

"I Believe in the Church"

Many people think you can be a good Christian without being a member of any church. Is church really necessary? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's way." Today we're exploring how God regards the church, and you can't afford to miss this study!

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way; we're here to search God's Word so that we might please the Lord. We know the Lord's way is the best way, the right way, and the holy way of life. The best way to know the Lord's way is to study the Scriptures. They are God's voice 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. We're so grateful that you care enough to spend this time with us. We want to be a part of your life each week.

When you mention the word "church," people respond in a multitude of ways. Some think of the church as something good but optional. 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 culture 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 opinion about what the church should be.

You've probably noticed religion in America has changed. Many groups have become religious entertainment venues and others have become like shopping malls. Some think the primary purpose of church is to cater to our wants and desires. We've become self-centered, thinking Jesus ought to be your servant, our servant rather than thinking we ought to be His. It's no wonder some see the church as optional and others as a waste 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.

Now if you want to think a little more about the church, we offer this information free in a little book we're titling, "Why I Believe". And we'd like to send you a free copy or a CD of our study. So just mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send us a e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number: 1-800-321-8633. If you are looking for a church home, call us and let us help you find one. We also stream this program on our website www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, and then we'll read from Acts 20:28 to 32, and we'll explore our need for the church.

Our reading today comes from Acts chapter 20 verses 28 to 32. And here Paul is meeting with the elders of the church at Ephesus. And a very sad occasion as he's kind of saying goodbye to them. And he says this to them beginning in verse 28.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

False religion and false churches should never stop us in our pursuit for true faith and true churches. Let's pray together. Oh Father we're thankful that Your word builds us up and gives us

strength and helps us to see the difference between right and wrong. Father help us to love the church as much as Your son Jesus loved it and purchased it with His own blood. This is our pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Yes, the Lord Jesus concerned, a, considered the church as necessary. He wants everyone to be a member of His church and to worship 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 belong to you or me; it belongs to the Lord. He built it. After Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16 verse 18, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (that is the confession) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." Yes, Jesus built His church, and not even His death could prevent it.

The church belongs to the Lord, because He purchased it. The apostle Paul by inspirations told the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:28, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Now, Jesus loved the church enough to die for it, how can we think so little of it. The church must be precious, very precious, to the Lord.

The Bible reveals how closely related Christ is to the church in Ephesians 1 verse 22 to 23: it says, "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, 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 fullness of Christ. We must never, never, 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 bride. The Bible says in Ephesians 5:25 to 27, "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." Now, Jesus has gone to great lengths to bless and to sanctify the church. He wants her to be radiant with glory. Jesus values 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 angry, just slander his wife. Do you think the Lord Jesus will look kindly on anyone who slanders His bride?

Now, I want to distinguish the church that the Lord Jesus calls His bride from what people today think when they hear the word "church." What I'm speaking about is the Lord's church that's described in the New Testament. Many religious groups who call themselves "churches" are nothing like the New Testament church. They differ in name, in organization, in doctrine, in mission, and in worship. They're often more a reflection of our culture than what God intended for the church to be. Some groups have so little spiritual value and content, it's no wonder people see it as unnecessary.

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

Well, why is the church so necessary? Well, there's several reasons. First, the Lord adds those He saves to His church. When the Jews at Pentecost heard Peter preach, they were pierced to the heart and they wanted to know what to do. Peter replied that they must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Acts 2:41 says, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three 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." Now the Lord forgives us at baptism and adds us to His church. And baptism was the time that they were 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 in Colossians 1:13 to 14, "For He (that is God) rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Now just as the Lord grants forgiveness when one repents and is baptized, so the Lord adds the baptized to His church. Now the church is the kingdom of Christ!

When John wrote to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 1, he revealed to them what Christ had done for them. The Bible says in Revelation 1:4 to 6: John to the seven churches that are in Asia: "Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

The book of Revelation addresses the people who had come into a kingdom and were priests to God. John taught that "we" Christians "are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5 and verse 19). You see there are but two 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. You remember the Lord said in Matthew 16:18 to 19, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom 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." Well now, why would the Lord build one thing and then give Peter keys to something else? He doesn't do that. You see, the church is the kingdom of God today.

Well, how do I know that? Well, think about this. In Acts 20:28, you'll recall that the Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. 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, they sang this new song to the Lord Jesus in Revelation 5 verses 9 and 10, "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 kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." 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 outside the church. The church contains the cleansed, but the others outside are still in sin. The kingdom contains priests to God, but outside there are no priests to God. The Bible says in 1

John 5 and verse 12 that, "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." Being in the Lord's church is vital to our eternal salvation.

Ephesians chapter 2 contrasts the difference between people who are in the world 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 before they became members of the church or the body of Christ. He says in Ephesians 2:12 to 13, "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. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

And in verse 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 citizens 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 temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Now before, they were strangers without hope and without God. But 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 family. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 3 and verse 15, "but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct 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." Now in this passage Paul identified the church 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. Now compare these two verses: Galatians 3:26 to 27 with 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 13. 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." You see, baptism is an act of faith that makes us children of God. 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 this verse says that we're baptized into the one body. Well, Ephesians 1:22 to 23 teaches the body of Christ is 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.

Now, when we realize the church is God's family, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the saved, and 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 optional. Are you a member of the church that Jesus built? I hope you are.

Let's pray together. Oh, Father we're thankful that through Your love and Your grace and through the sacrifice of Jesus and how His blood purchased the church. That we could be a part of Your family. And Father help us to love You as our father and to be children who do Your will always. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Many people claim to be members of the church, but they aren't active. 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 Lord. The Bible says in Hebrews 10:24 to 25, "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 one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." The

Lord wants us to encourage each other to love and good works and not forsake assembling with other Christians. You can't encourage other Christians to stay faithful if you quit going to church altogether.

Now I know some of you can't attend worship because of your health. And the Lord understands your situation. But if you can attend worship yet choose 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 door 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.

We hope you've been blessed by today's study. We're offering this free little book "Why I Believe" that include this particular program and of the ones this month. And we'd like to send this to you a free printed copy or a CD of this message, so 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 the Search office at 1-800-321-8633. Now our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org. and on our YouTube, on YouTube, on our channel, "Searchtvministry." Why not subscribe to it and watch us regularly. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses, just write to us and let us know that you want one. We offer free study sheets that go with our programs. Now they're free online or you can call and request them. Now if you call us don't worry we won't hassle you for money or put you on a mailing list. We'll only do the things that you ask us.

Please attend worship at one of the churches of Christ in your area. Why, they're the reason that we don't ask for money, they support us. Now if you are looking for a healthy church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ love guest and they want visitors, and you'll be so welcomed there and glad you visited. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program and encourage them to watch it. As always we say, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.