understands your situation. But if you can attend worship yet _____ to forsake meeting with the Lord's church, you're forsaking the Lord, too. The Lord loves His people and knows His church. If you quit serving Him, He knows it. When you stop attending, you also open the _____ to temptation of every kind. To stay spiritually healthy, stay in church.

To become a member of the church and to be saved, believe with all your heart Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; repent of your sins; confess Jesus as the Christ; and be baptized. When you're baptized, the blood of Jesus will wash away your sins and cause you to be added to the church. You'll become a child of God, born again into His family. If you're a member of the church of Christ and have stopped attending, why not come back to the Lord and to the church. Get right with God.