

"Why I Am a Member"

If I ask you to do something really important, I should have a good reason. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." 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 to 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, so I'm prepared also to 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, His family, His kingdom, and His vineyard. You can't separate the church from Jesus or Jesus from His church. To embrace one is to embrace the other. There is no other way.

Well I hope that our study today will be a blessing to you. 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 at www.searchtv.org.

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

Our reading today comes from Acts chapter 2, verses 38 to 41. This is on the day of Pentecost, and Peter has preached a strong sermon about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and He has pieced the hearts of people, and they ask what must we do.

And 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 great reading of the beginning of the church, and how people responded to the gospel invitation. Let's pray together. Father, We're thankful for the words found in scripture, so that we

might know how the church began and how to be added to the church by Your Son Jesus. And Father we pray that we may do His will always. In Jesus name, Amen.

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

First, I'm a member because Jesus loves the church and died for it. His attitude should shape our attitudes. Ephesians 5: 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 (or the family) of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." You see 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. And 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. Well how can I think that I'm following Him, when I'm not willing to be a 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; no one (no one) comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14 verse 6). The only way to have the Father, to go to heaven, is through Jesus Christ. Acts 4 and 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.

And the Lord expects His people to be wise and loving. And according to Matthew and verse 24 a wise person is one who hears His words and does them. The foolish person hears His word but does not do them. I want the Lord Jesus to count me wise! And the idea that we can do as we please and not do what the Lord says and be a faithful Christian is a mistaken idea. 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 verse 46). If the congregation that you attend isn't following the words of the Lord found in scripture, you're putting your soul at risk.

The Lord Jesus expects His people to obey Him as Lord! And Jesus said in John 14 and verse 15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Now obedience is how we show our love for Him! 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." I want to abide in God's love and favor. And to do that I must follow the example of Jesus by keeping the Lord's commandments.

And this is why in churches of Christ we immerse penitent believers for the forgiveness of their sins, just like they did in Acts 2:38, rather than sprinkle infants who don't know what's happening. This is why we sing a cappella as a congregation rather than have choirs and use instruments of music. This is why we have a plurality of elders as our leaders rather than have one pastor system or a single bishop. This is why we observe the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day. This is why we give cheerfully and freely as we have been prospered. This is why we go into all the world with the pure gospel and teach people all the Lord commanded us. This is why we help the needy, live godly lives, tell the truth, and love all people. This is why we can't pretend sin is okay, or that false doctrine is as good as the truth, or that repentance is unnecessary, or that morality depends just on the situation. Oh no, we can't do that.

Third, I'm a member 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." Well that number, "their number" that's used in that passage is a reference to the "church."

You see, the Lord knew that we would need a family on earth to help us, to teach us, to keep us strong in the faith. Paul said in Romans 15:14, "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, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

The love of Christ and the grace of God makes us all better. Worship at church, fellowship with brothers and sisters, and Bible study enriches our lives and shapes us into people who live godly lives and love each other. We need each other. 1 Peter 2:9 to 10 describes who we are as Christians and members of the church: "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 once were not a people, but now you're the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." You see the church provides the basis for the world to know the Lord and to know the gospel message of salvation. Oh we need the church.

Fourth, I'm a member because being "in Christ" means being in His body, the church. Galatians 3 verses 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." 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. 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 verse 5, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that 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 were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

The Scriptures clearly teach baptism is the time we enter the body of Christ. Now we know the body of Christ is the church, because the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 1:22 and 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."

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. 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." Separate from Christ, excluded, strangers to promise, having no hope and without God! My friend, there is a huge difference between being "in Christ" and being "outside of Christ." According to Ephesians 2 and 1, outside of Christ we're dead in our trespasses and sins.

Ephesians 2:19 describes what it means to be "in Christ": "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household (God's family)." I tell you, if you are in Christ and His church, you are in God's family, a fellow citizen with 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." 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 3:20 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." 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, you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time." Yes, I want to go to heaven! And the way to heaven is through Jesus and His church!

Let's pray together. Oh Father, help us always to look to You as our Father and to the Lord Jesus as our Savior, so that we might be acceptable in Your sight, and live with you forever and ever. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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

When you give your heart and life to Christ in obedience to the gospel, the Lord will add you to His church. And that's the only way that you can enter the Lord's church; the Lord must add you. And He

will add you when you place your trust in Him and firmly believe in Him and His teaching. Believing the gospel means believing in His death on the cross, and 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 to turn to righteousness; and that's repentance. It means that 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. Now when you're baptized, that is immersed in water, the Lord will wash away your sins, He'll cause you to be born again, and He'll add you to His church. And you'll enter the kingdom of heaven and clothe you'll yourselves with Christ. And God will consider you as one of His children. You see, baptism is the time that God acts upon you and makes you one of His own. And I hope and pray that you'll be baptized and become a member of the Lord's church, and do it today.

We hope that today's study has stirred you to be a member of the Lord's church. Now if you'd like a printed copy of today's message, 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. Now you can also find the Search program on YouTube. Just subscribe to our channel, or go to our channel SearchTVMinistry. We hope you'll go again and again and watch the program and tell a friend about it. Why not subscribe to that, and get all of the notifications about the program as it comes out.

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So 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. Well 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.