

***Question: I know that the Bible teaches we are saved by Jesus, but why should one want to be a part of the church?***

The Bible does not speak of being saved as one thing and joining the church as another. As used in the New Testament, the word “church” does not refer to a building or some kind of social organization. Instead, the word “church” means “assembly” or a group of people who have become Christian believers. These believers are always “the church” whether they are assembled together or not. Of the people who came to believe and were baptized on the day the church began, we are told that “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Act 2:41 NIV) and that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Act 2:47 NIV).

However, a person might choose NOT to associate with the church to which the Lord has added him. Doing this, a person would deny him/herself many blessings that can come from association with others as a church. From the beginning of the church, Christians found something special not only in their salvation which brought release from past guilt but also in their caring fellowship with one another. We are told that “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:44-46). In the days that shortly followed, these early Christians faced severe persecution because of their faith in Christ. Through sharing together as the church, they found the strength to continue in their life of faith in Jesus. They trusted in God and held tightly to one another. The third century Christian writer Tertullian quoted the enemies of Christianity as saying: “See how they love each other . . . they are ready to die for one another.”

To help us understand our relationships within the church, the New Testament compares the church to our physical bodies. In a lengthy passage, the apostle Paul discussed the need for the various parts of the body and their dependence upon one another. For example, he said: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don't need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem

to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Corinthians 12:21-22). When the church functions as Jesus intended, those who are part of it will have the same unity and care for one another as the members of our physical bodies have for each other. “There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other,” Paul added, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:25-27).

Many Christians who have experienced the joys and sorrows of life find it difficult to understand how those who do not have the support of a church get through these things. For them, the church is family. Their fellow-Christians are their closest friends and trusted confidants. Brothers and sisters in Christ can be depended upon to encourage, help, celebrate and walk with one another through whatever life may bring. The church should be this kind of place where people can find mutual love, healing, forgiveness and hope, as well as guidance from our Lord along the pathway of life.

But we also need to remember that churches are made up of people who are still in the process of becoming like Jesus. They are not yet made perfect. Most of them recognize their own failures and the need of grace for themselves and the need for a willingness to give grace and mercy to one another. As has been said, “The church is a hospital for sinners and not a sanctuary for saints.” Our Lord has provided our association with one another as a church in order to help one another become more like him.

No matter what words I may use, you will never fully appreciate what a good church can mean in your life until you have actually experienced it. I hope you will consider these things and investigate for yourself what it means to be part of “the body of Christ, the church” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

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