

The Church is Necessary

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Being a member of the Lord's body, His church, the ecclesia, is no small matter. It must not be taken lightly. Being with the brethren is essential to our salvation. With good reason the Hebrew writer commands that we meet together with our fellow brethren: *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another"* (**Hebrews 10:25**). In the following few paragraphs, I would like to bring forth the necessity of the church in our lives and some ideas on why the Lord has made it a necessity.

There is a connection between Christ, Christians and Christ's church. We know, and often speak, of Jesus coming into this world not to condemn it but to save it (e.g. **John 3:16-18**, **Hebrews 2:9**). We learn in scripture that this salvation is doled out individually, as each person hears the Word and accepts the salvation that is offered by our Lord: *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (**Romans 5:8**, also see note at the end). There is no doubt in scripture that Christ died for you and me. Yet the same scriptures reveal that Christ died for His church. They tell us that He died to cleanse her and set her aside for Himself, His own precious bride. (see **Ephesians 5:25-27**, **Ephesians 5:32**, **Titus 2:14**, **1 Timothy 4:10**, **Acts 20:28**). That both are revealed in scripture is significant.

When I am baptized, and raised anew, my life is dedicated to Christ. At that same moment, I become a part of the church. Luke confirms this in **Acts 2:47** telling us that *"the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."* In scripture, these two concepts are subtly, and inextricably, linked. I cannot be saved without being in the church, and I cannot be in the church if I am not saved. If we think of this concept in the inverse, it still holds. If I leave the church, I am leaving my relationship with Christ, and if I leave my relationship with Christ, I am also leaving the church. This concept is borne out in the book of **1 Corinthians 5** when Paul commands the church at Corinth to withdraw from a man who was openly living in sin. He tells them to *"deliver such an one unto Satan"* (**verse 5**); to *"purge out therefore the old leaven"* (**verse 7**); and finally *"Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person"* (**verse 13**). A person who is not living as a Christian cannot be part of the church. Putting them away recognizes that fact and hopefully causes them to repent. But the point holds. Paul commanded the church to acknowledge that this person was not following the Lord by putting them out of the church. This is not the only reason for the Hebrew writer's exhortation — that we ought not forsake the assembly of the saints — but it must be part of it. If I forsake the assembly, if I stop attending, can I say that I am a part of the church? If I am not part of the church, if I have forsaken the assembly, am I a Christian?

Every person will stand before the Lord and be judged individually (**Revelation 20:11-15**). We will stand looking into the face of God and we will be judged. If God has set the responsibility for our salvation squarely on each one of our shoulders (**Ephesians 5:17**, **Ephesians 5:1-10**, **Acts 17:30**), why did He make the church a necessity? I believe it is because in the church we can find brethren who will help us grow in the Lord.

There are many examples of essential activities that are only undertaken in in the context of the church. To start with we should be exhorting one another. If we go back to the passage from **Hebrews 10:25**, we find that the writer is contrasting two words, forsaking and exhorting. *"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"* (**Hebrews 10:25**). Those who forsake are not exhorting and are not being exhorted. When our brethren meet together we ought to be in attendance so that we can encourage one another (**1 Thessalonians 4:18**, **1 Thessalonians 5:11-14**, **1 Timothy 5:1**). In addition, John, in the book of first John, spends a great deal of time detailing how we ought to love one another (**1 John 4:7-8**, **1 John 4:20 - 21**, **1 John 5:1**). How can I demonstrate love for my brethren if I do not know them? Do I demonstrate love for them if I do not desire to be together with them? In being with brethren, we have the opportunity to demonstrate true love. In gathering together, we can practice love and encouragement. These are not the only aspects of Christian fellowship that the scriptures depict. We also see brethren leading and being lead (**1 Peter 5:5**, **Titus 1:5-11**, **1 Timothy 4:6-16**, **Hebrews 13:17**), bearing one another's burdens (**Galatians 6:2**, **Romans 15:1**, **James 5:16**), and submitting to one another (**Hebrews 13:17**, **Ephesians 5:17-21**, **Philippians**

2:3-4).

The Lord created the church so that we would have the opportunity to assemble together that we might encourage one another, practice love, lead and be lead, bear one another's burdens, and submit to one another. Ultimately, the Lord created the church so that we would be able to help each other in our walk with the Lord. The Day of the Lord is approaching. Let us not forsake the assembly, and thus deprive ourselves and our brethren of much needed aid.

Author's note: Here are a few scriptures that detail what I think it means to accept the salvation of our Lord: **John 14:15, John 14:21, 1 John 2:3-5, John 1:12, Mark 16:16, John 3:14-15, Acts 3:19, Acts 17:30, 2 Corinthians 7:10, Romans 10:9-10, 1 John 4:2, 1 Peter 3:21-22, Mark 16:16, Acts 18:8, Acts 15:9, Acts 26:18, Ephesians 5:1, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 3 John 1:11, 1 John 3:3, Philippians 4:8, Matthew 5:8, Philippians 2:15, 1 Corinthians 1:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Matthew 22:37-40, 1 John 4:12, 1 John 4:7, Ephesians 5:17, Philippians 2:12, 1 Peter 2:2.**