

"Membership in the Church"

If you could be a child of God and a citizen of the kingdom of God, would you? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders and this is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way." Today, we're exploring what it means to be a member of the Lord's church. Stay with us.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way. Romans 15 and verse 4 says, that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." The Bible gives us hope on every page. Scripture reveals God's plan to bless and redeem man from His weaknesses and sins. The Scripture teaches us how to live so that we may be free from the trapping of sin and find a home with God in heaven. Thanks for joining us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Many people today say, "Jesus, yes; but the church, no." About 80 percent of Americans believe you can be a "good Christian" without ever being a member of any church. Many want to be Christians but not members of any "organized religion." Some people have decided to become Christians "at large" or to establish small "house churches"; but they hold the organized church today in contempt. Can a Christian please the Lord Jesus and refuse to be a part of the church He built? Is attending church and being a church member optional?

Some quit worshipping at church because they had a bad experience, and we're sorry for that. Some leave the church because they have sinned and are ashamed. Some stopped going because they disagree with some teaching of the church. Many in our culture think churches are too "judgmental" and they've quit because they don't want to hear about sin. Others have simply gotten too busy for God and don't have time to worship. I hope you will put God first, and I want us to explore the value of the church that Jesus built and purchased. It was His church and He built it for a reason, and you'll be blessed to be a member.

Now, if you want to know more about church membership, we offer the information in this little booklet, on this program. If you'd like a copy of "Christ's Glorious Church" or a 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. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

Well, the Edmond church will now worship in song, and we'll read from Romans 12 verses 4 to 8, and then we'll examine membership in the church of Christ.

Our reading today comes from Romans chapter 12 verses 4 through 8. "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." That's a wonderful reading from the word of God. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that you have given us gifts to use in your service. Help us to be busy using them, and to be people who love you and service you always. And, may your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. In Jesus name, amen.

I hear people speak about "being the church," and they have an important message. We must be the body of Christ in the world today. The notion that we can "be the church" but not be a part of any local congregation, however, is an unscriptural idea. God expects His people to assemble with one

another for worship and ministry. The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 10:24-25, "and 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." In the New Testament, when a Christian quit assembling with the church, he was falling away from God. He was leaving the faith. He was hurting himself and hurting the church by returning to the world.

Jesus built the church to bless us. Solomon said, "Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27 and verse 17). People in the church make each other stronger, better, and more faithful and committed. Each Christian needs the example of love and faith that his brothers and sisters give him. Each Christian needs to so live and so love that he provides an example of commitment to the cause of Christ. Saying, "I love Christ, but I won't go to church," sends a mixed signal. It says, "I love God, but I'll choose which commands I'll obey and which I won't." This person isn't really obeying God but is obeying himself and his own wishes. Jackie and I engraved some words of Scripture in our wedding rings. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 4 verses 9 to 12, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there's not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they can keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart." God knew His people needed the strength and love that each one could give the other to grow and to remain strong in faith. Two are better than one, because they have each other.

Now where would we be without Bible teachers and godly examples? If you have children, don't cheat them out of a spiritual education. It is an absolute shame that nearly 40 percent of the young people in America grow up without any spiritual guidance. They need the help of God to face the temptations and pitfalls of life. Your children's spiritual education isn't complete if it lacks a study of the Bible. You can educate their minds, science and history and all the other things, but if you fail to educate their souls, you haven't prepared them for the day when Jesus comes again. You see, they won't know Him but will it be like the five foolish virgins who didn't have oil for the lamps and found themselves shut out of the kingdom.

Now someone converted you to Christ, and they were likely faithful church members. They not only taught you the gospel but also taught you about the church. Bible stories are not myths or legends; they are historical accounts of God's interaction with man. The Bible helps us to make sense of where we came from, why we're here, and what will happen to us after we die. And we need, we need this spiritual education.

The church is God's kingdom in this life, and heaven is God's kingdom in the next life. We enter the church here so that we may enter the kingdom of heaven in the days to come. Philippians 3 verses 20 to 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." Now people who have the hope of heaven want to live for the Lord.

1 John 3 verses 1 to 4 says, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world doesn't know us, because it didn't know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, that we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who practices

sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." I tell you, church helps us focus on the things that matter and to keep ourselves ready for the return of our Lord Jesus.

Now, we ask, "What was the church like in the New Testament?" Well the word "church" refers to an assembly, a congregation, that was called together for a specific purpose. After Paul had established several congregations on his first missionary journey, he returned to those congregations, strengthening and encouraging them. Acts 14 and verse 23 says, "When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." Later, in Philippians 1 verse 1, Paul wrote "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers (that is elders) and deacons." Did you notice that all the members were called "saints" and that's not a special class? There are no "super-saints" in the Lord's church; everyone is important and loved.

Now New Testament churches were organized with established leaders. They were visible congregations, meeting at set times and in set locations. Paul mentions many of the members of the church at Philippi or Rome or Corinth by name. Yes, sometimes churches met in a family's house. But in those days a large house could hold a congregation. In some cases, congregations met outside or in caves. At that time the church was often persecuted and considered illegal. The earliest church buildings date about 250 A.D. Although they could not openly show themselves, churches assembled to worship and to encourage each other.

Now in the early church God gave leaders, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4 verses 11 to 13). You see, God knew that His people needed training and equipping to do the work that He called them to do: to take the gospel to the whole world, and to build up the church, and to render help to those who are in need.

Now salvation is never without obligation. To be a member of the church means I'm responsible to the Lord and to my brethren. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 14 verse 27, that "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." When you become a Christian, the Lord adds you to His church. And from that day forward, you're God's servant and you belong to Christ. You're not your own. And since you belong to Christ, you must consider how your life reflects on Christ and on his church.

2 Timothy 2 verse 19 says, "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'That the Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.'" People who live for the Lord should live so as to bring glory and honor to the name of Christ. Sadly, some Christians by their ugly language and wicked behavior bring shame on the Lord, and they bring shame on His church. When You become a Christian, you decide to live the moral life that Jesus Christ teaches. And that means that you must leave sin behind. Paul asked in Romans 6 verses 1 and 2, "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"

My friend, we're obligated to leave sin, but we're also obligated to support the church, and to do that by our gifts and also by our attendance. As we mentioned Hebrews 10 verses 24 and 25 says, "let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the habit of some is, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." When we get involved in the worship of the church, we influence others to get involved. By attending worship we get to know our brothers and sisters, and we can encourage them

to stay faithful to the Lord, and we can stimulate them to love God, and we can stimulate them to be kind and serve others.

God also expects His people to financially support the work of the church. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9 verses 6 to 8, "Now this I say, that he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."

As Christians we have an obligation to one another. Titus 3 and verse 14 says, that "Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful." 1 John 3 verses 17 and 18 says, "But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, well how does the love of God abide in him? Little children (he says), let us not love with just word or with tongue, but love in deed and in truth." Now we show love for God by caring for others and helping them.

My friend, the best thing you can do to bless another's life is to teach him about the Lord. The primary work of the church is to preach the gospel to every creature. People need more than physical food; they need the Word of God to live spiritually. You remember the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 4 verse 4, "It is written, that 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" 1 Corinthians 15 verse 58 says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

Now someone says, "Well Phil, we went to church but we had a bad experience at church, and we won't be going back." My friend, I'm sorry that you had that bad experience, but was it the whole church or was it just an individual that hurt you? The Bible teaches that when a fellow Christian sins against you, you go to that person privately and you talk to him, trying to restore the relationship (that's from Matthew 18 verse 15). Many times people, rather than following the instructions of the Lord, just simply quit and separate themselves from other godly people that they really need in their lives. Don't quit the church over some rude brother or sister. Talk to that person and work it out.

Now I became a Christian because of Jesus. He's my Lord and Savior. I gave myself to Him. And I want to go to heaven and live with Him forever. And my pride isn't as important as going to heaven. So...I won't let anything, I won't let anything, or anyone come between my God and me. There will always be rude, selfish, and immature people; but if the Lord was gracious enough to forgive me, I ought to be gracious enough to forgive those who sin against me. I don't want to risk my soul, because I couldn't get along with a brother or sister in the church. I'd rather forgive and be forgiven than to hold a grudge and lose my soul. Wouldn't you? Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to be forgiving of others just as You have been forgiving of us. And to love others as You have loved us. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Some say they want to follow Jesus but have no use for the church; but if we enter into a relationship with the Lord, we must also embrace the Lord's family. The Bible calls the church the household or family of God in 1 Timothy 3 and verse 15. Now the church is not only God's family but also His creation. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church." And He loved the church so much that He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20 and verse 28). We cannot and we must not set the church aside so quickly. To reject the church is to reject Jesus Christ Himself.

Now we all realize the church is made up of fallible people, and sometimes they fail to measure up to the will of God, I know that. But before we give up on the church, let's remember that we all, both

you and me, we all “have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” according to Romans 3 and verse 23. You see we all stand in need of God’s grace. I don’t know any perfect Christians, but I do know forgiven brothers and sisters in the church who seek to live righteously and you know what, they grieve when they sin. Amazingly, God’s gracious love moves our hearts to walk in the light and to be in His family. And so we invite you to join us in serving the Lord as a member of His family, the church.

To become a Christian and to be added by the Lord to His church, believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Repent of your sins, every one of them and turn your heart to the Lord. Confess the Lord Jesus before others and be baptized into Christ. Now baptism is an immersion in water. And when you’re baptized into Christ, Romans 6:3 says you’re baptized into His death. Verse 6 says that in baptism we are crucified with Christ “in order that our body of sin might be done away with.” In baptism we’re buried with Christ and we’re raised to walk in newness of life. And we’re born again. When you’re baptized, the Lord Jesus will add you to His church, His family. And I tell you nothing, nothing, nothing is more important.

Well we hope you’ve appreciated today’s study about the church. This month we’re offering this free little booklet, entitled, “Christ’s Glorious Church.” Now if you get one, it’ll be a blessing to you, and we’re offering them free. If you want a copy or a CD of this message, 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. I also want to mention to you that you can also find us on You Tube.

Or you can call the Search office toll-free, 1-800-321-8633. Now our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org. We won’t ask you for money or put you on a list.

But we do ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. And if you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one. We’ll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend about the program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.