

Why Is A Church Relationship So Important

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Too many people who profess a belief in Jesus Christ fail to esteem that a relationship with a local church is critical to that belief. Perhaps this is because our obedience to the Gospel (1 Peter 4:17) is a personal action, not involving the church. It is personal to hear and believe (Romans 10:14); it is personal to confess Christ (Luke 12:8); it is personal to repent of our sins (Acts 2:38), and the choice to be baptized into Christ is ours alone (Mark 16:16). The church is not part of the process of salvation.

Yet we are told that the moment we obey the Gospel in baptism, we are added to the church (Acts 2:47) and we become members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). Thus while we are saved apart from the church, we are also saved into the church.

How important is it that we understand this? Many see their relationship with the church similar to a social club or some such organization. They see participation as being like paying dues and showing up to the occasional meeting. Our relationship with the church is quite different, and important in ways many may not understand.

1. Salvation is a Team Sport: Consider statements such as Galatians 6:2 *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*. Throughout the New Testament we are told that our receipt of eternal life requires not just an obedience to the Gospel in baptism, but an obedience throughout our life. Perhaps the most commonly stated obligation is our support of other Christians in the local church. Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us to assemble to encourage one another; 1 John 3:14 tells us to love one another. "Getting to heaven" requires helping other Christians get to heaven. It requires bearing the burdens of other Christians. That happens when we are meeting to encourage one another and having love for one another. A church relationship is important because it is a path to eternal life.

2. Church is a Matter of Judgment: On the other side of this point is eternal condemnation. Several of the previous passages go on to state that failing these obligations leads to hell. Hebrews 10:25 tells us that forsaking the assembly is a willful sin. Jesus states in Matthew 25 that those who did not demonstrate love for their brethren will be cast into the everlasting fire. "Avoiding hell" requires assembling with other Christians and supporting other Christians/taking care of other Christians. A church relationship is necessary to avoid hell.

3. The Assembly is a Place of Worship: When Jesus met the woman at the well, He told her this: *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."* (John 4:23-24). Spirit and truth are defined in John as the Word of God (John 6:63, 17:17). The assembly of the church is meant to offer a particular type of worship to God. We see that from the beginning of it (Acts 2:42) it was designed to accomplish this. "Seeking God" requires worship in Spirit and Truth, which is worship as an assembly of believers in decency and order. A church relationship is required to worship God in spirit and truth.

4. Fulfilling Your Purpose: Many times we are told that we all have ability to offer God. Romans 12:5-6 and 1 Peter 4:10-11 both tell us that we all have ability to serve each other, and that this service is accomplished within the family of faith, the local church. Our greatest purpose in life is this service. "Reaching your potential" requires a church family to learn from and to serve. A church relationship is necessary to reach our true potential.

5. The Family of God: One important idea of the church relationship is that it is a family relationship. Throughout the New Testament the local church is described as a family, as the household of faith (Ephesians 2:19, Galatians 6:10). "Family relationship" requires seeing church as family, not an event. More importantly, the spiritually discerning understand that the church is a manifestation of Christ Himself. Our love and service to the church is our love and service to Christ. To not have a relationship with the local church is to not have a relationship with Christ.

It is important to see that the church was purchased with the Blood of Christ (Acts 20), and is the very body of Christ. Too much is lost if someone does not appreciate what it means to be part of that body.