

"The Church Matters"

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." And today we're exploring what God says about the church!

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're 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 are 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 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 have never read the 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 my wants and desires. We've become self-centered, thinking Jesus ought to be 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 He that built or what place it has in His heart. The Lord never thought of the church as an option; in His eyes it's necessary.

Now if you want to think a little more about "the church matters", we offer the information on this program free. If you'd like a printed copy of our study and 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: 1-800-321-8633. Now if you're looking for a church home, call us and let us help you find one. We also stream this program on our website at 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 is from Acts chapter 20 verses 28 to 32. The apostle Paul is called the elders of the churches, of the church rather of Ephesus to himself and he's talking to them. Not know whether he would see them again or not. He said:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made 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.

That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that You through Your son Jesus built a church. And Father that His blood was able to purchase it. And

Father we pray that we will always honor the church and our relationship with You and to do what is right and follow Your word. In Jesus name, Amen.

Yes, the Lord Jesus considered the church as necessary. And He wants everyone to be an active 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 that He built 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. And after Peter confessed Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (that is the confession Peter made) 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 if Jesus loved the church enough to die for it, how can we think so little of it. The church must be precious to the Lord.

The Bible reveals how closely related Christ is to His church in Ephesians 1:22 to 23 it says: "And He put all things in subjection under His (that is the Lord's) feet, and gave Him (Jesus) 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. And 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. And we must never separate Christ from His church or the church from Christ.

The church is extremely precious to the Lord; 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 really mock and insult Jesus Christ. They're saying Jesus is foolish to sanctify and glorify the church. Now if you wish to make a man angry, just slander his wife. Do you think that the Lord Jesus will look kindly on anyone who slanders His bride?

Now, I want to distinguish the church the Lord Jesus calls His bride from what people today think when they hear the word "church." What I am speaking about is the Lord's church 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 of 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.

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 to be pulled into a false hope by something that calls itself church but differs greatly from the church Jesus built as found, again, in the New Testament. The Scriptures clearly make the church Jesus built a necessity for us to embrace if we wish to please God.

Now why is the church so necessary? Well there are several reasons. First, the Lord adds those that He saves to His church. When the Jews at Pentecost heard Peter preach, they were pierced to the heart and wanted to know what to do. Peter replied that they must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Acts 2 and verse 41 it 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 ("that is the church") day by day those who were being saved." The Lord forgives us at baptism and adds us to His church. Baptism was the time they were forgiven or saved.

And 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 one 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 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 or His kingdom. 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 (the ones released from their sins by His blood) to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Now the book of Revelation addresses 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 (the devil)" (1 John 5:19). There are but two kingdoms: 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 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." Why would the Lord build one thing and give Peter keys to something else? He doesn't do that. You see, the church is the kingdom of God today.

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. Now we have no record anywhere in the New Testament that the blood of Jesus ever purchased anything but the church and the people in it. The twenty-four elders, however, sang this new song to the Lord Jesus in Revelation 5:9 to 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 different 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, "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. Now the apostle Paul reminds those who came out of paganism at Ephesus of what they had before they became members of the church or the body of Christ. Ephesians 2:12 to 13 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. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Later on in verse 19 to 22, Paul describes them after they became Christians. And he said, "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." Before they were strangers without hope and without God. Now 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 3:15, "but in case I am 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." 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. Compare these two verses. First, Galatians 3:26 to 7, "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 baptism as an act of faith is what makes us children of God. Second, let's consider 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by (or in) 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 body. Well what is the body? It's the church. Ephesians 1:22 to 23 taught us the body of Christ is the church. So 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, and the blood bought institution, body of Christ, then we see why the church is so very important in God's eyes. Now being a member of the Lord's church is not optional. My friend are you a member of the church that Jesus built? Do you belong to Him? Are you one of His? If not I hope you will become one. A member an active member of the body of Christ, the church.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're so thankful to be Your children to be in Your kingdom the church, to be Your people that You love and that You care for. And Father we're thankful for the eternal life that You give to us. Help us always Father to value You and to value Your body, Your kingdom, the church. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Many people claim to be members of the church, but they aren't active. They've stopped worshiping at church or supporting it. But their actions, by them, they've actually abandoned the church and in that sense they have 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 (that is abandoning completely) 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. 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. And when you’re baptized the blood of Jesus will wash away your sins and cause you to be added to church. You’ll become a child of God, born again into His family. And 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.

Now we hope that you’ve been blessed by today’s study on how the Church really does Matters. If you want a free printed copy of this message and 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.

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Please attend worship at one of the churches of Christ in your area. They’re the reason that we don’t ask for money. If you are looking for a church home, call us and we’ll help you find one. Churches of Christ they love and they want guests, and you know what if you show up you’ll not only be welcomed but you’ll also be wanted. They want you to be one of their family. We’ll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.