

"Why I Am a Member"

If I ask you to do something really important, I should have a reason. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today I want to tell you why I am a member of the church of Christ. Stay tuned.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. Proverbs 30 and verse 5 says that "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him." This Bible is certainly true, because God is true and trustworthy. I've spent my whole adult life studying the word of God, and I've found it to prove true in every instance. You never have to doubt God's Word, because God's character, God's honesty, God's integrity, and God's wisdom are abundantly found in the words that He gave us. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Following Christ means becoming a member of the church that He built. You'll never make a more important decision than the one to follow the Lord Jesus. Following Him brings great blessing, but it also has great challenges. We must deny ourselves; have you ever denied yourself anything? We must take up our crosses daily and follow Him; are you willing? We must offer our bodies a living sacrifice. We must love the Lord more than anything else; do you? When I ask you to become a member of the Lord's church, I'm challenging you to put God first in everything and give Him your utmost loyalty and service.

Now I realize how serious this challenge is, and so I'm prepared to also tell you why I've chosen to follow Jesus and to become a member of His church. To follow Jesus means being involved in His church, that is His family, His kingdom, and His vineyard. You can't separate the church from Jesus or Jesus from the church. To embrace one is to embrace the other. There is no other way.

Now this month we're offering a free booklet called "Christ's Glorious Church." And if you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Acts 2:38 to 41, and we'll explore why everyone should be a member of the Lord's church.

Our reading today comes from the book of Acts, chapter 2, verses 38 to 41. "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.' And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!' So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." That's a reading from God's Holy Word. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that Your instructions to us to become members of your church and to be saved are so simple and easy. Help us to be true believers, to repent of our sins, and Father for those that have yet been un-baptized that they will do what is right. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

People ask, "Why are you asking us to be members of the church of Christ?" Well, I'd like to give you five reasons, reasons that matter!

First, I'm a member because Jesus loves the church and died for the church. His attitude should shape our attitudes. Ephesians 5, verses 25 to 30 says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body."

The New Testament describes the church as God's family. 1 Timothy 3 and verse 15 says, "but in case I'm delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." Now Jesus Himself looks at the church as His own family. The Lord Jesus asked in Mark 3 verses 33 to 35, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" And looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother." Now Jesus regards the church as His family. Well I want to be in that family.

Second, I'm a member of the church of Christ, because Jesus is my Lord and I serve Him.

Now only Jesus has the words of eternal life. Only Jesus will judge me on the last day. Only Jesus can be my Savior. Only Jesus can forgive my sins. If I want Jesus to be my Savior, I must also accept Him as my Lord. I must follow Him. And how can I think that I'm following Him, when I'm not willing to be part of the church that He built and purchased with His own blood? The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14 and verse 6). Well the only way to the Father, to heaven, is through Jesus Christ. Acts 4 verse 12 says, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." We must follow Him.

The Lord expects His people to be wise and loving. And according to Matthew 7 verse 24 a wise person is one who hears His words and does them, that is the words. The foolish person hears the words but does not do them. I want the Lord Jesus to count me as wise! The idea that we can do as we please and not do what the Lord says and yet still be thought of as a faithful Christian is mistaken. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7 and verse 21). Again He asked, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6 and verse 46). Now if the congregation that you attend isn't following the words of the Lord, my friend you're putting your soul at risk.

The Lord Jesus expects His people to obey Him as Lord! Jesus said in John 14 and verse 15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Now obedience is how we love the Lord Jesus! Now Jesus obeyed His Father out of love and He wants us to obey out of love too! The Lord Jesus explained in John 15 verses 9 and 10, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Now I want to abide in God's love and favor. And to do that, that means I must follow the example of the Lord Jesus by keeping His commandments.

And this is why in churches of Christ, first of all we immerse penitent believers for the forgiveness of their sins, just like we read in Acts 2:38, and we do this rather than sprinkle infants who don't even know what's happening. This is why in churches of Christ we sing a cappella as a congregation rather than have choirs and use instruments of music. This is why we, as churches of Christ, have a plurality of elders as our leaders rather than have a pastor system or a single bishop. This is why we as churches of

Christ observe the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day. This is why we give cheerfully and freely as we've been prospered. This is why we go into all the world with the pure gospel that's in the Word of God and we teach people all the Lord's, that He's commanded us. This is why in churches of Christ help the needy, live godly lives, tell the truth, and love all people. This is why we cannot pretend sin is okay, why we say false doctrine is not as good as the truth, why we say that repentance is necessary and not that it doesn't matter, and why we say that morality doesn't depend on the situation but depends on what God has said.

Third, I'm a member of the church of Christ because the Lord adds the saved to His church. Now, I love the church; it's filled with people who love the Lord and love and care for each other. I want to be around people who have strong faith and strong love for God. When people obey the gospel and are saved, the Lord adds them to the church. Acts 2:41 says, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." Verse 47 says, "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." Now the phrase "their number" is a reference to the "church."

The Lord knew that we would need a family on earth to help us, to teach us, and to keep us strong in the faith. Paul said in Romans 15 and verse 14, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another." We need the strength of each other's faith to keep us spiritually involved. We also need each other when we fall and fail. Galatians 6 verses 1 and 2 says, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, you restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. (He says) Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." We need to do that.

The love of Christ and the grace of God makes us all better. And worshipping at church with other saints, and fellowshiping with brothers and sisters, and having Bible study, all of this enriches our lives and shapes us into people who live godly lives and love each other. Folks we need each other. 1 Peter 2 verses 9 and 10 describes who we are as Christians and members of the church, and I tell you I want to be around people like that. He says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you were once not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." I tell you the church provides the basis for the world to know the Lord and to know the gospel message of salvation. We need the church.

Fourth, I'm a member because being "in Christ" means being in His body, the church. Galatians 3:26 to 27 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Now when I was baptized into Christ, I entered into a relationship with Him that I didn't have before. God counted me as His child and made me an heir of eternal life along with His Son Jesus. Now as a child of God, born again in baptism, I was privileged to enter the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 and verse 5, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Well what is this birth of water and spirit? Well it's baptism. What is the kingdom of God? Well it's the church, the body of Christ! 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 13 says, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

Now the Scriptures clearly teach that baptism is the time that we enter the body of Christ. We know the body of Christ is Christ is the church, because the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 1:22 to 23, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

Now to be a child of God, to be in the body of Christ, means the Lord has added me to His church. If I'm not in the church, I'm not "in Christ." If I'm not "in Christ," I have no promise and no hope. You remember Ephesians 2 and verse 12 describes the condition of people who are not Christians. It says, "remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Now separate from Christ, excluded, strangers to promise, having no hope and without God! My friend, there is a big huge difference between being "in Christ" and being "outside of Christ." Now according to Ephesians 2 and verse 1, those who are outside of Christ are dead in their trespasses and sins.

Ephesians 2 verse 19 describes what it means to be "in Christ": "So then you're no longer strangers and aliens (no), but you're fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." If you are in Christ and His church, you're in God's family, a fellow citizen with the saints! God doesn't exclude you as a stranger or alien anymore! Oh I love the promise of Ephesians 1 and verse 3, which says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." I tell you we have hope in Christ! We have promise in Christ! And I don't want anyone to miss out on these blessings. And that's why I want you to become a member of the Lord's church.

Fifth, I'm a member of the church of Christ, because membership means being a citizen of heaven. If I want to go to the heavenly kingdom, I must enter God's earthly kingdom, the church. Philippians 3 verses 20 and 21 says, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." Consider what a blessing it is to be a citizen of heaven!

More than anything, I want to go to heaven. 1 Peter 1:3 to 5 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Yes I want to go to heaven! And the way to heaven is through Jesus Christ and the church that He built and purchased with His own blood! Let's pray together. Father we're so thankful for the hope and the promise that we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. For His love for us and for His willingness to pave the way so that we might live with You forever. Oh Father, help us to do Your will. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

The grace of God matters! I wouldn't want to live one day outside the grace of God, not even one hour, not one minute, and not even one second without the promises of God! I know that to abide in His grace and love I must be a member of His family, the church. And I wished everyone was a member of the church that Jesus built. I wish everyone was willing to deny themselves and to take up their crosses daily and follow Christ. I want everyone to know the Lord and to place their trust in Him. Please don't think you can please the Lord Jesus and at the same time reject His church. You can't have one without the other.

When you give your heart and your life to Christ in obedience to the gospel, the Lord will add you to His church. That's the only way that you can enter the Lord's church; the Lord must add you. He will add you when you place your trust in Him, firmly believing in Him and His teaching. Believing the gospel means believing in His death on the cross, His burial, and His resurrection. It means believing that you're accountable to Him and that He will one day come again from heaven to judge the world. Your faith in Christ means you must change your heart to turn away from sin and turn to righteousness; that's repentance. It means you'll have to deny yourself so you can take up your cross daily to follow Jesus.

When faith, and love, and repentance unite, it will move you to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and to be baptized into Christ. And when you're baptized the Lord will wash away your sins, He'll cause you to be born again, and add you to His church. You'll enter the kingdom of heaven and clothe yourself with Christ. God will consider you as one of His children. Baptism is the time that God acts upon you and makes you one of His own. Oh I hope and pray that you will be baptized and become a member of the Lord's church today.

Now we hope that today's study has stirred you to be a member of His church. This month we're offering a free booklet, entitled, "Christ's Glorious Church." And it'll be a blessing to you. If you want a copy of it or you want a copy of this message by CD, then mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. You can also find us on YouTube at SearchTVMinistry. Subscribe to it and tell others about it.

Or, call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org. Now if you get a hold of us we won't ask you for money or put you on a list.

We do ask that you please, please get involved with a church of Christ. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we will be happy to help you find one. Well, Lord willing, we'll be back next week. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. Let them know that you're watching and encourage them to watch too. As always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.