



“Why You Need the Church”

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Many today claim *they* don't need the church in order to be a Christian. There are many reasons why. Some point to hypocrites or corruption they have witnessed in the church. Those things can lead people to say, *I live a purer Christian life than those people so why should I associate myself with them?* Of course, keep in mind that the temple and synagogue of Jesus' day had their share of hypocrites and blind guides. Though Jesus rebuked and condemned their sin and hypocrisy, it still did not diminish His love for the house of God, nor did it stop Him from frequenting those places.

Others say that with all the spiritual resources available online or on television, they can learn or grow that way. They feel that technology has really replaced the need to physically attend a church service or be a member of a church. I've received enough mail through the years to know that there are some well-meaning people who look at this program as their "virtual church." In fact, I've noticed some ministries and churches encouraging people watching online or on television to become members of their "media church" and worship along with them from home, and send offerings to them just like they would if they chose to be a member of a local church.

Then there are those who say, *I worship God wherever I am and serve God in my own way. I try to do good and help people. That's my church. Or I attend the church of nature. I worship God when I'm out fishing, on the golf course, and sitting up in the deer stand.* But is that God's design for you? Do those things constitute an acceptable alternative to traditional church membership and faithful attendance in a local church?

Acts 2:41-42 "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

We learn in **verse 47** that this is speaking of the church. These events took place on the Day of Pentecost, the day when Jesus established the church. Since that time, the Lord has added every saved person to that church. These verses indicate that those who were added to the church began functioning as local bodies of believers united in Christ. As the gospel began to spread throughout Judea and ultimately throughout the Roman Empire in years to come, local bodies of believers were established, united in Christ, and that's what the local church is. Is that model still relevant today, or can one be a Christian and choose not to be a part of the life and activity of the local church? As always, we will let the Bible speak about that subject today.

The Bible uses the word that is translated *church* in two or three different ways. The Greek word is *ekklesia* and it means *called out* or *an assembly*. Sometimes the term is used in a spiritual sense. For example, it is used to refer to all the saved called out of the world and spiritually assembled in Christ. In other words, it would refer to the spiritual relationship that all the saved the world over and throughout time have to Christ and thus to each other. This spiritual assembly is not a literal assembly of people that can be literally seen. Rather, you might think of it as an idea or a spiritual union or relationship.

Other times, the Bible uses the term to refer to a physical congregation in a given locality. In fact, many of the times the word *church* is used in scripture, this is how it's used.

Acts 14:23 "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

Acts 14:27 "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles."

Acts 15:4 "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them."

Acts 18:22 "And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch."

I Corinthians 1:2 "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:"

I Corinthians 16:1 "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye."

I Corinthians 16:19 "The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."

Romans 16:16 "...The churches of Christ salute you."

By using the term *churches* in the last passage, Paul obviously means the *congregations of the Lord's people* throughout the land. Each reference refers to distinct congregations of Christ in cities or provinces throughout the world. In **I Corinthians 14**, Paul refers even more specifically to the church as the people of a congregation meeting together in one assembly.

I Corinthians 14:19 "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."

When Paul says *in the church*, he is referring to the actual physical assembly of the church because that is the context of that chapter. So, from all of these passages, it is obvious that God's design for the church of Christ was to be manifest in this world in the form of congregations of Christians throughout the world wherever the gospel is preached and believers are found. Does the Lord still add daily to the

church those who are being saved (**Acts 2:47**)? I contend that nothing has changed in the mind of God and in His scheme of redemption and the results of it. If the Lord is still adding every person who is saved to the church, does that include identifying with and being part of a local congregation of people of like precious faith? That's what happened in the first century, and I again contend that nothing has changed in God's plan of dealing with His people, even today. New technologies, new philosophies, and modern trends and innovations do not set aside God's original design for the church.

There are several reasons why I believe every Christian needs the church. Why YOU, my friend, need the church. If you are follower of Jesus Christ, there are reasons why you cannot be a faithful follower of Jesus without His church. You cannot be true to God and a loyal disciple without being a faithful and active part of the local church for the following reasons.

I. Because of the church's relationship to Jesus

The Bible employs several metaphors to describe the church and its nature, its mission, its design, and its relation to the Lord. It's called *a vineyard* in **Matthew 20**, implying that it's a place where people work together for the Master. It's introduced as *Christ's bride* in **Ephesians 5:23-27** and **Revelation 22:17**, indicating the spiritual and indivisible union between Christ and the church. It is referred to as *the kingdom of God* in **Mark 9:1** and **Hebrews 12:28**, pointing to the rule of Christ over His subjects which make up the church. In **I Corinthians 3:16** and **Ephesians 2:21**, the church is *the temple of God* where God dwells, is worshipped and praised. You see, all these descriptions within themselves point to the divine importance and spiritual significance of the church--how God sees the church and thus, how we should see it. Many of those passages are written in the very context of local churches to which they were originally written. Should not the very relationship of Christ and the church which these metaphors illustrate show us the importance of the church?

Acts 20:28 "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

If the church is that important to God—that it would take the blood of His Son to bring it into existence—shouldn't it be important to you as well? Doesn't that alone make the church worthy of your interest, faithfulness, service and involvement?

II. Because the church is the living and functioning body of Christ

Here is another metaphor that the Bible uses to describe the church—*a body*.

I Corinthians 12:12-14 "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."

Here, Paul is not referring to the worldwide universal church as *the body*; instead, he is talking about the local church right there at Corinth. The Corinthian church was fraught with a multitude of problems including jealousy and a competitive glory-seeking spirit among many of its members. Especially with the presence of miraculous gifts, these worldly-minded believers were comparing one person's gifts to another's. Some were flaunting their supernatural abilities while others were jealous of those who they

thought had a more important or impressive gift than they did. This even caused their assemblies to devolve into confusion and chaos, warranting a strong rebuke from Paul. That is the context of Paul's admonition throughout this range of chapters. Paul tells them that instead, they should understand the nature and function of the congregation in the same way they can see a human body function and operate.

I Corinthians 12:15-18 “If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”

Here, Paul shows that every Christian at Corinth had some important and vital function in that local body, whether they realized it or not. Consequently, any time you read in the New Testament of Christians working and assembling, it is always in the context of the local congregation. That is incredibly important to keep in mind. No work, no human organization, no mission is ever ascribed to the universal church to carry out. Rather, it is for the local church. That is how God carries out His mission on this earth: through the influence and work of local churches.

Christians in the first century were not spiritual freelancers out doing the will of God on their own, but they were always knit together in a spiritual community with other believers in their own location. That IS the local church. Here at Corinth, Paul wanted them to understand that every member makes up the body as a whole to allow it to function under the control of its head, who is Christ. Each part—whether it be an eye, an ear, a nose, a hand, a foot—each part is vital to the proper and healthy function of that body. Thus, he says a few verses later:

I Corinthians 12:25,27 “That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another...Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

Have you ever seen a body dismembered and detached that was alive and functioning? Don't the members of the body have to be attached to that body for those members to have life and function as they're supposed to? Of course. If I were to cut my hand off, that hand would be dead and would serve no purpose to me. It would be useless. That is just as much the case in spiritual affairs. That's just as much true with the body of Christ. If you call yourself a faithful Christian according to the Bible, that implies an attachment to Christ. You can't be attached to Christ who gives spiritual life and function as God expects you to function without being attached to His body.

- III. Because God has commanded you to do things that can only be done by coming together with the church.

Hebrews 10:25 “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

How are we to exhort our fellow believers? By assembling together with them, the Hebrew writer says.

Acts 20:7 “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them...”

On the first day of the week...that's Sunday. When the disciples came together... That very language indicates that this was their custom. This is what occurred on the first day of the week. It was their regular practice to come together on Sundays *to break bread*. They met on the Lord's Day to eat the Lord's Supper. And then they heard Paul preach on this particular Lord's Day. When did they *break bread*? When they *came together*. That's very significant. A lot of people miss this aspect of communion. Listen very carefully: communion is not an individual activity between a person and God. Rather, it is described in the New Testament as a joint participation with the church. Paul could've communed somewhere by himself in his journey had he so chosen, but he didn't do that because that is not God's design for communion. That's not what communion is about. Paul purposely waited to meet with the church at Troas on this Lord's Day to break bread with them.

The very word *communion* means *a common sharing*. It necessitates a congregation of people coming together to share this divine meal at its appointed time. That is the only example that we have. I want to kindly say that I do not believe in people taking communion by themselves or in some other setting than in the assembly of the local church on the Lord's Day because eating bread and drinking fruit of the vine within itself does not constitute communion. Did you realize that? Rather, sharing that loaf of bread and sharing that cup of fruit of the vine with the body of Christ—that is how the Bible pictures communion. The act of sharing the meal is just as important as eating the meal.

Now, a person may be sick at home or in the hospital or incarcerated. Of course, if they're a child of God, they would rather be in the assembly. Of course, they long to be able to commune with the church. But the present circumstance or stress they are in prevents them from doing so. Just like exile prevented the apostle John from being with the church on the Lord's Day (**Revelation 1:10**). John was able to be *in the spirit on the Lord's Day*, but he couldn't eat with the church. The Bible says nothing about him breaking out a loaf of bread and some grape juice and having the Lord's Supper there on Patmos. His mind went to his brethren over yonder who were worshipping and coming together, and he longed to be with them, but he simply could not. He was hindered, providentially, from being with them. Back to the troubled church at Corinth. They had allowed certain practices to take away the solemn significance and benefit of eating the Lord's Supper together as a body, so that when Paul wrote and rebuked them, he said this:

I Corinthians 11:20 "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper."

They were coming together just as they were supposed to, into one place. That's what the assembly of the church is. Who was doing that? the church at Corinth. Why were they supposed to be coming together? To eat the Lord's Supper. But because of their carnality and pettiness, they were not properly observing it. They were not remembering the Lord and properly discerning the body as they came together. But the fact is, they were coming together into one place and the purpose of that meeting, rightly so, was supposed to be to eat the Lord's Supper. That is God's design today. If a person is sick and not able to be there, they simply cannot be there and they simply cannot commune. Communion is an act of sharing with the disciples. It is sharing that meal that the Lord designed on the night of His betrayal. It is a vital part of the Christian life and the church's worship. It is required of every faithful Christian who is able to do so. It is not only required, but it should be our yearning desire.

Friend, it is wonderful that you can use this and other mediums as a means of studying the Bible. I truly hope this program is a great help and encouragement to you from week to week. I hope it encourages you to study the Bible, to become a Christian, and to acceptably serve the Lord. But I want to stress that

not this, nor any other program or online teaching can be an acceptable replacement to the local church and my place of membership and service within it. We need the church because there are things that God has told us to do that we can only do within the local church.

IV. Because of the accountability that it provides.

It is impossible to live in spiritual isolation. Not only that, but it is wrong to do so.

Romans 14:7 “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.”

For example, the New Testament teaches that elders are to be appointed in the local church to oversee and shepherd that particular flock.

Hebrews 13:17 “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

God in His wisdom designed the church not only as a body, but as a family, a community. So that we might spiritually exist, grow, and thrive together and be held accountable in that process. Accountability is vital to successful development and frankly, that’s one of the main reasons that some think they DON’T need the church. They don’t want to be accountable. They don’t want people to know how they live and what they do. They want to be their own person and live their own way. According to the scriptures, you’ll never please God that way. You’ll never please God by trying to avoid accountability to Him, nor can you please Him by resisting the accountability that being part of the body of Christ provides to you.

Friend, you NEED the church. No matter what people try to tell you and how tempting it is to think otherwise, you need the church. It is designed by God, built by Christ, revealed by the Holy Spirit, and kept and preserved by the power and the grace of God. I want to encourage you to seek to be part of it today.

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