

"The Church Is Necessary"

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 going to explore what God says about 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. 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. And 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 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. And 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.

And 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. And 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 that He 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 study more about the church, we offer the information on this program free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send us an e-mail searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free number: that number is 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, we'll read from Acts 20:28 to 32 and then we'll take a look at the Lord's church.

Our reading today comes from the book of Acts chapter 20 verses 28 to 32.

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.

That was Paul's words to the elders of the church at Ephesus. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father help us always to be concerned about doing Your will and hearing those that would lead us astray. We're thankful that Your son was willing purchase the church with His own blood. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

Yes, the Lord Jesus considered the church as necessary. He wants everyone to be a member of His church and to attend worship regularly. The idea that you can be a good Christian and yet not be a

member of the church is not from the heart of God. Anyone who takes a close look at the New Testament will see that the church is quite necessary to our relationship with the Lord. The church Jesus built does not belong to you and me. It belongs to the Lord.

He built it. And after Peter confessed Jesus as 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 that He was the Christ) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." Yes, Jesus took the time to build His church, and not even His death could prevent it.

The church belongs to the Lord, because He purchased it with His own blood. 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.

Now the Bible reveals how closely related Christ is to the church in Ephesians 1:22 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 is 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 most precious to the Lord; in fact He considers the church as His bride. The Bible says in Ephesians 5 verses 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 (that is the church) would be holy and blameless." Now Jesus has gone to great lengths to bless and to sanctify the church. He wants the church to be radiant with glory. And we need to be careful how we think of the church.

When people slander the church or make it trivial, they mock and insult really Jesus Christ Himself. 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, at this point, 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, what I am speaking about is the Lord's church described in the New Testament. Now many religious groups who call themselves "churches" are not anything like the New Testament church. They differ in name, in organization, in doctrine, in mission, and even in worship. They're often more a reflection of human culture than of what God intended for the church to be. Some groups have so little spiritual value and content, it is no wonder people see them 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 be pulled into a false hope by something that calls itself a church but differs greatly from the church that Jesus built in the New Testament. Now the Scriptures clearly make the church Jesus built a necessity for us to attend if we wish to please God.

Well now, why is the church so necessary? Well, there are several reasons. The first is this: the Lord adds the saved 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. Well, Peter replied that they must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Acts 2 and verse 41 says, "So then, those who had received

his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” Now in verse 47 the Bible says, “And the Lord was adding to their number (that is to the church) day by day those who were being saved.” The Lord adds the saved or the baptized forgiven to His church. Baptism was the time that they were forgiven or saved and when they were added.

When a person is saved, the Lord Himself who adds that person to His church. So, 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's 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 (in) 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: that 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.”

Now when John wrote the seven churches of Asia, he spoke to a 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). There are but two kingdoms: and that's the domain of darkness and the kingdom of His beloved Son. Well, 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 verses 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 why would the Lord build one thing and then give Peter keys to something else? Well, 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 and verse 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. Well the twenty-four elders, however, sang this new song to the Lord Jesus in Revelation 5 verses 9 to 10, they said “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. (And) You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” The same blood did not purchase two different things—the church is that blood-bought kingdom.

Now being in the church means that you're blood-bought, but there is no promise of being blood-bought to those outside the church. The church contains the cleansed but the others outside are not cleansed. 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; (and) whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” You see, 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 had before they became members of the church or body of Christ. And he says about them in Ephesians 2 verses 12 and 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. (And then he said,) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Then in verses 19 to 22, Paul describes them after they became Christians, after they became members of the church. 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, (God's family) 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. Now they are God's family and fellow citizens in God's kingdom the church.

Oh yes, the church is vitally 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, he said "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 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. And if you claim to be in God's family but then say church membership is unnecessary, my friend, you are confused and may be deceiving yourself.

Now the very act that puts one into the family of God is the same act that puts one into the church. Compare these two verses. First, Galatians 3:26 to 27, he 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 baptism as an act of faith is what makes us children of God. And then second, let's consider 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 13, which 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 were baptized into the body. Well, Ephesians 1:22-23 taught us that the body of Christ is the church. So, God makes one His child a member of the church, the body of Christ, and He does that, both of those things, through baptism.

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, then we realize all those things, we will see why the church is so, so, important in God's eyes. Being a member of the Lord's church is not optional; my friend are you a member of the church that Jesus built? The one that you can read about in the New Testament. I hope you are. If not I hope you will become one. Let's pray together. Oh Father we're so thankful that though Your grace You made a way that we can become part of Your family. And be able to live with You forever and ever. And Father we're thankful that Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself to purchase the church. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

Many people claim to be members of the church, but they aren't active members. They've ceased to attend church or to support it. By their actions they've actually abandoned the church and in that sense abandoned the Lord. The Bible says in Hebrews 10 verses 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. The Lord understands your situations. 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 the 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 you've stopped attending, why not come back to the Lord and to the church. Get right with God.

Well, we hope you've been blessed by today's study of God's Word. If you want a free printed copy or a CD of this 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.

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So 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. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and do tell a friend about this program. Tell them that you watch and encourage them to watch too. Let them know that you've gained a great deal from it. And 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.