

## We Need the Church Acts 20:28-32

Many people think you can be a good Christian without being a member of any church. We will examine this thought this morning.

If you mention the word “**church**”, people would think of different things. Some see the church as optional; others as an institution. Some would say the church is made up of hypocrites; and others want to reinvent the church to fit modern culture. Everyone seems to have an opinion of what the church is or should be – even those who have never read the Bible or haven’t visited a church recently, if ever.

Few want to know what the founder “*Jesus Christ*” envisioned for the church He built. But we do need to understand that Jesus never thought of the church as an option; in His eyes it was necessary.

The church that Jesus built doesn’t belong to you or to me; it belongs to the Lord. He built it. After Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus, in **Mt. 16:18** said, ***“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*** Jesus built His church, and not even His death could prevent it.

*As a matter of fact, His death played a key role in forming the church,* because the Bible informs us that He purchased it with His blood. In **Acts 20:28** we read, ***“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”*** These words of Paul were spoken to the Elders of the church at Ephesus. For Paul it was important for the elders to watch over the church, because of the high price Jesus paid for each person within the church. If Jesus loved the church enough to die for it, how then can we think so little of it. The church is very precious to the Lord.

Paul in **Eph. 1:22-23** reveals to us how closely Christ is related to the church, ***“And he put all things 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.”*** The church is His body; it is the fulness of Christ, and He is the head of it. We cannot separate Christ from the church or the church from Christ.

The church is so precious to the Lord; so much so that he considers it His bride. In **Eph. 5:25-27** we read, ***“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”*** Jesus has gone to great lengths to bless and sanctify the church. He wants her to be radiant with glory. Jesus values the church that much.

When people slander the church or make it trivial, they in fact are mocking and insulting the Lord Jesus Christ, who pour his entire self into the church. If you wish to make a man angry, just slander his wife. Do you think the Lord looks kindly toward those who slander His bride?

Now, it is important that we distinguish the church that the Lord calls His bride from what people think of when they hear the word “**church**.” Many religious groups who call themselves “churches” are nothing like the New Testament Church. *They differ in name, in organization, in doctrine, in their mission, and in their worship.* Too often what many wish to call a church *is nothing more than a reflection of our culture* and not necessarily what God intended the church to be. Some groups have so little spiritual value and content that it is no wonder that so many people see it as unnecessary.

This difference of what we see today and what the Bible teaches confuses and causes people to stray away from the will of God. More than ever, people need to know the truth revealed in God’s word about the church. We need to see clearly what God desires rather than be pulled into a false hope by something that calls itself church but differs greatly from the church that Jesus built as found in the N.T. Scriptures clearly make the church that Jesus built a necessity for us to engage if we wish to please God.

**Why is the church so necessary?** *Let’s examine some 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. And then in **Acts 2:41** we read, “*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*” Then in **verse 47** we read, “*And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*” The Lord forgives us at baptism and adds us to His church. You see baptism was that time where they were forgiven or saved.

And when the Lord saves them, He adds them 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 1:13-14**, “*He has delivered 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.*” Just as the Lord grants forgiveness when one repents and is baptized, so the Lord adds the baptized person to His church. 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 has done for them. The Bible says in **Revelation 1:4-6**, “*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 kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*”

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*” (**1 Jn. 5:19**). **There are but two kingdoms:** *The domain of darkness and the kingdom of His beloved Son.*

The Lord Jesus himself spoke of the church as a kingdom. In **Mt. 16:18-19** we read, *“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

Why would Jesus build one thing and then give Peter keys to something else, if the church is not the kingdom? He doesn't do that. The church is the kingdom of God today.

Why am I so sure you ask? I want you to think about this. In **Acts 20:28** you will recall that he Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. We have no record anywhere in the N.T. that the blood of Jesus ever purchased anything but the church. The twenty-four elders, however, sang this new song to the Lord Jesus in **Revelation 5:9-10**, they sang, *“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”* The blood of Jesus didn't purchase two separate things, no – the church is that blood-bought kingdom.

**Second**, being in the church means that you are blood-bought, but there's no promise of being blood-bought to those outside of 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 Jn. 5:12**, *“Whoever has the Son has life; 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.

In **Ephesians chapter 2** Paul 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 the body of Christ. **Eph. 2:12-13** says, *“remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated 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 once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”*

Then in **verses 19-22**, Paul describes them after they became Christians, *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”* Before they were strangers without hope and without God. Now they are 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. In **1 Tim. 3:15**, Paul told Timothy, *“if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”* 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 you think that church membership is not necessary, then you are confused and may be deceiving yourself.

The very act that puts you into the family of God, is also what puts you into the church. Let's compare two verses. **First, Gal. 3:26-27**, *“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* In this verse Paul tells us that baptism is an act of faith that makes us sons of God. **Second**, now let's consider **1 Cor. 12:13**, *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”* This verse says we are baptized into the one body. If you remember **Eph. 1:22-23** taught us that 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, that is the church.

When we realize that the church is God's family, that it is the bride of Christ, that it is the body of Christ, that it is the saved, that it is blood bought by the blood of Christ, then we can see why the church is so important in God's eyes. Being a member of the Lord's church is not optional.

Many people claim to be members of the church, but they aren't active. They have stop worshipping at the church or supporting it. By their actions they have actually abandoned the church and in that sense, they have abandoned the Lord. **Hebrew 10:24-25** tells us, *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”* One of the Lord's purposes for having a church is so that we might encourage each other to love and good works, so forsaking the assembly means you are not doing the Lord's will – You can't encourage other Christians to remain faithful if you quit going to church altogether.

Now I am aware that some cannot attend worship because of health. The Lord understands such situation. But if you can attend and choose not to, you are abandoning the Lord's plan to help others make it to heaven, and thus you're actually abandoning the Lord. The Lord loves his people and He knows his church. If you quit serving Him, He knows it. When you stop attending, you also open the door to other temptations as well. *To stay spiritually healthy, stay in church.*

We have discussed today what you need to do to become a Christian and have God add you to His church. If your ready to obey, please contact me and we will help you get right with the Lord.